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Black Baseball History Honored in New Exhibit at Chicago Fed Money Museum

By Chicago Fed Staff Writer



A view of the Negro Leagues commemorative coins exhibit as installed at the Chicago Fed Money Museum in July, 2024. (Photo: Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago/Ping Homeric)

The Negro Leagues Baseball Centennial Commemorative Coin Act and the coins that came from it have inspired a new exhibit at the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago's Money Museum. In 2020 this congressional initiative celebrated the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Negro National League, the first successful Black professional baseball league.

Recognition of the importance of that and subsequent Black pro leagues continued this year, when, on May 29, Major League Baseball announced that more than 2,300 Negro Leagues players would have their statistics integrated into the MLB database. This meant, for instance, that baseball legend Willie Mays was able to see his ten hits as a Birmingham Black Baron

added to his career total weeks before his death. The Chicago Fed Money Museum's exhibit Triple Play: Negro Leagues Baseball Commemorative Coins honors the determination that Black baseball players showed during an era of segregation in professional baseball.

Opening in mid-July, the exhibit displays all three commemorative coins that were produced by the U.S. Mint, including a $5 gold coin, silver dollar coin, and clad half-dollar coin. The silver and clad coins depict imagery of Negro League teammates standing together, players in action from at bat to the pitcher's mound, and objects with historical significance such as the away game bus, which became a home on the road when players were refused entry to hotels and restaurants. A special tribute to the man often credited as the father of Black baseball, Andrew "Rube" Foster, is paid with the gold coin, which features his portrait and signature.

"We are especially honored to showcase these coins and celebrate Foster's founding of the Negro National League because of the direct ties he had to Chicago," said Sonia Booth, Money Museum representative for the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago. "In 1907 he managed and played for the Chicago Union Giants, and he formed a new team called the Chicago American Giants in 1911. These leagues spurred growth as Black-owned businesses rallied around the economics of game day."

As part of the Treasury, the U.S. Mint produces all coins for the nation, and everyday coins are distributed to banks through the Federal Reserve System. Commemorative coins, however, take a direct-to-consumer path as they honor American history and raise funds to preserve it. Since its 1982 inception, the commemorative coin program has raised more than $500 million; sales of the Negro Leagues coins benefited the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City, MO.

The coins and surrounding exhibit will be on display at least into early 2025 at the free museum, located on the Chicago Fed's first floor at 230 S. LaSalle Street in downtown Chicago. The museum is open weekdays from 10 am to 5 pm, and a security scan and government-issued ID are required for entry.

The Money Museum also features historical currency, interactive games, and many exhibits about the roles and responsibilities of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago and the Federal Reserve System. It is open to the public and is visited frequently by school and business groups. To schedule a guided visit, go to the Money Museum's reservations page.

The Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago is one of 12 regional Reserve Banks that, along with the system's Board of Governors in Washington, DC, make up the nation's central bank. The Chicago Fed serves the Seventh Federal Reserve District, which encompasses the northern portions of Illinois and Indiana, southern Wisconsin, the Lower Peninsula of Michigan, and the state of Iowa.

In addition to participation in the formulation of monetary policy, each Reserve Bank supervises member banks and bank holding companies, provides financial services to depository institutions and the U.S. government, and monitors economic conditions in its District.

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