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Jugando con los yanquis: Latin American stories, structural barriers, and colonial difference in  
Major League Baseball

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements

for the degree Master of Arts

in

Latin American Studies

by

David Longley

Committee in charge:

Professor Matthew Vitz, Chair  
Professor Robert Edelman  
Professor Danielle Raudenbush

2021



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University of California San Diego

2021

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Jugando con los yanquis: Latin American stories, structural barriers, and colonial difference in Major League Baseball

by

David Longley

Master of Arts in Latin American Studies

University of California San Diego, 2021

Professor Matthew Vitz, Chair

This thesis examines the historical and contemporary context of Major League Baseball in Latin America with particular attention to the colonial logics and processes of racialization embedded in the sport. Considering the US baseball presence in Latin America within a broader history of US domination of the region, I illustrate how the business of baseball both mimics and reproduces 1st/3rd World hierarchy and asymmetrical power relations. To demonstrate the extent to which colonial difference pervades the sport, I consider how Latin American player deviance and inferiority is policed and overdetermined by a white listening/perceiving subject. I examine how the white listening/perceiving subject's vigilance of Latin American behavior produces the

racialized figure of the “coño”, against which, in contrast, the normativity and acceptability of the white subject can be gleaned. I detail how the racialized qualities of the “coño” are rooted in histories of Eurocentric anti-Blackness and work to maintain and further white supremacy. Finally, I document aspects of the Latin American player experience, offering a glimpse at how players navigate and confront the business of baseball and the manifestations and expressions of white supremacy within it.

*Por las ambigüedades, los errores, las demasías, y todo lo demás, mala mía, mala mía, mala mía.*

## **Introduction:**

I've told this story often: I played Division III baseball for a small school in Massachusetts. The last competitive game I played was the national championship, a loss. A week after defeat, full of import and disappointment, I went to the Dominican Republic to work for the Boston Red Sox, my favorite team growing up as a kid in Maine. There, at the Red Sox Academy in the Dominican, I realized I was bad at baseball; I, a 22-year-old who had spent his high school and college years playing a sport, was nowhere near as talented or skilled as the group of mostly teenagers at the Red Sox' complex. I typically share this anecdote in self-deprecation, as a way to point out that I wasn't nearly as good at baseball as I had once thought. But the story also has a subtext that colors Major League Baseball's (MLB) overarching business and individual team processes from the lowest levels of the minor leagues to the majors. The mechanics of how and why I found myself in the Dominican Republic and why there were young players from all over Latin America living and training at an Academy, set to start an aspirational, professional playing career, fit within a longer history of US colonialism and domination of Latin America. To understand the contemporary state of MLB, its presence in Latin America, and the resultant experience of Latin American players maneuvering the sport's structures, we must start by examining the asymmetrical power relations that separate 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> World, and consider how, through various articulations of coloniality and white supremacy, those same hierarchies are actively protected and reinscribed within baseball.

The history of MLB in Latin America and the rise of the Academy system is well documented. Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, major league teams began constructing training complexes in the Dominican Republic that colloquially became known as Academies. Teams initially used these complexes as places to house potential amateur signees; prospective

players would stay at a team's Academy, train, and workout for scouts in the hopes of securing a contract. Since those early days, the Academies have grown into full-blown minor league affiliates with a much broader range of operations; though Academies still act as a place where amateur players try out, their main function is to house, coach, and "develop" already-signed Latin American players embarking on a path towards the major leagues. All major league teams have an Academy in the Dominican Republic and consistently rely on widespread, international scouting operations to identify and sign prospects. After reaching an agreement with a major league team, players from Venezuela, Panama, Colombia, Mexico, Cuba, Curacao, Nicaragua, and Honduras are sent to the Dominican Republic to experience their first taste of professional baseball, living and training at that team's Academy. The impact of the Academy system and Latin American pipeline has been marked, as roughly one third of all major league players are from Latin America.<sup>1</sup>

MLB's push into Latin America did not go unnoticed, generating critiques of US economic imperialism, labor exploitation, and neo-colonialism. As Alan Klein deftly noted in 2014, "Whereas in the first forty years, 1950-1990, MLB saw its role in the [Dominican Republic] as haphazardly skimming talent, the past fifteen years has seen a shift to thinking of the [Dominican Republic] as a renewable resource. To that extent, MLB is no different from any other capitalist enterprise that seeks resources abroad. It has invested heavily and more rationally because it makes better business sense to restock than to clear-cut."<sup>2</sup> The streamlining of team processes in the Dominican Republic, and Latin America more broadly, fundamentally shifted the landscape of team operations throughout the minor and major leagues. As a newly injected

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Lapchick, "MLB Race and Gender Report Card Shows Progress Still Needed," ESPN, April 18, 2017, [https://www.espn.com/mlb/story/\\_/id/19185242/mlb-race-gender-report-card-shows-%20progress-needed](https://www.espn.com/mlb/story/_/id/19185242/mlb-race-gender-report-card-shows-%20progress-needed).

<sup>2</sup> Alan Klein, *Dominican Baseball: New Pride, Old Prejudice* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014).

source of labor, Latin American players found themselves confronting systems that weren't designed for them. Linguistically, culturally, and ethno-racially, Latin American players entered and continue to enter a space -- on the field, in the clubhouse, and within decision-making circles -- composed of and managed by overwhelmingly, white, monolingual English-speaking individuals. The evolving ethno-racial and linguistic demography isn't noteworthy only in terms of representation; the power dynamics driving the player acquisition and decision-making processes within the sport, US conceptions of Latin America, and the construction and maintenance of white, normative sociality in the US have produced a distinct racialized hierarchy within baseball.

The first waves of Latin American players, during the pre-Academy days, were rife with stories of racism upon arrival to the US. Detailing the particular experience of US white supremacy, the leering white gaze, the double consciousness, players like Orlando Cepeda and Felipe Alou recalled the oppressive English-only policies of Alvin Dark -- manager of the San Francisco Giants during the 1960s -- who labeled Latin American players as unintelligent and simple.<sup>3</sup> In the climate of the 1950s, 1960s, and broader civil rights movement, such treatment is looked at, at least in present-day context, as part of the historical past, an antiquated expression of backwards beliefs and racist sentiment that no longer exists. Indeed, MLB has long produced and promoted an image -- albeit an incongruent and mythical one -- of diverse, post-racial, liberal democracy; the symbol of Jackie Robinson breaking the sport's color barrier has been celebrated as emblematic perseverance in the face of bygone sins for the better part of 70 years, despite a steady decline in the percentage of domestic, black players in the sport since the

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<sup>3</sup> Burgos Jr., Adrian. *Playing America's Game: Baseball, Latinos, and the Color Line*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 210-212.

1980s.<sup>4</sup> Latin America has its own revered figures from this time period, as players like Roberto Clemente, Orestes “Minnie” Miñoso, and the Alou brothers (among many others) spoke to the unique challenges that Black and Brown Latin American players faced in baseball, signaling both the common and distinct nature of their racialization relative to their black, US counterparts. A focus on symbolic heroes and “old” prejudices, however, doesn’t accurately capture how the game’s evolving terrain, as it relates to MLB’s move into Latin America, has been and continues to be propped up on colonial scaffolding.

In the more recent past, high profile Latin American stars like Moises Alou, Pedro Martinez, and Carlos Delgado, with their relative fame and recognition, have spoken up about issues of prejudice and racism towards Latin American players within baseball. In 2005 after a radio tirade from a local broadcaster targeted Latin American players, Felipe Alou -- one of the heroic pre-civil rights icons mentioned above -- claimed to see the same racial issues that he lived during his playing career.<sup>5</sup> In 2016, a collection of Latin American stars recalled the difficulties of navigating the white system of baseball, referencing instances of racism, albeit without explicitly or critically addressing the topic.<sup>6</sup> The question remains, then, how -- despite these critiques, despite the visibility of post-racial icons, despite economic parity for the game’s highest paid players regardless of country of origin, despite MLB’s mandating of Spanish-language interpreters for each team,<sup>7</sup> despite increased marketing of an expressive “Latin

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<sup>4</sup> Joon Lee, “Inside the Rise of MLB’s Ivy League Culture: Stunning Numbers and a Question of What’s Next,” ESPN, June 30, 2020, [https://www.espn.com/mlb/story/\\_/id/29369890/inside-rise-mlb-ivy-league-culture-stunning-numbers-question-next](https://www.espn.com/mlb/story/_/id/29369890/inside-rise-mlb-ivy-league-culture-stunning-numbers-question-next).

<sup>5</sup> Burgos Jr., *Playing America’s Game: Baseball, Latinos, and the Color Line*, 258.

<sup>6</sup> Marly Rivera et al., “BÉISBOL EXPERIENCE: The 50-Man Interview,” trans. Rafael Rojas Cremonesi, ESPN, 2017, [http://www.espn.com/espn/feature/story/\\_/id/19625385/beisbol-experience-mlb-50-man-interview](http://www.espn.com/espn/feature/story/_/id/19625385/beisbol-experience-mlb-50-man-interview).

<sup>7</sup> In *Playing America’s Game*, Adrian Burgos suggested that having Spanish-language interpreters would help resolve or mollify some of the “cultural” issues that Latin American players face. Having served in that role for a number of years, I can say that it should indeed be a standard practice if not expanded by teams but that the mere



American” style of play -- is it that such racialized, colonial stratifications continue to manifest themselves within the sport? How is white space policed and Latin American identity diminished? How does the US (Global North) continue to distinguish itself from Latin America (Global South)? To answer these questions, we must move away from individual, interpersonal expressions of racism and reorient our critique towards systems and structures of power, examining histories and contemporary articulations of racial-colonial difference. Within the world of baseball, said difference is produced both materially and discursively, through modes of coloniality at times explicit and at times embedded in daily interactions. In the pages that follow I offer an examination of major league baseball and a look at how the sport’s spaces and day to day practices maintain racial-colonial difference and global hierarchy.

### **Theoretical Approach**

#### *Coloniality and Occidentalism*

This work is indebted to a rich body of postcolonial and Black radical theory that situates the construction of race, racial capitalism, and anti-Blackness/white supremacy in colonial encounters. Confronting histories of anti-Blackness and colonial difference are necessary preludes to examine racism, coloniality, and articulations of 1st World/3rd World hierarchy in baseball. The work of Sylvia Wynter, Frantz Fanon, Anibal Quijano, Fernando Coronil, Walter D. Mignolo, Arturo Escobar, Edward Said among many others inform the entirety of this work and figure prominently across the coming chapters. Their contributions play an integral role in my analysis of how the existence and propagation of Latin American backwardness and inferiority within baseball is linked to a long history of colonialism and white supremacy. Indeed, by

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presence of interpreters does little to destabilize the white supremacist lens through which Latin American players are viewed.

drawing on a comprehensive body of postcolonial scholarship we can trace the apparent permanence and recurrence of Eurocentric elitism to the ethnoracial superiority central to Enlightenment thinking and Cartesian philosophy/duality. As Anibal Quijano tells us in *Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America*, Descartes' radical separation between reason/subject and body resulted in the body's expropriation from the realm of subject reason, instead locating it as an object of knowledge within nature.<sup>8</sup> For Quijano, Descartes' subject/reason and body/nature dualism permitted Europeans to construct and promulgate notions of race during their colonial conquest of the Americas, casting the indigenous inhabitants of the lands they were invading as non-rational, inferior subjects. Descartes' philosophy ushered in a radical shift in European thinking and created the conditions necessary for an epistemological shift that allowed Europeans, now imbued with the authority of scientific reason, to elevate themselves above the irrational beings they encountered on their colonial expeditions, people yet to attain such enlightened growth. This European, epistemic shift towards scientific rationality led to reflections on the role of man's relationship to nature, generating linear notions of time, progress, and modernity in which human civilization broke from its natural origins and culminated in a modern(ized) European society. Promoting and believing such thinking gave Europeans the license to determine or demarcate the moment in time in which they (and every other people) either "advanced" from primitiveness to rationality or stagnated in the historical past, bereft of reason. To quote Quijano directly,

All non-Europeans could be considered as pre-European and at the same time displaced on a certain historical chain from the primitive to the civilized, from the rational to the irrational, from the traditional to the modern, from the magic-mythic to the scientific. In other words, from the non-European/pre-European to something that in time will be Europeanized or modernized. Without considering the entire experience of colonialism

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<sup>8</sup> Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin American," *Nepantla: Views from the South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 555.

and coloniality, this intellectual trademark, as well as the long-lasting global hegemony of Eurocentrism, would hardly be explicable.<sup>9</sup>

The same Cartesian dualism that created the possibility of distinguishing between rational and non-rational peoples bred the conditions necessary to categorize entire populations ethnographically, trapped in the historical past, lagging behind their “scientifically-advanced” European counterparts. Indeed, as Walter D. Mignolo notes while engaging with Sylvia Wynter’s work, “put simply: we tend to believe our cosmogonies as natural truth(s); this belief system is calcified by our *commitment* to this belief system; the schema self-replicates, as we continually invest in its systemic belief qualities.”<sup>10</sup> One of the core areas of critique throughout this work is the white, US framing that Latin American players -- and Latin America -- are perpetually and naturally *behind* their US peers. My argument seeks to disaggregate baseball’s racialized hierarchies, moving past simplistic, liberal framings of individual or attitudinal racism, instead grounding the cultural and structural aspects of power within baseball as co-constitutive colonial remnants.

This work also attempts to overcome reductive narratives of cultural difference that cloak histories of domination between the US and Latin America. In the world of professional baseball, a dizzying range of Latin American action, behavior, and speech, becomes the subject of policing by white staff and players. Such monitoring functions both explicitly and discursively but often operates within a Self-Other contraposition in which difference -- at the cultural level -- is yet again naturalized. As Fernando Coronil notes, “Challenging an imperial order requires overturning the Self-Other polarity that has served as one of its foundational premises. This requires that cultures be seen, as Ortiz and Said propose, in contrapuntal relation to each other

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<sup>9</sup> IBID, 556

<sup>10</sup> Mignolo, Walter D. “Sylvia Wynter” What Does It Mean to Be Human?” In *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, edited by Katherine McKittrick. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

rather than taken to be autonomous units, that their difference be historicized rather than essentialized, and that their boundaries and homogeneity be determined, not assumed.”<sup>11</sup> This thesis attempts to take up Coronil’s challenge by historicizing US presence in Latin America and the resultant imperial logics and modes of comprehending Latin America as a relatively homogenous, 3rd World geography. By situating our analysis within such historical context, we are able to see how Latin American difference is both a product of and inherent to the existence of white, Eurocentered normativity. The manifold areas in which white subjects perceive, overdetermine, and mark Latin American difference, then, reveal how, in essentializing a perceived alterity, white subjects actively produce the very “boundaries of homogeneity” that Coronil describes. White policing of certain Latin American actions, requires a critical disaggregation if we are to overturn or move past the Self-Other polarity; so as not to acknowledge or recognize white perceptions as factual or concrete, we must historicize and interrogate how such monitoring and essentializing works in the service of maintaining white supremacy. The bordering of a white normativity and Latin American deviance within baseball has become embedded in a set of structures, practices and behaviors that emerge through stereotypes and processes of racialization and socialization that frequently go uninterrogated. While acute acts of racism dot baseball’s recent history and continue to transpire within its private spaces, the oppressive nature of professional baseball is not a compilation of individual racist acts towards Latin American and domestic, BIPOC players. This thesis examines professional baseball’s continued production and perpetuation of stereotypes about Latin America and Latin American players and questions how the construction of such an environment forces Latin American players to confront, conform, or adapt when presented with constricted

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<sup>11</sup> Fernando Coronil, “Beyond Occidentalism: Toward Nonimperial Geohistorical Categories,” *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 1 (1996): 73.

modes of acceptability and caricatured representations of themselves. Chapter 3 situates these themes more prominently, as it seeks to center Latin American accounts and descriptions of what it's like to move through the network of professional baseball and what that journey asked of them. To borrow a useful framing from Sylvia Wynter, the latter parts of this work ask "How do you deal with the stereotyped view of yourself that you yourself have been socialized to accept? Because the stereotypes are not arbitrary. It's not a matter of someone getting up and suddenly being racist. It is that given the conception of what it is to be human, to be an imperial English man or woman, you had to be seen by them as the negation of what they were. So *you*, too, had to *circumcise* yourself of yourself, in order to be fully human."<sup>12</sup> The existence of whiteness/Europeanness *as* human both equated and necessitated blackness and "foreignness" *as* savage -- oppression and domination cannot, then, merely be located in individual acts of racism. Additionally, as Wynter asserts, the furthering of stereotypes is not arbitrary; within the world of baseball, the production of a racialized, Latin American identity betrays a white supremacist, Eurocentric conception of humanity. Understanding the origins of Europeanness and a white, Western idea of what it means to be human allows us to historicize and contextualize the transnational spaces and interactions that constitute the world of major league baseball.

As already evidenced in this introduction, I rely heavily on the term *Latin American* to describe all players born in Latin America. As I hope the rest of the work shows, there is richness unique to each Latin American country that is lost under such a broad, umbrella term. The decision to group players as Latin American within the context of baseball makes sense given the everyday delineation of boundaries that mark Latin American players as *other* against a normative white US citizenry. Grouping players as Latin American, then, allows for an

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<sup>12</sup> David Scott, "Interview: The Re-Enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter," *Small Axe*, September 2000, 132.

interrogation of the representational role that the term plays within this space -- Latin American is behind, Black, Brown, Spanish-speaking, and foreign whereas the US is white, English-speaking, domestic, modern or local. These broader groupings fragment into a wide set of social dichotomies that are discursively constructed everyday within the world of professional baseball, a subject I address in detail in Chapter 2. Through the lens of whiteness, differing local contexts within Latin America are erased, replaced by blanketed knowledge of the region that is used as a necessary contrast in the maintenance of hegemonic whiteness within the US. Despite the divergent experiences within Latin American countries, once Latin American players enter the US, the diversity of their origins falls by the wayside and their 3rd World difference becomes operative.

That said, recognizing the term's limits is also important. In Chapter 1, I detail the role of US intervention in the Dominican Republic as a specific case of US imperialism, and neoliberal global expansion that both predated and was necessary for the explosion of major league baseball on the island and across Latin America more broadly. Referring to players leaving the Dominican Republic as Latin American is not meant to erase the specific history that I lay out in Chapter 1, however, while most teams' Latin American operations are based in the Dominican Republic, the players housed there come from all over the region. Additionally, relying on the "Latin American" label could be mistaken for a promotion of an all-encompassing "latinidad", a misleading descriptive category that assumes an inherent Latin Americanness that fits neatly into a broader ideology of deracialized multiculturalism. In using the term Latin American I am in no way attempting to advance "latinidad" as a concept or organizational grouping, as its existence relies on a conceptual framework of non-whiteness. Multiculturalist discourse masks social inequality vis-a-vis the homogenization of race and culture throughout Latin America and the

promotion of histories and national identities based on *mestizaje* sit at the core of multiple, specific state projects. However, the ideology of *mestizaje* creates a false notion of universal, liberal citizenship in which *everyone* is mixed and therefore equal; in a world where racial mixture is universal and acknowledged as such, discrimination can't exist, or such ideology might suggest. This thesis doesn't try to interrogate the disparate racial imaginaries of each Latin American country, however, recognizing the presence of multiculturalist discourse in many of these countries allows for an additional lens/mode of analysis when interpreting the responses of the Latin American players and staff interviewed for this project. It's also important not to rely on conceptual frameworks rooted in a US racial binary, as interviewees and their responses were not fostered under the US' particular brand of racism. A general understanding of multiculturalism and recognizing its homogenization of racial difference in Latin America, can serve as a useful tool for underscoring certain interviewee responses in which players insisted that they had not experienced racism or emphasized the importance of getting to know people on an individual basis.

The term "Latin American" also blurs the structures of ethnoracial categorization and more importantly, colorism, in Latin American countries and within the broader Latino community in the US. Against the domineering backdrop of global white supremacy, Latin Americanness or "latinidad" projects a uniform set of beliefs and homogeneity to what are diverse sets of social groups in both national and transnational settings. Latin American and US-born Latinos can have experienced racism in the broader US expression of white supremacy and even acknowledge it, while also championing support for conservative, right wing, white supremacist politics either in the US or back home. Such fault lines within Latin American and diaspora communities are blurred under the all-encompassing use of descriptors like Latin

American. Though the scope of the thesis does not attempt to unpack the country-specific histories of and relationships towards Blackness within Latin America, we must acknowledge the existence of anti-Blackness as a historical, global form of domination, not something specific to the US. Though I will touch on topics such as colorism, nationalism, anti-communism/anti-socialism, anti-Blackness and anti-Haitianism within the Latin American baseball community -- themes that all undercut the veracity and usefulness of a categorization such as Latin American -- they are better suited for further research.

Conversely, we must also be aware of the citation of individual Latin American voices from different countries and contexts -- as opposed to Latin America broadly -- and their role as symbolic authorities for a given country. The same uniform scope that is used to flatten various nations under the umbrella of “Latin American” can also be used to essentialize the voices of a few to portray a wide-ranging set of experiences in entire nations. This too poses a number of challenges, including the white US citation of Latin American tales or anecdotes as evidence of broader truths for entire national contexts or Latin America writ large. Thus, it is necessary to note the drawbacks of using a term that suggests equality both within and across national social systems. However, for the bulk of this work, as already noted, I am interested in the Latin American player experience as racialized and otherized in the context of US white supremacy.

### *Language Ideology, Mock Spanish, and Raciolinguistics*

Mock Spanish is a term coined by Jane Hill that refers to the borrowing and blending of Spanish-language words, suffixes, and pronunciations (often exaggerated, mispronounced, or hyperanglicized) into otherwise English discourse. This blending alters the meaning and message of the language by typically taking on a humorous or pejorative tone. The inclusion of Mock forms of Spanish in English discourse is used to signal the informal or colloquial nature of the



English-language speech or message.<sup>13</sup> In the everyday world of professional baseball, where the interaction between English-heritage and Spanish-heritage speaking populations is tantamount, the production of Mock Spanish is commonplace.

Precisely because Mock Spanish relies on inference, circulates within American pop culture and discourse, and is generally used in humorous, jocular exchanges, it often passes imperceptibly in white spaces. Appearing “normal” or benign to white actors, producing Mock Spanish can denote a desirable, cultured, or funny personality on the part of white, non-heritage Spanish speakers through its incorporation of syntactic and grammatical forms from another language, albeit in distorted fashion. Simultaneously, however, the borrowing and reproduction of Mock Spanish forms can only be funny if the speaker and listener have access to the negative stereotypes of Spanish-speaking populations on which the Mock Spanish inference or joke is predicated. Relying on racialized tropes and stereotypes, Mock Spanish communicates a more derisive message that goes unstated while simultaneously perpetuating a broader system of white racism through seemingly innocuous, everyday language. Hill outlines four major tactics and applications of Mock Spanish:

1. Euphemism - Spanish words that are insulting, lewd, or scatological in Spanish are substituted for vulgar English words
2. Adding Spanish morphology to English words - especially the definite article “el” or the suffix “-o”
3. Hyperanglicization and bold mispronunciation - Spanish words that are intentionally exaggerated or mispronounced in English
4. Semantic Pejoration - Spanish words of neutral or even positive meaning are moved down into a semantic space that ranges from merely jocular to the deeply negative and insulting<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Jane H. Hill, *The Everyday Language of White Racism*, Blackwell Studies in Discourse and Culture 3 (Chichester, U.K.; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 134.

<sup>14</sup> IBID, 134-139.

## Indirect Indexicality and Linguistic Hierarchy

Indexicality is a semiotic process in which an indexical sign or index derives meaning from its proximity to a given object and its ability to stand in for or be recognized as its object. A tangible way to conceive of indexicals is to look at how words such as “I” or “you” and “this” or “that” can be interpreted in different ways depending on the context in which they are used. If one does not know who is doing the speaking (“I”, “you”) or to what one is referring (“this”, “that”) the meanings of the significance of the words changes. The words are indexical in that they refer to (or index) someone or something depending on their connectedness or substitution for the object they are referring to. For example, if I say “Hey, look at those people over there,” referring to a group of people across the street, one must know where my statement took place and to whom I was referring to have “those people” make sense; the phrase “those people” is only intelligible with context. Hill argues that Mock Spanish negatively indexes and reproduces racist stereotypes of the Spanish language and Spanish-language heritage speaker but does so *indirectly* or *covertly* while retaining the symbolic resources of Spanish to perpetuate the interests of whiteness through claims of liberal diversity and respect for Spanish language and culture.<sup>15</sup> Indirect indexicality can appear in each of the examples included in the outline of Mock Spanish strategies (*Euphemism, Adding Spanish Morphology, Mispronunciation, and Semantic Pejoration*). All of these strategies, despite their light, nonsensical, or silly appearance, enforce the borders of white supremacy. As Hill asserts, “The idea that racism is a matter of individual belief, together with the referentialist ideology [or the “proper” use] of words...

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<sup>15</sup> IBID, 142-147.

obscures the way that racism is perpetuated through indexicality, in the intersubjective spaces where meaning is negotiated and inferences are made without ever being made explicit. This intersubjective space, the site where culture is made public and exchanged at every level of interaction, including the most quotidian, is neglected...”<sup>16</sup> Hill reminds us that Mock Spanish, as a broader tool of white supremacy, isn’t an extension of interpersonal racism but rather deeply rooted in this country’s organization and systems. These systems can be enforced discursively and intersubjectively and do not rely on what the speaker “meant” or whether or not the speaker is a “racist” individual. As the earlier examples indicated, Mock Spanish is not limited to racist publications or white nationalist hate groups that have come to represent the only recognizable expression of racism in liberal US understandings of racial violence. Instead, Mock Spanish can be found in the daily demarcation of white space and the delineation of Spanish-speakers’ subordinate position relative to (white) English speakers.

The day-to-day forms of Mock Spanish in baseball involve English speakers who believe themselves to know a little Spanish and, disregarding it as a language worthy of linguistic order or something that requires a certain level of care, casually reproduce it incorrectly. The reliance on the same hyperanglicized production of certain words and phrases often reveals a lack of real intent to help promote a dialogue in Spanish yet reaffirms the speaker’s congenial personality for having engaged in a lighthearted production of Spanish. Additionally, forms of Mock Spanish that make no effort in masking their mockery or “disorder”, or even derive their humor from the acknowledgement that the speaker (hilariously) has no hope of speaking Spanish, mark racialized difference through linguistic difference. As Mary Bucholtz and Qiuana Lopez argue in their study of linguistic minstrelsy in Hollywood films, when very visible “language use by

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<sup>16</sup> IBID, 179.

white speakers [is intentionally framed] as inauthentic...they also position linguistic difference as essentialized racial difference and, hence, reassert the normativity of white language and culture..." For Bucholtz and Lopez, white imitation of Black speech in Hollywood movies contributes to a new hegemonic whiteness that *includes* pieces of Black culture and simultaneously essentializes racial difference; white speakers frame linguistic difference as marked racial difference and reaffirm white language and culture as normative.<sup>17</sup> We can apply a similar analysis to baseball and Mock Spanish. White staff, players, and coaches emphasize their whiteness using Mock Spanish phrases to highlight their inability to speak Spanish; for whiteness to appear authentic and preserve its power, semiotic and linguistic markers of "Latin Americanness" -- through linguistic deviance -- become reference points from which white individuals can then distance themselves.

Hill notes that the breadth of Mock Spanish is quite narrow: the vocabulary may only consist of 100 words.<sup>18</sup> For those that might view these forms of Mock Spanish as disputable, frame the exchanges as playful, label its detractors oversensitive, or claim learner's ignorance, we must remember that Spanish is repeatedly framed as disorderly against a neat, structured backdrop of English and that Spanish speakers' production of English is disproportionately policed compared to crude white production of Mock Spanish. As Rusty Barrett notes, "...it is through indirect indexicality that using Mock Spanish constructs "white public space," an arena in which linguistic disorder on the part of whites is rendered invisible and normative, while the linguistic behavior of historically Spanish-speaking populations is highly visible and the object

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<sup>17</sup> Mary Bucholtz and Lopez, Qiuana, "Performing Blackness, Forming Whiteness: Linguistic Minstrelsy in Hollywood Film," *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 15, no. 5 (2011): 680–706.

<sup>18</sup> Hill, *The Everyday Language of White Racism*, 134.

of constant monitoring.”<sup>19</sup> Such looseness in the evaluation of white use of Spanish, when compared to the hypervigilance of linguistic boundaries (grammatical correctness, pronunciation, word choice, accent) for Spanish speakers, demonstrates how linguistic production tied to whiteness fades away, while similar practices associated with Black and Brown speakers are tightly regimented. These same double standards and forms of linguistic bordering are all too common within baseball, something that should come as no surprise given the demographic makeup of the game and sheer number of Latin American players in sport’s ranks. In professional baseball (on the field, in the clubhouse, during coaching or business exchanges etc.), the monitoring of Latin American players’ English and the conversely uncritical lens applied to white, Anglo use of Spanish is a near daily occurrence, a theme I expand on in Chapter 2. Bridging the work of Hill, Barrett, and other analyses of Mock language production with more recent linguistic anthropological analyses of language, coloniality, recursivity, and raciolinguistics, allows us to better arraign how racialized linguistic and semiotic practices fit into a legacy of colonialism and imperialism and continue to operate as a tool in the maintenance of white supremacy and US hegemony. Engaging with linguistic anthropological concepts such as enregisterment and the co-naturalization of race and language, we can offer a richer, more robust analytical framing that works backwards from Hill and Barrett’s work and locates linguistic hierarchy as a remnant and manifestation of coloniality.

As already discussed, colonial and imperial legacies in Latin America and the construction and codification of racial difference was central to European colonial ordering in that it foregrounded supposed biological difference as a way to naturalize the

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<sup>19</sup> Rusty Barrett, “Language Ideology and Racial Inequality: Competing Functions of Spanish in an Anglo-Owned Mexican Restaurant,” *Language In Society* 35, no. 2 (April 2006): 164–65.

superiority/inferiority of certain peoples. Language also played an essential role in delineating colonial hierarchical structures and consolidating power. Anibal Quijano explains that colonizers “...repressed as much as possible the colonized forms of knowledge production, the models of the production of meaning, their symbolic universe, the model of expression and of objectification and subjectivity,” language being chief among them. He continues, saying that by engaging in epistemic suppression, colonizers “...forced the colonized to learn the dominant culture in any way that would be useful to the reproduction of domination...”<sup>20</sup> Investigating the coloniality of language, Gabriella Veronelli depicts how European colonizers dismissed indigenous languages as feeble and simplistic due to their association with boorish, savage people, not rational Europeans.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Flores and Rosa trace the evolution of raciolinguistic ideologies from early colonial framings of indigenous populations as subhuman (due to their inability to express ideas that Enlightenment thinkers believed necessary to the formation of Man) to less evolved humans who held their own worldviews, worldviews forever lagging on the scale of human development.<sup>22</sup> Despite English and Spanish both being colonizing languages, the coloniality of language as a stratifying tool persists in baseball; Latin American players’ English ability -- and language production more generally -- is conflated with intelligence, following colonial logics in relative lockstep. The failure to “adequately” produce English becomes evidence of Latin American backwardness and depravity. Ability to produce or comprehend “acceptable” English constitutes proximity to whiteness, whereas the failure to do so connotes proximity to otherness and distance from humanity. Drawing from Fanon we can see

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<sup>20</sup> Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin American,” 541.

<sup>21</sup> Gabriella Veronelli, “The Coloniality of Language: Race, Expressivity, Power and the Darker Side of Modernity,” *Wagadu* 13 (2015): 108–34.

<sup>22</sup> Nelson Flores and Jonathan Rosa, “Unsettling Race and Language: Toward a Raciolinguistic Perspective,” *Language In Society* 46 (2017): 621–47.

how language grants access to “cultured”, “modern”, white spaces. He reminds us that, “to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture. The Antilles Negro who wants to be white will be the whiter as he gains greater mastery of the cultural tool that language is.”<sup>23</sup> For the Latin American player in the US, pressure and obligation to speak English is strong. Failure to deploy a passable level of English -- something that would grant a given player greater proximity to whiteness/humanity -- results in a confirmation and calcification of linguistic and 1st/3rd World hierarchy. However, the definition of appropriate or acceptable language production isn’t mediated in a vacuum but rather by white listening subjects.

### **Enregisterment and White Listening/Perceiving Subjects**

Miyako Inoue and Asif Agha’s work on enregisterment and the listening subject play a pivotal role in my analysis of how Latin American players’ behavior and language is racialized and hierarchized. To borrow Agha’s definition, enregisterment is a “processes whereby distinct forms of speech come to be socially recognized (or enregistered) as indexical of speaker attributes by a population of language users.”<sup>24</sup> As the upcoming chapters will show, Latin American production of English within the baseball setting becomes enregistered as indexical of Latin American inferiority and unintelligence. Inoue’s study of Japanese “women’s language,” examines how the expressive practices of Japanese women were enregistered with a uniquely, seemingly empirical form of “schoolgirl speech.” However, instead of a concrete form of “schoolgirl speech,” Inoue’s intervention shows that it was instead a masculine anxiety -- reacting to economic and political modernization -- that created this category of expression; the masculine insecurity of that particular historical moment revealed what Japanese male

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<sup>23</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1982).

<sup>24</sup> Asif Agha, “Voice, Footing, Enregisterment,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (2005): 38–59.

intellectuals *perceived* and *overheard*, not something particular about the schoolgirls' form of expression.<sup>25</sup> Nelson and Jonathan Rosa also figure heavily in my analysis, as they assert the importance of questioning the role of listening subjects and contextualizing listening practices: "instead of beginning by attempting to document the range of linguistic practices that are distinctive of a given racial group, raciolinguistic enregisterment involves asking how and why particular linguistic forms are construed as emblems of particular racial categories and vice versa, in what historical, political, and economic contexts, and with what institutional and interpersonal consequences."<sup>26</sup> This reframing, along with Flores and Rosa's broader conceptual raciolinguistic framework, which "...[refuses]to center the analysis on attempts to document the empirical linguistic practices of racialized subjects, and instead interrogating the interpretive and categorizing practices of racially hegemonic perceiving subjects,"<sup>27</sup> allow us to build on the concepts of Mock Spanish, linguistic hierarchy, and indirect indexicality so that we can examine the interpretive practices of white listening subjects embodied by white coaches, staff, and players. Applying this analytical framework necessitates a reimagining of the seemingly evident "truths" in inter-subjective spaces and interactions. Instead of unevenly naturalizing components of Latin American expression, we can shift our focus to what white listening and perceiving subjects reveal about themselves and question how "the act of overhearing and evaluating... is necessary for establishing...moral contrast."<sup>28</sup> While the everyday conversation and presence of Mock Spanish within the baseball world continues to reproduce negative stereotypes of Latin American players, the monitoring and demarcation of white space isn't limited to linguistics. A

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<sup>25</sup> Miyako Inoue, "The Listening Subject of Japanese Modernity and His Auditory Double: Citing, Sighting, and Siting the Modern Japanese Woman," *Cultural Anthropology* 18, no. 2 (2003a): 156–93.

<sup>26</sup> Flores and Rosa, "Unsettling Race and Language: Toward a Raciolinguistic Perspective," 634.

<sup>27</sup> *IBID*, 627-628

<sup>28</sup> Angela Reyes, "Inventing Postcolonial Elites: Race, Language, Mix, Excess," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 27, no. 2 (n.d.): 218.



raciolinguistic analysis also includes a broader racialized semiotics that involves the overdetermination of physicality, behavior, expressiveness, and appearance/dress. The white *perceiving* subject's overdetermination of signs can be found in examples of racial profiling that range from the discursive -- commenting on a Latin American player's tight pants or chain jewelry, say -- to perceived threats of violence, hypersexuality, and illegality, all themes I examine in detail in Chapter 2.

### *Baseball and an Anthropology of Sport*

Of course, an analysis of baseball requires engagement with histories and anthropologies of sport. Given the broader organizing framework of this work in the legacies of colonialism, imperialism, and white supremacy, I draw on theories of sport rooted in empire and globalization. As C. L. R. James explains in *Beyond a Boundary*, the British, as a vehicle of informal empire, imbued the game of cricket and the way in which it was played in the West Indies with imperial logics, expressing them in the form of a code of conduct on the field. Noting how middle-class, Puritan notions of restraint, loyalty, and a stiff upper lip represented a British ideal and elitism on the pitch that West Indian players could never attain, James states, "...the Englishmen in their relation to games in the colonies held tightly to the code as example and as a mark of differentiation."<sup>29</sup> It is these very marks of differentiation, at the embodied level, and how they are delineated within the world of baseball that I seek to address in this work. What is it that teams ask of Latin American players? What practices, behaviors, and skills are deemed essential for Latin American players to learn? What aspects of their identities are deemed disruptive? How do training practices and years negotiating team expectations and oversight in

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<sup>29</sup> C. L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary*, version 50th anniversary edition, 50th anniversary edition, C.L.R. James Archives (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

the minor leagues impact players from Latin America? How is obedience and order created institutionally? In answering such questions, Foucault's concept of "the correct means of training" offers guidance. His theorization of "the correct means of training" requires the submission of the body to disciplined practices determined by institutional (team) mandate and supervision. These means are achieved by increasing "...the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and [diminishing] these same forces (in political terms of obedience)."<sup>30</sup> Such conditioning acts as a form of subordination that ultimately reinscribes empire through the embodied forms of practice and play. In looking at the steady stream of new Latin American players entering the ranks of professional baseball each year, we can utilize Foucault's framework for the "correct means of training" to question how seemingly benign methods of training and conduct within sport both corral Latin American players towards a certain degree of obedience and a normative code of conduct.

This thesis also touches on how the realm of sports can seemingly *become* politicized, centering the individual who commits an act or makes a comment that triggers the politicization of a previously neutral situation. As Michael Serazio and Emily Thorson note, sport has been a primary tool in the creation of a nationalistic, imagined community, exuding "a sense of harmony and unity, [and] creating, albeit fleetingly, a homogenizing effect."<sup>31</sup> They assert that fandom does not tend to be principally motivated by nationalistic loyalty, but instead originates in "moment of affinity between the fan and the transcultural object."<sup>32</sup> However, nationalism and militarism, have long permeated through sport in the US and athletic spaces continue to construct

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<sup>30</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

<sup>31</sup> Michael Serazio and Emily Thorson, "Weaponized Patriotism and Racial Subtext in Kaepernick's Aftermath: The Anti-Politics of American Sports Fandom," *Television & New Media* 21, no. 2 (2020): 151–68.

<sup>32</sup> IBID.

the nation, defining and policing the borders of what is and isn't permissible as a member of the national community. Take the common refrain (still present in much of US socio-political discourse) used to berate Colin Kaepernick and anyone else who doesn't show sufficient respect or indebtedness to the US: telling those critical of the US to "leave" or "go back where they came from." During his now famous 2016 protest, Kaepernick received the following criticism from Hall of Fame football coach and bigot Mike Ditka, "Anybody who disrespects this country and the flag. If they don't like the country, they don't like our flag, get the hell out."<sup>33</sup> Given Kaepernick's US citizenry, we can see how such commands are often tied more to the color of one's skin than whether or not a person actually immigrated to the US, highlighting the US history of Black and Brown unbelonging and the centrality of whiteness in the construction of US identity. In an age (under Obama, Trump, and likely Biden) in which Customs and Border Patrol has shown an increasingly public, terrorizing, militarized presence the general public has had access to symbols (the border wall) and rhetoric of legality/illegality, that are then used as tools to reinscribe the borders and allow/deny entry to a white ethno-nation. The discussion of appropriateness and (dis)respect in Chapter 2 examines how these same narratives manifest themselves, directed at Black and Brown players from Latin America.

In addition to the role of sport as an extension of empire and a tool for constructing national borders, this thesis incorporates an analysis of sport at the expressive, embodied level. Building on his seminal concept of habitus,<sup>34</sup> French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu argued that definitions of sport are never intrinsic and always habituated in their meaning; instead of

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<sup>33</sup> Mike Florio, "Mike Ditka to Colin Kaepernick: 'If You Don't like the Country . . . Get the Hell Out,'" Pro Football Talk: NBC Sports, September 23, 2016, <https://profootballtalk.nbcsports.com/2016/09/23/mike-ditka-to-colin-kaepernick-if-you-dont-like-the-country-get-the-hell-out/>.

<sup>34</sup> Habitus denotes a system of lasting, inculcated, dispositions that are inscribed on the body through the experience of everyday life.

representing one truth, one history, or one societal role, the dominant meaning of sport by social users can change based on the current historical and social moment in which events occur. For Bourdieu, empirical, finite interpretations of sport can never exist -- sports and styles of play within a certain sport can have simultaneous meanings and interpretations that are validated by the varying social dispositions and experiences of the athletes. Bourdieu also asserted that there are certain things that can only be understood and communicated corporeally; bodily movements that can only be produced while playing a sport are among those practices that allow for a type of bodily expression and comprehension that cannot be explicated or conveyed through an alternative mode of communication or medium. Here we might liken Bourdieu's analysis to more common terms such as "style of play," one that could be generational, regional, classed, raced. His allusion to corporeal communication conjures the awesomeness of individual players or plays across all sports in which an athlete's skill, feats, or failures convey something that only could have come from their sporting actions. The application of habitus as an all-encompassing means of understanding bodily expression and performance through sport, falls short, however, as it lacks an anthropologically oriented concept of culture in which local practices are determined by cultural schemas, myths, and beliefs.<sup>35</sup> To fill these theoretical gaps, scholars such as Susan Brownell built on Bourdieu's work, extending his analysis to the concept of "body culture". As Brownell explains in *Training the Body for China*, Body culture is a broad term that includes daily practices of health, hygiene, fitness, beauty, dress and decoration, as well as gestures, postures, manners, ways of speaking and eating, and so on. It also includes the way these practices are trained into the body, the way the body is publicly displayed, and the lifestyle that is expressed in that display. Body culture reflects the internalization and incorporation of

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<sup>35</sup> Niko Besnier and Susan Brownell, "Sport, Modernity, and The Body," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41, no. 1 (2012): 450.

culture. Body culture is embodied culture.<sup>36</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, applying body culture to the realm of baseball allows us to better understand how the white perceiving subjects' overdetermination of signs is used to nationalize, regionalize, and racialize aspects of Latin American play. As I discuss, the blending and adoption of stylistic elements across ethno-racial lines reveals the embodied nature of style of play and the limits of fixed notions of nation, region, and ethnicity often tied to sport. As I stipulated in an earlier section of this introduction, examining how race, language and behavior (in this case conduct and performance on the field of play) are concomitant, we can observe how white players and staff patrol the boundaries of acceptability, ultimately codifying white norms, at once naturalizing or biologizing Latin American bodily expressions as deviant and distancing whiteness from said behavior. While it might be tempting to group style of play at the national, regional, or class level, we must acknowledge how histories of colonialism, imperialism, globalization, and the current conditions of migratory labor inform sporting performance across international boundaries.<sup>37</sup> In the globalized world of baseball, where the league and individual teams have increasingly come to rely on a stream of migrant labor from Latin America, on field performance and style of play do not necessarily generate obvious examples of domination, oppression, or resistance that cut along center-periphery lines. When Latin American players (as 3rd World actors) appear emphatically defiant or celebratory they could be generating symbolic and representational visibility for people in a country that the world has deemed unimportant or they could just as easily be reviving colonial stereotypes and marginalizing the targets of such stereotypes.<sup>38</sup> Thus, it is

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<sup>36</sup> Susan Brownell, *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People's Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 10–11.

<sup>37</sup> Niko Besnier, "Sports Mobilities Across Borders: Postcolonial Perspectives," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 7 (2015): 849–61.

<sup>38</sup> IBID, 858

important to examine how individual actions are framed, interpreted, and often overdetermined, within white space and subsequently what such readings and discussions of said actions reveal about whiteness generally.

**Method:**

In this work I combine oral histories in the form of semi-structured formal and informal interviews, archival research, and readings of popular culture to investigate how histories of US empire, white supremacy, and racial-colonial logics (as well as their continued perpetuation through forms of coloniality) have defined the environment of major league baseball and shaped Latin American experience within the sport. I employ a type of critical analysis that juxtaposes player experiences and accounts with observed forms of structural violence and a hegemonic cultural system that reproduces forms of white racism through language, appropriation, and a reliance on tropes/stereotypes rooted in colonialism and forms of domination flowing from Global North to Global South, the US to Latin America. Chapter 2 draws heavily on a body of tweets that communicate a set of racialized Latin American behaviors and practices. From a methodological standpoint, it is important to note that I never asked interview respondents about the tweets -- neither their existence nor their content. I did not want to guide or lead my interviewees to a specific answer or color their recollection of their own story and experiences. If anything, interviewee unawareness of the tweets and lack of reference to them during the interviews revealed the extensiveness of certain stereotypes within the game; knowing that interviewees were able to recall or corroborate certain stereotypes expressed in the tweets adds veracity to what would otherwise be seen as only embodied experience on the part of the interviewees.

## **Terminology:**

*Latin American:* A term used to describe all players born in Latin America regardless of country of origin.

*Latino:* In the body of this work, I use the term “Latino” to refer to people of Latin American descent living in the US. However, in player interviews, some interviewees use the term indiscriminately to refer to both individuals from Latin American and those born in the US. In interviews where participants use the term Latino, they are almost always referring to the broader Latin American player population regardless of where an individual was born or currently resides.

*white, Anglo, US, English-Speaking:* As it relates to discussions of linguistic hierarchy and language ideology, I rely on this set of terms to describe the overwhelmingly white, heritage English-speaking population.

*1st World/3rd World, Global North/Global South, Western:* As is the case with any work that deals with histories of colonialism, imperialism, and engages in analysis of modernity, development, and coloniality, the terms Western, 1st World/3rd World, Global North/Global South are often used interchangeably. Though I predominantly employ 1st World/3rd World, Global North/Global South, all three appear throughout this work and none of them is used to imply an apparent geographical fixity. I acknowledge the fluidity of such terms and attempt to highlight their instability and function as a form of ethnocentric hierarchization deployed in the name of power and hegemony by the 1st World/Global North/West.

*Professional baseball:* Unless otherwise noted, I generally use the term professional baseball to refer to the Major League Baseball apparatus. That is, any form of play associated with one of the 30 major league teams in the major or minor leagues.

## **Access and Positionality:**

It goes without saying that my current profession and prior positions in professional baseball have granted me entry into a world that I otherwise wouldn't have had access to for a project of this scope; because I work for a major league team (and have for the past nine years in different capacities and roles), I have been able to interact and become close with a broad group of players and staff alike that neither the general public nor those in the academy typically interact with. In a simplistic sense, I have been embedded in the broader baseball community and adjacent to the Latin American player community for nearly a decade. Of course, the relationships I've built over time were not part of some cold calculus to conscript interviews for

an academic project, on the contrary; the positions I've held have required me to work closely with Latin American players, thus friendships and working relationships evolved naturally over time. I did not begin my master's program until my sixth year in professional baseball and did so in an attempt to better comprehend and interpret what I was seeing and the work I was doing on a daily basis.

Previous forays into the study of major league baseball, its growth in Latin America, and the treatment of Latin American players, have often relied on interviews with people like myself or others with more experience; baseball executives who can speak with a relative level of authority, having worked with, scouted, or observed Latin American players over a number of years.<sup>39</sup> While those access points are valuable, my work takes things a step further by *also* speaking with a number of contemporary players and staff members on MLB teams and detailing the modes and ways in which whiteness and white supremacy border the game and maintain hierarchy within it. As I weighed this project, I kept coming back to the fact that I could not and should not speak for the player population and instead should frame my analysis historically and structurally through a reckoning with colonialism, imperialism, and white supremacy inherent to the existence of the US. Due to my ability to speak Spanish and my close work with Latin American players over the years trying to help them actualize their goals and improve over the course of their careers, I have generally been granted access to Latin American circles. So much so that it felt awkward asking people I've been quite close with for a number of years whether or not they would be okay with me interviewing them. Nervous that a formal request would seem off-brand or weird, I left feeling reassured after every ask; my interviewees didn't hesitate, often cutting off my anxious framings or ramblings, telling me that whatever I needed, they would

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<sup>39</sup> See Alan Klein's case studies in *Dominican Baseball* in which he references 5 people central to the history of baseball in the Dominican Republic.



provide. “Cuenta conmigo, bro,” -- “Tú siempre me cuidabas,” -- “Claro hermano, hay que reciprocarse, lo que tú harías para mí, yo haría para ti.” That’s not to say there haven’t been moments of reproach, trust building, and limitations to what players have felt comfortable sharing with me. Even with fluent Spanish, even as people have struggled to place me or have misread me as Latino, I haven’t been guaranteed open access to everything in Spanish-speaking players’ lives. To pretend or assume as much would be both arrogant and false. Although I do have a relative level of insight into the world of baseball and how the structures of the game both fail and exploit Latin American players, I want to avoid any terms such as “authority” and “expertise” as it relates to the subject matter in question. In a professional sense, I can speak as someone who has had both the privilege and ability to float between US (read as white, English-speaking) and Latin American (read as typically Black and Brown, Spanish-speaking) spaces and in an academic sense I can speak as someone in dialogue with and constantly learning from a broad canon of postcolonial, Black liberation, and linguistic anthropological scholarship. That said, the framing of this thesis attempts to avoid moments or anecdotes centered on *my* experience, instead opting to contextualize player and staff responses in the broader framework of racial-colonial domination, coloniality, white supremacy, and language ideology.

### **Participants and the Use of Pseudonyms:**

Throughout this work, I employ the use of pseudonyms to protect the identities of my interviewees. For current players and staff, the stakes are potentially high, though, to my surprise, the vast majority of players I spoke with about confidentiality had very few concerns about masking their identities. That said, I took extra care to make participants aware that their responses would not be traced back to them, so as not to bring them unwanted attention or at worst, adversely affect their career prospects. As such, I alter identifiable moments, names,

places, while trying to stay true to their personal stories. Player respondents hail exclusively from the Dominican Republic and Venezuela, as I sought to limit my focus to the two countries historically responsible for the majority of Latin American players in the game (both minor and major leagues). Between trades and free agency, the players averaged at least two teams played for with some having been on 3 or 3+ teams. In total, the participants in the study either played or worked for 14 different teams over their careers during the window when I conducted interviews. Therefore, their responses are representative of a shared experience across baseball as an industry, not just a look at one team's ecosystem. The majority of the players interviewed are all current or former major leaguers: some role players, some starters, some league leaders. My choice to focus on major league players was intentional, as the power dynamics of interviewing minor leaguers still trying to make their way to the big leagues seemed uneven given my position within the game. Major leaguers, on the other hand, though not a uniform demographic by any means, are more likely to speak freely from a relative, though by no means perpetual, position of security (economic, status, performance, etc.). Additionally, being in the major leagues represents the culmination of a journey and affords players the possibility to reflect on a completed trajectory -- how they got to where they are and what happened along the way. Minor league stories and experiences are every bit as legitimate as those from the major league, as the structural barriers and white supremacist hierarchies are often more pronounced in the minor leagues and occur independent of whether one eventually makes it to "the show". However, while this thesis offers critical analysis of multiple components of the minor leagues, the interviewees themselves were not minor leaguers.

It is also important to state that over my career I have worked for 4 different professional teams, the last 6 years with the San Diego Padres and the first few years bouncing around, as I

tried to break into the game. Due to the various stops early in my career, the participants in the study are not simply people I interacted with while working for San Diego. Though there surely would have been a number of willing participants, I did not want to make it easy to deduce or infer a given interviewee's identity, instead drawing on contacts and relationships I have built over the years to find willing participants. Additionally, as noted earlier, I did not want this research to run up against professional responsibilities or appear as a conflict of interest. For non-player participants, that is staff and coaches, the approach was similar. I interviewed executives and team personnel with a wide range of experience across the majors, minors, on the field, in scouting, and in the front office. The staff participants consisted of Latin American and white, US individuals who, as was the case with the players, had worked for different teams in a wide range of capacities. In the pages that follow, I attempt to blend their stories, comments, and perspective, offering a unique look into the world of professional baseball and the historical, racial, and geo-political backdrops that inform it.

### **The Chapters:**

Chapter 1, "Entering and Leaving Modernity: Developmental Trajectories to and from Latin America," reads Major League Baseball's presence in Latin America within a broader history of US intervention, neoliberal reach, and developmentalism in the Global South. With a focus on the Dominican Republic -- as both the primary hub for all major league teams in Latin America as well as an exemplary case of a country scarred by US invasion and influence -- the chapter considers how legacies of colonial/imperial power and hierarchy are maintained between center and periphery, 1st and 3rd World, US and Latin America.

Chapter 2, "The Construction of a "Coño": Colonial Difference and White Normativity in Professional Baseball," outlines how language, discourse, and behavior both within and adjacent

to the spaces of professional baseball reinforce racial-colonial hierarchies. By scrutinizing the types of language and conduct that white individuals mark as different, we can infer both what falls outside of white normativity and conversely how whiteness is constructed; in focusing on what white subjects deem unacceptable and abnormal, we can derive what *is* in fact desirable or admissible. The chapter examines the white creation and proliferation of a racialized Latin American player identity and descriptor known as “coño,” popularly circulated on Twitter and in locker rooms through the phrase “Total Coño Move.” Chapter 2 assesses the different attributes of the white-constructed “coño” and concludes with a short profile of YouTube personality Domingo Ayala that embodies, proliferates, and sells the image of the racialized “coño” figure to the broader public.

Chapter 3, “Rumbo a las mayores: Encountering Development and Navigating the Business of Baseball” synthesizes the theory and methodological strategies of the first two chapters using them as a backdrop against which Latin American player accounts can be compared and contrasted. Though excerpts from player interviews dot the first two chapters, Chapter 3 relies heavily on oral histories, formal and informal interviews, and the words of current and former Latin American major leaguers. The chapter is framed along a thematic chronology that follows a rough through line from amateur to professional, minor leagues to major leagues, underscoring points of commonality in the Latin American player experience. Paying particular attention to baseball as both a business and cultural system, Chapter 3 examines how players come to understand their worth, place, treatment, and identity within the game, at times through explicit moments of confrontation and in other cases through less perceptible, internalized ideas and beliefs.

The Conclusion touches on a handful of themes and loose ends that run parallel to the heart of this work. The first section briefly examines how neoliberal multiculturalism has seeped into the game, often portraying images to its audience that differ from the realities of Latin American experience on the ground. As opposed to the more blatant vending of racism through figures like Domingo Ayala, this section highlights how the very images of diversity and multiculturalism that the league, companies, and media seek to promote are oftentimes the same behaviors that are policed within white space. Additionally, a cursory look at recent tension points or scandals relating to Latin American players as well as contemporary representations of Latin American players in the press, reveal the limits of a projected, public-facing, flattened diversity that continues to promote 1st World/3rd World hierarchy. The Conclusion then moves to a case for internationalism by drawing on the shared oppressions that both Latin American and other BIPOC players (and their respective communities) face within the sport.

## 1. Entering and Leaving Modernity: Developmental Trajectories to and from Latin America

*What is termed globalization is the culmination of a process that began with the constitution of America and colonial/modern Eurocentered capitalism as a new global power. The racial axis has a colonial origin and character, but it has proven to be more durable and stable than the colonialism in whose matrix it was established.*

- Anibal Quijano, *Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America*, 2000

*While any society may produce stereotypical representations of cultural difference as part of its own self-production, what is unique about Occidentalism is that it entails the mobilization of stereotypical representations of non-Western societies as part of the West's self-fashioning as an imperial power. Occidentalism is inseparable from Western hegemony not only because as a form of knowledge it expresses Western power but because it establishes a specific bond between knowledge and power in the West.*

- Fernando Coronil, *Beyond Occidentalism: Toward Nonimperial Geohistorical Categories*, 1996

Each year, professional baseball teams book hundreds of flights to and from Latin America. The majority of trips are for major and minor league players -- at various points in their careers -- coming to the US to participate in their respective seasons. Major League Spring Training invitees (and minor leaguers after them) arrive in late winter and early spring to begin preparing for the upcoming season that will stretch through the spring and summer. A wave of younger players, most of whom had been practicing in the Dominican Republic for their own Spring Training, fill in the ranks of the Arizona and Florida complexes after players a year or two ahead of them ship out to a minor league affiliate. Over the autumn months, promising prospects attend a team's "Instructional League," play in the Arizona Fall League, or attend any number of team-specific mini-camps. The constant flow of players, a checkered collection of ages, nationalities, talents, and stories, courses out of Latin America and into to the US year after year in cyclical fashion. In the other direction, executives, scouts, and coaches travel to Latin America to see current minor or major leaguers and prospective amateurs. Oftentimes, visits

revolve around a team employee checking in on the players within their own organization; staff members go to work with major or minor leaguers during both the season and offseason to address something specific in a player's game, offer or receive updates, or simply make sure all is well. Professional scouts watch recently signed, young players at their own team's complex or attend winter ball games, updating scouting reports that will inform potential trade and free agent acquisitions. International and special assignment scouts as well as scouting directors and other front office brass will hop from country to country to evaluate and negotiate with the biggest amateur prospects, securing deals for those eligible for upcoming signing classes. The international ecosystem of Major League Baseball (MLB) has created a multivalent set of movement patterns that spans Latin America and the US.

The reason for such extensive movement is a result of the flood of Latin American players into the ranks of professional baseball over the last three to four decades, a topic that has been thoroughly researched by the likes of Alan Klein, Rob Ruck, and Adrian Burgos, among others. Klein in particular has taken the time to examine the *flow* and *trajectory* of player talent from the Dominican Republic to the US, engaging with Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems theory and applying the framework of a commodity chain to help understand player movement and the stream of human capital from Latin America to the US.<sup>40</sup> This chapter picks up where previous scholarship has left off, tracing Latin American player movement *up* the commodity chain as well as movement in the opposite direction, as coaches, executives, and staff from the US follow the same path *down* or *back to* Latin America. I situate the human circulation within a postcolonial framework, focusing on discourses of development, underscoring the ways in which

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<sup>40</sup> Klein, *Dominican Baseball: New Pride, Old Prejudice*.

Klein acknowledges that the commodity chain is an imperfect but useful analytical frame for understanding the flow of baseball players from the Dominican Republic (and Latin America) to the US.

both the physical and discursive movement between the US and Latin America replicates and reinforces colonial hierarchies. Major League Baseball as a system (and individual teams as extensions of said system) has come to view players moving up the chain from Latin America to the US as in need of development, acquiring more modern skills and acceptable forms of behavior as they distance themselves from their languid Latin American origins.<sup>41</sup> Conversely, the predominantly white, US-born individuals involved in the web of major league baseball have come to see Latin America as a necessary backwater for the maintenance and growth of the business. As such, when team reps are required to go to Latin America for work -- coaching, scouting, or general business -- they tend to brace themselves for a journey *backwards* in a linear conception of time and history, a return to a recent past from which they have since emerged.



**Figure 1.1** Winter Ball at Quisqueya, 2020. Photo by the author.

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<sup>41</sup> Walt Rostow's modernization theory and its "Five Stages of Development" informs this section. Rostow's theory assumed a certain level of historical equity and freedom in making economic decisions, something many postcolonial scholars such as Alberto Quijano would later expose as Eurocentric and ignoring histories of colonial and imperial influence.



Most of the travel to and from Latin America revolves around a major league team's Academy in the Dominican Republic, a place from which Latin American players "graduate" or move up and a site where white, US actors come to help coach, train, and evaluate those same players. My analysis expands on previous studies of the Academy, offering more color to its material and symbolic function within the broader system of professional baseball. As the most common destination in Latin America, the Dominican Republic plays host to US team representatives throughout the season and offseason. Team leadership groups in the form of Scouting Directors, Assistant General Managers, General Managers, their employees or extensions of a team's Player Development department -- directors, coordinators, coaches, medical and strength and conditioning staff -- are in constant movement between 1st World and 3rd World, making multiple trips to the Dominican Republic and team Academy annually. Though the individuals traveling to and from Latin America in a given season may change, the well-established migratory patterns and routines repeat themselves year in year out. My analysis in this chapter centers on the Academy not only as a colonial outpost, as Alan Klein has called it, but also as a port of embarque/desembarque. It is the first team-controlled site of development and refinement and the place where Latin American prospects begin their professional career and hopeful journey towards the big leagues. It is also a common point of entry *into* Latin America and the world of Latin American baseball for most white, US team representatives. The Academy is a waystation, a pit-stop where different populations engage with foreign systems and values for the first time, encounters that ultimately *import* and *export* colonial logics and stratums.

First, I outline some basics of US imperial and neo-colonial presence in the Caribbean, with special attention to the historical relationship between the US and Dominican Republic. My

focus on the Dominican Republic should not minimize the role of US intervention in the region or its relationship with other Latin American, baseball-producing countries, in particular Venezuela, Mexico, Cuba, Panama, Nicaragua, Honduras. Indeed, teams had established parallel Academy and league structures in Venezuela but with the closure of the Venezuelan Summer League in 2016,<sup>42</sup> players from all over Latin America are generally sent to team Academies in the Dominican Republic to begin their careers. As such, a focus on the Academy is not simply an analysis of Dominican baseball but rather offers a regional, Latin American scope. I then examine the socialization practices present at team facilities and how they rely on discourses of development that ultimately fortify Latin American difference and inferiority in the face of US modernity and primacy. So as to not fall into the trap of analyzing the Academy as a fixed, immutable space with concrete, unchanging functions -- namely the training of juvenile Latin American players -- I depict the Academy as a transitory location where knowledge and discourse circulate between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> World. By focusing on both passages *to* and *from* Latin America, the travelers moving in both directions, and their relative spatio-temporal proximity *to* and distance *from* modernity, I attempt to bring baseball's colonial logics into relief. The divergent and often diametrically opposed understandings that Latin American players and US staff have of their respective international trips betray Eurocentric, colonial legacies of Latin America as backwards, undesirable, and perpetually *behind* the US. In tracing movement along the commodity chain -- up/down or forward/backward -- we are able to see how Latin American players are portrayed as on a path to reform and growth while their US-born, predominantly white, counterparts understand themselves to be leaving the confines of modernity to return to a

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<sup>42</sup> MLB initiated the Venezuelan Summer League (VSL) in 1997, as teams sought to mirror the burgeoning Dominican academy model, establishing Academies and expanding the orbit of their operations in Latin America. As recently as 2007, there were 11 major league team-affiliated complexes functioning in Venezuela. Longstanding antagonism and tension between Washington and Caracas led to the dissolution of the VSL in 2016.

less complete, earlier version of civilization. The juxtaposition of Latin American aspirations to get off the island and white-US opposition or reservation to travel to the Dominican Republic (or Latin America generally) helps reveal the operative logics at play, as differing parties cross their respective geographic and spatio-temporal borders.

### **Imperial Backdrops**

For many US staff and players, exposure to Latin America is often limited to interactions with teammates and colleagues stateside. Others, as I have alluded to, make regular trips to Latin America that can accumulate over the years, giving these travelers relative authority or expertise in white, US spaces where Latin America remains foreign or unknown. Regardless, with limited context to comprehend the origins of their Latin American counterparts, US staff and players tend to draw anecdotal conclusions about a vast region, relying on institutional knowledge dotted with tropes about how and why Latin American players act the way they do and the role that their home countries (both nurture and nature) play in such behavior. However, such shoddy pseudo-anthropological attempts to make sense of Latin America, often end up naturalizing a perceived cultural difference and racial-colonial hierarchies. To understand the practices, commentary, and discourse around Latin America within the world of baseball as something unique to the sport or derived from a more “recent” encounter between distinct staff and player populations is to separate such stances from their colonial origins. Revisiting histories of US intervention and domination throughout Latin America and the Caribbean is necessary to understand how the orientalist ideas and practices (central to Western ascendancy in the Global South) continue to manifest themselves in the structures of professional baseball. While individual Latin American player achievement can distract from or eschew the Global North’s historical repression of the Global South, one cannot ignore the effect that US invasion and neo-

colonial force has had in the region. Fernando Coronil's words are instructive: "By guiding our understanding toward the relational nature of representations of human collectivities, it brings out into the open their genesis in asymmetrical relations of power, including the power to obscure their genesis in inequality, to sever their historical connections, and thus to present as the internal and separate attributes of bounded entities what are in fact historical outcomes of connected peoples."<sup>43</sup> As it relates to baseball then, the naturalization of poor economic conditions in player-producing nations like the Dominican Republic and Venezuela or the centering individual player success stories from said countries as an empty symbol of meritocracy, cannot erase centuries of US dominance in Latin America. Backed by "science and rationality" and a need to both ascribe to and further its epistemological legitimacy, colonial and imperial occupation could be viewed as liberation, a form of guidance for laggard peoples unable to "advance" on their own. Such ideas would motivate countless US invasions, interventions, and destabilizations in Latin America throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

Take then President Woodrow Wilson's comments to the Associated Press in 1915, after the US had invaded Haiti and shortly before it occupied the Dominican Republic, "If we have been obliged by circumstances...in the past, to take territory which we otherwise would not have thought of taking, I believe I am right in saying that we have considered it our duty to administer that territory, not for ourselves, but for the people living in it."<sup>44</sup> An extension of the US government's broader application of the Monroe Doctrine,<sup>45</sup> Wilson's labeling of the Dominican

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<sup>43</sup> Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 14.

<sup>44</sup> Arthur S. Link, ed., "Woodrow Wilson, 'Remarks to the Associated Press New York, 1915,'" in *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 33 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

<sup>45</sup> The Monroe Doctrine sought to prevent European interference and additional colonial expansion in the Americas. Under its statutes, any European presence in the region would be interpreted as a threat to US interests. The US furthered this stance under Theodore Roosevelt via the Roosevelt Corollary, which stated that the use of military force would be warranted if any European nation meddled in the region. These policies provided the justification for the US invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1916.

Republic and its inhabitants as in need of governance “justified” US military intervention and projected the US -- through the embodied presence of the marines invading the island -- as a civilizing, white, and just nation. Of course, this paternalistic, benevolent framing, rooted in colonial difference, ultimately served US interests that proved deleterious to nations like the Dominican Republic, on the receiving end of US “help.” As Lorgia García-Peña succinctly summarizes, the US invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1916 left an indelible mark on the country and helped dictate its political, economic trajectory for much of the 20th century:

A brief glance at the early twentieth-century United States occupation of Haiti (1915-34) and of the Dominican Republic (1916-24) tells us a lot about the role of the United States in the creation of unequal economic and political systems that benefit rich corporations while condemning the majority of the population to poverty and disenfranchisement. During its eight-year occupation of the Dominican Republic, the US government handed Dominican finances over to the National City Bank of New York, which would later be controlled by the Rockefeller Group. This move facilitated corporation ownership of Dominican land for sugar production. Another bequeath of the US occupation was the creation of the Guardia Nacional Dominicana (Dominican National Guard, or GND), which served as a vehicle for the ruthless dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo (1930-61), the US occupation’s right-hand mand and appointed general.<sup>46</sup>

This same rationale would come to inform US stances towards the Dominican Republic during and immediately after the Trujillo regime. As anticommunism swept the post-World War II US, Trujillo positioned himself as a staunch, anti-leftist in order to broker arms deals with the US. Though historically in favor of exporting liberal democratic norms to the Global South to curb the threat of leftism,<sup>47</sup> the US didn’t initially oppose the iron fist of Trujillo, convinced that his

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<sup>46</sup> Lorgia García-Peña, *The Borders of Dominicanidad: Race, Nation, and Archives of Contradiction* (Durham ; London: Duke University Press, 2016), 60.

