

STATEMENT OF DONALD W. MURPHY, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, CONCERNING S. CON. RES. 60, DESIGNATING THE NEGRO LEAGUES BASEBALL MUSEUM IN KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI, AS AMERICA'S NATIONAL NEGRO LEAGUES BASEBALL MUSEUM

November 15, 2005

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. Con. Res. 60, designating the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City, Missouri, as America's National Negro Leagues Baseball Museum. Since the concurrent resolution involves a statement expressing the sentiment of both the Senate and the House and would not become law, our comments are limited to providing background information for the consideration of the committee.

African-Americans began to play baseball in the late 1800s on military teams, college teams, and company teams. They eventually found their way to professional teams with white players. Because of racism and segregation, laws forced them from these teams by 1900. These black players then formed their own units, "barnstorming" around the country to play anyone who would challenge them.

In 1920, an organized league structure was formed under the guidance of Andrew "Rube" Foster—a former player, manager, and owner for the Chicago American Giants. In a meeting held at the Paso YMCA, the center for black culture and life in Kansas City, Missouri, he and a few other Midwestern team owners joined to form the Negro National League. The Kansas City Monarchs were charter members of that league. Rival leagues were soon formed in eastern and

southern states, bringing the thrills and innovative play of black baseball to major urban centers and rural countryside in the United States, Canada, and Latin America.

The leagues maintained a high level of professional skill and became centerpieces for economic development in many black communities. The Kansas City Monarchs introduced night baseball five years before the major leagues did and won their first Negro Leagues World Series title in 1924. In 1947, Major League Baseball's Brooklyn Dodgers recruited Jackie Robinson from the Kansas City Monarchs. When he left the Monarchs to move to New York, Robinson became the first African-American in the modern era to play on a Major League roster. While this historic event was a key moment in baseball and civil rights history, it prompted the decline of the Negro Leagues. The best black players were now recruited for the Major Leagues, and black fans followed. The last Negro Leagues folded in the early 1960s, but their legacy lives on through the surviving players and the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum (NLBM).

Through the inspiration of Horace M. Peterson III (1945-1992), founder of the Black Archives of Mid-America, a group of local historians, business leaders, and former baseball players came together to create the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in the early 1990s. It functioned out of a small, one-room office in the Lincoln Building, located in the Historic 18th & Vine Jazz District of Kansas City. The museum opened in 1991 as a tribute to some of baseball's best unknown players. In 1994, it expanded to a 2,000 square-foot space in the Lincoln Building.

During the late 1990s, plans were underway by city officials to create a new home to showcase Kansas City's jazz heritage and to revitalize the Historic District. A new facility was built to host

the new American Jazz Museum and a new, permanent, expanded home for the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum. This new 50,000 square-foot building opened in September 1997 and the Baseball Museum opened in November. It has welcomed several thousand visitors, including school groups and dignitaries. The NLBM also has developed a traveling exhibit to help bring the history of black baseball to people outside Kansas City.

The NLBM was created to remember the often-forgotten stories of legendary athletes who built a baseball league in the midst of segregation and helped make baseball one of America's national pastimes. It was conceived as a museum to preserve and interpret the legacy of Negro Leagues Baseball, telling the complete story of the average players to the superstars. It tells the story of a vibrant and compelling center of American history that has not been told before. The National Baseball Hall of Fame, in Cooperstown, New York, recognizes baseball's greatest players. However, the NLBM provides special recognition to those Negro Leaguers who have been honored in Cooperstown.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.