



## A Study Guide

Prepared by Roberta McNair for  
CFI Education

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## Table of Contents

About the Film .....	4
September 28, 2009, blog entry for Marcos R. Parodi, who worked as a Production Assistant on <i>From Ghost Town to Havana</i> .....	4
Consultant David N. James posted this entry on July 24, 2011 .....	5
Funding for the film from the Moenkopi Group.....	6
About the Filmmakers .....	7
Eugene Corr .....	7
Roberto “Chile” Perez .....	7
Grants for the Film .....	7
Background .....	9
Youth Baseball in the U.S. and Oakland .....	9
The History of Little League .....	9
West Oakland Kids Get a Safe Place to Play .....	10
Youth Baseball in Cuba .....	11
Cuban Little League Baseball .....	11
Young Baseball Players in Cuba .....	11
Ghost Town .....	14
Spurred by ‘60 Minutes,’ Oakland to Spiff Up Run-Down Area .....	14
Killings common, answers rare in Oakland area.....	15
Travelling to Cuba.....	17
Cuba Travel Advice .....	17
Cuba prepares for an end to the travel ban .....	18
New Ways to Visit Cuba—Legally .....	18
U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs: Cuba .....	20
Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) / U.S. Interests Section Location (USINT) .....	21
Oakland Royals Baseball Team .....	22
Baseball Brings Life, Hope to Mean Streets .....	22
Miracle on 29th Street keeps getting better .....	24
Baseball’s Robin Hood .....	25
Coach Roscoe Bryant, Jr .....	27
The Players .....	27

Ciudad Habana Team .....	31
Coach Nicolas Reyes .....	31
The Players .....	31
Questions for Research and Discussion .....	33

## About the Film

Beginning in the summer of 2007, director Eugene Corr and crew followed the lives of Afro-Cuban boys growing up in Ciudad Habana, Cuba, playing baseball for Coach Nicolas Reyes, and African-American boys growing up in a neighborhood in West Oakland called “Ghost Town,” playing for Coach Roscoe Bryant.

A portrait of the coaches and the boys emerged, along with a strong sense of their neighborhoods, families, schools, and cultures. The filmmakers witnessed the enormous obstacles the Ghost Town boys face in their lives, yet the story of Roscoe and his players is positive, even inspiring. The Ciudad Habana boys and their Afro-Cuban coach, Nicolas, live in material poverty, yet their daily lives are surprisingly more carefree, with safer streets, far less racial prejudice and segregation, better schools, stronger family and community ties, and more organized sports opportunities. Life for the boys’ parents is harder. The economy is bureaucratic, centralized (though this is changing), and inefficient. Yet, compared to West Oakland, it’s paradise for poor kids. It sometimes seems as if the biggest mistake a child in Cuba can make is to grow up.

From the beginning Coach Roscoe and Coach Nicolas—introduced on video—wanted to meet and play each other. Getting passports and legal permission to travel to Cuba took almost two years, but on May 4, 2010, Oakland Coach Roscoe Bryant and nine young African-American players, ages 10-15, flew from Oakland to Havana, Cuba, to play Coach Nicolas’ Ciudad Habana team.

For the next week, the boys and coaches ate, danced, sang, swam, argued, teased, and played baseball together. Wary, street-hardened Ghost Town boys opened up and warmed to the fun-loving friendship of their Afro-Cuban hosts. No sirens, no shootings! Pretty girls! Baseball! Fun! On Day 5 of a beautiful week of baseball and friendship, Coach Roscoe received a fateful phone call from

Ghost Town: The stepfather of one of his players, Chris, 13, had been murdered. Coach Roscoe, Chris, and the team again faced the challenge of life in West Oakland.



*Oakland Royals coach Roscoe Bryant*

Coach Roscoe returned from Havana with a renewed sense of his mission, however. He set aside the anger and hurt in his personal life and applied the loving, fatherly techniques of coaching he learned from Coach Nicolas. While never compromising on baseball skills, Coach Nicolas’s nurturing approach develops each child’s talents and works through their limitations to achieve a team of boys whose love for the game—and their teammates—makes them stronger players, sons, brothers, and friends. Coach Roscoe learned to see his team as individual boys with the need to connect to him and their teammates. Through the shared love of baseball, he now nurtures his players the way he learned from Coach Nicolas, and the result is not only good teams but also stronger boys, who are better prepared to cope with and transcend the difficulties they face daily in Ghost Town.

<http://playtwopictures.com/about.html>

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Ghost-Town-to-Havana-Documentary/161104022009>

**September 28, 2009, blog entry for Marcos R. Parodi, who worked as a Production Assistant on *From Ghost Town to Havana*:**

*From Ghost Town to Havana* examines the role of coaches and mentors in the lives of young boys, 9–13, living in poor neighborhoods

in Havana, Cuba, and West Oakland, California. It explores the contrast between growing up in the two different environments. The boys in Ghost Town in West Oakland live in what some consider the toughest and most violent U.S. neighborhood. Some of these boys' family members or friends have been murdered in front of their eyes, while others have drug-dealing parents. Most of the boys have no father figure, but are lucky enough to have loving, supporting, and hardnosed mothers to push them. The Ghost Town boys are tempted with the glitz and glam of making fast money as a drug dealer or gang life. In their situation it's impossible to resist.



*Coach Roscoe and Coach Nicolas meet*

In Havana, Cuba, boys of the same age receive free health care, free education, and a huge amount of love and support from families and the community. Cuba invests a lot towards their youth. Cuba has excellent educational programs, which are producing excellent minds in engineering and medical minds. However, the harsh reality is that with the free education in Cuba also comes the lack of opportunity as an adult with a career. The boys in Ghost Town have a multitude of opportunities available to them, but are not receiving assistance to attain the education or means necessary to escape from Ghost Town.

This documentary follows a set of boys who are attempting to reach goals greater than their environments may allow. It is a powerful, controversial, and inspiring film.

<http://marcosrparodi.wordpress.com/2009/09/28/from-ghost-town-to-havana/>

### **Consultant David N. James posted this entry on July 24, 2011:**

*From Ghost Town to Havana:* A new documentary film being made by Eugene Corr

"In the summer of 2006, three unarmed kids were gunned down on an Oakland street. Roscoe Bryant, 44 at the time, ran out of his house. One of the boys, Thomas, 15, died in his arms. Roscoe, the father of two boys himself, decided he had to do something. As an alternative to the gangs and violence engulfing his Ghost Town neighborhood, he started the Oakland Royals baseball team. We've been following the story of Coach Roscoe and his players for the past three-and-a-half years."

—Eugene Corr

I have long been touched by the despair that resides in the sad existences suffered by inner-city kids, who, through no fault of their own, with no nuclear family and no role models except "Rap Stars," drug dealers, and other criminals in their respective communities, are presented with nothing positive and useful upon which to base their futures.

I believe a compelling lesson can be learned from Eugene Corr's film, *From Ghost Town to Havana*, and that is that if the sad, dangerous, and wasteful things are going to be changed in the many neighborhoods like Ghost Town (this film focuses on West Oakland, California, but there are Ghost Towns in every one of our larger cities), mentors are needed and needed badly. The film's purpose is to show that more Roscoes (learn about him in the trailer) can make a difference.

I spent the week of July 10–15, in Berkeley, California, *pro bono*, to learn more about the film from "Gene" and his associate producer and its needs—which as you might expect is money, needed to complete the full translation from Spanish and final editing. The film's cost was front loaded and still needs about \$200,000

to finish with the translation and final editing so it can find a public audience with PBS, HBO, or other similar venues.

If you find *From Ghost Town to Havana* can be an important vehicle to make a difference and you can make a 501(c)(3) tax-deductible contribution, we will be grateful and hopefully some kids will have a better shot at improving their lives through the film's mentoring objectives.

<http://mhsclassof58thenandnow.blogspot.com/2011/07/new-documentary-film-being-made-by.html>

### **Funding for the film from the Moenkopi Group:**

The Moenkopi Group is a tax-exempt 501 (c)3 non-profit corporation which produces high-quality film and video documentaries on subjects not usually addressed in mainstream media. Their purpose is to provoke and enlighten, to foster an informed citizenry, expand civic participation, and encourage in viewers the awareness to evaluate social policy.



*Chris Fletcher*

From their website:

Moenkopi is acting as fiscal sponsor for the feature-length documentary film *From Ghost*

*Town to Havana*, produced and directed by Eugene Corr of Playtwo Pictures in Berkeley, California. Since the summer of 2007, the project has followed the lives of Afro-Cuban boys growing up in Ciudad Habana, Cuba, playing baseball for Coach Nicolas Reyes, and African-American boys growing up in a neighborhood in West Oakland called "Ghost Town," playing for Coach Roscoe Bryant. In the spring of 2010 Coach Roscoe Bryant leads nine of his wary street-wise players, including 13-year-old right fielder, Chris Fletcher, on a trip to Cuba to play baseball against Coach Nicolas' team. On the last night of a beautiful week of baseball and friendship, Coach Roscoe receives a call from home. Chris' stepfather has been murdered. Can Coach Roscoe persuade his players to embrace life in the midst of death? The film highlights the tough path Roscoe's players must follow to find a way out of a life of poverty and neglect and the key role mentors play.

