

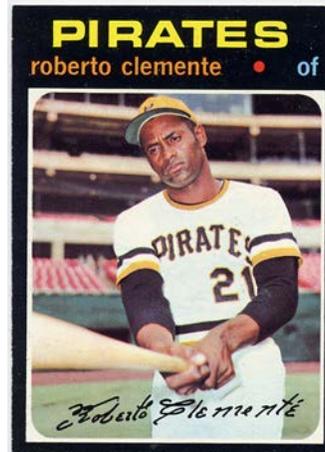


Beyond Race Cards in America's Pastime: An Appreciative Reply to Findlay and Santos

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[LINK TO ABSTRACT](#)

I am one of the authors of the article—Hewitt, Muñoz, Oliver and Regoli (2005)—treated by David Findlay and John Santos (2012) in their piece on discrimination and the price of baseball cards.² I do not speak for my 2005 coauthors³, two of whom are now retired, but there is much reason to suppose they, like me, would salute Findlay and Santos for their fine work in correcting, replicating, and extending our investigation. Findlay's and Santos's examination and various analyses enrich and strengthen our findings and those of other scholars. Their article presents a wonderful opportunity to revisit an important and fascinating area of research in American society—baseball.



Findlay and Santos (2012) examine the data in ways that advance our parsimonious model. They undertake a wonderful and vigorous approach to both the data and the statistical estimates. Indeed, their examination of the relationship among price series, availability, and card quality explains a much larger percentage

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2. Images of Topps baseball cards used courtesy of The Topps Company, Inc. For more information about The Topps Company, please see their website at www.topps.com.

3. Oliver's role in the research focused on design and analysis of the statistical data.

of the variation in rookie card prices. What is less clear, perhaps, is the relation of these variables to the focus of our research question with respect to these variables, particularly their impact on the relationship between the race of a player and the price of his rookie card.

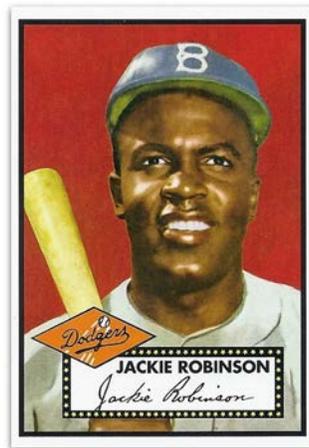
The examination of the impact of race on baseball card values is a research question that has been examined in various ways with varying results depending on sample and methodology. Some studies have found racial bias (Andersen and La Croix 1991; Burnett and Van Scyoc 2004; Fort and Gill 2000; Gabriel, Johnson, and Stanton 1999; Nardinelli and Simon 1990). Other research has found minimal or no racial bias (Gabriel, Johnson, and Stanton 1995; Hewitt, Muñoz, Oliver, and Regoli 2005; McGarrity, Palmer, and Poitras 1999; Messitte and Powell 1995; Mulligan and Grube 2006; Regoli 1991; Scahill 2005).

Our research, along with that of Findlay and Santos, has found a lack of a statistically significant relationship between race and baseball card values. However, we have expressed considerable reservation in the implications of these findings. Do these findings mean that race does not affect the value of baseball cards?

Bonilla-Silva (2003) argues that contemporary racism is obscured by talk of meritocracy and minimal racism. Such discourse may suggest that equally deserving African Americans rise to the top and that, due to exceptional Black representation across different arenas of social life, discrimination is not as bad as it once was.

The integration of baseball provided evidence that America's landscape was changing. Glasser (1987) has written about the importance of baseball in the national cultural landscape:

This progress was important on the cultural landscape during a time of much upheaval. I date the beginning of [racial] change from 1947, when Jackie Robinson broke the color line in baseball, because I have always believed that the changes enacted on the cultural stage are more profound than those on the legal stage. I was nine years old. I lived in Brooklyn and acted out that whole drama. I went to Ebbets Field. One day Ebbets Field was all white and the next day it was integrated. As a nine-year old, I suddenly found myself sitting beside a fifty-two-year old black guy drinking a beer and smoking a cigarette, and slapping hands with him when something good happened for the Dodgers; we were part



the drama that was going down on the field. Everybody identified with it. For this to be happening on national television as part of the mass culture that hundreds of thousands of people participate in was a drama that far exceeded in impact the business that goes on in Congress and the Supreme Court. (Glasser 1987, 84)

Glasser's observation makes a larger point about baseball's ability to unite people in a profound way, manifesting itself in the form of a major cultural event. Later in the history of our nation, television's response to negative stereotyping was to include blacks in positive and important positions, such as doctors, lawyers, business executives, and so on. However, the level of presentation greatly exceeds the level of integration in baseball and other professions. Thus, people came to believe that greater progress has been made since the Civil Rights Movement than is actually the case. Although we cannot deny great changes in the the U.S. racial landscape, the danger is that overcompensation in the visual terrain of popular culture masks underrepresentation and inequality along the lines of race in everyday life, the workplace, education, housing, income and other areas.

The sample of both our study and the Findlay and Santos study included only players selected into the Hall of Fame. They are the *crème de la crème* emerging from several decisions in a selection process that some studies have found to be affected by race (Desser et al 1999; Findlay and Reid 1997), while other research has found such effects to be limited in scope, particularly to the interaction among race, nationality and performance (Jewell et al 2002). As for the entry into the Hall of Fame itself, the selection process includes factors other than performance in that it subjects Black players to an analysis of their worthiness by a primarily White decision-making body.