<sup>47</sup> The Truman Doctrine, as exemplified by his “Four Point Plan” and “Fair Deal”, expanded in the post-World War II era as a method to contain the geopolitical expansion of communism. Through massive global aid in the form of capital, technology, education, and science, Truman hoped to “modernize” the less economically “developed” or “advanced” societies of the era and prevent them adopting leftist political ideology and government. Similarly, in the early 1960s, John F. Kennedy unveiled the “Alliance for Progress” an economic assistance program to promote “political democracy” and development in Latin America that simultaneously served as a way to exert influence in a region the administration had deemed vulnerable to social revolution and communism. The Kennedy regime

authoritarian governance would prevent the uncivilized masses of the 3rd World from drifting towards communism; despite his cruelty, Trujillo could thwart threats from the left and in doing so quell US fears. It wasn't until countless unpopular economic policies, a falling out with the Catholic Church, and the murder of the Mirabal sisters<sup>48</sup> that Trujillo's power began to decline.<sup>49</sup> His assassination in 1961 (to which the US and CIA have been tied) led to a period of civil war, military coups, and destabilization on the island. In the wake of the turmoil that Trujillo's void left, the US would directly invade again in 1965 to prevent the democratically elected Juan Bosch from forming a government that had been deemed unfavorable and too left leaning for US tastes. Joaquín Balaguer (a former Trujillo confidant, neoliberal, and anti-communist) would eventually be installed as president, securing US interests for decades to come. As the country descended into right-wing Trujillista control again, Juan Bosch astutely noted, "Creo que en la República Dominicana Latinoamérica ha recibido una lección...que no es posible establecer democracia con la ayuda de Estados Unidos, y que tampoco es posible establecer democracia contra los Estados Unidos // *I believe that in the Dominican Republic Latin America has learned a lesson...that it isn't possible to establish democracy with the help of the United States, nor is it possible to establish democracy against the United States.*"<sup>50</sup>

Assuming the presidency after the US-backed ousting of Juan Bosch, Joaquín Balaguer led the Dominican Republic's initial economic shift towards neoliberalism, expanding and investing

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ultimately ended up providing support for staunchly anti-communist governments, withholding the same resources from left-leaning administrations.

<sup>48</sup> The Mirabal sisters, Minerva, María Teresa, and Patria -- also known as "the butterflies" -- are national heroines in the Dominican Republic who helped drive clandestine opposition to Rafael Trujillo's regime before being murdered at the hands of the state in 1960.

<sup>49</sup> Richard Lee Turits, *Foundations of Despotism: Peasants, the Trujillo Regime, and Modernity in Dominican History* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 232–58.

<sup>50</sup> Juan Bosch and Guillermo Piña Contreras, *En Primera Persona: Entrevistas Con Juan Bosch* (Santo Domingo, República Dominicana: Comisión Permanente de la Feria del Libro, 2000).

heavily in the tourism industry throughout the late 1960s and 1970s. In his effort to promote tourism, Balaguer embarked on a campaign to attract foreign investment, accepting loans from a wide array of international agencies, most notably the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).<sup>51</sup> Though a seemingly neutral effort to grow the economy on its face, expanding and investing in the tourism industry revolves around foreigners from the Global North traveling to a more “affordable” host country in the Global South where they will spend their time and ideally, their money. However, in a clear case of economic dependence, core countries like the United States – where airline monopolies, planes, technologically adept travel agents and marketing firms reside – dictate the terms of business with a peripheral nation like the Dominican Republic. Furthermore, any sort of shift in the tourism markets or policies in the US – for example, depressed travel due to an international crisis or increased travel from expanded vacation time – will have an adverse effect on tourism-driven economies like the Dominican Republic. Even in the moments of boom, it is elite resort owners in the Dominican Republic who are benefitting from this global relationship, while poor, working class Dominicans are relegated to low-skilled, servile jobs centered on improving the tourist experience of visitors from the Global North.<sup>52</sup> In a short, poignant description of the type of uneven development that the Dominican Republic experiences as a result of tourism, Amalia Cabezas notes that, “while tourists enjoy potable water, paved roads, electric energy, and thirty-six airports, Dominicans experience daily blackouts, lack of clean water, lack of public transportation, and shortages and deficiencies in all forms of infrastructure.”<sup>53</sup> Indeed, Cabezas’ description highlights how the

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<sup>51</sup> Steven Gregory, *The Devil behind the Mirror: Globalization and Politics in the Dominican Republic* (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 2007), 23.

<sup>52</sup> IBID, 25

<sup>53</sup> Amalia Lucia Cabezas, “Tourism, Sex Work, and Women’s Rights in the Dominican Republic,” in *Globalization and Human Rights*, ed. Alison Brysk (University of California Press, 2002), 47.

domination has shifted in terms of type (direct military to economic) but the power dynamics remain the same, connected by a historical through line of US hegemony. Famed Dominican author Julia Alvarez captures such a shift in *In the Time of the Butterflies*, in which her dislocated narration techniques to recount the Mirabal sisters' deliberate action and subversion of the dictatorship, situating the sisters (and Dominican women more broadly) as powerful actors who were able to effect historical change and galvanize opposition against Trujillo. Alvarez uses her character Dedé – a fictional, fourth Mirabal sister – to reflect on the lives and legacy her sisters.<sup>54</sup> As Dedé, attends a 1994 event to honor her sisters, she sees an old friend, Lío, and the two reflect on what Dedé's fallen sisters have meant for the Dominican Republic, "He takes my hands and says 'The nightmare is over, Dedé. Look at what the girls have done.' He gestures expansively. He means the free elections, bad presidents now put in power properly, not by army tanks. He means our country beginning to prosper, Free Zones going up everywhere, the coast a clutter of clubs and resorts. We are now the playground of the Caribbean."<sup>55</sup> Here, by referring to "free elections" and "army tanks" Alvarez conjures up images of US military occupation and the denial of democratic values in the mid 1960s. She also uses Dedé to reflect on how much the Dominican Republic has *improved* according to developmentalist logic; relative to an oppressive dictatorship – and couched in a discourse of modernity – beach front resorts and democratic elections can be seen as advances. Alvarez makes her skepticism of this version of modernity more explicit a few paragraphs later when Dedé asks, "Was it for this, the sacrifice of the butterflies?"<sup>56</sup> Dedé is justified in her question, as the form of domination has shifted and taken on a more benign malevolence; in place of dictatorial force and violence backed or ignored by

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<sup>54</sup> Julia Alvarez, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, version 1st Algonquin pbk, 1st Algonquin pbk (Chapel Hill, N.C: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2010).

<sup>55</sup> IBID, 318

<sup>56</sup> IBID.



global powers, the Dominican Republic has been left with economic impositions and exploitation from the Global North. In the context of globalized neo-liberal economic policy opening up sectors of the Dominican economy, such as tourism, we can also comprehend how the business of baseball became -- and continues to be -- ripe for streamlining and expansion.

Much like Dedé's observation of resorts and clubs sprouting up everywhere along the Dominican Republic's coast, from the late 1980s on, major league teams began to put down roots on the island by constructing training complexes/team facilities known more commonly as Academies. The Academies signaled MLB's desire to expand globally and do so in a cost-effective manner. As Rob Ruck notes in *Raceball*, "[With the Academies,] teams could systematize player procurement and development while cultivating players at a fraction of the cost of securing comparable talent in the United States. Few major league investments have ever proved more efficient or productive."<sup>57</sup> After the Dodgers opened Campo Las Palmas in 1987 (widely acknowledged as the first official team-affiliated Academy on the island), MLB and individual teams began to industrialize rapidly, copying and pasting the Dodgers' mold and expanding their reach across the island. The installation of Academies became an economical measure to acquire and develop talent without overloading the existing minor league complexes and affiliates in the US; by housing the vast majority of young, Latin American prospects at the Academy, teams did not -- and still do not -- have to attain visas for all of their players. Only those deemed good enough to advance ever travel to the US require working papers. MLB and teams' speculation in the Dominican Republic did not go unnoticed. In some of his earliest work,

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<sup>57</sup> Rob Ruck, *Raceball: How the Major Leagues Colonized the Black and Latin Game* (Boston, Mass.; Enfield: Beacon; Publishers Group UK [distributor, 2012), 197.

Alan Klein examined the role of baseball as a form of underdevelopment in the Dominican Republic in 1989 as the academy system gained steam:

As American baseball teams go about their business of competing to win, they, like other neocolonial enterprises, wind up crippling the organization of Dominican baseball while at the same time making it more dependent on the US. In viewing the role of American sport in the Third World, one can gain insight into the means by which American political, economic, and cultural presence works to make other nations dependent and poorer. Far from being the result of callous and avaricious actions, dependency is often fostered by seemingly innocuous institutions, chief among them popular culture.<sup>58</sup>

Klein noted that increased US presence undermined the autonomy of Dominican amateur and professional baseball by elevating major league opportunity as the only viable, lucrative baseball career option. Under such an arrangement, players under major league team control require team permission if they are to play in any winter ball league — be it in their home country or abroad -- highlighting how important it is that winter ball teams and their representatives (in the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Mexico for example) curry favor and maintain good working relationships with major league team executives.<sup>59</sup> Additionally, MLB's privatization of the sport has resulted in the funneling of player's into a "July 2nd signing system" in which all parties involved -- players, trainers, agents, player's families -- aspire to earn a large bonus sometime around a player's 16th or 17th birthday. The focus on signing players at such a young age has led to a number of unplanned fallouts, such as the establishment of an expansive, local, informal economy that seeks to train and maximize a teenage player's signing bonus when July 2nd rolls

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<sup>58</sup> Alan Klein, "Baseball as Underdevelopment: The Political-Economy of Sport in the Dominican Republic," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 6 (1989): 95–122.

<sup>59</sup> It has become increasingly rare that established major league regulars will participate in winter ball only occasionally deciding to join his team if they are in need of a playoff push. In addition to major league players opting not to play, teams usually prohibit younger prospects from playing, leaving winter ball spots for journeyman types, players who lost time during the professional season to injury or suspension, or free agents seeking to boost their value before the upcoming season. A number of higher profile players and prospects participated in winter ball in the leadup to the 2021 regular season, after a pandemic-shortened 2020 limited game reps for everyone in the sport. Again, in this case, for established major leaguers, winter ball is viewed as a place to get increased reps for someone deemed lacking.

around. Klein unpacks many of these unintended consequences and examines the demonization of the “buscones” or independent trainers who coach amateur Latin American players and have historically been painted as rapacious manipulators who work outside the formal structures of MLB and take advantage of their teenage charges.<sup>60</sup> Though I will save a more detailed discussion of independent trainers and the informal economy for later in this thesis, it’s notable that MLB has recently tried to bring trainers into the fold, setting the terms of engagement through their Trainer Partnership Program. The description of the program from MLB’s website reads:

The Trainer Partnership Program is a collaboration between Major League Baseball (MLB) and independent trainers to help develop international baseball while addressing important issues in the international market. Independent trainers are an essential part of the player development system in Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Venezuela and other countries, and MLB supports trainers who are focused on developing players in a safe and healthy environment while following MLB rules and acting ethically. Participating trainers are required to meet certain MLB standards, including early registration and drug testing of their players, and they maintain an ongoing dialogue with MLB about international baseball policy.<sup>61</sup>

The program is widely viewed as an effort to curb the use of steroids among amateur players, something that most parties -- the league, teams, players, families, and most trainers -- seem to agree with. However, it should not go unnoticed that these terms are the latest adjustment to the existing signing system that “allows MLB to put regulations and potential business consequences in place for a group of trainers that the league largely did not otherwise control”.<sup>62</sup>

As MLB continues to inject Latin American talent into the game, institutional focus has centered on how to manage, integrate, and reform Latin American players into an *existing* system, not on how to overhaul or reimagine a flat, international, framework that values domestic and foreign players equally. It shouldn't be controversial, then, to make the assertion that Major League

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<sup>60</sup> Klein, *Dominican Baseball: New Pride, Old Prejudice*.

<sup>61</sup> “MLB Trainer Partnership Program,” MLB.com, n.d., <https://www.mlb.com/trainer-partnership>.

<sup>62</sup> Ben Badler, “MLB Starts Trainer Partnership Program In Latin America,” *Baseball America*, August 17, 2018, <https://www.baseballamerica.com/stories/mlb-starts-trainer-partnership-program-in-latin-america/>.

Baseball and individual teams -- in their current and historical forms -- were never designed with Latin American players in mind. Instead, the league and teams have featured piece-meal and ever-changing set of reactions to the presence of foreign players. League and team practices towards Latin American players can be understood as slowly evolving modes of management of a 3rd World Other, at worst viewing players as cheapened, expendable commodities, and at best seeking to ameliorate hurdles to their integration into the machine of professional baseball. Once in the system, signed to professional contracts, Latin American players become many things: a problem to be solved, a group of individuals that needs to be schooled and refined, an issue that needs fixing within a broader business model, and above all else unequal participants in a sporting relationship that can't be extricated from US' historical domination of Latin America.

### **The Academy as a Site of Development: Making Acceptable Citizens**

Before further examining the Academy's role as a site of socialization, it's important to understand its standard function across professional teams and how its presence fits into the larger structure of the minor leagues. The Academy's most visible purpose is as a training site for young Latin American prospects and a venue at which teams compete in the Dominican Summer League (DSL) a level of "rookie ball," the lowest level of the minor leagues; from June to September teams bounce around the island, traveling to opposing organizations' Academies to play in DSL regular season games. However, the Academy's use is not limited to hosting practices and formal games, as its activity shifts depending on need and time of year.

**Table 1.1** Anatomy of an Academy

Functions of the Academy in the Dominican Republic		
Level	Time of Year	Note
Amateur Workouts and Games	All Year	Amateur players looking to sign come to the Academy for various types of tryouts. Players travel with their trainers from all over Latin America (increasingly from Venezuela after the closure of the VSL) to try out for major league teams in the Dominican Republic.
Dominican Summer League (DSL)	June - September	Teams play each other in a formal minor league season with games taking place at the Academies. Players live on-site at the Academy and participate in team programming that usually involves some sort of educational and "life skills" component.
Tricky League	July - September	Recent signees who aren't yet eligible to play in the DSL compromise teams that scrimmage or play informal games against other organizations or prospect teams. Tricky league players will often participate in practices and off-field programs alongside, rostered DSL players.
Instructional League	October - November	Younger, mostly Latin American prospects are invited to the Academy to get extra work, more focused coaching and attention.
Winter Camps and Offseason Training	November - January	On occasion, teams will host short camps with specific goals/areas of focus for certain minor league players. Some teams will keep their academy open for the offseason (with varying levels of functionality) so players can access and utilize the facilities over the winter.
Spring Training	January - February	Players prepare for the upcoming season and are usually broken down into two groups: 1. Players who will travel to the US and participate in a team's official Minor League Spring Training 2. Players who will go through their full spring training in the Dominican Republic.

The Academy also serves as the entry point into *professional* baseball for Latin American players. As such, the shift from amateur tryouts, tournaments, and showcases represents an increase in formality and discipline proximate to one's new status as a full-time athlete. Despite players having already been evaluated and having received compensation in the form of a signing bonus (be it large or small), entering the professional ranks exposes them to institutional expectations and scrutiny. At the Academy, practice, play, on-field performance, and individual, physical skills are tracked, measured, honed, and improved with the aim of improving a player's game and helping that player earn a promotion. Barring elite on-field talent or prospect status, it generally stands that the farther one is away from the major leagues, say, at the Academy, the lowest level of professional baseball, the more one must adhere to team expectations or protocols. Though not necessarily expressed by team employees on the ground, the promotion and enforcement of Academy protocols can be viewed through a lens of informal empire in which baseball acts as a more discrete extension of US global hegemony. Of course, my contention here is not that teenage Latin American players do not have a number of areas to improve if they hope to be able to compete and play at the major league level; any elite athlete will need the requisite combination or balance of natural talent and hard work to maximize their ability and reach their potential and most players require at the very least several years to ascend to "the bigs." However, teaching young amateur players "how to be professionals" and check the necessary performance boxes on the field assumes a normative, "correct" (read as US) way to play the game. While strong on-field performance during the DSL and a display of certain physical displays or measurables are a player's most likely path to "graduate" in an informal sense -- in that everyone's aspiration is to move up from the lowest level of the minors and

progress towards the major leagues -- his behavior at the Academy is also arbitrated in numerous off-field areas.

**Table 1.2** Structure of the Minor Leagues

\*Short season teams were eliminated over the course of 2020 in the leadup to the 2021 season. The restructuring of the minor leagues, elimination of teams, and the ongoing battle to increase minor league wages are all wrapped up in a broader context of MLB and ownership seeking to streamline processes and cut unnecessary costs. I included Short-Season as a reference point, since all interviewees who participated in this study would have gone through minor league systems with such a level. Even without short-season teams, the nature of player movement has remained similar.

Rookie Ball (DSL)	Dominican Republic
Rookie Ball (AZL/GCL)	Arizona/Florida
Short-Season*	x
A	-
A+	-
AA	-
AAA	-
MLB	-

The Academy’s multifaceted function isn’t limited to the field of play. The annual procurement of visas for all foreign players often runs through a point of contact at the Academy. The signing of international prospects each July 2nd usually occurs at the Academy and if it doesn’t, the workouts leading up to the signing surely did. Baseball goods, equipment and team gear, items players forgot while in the US, and important legal documents are all sent to the team complex. The Academy unquestionably plays an essential part in each team’s minor league structure and ecosystem. Despite the numerous avenues of academic investigation that the Academy offers, my interest primarily lies in how it actively socializes Latin American prospects, particularly, through the implementation of team education and “Life Skills” programs that have historically centered on teaching English as a second language and reforming player behavior. In the earliest

days of the Academy system, no such instruction occurred in-house, that is teams did not provide English programming, leaving Latin American players who traveled to the US ill-equipped to navigate a foreign, English-first society. Before league and team-wide emphasis on education grew, some clubs would shuttle players to and from the capital to conduct classes, though more recently teams have employed the practice of bringing teachers to their facilities to offer instruction. Eventually, MLB would mandate that all teams needed to provide a minimum of English instruction at their facility. This shift created an increased need for teachers on-site at the Academy (primarily English instructors though specific subject teachers have also appeared more regularly), offering an opportunity for 3rd party companies to provide such services to teams with little familiarity in the educational space. Increasingly, teams have hired professionals from both the US and Latin America to build out education infrastructure and programming all while creating continuity between the Academy and minor league system in the US. The increase in attention, investment, and promotion of education within professional baseball can be tied to public relations and scrutiny of a signing system that is perceived as forcing players to abandon their schooling at younger and younger ages in the pursuit of attaining a professional contract at age 16.<sup>63</sup> As such, MLB has played an ever-changing supervisory role in navigating and overseeing administrative practices/regulations for a signing system and business environment of their creation. Over the years, the league has brokered partnership and pilot educational programs with third party contractors that they then offer to teams as an MLB-stamped, all-inclusive schooling package. The league has also allowed teams to pursue their own academic structure as long as it meets requirements that can change from year to year, at times asking teams to provide certain subject matter or a path to a high school diploma only to withdraw those

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<sup>63</sup> Klein, *Dominican Baseball: New Pride, Old Prejudice*.



mandates and temper their involvement. Despite all this, the education infrastructure and dealings between MLB, teams, and players remain messy and disorganized at best. Players come from all over Latin America from a range of different countries where education systems and diploma requirements vary widely. On top of that, and more importantly, players arrive with different levels of formal education and individual learning needs. The balance between baseball and academic responsibility remains a tenuous but core question amidst the constantly shifting education landscape: What sort of role should teams play in the education of the teenage, Latin American players they sign? If they have education programs, what should teams be teaching these players in terms of subject matter? And, in the event that teams do provide any number of education options -- a diploma program, informal onboarding, team specific learning outcomes, or cross-cultural instruction to help prepare for life in the US -- how can power dynamics between team/player and the re-inscription of imperial/colonial hierarchies be mitigated, if at all? Alan Klein correctly notes that simply falling back on the fact that education leads to more opportunity than sport may be shortsighted or ethnocentric, “Unlike in the United States, in many developing nations the link between education and employment opportunity is weak or nonexistent. While it may seem counter-progressive and counterintuitive to Americans to promote baseball over education, in the DR, the argument in favor of baseball, at the expense of education is a credible one.”<sup>64</sup> Similarly, in his study on migrant Black Athletes from Africa, Munene Franjo Mwaniki asserts that, “underdevelopment and the continuation of neocolonial policies...limit the sovereignty of the African nation-state. The concurrent devaluation of African education by Western institutions has a significant impact on the lives of recent African immigrants to the West. Hence, with limited economic opportunities because of these complex

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<sup>64</sup> IBID, 64.

factors, we begin to see sport overtaking education in the minds of youths who want to succeed. Sport is nothing if not a low-cost entry into a hard, manual labor lottery.”<sup>65</sup> Klein and Mwaniki explain that Western views and understandings of education as a clear-cut path to upward mobility don’t necessarily hold as much weight in the 3rd World, especially with the pressure and pervasiveness of repressive neocolonial economic policies. For aspiring athletes, sports can often represent more direct and immediate access to money and support for their families. Throughout my research, players voiced similar sentiments when discussing differences between the US and their home countries. Daniel and Eduardo, both from the Dominican Republic, shared their thoughts:

**Daniel:** How many players are there, teammates of ours, that have graduated as engineers? What Dominican player has graduated over there (the US) in anything? Maybe a handful. Who, for example, has a degree in that? It’s hard -- as far as I know I don’t know anyone. After they finish with their careers, for example, or they get released, yeah, they can study. But here, [in the US] you know that studies come first over baseball. Over there, no. There [in the Dominican Republic] it’s baseball and then studies. That’s the difference.

**Daniel:** ¿Cuántos jugadores, compañeros de nosotros, hay graduados que son ingenieros? ¿Qué pelotero dominicano ha graduado allá (los EE. UU.) de algo? A lo mejor un abanico. ¿Quién está, un ejemplo, allí graduado de eso? Es difícil -- que yo sepa no conozco nadie. Después de que terminan con su carrera un ejemplo o los botan allí sí, pueden estudiar. Pero aquí [en los EE. UU.] tú sabes que es primero el estudio que el béisbol. Allá, no. Allá [en la República Dominicana] es béisbol y después estudio. Es la diferencia.

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<sup>65</sup> Munene Mwaniki, *The Black Migrant Athlete: Media, Race, and the Diaspora in Sports*, Sports, Media, and Society (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017).

**Eduardo:** If we weren't poor, for example, and we got to the point where we couldn't sign, well, then either way I'd stay with my family, [and] since we have money, we'd find a way to get more. The majority of us don't have that option. It's like baseball or we find *something* to do. Study to see if we find something. And here, we study and at the end of the day we're unemployed. And it's exactly the same in most Latin American countries. They study and then at the end it's 'Ok and now where to?' Because when you finish with your studies they always ask you, for example, they're looking for a marketer who has five years of experience. How am I going to have five years of experience if I just got out of college?

**Eduardo:** Si no fuéramos pobres y un ejemplo nosotros llegáramos a donde no pudiéramos firmar pues ya comoquiera me quedaría con mi familia, [y] como tenemos dinero, buscaríamos la forma de cómo conseguir más. La mayoría no tenemos esa opción. Es como que, pelota o nos ponemos a hacer *algo*. A estudiar para ver si conseguimos algo. Y aquí, estudiamos y al final estamos desempleados. Y así mismo es en la mayoría de los países latinoamericanos. Estudian y al final 'ok, ¿y ahora para dónde?' Ok. Porque cuando tú sales de tus estudios siempre te piden...por ejemplo, buscan un mercadólogo que tenga cinco años de experiencia. ¿Cómo voy a tener cinco años de experiencia si acabo de salir de la universidad?

Both players highlight the prioritization of baseball their home country as viable economic avenue in and path that can be more lucrative than earning a degree. As Daniel notes, studying can come *after* baseball but the money-making opportunity that the game presents comes first, a contrast, in his mind, to the US where academics supersede athletic endeavors. For Eduardo, the opportunity that even higher education provides is insecure, unstable with no guarantee that one will end up with a job. In an environment where academic achievement isn't synonymous with economic security and a potentially life-changing payday awaits at age 16, Latin American players will drop out of school at an early age to pursue a career in baseball. As a result, it's common for players to arrive at the Academy with a wide variety of learning needs and differing exposure to formal education structures and curriculum, something teams are not always equipped to handle infrastructurally; despite having in-house academic programming, association with 3rd party groups, or offerings to attain a high school diploma, major league organizations usually don't navigate the nuance and instruction needed to fill individual learning gaps or meet personalized learner needs. Of course, there are plenty of players who have finished high school

-- many, including some of my interviewees, who had parents stipulate that they finish their bachillerato before being allowed to play baseball. Regardless, within the world of baseball, the Academy has grown into a symbolic site of education amidst the indiscriminate backdrop of under/uneducated Latin American teens. Without discounting the role of material poverty and uneven educational systems both across Latin America and more specifically in a given player's life, US generalizations and the uncritical equation of formal education with innate intelligence are ethnocentric at best. Of course, attitudes of Latin American intellectual inferiority derive from racial-colonial logics inherent to the creation and maintenance of US hegemony. Assessing the subject matter that often circulates the Academy's educational spaces provides additional insight.

As noted earlier, one central component of education programs at the Academy, regardless of a player's schooling history, is English instruction, as players are prepped for a career surrounded by monolingual English-speaking staff and teammates. However, over the course of a player's career, language acquisition becomes a site of intense examination and monitoring by team employees and can come to define a player's perceived ability to "process information," his appetite to "get better," or his "desire to learn." Inability or apparent unwillingness to practice and improve one's English communication skills, can confirm naturalized views of intellectual inadequacy, a conflation already germinating in the US imaginary due to the widespread practice of leaving school early to play baseball. Here, I'd like to revisit the analytical framework and application of a raciolinguistic perspective mentioned in the Introduction. A raciolinguistic perspective theorizes the co-naturalization of language and race as a part of the project of modernity<sup>66</sup> in which colonial and imperial legacies in Latin

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<sup>66</sup> Flores and Rosa, "Unsettling Race and Language: Toward a Raciolinguistic Perspective."

America and the construction and codification of racial difference was central to a European colonial ordering that foregrounded supposed biological difference as a way to naturalize the superiority/inferiority of certain peoples. That is, language and race become seen as indicative of and linked to one another, inseparable markers that allowed for the creation of difference and consolidation of colonial hierarchical structures and power. One must ask, then, what role do team-run English programs (and education programs more broadly) play and what motives drive English language acquisition? Let me be clear, *offering* English language classes, diploma programs, any sort of extracurricular work is by no means fundamentally bad for Latin American players. However, the second that Latin American proximity to a white, bourgeois standard of formal education (read as intelligence) begins to motivate curriculum and pedagogy, the more Fanon's colonial subject -- and his humanity as tied to his proximity to whiteness vis-a-vis language -- comes to mind. While English language and Life Skills programs are ubiquitous at team Academies, the ways in which English helps grant or deny Latin American access to white space or facilitate upward mobility throughout the minor leagues is rarely interrogated. As William, a front office executive told me, reflecting on organizational principles and processes during an interview "No team would ever say, 'Hey, you're going to get better coaching if you speak English' or 'We're going to be able to go that extra distance with you if you speak English,' but it's true!"

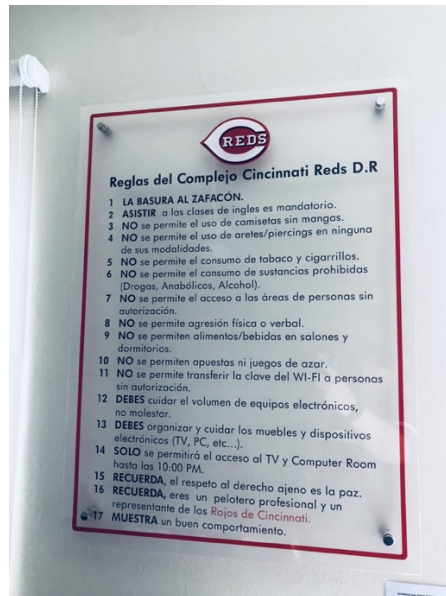
Interestingly, by instituting education programs -- be they substantive or performative -- major league teams create an illusion of neutral academic opportunity that wouldn't have otherwise existed for Latin American players, however, baked into this seemingly benevolent exercise is an active evaluation and projection of Latin American players' future capacity to learn or think critically. The existence and overdetermination of the academic environment

embedded within the business of baseball evokes what María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo calls “the desiring subject of development.” John Patrick Leary, explicating Saldaña-Portillo’s term, describes the “desiring subject of development” as a figure “...that emerges from the contradiction between the ideal of capitalist modernization and the civilizational discourse of colonialism. The third-world subject (in the sovereign sense of this word), still needing the “improvement” of the West, is now a free subject (in the grammatical sense) who chooses his own improvement.<sup>67</sup> We can utilize this framework to help contextualize the broader institutional practices of MLB and team educational offerings, starting with the Academy. Latin American players are provided with the access to classes and instruction and can learn “what it takes” to “become a professional” and “make it to the US.” If they don’t, it will not be a result of the system in place -- since other players *will* make it under the same set of circumstances -- but rather a question of individual talent or effort, a failure to take advantage of the *opportunity presented to them*. Such logics begin at the Academy and follow players throughout their career thereafter; if they fail to advance after having been given the tools or instruction to succeed -- be it on the field, off the field, or both -- it can be viewed as a personal shortcoming rather than a structural limitation. Additionally, such framings offer a way for team personnel at all levels of the organization -- coach, teacher, staff, management -- to absolve themselves of the weight of such systemic barriers instead, blaming failure on a lack of individual gumption. Thus, it is necessary to pivot away from terms and ideas such as acculturation and remediation that suggest Latin American players are somehow abjectly in more need of development and refinement. Of course, there is a requisite level of maturation that *any teenager* might need as

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<sup>67</sup> John Patrick Leary, *A Cultural History of Underdevelopment: Latin America in the U.S. Imagination* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 8.

they embark on a professional baseball track that could last the next 15 years of their lives, if fortunate. However, what Klein refers to as “cultural remediation” at the Academy can also be viewed as classed and racialized approximation to white bourgeois norms, a form of colonization. Take this example of team rules at the Cincinnati Reds’ Academy from a 2018 article in *The Athletic*.



**Figure 1.2** Complex Rules.<sup>68</sup>

Among the seventeen rules listed on “Rules of the Cincinnati Reds D.R. Complex” are: 1. Throwing trash in the trash can, 2. Mandatory attendance to English classes, 3. No sleeveless shirts, 4. No earrings or piercings, 16. “Remember, you are a professional baseball player and representative of the Cincinnati Reds.” and 17. “Demonstrate good behavior”. While many of the rules convey a level of superficial, “professional” conduct, they also allude to a set of appearances and behaviors that won’t be disruptive upon traveling to the US: cleanliness, a tidy,

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<sup>68</sup> C. Trent Rosecrans, “Where Baseball Starts: 72 Hours at the Reds’ Dominican Republic Complex,” *The Athletic*, September 4, 2018, <https://theathletic.com/491371/2018/09/04/where-baseball-starts-72-hours-at-the-reds-dominican-republic-complex/>.

neat appearance, and a business-like demeanor with no unruly behavior. Alan Klein touches on the formation of a baseball player at the Academy, noting that the Academy space “..use[s] an array of practices to erase undesirable traits and forge new, more desirable ones.” However, as he examines a number of examples in which Latin American teens encountered issues in their professional development at the Academy and after having traveled to the US, his critique stops short of questioning *why* and *how* such behavior is policed: “At the academies, such behavior, while disruptive, is understood and acted on Dominican terms, but in the United States, it can result in dismissal. In the United States, an “attitude” is rarely tolerated and is likely to be culturally mislabeled and to carry dire consequences.” Or, “One international scouting director who had bawled out the staff at the Dominican Academy for inadequately preparing rookies they were sending to the Gulf Coast League said, ‘They need to be more professional and disciplined than they are.’”<sup>69</sup> Klein rightfully raises the question of whether or not punishment or termination (a player being released) is the player’s or organization’s fault: “Did the team really understand the player completely and were all possible remediation efforts attempted, or was the player flawed beyond redemption?”<sup>70</sup> However, he then discusses the instruction of US culture and English language as potential preventative solutions to such incidents. Though familiarity with a foreign country and the value of linguistic and cultural literacy cannot be understated, such a stance places the onus squarely on the shoulders of the Latin American player to approximate a certain level of white acceptability in their behavior; the team, on the other hand, is not held to account. If the arbiters of behavior are equally illiterate in the cultural practices and language of a given Latin American country, where should the blame fall? Historically, deviation from the hegemonic norms of the US has resulted in a relegation of Latin American players to

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<sup>69</sup> Klein, *Dominican Baseball: New Pride, Old Prejudice*, 58–59.

<sup>70</sup> *IBID*, 59.



the backward status of their home countries, concretizing the difference and hierarchy that already presuppose relations between US-Latin America and 1st World-3rd World. The introduction and inculcation of these norms begin in earnest at the Academy, often setting the stage for what Latin American players can come to expect over the course of their professional journeys. However, if we only analyze the symbolic and material role of the Academy in the life of a young Latin American prospect, we miss its productive function in contemporary Player Development programs and white, US understandings, readings, and treatment of Latin American players as they progress through the minor leagues.

### **Oppositional Human Flow to and from Latin America**

The day-to-day function of the Academy almost always relies on Dominican workers and administrators who are familiar with maneuvering their country's systems and procedures: this can relate to labor law, visas, transactions, travel, emergencies, as well as a wide range of local knowledge that remains inaccessible to foreigners. White higher ups who are based in the Dominican Republic, then, tend to remain tied to the baseball side of things, acting as the members of the minor league, Player Development system entrusted with furthering the aims, goals, tenets, styles, lessons and organizational expectations for Latin American players before their potential departure to the United States.<sup>71</sup> Player Development departments oversee all aspects of minor league operations, meaning that it's not always coaches who are sent to the

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<sup>71</sup> In some cases, teams put their academies under the purview of white, English-speaking coaches/administrators sent to live in the Dominican Republic. Though not a widespread practice, these individuals do not necessarily have command of the Spanish language, making their oversight of an entire complex, its staff and players, and the administration and maintenance of its daily function tenuous at best, highlighting their reliance on local, Spanish-speaking employees. In the cases where such directorships are in place, proximity to power or a director's ability to pick up the phone or communicate with higher ups (typically English-speaking) is prioritized over functional management of the Academy itself.

Dominican Republic for work at the Academy; such assignments occur across the medical, athletic training, strength and conditioning, scouting, general baseball operations, research and development, information and technology departments. Regardless of whether or not the individuals sent to work abroad speak Spanish, white “expertise” is exported to the Dominican Republic each year, supplanting local labor in the name of streamlining development and imparting knowledge to Latin American staff and players alike. White employees -- and to a lesser degree players -- who have spent time in Latin America or are often sent to the Dominican Republic to gain experience, tend to be viewed favorably within white, US circles due to the perception that life and work in the Dominican Republic is more difficult; US-based employees who work for extended periods in the Dominican Republic are viewed as paying their dues or “toughing it out” for their work in the backwater of Latin America. Staff and players also travel to the Dominican Republic for more didactic purposes, to “*see*”, “*learn*”, and “*live under*” the same conditions as their Latin American pupils, teammates, and counterparts. Such vague “lessons” can sometimes refer to the stricter, more regimented work schedule for players, typical at most Academies -- the day begins early with practice all morning and games in the afternoon, a grueling schedule for someone not accustomed to the early wake up or style of practice/play. However, more often than not, these work trips often mimic or create (sometimes intentionally, sometimes organically) a theatrics of discomfort or dislocation for white staff; team employees sometimes cite how important it is that white staff members feel uncomfortable so that they might recognize the trials of Latin American players when they come to the US. While there is something to be said for reminding white staff that their stances, views, and ways of doing things do not carry the same cultural cachet outside of the US, their presence in the Dominican Republic is usually brief and in controlled settings, ultimately rendering their discomfort more

performative than meaningful. Additionally, having white staff (and less frequently player) observation and “participation” in “the same” Latin American conditions at the Academy revolves around an essentialization of Latin American poverty, destitution, and hardship. Though these ideas circulate during visits to the Academy and in Academy discourse more broadly, sometimes merely being in the Dominican Republic or another Latin American country is enough to confirm ideas about the region’s underdevelopment.

An oft-recited refrain within the white baseball community is that the Dominican Republic -- and Venezuela at times -- is like the Wild West. Lawless, a free for all, everyone left to their own devices. I asked William, a white baseball executive with extensive experience in the minor and major leagues, about the term.

**David:** Have you heard of the Dominican Republic referred to as the Wild West?

**William:** Uh, yes.

**Dav:** What does that mean to you and why do you think it’s talked about that way?

**Wil:** I mean I think, you take somebody who hasn’t been exposed to a whole lot outside of [their] little bubble. I fly into Santo Domingo and there’s no speed limit, the red light seems optional, and there are people coming up to my car trying to sell me things. These sorts of things wouldn’t fly or seem so uncivilized [compared to] where I’m from. And that’s your first touch, [your first impression], that’s it. When you land, you’ve done this a million times, when you take a commercial flight and you land in Charlotte, [North Carolina, for example]. Row 1 leaves, and then row 2 leaves, and then row 3 leaves, and then row 4 leaves. When you land in Santo Domingo, what happens? Everyone stands up and everyone just goes. And it’s a free-for-all. I’ve done it a dozen times, this happens. The security line can be a mess sometimes. There are people coming up to grab my bags that don’t even work at the airport. My point is that you get this initial impression that’s like ‘Whoa, at best this is disorganized,’ and you go from there. So, I think people have this thought in their head that’s like ‘Okay, the law and order [that I’m used to] is not the same here.’

Joey, another white baseball operations employee confirmed William's account:

**Joey:** The whole Latin American, international scene is seen as the Wild West. It's seen almost as a rite of passage [for] the most hardcore, American, typically white, executives and scouts. [They're] the ones that go there even if they have no expertise and don't speak Spanish, but they can go there and quote-unquote survive, whatever that means. And you hear stories about getting sick from the food and the electricity going out, and no running water. But [you] also [hear about] people getting mugged, the roads, how scary it is to drive. It's treated as this other type of place. Only the macho guys who are really into baseball can survive there and then once they've done that they can come back here, make a bunch of money, and live a comfortable life because they proved that they could do it there. [You hear,] 'Oh so-and-so couldn't handle it, he was throwing up for hours after he ate some food there,' or 'I'm down in the jungle looking for players.' It's like, I've never been there but I assume that most of the places people are going aren't in the middle of the jungle. It's [some] imagined Rudyard Kipling colonial-type adventure bullshit.

Joey's comments acknowledge the familiarity of the "Wild West" terminology, recalling an "uncivilized", unruly, ungovernable landscape. However, he also references how scouts recount their trips to Latin America as excursions into the "jungle", moving past mere disorder and instead summoning images of earlier colonial encounters and exploration into feral, untamed nature. One can easily spot the similarities between such reports and the dramatic language of Conrad's seminal colonial literature: "Land in a swamp, march through the woods, and in some inland post feel the savagery, the utter savagery had closed round him, all that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forests, in the jungles, in the hearts of wild men."<sup>72</sup> The scouting narratives are similar: stories of sickness, violence, danger, survival. As Joey aptly puts it, their experiences invoke the same wild, savagery as *Heart of Darkness*, the civilized men embarking on a "colonial-type adventure" into the unknown, undomesticated "jungle."

William and Joey weren't alone in their appraisal of how white baseball employees discuss their "adventures" in Latin America. Blending excerpts from multiple conversations, interviewees shared a wide range of similar examples. A coach's sarcastic commentary while in

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<sup>72</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (Place of publication not identified: VALUE CLASSIC REPRINTS, 2016).

a group van on the way to the Academy: first, after seeing a man with a cow: “Oh, just taking my cow for a walk” then seeing a woman sweeping the street in front of her home: “Oh, just sweeping the street.” Or, after passing a family of four all mounted a motorcycle without helmets, turning to a Dominican colleague and asking him how many people he fit on his scooter before mocking and ridiculing the lack of safety inherent to having that many people on the same vehicle. “Cheap seafood by the beach, a good exchange rate,” the Dominican Republic as “a different world”. No hot water in the showers in Venezuela, being surprised that they have Christmas trees in Venezuela “...as if Christmas hadn’t made it to the 3rd World.”<sup>73</sup> Suggesting that Dominican players’ flat feet is a result of them having grown up without shoes. These are just some of the examples that interviewees offered up regarding white staff and colleagues’ conclusions and readings of Latin America based on glimpses, experiences, and stories.

Such exchanges while on the ground in Latin America or retellings once back in the US are common for white visitors to Latin America and fit into a broader history of discourse circulating from Global South back to Global North. As Steven Gregory details in his chapter “Sex Tourism and the Political Economy of Masculinity,” US migrants to the Dominican Republic often share stories that fortify global hierarchies and normative masculinity: “storytelling dominated the conversation as each man provided an experience that illustrated Dominican ignorance, corruption, and lack of ambition. Such talk was common among expatriates, who were ever alert to any slight that seemed to question their sense of innate superiority or entitlement.”<sup>74</sup> Joey expanded on his earlier thoughts, touching on the same themes of superiority and entitlement for US staff in the Dominican Republic:

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<sup>73</sup> Interviews by author.

<sup>74</sup> Gregory, *The Devil behind the Mirror*, 131.

**David:** What are some of the stories you've heard from people coming back from the Dominican?

**Joey:** Somebody went to get a prostitute and they were getting chased by the police and were in a police chase to get back to the apartment after dropping the prostitute off. I mean, I don't know if any of these stories are true. They don't sound very true, but it becomes very romanticized in a way.

William shared similar thoughts:

**William:** There may be for some people, racial overtones, there may be some classist overtones. Things just aren't quite as nice as what you're used to. But honestly, I think so much of it has to do with language...when I go to the Dominican, I can't speak English. You're an authority figure, you're one of the front office people from America [and you can't speak your language]. So, I think the discomfort comes from being there, it comes at the hotel, it comes getting in a taxi to go to the airport, it comes at the airline desk because you get anxious like 'Why don't they speak English?'

Much like the US immigrants to the Dominican Republic that Gregory describes, the staff Joey and William refer to hold an air of superiority and had certain expectations regarding treatment, authority, and subservience while in Latin America.

As noted earlier in this chapter, teams will sometimes intentionally send US prospects on visits to the Dominican Republic in an attempt to show US-born players where their teammates and coaches “come from.”<sup>75</sup> Though quite literal in a sense, the act of showing US players where their colleagues “come from” also plays a metonymic role in that it represents the generalized underdevelopment and poverty of the Global South. While a number of Latin American interviewees confirmed that it is indeed useful for white, US players to see their home countries,<sup>76</sup> it's difficult to see how these visits promote anything other than an essentialized,

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<sup>75</sup> See Klein's profile on Rafael Pérez in *Dominican Baseball* for more detail. Klein notes that during his time with the Mets, Pérez helped institute a “reverse migration” program that took Mets minor leaguers to the Dominican Republic to see where their Latin teammates came from in the hope that this would encourage more empathy among the American players.” Pérez's efforts with the Mets are not unique, as a number of teams engage in similar practices.

<sup>76</sup> Multiple players expressed the importance of having their white teammates see where they came from as a way to legitimize their hard work, struggle, and path to the minors/majors. This is a subject I address at length in Chapter 3.

externalized poverty and deprivation unique to the Dominican Republic (specifically) and Latin America (broadly). My point is not to erase the disproportionate difficulty that Latin American players face in “making it;” however, educative visits of this sort meant to “show” US players the truth or reality of Latin America simultaneously erases those same realities in the US and obscures the US’ role in driving the Latin American realities they are observing. As Eduardo told me, “Todos los países son iguales. Todos tienen sus partes pobres, chichisimas, feísimas. Así allí (los EE. UU) las tienes también. Tienes las partes bonitas, y tienes las partes pobres // *All countries are the same. All of them have their poor, rundown, ugly parts. You have them there (the US) too. You have the pretty parts, and you have the poor parts.*” Eduardo’s comments provide the astute recognition that poverty can be found across the globe in local geographies, not merely in the perceived widespread degradation of 3rd World nations. Just as Latin American otherness becomes legible by comparing it to the modern US, uneven internal development in the US -- the ugly, rundown areas Eduardo describes -- is made visible against a backdrop of underdevelopment abroad.<sup>77</sup> While US actors’ observation of Latin American inferiority and difference has varying degrees of condescension, we can see similar inferences in all of the quotes and anecdotes referenced so far; difference can be neutral, inconvenient, or malicious but by and large, it is framed as subordinate. Indeed, the same regulations, formality, and order that William and other interviewees associated with the US are not always present in the Dominican Republic or Global South generally. However, the poverty and perceived lack of order tends to be naturalized instead of being viewed as an ongoing set of social and economic relations that have evolved, with contestation and resistance, over time. Absent from the

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<sup>77</sup> John Patrick Leary, *A Cultural History of Underdevelopment: Latin America in the U.S. Imagination* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016).

circulation of white accounts returning to the Global North from Global South are political and socio-economic analyses rooted in global capitalism and underdevelopment.

Indeed, while views of Latin American backwardness germinate at the Academy and occur while white baseball employees are in Latin America, they tend to come home to roost, reverberating through professional baseball spaces in the US. The circulation of these reductionist or stereotypical views doesn't go unnoticed by Latin American players. Take a story related to me by a player regarding the discourse within his team as they prepared to play a series in Mexico.

**Ronald:** All they kept talking about were drugs, cartels, and shootings. They have this idea of Mexico as crime-ridden, but the fact of the matter is if you cross the wrong person in any country, you're going to get punched. What they didn't know is that in Mexico, they're nobodies. They don't matter there.

All the gringos were taking their probiotics to prepare for the food and shock to their system. None of the Latinos were. I remember thinking, 'They don't even know how Americanized Mexico is, unfortunately. There's going to be a PF Changs and a Cheesecake Factory. They're going to be awe-struck when they see the city. Do they think we're traveling to Africa or what?'

How are you going to go to a new country and arrive there scared without wanting to get to know it?

Ronald expressed frustration recalling the reductionist white perceptions of Mexico, how everything was couched in precaution, danger, fear and lawlessness. From dietary concerns to comments about cartels, Ronald discussed how the US imaginary of Mexico didn't match reality with American corporations on the ground and that Mexico has its own capitalist order with

**Ronald:** De lo único que hablaban era de drogas, cárteles y tiroteos. Tienen la idea de que México está plagado de delitos, pero el hecho es que, si te cruzas con la persona equivocada en cualquier país, te van a golpear. Lo que no sabían es que en México no son nadie. Allí no importan.

Todos los gringos estaban tomando sus probióticos, preparándose para la comida y el shock al sistema. Ninguno de los latinos lo fue. Recuerdo haber pensado: 'Desafortunadamente, ni siquiera saben cuán americanizado está México. Habrá un PF Changs y una Cheesecake Factory. Se quedarán asombrados cuando vean la ciudad. ¿Creen que vamos a viajar a África o qué?'

¿Cómo vas a ir a un nuevo país y llegar allí con miedo sin querer conocerlo?



powerful actors who would scoff at the traveling baseball party imagining and positioning itself *above* the masses and violence of Mexico. Interestingly, where white US staff and players saw degradation and disorder in Mexico, Ronald took a similar tack when contrasting Mexico with Africa, suggesting that the *real location* of chaos and disarray was somewhere else, somewhere lower in the global hierarchy. Ronald wasn't the only player who offered up thoughts on how white staff and players perceive and imagine Latin America. Daniel provided another Dominican/US juxtaposition, touching on one of the most common exclamations that white individuals share upon arriving to or returning from the Dominican Republic: that the driving (as a result of a lack of traffic laws or lack of enforcement of those laws) is *crazy*.

**David:** ¿Qué es lo que dicen cuando van [a Dominicana?] ¿Qué es lo que dicen en cuanto a manejar? // *What do they say when they go to the Dominican Republic? What do they say about driving?*

**Daniel:** Somos locos, somos locos. Que estos son locos. Que le tienen temor a la vida *\*riéndose\**. ¿Locos? No. Así aprendimos a manejar. // *We're crazy, we're crazy. That these people are crazy. That they're scared to live \*laughing\**. Crazy? No. *That's how we learned to drive.*

Daniel easily produced the answer about what US visitors think about Dominican driving, noting that Dominican driving style is not necessarily about being crazy and reckless but rather how many Dominicans have learned to drive. Merely because driving isn't the same or doesn't follow the same regulations and safety measures as in the US doesn't warrant a mental leap or the ascription of an inherent craziness or recklessness with all Dominicans. Of course, it's not uncommon for people from the Dominican Republic to acknowledge a degree of recklessness in the driving style at home, however, the retellings upon return to the US on the part of white baseball staff and players are meant to index widespread underdevelopment, not neutral self-reflection. While these examples are contemporary in nature, such feedback loops from Latin

America to the Global North are nothing new. In his exhaustive study on histories of development and underdevelopment in Latin America, John Patrick Leary traces how development discourse evolved from a colonialist view in which “undeveloped” nations resisting white invaders were not so different from the “conquering white race,” they were merely waiting to be realized in the course of modernization.<sup>78</sup> His examination of 19th and 20th century US travel writers underscores the confluence of the US and Latin America, and the projection of Latin America into a past that the modernized US had already left behind. In his own words, [In] Latin America travel writing of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the poverty of the Global South appears as *homogeneous* and *natural*, rather than *heterogeneous* and *social*. This essentialist understanding of space can be seen in much of the US regionalist fiction of the same era...which treated the underdeveloped spaces of the United States as repositories of a cultural past being subsumed by the technology and alienated social relations of capitalist modernity.<sup>79</sup> We can understand the process of US baseball staff reporting back to their peers about their trips to Latin America in similar terms. In visiting the Dominican Republic or another Latin American country, white staff and players are offered a glimpse of a reality that is not their own, a reminder of what they are not, an externalized lack represented in poverty both economic and technological that the US has “progressed” or “evolved” out of. Joey confirmed such narratives in his baseball circles from over the years, stating that,

**Joey:** Going to the DR in particular is seen as the ultimate version of that, that you're leaving the comforts of America. It's obviously not homogenous. It's also just ignoring that plenty of parts of the US are just as impoverished just as crumbled in their infrastructure if not way more so. [Parts of] the Dominican [Republic] are way nicer than a lot of parts of the US but we don't see it as a continuum like that.

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<sup>78</sup> IBID, 59-60.

<sup>79</sup> IBID, 50.

[The people relaying these reports] think that the US is this civilized place where everything works better and there are laws, and everybody follows the law. It doesn't matter that none of this is true. The same people that are saying this are the people that speed all the time and never wear a seatbelt, but they'll talk about how crazy driving is in the Dominican [Republic] and that they "survived there" so that makes them a better driver when they come back here and break our laws. I mean it's just a completely imagined version of what America is and they use that to contrast [or] prove that we're a superior country, that there's some sort of American exceptionalism, [and] that we're not [a] degraded culture.

By relaying such narratives year in and year out, white, US visitors to Latin America continue to construct what Arturo Escobar and Edward Said call “imaginative geographies”: modes of demarcating space that separate “us” from “them” and produce difference, hierarchy, and subjectivity.<sup>80</sup> The tales that white baseball staff and players tell to Latin America continue to reproduce images of the region and its inhabitants as deficient and lagging behind the US, hardening existing hierarchies, amplifying the importance of US guidance and somehow revealing the overwhelming need for Latin American improvement and modernization.

The structures of professional baseball provide such a path to modernity, of course, from Latin American players’ first days at the Academy to each subsequent stop on their way through the minor leagues. Upon arrival in the US, however, difference begins to be policed more stringently, as Latin American players become the foreigners who stand out against the backdrop of white, US subjectivity. Baseball’s annular flow to and from Latin America to the US helps recreate colonial difference by shuttling its logics -- both physically and discursively -- between the 1st and 3rd World. The resultant ideas and conclusions that this constant flow emits work in concert with domestic processes of racialization that monitor and otherize Latin American behavior in the name of maintaining a white, masculine US normativity and supremacy. Once in the US, Latin American players find themselves navigating a space rife with white profiling

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<sup>80</sup> Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), 9–10.

practices of black and brown behavior that, through the monitoring of linguistic and corporeal boundaries, overdetermine individual subjectivities and readings of the *Other*. As Lorgia García-Peña notes in her examination of the Dominican diaspora, “In the United States, it is not just class, but also skin tone, hair texture, accent, education, level of cultural assimilation, and ability to participate in the purchase of cultural commodities that define one’s race.”<sup>81</sup> We must understand the racialization of Latin American players, then, as occurring through multiple frames; embodied experience, communicative practices, sartorial style all help constitute the primary markers of Latin American alterity. Acknowledging the nuanced and varied nature of racialized oppression requires moving past an analysis rooted in individual experience and instead interrogating the history, processes, and institutions that govern everyday life in the world of baseball. Returning to Barnor Hesse’s colonial constitution of race thesis, we can orient our understanding of race as separate from individual decisions or perceptions of the body of the objectified, instead situating it as an inherited expression of modern-colonial violence.<sup>82</sup> Employing this framework attunes us to how racialized subjectivities and linguistic practices intersect, shift, and are ultimately tied to larger structures of power. If Chapter 1 showed us how baseball’s steady movement of bodies, ideas, and opinions -- rooted in histories of domination and US hegemony -- travel between the US and Latin America, Chapter 2 asks how coloniality, processes of racialization, and white supremacy appear within the sport’s everyday spaces.

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<sup>81</sup> García-Peña, *The Borders of Dominicanidad*, 191.

<sup>82</sup> Barnor Hesse, *Conceptual Aphasia in Black: Displacing Racial Formation*, ed. Paul Khalil Saucier and Tryon P. Woods, *Critical Africana Studies* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016), vii–x.

## 2. The Construction of a “Coño”: Colonial Difference and White Normativity in Professional Baseball

*Every colonized people...finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards.*

- Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1968

On November 11, 1978, in its fourth season, *Saturday Night Live* introduced the fictional character “Chico Escuela,” a former all-star baseball player from the Dominican Republic who played for the Chicago Cubs. Hired for \$900 to speak at a Knights of Columbus event, Chico is introduced, steps to the podium, and utters his famous line in thick, accented English, “Thank you *berry* much. Baseball been *berry, berry* good to me. Thank you, God bless, you. Gracias!” Chico sits down before being called back to the podium, adding “Keep you eye...keep you eyes on de ball.”<sup>83</sup>



**Figure 2.1** Chico Escuela<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> “Saturday Night Live,” November 11, 1978, <http://snlarchives.net/Episodes/?1978111112>, <http://snlarchives.net/Episodes/?1978111112>.

<sup>84</sup> IBID.

Chico appeared on Saturday Night Live a handful of times after his 1978 debut, always uttering his staple catchphrase that baseball had been “*berry, berry, good to [him].*” Roughly twenty years later, Dominican slugger Sammy Sosa, would occasionally sprinkle in the phrase when talking to the media, conjuring up the familiar character as well as the trope of simple Dominican players with little command of English. Despite his own humorous invocation of the line during his playing career, Sosa’s accent was remembered as a foil to highlight his linguistic disorder relative to a white, English-speaking norm. Take the below excerpt from a 2009 Bleacher Report article:

Former **MLB** slugger Sammy Sosa once said, "Baseball has been very, very good to me." Actually, in his Dominican accent, baseball was actually "berry, berry" good to him. And for me, the sport has been nothing but "berry, berry sweet" to me.

**Figure 2.2** Sosa, Baseball Has Been Good.<sup>85</sup>

Though supposedly meant to be a lighthearted reference or an intentional marketing ploy,<sup>86</sup> Sosa’s use of the term is still recalled or invoked by white circles as something that signaled his difference. Indeed, the Sosa example isn’t a standalone, as the double standard of policing linguistic boundaries within baseball isn’t limited to recycled catchphrases from the 1970s. There are a number of recent, high profile examples in which Spanish-speaking players, either because of their fluency in Spanish and perceived (real or imagined) inability to communicate well in English, were publicly mocked or derided. Take Philadelphia Phillies Hall of Famer Mike

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<sup>85</sup> S L, “Through the Steroid Era, Baseball Still Has Been Very Very Good to Me,” Bleacher Report, May 13, 2009, <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/173978-through-the-steroid-era-baseball-still-has-been-very-very-good-to-me>.

<sup>86</sup> Burgos Jr., *Playing America’s Game: Baseball, Latinos, and the Color Line*, 251.

Schmidt's response when asked in 2017 if the Phillies could build around then-star, Venezuelan-born, Odubel Herrera<sup>87</sup>:

My honest answer to that would be no because of a couple of things. First of all, it's a language barrier. Because of that, I think he can't be a guy that would sort of sit in a circle with four, five American players and talk about the game. Or try and learn about the game or discuss the inner workings of the game. Or come over to a guy and say, 'Man, you gotta run that ball out.' [He] just can't be — because of the language barrier — that kind of a player...I think the fans love him. He's not afraid to do things that sort of irk the other team if you will, and you know what that is. I probably would hate him if I played against him because of his antics on the field, but he's not afraid. He's not afraid to do that....those are the reasons that I don't think you can build a team around him.<sup>88</sup>

Or Brian T Smith's conscious skirting of established journalistic practice by directly quoting Carlos Gomez's broken English in a 2016 interview: "'For the last year and this year, I not really do much for this team. The fans be angry. They be disappointed,' said Gomez."<sup>89</sup> Both quotes show the degree to which white society labels Spanish-heritage speakers as linguistically unqualified or deficient: the first suggests that Herrera's potential difficulty to communicate with white, English-speaking players (indexed as normative, desirable) would thus make him incapable of being the leader or central figure in a locker room and the second offers an example of such choppy, limited communication (indexed as incoherent and infantile). Schmidt's comments place the responsibility squarely on Herrera to be able to win his white teammates over in English, not the other way around. Smith's quote in particular, leaves Gomez and his halted English outside of the realm of white acceptability and order. Gomez, with the support of

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<sup>87</sup> Herrera was suspended for 85 games by MLB in July of 2019 for assaulting his girlfriend. He was subsequently designated for assignment by the Phillies and assigned to their Triple-A team in Lehigh Valley. While it may be convenient to cite Herrera's domestic violence as a post hoc vindication of Schmidt's comments, Schmidt's remarks had occurred well before the assault. Without taking away from the gravity of Herrera's actions, Schmidt's statements were made independent of Herrera's future battery.

<sup>88</sup> CBS, "Mike Schmidt Apologizes For Saying You Can't Build Team Around Odubel Herrera Due To 'Language Barrier,'" CBS Philly, June 6, 2017, <https://philadelphia.cbslocal.com/2017/06/06/mike-schmidt-odubel-herrera/>.

<sup>89</sup> Brian T. Smith, "Carlos Gomez Knows He's a Disappointment to Astros Fans," Houston Chronicle, May 4, 2016, <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/sports/columnists/smith/article/Carlos-Gomez-knows-he-s-a-disappointment-to-7394244.php>.

a number of media figures, ridiculed Smith's decision to highlight his stilted responses,<sup>90</sup> noting how such vigilance is not equally applied to white individuals attempting to speak Spanish.

To comprehend how such ideas circulate publicly, we must recognize how the presupposition of negative stereotypes creates the necessary background for the “Chico Escuela”, Mike Schmidt, and Carlos Gomez, thus rendering them intelligible. Presupposition defines the terms and context through which information is understood but also a productive process in that it introduces stereotypes to people who may not have been aware of them. In the previous examples, the stereotype that Latin American players are linguistically inadequate and uneducated serves as a backdrop *while also promoting* those very tropes to an uninitiated audience.<sup>91</sup> We have ample evidence of how media portrayal of linguistic and presumed educational deficiency continue to be (re)produced discursively. There's commentator Colin Cowherd's 2015 comments regarding Dominican players' capacity to understand the intricacies of baseball:

It's baseball. The game is too complex? I've never bought into that, 'Baseball's just too complex.' Really? A third of the sport is from the Dominican Republic. The Dominican Republic has not been known in my lifetime as having world-class academic abilities. A lot of those kids come from rough backgrounds and have not had opportunities academically that other kids from other countries have.<sup>92</sup>

Or, another example that may still be fresh in readers' minds, from former Seattle Mariners CEO, Kevin Mather, who was caught on video in February 2021 deriding Japanese special assignment coach Hisashi Iwakuma (a former Seattle Mariners pitcher), and Cuban uber

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<sup>90</sup> Craig Calcaterra, “Carlos Gomez Calls out a Hit Piece-Writing Columnist,” NBC Sports, May 6, 2016, <https://mlb.nbc.com/2016/05/06/carlos-gomez-calls-out-a-hit-piece-writing-columnist/>.

<sup>91</sup> Michael Silverstein, “Language Structure and Linguistic Ideology,” in *The Elements: A Parasession on Linguistic Units and Levels*, ed. Paul R. Clyne, William F. Hanks, and Carol F. Hofbauer (Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society, n.d.), 193–247.

<sup>92</sup> ESPN.com news services, “Cowherd Details Flap over Comments Made about Dominican Ballplayers,” ESPN, July 24, 2015, [https://www.espn.com/espn/story/\\_/id/13311873/colin-cowherd-addresses-air-remarks-made-dominican-republic](https://www.espn.com/espn/story/_/id/13311873/colin-cowherd-addresses-air-remarks-made-dominican-republic).



prospect, Julio Rodríguez for their supposed struggles with English. Mather stated, "For instance, we just rehired Iwakuma; he was a pitcher with us for a number of years. Wonderful human being; his English was terrible," and "Julio Rodríguez has got a personality bigger than all of you combined. He is loud. His English is not tremendous."<sup>93</sup> Mather's comments weren't included in early drafts of this work, as they had yet to occur, however, they serve as a stark example of how presupposition functions productively. That is, Mather's statements follow a long line of similar linguistic monitoring not merely another localized transgression. Such repeated public bashing and circulation of Latin American linguistic disorder in the public sphere can be read as a product of existing, historical narratives around Latin American language acquisition, its conflation with intelligence, and the indexing of a simple, uneducated foreign athlete. They can also be understood as a productive, new data points in the protraction of similar discourse; for someone who has no familiarity with such stereotypes about Latin American players, presupposition creates and projects those same prejudices to a now informed audience, furthering the dissemination and fortification of white, English linguistic order and supremacy. In short, these examples function circularly, working in concert with each other as both sources and products of continuously perpetuated tropes. While such anecdotes capture the public vigilance and oversight of both Spanish as a legitimate mode of communication and heritage Spanish speakers' use of English at the level of mass media, the construction and maintenance of linguistic hierarchy is firmly embedded in the everyday interactions that occur in shared social spaces of professional baseball.

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<sup>93</sup> ESPN.com news services, "Seattle Mariners President/CEO Kevin Mather Resigns after Comments," ESPN, February 22, 2021, [https://www.espn.com/mlb/story/\\_/id/30946443/seattle-mariners-president-ceo-kevin-mather-resigns-comments](https://www.espn.com/mlb/story/_/id/30946443/seattle-mariners-president-ceo-kevin-mather-resigns-comments).

Chapter 2 outlines how language, discourse, and behavior both within and adjacent to the spaces of professional baseball reinforce racial-colonial hierarchies. The first section draws heavily from Jane Hill's linguistic-anthropological scholarship on language ideology. The second section engages with contemporary rearticulations of coloniality, exposing the ways in which colonial difference -- found in recognizable binaries such as: modern/primitive, rational/natural, intelligent/ignorant, European/non-European (or alternatively, white/non-white) -- is regimented through the co-constitution of language and race. Employing a raciolinguistic analysis and following the work of linguistic anthropologists such as Miyako Inoue, Jonathan Rosa, Robert Flores, and Angela Reyes, as well as Frantz Fanon's analysis of the "Negro and Language" from *Black Skin, White Masks*, the chapter examines how white players, staff, and employees both overhear the Spanish language and overdetermine certain Latin actions producing a perception of racial, linguistic and behavioral difference. By scrutinizing the types of language and conduct that white individuals mark as different, we can infer both what falls outside of white normativity and conversely, how whiteness -- and its primacy -- is constructed and fortified; in focusing on what white subjects deem unacceptable and abnormal, we can derive what *is* in fact desirable or admissible.

The chapter's approach interrogates the white creation and proliferation of a racialized Latin American player identity and descriptor known as "coño", popularly circulated in the phrase "Total Coño Move" throughout the 2010s. The phrase "Total Coño Move" frequently appeared on Twitter (from an account with the same name) to capture Latin American difference and share specific moments with an audience that presumably had similar experiences or interactions with Latin American players, in short, other white minor league players and staff. Circulated and disseminated as a humorous account, Total Coño Move purveyed an idea of

ethno-racial difference as tied to linguistic difference, aligning with Hill and Barret's explorations of indirect indexicality already discussed in this work; the experiences that white players tweeted about actively compiled a "funny" repository of tweets about Latin American actions and behavior that those tweeting deemed as notable, different, deviant. For those interacting with the account to recognize these tweets as "funny", however, they needed draw on or presuppose the negative stereotypes of their Latin American peers. In doing so, the account simultaneously spoke to people who could "access" the stereotypes and jokes in the tweets but also presupposed these perceived deficiencies and recirculated them, making them available to a broader audience who might not have had them in mind. That is, to both get and share the joke, white players projected racialized stereotypes regarding Latin American behavior to a larger white audience within and outside of professional baseball that might not have heard of or considered said stereotypes. Despite some actions being otherwise neutral or unspecific to Latin America, white perceiving subjects' overdetermination and assessment of particular actions as tied to an empirical Latin American difference, maintains white hegemony and Latin American inferiority. This chapter teases out five areas of overdetermination or sets of behavior from which white subjects concoct the image of a "Coño":

1. Backwardness, Unintelligence, Primitiveness
2. Appropriateness, (Dis)respect, and Nationalism
3. Style of Play: Effort, Exaggeration, Expressiveness
4. Violence, Toughness, Hyper-Sexuality, Physicality and Appearance (Masculinity)
5. Mischievousness and Cheating

Importantly, however, referring back to a raciolinguistic perspective allows us to examine how the white listening and perceiving subject at once overdetermines Latin American actions

while also defining its contrast, a normative, white, masculine subject. The tweets themselves reveal what actions the authors deemed worthy of the label “coño” and construct a specific representation of a “coño” Latin American player. The aforementioned categories or components of the “Coño” in the white baseball imaginary betray the instability and anxiety of white, normative, masculinity within the sport. By delineating what is and isn’t “coño,” the tweets capture the endurance and reproduction of colonial legacies and white supremacy in modern, seemingly “diverse” organizations. Parsing the body of tweets, we are able to see consistent themes that configure the various attributes or assemblages of a “Coño”. These attributes often manifest themselves in longstanding racialized tropes associated with both immigrant populations, unique aspects of US racism, and a broader framework of global anti-Blackness. By constructing the “Coño” and labeling his behavior as primitive, violent, hyper-sexual, excessive, mischievous, and duplicitous, white players elevate themselves above the backwardness and underdevelopment of Third World Latin America and its inhabitants. In their attempts to assuage racialized anxieties about Latin American threats to white hegemony within baseball, white perceiving subjects (players and staff) position themselves as rational, collected, professional, controlled, moral, and honest. By engaging with the Total Coño Move account and tweets, we can see how white individuals assign racialized meaning to linguistic and behavioral practices, conveying what it means to be white, protecting the boundaries of whiteness, and recirculating racialized links to language and behavior.

Chapter 2 concludes with a brief profile on Domingo Ayala, the fictional YouTube and social media personality of Bryan Resnick who impersonates a caricatured Latin American baseball player, drawing on and emphasizing many of the foundational tropes used in the formation of the racialized, “coño” figure. The case of Domingo Ayala, or rather his existence

and widespread popularity, legibility and passability of a minstrel-esque performance, betray a culture of white supremacy that accepts the co-naturalization of race and language, over determines signs, and denigrates behaviors that are read as foreign or not compatible with white hegemonic masculinity. By co-opting many of the stereotypes associated with being a “Coño”, Resnick has been able to convert racialized Latin American difference into a job, pawning off the character to an uncritical audience eager to be reminded of what they aren’t.