<http://www.themoenkopigroup.org/Projects.html>



## About the Filmmakers

Producer/Director **Eugene Corr**  
Co-Producer/Cuban Co-Director/ Director of  
Photography **Roberto “Chile” Perez**  
Cinematographers **Ashley James, Monica Lam,**  
**Steve Burns**  
Editors **Gary Weimberg, Matthew Baldwin,**  
**Steve Bloom**

### Eugene Corr



*Producer/Director Eugene Corr*

Eugene Corr has broad experience in both fiction and non-fiction filmmaking. He wrote and co-directed the documentary *Waldo Salt: A Screenwriter’s Journey*, for which he was nominated for an Academy Award in 1991. He also wrote and directed the 1986 dramatic feature film, *Desert Bloom*, (Sélection Officielle, Cannes Film Festival).

In addition, Corr has worked as a second unit director on major motion pictures, written or co-written dramatic features, and written for TV. He has directed episodic television. He has also directed television commercials for Chelsea Pictures in New York City. Most recently he co-wrote, with Edwin Dobb, the documentary *Butte, America: The Saga of a Hard Rock Mining Town*, for Pamela Roberts’ Rattlesnake Productions.

In July 2007, Corr began shooting *From Ghost Town to Havana* in Oakland and Havana, following the lives of two youth baseball coaches, Roscoe Bryant and Nicolas Reyes. Corr’s father, Gene Corr, was a legendary

baseball coach in Richmond, California, for 40 years.

### Roberto “Chile” Perez



*Director of Photography/Co-Producer/Cuban  
Co-Director Roberto “Chile” Perez*

Widely regarded as one of Cuba’s finest cinematographers, Chile’s images have traveled the world. He has worked as Director of Photography on hundreds of documentaries including productions for ABC, CBS, NBC, Discovery Channel, and the Halogroup in the United States; NHK and TV Asahi of Japan; Canal Arte of France; and O Globo y Manchete of Brazil. Chile creates frames of great depth and stunning visual beauty, perfect to capture the raucous, sensuous, color-saturated vitality of Cuba.

Among his important documentaries are *When I Think of Che*, *Lennon in Havana*, *Cuban Art Series*, and the series, *Spiked Wings*. He has received dozens of awards in national and international competitions.

<http://playtwopictures.com/filmmakers.html>

### Grants for the Film

*From Ghost Town to Havana* was honored with several grant awards from individuals and organizations. These organizations included:

[California Council for the Humanities/ California  
Documentary Project](#)

[The San Francisco Foundation—Bay Area  
Documentary Fund](#)

[Berkeley Film Foundation](#)  
[San Francisco Film Society and Film Arts](#)  
[Foundation Documentary Fund](#)  
[The Fleishhacker Foundation](#)

In addition, Eugene Corr was awarded a six-month residency for post-production as a San Francisco Film Society FilmHouse Resident. *From Ghost Town to Havana* is a documentary feature exploring the lives of two dedicated and charismatic baseball coaches in Oakland, California, and Havana, Cuba. Each man helps the young boys they coach become young men and to face the challenges of the game and of the societies they live in. Eugene Corr is an Academy Award-nominated filmmaker (feature documentary) and a coach's son.

<http://www.sffs.org/content.aspx?catid=22,37&pageid=772>



*Gene Corr, Chile Perez, and  
Cinematographer Ashley James*

Producer and director Eugene Corr was featured in an SF360 article discussing *From Ghost Town to Havana*:

<http://www.sf360.org/Articles/In-Production/?pageid=11791>

<http://playtwopictures.com/media.html>



## Background

### Youth Baseball in the U.S. and Oakland

#### The History of Little League

Little League's roots extend as far as baseball's history itself—even into the 18th century.

Soldiers of the Continental Army played ball at Valley Forge during the American Revolution. U.S. citizens played more modern versions of the British games of cricket and rounders through the early 19th century, often called "town ball." In the 1840s, New Yorker Alexander Joy Cartwright and his acquaintances played a game they called "base ball" that was very similar to the game we know today. ...

During the American Civil War, soldiers on both sides played baseball to pass the time between battles. In 1869, the Cincinnati Red Stockings became the first openly professional baseball team. By the end of the 19th century, baseball was known as "America's Pastime."

As early as the 1880s, leagues were formed for pre-teen children in New York, but they were affiliated with adult "club" teams and did not flourish. Children often played "pickup" baseball in streets or sandlots instead, and with substandard equipment. Cast-off bats and balls were taped and re-taped, and catcher's equipment in children's sizes was almost nonexistent.

In the 1920s, the American Legion formed a baseball program for teen-age boys that [still] exists today. American schools also started baseball programs. But there was still a void for pre-teen boys who wanted to play in organized games. Other smaller programs cropped up from time to time, but did not catch on beyond local areas.

In 1938, a man named Carl Stotz hit upon the idea for an organized baseball league for the boys in his hometown of Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Carl had no sons of his own, but he often played ball with his young nephews,

Jimmy and Major Gehron, and wanted a way to provide an organized program for them.

Carl gathered several of the neighborhood children and experimented with different types of equipment and different field dimensions during that summer. The program still did not have a name, and no games were played.

In 1939, Carl and his wife Grayce took the experiment a step further, enlisting the help of brothers George and Bert Bebble and their wives, Annabelle and Eloise, respectively. Carl, George and Bert were the managers of the first three teams: Lycoming Dairy, Lundy Lumber and Jumbo Pretzel. John and Peggy Lindemuth soon joined the group, with the eight volunteers making up the very first Little League board of directors.

Carl also talked to his friends in the community and came up with the name: Little League. His idea was to provide a wholesome program of baseball for the boys of Williamsport, as a way to teach them the ideals of sportsmanship, fair play, and teamwork. ...

On June 6, 1939, in the very first Little League game ever played, Lundy Lumber defeated Lycoming Dairy, 23-8. Lycoming Dairy came back to win the season's first-half title, and faced second-half champ Lundy Lumber in a best-of-three series. Lycoming Dairy won the final game of the series, 3-2. ...



*Little League team in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania*

From those humble beginnings, Little League Baseball has become the world's largest organized youth sports program. In the space of just six decades, Little League grew from three

teams to nearly 200,000 teams, in all 50 U.S. states and more than 80 countries.

And the basic goal remains the same as it did in 1939: to give the children of the world a game that provides fundamental principles (sportsmanship, fair play, and teamwork) they can use later in life to become good citizens.

<http://www.littleleague.org/learn/about/historyandmission.htm>

### West Oakland Kids Get a Safe Place to Play

May 25, 2011, by Xan West

Thirteen-year-old Javon and fourteen-year-old Frenswa grew up in West Oakland. Like many youth in the neighborhood, they haven't had many opportunities to play in neighborhood parks. But that's about to change. On Saturday, April 30, Javon, Frenswa, and residents and community leaders from throughout the Bay Area came together to build a playground for West Oakland kids at Wade Johnson Park. The hope is that safe places to play to will create happier and healthier youth.



*Oakland Royals 7-8 year olds  
Undeclared in 2012*

As he paints a baseball diamond, Frenswa recalls playing in his backyard when he was younger because there wasn't anywhere else to play. He thinks having the opportunity to build this park is fun, and necessary for his neighborhood.

"[We're here] to help our community and to build this place up," says Frenswa.

Seventeen-year-old Shamika reflects on the run-down condition of the parks that currently exist in West Oakland.

"I didn't have this when I was growing up, so I thought, let me give someone else the chance to have what I didn't have," says Shamika. "I was running in the dirt and kicking rocks."

The conditions in many public parks are so bad that it is a common site in West Oakland to see fences that have been cut so that neighborhood children can play in school playgrounds during non-school hours. I live near Foster Elementary School and often see children go through the hole in the fence to play.

In addition to dangerous and poor conditions in the few parks that exist, many of them have been overrun by drug dealers, prostitution, and other criminal activity. The park closest to my house contains only rusty swings, no night-lights and a notoriously dangerous hill that provides cover for those not wanting to be seen from the street. I've rarely seen children playing there.

Fortunately, play in West Oakland is headed in a new direction. Sitting on over two and half acres, the newly improved Wade Johnson Park will contain a large play structure, garden beds, a baseball diamond, and many other attractions.

The park sits in the shadow of what was once Cole Middle School, which was the last non-charter school left in West Oakland. After the 2009 school closure, and the subsequent use of the building as a police station, this block has served as a long-term reminder of a neighborhood in decline. For some, the park creates hope in the shadow of what has felt like failure.

... "Building a new park creates a sense of community and helps beautify the neighborhood, giving the families here a sense of pride in their community," says Sandra Sanders-West, my mother and Neighborhood Services Coordinator for West Oakland.

