

BLACKBALL Continued from Front Page



The Leroy Grant room inside the “Blackball” exhibit honors the Freedmen’s Town native and Negro League star, whose career spanned the Chicago American Giants, the New York Lincoln Giants, and beyond.

On Feb. 19, the Houston Freedmen’s Town Conservancy premiered *Blackball: Baseball, Barbeque, and Blues*, an exhibition that explores Black baseball history in Houston’s Fourth Ward. The exhibit gives viewers a closer look at the pivotal role Freedmen’s Town played in the evolution of baseball. Beautifully curated by Seba R. Suber, *Blackball* sheds light on the legacy of West End Park and the impact of segregation on America’s favorite pastime.

As the oldest Black settlement in Houston, Freedmen’s Town has a long, rich history. Located along Buffalo Bayou in Fourth Ward, it was founded by formerly enslaved people in 1865, not long after Juneteenth. It soon became Houston’s first free Black community. Newly emancipated Black residents built homes, schools, churches, and lives in an area where they could prosper. Indeed, they did: by 1880, Freedmen’s Town was home to 95% of Black Houstonians.

In Freedmen’s Town, baseball was a way of life. On Sundays, residents left church and gathered around barbeque pits and slow-smoking fires, sharing meals, listening to music, and playing games in local sandlots. These unpaved lots of dirt and grass became game sites. Inside the first of two houses that form the *Blackball* exhibit, an infographic sheds light on the importance of these spaces. “Before stadiums [and] before leagues,” it reminds us, “there were streets, songs, smoke pits, and sandlots.” Then, as now, baseball brought people together, fostering community as well as competition.

These developments unfolded against a segregated landscape. Though some Black players joined integrated teams, a “color line” soon formed. The National Association of Base Ball Players (founded in 1857) banned Black players in 1867. The National League (NL), one of the two leagues that now make up Major League Baseball (MLB), launched in 1876 but had virtually no Black players during the 19th century. In 1887, both major and minor leagues adopted an unwritten “gentleman’s agreement” that essentially banned Black ballplayers.

So Black players created their own leagues and teams. In New York, teams like the Cuban Giants — which consisted entirely of light-skinned Black men — and the Lincoln Giants emerged in the late 1880s and early 1890s. In 1888, the minor-league Houston Buffaloes began playing games, becoming Houston’s first professional sports team. For years, they played at Herald Park on McGowen Street between Milan and Travis. But when Herald Park was redeveloped into a residential neighborhood, the Buffaloes, also known as the Houston Babies, found a new home.

The *Blackball* exhibit sheds light on that long-forgotten home: West End Park, located on Andrews Street near Heiner. Built in 1905, it was the first venue in the city where Black teams could regularly play. It was also home to the Houston Buffaloes, who played their inaugural game on April 1, 1905, against the Baton Rouge Captains. West End Park drew crowds to professional ballgames, but it was more than just a baseball field. It hosted high school and college football games, carnivals, religious revivals, and more. West End Park was a cultural centerpiece of Freedmen’s Town until its demolition in

1948.

West End Park was a community hub within Fourth Ward, which was itself the nucleus of Black Houston’s civic and cultural life. Fourth Ward was also the home of legendary baseball player Leroy Grant. Born in Freedmen’s Town in 1889, he grew up playing on neighborhood fields and sandlots. In 1910, he auditioned for the Houston Buffaloes and earned a starting role at first base. He soon drew the attention of legendary manager and team owner Rube Foster, who signed him to the Chicago American Giants for the 1911 season. The next year, he traveled with Foster to Cuba, playing in the Cuban Winter League.

By 1912, Grant was recruited by the New York Lincoln Giants, widely regarded as one of the strongest teams in the Eastern U.S. That Giants roster included future Hall of Famers John Henry “Pop” Lloyd and Smokey Joe Williams. The team went on to defeat the Chicago American Giants in 1913 in what was deemed the “Colored Championship of the World.”



Writer and filmmaker Laura Walker with curator Seba R. Suber and Freedmen’s Town Conservancy Executive Director Sharon Fletcher at the *Blackball* premiere.

Grant stayed with New York until 1915, when he began a brief stint with the Breakers Hotel, a Winter League baseball team based at a luxury Palm Beach hotel. He then returned to the Chicago American Giants, though his career was interrupted when he was called to serve in World War I. He stormed back in 1918 with a career-best season, batting .348. He remained with the Giants until 1924.

The exhibit dedicates an entire room to Grant, who was

highly regarded as one of the finest hitting and fielding first basemen of his day. It also devotes a room to the man who recruited him: Andrew “Rube” Foster. Born in Calvert, Texas, about 30 minutes north of Bryan–College Station, in 1879, he made his professional debut with the Waco Yellow Jackets, an independent Black baseball team. He went on to play with the Chicago Union Giants and the Philadelphia Cuban X-Giants during the early 1900s. Beginning in 1902, Foster won 44 games in a row as a pitcher and led the X-Giants to the Black baseball championship in 1903, according to MLB.