### *Mock Spanish and Linguistic Hierarchy*

Jane Hill’s scholarship and theorizations on Mock Spanish bred a larger wave of work on mock registers and their links to other racialized identities (Chun, 2004, 2016; Meek 2006) as well as further case studies of the role of Mock Spanish in the workplace (Barrett, 2007). Barrett echoed Hill’s conclusion that Mock Spanish elevates whiteness by indexing the sociable and desirable personal qualities of its speakers, while also negatively indexing racialized messages. As a result, “speakers of Mock Spanish may thus produce offensive racialized meanings while simultaneously interpreting their utterances as a reflection of an open-minded (explicitly non-racist) point of view.”<sup>94</sup> In his observations of exchanges within the Mexican restaurant where he conducted his field work, Barrett demonstrates the double standards at play in a linguistic hierarchy in which Spanish speakers are made aware of their linguistic deficiencies in both Spanish and English, whereas English speakers have no repercussions for their sputtering displays of Mock Spanish that have little intent to facilitate actual conversation. Barrett, citing Shana Poplack, illustrates how English directives -- with a single or several Spanish words sprinkled in -- assume that the inclusion of Spanish words constituted a sufficient form of

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<sup>94</sup> Barrett, “Language Ideology and Racial Inequality: Competing Functions of Spanish in an Anglo-Owned Mexican Restaurant,” 165.

communication despite the fact that the construction of such sentences violated morpheme and equivalence constraints found in Spanish.<sup>95</sup> As Barret asserts:

It is assumed that Spanish-speaking employees will eventually "get used to" receiving directives that they cannot understand. Despite recognizing that directives were not always understood, managers typically blamed failure to follow a given directive on the Spanish-speaking employee. In the following example, a manager blames the failure on the "laziness" of the Spanish-speaking employee rather than on miscommunication

*Manager:* You have to finish todo eso, porque I have other things to do. todo eso, all this.

*Manager* (later to Anglo employee): Did you see that? He didn't finish that - he didn't do what I told him!

*Rusty:* Maybe he didn't understand you.

*Manager:* Oh, he understood me all right, he's just lazy.<sup>96</sup>

Instead of questioning his own ability to convey a clear message, the manager instead concluded that the employee was lazy. Using the same workplace framework and applying similar stratified divisions of manager/employee relationships to baseball reveals a number of parallel examples. Though hierarchy is blurred or takes different forms within the sport -- front office executive/player, coach/player, veteran player/younger player -- every component of a player's day (and over the length of his career) is mediated, discussed, and analyzed, by an overwhelming majority of white, monolingual, English or lower-proficiency Spanish speakers. Whether it's coaches or staff providing baseball instruction or guidance, teammates joking around or sharing experiences/knowledge, medical or strength and conditioning staff explaining or outlining a

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<sup>95</sup> Shana Poplack, "Sometimes I'll Start a Sentence in Spanish y Termino En Español: Toward a Typology of Code-Switching," *Linguistics* 18 (1981): 581-618.

Poplack notes that Anglo violations of Spanish grammar and syntax appear frequently in free morpheme constraints such as the addition of the bound morpheme -iendo to the end of the word eat-: \*eat-iendo 'eating' and equivalence constraints such as 'a car nuevo' in which the differing syntaxes and adjective placement of the Spanish 'un carro nuevo' and the English 'a new car' are evident. Poplack's study concluded that these errors were common among Anglo code-switching but much less so for Spanish-English bilinguals.

<sup>96</sup> Barrett, "Language Ideology and Racial Inequality: Competing Functions of Spanish in an Anglo-Owned Mexican Restaurant," 185.

certain movement, or examining an injury, front office personnel sharing a development plan, analyzing performance, or executing transactions, players find themselves negotiating situations with a wide set of vocabularies and contexts. When Spanish-speaking or bilingual staff are not present -- and even at times when they are -- English-speaking interlocutors often perpetuate the same confusing grammatical and syntactic disorder outlined in Barrett's examples from the restaurant. Some common examples come in the form of semantic pejoration and mispronunciation/hyperanglicization. The use of "no bueno" to describe something as generally negative is seemingly omnipresent within the sport. Most commonly, white coaches and players will use it to describe a particular performance or action. One might hear "that slider was no bueno" or "How does your arm feel today? No bueno?" Spanish words and colloquial phrases such as "tranquilo", "todo bien", and "bruto" are commonly reproduced along with more mainstream examples of Mock Spanish like "muchos grassy ass". "Tranquilo" or "chilling," "cool," "good," is a common Dominican response to "How are you?" and is an easy word for English speakers to pick out and reproduce. However, the pronunciation of "r" in Spanish requires a tongue trill that proves difficult for many English speakers. Additionally, the "a" in Anglo Mock Spanish takes the sound of the "a" in words like "angle" and "rang" instead of the Spanish "a" that would resemble English words like "khan". Similarly, the common Dominican greeting "¿Que lo que?" has become an almost tokenized term in white baseball speech, often taking exaggerated, blandly pronounced forms that emphasize elongation and drawn out versions of the phrase -- "kay low kay" -- in an attempt to make it sound dry or elongated as opposed to the staccato delivery in Spanish. The same can be said for the word "bruto" or "dumb", which often comes out pronounced as "brew-dough" as opposed to the hard "r" and hard "t" in the Spanish pronunciation. These examples give the impression that Spanish is simple and casually

navigable with a handful of words and terms that do not even necessitate appropriate pronunciation.

At times, miscommunication can be on the minor side, like when Eduardo, a promising, young major leaguer, told me that one of his white coaches always used to say “ritmo” to him while he was hitting. He knew that the coach was saying the word “rhythm” in Spanish but without more context, he never knew what he was ultimately trying to say. In other cases, interactions can be graver with potentially serious consequences. Clark, a white member of the medical staff on a major league team, detailed the particular damage that Mock Spanish and linguistic conceit can cause in the medical space:

**David:** [In your area] how often are there native Spanish speakers speaking with native English speakers and those people [are trying] to understand each other?

**Clark:** Oh, like, that’s literally half of my clinical day. Literally.

**Dav:** How are those interactions?

**Cla:** At times, not great. Lots lost in translation, whether it’s one way or both ways.

**Dav:** Do you think that in the medical space, in instances when you need more linguistic clarity or interpretation that you always get it?

**Cla:** No. I wouldn’t say I have a perfect record with that either.

**Dav:** Do you think that lack of communication even happens in severe or serious medical cases?

**Cla:** Yes. I’ve seen it happen. It does happen. [White, monolingual doctors] explaining an MRI in Spanish or poor Spanish or in English? Yeah, [it happens].<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> The medical example with doctors conjures up images of Fanon’s descriptions of physicians speaking pidgin to Black, colonized people in France.



Such white, Anglo production of Spanish in the workplace can be viewed as an advantageous business skill, leading to an increased desire to practice or demonstrate ability or proficiency to deliver a message in Spanish. As Coromoto, a baseball operations executive, explained to me,

It happens to me all the time. Because people know I speak Spanish, they feel the need to address me with an “hola” or say goodbye with an “adios”. Not that that’s a huge deal but that’s not counting all the random insertions of Spanish words into the conversation. It’s almost like they want to show off or prove to me or themselves that they know a certain word or set of words in Spanish. And that’s just with me! That’s not even taking into account all of the examples of white colleagues talking with Latin American players, having a serious or relatively serious meeting and using the wrong word -- which, by the way I’ve seen upset a number of [Latin American] players who come out of the meetings pissed off, specifically because of *the way* a message was delivered, or the words chosen to make that point. [White staff or coaches] are not conveying what they’re trying to say and don’t know that there’s anything wrong. But they’re just practicing. It’s fine. God forbid holding their Spanish to any standard.

Coromoto’s words lay things bare: white, Anglo individuals liberally deploy Spanish without any sort of reflection as to what message their words may have conveyed. The power dynamics at play in any such exchange are almost always disproportionately in favor of the white, English speaker; white staff or executives are in positions of judgement and evaluation, not the other way around, often leaving Latin American players (and staff depending on the context) left to act or execute tasks with an incomplete set of instructions or message. However, as noted in Coromoto’s comments on workplace culture, making an effort to speak Spanish, no matter how broken, is perceived as a good thing by the speaker. Spanish becomes a site of white, Anglo linguistic practice and acquisition, a desirable skill, a venerable effort, despite not necessarily serving an actual purpose in facilitating communication or conversation. Even “earnest” or “genuine” efforts to speak Spanish can function as chances for Anglo/white improvement or practice, yet again revealing the divergent social roles that language plays depending on who is doing the speaking. Attempts at learning a new language and improving communication can be commended but the material effects or impact of white management’s inability to speak coherent

Spanish are not the same as a Spanish-speaking player or staff member's inability to act on a garbled directive or demonstrate "adequate" proficiency in English. To be abundantly clear, is not to arbitrarily police who can and cannot try to speak Spanish, but rather to underscore that simply trying, practicing, and making an effort are perceived differently depending on who is doing the speaking and what language is being spoken. Referring to Fanon's analysis of white people speaking pidgin to Black people in France and Europe more generally, we can see similar behavior in the treatment of Latin American players: "I meet a Russian or a German who speaks French badly. With gestures I try to give him the information that he requests, but at the same time I can hardly forget that he has a language of his own, a country, and that perhaps he is a lawyer or an engineer there. In any case, he is foreign to my group, and his standards must be different. When it comes to the case of the Negro, nothing of the kind. He has no culture, no civilization, no long historical past."<sup>98</sup> Within the broader spaces of baseball, standards of second language production become completely warped, elevating white actors with limited Spanish communication skills, while not maintaining similarly loose evaluations of Latin American players/staff speaking English. When I asked Clark if most of the white baseball employees who speak English as a first language have Spanish skills that are on par, above, or below most of the Latin American players' English ability he scoffed at the idea that the two populations could be compared:

**Clark:** Far below. [For] the majority. The standards are so inverted it's not even close.

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<sup>98</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 25.

William, an experienced, white baseball executive with extensive experience in the minor and major leagues, had this to say about his observations of uneven linguistic expectations, standards, and assessments over the years:

**William:** It's so unfair, I'll use myself as an example. I took Spanish in high school, I took it in college, I've worked in professional baseball for 13 years. I have every resource available to me, I've had free Rosetta Stone, I've had the ability to take [Spanish] classes at [work], I'm financially capable to sign up for a college course online. I have every resource available to me and I still don't speak the language, but no one is going around like 'What the fuck is this guy doing?' or [intimating] that I'm stupid. No one is saying that.

**David:** So, do you think there is a double standard in place?

**Wil:** Yes. Because "it's America," it's my turf. I don't have to adapt, you do.

**Dav:** It's also funny because I feel like a lot of the framing around English [or the answer to the question] 'So why do Latin American players need to learn English?' is 'Because it's going to help them do their job' or 'to be able to communicate with coaches and teammates.' So, even if you're saying that this rationale justifies the need to learn, couldn't you use the same rationale for yourself in the example you just gave?

**Wil:** It should be, it should be!

Despite apparent disadvantages communicating in Spanish or relying on basic survival or mock forms, white staff and players are rarely under the same sort of scrutiny that has bearing on their career prospects or public image. However, alternative subjectivities and modes of being, even entire languages, become disorderly against the backdrop of white, English-speaking normativity. When miscommunication does occur between marginalized populations and white, English speakers, the citation of stereotypes or apparent defects is used to place the blame on the racialized individuals for not having done what was expected of them.

One such example came from an interviewee who offered a striking example in which a handful of coaches used to joke about how a former Dominican player couldn't speak English *or* Spanish and, as a result, must have been from Haiti. Additionally, as the story was relayed to me,

they would say that “Dominicans don’t even understand him” or that his “IQ was 65” to bolster their point. Without discounting the fact that the player in question could have grown up in Haiti or borderlands in the Dominican Republic, produced a variant of Spanish that was hard for other Dominicans to understand, or be on the receiving end of anti-Haitian prejudice from his countrymen that in turn helped transmit harsh messages to the coaching staff, there was nothing to suggest that this player did not speak Spanish. The coaches, all monolingual English speakers, weren’t in a position to make evaluations of the Dominican player’s proficiency in either language, but especially not about the player’s Spanish. Along with a lack of English proficiency, was it the player’s affect, quietness, timidity, that allowed white staff to conclude he could also not speak Spanish? Here we see the racializing double standards applied to language and how the perceived lack of language presupposes the stereotype of Latin American players as unintelligent. It also stratifies language and place, locating English ability at the top, subordinating Spanish as a mode of communication the player *should* have access to, and painting Haiti as a place without language. Additionally, in this account the burden to communicate was placed entirely on the player and much like Barrett’s manager/employee example, was explained away through a racialized deficiency, “natural” unintelligence. We can draw a clear line from perceptions of unintelligence vis-a-vis language and how the opinions of white, monolingual speakers, particularly those charged with improving and/or evaluating their baseball skill and performance, can define the narrative surrounding players, potentially hampering their career prospects.

As noted in Chapter 1, white players and staff often direct their focus on a player’s ability to speak English as a de facto measurement of that player’s “intelligence”. Subconsciously or intentionally, they then use Latin American production of English as a site of analysis and

scrutiny to project or understand “how smart” a given player is, equating language production to a degree of innate intellect. Lack of “intelligence” often leads to the perception that a player won’t be able to retain information and thus could have difficulties throughout his career as he has to make more adjustments and is presented with increasingly nuanced information regarding performance, strategy, or statistical analysis. Evaluating a player’s current or future ability to absorb and process information is not limited to Latin American players, however, with the added hurdle of having white players and staff using English production to draw conclusions about their congenital brain power, Latin American players can experience hampered career prospects through no fault of their own.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, The widespread suppression of Latin American promotions through the minor leagues relative to their white counterparts was recently examined by Rob Arthur. In his study for Baseball Prospectus, he found that BIPOC players were 3-4% less likely to earn a promotion in the minor leagues despite the fact they account for a disproportionate number of wins and value for teams at the major league level.<sup>100</sup> Though Arthur’s study also included US-born BIPOC, the vast majority of BIPOC players in the minor leagues are from Latin America. While each example of non-promotion or being released is typically justified by inadequate on-field performance, one can’t help but link Arthur’s study to the everyday processes of racialization within baseball, centered on Latin American language production, behavior, intelligence and perceived inadequacy.

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<sup>99</sup> It is worth referencing Saldaña Portillo’s “desiring subject of development,” (a prominent, analytic figure throughout this work), as Latin American players are usually offered or made to attend English classes throughout the minor leagues, as noted in Chapter 1. The existence of these classes provides a convenient, seemingly logical, justification for white staff when they determine a Latin American player isn’t intelligent: he had access to classes and learning tools and simply wasn’t able to improve.

<sup>100</sup> Rob Arthur, “Moonshot: Racial Bias Shapes Which Players Make The Majors,” Baseball Prospectus, July 2, 2020, <https://www.baseballprospectus.com/news/article/59905/moonshot-racial-bias-shapes-which-players-make-the-majors/>.

White perceptions of Latin American unintelligence can't be uncoupled from rules and structure of the international amateur signing system (discussed in Chapter 1) in which Latin American players typically sign at age 16, often having left the scholarly track behind in favor of pursuing a baseball career. White staff and players in the baseball world -- though they are not necessarily alone in their thinking, as other Latin American/Latino individuals will also make points along these lines -- tend to associate this absence of schooling with a quantifiable lack of smarts. It should be noted that even individuals who don't view years of education as analogous to intellect must acknowledge the commonality of players leaving school early to pursue baseball. However, instead of naturalizing the calculus to drop out of school and the subsequent lack of formal education as something inherent to Latin American players, it's instructive to frame such decisions within the context of limited economic pathways and the broader economic relationships between Global North and Global South. As discussed in Chapter 1, the uneven distribution of global economic power (mediated through the US forms of empire) and its baseball-specific manifestation (a pseudo commodity chain from Latin America to the US) have more impact on individual players' decisions to pursue careers in baseball as teenagers than some predestined path to ignorance. Without knowledge of Latin American political economy or divergent national educational systems, white players and staff -- instead of allowing for the possibility of country-by-country variance or individual specificity -- tend to flatten Latin American experience: players likely had to drop out of high school (if not before), have less formal education, and are therefore less capable than their white US counterparts. Such views and tropes are dangerous in any form but present major issues when less formal education or English-speaking ability is conflated with having less "raw intelligence." I discussed the topic

further with William, asking him if he thought that Latin American English production and natural intelligence were considered fused within the world of baseball:

**David:** Do you think at times [Latin American English] language ability gets conflated with intelligence?

**William:** All the time, all the time.

**Dav:** In what way?

**Wil:** Regardless of level. Shit, I think it gets worse the higher you go. Because it's like, if you've reached this point of your career [there's an expectation you should speak English]. I think [with] the younger guys it turns into an effort thing.

**Wil:** I can remember being around it. You see these guys, these three 19-year-olds and [of these three] 19-year-olds, two have made strides to where they can have some sort of conversation in English and this guy still can't. And it's like [with the third player] 'What are you doing? Why aren't you catching up?' [And when] you get these quote unquote older guys, it's like 'If they don't [have] it by now, they must suck'.

William unequivocally acknowledges something that has plagued baseball for decades, the unfair equating of second language acquisition with natural (un)intelligence. If labeled as not being able to retain or process information, not hard-working, or uninterested in learning/improving -- or even just missing out on the ability to form better relationships with coaches and staff, thus gaining more favor by default ability to communicate with people who can report on their performance -- Latin American players can have their career trajectories stunted. William's comments also reveal how the onus to learn English is placed on *the individual*, as he highlights how comparing Latin American players' English level against each other is often used to highlight some sort of personal deficiency or lack of effort. Here, Saldaña-Portillo's "desiring subject of development" is instructive yet again. As William's comments suggest, white individuals cannot comprehend *why* certain players succeed and certain players fail to learn when they are all provided with the same tools to learn English. Since the system of professional baseball affords Latin American players with the *opportunity* to learn English the inability to do

so must say something about the individual learner. The (il)logical leap that follows is that Latin American players, whether due to an innate lack of intellect or 3rd World academic deficiency, aren't smart. "Underwhelming" English skills reveal and reinforce the idea that the Latin American societies from whence these players came are degraded; a player can only attain mobility and recognition when they reach a certain level of communication in English. However, by arraigining the role of white listening and perceiving subjects, we can re-orient our gaze towards white listening practices as opposed to a "natural" Latin American inferiority. As William told me regarding the double standards present in baseball's linguistic hierarchies, "I think it's more of an us problem than a 'them' problem." William wasn't alone in his observations as another baseball operations exec, Coromoto, acknowledged the same backwards structures of evaluation and projection of intrinsic (un)intelligence as tied to lack of English-speaking ability, vehemently condemning baseball's long-standing evaluative framework:

And the other thing [that needs to change] -- and I've talked to people about this -- [is how] intelligence is measured by the level of English that these kids have. You know? It's like, if you speak more English, you're smarter, but no. ¿Qué tiene que ver el culo con las pestañas? It has nothing to do with it, it has nothing to do with it. And the fact that they (Americans) assume that just because [Latin American players] can't communicate doesn't even mean anything. It's an assumption that makes zero sense. It doesn't mean anything. You cannot measure how smart they are just because they can or can't speak [English] fluently.

Instead of focusing on Latin American English production as the operative field of analysis, Inoue's work on enregisterment and the listening subject can help unpack perceived Latin American inferiority as tied to language ideology. Rather than viewing the English of non-native speakers as fixed linguistic production, we must consider it in the context of *who* is overhearing and evaluating their English. Using Asif Agha's definition of enregisterment as a "process whereby distinct forms of speech come to be socially recognized (or enregistered) as indexical of



speaker attributes by a population of language users,”<sup>101</sup> we can see how Latin American player’s utterances in both English and Spanish can indexically reinscribe their inferiority and unintelligence. In Inoue’s study of Japanese “women’s language”, she examines how the expressive practices of Japanese women were enregistered with a uniquely, seemingly empirical form of “schoolgirl speech” that was instead a masculine anxiety -- reacting to economic and political modernization -- that created said category of speech. For Inoue, the male intellectuals’ overhearing of “schoolgirl” speech was more a result of their grappling with modernity than it was a detection of a concrete way of talking on the part of the women.<sup>102</sup> Building on Inoue’s intervention and the work of Flores and Rosa Chapter 2 employs a raciolinguistic approach that “[refuses]to center the analysis on attempts to document the empirical linguistic practices of racialized subjects, and instead interrogating the interpretive and categorizing practices of racially hegemonic perceiving subjects.”<sup>103</sup> As this chapter shows, we must move our focus away from Latin American players, their English-speaking ability, and degree of belonging within a white, English-speaking space and redirect it towards the actions and interpretive practices of white listening subjects embodied by white coaches, staff, and players.

As a recognizable entry point in discussing how white listening subjects function, we can revisit the example mentioned earlier in this chapter in which white coaches were making fun of a Dominican player’s speech, demeaning his intelligence, and locating Haiti as a site of languagelessness. Instead of debating the accuracy or correctness of their claims (and thus centering the player as the subject in question) we can read their comments as reflecting

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<sup>101</sup> Agha, “Voice, Footing, Enregisterment,” 38.

<sup>102</sup> Inoue, “The Listening Subject of Japanese Modernity and His Auditory Double: Citing, Sighting, and Siting the Modern Japanese Woman.”

<sup>103</sup> Flores and Rosa, “Unsettling Race and Language: Toward a Raciolinguistic Perspective,” 628.

insecurity akin to that of Inoue's masculine anxiety, perhaps suggesting the precarity of their own "intelligence" and a need to visibly assert their superiority. Building on Inoue's argument that "a particular mode of hearing & seeing is, then, an effect of a regime of social power, occurring at a particular historical conjuncture...language ideology sets the boundary for what counts as language & what does not," allows us to reimagine the seemingly evident "truths" in baseball's inter-subjective spaces and interactions. Rather than center Latin American expression, we can instead address what white listeners reveal about themselves in their jokes and critiques so as to interrogate *how* "the act of overhearing and evaluating... is necessary for establishing...moral contrast."<sup>104</sup> While the everyday conversation and presence of language ideologies and hierarchies within the baseball world continue to reproduce negative stereotypes of Latin American players, the monitoring and demarcation of white space doesn't only occur through language production. Engaging in a raciolinguistic analysis also includes confronting a broader racialized semiotics that involve the white subject's overdetermination of Latin American physicality, behavior, expressiveness, and appearance/dress (among other things). Thus, it is not just the white listening subject but also the white *perceiving* subject who's overdetermination of signs can be found in examples of racial profiling that range from the discursive to the material and physical.

As it relates to the world of baseball, we have access to a treasure trove of concrete examples of how such white perceptions, overdeterminations, and overhearing have historically marked and continue to racialize Latin American on a daily basis. In the following section, I examine a body of tweets that engaged with the deleted account Twitter account "Total Coño Move" as well as tweets with the hashtag #totalcoñomove or #TCM. Peaking in popularity in the

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<sup>104</sup> Reyes, "Inventing Postcolonial Elites: Race, Language, Mix, Excess," 218.

early 2010s, the Total Coño Move account and hashtag served as a way for an overwhelmingly white group of minor league baseball players to share the stories and accounts of playing alongside Latin American teammates. The account's clearest audience was a set of people who presumably had similar experiences or interactions with Latin American players or simply, white minor league players and staff. Aside from the more explicitly racist substitution of the word "coño" for Latin American or the Latin American players themselves -- replacing a broad yet diverse regional demography with a scatological Spanish word -- the set of tweets and replies to the account serve as an ideal space to apply broad parts of the sociolinguistic theory outlined in this chapter. Though shared and disseminated as a humorous content, the Total Coño Move account (and those who engaged with it) created or entailed racialized stereotypes regarding Latin American behavior, essentializing ethno-racial difference as tied to linguistic difference and perceived 1st/3rd World hierarchies.

Before diving into the analysis of Total Coño Move, a couple notes. When citing Total Coño Move tweets, I opt to cover the handles of the Twitter users -- this is intentional. My focus is not on individual actors and instances where one might feel inclined to finger point or make charges of isolated racism. The tweets themselves need to be viewed collectively as an outcropping of societal white supremacy and expressions of internalized social stratifications and power relations, not simple, reductionist conceptions of attitudinal racism. The identities of the users matter less than how their engagement and commentary fits a broader racializing, hegemonic discourse that extends from racial-colonial logics. Regarding language: The Spanish word "coño", though technically meant to describe female genitalia, is more commonly used as an expletive in many Spanish-speaking countries. For American English/non-Spanish speakers, it is sometimes easier to understand coño's usage and application along the same lines as the

exclamatory function of certain curse words. This could mean using the word as a negative reaction or in astonishment or surprise among other contexts. Baseball, like any competitive sport in which individual athletes seek to perform as well as they can but are regularly disappointed, has its fair share of cursing on and off the field. As such, the word “coño” is commonplace in the lexicon of the game. While “coño” and all other types of expletives are thrown around every day in the world of baseball, for white, English-speaking players in some cases, the term has been appropriated and repurposed as a metonymic tool to represent all Latin American players. Though seemingly localized to baseball (though it could, of course, appear elsewhere) referring to Latin American players as “coños” doesn’t carry the same history or generate the same acerbic bite as slurs or other terms potentially read as derogatory when used to homogenize and deride entire ethno-racial groups. Per conversations with interviewees, the term is often circulated by white players, most of the time in “joking” terms for other white listeners -- as opposed being directed at a Latin American player or group of players in a shared interaction. Take the following examples:

**Example. 1:** Time for our meeting, where are the coños?

**Example. 2:** Go tell Hernández to round up the coños.

Coño has also circulated in adjective form with terms such as “coño corner” to refer to a part of the locker room where a group of Latin American players has congregated or “coño leg kick” to mark Latin American pitchers who upon landing with their lead foot and delivering a pitch, recoil with their back leg due to the extreme force they generate in their pitching delivery as they make their move towards home plate. But how do spaces like a corner or bodily movements like a leg kick -- fictionalized and spoken into existence -- become attributed to Latin American players alone? In the case of the leg kick, the whip or recoil that pitchers produce has come to be perceived and interpreted by a white audience as exaggerated and over-the-top. When

referenced, “coño leg kick” is imbued with a tone of dismissiveness, mocking, and absurdity, but why does it stand out? In speaking with Clark, the frailty of the argument that certain physical actions are unique to Latin American players came through. I asked him if he had heard the term “coño leg kick”:

**Clark:** Oh yeah, \*laughing\* I have heard that. I don’t think much of it [because] that one, to me, doesn’t make sense.

**David:** Everyone does [a move like that] ...

**Cla:** Yeah! There’s a biomechanical reason. To me, I like it. Do it. It’s probably helping you, saving your arm a little bit. I guess I just miss it because *ev-er-y-one* \*drawn out for emphasis\* does that to some degree. Everyone has some sort of “coño leg kick” \*sarcastically\*. But that is an interesting point -- why does that become a thing for [the] definition of a Latin player? [For example, when John (a white player)] humps up [he] has a quote unquote “coño leg kick”.

Here we can see a convergence of various language ideologies already addressed in this thesis: Mock Spanish in the euphemistic application of “coño” to describe a “negative” or “deviant” action and more importantly the policing the leg kick as racialized as “coño”, or non-white. By focusing on how white players and staff see, hear, and determine what is “coño”, we can read the direct labeling of Latin American players as “coños” and their actions as “coño moves” as racialized or ethnicized constructions labeled as uniquely Latin American. While these framings serve a multitude of context-dependent functions, they can be understood through two broader discursive categories: 1. a discourse of development and modernity that locates Latin American players and their home countries as sites of poverty and backwardness and 2. a process of racialization that both otherizes Latin American players against a US racial backdrop, simultaneously revealing the accepted norms from which a white, hard-working, masculinity identity can be derived. The propagation of the term “coño” and the overdetermination of Latin American behavior by white players and staff signal what Angela Reyes calls colonial

recursivity or the rearticulation of long-held colonial distinctions.<sup>105</sup> Alternatively, to channel Chakrabarty, white players and staff symbolize the “modern” Western or colonizing gaze that constantly assesses and evaluates the “non-modern” actions of Latin American players in the US or center of modernity.<sup>106</sup> Though the assessments of Latin American players and evaluations of what is/isn’t modern are multifarious, recurring themes do appear, attuning us to what constitutes “coño” and conversely, what comprises its antithesis, white normativity.

### **Backwardness, Unintelligence, Primitiveness**

As already noted, to comprehend the Total Coño Move account (and interaction with said account) in its most basic function is to recognize it as a space for white players to call attention to actions or behavior that they deemed particularly notable or funny as a result of them appearing uniquely Latin American. Even if the Latin American behavior in question seemed unobtrusive or neutral in motive or outcome, when viewed from the gaze of a white player, it was flagged as primitive, backwards, or irrational/stupid. Take the following example:



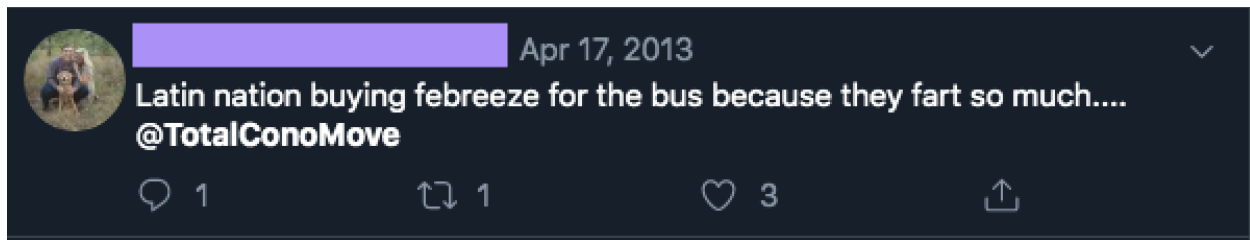
**Figure 2.3** Frozen Pizza.

<sup>105</sup> IBID, 228.

<sup>106</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for ‘Indian’ Past?,” *Representations* 37 (1992): 1–26.

In *Figure 2.3* we don't have an image to help us, only the author's words. The action in question? A Latin American player bringing a frozen pizza to the stadium and cooking it in the microwave. The obvious intended punchline of the tweet is that the Latin American player prepared a frozen meal in the microwave as opposed to the oven. The secondary and less prominent moment of disorder referenced here is that the player brought the frozen pizza to the field. Food is always provided at minor and major league parks, though the quality can vary greatly and often may not align with the dietary needs or customs of Latin American players. Regardless, the fact that the player brought the pizza from home takes a backseat to the implied unbelievability of trying to cook it in the microwave, a blunder we might expect any teenager or early-20-something to make, regardless of where they're from.

The next tweet focuses on the rudeness and grotesqueness of Latin American players noting that they fart an inordinate amount on the team bus and have bought Febreze to try to mask the smell. Looking at the text, we see the term "Latin Nation" used to refer to Latin American players. A label that still circulates in clubhouses to this day, "Latin Nation" functions as a reductivist, generalizing grouping that places all Latin American players under a fictional national banner. The term is usually deployed to emphasize or exaggerate the perceived Latin Americanness of a group of players and is used as a joke in and of itself. The so-called Latin Nation is fictitious, constructed by white perceiving subjects to more easily refer to a diverse set of individuals and group them by their difference, erasing what might differentiate players from say, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Panama, Mexico or how players from the same country might differ greatly in terms of class, race, etc. Present in the term is a broad set of racialized, social markers that flattens Latin American players into an interpretable oneness, a marked set of behaviors that is located elsewhere in "Latin Nation".



**Figure 2.4** Febreze on Bus.

“Latin Nation” aside, the aim of the tweet is to draw attention to the repulsiveness of Latin American behavior. The focus on fecal bodily functions positions Latin American players as lacking manners at best and barbaric at worst. In either case, they are painted as untamed in the presence of the more civilized people with whom they share the team bus. By noting that the players bought Febreze, the author is also suggesting that Latin American players are aware of their grossness or rudeness yet lack the self-control or decorum to refrain from such behavior. The white attention to Latin American players farting and the naturalization of this behavior as somehow Latin American, suggests that the foil to Latin Americans -- white, US individuals -- would never commit such a faux pau. Marked as a homogenized people with backwards customs, Latin American players produced moments such as the bus incident that reminded white players of their modernity and civility, their advancement and superiority over the whole of Latin America.

Despite not necessarily being aware of the Total Coño Move account, interviewees were conscious of the fact that white players and staff often view them as part of an ignorant, unintelligent population hailing from primitive origins. In a conversation with Daniel, a major league player from the Dominican Republic, a discussion regarding the gaps in technological advancement between his home country and the US undercut the conceit of white US understandings of progress and modernity:



dado cuenta que cuando en Dominicana viene a llegar una máquina -- vamos a poner una lavadora -- cuando llega a Dominicana ya solamente la tiene ahora son los popis, la gente de high-class, los que pueden?

Date cuenta cuando un jugador llega aquí, [cuando uno quiere] tomar un café es diferente, uno tiene que preguntar.

‘Mira y esta máquina?’

‘Es una máquina. Es simple. Presiona y te da un café.’

[Y dicen] ‘wao, ese sí es bruto’ pero no es que sea bruto es que allá esa máquina no ha llegado. ¿Tú me entiendes? La cosa es que nuestro país es así, no tenemos como quien dice esos recursos y esos mecanismos para que todo nos llegue bien, para cuando uno venga a este país uno no va [a tener esos problemas].

Porque yo te digo la verdad. Tú sientas un dominicano con una máquina [nueva] y tú sientas un americano con una máquina [nueva] y el resultado va a ser igual y puede que el dominicano sobresalga más.

**Daniel:** I think it's because of our country, you know? You know that the US is an extremely developed country compared to a lot of countries, and especially compared to the Dominican. And haven't you realized that when a new machine makes its way to the Dominican -- let's say a washing machine -- when it arrives in the Dominican the only people that have it are the popis, or the high-class people, the people that can [afford it]?

**Daniel:** Yo digo que es por el país de nosotros, ¿me entiendes? Tú sabes que estados unidos es un país sumamente desarrollado comparado con muchos países y mucho más con Dominicana... Y no te has

Understand that when a player arrives here, when you want to have a coffee it's different, you have to ask.

‘Hey, what’s up with this [coffee] machine?’

‘It’s a [coffee] machine. It’s simple. Press [there] and it makes you a coffee

And they’ll say, ‘wow, that guy is dumb’ but it’s not that he’s dumb it’s just that it hasn’t arrived there (the Dominican). You understand? The thing is that’s how our country is, we don’t have, what one might call, those resources or those mechanisms so

Over the course of the interview, Daniel made several points highlighting how the types of

knowledge valued in the 1st World/the US are just that, arbitrary sites of comprehension that

become read and hierarchized along a scale of naturalized intelligence. As Daniel points out,

one’s familiarity with a certain piece of machinery or type of technology does not represent an

innate inferiority or lack of intelligence, but rather is a question of access. Notably, Daniel’s

comments also allude to class comfort within the Dominican Republic, indicating that the popis

(the upper class) have the capital to buy items associated with modernity and development, the

same items that then become distinguishers between 1st and 3rd World when 3rd World actors

engage with them for the first time. Daniel articulates how unfamiliarity with certain processes --

in this case not knowing how to use a coffee apparatus -- become framed as a lack of knowledge

and intelligence on the part of Latin American players. We can revisit Quijano’s discussion of

the West’s control of knowledge to understand how hegemonic epistemes continue to delineate

and mark hierarchical boundaries used to validate or exclude: “[Europe] repressed as much as

possible the colonized forms of knowledge production, the models of the production of meaning,

their symbolic universe, the model of expression and of objectification and

subjectivity...Repression in this field was most violent, profound, and long lasting among the

that everything comes easy so that when you show up here you don’t have those problems.

Because I’ll tell you the truth. You sit a Dominican down with a [new] machine and you sit an American down with a [new] machine and the result is going to be the same and the Dominican might even excel more.

Indians of Ibero-America, who were condemned to be an illiterate peasant subculture stripped of their objectified intellectual legacy.”<sup>107</sup> Daniel and I discussed the topic further:

**Daniel:** I didn't know how to pump gas.

**Dav:** In Venezuela, from what they tell me, there's someone that does it for you.

**Dan:** In the Dominican Republic it's the same - when you go to the Dominican. [Here] you have to use your card and the thing in English, you know? I didn't know, I came here and didn't know.

**Dav:** And now that you know, you know it's something simple.

**Dan:** A piece of cake!

**Dav:** But at the time, if you said that or if someone heard that, the Americans would be laughing.

**Dan:** They'd say, 'This Latino doesn't even know how to pump gas, something so simple,' but it's that there it's different.

**David:** Me llega a la mente otro ejemplo. Creo que fue de ligas menores...alguien o unos coaches riéndose de un muchacho que no sabía bien echar la gasolina.

**Daniel:** Yo no sabía echar la gasolina.

**Dav:** En Venezuela según me dicen hay alguien que lo hace.

**Dan:** En Dominicana igual - cuando tú vas a Dominicana. [Aquí] hay que poner la tarjeta y la vaina en inglés, ¿me entiendes? No sabía, yo vine aquí y no sabía.

**David:** Another example comes to mind. I think it was from the minors...someone or some coaches laughing at a player who didn't know how to pump gas.

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<sup>107</sup> Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin American," 541.

**Dav:** Y ahora ya que tú sabes, tú sabes que sí es una cosa simple.

**Dan:** ¡Una sencillez!

**Dav:** Pero en el momento, si tú dijeras eso o si alguien escuchara eso, los americanos se estarían riendo.

**Dan:** [Dirían] ‘Este latino no sabe ni siquiera echar gasolina, una cosa tan sencilla,’ pero es que allá es diferente.

Openly admitting that he was lost when he had to pump gas for the first time in the US, Daniel explains how strange the process seemed -- from the form of payment to the English on the small keypad. Daniel states that he had to use a debit or credit card at gas stations in the US, something that rarely occurs in the Dominican Republic or Venezuela where one typically pays in cash. Whether or not the white, US actors mentioned so far (the authors of the tweets, those referenced in Daniel’s examples) realized it, they were also operating within the same discourse of development/underdevelopment examined in Chapter 1. For Latin American players to be labeled stupid or ridiculous, they had to fail the very types of “tests” that Daniel denounced as an inadequate marker of advancement or knowledge. As the tweets indicate -- and as Daniel outlines -- the jokes operate under the assumption that Latin American players are primitive, ignorant, or less intelligent/civilized than their white, US counterparts. Technologically, behaviorally, customarily, the body of tweets paints Latin American players as incapable of operating “properly” in 1st World modernity, leaving them outside the bounds of white, 1st World expectation and normativity.

Another interviewee, Coromoto expressed similar sentiments, noting that despite the potentially large bonuses afforded to Latin American players, perceptions of poverty in the 3rd World and perceptions of “poverty of the mind” regularly occur. Speaking about the uneven treatment that Latin American players receive in the US and whether that treatment is classed, Coromoto declared, “El trato no necesariamente viene por cuánto dinero tienes, sino de donde

vienes, pobre de mente (aunque tienes miles o millones de dólares) pero eres pobre de mente nada más porque vienes de un sitio de donde soy yo que sabemos que no es desarrollado en los estandartes de ellos [los americanos] // *The treatment doesn't necessarily come from how much money you have, but rather where you come from, poor of mind (although you might have thousands or millions of dollars), but you're poor of mind only because you come from a place -- a place where I'm from -- that isn't developed per the standards of the Americans.*" Coromoto highlights how white, US conceptions and judgments of Latin America are rooted in the region's inferior global position relative to the US. It's not a matter of class, per say, since each year international players receive signing bonuses in the millions, however, wealth alone doesn't shield Latin Americans from US notions of racialized superiority and advancement. Both Daniel's and Coromoto's accounts show how Latin American players and staff are keenly aware that people hailing from various Latin American countries are understood to be coming *from* the historical past *to* a modern, civilized space. While this set of tweets and interview excerpts demonstrate the ways in which Latin American players "fail" to participate in a developed, 1st World, white space, additional Total Coño Move tweets also reveal that Latin American players are perceived to have direct ties or proximity to nature and indigenous (marked as primitive) belief systems.

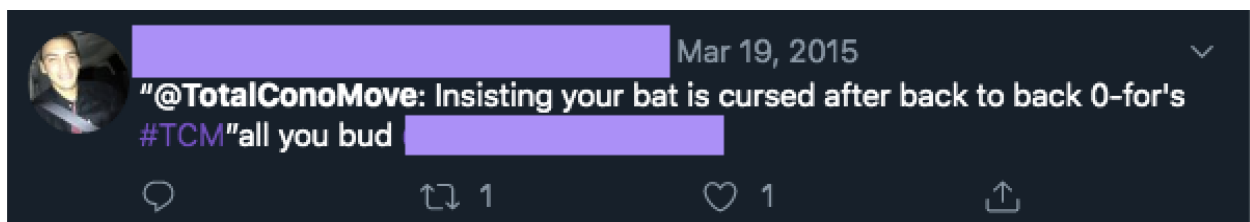


Figure 2.5. Cursed bat.

Figure 2.5 details how a Latin American player, after having two straight games without a hit ("back-to-back 0-for's"), stated that a cursed bat had led to his poor performance. Many

players, of all ethno-racial backgrounds, complain about their bats, switch them out, insist that one bat has hits in it whereas another one doesn't, borrow or continue to use a bat from a teammate because of success with that particular bat, or even joke lightheartedly that a bat has powers, is cursed, blessed or tied to any number of other supernatural phenomenon. However, the author concretizes the belief that a bat could be cursed as something representative of all Latin American players. After all, this incident is being shared as a "move" that Latin Americans engage in. The author quips "all you bud" as a way to distance himself from the practice, undercutting and delegitimizing the Latin American player's "belief" that the bat is cursed. By attempting to link Latin American players to a "retrograde" spiritual belief system that could allow for the possibility of cursed bats and mystical forces influencing the game, the author draws on religious stereotypes driven by Judeo-Christian marginalization of historically African, or in this case Afro-Caribbean, religious practices such as Santeria or Voodoo. In the broader space of professional baseball, this trope has cultural weight, as it was popularized and assigned to Latin American players in one of the most well-known baseball movies to date, *Major League*.

One of the main characters of the 1989 film is Pedro Cerrano, a Cuban baseball player whose backstory entails a supposed flight to the US for religious freedom and the ability to practice voodoo.



**Figure 2.6.** Cerrano Praying to Jobu at his Locker.

**Jake Taylor (Far Left):** *Que pasa there, Pedro?*

**Pedro Cerrano (Center):** *Bats, they are sick. I can no hit curveball. Straight ball, I hit it very much. Curve ball, bats are afraid. I ask Jobu to come, take fear from bats. I offer him cigar and rum. He will come.*<sup>108</sup>

While Cerrano's quote (and his English throughout the entire movie) serve to fortify the same linguistic hierarchy and double standards discussed earlier with Chico Escuela, Sammy Sosa and others, *Figure 2.6* underscores the association of Latin American players with indigenous or traditional belief systems. Cerrano is relegated to the mythical and magical, not the scientific or (at least) rational world of his white teammates. We see the very same discourse in the 2015 tweet in which the author ascribes a level of religious or spiritual authenticity to the Latin American player saying his bat was cursed. The irony of presenting both Cerrano and the unnamed player in the cursed bat tweet as believers in the spiritual or supernatural (indexed as

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<sup>108</sup> David S. Ward, *Major League* (Paramount Pictures, 1989).

Latin American) lacks congruence in that baseball is a game notoriously filled with superstition, independent of ethno-racial identity.

One of baseball's most longstanding and recognizable myths/lore revolve around the existence of curses; the Curse of the Bambino in which the Boston Red Sox ill-fated sale of Babe Ruth to the Yankees before the 1920 season is thought to have led to Boston's championship drought from 1918 - 2004. The Curse of the Billy Goat in which a Chicago bar owner Ken Sianis cursed the Chicago Cubs for banning his pet goat from entering Wrigley field in 1945, resulting in the Cubs 71-year championship drought. Unpacking the history of mythmaking in baseball is a topic better addressed elsewhere; however, to imply that the preternatural holds a uniquely Latin American place within baseball is patently false when taking even a superficial glance at baseball tradition and folk tales. Furthermore, the same contradiction appears at the individual level, as many white players hold wildly superstitious practices and routines that are anything but rooted in the rationality, science, and purported order of the West. Players openly admit this. There are constant attempts to catalog and document baseball player superstitions. Take Tim Kurkjian's 2013 article for ESPN where he details how some players will eat the same food before each game, change (or not change) clothes over a period of time, keep a poker chip in their back pocket, not get a haircut, always use the same shower, etc.<sup>109</sup> Such practices may be silly, legitimate, religious, spiritual, agnostic -- for the purposes of this thesis, it doesn't ultimately matter. Seemingly, the only difference between the superstitions outlined in the Kurkjian's article and the portrayal of Cerrano and the player with the cursed bat is that they are not viewed as part of a naturalized belief in otherworldly forces that fall outside of Judeo-

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<sup>109</sup> Tim Kurkjian, "It's Friday the 13th. Be Afraid Amused.," ESPN, September 13, 2013, [https://www.espn.com/mlb/story/\\_/id/9664251/trifle-superstitions-which-mlb-players-believe](https://www.espn.com/mlb/story/_/id/9664251/trifle-superstitions-which-mlb-players-believe).



Christian religiosity. We see the insidiousness of colonial logics and discourses of development in deciding how, when, and with whom these labels are applied; the continued association of deviant spiritual, religious belief systems with Latin America recalls a pre-modern or pre-colonization indigeneity or “primitiveness”. Against the backdrop of the “organized” Judeo-Christian religiosity imposed throughout colonization, Latin American players -- and their assumed ties to indigenous beliefs -- again become stuck in the historical past.

Another strain of modern vs. primitive discourse that appears in the white construction of the “coño” is perceived Latin American proximity to nature. Reminiscent of “Latin Nation” from the Febreze tweet, the following example also lumps Latin American players into a flattened, monolithic group, opting to use the pejorative term “the Latins”. In *Figure 2.7* (below), we see a picture of a bird in someone’s hand and are able to intuit from the language of the tweet that the act of catching a bird and bringing it “into the locker room” triggered the “total coño move” designation.



**Figure 2.7** Bird catching.

When trying to understand why this act may have generated surprise or discomfort for a white audience but not (as we're made to believe from the tweet) for someone from Latin America, we can again see the legacies of Quijano's colonial evolutionism and dualism at work. The West, following a linear, one-directional notion of human evolution, emerged from a state of nature to become *the most* civilized, advanced species, leaving other, inferior peoples and races in the historical past, their bodies dominable and closer to nature. Bird catching can be seen as an antiquated skill or ability that those in the West no longer need or would no longer dare engage in. These distinctions between a Western departure and evolution from nature have long been present in the US imaginary. Indeed, as John Patrick Leary notes in his investigation of US travel writing on Latin America from the 19th century, "In the foreignness of Latin America, US authors see a reflection of themselves: their recent past, their possible future, the continental America that a porous and only recently fabricated border cannot completely contain."<sup>110</sup> These same colonial logics appear in *Figure 2.7*. The act of catching a bird seems tied to a past in which people were more closely interacting in/with nature. How else would this player be able to corral a wild animal if not in touch with or close to that same wildness himself? On top of placing the player's actions in the discursive colonial yesteryears, the author also denotes a degree of intrusion or corruption of expected order by the bird's presence *inside* the clubhouse. In white normative, Western capitalist order, nature is meant to be left *outside* and proximity to it reminds "developed" nations of remnants of who they used to be.

Despite producing what they might have viewed as novel quips capturing the essence of their "ridiculous" teammates, the authors of the Total Coño Move tweets, often engaged in the reproduction of colonial racial logics rooted in Eurocentric binaries of modern/primitive,

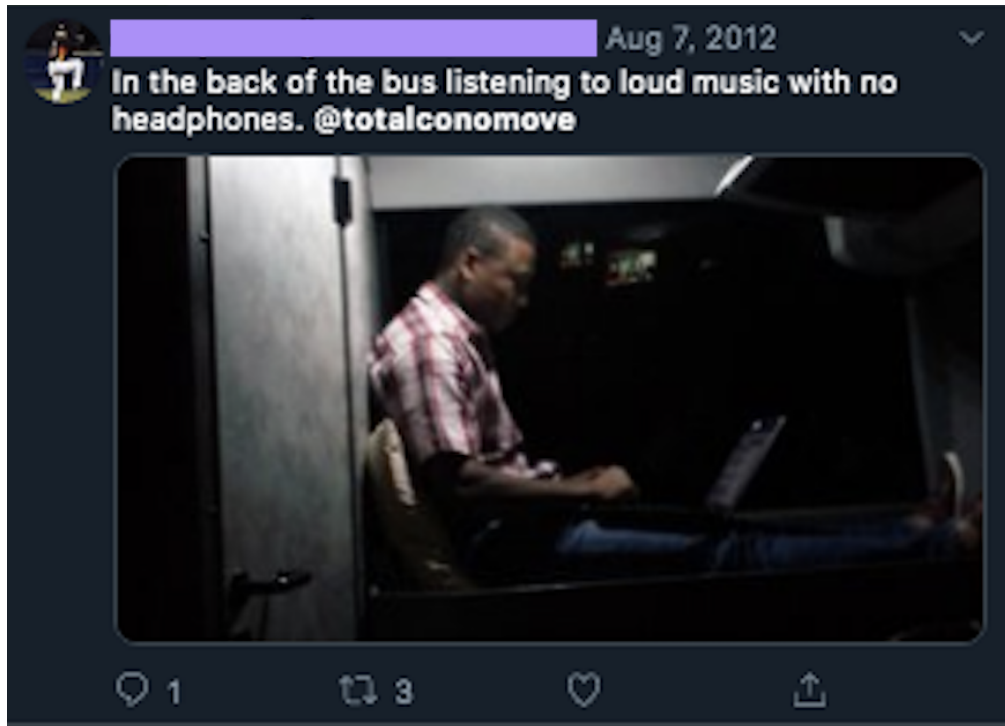
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<sup>110</sup> Leary, *A Cultural History of Underdevelopment: Latin America in the U.S. Imagination*, 60.

rational/natural, intelligent/ignorant, Judeo-Christian/magical. The actions that the white perceiving subjects mentioned in this section deemed “coño” reinforce an image of Latin American players and Latin America as backwards, simple, and pre-modern. Importantly, the highlighting and cataloguing of Latin American actions deemed as backwards, also positions white players as removed from or unassociated with such deeds. These designations offer a glimpse at how the hierarchy, normativity, acceptability of whiteness is constructed in the everyday world of baseball.

### **Appropriateness, (Dis)respect, and Nationalism**

Building on white perceptions and conceptions of Latin America, cultural degradation, this section addresses a more marked white regimentation of Latin American behavior perceived to cross the boundaries of appropriateness and respect in white space. Otherwise small or unremarkable acts become territory for judgement and differentiation, none more so than behavior that white actors deem “disrespectful” or offensive. This plays out on and off the field; I address “disrespect” on the field in the following section on style of play, while I examine more general notions of offensive behavior, that is actions that don’t fall in line with white normativity, here. The quotidian cases of Latin American “disrespect” are often wrapped up in notions of individualism, deservedness, and the disturbance of expected or assumed personal rights. One theme that appeared frequently among the Total Coño Move tweets is that Latin American players are louder, more unruly, and less reserved than their US counterparts. Whenever a Latin American player or group of players disrupts the expected level of white tranquility or peace, it’s labeled “coño”.

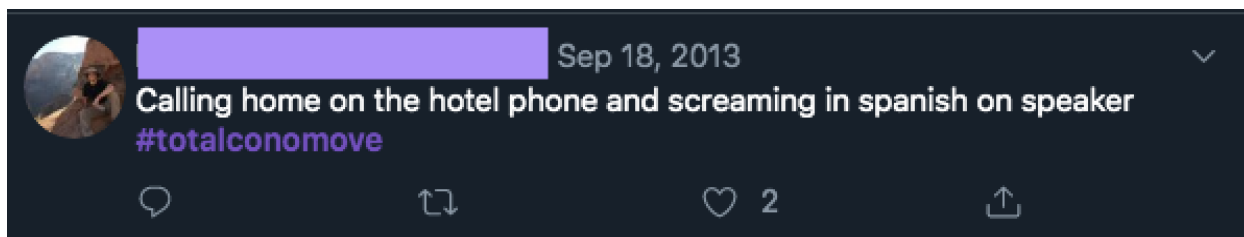


**Figure 2.8** Music on Bus.



**Figure 2.9** Loud Music in the Morning.

The authors imply a lack of decorum or consideration on the part of the Latin American players listening to the music, suggesting that both the genre and volume are unwanted impositions and in turn become “coño.” The second tweet centers the fact that the music is in Spanish, begging the question, that had the music not been in Spanish, would its loudness have mattered? The problematization of Spanish (and Spanish speakers) as loud or somehow louder than English (and English speakers) isn’t just tied to music.



**Figure 2.10** Calling Home.

*Figure 2.10* relates a moment shared by teammates at a hotel -- either in the same room or same vicinity -- in which the Latin American player's phone call consists of "screaming in Spanish" and leaving the call on speaker for the world to hear. For a Latin American player, the use of Spanish on a call if not a foregone conclusion, should not be noteworthy, especially if he's calling home, as it's safe to assume that the vast majority of a Latin American player's social circle is Spanish speaking. However, the author's need to mention the language in which unwanted loudness occurred suggests a linkage between undesirable Spanish and a racialized rowdiness or disrespect. Clark shared similar examples in his interview when describing racist-tinged moments in a major league clubhouse:

**Clark:** [I see it] when there's a group of Spanish speakers speaking Spanish and having fun in the training room and a non-Spanish speaker walks in and gets pissed off that they're speaking Spanish. What are you mad about? It's a little bit of like 'This is my country, this is my game, this is my training room.' Probably the thing that bothers me the most that I hear incredibly frequently is this requirement of Latin American players or native Spanish speakers to speak English. Like why is that a requirement? I hear that a ton. And it's usually done quietly and amongst the two non-Spanish speakers on this side of the room that are like 'Why can't they speak English?' and it's like, those guys speak English very well but why do they have to speak English in the training room or the hot tub or wherever?

Another big one is guys coming into the weight room or the pool room and seeing that there are 4-5 native Spanish speakers in the hot tub and being like 'Oh, I'm not going to get in the hot tub. I'll be all alone. It's going to be awkward or weird' or 'They're having their party; I'm not getting in that.' Not in a 'I'll let them have their space type of way' more like back of the bus bullshit like 'That hot tub is tainted now.'. Or the weight room and there's Latin American music playing and [guys are like] 'I'm not going to go in there and work out now.' I hear that so often. In the training room I probably hear something like that every other day. I remember this group of Latin American players

who during the season would all get in the hot tub pre-game, same time every day, and white players would walk in and sort of throw their hands up exasperated and leave.

All of these examples ingrain Spanish's linguistic deviance, solidifying the boundaries of white, English-speaking space by noting the disruptive nature of music or "loud" Spanish. The volume of the Spanish draws attention and destabilizes normative white, English-speaking space -- read as composed, calm, respectful -- becoming a channel for racialized critique of Latin American behavior -- read as raucous, reckless, and unruly.

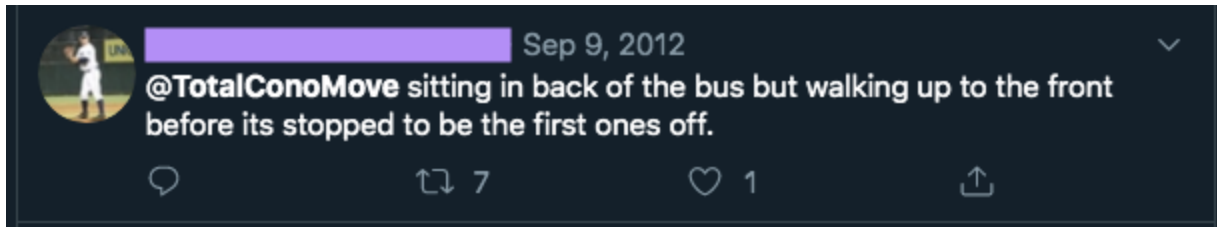
Respect is also measured through recognition of authority and hierarchy. A common litmus test of Latin American deference and respect, as well as intelligence, is a player's ability to remember the names of his teammates, coaches, and a handful of higher ups in the organization. A common theme from interviewees who had worked multiple years in baseball was whether or not Latin American players knew their name or full name given how much time said individuals spent with the players. The implied expectation was that because of these employees' proximity to Latin American players or ability to communicate in Spanish (and thus create a better relationship with players) that they should in turn know those employees' names, though that is not always the case and isn't reflective of the strength of a given relationship. Similarly, according to interviewees, white staff and players -- as well as other Latin American players for a white audience -- will bluntly ask Latin American players if they know people's name in front of others to prove a point or to put players on the spot with the expectation being that the player won't be able to produce a given person's name. In one such case, an interviewee recalled how staff members and teammates had a Latin American player try to recite the names of his teammates in front of those very teammates, a task he was unable to complete. As these staff members explained, the player's failure to produce the names of his teammates showed that he didn't care about them or hadn't taken the time to actually learn their names. Given the

amount of time that group had spent together, staff members and the player's teammates thought there was little excuse -- language barrier, pronunciation, or otherwise -- for the player not to know the names of the people he spent each day with. The association of naming practices with deference and acknowledgement of worth seems uniquely tied to white, middle-class norms of respectability. Often, Latin American players will refer to white staff members in terms of their position or function: "bullpen coach", "pitching coach", "hitting coach", "manager" etc. and know that those individuals can be invested in them, appreciate that investment, and respect that individual without knowing either that person's first or last name. Coromoto, shared experiences from the job:

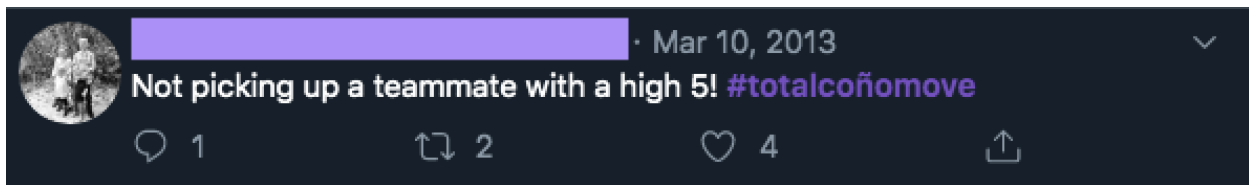
**Coromoto:** If Spanish-speaking players come to me for help, they're coming to me to ask something, because they need something. But every now and then, when that happens, one of my bosses will come in and interrogate them while we're talking and ask them 'Do you know her name?' It's always so uncomfortable and I'm like 'He doesn't need to know my name; he just needs to know I can help.' I'm not sure what the obsession is with putting players on the spot when it comes to names. It doesn't mean he respects you any less because he doesn't know your last name.

Respect and trust can grow regardless of knowing personal details. Over time, if an individual teammate or staff member continues to be a steady presence in a player's career and life, those personal details are shared like in any other social relationship. But the expectation that Latin American players know all names in the organization reinforces hierarchy for hierarchy's sake, a white emphasis on power and authority, not a mutual respect derived from reciprocal care or time invested. This idea of an acute, Latin American lack of concern for others regularly gets framed as "coño".

Take *Figures 2.11* and *2.12*:



**Figure 2.11** Cutting in Line.



**Figure 2.12.** No High Five.

To the white perceiving subject, “cutting in line” or not giving a teammate high five signal Latin American disrespect while also suggesting that such slights wouldn’t occur if the players in question were considerate (read as white). While these tweets and experiences highlight the daily occurrences of perceived disregard for authority and decorum, more legitimate threats and bitter contestations to white normative identity have occurred within the world of baseball and sports more generally.

Regarding sport’s alignment with the nation and US empire, athletics is often framed as a neutral, meritocratic space where ethno-racial difference falls by the wayside and talent and hard work become the only factors in one’s success or failure. In such a sporting realm where a supposed fairness reigns, narratives of deservedness and indebtedness emerge; players who work hard and play well *deserve* the opportunity to play at the highest level (and benefit from the resultant wealth and status) and should concurrently be grateful for the opportunity to be in a position to earn a large salary. Thus, sport tends to be presented and promoted as a colorblind, raceless space where individual prejudice plays no role and one’s play does the talking.

Pushback against the myths of colorblindness or the realities of an (un)equal playing field -- be it



Colin Kaepernick questioning the foundational and continued perpetuation of US state violence and killing of Black people or Carlos Delgado's opposition to the war in Iraq -- results in fervent reaction from those who most benefit from the "liberties" and historical stratification of the nation, namely white people. In the two examples referenced above, white audiences berated Kaepernick and Delgado for not acknowledging or championing these perceived "freedoms" -- though having never been afforded them equally -- and cast them as undeserving of the wealth and opportunity that the US had provided them with.<sup>111</sup> Below, I discuss the two primary ways in which the US nation is bordered within baseball and sport more broadly: 1. By reifying and reconstructing the US as a land of opportunity that cannot be criticized due to the possibility of upward mobility and 2. By championing a white ethnonational patriotism that equates "Americanness" or the nation itself with an indubitable militarism.

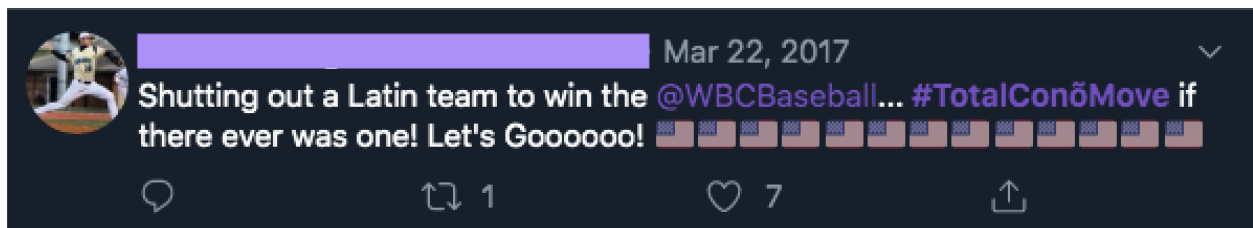
Baseball has a long history of acting as a megaphone for the US nationalist ideologies and sentiments. In his study on the role of baseball in the production and spread of US empire, Robert Elias argues that in order to maintain its foothold, at least in name, as "America's pastime," baseball has had to align itself with the hopeful aspirations of the American dream and become a symbol of American masculinity and patriotism through militaristic displays.<sup>112</sup> Elias looks back at baseball's interconnectedness with patriotism and militarism throughout American history, linking the sport to a number of major wars as well as various interventions in Latin American during the Cold War. He goes on to discuss baseball as an early globalizing business that increased its efforts to find cheapened labor in the 1990s, concluding that baseball has

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<sup>111</sup> Naturally, the US as a nation and land of opportunity was built on the back of Black chattel slavery and imperial/neo-colonial global domination of Black and brown populations across the Global South.

<sup>112</sup> Robert Elias, "The National Pastime Trade-off: How Baseball Sells US Foreign Policy and the American Way," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 28, no. 17 (2011): 2506.

mirrored American imperial ambitions, but in doing so has fostered blind patriotism and undermined the integrity of the game. Similarly, Michael Butterworth's work reflects on how baseball and ballpark rituals became imbued with patriotic performance after the 9/11 attacks. Butterworth notes that while baseball rituals offered a sense of escape and collective mourning in the days immediately following 9/11, these sentiments eventually turned into expressions of nationalism and American hegemony. By looking at concrete changes in fan experience at ballparks after 9/11 (such as the introduction of "God Bless America" playing in the 7<sup>th</sup> inning) Butterworth questions the ways in which the "national pastime" became a rhetorical device for furthering nationalistic stances. Butterworth argues that ballpark rituals united Americans, but hardened ideas of collective identity and national self by including certain traits and excluding others. He concludes that baseball ultimately helped construct what it meant to be "American" in the post-9/11 world, opting for a more narrowly focused and virulent patriotism over a promotion of democratic principles.<sup>113</sup> The elevation of baseball as an arena for the expression of American patriotism and exceptionalism appears in the Total Coño Move archives.



**Figure 2.13.** US Wins the WBC.

The above tweet references the US victory in the 2017 World Baseball Classic (WBC) over Puerto Rico, jokingly calling the victory a Total Coño Move for having defeated a "Latin team". Although the WBC is an international competition that could be expected to bring out

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<sup>113</sup> Michael Butterworth, "Ritual in the 'Church of Baseball': Suppressing the Discourse of Democracy after 9/11," *Communism and Critical/Cultural Studies* 2, no. 2 (2005): 107–29.

nationalist under/overtones, the bordering of the US as “non-coño” or non-Latin American (despite, in this case, the ever-contradictory liminal positioning of Puerto Ricans as having access to US citizenship but existing as a neo-colonial subsidiary of the US) asserts a decidedly white ethnonationalism. The “coño” or Latin American player is not a part of the US and is reminded of his position in the face of flag-waving, white national pride, on the playing field. Of course, similar processes of exclusion take on racialized tones when Black and Brown athletes, born in the US or not, speak up or challenge the symbolic nation through critiques of state violence on its own citizens and abroad. As we’ve seen over the past few years in the WNBA, the highly publicized protest of Colin Kaepernick against the police slayings of countless Black people, and the more recent protests across all major sports in the summer of 2020, to oppose US state violence publicly results in swift rebuke and a questioning of one’s loyalty to and belonging in the US. During the 2020 MLB season, and following the example put forth by NBA teams and players threatening to boycott their postseason (though no boycott actually took place), various MLB teams decided to sit out games in protest and solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. Prior to the summer of 2020, however, baseball’s only visible, public challenges to US hegemony and sanctity came in Bruce Maxwell’s kneeling for the National Anthem in 2017 - - Maxwell was the only MLB player to kneel that season, doing so in solidarity with Kaepernick — and Carlos Delgado’s 2004 opposition to the Iraq War and US bombing practice in Vieques, Puerto Rico. Both incidents are noteworthy in that they occurred in a more hostile public environment, that is, a moment in time in which the league and each MLB team had yet to scurry and profess their public (symbolic) support for Black Lives Matter. The Delgado incident is of particular note in the context of juxtaposing Latin American behavior and adherence to an American appropriateness couched in nationalism. Though his dissension was brief — as team

ownership, buoyed by public pressure and charges of anti-Americanism, ordered him to stop — it offers a useful point of analysis to understand the intersection of sport, respect race, and imperialism.

In 2004, Carlos Delgado spoke out against the then recently imposed requirement of standing for “God Bless America” in the 7th inning of each baseball game, refusing to stand in protest of the US invasion of Iraq. Speaking with the Toronto Star, Delgado explained, “I think it’s the stupidest war ever. Who are you fighting against? We have more people dead now, after the war, than during the war. You’ve been looking for weapons of mass destruction. Where are they at? You’ve been looking for over a year. Can’t find them. I don’t support that. I don’t support what they do. I think it’s just stupid.”<sup>114</sup> Delgado, a Puerto Rican, also noted that his anti-militarism stemmed from US military exercises and bombings in Vieques, Puerto Rico that occurred from the 1940s to 2003.<sup>115</sup> Speaking with the New York Times that same year, Delgado explained how residents of Vieques “... lived in that target practice area for 60 years...They tell you stories of how, in the middle of the night, a bomb blew up. I never experienced it, but I can imagine it. I can see why you might be a little hostile from time to time.”<sup>116</sup> He noted that the toxicity left over from the bombs “[is] still in the environment, it’s still in the ground, it’s still in the water. That’s why we’ve got the highest cancer rate of any place in Puerto Rico.”<sup>117</sup> Delgado’s protest was prescient as the bombings continue to damage Vieques, affecting health outcomes and presenting dangerous oceanic minefields as only 1,600 of the 4,000 hectares

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<sup>114</sup> Dave Zirin, “The Silencing of Carlos Delgado,” *The Nation*, December 7, 2005, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/silencing-carlos-delgado/>.

<sup>115</sup> IBID.

<sup>116</sup> William C. Rhoden, “Sports of The Times; Delgado Makes a Stand by Taking a Seat,” *The New York Times*, July 21, 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/21/sports/sports-of-the-times-delgado-makes-a-stand-by-taking-a-seat.html>.

<sup>117</sup> IBID.

(4,000 of the 10,000 acres) suspected of having munitions have been surface cleared.<sup>118</sup> While Delgado's outcry was tolerated in Toronto, when he went on the road to cities like New York, he was often the subject of derisive remarks, constant booing, and chants of 'USA! USA!' whenever he made an out. Some even suggested he was a terrorist who should go to jail.<sup>119</sup> After concluding his contract with the Toronto Blue Jays, Delgado signed with the New York Mets and backed off his protest, acquiescing to the requests of the Wilpon ownership group, much to the chagrin of those who supported the righteousness and symbolism of his protest.<sup>120</sup>

While moments like Delgado's individual protest seemingly *become* politicized, thus centering the individual who commits an act or makes a comment that triggers the politicization of a previously neutral situation, nationalism and militarism have long permeated the world of sports. As Michael Serazio and Emily Thorson note, sport has been a primary tool in the creation of a nationalistic, imagined community, exuding "a sense of harmony and unity, [and] creating, albeit fleetingly, a homogenizing effect."<sup>121</sup> They assert that fandom does not tend to be principally motivated by nationalistic loyalty, but instead originates in "moment of affinity between the fan and the transcultural object".<sup>122</sup> That said, sport continues to construct the nation, defining and policing the borders of what is and isn't permissible as a member of the national community. Take the common refrain (still present in much of US socio-political discourse) used to berate Kaepernick and anyone else who doesn't show sufficient respect or indebtedness to the US nation is to tell them to "leave" or "go back where they came from" often

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<sup>118</sup> Dena Takruri, "Puerto Rico's Vieques Still Reels from Decades of US Navy Bombing," Aljazeera, July 1, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/blogs/americas/2019/06/puerto-rico-vieques-reels-decades-navy-bombing-190626153309174.html>.