... Hannah, a fourteen-year-old who came with her church from Hayward, says she's

joined forces with Frenswa and Javon to paint the baseball diamond for their community.

“It’s important to get to go out, get some vitamins from the sun,” says Hannah. “Coming here to play gives you the ability to meet other people, broaden your horizons, and to socialize.”

<http://blogs.kqed.org/ourxperience/2011/05/25/west-oakland-kids-get-a-safe-place-to-play/>

## Youth Baseball in Cuba

### Cuban Little League Baseball

By Ana Lorena Fernández, May 2012

Watch Cuban kids playing baseball in Havana and you can feel yourself transported back to an idyllic 1950s America. This is essence of home-spun, enthusiastic, non-commercial, passionate, and local. Mix in a little apple pie, ignore the crumbling architecture and you would be there.

A baseball bat and ball is one of the most treasured gifts boys can receive for Christmas or his birthday. And if the gift is a baseball glove, then it’s like putting them on cloud nine. What kid in Cuba hasn’t spent the afternoons trying to hit a homerun and dreaming of becoming a famous baseball player? Baseball heroes Omar Linares, Orestes Kindelán, Victor Mesa, and Lourdes Gurriel, among so many others, have shown them that anything is possible.

Their parents are as enthusiastic about baseball as their children and take their kids to train at the nearest sports center hoping that they will become one of the greats; or simply to have some fun batting a ball and stealing bases. The kids who show talent for baseball are selected to join the little leagues and play against teams from different municipalities. The most talented go to sports schools and from there, after much training and many competitions, the best are chosen for the provincial teams. For world competitions, the Cuba Baseball Team is composed of the players who have achieved outstanding results in their provinces during the year.

However, while the kids are still kids, playing ball in their localities ensures them a safe and healthy way of spending their free time. Dads take out time to cheer their sons on when the team competes or simply practices, proud of his kid’s first homerun, or stolen base or scoring his first run.

Although volleyball and football have gained popularity in Cuba over the years, it is baseball that attracts millions of spectators to the stadiums scattered throughout the Island and is followed by millions more through radio and television.



*Cuban Little League team in Havana*

Baseball reigns supreme among sports in Cuba, and little kids zealously follow their teams’ performances during the season series, dreaming that one day they will be able to change the grandstand for the diamond.

[http://www.cubaabsolutely.com/AboutCuba/article\\_baseball.php?id=Cuban-little-league-baseball](http://www.cubaabsolutely.com/AboutCuba/article_baseball.php?id=Cuban-little-league-baseball)

### Young Baseball Players in Cuba

Calvin Davis, Anderson University

Ninety miles, that is it. That is all that separates the United States of America from the island of Cuba. It is remarkable that the two countries are so close in proximity, yet so far from one another in so many other ways. It is strange that most Americans know little or nothing about the island country that is only 90 miles away. The island of Cuba is full of delicious food, excellent music, breathtaking scenery, beautiful people, and baseball. Lots and lots of baseball. However, before one can



begin to understand the game of baseball as it relates to Cuba's youth, one must have some understanding of the country itself.



Cuba is a relatively small island located about 90 miles south of Miami, Florida. Like many countries in Latin America, Cuba has struggled with political unrest that has resulted in poverty for many of the country's citizens. Without a doubt the primary example of political unrest in Cuba came during the Cuban Revolution in the 1950's. The Cuban Revolution encompassed the overthrow of the Fulgencio Batista dictatorship, and the insertion of the Fidel Castro government. Batista enjoyed many years of being in power in Cuba. According to Thomas Patterson in his book *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution*, "ruling Cuba from the shadows in the 1930's he (Batista) amassed considerable wealth through sweetheart deals and fraud. In 1940 he actually put himself up for the presidency and won what was probably an honest election. But after serving four years, Batista stepped down and settled into his Daytona Beach, Florida, estate. He returned to the island in 1948 after election to the Cuban Senate from Santa Clara province. Plotting with army officers and their loyal troops and exploiting a public revulsion against blatant governmental corruption, Batista seized power on March 10, 1952, in a well-planned coup that succeeded in just a few hours." Needless to say, the Cuban people had little to no say in any of the political affairs when Batista was in power, he ruled basically as a dictator, and there is no

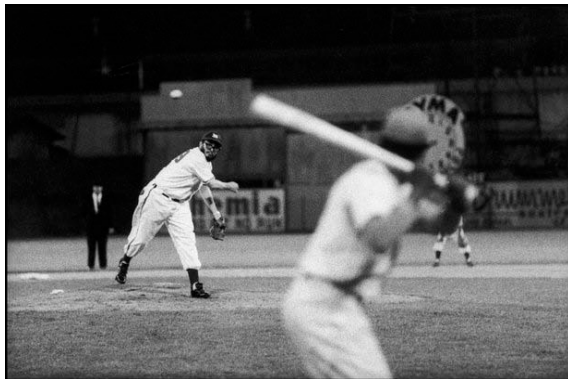
doubt that a change had to be made. The overthrow of Batista is also known as the Cuban Revolution, in 1959. According to *Cuba: Island of Dreams* by Antoni Kapcia, most of Cuba was in favor of the revolution. The revolution gained support from many people with diverse social, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. When announcing the revolution, Fidel Castro made wonderful promises that the Cuban people had been longing to hear. At one point during his announcement he said: "I want to tell the people and the mothers of Cuba that I will resolve all problems without shedding a drop of blood. I tell the mothers that they will never, because of us, have to weep." These promises sounded wonderful to the Cuban people at the time of the revolution.

Through all of the political unrest that has plagued Cuba for so long there is one thing that has remained somewhat constant—a deep love for baseball. Baseball proved constant in a poverty-stricken country and acted as a savior for Cuba's youth. As expected, Cuban boys begin developing a love for the game at a very young age. Just like the United States, young boys in Cuba start learning the game of baseball as soon as they can walk. There are certainly several parallels between children learning the game of baseball in Cuba and America. In both countries many young children love the game and have a true desire to excel in it. In both Cuba and America children participate in formal little league games as well as informal "pick up" games daily. However, there is something special that separates most of the Cuban players from most of the American players.

Prior to researching baseball in Cuba one may think that Cuban players tend to be more talented than American players because of better training. However after doing some research on the topic, one is able to see that young Cuban baseball players are motivated to compete more so than young American players. Obviously this is a general statement and certainly does not apply to each individual baseball player in Cuba or America. It is very difficult and dangerous to assume that one

person has more intrinsic motivation to succeed at something than another person but through research, one can see that this is true as it relates to the comparison of young Cuban and American baseball players. The following explains how young Cuban baseball players have a higher level of intrinsic motivation to compete in the game of baseball than young American players.

In his book *The Pride of Havana: The History of Cuban Baseball* Roberto González Echevarría brings up several very interesting points about how baseball is organized and played by young people in Cuba. In the first chapter of the book Echevarría explains that young Cuban players play a lot of “informal” baseball games with minimal adult supervision. He goes on to mention that it was not uncommon for poor boys to play baseball using various cheap materials rather than an actual ball and bat. ... Echevarría paints the picture for his audience that in Cuba, baseball is not seen as a game or as a something to do in order to stay in shape. Baseball is life in Cuba. Javier Mendez says it best in the book *Full Count: Inside Cuban Baseball*, “It is part of being Cuban. Baseball is one of the roots of Cuban reality.”



*Fidel Castro pitching for Los Barbudos  
(The Bearded Ones) in 1959*

... even without very much adult supervision and guidance, neighborhoods organize teams and compete with each other. This idea is something that at first may not seem very different than baseball in America. However, it is certainly important to note that the young players themselves are organizing these teams

and setting up the games without help from adults. This is something that probably would probably not happen in America. There are very few American children that would have the internal motivation to play organized baseball so badly that they organize teams.

... While there are formal little leagues in Cuba, most players learn how to play well by imitating other players. This is very different from the way that young baseball players learn the game in America. Here, there is no need for young players to organize their own teams because there are various little leagues that are relatively easy to get involved in. Most young players in America are able to receive some sort of formal instruction from a baseball coach. ...

... motivation to excel at the game is the primary difference between young baseball players in Cuba and America. ... Due to poverty many young players cannot afford to play little league ball, so instead they organize their own teams and form their own leagues without help from adults. This is something that doesn't happen in America because it is much easier for young players to play in little leagues. In fact, according to the book *Play Ball!: The Story of Little League Baseball*, “During the most recent years the number of Little Leaguers in America has fallen—about one percent each year since 1998.” It would be reasonable to conclude that children in America want to spend more time indoors watching TV and playing video games than playing sports. Of course this is certainly not the case for all young players in America. There are many players that have just as much of a heart to compete as young Cuban players, but after research one can conclude that Cuban players are more intrinsically motivated to compete than most young American players.