Foster earned a reputation as a stellar pitcher. Legend has it that he earned his nickname “Rube” after outdueling another top-flight white pitcher, Rube Waddell, in an exhibition game. But he was more than just a pitcher. Foster branched into management, becoming player-manager of the Leland American Giants in 1907 and leading them to a 100-win season. Three years later, he wrested control of the team from owner Frank Leland and partnered with businessman John Schorling to have the team play at Chicago’s South Side Park. In 1911, the Lelands became the Chicago American Giants.

Under Foster’s leadership, the Chicago American Giants went 78–27 in 1911 and claimed the first of four consecutive Western championships. In 1912, the American Giants went 112–30. Two years later, they went 126–16 and advanced to what was then called the “Colored World Series.” The Giants swept the Brooklyn Royal Giants to win the series, according to the Society for American Baseball Research.

What Foster did next, however, cemented his legacy as “The Father of Black Baseball.” On Feb. 13, 1920, a group of team owners met in Kansas City and formed the Negro National League, which featured teams in Chicago, Cincinnati, Dayton, Detroit, Indianapolis, Kansas City, and St. Louis. Foster was elected president of the Negro Leagues. With Foster at the helm, the Chicago Giants went on to win Negro League championships in 1920, 1921, 1922, and 1926.

Interestingly, two separate Negro League championship games were played at West End Park. That revelation comes via an infographic in the second of the two houses that form the *Blackball* exhibit. It was here that Houston Freedmen’s Town Conservancy Executive Director Sharon Fletcher took *Forward Times* inside the project.

When asked about the genesis of the project, Fletcher said one of the main inspirations was Leroy Grant.

“He’s a hometown hero. His story has never, ever been told. With the integration of Major League Baseball and the integration of Negro League stats into Major League Baseball,” she said, “along with the World Baseball Classic coming here to Houston in the month of March — that’s next month — we thought it would be a great opportunity to center this exhibition in that moment.”

Fletcher noted that people often know about the historic buildings and bricks of Freedmen’s Town but rarely hear about the people — their stories, accomplishments, and contributions to the city, country, and globe.

“We get to tell the story of Leroy Grant. We get to highlight Negro League accomplishments as part of Major League Baseball. And we get to have this exhibition on display during the World Baseball Classic. There are folks who are going to travel from all over to be here in Houston, and our hope is that their love for baseball will lead them into Freedmen’s Town to learn more about the history here and about Leroy Grant.”

Grant is just one of the Negro League players highlighted in the exhibit, which also provides more information about West End Park. Fletcher revealed that the park was also the site of major-league action by white players.



Legendary baseball player Leroy Grant in a New York Lincoln Giants uniform during his Negro League career.

I pointed out a displayed quote by writer Mark Ribowsky: “The park was the stage where Black baseball’s artistry met America’s anxiety.” While that quote originally applied to a park in Chicago, Fletcher asserted that it could apply anywhere Negro League baseball was played.

As we walked into another room, white baseball jerseys hung from clotheslines, each emblazoned with the names of Houston’s Black neighborhoods: Mother Ward (Fourth Ward), Fifth Ward (“The Nickel”), Third Ward (“The Tre”), Sunnyside, Independence Heights, and more. These communities also participated in the baseball landscape, Fletcher said. She credited Seba Suber and Dr. Layton Revel, head of the Center for Negro League Baseball Research, for helping collect and curate the works featured in the exhibit.

When asked what she would like viewers to take away from the exhibit, Fletcher responded:

“I think holistically, what I would want people’s takeaway to be is to really think about the elevation of African American contributions to American history and to America’s favorite pastime, which is baseball. I’m hoping that through baseball, people can really connect to this community and its contributions.”

CLASSIFIEDS

PUBLIC NOTICE

CellCo Partnership and its Controlled Affiliates Doing Business as Verizon Wireless (Verizon Wireless) proposes to build a 50-foot Communications Pole at the approx. vicinity of 7604 2/3 Ameswood Road, Houston, Harris Co., TX 77095 [Lat: 29-53-15.504 N, Long: 95-37-46.1748 W]. Public comments regarding potential effects from this site on historic properties may be submitted within 30 days from the date of this publication to: *Trileaf Corp, Arjun Pai, a.pai@trileaf.com, 7700 West Highway 71, Suite 200, Austin, TX 78735 – 512.519.9388*

Invitation to Submit Competitive Sealed Proposal

OST/Alameda Corridors Redevelopment Authority, COH TIRZ #7
3131 Emancipation Avenue, Suite 225, Houston, Texas 77004

Project Name: Greater Third Ward Neighborhood Project Section B
Project CIP #T-0722, WBS NO. N-T07000-0001-7

Project Location: Houston, TX
Estimated Construction Cost: \$17 Million
Bid Date and Time: 03/13/2026 @ 2:00 PM

Proposals will be accepted until 2:00 PM on the proposed date shown above only on the CivasUSA.com website. Proposals received after the deadline will not be accepted. Accepted proposals will be posted on CivasUSA.com by 03/13/2026 after the bid opening. A full bid tabulation will be posted after bids are reviewed and confirmed by the Owner. Although cost is a factor, proposals will be evaluated by other factors in addition to the cost. Lowest cost proposal does not guarantee selection of the proposer.