<sup>119</sup> Elias, "The National Pastime Trade-off: How Baseball Sells US Foreign Policy and the American Way," 2518.

<sup>120</sup> Zirin, "The Silencing of Carlos Delgado."

<sup>121</sup> Serazio and Thorson, "Weaponized Patriotism and Racial Subtext in Kaepernick's Aftermath: The Anti-Politics of American Sports Fandom," 153.

<sup>122</sup> IBID.

having more to do with the color of one's skin than whether or not a person actually immigrated to the US. As noted in the Introduction, Hall of Fame football coach and bigot Mike Ditka highlighted this history of unbelonging and the centrality of whiteness in the construction of US identity when he famously reacted to Kaepernick's protest in 2016 by telling him to "get the hell out" of the country if he didn't respect the flag.<sup>123</sup> In an age in which Customs and Border patrol has shown an increasingly public, terrorizing, militarized presence (independent of who sits in the White House), the general public has had access to symbols (the border wall) and rhetoric of legality/illegality that are then used as tools to reinscribe the borders and allow/deny entry to a white nation. The same narratives appear in baseball directed at players from Latin America.

Weaponizing the nation in order to level threats of exclusion or banishment occurs regularly within the world of baseball, with white comments usually revolving around deservedness, earning power, and the US as a land of opportunity. White teammates and staff will at times dismiss Latin American critiques regarding pay or structural shortcomings within baseball by saying that players can go back home if they don't like how things are done here. These comments imply that there are not better options awaiting a player back home, which interestingly, though not likely the speaker's intention, is tied to structural legacies of imperialism, colonialism, and global capitalism -- the same systems reproducing the conditions that Latin American players tend to critique within the game. Additionally, locating the decision to be in the US at the individual level, despite suggesting that no better economic options exist back home, blurs the fact that a given player may have long recognized his limited options and have pursued baseball for precisely those reasons. The condescension implicit in suggesting that a Latin American player go back home to no other viable economic interests intimates that the

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<sup>123</sup> Florio, "Mike Ditka to Colin Kaepernick: 'If You Don't like the Country . . . Get the Hell Out.'"

player should know better, realize he has no better opportunity, and be grateful for what the US has provided him. What it doesn't do is question why there are few options back home or acknowledge that a Latin American player already knows this and is still leveling a criticism about how things work in professional baseball.

One notable example relayed to me by a front office executive during my research, involved a more established white player on the major league team who was on rehab assignment at his team's spring training complex where he found himself in the company of young, teenage Latin American players. Spring training complexes usually double as facilities for Rookie Ball, the lowest level of minor league baseball, a level where rosters are usually composed of a majority of Latin American players, oftentimes in the US for the first time. The interaction in question occurred while a group of young Latin American players were in the gym, conversing and listening to reggaeton over the speakers. The white player, progressing through a workout, yelled at them for not working, saying "This isn't a party," referring to the music and loudness examined earlier, as well as the perceived lackadaisical attitude the players had while they were "supposed to be" training. The white player noted that the players weren't in their country and that here, in the US, one shouldn't behave as they were. The white player emphasized that the Latin American teenagers needed to respect his authority, in so many words, for having spent time in the big leagues (often a default measure used to distinguish those with the most clout or worthy of the most veneration).<sup>124</sup> The staff member overseeing the gym

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<sup>124</sup> Baseball hierarchy and institutional respect is often metered out according "service time" or more colloquially, "time". Service time is how many years, months, days a player has played in the major leagues. Most respect is afforded to accomplished veteran players who continue to play at the highest level, though veterans at the tail end of their careers hanging on in the upper minors still warrant recognition. The pecking order also relates to those with *any* service time in the big leagues vs. those who have never reached the big leagues (minor leaguers). The farther one is from the big leagues, the more deference one is expected to show towards their superiors. To a lesser degree, inclusion on the 40-man roster acts as a separator or differentiating status among minor leaguers who may not have reached the big leagues yet.

concurrent and reiterated to the players that they needed to do as they were told due to this player's roster and relative veteran status. The interaction outlines the way that narratives of belonging and returning (or being told to go back to) are deployed to monitor and maintain a normative white identity and hierarchy in the US. Additionally, it signals the respective worth, real or perceived, of the different player groups. The white player, an extension of the major league team, could assert his status as being more important than a group of Latin American rookie ballers, a demographic often homogenized as a dime a dozen. The reaffirmation of the white player's stance by another white authority figure in the strength coach normalized the bordering of both the nation and ultimatum posed to the Latin American teens: conform or leave.

Such interactions aren't unique for Latin American players, whether they involve veteran players, peers, or staff. In my interview with Daniel, he acknowledged the difficulty of feeling pressured to abide by US customs or having them imposed on you, while lacking the flexibility or possibility to defy them without being marked as a problem.

**Daniel:** Tú sabes que a veces nosotros, parece como que, nosotros nos sentimos como atemorizados, yo digo. Un país extraño o ajeno ok, nosotros estamos en su país tenemos que hacer lo que ellos quieran. ¿Me entiendes? A veces es como decimos...nos dejamos... no sé. Nos dejamos meter el dedo es la palabra. ¿Me entiendes? Porque a veces, [aquí tienes] un ejemplo -- nos dicen 'mira van a hacer tal y tal cosa' y después a la primera 'no se va a hacer así, se va a hacer así' [y tú dices]; 'ah sí, está bien.' [Y después dicen] 'mira, se va a hacer así' y te vienen y te cambian el plan y entonces tú dices, 'No, no, no, no. Aquí no somos locos. Tú una cosa me la dices como es, o no es.' Porque si [ellos] nos ponen esto, [esa mala comunicación por directivos cambiantes] te agregan al grupo de los que yo digo

'¿como?' los latinos. ¿Tú entiendes? Los malditos latinos otra vez.

**Daniel:** You know, sometimes it's like we're frightened, I'd say. A strange, foreign country, ok, we're in their country, we have to do what they want, you know? Sometimes it's like what we call...we let ourselves...I don't know. We let them screw us over. You get it? Because sometimes, [here's] an example -- they tell us 'look, you're going to do this and that thing' and then out of the blue 'you're not going to do it like that, you're going to do it like this,' and you say 'ah, okay, that's fine.' [And then they say] 'look, you're going to do it like this' and they come to you and they change the plan



and then you say “No, no, no, no. We’re not the crazy ones here. You tell me the way something is or the way something isn’t.’ Because if they can put that on us, [that bad

communication due to changing directives] they’ll just add you to the group that I call ‘what?’ the Latinos. You understand? The fucking Latinos again.

Just like the players in the gym being attacked for perceived bad work habits or not showing enough deference to the “superior” white player in their presence, Daniel’s comments show that Latin American players are often left in a lose-lose situation; they are at the mercy of white order be it direct instruction or enforced boundaries of acceptability within the US. Daniel communicates how beaten down Latin American players feel when, already knowing that they’ll likely have to adjust to “the way that” US people do things, white staff and coaches (or those in power) continually adjust the programming and terms of engagement that Latin American players have to keep up with. For every change in instructions that goes uncommunicated, the shortcoming is viewed as a Latin American deficiency despite the fact that it is often the white subjects’ continued adjustment of expectations that begets Latin American failure to meet them. With his rhetorical question (“Te agregan al grupo de los que yo digo ‘como?’ los latinos // *They’ll just add you to the group that I call ‘what?’ the Latinos*), Daniel also highlights the ubiquity of such thinking -- that Latin American players’ failure to keep up with ever-shifting directives, results in the negative group labeling of “los latinos”, problematizing Latin American behavior, not US standards, ideals, or expectations.

A key point mentioned in Chapter 1 that must be restated here is that Latin American players can be grateful to a team for having given them a chance, be sincere, have worked hard either to receive a substantial signing bonus, make it to the major leagues (or both), achieved economic parity with their white peers *and still* have passed through an exploitative system. To those that might question or cite Latin American players' own comments on loving the US and being indebted for the economic stability, status, comfort, experience etc., those points can all be

true, embodied, real and the system itself *can still* have been exploitative. They are not mutually exclusive. This bears repeating for a white audience -- as well as for a Latin American demography who may genuinely (and understandably/rightfully) feel indebted to a team and team individuals who believed in and worked with them -- that might try to undercut the arguments made throughout this thesis by referencing such comments as proof to the contrary. To call the system of professional baseball exploitative is not meant to take away from individual hard work, merit, and achievement in the slightest but rather to note that despite players -- Latin American or otherwise -- overcoming insurmountable odds to “make it”, the system remains far from a meritocracy or proportionate in its distribution of power/wealth to its labor force.

Returning to the ways in which disrespect and appropriateness are monitored, the Kaepernick and Delgado protests serve as an entry point to examine the increased association of sport with the military and the conflation of military and flag with nation. As evidenced during Kaepernick’s stand, detractors spun what was quite simply a protest of police violence into an issue revolving around disrespecting the flag and the soldiers who protect the flag -- read as a symbol for American freedoms.<sup>125</sup> In Delgado’s case, as noted earlier, the questioning of militarism was met with chants of “USA, USA,” suggesting the inherent ties and outward support of US militarism as a requisite for supporting the nation. More recently, in August of 2020 during league-wide Black Lives Matter protests, NBA player Meyers Leonard opted to stand as his teammates knelt for the national, citing his brother’s and friends’ military service

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<sup>125</sup> Indeed, Kaepernick held a meeting with Green Beret, Nate Boyer who had previously penned an open letter to Kaepernick to explain what the flag meant to him. Kaepernick met with Boyer to discuss how he could carry on his protest without disrespecting the military and the two settled on him kneeling.

and protection of the US as driving his reverence for the flag and anthem.<sup>126</sup> The operative logic present in all of these examples is the apparent counter-valence between the national anthem/military and Black life, that is, holding respect for the military takes an oppositional stance to the support of Black life in the US. If patriotism and advocacy for Black humanity in the US (domestically) is controversial, then, as we saw in the Delgado example, the possibility of publicly critiquing the exportation of similar violence abroad (internationally) seems bleak. This theme takes on particular prominence in baseball, however, as the US military has consistently acted as an imperial, invading force throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, specifically.

The seemingly blatant dissonance of baseball's internal and external celebration/promotion of militarism, while also relying on Latin American labor from countries the military has either invaded or sought to destabilize should come as no surprise; MLB as an institution and individual teams respectively, have always promoted contradiction in what they celebrate. The practice of enlisting soldiers to visit the minor or major leagues as motivational speakers is one such example. In its attempt to promote a soldierly brotherhood and camaraderie, while appealing the sensibilities of a historically conservative, white player and staff population (as well as fanbase), Major League Baseball and individual organizations demonstrate a blatant disregard or unawareness of the US military's material and symbolic role in the political histories of the countries responsible for its Latin American talent pool. One only need take a cursory glance at 19th-20th century Latin American geo-politics or a list of the US interventions in Latin America, to understand the contradiction in platforming US servicemen to deliver messages of camaraderie, victory, struggle to an audience filled with players from Latin America. In some

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<sup>126</sup> ESPN.com news services, "Miami Heat's Meyers Leonard Chooses to Stand during National Anthem," ESPN, August 1, 2020, [https://www.espn.com/nba/story/\\_/id/29579676/miami-heat-meyers-leonard-chooses-stand-national-anthem](https://www.espn.com/nba/story/_/id/29579676/miami-heat-meyers-leonard-chooses-stand-national-anthem).

cases, guest speakers regale the audience with tales of killing Brown and Black people abroad even though some decades earlier, the recipients of similar US military violence hailed from the same countries as Latin American audience members.



**Figure 2.14.** US Soldiers in Santo Domingo, 1965.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Bill Downs, “Regarding the United States’ Intervention in the Dominican Civil War Senator Fulbright Criticizes the President’s Foreign Policy,” Bill Downs War Correspondent, September 21, 1965, <https://www.billdownscbs.com/2016/03/1965-regarding-united-states.html>.



**Figure 2.15.** “Rabia” by Juan Pérez-Terrero, April 28, 1965. Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.<sup>128</sup>

In talking with various baseball operations executives, the presence of military figures in motivational or didactic settings for minor and major leaguers alike was relatively common in their organizations, especially in the minor leagues where the percentage of Latin American players is particularly high. As Coromoto told me in an interview,

I remember sitting through a talk from the Navy Seals thinking, ‘These [Latin American] kids aren’t going to get anything out of this, not only because of US presence in Latin America but also the different symbolic role that the military plays in a lot of their home countries. When I spoke to my boss, he told me that the message was about endurance, intensity, and performance under pressure -- things that were relatable to baseball -- and I said ‘That’s not what they (the Latin American players) are getting out of this talk.

The boss in question, associated the military with intensity and overcoming adversity, themes pertinent to baseball performance, but the emphasis on adversity as translatable to sports, erases the fact that most of the difficult situations facing a soldier occurred in violent military contexts.

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<sup>128</sup> García-Peña, *The Borders of Dominicanidad*, 171.

By focusing on the intensity of a soldier's actions, decisions under pressure, and educative nature of said experience, the boss ignores the invasive, occupying reason for military presence, choosing instead to center the lessons-learned from such an experience. Additionally, the presence of such speakers reveals the ways in which systems and programming within professional baseball, if not openly appealing to a conservative, white male audience, fail to recognize the nuanced histories of US-Latin American relations or how placing US military members in front of a Latin American audience might send mixed messages. It is through these types of choices that MLB and individual teams both externally -- in their promotion of a patriotic brand and public-facing alliance with the military -- and internally -- in visits and speeches from Navy Seals or messaging on work ethic, grit, and determination tied to military training -- reinscribe the nation.

To assume a specific Latin American reaction to the US military is also unfair, despite the commonality of US intervention and influence in Latin America at large, as each country and its inhabitants are not monoliths. I have come across Dominican players who cite their conservative upbringing under the tenets of Trujillo as part of their moral rectitude or openly supported Trump and racist immigration policies vis-a-vis anti-Haitianism, Venezuelans who are so anti-Maduro that they would welcome US intervention, Cuban players who have left their home country only to settle in the right-wing, anti-Castro havens of Florida. While some may cite those examples as a defense of US military symbolism and messaging, it does not change the negative impact that US intervention has had on those countries. Each of these Latin American nations has been marked by processes of colonization and imperialism with ruling class influence, repressive military and state police actions, and ideologies rooted in global anti-Blackness. Additionally, the interrogation of US intervention in Latin America is less frequent

for players -- especially those who have “made it” -- who feel indebted to baseball, and thus the US for economic security/prosperity that they did not have back home or are simply not focused on anything but their career and family. National and political affiliations become blurred. Again, we see the duality of the US as the land of opportunity and how narratives doused in the mythology of the American Dream demand a gratefulness and loyalty that, when questioned, result in the retraction of access or inclusion in the nation; by offering financial opportunity and escape from poorer communities domestically and abroad, the US is able to position itself as savior, obscuring the ways in which said wealth was accumulated (colonialism, imperialism), and revoking access to it at the first sign of dissent. Independent of how players engage with the current reality of their home countries, one cannot divorce centuries of US colonial and imperial presence in Latin America from today’s socio and geopolitical realities.

While the examples in this section have centered primarily on events occurring off the field of play, the language of appropriateness and (dis)respect also appear in the policing of on-field performance and expression. Though the framing of stylistic differences on the field are usually chalked up to an ambiguous label of “cultural difference”, baseball is more than just a simple embodiment of national or ethnic character. To borrow a framing from Niko Besnier and Susan Brownell, by “rescuing sport from the nation” we can instead focus on how histories of colonization, imperialism, globalization, and labor migration have come to inform style of play.<sup>129</sup> Thus, we are able to see how the overdetermination of on field actions and the subsequent outrage surrounding deviation from an expected code of conduct fits into a broader

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<sup>129</sup> Besnier and Brownell, “Sport, Modernity, and The Body.”

framework of white supremacy, anti-Blackness, and 1st/3rd hierarchy, not just simply “cultural difference”.

### **Style of Play: Effort, Exaggeration, Expressiveness**

Perhaps the most common or publicly recognizable form of monitoring Latin American behavior is a player’s “style of play”. Naturally, the actual arena of on-field competition is the most visible for consumption and in turn, makes it the subject of more public scrutiny among talking heads, mass media sports shows, and fans of all types. When players of any major sport are on the biggest stage, each action or moment captured on camera becomes a subject of discussion. Baseball is no exception as it has had its fair share of debates surrounding what is appropriate, acceptable, or “not okay.” The majority of baseball’s recent public tiffs have revolved around seemingly generational shifts in on-field conduct or style (the perpetual old school vs. new school debate) and the breaking/enforcing of unwritten rules, which define the contours of respect/disrespect. However, although it’s true that anyone can break an unwritten rule or deviate from the scriptures of how the game *has been* or *should be* played, the policing of difference in style of play has often mirrored racialized difference. A refrain commonly used in baseball is “play the game the right way” but the definition of “right” or correct is of course tied to an established or normative mode of play. While the application of this phrase can indeed have tangible value in separating winning behavior from losing behavior on the field -- say, hitting the cut-off man in order to execute a good relay throw, running out a groundball, hustling to break up a double play -- it is also used as a form of marking and policing what is and isn’t acceptable, a way to determine ascription to and deviation from normative styles. These rules, expectations, and hegemonic styles of play can be understood as products of a broader white, masculine normativity and hierarchization of behavior. After all, it was not the waves of Latin



American players who entered Major League Baseball over the last few decades who established the terms of acceptability within the game. As C. L. R. James explains in *Beyond a Boundary*, the British, deployed cricket in the West Indies as a form of informal empire, imbuing the game with imperial logics and expressing them in the form of a code of conduct on the field. Noting how middle-class, Puritan notions of restraint, loyalty, and a stiff upper lip represented a British ideal and elitism on the pitch that West Indian players could never attain, James states, "...the Englishmen in their relation to games in the colonies held tightly to the code as example and as a mark of differentiation."<sup>130</sup> It is these very marks of differentiation, at the embodied level, on the baseball diamond, that I seek to highlight in this section.

In the globalized world of baseball, where the league and each team have increasingly come to rely on a steady stream of migrant labor from Latin America, on the field performance and style of play don't necessarily generate obvious examples of domination, oppression, or resistance that cut along center-periphery lines. When Latin American players (or 3rd World actors generally) appear emphatically defiant or celebratory they could be generating symbolic and representational for people in a country that the world has deemed unimportant, though they could just as easily be reviving colonial stereotypes and marginalizing the targets of such stereotypes.<sup>131</sup> Thus, it is important to examine how individual actions are framed, interpreted, and often over-determined within white space and subsequently what such readings and discussions of said actions reveal about whiteness generally.

In recent memory, no other area has been more hotly debated than that of the bat flip or "pimping" (admiring) a home run as it leaves the ballpark. In the unwritten rules of baseball,

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<sup>130</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 40.

<sup>131</sup> Besnier, "Sports Mobilities Across Borders: Postcolonial Perspectives," 858.

such admiration could be viewed as grandstanding, embarrassing, or “showing up” the pitcher who allowed the home run. This supposed breach of conduct took center stage in 2015-2016 after Jose Bautista hit a three-run homerun in a decisive Game 5 playoff game versus the Texas Rangers.<sup>132</sup>



**Figure 2.16.** Bautista Bat Flip.<sup>133</sup>

Bautista’s bat flip and the white reaction to it was well covered in the media. Was it right? Was it wrong? Was it disrespectful? Was it acceptable? Was it okay that he made such an emphatic display in an emotionally charged moment?

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<sup>132</sup> A simple Google search of Jose Bautista produces “Jose Bautista Bat Flip” as the second auto-fill option.

<sup>133</sup> Jim Sheppard, “Globe and Mail Dominates This Year’s National Newspaper Awards,” *The Globe and Mail*, May 28, 2016, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/globe-and-mail-dominates-2015-national-newspaper-awards/article30189070/>.



**Figure 2.17.** Dyson After Allowing Homerun to Bautista.<sup>134</sup>

The opposing team didn't think so, as several Rangers players sharing their displeasure. Longtime MLB veteran Cole Hamels stated, "It's hard to be politically correct. It's tough to see. A lot of us on our team don't carry ourselves that way."<sup>135</sup> Sam Dyson, the pitcher who gave up the homerun to Bautista and looked to pick a fight afterwards said, "Jose needs to calm that down, just kind of respect the game a little more."<sup>136</sup> I am not looking to rehash the entire, well-examined saga but the moment still serves as an important touch point when considering the ways in which Latin American players are cast in a negative, othering light while on the field of play. Hamels invokes the use of "political correctness," which we can read as his simultaneous desire to and fear of saying something bigoted, or otherwise deemed socially unacceptable/uncouth, in critiquing Bautista's actions. Instead, he settles for an externalization of the issue, separating Bautista into a different camp that, unlike Hamels and his teammates, does not conduct itself accordingly. Dyson, using a near omnipresent logic in all baseball clubhouses,

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<sup>134</sup> Cameron Goeldner and Tom Szczerbowski, "If Baseball Is Dying, It Can Be Blamed on Players like Sam Dyson," *Purple Row* (blog), October 14, 2015, <https://www.purplerow.com/2015/10/14/9536165/if-baseball-is-dying-it-can-be-blamed-on-players-like-sam-dyson>.

<sup>135</sup> Sean Gregory, "There Was Nothing Wrong Whatsoever With That Jose Bautista Bat Flip," *TIME*, October 15, 2015, <https://time.com/4074336/jose-bautista-bat-flip-baseball/>.

<sup>136</sup> *IBID.*

put it more simply, suggesting that Bautista was not playing the game “the right way” and that he needed to “...respect the game...”. Much like the delineations of acceptability, respect, and civility touched on in the last section of this chapter, we can see how the similar issues manifest themselves on the field.

Bautista himself penned an entire article in the popular sports testimonial website, The Players’ Tribune, in what served as an explanation as well as a sort of defense and justification of his actions. The article relied on arguments of cultural difference and notions of style of play tied to nation (in this case, the Dominican Republic) and region (Latin America); in short, Bautista explained that in the Dominican Republic and Latin America baseball is louder, more emotional, and ingrained in players’ DNA, whereas in the US it is more orderly, or akin to a “country-club game”<sup>137</sup>. It is worth questioning, however, who the article's intended audience was, as it reads like a defense of Bautista’s actions and explanation of *why* he acted in such a manner (presumably addressing those who misinterpreted his actions, presumably white people).

Bautista concluded his piece with the following paragraphs:

But for whatever reason, there’s a small section of old-school, my-way-or-the-highway type of people who never want the game to evolve. They’re the dinosaurs who believe that everybody should play the same and act the same. They usually claim that it is out of “respect.”

In my opinion, true respect is about embracing the differences in people’s cultures. That’s what the melting pot of America is all about.

I flipped my bat. I’m human. The emotion got to me. It’s in my DNA. If you think that makes me a jerk, that’s fine. But let’s call it what it is. Let’s not have these loaded conversations about “character” and the integrity of the game every time certain players show emotion in a big moment. That kind of thinking is not just old school. It’s just ignorant.<sup>138</sup>

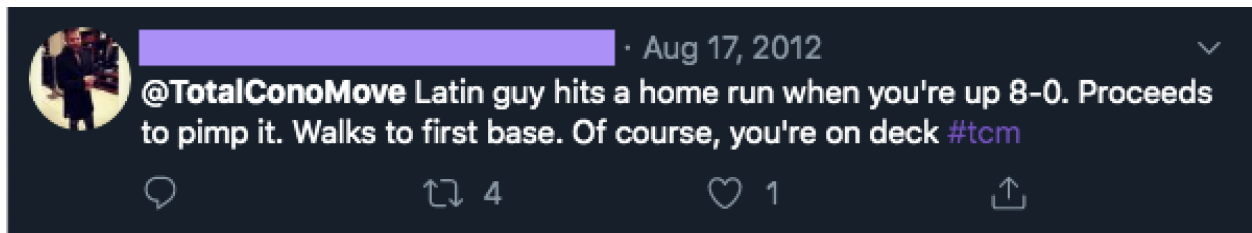
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<sup>137</sup> Jose Bautista, “Are You Flipping Kidding Me?,” The Players’ Tribune, November 10, 2015, <https://www.theplayerstribune.com/articles/jose-bautista-bat-flip>.

<sup>138</sup> IBID

Though Bautista does call out the disingenuous nature of using coded language and veiled critiques of “character” and “respect” to make more covert, racist statements, he stops short of addressing the racialized component of the criticism, instead, opting to frame the issue as one of ignorance and failure to acknowledge cultural difference. Additionally, the naturalization of Latin American players as emotional, loud, and unable to help themselves because these traits are part of their biology, at best dulls his critique of the “dinosaurs” who have interests in maintaining white normative modes of expression and at worst, reaffirms the tropes of Latin Americans as emotional, irrational, and disorderly. This is not meant to target Bautista for not going far enough in a self-defense article he should never have needed to write. However, by focusing on Latin American players and their “natural” difference, as well as the “small section of old-school” people, his comments obfuscate a broader system of white supremacy that perceives and polices difference, instead locating the fault in a small number of misguided individuals.

By looking at comments and incidents that occurred both before and after the Bautista bat flip, we can assess how narratives of old school vs. new school or “respecting the game” are continually racialized and how that racialization reveals the insecurity of white normative order. Additionally, examining white policing of Latin American style of play across different mediums allows us to move away from singular incidents, individual detractors and critics, and a theory of race rooted in personal opinion and action.



**Figure 2.18.** Pimping homerun, winning by a lot.

Take this Total Coño Move tweet from 2012, that, much like the Bautista saga, reveals the racialized nature of celebratory or more expressive acts on the field. In the tweet the author criticizes his Latin American teammate for pimping a homerun when winning by a wide margin, something that is considered disrespectful to the other team, since the game is seemingly well in hand. The author notes that in this scenario he is/was on deck or the next person due to hit, suggesting that he may receive retribution for his Latin American teammate's error. The unwritten rules of punishing an opponent for showboating commonly involve a pitcher intentionally throwing at a batter. In this tweet, the author is suggesting that out of selfishness, unawareness/stupidity, disregard, or arrogance, his Latin American teammate has left him in a dangerous position. If readers think the events of the tweet sound familiar, it's because they do. A nearly identical scene played out in what turned out to be one of the most controversial moments of the 2020 season, when budding San Diego Padres superstar Fernando Tatis Jr. hit a grand slam vs. the Texas Rangers in a 3-0 count with his team up 10-3. Tatis Jr. swung at a 3-0 pitch -- whereas unwritten rules would have seen him take a pitch with his team winning and a perception that the Padres did not need to score more in order to win -- and hit a grand slam, upping the Padres' lead to 14-3. In the following at-bat, Rangers pitcher Ian Gibault, on direction from their Manager Chris Woodward, threw behind Manny Machado, a warning shot that signaled the Rangers' displeasure with Tatis' actions. The incident turned into a hot-button issue on nearly the same scale as the Bautista bat flip, spilling over from the sports bubble into

national and international news coverage. Tatis received an outpouring of support from baseball players and athletes across the sports world, a number of articles acknowledged the pearl-clutching, antiquated nature of unwritten rules and their enforcement. Though Tatis did not feel social pressures to pen an open letter, the origin of the debate and the Rangers' opposition to Tatis actions signaled that certain behavior is still cause for outrage or and perceived as disrespectful. Even with MLB's recent marketing and outward support of a 'new school', tension continues to exist within the game. Roughly one year later, at the beginning of the 2021 season, the same situation emerged with Dominican player Yermín Mercedes and his manager, Hall of Famer Tony La Russa of the Chicago White Sox. La Russa openly condemned Mercedes (his own player) siding with the opposition and traditional, unwritten rules of the game, suggesting that Mercedes would learn a lesson, stating his player had made a "big mistake" and was "just clueless". He portended that the other team would retaliate by throwing a pitch at Mercedes, something that came true the following day as Tyler Duffey attempted to hit him with a pitch. After the game, La Russa stated that "he didn't have a problem with how the Twins handled that."<sup>139</sup> Throughout the saga, White Sox players – and the public, generally -- took to social media to defend Mercedes decry their retrograde manager's stance. Twins pitcher Tyler Duffey and manager Rocco Baldelli each received suspensions. Though such tension is often framed as a generational struggle between new school and old school, generational shifts also align with the steady increase of Latin American players and superstars in the game. The incidents in

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<sup>139</sup> ESPN, "Minnesota Twins' Tyler Duffey Suspended 3 Games for Throwing behind Yermin Mercedes; Manager Rocco Baldelli Gets 1-Game Ban," ESPN, May 20, 2021, [https://www.espn.com/mlb/story/\\_/id/31479017/minnesota-twins-tyler-duffey-suspended-3-games-throwing-yermin-mercedes-manager-rocco-baldelli-gets-1-game-ban](https://www.espn.com/mlb/story/_/id/31479017/minnesota-twins-tyler-duffey-suspended-3-games-throwing-yermin-mercedes-manager-rocco-baldelli-gets-1-game-ban).

question have historically been racialized or located in Latin America, as the obscure 2012 tweet detailing the consistency of white criticism over the years.

It should be stated that even over the past few years, the enforcement of unwritten rules has occurred across ethno-racial lines. Jose Ureña, a Dominican pitcher, and Ronald Acuña, a Venezuelan phenom for the Atlanta Braves have been at the center of a multi-year feud that saw Ureña throw at Acuña for having hit a homerun off him and celebrating with a bat flip.<sup>140</sup> Similarly, Madison Bumgarner, a long-time, star pitcher, has a long history of intimidating opponents and staring down those batters he feels disrespected him. One of his more recent, public squabbles occurred when Los Angeles Dodger, Max Muncy took him deep and admired his home run too long for Bumgarner's liking -- both Bumgarner and Muncy are white.<sup>141</sup> These examples suggest that while divisions may be racialized in discourse and symbolism, the reality of how individual players act is more complex and warrants interrogation of the racial politics and context that inform such incidents. That said, while it is indeed true that the enforcement of unwritten rules is often rooted in generational practices/beliefs and can occur when both parties fall under the same ethno-racial umbrella, the widespread association of deviant actions on the field with Latin American players suggests something more insidious than these individual incidents might suggest. In not-so-subtle language, Bud Norris had this to say in a 2015 interview with Jorge Ortiz:

I think it's a culture shock. This is America's game. This is America's pastime, and over the last 10-15 years we've seen a very big world influence in this game, which we as a union and as players appreciate. We're opening this game to everyone that can play. However, if you're going to come into our country and make our American dollars, you

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<sup>140</sup> Gabe Lacques, "No Rule - Written or Unwritten - Excuses Jose Ureña's 'purpose' Pitch to Ronald Acuña Jr.," USA Today, August 15, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/mlb/2018/08/15/marlins-jose-urena-purpose-pitch-braves-ronald-acuna-unwritten-rule/1005168002/>.

<sup>141</sup> Ken Gurnick, "Muncy to MadBum on HR: 'Get It out of the Ocean,'" MLB.com, June 9, 2019, <https://www.mlb.com/news/walker-buehler-gets-win-over-madison-bumgarner>.



need to respect a game that has been here for over a hundred years, and I think sometimes that can be misconstrued. There are some players that have antics, that have done things over the years that we don't necessarily agree with. I understand you want to say it's a cultural thing or an upbringing thing. But by the time you get to the big leagues, you better have a pretty good understanding of what this league is and how long it's been around.'<sup>142</sup>

Bud Norris could be a bad person or an individual who doesn't represent the broader beliefs of a white player population, of course, but his language and fortification of what is and isn't allowed -- deeming certain Latin American as "antics" and even invoking the bordering of nation discussed in the previous section -- are not merely one-off comments but rather part of a more robust discourse of white supremacy and Latin American inferiority within the game.

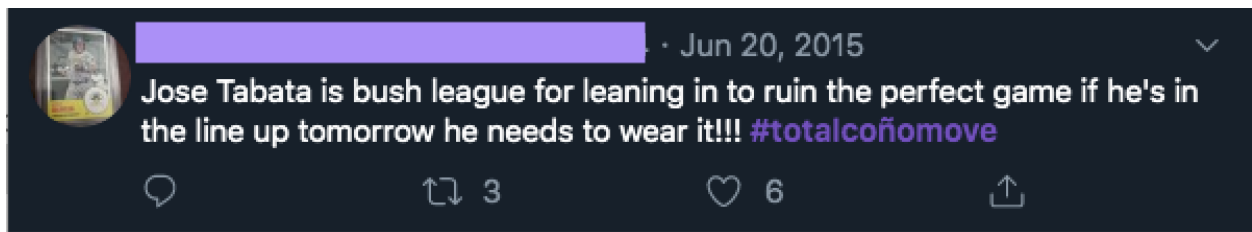


Figure 2.19. Leaning into a Pitch.



Figure 2.20. Kissing the Ball.

*Figures 2.19 and 2.20* provide us with more examples of what sorts of Latin American “antics” fall outside of the realm of white acceptability, professionalism, and discipline. *Figure*

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<sup>142</sup> Jorge L. Ortiz, “Baseball’s Culture Clash: Vast Majority of Brawls Involve Differing Ethnicities,” USA Today, September 15, 2015, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/mlb/2015/09/30/mlb-bench-clearing-brawls-unwritten-rules-ethnic-backgrounds/73066892/>.

Alan Klein, who has appeared throughout this work, was interviewed for Ortiz’s piece. In it, he suggested that much of this resentment and anti-Latin American sentiment likely originated in the clubhouse. Parts of this thesis should serve as a qualified confirmation of his suspicion.

2.19 notes the lack of respect that Jose Tabata had for the opposing pitcher who was throwing a perfect game. By leaning into (getting hit by) a pitch he was breaking the unwritten rule of not honoring the rare feat of the perfect game by trying to hit his way on base. Had he tried to hit his way on base and ended up getting a hit, it would not have been an egregious insult. For breaking this rule, Tabata deserves to wear it (or get hit by the opposing pitcher) in the game the next day. While a US-born, white player has likely broken up a perfect game or no-hitter in similar fashion, Tabata's "decision" to get hit is portrayed as a "total coño move" that exemplifies Latin American disrespect for the game.

*Figure 2.20* highlights a lack of (expected) seriousness on the field, as a Latin American pitcher's decision to kiss the ball before having secured the final out on a routine play is read as exaggerated and overly care-free. Instead of being seen as a momentary expression of happiness, relief, excitement that the game was effectively over, the kiss is noted to have occurred *before* running the ball over to first base, underscoring the recklessness of the act. Additionally, by kissing the baseball, the focus can be read as potentially having shifted to the Latin American player's *individual* act of kissing the ball, instead of merely completing the play and celebrating the *team* victory. Actions such as kissing the ball that fall outside of the expected order of the game result in labels of unprofessionalism, lack of seriousness, which translate to lack of care or appreciation for the game. One of the clearer examples or embodiment of disproportionate media scrutiny and coverage of supposed "coño antics" or operating outside of baseball's norms can be found in the case of Yasiel Puig.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> It should be noted that as of writing Puig is mired in serious sexual assault allegations. As was the case with Odubel Herrera, including him in this portion of the thesis is not in any way a justification for such behavior or some sort of character defense. My sole focus here is on the discourse surrounding Puig and his representations in the media as evidence of the broader racialization of Black and brown Latin American players.

Puig signed a seven-year, 42-million-dollar deal with the Los Angeles Dodgers in 2012 at age 21 after leaving Cuba. He debuted in the big leagues the following year, helping the Los Angeles Dodgers down the stretch in their push to make the playoffs. Puig's signing and performance in the 2013 season helped spark a league-wide interest in signing Cuban players, who, as a result of his strong play and competitive professional league in Cuba, were viewed as more developed and able to play to play in the big leagues – thus commanding larger contracts. Many of the big contracts that came out of the Cuban wave resulted in busts with poor performance from a number of players, but they also created negative narratives of deservedness within white playing circles; Cuban players were viewed as not having worked or toiled like other white players in the minor leagues, instead receiving lucrative contracts and fast tracks to the majors. The Cuban moment of the 2010s deserves a more thorough analysis that falls outside the scope of this study, however, for the purposes of discussing acceptability, Puig and other Cubans who signed that period faced an uphill climb in terms of winning over white teammates and staff. Additionally, due to the little amount of time he spent in the minor leagues before his call up to the big leagues, Puig's style of play became categorized as raw, unrefined, natural, and physical.<sup>144</sup> So much so that famed Dodgers broadcaster tagged Puig with the racist nickname “Wild Horse”, though, publicly it was painted as an endearing name.<sup>145</sup> As, Munene Mwaniki notes in his examination of Black migrant athletes from Africa,

...Representations of Black African athletes as having raw, immature, childlike, untapped, or unrefined ability [is nothing new]. These descriptors reinforce the connection between Africa and its presumed lack of development in comparison to the West. Western notions of progress—and superiority—depend on a spatiotemporal fixity in order to determine how far “we” have come...As they concern this study, discourses of “raw” or

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<sup>144</sup> This same logic is applied in Chapter 1 when discussing international amateur signees and rationale for 18-year-olds or 22-year-olds not receiving the same signing bonuses as their US counterparts.

<sup>145</sup> Kevin Baxter, “Yasiel Puig, Dodgers’ ‘Wild Horse,’ Continues to Play at a Gallop,” LA Times, March 7, 2014, <https://www.latimes.com/sports/dodgers/la-xpm-2014-mar-07-la-sp-dn-yasiel-puig-dodgers-20140307-story.html>.

undeveloped athletic ability reinforce the hegemonic narrative of progress. These discourses tend to be used in general when discussing athletic prospects who are perceived to lack certain (often normalizing and idealized) skills yet still have the “natural” athletic ability to learn those skills—the technical details—given time. However, in the representations of Black African migrant athletes, discourses of raw ability are intra- and intertextually related to those that construct them as Others in the West.<sup>146</sup>

Though Mwaniki is focused on Africa specifically, the racial logics inherent to Western ideas of progress extend to the entire 3<sup>rd</sup> World generally and thus apply to the case of Puig and other Latin American players seamlessly -- Scully’s labeling of Puig as a wild horse for his unrestrained, unrefined, physical style of play exemplifying the presumed lack of development relative to the 1<sup>st</sup> World. Within the US context, however, especially as it relates to the construction of a US Black-white, racial binary, such comments also evoke memories of slavery and the unrestrained physicality of enslaved Black men. As Rachel Alicia Griffin reminds us in her 2012 critical race analysis of the NBA,

During slavery, Black males were ideologically fixed as animalistic, dangerous, and hypersexual. Rooted in the white colonial gaze, these stereotypes were reproduced and/or simultaneously contested by Black male participation in sports. Black men were often forced to engage in sports to entertain white audiences, and their athletic triumphs ironically affirmed assumptions that they were naturally physical and violent.

Both Mwaniki’s work and Griffin’s framing demonstrate the broader role that coloniality plays in locating Latin American athletes in the historical, natural, unrefined, and disorderly past, while also appealing to a US specific antagonism towards Blackness rooted in the country’s history of slavery. To return to the “wild horse”, we need to go back to 2013, when Puig became a polarizing player by drawing in fans who enjoyed his expressiveness while also upsetting those

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<sup>146</sup> Mwaniki, *The Black Migrant Athlete*, 57.

who viewed him as disrupting the boundaries of acceptability/order in baseball. He quickly became a target for behavior policing:

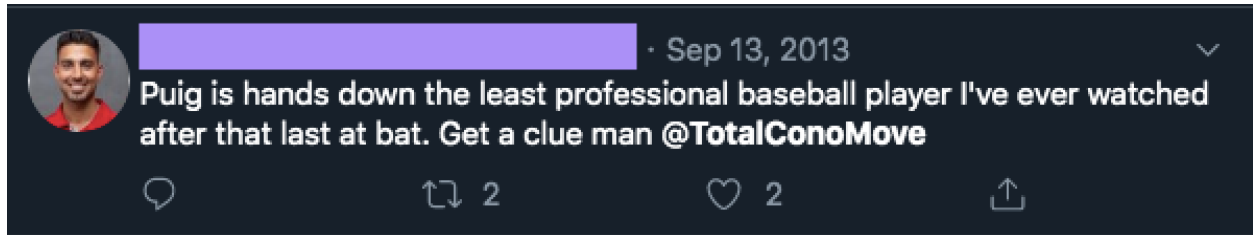


Figure 2.21. Unprofessional Puig.

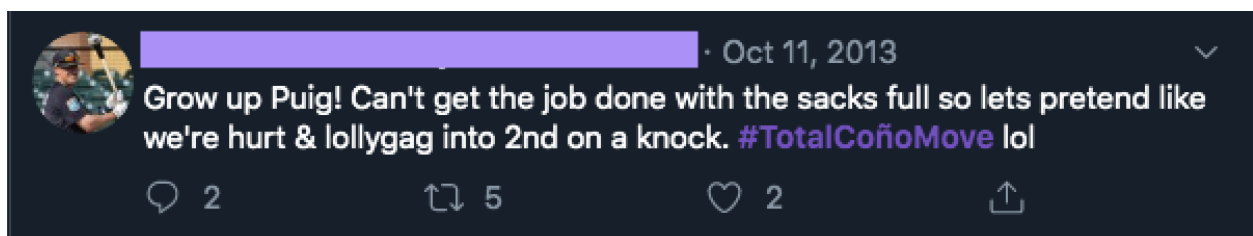


Figure 2.22. Puig Lollygagging.



Figure 2.23. Puig Headfirst Slide.

All three examples occurred in Puig's rookie season and highlight Puig's departure from the expected style of play and the resultant labels of unprofessional, immature, lazy, ridiculous that came with it. Puig's actions, however, were not limited to Yasiel Puig the individual; rather, with their "coño" designation they became representative of a homogenous group of Latin American behavior. Puig was also dinged for the same behavior as Jose Bautista, mentioned earlier, criticized for flipping his bat, especially when the ball didn't end up leaving the park. Take this example from the 2017 playoffs vs. the Chicago Cubs: Puig made good contact, drove the ball, watched it fly, flipped his bat thinking it was going out of the park (only to realize it wouldn't)

barely making it to second base for a double. The play occurred at a crucial point in the game, resulting in a wave of criticism from viewers everywhere, including prominently-platformed talking heads:



**Figure 2.24.** Olbermann Tired of Puig.

Olbermann, adhering to normative white scriptures and expectations as to how the game should be played -- and presumably having watched Puig play for a number of years (hence his “tiredness”) -- wades into the maintenance of white boundaries and acceptable forms of play. Mocking Puig for flipping his bat on a ball that didn’t end up being a home run, Olbermann’s tweet is only missing the phrase “#tcm” or “#totalcoñomove”. While it’s worth noting that there were many detractors -- white, US, and Latin American alike -- of Puig’s style of play and disregard for both written and unwritten rules, the consistent assignation of his individual actions as “coño” is my particular interest; this is not some profile on Puig *the person* but instead a representative bridge to the other TCM tweets, a link that exposes how the actions that bothered so many about Puig were not necessarily specific to Puig but instead the disorder they introduced to the white frameworks ingrained in baseball. Puig’s refusal to adhere to accepted behavior on the field marginalized him within the game and fed into existing narratives regarding a uniquely Latin American selfishness and disregard for the greater good/team, something we can see within the set of TCM tweets.

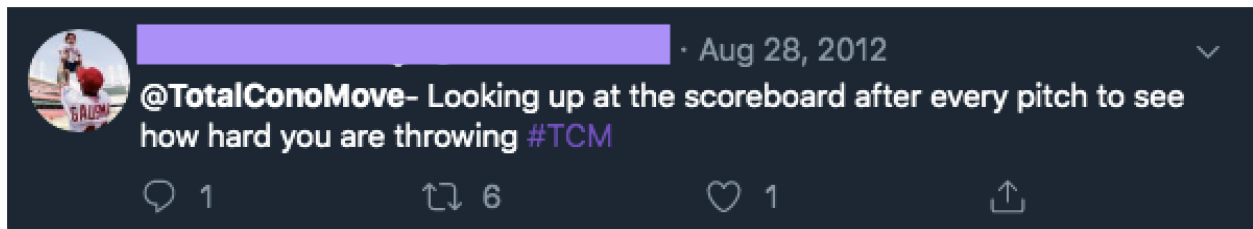


Figure 2.25. Checking Scoreboard Velos.



Figure 2.26. Velo Chart.

In *Figure 2.25* the author brings attention to a Latin American pitcher who is seemingly obsessed with the velocity of his pitches -- that is, his own performance -- more than the game itself. Though we don't know who was on the mound, the tweet fails to take into account a number of factors. Was this player told he needed to get his velocity up and therefore it was weighing on his mind? Perhaps. Have players been conditioned to equate velocity with value since before they signed? Undoubtedly. The foregrounding of a Latin American obsession with velocity appears more than once in the TCM sphere. The second example, *Figure 2.26*, reaffirms that Latin American pitchers are viewed as having no regard for the team and are instead caught up in personal performance. Rather than "caring about cashing in 3 runs" the Latin American pitcher goes "straight to the velo chart" to see how hard he was throwing. Both *Figures 2.25* and *2.26* reveal a perceived Latin American selfishness juxtaposed with the implied higher moral standards of white players who place team values above individual successes or failures. What both of these tweets do not acknowledge, however, is both a level of pragmatism on the part of the Latin American players -- their performance and nobody else's will determine their ascension

in the minor leagues or eventual release <sup>147</sup> -- or the context in which Latin American players were signed.

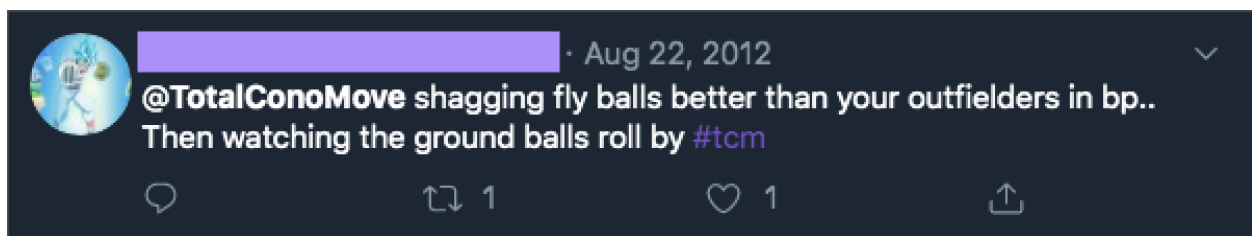
The former point is not meant to suggest that Latin American players are more ruthless or cannot operate within a team or collaborative atmosphere, but rather that what is perceived by white subjects as selfish and rude may in fact be an awareness of one's own precarious position in a business that relentlessly evaluates individual talent and performance. The latter point is somewhat predictable but demonstrates a lack of understanding or awareness of what international signing practices (and amateur practices to a large degree) have valued historically. As discussed earlier, many Latin American players looking to secure a bonus at the age of 16 know that they must demonstrate sufficient projectability to a team's evaluators and scouts. One of the core components in evaluating a pitcher is velocity. While opinions on how to project velocity have varied over time, especially when evaluating teenage boys, the emphasis on velocity as a both a gateway to being signed and moving up through the minor leagues has been and continues to be prominent. Though we don't know if the Latin American players referred to in these tweets had continually heard messages emphasizing the importance of throwing hard, it's completely logical to think that they might have continued to value velocity despite potentially having heard more nuanced messages from coaches, the Player Development Department, or teammates. The labeling of Latin American players and their character as tied to their actions on the field is equally riddled with holes.

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<sup>147</sup> In recent years, the minor leagues have increasingly been focused on developing *individual* players, not about team winning. The degree to which one side -- individual or team -- is emphasized depends on a given organization, but the debates are ubiquitous and have generally trended towards improving individual talents to help the Major League team where winning has the biggest economic impact. That is not to say there is no importance on "team baseball" and that is effectively the debate that each organization has internally. But, imparting lessons from "team baseball" does not, or has not, superseded individual talents by and large.



Accusations of selfishness can also play a dastardly role if shared widely across a team or with coaches/decision makers. Labeling a player as a “bad teammate” or as having “bad makeup” -- for actions that aren’t clearly good or bad but fall outside of the white perceiving subject’s moral framework -- can lead to that player having a bad reputation over the course of his career. While, being labeled a bad teammate may not affect the most talented players -- though it does play a role even at the major league level if word gets around -- it can act as a tiebreaker in deciding who stays and who goes in the minor leagues when cuts are made.<sup>148</sup> The same can be said when it comes to a player’s effort, another highly scrutinized area of marking for Latin American players. In addition to white subjects perceiving exaggeration, over-expressiveness, and selfishness within the Latin American game, laziness also finds itself marked as “coño”. *Figures 2.27 and 2.28* provide two such examples.



**Figure 2.27.** Practice vs. Game Effort.



**Figure 2.28.** Cutting poles.

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<sup>148</sup> Arthur, “Moonshot: Racial Bias Shapes Which Players Make The Majors.”

*Figure 2.27* builds on the previous theme of prioritizing the individual over the team or teammates. The author notes that a Latin American infielder can shag (track down) fly balls in batting practice better than the team's outfielders, suggesting a high level of skill, speed, ability. Come game time, however, the author asserts that the same player "watches groundballs roll by," in effect not making the effort to reach a "gettable" ball despite clearly having the talent described in the first half of the tweet. The lack of effort, laziness, or potential malintent towards the pitcher (whose personal numbers will be affected by groundballs resulting in hits) is, in the author's estimation, uniquely "coño". Similarly, *Figure 2.28* offers a more direct charge of laziness, claiming that of the required 10 poles (running along a field's warning track or outfield grass from one foul pole to another) assigned to a Latin American player as part of his conditioning, he only ran 4. Such assertions conjure up the highly racialized and stereotypical images of the lazy immigrant who looks for shortcuts, does less work, and doesn't put in the time or effort to get ahead or earn his keep. These two tweets round out the racialized reading of Latin American style of play as perceived through the white gaze. Dramatic, over-expressive, selfish, lazy, undisciplined. Operating outside of both established and unwritten rules with a higher propensity to disrespect the game and threaten white values, order, and hierarchy. If one needed additional proof at this point that the Total Coño Move tweets function as a dog-whistle or substitute for more overt expressions of white supremacy, we can look at its transcendence in application from something specific to Latin American players in baseball to Black, NFL player, Richard Sherman.

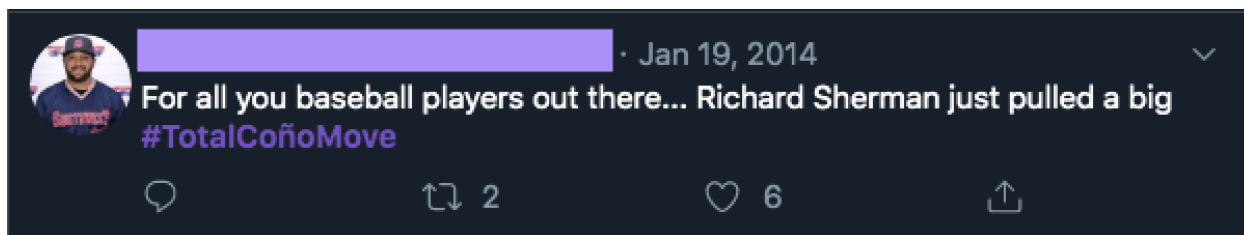


Figure 2.29. Richard Sherman, “Coño”.

Sherman has been an outspoken critic of white media condescension and reduction of Black football players to dumb, physical, athletes who lack the acceptable markers of white society. He famously eviscerated white sports commentator Skip Bayless on national television in 2013, saying, among many other things, "I'm intelligent enough and capable enough to understand that you are [an] ignorant, pompous, egotistical cretin. I'm going to crush you on here because I'm tired of hearing about it."<sup>149</sup> His reputation as a ruthless trash-talker on the field and confident self-promoter of his game made him a frequent target in the media for detractions rooted in white notions of respectability and decorum. His inclusion and reference in the set of Total Coño Move tweets reveals the deep associations between the construction of a “coño” in the baseball world and the active racialization of certain styles of athletic play and performance through a lens of anti-Blackness. Sherman is not from Latin America, does not speak Spanish (as far as I know), and does not play baseball. We see the complete incongruity of the term and its application to someone who could not technically fit the criteria of a “coño” in that he is not a Latin American baseball player, however, his actions, in deviating from what the white perceiving subject and the social standards of whiteness permit, were nonetheless marked as “coño”. We can thus continue to understand TCMs as flexible designations of racial hierarchy, applied liberally to the contexts in which they highlight disorder in white space, not the naturalized, biologized qualities unique to Latin America they purport themselves to be.

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<sup>149</sup> Chris Chase, “Richard Sherman Blasts Skip Bayless on ‘First Take,’” USA Today, March 7, 2013, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/gameon/2013/03/07/richard-sherman-skip-bayless-first-take-fight/1971737/>.

## **Violence, Toughness, Hyper-Sexuality, Physicality and Appearance (Masculinity)**

Though often communicated through commentary on Latin American style of play, white perceiving subjects also use behavior on the field to demarcate the lines of white normative masculinity. White players position a normative masculinity rooted in toughness, calmness, reserve, and discipline against a Latin American masculinity framed as sensitive, emotional, hot-headed, and violent. In doing so, white subjects project white normative masculinity as desirable, ideal in the face of an uncontrolled, weaker form of Latin American masculine performance. While much of the over-determination of a perceived Latin American masculinity occurs during practice or play, the stereotypes perpetuated from on-field activity spill over to locker room spaces, in which judgment of sartorial style and perceived hypersexuality -- areas of analysis tied to US histories of slavery and anti-Blackness -- also signal the construction and stratification of the masculinities in question. Additionally, the perpetuation and application of naturalized or pathologized Latin American hypermasculinity or machismo operate as an ever-present subtext in the US imaginary, further defining the contours between white normative and Latin American aberrant masculine performance.

An area of particular vigilance is Latin American toughness, or lack thereof, in the face of baseball's most frequent sources of pain: being hit by a pitch, fouling a ball of one's foot or leg, or in the case of catcher's having a foul ball hit an unprotected part of the body. The reactions to physical pain that receive the most scrutiny are those that drag out, suggesting a low pain tolerance (read as toughness) or a perceived level of over-exaggeration. Many of these critiques stem from perceptions that Latin American players engage in a type of theatrics, writhing in pain for "too long" (be it seconds or minutes) only to overcome the seemingly debilitating pain and continue to play. For white perceiving subjects, a player's ability to

continue playing after such a public demonstration of pain, suggests that the player could not have been that hurt in the first place, making him “soft”, exaggerated, or dramatic. Thus, white perceiving subjects, driven by a hegemonic masculinity rooted in resolve and outward stoicism, become the arbiters of pain and any reactions to it.



Figure 2.30. Foul Ball off Ankle.



Figure 2.31. Hurt Before Homerun.

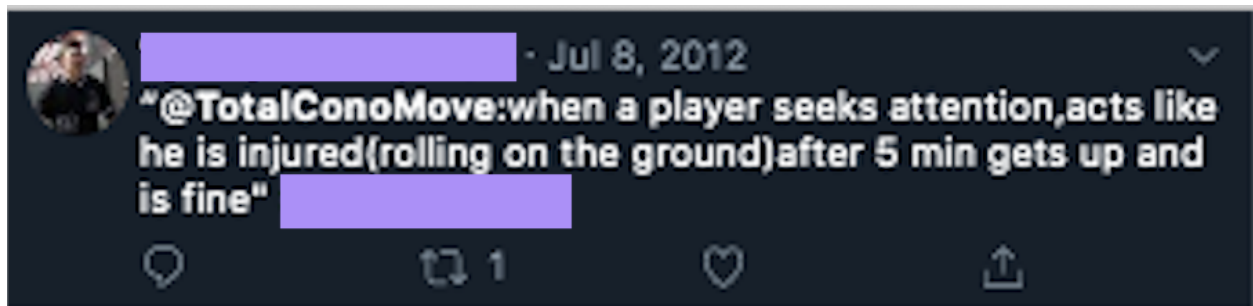


Figure 2.32. Rolling Around on Ground.

These tweets represent some of the most commonly circulated narratives regarding pain tolerance, “softness”, and overreaction as uniquely Latin American. Each of the above tweets highlights the fact that the Latin American players in question ultimately ended up being “fine” as evidenced by their ability to perform or play after the incident in question, suggesting that the players were either overly sensitive, never hurt in the first place, or faking their pain or injuries

for attention. Since fouling a ball of a body part is such a common occurrence in baseball, anyone who has played has dealt with the same level or similar levels of pain. As a result, an aggrieved reaction to something that most players have dealt with offers a general point of reference that can then be mediated and labeled as appropriate or aggrandized. Relying on the continued construction and reproduction of a white masculine ideal that endures and dismisses pain, white perceiving subjects are able to judge Latin American responses to physical harm, determining which are overreactions and which are appropriate. Discourse around Latin American pain tolerance has become so common that it has produced a set of nicknames within white baseball circles: the Latin Death Roll or the Dominican Death Roll.



**Figure 2.33.** Dominican Death Roll.

In talking with Clark, a white medical staff member, he confirmed the pervasiveness of terms like the Dominican or Latin Death Roll and the prevalence of narratives of toughness and masculinity within the medical sphere, offering a nuanced critique of pain and reactions to it.

**David:** Have you ever heard the term “Latin or Dominican Death Roll”

**Dav:** Give me an example or two. When have you seen it?

**Clark:** Yeah, all the time \*laughing\*

**Cla:** So, textbook \*laughing\* Latin Death Roll would be like watching Alvarez blow out his elbow. That’s what it looks like [but] he had a severe, real injury. Right? So, you see that and then you’ve got Contreras getting hit by a softly lobbed ball in the head. And the responses are the same: the going down, rolling on the ground, writhing in pain, but one was a significant UCL

**Dav:** What is it?

**Cla:** It’s an exaggerated, theatrical response to an injury. Real or not. Severe or not, I should say. So, the response is the same whether you’re nicked, or you get really hurt.

(ulnar collateral ligament) tear, abruptly, and then one was not a significant injury but the response [was] the same.

**Dav:** Why do you think it earned that name?

**Cla:** Because it is particularly prevalent, whether it is real or not, it seems to happen, or it seems to be [more common] with Latin guys.

**Cla:** But Richardson (a white Player) is kind of like that. It could be pretty minor but he's going to make a scene about it, draw attention to it.

**Dav:** So, you don't think it's something unique to [Latin American players].

**Cla:** It's not unique to [Latin American players] it's just probably more ... prevalent is not the right word but that's all that's

coming to mind. Common? Frequent? Or it seems to be.

**Cla:** [That said,] pain is a really individualized thing, anyways. There's so much emotion tied to pain, it's a centralized response, it happens in the brain. It's real but it's more like an emotion. The same stimulus causes different emotions in different people. The same thing can be said for pain.

**Dav:** Last thing on Latin Death Roll for now. Do you think it accurately represents the toughness of an individual?

**Cla:** No, I don't, no.

**Dav:** Do you think it's sometimes represented [or equated with toughness]?

**Cla:** I do, yeah. But [is it actually] tied to toughness? No, it's a response.

Clark acknowledges his familiarity with the term "Latin Death Roll" and offers a definition that aligns closely with what was communicated in *Figures 2.30-2.33*. He suggests that these types of reactions do tend to occur more with Latin American players, at least in his estimation, though he refutes any notion that Latin American reactions to pain have anything to do with toughness, despite widespread assertions of their linkage. Clark notes that pain is a centralized response and that the same stimuli can produce a wide range of reactions. It is the racialization of these reactions, however, that reproduce white superiority and Latin American weakness.

The association of masculinity with toughness and the elevation of an unflappable, white, masculine athlete is not only applied to Latin American players. US players who don't demonstrate the requisite or expected level of grit, or who show too much sensitivity are also

reprimanded within baseball's social order. Much of this derives from some of the old school versus new school groupings and practices addressed earlier in this chapter. Generally speaking, the old school stance rests on a mythologized resolve rooted in lack of access to modern medical treatments, massage therapy, and any sort of "unnecessary" pain alleviation; players who didn't have access to such medical resources found different ways to manage pain in order to play every day, creating a romanticized image of the masculine (read as tough) player who found a way to surpass the physical limits his body without anybody else's help. Furthermore, an injury that can be tolerated in the game without having to make a visit to the training room or let on to having any physical limits keeps a player on the field. With such a limited window to play professionally and so few spots on a team, a player's ability to stay healthy influences his earning power, further stigmatizing visits to seek out medical attention. These narratives and masculine ideals also align with US notions of individualism in that by either not having access to or willingly denying medical aid, the success of that player is a result of his strength and perseverance -- nobody else can take credit. To this day, players (US-born or Latin American) are mocked for spending too much time in the training room or too much time "on the table", reinforcing normative expectations of a certain type of masculine performance. While the construction of this particular expression of hegemonic masculinity in this space is thus decidedly not rooted in specific ethnoracial or national/regional targeting, the fact that terms such as Dominican Death Roll and the over determination of reactions deemed "not tough" continue to be located as inherently Latin American reveals the externalization of the undesirable parts of white normative masculinity and the elevation of its appealing, idealized components as white, not Latin American.



Interestingly, the white focus on Latin American sensitivity and low pain tolerance or weakness contrasts a commonly deployed framework used to interpret Latin American masculinity, *machismo*. Similar to many of the constructed attributes of a “coño” or Latin American player, machismo has a long history of pathologizing racisms and naturalizing negative stereotypes with a perceived Latin Americanness. As Benjamin Cowan explains in *How Machismo Got its Spurs*,

Machismo is a conceptualization of hypermasculinity presumed to be derived from an Iberian or Latin American cultural essence, and applied by anglophone scholars and popular authorities since the 1950s to flag, admonish, or deride hypermasculinities of variable forms. Today, these hypermasculinities can be non-Latin in origin and scope but are associated simultaneously with retrograde patriarchy and unarticulated stereotypes of [Latin Americanness] by the word itself, now used as a generic shorthand for negative masculinity.<sup>150</sup>

Cowan acknowledges the manifold ways that machismo connotes and indexes negative masculinities and stereotypes about Latin America. However, one of the most common deployments of the term “machismo” is to signal a heightened proclivity or natural tendency to commit violence, often as a result of unrestrained emotions. Such “lapses” into an overly emotional or hyper-masculine state are often framed as an expected return to a “natural” Latin American masculinity.

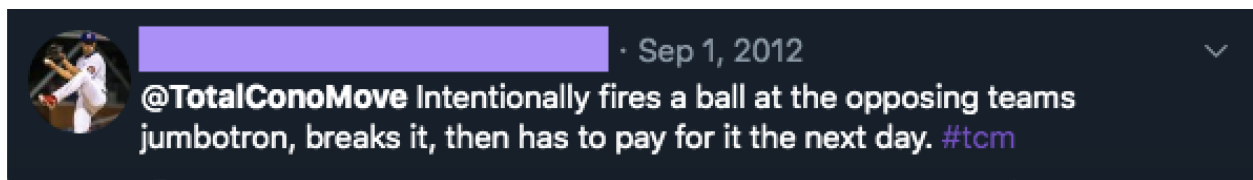


Figure 2.34. Breaking Jumbotron.

<sup>150</sup> Benjamin Arthur Cowan, “How Machismo Got Its Spurs—in English: Social Science, Cold War Imperialism, and the Ethnicization of Hypermasculinity,” *Latin American Research Review* 52, no. 4 (2017): 619.



Figure 2.35. Soler Charges Dugout.

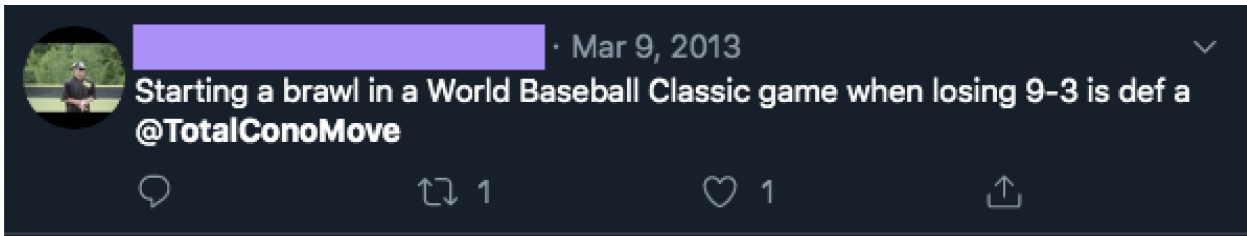


Figure 2.36. Starting a Brawl.

Though the above examples range in degree of infraction, we can see how white perceiving subjects paint Latin American players as naturally violent and lacking control. In *Figure 2.34*, the author implies that the Latin American player in question, erupting with frustration, decided to throw a ball at the jumbotron screen during a game and, blinded by his unrestrained emotions, didn't realize that he would have to pay for the damages to the screen the following day. Though this example doesn't involve violence directed at another person, it conveys a disregard for consequences after having participated in some sort of physical destruction. The latter two examples depict Latin American players fighting, acts that also earn the "coño" label. In the first tweet, Soler is depicted as maniacally out of control, attacking an entire opposing team with a bat. In *Figure 2.36*, a Latin American team in the WBC, losing the game badly, is painted as resorting to violence to salvage some sort of face or damaged pride. The Latin American player is contrasted with a US-born counterpart who, able to show restraint, and use better judgement, stays above the fray, and doesn't give in to brute tendencies through violence. Of course, these tweets are one-sided descriptions that locate the provocation and violence as Latin American,

obscuring any willing, white participants that would betray the fixity of violence as “coño” or Latin American.

As ingrained as these stereotypes are in the white construction and perpetuation of machismo, they are also linked to the US experience of anti-Blackness and slavery. As a result, white US readings of Latin American hypermasculinity rely on the converging histories of Latin American machismo vs. white rationality as well as US slavery and the need for white order and control of Black bodies. US ideas about Latin America have historically been read through the lens of US slavery. US recognition of the nascent Dominican Republic hinged on concepts of anti-Blackness, white supremacy, and anxiety and animosity towards Haiti, a former slave economy. As Lorgia García-Peña asserts, the fear of Haiti or “the overwhelming concern that overtook slave economies like the United States and Spain following the slave revolt that began in 1791 and led to Haitian independence in 1804 -- is foundational to the production of US notions of race and citizenship.”<sup>151</sup> Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the threat of US imperialism and expansionism helped fuel Latin American nations’ distancing from a Blackness associated with Haiti, opting instead for historical narratives of mestizaje. Indeed, after the Dominican Republic’s independence in 1844, Dominican nationalists “...aimed to fashion a national identity against the persisting Haitian threat -- one that emphasized the new republic's Hispanic, rather than African origins and its racial distinctiveness from Black Haiti.”<sup>152</sup> The US welcomed such stances as US Secretary of State John C. Calhoun advocated that the young Dominican Republic receive formal recognition from the US, France, and Spain in order to

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<sup>151</sup> García-Peña, *The Borders of Dominicanidad*, 7.

<sup>152</sup> Gregory, *The Devil behind the Mirror*, 180.

prevent “the further spread of Negro influence in the West Indies.”<sup>153</sup> These histories and the experience of US slavery and white supremacy shaped how the US came to understand and interpret Latin America. Just as the history of Latin America cannot be separated from a US lens of slavery, white, US readings of Latin American players cannot be disconnected from US histories and expressions of anti-Blackness.

