

# Play Ball!

## A Program on Reconstruction Era Baseball in Arkansas

### Essential Question

Did baseball play a role in Reconstruction Era America?

### Objectives

- Students will learn how baseball was played in the 1860s.
- Students will learn where the first game of baseball was played in Arkansas.
- Students will understand that MacArthur Park was once a sprawling military complex where soldiers lived, worked and played.
- Students will learn that the arsenal grounds were also the location of outdoor activities by the citizens of Little Rock.
- Students will learn that during the early years of baseball in the United States, baseball was an integrated game before becoming segregated.

### Guiding Questions

- Who were some of the first people to play baseball in Arkansas after the Civil War?
- Why was baseball in Little Rock dependent upon the soldiers at the arsenal?
- What benefits might baseball have had on Little Rock and Arkansas during Reconstruction?
- What is segregation and when and why did it happen?

### Key Terms

- Arsenal – a place where weapons are made or stored.
- Reconstruction – the act or process of building something that was damaged or destroyed again.
- Integration – incorporating different groups or individuals into society or an organization as equals.
- Segregation – the practice or policy of keeping people of different races, religions, etc. separate from each other.
- Pastime – an activity that you enjoy doing during your free time.
- Morale – the confidence, enthusiasm, and discipline of a person or group at a particular time.

### Program Overview

Arkansas (along with former Confederate States) found itself in a period of Reconstruction following the Civil War. Beginning in 1863, and officially ending in 1877, the states of the former Confederacy were occupied by United States soldiers, under martial law, and trying to return to a sense of normalcy after four years of destructive Civil War.

Soldiers at the arsenal, comprised of soldiers from outside of the South, brought with them the game of baseball, which was quickly spreading across the country as the new national game. At this time, there were no city parks or playing fields in Little Rock. Therefore, if citizens of Little Rock desired green space for relaxation or for games, they used either the grounds around St. John's College (now underneath

Interstates 30 and 630), or the United States Arsenal (now MacArthur Park). Citizens, as well as soldiers, mingled together on the arsenal grounds. The first recorded game of baseball ever played in the State of Arkansas took place there on May 11, 1867, between two Little Rock baseball clubs; Pulaski Base Ball Club and Galaxy Base Ball Club.

All across the country people sought to return to a sense of normalcy, to simpler times free from battles, death and destruction. Baseball became an outlet as a way for the nation to heal the wounds of civil war. American citizens were war weary and sought new figures to emulate and admire, and that would come in the form of baseball players.

During these early years of baseball in America, the game was an integrated one. It was not until the 1880s that baseball became segregated. It is not known if any of these early baseball teams in Arkansas were integrated, but whites and blacks did play alongside each other during the 1860s and 1870s. For more information on the segregation of baseball, please follow this link (*provide link*).

### **Activity**

Students who come and participate in “Play Ball!” will have the opportunity to play a game of baseball on the actual ground where the first recorded game of baseball occurred in Arkansas. The bat, ball, and bases are historically correct reproductions, along with the field chalked according to the baseball rule book of 1867. Further, students will have the opportunity to experience baseball as it was played in 1867, using the same rules players used during that time. Not only is this a fun and unique opportunity to expose students to an aspect of American culture, but it is also a living history lesson in Reconstruction era Arkansas, covering such topics as Reconstruction, cultural pastimes, customs, and early race relations following the American Civil War. By taking part in this program, students will learn that baseball played an important role in Reconstruction Arkansas because it helped to ease tensions between the citizens of Little Rock and Federal soldiers during a difficult time in U.S. history as the two groups interacted and played baseball together.

### **Time Frame**

30 minutes minimum per group (required) – 3 hours maximum

### **Materials Provided**

Reproduction 19<sup>th</sup> century baseball bats, balls, bases

### **Arkansas Frameworks**

*(Hyperlink provided to a PDF file of all the frameworks this program touches upon)*

### **Reference Material**

*(Hyperlink provided to a PDF file with online and published material to supplement this program)*

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### **Online References**

Arkansas Baseball Encyclopedia

<http://arkbaseball.com/tiki-index.php?page=Miscellaneous&structure=Miscellaneous>

The Rules of 1867, as adopted by the National Association of Base-Ball Players

<http://vbba.org/Rules/1867.htm>

Simplified explanation of baseball rules from 1867

<http://www.thehenryford.org/exhibits/baseball/rules.asp>

### **Books**

The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Arkansas

Persistence in the Midst of Ruin, by Carl Moneyhon; University of Arkansas Press, 2004

Old Time Baseball: America's Pastime in the Gilded Age, by Harvey Frommer; Taylor Trade Publishing, 2005.

Black Baseball Entrepreneurs, 1860-1901: Operating by Any Means Necessary, by Michael E. Lomax; Syracuse University Press, 2003.

Inventing Baseball: The 100 Greatest Games that Shaped the 19th Century, by Bill Felber, Mark Fimoff, Len Levin and Peter Mancuso; SABR, Inc., 2013.

### **Arkansas Department of Education Frameworks Satisfied**

G.1.AH.9-12.2: Research elements of culture in a community, state, or nation (e.g., food, clothing, housing, language, sports/recreation, customs, traditions, art, music, religion)

G.2.5.2: Understand the contributions of people of various racial, ethnic, and religious groups in Arkansas and the United States

H.6.5.21: Identify and locate significant Civil War sites of the Union and Confederacy

RP.6.AH.9-12.1: Examine the Reconstruction Era in Arkansas

PEL.1.4.5: Strike a ball with increased velocity and accuracy

For a complete list of Arkansas Frameworks that this program relates to, please follow this link *(provide a link to a PDF file with all frameworks that pertain to this program)*