The differences between young baseball players in Cuba and America may at first seem relatively minimal but through research, one can easily see that baseball is approached much differently in Cuba than it is in America. It is no secret that Cuba produces great baseball players: For decades Major League Baseball

teams have flooded their rosters with Cuban players. Some of the biggest names in Cuban athletes include Rafael Palmeiro, Jose Canseco, and Raul Valdes.

<http://andersonuniversity.libguides.com/content.php?pid=316699&sid=3421991>

## Ghost Town

Ghosttown (or Ghost Town) is a neighborhood in West Oakland. It overlaps partially with the Hoover/Foster neighborhood. One could call it "West Oakland Annex" because until about the mid-1980s everything east of San Pablo was considered to be in North Oakland. For example, the North Oakland Public Library branch was on the east side of San Pablo between 34th/35th Streets.



### Origins of the Name

There are many different versions of the origins of the name "Ghosttown." Here are just a few:

- It was named after two historic casket companies located in the neighborhood.
- It originated because the neighborhood felt like a "ghost town" after many families were displaced by eminent domain for the construction of the 980 Freeway and BART.
- Due to the high number of shootings in the area in the 1980s, the police began referring to the area as a "ghost town."
- According to the Wikipedia entry for Ghost Town, "The name originates from a drug king pin who referred to the area as a ghost

town due to the shortage of other drug dealers whose absence was attributed to the kingpins dominance over the area." However, the source cited for this information is the same source as the two above points, but it appears that that source doesn't actually advance this theory.

It is difficult to identify when the name "Ghosttown" first began to be used to describe this neighborhood. According to Google Trends, "ghost town oakland" had almost no searches before 2008. This San Francisco Chronicle story from 2000 discussing the 60 Minutes report spotlighting the violence in the neighborhood (please add a link to the 60 Minutes report here if you find it!) shows the tenuous nature of the neighborhood name at the time: "known as 'Ghost Town' on the streets." As of 2013, Ghosttown does not appear on Google Maps (the entire area is listed as Hoover-Foster). It would be good to have more information on the role of newcomers to the neighborhood, such as Novella Carpenter's Ghost Town Farm or Ghost Town Gallery, in popularizing the name.

<http://oaklandwiki.org/Ghosttown>,  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghost\\_Town,\\_Oakland,\\_California](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghost_Town,_Oakland,_California),  
<http://localfoods.about.com/od/localfoodsexperts/ss/ghosttownfarm.htm>, <http://ghosttownfarm.wordpress.com/>

### Spurred by '60 Minutes,' Oakland to Spiff Up Run-Down Area

Phillip Matier, Andrew Ross, January 24, 2000

Rather than complain, Mayor Jerry Brown has decided to make a showcase out of that blighted West Oakland neighborhood that was prominently featured in a recent "60 Minutes" profile.

The show's highlighting of a poverty stricken few blocks along Martin Luther King Jr. Way caused quite a ruckus around Oakland. So much so that the Oakland City Council last week passed a resolution demanding a retraction from CBS. The show's producers have no intention of apologizing for anything—and even City Council members privately admit that their



vote for a retraction was little more than a symbolic protest.

But Mayor Brown thinks that the sniping at CBS is just another example of “spending more time in denial” and that the real task is to turn things around—especially things that garner national attention.

So, no sooner than the “60 Minutes” producers had left town, Brown was paying a couple of visits to the troubled neighborhood. Then he quietly assembled a team of cops, building inspectors and community development experts to try to work out a plan to reclaim the area.

It ought to be interesting. The three-block stretch is a mix of apartments, single-family homes, and ramshackle rundowns left by absentee landlords. There are elderly retirees and youngsters on the corners, plus the usual liquor store on the corner.

Police tell us that in the area, between 30th and 33rd Street, there were 38 major crimes in the past six months—including two drug-related slayings, an assault, several robberies, and at least one arson.

“This area certainly has its problems, but it’s not the worst,” says Police Capt. Ralph Lacer. And clearly, one visit to the neighborhood—known as “Ghost Town” on the streets—shows it’s not. It’s just another neighborhood sliced up by the freeways and a busy street. Only it got national attention.

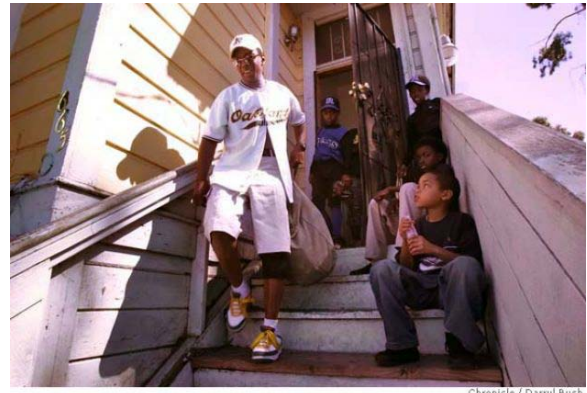
And the attention will continue.

For starters, the city will head to court later this month to try to force an absentee landlord from San Francisco to fix up his boarded-up Victorian. If he refuses, Oakland will ask the court to put the building into receivership, allowing the city to make the repairs itself. The city is also looking at giving the liquor store owners grants to fix up the fronts of their store.

The makeover also includes fixing the cracked sidewalks, improving the lighting and ordering up a bigger police presence.

As for the reaction? So far—mixed.

The families and older residents we talked to were ready for change—any change.



*Coach Roscoe Bryant Jr., left, carries equipment down the stairs of his home, as he prepares to take local kids including Deante Miller, 10, sitting front right, from his West Oakland neighborhood to the baseball field for practice. Photo: Darryl Bush*

The corner hangers were a different story. “It just looks good for the campaign,” says Kevin Davis, a 25-year-old who claims to have nine kids and no job. “We’re tired of feeling trapped. We ain’t seen anything but nothing.” Brown makes it clear that he’s not counting on any miracle fixes—but he does pledge to have things looking better in the next six months to a year and a half.

“This will test the capacity of government to turn these neighborhoods around,” Brown told us.

<http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/matierross/article/Spurred-by-60-Minutes-Oakland-to-Spiff-Up-3317457.php>

### **Killings common, answers rare in Oakland area**

Charles Burress, Chronicle Staff Writer  
September 28, 2008

“Baby Iraq” is one name they give it. “A devil’s playground” is another.

It’s a forlorn spot on MacArthur Boulevard in East Oakland where fresh grief erupts with each new burst of bullets from unknown guns. Four young people have been slain on MacArthur near 83rd Avenue since April, including 18-year-old Kennah Wilson and the

unborn child she was carrying, who lived for a short time after Wilson was shot. At least seven other people have been wounded. No arrests have been made.

This location on MacArthur, west of Interstate 580 and about a mile northwest of the Oakland Zoo, may be the most concentrated killing zone in a city where killing is common. Oakland, ranked America's fourth-most- dangerous city in a CQ Press study released in November, has seen 105 homicides so far this year, up from 104 at the same time last year.

Police blame the MacArthur Boulevard bloodshed on a pervasive problem—young men who fall into drug dealing and violence. In response to the killings, city officials recently made quelling violence at the location a priority, combining a stepped-up police response with outreach and job-finding assistance for youths.



West Oakland

But solutions remain elusive.

"We shouldn't be burying our children—our children should be burying us," said Verona McRae, one of the approximately 200 mourners at Good Hope Missionary Baptist Church on Sept. 11 for the funeral of Wilson and her infant, Kamilah Donyea Robinson. The baby was delivered after Wilson was shot, lived briefly and is now listed as Oakland homicide victim No. 93 for this year.

Another young mother who lived at the same location, Shaneice Davis, 21, was sleeping in bed just before midnight April 7 when a

bullet from outside ripped through the wall. She was homicide No. 38.

"That's the hole made by the bullet that killed my daughter," Davis' mother, Consuelo Starks, said in a flat voice as she held her now-motherless year-old granddaughter. The hole in the apartment remains visible from the outside, about 10 inches below a bedroom window covered by black anti-burglar bars.

"That's the second time bullets came through my house," said Starks, who was in the midst of moving. She declined to say where she was going. ...

#### *Bonds forged under fire*

Residents of the two buildings form a micro-community, united not just by their proximity but also by family ties, their shared grief, and the bonding of people trapped together under siege.

Jones' niece, Tommiesha Jones, was another resident and another victim, killed in 2005 in a hail of bullets that riddled a car in which she was riding in Richmond. A street memorial gathering for her exactly three years later, on April 7 of this year, in front of the MacArthur apartment building was suddenly punctured just before midnight by what sounded like firecrackers.

Bullets from a drive-by shooting wounded three men at the gathering and struck Shaneice Davis as she lay sleeping in her apartment. She died two days later.

Sometimes the bullets come from passing cars, and sometimes they seem to come from a darkened stretch of 83rd Avenue that intersects MacArthur, residents say.

Tommiesha's brother, Tommie Jones, 19, was one of the young people hanging out on the sidewalk in front of his apartment building one day recently.