Without diving into the long history of US destruction of Black bodies and recurring demonization of Black men, it is important to note how certain stereotypes -- hypersexuality, aggressiveness, violence -- share certain overlaps with depictions of Latin American players. As Abby Ferber points out,

Black men were also constructed as inherently violent. [The] combination of violence and sexuality made Black men inherently unsuitable for work until they were trained by white men and placed under their discipline and control. To explain these relations, white elites created the controlling image of the buck. Unlike images of African natives who roam their wild homelands like beasts untamed by civilization (colonialism), the representation of the buck described a human animal that had achieved partial domestication through slavery. (Collins, 2005, p. 56). Black men were defined as beasts who had to be controlled and tamed to be put into service.<sup>154</sup>

In a US racial binary that promotes white supremacy and denigrates Blackness, the distinction in origins rarely matters when applying racist stereotypes. Thus, the same tropes applied to Black men in the US are also overlaid onto Latin American players who may or may not see themselves as or identify as decidedly “Black”. In an exchange with Chicho he told me that perceived national lines and styles of play had become blurred, citing Amir Garrett (a Black, US-born player) as someone who plays *aggressively*, “Eso es un perreo demasiado arrecho. Él que peleó con el otro equipo, con Pittsburgh. Amir Garrett. Es un perreo demasiado arrecho y él es

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<sup>153</sup> Silvio Torres-Saillant, “The Tribulations of Blackness: Stages in Dominican Racial Identity,” *Callaloo*, Dominican Republic Literature and Culture, 23, no. 3 (Summer 2000): 1086–1111.

<sup>154</sup> Abby L. Ferber, “The Construction of Black Masculinity White Supremacy Now and Then,” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 31, no. 1 (February 2007): 15.

gringo, ¿ves? No son los latinos nada más que perrean. // *That's a big 'fuck you' attitude. The guy that fought with the other team, with Pittsburgh. Amir Garrett. It's a big 'fuck you' attitude and he's a gringo. See? It's not just the Latinos that have swagger.*"



**Figure 2.37.** Amir Garrett Fights the Pittsburgh Pirates.<sup>155</sup>

Chicho's comments are provocative on a number of levels. First, they show his awareness that Latin American players are perceived as being showboats and having swagger. Chicho uses Garrett (referred to as a gringo) as an example of how aggressiveness on the field does not necessarily have to be a Latin American attribute. A connection he doesn't draw, however, is that both Latin American players and in the case of Garrett as a Black man in the US, are both racialized populations. What he sees as evidence of a convergence of *national* styles of play or comportment -- "See? It's not just Latinos that have swagger." -- though potentially true, also goes back to the historical association of violence with both Black and Brown masculinity. Chicho indicated that he wasn't sure if race played a role in how both Black, domestic players

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<sup>155</sup> Associated Press, "Reds' Amir Garrett Starts Brawl with Pirates, and Yasiel Puig Prolongs It," LA Times, July 31, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/sports/story/2019-07-31/amir-garrett-brawl-pirates-reds-yasiel-puig>.

and Latin American player populations are interpreted within baseball's white spaces. Chicho was aware of the stereotypes surrounding Latin American aggressiveness but didn't necessarily see the oppression he has witnessed or experienced as intersecting with that of Black people from the US. He did acknowledge that both player groups tend to gravitate towards each other, spending more time together in locker room and clubhouse spaces than they do with their white counterparts. However, missing from his reflections was a recognition of shared struggle, an internationalist perspective linking the ways in which the white gaze views and produces difference within domestic, Black and BIPOC and Latin American masculinities. Indeed, the intersection of histories of global anti-Blackness, US slavery, and machismo appear in more than representations of a biologized Latin American and Black violence, also emerging in discourse and discussions of virility and sexuality.

As the following Total Coño Move tweets indicate, otherwise benign or potentially flirtatious acts are policed and problematized as uniquely Latin American. In *Figure 2.38*, the author highlights how a Latin American player appeared to snub an older male fan, ignoring him and instead signing an autograph for a 16-year-old girl close by. The suggestion is that the Latin American player, exhibiting his "coño" attributes, opted for a sexually driven choice in favor of a "respectful" or more appropriate decision, which would have seen him tend to the man asking for an autograph. The message implies that the Latin American player couldn't help himself, overcome by his base instincts as opposed to what decorum asked of him. Interestingly, the author also includes the girl's age, noting that she is 16. Of course, one wonders if the author really even knew the age of the girl in question but his inclusion of the age in the tweet suggests something more devious: an older Latin American preying on a younger girl. Though we will

never know the player's or girl's age, the image that the tweet provokes is clear: an older Latin American player with sexual hunger willfully pursuing a teenage girl.

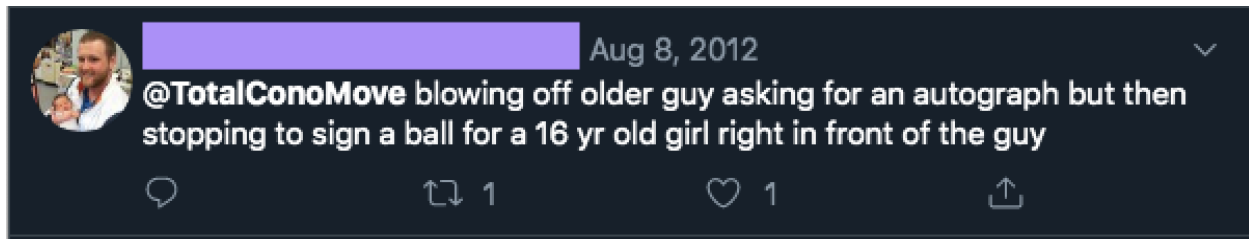


Figure 2.38. Signing Ball for a Girl.

When speaking with Joey, a white baseball operations executive, he immediately mentioned hypersexuality as one of the most frequently recited stereotypes of Latin American players:

**Joey:** Overly sexualized is a big thing. You know if there's a woman around they're not going to be able to handle themselves. That's a very ugly idea. You hear former players talk about how they (Latin American players) act in the locker rooms and in the shower. [But Latin American players] are hypersexualized about women but also in a homophobic way too.

**David:** What do you mean in a homophobic way too?

**Joe:** I mean, a big thing in amateur scouting is sitting down with a high school player and figuring out if he's going to be able to sign straight out of high school. A big part of that is [communicating to the player that] 'You're working a job, you're going to fail, you can't quit, you gotta stick this out.' [We need to get a feel for whether or not] he's going to be good about that or [if he's] going to just quit. But I've also heard 'Is he going to be able to handle the locker room and the showers? Is he going to be able to handle the Latin American guys and their antics in the shower?' I don't know what that means, but that's something you hear. I don't know if that's true or not but it sounds like a stereotype to me.

It's kinda weird though because if you go to college I assume that shit is probably going to happen too but maybe it's somehow more comfortable because it's a bunch of other white guys with you that all speak the same language so you know what they're saying about you in the shower? But if you're 18 and have to do that with guys speaking a different language and they look different than you, are you going to be able to handle that? I guess that's the implication?

In analyzing the autograph incident and Joey's comments regarding how Latin American players can't "handle themselves" around women, we can see the prevalence of white conceptions of and

concerns about unchecked Latin American virility. Of course, there is a level of irony in the fact that whatever sort of hypersexuality the author is ascribing to Latin America, white North Americans and Europeans engage in their forms of sexual dominance and heteronormative masculinity when visiting Latin America, a topic touched on in Chapter 1. To borrow Steven Gregory's term, the mostly white North American and European tourists that flood the Dominican Republic each year to participate in the sex tourism economy engage in a kind of "imperial masculinity" that reinscribes socio-spatial hierarchies between 1st and 3rd World.<sup>156</sup> Alternatively, as both the tweet and Joey's quote suggest, Black and Brown Latin American players harbor an animalistic sexuality that poses a threat to normative ideologies of race, class, and gender in the US. Indeed, this unrestrained Latin American sexuality has been monitored historically with particular examples of linking "machismo" to overpopulation in Puerto Rico. As Ben Cowan notes, sociologist J. Mayone Stycos, "followed by a cadre of anthropologists, medical professionals, and sociologists "engaged in earnest research that asserted that "machismo predetermined dangerous instability in Puerto Rican society. Men, unable to control their machista drive to father as many children as possible, had overpopulated the island, multiplying the undernourished, undereducated, unsupportable, and politically vulnerable masses."<sup>157</sup> Whereas Latin American players are policed for any perceived violation of normative sexual and gender roles, white tourists in the same Latin American countries from which the players hail, maintain a liberating, imperial virility in their sexual acts. Colonial difference becomes operative where Latin American women must be subordinate, requiring white male dominance and liberation and where Latin American men require restraint,

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<sup>156</sup> Gregory, *The Devil behind the Mirror*, 113.

<sup>157</sup> Cowan, "How Machismo Got Its Spurs—in English: Social Science, Cold War Imperialism, and the Ethnicization of Hypermasculinity," 612.



management, and corralling lest they lose control of their sexual instincts. Additionally, Joey's comments regarding the "Latin American guys and their antics in the shower" reveal a certain level of insecurity tied to white, US cis het masculinity. The possibility that Latin American "antics" or presumably deviant, sexually tinged, or suggestively homosexual behavior in the shower is something that white, domestic players would need to confront or navigate as a form of adversity, betrays Latin American behavior as destabilizing or threatening a hegemonic, US masculine performance.

### **Mischievousness and Cheating: Age Falsification and Steroids**

Another highly visible trope in the baseball sphere is that of the cheating Latin American player, particularly in the forms of age falsification and/or identity fraud and steroid use. Over the last couple decades, these issues have been overwhelmingly associated with Latin America and more specifically the Dominican Republic. With multiple cases involving major league players as well as the highly publicized case of little league player Danny Almonte, age falsification and identity fraud have played a prominent role in discussions of Latin American legality, deservedness, and legitimacy since the start of the 2000s.<sup>158</sup> In addition to age falsification, one cannot address baseball scandals without mentioning steroids. The shadow that the steroid era cast over the game is still felt to this day and steroid use is often used to separate cheaters from players who avoided temptation, worked hard, and maintained integrity throughout their careers. Retribution for steroid use played out publicly after the federally-backed Mitchell Report revealed that dozens of star players had indeed used performance enhancing drugs.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Enrique Rojas, "Fausto Carmona Arrested in Dominican," ESPN, January 19, 2012, [https://www.espn.com/mlb/story/\\_/id/7480419/fausto-carmona-cleveland-indians-arrested-accused-using-false-identity](https://www.espn.com/mlb/story/_/id/7480419/fausto-carmona-cleveland-indians-arrested-accused-using-false-identity).

<sup>159</sup> MLB.com, "View the Complete Mitchell Report," MLB.com, n.d., <http://mlb.mlb.com/mlb/news/mitchell/index.jsp>.

Players testified before congress, icons fell from grace, speculation raged as to who was clean and who had taken ‘roids. MLB sought to sanitize its image, implementing strict testing measures with harsh penalties for those that tested positive, regulations that are still in place to this day. This section looks at how age falsification and steroid use have become perceived as uniquely Latin American practices and how they are utilized to paint Latin American players as mischievous, lawless, and prone to cheat at once eliding the historic use of steroids in the US and undercutting the legitimacy of Latin American success. The association of Dominicanness with lawlessness, cheating and the broader demonization of Dominicans has been well covered by Alan Klein, specifically in his 2014 book, *Dominican Baseball: New Pride, Old Prejudice*. While Klein’s research serves as a necessary reference, I situate steroid use and age falsification in the broader construction of a racialized Latin American other, examining how associations with these seemingly illicit practices have become coupled with Latin America. The salience of Latin American cheating and the untrustworthy “coño” has undoubtedly grown in the public sphere as a result of incidents like the Almonte scandal and positive steroid tests. As such, racialized representations of Latin American players as rule breakers already circulate within the white US imaginary. However, the everyday world of professional baseball remains rife with the discursive reproduction of such tropes, further perpetuating and concretizing Latin American players as unlawful and unworthy.

#### *Age Falsification and Identity Fraud*

Identity fraud for international signees typically involves the altering of birthdates or identities in the official documents that amateurs submit to MLB prior to finalizing a deal and signing a contract with a major league team. As Alan Klein noted in 2014, Altering one’s documents; obtaining new, false, documents; and taking over a younger person’s birth certificate

are all fairly easy to do in the Dominican Republic. Compounding the problem is an antiquated record-keeping system (only-recently computerized) in which vital information often exists in only handwritten form. Many poor people, for instance, do not register births of children with the state until years after the fact, a phenomenon referred to as “late declaration”.<sup>160</sup> The submission of identity documents leads to an MLB investigation into the veracity of the information that is meant to confirm the amateur player’s identity. Such investigations usually result in approvals; however, they can also produce false information or in some cases yield unconfirmable data. The latter two results can lead to complete breakdowns in negotiations or renegotiations that lower the asking price on a prospect with seemingly dubious credentials, a scenario in which teams see themselves as taking on the risk (especially if the prospect is highly touted or comes with a big asking price) of potentially finding out that said player is older than originally indicated.

Notably, MLB’s enactment of stringent identity investigation can be traced directly to the events of September 11, 2001, and the US State Departments tightening of visa regulations. Under the guise of counterterrorism, the US State Department increased its commitment to verify the identities of anyone entering the US. As a result, Dominican documents came under more rigorous scrutiny. Citing a 2003 investigative report by Mike DiGiovanna of the Chicago Tribune, Alan Klein explains that “in the two years following the September 11 attacks, MLB found 550 cases of identity fraud, and 99 percent of them were Dominican.”<sup>161</sup> Despite the fact that identity fraud has more commonly occurred in the Dominican Republic, it should come as no surprise that perceptions of cheating, though still not justified when focused solely on the Dominican Republic given MLB’s strict verification policies, are projected onto Latin America as a whole. The white perceiving subject’s interest in discerning Latin American heterogeneity is

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<sup>160</sup> Klein, *Dominican Baseball: New Pride, Old Prejudice*, 122.

<sup>161</sup> *IBID*, 122.

limited at best if not completely nonexistent, a process that results in the flattening of the general Latin American player population. Regardless, the association of Dominican and Latin American players with identity fraud is well noted. Be it the highly visible cases of ex-Major League pitcher Roberto Hernandez, known during the best years of his career as Fausto Carmona,<sup>162</sup> former superstar Miguel Tejada admitting he was two years older than he said he was at the time he signed (19 not 17), or prominent 16-year-old Dominican prospect Esmilyn Gonzalez -- later to discovered to be 23-year-old Carlos Lugo -- signing with the Washington Nationals for 1.4 million dollars.<sup>163</sup> While these instances were tied to the very mechanics of professional baseball, it's important to look back on the outsize impact that the Danny Almonte scandal in the 2001 Little League World Series played in bordering US citizenship and whiteness through lenses of legality/illegality, identity fraud, and the racialization of Latin American players.

Almonte's case has been well covered in both public and academic circles, but his story still serves as a touchpoint when understanding white policing of lawfulness and belonging both in baseball and the US more broadly. Almonte, the 12-year-old star player at the center of the 2001 Little League World series, led his team from the Bronx (nicknamed the "Baby Bombers" as homage to the New York Yankees) to a 3rd place finish in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. It was Almonte's individual performance, not the team's finish, that garnered so much attention; in the qualifying game to reach the tournament in Williamsport, Almonte threw a no-hitter on national television vs. State College, PA. With buzz around his stellar outing in the qualifying game, Almonte outdid his no-hitter, throwing a perfect game at the Little League World Series and

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<sup>162</sup> Tyler Kepner, "Baseball's Identity Fraud Problem May Be More Prevalent," The New York Times, January 28, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/29/sports/baseball/identity-fraud-among-dominican-players-worries-baseball-officials.html>.

<sup>163</sup> ESPN.com news services, "Tejada Admits to Being Two Years Older than He Had Said," ESPN, April 17, 2008, <https://www.espn.com/mlb/news/story?id=3351418>.

carrying his team to an undefeated record as they entered the US championship before their eventual third place finish. Throughout his team's run, Almonte gained a large public following and fanbase, but days after the Little League World Series had concluded, *Sports Illustrated* ran a story revealing that Almonte was in fact 14 years old, two years above the age limit to be able to participate in little league baseball. Almonte's fall from grace was precipitous, as he vacated his position as a rags-to-riches success story and symbol of hard work, suddenly descending into a racialized, undeserving rulebreaker. In his thorough examination of the Almonte case, Ryan King-White employs a cultural studies framework to unpack the media coverage of the Almonte before and after the scandal, arguing that his media treatment served to reinforce white normativity and neoliberal order in the US. He asserts that "Almonte's success allows for those defending American neoliberalism to suggest that if he, a poverty stricken, Dominican, (im)migrant, can become successful in the United States others should be able to do the same without support from the government."<sup>164</sup> US President George W. Bush even weighed in saying, "I'm disappointed that adults would fudge the boy's age. I wasn't disappointed in his fastball and his slider, guy was awesome ... I mean he's a great pitcher, but I was sorely disappointed that people felt like they could send in a false age particularly when it comes to Little League Baseball of all places."<sup>165</sup> King-white draws on Stuart Hall in his inspection of the constraining social structures/contexts in which the Almonte incident occurred, demonstrating how Almonte's mediated symbolic presence serves to reinforce hegemonic relationships between the US and Dominican Republic, whites and non-whites, as well as the (relatively) wealthy and

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<sup>164</sup> Ryan King-White, "Danny Almonte: Discursive Construction(s) of (Im)Migrant Citizenship in Neoliberal America," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 27 (2010): 189.

<sup>165</sup> Robert D. McFadden, "BASEBALL; Star Is 14, So Bronx Team Is Disqualified," *The New York Times*, September 1, 2001, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/01/sports/baseball-star-is-14-so-bronx-team-is-disqualified.html>.

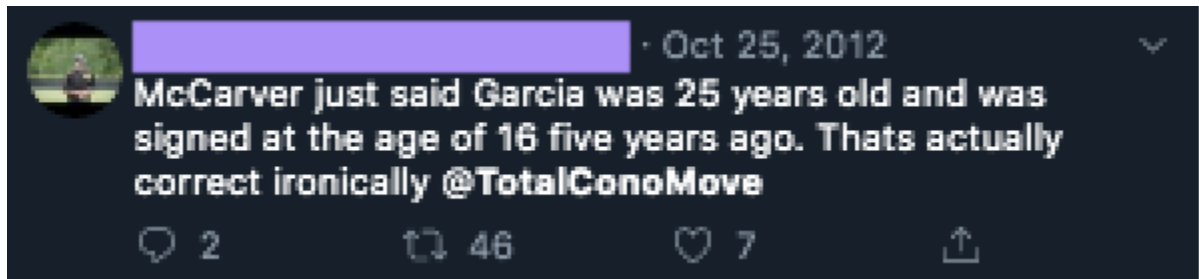
poverty stricken. King-White deftly shows how Almonte's strategic racial representations in the media conveyed an image of achieving via hard work and fairness during his highs (implicit praise for the neoliberal order) and a racially charged, deviant, assault on white acceptability in the public criticism that followed his fall (a condemnation on the individual, not the limits of the social structure informing individual action). Such double standards weren't lost on Dominican observers. As Pedro Martinez, arguably the best pitcher on the planet at the time of the Almonte incident, told the Boston Globe, "If he was from America, that kid would probably be ...getting a little medal from George Bush. Now all of a sudden because the kid's from the Dominican, he's not legal."<sup>166</sup> Almonte's name and story would pop in and out of the public eye over the next decade with a series of "*where is he now*" and "*what if?*" stories but questions of legality and legitimacy would continue to dog professional Dominican and Latin American players and circulate within the world of professional baseball. Even as Almonte's case fades farther into the rearview mirror and high-profile cases of age fraud and steroids have become few and far between in MLB, the historical surveillance of Dominican and Latin American bodies within the US (and baseball specifically) has led to hardened belief sets regarding the legitimacy and deservedness of Latin American players within the professional ranks.

Throughout the minors and majors there continues to be a white, US perception that Latin American players have a proclivity to use steroids, lie about their age, and skirt the rules. This framing both legitimizes white normative behavior (all-natural, non-steroid, non-cheating) and obviates the checkered past of white or US consumption of steroids, expropriating it to Latin

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<sup>166</sup> Bob Hohler, "Martínez Weighs In," *Boston Globe*, August 30, 2001.

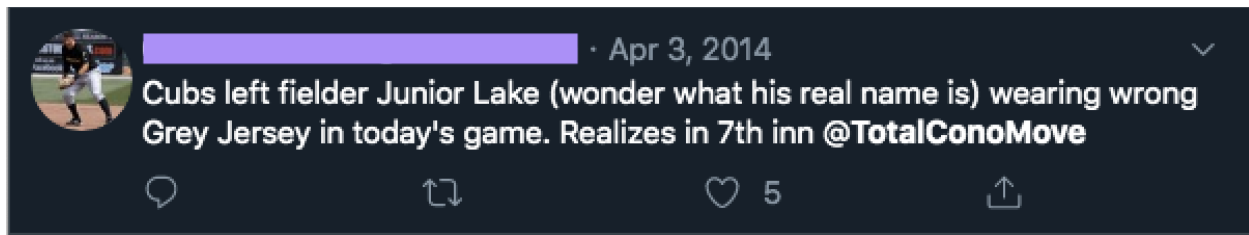
America and places Latin American players in a constant state of questioning, doubt, scrutiny by teammates and staff.



**Figure 2.39.** Actually 25.

In the above tweet the author references comments made by broadcaster Tim McCarver from a playoff baseball broadcast in 2012. The author notes that McCarver, providing some information about a player (García) noted that he was 25 years old and signed at age 16 five years ago. McCarver's math doesn't add up, as García would have been 20 if he signed five years ago or he could have misspoken in the event that the player had signed at age 16, *nine* years ago. Regardless of the error, the tweet plays off McCarver's mistake, insinuating that he didn't misspeak, and that García was in fact 25, not 21, the accurate age if he had signed at 16 five years ago. The tweet suggests that García has falsified his age and in doing so has engaged in a general Latin American practice, thus making it a Total Coño Move.

Similarly, *Figure 2.40* reveals the white mistrust of Latin American players, questioning former Chicago Cub Junior Lake's identity by mockingly asking '[I] wonder what his real name is?' The author highlights this fact by noting that Lake has the wrong jersey on, giving him a window to both undermine the veracity of his identity and paint him as stupid for having worn the wrong jersey. It would seem that the Total Coño Move in question is Lake putting on the wrong jersey, however, the intimation that Lake is not who he claims to be betrays the deep seeded association of Latin American players with fraud and deception.



**Figure 2.40.** Junior Lake, Real Name.

We also see the ways in which demonizing Latin American players for suspected fraud circulates through mass media and the entertainment industry. *Figure 2.41* addresses the falsification of birth certificates directly, affirming that a shoddily, clearly handwritten, unofficial document is more or less (‘seems about right’) representative of Latin American actions and is thus “coño”.

The images, from the 2006 movie, *Benchwarmers* depict a grown man, Carlos, with the help of his white accomplice, Jerry, pretending to be a 12-year-old so he can enter a little league tournament to defeat the movie’s protagonists. Prior to being granted entry to the tournament the following exchange takes place:

**Jerry:** I wanted you guys to have a little edge, so I brought my friend Carlos. He is from the Dominican Republic, and he is one incredible ball player.

**Wayne:** Carlos, that’s great. How old are you?

**Carlos:** I’m twelve.

**Wayne:** More like twelve hundred.

**Carlos:** Check my birth certificate.

**Jerry:** He’s legit.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Dennis Duggan, *Benchwarmers* (Columbia Pictures, 2006).





**Figure 2.41.** Birth Certificate.

The movie scene and framing of age falsification vis-a-vis little league baseball clearly draws on the Danny Almonte incident but the Total Coño Move tweet repurposes the same logics, applying them to the realm of professional baseball more broadly. Indeed, the tweet adds very little new context, merely agreeing that the scene’s message is more or less accurate as it relates to professional baseball yet in doing so, solidifies age falsification as a “coño” behavior that Latin American players use unscrupulously to get ahead.

Each of these tweets shows the degree to which age falsification has become core to the white perception and construction of a “coño”. Though not necessarily expressed online, these same views are widely held and perpetuated by white players and staff in the day to day of professional baseball. A Latin American player’s physicality, ability, or anything deemed extraordinary becomes the indicator or justification for white conclusions of Latin American age

fraud. White staff and players make jokes about how hard it must be for certain Latin American players to play well into their forties, when they are actually in their twenties or thirties. The atmosphere is filled with quips and lines that further white views and assumptions about Latin American fraud and in doing so consolidate the boundaries of white space. However, the most common way in which these attitudes are revealed is not secluded to white-only interactions or tucked behind closed doors but instead comes in the form of interrogative questions made by white players to Latin American players, at times serious and at times jocular: “How old are you?”, “How old are you *really*?”, “Okay, okay, but what’s your actual date of birth?”. This happens predominantly in clubhouses, on the field, or in sites where players from Latin America and the US are interacting the most. Such questioning is not limited to players as coaches, support staff, and front office invoke similar tropes and suggestions regularly. This theme was particularly prevalent across my interviews as a majority of players recalled instances in which their age was questioned or suggested to be higher than what they said.

While the need for Latin American players to defend themselves and justify their identity, work, and talent can undermine the legitimacy of that individual’s work to get to that point but also signals a degree of white insecurity about their own performance/talent/ability as compared to Latin American players. Such frequent commentary about Latin American age falsification underscores the unstable position of white masculinity and hegemony over the sport. What could explain imposing physical features if not biological racist framings or a body that’s more mature than it’s “supposed to be” be it via a fake birth certificate or steroids. As Eduardo told me when relating his stories about being asked how old he was,

**Eduardo:** It's like they thought 'These guys have an advantage over us because they inject themselves or have a false age or are older than they say' and now that I think about it it's like at [they were worried that] 'These guys are going to take our job'.

**David:** Uh huh, so you saw it more like a reaction out of fear of losing their jobs?

**Edu:** Exactly, exactly. It was more like that, that's what I was thinking. Like fear on their part. [They had to be thinking] 'Man, these guys come out of nowhere, from other countries and cheat'

**Eduardo:** Ellos como que pensaban que 'Estos tipos tienen ventaja sobre nosotros porque se pujan o tienen edad falsa o vienen con mayor de edad y es como que *al pensar* [que se preocupaban de que] 'estos tipos nos van a quitar el trabajo'.

**David:** Ajá, ¿entonces tú lo viste así más como una reacción por miedo de perder el trabajo?

**Edu:** Exacto, exacto. Era más como eso que yo pensaba. Como que es miedo de ellos. [Tenían que estar pensando:]

'Conchale, estos tipos vienen de la nada así de otros países y vienen con trampa'

Juan, a Latin American coach echoed similar point,

**Juan:** Most high school kids in the US don't throw 92 [mph], so [if] you throw 92 you must be older because you're from Latin America. This [white US first rounder] should be 25 [years old] then because he throws 96. To me, the Latin American guys...have their age valued [because of] their skill set but then when you see their reactions and emotions you should know that they're 17 because they react like a teenager. If the guy was 25 he wouldn't act like that.

I think it's also [due to the fact] that [Latin American players] are coming to the US to play the sport that's supposedly the American pastime and they're taking chances away from the Americans because they're coming to this country. *Something must be wrong.* I [as an American] can't just accept that you [the Latin American] spent the last three years of your life practicing every single day to hit the ball far, to throw the ball hard, to run fast. 'Why would you be better than me?' [Well, you know why? Because] he just spent about 300 hours do something over] the past year that you spent about 50 hours doing. \*\*

**David:** Yeah, it's like 'It can't be that you're better than me. So, I have to search for the why, I have to find the reason.'

**Jua:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean there is something illegal. When everybody used steroids [during the steroid era] it was like 'Ah everyone's got steroids' but faking your age is like 'Oh wow that's incredible, how are you doing that?' Steroids to me were the American thing and it got to Latin America and now it's like 'Oh the Latin guys are taking steroids' but no, you created steroids, you tried to be stronger than everybody and now you [pretend] everyone else is evil. Just because they became better athletes than you doesn't make them cheaters or [make them] older [than they are].

While perceiving immigrant work populations as a threat is central to US history and the history of whiteness in particular, we can see how denigrating Latin American players and forwarding notions that they have cheated or acquired unfair advantages in the sport serve to reaffirm a white moral rectitude and xenophobic marginalization of the immigrant workers. By undercutting Latin American achievement, white staff and players (as well as the media more broadly) paint themselves as morally (superior) and thus more deserving of success, both maintaining the borders and controlling the narratives as to who deserves recognition and compensation. Such framings sprout from the dogmatic US belief in individualism and that the “hard work” of white players is more legitimate than the path -- painted as riddled with corruption and cheating -- Latin American players had to take. Naturally, these views and their outward expressions do not take into account the structural components of historical systems of power between the countries, as discussed in Chapter 1. And, even when there is a degree of sympathy for falsifying one’s identity it is usually decoupled/disassociated from these systems of power, instead framed in empty comments about poverty forcing people to make such decisions.

### *Steroids*

Steroid use is the only attribute or practice included in this chapter that does not have a corresponding Total Coño Move tweet. However, in conversations with players, it became clear that steroids were lumped together with practices like age falsification under a more expansive umbrella of Latin American deceit. Both steroid use and age falsification offer a “way out” or explanation within white circles as to how or why Latin American players might have exceptional talent; through unnatural means or cunning, Latin American players have gamed the system. As such, we can understand steroid use in conjunction with the existing white definitions of “coño”, as another practice that associates Latin American players with malicious cheating or

cutting corners, while simultaneously explaining away individual talent. Just as age falsification has become seen as a uniquely Latin American/Dominican practice, steroid usage has also been snatched from the jaws of white, US users and reassigned to deceitful Latin American sectors of baseball. The assignment of steroids to Latin America further demarcates the white border along both physical and moral lines, implying that white actors don't engage in steroid use despite a history to the contrary. Multiple Latin American interviewees offered their thoughts:

**Chicho:** Piensan porque somos latinos nos puyamos pues, nos metemos esteroides por alguna gente por algunos tipos que hicieron eso piensan que todos los latinos van a ser así. Y piensan que tu te subiste de edad, pero eso es otra cosa. \*Riéndose\* porque cónchale la diferente comida, tu sabes que uno se alimenta de frijoles y ese montón de cosas que son pura proteína mientras que lo que comen desde niño es puro pan, no es lo mismo. Piensan que porque uno está más desarrollado se puya o es mayor de edad o cualquier vaina pues. Y eso está mal pues porque Barry Bonds se puyaba Mark McGwire se les puyaban y eran dos gringos y van a decir que la mayoría son latinos.

Chicho notes a clear association with being Latin American (or Latino, in his words) and using steroids, suggesting that because certain players within the Latin American community have done so, the stain has been liberally applied to the entire player population. Chicho alludes to some of the staples of Latin American cuisine to explain, at least in his mind, why young players might appear more physically mature than their US-counterparts, saying just because someone is more physically “developed” the assumption is that he has used steroids or falsified his age. Implied in Chicho's reference to dietary differences, is the possibility that physical differences might occur between different populations due to simple, benign, quotidian practices, not the calculated use of foreign substances. Roberto discussed steroid use, suggesting that the stigma and association with Latin American players has calmed down somewhat, due in part to the fact that lots of US players have also been exposed for using steroids.

**Roberto:** Pero ya se calmó un poco porque también salieron gringos con esteroides. Entonces uno se dice, ‘Ok, Sammy Sosa lo usó, lo usó fulano, ok, pero también McGwire lo usó, lo usó Barry Bonds, lo usó Roger Clemens, esa gente famosa también lo usaban.’ Entonces ya mayormente los latinos ya se están defendiendo con eso. Hubo un caso allá en doble-A de un amigo mío, eran un latino y un gringo y cuando salió eso del salón de la fama y eso un gringo dijo dique ‘wao pero Sammy Sosa no va a ir porque estuvo con esteroides’ y un latino dijo ‘ok pero Barry Bonds tampoco va porque también salió con esteroides’. Y planteaba la reacción como para pelear y todo el mundo como ‘hey, hey, hey, tranquilo, tranquilo.’ ¿Ves? Ya los latinos se están defendiendo.

Roberto notes the contradiction in US framings of steroid use as Latin American, noting how some of the sport’s biggest names -- Mark McGwire, Barry Bonds, Roger Clemens (all born in the US) -- were found out to have used steroids. He builds on that fact, recalling an incident that he observed in double-A in which a Latin American player responded to a white player who noted that Dominican Sammy Sosa wouldn’t make into the Hall of Fame due to his steroid use. The Latin American player’s retort, that neither would Barry Bonds, irked the US player to the point that the two nearly came to blows. As Roberto put it, the Latin American player’s quip was evidence that Latin American players have started to “defend themselves” against accusations of performance enhancement by US players and outlets. The presence and frequency of such accusations create an environment in which steroid use becomes associated with or inherent to Latin Americanness. Existing in such conditions of assumed guilt or cheating can be stifling, so much so that universal modes of vigilance and steroid monitoring within the sport can feel targeted. Take Carlos Gomez’s comments from 2018 in which he claimed that older players and Latin American players were disproportionately targeted for drug testing despite the Joint Agreement’s stipulation that all testing must be random.<sup>168</sup> Whether or not the data from the time period in question would corroborate Gomez’s claims is not of particular interest. Rather,

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<sup>168</sup> Mike Oz, “Carlos Gomez: MLB Drug Testing Isn’t Random, Targets Older and Latin Players,” yahoo!sports, May 22, 2018, <https://sports.yahoo.com/carlos-gomez-mlb-drug-testing-isnt-random-targets-older-latin-players-170350540.html?guccounter=1>.

Gomez's feeling, awareness, or sense Latin American players were unfairly targeted for testing makes sense in the same spaces that Chicho and Roberto discussed in their interviews. As I have detailed throughout this chapter, however, points of contestation do occur. The discussion of age falsification and steroids was so acute for many of the Latin American players I interviewed that I cover the topic in more detail in Chapter 3, choosing instead to examine the incidents from the Latin American perspective as opposed to a racializing tool used in the bordering of white space. The entirety of Chapter 3 expands on how Latin American players encountered many of the tropes used to construct the "coño" figure, expanding on -- in players' own words -- how confrontation with white, US staff and players as well as an awareness of baseball's racializing schemas informed their paths to the big leagues.

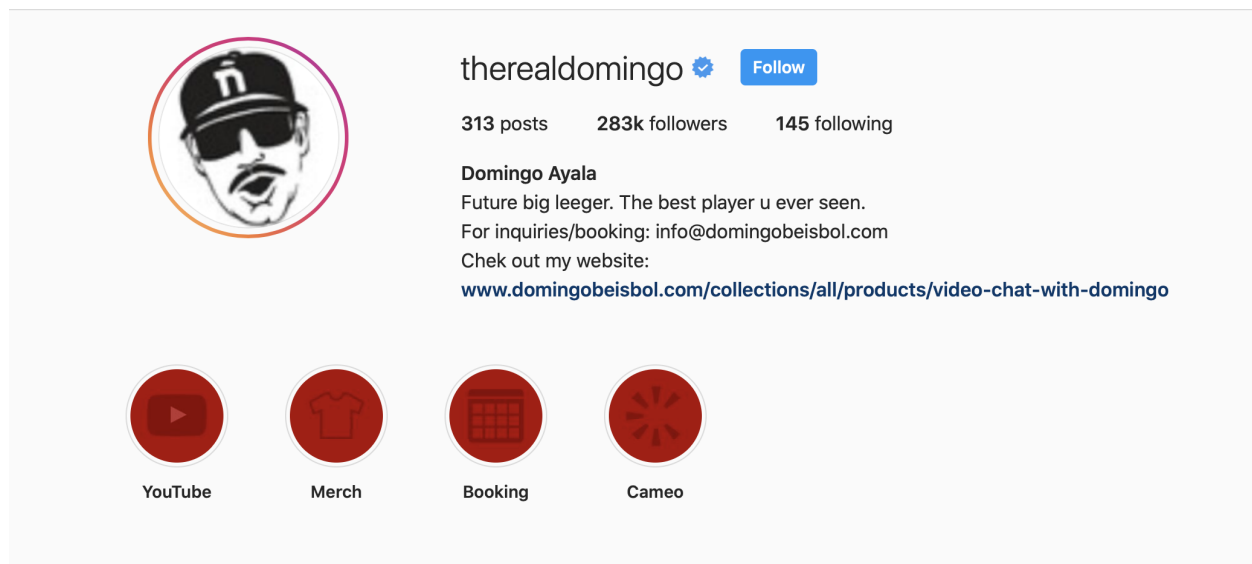
### **Domingo Ayala, Embodiment of a "Coño"**

To conclude this chapter, I discuss how discursive and cultural reproduction of the "coño" Latin American baseball player has spilled into the public sphere, reproducing itself for white audiences and reinforcing colonial difference/hierarchy. If you followed baseball during the 2010s it's likely that Domingo Ayala came across your screen at some point. The fictionalized, racist YouTube creation of Bryan Resnick, Ayala is a caricatured Latin American baseball player who engages in ridiculous, stereotypical and hyper-dramatized behavior on the field.<sup>169</sup> The cult of Ayala blossomed, finding an audience eager to gobble up familiar Latin American tropes, through Ayala's racialized behavior and language. What started as a modest YouTube channel turned into a massive following on all social media platforms, branded merchandise, baseball camps, paid appearances, and even invitations to multiple spring training

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<sup>169</sup> Bryan Resnick, DOMINGO AYALA - Trademark Details, JUSTIA Trademarks, issued February 2, 2013, <https://trademarks.justia.com/858/37/domingo-85837556.html>.

sites with major league teams over the last 5-10 years. A cursory look at Domingo Ayala content, however, reveals an overtly racist embodiment of Latin American difference, disseminated for the amusement of a white audience. The concept of indirect indexicality touched on at the beginning of the chapter proves particularly useful here in that Ayala signals racist jokes to an audience that has a framework to *get the jokes*, while also functioning productively, spreading a ridiculous, stereotyped image of Latin American players to unsuspecting viewers. My analysis of Bryan Resnick's Domingo Ayala focuses on three points: 1. How the fictionalized character engages in a form of minstrelsy with racist impersonations and instances of potential brown face, 2. How Ayala's/Resnick's jokes and humor appeal to a white, English-speaking audience, and 3. How racialized Latin American difference has been co-opted and recycled to turn a profit.



**Figure 2.42.** Domingo Ayala Instagram.





**Figure 2.43.** Domingo Ayala Twitter.

Resnick’s Ayala is supposed to be from the Dominican Republic but almost never speaks Spanish in his videos. When he does, his speech reveals anything but a Dominican accent or vocabulary, often relying on commonly used Mexican phrases and curse words. Additionally, his mispronunciations, and grammatical errors in English don’t follow any sort of consistency in terms of common mistakes for L1 Spanish-speakers attempting to learn English as an L2. Take, for example, his constant emphasis on the word “time”. On his website, social media accounts, and in his videos, he displays the word written as “tyme” to capture a phonetic miscue in English of the word “time” by a heritage Spanish speaker. The inclusion of the letter “y” in “tyme”, however, reveals a complete lack of awareness of Spanish phonemes, or, as one of my interviewees quipped upon watching an Ayala video, “Si quisiera escribir la palabra como se oye, pondría la “a” y la “i” (taim) en vez de la “y”. En español ni siquiera se puede leer porque la ‘y’ nunca aparece entre dos consonantes.// *If he wanted to write the word how it sounds, he would put an “a” and an “i” (taim) instead of the “y”. You can’t even read it in Spanish*

*because the “y” never appears between two consonants.”* For a character that supposedly hails from the Dominican Republic and would thus be fluent in Spanish, presenting the word “time” as “tyme” would never cross his mind. Additionally, the use of the word “leeger” instead of “leaguer” (see *Figures 2.42-2.43*) reveals Resnick’s unfamiliarity with Spanish phonemes and the fact that his audience is white, English-speaking; The -ee- in “leeger” does not produce close to the same sound in Spanish and thus would only be interpretable for someone familiar with English sounds and pronunciations.

The same phonetic hiccups appear all throughout Ayala’s videos. In watching his very first YouTube video, “How to Play Infield with Domingo Ayala”, grammatical and phonetic errors are frequent, but they don’t align with mistakes that heritage Spanish speakers typically make. Ayala is *trying to* make fun of mispronunciations but isn’t doing it in line with errors that tend to arise for heritage Spanish speakers learning English. Take Ayala’s correct phonetic production of the letter “i” in the word “quick” -- a typically difficult sound for heritage Spanish speakers -- or his correct pronunciation of “hand” instead of pronouncing the “a” as it is in Spanish or cutting the “d” off the end of the word. In short, despite his best efforts to present a character who speaks a racialized, exaggerated English it does not seem as though Resnick either speaks Spanish or has familiarity with Dominican speech, despite supposedly being born on Hispaniola. As another interviewee told me, “Se está burlando pero se está burlando mal. // *He’s making fun of them but he’s doing it badly.*”

One of the primary humoristic drivers of Ayala’s videos is his style of play. Generally framed as instructional “how to” videos, Ayala teaches his audience baseball fundamentals but often contradicts his own guidance, instead opting for a “flashy” or “cool” move on the field. His actions are always over-exaggerated to the point that his audience is aware of his decision to

display showmanship instead of efficacy. He sports a chain in the majority of his videos, playing on the trope that associates of Latin American players with lavish jewelry purchases and in his first few videos, also appears to confirm the use of brown face quite literally.



**Figure 2.44.** Not a Farmer's Tan.



**Figure 2.45.** Skin Tone 1.



**Figure 2.46.** Skin Tone 2.

Resnick abandoned the brown makeup<sup>170</sup> after his earliest video but continued to present a misalignment between his character and anything remotely Latin American or Dominican. Most of his videos begin with a handful of different mariachi and ranchera songs, genres of music most closely associated with Mexico and rarely listened to in the Dominican Republic. The disjointedness of Ayala's show is not an issue, of course, as the core of his character is not specific but rather a nebulous amalgamation of Latin American tropes rolled into one racist character. Note Ayala's introduction on his website where we see familiar through lines already examined in this thesis:

At the age of two, Domingo Ayala started playing baseball. It wasn't long after that when he became one of the best players in his hometown of Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic. In his pursuit to make it to the MLB, Ayala packed his bags and moved to the United States. Now, the self-proclaimed best baseball player in the world still claims to be 17 years old. Though many believe him to be slightly older, no one has seen a birth

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<sup>170</sup> Of course, the dissemination of such reductive, racialized stereotypes would still be problematic were Resnick Latin American/Latino -- as BIPOC are not immune to advancing white supremacy -- but that is seemingly not the case here. Even if he were able to claim some degree of Latin American heritage, it would not matter as his career and material gain has been driven by the propagation of a racialized Latin American other.

certificate to disprove his claim. As he travels the world teaching baseball, his ultimate goal is still to make it to the big leagues.<sup>171</sup>

Here, the trope that Dominican players lie about their age and forge their birth certificates appears yet again. The implied joke being that Domingo, like so many other Dominican players, is blatantly lying about his age, disingenuously asserting he is still 17 years old, and, because nobody can disprove such a claim, is protected in his lie. The pervasiveness of Latin American and Dominican age fraud in US culture is apparent in its centrality to the construction of Domingo Ayala. Through the inclusion of and emphasis on age fraud as a part of Domingo's story, such ideas, transmitted through "comedy", at once become more widely available to a white audience and reinscribe Latin American mischievousness and illegitimacy.

Ayala's celebrity spread all the way to major league fields, as he spent time touring spring training facilities throughout the 2010s, working out with players, filming videos and creating content. In one such case, with the Seattle Mariners, senior leadership was seemingly behind the decision to bring Ayala into camp to lighten the mood during spring training.<sup>172</sup> Ayala's website suggests that it's important to "laugh out ourselves", indicating the protection Resnick likely feels behind the veil of humor, however, as this thesis has shown, racialized stereotypes within baseball have lasting, material and cultural consequences despite "humorous" intentions. The mere existence of Domingo Ayala, that is, the possibility for Resnick to create such a successful grift off the perpetuation of racist stereotypes of Latin American players could only ever occur in a white supremacist environment. As the first two chapters have argued, the continued mapping and remapping of racial-colonial difference and power appears through the co-naturalization of race and language, the over-determination of signs, and the denigration of

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<sup>171</sup> "Domingo Beisbol," Domingo beisbol, n.d., <https://www.domingobeisbol.com>.

<sup>172</sup> Greg Johns, "Comedian Ayala Cracks up Mariners at Camp," March 1, 2016, <https://www.mlb.com/news/domingo-ayala-visits-mariners-spring-training-c165873044>.

behaviors that are read as foreign or not compatible with a civilized, white modernity. However, without a critical lens to apprehend how such racist performance fits into a widely circulated tropes surrounding Latin American players and their racial-colonial origins, Resnick has co-opted the “coño”, implicitly contrasting the character’s ridiculousness with white normativity, selling his minstrelsy back to an eager audience unbothered or uncritical of how affording this character legitimacy perpetuates white supremacy.

### 3. Rumbo a las mayores: Encountering Development and Navigating the Business of Baseball

*Ya nada mas con tan solo nosotros a venir [aquí] a jugar, ya eso te lo dice todo. Que [el juego] es de aquí, ya. O sea que se necesita visa para venir a jugar béisbol aquí. Ya eso es de ellos. Pero tú sabes que nosotros le ponemos el picantico, nosotros somos la sal de su sopa, claro.*

*Without considering anything else but the fact that we come here to play, that already tells you everything. That [the game] is from here, period. I mean, you need a visa to come play baseball here. The game is theirs. But you know that we give it a little bit of spice, we're the salt to their soup, obviously.*

- Simón, interview by author, 2019

*The things I did not notice and took for granted were more enduring: the British reticence, the British self-discipline, the stiff lips, upper and lower.*

- C. L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 1963

Though I have included a wide range of excerpts from player and staff interviews in the first two chapters, Chapter 3 centers the interviews I conducted as part of my research more prominently. Chapter 1 established the historical and socio-economic backdrop of professional baseball's presence in Latin America, detailing how the circular human flow between Latin America and the US follows and reinforces colonial and imperial power. Chapter 2 examined the how white space is created, mediated, and fortified in profesional baseball as a means of maintaining white supremacy and colonial difference; it paints a picture of the environment that Latin American players are thrust into upon arrival in the US the obstacles and prejudices they will have to engage with throughout their careers, as they attempt to make it to the major leagues. Chapter 3, then, tries to capture the embodied experiences and shared stories of Latin American players (and staff to a lesser degree) as they move from Global South to Global North and maneuver the environs of professional baseball. Using the histories of imperialism and

colonialism discussed in Chapter 1 and the construction and policing of white space vis-a-vis racialized linguistics and semiotics in Chapter 2 as context, Chapter 3 addresses what players themselves had to say about their paths through professional baseball. By drawing from their interviews and sharing their stories, I trace some of the biggest moments along their path to the big leagues, stopping at the inflection points and underscoring some of their most vivid memories as they traversed a system that was not designed for them. I seek to avoid a mere recounting of their career from anonymity to stardom or rags to riches, as such narratives tend to essentialize 3rd World poverty and reductionist bootstrap narratives. Nor do I want to position their stories as simple, easily packaged authoritative anecdotes about what “what Latin American players have to say.” Instead, I hope to frame their responses in such a way to offer insight into which aspects of baseball as a broader business and system -- as an extension of US racial capitalism -- become ingrained and internalized. The participants are sharing their accounts of how they interacted with the policies, structures, imaginaries (whether they were aware of them or not) of professional baseball from a young age. What truths or consistencies appear across their stories? What are the moments or broader categories in which *they* felt marked as other or different? How did they react to certain treatment? What were the means of overcoming or avoiding barriers, structural or interpersonal? Where is the overlap in what Latin American players recognized as racialized treatment and what the white listening/perceiving subjects from Chapter 2 fashioned as “coño”? This chapter tries to combat and push back against the hegemonic, racist views that have become ossified within baseball.

ESPN explored a similar line of investigation with its series on the “Béisbol Experience” in 2017. The investigation focused on Latin American stories and broke their responses down



thematically into six categories: Family, Learning English, Food, Money, Ballpark Culture, Identity. The website landing page reads as follows:

In 2017, Latinos represent over one in four players in MLB and have shaped America's pastime as much as it has shaped them. We asked prospects, starters and future Hall of Famers to share their stories and perspectives. What is it like to learn a new language, crack the game's code of unwritten rules and deal with political turmoil in the United States and back home? Here is their *béisbol* experience.<sup>173</sup>

The project was circulated widely and did a decent job including anecdotes that touched on the historical -- and ongoing -- structural barriers that Latin American players face in professional baseball. However, despite some players' answers alluding to topics such as racism, unequal treatment, and certain racialized behavior, the project was not intended or not able to contextualize player stories within the broader systemic inequality of major league baseball or history of US white supremacy and hegemony in Latin America. Some players mentioned the constricting nature of unwritten rules and a perceived extravagant Latin American style of play. Edwin Encarnación recalled receiving preferential treatment in the minors because he was a prospect while his lesser touted friends dealt with racism. Sandy León explained that Latin American players don't want to speak out for fear of repercussions and lack of power within the game. Yasiel Puig (discussed in Chapter 2) noted that Latin American players "are not understood" and are forced "to adapt".<sup>174</sup> However, while these players and many more notable names opened up on a wide array of topics, no analysis or context followed. Naturally, an investigative report for ESPN made up of quotes on a wide range of themes then presented on a website with massive reach and consumer potential is different from the aims of this paper. Yet, it is important to note that while the excerpts in the "*Béisbol Experience*" hinted at a much

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<sup>173</sup> Rivera et al., "*BÉISBOL EXPERIENCE: The 50-Man Interview.*"

<sup>174</sup> *IBID.*

broader set of issues within the game, an interrogation of the power structures that molded and informed player comments was lacking.

Chapter 3 follows a thematic chronology that, while not temporal, linear, or homogenous, follows a certain order of events that almost all Latin American players experience. It's important to recognize this process as cyclical and recurring on a yearly basis. Most of the interviewees progressed through different minor league systems and played for different teams. Additionally, they all signed in different years and followed different career trajectories. Based on their ages and stories, we can understand their experiences as representative of Latin American players over the last decade plus but having gone through similar trials at *different points*, in *different places*, and in *different years* than others. Thus, their combined narratives can help color and enrich an oral history of the Latin American player experience, an ongoing process that can't be attributed to a distant past, specific team, or one individual. I begin with interviewees' baseball origins and their introduction to the sport before shifting to when it was that they recognized that baseball is a business. I then follow them through their signing experiences, touching on themes such as community support and the bureaucratic, administrative, and emotional components of signing at a young age. From there, I move to their early days of professionalization both at the Academy (discussed in more detail in Chapter 1) and in the US minor leagues. I focus on players' first impressions, biggest lessons, and what sort of information or knowledge they recall being imparted to them. Once stateside, the chapter attends to players' initial experiences in a foreign country and how they adjusted to life and language in the US, all the while navigating increasing encounters with US-born players and staff. This section highlights moments of conflict, confrontation, and confusion as well as community support abroad in the form of Latin American solidarity and guidance from more

experienced, Latin American players and staff. The interviewees then speak broadly on a number of themes from their playing careers, reflecting on what the system of professional baseball asks of them and what marks it has left on them to date.

### **Origin Stories**

Most players' introductions to baseball followed a similar path: things typically started in their family and were passed down to them by loved ones. The majority of interviewees had older relatives -- brothers, cousins, parents -- who had already played baseball before them, some professionally, and many more in local leagues. Others had big baseball fans in the family or were pushed by someone in their neighborhood. Independent of the exact details surrounding a player's first time picking up a bat or a ball, for all the interviewees, baseball figured prominently in their daily lives from a young age. This should come as no surprise, as baseball in both the Dominican Republic and Venezuela occupies a sizable part national, sporting imaginary/identity. As Daniel told me, "Tú sabes como país, como dominicanos que somos y como latinos nosotros llevamos béisbol en la sangre // *You know as a country, as the Dominicans that we are and as Latinos, we carry baseball in our blood.*" In recent years, however, scholarship, journalism, and broader baseball discourse has often framed Latin American players' entry into baseball as either a calculated business move or a case of puppeteering in which naïve kids are gamed by greedy handlers. From a US perspective, then, pursuing professional baseball in Latin America can appear a rehearsed practice in which young players and their families clamor to secure the largest signing bonus possible at all costs. While one must acknowledge certain realities – such as how the existing international signing system forces Latin American players to confront the churn of baseball's business in their early

teens/adolescence -- most professional beginnings are humble. I asked the player group how they were first introduced to baseball:

**Simón:** Yo creo que por lo menos yo nací con eso porque mi papá también jugó cuando era joven, no jugó profesional pero sí jugó buen béisbol allá en Venezuela. Y desde que era un niño, sí mi mamá me llevaba a ver los juegos, pero yo no te puedo decir si él era bueno o no porque estaba muy chiquito. Pero a mi papá le gustaba el béisbol. Jugó béisbol. Mis primos, mis tíos, todos jugaron béisbol y crecí en ese ambiente pues. Ellos me llevaban para el estadio, pero los que sí me llevaban mucho para el estadio eran mis primos, mis primos que también jugaron béisbol. Nunca firmaron, tampoco jugaron profesional, pero si ellos fueron los que, desde niño, niño jugábamos en el patio de la casa de mi abuela [y] me llevaban para el estadio cuando jugaban. Allí yo fui creciendo alrededor de ese ambiente de béisbol [o] como quien dice, fue algo familiar.

*I think that I was born into this because my dad also played when I was young, he didn't play professionally but he played good baseball back in Venezuela. And from the time I was a kid, my mom brought me to watch the games but I couldn't tell you if he was good or not because I was so little. But my dad liked baseball. He played baseball. My cousins, my uncles, they all played baseball and I grew up in that environment. They all brought me to the stadium but the ones who really brought me to the stadium a lot were my cousins, my cousins who also played baseball. They never signed, they didn't play professionally either, but they were the ones that from the time we were really little we played on the patio at my grandma's house [and] they brought me to the stadium when they played. I grew up around that baseball environment [or] as you could say, it was something familial.*

**Eduardo:** Yo tengo un primo que jugaba béisbol, [era] bastante bueno. Sabes, antes no era como ahora -- ahora hay un poquito más de facilidad para conseguir la firma y era mi ídolo pues. Aparte que mi papá jugaba béisbol cuando era joven. No jugó profesional, pero él siempre quería que aquí hubiera un pelotero en la familia. Entonces de ahí, con el impulso de mi papá fue que yo me motivé a jugar béisbol. Al inicio, era un simple juego para divertirnos -- siempre jugábamos en la calle. Al inicio era un juego como para divertirse.

*I have a cousin who played baseball, [he was] pretty good. You know, before it wasn't like it is now -- now it's a little bit easier to sign professionally -- and he was my idol. Aside from that, my dad played baseball when I was young. He didn't play professionally, but he always wanted there to be a baseball player here in the family. So from there, with the nudge from my dad, I decided to play baseball. At the beginning, it was a simple game for us to have fun -- we always played in the street. At the beginning it was a game for us to enjoy.*

Both Simón and Eduardo had similar family influences in the game, as their fathers and cousins played in Venezuela and the Dominican Republic, respectively. Simón recalls going to the stadium to watch his dad play, though was too young to remember if he was any good. Eduardo's cousin, who played professionally in a time when signing processes weren't as streamlined, was his idol growing up. In each case, baseball was something familial and community driven.

**Chicho:** Todo comenzó fue por mi tío, desde chiquito era fanático del béisbol. Y eso nos lo inculcó a nosotros, porque nosotros somos tres hermanos, justamente tres sobrinos cercanos. Y él, fanático del béisbol, ya bueno, se veía venir pues que jugaríamos eso.

*Everything began because of my uncle, from the time I was young he was a baseball fan. And that inculcated us, because we're three brothers, technically three close nephews. And my uncle, the baseball fan, well, you could see it coming that we'd play baseball.*

For Chicho, it was his uncle who made sure that his son and nephews played baseball. Chicho acknowledged that not everybody had direct contact with someone who had gone through the professional signing process, something he views as an area that he can now help others in the community with if they have questions. For him, passing on the dos and don'ts of baseball is something he can offer up in a similar fashion – albeit with more experience – to what his uncle did for him.

**Felipe:** Tú sabes que yo tuve la oportunidad de tener tres hermanos firmados. Ellos eran mis modelos para seguir y yo los veía en ese tiempo como superhéroes, como grandes peloteros y yo decía, 'Bueno, yo tengo que ser igual o mejor que cada uno de ellos'. Entonces yo me metí lleno a esto que fue a la edad de 12 años -- porque yo jugaba fútbol antes, me gustaba jugar soccer entonces en Dominicana el soccer no tiene mucha vida. [Hacia mi] entrenamiento y después de allí me agarró uno de los hermanos míos a darme práctica y de allí pasé a los 14 años a un programa<sup>175</sup> local y de allí tuve la oportunidad

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<sup>175</sup> Here "programa local" or "local program," also referred to an amateur academy, refers to a training complex that houses aspiring amateurs as they train and prepare to sign a professional contract. Local programs are run by independent trainers and vary in size, money, visibility. They are an offshoot of baseball's broader efforts at globalization and a response to the demand for teenage players to sign professional contracts; they are the domestic sites of refinement that help prepare teenage prospects secure a contract and prepare for their professional journey.

de firmar. Realmente yo nunca fui tan ciego con el dinero. Sí yo veía a [mis hermanos] que ellos andaban todo el tiempo en lo que un dominicano dice ‘pinta’ y cosas así y yo decía, ‘Bueno, yo quiero ser como ellos’ o quizás mejor que ellos’, ¿entiendes? Esa fue la infatuación que me daba, pero no dique cosas de dinero porque yo nunca pude ver dinero así en abundancia.

*You know, I had the opportunity of having three brothers signed professionally. They were my models to follow and back then I viewed them like superheroes, like big baseball players and I said, “Well, I have to be as good or better than every one of them.” So I fully committed to this at what was age 12 -- because I played soccer before, I liked to play soccer but in the Dominican soccer doesn’t have a lot of life. [I did my training] and from there one of my brothers grabbed me to work me out and from there I went to a local program at the age of 14, and from there I have the opportunity to sign. Honestly, I was never blinded by money. Yeah, I saw [my brothers] who would always be walking around with what a Dominican might call ‘swag’ and things like that and I’d say, ‘Well, I want to be like them or maybe better than them,’ understand? That was the infatuation that gave me but not like in terms of money because I was never around money like that in abundance.*

Felipe’s path was similar. He had a much more visible baseball presence in his family, with three brothers all signed to the professional ranks. Even with such a prominent baseball presence in his family and an awareness that his brothers had the means to dress in a way that he deemed desirable as a kid, the pursuit of money was never front and center, primarily because had never been around wealth. Felipe pointed this out to highlight how a desire to look and dress like his brothers wasn’t tied to a conscious pursuit of money from an early age. Franklin, on the other hand, had a neighbor introduce him to the sport.

**Franklin:** Bueno, yo me enteré de béisbol fue a la edad de 11 años. Todavía recuerdo que empecé a jugar béisbol por un vecino mío que me dijo, ‘Ven, ven, vamos a jugar.’ Empecé a los 11 años. Yo me acuerdo de que mi madre me dijo ‘Si tú sabes que vas al play y [que] tú vas a estar yendo, saliendo, regresando al play, [y si no lo tratas como un compromiso,] mejor dejarlo y no te inscribas,’ y yo le dije ‘Mami, sí, sí, tranquila yo voy todos los días al play.’ Y de allí, de ese entonces comencé con mi carrera.

*Well, I found out about baseball at age 11. I still remember that I started playing baseball because a neighbor of mine told me ‘Come on, come on, we’re going to play.’ I started at age 11. I remember that my mom told me, ‘If you know that you’re going to the field and you’re going, leaving, coming back, [and you don’t treat it like a commitment,]*

*better to leave it and don't sign up,' and I told her, 'Mom, yeah, yeah, calm down. I'll go to the field everyday.' And from there on out I began my career.*

**Daniel:** Tú sabes que como dominicano yo empecé a jugar béisbol tarde. A practicar lo que se dice profesional [empecé] tarde. Porque yo con 15 años nunca había ido a un programa de nada. Yo jugaba, pero nada profesional ni liga sino solamente en los campos. Era así mismo lo que estoy diciendo. Era 'Hoy es sábado, vamos a jugar, vamos a jugar.' Invitábamos a muchachos de otra comunidad y jugamos dique un desafío [o competencia] como que 'Vamos a jugar un desafío, les vamos a ganar' pero nada así dique 'wao'.

*You know that as a Dominican I started to play baseball late. To practice what one would call professionally, [I started] late. Because at 15 I hadn't gone to a program or anything. I played but nothing professionally, not even a league, just at the local fields. It was exactly what I'm saying. It was, 'Today is Saturday, let's go play, let's go play.' We invited the kids from another neighborhood and we played what you'd call a challenge [or competition], like 'We're going to have a competition and we're going to beat you,' but nothing crazy, like "wow".*

Daniel's entry into professional baseball was different than most, signing later than the other interviewees at an age considered old for Dominican standards given the premium placed on 16-year-old amateurs. At an age when most international prospects likely would have already joined a local program and attended numerous showcases and tryouts, he was still playing baseball for fun. As each player's comments suggest, however, there is a moment in which baseball is no longer *only* about fun. That's not to say that there is always a stark "aha!" or shift from juvenile ignorance to calculated business acumen. Instead, most players described a gradual recognition, through accumulating observations and communications, that the baseball industry is anything but casual.

### **Baseball as a Business**

In discussing how a childhood game turns into a potential path to economic security and an eventual career, I asked interviewees when it was that they realized professional baseball was a massive industry. Each respondent cited his improvement, maturation, and scouts' external

projections of their future ability as key drivers in the years before signing a professional contract. In the scouting world, projecting a player's eventual talent level, after all, is the name of the game at any level of baseball, a task that proves especially hard with young, teenage players; trying to predict a player's future skill at age 13, 14, or 15 is anything but an exact science. As my interviewees confirmed, their improvement on the field increased the buzz around their names and resulted in having more eyes on them when they played. In the final few years before turning 16, evaluators of all types come to watch prospects -- some are scouts for major league teams while others are representatives or directors of local programs where young teens can hone their skills in the leadup to their targeted signing date. However, even as players inch closer to potentially signing a professional contract, the broader mechanics of the system can remain fuzzy, things that they only begin to grasp the more time they spend in a team's system and the higher up they go.

### *Scouts in the Stands and Community Encouragement*

**Chicho:** El hermano mayor mío también jugaba y era outfield, tenía un brazo potente, o sea un brazaletes pues, era un tipo compacto. Y se lo mostraron y todas esas cosas, le gustó, y ahí fue que empezamos a ver que se podía jugar pues profesional porque nos empezaron a hablar y todas esas cosas. Pero nosotros, como decimos allá, gente de campo pues, no sabíamos, nos fuimos en la primera [que le ofrecieron, el primer programa local]. Pensamos que sí, que sí sabían y todo eso, y resulta ser que la señora como era principiante tampoco sabía y le dañó el brazo al hermano mío, se lesionó porque no lo supieron llevar. Y yo estaba ilusionado y me quería ir con él para ese programa que tal que lo otro, pero el hermano mío pilló y supo que no me convenía pues. [En mi caso,] me di cuenta [que] fue [un negocio] cuando comencé a avanzar duro. Que comencé a ver que mucha gente empezaba a venir y a venir nada más a verme pues y empezaban a hablar conmigo y todas esas cosas, me di cuenta de que 'Cónchale, aquí se puede ser importante en esta vaina'. Para ese entonces no había escuchado [que el béisbol era un negocio] como ahorita. Están más impregnados ahora en el béisbol. Antes solo fue para divertirnos, nunca pensé en firmar o tampoco sabía que podía firmar pues. No sabía de eso pues, solo jugaba béisbol porque me gustaba. Hay personas y jugadores ya que desde que están jóvenes ya están pensando en firmar porque ya están como que más impregnados en el béisbol. Nosotros jugábamos más béisbol era como para divertirnos, yo nunca pensé en eso de firmar o algo así. Oye, tampoco sabía que se podía firmar pues,



no sabía cómo era eso pues, sino que jugaba béisbol porque me gustaba. Entonces yo cada vez que voy [a casa] veo más y más chamitos jóvenes entrenando en el estadio, veo que hay muchos programas locales, van por esos lados, entonces yo creo que sí, el firmar [ahora es] una influencia para ahorita las personas jóvenes pues.

*My older brother also played and was an outfielder, he had a big arm, like a cannon, he was a compact guy. And they tried him out and all those things, he liked it, and that's where we started to see that you could play professionally because people started talking to us and all that. But we were country people, like we say back home, we didn't know, we went with the first option [they offered him, the first local program]. We thought that they knew and all that and it turned out that the the woman was also a beginner who didn't really know either and ended up hurting my brother's arm, he got hurt because they didn't know how to build him up. And I was excited, I wanted to go with him to that program and all that but my brother stopped me and knew that it wasn't best for me. [In my case,] I realized [that] it was [a business] when I started to advance hard. I started to see that a lot of people began showing up and they came just to see me and they started to talk with me and all those things, I realized that 'Wow, this stuff here could be important.' At that point I hadn't heard [that baseball was a business] like now. They're more imbued with baseball now. Before it was just to have fun, I never thought about signing nor did I even know you could sign, I guess. I didn't know anything about it, I just played baseball because I liked it. There are people and players now that since they're young, they're thinking about signing because now they're more imbued with baseball. We played to have fun, I never thought about signing or anything like that. Seriously, I didn't even know what signing was, I didn't know how it was, rather, I was just playing because I liked it. So every time I go [home] I see more and more youngsters training at the stadium, I see there are a lot of local programs, they're going to those areas, so I think yes, signing, [is now] a big influence for young people.*

Chicho's account rests heavily on how much his brother influenced his understanding of the possibility of professional baseball, as he served as an example of what was necessary from a process standpoint and particularly, what could go wrong. It was his brother's path that contextualized Chicho's first engagement with baseball as a prospective career path, despite what he admitted was a limited understanding of sport's different levers and the different roles and connections of amateur preparation and professional signings. Interestingly, Chicho notes that kids seem more grooved towards signing professionally now than when he was coming up. Roberto and Simón felt similarly:

**Roberto:** Ahora, mayormente, los chamaquitos, los chiquiticos saben que van a firmar. O sea, en mi caso yo no sabía.

*Now, for the most part, kids, the young ones, know they're going to sign. Like, in my case, I didn't know.*

**Simón:** Yo diría que los tiempos han cambiado. Antes, por lo menos en Venezuela, uno se preocupaba por estudiar que era más el estudio que cualquier deporte pues. Todo era estudiar, estudiar, estudiar porque eso es lo que uno siempre venía haciendo de chiquito uno no sabía si iba a ser bueno, si iba a firmar -- siempre el béisbol era como una segunda opción para disfrutar. Pero ya que los tiempos han cambiado ya la gente la empezó a ver como un negocio -- yo diría para estos tiempos la gente ya lo toma, así como que no juegan por pasión, o sea quizás lo seamos así, pero los agentes y eso ya no lo vean así como que juegan por pasión o lo ven de otra manera pues. Yo pienso que eso se ha perdido.

*I'd say that times have changed. Before, at least in Venezuela, you were worried about studying, it was studies over any sport, that is. Everything was study, study, study, because that's what you had always done as a kid and you didn't know if you were going to be good, if you were going to sign -- baseball was always like a second option to enjoy. But now that times have changed, people started to view it as a business -- I would say that in the current moment people look at baseball like they don't play for passion, or maybe they do but the agents and all that, they might not view it like that, that they play for passion, or they look at it differently. I think the game has lost that.*

All three players sensed a change in how young amateurs are viewing the game. Unsurprisingly, as the increased mechanization of the signing system and the steady outpouring of talent from Latin American has only become more efficient and transparent over the last few decades. However, both Chicho and Simón recall a more romantic version of baseball -- real or imagined -- played with passion, played for enjoyment, contrasting it with what they perceived to be the more transactional nature of the game in recent years. Regardless, all my respondents stated that they never began playing the game with a professional contract or signing bonus in mind. It wasn't until encountering or being made aware of the more serious processes of professional baseball, be it in the form of scouts watching them play or local trainers urging them to pursue the sport more seriously, that a mental shift took place.

