

From Giants To Monarchs. The 1890 Season Of The Colored Monarchs Of York, Pennsylvania

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In 1888, a column in the *Sporting News* stated: “There are players among these colored men that are equal to any white players on the ball field. If you don’t think so, go out and see the Cuban Giants play. This club, with its strongest players on the field, would play a favourable game against such clubs as the New Yorks or Chicagos.” Neither ethnically Cubans nor physiologically Giants, from 1885 to 1891, the Cuban Giants Base Ball Club was the most successful and boasted, from time to time, some of the best Black players of all the Negro leagues, nineteenth and twentieth century. The Club was formed in the late summer of 1885, as Black historian Solomon (Sol) White reports, from a group of Long Island waiters who entertained guests of the Argyle Hotel in Babylon, N.Y., by playing baseball. According to White, the players spoke in gibberish while on the field in order to pass for Spanish, thus, making it socially acceptable to compete against all white clubs.

While there is speculation as to how many tables these players ever actually waited, in the fall of 1885, Walter Cook a wealthy Trenton, N.J., businessman, purchased the Giants and began replacing the alleged waiters with quality salaried Black players. He hired S.K. Govern, a native of the West Indies, as manager and sent the team to Cuba to hone their baseball skills during the winter.

In February, 1886, the Giants returned to Florida and began playing their way northward with exhibition games. The Club enjoyed considerable success, even challenging and defeating two white major league clubs. From that first full season, the Cuban Giants established themselves as a premier baseball club. But due to social bias and discriminatory practices of the period, the team was relegated to playing independent and minor league teams, most frequently with the same complexion, Black.

Not until 1889 were the Giants admitted to a racially mixed, yet predominantly white league - the Middle States League. But despite superior performance on the field, the team finished a *controversial* second on the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania representative.

In 1890 the Middle States League reorganized and was renamed the Eastern Interstate League, with all the team located in Pennsylvania. The Cuban Giants' application to the reorganized league was denied, largely through the efforts of political influencing by the Harrisburg Club and prominent citizens in the community. As a result the Cuban Giants wound up playing in tiny York, Pennsylvania, and became Harrisburg's most feared and hated rival.

This paper presents a brief review of the 1890 season, and it investigates the political, economic, and racially discriminatory circumstances that led a team of top professional baseball players to move from Trenton, N.J., to play in York, Pennsylvania. It shows the acceptance and support of a Black baseball team as the representative of a small, rural and predominantly white community.