"This area is very dysfunctional," he said as he stood next to the memorial to Wilson, his former classmate at Rudsdale Continuation High School. "We done been through a lot at a

young age. We're traumatized. ... It's hectic out here. It's life."

Conveying the reality to outsiders is impossible, he said. "You can explain to someone detail by detail, but they can never feel it until they live it," he said. "To see what it's like to hear gunshots, having bullets flying—until they live it, they're really never going to know."

Under his black hoodie, he wore a white memorial T-shirt with several photos on it. One shows him and Wilson together, another features his sister Tommiesha, and another shows his cousin, Raymond Chambers, 17, gunned down on San Pablo Avenue in Oakland in 2006.

Other young people come and go, some strolling down MacArthur past the small mosque and weedy empty lot from the direction of the nearby store advertising liquor and groceries. Some arrive in vans or cars.

A man on unsteady legs said residents of the area need help applying for and finding jobs. "We don't know where the jobs are," he said. "Mostly everybody gets turned down, so they get discouraged."

#### *Seeking the cause*

The people there say they don't know why the spot has turned bloody. "I don't know what it could be," said Tommie Jones, who moved to MacArthur Boulevard from another part of Oakland in 1999. "It's not gang related."

Although the area has seen other crime problems in recent years—including a major drug bust in 2005—Jones said the anonymous street shootings began this year. ...

Linda Jones isn't waiting for a solution. When she finds a new place to live, she said, it won't be near a liquor store or where people hang out on the street.

"Everybody around here is on pins and needles," she said. "It's a sad situation over here. It's like a devil's playground."

West Oakland Area Map



<http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Killings-common-answers-rare-in-Oakland-area-3192800.php>

## Travelling to Cuba

### Cuba Travel Advice

*Updated October 8, 2009*

**TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS:** Due to United States restrictions, travel to Cuba is extremely limited. The latest revisions of U.S. restrictions went into effect on Sep 3, 2009. ...

**DOCUMENTS:** Under U.S. restrictions, only persons whose travel falls into certain categories may be authorized to spend money related to travel to, from, or within Cuba. A. General License (no application to Office of Foreign Assets Control necessary): 1/ Official U.S. and foreign government travelers; 2/ Journalists and supporting personnel; 3/ Persons traveling to visit a close relative who is a national of Cuba or who is a U.S. government employee assigned to the U.S. Interests Section in Havana; 4/ Full-time professionals conducting research in their fields; 5/ Full-time professionals attending certain professional meetings; 6/ Persons attending telecommunications-related professional meetings; 7/ Persons traveling for commercial marketing, sales negotiations, or for servicing of telecommunications-related items; 8/ Employees of a producer or distributor of agricultural commodities, medicine, or medical devices or an entity representing such a firm for the purpose of commercial marketing, sales

negotiations, or for servicing of such items; 9/ Cuban nationals returning to Cuba.

B. Specific License issued by the Office of Foreign Assets Control: 1/ Persons traveling for certain clearly defined educational activities – including: participation in a structured educational program that includes at least 10 weeks in Cuba, independent research for writing a master’s thesis, doctoral dissertation, or similar document, participation in a formal course of study or teaching at a Cuban academic institution, or sponsoring a Cuban scholar in the U.S.; 2/ Persons traveling for religious activities; 3/ Persons traveling for certain humanitarian projects; 4/ Persons traveling for free-lance journalism; 4/ Persons traveling for professional research or to attend a professional meeting that does not meet the requirements of the relevant general license; 5/ Amateur or semi-professional athletes traveling to participate in a competition held under the auspices of an international sports federation, or for participation in certain public performances or exhibitions; 6/ Persons traveling on behalf of private foundations or research or educational institutes; 7/ Persons traveling for purposes related to exportation, importation, or transmission of information or informational materials; 8/ Persons visiting close relatives who are neither Cuban nationals nor U.S. government employees assigned to the U.S. Interests Section; 9/ Other Specific Licenses issued by OFAC.

[http://www.marazul.com/cuba%20travel\\_docs/Cuba%20Travel%20Advice.pdf](http://www.marazul.com/cuba%20travel_docs/Cuba%20Travel%20Advice.pdf)



## Cuba prepares for an end to the travel ban

By Sean O'Neill, April 12, 2010

A year ago, we blogged about Congress’s debate over lifting the travel ban for Americans to Cuba. Here’s an update...

Cuban officials are banking that the ban will end soon, and they have begun to prepare for a boom in business. The country recently announced plans to open nine new hotels this year, adding about 50,000 rooms to the island. (For perspective, consider that Las Vegas added only 14,000 rooms in the past year.)

Unofficially, travel to Cuba has already picked up. More and more Americans are visiting thanks to legal loopholes that allow “research trips.” Two years ago, the State Department were very selective about who was obtain to visas for these trips, and few citizens were allowed to go. But today, Americans who aren’t specialized academics, musicians, or full-time missionaries are often being granted visas because of more lenient U.S. officials, says *The Miami Herald*. A few tour groups use websites to tout their expertise in making the system work.

Illegal travel also appears to be on the rise, too. By not having their passport book stamped in Cuba, travelers can avoid U.S. punishment. “U.S. customs officers don’t issue citations for violations of the U.S. Cuba policy, but rather refer cases to the Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control,” reports the *AP*. Interestingly, the Treasury Department has not prosecuted any American in recent years for violating the law.

<http://www.budgettravel.com/blog/cuba-prepares-for-an-end-to-the-travel-ban,11206/>

## New Ways to Visit Cuba—Legally

By Michelle Higgins, June 30, 2011

ALWAYS wanted to visit Cuba? Well now you can—legally.

Thanks to policy changes by President Obama earlier this year designed to encourage



more contact between Americans and citizens of the Communist-ruled island, the Treasury Department is once again granting so-called “people-to-people” licenses, which greatly expand travel opportunities for Cuba-bound visitors.

The licenses, created under President Bill Clinton in 1999, stopped being issued in 2003 under travel restrictions imposed by President George W. Bush. ... To be clear, it is still illegal for ordinary American vacationers to hop on a plane bound for Cuba, which has been under a United States economic embargo for nearly 50 years. True, plenty have dodged the restrictions—and continue to do so—by flying there from another country like Mexico or Canada (for Americans, traveling to Cuba is technically not illegal, but it might as well be since the United States prohibits its citizens from spending money in Cuba, with exceptions for students, journalists, Cuban-Americans, and others with legal reasons to travel there). And while Washington has also expanded licensing for educational groups traveling to Cuba by loosening requirements, travelers joining an educational trip must still receive credit toward a degree.

But the new people-to-people measures make it easier for United States citizens who do not have special status as working journalists or scholars to visit Cuba legally, so long as they go with a licensed operator.



*Community art project in Havana is on a “people to people” tour*

“All a U.S. citizen has to do is sign up for an authorized program and they can go to Cuba. It’s as simple as that,” said Tom Popper,

director of Insight Cuba, a travel company that took more than 3,000 Americans to Cuba between 1999 and 2003, and was among the tour operators to apply for a license under the new rules earlier this year. It received its license at the end of June, and has planned 135 trips of three, seven, or eight nights over the next year.

... The trips aren’t your typical Caribbean vacation. Rather, the focus is on meeting local citizens and learning about the culture, not beach hopping and mojito-swilling. Days are filled with busy itineraries that may include visiting orphanages or speaking with musicians or community leaders. Guidelines published by the Treasury Department say the tours must “have a full-time schedule of educational exchange activities that will result in meaningful interaction between the travelers and individuals in Cuba.” But besides the mingling, the trips—which can range from \$1,800 for a long weekend in Havana to more than \$4,000 for a week—usually include opportunities to visit historic sites like Old Havana, or, for longer itineraries, a visit to Cienfuegos, a picturesque city in the South.

In terms of hotels, “service may not be quite as good and the Internet connection is incredibly slow and frustrating,” said Ms. Moore of Distant Horizons. But, she said, “they have all the facilities you’d expect: swimming pools, little gyms. And there are a lot of very good private restaurants.”

Don’t expect to stock up on those coveted Cuban cigars, however. Travelers aren’t allowed to bring cigars or rum back to the States, according to the Treasury Department.

Demand for Cuba is so strong that tour operators say that many of the trips already have long waiting lists. Learning in Retirement, an educational program associated with the University of Wisconsin in La Crosse, which is offering a 10-day people-to-people trip in April, said more than 65 people have already expressed interest for its 35 spots. “That’s just through word of mouth,” said Burt Altman, a

retired professor who organized the trip. “We haven’t even put out the itinerary.”

“It’s the forbidden fruit,” said Mr. Popper of Insight Cuba. “It’s 50 years of pent-up demand for a country that 75 percent of Americans really, really want to travel to.”