**Eduardo:** Yo tenía como 11 años, que fue un entrenador a llevarle un contrato a mi mamá para que lo firmara por un 30% [de mi bono eventual]. De ahí en adelante fue que pensaba más como que ‘Oh, esto es un negocio pues.’ Siempre los entrenadores de otros equipos decían ‘oye, tú eres bueno, mantente siempre practicando, no te descuides, trabaja duro, tú vas a llegar a firmar, tú vas a ser pelotero, tú vas a firmar’. Siempre me decían mucho eso los scouts de otros equipos, y uno se lo cree más porque cuando te lo dice alguien en particular que no tiene nada que ver contigo, tú te lo crees más. Es cuando uno empieza más a trabajar. Aparte, también los vecinos [tienen que ver]. Tú ves, que yo llegaba los fines de semana a la casa [del entrenamiento], cuando llegaba de la pensión o del programa local, que los veía que me saludaban como contentos de que ‘Cónchale, nosotros vamos a tener un pelotero, mira como él se esfuerza, como se va temprano a correr,’ y todo eso. Eso va por lo que uno escucha de la gente alrededor tuyo, como te hablan, como te aconsejan, cómo te dicen las cosas -- desde que te motivan, entonces ahí, tú dices ‘Coño, yo soy bueno, yo tengo que seguir atrás de mi sueño.’

*I was probably 11 years old, when a trainer went to my mom with a contract for me to sign for 30% [of my eventual bonus]. From there on out was when I started thinking ‘oh, this is a business then.’ Trainers from other teams always said, ‘hey, you’re good, keep practicing, don’t let up, work hard, you’re going to end up signing, you’re going to be a baseball player, you’re going to sign.’ Scouts from other teams were always telling me that, and you start to believe it more because when someone you don’t know, who doesn’t have any tie to you says it, you believe it more. That’s when you start to work more. Aside from that, you’re neighbors [matter] too. Understand I’d come back home [from training] on the weekend, when I’d come back from the boarding house or local program, I’d see them and they’d say hi, happy, like ‘wow, we’re going to have a ballplayer, look at how he’s pushing himself, how he’s leaving early to go run,’ and all that. That goes along with what you hear from the people around you, how they talk to you, how they give you advice, how they tell you things -- from the time they start motivating you, then you say, ‘damn, I’m good, I have to pursue my dream.’*

**Daniel:** Yo jugaba los sábados donde nosotros jugamos de hobby y alguna gente decía ‘Coño, pero este muchacho parece un profesional.’ Fue allí que la gente dijeron ‘Oye, vete de aquí, sal de este campo que de ti se puede sacar algo, tú puedes agarrar una firma.’ [Yo jugaba en los campos locales] hasta que un señor me miró, me miró la mano, me miró el tamaño y me dijo ‘Oye, pero vas a entrenar por el programa mío y tú nunca sabes.’ Yo dije, ‘Bueno, yo no estoy haciendo nada en mi casa déjame yo arrancar para allá.’ \*Retóricamente\* Y [en ese momento] por allá había scout? ¿Qué sabía yo? Ni siquiera sabía que era un scout. ¿Qué sé yo qué es lo que es un scout? No sabía que era un tryout, no sabía nada de eso.

*I played on Saturdays where we’d all play as a hobby and some people would say, ‘damn, but this kid looks like a professional.’ That’s when people said, ‘Hey, get out of here, get off this field, you could make something of yourself, you could get a deal.’ [I played on the local fields] until a man looked at me, he looked at my hand, he looked at my size, and he said, ‘Hey, you’re going to train at my program, you never know.’ I said, ‘Well, I’m not doing anything at home, let me head over there.’ \*Rhetorically\* Were*

*there scouts out there at that time? What did I know? I didn't even know what a scout was. What do I know about what a scout is? I didn't know what a tryout was, I didn't know any of that.*

**Franklin:** Yo me di cuenta [que fue un negocio] a los 14 años cuando hice mi primer tryout. Yo me di cuenta de ese entonces que [existía la posibilidad] de ser un jugador de grandes ligas porque el mismo scout que [originalmente] me escouteó ese día me dijo, 'Oye, a ti lo único que te hace falta es echar un par de libras.' De allí me enamoré del béisbol. Allá mayormente los buscones te observan y te dan seguimiento y dicen a uno 'Mira, yo creo que tú tienes talento para ser pelotero,' y ellos te dan las oportunidades.

*I realized it was a business at age 14 when I did my first tryout. I realized from then on that [the possibility] of being a big leaguer [existed] because the same scout that had [originally] scouted me told me, 'Listen, the only thing that you need to do is gain a couple pounds.' From there, I fell in love with baseball. Over there the trainers observe you, follow you, and say, 'Look, I think you have talent to be a ballplayer,' and they give you opportunities.*

**Roberto:** [De nuevo,] yo empecé jugando yo no sabía que firmaba gente ni nada de eso, yo empecé *jugando*. Después de que yo ya cumplí los 14 los de mi alrededor me dijeron 'Ok, mira. Ya tú estás más o menos bien y la gente ha venido a verte. Estás tú por firmar.' Y yo [dije,] '¿Qué es lo que es firmar?' [ y me dicen] 'No, jugar profesional,' y yo digo '¿En serio?' me [dijeron] 'Sí' y yo, 'A no, pues, vamos a darle, vamos a darle.' A los 14 fue que yo, mi mente se puso que eso era, que yo podía firmar y jugar profesional. Pero [antes] yo iba al play a divertirme todo a divertirme, no tenía en mente dique de jugar profesional.

*[Again,] I started playing not knowing that people signed or any of that, I started **playing**. After I turned 14 the people around me said, 'Okay, look. You're pretty good and people have come to watch you. You're going to sign.' And I said, 'What's signing?' and they said, 'No, play professionally,' and I go, 'Seriously?' and they said, 'Yes' and I go, 'Okay then, well, let's do it, let's do it.' At age 14 was when my mind decided that was it, that I could sign and play professionally. But [before that] I went to the field to have fun, always to have fun, I wasn't thinking about playing professionally.*

**Simón:** Yo sí te puedo decir que jugar béisbol para mi en mi niñez no fue una opción como que de niño 'te vamos a hacer para que firme de allí vamos a resolver la vida pues'. Yo si te puedo decir que jugué lo disfruté y después ya grande fue que dijimos 'Ok si hay chance de firmar vamos a trabajar para firmar,' pero desde muy niño no teníamos esa visión. Solo uno se iba, jugaba, disfrutaba y ya. Quizás mis primos no tenían esa visión, pero si te puedo decir que mi papá, desde niño, siempre me decía que quería que yo firmara y que jugara con los Yankees de paso, [como para motivarme]. Desde muy niño, no te estoy mintiendo eso es la pura verdad. Desde muy niño siempre me hablaba [así] y yo pienso que a mi papá a él le gusta el béisbol más que a mi. Pero tú sabes cuando uno está niño eso ni te pasa por la mente. Pero ya, así como para firmar que ya empezamos a escuchar que era bueno para jugar profesional ya cuando tenía como 12 años.

Tú sabes que donde yo vivo eso es un pueblo y para allá antes los scouts no iban para allá porque es muy lejos. Pero una vez nosotros vinimos del municipio donde yo vivo hacia la ciudad, vinimos a jugar en un [torneo] campeonato y en ese campeonato yo lo hice bien, quedé más valioso. Había un señor que era presidente de un equipo muy bueno y de nombre en la ciudad entonces [después del campeonato] él fue para mi pueblo para hablar con mi papá y mi mamá para traerme a su equipo. Eso era pequeñas ligas. La primera vez que él fue mi mamá no me dejó porque como te dije allí estaba estudiando [pero eventualmente] yo me fui para jugar para su equipo en la ciudad. Entonces allí empezó todo, allí empecé a jugar y me veían los scouts.

Uno empieza a ver el seguimiento que están tratando, los scouts buscándote, empieza a sonar, tryouts, desde que uno llega a una presencia valiosa pues. De allí uno sabe 'Ok yo estoy en una buena posición.' Entonces por lo menos uno sabiendo eso -- éramos de una familia muy humilde -- entonces uno empieza a ver 'Ok ya y tengo chance de cómo por lo menos sacar mi familia adelante con esto.' ¿Entiendes? Y de allí uno empieza a trabajar de tal manera que tú, coño, puedes hacer lo posible por agarrar un buen dinero y así ayudar a tu familia y ayudar a mucha gente de tu alrededor.

*I can tell you that playing baseball for me as a kid wasn't an option like from a young age 'We're going to groom you to sign and from there we're set for life.' I can tell you that I played, I enjoyed it, and after that, once I was big was when we said, 'Okay, there's a chance to sign, we're going to work to sign,' but from a young age we didn't have that vision. You would just go, play, have fun and that's it. Maybe my cousins didn't have that vision for me but I can tell you my dad, from the time I was a kid, always told me that he wanted me to sign and even play for the Yankees, [to motivate me]. From a very young age, I'm not kidding, it's the honest truth. From a young age he always talked to me [like that] and I think that my dad liked baseball more than me. But you know that as a kid that doesn't even cross your mind. But that said, in terms of signing, we started to hear that it was good to play professionally when I was around 12.*

*You know that where I live is a town and out there, back then the scouts didn't go out there because it's far. But one time we came from the municipality where I live towards the city, we came to play in a championship tournament and I played well there, I ended up getting MVP. There was a man who was the president of a very good, well-respected team in the city so [after the tournament] he went to my town to talk with my mom and dad to bring me over to his team. That was little league. The first time he went my mom didn't let me because, like I told you, I was studying but eventually I went to play for his team in the city. So that's where everything started, that's where I started to play and scouts saw me.*

*You realize how they're monitoring you, the scouts looking for you, a buzz starts to build, tryouts, until you reach a valuable level, I guess. From there you know, 'Okay, I'm in a good position.' So, at a minimum, knowing this -- we were from a really humble family -- you start to see, 'Okay, I have a chance to at least help my family with this,' you understand? And from there you start to work in such a way that, damn, you'll do*

*whatever you can to get good money and help your family and help a lot of people around you.*

Roberto, Eduardo, Simón and Daniel all remember having community members tell them that they had potential, sharing how scouts and local trainers had come to watch them play. In Eduardo's case, he had a singular moment in which a local trainer made an offer to train him for 30% of his future signing bonus -- a standard rate for trainers who take on pre-teens and teens, house them, feed them, and work with them in the leadup to their 16th birthday and July 2nd signing date. Eduardo recalls that at age 11, after his family received such an offer, he started to recognize that baseball was more than just a game. That said, the community aspect and praise that these three players received from non-family members and at times relative strangers was important in their self-awareness as players. As Eduardo noted, "Uno se lo cree más porque cuando te lo dice alguien en particular que no tiene nada que ver contigo, tú te lo crees más. // *You start to believe it more because when someone you don't know, who doesn't have any tie to you says it, you believe it more.*" Though one's understanding or recognition of baseball as a professional path may not come all at once, the jump from playing the game for fun to formalizing one's efforts can happen organically. Also, while the business model of the international signing system has become increasingly streamlined, thus making signing more visible for players at a younger age, players' responses also revealed the degree to which individual careers aren't necessarily planned from the onset; major league teams' presence in Latin America was already prominent when each of these players was of signing age, however, playing professionally didn't always cross their minds until it became clear that such a possibility existed, until they knew they had a chance.

## *Local Programs as a Stepping Stone*

For other players, the business side of the sport didn't come into relief until they were at a local program, already integrated into an informal feeder system for MLB and preparing more rigorously with the goal of signing on July 2nd clearly in sight.

**Felipe:** Yo reconocí [que fue un negocio] realmente, David, cuando llegué al programa local en mi comunidad, allí fue donde yo pude abrir los ojos y que yo veía que a la mayoría de los muchachos les ofrecían dinero. Allí yo dije “Bueno, pues espérate esto es un negocio bueno entonces yo tengo que fajarme y no ser uno más del montón sino fajarme y salir adelante. Realmente a esa edad [cuando era chiquito] no tenía noción de lo que era el dinero. Yo simplemente jugaba porque realmente me gustaba, nunca puse en querer dinero hasta que fui ya recapacitando y avanzando de edad. Yo allí vi, entendí que esto es un negocio.

Tú sabes, David, que es lo bueno de tú tener una buena educación y tú sabes lo que uno quiere. Ya cuando tú sabes que tú tienes una persona educada tú la puedes soltar en cualquier lugar y tú sabes que eso no [le] va a dar vergüenza. Eso fue lo que mi papá siempre me inculcaba a mí. Cuando llegué al [programa local], o sea, nunca había estado en un complejo así y llegue como una persona que no sabía como expresarme bien con las personas quizás porque me daba vergüenza. Pero fui aprendiendo, aprendiendo, aprendiendo y batallando sabía que yo tenía que trabajar fuerte porque no quería ser uno más del montón sino una persona que quería sobresalir de los demás. Había veces que los demás estaban prácticamente ready para acostarse y yo estaba cogiendo loma, ya eso eran a las 9 o 8 de la noche, haciendo gimnasio a esa hora con pesas. O sea, no me [hacía] un profesional, pero por lo menos hacía algo y yo sabía que eso me iba a llevar a otro nivel, al nivel que los demás quizás no podían llegar. Si no haces las cosas que te salgan del corazón yo digo que tú no vas a tener buenos resultados.

Como te dije ahorita, allí [en el programa local] yo aprendí que esto es un negocio. Ya lo que yo decía era, “Bueno, yo quiero firmar y andar en un buen vehículo, tener mi familia por lo menos bien, entonces ya lo veía como un negocio y sabía que tenía que fajarme -- que eso no era de boca que yo lo podía conseguir sino fajándome desde temprana edad.

*I recognized [it was a business], honestly, David, when I arrived at the local program in my community, that's where I was able to open my eyes and saw that they were offering money to most of the kids there. That's where I said, 'Okay, hold on, this is a good business so I have to push myself and not be just another face in the crowd, I've gotta push myself and get ahead.' Honestly, at that age, [when I was young] I didn't have a notion of what money was. I simply played because I honestly liked it, I never focused on wanting money until I started reconsidering and getting older. That's where I saw, where I understood that this is a business.*

*You know, David, the good part in you having a good education and you know what it is someone wants. When you know that you have an educated person you can throw them anywhere and you know that [they] won't be embarrassed. That's what my dad always inculcated in me. When I arrived at the local program, that is, I had never been in a complex like that and I arrived as someone who didn't know how to express myself well with others, maybe because I was embarrassed. But I kept learning, learning, learning, and battling knowing that I had to work hard because I didn't want to be another face in the crowd, but rather a person who wanted to stand out from the rest. There were times when everyone else was practically ready for bed and I was getting after it at like 9 or 8 at night, working out and lifting weights. That didn't make me a professional but at least I was doing something and I knew that that would bring me to another level, to a level that the others maybe couldn't reach. If you don't do things that come from the heat I'd say that you're not going to have good results.*

*Like I told you just now, there [at the local program] I learned that this is a business. What I said was, 'Okay, I want to sign and have a nice car, make sure my family is taken care of, so I saw it as a business and I knew that I had to push myself-- that this wasn't something I could achieve by just talking about it, but by pushing myself from a young age.*

**Daniel:** Y de allí, [en el programa local] fui cogiendo como decimos nosotros el gusto a la pelota. Entonces en esa trayectoria me fui enterando cómo era eso que es lo que era un 'julio 2' pero me hicieron un pelotero profesional, ¿me entiendes? Fue allí que yo fui aprendiendo. Yo me dije 'Wao, que yo tenía conocimiento de lo que era la pelota -- tres outs, el otro batea -- pero no nada así de profesionalismo.'

Con 18 años me llevan para el programa y [dije] 'Mierda, ¿qué es esto?' Y me presentan una agente [por ejemplo] 'Mira este tipo de los Yankees, este es el tipo que te va a ver,' y dije 'Bueno, esto es lo profesional.' De allí me fui enamorando, enamorando [con el deporte] hasta que no había lunes ni domingo, ya para mí, todos los días eran días de ir al play. De lunes a lunes.

*So from there, [at the local program] I started getting what we'd call an appetite for baseball. So on that trajectory I started realizing how all of this worked, what a 'July 2nd' was but they made me a professional player, you understand? It was there that I started learning. I said to myself, 'Wow, I had some understanding of what baseball was - - three outs, the other guy hits -- but nothing like this in terms of professionalism.'*

*At age 18 they took me to the program and I said, 'Shit, what is this?' They introduced me to an agent [for example], 'Hey, this guy is from the Yankees, this is the guy that's going to watch you,' and I said, 'Okay, this is professional.' From there I started falling in love, falling in love [with the sport] until there wasn't a Monday or a Sunday for me, every day was a day to go the field. Monday to Monday.*



Local programs regularly bring players into tryout settings and face to face with agents, scouts, and major league team reps for the first time. Felipe notes that his conception of baseball as a vehicle to generate income came when he saw other players from his program begin to sign deals. It's also where both Felipe and Daniel signal that their work ethic and conceptions of professionalism started to take shape, as Daniel admits not knowing much about the technicalities of baseball before arriving at his local program, while Felipe remembers having an awareness of the sheer volume of aspiring professional players and a desire to not be just another name amidst a sea of players who didn't "make it". Each of the players who I interviewed is a current or former major league player, thus they all form part of the select, lucky few who *did* "make it". Achievement comes in different forms, of course. A young player who signs for a substantial bonus on July 2nd could be considered to have "made it" if he earns enough to alter the course of his or his family's life. For others signing more humble bonuses, the specter of substantial economic gain rests in the distant chance to play in the big leagues or get added to a team's 40-man roster where player salaries spike. Other signees are satisfied with the steady wages of minor league baseball, albeit at rates historically lower than minimum wage, as the paycheck represents a step up from what they might have earned back home. Signing, then, presents a multitude of economic pathways with varying material and symbolic values depending on a player's background. In the current international signing system, July 2nd can signal a huge payday, the beginning of a long career, or a day of disappointment; outside of the top rungs of a signing class, many players receive smaller bonuses, while many more don't even receive offers. The majority that do end up signing, regardless of bonus amount, never reach the big leagues. In the next section, I discuss the signing process as told by my interviewees.

## The Signing Experience

Signing a professional contract can represent a huge achievement in a young player's life and marks their first official step towards the major leagues. However, the signing system forces players to engage with both bureaucratic regulations, stringent identity investigations, and hazy valuations of self-worth tied to one's age. Additionally, signing professionally can also mark a moment for players to repay those who helped them reach their initial goal; friends and family, independent trainers, directors of local programs, or agents (at times all the same person) who worked with a player before signing receive a substantial cut of the player's signing bonus. Though I choose not to delve too deeply into the nuance of player and independent trainer relationships in this section,<sup>176</sup> it's important to understand the signing experience as a key point of interaction between a "formal" 1st World party represented by team/league with the "informal" 3rd World entity represented by the player, the player's family, and independent trainers. I asked respondents to reflect on their signing experiences.

### *July 2nd: Age, Identity, and Value*

Franklin explained the excitement he had on his signing day despite the fact that he didn't receive what was considered a significant signing bonus,

**Franklin:** [La firma] fue un momento muy emocionante porque yo no me lo creía, no me creía eso. Cuando me dijeron estaba yo cenando y dejé hasta la cena y llamé a mi mama y le dije, 'Mami me firmaron,' y mi mama ni me lo creía -- cuando llegué al otro día a la casa y le dije que me iban a firmar [eso fue] cuando me creyó. Me acuerdo todavía de que cuando me llamaron para firmar me dijo el señor [que me entrenaba], 'Te [van] a firmar, pero te [van] a dar menos de 50 [mil],' y yo le dije 'No, firma por lo que te den, lo que quiero yo es jugar béisbol.' Es un momento que no se me olvida todavía.

*My signing was a really exciting moment because I didn't believe it, I didn't believe it was happening. When they told me I was having dinner and I just left my meal, called my*

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<sup>176</sup> Alan Klein's *Work in Dominican Baseball* offers the most comprehensive account of independent trainers and how they fit into the broader business of baseball.

*mom, and said 'Mom, they signed me me,' and my mom didn't believe me -- when I got home the next day and I told her that they were going to sign me [that's] when she believed me. I still remember that when they called me to sign the man [that was training me] told me, 'They're [going] to sign yo but they're [going] to give you less than 50 thousand,' and I told him, 'No, sign for whatever they give you, what I want to do is play baseball.' It's a moment I still haven't forgotten.*

Chicho offered a different recollection of July 2nd and his emotions during the signing process.

**Chicho:** Yo sabía más que todo era por los compañeros que yo tenía que ya iban a firmar justamente del programa local donde yo estaba. Cuando yo vi que firmaron y que fue un BOOM, porque uno de ellos fue Marco Pérez, que firmó el año antes que yo, y esa vaina fue un boom, y yo dije “Cónchale, está bien julio 2”. Me dijeron que tú tienes que firmar julio 2, que los julio 2 son los que importan, que después de ahí, si tu firmas, no importa mucho. Y después de ahí fue que me empezaron a decir y a meter en la cabeza que [tenías] que ser julio 2”

Yo creo que firmé julio 3 y ahí empecé a pensar, ‘Cónchale, ¿será que no valía mucho? porque para ese entonces otros [jugadores prominentes] estaban cerrados pues, ya en enero ya estaba pues, para ellos. Que ese mismo 2, ya estaba cerrado, ya hasta en el periódico y todo salía. Y cuando yo vi que no salí ni nada, yo me sentí mal. Imagínate desde que llegué al complejo de mi programa, empezaron a decirle a uno que tú vales tanto, que tu vas a hacer esto - que uno se lo mete en la cabeza pues y se lo cree. Que cuando no pasa a veces uno se siente mal pues. La gente me explicó ‘Tú fuiste el más caro - eso vale mucho. No creo que tú juegues en Dominicana ni aquí en Venezuela y eso es un gran salto.’ Y [allí] me di cuenta que el bono influye pues.

*More than anything I knew about things through the friends that I had that were going to sign from the local program where I was training. When I saw that they signed and it was a BOOM, because one of them was Marco Pérez, who signed the year before me, and that was a boom, and I said, 'Wow, this July 2nd is good.' They told me that you have to sign July 2, that the July 2nd guys are the ones that matter, that after that, if you sign, it doesn't matter much. And after that was when they started to say and get it in my head that you had to be July 2nd.*

*I think I signed July 3rd and I started to think, 'Wow, am I not worth that much?' because by that time other prominent players had already closed deals, in January it was already done for them. So that exact day, July 2, it was already done, even in the newspaper, everything came out. And when I saw that I didn't show up or anything, I felt bad. Imagine that from the time I arrived at the local program, they started to tell you that you're worth this much, that you're going to do this -- you start to get it in your head and you believe it. So when it doesn't happen, you feel bad. People explained to me 'You were the most expensive - that's worth a lot. I don't even think you'll play in the Dominican or here in Venezuela and that's a big jump.' And [that's when] I learned that the bonus influences things, I guess.*

Chicho's familiarity with the scope of the international signing period and the pressurized discourse around signing on July 2nd originated due in part to seeing his friends and colleagues from the local program sign deals. Knowing that his contemporaries received bonuses on July 2nd as well as the constant reinforcement he had heard about the importance of July 2nd from the coaches and trainers at his local program underscored the date in Chicho's head. The constant repetition and goal setting tied to July 2nd set Chicho up for what was short-lived disappointment as others finalized agreements while he was left seemingly empty-handed. Though he soon realized that he had received one of the largest bonuses of the signing period, Chicho still recalled the momentary brush with failure at such a young age and understood relative to the incessant focus on a player's value as tied to a firm date.

Roberto offered similar thoughts on the inherent value that such a signing system ascribes to 16-year-olds and what that means for those who don't sign at age 16. While not the same as Chicho's momentary scare, the topic continues to be hotly debated within Latin American baseball circles, though not all that frequently in visible, prominent US baseball circles. The pressures that the signing system applies to players such that they falsify their age or take steroids to increase their payout on July 2nd were already covered in Chapter 2 but bear repeating here. Whether it was Danny Almonte and his family or an international signee, locating the responsibility and potential "misdeeds" on the individual or group of individuals overlooks the power structures governing people's lives and decision-making processes. As Alan Klein asserts, "it strains credulity to believe that an eighteen-year-old baseball player is losing value by the month. Yet few place blame where it belongs: squarely on MLB's decision to put the highest value on the legally youngest Dominican players. The older a person is, the lower the

individual's value in this market."<sup>177</sup> Klein criticizes MLB's maintenance of lower signing ages for international signees and higher valuation for younger teens. To apply a US lens of legality and moral judgment on those who might engage in fraudulent acts to secure a viable economic future requires a level of dissonance from the US historical role in underdeveloping the Dominican Republic and parts of the Caribbean more broadly. Expropriating the responsibility and desperation of those willing to bend the rules as uniquely Dominican or Latin American follows the same path, avoiding a reckoning with US influence in Latin America and locating any behavior deemed reprehensible (by US standards) as the product of some distant, unfamiliar, 3rd World poverty and chicanery. Roberto's comments raise questions and offer a line of thinking common among Latin American players and staff within professional baseball.

**Roberto:** ¿Cuanta gente, cuantos pitchers no hay en Dominicana que están abajo con 18, 19 años que están bien y ya la gente no los están viendo por la edad? [Si cambiara la edad de firma] sería mucho mejor porque allá hay mucho talento que se desperdicia por eso porque no dan oportunidad. Dicen que están viejos, pero no están viejos nada, no están viejos nada. Para allá, para dominicana están viejos, pero aquí, ¿aquí la mejor firma es cuando? 17, 18 años? Para tú firmar allá [en Dominicana] con 18 años tienes que ser un tipo que haga una cosa que esté fuera de tu alcance. Tienes que hacer una cosa increíble firmar con 18.

*How many people, how many pitchers are there in the Dominicana that are somehow lesser at age 18, 19 that are good and people aren't seeing them just because of their age? [If the signing age changed] it would be much better because there's a lot of talent there that gets wasted due to the fact that they're not giving them opportunities. They say that they're old but they're not old at all, they're not old at all. Over there, in the Dominican they're old but here, here the best deals are when? At 17 or 18 years old? For you to sign over there [in the Dominican] at 18 you have to be someone that's doing something that's out of your reach. You have to do something unbelievable to sign at 18.*

Felipe echoed Roberto's sentiments, lamenting the fact that the system constrains the possibilities for so many Latin American players over such a brief window:

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<sup>177</sup> Klein, *Dominican Baseball: New Pride, Old Prejudice*, 124.

**Felipe:** Es algo realmente que -- esta es mi opinión personal -- que los scouts y los buscones están aportando a que eso suceda. Porque realmente, lo que yo no logro entender es si tú firmas un muchacho de 16 años él tiene que jugar [profesionalmente] con 17 años porque [por las reglas] uno no puede jugar con 16. ¿Qué pasa? Si tú no firmas con 17 no puedes jugar ese mismo año. Entonces ya un muchacho de 17 años lo están descartando lo cogen para relleno. Entonces ya cuando [uno] tiene 18 años ya no te quieren ni ver. Entonces eso es lo que fuerza a lo que los peloteros que ya se ven con una edad avanzada que saben que como está este negocio y que no se ven con esa bulla así tan grande, lo que hacen es quitarse la edad a ver si pueden enganchar una, como decimos nosotros. ¿Tú entiendes? Y eso es lo que realmente frustra porque dime tú, esos peloteros que tienen esa edad [no adecuada] dejaron todo, la mayoría dejaron la escuela, la mayoría dejan prácticamente todo para dedicarse a lo que es la pelota y si te daña la carrera así porque tú no puedes firmar porque tienes una edad más o una edad menos es algo sumamente frustrante.

Tú sabes que cuando firmas en los estados unidos., prácticamente [el nivel] más bajito que puedes jugar es la rookie. Si tú vas a jugar la rookie con 18 años ya tú estás quizás un poquito bien, eso es como que tú juegas un verano en dominicana [en la DSL]. [Por ejemplo], tú juegas un verano en dominicana con 17, ya tú vienes para acá a los 18 allí estamos como quien dice a la misma edad. Pero ¿qué pasa? Eso es lo que lleva las personas que se quiten la edad porque dime tú, [si] yo un pelotero y que yo vea a todo el mundo firmando y muchachos que estaban mucho mejores que yo firmando y le dan pasando y le dan pasando eso me va a llevar a yo cometer ese hecho quizás porque yo lo que quiero es conseguir una firma sea como sea.

*It's something that really -- this is my personal opinion -- that the scouts and local trainers are contributing to. Because honestly, what I can't get my head around is if you sign a 16-year-old kid he has to play [professionally] at age 17 because [due to the rules] you can't play at 16. So what happens? If you don't sign that year at age 17 you can't play that same year. So now they're casting aside a 17-year-old kid or they get him as a filler. So now when you're 18 they don't even want to see you. So that's what forces players that are now considered to be too old, that now how this business works, and aren't seen as generating buzz or interest, what they do is lower their age to see if they can hook onto something, as we say. You get it? And that's what's honestly frustrating because you tell me, those players that are at that [unacceptable] age they left everything behind, the majority left school, the majority practically drop everything to dedicate themselves to baseball and if it hurts your career because you can't sign due to the fact that you have a higher age or lower age is extremely frustrating.*

*You know that when you sign in the US, basically the lowest [level] you can play at is rookie ball. If you're going to play rookie ball at age 18 you're already in a pretty good spot, that's almost like you played a summer in the Dominican, in the Dominican Summer League. [For example,] you play a summer in the Dominican at 17, then you come here at 18, we're around the same age. But what happens? This is what causes people to shave off their age because you tell me, if I'm a player and I see everyone signing and kids that were a lot better than me signing, and they're passing me, and they're passing*

*me, that might bring me to commit this deed because what I want is to sign a deal at whatever cost.*

Both Felipe and Roberto express their frustration with the existing signing system, giving voice to Alan Klein's assertion that it "strains credulity" or involves a degree of mental gymnastics to see how a player is losing value once he passes his 16th birthday. For Roberto and Felipe, it's difficult to reconcile how one could consider 18-year-olds as somehow "too old". Felipe notes that in an environment where such logic prevails, where you as an at age 18 see everyone passing you by and are committed to doing whatever you need to do to sign, falsifying your age or taking steroids suddenly doesn't seem so crazy. As discussed in Chapter 2, even in the cases when no rules are bent or broken or no workaround has occurred, the perception of Latin American criminality remains. On top of that, merely reaching a deal at a desirable age isn't the only hurdle for Latin American players. Cases of age falsification and positive steroid tests come after an official MLB investigation into the identity of each player. The administrative and bureaucratic components of MLB's investigation process and any gray area relating to a player's identity can have drastic, material effects for Latin American amateurs, even when such investigations yield inconclusive information. Take Felipe: he had several teams bidding for him as July 2nd approached but a narrative within his own neighborhood created enough uncertainty around his age such that teams felt as though there was too much risk involved in signing him. As a result, multiple teams retracted or greatly reduced their offers.

**Felipe:** Tú sabes, David, a mi me pasó eso. A mi decían que yo tenía mi edad. Yo nunca dude de mi porque yo sabía que mi papá no era una persona que miente. Tú sabes que esa gente mayor, de antes esa gente son muy estrictas ya que antes era muy difícil hablarle una mentira a tu papá o a tu mamá, tú sabías que si lo hacías tú tenías problemas. Entonces la historia era, David, que había un programa allá llamado 'el Futuro' pero ¿que pasa? Los hermanos míos, como te dije, jugaban -- ellos me metieron a jugar campesina con 14 años. Entonces allí mi nombre empezó a mencionarse mucho en mi pueblo, pero había un torneo llamado 'el Futuro' que era de muchachos -- o sea de eso de campesina yo jugaba con hombres, tipos firmados, tipos que habían jugado grandes ligas, y firmados

doble A, triple A, tipos grandes, ¿entiendes? El único novatico allí era yo en ese entonces. ¿Qué pasa? Ya como te dije mi nombre empezó a sonar allá por el barrio, 'Fulano, fulano, que el hijo de Miguel, que el otro' entonces pasó lo siguiente: Había ese torneo, 'el Futuro'. En 'el Futuro' yo no podía jugar con los que tenían 14 -- eran de 13 a 14 y de 15 a 16 o sea dos categorías diferentes. A mi no me podían meter en la de 14 porque yo estaba por encima de la liga de los de 14. Me tenían en una de 16 a 18, 16 a 18 pero yo tenía 14 años. Entonces el acuerdo que nosotros quedamos fue el que me preguntara yo tenía que decirle que tenía 16 años porque no podía jugar en lo del 16 teniendo 14 años, ¿Entiendes? Entonces ese fue el acuerdo porque mi hermano conocía al presidente [del torneo], ese fue el acuerdo que nosotros quedamos entonces cuando ellos me preguntaban yo decía que tenía 16. Pero ¿qué pasó? Eso realmente me hizo un gran daño porque tú sabes cómo son los scouts allá, que van a investigar por tu casa entonces cuando fueron a investigar a mi por mi casa decían que yo tenía mi edad que yo había antes tenido. Ya en esa época yo ya tenía 15 y [los scouts] decían que yo tenía 17 porque tenía supuestamente dos años más, pero yo lo hice para poder jugar en el torneo 'del Futuro' de la categoría más grande no en la chiquita porque realmente no me sentía bien [en la categoría más baja]. Entonces eso me afectó mucho, me afectó mucho porque hubo equipos que me habían ofrecido mucho dinero y me decían que no que me tenían que bajar el bono y me iban a seguir investigando porque [según ellos] les dije que tenía más edad [de la] en el acuerdo. Y yo decía, 'No, no. Yo no tengo más edad. Esa es la edad mía.' Entonces allí [estuvimos], hablando, hablando, hablando, hablando hasta que un equipo me agarró y me firmó. Entonces de allí, los demás equipos -- o sea ese equipo fue como quien dice 'el que se tomó el riesgo' -- pero ellos sabían que yo no estaba mochado porque [ese equipo] sí me investigaron de una forma correcta pero los otros de una vez me descartaron porque escuchaban por el barrio que yo tenía más edad de la cuenta. Entonces eso fue realmente una pequeña frustración para mí porque yo sabía en lo que yo estaba y entonces estaban vociferando que yo tenía más edad de la que yo tenía.

*You know, David, that happened to me. They told me that I wasn't as old as I said. I never doubted myself because I knew that my dad wasn't someone who lied. You know that older people like that, those people from that era are very strict such that back then it was really hard for you to tell a lie to your dad or mom, you knew that if you did that you had problems. So, the story goes, David, that there was a program there called 'the Future' but what happens? My brothers, like I told you, played -- they got me involved in pickup games at 14. So people started mentioning my name around town but there was a tournament there called "the Future" that was for boys -- in other words, in that pickup stuff I was playing with men, signed guys, guys who had played in the big leagues, guys who were signed playing in Double-A, Triple-A, big dudes, you know? The only little rookie there at that time was me. What happens? Like I already told you, my name was starting to make noise around the neighborhood, 'This guy, that guy, the son of Miguel, this thing,' so the following happened: There was this tournament, 'The Future'. In 'The Future' I couldn't play with the 14-year-olds -- there were 13 to 14 year-olds and 15 to 16-year-olds that is, two different categories. They couldn't put me in the 14s because I was better than the entire 14-year-old league. They had me in one for 16 to 18, 16 to 18 but I was 14. So the agreement we made was that whoever asked me, I had to tell him I was 16 because I couldn't play with the 16s being 14, you get it? So that was the deal because my brother knew the president of [the tournament], that was the deal we made so*



*when they asked me I said I was 16. But, what happened? That honestly hurt me a lot because you know how the scouts are over there, they're going to go investigate around where you live, so when they went to investigate me around my area people said I was as old as I actually had back then. At that time I was 15 and [the scouts] said I was 17 because I supposedly was two years older but I had done it to be able to play in 'the Future' tournament at the highest level not in the younger one because I honestly didn't feel good playing [in the lowest category.] So that affected me a lot, it affected me a lot because there were teams that had offered me a lot of money and they told me that they had to lower my bonus and that they were going to keep investigating because [according to them] I told them I was older than I the age [from the] deal. And I said, "No, no. I'm not older, that's my real age." So there [we were], talking, talking, talking, talking, until a team grabbed me and signed me. So from there, all the other teams -- that is to say, that team was the one that you could say 'took the risk' -- but [that team] knew that I wasn't shaving off years because they investigated me the right way but the other ones threw me out right away because they heard in the neighborhood that I was older than the record. So that was honestly a small frustration because I knew what I was and then they were ranting that I was older than I really was.*

Felipe's experience is something that would never come to light for the casual observer yet had sizable material consequences for him and his family. Though he never failed an investigation or was flagged for having broken any laws or MLB rules, the seed of doubt surrounding his age was enough to reduce the amount of money he received. His case demonstrates how the imposition of bureaucratic regulation and the *perception* of deceit on the part of Latin American players can affect those it isn't meant to inhibit. Daniel on the other hand, represents one of the few players who, as Roberto said, did indeed do "something unbelievable," to secure a contract at age 18. After he signed at an age considered "old" in Latin America, those around him made him aware of the sort of effort and performance he would have to demonstrate if he expected to succeed professionally after getting a "late start."

**Daniel:** [La experiencia de la firma mía fue rara] una por la edad. Tú sabes que un muchacho con 18 años tirando 85-88 millas uno dice 'este no tiene proyección y está [demasiado] flaquito al fin.' Pero entonces, la gente al ver mi anhelo y mi potencial y la forma de yo jugar la pelota y la confianza en mí que me tenían en el programa allí como quien dice y me dieron una oportunidad. Entonces seguía enfocado, enfocado y me decían 'Mira, aquí tienes tu edad, tienes que trabajar el doble de los demás. Eran carajitos de 14 años, 15 años, 16 años, y yo con 18. ¿Entiendes?

*[My signing experience was strange] due in part to my age. You know that an 18-year-old kid throwing 85-88 mph, one says 'this guy doesn't project well, he's [too] skinny after all' But then people, upon seeing my desire and my potential and the way I played baseball and the confidence that they had in me at the program, that's where they gave me an opportunity. So I stayed focused, focused, and they said to me, 'Look, here we know your age, you have to work twice as hard as everyone else. There were little kids, 14, 15, and 16 year-olds and I was 18, understand?*

Daniel's time at the local program instilled in him a recognition of his depressed value relative to the other, younger teenagers training around him as well as a heightened sense of urgency to work twice as hard if he were to have any chance at signing professionally. Interestingly, if not unsurprisingly, the wake that extends from a Latin American player's 16th birthday extends in both directions: those that go past their 16th birthday unsigned face an uphill climb whereas the clamor to sign and secure the best players *at* age 16 means that scouting and evaluating them begins and continues in their pre-teens and early teens. As such, the pressure to sign players at such a young age has spawned a widespread practice of informal, verbal agreements with a player's camp before said player is eligible to sign under MLB guidelines and protocols. As my interviewees confirmed, if a player is to sign at age 16, then informal agreements occur months, sometimes years in advance. This practice usually goes unnoticed, however, if a team backs out or is perceived to be renegeing on a deal made before a player's 16th birthday, things can get chippy and gain publicity. Such was the 2014 case of Christopher Torres, whose trainer claimed the Yankees had retracted a multi-million dollar verbal agreement to sign the young prospect.<sup>178</sup> Though we will never know the conversations that took place or the veracity of cases that make it into the public eye -- since high profile debates typically devolve into contradictory charges and due to the fact that such agreements occur behind closed doors -- two interviewees

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<sup>178</sup> Craig Calcaterra, "Dominican Trainer Says the Yankees Reneged on an Offer to a 16-Year-Old Player," NBC Sports, August 4, 2014, <https://mlb.nbcsports.com/2014/08/04/dominican-trainer-says-the-yankees-reneged-on-an-offer-to-a-16-year-old-player/>.

acknowledged the practice unprompted during our interviews. The scope of my research wasn't focused on the ins and outs of the international signing system and I wasn't trying to elicit examples of rules violations and wrongdoing. That said, both Simón and Felipe referenced the prevalence of informal agreements in their respective home countries, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic.

**Simón:** Yo fui para la Academia de un equipo profesional -- yo tenía 13 o 14 años -- y duré un mes allí. Después fui a otra Academia profesional de grandes ligas, duré un mes allí, y después fui a representar el estado donde yo vivo -- aquí le decimos 'Nacionales'. Fui a representar mi estado y allí en ese [torneo] nacional fue que ya supimos que la posibilidad de firmar era bastante grande que tenía muchas posibilidades de firmar porque lo hice muy bien allí. Allí hubo muchos scouts que se acercaron a mi papá y mi mamá y eso y lo otro. Después me empezaron dar seguimiento, después tuve un tryout yo solo con la gente de un equipo de grandes ligas, allí fue que me vieron, me fue bien. Me invitaron para otro tryout donde estaban los peloteritos más sonados de aquí de Venezuela. Y allí me fue bien e incluso allí mismo concretamos, allí mismo firmé. No tenía edad, pero tú sabes cómo lo hacen. Todos los equipos han hecho eso, todo el mundo ha hecho eso, eso lo han hecho toda la vida

Uno cuadra allí con ellos [y preguntan,] 'Ok, ¿cuanto quieren?' y discutimos el contrato, 'No, yo quiero tanto.' Si llegan a un acuerdo ya está el acuerdo hecho, pero se va a hacer oficial el dos de julio que es la edad exacta que uno firma. Te digo que eso vienen haciendo desde hace mucho porque yo he escuchado historias de jugadores nivel superestrella de la vieja escuela que ya son retirados y no tenían la edad, así que imagínate. Hace tiempísimo.

*I went to the Academy of a professional team -- I was 13 or 14 -- and I stayed there for a month. After that, I went to another professional, big league, Academy, I spent a month there, and then I went to represent the state where I'm from -- here we call it "Nationals". I went to represent my state and there at that national [tournament] was when we knew that the possibility of signing was pretty big and I had a lot of chances to sign because I did really well. There were a lot of scouts there that approached my dad and my mom and this and that. After, they started to follow me, after that I had a tryout by myself with the reps of a big league team, that's where they saw me, it went well. They invited me to another tryout where the youngest players with the most buzz in Venezuela were. And it went well there so much so that we agreed to a deal right there, I signed right there. I wasn't of age but you know how they do it. All teams have done that, everyone has done that, they've done that forever.*

*You agree to the deal there with them [and they ask,] 'Ok, how much do you want?' and we discuss the contract, 'No, I want this much.' If they reach an agreement there you have it but it's going to become official on July 2nd, which is the exact age that one signs.*

*I'm telling you they've been doing that for a long time because I've heard stories about superstar players from the old school that are retired now that weren't of age, so just imagine. It goes way, way back.*

Felipe provided a similar account to Simón's

**Felipe:** Tú sabes que en Dominicana es muy difícil -- o sea, en Dominicana en esos tiempos se estaba viendo un momento de que había peloteros que se los firmaban a temprana edad. Y entonces, conmigo pasó lo mismo. Y cuando tú tienes palabras, cuando tú te acostumbras a tener palabras, o sea, el abogado mío tenía la confianza de decirme todas las cosas que estaban pasando. Y yo nunca me engrandecía yo me motivaba más a seguir trabajando. Entonces, eso me llenaba de satisfacción porque yo veía que él en mí lo mismo que estaba buscando lo mismo que yo quería que era salir hacia adelante y ya cuando llegó la firma, la familia contenta, todo cambió de la noche a la mañana y hasta ahora seguimos viendo los frutos.

Hay veces que ahora mismo los peloteros los firman a una temprana edad. Pero, como te dije, el equipo que primero me ofreció [una firma] fue el equipo que yo firmé primero entonces, como te dije, de la palabra y la realidad [es que] nunca miré a otro equipo que quería ofrecerme más dinero porque ya tenía una palabra concreta ya con ese equipo.

*You know that in the Dominican it's very difficult -- that is, in the Dominican in those days you were witnessing a time when they were signing guys at an early age. So then, the same thing happened with me. And when you have someone's word, when you get used to taking someone's word, that is, my agent had enough confidence to tell me everything that was happening. I never got a big head, I motivated myself more to keep working. So, that filled me with satisfaction because I saw that he was looking for the same thing that I wanted which was to get ahead and when the signing arrived, my family was happy and everything changed overnight, and to this day we keep reaping the rewards.*

*There are times, right now, that ballplayers are signing at an early age. But, like I told you, the team that first offered me [a deal] was the team that I signed with first so, as I told you, by having their word and the reality [is that] I never considered another team that wanted to offer me more money because I already had a concrete verbal agreement.*

Latin American players feel the pressures and constraints of the current signing system acutely, bemoaning the incongruity of an age fetishism that can both force “less valuable” or “older” players to take steroids or shave off their age while simultaneously producing an environment where early agreements speculate on pre-teen and early-teen futures. As I detailed in Chapter 1, however, MLB's more recent efforts in the international market have included steps such as the creation of the Trainer Partnership Program, focused on how to manage, integrate, and reform

international, amateur training and signing practices. Indeed, adjustments are tailored to fit within the existing system, not to overhaul or reimagine a flat, international, framework that values foreign and domestic players of the same age equally. Rather, the Trainer Partnership Program is primarily viewed as a way to “clean up” the unbridled practices of 3rd World actors reacting to the expansive, capitalist reach of baseball in Latin America.

### *Independent Trainers: Differing Roles and Interpretations*

The area that MLB has most fervently sought to reform is the presence and influence of independent trainers<sup>179</sup> -- or more pejoratively “buscones” -- who prepare young amateurs for their signing day and generally receive anywhere from 30-50% of a player’s signing bonus. While the role of independent trainers has become relatively commonplace in the current international signing system, there are times when players don’t rely on them -- or any 3rd party -- to negotiate on their behalf in the courtship period before signing. Take Simón,

**Simón:** El que negoció mi contrato fue mi papá, yo no tenía agente como se usa ahora. Yo tuve la suerte de que en ese tiempo no tenía agente y que el que negoció fue mi papá. Por lo tanto, el dinero que yo agarré en ese momento todo fue para nosotros porque no tuve agente.

*The guy who negotiated my contract was my dad, I didn't have an agent the way they do now. I was lucky that at that time I didn't have an agent and that and the guy who negotiated my contract was my dad. Therefore, the money that I got at that time, all of it was for us because I didn't have an agent.*

However, as Simón’s comments suggest, the presence of agents or trainers negotiating on behalf of amateur players has become increasingly common. With an amplified role in the globalized world of baseball, independent trainers have also received intense scrutiny, particularly from the US media, which has regularly painted them as freeloaders who aren’t integrated into the formal

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<sup>179</sup> Indeed, it is much more common to hear the term “entrenador” instead “buscón” as the stigma has been far-reaching, and the term has taken on a more pejorative tone in recent years.

structures of MLB. However, to reduce the entire group of independent trainers to a bunch of scam artists is inaccurate. As Alan Klein explains,

Depending on where on the spectrum they stand, buscones can be involved in feeding and housing players and taking them for physical therapy and medical treatment. The players are given equipment to play with, and their families often are provided for at a nominal level. If they prove to be talented, the prospects are taken to teams for tryouts and perhaps signed, and with a few exceptions (the very largest contracts), the negotiations are handled by the buscones. Thus, it bears repeating that buscones are much more than just “finders” of talent; they are also more than “independent trainers,” as they prefer to be called. They are at times counselors, surrogate fathers, boarding-school owners, and agents. In sum, the Dominican player developer can become the most important person, after his mother, in a hopeful young ballplayer’s life and deserves not to be trivialized and vilified.<sup>180</sup>

A narrow focus on the backwardness or the potential for scheming in such relationships erases the fact that many players view both their trainers and the community members who helped them early in their careers as integral to their success, not as people trying to take advantage of them. Whether or not players have a good relationship with their amateur trainers, they often rely on communal ties as a form of support over the course of their careers. Especially in the case of players who have disposable income (whether that be via a large signing bonus or having had success in their professional careers) these bonds or kinship ties can result in informal or formal paid roles. Many of the interviewees could point to friends and colleagues who had supported them from their early days who now served as their de-facto drivers, assistants, trainers, strength coaches, etc. While these roles are often viewed endearingly or as a form of repayment from a player’s perspective, as was the case in Klein’s study of “buscones”, they are summarily mocked or racialized in white, US circles. Joey, a front office executive, and I discussed the subject:

**Joey:** Yeah, I mean if there's somebody who's around a Latin American player [that person is always part of] ‘the posse.’ [People will say] 'Oh that's his boy, he hangs out with him, nobody really knows what he does,' even though some of these people are

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<sup>180</sup> Klein, *Dominican Baseball: New Pride, Old Prejudice*, 79.

actual strength and conditioning coaches and work with players or give them drills -- they're real coaches. But they aren't considered real parts of the baseball community. They're not putting it on resumes that they worked with some veteran big league player. But we as an industry don't see them that way. Whereas if you're some guy who works in rural Kentucky and you've worked with big leaguers and own a facility with a couple bullpens you can become a "guru" [with your big league clients as proof of your expertise]. You're not part of the posse, you're an up-and-coming trainer, you're a guru, you're an expert in something. If you're somebody hanging around a Latin American player we don't look at it that way. It's like "He's part of his posse. Do we like that he has a posse? are those guys getting him into trouble?" it's just talked about in a different way.

I pushed Joey to expand more on this idea of expertise, asking if he thinks that much of this has to do with the fact that these people are viewed as informal participants of the baseball economy because they might not necessarily have the same "qualifications," secondary degrees, or certifications are therefore viewed as having less competence:

**Joey:** That's what we think. I mean, some of these guys have developed better big leaguers than any of the people here that don't know shit but they're not going to be considered an expert in the same way. I think it's this whole stigma that 'Oh, the people they're hanging around with are their buddies, they're freeloaders, they're hanging around with a big leaguer [thinking that] they'll maybe get themselves out of poverty.' We see them as opportunistic and not really serious, but the same stuff happens here, you [just] don't hear it talked about with white players. With some African American players, you definitely hear that, and you hear it in basketball and football. It's hard to see what the difference is there other than race.

Another baseball operations employee, Coromoto, echoed these sentiments, stating that the people around Latin American players who act as support systems outside of the team structure are "... framed as people who want a piece of the pie. They get painted as a negative part of a player's decision making. As players progress, they are painted as 'hanging onto their crew' or have an 'entourage' that has been around since the beginning. I mostly hear this group of people referred to as a potential impediment to that player's career progress." Yet, most player responses when discussing trainers and community support aligned with Klein's assertions; neighbors, community members who pushed them, or coaches and trainers who worked directly with them are viewed endearingly and as instrumental to their success. As Roberto noted,

**Roberto:** [A veces los americanos ven a los jefes o entrenadores como] aprovechadores como dicen \*riendo\*. No, allá hay algunos, hay algunos. Yo he conocido jugadores que ya [son] grandes ligas entonces a veces los jefes les dicen, ‘No, tienes que darme un porciento de tu sueldo,’ y [los jugadores] dicen ‘¿Como que un porciento si yo te di tu 40% cuando yo firmé?’ ¿En qué mente cabe eso? Dicen [los entrenadores esos] que hay que darlo, pero no es obligado. Yo tuve que dar un 40% de mi bono, pero cuando yo me voy a Dominicana yo siempre, ‘Toma tu multa, mil dólares. Toma tu multa, mil dólares.’ Lo reparto, mayormente en navidad se lo doy, se lo mando y están contentos, tranquilos conmigo. Porque no es una obligación, yo lo hago porque de verdad esa gente me ayuda mucho no en el sentido de que me den dinero ni que me den casa sino como que me ayudaron mucho, me enseñaron mucho de béisbol. Ellos fueron los que me hicieron, si no fuera así no hubiera jugado. Mayormente [de los jugadores profesionales] que conozco, cada vez que van a Dominicana [hacen lo mismo], ‘Toma tu mil dólares, toma tu mil dólares,’ pa, pa y los mantienes contentos. Cuando yo llego, yo los llevo para mi casa, ‘Venga para acá para hacer una comida.’ Cuando yo estoy con ellos estoy al 100%. Si [me preguntan] ‘Mira, ¿puedes darme esto?’ si lo tengo [les digo] ‘Toma, resuelve.’ Normal. Con la gente de donde yo me crie, en navidad el año pasado, le di pollo en la noche buena. Siempre hago algo allá, siempre.

*[Sometimes Americans look at bosses or trainers like] freeloaders as they say \*laughing\*. No, over there there are some, there are some. I've met players that are big leaguers where their trainers sometimes say, 'No, you have to give me a percentage of your salary,' and [the players] say, 'What do you mean a percent if I gave you 40% when I signed?' How does that make sense? [Those trainers] say it has to be paid but it's not obligatory. I had to give 40% of my bonus but when I go to the Dominican I'm always like, 'Here, take your penalty, a thousand dollars. Take penalty fine, a thousand dollars.' I divy it up, generally on Christmas I'll give it to people, I'll send it to them, and they're happy, pleased with me. Because it's not an obligation, I do it because honestly, those people help me a lot, not in the sense that they give me money nor that they give me a house more like they helped me a lot, they taught me a lot about baseball. They were the ones who made me, if it weren't that way I wouldn't have played. Generally, [out of the players] that I know, every time they go to the Dominican [they do the same], 'Here, your thousand bucks, take your thousand dollars,' pa, pa and you keep them happy. When I arrive, I bring them to my house, 'Come over to eat.' When I'm with them I'm at 100%. If [they ask me] 'Hey, can you give me this?' if I have it [I tell them] 'Here, do what you need to.' Normal. With the people from where I grew up, on Christmas last year, I gave them chicken on Christmas Eve. I always do something there, always.*

Roberto acknowledges the fact that there are some trainers who look to get as much out of a former prospect as they can once that player reaches the big leagues. However, he estimates these ‘aprovechadores,’ are few and far between, citing his own experience and the normalcy of offering up a large chunk of his signing bonus and still feeling indebted to the people and



community that helped mold him. As he states, he's willing and eager to help those who helped him, not obligated, or strong-armed by a former trainer. Simón and Eduardo also offered reflections on the importance of kinship ties,

**Eduardo:** Sí, [esas relaciones] te dan mucho empuje porque tú te das cuenta de verdad lo bueno que tú eres. Tú ves a otra persona particular fuera de tu familia o entrenadores que te dicen cosas como esas entonces ya tú te lo crees. Y más que habían jugado béisbol, sabes que no habían sido profesionales, pero si habían jugado béisbol. Y también otros jugadores que habían estado jugando en ese momento, te veían practicando y te decían lo mismo.

*Yeah, [those relationships] give you a big boost because you realize how good you actually are. You see someone else outside of your family or trainers that tell you things like that and you believe it. And more because they had played baseball, you know that they hadn't played professionally but yes, they had played baseball. And other players that had played at that time too, they saw you practicing and they told you the same thing.*

**Simón:** Muchas personas [me empujaron y me apoyaron], muchas personas, hasta amigos. Sabes, que eso influye mucho -- que uno tiene personas que siempre estuvieron con uno desde niño, tus amigos, tus amistades, tus primos, tus hermanos, todos, hasta la gente del pueblo. Después que uno tiene la posibilidad de jugar profesional, tú sabes que eso no le llega a todo el mundo que ya uno está cerca de tener esa posibilidad, coño, todo el mundo empieza a apoyarte y a tratar de darte buenos consejos y tratar de apoyarte a que eches por delante.

*A lot of people [pushed and supported me], a lot of people, even friends. You know, that that influences a lot -- that you have people that were always there since you were a kid, your friends, your friendships, your cousins, your brothers, everyone, even the people in the town. After you have the chance to play professionally, you know that that isn't an opportunity that everyone gets, so when you're close to having that shot, fuck, everyone starts to support you and tries to give you good advice and tries to support you so that you keep going.*

As discussed throughout this thesis, the long held understanding that Latin American players and their immediate associates are perpetually *behind* their US equivalents rears its head in a variety of ways. Whether it's the condemnation of participation in the informal economy that the globalized business of baseball has created, the judgement of Latin American participants as underqualified, inexperienced or in need of guidance, the inability of Latin American players to

discern “what's best for them” as it relates to their trainers, or the concrete nature of a signing system that values players of the same age less in Latin America than in the US, we can trace the roots of such thinking to colonial origins.

### **Introductions to Professional Baseball: The Academy and Lower Levels**

Once signed, Latin American players generally prepare to play at their team’s Academy in the Dominican Republic. First in the informal “Tricky league” in which recent signees from all teams play against each other in an unofficial league with no MLB affiliation (as they must be 17 to officially play in the Dominican Summer League [DSL]). A Latin American player’s first professional season typically occurs at the Academy and in the DSL, though highly touted prospects or those who are either more advanced players or big bonus recipients are sometimes sent to rookie ball in Florida or Arizona, viewed as a step above the DSL. As noted in Chapter 1, players from all over Latin America are sent to the Dominican Republic to begin their careers, independent of country of origin. This can present challenges of its own for players not from the Dominican Republic, as they find themselves far from home, living in a new country and engaging with a new set of norms. Within the world of baseball, the flattening of Latin America or the assumption that a shared language somehow equates players from different countries and backgrounds, often causes white US staff and players to overlook the jarring nature of such a move for a teenager. As Simón recalls, his transition from Venezuela to the Dominican Republic wasn’t easy.

**Simón:** Después de la firma, fui a Dominicana jugué mi primer año allá. Yo sí te voy a decir que cuando yo llegué a Dominicana tú sabes que el primer año, era mi primera experiencia profesional y allí yo veía gente que ya tenía 3 hasta 4 años en Dominicana. Y aunque firmaron en el mismo año mío, yo podía ver en ese momento yo los veía superiores a mí, yo decía ‘Coño, pero yo estoy flaquito, chiquito, y estos tipos son unos hombres. Yo no puedo jugar con ellos,’ me sentí inferior. Pero, lo que me ayudó mucho

fue que el año que yo firmé había muchos venezolanos de donde yo soy, de mi estado. Entonces ellos me recibieron, me acogieron bien y así, yo hice confianza con ellos y ellos me fueron enseñando todo y ya. Ya después cuando me tocó jugar el año siguiente ya yo tenía esa confianza porque ya me habían enseñado todo, como quien dice, ellos me fueron mostrando como era todo en Dominicana pues. Y ya para el próximo año ya yo sabía todo gracias a ellos.

Eso es, no lo es todo, pero coño te ayuda por lo menos un cuarenta por ciento, ¿me entiendes? Coño va a ser tu primer año, sabes que, si estás solo, coño, y para uno agarrar la confianza se va a tomar tiempo. Pero si estás con personas y gente tuya, coño, si te iba a tomar tres meses para agarrar la confianza ya con ellos allí -- más que ellos ya eran veteranos -- en vez de tomarme 3-4 meses hasta un año lo que me tocó fue una semana. Sí, eso me ayudó a mi muchísimo.

*After signing, I went to the Dominican and I played my first year there. I can tell you that when I got to the Dominican, you know that in the first year, it was my first professional experience and there I saw people that already had 3 or even 4 years in the Dominican. And although they signed the same year as mi, I could see at the point, I considered them superior to me, I said, 'Damn, but I'm skinny, small, and these guys are men. I can't play with them,' I felt inferior. But, what helped me a lot was that the year I signed there were a lot of Venezuelans from where I'm from, from my state. So they took me in, they received me well and that way I gained trust with them and they started teaching me everything and that was it. After that when I started to play the next year I already had that confidence because they had taught me everything, as we say, they kept showing me how everything worked in the Dominican, I guess. So the next year I knew everything thanks to them.*

*That's not everything but damn it helps at least say forty percent, you know? I mean, it's going to be your first year, you know you're alone, damn, for you to get confidence it's going to take time. But if you're with people and your people, I mean, if it was going to take you three months to gain confidence with them there -- and more the fact that they were already veterans -- instead of taking me 3-4 months to a year it took me about a week. Yeah, that helped me a ton.*

Regardless of where a player starts, the socialization processes tied to a player's new professional status remain consistent across levels. As I discussed in Chapter 1, for newly signed players the Academy represents an arena where players receive the necessary baseball instruction and "appropriate" socialization meant to prepare a group of mostly teenagers for their potential/aspirational future in the US. Though my earlier analysis delved into the symbolic function of the Academy and some of the institutional knowledge it seeks to impart upon the

players living and training there, I asked interviewees what they remembered from those early years and what marked their transition from amateur to professional.

*What does the system ask of you? Who does it ask you to be?*

A particular point of interest while conducting interviews was how players responded to modes of socialization that demanded a certain type of behavior from them to be in good-standing or perceived as professional. Alluding to Saldaña Portillo's "desiring subject of development" yet again, we can understand Latin American players' professionalization as existing within a framework in which they can "choose their own improvement." Once signed and working out at a team facility, Latin American players are given access to the classes and instruction necessary to learn "what it takes" to "become a professional" and "make it to the US." If they don't progress, it won't be because of the system in place -- since other players *will* make it under the same set of circumstances -- but rather a question of individual talent or effort, a failure to take advantage of the *opportunity presented to them*. Such logics begin at the Academy and follow players throughout their career thereafter; if they fail to advance after having provided the tools or instruction to succeed -- be it on the field, off the field, or both -- it can be viewed as a personal shortcoming rather than a structural limitation. Such framings offer a way for team personnel at all levels of the organization -- coach, teacher, staff, management -- to absolve themselves of the weight of such systemic barriers instead, blaming failure on a lack of individual gumption. Additionally, such practices can be understood as a racialized process of becoming for young players: becoming legible, becoming civil, becoming acceptable against a modern, developed white ideal. Respondents offered a variety of answers when recalling their time at the Academy and at the lower levels of minor league baseball, however, several

consistent themes emerged. One such topic that came up repeatedly across all interviews was the importance of punctuality, order, and formality. As Eduardo explained,

**Eduardo:** Prácticamente, nosotros antes de firmar [es como que practicamos] -- es formal, pero a la vez informal y sin organización. Es como que llegaste al play [y alguien te dice], ‘Estréchate!’ Vamos a parar rollins, vamos a batear,’ y ese tipo de cosas. Tú haces 300 swings antes de firmar en un día, a tú tener ahora un horario donde usted tiene el stretch, usted tiene early work a las 7 de la mañana, de que nada mas son 5 rounds de BP (práctica de bateo) de 5 pitcheos, de que va a hacer extra work. O sea, ya es diferente. Cambié mi mentalidad de hacer una práctica informal sin horario a tener ahora responsabilidad.

*Basically, for us, before signing, [it’s like we practice] -- it’s formal but at the same time informal and without organization. It’s like, you arrived at the field [and someone says to you], ‘Go stretch! We’re going to take ground balls, we’re going to hit,’ and that sort of thing. You take 300 swings in a day before signing to now having a schedule where you have stretch, you have early work at 7 in the morning, no more than 5 rounds of BP (batting practice), five pitches each, and you’re going to do extra work. That is, now it’s different. I changed my mentality from doing an informal practice without a schedule to now having responsibility.*

Eduardo compares workouts as an amateur to what he experienced at the Academy, noting that although the practices he had before signing were formal, they were less organized. Before, there was a set list of activities that everyone more or less accomplished in a given day but the Academy instituted *structure*. Once he was incorporated with the team, Eduardo explains that the schedule was detailed: an exact stretch time, a designated window for early work preceding the official practice, specific rotations with constraints during practice (5 rounds of 5 pitches during batting practice), and extra work after practice had ended. His biggest takeaway, though, was that such structure inculcated one with a sense of “responsibility.” Roberto recalled the mechanisms used to keep players in line and on time stating that, “[La Academia] es otro mundo. En esa Academia, la puntualidad era [todo], oye si tú llegabas un minuto tarde te multaban hasta con 100 dólares. Si uno cobraba 90 dólares a la semana, ¿como tú ibas a pagar eso? Tenías que llegar temprano. // *The Academy is another world. In that Academy, punctuality was everything,*

*seriously, if you arrived one minute late they fined you up to 100 dollars. If you were earning 90 dollars a week, how were you going to pay that? You had to get there early.”* In speaking with interviewees, the threat of fines was common across teams, as it was viewed as a persuasive threat for those who may be accessing steady income for the first in their lives. By tying a material penalty to tardiness, teams could emphasize punctuality and orderliness as central to a Latin American player’s “progress” and professional identity. Eduardo expanded on the topic, noting that the Academy and lower levels of baseball seek to iron out a Latin American player’s behavior, “[El sistema pide que arregles] el comportamiento [y eso se refiere a] la voceadera o de llegar tarde. Que para nosotros, un ejemplo, a las 2:30 es a las 2:45 [pero] aquí las 2:30 son las 2:20 o 2:25, tienes que estar antes. Aún hay muchos que no entienden que las 2:30 son las 2:30 o antes, no puede ser después. // *The system asks you to fix your conduct and that means being loud or arriving late. Which, for us, for example, at 2:30 is actually at 2:45 but here 2:30 means 2:20 or 2:25, you have to be there before. There are still lots of people that don’t understand that 2:30 means 2:30 or before, it can’t be after.*” Simón offered a similar take, explaining how with his first professional team, expectations regarding the code of conduct rarely even had to be verbalized:

**Simón:** [Con el equipo que yo firmé] no había necesidad de que te dijeran [cómo tenías que actuar.] Ya con solo tú estar en ese equipo ya sabías que la cosa iba a ser de la mejor manera. Iban a tratar de que fuera de la mejor manera por como ellos te iban llevando pues. Por lo menos nosotros en Dominicana, allí mismo en el comedor teníamos que comer con camisa con cuello y para la clase de inglés nadie se podía quedar. Estar temprano, cosas como esas, entonces por lo menos sabiendo ya con eso, no te ibas a portar mal en estados unidos. ¿Entiendes? O sea, no era necesario que te dijeran eso porque ya te imaginabas pues.

*[With the team I signed with], there was no need for them to tell you [how you had to act.] Just being on that team you already knew that things were going to be done the best way. They were going to try to do things right in terms of how they brought you along, I guess. At least for us in the Dominican, there in the dining room we had to eat with a collared shirt and for English class nobody could be absent. Be early, things like that, at*

*least knowing that with that you weren't going to misbehave in the US, you know? That is, it wasn't necessary for them to tell you because you already imagined it, I guess.*

Dining with collared shirts, never missing English class, showing up on time, fines -- Roberto, Eduardo, and Simón, all describe measures used to enforce rules and create an orderly environment. Indeed, throughout the interviews players constantly repeated that they had to “behave” or “do things the right way” if they were to succeed, underscoring the internalized nature of such refrains within the game.

**Simón:** No te ibas a portar mal

*// You weren't going to misbehave.*

**Eduardo:** Tenías que hacerte las cosas bien para no meterte en problemas.

*// You had to do things the right way to not get into trouble.*

**Roberto:** Tienen que comportarse bien.

*// You have to behave well.*

**Ronald:** Se comporta bien porque estos gringos están mirando.

*// You behave because these gringos are watching.*

The constant repetition of “doing things the right way” and “behaving” necessitates an antonym and implies a Latin American proclivity to act otherwise. As examined in both Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, unruly, uncontrolled behavior on the part of Latin American players and the oversight and policing of said behavior on the part of white, US management is rooted in Eurocentric, white supremacist logics. We can see parallels in C.L.R. James’ reflection on schooling and playing cricket under British colonial rule in the West Indies, “[the] vision and self-respect which was imposed on us by the fact that our masters, our curriculum, our code of morals, *everything* began from the basis that Britain was the sources of all light and leading, and our business was to admire, wonder, imitate, learn’ our criterion of success was to have succeeded in approaching that distant ideal – to attain it was, of course, impossible.”<sup>181</sup> Integration into an organization's professional ranks requires players of all types to submit to authority, instruction,

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<sup>181</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 30.

and prescribed training regimens in order to move up and reach James' distant ideal. For my respondents, punctuality, formality, responsibility, structure, and controlled behavior all stood out, as having left particularly lasting impressions years after players had passed through such training. Notably, Ronald's comment that "estos gringos están mirando // *these gringos are watching*" acknowledged a recognition of the white perceiving subject and the importance of a certain degree of performance for among Latin American players. "Playing the game" or doing what is expected of them within a white, managerial system because it is expected of them is not unique to Latin American players in professional baseball. In his examination of Black athletes in a university setting, Gabby Yearwood describes the events surrounding a Black football player named Oliver who in a class said that he "knew the playbook" on how he needed to act on campus to be in good standing, revealing to Yearwood that he felt that,

Neither his grades nor his personal convictions nor the values he held mattered to anyone at the school, and as a result, he felt that he had little power to change his situation. Because of this, he did not feel it was necessary to put in much effort academically. "The playbook" was learning how to be managed and controlled physically in order to be lucrative in the future and not necessarily to gain intellectual growth. Oliver's blase comportment in the classroom thus reflected his feelings of powerlessness in relation to the university experience and his philosophy that his relationship to the school was never about his academic education as it is claimed by the collegiate sports rhetoric.<sup>182</sup>

Yearwood continues to unpack the role of the performative "playbook", asking another Black student athlete, Derrick, his thoughts,

'Sometimes you got to do just 'cuz you have to. And then, when you go to Coach you got to play da game jus' like the way he play da game. You got to be like, "Hey. Yeah, Coach." "Heading to class Coach." "Can't wait to get dere!" "Hey, I love bein here!" "I love GSCU!" You got to play it.'