Copies of the CSP Documents may be obtained online from www.civasusa.com; search GREATER THIRD WARD NEIGHBORHOOD PROJECT SECTION B COH-TIRZ #7. Contractors and the public must register on this website to view and/or download specifications and plans for this project. There is NO charge to view or download documents.

Proposers may submit questions online through CivasUSA. Addenda and other documents will be addressed and posted on the CivasUSA website.

Project consists of removal and construction of paving, storm sewers, water lines, sanitary sewers, sidewalks, driveways, curbs, wheelchair ramps, permanent signs, pavement markings, and streetlights. The project area is located inside the City of Houston limits bounded by Tamm Street to the north, Alabama Street to the south, Emancipation Avenue to the west, and Sauer Street/ Delano Street to the east.

The Project includes City of Houston Standard Construction Specifications for Storm Drainage, Street Paving, and Traffic Control, which are incorporated into the Project.

These Standard Specifications, along with Standard Details, may be acquired at no cost on the City’s website at <https://www.houstonpermittingcenter.org/office-city-engineer/design-and-construction-standards>.

Proposers shall comply with City Ordinance 2013-0428, Chapter 12, Article C, City of Houston Code of Ordinances, as amended, and City of Houston Office of Business Opportunity Minority, Women, and Small Business Enterprise (MWSBE) Procedures. Bid bond in the amount not less than five percent (5%) of the total amount of the cost proposal must accompany each proposal as a guarantee that the selected proposer will enter into a proper contract and execute bonds and guarantees on the forms provided within (10) days after the date contract documents are received by the selected proposer.

Proposal security shall be in accordance with Section 00200– Instruction to Proposers and Section 11.6 of the General Conditions of the Contract (Document 00700).

Pre-proposal Meeting: An optional pre-proposal meeting will be held on 02/25/2026 at 3:30 PM CST at 3131 Emancipation Ave., Suite 225, Houston, TX 77004. Attendees have the option to attend in-person or on Teams. The meeting link will be posted on CivasUSA.

Contact with Authority staff or engineers/consultants with regards this project is not permitted and will disqualify the bidder. All communications should be by email to:

Projects@OSTAlameda.com

Mr. Hexser Holliday
Director of Capital Projects Planning and Development
OST/Alameda Corridors Redevelopment Authority TIRZ #7
Email: Projects@OSTAlameda.com

HELP WANTED

Liberty Energy Services LLC seeks Senior Technical Sales Engineer in Houston, TX to collaborate with laboratory and supply chain departments to develop new products and qualify and onboard new chemicals. Work with Account Representatives to optimize designs from a performance and cost perspective. Position requires bach. degree in Petroleum Eng., Mechanical Eng., Chemistry, or rel. field and 5 years of post-bachelor’s exp., which must include some exp. in: Hydraulic fracturing fluid systems and hydraulic fracturing stimulation chemicals, Hydraulic fracturing operations, Friction flow loops and results, Chandler 5550 High Pressure High Temperature Viscometer, Data visualization using Tableau and Spotfire. To apply, email resume to Tracee Quinnett, HR@libertyfrac.com.

HELP WANTED

Product Marketing Manager

Responsible for prdct planning, delivery & marketing throughout the prdct lifecycle. Dvlop a vision & roadmap for the prdct based on input from internal stakeholders, cstmers, mrkt research & own industry insight. Work closely w/ Development/Engineering & other teams to deliver prdcts that align w/ this vision, meet market needs & are delivered to a consistently high-quality standard. Dvlp a forecast for the prdct based on input from marketing, sales, market analysts & own exp. & manage its delivery. Identify the key benefits & value of prdts. This will be used to create & maintain marketing plans & collateral (including web updates, prdct training materials & sales training). Reqs a master’s dgr in marketing mgemnt or foreign equivalent. Mail rsmes to Metalist LLC. DBA AWC Indeed, 11993 FM 529 Rd. , Houston, Tx, 77041.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

Request for Proposal – Houston-Galveston Area Council – Public Services – Medium and Heavy Trucks, Truck Bodies, and Trailers – HT07-26

H-GAC is soliciting responses for selecting qualified manufacturers, dealers and distributors of Medium and Heavy Trucks, Truck Bodies, and Trailers and to make these types of products available to Customers of the HGACBuy Cooperative Purchasing Program under blanket type contracts.

To view the solicitation documents, visit <https://www.h-gac.com/procurement> or [ESBD \(txsmartbuy.com\)](https://www.esbd.com)

Response Deadline: April 9, 2026 @ 12:00 P.M. CT