[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/10/travel/at-long-last-legal-trips-to-cuba.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/10/travel/at-long-last-legal-trips-to-cuba.html?_r=0)

## **U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs: Cuba**

### *Entry / Exit Requirements, Travel Transaction Limitations*

The Cuban Assets Control Regulations are enforced by the U.S. Department of the Treasury and affect all U.S. citizens and permanent residents wherever they are located ... . The regulations require that persons subject to U.S. jurisdiction be licensed in order to engage in any travel-related transactions pursuant to travel to, from, and within Cuba, or that the transactions in question be exempt from licensing requirements. Transactions related to tourist travel are not licensable. This restriction includes tourist travel to Cuba from or through a third country such as Mexico or Canada. U.S. law enforcement authorities enforce these regulations at U.S. airports and pre-clearance facilities in third countries. Travelers who fail to comply with Department of the Treasury regulations could face civil penalties and criminal prosecution upon return to the United States. ...

### *General and Specific Licenses for Travel*

General licenses are available for certain categories of travel. General licenses constitute authorization for those transactions set forth in the relevant provision of the Cuban Assets Control Regulations. No further permission from the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) is required to engage in transactions covered by a general license.

Specific licenses are also available for certain categories of travel. OFAC will consider the

issuance of specific licenses on a case-by-case basis to permit travel-related transactions where the proposed activity is not covered by a general license but is addressed by one of the statements of licensing policy listed in section 31 C.F.R. part 515.560(a) and set forth in a related section of the Regulations. A specific license applicant must wait for OFAC to issue the license prior to engaging in travel-related transactions.

For further information on travel to Cuba under a general or a specific license, consult the OFAC publication Comprehensive Guidelines for License Applications to Engage in Travel-Related Transactions Involving Cuba. You should also visit OFAC’s Cuba Sanctions website.

The United States maintains a broad embargo against trading with Cuba, and most commercial imports from Cuba are prohibited by law. Most exports are also prohibited, unless licensed by the Department of Commerce or subject to a Department of Commerce license exception. Sales of items in certain sectors, including medicine, medical devices and supplies, and agricultural commodities, have been approved for export by specific legislation. The Department of the Treasury may issue licenses on a case-by-case basis authorizing Cuba travel-related transactions directly incident to marketing, sales negotiation, accompanied delivery, and servicing of exports and re-exports that appear consistent with the licensing policy of the Department of Commerce.

[http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1097.html#entry\\_requirements](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1097.html#entry_requirements)



*Plaza in Havana*



## Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) / U.S. Interests Section Location (USINT)

USINT represents U.S. citizens and the U.S. Government in Cuba, and operates under the legal protection of the Swiss government. The Interests Section staff provides the full range of consular services to U.S. citizens in Havana. The Cuban government limits travel of USINT staff outside of Havana, so there may be limits to the services provided outside the capital. U.S. citizens who travel to Cuba are encouraged to contact and register with USINT's American Citizen Services unit. If you are traveling to Cuba, please inform USINT. If you enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP), USINT can keep you up-to-date with important safety and security announcements. Enrolling will also help your friends and family contact you in an emergency.

[http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1097.html#registration](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1097.html#registration)



*Bridge over a Cuban highway*

## Oakland Royals Baseball Team

### Baseball Brings Life, Hope to Mean Streets

*Boy's death spurs Oakland couple to save neighborhood kids one game at a time*

By Scott Ostler, June 22, 2007

The Royals were born the night Thomas Simpson was gunned down in Ghost Town.

Ghost Town is a violence-ridden West Oakland neighborhood, violent even by Oakland standards. Google a murder map of Oakland, and a cluster of dots pop up in the little area tucked just southwest of the MacArthur Maze.

The Royals are a kids' baseball team. The name has meaning, although it would appear to be ironic. The Royals play ball wherever they can get a break on fees, they get their baseball equipment at flea markets, they are driven to games in a 20-year-old van, and they wear royal-purple uniforms purchased with the odd-job sweat of their coach's brow.

They are a grassroots team born of their neighborhood's poverty and violence.

Roscoe and Lehi Bryant and their three children live in Ghost Town in a big Victorian home that is a magnet for neighbor children. The Bryants have dogs and a trampoline in the yard and a park next door.

On April 8 of 2004, one of the kids playing in the Bryants' yard was Thomas Simpson, a 15-year-old freshman at nearby McClymonds High who lived around the corner. Simpson left the Bryants' home at about 8 p.m., walked across the street, and was talking to three friends when a white van pulled up. Several shots were fired from the van. All four people on the sidewalk were hit.

Thomas took two bullets and tried to run away but then was shot in the back. He died in Roscoe Bryant's arms. One other young man also died.

The reason for the shooting: Unknown. It's part of Ghost Town's random craziness, and people who live here either ignore it, get sucked into it or fight it. When Thomas Simpson died, the Bryants chose Option C.

"My wife and I decided we have to be more proactive," Roscoe Bryant said. "How could we keep kids off the street in large numbers?"

The Bryants decided they would start a baseball team. Roscoe and Lehi (pronounced LAY-hi) had everything they needed—except coaching experience, money, a place to play, adequate transportation, and assistance from other adults.

Also lacking: Players, other than their two sons (they also have a daughter). ...

"Roscoe asked me, 'Do you like baseball?' " said neighbor Chris Fletcher, who was 7 at the time. "I said, 'I don't know.' I came to the first practice, and it was, like, fun."



*Coach Roscoe Bryant, Jr*

Roscoe hit the library, studying books and videos on coaching baseball. He had been a champion high school wrestler in Ohio and a boxer in the Army, but he was learning baseball and coaching from scratch.

He contacted a youth league in Oakland, but the team and player fees were beyond the Bryants' budget. They ran into the same problem in Alameda, Albany, and El Cerrito. Finally, Roscoe phoned a rec league in San Francisco, and a league official waived the entry fee. ...



*Bay Bridge between Oakland and San Francisco*

The Royals were tourists in San Francisco that first season, some of the players seeing the city for the first time. At games, the opposing team's bleachers often were full and the Royals' bleachers empty. ...

Baseball is only part of the big picture. The kids are so busy playing ball that they don't realize they're learning life skills.

"We're able to interject morals, standards, social skills, problem solving, perseverance," Roscoe said. "They're on a team, they learn how to resolve issues. In our neighborhood, issues are resolved with guns."

"They learn discipline and respect," Lehi said, "so they know how to talk to each other. The problem in our community now is a breakdown in communication."

That first season, the Royals made it to the playoffs.

"It was magical," Roscoe said.

The kids loved it, and by early the next spring they were eager for practice to start for the new season.

Last year, the Oakland Cal Ripken Babe Ruth League welcomed the Royals. The Bryants had players in two age groups, 7 to 10 and 11 to 12, but only enough money for one team, so they

played in the 11 to 12 division, and they went 0-13.

"We were probably the laughingstock of the league, but we didn't care," Roscoe said. "It was the darndest thing. Not one kid quit, and they never got down."

That's a slight exaggeration.

"When we lost our 12th game in a row, I threw my hat down and said, 'I quit,'" said Chris Fletcher, age 10. "Roscoe told me that quitting's not necessary."

... The Bryants discovered that the kids love to win, but mostly they love to play. And everyone plays—there's no star system on the Royals. They practice with enthusiasm, they quietly absorb instruction from the coaches, and when practice is over, they leave the field reluctantly.

When there's no game or practice, pickup games often break out in the park next to the Bryants' house. Dozens of kids of all ages play ball instead of dodging bullets and street-corner drug dealers. They opt out of what Roscoe calls "gladiator school."

The Royals all know about crime and violence. At school, sometimes recess is canceled due to gunfire.

"A couple weeks ago, I was coming home from school with my cousins," said Shaka Garrett, an 11-year-old Royal. "We were hopping a fence, and we heard shooting. This girl I know got shot in the leg. My cousins helped her, and I ran home."

Roscoe and Lehi's original goal was to keep children off the streets, so when there's no baseball, they take the Royals bowling, golfing, to movies, and for pizza. They attend some A's games with help from that team's youth programs. ... But ask him why he named the team the Royals.

Roscoe is standing near his wooden front steps, which are in need of repair. There are bullet holes in the wood under the window. He

would like to do the fix-up chores, but time and money are spent on baseball.

Roscoe said, "I named them the Royals because I see these kids as young kings and queens in training. I see them as future kings of industry, of business, of the community."

<http://www.sfgate.com/sports/ostler/article/BASEBALL-BRINGS-LIFE-HOPE-TO-MEAN-STREETS-2555115.php>

## Miracle on 29th Street keeps getting better

*Oakland Royals bring hope to neighborhood*

By Scott Ostler, August 6, 2007

Whenever a big-league team wins a pennant or World Series, invariably the players salute themselves for showing great character and overcoming obstacles.

It's inspiring stuff, but I'd like to see 'em try it with second-hand gloves, third-hand cleats, and flea-market bats.

In terms of character shown and obstacles overcome, I'd like to see the big guys try to hang with the Oakland Royals.

The Royals were born three years ago when a teenaged neighbor died in the arms of Roscoe Bryant after a drive-by shooting on 29th Street, in Oakland's notorious Ghost Town neighborhood. ...