Here, Derrick references not only that student-athletes "play da game" but so does the coach. He identifies that the coach is also performing a fake sense of caring about the

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<sup>182</sup> Gabby Yearwood, "Playing without Power: Black Male NCAA Student-Athletes Living with Structural Racism," *Transforming Anthropology* 26, no. 1 (2018): 24.



student's academics when all that matters is performance on the field. In an American sporting context such as this, coaches represent ultimate authority. They are gatekeepers to future professional and financial success. Student-athletes, such as the young men I met in my research, were consciously aware that their behaviors and attitudes were constantly under surveillance. Student-athletes recognized that their coaches' reference to professional scouts and other opportunities could transform their lives and that of their families, and were thus tightly controlled by athletic staff and used as incentives and forms of punishment. They described the constant monitoring as being catalogued, measured, and evaluated daily. They also knew that past behavior would be scrutinized later.<sup>183</sup>

Though the contexts are different -- academic, unpaid vs. professional, paid -- the Black university student athletes and Latin American baseball players share analogous experiences as racialized populations, seeking to perform and ascend through an institution governed by white decision-makers and a white supremacist normativity. Even in a fiery, motivating setting intended to prepare those about to travel to the US, Latin American coaches and administrators couched their advice as needing to play within a certain set of constraints. Roberto detailed what he and other players at the Academy were told before they departed to the US for the first time.

**Roberto:** Parten cabezas cuando vayan. Todos son gringos. Hagan lo doble que ellos, quitarles su comida, rompan cabezas como decimos allá -- como que metan mano en los juegos. Compórtense bien con buen comportamiento porque eso es importante, eso fue lo que nos dijeron. Tienen que comportarse bien porque una gente malcriada no va a llegar a ningún lado. En ningún lado una gente malcriada sobresale. Tienes que tener buen comportamiento, saber como hablar. Cómo funcionaban las cosas aquí [en los EE. UU.] Porque allá, en Dominicana las cosas son muy diferentes que aquí. Porque aquí las cosas van como más en orden. Tienes que estar puntual a los plays, nunca llegar tarde. Lo primero, nunca llegar tarde a los plays, siempre estar puntual. Llegar 15, 10 minutos antes de la hora para que tengan tiempo hacer sus cosas. Nos decían todo eso, siempre nos decían eso. Es mejor temprano que tarde.

*Bust some heads when you go. They're all gringos. Do twice as much as them, take food off their plate, bust some heads, like we say back home -- as in, kill it in the games. Act appropriately with good behavior because that's important, that's what they told us. You have to behave because a misbehaved person isn't going anywhere. A misbehaved person doesn't excel anywhere. You have to have good behavior, know how to talk. How things worked here [in the US]. Because back home, in the Dominican, things are very different from here. Because here things are like more in order. You have to be on time to the*

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<sup>183</sup> IBID, 25.

*fields, never arrive late. That was the first thing, never be late to the fields, always be punctual. Arrive 15, 10 minutes before the time so you have time to do your things. They told us that, they always told us that. It's better to be early than late.*

Even in a message laced with aggressive talk of “busting heads,” and “taking food off [white players’] plates,” instructors advised players to be on their best behavior, speak well, and never be late, knowing that these things would be monitored upon arrival to the US. Eduardo recalled a piece of advice from his mom stating, “El mejor consejo [que he recibido] es de mi mamá. Por eso yo nunca me he metido en problemas, nunca he tenido ni siquiera roces - tú ves que hay muchos jugadores que tienen roces con entrenadores y ese tipo de cosas. Mi mamá me dijo dos cosas antes de yo irme: sea respetuoso y tenga tolerancia. // *The best advice [I've received] is from my mom. That's why I've never gotten into trouble, I've never even had brushes with anyone -- you know there are a lot of players that have run-ins with coaches and that sort of thing. My mom told me two things before I left: be respectful and have tolerance.*” While some players, like Ronald, explicitly noted that white people were constantly observing their actions, the advice of other Latin American individuals -- be it mentor types at the Academy or family members -- anticipated the racialized interpretations of “bad behavior” the players they addressed were bound to face. It isn't surprising, then, for players to have fond memories of their time at the Academy, recognizing it as a place that prepared them for the trials they would soon encounter in the US:

**Felipe:** [Por mi experiencia en la Academia del equipo que me firmó] estoy sumamente agradecido, David. Porque tú sabes que ya cuando uno firma que uno cree que se sabe todo y eso no es así. Allí es donde tú tienes que poner los pies sobre la tierra y trabajar fuerte. Yo lo que me enfoque fue en tratar de dejar el dinero a un lado y enfocarme en lo que yo realmente quería y de eso le doy gracias a cada uno de los staff allá que me decía la cosa clara. Porque hay veces que uno como pelotero uno se cree que se sabe toda, uno no se lleva de consejo y la gente le quieren dar consejo a uno y uno se lo entra por un oído y te sale por otro cuando, no te interesa porque uno cree que se sabe toda. Y yo escuchaba y resolvía lo bueno y lo malo trataba de echarlo a un lado y por eso soy ahora mismo la persona que soy.

*[For my experience at the Academy with the team that signed me] I'm extremely grateful, David. Because you know that when you sign you think that you know everything but that's not the case. That's where you learn how to come down to earth and work hard. What I focused on was trying to put the money aside and focus on what I honestly wanted and for that I thank every one of the staff there that spoke to me honestly. Because there are times that you, as a ball player, you believe that you know everything, you don't listen to advice and the people that want to give you advice and you it goes in one ear and out the other, it doesn't interest you because you think you know it all. I listened and I took the good and the bad and tried to put it aside and for that I'm the person that I am today.*

Felipe wasn't the only one who expressed such a sentiment, as Simón's account -- in which he stated that the team that signed him for doing things "de la mejor manera // *in the best way*," -- also offered praise. By contrasting Felipe and Simón's comments and gratitude for the lessons they learned at the Academy with the institutional expectations tied to imperial, white normative comportment, we can tease out the duality and contradiction of processes of professionalization within baseball. Yearwood offers another instructive overlap acknowledging that although a Black student-athlete "...recognized his powerlessness [within the system], he was also indebted to it. This contradiction is part of the stress that racialized structural violence enacts upon the subjects who are caught in its web. [Thus,] we must also take into account their experiences with hyper-monitoring, control, and the management of their bodies— something many of them experience as forms of daily oppression and inequality directed at them for being Black male student-athletes on campus."<sup>184</sup> Yearwood's framework allows us to understand how young Latin American players in acquiring "professional skills and habits" such as responsibility, formality, punctuality, respect for hierarchy are both able to garner positive feedback and mobility and simultaneously discern the contours of acceptability/deviance. Of course, coaches and mentors at the Academy or in the lower levels of the minor leagues could have had a

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<sup>184</sup> IBID, 26.

profound impact on each one of these players. However, perpetuating an earnest narrative that Latin American players must conform to expectations of respectable white conduct both reinscribes colonial hierarchies and maintains a goal forever out of reach. Conditioning players to equate such standards with their own identities and distinguishing these impositions from their own beliefs is nothing trivial. As C. L. R. James reflected on his cricket career, even he, “a colonial born and bred, a Marxist, declared enemy of British imperialism and all its ways and works” made it to the age of fifty without questioning the coloniality of being that he had internalized through cricket.<sup>185</sup>

### **Adjusting to Life in the US**

While the Academy’s socialization practices are aimed at inducting teenagers into professional baseball, they are also forward-facing, couched in warnings of what awaits in the US and a destiny of failure if they are unable to adhere to the job’s demands both on and off the field.

Eduardo recalled the cautionary tales related to him and others at the Academy,

**Eduardo:** Bueno, en la Academia el profesor de inglés siempre [nos hablaba] sobre reglas de estados unidos y todo ese tipo de cosas. Siempre nos metían en la cabeza que era un país muy organizado, no se podía ni siquiera orinar en la calle, no podía ni siquiera mirar a una chica que te pasaba por el lado, que iba a ser difícil para comer. Eso nos motivaba también para aprender inglés en la clase como que nos pusiéramos para eso. Yo me imaginaba [los estados unidos] de esa forma en la que me los describían porque nunca me había ido. Pero ya yo llegué aquí me di cuenta de que en parte tenían razón porque de verdad es un país organizado, tiene sus reglas, pero no es tan estricto como uno lo pintaba en la clase. Es un país normal como todos.

*Well, at the Academy the English teacher always talked to us about rules in the US and all that stuff. They always got it in our heads that it was a very organized country, you couldn’t even pee in the street, you couldn’t even look at a girl that walked by you, that it was going to be hard to eat. That motivated us too to learn English in the class that they had for us. I imagined the US in the way that they described it because I had never gone. But I arrived here and I realized that in part they were right because it really is an*

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<sup>185</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 45–46.

*organized country, it has its rules, but it's not as strict as they painted it in the class. It's a normal country like any other.*

Tales of an unknown US circulate throughout the Academy, with counsel ranging from the comical, to the accurate, to the overly-dramatized (so as to act as a deterrent). Such discourse is meant to keep players in line and ever-focused on reaching their next goal, traveling to the US. The threat of not “being ready” to travel or not being prepared for what’s next can weigh heavily on players if they haven’t yet been to the US. In some cases, everything about that journey seems foreign; as Chicho noted, “Antes de irme yo no sabía nada de los estados unidos. Nada, prácticamente nada. Lo que yo sabía era de las películas que a veces veía y las canciones, como rock que escuchaba, pero hasta ahí. // *Before going I didn't know anything about the US. Nothing, basically nothing. What I knew was from the movies that I sometimes watched and songs, like rock that I listened to but that was it.*” In others, passage to the US represents a significant step for a young, Latin American player, as it signifies his first promotion and reaching the next rung on the tall ladder towards the major leagues. However, for many, arriving in the US also marks the beginning of a difficult adjustment period, as they figure out how to navigate the systems, structures, and expectations of a foreign country, oftentimes still in their late teens and unable to communicate well in English.

### *Arrivals*

**Roberto:** Lo más difícil fue acostumbrarme porque yo me acuerdo que yo llegué esa noche y yo extrañé a mi mamá vale. Y yo me puse en ese hotel y no sabía cómo conectar el internet. Y yo sin hablar con mi mamá yo hasta grité esa noche. Y [pensaba], ‘Yo me quiero ir de aquí,’ pero después razoné porque yo vine para acá para sacar la familia adelante. Bajé al lobby ‘Hey, ponme el internet,’ y me lo puso una mujer y hablé con mi mamá y me puse más tranquilo, me tranquilicé. Me dijo “Estate tranquilo mijo tú vas a estar bien. Haz tu práctica normal y hazte un buen trabajo.’ A la mayoría nos pasa porque[aquí] es diferente, vale.

*The hardest part was adjusting because I remember that I arrived that night and I missed my mom, man. And I was there in that hotel and I didn't know how to connect the internet. And without talking to my mom I even screamed that night. And [I thought], 'I want to leave,' but then I reasoned with myself because I came here to get my family ahead. I went down to the lobby, 'Hey, hook me up to the internet,' and a woman set me up and I spoke with my mom and I relaxed, I calmed down. She told me 'Be calm, my son, you're going to be fine. Do your normal practice, do a good job.' That happens to most of us because it's different here, man.*

Roberto shares a common feeling for many players who recently arrived in the US:

homesickness and wanting to go home. Missing his mom and wanting to turn back forced Roberto to confront his motives and reasons for being in the US -- helping his family. The notion that some strict shift from amateur to professional occurs obscures the fact that many of these players are still in their late teens and going through a jarring experience that would be hard for anyone independent of origin. Roberto's desire to go home -- or any player being homesick for that matter -- doesn't signify that said player "isn't cut out for baseball." As Coromoto explained, the expectation that players must suddenly comport themselves like mature professionals is both misplaced and diffuse within the world of baseball.

Just because these kids have signed professional contracts doesn't mean that they're not kids anymore. And just because they're shaken up or quiet or don't do things "the right way" when they come to the US doesn't mean they're unprofessional. It's not just a Latin American thing but it gets viewed that way. Moving to a different country at age 18 without any sort of family support structure, living on your own for the first time, and not speaking the language would be hard for *anybody*, no matter where they are from.

Coromoto reframes the discussion around young Latin American players arriving in the US, highlighting how the performance of "professionalism," fitting in, and engaging in normative, acceptable behaviors -- many of which were discussed in the previous two chapters -- fail to acknowledge a seemingly obvious reality: many of these players are traveling for the first time, most are traveling alone or abroad for the first time, the majority have limited English skills and potentially significant economic burdens, and most are teenagers. My point here is not to

infantilize players by labeling them “kids” but rather to underscore the reliance on the “professional” discourse that Coromoto alludes to as operative in setting expectations and standards for Latin American players within the game. Coromoto concluded, “I’d like to see what all of the people reprimanding these kids or judging them so harshly looked like ages 18-21. My guess is it wasn’t too professional.” Realities can set in quickly, even if a player has access to money relative to his peers. As Felipe told me,

**Felipe:** Tú sabes que es una transición un poco fuerte. Tú tienes que adaptarte a lo que es el idioma, lo que es la comida. Se me hacía un poco difícil. Hay veces que con dinero tienes que pasar hambre. Que yo tengo una historia de un pelotero [de cuando] nosotros fuimos a comer en un restaurant. Me acuerdo yo [que] el otro pelotero me dijo que ‘Vamos a comer’ y ese que mencioné ahorita le dijo ‘No, no, no, no, no él se va conmigo a comer,’ como que dando una clase de inglés. Primera vez que yo estoy en los Estados Unidos entonces él [me] agarra. Y cuando fuimos al lugar a comer tuvimos que devolvemos para atrás porque él no sabía que la tipa que hablaba español, la que le tendía todos los días ese día no iba. Entonces tuvimos que devolvemos para atrás para el hotel y llamamos a alguien que nos llamara una pizza para nosotros comer o sea para nosotros cenar.

*You know, it’s a pretty hard transition. You have to adapt to the language, the good. It was hard for me. There are times that even with money you go hungry. I have a story from a player [from when] we went to eat at a restaurant. I remember [that] another player told me, ‘Let’s go eat,’ and the other guy I just mentioned told him, ‘No, no, no, no, no he’s going with me to eat,’ like he was giving an English class. IT’s my first time in the United States so he grabbed [me]. And when we went to the place to eat we had to turn around and come back because he didn’t know that the woman who spoke Spanish, the one who served him every time he went wasn’t there that day. So we had to go back to the hotel and we called someone to order us a pizza for us to eat, or rather for our dinner.*

Not being able to access food away from the field is a common experience among players. In Felipe’s story, his friend wanted to impress him by showing off his wherewithal and mobility in the US only to be letdown when his Spanish-speaking contact wasn’t at the restaurant. For Eduardo, it was more about finding places amenable to ordering, places that didn’t present the same challenge of speaking to a waiter.

**Eduardo:** Me sorprendió que no había nadie que hablara otra cosa que no fuera inglés. Era puro comunicarnos entre nosotros. Y lo que no me sorprendió es que sí había otros lugares donde podíamos comer que no fuera Chipotle. Podíamos comer en otros lugares que no era tan difícil tampoco buscar la forma de conseguir comida. [La cosa es] que en Chipotle tú puedes señalar -- puro nada más señas si tú no tienes inglés para hablar pues. También, lo único parecido a Dominicana es Chipotle, lo único que usted va a poder comer es Chipotle porque es fácil comprarlo, es lo más parecido al arroz y pollo. Al final te das cuenta de que tú puedes ir a cualquier sitio, como, por ejemplo, de comida rápida y decir un number 1 o un number 2 y te lo van a servir -- de lo combos que siempre están en los menús que están a la vista que tú no tienes que estar complicándote.

*It surprised me that there wasn't anyone who spoke anything aside from English. It was purely communicating amongst ourselves. And what didn't surprise me was that there were other places besides Chipotle where we could eat. We could eat at other places, it wasn't that hard to find a way to get food. [The thing is] that at Chipotle you can point -- it's all signs so if you don't know enough English to speak, that is. Also, the only thing that's like Dominican food is Chipotle, the only thing you're going to be able to eat is Chipotle because it's easy to buy, it's the closest thing to chicken and rice. At the end of the day you realize that you can go anywhere, for example, fast food and say number 1 or number 2 and they're going to serve you -- from the combos that are always on the menus that are there, visible so you're not there overcomplicating things.*

It's worth noting that in the Life Skills and English portions of teams' academic programming at their Academies and throughout the minor leagues, practicing such scenarios as ordering at a restaurant (sometimes even by taking players to practice at restaurants) occurs. However, if these are the only steps taken, they still place the onus on the player -- not the team or its support structures -- resting on a fend-for-yourself, sink or swim mentality. For some players, like Chicho, friends and support networks didn't materialize right away, making the day-to-day all the more isolating.

**Chicho:** Al momento de lesionarme, porque me lesioné al tiempito [después de firmar] y tuve un tiempo aquí en Estados Unidos, ya en ese momento fue donde me di cuenta que, cónchale, uno tiene que aprender a hablar inglés porque llegué sin dinero y el bono no se me había hecho efectivo, no tenía banco, no tenía amigos prácticamente porque estaban nada más los tipos que estaba de rehabilitación, y esos eran tipos que ya habían jugado en la fuerte o por ahí. Y toditos eran gringos y no iban a hablar con un novatico.

*At the time I got hurt, because I got hurt right [after signing] and I passed some time here in the United States, at that time is when I realized, wow, you've have to learn to speak English because I arrived without money and I hadn't cashed my bonus, I didn't*



*have a bank, I didn't have any friends because practically the only people around were the guys rehabbing, and they were guys that had played in high-A or around there. And all of them were gringos and they weren't going to talk with a little rookie.*

As each one of these examples illustrates, albeit in different contexts and individual struggles, language played a major role in players' early experiences in the US, conjuring up acute memories of feeling stuck, unable to support oneself. So far, I have examined the role of language on multiple levels, the humanity it grants you in the metropole, the mobility it elicits within in professional spaces, and the barriers it presents if you don't have access to it or can't communicate with those in power. In the following excerpts, I focus on what players recall regarding their experiences with English, what it represented to them, allowed (or didn't allow) them to do, why they felt they had to learn, and techniques to overcome the limits language placed on them. Additionally, I examine forms of community support between more experienced players with time in the US and new arrivals attempting to overcome linguistic hurdles.

#### *Learning the Ropes and Fraternity in the US*

From a professional standpoint, the pressure to speak English and the disadvantages of not being able to communicate hit players square in the face. Simón and Roberto, detail the dynamics of not understanding, being too shy to speak up, and how the lack of support and limited number of Latin American or bilingual staff hampers Latin American players as they try to find their footing.

**Simón:** Yo pienso que [hay] más barreras para los latinos. Uuu, mil veces. El idioma, ese es el principal. [Uno bregala] con muchas cosas que quizás uno no esperaba.

*I think that [there are] more barriers for the Latinos. Ooh, a thousand times more. The language, that's the main one. [You battle] a lot of things that maybe you didn't expect.*

**Roberto:** Tú sabes que uno viene aquí nada más diciendo 'Hi.' Había uno, un venezolano que trabajaba traduciendo, él siempre se dedicaba allí a un grupo a traducirles, pero éramos como cuántos ese grupo y ese grupo de latinos no tenía tiempo para todos. Y a

veces me frustraba porque ni hablaba y yo decía “Yes, yes,” y yo sin entender nada. Y yo digo ‘¿Qué estoy diciendo “yes” sí no entiendo?’ Y a veces hacíamos cosas y uno lo hacía mal porque no entendía y a veces me frustraba [y me decía] ‘Coño tengo que aprender,’ porque yo sé que puedo hacerlo, pero no puedo porque no estoy entendiendo cómo hacerlo. Me frustraba mucho. Si tú no dices ‘Hey, yo no entendí,’ ellos se van. Yo nunca tuve miedo, de verdad. Yo nunca tuve miedo de preguntar dique ‘Que significa eso?’ Siempre decían ‘Levanta la mano él que no entendió,’ y todo el mundo mano abajo y yo ‘Sí, no entendí.’ Después, me explicaban a mi y me preguntaban todos los demás y yo ‘Pero que fue, ¿no entendieron?!’\*riendo\*

*You know that one comes here only saying ‘Hi.’ There was one guy, a Venezuelan who worked, translating, he always made sure he was there with a group to translate for them but we were so many in that group and he didn’t have time for everyone. And sometimes I’d get frustrated because I didn’t even speak and I said, ‘Yes, yes,’ and without understanding anything. And I’d say ‘Why am I saying “yes” if I don’t understand?’ And sometimes we’d do things and someone would do it wrong because he didn’t understand and sometimes that frustrated me [and I’d say to myself,] ‘Fuck, I have to learn,’ because I know I’m able to do this but I can’t because I’m not understanding how to do it. It frustrated me a lot. If you don’t say, ‘Hey, I didn’t understand,’ they leave. I never was afraid, really. I never was afraid to ask, ‘What does that mean?’ They always said, ‘Raise your hand whoever didn’t understand,’ and everyone kept their hands down and I was like, ‘Yeah, I didn’t understand.’ After, they’d explain it to me and then everyone else would ask me and I was like, ‘Wait a second, you all didn’t understand?!’ \*laughing\**

In Roberto’s case, despite the willingness of a Venezuelan staff member to interpret and try to help as many of the Latin American players as possible, he wasn’t accessible to all of them, leaving players to fend for themselves. Roberto explains his internal frustrations and the pressure to not appear incapable or inadequate by saying “yes” to things he didn’t understand. His consternation peaked when he would make a mistake in practice or a drill on something he clearly hadn’t understood but had condemned himself to with his earlier “Yeses.” Notably, Roberto recalls knowing that he could of course do what was being asked of him but not when he didn’t understand *what was being asked*. This is a seemingly obvious statement but an area of support that baseball as an industry continues to fumble. Asking players to raise their hands if they didn’t understand falls short or, as Coromoto quipped, “Having some white dude who doesn’t speak Spanish ask ‘¿Entiendes?’ or ‘¿Entendiste?’ or ‘¿Comprendes?’ doesn’t do

anything.” White questions of confirmation in Spanish after long explanations are all too common within the sport and place the weight on the player to speak up, otherwise those giving the instructions “se van // *leave*”. Players with initiative who seek out answers when they don't understand are seen as wanting to learn and no interrogation of the person doing the explaining ever occurs. Even in instances where coaches and staff make more sincere attempts to communicate in Spanish, we must stay alert to the linguistic hierarchies undergirding white, Anglo production of Spanish. As examined in Chapter 2, white Spanish production -- oftentimes in Mock forms -- is a sign of liberal diversity that doesn't question how Spanish words and phrases are being (mis)interpreted. Reusing an excerpt from Coromoto, “[white staff or coaches] are not conveying what they're trying to say and don't know that there's anything wrong. But they're just practicing. It's fine. God forbid holding their Spanish to any standard.” The failure to adequately teach players on their own terms and in their own language continues to plague teams, though internally, organizational commitment to remedy such issues is generally left wanting.

There is also a strain of thinking in baseball, at times even propagated by Latin American staff, that trial by fire is the only way -- and implicitly an appropriate way -- for Latin American players to learn what it takes to survive. A more critical corollary of that thinking posits that Latin American players are too pampered and have too many people doing things for them such that they never learn to take responsibility for their own lives, career, etc. Carlos, a Latin American Staffer, had this to say when I asked him about the propagation of such stances, “Sí, sí la he escuchado. Hasta de los mismos coaches que dicen ‘Bueno, tú sabes cómo es esto.’ Y [desafortunadamente] todo es parte del mismo problema porque nunca ha habido soporte para los jugadores entonces los coaches latinos, que generalmente fueron jugadores también, no van a

estar diciendo ‘Vamos a cambiar las cosas’ porque el sistema nunca fue receptivo. // *Yeah, yeah, I’ve heard that. Even from coaches who say, ‘Well, you know how all this works.’ And [unfortunately] it’s all part of the same problem because there has never been support for the players so the Latin American coaches, who were generally players too, aren’t going to be saying, ‘We’re going to change things,’ because the system was never receptive.*” While, of course, no player should be denied access to learn English or dissuaded from learning or practicing a subject of interest, the inherent respectability of pushing normative forms of behavior (some of which I discussed in Chapter 2) and the essentialization of English as appropriate and expected is obvious. As one Latin American interviewee told me when asked for an opinion on the matter, “Bueno, yo opino que eso es una mamada que le hacen a los latinos porque a los gringos no le dicen ‘Bueno, así a los coñazos es que se aprende. // *Well, I think it’s a joke that they put on the latinos because they don’t tell the gringos ‘Alright, everyone learns by being thrown off the deep end.’*” Despite the obvious hurdles of adjusting to life in the US and the potential for retrograde advice masked as respectable encouragement (be it linguistic, attitudinal, etc.), players find ways to cope and navigate their day to day, relying on workarounds, and communal support within the Latin American or Spanish-speaking player group. A common tactic that multiple players cited as crucial in their early years was simply observing what others did and going last in group activities or drills. Simón, Roberto, Chicho, and all shared examples:

**Simón:** Hubo tiempos que por lo menos para mis tiempos [cuando] nada más hubo [unos] traductores y muchas veces te mandaban a correr para allá y no había nadie que hablara español entonces me decían algo y yo tenía que improvisar lo que me estaban diciendo. O sea, improvisar en el sentido de que ‘Vamos a correr la bases,’ entonces yo siempre era vivo yo dejaba que, por lo menos si había un grupo, yo dejaba que alguien se fuera adelante para yo ver lo que iba a hacer y eso mismo hacía yo. Pero imagínate que yo tuviera que hacer o si me dijeran a mi, ‘No, tú tienes que hacer otra cosa.’ Yo no lo iba a hacer porque no sabía lo que me estaban diciendo. No sabía ni papita de ingles, pero yo supe cómo sobrellevar esa situación. Porque, ok, sabes que dicen Ok, dale tu primero,’ y

yo, 'No, espérate. Déjame yo ver cómo se hace para yo también hacerlo.' Por eso te digo, que siempre fui vivo para eso.

*There were times that at least in my time [when] there were no more than [a few] translators and a lot of times they sent you to run over there and there wasn't anybody who spoke Spanish so they would say something to me and I would have to improvise whatever it was they were saying to me. That is, improvise in the sense of 'We're going to run the bases,' so I was always sharp and I let, at least if there was a group, I let someone else go first so I could see what they were going to do and I did that exact same thing. But imagine if I had to do something or if they said to me, 'No, you have to do something else.' I wasn't going to do it because I didn't know what they were saying to me. I didn't know a lick of English but I knew how to overcome that situation. Because, okay, you know they say, 'Okay, you go first,' and I'd be like, 'No, hold on. Let me see how you do it so I can do it too.' That's why I'm telling you, that I was always aware of that stuff.*

**Roberto:** Si hacíamos ejercicios uno siempre se iba casi de último en la fila para ver lo que estaban haciendo. Uno nunca está de primero, aunque uno quiera siempre ir de primero. No quiere hacer la cosa mal. Nos quedábamos de último y de allí veíamos y hacíamos la cosa bien.

*If we were doing exercises you'd always go at the end of the line to see what they were doing. You never go first because even though you might want to go first. You don't want to mess up. We would go last and from there we'd watch and we did things right.*

**Chicho:** Yo siempre estaba rodeado de gente, amigos que sabían más o menos, y cualquier cosa no le preguntaba al coach pero sí le decía al compañero de al lado 'Mira, ¿Qué dijo este?, ¿Qué significa esto?' y sino me quedaba viendo, me quedaba de último o casi de último y esperaba que todo el mundo pasara para ver que estaban haciendo.

*I was always surrounded by people, friends that knew more or less, and anything I didn't ask a coach, I'd ask the teammate next to me, 'Hey, what'd he say? What does this mean?' and if not, I watched, I went last or almost last and I waited for everyone to go to see what they were doing.*

On-field activity leaves little room to hide, as Roberto explained earlier, and acting as others do or asking someone else who might have understood the directive was -- and continues to be -- a widespread tactic for many Latin American players, particularly younger players, or those without English proficiency, to get through a workday. Inherent to asking teammates what to do in a pinch on the field, is the trust and mutual aid that Latin American players afford each other. Communal support, of course, is not limited to the field of play. Another consistent point across

interviewees was how grateful and fortunate they were to have teammates willing to guide them when the organization failed to do so or when the type of care they needed fell outside of the team's scope. Though country of origin often plays a big role in terms of building community, players acknowledged that cultural overlap and a shared language meant that these support systems could span home country, age, and other identifiers. The common theme that came through was that camaraderie and community spanned national signifiers, as common struggles united Latin American players in their earliest days in the US.

**Chicho:** Gracias a dios me conseguí un pana -- un chamo que me ayudó bastante que estaba ahí, un venezolano que creo que había pasado por las mismas vainas, que fue el que me aconsejó, me dijo cómo era todo. Me dijo 'Si tu no sabes cocinar, ven y tal.' Me ayudó también a cambiar un cheque porque tampoco tenía dinero y la gente me mandó un cheque y no sabía como cambiarlo. Y también me dijo, 'Tú tienes que aprender a hablar inglés, eso es lo que tienes que aprender, eso te va a ayudar bastante.'

*Thank god I was able to find a friend -- a dude who was there who helped me a lot, a Venezuelan who I think had gone through the same things, he was the one who gave me advice, he told me how everything was. He told me, 'If you don't know how to cook, come over and all that.' He helped me cash a check because I didn't have money either and they had sent me a check and I didn't know how to cash it. He also told me, 'You have to learn to speak English, that's what you have to learn, that will help you a lot.'*

**Daniel:** Lo bueno gracias a dios en el equipo que caí que me encontré con buenos muchachos que siempre estaban allí para ayudar. Siempre estaban para ayudar, nunca decían que no. El mismo año que yo jugué había muchos latinos entonces el mánager también era dominicano ¿Entiendes? Que eso también ayuda más. [Y otra cosa] ir a los restaurantes a comer [fue] un poco complicado. Entonces uno tiene que esperar por un jugador que tenga más tiempo que uno aquí en los Estados Unidos que sepa por lo menos ordenar la comida y esas cosas.

*The good thing was, thank god, that on the team where I ended up I found myself with good kids who were always there to help. They were always there to help, they never said no. The same year that I played, there were a lot of Latinos and the manager was also Dominican, you know? That also helps. [And another thing] going to restaurants to eat [was] a little complicated. So you have to wait for a player who has more time than you in the United States that at least knows how to order food and those things.*

**Simón:** Yo te puedo decir que en mi carrera he sido más que bendecido porque fue lo mismo [cuando yo llegué a los estados unidos]. ¿Oíste? [El apoyo que me dieron mis

compañeros en dominicana, me lo dieron de nuevo en los estados unidos.] Llegando aquí fue lo mismo. Había un grupo que estaba allá [en dominicana] y ya yo los había conocido. Tenían también ya varios años aquí, jugando en la rookie y repitiendo pues ya yo también había hecho confianza con ellos. Y entonces eso también me ayudó mucho porque ellos siempre estaban allí para mí o sea cuando yo firmé ellos me veían a mi como, por decir, 'Ok este novatico es de nosotros' \*ríe\*. Me cuidaron e incluso me ayudaban con lo que era la comida, a traducirme las cosas. Tú sabes cuando uno llega a spring training el primer año uno como no sabe el programa, estás perdido. Pero cuando yo llegué yo los tenía a ellos y me explicaban todo el programa por lo menos. En la mañana cuando llegaba tenía uno de los muchachos que más me ayudó, ese me decía todo. Por lo menos veíamos el programa, me veía el número y me decía, 'No, vas a estar en el field este, field número uno y después allí tu vas para allá.' Después de ese spring training ya yo sabía todo. Quizás otra persona tenga otra opinión, pero yo te puedo decir que me ha tocado estar con un grupo de latinos buenos porque te ayudan uno con otro, son buena gente, nunca me ha tocado un grupo mal.

*I can tell you that in my career I've been more than blessed because it was the same [when I arrived in the US], you see? [The support that my teammates gave me in the Dominican, they gave it to me again in the US.] Arriving here was the same. There was a group that was there [in the Dominican] and I had already met them. They also had a few years here, playing in rookie ball and repeating levels so I had also built trust with them. So that helped me too because they were always there for me, that is, when I signed they saw me like, 'Okay, this rookie is one of us.' \*laughs\* They took care of me and they also helped me with the food, translated things for me. You know that when you get to spring training the first year you don't know the program, you're lost. But when I arrived I had them and they explained the whole program at least. IN the morning when I arrived I had one of the guys that helped me the most, he told me everything. At the very least we'd look at the schedule, he'd look at my number and tell me, 'No, you're going to be on this field, field number one and after that you go over there.' After that spring training I already knew everything. Maybe someone else might have a different opinion but I can tell you that I've ended up with a good group of Latinos because they help one another, they're good people, I've never been with a bad group.*

**Eduardo:** Yo siempre me juntaba con los muchachos que ya habían jugado aquí. Un ejemplo, yo siempre estaba pegado de Martínez. El primer año de 'instruccional' mi roomie era Martínez, o sea, yo no tenía tantas complicaciones para comer porque Martínez me decía 'Oye, vamos a comer -- vamos para tal sitio'. Y así viéndolo a él ordenando fue que yo también aprendí. Una de las formas de ir a comer algo diferente era ir a comer con ellos [jugadores latinos que ya tenían tiempo en estados unidos] y así también se fue haciendo amistades.

*I always hung around the kids who had already played here. An example, I was always attached to Martinez. The first year of 'instructs' my roommate was Martinez, that is, I didn't have many complications eating because Martinez said to me, 'Hey, let's go eat, let's go to this place.' And that way, seeing him ordering was also how I learned. One of*

*the ways to go eat something different was to go out with the [Latino players who already had time in the United States] and that's how you also make friends.*

**Franklin:** Cuando llegué aquí ya encontraba compañeros que estaban aquí y ellos me fueron enseñando como era la cosa hasta que yo después agarraba y enseñaba a otros que llegaban [por primera vez]. El compañerismo tiene que ver demasiado. ¿Cómo te digo? Si cada uno ayuda al otro y el otro puede ayudar a otra persona, por ejemplo, si tú me ayudas a mí, yo puedo ayudar a [otro compañero]. Los nicaragüenses con los dominicanos, los dominicanos con los venezolanos, todos los latinos siempre nos damos el apoyo.

*When I came here I found teammates that were already here and they started teaching me how it all worked until I eventually got it and taught other people that were arriving [for the first time]. Camaraderie is such a big deal. How can I explain it? If each person helps someone else, that person can help another person, for example, if you help me I can help [another teammate]. The Nicaraguans with the Dominicans, the Dominicans with the Venezuelans, all the Latinos always give each other support.*

While the themes that Chicho, Daniel, Simón, Eduardo, and Franklin touched on have appeared throughout this section in different contexts -- food insecurity, not being able to order, not being able to communicate, not knowing what to do at the field or how to follow directions -- the through line in most players' anxieties and frustrations are tied to communicating in English. Though most of the discussion on communication in this section saw players reflecting on internal, personal difficulties and frustrations, as well as methods to alleviate or minimize those issues, English or lack of English can also reveal the fault lines between Latin American players and their white teammates or coaches. As discussed at length in the previous two chapters, the enforcement of linguistic hierarchy and simultaneous elevation of English/denigration of Spanish works to maintain white supremacy within the sport regardless of individual intent or personal feelings. In the following section, I examine how English and communication form one of the crucial terrains on which Latin American players and white players and staff clash.



### **Conflict and Confrontation:**

When addressing the topic of racism directly with players the vast majority asserted that they hadn't been victims of racism or that it hadn't marked their careers in a significant manner. Discussions about racialized experiences, discrimination, and prejudice, saw interviewees offer indirect answers, externalize accounts (citing teammates or other people they knew who had such dealings) but generally avoid charges of racism. However, when asked to share the prevailing tropes, biases, and assumptions that exist within baseball regarding Latin American players, almost every interviewee had something to say. Though I implored some interviewees to share their definitions and perceptions of racism, I was more interested in discussing their awareness of and experience with specific examples of Latin American racialization within the game. Players' responses to more specific queries signaled how much the phrasing and lexical nature of questions themselves informed their answers. While my respondents affirmed that they hadn't endured any severe, visible experiences of racial violence or mistreatment, they all shared incidents of conflict with white staff or teammates and could reproduce the oft-repeated stereotypes of Latin American players within the game. Here, then, we can contextualize their responses in our ongoing understanding of racism or racial-colonial difference as something broader than interpersonal resentment, instead tied to histories of domination and reproduction of said domination in forms of coloniality. Below I contrast players' answers regarding racism with moments of injustice or racialized tension from their careers. My intention, of course, is not to project a US racial binary onto their recollections or reveal contradictions in their statements for some sort of "gotcha" moment. Ideas of selfhood and racial identity differ from country to country, though generally, white supremacy and anti-Blackness pervade not only the US but also Latin America through different manifestations of colorism or mythologies of mestizaje. As

such, players didn't always frame racism (as a concept) or their tense experiences with white US staff and teammates as tied to skin color. As I have stated previously within this thesis, examining the intersection of baseball and the racial imaginaries of each Latin American country merits its own, separate investigation. Instead, I use this section to understand how it is that players might at once state that they hadn't dealt with racism while also sharing -- at times angrily -- moments of disagreement and mistreatment they perceived as being ethno-racially driven. Their stories deepen our comprehension of the penetrating nature of white supremacy and the limits of relying on ambiguous, blanket terms like "racism" that can devolve into framings of malevolence as a matter of unique, individual hatred, rather than identifying it within the forms of governance and power structures that Latin American players must confront within the sport.

*(Not) Experiencing Racism as a Concept*

As we saw in interviewees' reflections on how they adjusted to life in the US, many players cited positive interactions and relationships with their white teammates and coaches. Some, like Eduardo, formed strong bonds with white teammates as they continued to play with the same group of players for years. Chicho, on the other hand, avoided the people he viewed as threatening or less tolerant. Independent of how players broached the subject of interacting with white, US staff and players, by and large, they did not acknowledge adverse experiences with racism, at least by name.

**Roberto:** Mayormente conmigo siempre fueron amables. Nunca me hablaron mal.

*For the most part, they were always nice to me. They never disparaged me.*

**Chicho:** Gracias a dios yo no viví tanto aumento de racismo. Trataba de apartarme de esa gente pues.

*Thank god I didn't experience an increase in racism. I tried to stay away from those people, I guess.*

**Eduardo:** Yo en mi caso no tuve nunca compañeros racistas a menos que no me haya dado cuenta. Si otros se han dado cuenta no lo sé, pero en mi carrera nunca tuve compañeros racistas. Gracias a dios la mayoría de los jugadores con los que yo jugué eran todos de mi edad o sea si fueron drafteados o si vinieron de Dominicana. Y siempre tuvimos buenas relaciones, toditos. Si yo me equivocaba tratando de comunicarme con ellos, no se reían, sino que me corregían. Eso fue bueno. Y siempre mantuve con los mismos jugadores hasta como que clase A. ¿Y que te digo? Nunca vi el racismo, en verdad siempre trataban en mi caso de ayudarme a comunicarme con ellos, esa fue una de las cosas más positivas que yo tuve en ligas menores.

*In my case, I never had racist teammates unless I haven't realized it. If others have recognized it I don't know but in my career I never had racist teammates. Thank god the majority of players who I played with were all my age, whether they were drafted or if they came from the Dominican. And we always had good relationships, everyone. If I made a mistake trying to communicate with them they didn't laugh but corrected me. That was good. And I was always with the same guys until like Class A. What else can I tell you? I never saw racism, honestly, in my case they tried to help me communicate with them, that was one of the most positive things I had in the minors.*

**Simón:** Todo era de la mejor manera pues. No había maltrato, sino que ellos trataban de que uno se sintiera bien entonces, por lo menos yo, yo me sentí bien. No había necesidad de que me dijeran, 'No, tienes que hacer esto, tienes portarte así allá, así allá, asao. E incluso, todos los coaches americanos que yo tuve, no, era algo increíble, no te puedo hablar mal de ninguno. Y cuando me iban a cambiar yo te puedo decir que me llamaron más de 7, 6 americanos así que eran coaches y fueron managers que me llamaron para desearme suerte y eso. Quizás yo tuve esa bendición de que todos, pues no todos, pero me trataron bien.

*Everything was done in the best way, I guess. There wasn't mistreatment, rather they tried to make you feel good, at least I felt good. There was no need for them to tell me, 'No, you have to do this, you have act this way, this that and the other thing. And also, all of the American coaches that I had, it was something unbelievable, I can't speak badly about any of them. And when they were going to trade me I can tell you that more than 7, 6 Americans that were coaches and were managers, they called me to wish me luck and all that. Maybe I had that blessing that all of them, well not all of them, but they treated me well.*

**Daniel:** Y con los americanos me llevaban todos bien, toditos bien.

*And with the Americans, I got along with all of them well, all of them well.*

Though personal discussions and definitions of racism can vary widely or take on a subjective nature, I asked a handful of respondents to share what they considered to be racist in a general sense. When discussing their conceptions and understandings of racism, interviewees identified many of the same areas that white listening and observing subjects tend to discuss in Chapter 2. Take Roberto's stance,

**Roberto:** El racismo normal no es como tú tienes algo que te dicen 'Recógeme eso'. El racismo también [existe] verbalmente como que te digan 'Tú no te vistes bien,' o 'Tú no te ves bien,' o 'Tú eres un moreno,' lo que sea. Hay racismo así nada más que con cosas materiales. Pero conmigo no han sido así.

*Everyday racism isn't like you have something like 'Go get that for me.' Racism also [exists] verbally like if they say to you, 'You don't dress well,' or 'You don't look good,' or 'You're dark,' whatever. There's racism with nothing more than material things. But with me they haven't been that way.*

Though he states that white staff and teammates didn't treat him this way, Roberto noted the discursive nature of racism, opining that racism doesn't mean being bossed around and told to do things but can appear through simple comments on dress, appearance, and skin color. Others, like Eduardo and Simón cited intolerance, xenophobia, and mistreatment in their definitions.

**Eduardo:** Creo que el racismo es como el rechazo a las demás culturas. Esa es la definición que yo tengo. Como que la gente que te moleste -- tu educación, o tu cultura pues, o tu manera de comportarte.

*I think racism is like the rejection of other cultures. That's the definition I have. Like those people annoy you -- your education or your culture, I guess, or how you behave.*

**Simón:** El desprecio, maltrato. O sea maltrato quiere decir maltrato por nada pues o que te hagan sentir que el tipo está contigo pero adentro te está metiendo el puñal. Son malas personas, esos no quieren a nadie, y por lo menos considero yo que eso es racismo. Que, si es de un americano a un latino, sí. Me imagino que eso, dirán, es el racismo. Bueno, no sé, a mi no me importaba eso en ese tiempo.

*Contempt, mistreatment. That is, mistreatment in the sense of mistreatment for nothing or that they make you feel like someone is with you but deep down they're sticking the knife in. They're bad people, they don't like anyone, at least that's what I consider racism to*

*be. That's if it's from an American to a Latino, yeah. I imagine that they would say that's racism. Well, I don't know, it didn't matter to me back then.*

Despite respondents' varying definitions of racism -- brief, comprehensive, common -- their contentions that they never or rarely experienced racist treatment, were betrayed by answers to questions regarding issues they had with white, US staff and players. While it's important to understand how interviewees conceived of racism, to better comprehend why or why not players might not have perceived certain acts to be racist, my bigger aim is to reorient our understanding of racism as deeply embedded in both global and national systems of power and as something that can be reinforced through both material and discursive channels, not merely attitudinal or singularly egregious acts of violence. Because a given player or set of players say that they didn't experience racism -- though in some cases, said they saw it happen to others, just not them -- does not mean that the very structure of baseball isn't rooted in white supremacy. To return to Barnor Hesse's colonial constitution of race thesis that "race is not in the eye of the beholder or on the body of the objectified," but rather "an inherited western, modern-colonial practice of violence, assemblage, superordination, exploitation, and segregation... demarcating the colonial rule of Europe over non-Europe,"<sup>186</sup> we can adjust our gaze to how racialized subjectivities within baseball are tied to histories of colonialism, imperialism, global white supremacy, anti-Blackness (as well as the particularities of the US-specific context) inherent in those projects. Chapter 1 showed us how the flow of bodies from 3rd World to 1st World and vice versa are tied to histories of domination and US hegemony within Latin America. Chapter 2 examined how white players and staff -- in their overdetermination of Latin American language and behavior -- reinscribed long-held colonial distinctions between 1st and 3rd World, elevating whiteness and relegating the Black and Brown player populations from Latin America to their "backwards"

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<sup>186</sup> Hesse, *Conceptual Aphasia in Black*.

origins. This section builds on those themes in that it consolidates player responses to a range of topics analyzed in the first two chapters. Though, I have included player and staff accounts in the earlier chapters, the following analysis underscores the generalness of Latin American player experience and in doing so, the structural rot that has accumulated within the game.

### *Linguistic Hierarchy and Interactions as Disputed Terrain*

Unlike some of the other interviewees who cited the welcoming nature of their US teammates when first coming stateside, Chicho's early interactions with his white, US counterparts weren't as rosy.

**Chicho:** [La relación con los americanos fue] malísima porque yo no hablaba inglés y ellos tampoco se esforzaban para enseñarle a uno, no se tomaban ese tiempo -- [decían] vayan a la clase de inglés y ya. Y de ahí, cuando nos reunían y vaina, hablaban inglés y ahí uno tenía que buscar manera de cómo buscar un traductor o buscar una gente que supiera más o menos español para que te dijera pues. [Y si nosotros no mejoramos decían,] 'No quieren aprender'

Se burlaban de uno porque uno trataba de hablar el inglés. Se burlaban, decían que uno era bruto que está lento que el otro. Que pronuncie bien la palabra y después uno hablaba español normal y le decía su vaina y le decía que habla américa y tal -- esas cosas pues. Pero eso no era todo el tiempo, esos eran casos aislados. Eso fue creo que lo que me ayudó porque aquí llegó gente que no sabía nada de inglés, que no sabían ni decir 'hi', y a mi se me hizo rápido en el tiempo que estuve lesionado. En los 2 meses que estuve aquí en los Estados Unidos se me hizo más fácil porque ya estaba más acostumbrado a escuchar esas palabras.

Entonces yo entendía más o menos lo que querían decir algunos gringos cuando hablaban de los latinos y eso me molestaba. Pero no sabía como decírselo, entonces eso como que me motivó a aprender más para que cualquier cosa que decían los gringos, yo se los respondía. Se metían con los latinos nuevos porque como no hablaban inglés y se burlaban y eso cuando uno trataba de [ayudar] -- eso es otra cosa que uno trata de hablar y todas esas cosas, pero como se burlan de uno, uno como que se cohíbe, como que le da pena de tratar de aprender.

*[My relationship with the Americans was] awful because I didn't speak English and they didn't try to teach you, I guess, no they didn't want to take the time, I guess -- [they said] go to English class and that was it. And from there, when they'd round us up for a meeting and stuff, they'd speak in English and there you'd have to find a way to get a*

*translator or find someone that knew Spanish more or less to tell you what was said. [And if we didn't get better they said,] 'They don't want to learn.'*

*They made fun of you because you'd try to speak English. They joked, they said you were dumb, that you were slow, this and that. To pronounce things correctly and then you'd speak Spanish like normal and they'd say their bit and they'd say speak American and all that -- those sorts of things. But that wasn't all the time, those were isolated cases. That's what I think helped me because people would arrive here that didn't speak any English, that didn't even know how to say 'hi', and I learned quickly during the time I was injured. In those two months that I was here in the United States, it came easy to me because I was used to hearing those words, I guess. So I understood more or less what some gringos meant when they were talking about the Latinos and that bothered me. But I didn't know how to say anything to them, so that's what motivated me to learn more than for anything the gringos said, I could respond to them. They'd get into with the new Latinos because they didn't speak English and they made fun of them and that's when you try [to help] -- that's another thing that you try to speak and all that but since they make fun of you, you get self-conscious, like you get embarrassed from trying to learn.*

Chicho's story offers a number of examples that have appeared in different contexts throughout this work: the imposition of a hegemonic white, English-speaking identity through comments like "speak American" and making fun of grammatical or pronunciation errors, the racialized view that if Latin American players couldn't speak the language it was because they were "stupid," "slow," or "didn't want to learn," the exclusion of Latin American players who can't speak English. Chicho acknowledged that the general lack of support, be it institutional or organizational, made things more difficult. Without adequate support systems, Chicho felt that the only recourse to help Latin American players communicate was to "go to English class," a narrative and response pushed by white players and staff that would be viewed as a character flaw or natural deficiency, if they didn't progress as expected. On top of that, Chicho noted that the toxic environment in which he and other Latin American players were made fun of caused players to close themselves off and not want to speak up. However, Chicho cites this treatment as his primary reason for learning English, as a way to make out what US players were saying about him and his Latin American colleagues, so he could better respond to white jabs and jokes. In his

case, learning English wasn't merely a mandated task he had to complete to fit in but rather a tool to push back against those making fun of him. Although, Chicho attributes these sour interactions as isolated cases, the condescension directed at non-English speakers and the increased ease with which the Latin American players who achieve "relative mastery" of English are able to maneuver through a white system also appeared in my conversation with Juan, a Latin American coach working in the minor leagues.

**David:** Do you think that white coaches talk differently to Latin American players than they do to US-[born] players?

**Juan:** \*Laughs, mumbling\* The tone...or the message in general. [It's like] 'He can't comprehend what I say so I'm just going to say it differently. But it's not different in a good way, it's [more] 'I'm going to say this and hopefully he gets me but if not, who cares?'

**Jua:** [It also depends on playing favorites and prospects]. If it's a Latin guy or a [prized prospect like a promising] shortstop that's Latin, the communication is a lot different. It's like 'Hey, it's okay, life is going to be fine, let's do this' but if it's a [Latin American] backup third baseman [who] never plays it's like 'Fuck you, you're a dumbass, you're not allowed to do anything.' I think that happens quite a bit. It depends what you need as a coach from the player.

**Jua:** [An example:] it happened all the time with Fernando Tatis [Jr.]. Everyone knew that he was going to be a superstar. The attention he got was a lot different. I almost wish that he didn't speak English to see how they would have treated him. Because the only advantage that Juan Soto has or Fernando Tatis has -- they're superstars -- is that they're able to speak two languages. Otherwise it would have been a lot harder. I'm very curious as to how Ronald Acuña [as someone whose English isn't as good] handles things.

Juan's account reveals how white coaches and staff altered their speech when speaking with Latin American players. The paternal tonal changes and simplification of language and phrases based on perceived unintelligence relies on the same colonial logics that fuel ideas of Latin American premodernity and backwardness. We can return to Fanon by interpreting racialized linguistic condescension as an extension of coloniality. As he states in *Black Skin, White Masks*,



“A white man addressing a Negro behaves exactly like an adult with a child and starts smirking, whispering, patronizing, cozening” or later, “the European has a fixed concept of the Negro, and there’s nothing more exasperating than to be asked: ‘How long have you been in France? You speak French so well.’”<sup>187</sup> Such patronizing tones and phrases as well as forms of pidgin communication reveal the expectation and assumption that Latin American players cannot or should not be expected to understand or produce sophisticated, intelligent forms of communication. Second, Juan notes how cultural proximity (along with immense talent) enables movement up the baseball ladder, solidifying English’s role as a path to more success and noting the improved treatment it elicits from white staff members. Juan’s view from above, from a relative position of authority as a coach, offers a unique perspective, however, to think that these changes in behavior and tone are lost on players would be folly. When speaking with Daniel and Franklin, the topic of the “tono gringo” or gringo tone, a uniquely white tone of speech that signified condescension and patronization for both interviewees. The use of the term “tono gringo” isn’t necessarily widespread among the Latin American player population, however, both interviewees’ recognition of such white speaking practices signaled their association of treatment and speech as uniquely gringo, coming only from white, US parties. Their recognition of the “tono gringo” bolsters Juan’s earlier points about how white staff address and interact with Latin American players. I asked Daniel to explain the “tono gringo” and how it comes into play:

**Daniel:** El [‘tono gringo’ es ese] tonito gritando como si [algo] fuera escandaloso. Si tú vas a explicar la vaina, tú no tienes que usar ese vocabulario, esa vaina. Explícame la vaina como es o olvida esa maldita mierda.

Tú sabes que el jugador latino firma con 16 años y no alcanza a terminar los estudios [mientras] los americanos, los firman de high school. Entonces nosotros, nos tienen como personas brutos o no brutos así, pero personas poco estudiadas. Allí es que viene la cosa, que el americano piensa que todos los latinos somos iguales. Hay que hacerles demostrar

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<sup>187</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*.

que el hecho que yo no haya terminado mis estudios yo no puedo tener conocimiento de una cosa o el hecho que [y si] yo no tengo conocimiento de una cosa no quiere decir que no vaya a aprender. Por eso es por lo que nosotros decimos ‘Oye deja tu maldito acento gringo y explica la cosa como es o arranca.’ Es por la misma razón que siempre dicen que los latinos son los brutos. Por eso a nosotros nos incomoda porque [cada vez que pasa algo] dicen ‘Ay los latinos.’ ¿Entiendes? Uno se siente ofendido.

Ese es el punto, [que nos tratan a todos como si fuéramos iguales]. Pero no, no, no, no, no. Si tu me explicas a mi, explícame como es. A mi no me compares con todos latinos. A mi no me mires como una persona bruta. A mi la cosa me explicas formalmente.

Yo personalmente siento como que cuando a un blanquito, vamos a decir, le dan una información a nosotros no nos dan igual o completa. Porque cada vez que nos dan una información siempre nosotros miramos a los blanquitos y nosotros decimos ‘¿Por qué esto está diferente?’ y [el personal responde] ‘También dijeron que tienen que hacer esto’ [y nosotros] ‘Por que no [nos] dijiste?’ y después ellos dicen ‘No, es que les íbamos a decir.’ Es como que le dan más detalle o no se que carajo es.

***Daniel:** The ‘gringo tone’ is that little yelling tone as if [something] were outrageous. If you’re going to explain something, you don’t have to use that vocabulary, that tone. Explain it to me how it is or forget that fucking shit.*

*You know that latino players sign at age 16 and aren’t able to finish their studies, while Americans sign out of high school. So they view us as stupid people or maybe not stupid but as people without much education. That’s where that comes from, that the American thinks that all the latinos are the same. It’s important to show them that the fact that I haven’t finished my studies doesn’t mean that I don’t know things and if I don’t know about something, that doesn’t mean that I won’t learn. That’s why we say, ‘Hey, cut the fucking gringo accent and explain what needs to be explained or get out of here.’ It’s the same reason that they always say that the latinos are the dumb ones. That’s why we get uncomfortable [any time anything happens] because they say ‘Ay, the latinos.’ You get it? You get offended.*

*That’s the point, [that they treat us all the same]. But no, no, no, no, no. If you explain something to me, tell it like it is. Don’t compare me to all other latinos. Don’t look at me like I’m a stupid person. With me, you explain things formally.*

*Personally, I feel like when a white guy, let’s say they give him some information, with us they don’t give us the same or the complete info. Because any time they give us some information we always look at the white guys and say, ‘Why is this different?’ and [the staff member responds], ‘They also told them to do this too’ and we’re like ‘Why didn’t you tell us?’ and then they say, ‘No, it’s just that we were going to tell you.’ It’s like they give them more detail or I don’t know what the hell it is.*

Here, we can expand on the brief discussion of pidgin and differential treatment of racialized others due to a perceived deficiency or lack of intelligence. What Daniel refers to as the “tono gringo” locates the condescension and stratified social places of the white staff member or player and the Latin American player discussed in Chapter 2. Similarly, Daniel confirms what Juan alluded to regarding the change in tone and message, noting that white staff provide Latin American players with altered, dumb-downed, or simply different directives. Fanon also had an answer for white justifications as to why they needed to simplify their speech when communicating racialized others, saying “I will be told, there is no wish, no intention to anger him. I grant this; but it is just this absence of wish, this lack of interest, this indifference, this automatic manner of classifying him, imprisoning him, primitivizing him, decivilizing him, that makes him angry. If a man who speaks pidgin to a man of colour or an Arab does not see anything wrong or evil in such behaviour it is because he has never stopped to think.”<sup>188</sup> As Fanon notes, it is precisely the perceivable difference in tone and the content being shared that angers the listener, something Daniel articulates clearly. Franklin confirmed tonal changes on the part of white, US staff speaking to Latin American players, mentioning the ‘tono gringo’ and defining it as a form of speech ‘media agresiva // *sort of aggressive*,’ he explained:

**Franklin:** Bueno, ¿Cómo te digo? Tú sabes que mayormente ustedes se hablan -- a veces tengo ese problema con mi esposa [porque es de los estados unidos] -- la mayoría de los americanos se hablan agresivamente, no es igual que nosotros. Cuando nos hablan y nos suben la voz nosotros sentimos como que los estamos ofendiendo, que nos están regañando, que nos están hablando duro. ¿Tú ves? [Se lo toma] como un regaño como cuando uno está con su madre y regaña a uno.

*Well, how do I put this? You know that you all talk to each other -- sometimes I have this problem with my wife [because she's from the US] -- the majority of Americans talk to each other aggressively, it's not that same as us. Because when they talk to us and they raise their voices we feel like we're offending them, that they're scolding us, that they're*

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<sup>188</sup> IBID, 24.

*talking tough, see? You take it as scolding like when you're with your mom and she reprimands you.*

Franklin adds to Daniel's comments, explaining what he perceives as a particular, aggressive form of US speech that white staff employ when talking to Latin American players. He points out raising one's voice and talking tough as components of the "gringo tone" and likens it to when one receives a scolding from their mom. Both Daniel and Franklin view the tone as a general practice, something identifiable when they hear it or when they are spoken to in such a way. I asked Daniel to elaborate on why white staff speak down to Latin American players and he reiterated his stance that it's tied to a perceived lack of intelligence or formal education.

**Daniel:** Yo entiendo que es por lo mismo que estuvimos hablando sobre el estudio. No terminar los estudios a veces los firman -- yo no, gracias a dios yo termine mi bachiller -- pero a veces hay jugadores que los firman que de casualidad aprendieron a escribir su nombre. No creas tú, por inteligente que sea, no vayas a esperar que esa persona se vaya a expresar bien hacia otra persona. Pero quizás no porque no quiere, sino que el tiempo no le alcanzó para aprender.

Yo creo que esa es la diferencia, por darnos diferente información. Bueno, tú has trabajado y tú sabes que nos dan diferente información. Te has dado cuenta. Siempre te van a decir, Explícale bien a los latinos. Explícale bien a los dominicanos. Explícale bien, explícale bien. Que tú sabes [como son], díles a tal hora. David, recuerda a tal ahora.' ¿Me entiendes? Y es por la misma razón.

*I understand it to be due to the same stuff we were talking about regarding education. Sometimes they sign guys not having finished their studies -- not me, thankfully I completed my diploma -- but sometimes there are players that they sign who by chance learned to write their name. Don't think, as smart as someone is, you're not going to expect that person to express themselves well towards someone else. But maybe not because they don't want to but they just didn't have the time to learn.*

*I think that's the difference, for giving us different information. Well, you've worked, you know that they give us different information. You've realized. They're always going to tell you, 'Explain it well to the Latinos. Explain it well to the Dominicans. Explain it to them well, explain it to them well. You know [how they are] , tell them at what time. David, remind them at such and such time.' You understand? It's for the same reason.*

Daniel highlights the conflation of formal studies with intelligence as the primary source of white condescension and assumptions about Latin American players and their capacity to process

information and carry out instructions. He recognizes the fact that sometimes there are certain players with poor literacy in Spanish but warns against overrepresenting such traits as evidence or proof of intellectual deficiency. In his words, it's not that that player didn't necessarily want to learn but rather that he might not have had enough time to. Daniel's analysis implies that those who were unable to finish their studies didn't have an alternative and that material realities likely forced them into situations that didn't allow for studies, such as the pursuit of a baseball signing or different labor. Additionally, as he expands on the topic, Daniel cites how not having formal education (real or perceived) as the pretext that prompts white staffers to constantly remind Latin American players of quotidian items, such as being on time. To be reminded from the time one signs at age 16 well into his 20s about being on time or some other simple directive, suggests an underlying assumption that Latin American players typically won't grasp the message and need more management than their white counterparts. Daniel notes that white monolingual staff often abdicate their responsibility to explain instructions, passing it off to their Latin American or bilingual counterparts, while also underscoring their belief that Latin American players require *extra* vigilance through comments like "Explain it to them well," "make sure they understand," or "remind them". Having a bilingual go-between communicate the message but qualifying it with "make sure you explain it well," both externalizes white monolingual responsibility and reveals white US assumptions about Latin American intellect. Simón put it more directly, noting that white staff members have an excuse if a Latin American player doesn't understand their instructions, "La responsabilidad [cae] al jugador. Claro, claro que sí porque [los coaches] tienen como lavarse las manos, ellos pueden decir 'yo le dije' y si yo voy y digo 'no, no me dijo nada' quien me va a creer a mi? [O en su] español malo, ajá, la traducción fue mala // *The responsibility [falls] to the player. Of course, of course it does because [the coaches] have a way*

*to wash their of it, they can say 'I told him,' and if I go and say 'No, they didn't tell me anything,' who's going to believe me? [Or in their] bad Spanish, uh huh, the translation was bad*.” Interestingly, however, when Latin American players seek clarity or more detail regarding instruction, it can be perceived as subverting white, coaching authority, as it flies in the face of the operative assumptions within baseball regarding Latin American inferiority.

Multiple interviewees discussed the recoil on the part of white, US staff when they pushed back, questioned, or sought out more information or instruction. A common refrain within the coaching world is “If I can’t tell you why you should do something, you shouldn’t do it,” yet for Latin American players that doesn’t always seem to be the case. Both Roberto and Daniel discussed the topic, again, citing paternalism and the assumed inferiority of Latin American intellect -- and thus not knowing what’s best for oneself -- as the drivers behind such tension with coaches. As Roberto outlined, such cases can be as simple as asking for clarity on a directive or set of instructions, “A veces a los coaches les choca eso. Que te expliquen algo que no entendiste porque ya te hablaron. Si tú dices que no entendiste tú vas a estar mal con ellos // *Sometimes that rubs coaches the wrong way. That they explain something and you didn't understand because they already told you. If you say that you didn't understand, you're going to be on their bad side.*” Similarities exist across the sporting world among racialized populations, as Gabby Yearwood points out in his study on structural racism in collegiate sports, “When it was time for scouting by professional teams or for coaching opportunities, those who acted according to Black humility were rewarded, and those who voiced concerns were seen as having behavioral ‘problems’ that was also tied to their Blackness.”<sup>189</sup> Deference and humility go rewarded whereas questioning is flagged as inappropriate or offensive.

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<sup>189</sup> Yearwood, “Playing without Power: Black Male NCAA Student-Athletes Living with Structural Racism,” 25.

**Daniel:** Yo me acuerdo de que un año tuvimos como diez coaches queriendo corregir y cambiar cosas conmigo. Y yo intervine y dije, ‘Vamos a aprovechar este tiempo ya que estamos todos aquí y nos vamos a poner en la misma página’. Porque si no, [si no hubiera hecho eso yo,] son cosas que ellos no te van a decir. Y a veces eso está difícil para un jugador latino [hablar sin reservas] porque se va a ver como una crítica. Se va a decir como que, ‘¿Tú vas a decir que mi trabajo no tiene sentido o que yo no sé lo que estoy haciendo? [O simplemente, pueden volver a lo de ‘los latinos’] y decir ‘Es bruto, es un latino bruto no le digas nada.’

*I remember that one year we had like ten coaches wanting to correct and change things with me. And I intervened and I said, ‘We’re going to take advantage of this time since we’re all together and we’re going to get on the same page.’ Because if not, [if I hadn’t done that,] they’re things that they’re not going to say to you. And sometimes that’s hard for a Latino player [speaking without reservation] because it’s going to seem like a criticism. They’re going to say something like, ‘You’re going to tell me that my work doesn’t make sense and that I don’t know what I’m doing?’ [Or they can simply come back to the whole ‘Latinos’ bit] and say, ‘He’s dumb, he’s a dumb Latino, don’t tell him anything.’*

Daniel details how quickly assumptions about Latin American intelligence come into play when certain coaches perceive a threat or questioning of their work or relative expertise. He explains both how difficult it can be for a Latin American player to raise such a point and how important it is if they are to receive the desired level of clarity and information -- something he perceives as being withheld for similar white concerns that the Latin American player ‘won’t understand.’

Daniel also highlights how white coaches have an easy an out if ever questioned, by falling back on arguments on accepted arguments that Latin American players aren’t as educated or are dumb and thus don’t warrant a serious explanation. Daniel recounted an instance in which a white monolingual coach had the audacity to raise concerns about Daniel’s work ethic or plans without having understood the language, context, or meaning behind the comments in question. He outlined the subsequent confrontation he had with the coach in question after receiving a call from team management regarding what the coach had overheard and relayed about Daniel:

**Daniel:** Mira, yo te quiero decir unas cuantas cosas. No lo tomes por el lado ofensivo ni quieras meter en la cabeza que yo no quiero saber de ti. Salió un comentario de tu boca

que viste tal y tal cosa, no es bueno que tú lo digas. La próxima vez, tú te acercas a mí y tú me lo dices, ‘Mira, Daniel, ¿tú estabas hablando en serio?’ porque tú no sabes las cosas que te pueden traer problemas a ti o las cosas que me pueden traer problemas a mí. Ahora, si es que yo estoy haciendo una cosa *a ti*, diciendo una cosa *a ti*, faltando el respeto *a ti*, faltando el respeto a un compañero, tú tienes todo el derecho de hacer la cosa. Pero por una cosa que yo bromeo, yo no me sé tu nombre, no me interesa, yo no sé quien tú eres, no sé qué diablo tú trabajas aquí, no me interesa, pero conmigo no vayas a buscar cámara. Ya tú me metiste en el medio por una simple pendejada y a mi me llama la atención. A mi no me gusta llamarme la atención, [especialmente] por cosas que no son.

Tú lo hiciste inofensivamente, sin querer lastimar algo, pero son comentarios que [tienen repercusiones.] Mira, a mi me llamaron los jefes. Y aquí hay cosas demasiadas importantes entonces tú me vas a llamar atención a mi por una pendejada.

*Look, I want to say a few things to you. Don't take it as offensive and don't get it in your head that I don't want to have anything to do with you. A comment came out of your mouth that you saw this and that and it's not alright that you share that. Next time you come to me and you ask me, 'Hey, Daniel, were you serious about that?' because you don't know which things could end up causing problems for you or causing problems for me. Now, if it's that I'm doing something **to you**, saying something **to you**, disrespecting **you**, disrespecting a teammate, you have every right to do something. But because I was joking about something, I don't even know your name, it doesn't interest me, I don't know who you are, I don't know what the hell you do here, it doesn't interest me, but don't look to get face-time by talking about me. You already got me in the middle of something stupid and that draws attention to me. I don't like to draw attention to myself, [especially] for things that didn't happen.*

*You did it inoffensively, without wanting to harm anyone, but those are comments that [have repercussions.] Look, the bosses called me. And here there are too many important things and you're going to draw attention to me for something stupid.*

It needs to be stated that Daniel's forceful words towards the coach likely wouldn't have been tolerated were it not for his status as an established major leaguer. As I noted in Chapter 2, a player's service time and prominence on the big league team is what earns him a certain amount of respect and latitude to speak his mind or voice his opinions openly. Until earning that status, however, a player doesn't have such leeway and is much more likely to stay quiet since even engaging in earnest questioning, let alone more tense exchanges like Daniel's, can leave a player on management's bad side. As this incident outlines, white overhearing and overdetermination of



Latin American tone or action, can generate unwanted attention for Latin American players. As Daniel lamented, not everyone is able to address or resolve situations as he did, leaving room for “Sencilleces que las convierten grande, me entiendes? Un problemón por un comentario sin sentido // *Little things that turn into something bigger, you know? A giant problem because of a pointless comment.*” Alternatively, conforming to expectations and norms and muting actions perceived as threatening or out of line can become internalized over time. Roberto explained how after so much time waiting at the end of the line during drills for fear of making a mistake, one day he went second to prove that he had understood and could do what his coaches asked of him.

