Project Overview
This project looks at African American history in Dunn County, Wisconsin through the context of barnstorming baseball. Current research on African American baseball history generally consists of Jackie Robinson and the reintegration of professional baseball. While this span of African American baseball history is important, there is much more out there that needs to be studied. In my research, I concentrate on the years of the Barnstorming Era (1890s-1940s) which precedes Jackie Robinson. During these years, I look at the importance of African American barnstorming baseball teams on the communities they traveled to and played against. To accomplish this, I concentrated on Dunn County, Wisconsin and their rich history of barnstorming baseball.

Barnstorming Baseball
Once African Americans were banned from playing professional baseball, they found other ways to play the game. In 1904, the Menomonie Blue Caps traveled to Rennville, Minnesota to play the racially-mixed All Stars (photo below). The following year they hosted the All Stars. Later that year, the Blue Caps faced the racially-mixed Chippewa Falls Gotzians at home. In the nearly 50 years that followed, African Americans continued to compete in barnstorming baseball games in the county.

Notable Barnstorming Players

Toni “Tomboy” Stone
Marcenia Lyle Alberga, better known as Toni Stone, was the first female to play in the Negro Leagues. In 1938 she was a member of the Twin City Colored Giants team that played in Dunn County. At the age of 17, Stone was just starting her baseball career. The Dunn County News article at left points out she was a substitute in the eighth inning. Notice that a young Andy Pafko was the centerfielder for the Connorsville team opposite Stone.

Alex Irwin
In 1904 Alexander Charles Irwin began playing baseball in Chicago. By 1908, Irwin was a member of the Minneapolis Keystones team that played in Dunn County. A year later in 1909, Irwin was a member of the Menomonie White Sox and the Menomonie Skidoo. By playing for these two teams, Irwin became the first and only known African American on a Dunn County team during the Barnstorming Era. As a member of the 1905 Chicago Union Giants team (above, far left), Irwin started to make a name for himself on the field. Irwin also made a name for himself in the Twin Cities after his baseball career (below).

Barnstorming Teams in Dunn County
Dunn County teams hosted numerous barnstorming opponents. These barnstorming teams included men and women on their rosters, as well as Native Americans and Latinos. A partial list of teams includes:

- Chicago Spauldings [sic] – 1888
- Lady’s Denver Club (IL) – 1892
- Green’s Nebraska Indians – 1901
- Renville All Stars – 1905
- Chippewa Falls Gotzians – 1905
- University of Hawaii (Chinese team vs. Stout Institute) – 1913
- Illinois Colored Giants – 1921
- California Owls – 1930
- St. Paul Monarchs – 1931
- St. Paul Colored Gophers – 1932
- Piney Woods Giant Collegians – 1933
- Gilkerson’s Colored Union Giants – 1933
- Van Dyke’s Colored House of David – 1934
- Twin City Colored Giants – 1938

Importance of the Topic
From 1840 to 1960, Dunn County’s highest African American population in a census year was 12. There were limited opportunities for Dunn County residents to interact with African Americans with so few living in the area. This makes these barnstorming teams even more important. Some questions that came from my research were why did so many black teams come to a location with so few African Americans? Was any racism shown toward the barnstorming teams?

Newspaper Coverage
Newspaper coverage of black barnstorming teams was spotty at best. It was not until black newspapers emerged that black baseball received consistent coverage. When white-owned newspapers covered games, racial stereotypes often were very visible. Even the Dunn County News was not entirely free of discriminatory phrases in their coverage of black baseball teams (below). The author of this article praised the Gotzian team, but waited until the end of the baseball page for a racial comment about George Wilson.