The Royals didn't know where their next postgame snack was coming from, but they learned to hit the cutoff man and to play team ball.

Starting the Royals and keeping them going, you could call that the Miracle on 29th Street. It was a great story, which was dropped in my lap and I passed it along to Chronicle readers, who adopted the Royals.

More than 600 people, organizations, and clubs stepped forward with offers of money, equipment and assorted help and love. Roscoe's go-to word has become "wow." The Bryants' main struggle now is to properly thank all the donors.

"It's been a blessing to me and to all the kids," Roscoe says. "It's really changed their outlook, the way they conduct themselves and the way they carry themselves."

If you don't believe in angels, you should have sat on the Bryants' front porch and watched strangers pull up with truckloads of equipment, new and used. The Royals got so much baseball stuff that they helped equip two other teams in their Berkeley league.



*Coach Roscoe Bryant Jr., left, yells instructions to kids at baseball practice at Lowell Park in West Oakland, in a local baseball program for kids run by Roscoe Bryant Jr. and his wife Lehi. Photo: Darryl Bush*

From the angel e-mail, I learned of a couple of guys in the East Bay who play Santa Claus/Robin Hood, collecting used baseball equipment, fixing it up and passing it along to needy teams at all levels. ... One Royals' benefactor set up a Web site, [www.oaklandroyals.org](http://www.oaklandroyals.org), for the team and its supporters. An attorney and a CPA pitched in to help with the legalities and paperwork involved with donations. The Royals got new unis.

"Amazing uniforms," Roscoe says. "We could never have afforded them. It just, wow, you could see the change in the boys."

The Royals received invitations to baseball camps and clinics, including an offer from Cal's baseball team. The Giants treated the Royals to a luxury suite at the All-Star Game Home Run Derby. The A's invited them to a game.

The hugest donations were from the people who wrote to say, "I can only afford to send a few dollars ..."

The Bryants received a batting cage and pitching machine for their backyard. They were given two used computers and some office equipment, so they're setting up a homework center in a spare room. Lehi is a whiz at improving the state test scores of her students, and now she can put that talent to work with the neighborhood kids.

The donations allowed the Bryants to add a third team of Royals.

"Now we've got 43 kids playing baseball this summer, instead of running the streets," Roscoe says.

Most of the Royals started baseball from scratch three years ago, but with experience and the new equipment and clinics and camps, they're starting to do some damage in pennant races. The older Royals will soon graduate to a higher league, and Roscoe says, "Last year, everybody laughed at us. This year coaches are calling, saying, 'Can I get that kid?'" ...

If the Bryants were crazy dreamers before, they have become absolutely delusional. With the donations, contacts formed with local companies, and offers of help with tapping into grants and loans, the Bryants are thinking big.

"We've always wanted to open up a youth center," Roscoe says.

What started out as a crazy idea, an impossible dream, just gets crazier.

"The local drug dealers watched what we've been doing," Roscoe says, "and they formed their own softball team. So they're off the block for a couple hours every night."

<http://www.sfgate.com/sports/ostler/article/Miracle-on-29th-Street-keeps-getting-better-2549182.php>

## Baseball's Robin Hood

*The number of inner-city black youth who play baseball has declined rapidly, but Jeff Humphrey is helping keep dreams alive in the urban East Bay.*

By Paul Gackle

Roscoe Bryant founded the Oakland Royals, a kids' baseball team in West Oakland's Ghost Town neighborhood, after a fifteen-year-old boy was killed by gunfire in his front yard. Bent on getting neighborhood kids off the street, Bryant quickly rounded up enough boys to field a team, but then ran into a logistical problem: Baseball is expensive. Unlike other sports that require nothing more than a ball and a buddy to play, baseball teams need a laundry list of pricey gear—hats, bats, cleats, helmets, gloves, and catchers' equipment. Bryant scraped together what he could by scouring local Salvation Army and Goodwill stores; the team played its first games with only six gloves. "We just hoped it didn't get hit to the outfield," Bryant said.



Jeff Humphrey and his crew

But now, seven years later, the Royals are fielding five teams with 75 kids, ranging from five-year-old tee-ballers to 15-year-old budding stars. The program's growth is a reflection of Bryant's commitment, but he insists that it would be nearly impossible if he weren't receiving hundreds of dollars of used equipment from a Robin Hood-type figure in the East Bay baseball community—Jeff Humphrey. "Eighty to ninety percent of the equipment we have comes through Jeff," Bryant said. "Without him, we don't play ball; I might be able to field one team."

The considerable cost of fielding a baseball team is one reason why so many young urban athletes have turned to other sports. Of course, there are myriad other reasons for this trend—the rise of basketball and football as major TV sports, the constant motion and instant gratification of those games, a lack of recruiting



by college baseball, and a big-league scouting shift from inner cities to Latin America. But the combination of costs and these other factors has resulted in a sharp decline in the number of inner-city youth—especially African Americans—playing baseball at every level.

It shows up in the big leagues, too. This season, only 8.5 percent of major-league ballplayers on opening-day rosters were black, down from a high of 27 percent in 1975. Even here in the East Bay, which has one of the country's richest traditions of producing African-American talent—Hall of Famers like Frank Robinson, Willie Stargell, Joe Morgan, and Rickey Henderson, to name a few—the number of kids signing up to play youth ball in Oakland, San Pablo, and Richmond has dropped by the hundreds since the mid-Eighties.

The cost of playing baseball is an enormous obstacle for parents and coaches in economically deprived neighborhoods like Ghost Town. That's why former Cal batting coach Oscar Miller started collecting used gear from kids who attended his instructional clinics six years ago. "It all started with Oscar Miller's dream to get gear back to West Oakland where he grew up," said Humphrey.



*Sport 4 Life Director, Kalid Meky, and Oakland Royals Baseball Coach, Roscoe Bryant, team up to bring computers to the Oakland Royals Baseball Team.*

On a day in 2005, Humphrey was driving his eleven-year-old son Jack to Miller's summer camp with a friend who was carrying two extra pairs of cleats. That's when Humphrey learned about Miller's desire to round up used gear for kids in West Oakland. As someone who'd

coached more than twenty youth teams in Oakland, Piedmont, and Walnut Creek, Humphrey figured he'd make a couple of calls, send out a few e-mails, see if he could help. ...

It didn't take long before gear starting pouring in from all over the place: Teams and little leagues in El Cerrito, Livermore, Burlingame, Hillsborough, and Marin County started giving away their used stuff; Berkeley High, Northgate, Bishop O'Dowd, and Head Royce donated equipment for teenagers; Total Sports in Dublin offered up 1,300 pairs of pants that outfitted five teams; Triple Play Batting Cages in San Leandro gave away used bats; Oakland A's radio announcer Ken Korach provided several boxes of baseballs and Mizuno USA supplied 125 pairs of brand-new cleats. Humphrey's boss, Ken Nitzberg, at Devon Self-Storage in Oakland, even wrote a check for \$500 so that Roscoe Bryant could build a batting cage in his backyard. "It's the centerpiece of the neighborhood," Bryant said proudly. "It gives the kids something to do when we're not playing." ...

In six years, Humphrey has delivered 24 truckloads of gear to 1,000 kids playing for about forty teams in West Oakland, San Pablo, Richmond, Vallejo, Rodeo, and East Palo Alto. "Jeff gives us anything we need," said Bob Forman, president of the San Pablo Baseball Association.

Like Bryant in Oakland, Forman's biggest challenge is financing everything a healthy baseball league requires: \$300 per bat, \$100 per glove, \$35 per helmet, \$150 for catchers' gear, \$50 for cleats, \$22.50 for a box of baseballs, and that doesn't include uniforms, equipment bags, chalk, umpires' fees, and field maintenance. In a suburban league like San Ramon Valley, registration fees run up to \$350 to cover these expenses, but most parents in San Pablo and Richmond can't fork over that kind of money. ...

But the modest Humphrey doesn't think his role should be blown out of proportion; he views himself as a middleman. The real heroics,



he says, are performed by guys like Forman and Bryant, who devote themselves to giving kids a better chance in life. "I'm just a conduit between the people who have used gear they don't want to throw away and the kids who need it to play baseball," Humphrey said.

He said his motivation isn't about increasing the number of African Americans in Major League Baseball. His goals are more modest, yet more meaningful: He thinks sports can boost a kid's self-esteem while instilling values of teamwork, sportsmanship, and perseverance. Humphrey also wants to spread the joy of playing a kid's game. "You're only young once," he said. "It's really about giving more kids a chance to have memories of playing the great game of baseball."

<http://www.eastbayexpress.com/oakland/baseballs-robin-hood/Content?oid=2647179>

### Coach Roscoe Bryant, Jr



*Coach Roscoe in an unguarded moment*

Roscoe's first foray into coaching baseball began in 2005 when he and his wife, Lehi, co-founded the Oakland Royals Baseball team for kids in the Oakland, CA neighborhood, Ghost Town. Roscoe's past successes in athletics, academics, fifteen years in an education career,

and more importantly his passion for coaching and mentoring inner city youth have helped create an excellent program for the at-risk youth in his neighborhood. Roscoe plans to take the Royals' positive message of teamwork, peace, and achievement to inner city communities across the state of California.