**Roberto:** Un día me pongo yo *de segundo* y me dice [el coach en inglés,] ‘Hey, ¿que te dije?’ y yo ‘No, yo sé que tú me dijiste,’ y me dijo, ‘Yo quiero ver, a ver que tú sabes.’ Y fui, lo hice bien y me dijo, ‘Ohhh, you know. Ya sabes,’ y después fue como más flexible y me decía ‘Oye, Roberto ven ponte aquí, ponte aquí.’ Me tenía siempre adelante, ‘Roberto, vente adelante, vente adelante,’ y así fue como yo empecé a aprender un poco más. Porque yo les enseñe a ellos que yo quería, que yo quería aprender entonces ellos se dieron cuenta que yo quería.

*One day I went second and [the coach] says to me [in English,] ‘Hey, what’d I tell you?’ and I go, ‘No, I know what you said to me,’ and he told me, ‘I want to see, see what you know.’ I went, I did it well and he said, ‘Ohhh, you know. Ya sabes,’ and after that he was more flexible with me. He’d say, ‘Hey, Roberto, come here, go here.’ He always had me first, ‘Roberto, come up front, come up here,’ and that’s how I started to learn a little more. Because I showed them that I wanted it, that I wanted to learn so they realized that I wanted to.*

Roberto’s anecdote reveals what he remembered as a moment of personal growth but also the intense pressure to “show them that he wanted it, that he wanted to learn so they realized he did.” His desire to go second in line and prove that he both understood and wanted to learn indicates the synthesis of conformity and adherence to positive feedback, validation, and progress. Such moments recall the “desiring subject of development”, referenced throughout this work, who has taken it upon themselves to improve and demonstrate the requisite level of effort to be

incorporated into normative modes of existence. However, these fleeting moments of personal validation that reinforce “appropriate behavior” and direction-following center the individual as uniquely able to overcome challenges without acknowledging the repeated construction of these challenges within the structures of the sport. Indeed, the line-hopping that made Roberto feel as though he had proven something momentous, had occurred years earlier for Simón and continues to occur year in, year out. As each account illustrates, players jump through a wide range of hoops as it relates to navigating language and the power structures of a professional team, all the while engaging with a US racial binary and imaginary that racializes them and foregrounds their 3rd World inferiority. On top of such charged communication and tense exchanges, players could also produce personal examples of when white staff and players projected additional stereotypes -- or “coño” attributes -- onto them. The most common of these supposed “qualities” related to their legality and deservedness within the sport.

#### *Latin American Illegitimacy: Age Falsification and Steroids*

As I examined in Chapter 2, white perceptions of mischievousness and illegitimacy within the Latin American player population is widespread. So much so, that every player I interviewed had an exchange in which both their identity and “legality” was questioned. While Roberto acknowledged that it’s “mejor evitar esos temas // *better to avoid those topics*” Latin American players inevitably come face to face with charges or jokes about age falsification, steroid use, unintelligence, and deviant behavior. Whereas Chapter 2 established the fact or reality of white questioning of Latin American identity and legitimacy as a component of a process of racialization, this section centers Latin American reactions to such claims.

**David:** Te preguntaron en ese momento [temprano en tu carrera de ligas menores] ‘¿Cuántos años tenías de verdad?’

**Chicho:** Sí \*riéndose\*

**D:** ¿Cuántas veces has escuchado esa pregunta?

**C:** Ahh cónchale varias veces, ¿oíste?

\*Los dos se ríen\*

**C:** Valió esa.

**C:** Y algunas veces yo sé que es jodienda pues, pero igual como que lo dicen con una duda, ¿ves?

**C:** Como que generalizan pues, eso es chimbo, ¿ves? Esa vaina es chimba porque entonces yo tengo varios amigos americanos que son chéveres. Yo no les voy a decir que todos son racistas porque he conocido a gringos que son racistas, no voy a hacer eso, ¿ves? Eso es lo que hay que entender, que no todos los latinos son así.

**David:** At that point in time [early in your minor league career] did people ask you how old you really were during this time?

**Chicho:** Yes \*chuckling to himself\*

**D:** How many times did you hear that question?

**C:** Oh man -- haha -- plenty of times

\*Both laugh\*

**C:** That was a good one.

**C:** And sometimes I know it’s joking around but at the same time they say it with a level of doubt, see?

**C:** Like they generalize, you know? It’s just lame because I have plenty of American friends that are cool. I’m not going to say to them that all of them are racist just because I’ve met some racist gringos. I’m not going to do that. You know? That’s what you have to understand, not all Latinos are like that.

Chicho acknowledges the space for joking and that white players may not mean harm in their line of questioning but nevertheless, feels bad because of the obvious stereotyping and generalization that the white players are relying on. Chicho was not alone in his experience.

There’s Eduardo:

**David:** Yo he escuchado la pregunta ‘¿Cuántos años tú crees que tiene *de verdad?*’ [mucho].

**Eduardo:** Exacto. Eso también es un prejuicio que tienen. Los americanos piensan que todos los latinos estamos mochados. Esa pregunta se me hacía mucho a mi antes cuando empecé a jugar en estados unidos.

**D:** ¿Sí?

**E:** Sí

‘¿Cuántos años tú tienes?’

‘Oh yo tengo 18’

‘¿Y en dominicana cuantos tú tienes? Aquí tú tienes 18 pero ¿allá cuantos tú tienes?’

‘Esa pregunta me hacían mucho.’

Or Daniel:

**Daniel:** Bueno, sí. Siempre se lo dicen. Hay muchos que me ponen más edad, muchos me ponen menos. Siempre eso pasa y mayormente con los dominicanos. Porque sabes que en dominicana se ha visto muchas cosas. Salen positivos. Cuando tú ves un buen [jugador] dominicano que saca muchas pelotas dicen que ‘no, son los esteroides’. Cuando tú ves un dado latino que tiene por ejemplo menos edad que un americano o que está tirando más duro que un americano dice que tiene más edad o son los esteroides.

**David:** I’ve heard the question ‘How old are you *really?*’ [a lot].

**Eduardo:** Exactly. That’s also a bias that they have. The Americans think that all Latinos have shaved years off their age. That’s a question I got asked a lot when I started playing in the United States.

**D:** Yeah?

**E:** Yeah

‘How old are you?’

‘Oh, I’m 18’

‘And in the Dominican how old are you? Here you’re 18 but how old are you there? They asked me that question a lot.’

**Daniel:** Well, yeah. They always say that. There are lots of people that say I’m older or say I’m younger. That always happens and mostly with the Dominicans. Because you know in the Dominican there’s been a lot of stuff. People test positive. When you see a good Dominican player that hits a lot of homeruns they say ‘no, it’s steroids’. When you see a given Latino that’s, for example, younger than an American or is throwing harder than an American they say that he’s older or using steroids.

Or Roberto:

**David:** Durante esos años que tú subías...aunque estuvieran jodiendo [o] haciendo bromas, que escuchabas en cuanto a esos temas de [la edad]. [Como alguien diciendo] ‘Mira, pero tú *de verdad* no tienes 22’, por ejemplo.

**Roberto:** Eso siempre se ha escuchado. Por ejemplo, a mi mucha gente no me creía la edad estando yo firmado. Porque yo siempre he tenido un buen brazo y desde joven siempre he tirado buena velocidad. Y cuando yo llegué a los estados unidos y me dijeron, ‘¿cuántos años tú tienes?’ y yo tenía 18. Y me dijeron ‘¿18!?’ y siempre se me quedaban ‘¿18!? [Pero] este está tirando 97-98, 96-98 [mph]. O sea, los jugadores [decían eso], no mayormente los coaches porque ellos sabían.

**R:** Siempre había esa intención de preguntarle a uno [su edad]. Mira *\*golpeando a la mesa para énfasis\**, cada jugador dominicano que ha viajado a los estados unidos desde que uno llegaba, lo que te preguntaban los gringos era ‘¿Cuántos años tú tienes?’

**D:** Y después ‘¿*De verdad*, ¿cuantos?’

**R:** *De verdad* cuantos y yo ‘*de verdad* tengo eso’.

Roberto shares his own experience while also strongly asserting the ubiquity of such questions, saying that it’s likely that every Dominican who’s had to travel to the US has had to respond to such questioning. The other respondents’ stories support his point. Though not all Dominican, the prevalence and consistency of answers was both unsurprising and telling; each player had heard or been asked the seemingly benign question ‘How old are you?’ only to have it turn into a more insidious line questioning that insinuated the illegitimacy of their accomplishments or ability.

**David:** During the years you were coming up...although they were kidding around [or] making jokes, what did you hear in terms of those themes [about age]. [Like someone saying] ‘Look, but you aren’t *actually* 22’, for example.

**Roberto:** You’ve always heard that. For example, a lot of people didn’t believe my age, even [after] being signed. Because I’ve always had a good arm and since childhood I’ve thrown pretty hard. And when I arrived in the United States they said to me, ‘How old are you? And I said 18. And they always were like ‘18!? But this guy’s throwing 97-98, 96-98 mph.’ I mean the players said that, the coaches not as much because they knew.

**R:** There was always that intention to ask someone [their age]. Look *\*hitting the table for emphasis\**, every Dominican player that has traveled to the United States after arriving, what the gringos were asking you was “How old are you?”

**D:** And then ‘*Really*, how old?’

**R:** *Really*, how old and I’d say I’m *really* this old.

The frequency of such questioning, uniformity of shared experience by the Latin American players and assumptions on the part of white players and staff reveals the pervasiveness of the age/identity fraud trope within professional baseball. Importantly, the players who discussed identity fraud came from 5 different organizations, all with different leadership, different coaches, different teammates, yet the refrain remained the same: How old are you? How old are you, really? How old are you back home? These logics are not unique to a few bad actors localized on one team or in one organization but rather a widespread set of opinions that is not only passively passed down or absorbed from other mediums (Domingo Ayala, Danny Almonte, movies like *Benchwarmers*, all referenced in Chapter 2) but also socially produced and reproduced within smaller white circles both in homogenous, white settings as well as in the very interactions white staff and players have with Latin American players.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, former MLB players regularly acknowledge the ways in which the current signing and valuation systems limit their window to sign a professional baseball contract. Former big league pitcher Joel Peralta, who claimed he was 16 when he signed, though he was actually 20, shared his thoughts with the Tampa Bay Tribune in 2013, “I wish I never had to do that, but if I didn’t do it I wouldn’t be here,” he said. “We don’t have the chance after [we] turn 18, 19, years old to become a professional ballplayer...[H]ere in the United States, [players] can be drafted when they’re 22, they get a chance to play pro ball. We don’t have that. The only chance when you’re 20, like I was, to sign was to lie about your age.”<sup>190</sup> Many interviewees, although not advocating or necessarily condoning age falsification,

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<sup>190</sup> Klein, *Dominican Baseball: New Pride, Old Prejudice*, 124–25.

acknowledged the limited economic options that international amateurs and their families face as they hope for a signing bonus will bring economic stability. As Roberto told me,

**Roberto:** En verdad mucha gente lo hace, mayormente los que lo hacen están pensando en su familia, por ejemplo, si tú vas a conseguir \$500,000 con los 16, si tú lo puedes conseguir lo vas a conseguir. No vas a rechazar \$500,000 por \$20,000. Hay mucha gente que lo hacen mayormente por su familia para estar bien, aunque ellos salgan empañados, pero como quien dice ya dicen ‘ya yo cumplí, mi familia está bien’

**Roberto:** Honestly a lot of people do it, most of the time those who do it are thinking of their family, for example if you can get \$500,000 at 16, if you can get it you’re going to get it. You’re not going to turn down \$500,000 for \$20,000. There are lots of people who do it, mainly so their family can be alright, even though they might come out tainted. But you know, they’ll say “I did my part, my family is taken care of.

All respondents who touched on the issue of falsifying one's age to secure a higher signing bonus explained that they *understood* why players might opt to do so. Though, a couple players didn’t necessarily condone the practice even if they know that it’s generally deployed in the name of family. Despite varying judgments on the acceptability of the practice, all Latin American players I spoke with generally agreed that the nature and history of the signing system played a large role in its occurrence. A common thread of frustration regarding the level of hypocrisy in the signing systems is clear and something that extends to Latin American circles all throughout professional baseball. Many vehemently question why it’s possible for an 18-year-old high school senior or a 21 to 23-year-old college senior in the US to receive a multi-million-dollar bonus, when a Latin American player of the same age would be fighting to merely sign or hope that a team might take a flyer on him. The refrain and logics from MLB and front-office employees is generally the same: high school and college players in the US, despite being older, have faced better competition, played in hundreds of games against said competition, and generally have reliable statistics or performance data available as compared to Latin American

amateurs. While certain aspects of this are true<sup>191</sup> they also fall back on the same framings of raw, unrefined, human capital originating in a colonial past; without the structure, systems, numbers, or order to create substantive inter-league play, thus justifying an investment at the same age as their US counterparts, Latin Americans remain behind, devalued, and undeserving of equal offers at equal ages as their white counterparts. Interestingly, other common industry narratives betray these very stances. A frequent point made by scouts or those with involvement in the domestic-US, amateur scouting world — roles that constantly try to calibrate talent and adjust their opinions for similarly aged players from diverse backgrounds — is that Latin American players with a few years in professional baseball are often the same age as amateur players from the US. Refrains such as, “This guy would be a high school senior” or “He’d still be a college sophomore” or “We have to remember that this guy is only 20 and he’s been signed for four years, if he were in the draft this year, he’d be going in the first round” are ubiquitous within the game. Scouts and evaluators often use this framing to make sure they’re not judging a player too harshly since he’s technically been a professional for multiple years but remains as young as draft-eligible players or uber-prospects set to make millions in that year’s draft. Though these comments lay bare the contradiction of the different valuation frameworks, familiar racial logics come into play, elevating and essentializing the experience gained in the minor leagues that must refine the product until it reaches equal value as its domestic counterpart or, put another way, reform, and improve a vastly unprepared or undeveloped players from the Global South so they get on equal footing with their US peers.

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<sup>191</sup> High school prospects and college players will have played in vastly more games and attended many more showcases than your average 18-year-old Dominican or Venezuelan player. Of note is the wave of Cuban signees from the 2010s who played in La Serie Nacional, professional league in Cuba. Due to what was perceived to be “good” competition, older Cuban prospects leaving during this wave were seen as more immediately MLB-ready and thus commanded large bonuses at older ages.



Eduardo offered some hopeful thoughts, suggesting that due to MLB's strict investigation protocols the narratives of age falsification would eventually disappear. With fewer incidents, he posited, there would be less prejudice and the association of fake identities with Latin American players would begin to dissipate. Indeed, some players even recalled offering up *further* investigation as a defense in the face of such white questioning.

**Roberto:** Lo que yo decía fue, 'Oh, ¿tú estás pendiente de mí?' Si tú estás pendiente de mí está bien. Yo me enfoco en mi trabajo, si tú no te enfocas en lo tuyo tú estás mal porque estás enfocado en el mío. Oye, la mente mía es así siempre. Si alguien dice una cosa mala de mi, lo que yo digo es 'No,' porque no estoy mal, mal estás tú que está investigándome a mí. So, tú estás perdiendo tu tiempo de calidad para buscar una cosa que no te beneficia a ti y tú me estás dando más fama a mí entonces el que está ganando soy yo, habla lo que usted quiera de mí estoy tranquilo.

**Daniel:** Tú sabes que siempre llega [el comentario] que 'Tú eres un hombre viejo porque tú no coges presión, tú estás tirando demasiado duro. Tú tienes que hacerte una prueba.' Y yo siempre respondía, 'No, chulo, mira. Esa es mi edad y tú me puedes mandar una prueba de MLB cuando tú quieras.' Simplemente que yo vengo de un país donde yo pasé yo mucho trabajo, yo no voy a venir aquí a estados unidos para adivinar -- y de donde yo vengo de una familia pobre ya yo que estoy adentro, aquí yo puedo generar dinero para yo dar un bienestar a ellos.

Independientemente [de eso] yo creo que es por los jugadores antecedentes latinos que han dado positivo. Algunos americanos lo hacen por fastidio como quien dice por fastidiar para ver si tú te enojas es como buscando una forma de hacerte enojar. O quizás para ver la reacción para ver como reaccionas [y te dicen] 'Mira tú estás consumiendo esteroides,' para ver la reacción que tú haces.

**Roberto:** *What I'd always say was, 'Oh, you're paying attention to me? If you're worried about me, that's fine. I'll focus on my job, if you don't focus on yours that's your loss because you're focusing on mine. Listen, that's how my mind always works. If someone says something bad about me, what I say is, 'No,' because I'm not in the wrong, you're in the wrong trying to investigate me. So, you're losing your precious time to look for something that doesn't benefit you and you're giving me more attention so the person winning here is me. Say what you want about me, I'm cool.*

**Daniel:** *You know that this type of comment always shows up, 'You're an older man because you don't feel pressure, you're throwing too hard. You have to take a drug test.' And I'd always respond, 'No, buddy, look. That's my age and you can send me an MLB test whenever you want. Simply put, I come from a country where I put in a lot of work, I'm not going to come to the United States to just figure it out – and where I come from, from a poor family, now that I'm on the inside I can generate money to provide for them.'*

Roberto and Daniel's responses to white interrogation overlap with the discussion of white instability and insecurity discussed in Chapter 2. Such charges against Latin American players and their implication reveal a degree of white preoccupation with their own performance and careers. As Roberto explains, "If you're not focused on your own work you're in the wrong because you're focused on mine." Other respondents felt that despite such blatant doubts or questions about their personal accomplishments, their knowledge that they had done nothing wrong was enough validation for them.

**Chicho:** Al final va a ser una duda. Si tú lo transformas en una realidad, si tú tienes pruebas -- si tú hiciste algo, ahí si te pone en duda el mérito y el logro de lo que tú has hecho. Pero mientras sea un a duda, yo creo que no. [Yo] sabía que estaba 100% legal [y eso es lo que importó].

**Felipe:** En lo personal quizás lo afecte, pero todo eso depende de cómo tú tengas tu autoestima y tú sabiendo la persona que tú eres. Si tú eres una persona que sabe que has hecho eso no te puede afectar.

**Chicho:** *At the end of the day it's going to be a doubt. If you don't turn it into a reality, if you don't have proof -- if you did something, that's where you put the merit in doubt and the achievements you'd had. But as long as it's a doubt I don't think so. [I] knew that I was 100% legal [ and that's what mattered.]*

**Felipe:** *On a personal level maybe it affects you but all of that depends on how your self-esteem is and you knowing the person you are. If you're a person who knows what they've done that can't affect you.*

However, despite a willingness to use MLB testing or investigations as a badge of confidence in one's own identity, the ingrained nature of colonial difference within baseball suggests that such views toward Latin American legitimacy won't abate any time soon. Felipe's outlook portends as much:

**Felipe:** Pero es como te digo, [la gente cuestionando las edades verdaderas de uno,] eso nunca, nunca, nunca se va a acabar. Y más en estos tiempos ahora. ¿Cómo vas a tener un carajito de 14 años que le da más duro que una persona con 25 años? Es algo sumamente ilógico. Y allí es cuando tú dices, ‘Ven acá, y ¿como yo tengo 27 años y aquel tiene 14 años y le está dando más duro que yo ahora?’ ¿Tú entiendes? Entonces son esas cosas que te ponen a dialogar y tú dices, ‘Bueno, tendría que estar mochado, es o algo por el estilo.’ Pero es mentira, no es que el carajito está mochado, sino que es un carajito desarrollado y el carajito tiene una habilidad de buena.

[Pero como dije,] es algo que nunca se va a acabar, David. Es algo que realmente nunca se va a acabar. Porque ahora mismo están apareciendo fenómenos, David. Están apareciendo carajitos que tú dices ‘Oye, ¿como un carajito con 16 años le puede dar de esa forma a la pelota? ¿Como un carajito con 16 años te puede jugar la pelota de esa forma? ¿Como un carajito de 15 años te puede jugar la pelota así? ¿Como un carajito de 14 años puede hacer eso que hace? Entonces allá viene la ovación y tú te pones a maquinar y dices ‘este tiene que estar mochado o algo.’ ¿Tú entiendes? Eso es algo que nunca se va a acabar porque mientras más tiempo pasa, más fenómenos vienen saliendo.

**Felipe:** But it’s like what I’m saying, [people questioning someone's real age,] it’s never, never, never going to stop. And even more so in today’s atmosphere. How are you going to have a 14 year old hitting the ball harder than someone who’s 25? It’s something completely illogical. And that’s when you say, ‘Hold on, how is it that I’m 27 and that 14 year old is hitting it harder than I am?’ You understand? So, it’s those things that get you talking and you say, ‘Well, he’d have to have changed his age or something like that.’ But that’s a lie, it’s not that this kid falsified his age rather that he’s developed and has a ton of talent.

[But as I said,] it’s something that’s never going to stop, David. It’s honestly something that’s never going to stop. Because now you have these phenoms showing up, David. These kids are showing up that make you say, ‘Hey, how can a 16 year old kid hit the ball that way? How can a 16 year old kid play the game that way? How can a 15 year old kid play the game like that? How can a 14 year old kid do what he does? Then comes the wow (PHR) and you get thinking ‘this guy has to have shaved off some years’. You understand? That’s something that will never stop because as more time passes, more phenoms are coming along.

As long as the current signing and valuation systems remain intact, Felipe’s point seems well founded. If there is a steady influx of young, teenage Latin American players each year, superstars are bound to be mixed in and make it to the big leagues or display advanced levels of

play at an early age — just look at Juan Soto, Fernando Tatis, and Ronald Acuña Jr.<sup>192</sup> With such talented teenage players to challenge and undermine the white normative path to success in MLB, continued rationalizations or demeaning jokes regarding age falsification will remain. Even if the signing age were raised to 18+ years old for international signees, that may not fix the perpetuation of Latin Americans as fraudulent. As Eduardo noted in one of our interviews, age falsification has slowed way down because of MLB's investigation protocols but that hasn't kept white labeling practices and hierarchization at bay. Regardless of what formal regulations MLB puts in place, the continued questioning of Latin American legitimacy seems unlikely to disappear.

Despite each individual player reaching a level of personal acceptance or understanding with how one should negotiate the world of baseball, the structural and societal weight of white acceptance and behavioral appropriateness was not lost on respondents. As Daniel told me, every time a Latin American player gets negative press, the internalized pressures to live up to a white supremacist standard come to the fore. Notwithstanding these standards being unattainable, the anxiety they produce for racialized Latin American players can boil over.

**Daniel:** Allí es que viene el mismo tema un ejemplo, salen las noticias y un jugador [latino] tal dio positivo [y dirán,] 'Mierda, los latinos otra vez. Otro latino jodido.' ¿Violencia doméstica? 'Los latinos otra vez.' ¿Me entiendes? Eso es lo que te digo. Y uno dice 'Wao, volvimos a cagarla, volvimos a cagarla.'

*That's where the same theme shows up, the news comes out and a given [Latino] player tested positive [and they'll say, 'Shit, the Latinos again. Another fucked Latino.' Domestic violence?'] The Latinos again.' You understand? That's what I'm telling you. And one says, 'Wow, we fucked it up again, we fucked it up again.'*

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<sup>192</sup> All 3 players debuted in the major leagues at either age 19 or age 20.

As Walter Mignolo notes in his examination of the intersection of Sylvia Wynter and Frantz Fanon's work on sociogenesis, "I am who I am in relation to the other who sees me as such; and, in a society structured upon racial hierarchies, becoming Black is bound up with being perceived as Black by a white person."<sup>193</sup> Daniel's comments reveal that certain actions -- steroid use and domestic violence as well as the gamut of overdetermined semiotic forms examined in Chapter 2 -- have become naturalized as Latin American and carry with them a burden. Despite his knowledge that such labels cannot be applied to the entire Latin American player group, despite knowing that these charges might not apply to him as racialized as Black, Brown, Latin American or "coño" identity still comes from how white (supremacist) society perceives him. In short, he is ever-aware that regardless of individual action, he is still stuck within a framework of "Being through the eyes of the imperial Other," that is, he know "that he is being perceived, in the eyes of the imperial Other, as not quite human."<sup>194</sup> The pressure Daniel expresses when repeating "Volvimos a cagarla, volvimos a cagarla // *We fucked it up again, we fucked it up again*" resonates, as he conveys the Sisyphean nature of belonging as a racialized, 3rd World subject under white supremacy.

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<sup>193</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, "Sylvia Wynter" What Does It Mean to Be Human?," in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. Katherine McKittrick (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

<sup>194</sup> IBID.

## Conclusion: cabos sueltos

*Sí, pero eso no era todo el tiempo, esos eran casos aislados. No eran todos los gringos que eran así sino uno que otro racista -- que siempre hay, tú sabes.*

*Yeah, but that wasn't all the time, those were isolated cases. It wasn't all the gringos that were like that, rather a racist here and there – which there always are, you know.*

- Chicho, interview by author, 2019

*Yeah. For sure [there's racism in baseball], without a doubt. I see it mostly from player interaction rather than like organization to player. I mean I think the organization to player problem is more like 'treat everyone the same' and it's not the same. But player interaction for sure. There's just a ton of racist dudes on teams I've been a part of.*

- Clark, interview by author, 2020

*Violence is initiated by those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognize others as persons—not by those who are oppressed, exploited, and unrecognized. It is not the unloved who initiate disaffection, but those who cannot love because they love only themselves.*

- Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1968

Examining racism in sport – or any other social space for that matter – can be difficult to separate from particular instances of perceivable hate or individual trespasses that stand out in their extremity. Of course, whether or not these cases ever make it to the public eye doesn't change the fact that at an embodied level, racist acts and processes of racialization help define and comprise personal conceptions of and relationships to ethno-racial identity and their corresponding places under different racial regimes. As I have highlighted throughout this thesis -- and as evidenced in the first two quotes above -- despite differing stances as to whether or not racism exists within baseball or how widespread it may or may not be, framings of racist action

are often personalized, based on interactions, experiences, and by and large viewed as attitudinal. However, the distinctiveness of racism in baseball – though isolated in some of its expressions -- is not that distinct at all.

To be sure, the existence of specific processes of racialization towards Latin American baseball players is unique to the sport; the perpetuation of “Total Coño Moves” and the “coño” figure speak to how legible and diffuse specific, racist notions are within the game. However, while it would be convenient to situate the racist production of the “coño” within an easily-cast-aside group of players or staff, the cultural production of the racialized Latin American player is both slippery -- appearing across different mediums: from Chico Escuela, Major League – and regenerative, as the same tropes and narratives surrounding players have appeared and reappeared, albeit in different mutations, since the first Latin American players were integrated into major league baseball. The recurrence and relative permanence of Latin American stereotypes within baseball over a matter of decades exposes the frailty of arguments centered on individualized racisms, pointing to something more chronic, more insidious. Indeed, contextualizing such expression in the broader historical relationship between the US and Latin America reveals fault lines, histories of white supremacist, colonial domination and 1<sup>st</sup> World/3<sup>rd</sup> World hierarchy that suddenly make these contemporary expressions of racial-colonial stratification, at once less surprising and more intelligible. Despite the relative recency of the Total Coño Move archive, Domingo Ayala, or the continued media circulation of damaging Latin American tropes, the logics that inform these cases are not new. Dehumanization starts at the colonial encounter, the imperial conquest, the distinction between primitive and modern, the creation and hierarchization of 1<sup>st</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> World.

Just as notions of naturalized difference were used to prop up colonial, Euro-centered primacy or served as justification for US intervention in Latin America – as was the case of the Dominican Republic, discussed in Chapter 1-- the active reading of Latin American difference on the part of white perceiving and listening subjects both derives from and reinscribes the same historical, asymmetrical power relations. Discourse within the game regarding Latin American deviance is not only tied to a set of individual actions but also a region at large, a place that lags behind US modernity and produces peoples who do the same. The broad, geo-political and economic relationships between the US and Latin America have played this out in harsh, violent focus. As such, when discussing the baseball ties between US and Latin America one is never starting with a blank canvas or neutral context; US imperial invasion, neocolonial economic domination, and broader underdevelopment of the entire region cannot go ignored or unstated when assessing human flow and exchange between US and Latin American baseball parties. The movement of US and Latin American bodies within the game and the resultant discourse that passes *between* 1<sup>st</sup> World/3<sup>rd</sup> World and *across* imagined spatio-temporal boundaries reveals as much. The contrasting and often discordant views that Latin American players and US staff have of their respective movement between 1<sup>st</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> World expose Eurocentric, colonial imaginaries of Latin America as primitive, natural, and stuck *behind* the US in a linear conception of time and history. By looking at existing structures of baseball's business in Latin America and tracing different parties' trajectories along the commodity chain -- up/down or forward/backward -- we are able to see how Latin American players are positioned on a hopeful path towards growth and development as they travel to the US, while their US-born, predominantly white, counterparts, when heading in the reverse direction to Latin America, imagine themselves to be stepping outside of modernity to return to a less complete, earlier version of civilization.



The maintenance and reproduction of 1<sup>st</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> world dichotomies and colonial stratification within baseball appear in more than just human and capital flow between the US and Latin America; as detailed in Chapter 2, coloniality and white supremacy are rife within the sport's quotidian realm. The examples are many and are oriented around white subjects perceiving, overdetermining, and highlighting Latin American difference as decidedly non-white and thus undeserving of the same level of treatment, respect, and humanity. Through hierarchizing linguistic and semiotic production and marking anything from style of play to using household appliances as both deviant and uniquely Latin American, white perceiving and listening subjects delineate the borders of white normativity. However, reorienting our lens and critically disaggregating white perceiving and listening practices allows us to destabilize and undercut the construction of a racialized Latin American geography; rather than acknowledge or recognize white perceptions and racialized representations of Latin American players as factual, accurate, or worthy of consideration, contextualizing them within a longer history of racial-colonial violence attunes us to how such production continues to work in service of maintaining white supremacy. As I have argued throughout this work, the “coño” figure and “coño” behavior tells us more about whiteness, white subjectivity, and the maintenance of existing power structures than it does about any naturalized, Latin American truth.

That is not to say that the active maintenance of white supremacy and uneven power structures of the game do not leave their mark on Latin American players. Merely recognizing the roots and ongoing presence of racial-colonial logics or the extractive, non-egalitarian structures of the game doesn't account for the ways in which players maneuver, confront, or internalize hegemonic notions of value, identity, acceptability, and hierarchy. The honest accounts from a wide range of Dominican and Venezuelan major leaguers throughout Chapter 3

offer personal examples and various inflection points of what it's like growing up within the world of professional baseball. From the years prior to signing to their first time in the US, players reflected on intimate moments of self-making as well as more common, representative experiences that appeared across a majority of major and minor league contexts. By comparing and contrasting how players perceived both their treatment and behavior within a white-ordered system we can unpack both how regularly Latin American players have to confront certain tropes as well as individual inflection points where players dealt with both moments of burden and validation within the system. Chapter 3 also orients us to the differing conceptions of racist treatment versus actual moments of racialized tension or injustice. As noted earlier, by contrasting players' statements regarding racism in their careers with actual moments of frustration and indignation, we can see just how flexible ideas of self-hood are under different racial regimes. However, without projecting a US racial binary onto player accounts or invalidating their recollections, much of this work has argued that global anti-Blackness, as an organizing frame, informs white treatment of Latin American players, regardless of whether players recognized such tension as tied to skin color. As noted in the Richard Sherman example, in which a Black, US football player's actions were framed as a "total coño move", his insertion into the TCM tweets underscores the overlapping nature of the "coño" figure in baseball and the active racialization of certain styles of athletic play and performance through a lens of anti-Blackness. The indiscriminate application of the "coño" tag reminds us that moments of conflict from player accounts as well as the white overdetermination of Latin American behavior generally are a result of malleable designations of racial hierarchy, used wantonly to highlight disorder in white space.

In this final section, I touch on a handful of themes that didn't fit neatly into the body of the work but warrant consideration if we are to comprehend and critique the current and future state of professional baseball, its maintenance of racial-colonial power structures, and relationship to Latin America. To aptly comprehend and grapple with such embedded histories of domination we must remain vigilant in the face of purported claims of progress and examine both the limits and possibilities that the current state of the game affords.

### **Neoliberal Multiculturalism: The Commodification of Latin American Difference**

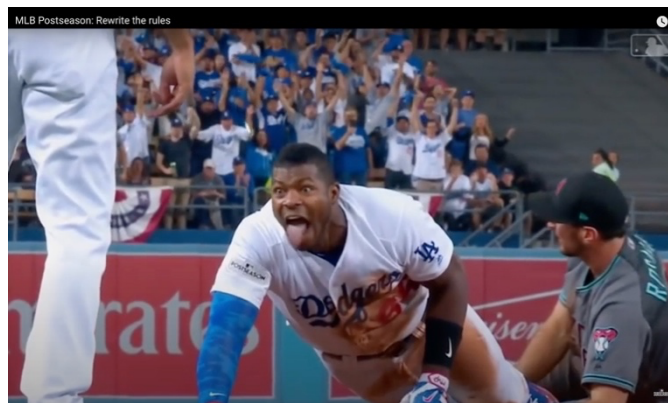
Throughout this work, I have shown how white listening and perceiving subjects demarcate white space and normativity by overdetermining Latin American behavior and speech and marking it as unacceptable and undesirable. Each chapter has provided examples of what Latin American difference might look like, how it's created in professional baseball, what it reveals about whiteness, and how its origins are tied to histories of imperialism and colonialism. However, many of the actions that have been marked and denigrated within baseball as ostensibly Latin American or "coño" have recently been co-opted and promoted by business entities and individuals alike through a commodified expression of neoliberal multiculturalism. This section offers a brief glimpse at how Latin American difference has been subsumed into a consumable spectacle.

#### *Marketing Policed Behaviors*

Despite the persistence and history of belittling Latin American play and on-field actions as inappropriate, the broader business of MLB, teams, and brands have pivoted over the last few years, instead invoking Latin American difference into their broader marketing schemes. Prior to the 2014 season -- building off of the 2009 creation of the official MLB Spanish-language account, Las Mayores -- MLB launched country and community specific Twitter accounts for

Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Mexico, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. Three years later, before the start of the 2017 season, MLB did the same on Instagram. MLB Dominicana, MLB Venezuela, MLB México, MLB Cuba, MLB Puerto Rico (among others) provide content that revolves around players from those countries to an audience in or with links to those countries.<sup>195</sup> While this, of course, isn't "bad" -- often times fans from said countries like to follow players from their country as a point of national pride, over foreign teams with no local ties -- it does fit into MLB's plan to extend its global reach, at once tapping into foreign markets while also projecting an inclusive, multicultural, diverse and at times rags-to-riches image.

This public-facing shift has extended past country-specific, targeted marketing, spilling over into the very narratives surrounding the style of play that I examined in Chapter 2. One need look no further than MLB's recent playoff commercials for the 2018 and 2019 postseasons. In 2018's iteration, "Rewrite the Rules" -- famous for its line "let the kids play" -- Hall of Famer Ken Griffey Jr.<sup>196</sup> narrates, as shots of some of baseball's youngest stars flash across the screen.



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<sup>195</sup> Additional accounts exist for other Latin American countries. The ones listed are the accounts with the biggest followings. We can also group MLB's Spanish-language social media account, "las mayores" and outlets such as "La Vida Baseball" that seek to promote Latin American stories and diversity in the game under the same umbrella as the country-specific accounts.

<sup>196</sup> Ken Griffey Jr. = an all-time baseball great, nicknamed "the Kid" after debuting in the big leagues in 1989 at age 19. He was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 2016.

**Figure 4.1** Rewrite the Rules.<sup>197</sup>

Griffey Jr. takes aim at many of the racialized, stylistic elements of on-field play and behavior, challenging the hegemonic code of conduct:

**Ken Griffey Jr:** They said rules are rules. Don't stop and stare.

**Unnamed Broadcast Snippet:** [He] tossed that bat 30 feet into the air.

**KGJ:** Don't flip your bat. Respect the jersey. He didn't earn that right. They called him unprofessional. No celebrating, keep your head down. Flashy. Immature. Showboat.

**UBS:** You don't have to do that. Getting a little tired of it. Something you do not do in baseball!

**KGJ:** They said it all. No more talk. Let the kids play.

**UBS:** It's just a new world.

Griffey cites a handful of examples in which racialized language or terms condemn a more expressive style of play associated with Latin American -- or in his case Black American -- players. The use of the word "kids" in the commercial also highlights the young wave of Latin American talent at the forefront of MLB.<sup>198</sup> MLB built on this campaign prior to the 2019 season with "Let the Kids Play 2.0" in which a number of star players discuss (in English and Spanish) their playing style as a seemingly unified generational front with no racial or linguistic divisions. Similarly, as the 2019 playoffs arrived, MLB released its annual postseason ad, building on the precedent they set the year before with the Griffey Jr. "Let the Kids Play" commercial. The 2019 version, "We Play Loud", begins in black and white, showing archival stadium footage as old-time music plays. New York Yankees player Aaron Judge strolls to the plate in front of Black

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<sup>197</sup> MLB, *MLB Postseason: Rewrite the Rules*, Video File, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZfEv4JqxHQ>.

<sup>198</sup> Juan Soto and Ronald Acuña were the primary examples in these two commercials, though the same has happened in increasing fashion with Fernando Tatis Jr. amidst his meteoric rise to stardom.

and white masses from a distant time. In the background his voice comes over the speakers: They say baseball...isn't like it used to be. They're right. His image comes into color as the beat to "Limonada Coco [Remix]", a popular dembow track by Musicologo The Libro and Lapiz Conciente begins to pulse.



**Figure 4.2** Baseball Has Changed.<sup>199</sup>

As the track builds, clips of the young stars from that year's playoff field are shown celebrating, animated against the drab, colorless images of the past. The inclusion of "Limonada Coco [Remix]" and dembow more broadly is a nod to all Dominican and Caribbean players and viewers alike. Dembow is a genre birthed out of a broader history of reggaeton, though its contemporary and most consumed form comes from the Dominican Republic, typically featuring energetic, galloping beats, sticky, repeatable (if often non sequitur) phrases, and booming bass.<sup>200</sup> Incorporating dembow in the postseason commercial is a deft blending of an increasingly popular musical genre and yet another example of MLB signaling its promotion of an image that *includes* Dominican/Caribbean identity, Spanish/English bilingualism, and diversity in general.

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<sup>199</sup> MLB, *MLB Postseason: We Play Loud*, Video File, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLkcHGQzN0s>.

<sup>200</sup> Interestingly, as noted in Chapter 2, Latin American music like dembow can be used as a racialized marker that perturbs White players and disrupts white space in the broader bubble of professional baseball.



**Figure 4.3** Acuña Bat Flip.<sup>201</sup>

As the ad hums along, young Dominican phenomenon Juan Soto chimes in, declaring in Spanish, “Es una nueva generación.” Similar to their “Let The Kids Play 2.0” commercial, in which Ronald Acuña shares his lines in Spanish, MLB makes the conscious choice of centering Spanish and promoting players speaking in their mother tongue.



**Figure 4.4** Es una nueva generación.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> IBID.

<sup>202</sup> IBID.

Again, placing Spanish on an equal playing field as English and acknowledging its linguistic legitimacy *relative to English*, allowing players to communicate in the language they feel most comfortable is inherently positive. The fact that they speak Spanish in the commercial is not the subject of my critique, rather, its prominence reveals a degree of convenient selectivity on the part of MLB, Spanish and Caribbean identity and culture *fits* within the broader context of promoting a global, diverse image yet requires a certain co-optation of the very things -- style of play, language, music -- that continue to serve as racialized markers of difference for white perceiving subjects within the sport.

The issue with MLB's promotion of a young, diverse, multilingual generation of players is that they do not dictate the terms of engagement on the field or the attitudes of players within the clubhouses. The acknowledgement of a Latin American and Latino fan base and concurrent desire to promote Latin American stars – via performance, style, and forms of expression -- does not erase the ways in which similar behavior continues to denote otherness, an otherness that has been stratified and racially marked, even as MLB seeks to profit from it. Stuart Hall's definition of liberal multiculturalism offers a useful framing to help us understand these marketing shifts: "liberal multiculturalism seeks to integrate the different cultural groups as fast as possible into the "mainstream" provided by a universal individual citizenship, tolerating only in private



particularistic cultural practices.”<sup>203</sup> While MLB has given a representational wink to Latin America and the Caribbean in its postseason commercials, that does not mean that white, domestic players’ attitudes have changed or that MLB isn’t actively naturalizing or assigning stylistic elements of play to Black and Brown bodies from Latin America. After all, the tweets from the Total Coño Move era show us the relative recency and consistency of these tropes *within* baseball, its clubhouses, and locker rooms and the continued policing of these rules on the field despite MLB’s public relations and advertising strategies. To help explain this public/private dissonance, a quote from Dr. Angela Davis comes to mind, “I have a hard time accepting diversity as a synonym for justice. Diversity is a corporate strategy. It’s a strategy designed to ensure that the institution functions in the same way that it functioned before, except now that you now have some black faces and brown faces. It’s a difference that doesn’t make a difference.”<sup>204</sup> By “acknowledging” and underscoring Latin American presence, thus publicly distancing itself from the old, rigid, writs of baseball, MLB, teams, brands, and the media apparatus make Latin American difference more consumable, mollifying the perceived threat of Latin American bodies. As current and future generations of Latin American stars provide the fuel for this discursive, marketing and consumer shift, fans would do well to note the inconsistencies and incongruities between crafted, public-facing narratives and structural inequalities within the sport.

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<sup>203</sup> Stuart Hall and David Morley, *Essential Essays*, Stuart Hall, Selected Writings (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 96.

<sup>204</sup> Maddi Eckert, “Civil Rights Leader Angela Davis Speaks at Bovard,” *Daily Trojan*, February 23, 2016, <https://dailytrojan.com/2015/02/23/civil-rights-leader-angela-davis-speaks-at-bovard/>.

## *Representational Politics and Diversity as Progress*

Of course, multicultural marketing efforts centered on diversity aren't the only public stances the league, teams, and brands have taken in recent years. In the wake of the uprisings in the Summer of 2020, the formerly sacrilege phrase "Black lives matter" became a watered-down, corporate performance to help shield companies from potential charges of racism, instead, generally presenting an empty declaration of solidarity with Black people. Despite team, league, and individual public performance, baseball's whiteness remains unchallenged. Both in its history -- as integration saw the fall of a rich, Black baseball tradition and in its current form with an exodus of domestic, Black players since the turn of the century.<sup>205</sup> MLB and teams have sought to address such issues as many corporate entities do in the current historical moment, through diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts. The league created its Diversity Fellowship Program in 2018, a pipeline that seeks to offer women and minority groups surer spots within a professional team, paying their salaries over 18-24 months, giving teams a chance to hire the fellows full-time during or after that window. However, in talking with multiple participants in the program, there was a sense that BIPOC candidates and white women filling the fellowship slots predominantly came from prestigious schools, valorizing and upholding the same white supremacist expectations, standards and power structures that had been in place. As Dylan Rodriguez reminds us in *White Reconstruction*,

The flexible genius of multiculturalist white supremacy is its capacity to sustain, transform, and elaborate the aspirations of ascendancy while claiming the moral-political high ground of diversity, inclusion, and equity -- this virulent suppleness indicates white supremacy's sustainability across institutional mandates while exhibiting the strength of its resistance to cultural and political obsolescence. In this iteration, white supremacy breaks the conventions of its classical apartheid logic and re-operationalizes within the

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<sup>205</sup> Ruck, *Raceball*; Lee, "Inside the Rise of MLB's Ivy League Culture: Stunning Numbers and a Question of What's Next."

normative political and cultural structures of (post-segregation, post-apartheid, “post-racial”) democracy, liberal humanism, and (national) progressivism.<sup>206</sup>

That’s not to say that the hegemonic, malignant white masculinity that pervades baseball hasn’t gone completely unchecked; major scandals have rocked the industry in recent months as white, male executives and coaches in positions of power have been outed for their harassment of women both in and outside of the baseball industry. However, without viewing the sport’s virulent sexism as connected to the racial-colonial frameworks inherent to US society, any sort of intersectional or coalitional praxis is undercut; championing an intersection of identities as opposed to an intersection of oppressions diffuses criticism of white, patriarchal, racial-capitalism, despite individual moments of perceived victory or change. Indeed, even in cases where the league, individual teams, or the press make an effort to “platform” or present their support for diversity, they often fall back on familiar, racialized ideas and representations of Latin American players, reifying them in the process. Consider this article from April, 2020 in which the author, Mitchell Light, details the role of Jen Wolf, an employee for the soon-to-be-renamed Cleveland Indians. As the article lays out, a large part of Wolf’s job is to help Latin American players adjust to life in the US, a role that has become all but ubiquitous within each team. As Wolf notes in the article,

‘I know some teams have a cultural coordinator or Latin American coordinator that focuses on Latin players, and they do some of the stuff I do...but it is not as broad. Some teams, it falls on the education person, some teams it falls on other staff. I go to the bank a lot, help guys open bank accounts. You can have an intern do that, and some teams do, but part of my role is to be more intentional with it. Don’t just take them to get a Social Security card, show them what it is and why it’s important. Tell them why they shouldn’t keep the card in the wallet, why they should memorize the number. Let’s not just open a bank account. Show them their options, show them the difference between debit and credit.’<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Rodriguez, *White Reconstruction*, 56.

<sup>207</sup> Mitchell Light, “A Banker, Dietitian and Counselor, Jen Wolf Does It All for Indians’ Prospects,” *The Athletic*, April 6, 2020, <https://theathletic.com/1702816/2020/04/06/a-banker-dietician-and-counselor-jen-wolf-does-it-all-for-indians-prospects/>.

Wolf's allusion to the checkered nature of how teams address necessary administrative, legal steps to make sure Latin American players receive Social Security cards is accurate, as each team handles the process differently but typically sends a bilingual employee with a group of players to make sure it's handled. However, across the league, the prominence and emphasis on *guidance* in such positions present a degree of white saviorship (if the person in said position is in fact white) or, independent of ethno-racial identity, a doubling down on the need to approximate, or perform in line with white expectations and norms. Though, I do not aim to single out Wolf or take her quotes out of context, she points to a degree of "intentionality" in her work, rooted in educating the players about the "what" and "why" something like a Social Security card is important, framing the act of securing a Social Security card as an important teaching opportunity. As I discussed in Chapter 1 and throughout this thesis, the juxtaposition of white, bourgeois, formal education discourse (represented by the team) and Latin American lack of schooling (embodied by the player) tends to concretize a natural Latin American unintelligence that can be improved or sanitized within the system. The apparent necessity to "educate" players on the importance of their Social Security card is just one example.

Throughout the article, judgments on Latin American behavior reveal that the perspective from which the piece was written aligns with that of baseball's white perceiving subject detailed throughout this work. Light's obsession with Wolf's efforts to get Latin American players to eat "purple potatoes" as some sort of marker of cultural openness, and refinement is utterly vacuous.

The article opens with melodrama:

She wasn't asking for much. All Jen Wolf wanted was for the young men to try the purple mashed potatoes.

They were good. She promised.

But Sergio Morillo wasn't interested.

"I didn't try them because I didn't know what they were," the 20-year-old Dominican pitcher said, through an interpreter. "If I don't know what something is, I am not trying it."

The mashed potato "incident" occurred in early March in Goodyear, Ariz., at the spring training home of the Cleveland Indians about two weeks before the MLB season was suspended. And it's moments like this that make Wolf, a 33-year-old Massachusetts native, feel like the "team mom."

"Literally before I took this call, I was in the cafeteria," said Wolf, whose actual title is life skills coordinator. "We are serving mashed potatoes today, but they used the purple potatoes. Guys are looking at it like, 'What the hell is that.' My job after this call is to see how many people I can get to try the potatoes because they taste really good. They taste like regular mashed potatoes."<sup>208</sup>

The Latin American player quoted in the excerpt, Sergio Morillo, offers a completely reasonable, unsensational explanation as to why he didn't eat the purple potatoes -- "I didn't know what they were...If I don't know what something is, I am not trying it." Yet, this clear, straightforward response is positioned as uncouth confirmation of Latin American incivility, something that must be refined through guidance and acculturation. As I have already mentioned, highlighting this piece and Wolf's role is not meant as a personal attack but rather as evidence that gestures of goodwill and the promotion of encouraging narratives about helping hapless Latin American players, often end up reproducing colonial difference and hierarchy. Unfortunately, in a seeming effort to elevate oft-silenced minority voices within baseball -- in this case that of a woman -- both the author, Mitchell Light, and the article's subject Jen Wolf (with the caveat that one assumes her quotes are representative of her general actions) perpetuate racialized tropes of Latin

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<sup>208</sup> IBID.

American players. Light's article serves as an all-too-common, teachable example of how ethno-racial, class, and historical analyses are ignored in attempts to highlight "feel-good" stories. Situating our understanding of race as in a constant state of (re)construction -- as opposed to a set of personal perceptions or feelings -- we can see how such articles reinscribe racial-colonial difference, while attempting to highlight Wolf as a symbol of diversity. The issue here, of course, does not rest with Wolf but rather the idea that representational narratives equate to equality and progress. The article's subject could be BIPOC, a 3rd World actor, LGBTQIA+ or any combination of identities, however, without interrogating how the promotion of individual exceptionalism from minority groups relative to a degraded 3rd World validates the legitimacy of racial-colonial white supremacy, existing power structures are only strengthened. Recognizing this fact and how such discursive production acts as a product of broader multiculturalist diversity, attunes us to the limits of reductive, simplistic cues of symbolic progress when the logics undergirding it remain rotten. We would be wise to remember that the promotion and circulation of symbolic victories without material change doesn't happen by mistake and remains ever-present within baseball as it does in broader US society:

Contemporary institutional (racial, racist state) articulations of multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusivity (per multiculturalist white supremacy) do not reflect the obsolescence of white supremacy, race, and/or racism. Rather, they indicate the historical continuities and discursive-political complexities (including the internal ideological contradictions) of white supremacist social formations. These institutional articulations are formed in the foundational relations of anti-Blackness and racial-colonial power, and generally normalize those relations while narratively disavowing them.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Dylan Rodriguez, *White Reconstruction: Domestic Warfare and the Logics of Genocide*, First edition (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021), 44.

## A Call for Internationalism

In 2007 and 2010, respectively, two of baseball's most prominent, recognizable, Black American players -- Torii Hunter and Gary Sheffield -- made controversial statements regarding race, skin color, opportunity, and relative deservedness within the Black American and Latin American baseball communities. In an interview with GQ, Sheffield declared,

I called it years ago. What I called is that you're going to see more black faces, but there ain't no English going to be coming out. [It's about] being able to tell [Latin players] what to do -- being able to control them...Where I'm from, you can't control us. You might get a guy to do it that way for a while because he wants to benefit, but in the end, he is going to go back to being who he is. And that's a person that you're going to talk to with respect, you're going to talk to like a man. These are the things my race demands. So, if you're equally good as this Latin player, guess who's going to get sent home? I know a lot of players that are home now can outplay a lot of these guys.<sup>210</sup>

Three years later, Hunter had this to say:

People see dark faces out there, and the perception is that they're African-American. They're not us. They're impostors. Even people I know come up and say: 'Hey, what color is Vladimir Guerrero? Is he a black player?' I say, 'Come on, he's Dominican. He's not black.'

As African-American players, we have a theory that baseball can go get an imitator and pass them off as us. It's like they had to get some kind of dark faces, so they go to the Dominican or Venezuela because you can get them cheaper. It's like, 'Why should I get this kid from the South Side of Chicago and have Scott Boras represent him and pay him \$5 million when you can get a Dominican guy for a bag of chips?' ... I'm telling you, it's sad..<sup>211</sup>

Though Hunter walked back his original comments, apologizing and citing his intention to highlight cultural, not phenotypic difference (“What I meant was they're not black players; they're Latin American players. There is a difference culturally. But on the field, we're all brothers, no matter where we come from.”<sup>212</sup>) both statements offer a valuable entry point into

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<sup>210</sup> ESPN.com news services, “Sheffield Says Latin Players Easier to Control than Blacks,” ESPN, June 3, 2007, <https://www.espn.com/mlb/news/story?id=2891875>.

<sup>211</sup> Associated Press, “Hunter Talks about Race,” ESPN, March 10, 2010, <https://www.espn.com/los-angeles/mlb/news/story?id=4983236>.

<sup>212</sup> IBID.

the broader analyses of anti-Blackness and white supremacy discussed in this thesis. My intention in revisiting these quotes is not to slander either player for their comments or suggest that they represent(ed) a broader Black American view within the game. Rather, by parsing their respective claims, I try to reframe their frustrations in the context of a shared marginality with their Latin American counterparts -- one rooted in racial-colonial difference, global capitalism, anti-Blackness, and white supremacy -- while also redirecting their critiques towards the systems of oppression that fuel said otherness and considering the possibility for internationalist solidarity.

Both Sheffield and Hunter cite phenotypic markers -- "black faces" and "dark faces" -- but draw sharp lines of distinction between US and Latin American Blackness, calling the latter group of players "impostors" and "imitators." Interestingly, Hunter suggests that "they", presumably MLB and major league teams, "...had to get some kind of dark faces," indicating a perceived need or societal pressure to project a public-facing image of diversity. However, both he and Sheffield touch on topics of cost, value, and control, asserting that "cheaper" Latin American players have been displacing Black American players. Employing anti-immigrant narratives regarding job security, both Hunter and Sheffield implied that due to their economic precarity and a need for steady income, Latin American players are both more affordable (read as desirable) and in Sheffield's words "controllable" than their Black US peers. Sheffield's invocation of "control" and a certain docility within white-dominated professional spaces echoes the discussion in Chapter 3 regarding Black athletes in different sports and settings who recognize the expectations of white managerial systems; Yearwood's Black college athletes mention the importance of following the "playbook" of normative behavior and Latin American players in baseball recognize the need to "behave" or "comportarse bien." Sheffield



acknowledges that Black American players recognize the weight and expectations of a white baseball system, explaining how they may intentionally act passively to “benefit” but that eventually “he is going to go back to being who he is,” someone who falls outside of the bounds of white behavioral acceptability. Sheffield also cites Latin American players’ lack of English as one of the defining differentiators between US and Latin American Blackness and identity, signaling the prominence of linguistic deviance in US social structure and the dual marginality that Latin American experience, discussed at length throughout this work.

Importantly, Hunter and Sheffield’s comments represent one thread of a larger conversation regarding race, Blackness, and identity within the game. Just as Hunter and Sheffield fail to acknowledge the causes or commonalities inherent to Black American and Latin American subordination, the diverse Latin American baseball community doesn’t necessarily see the Black liberation struggle within the US as relevant to their experience. As noted, multiple times throughout this work, the erasure and negation of Black identity within Latin American racial imaginaries is a necessary point of analysis if we are to tease out the extent to which white supremacy has defined our global social-cultural schemas and epistemes. An investigation of the specific, national, racial-colonial histories in Latin America and how such ideas manifest themselves within baseball undoubtedly warrants its own study. Whether in the form of an ideology of “racial democracy” or generalized mestizaje that masks the colonial domination of Black people in Venezuela, Colombia, or Brazil or a more acute anti-Blackness in the form of anti-Haitianism in the Dominican Republic, racial stratification and white supremacy persist. Anibal Quijano reminds us that racial stratification in Latin America was no coincidence: “...The process of independence for Latin American states without decolonizing society could not have been, and it was not, a process toward the development of modern nation-states, but was instead

a rearticulation of the coloniality of power over new institutional bases...The structure of power, [then,] was and even continues to be organized on and around the [racial] colonial axis.”<sup>213</sup>

We can expand on Quijano’s framing by returning to Lorgia Garica-Peña’s assertions surrounding the “fear of Haiti” discussed in Chapter 2, in which the US reproached the newly freed, Black nation for its material and symbolic threat to the viability of the US slave economy. With the ever-present threat of direct and economic intervention in the Caribbean and Latin American more broadly, the US pushed young nations like the Dominican Republic to dissociate from Haiti and led 19th century Dominican writers and patriots to promote a “...dominicanidad as a hybrid race that was decidedly other than Black, and therefore different from Haiti’s Blackness.”<sup>214</sup> These anti-Black racial regimes were codified under dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo and his successor Joaquín Balaguer, embedded in state violence and state-sanctioned racist ideologies. Both in their most violent articulation -- the massacre and ethnic cleansing of a multiethnic, Afro-Hispaniola rayano population at the hands of Trujillo’s forces, also known as El Corte -- and through 20th century policy that framed the ethnic Haitian culture of the borderlands as a existential threat to national sovereignty and the Hispanic, non-Blackness of Dominican identity. To quote Joaquin Balaguer and the ideologies supporting his regimes (1966-78, 1986-96),

*Nuestro origen racial y nuestra tradición de pueblo hispánico no nos deben impedir reconocer que la nacionalidad se halla en peligro de desintegrarse si no se emplean remedios drásticos contra la amenaza que se deriva para ella de la vecindad del pueblo haitiano....Para corregirlo tendrá que recurrirse a providencias llamadas forzosamente a lastimar la sensibilidad haitiana. Lo que Santo Domingo desea es conservar su cultura y sus costumbres como *pueblo español* e impedir la desintegración de su alma y la pérdida de sus rasgos distintivos.*

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<sup>213</sup> Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin American,” 567–68.

<sup>214</sup> García-Peña, *The Borders of Dominicanidad*.

[*Our racial origins and traditions as a Hispanic people* should not keep us from recognizing that our nationality is in danger of disintegrating if we do not employ *drastic measures* against the threat represented by the neighboring Haitian people.... In order to correct this, we might have to employ tactics that will, without a doubt, hurt the sensibility of the Haitian people. What Santo Domingo desires is to preserve its culture and customs as the *Hispanic people* we are, and to stop the disintegration of our soul and the loss of our distinctive characteristics.]<sup>215</sup>

The continued promotion of a Hispanic identity and concurrent distancing from Blackness appears in the baseball context in that those who pursue a professional signing or path are often classed and racialized, viewed through a lens traceable back to colonial and imperial exploitation of Black and rayano Dominicans. As one interviewee told me -- a self-acknowledged lighter-skinned, Dominican from a relatively affluent background -- he doesn't often get profiled as a baseball player when in the Dominican, as he doesn't "fit" the typical baseball profile. He recalled the responses and questions from his wife's family when they learned she was dating a ballplayer years ago: "Is he Black? Does he have tattoos? Does he wear chains? Can he read and write?" He remembers telling them the high school he went to, which conveyed a certain class composition, sophistication, and acceptability to his then-girlfriend's family, wary of the poorer, Black population associated with baseball in the Dominican Republic. His account reveals the endurance of anti-Black logics within the Dominican Republic, at least within upper class circles, and the construction of a "dominicanidad" that is *other than* Black. The weight of white supremacy at home in the Dominican Republic feels particularly salient with the notable case of Black Dominican ballplayer Sammy Sosa suddenly appearing with lighter, whitened skin in his post-playing career.<sup>216</sup> Without essentializing these two anecdotes or the Dominican Republic's

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<sup>215</sup> IBID, 98

<sup>216</sup> Enrique Rojas, "Sosa: Cream Has Bleached Skin," ESPN, November 10, 2009, <https://www.espn.com/mlb/news/story?id=4642952>.

particular racial imaginary, it's important to view such incidents as part of histories and rearticulations of global anti-Blackness that link US and Caribbean racialized experience.

This thesis has laid out in detail how, despite individual Latin American self-identifications or subscriptions to different racial regimes, racial-colonial and anti-Black logics are used to read, racialize, and marginalize Latin American players as Other, while simultaneously consolidating and bordering white US spatiality and power within the sport. Or, put another way, individual Latin American feelings regarding racial self-identity, when applicable -- that is to say when the binary US racial imaginary allows for categorization of said players as Black, Brown, or decidedly non-white -- aren't a defense against the dual marginality (racial, linguistic deviance) they experience in the US nor the global capitalist mode of domination that has underdeveloped so many Latin American societies. Independent of the commonalities and points of departure in the racialized experiences of Black American and Latin Americans in the world of baseball, their otherness and exclusion are constructed vis-a-vis the white normativity and supremacy on which US global primacy and domestic hierarchy rests. As Rob Ruck notes in *Raceball*, shortly after touching on the earlier comments from Hunter and Sheffield, Black American and Latin American baseball communities share more history than meets the eye as it relates to their historical involvement in and exclusion from Major League Baseball:

The history of African Americans and Latinos in baseball has traditionally been portrayed as a tale of their shameful segregation and redemptive integration. Segregation was certainly shameful, especially for a sport so heavily invested in its own rhetoric of democracy and American exceptionalism. But for African Americans and Latinos, integration was also painful. Although long overdue and a catalyst to social change, integration cost black and Caribbean societies control over their own sporting lives. It changed the meaning of sport, and not usually for the better. While channeling black and Latino athletes into major league baseball, integration did little for the communities they

left behind. On the contrary, it actively destroyed or weakened institutions in the black community and the Caribbean.<sup>217</sup>

To be sure, I have argued that the processes of racialization that Latin American players experience upon integration to the world of major league baseball rest on the same racial-colonial, extractive capitalist structures that emerged from the US slave economy. As evidenced in Chapter 2 in my discussion of Black American football player Richard Sherman, the racialized “coño” label was used flexibly to portray both Latin American and non-Latin American Black athletes as unacceptable, united in nothing but their Blackness and racialized behavior against a white supremacist foil. Acknowledging the expansiveness of a global anti-Blackness that does not distinguish between countries of origin can help build bridges and find commonalities between seemingly disparate histories and struggles. Narratives of “latinidad” -- with their inherent denial of Black humanity and the pressure to approximate white, English-speaking, bourgeois identity -- only work to undercut the potential for coalitional, internationalist solidarity. The same can be said for any degree of Black American disdain towards Latin American players, as both communities have been ravaged by US capitalism. As the intersection of sports and politics create a seemingly endless arena for debate and performance, an internationalist stance, historicized through shared struggle, and grounded in opposition to global white supremacy/anti-Blackness offers the possibility for BIPOC and racialized athletes across all major sports to leverage their labor and make substantive structural, material demands that go beyond co-opted, inclusive, and symbolic gestures meant to diffuse their claims for justice.

All of this is not to say or to locate the responsibility for changing baseball in international, marginalized communities of color, rather it is meant to highlight their collective

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<sup>217</sup> Ruck, *Raceball*, xiii.

power against the white supremacist structures of the sport. As this thesis has detailed, white supremacy's tendrils extend far past isolated, individual acts of racism. Additionally, calls for white advocacy, support in the fight against racial justice within baseball circles are typically truncated. Recently retired, long-time pitcher C.C. Sabathia captured the bleakness of white solidarity within the game in the aftermath of the 2020 uprisings, "How lucky are N.B.A. players to have other Black players in the locker room to make that decision? No offense, but if I'm sitting in a baseball clubhouse right now, what are the chances my teammates are going to make that decision and have my back? There's a 20 percent chance my teammates make that decision. It's got to feel good to be in a league where people at least feel your pain."<sup>218</sup> Sabathia's comments align with the core claims and investigations of this thesis; the overwhelming whiteness of the sport and the continued production of coloniality within it consolidate power and muffle calls for redress. That said, the immediate fallout of the 2020 uprisings presents a unique moment for coalitional politics and solidarity across US-Latin American contexts and in recent months there have been hints of a reignited, united front. Prior to being traded to the New York Mets and signing a massive, 341-million-dollar extension, Puerto Rican superstar, Francisco Lindor offered his thoughts on racial oppression in the US and the Black Lives Matter movement, "My life is not hard...I'm blessed. I have the greatest job I could ever have. But there are times if I'm not looking like Francisco Lindor, they might look at me different...We are fighting, not just for the Black community, we're fighting for everybody of color. We can't just say 'All life matters' if we don't go after the ones in need in that moment, and that's people of color."<sup>219</sup> Similarly, over the last few months a collective of more than 100 Black American

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<sup>218</sup> James Wagner, "After a Long Lull, Protesting Is Taking Hold Across Baseball," *The New York Times*, August 28, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/28/sports/baseball/mlb-protest-canceled-games.html>.

<sup>219</sup> Richard Justice, "Lindor, Clemente Jr. Talk 'Colorism En Beisbol,'" September 18, 2020, <https://www.mlb.com/news/francisco-lindor-roberto-clemente-jr-colorism-in-baseball-panel>.

players has come together to form the non-profit “Players Alliance” a group, “...united to use their voice and platform to create new opportunities for the Black community in all areas of baseball and society. The organization’s mission is to create an inclusive culture within baseball and the community, where differences are leveraged to elevate racial equality.”<sup>220</sup> The Players Alliance has initiated a number of different programs, ranging from a “Pull Up Tour” where they distributed basic goods and needs to Black communities during the pandemic, to a recycling program for used baseball gear, or a mentorship program with current and former players that seeks to promote love and career prospects on and off the field in the Black community. Notably, a number of prominent players helped raise funds on the previous two Jackie Robinson Days, this year donating their game checks asking their peers to do the same. As valiant or well-intentioned as these individual and group initiatives may be, the scope and terrain of struggle cannot center on solely increasing diversity or representation within baseball if it seeks to dismantle or even dent the existing distribution of power within the sport, domestically and globally. Despite the noise of symbolic action and professed support or solidarity from individuals, teams, and leagues, players can still leverage their power and baseball’s reliance on their skill and performance to move past political performance and co-opted language of caring, instead actualizing material support for marginalized people and radical grassroots organizations at home and abroad. Understanding and viewing domestic BIPOC and Latin American struggles as linked in their opposition to *global* white supremacy, not as individualized or localized experiences, oppressions is imperative in resisting the cunning of multiculturalist discourse and reform. It would not be the first time that such coalitional efforts, if realized, have occurred across US-Caribbean contexts, as we can look to historical antecedents to find recognition of

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<sup>220</sup> MLB Players Association, “THE PLAYERS ALLIANCE,” 2020, <https://www.mlbplayers.com/the-players-alliance>.

shared struggle and circumstance. The Black Panthers and the Young Lords, Puerto Rican nationalists and revolutionaries, aligned in their anti-imperialist politics and condemnation of white US, capitalist, exploitation of marginalized communities across the globe. As Johanna Fernández notes in her exhaustive study on the Young Lords, “Although civil rights and Black power movement histories are popularly understood within the framework of Black American citizenship rights, the work of organizations like the Black Panthers and the Young Lords paint a portrait of struggle that is more composite. Their organizing efforts show that the black movement set in motion an awakening of social consciousness wherein virtually no social issue escaped public scrutiny.”<sup>221</sup> It is precisely the “composite” struggle that Fernández alludes to, the acknowledgment of a common marginality that holds both the most leverage and possibility for Latin American and BIPOC players within baseball. Though I am not blind to the fact that Latin American and BIPOC baseball stars are not the same as Black Panther or Young Lord, working class, socialist revolutionaries, any hope of eradicating white supremacy in the sport will require an acknowledgement and set of actions unified in their commitment to shared struggle and resistance to racial-colonial structures, practices, and epistemes. It does not go far enough to simply float solutions rooted in representational, diversity politics or tunnel energy towards “raising awareness”. Indeed, as touched on earlier in the Conclusion, championing diversity for diversity’s sake can often reinscribe the very colonial logics that undergird the asymmetrical power structures driving inequality. Being able to spot neoliberal performance and corporate attempts to mollify demands becomes key. As domestic, BIPOC players continue to push for change within the baseball, a reciprocal allyship with their Latin American comrades can expand the horizon of struggle and broaden a set of material demands that can aid the communities

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<sup>221</sup> Johanna Fernández, *The Young Lords: A Radical History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020).



whose players continue to drive the business of baseball. Demands should not be limited in their imagination, confined to clean, charitable contributions or visible acts community service that individualize a politics of caring. Instead, by recognizing how the system similarly devalues both domestic BIPOC and Latin American players, a unified player group can and should advocate for lasting structural and material changes.

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