Second, and relevant to both the selection process and the results of our analyses, there are severe limitations in conceptualizing racism in a static fashion or, more specifically, in interpreting results in dichotomous fashion or simply as a quantitative result. It is more analytically meaningful to consider racism along a continuum and also to consider the results in terms of the logic and meaning of collector preferences.

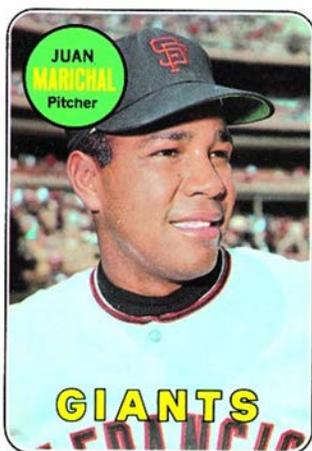
Although our findings indicate a lack of significant relationship between player race and card value, we have to keep in mind that we are looking at a preselected sample—that is, Black players who have already been deemed worthy of selection by the larger, dominant White society. The fact that some Black players have been allowed into the Hall of Fame, and that the card values of these players are similar by race, does not clearly establish that this arena of social life is free of racism or racial thinking.

Unlike the past, when African Americans were excluded from most American institutions, today we can point to almost any arena of social life in the United States and find the inclusion of African Americans. However, the inclusion of some African Americans does not satisfactorily account for the exclusion of many African Americans on a widespread level. Our finding—that no statistically significant difference exists in the value of their cards based on race—must be understood as only being operative for, or indicative of, Black players found to be acceptable for inclusion in the Hall of Fame. That is, there may be a form of tokenism at work here, a seeming level of equality based on those Black players found to be worthwhile and acceptable by a predominantly White decision-making body.

Thus, the measure of racism here should not be limited to whether African Americans are included or valued equally but under what conditions and based on what criteria are African Americans included and valued equally. We indicated in our study that to address this question researchers would need to expand our sample and data. However, future studies that hope to shed light on the impact of player race on card values also require a different methodology to determine whether any racial logic or thinking exists in the mind of collectors.

It is only by way of a more qualitative approach such as focused interviews that researchers will better understand the meaning of numbers or, more specifically, the reasoning and values attached to the prices of cards of Black and White players. Although Feagin (2000) posits that race affects all levels of society, it is not as simple as a yes or no question, or Black or White differences; it is also a question of how race might affect both the outcomes and also the meanings, explanations, and interpretations that collectors associate with the outcomes or, in this case, the valuation of the cards. Research on questions of race is not simply a case of ‘show me the money’—we must also ask research to show us the meaning.

On Latinos in the Player Sample



Findlay and Santos note that we excluded Latinos from our investigation. Before withdrawing commentary, I want to give a brief explanation of that decision.

Back in 2004, Regoli invited me to examine the findings and consider their implications within the larger body of research on race. I played a role in conversations about the decision to exclude Latinos from the sample. In the statistical analyses in preparation of our research publication (Hewitt, Muñoz, Oliver and Regoli 2005), we found no statistically significant estimates of the impact on ethnicity on baseball card values; this finding was subsequently

reported in Regoli, Primm and Hewitt (2007).

In a previous study (Regoli 2000) and in a subsequent study (Primm, Piquero, Hewitt and Piquero 2010), Regoli included at least three of five Latino players identified as Black in statistical estimates. The rationale was that baseball card traders identify race by physical appearance. In discussing our sample, while in the midst of conducting the research for the study, we concluded that the lack of significance was most likely a result of the limited number of Latinos in the sample. Thus, our research did not allow discussion of any reliable findings regarding the impact of Latino ethnicity on the value of baseball cards. In short, the issue of including Latinos had already been resolved by the time of our 2005 study.

Primm et al (2010) explain the complexity of racial identification and subsequent rationales in studies related to our research:

Since there were only four Latino players in the study they were combined with the Black players to form one category. There may be differences in the value of cards between Black, White, and Latino players that are being masked by their categorization in this study, and this will surely be the case in the future as Latino baseball players become an increasing and dominant presence in the game. In addition, this is likely to open useful inquiries that explore race and ethnicity based on skin tone (see Hunter's (2005) discussion of "colorism"). These and other questions regarding the role of race in sports card collecting should offer a rich area for researchers for some time to come. (872)

Racially speaking in the United States, many Afro-Latinos—Puerto Rican, Cuban and Dominican Americans—continue to be identified primarily as Black (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Gonzalez 2011). It is only recently that our consciousness about racial identity is beginning to emerge beyond the simple definition of race relations in terms of Black and White; this recognition is exemplified by increasing public awareness of the presence and impact of Latino players in baseball.

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Robert Muñoz is an assistant professor at Portland State University. He attended Southern Methodist University (B.S.) and University of Colorado, Boulder (Ph.D.). Other research areas include family structure, educational attainment, tobacco control, cultural competency in mental health, and Latino wellbeing. He has worked as a program director, principal investigator and evaluator in public health, immigration and youth projects. Robert champions higher education for diverse students, program and pipeline development, student research opportunities, and enhancing infrastructure and capacity for equity. Current courses include Histories, Representations & Imaginations of Latinidad in American Culture; Southwest Borderlands; and Race and Social Justice. Robert loves hiking, dancing, film, and road trips across America. His email is zrobert@pdx.edu.

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