<http://playtwopictures.com/teams/oaklandroyals.htm>

### The Players



Reynaldo Acosta, age 14  
Positions: 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and Outfield



Rontral Arcement, age 11  
Positions: 2<sup>nd</sup> and Shortstop



Christopher Fletcher, age 13  
Position: Outfield



Roscoe Bryant III, age 16  
Position: 2<sup>nd</sup>



Kashaka "Shaka" Garrett, Jr, age 15  
Position: 1<sup>st</sup>

Roscoe Bryant's Varsity Baseball Stats at Skyline High School, Oakland, CA, May 2012

Team: Baseball  
Class: Sr  
Ht & Wt: 5-10 / 139  
Pos: 2B, SS  
Games Played: 42  
Batting Average: .181  
On Base Percentage: .259  
Hits: 19  
RBIs: 15  
Runs: 37





Eddie Heard, Jr, age 16  
Positions: Pitcher, Catcher, and Outfield



Justin Robinson, age 12  
Positions: 2<sup>nd</sup>, Shortstop, and Pitcher



Malik Smith, age 13  
Positions: 2<sup>nd</sup> and Shortstop



Malik Smith and Eddie Heard in Havana



Monte Smith, age 15  
Positions: 3<sup>rd</sup> and Outfield



Monte Smith and Chris Fletcher in Havana



Malik, Eddie, Ridel Soria Madam, and Chris



Ridel and Rontral



Marcos Sanchez and Justin Robinson



The Royals



## Ciudad Habana Team

### Coach Nicolas Reyes

Nicolas Reyes is a coach of young baseball players, ages 5 to 10 years, in Ciudad Habana, Cuba. He is a youthful 61 years, a coach for 38 years. Nicolas is a legend in Ciudad Habana, a celebrity on its streets and on rocky fields of dreams. He says, "I love to work with kids who don't even know how to hold a bat. If I was born again, I'd like to come back as what I am now, a coach of young players." Nicolas played shortstop for the powerhouse Habana Industriales, the equivalent of Major League baseball in Cuba. As a player he was known as "the small pelotero with the huge heart." Happily married for 38 years, he is the proud father of four children and four grandchildren.

<http://playtwopictures.com/teams/Ciudadhabana.htm>



*Coach Nicolas Reyes*



Shaka Garrett gets tips from Coach Nicolas Reyes at Regla field in Havana

### The Players



Jose Adonis, age 13

Position: Right Field



Carlos Chavez, age 14

Positions: 1<sup>st</sup> and Outfield



Gilberto Gonzalez, age 13  
Positions: Shortstop and Infield



Ridel Soria Madam, age 13  
Position: Centerfield



Jordan Morales, age 12  
Position: Catcher



Malik, Ridel, and Eddie



Ridel and Malik Smith



Ciudad Habana

Pictures of Oakland Royals and Ciudad Habana ball players in Havana are on Flickr:  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/playtwopictures/>



## Questions for Research and Discussion

1. Parental support for youth baseball is very strong in Havana, as shown in the enthusiastic turnout for the game at Regla field. As Coach Roscoe pointed out, there are very few fathers or father figures that go to see the kids play in Oakland, and we learned that the family situation for many of the Oakland kids has been very unstable. In the scenes where the Oakland Royals visit the homes of the Ciudad Habana players, the reception they receive from the parents and extended family is heartfelt and loving. This isn't just because the boys on the team are special guests: Parents are openly affectionate with their children (grandparents and other family adults are, as well), and the Cuban children we meet in the film all seem to live in stable—if economically poor—environments.

Remembering the scene in which Ridel's mother shows the Oakland kids how she kisses and hugs 13-year-old Ridel and invites 16-year-old Eddie to sit on her lap "the way Ridel does," what was your reaction to the affectionate displays of the Cuban families? How does this differ from your own family experience? Would you sit on a friend's mother's lap, if invited to? Why or why not?

The Oakland kids warmed to the affectionate atmosphere in the Cuban homes, but it was certainly "foreign" to them in many ways. Imagine yourself in the place of the boys from the Royals, encountering what is the norm for the Ciudad Habana kids. Refer to the section on [Ghost Town](#) (page 13) to get a fuller picture of what kind of environment the Oakland kids experience daily, and then develop dialogs that the Oakland kids might have shared among themselves when they initially encountered the Cuban family atmosphere.



2. Coach Roscoe Bryant goes through many changes in his life during the three years the film was shot. He starts the film in a happy marriage from a relationship of 23 years. Starting the Oakland Royals was a positive mission for him, and it was done side by side with his wife Lehi. After his marriage ends, Coach Roscoe continues his work with the Royals, but he seems less motivated and needs to be pushed to finally get his passport for the trip to Cuba. He admits he is a broken man.

Coach Roscoe sees his role as the Oakland Royals' coach as being a mentor to the boys, as well as a positive male role model for them. His coaching style, however, is arguably stern: When players act up in Oakland, they must run distances, and when Monte angrily walks away from a game in Havana, Coach Roscoe won't let him play, even when Monte returns before the game begins. Coach Roscoe reconsiders and lets Monte play, but the decision seems motivated more from others' reactions to the situation than from his own change of heart.



*Coach Roscoe tells Monte to leave*



*Coach Roscoe reconsiders his decision*

Even as the team is getting ready to play, Coach Roscoe himself knows that this could be his last game with the Royals, because he has lost his enthusiasm and sense of mission for coaching the Royals. Yet this is in conflict with his philosophy that tells him and others never to quit.



Coach Nicolas takes a nurturing approach to his coaching, encouraging the players but always keeping in mind that they are children. His way is in keeping with the Cuban parenting style the film shows. Although he sees that Coach Roscoe is in crisis, he can only provide an example for Coach Roscoe, not tell him what to do.

When the Oakland Royals return home, Coach Roscoe seems to have undergone a change. Describe the change in his coaching style and his attitude in general.

What affected Coach Roscoe in Cuba? The families? Coach Nicolas? Time away from Oakland?

Discuss all the possibilities and whether or not the change is positive for him and the team. Knowing that the coaches are still in touch with one another regularly, what has their friendship become? Coach to coach? Mentor to son figure? Something else?

If you had a choice between having Nicolas or Roscoe as your coach, which would you choose and why?

3. Soon after anti-Communist Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista fled his country on January 1, 1959, and the successful revolutionary leader Fidel Castro took control, the United States broke off relations with Cuba. Although Batista was by all accounts one of the most repressive dictators in Latin America, Castro's allegiance to Communism and the Soviet Union condemned Cuba to decades of isolation from the U.S. Castro implemented socialist reforms in place of the rapacious Batista government, which earned him popularity in Cuba but could not be tolerated by a Cold War-obsessed U.S. So even though thousands of Cubans (mostly from the middle and upper classes) fled Castro's Cuba for the United

States—particularly Miami—and Miami was only 90 miles away from Cuba, the barrier between Cuba and the United States became absolute.



With the easing of tensions between Soviet Union and the United States in the mid 1980s, Cuba began to lose its essential financial support from the Communist Party in Moscow. By the time of the breakup of the Soviet Union in December of 1991, Cubans had already been suffering through forced austerity that included fuel rations and limited electric power, with the economy having declined by 40 percent since 1989, resulting in food shortages, malnutrition, and lack of basic necessities. Cuba struggled without aid from its former allies.

*Cuban flag and sculpture of Che Guevara on facade of Ministry of Interior, Plaza de la Revolucion, Havana, Cuba*

In 2009, President Obama lifted the time restrictions for Cuban-Americans to travel to and stay in Cuba, and in September 2009, further restrictions were eased or eliminated. Read the information given in [Cuba Travel Advice](#) (page 17), which lays out the policies in place when the Oakland Royals were planning their trip to Havana. While legislation was in the works to further facilitate travel by U.S. citizens to Cuba in April 2010, (see [Cuba prepares for an end to the travel ban](#), page 18), it was not yet enacted in May of 2010, when the Royals went to Cuba.

It is not explained in the film how the team entered Cuba, so based on the information in the two articles linked above, as well as the other articles in that section, although they were published in 2011, speculate on the way the Oakland Royals, the coach, and the mothers of the teammates might have entered Cuba. Possibilities include, but are not limited to, traveling legally to a third country, such as Mexico, and then entering Cuba without having passports stamped (pages 18 and 19); “Amateur or semi-professional athletes traveling to participate in a competition held under the auspices of an international sports federation” (page 18); and “educational exchange activities that will result in meaningful interaction between the travelers and individuals in Cuba (page 19).”

Would you be willing to travel to Cuba through a third country, even though doing so might result in “civil penalties and criminal prosecution upon return to the United States” (page 20) and a large fine? Why or why not?