WU?@therep

FLY

by Trey Ellis and Ricardo Khan
Directed by Ricardo Khan

CONTENTS

THE REPERTORY THEATRE OF ST. LOUIS

Repertory

MAJOR SPONSOR:

BOEING

STUDENT MATINEE SPONSOR:

World Wide Technology

ARTS IN EDUCATION COUNCIL 1963–2013
Shaping a Vibrant Arts Community For All
KeepArtHappening.org

Missouri Arts Council
The State of the Arts

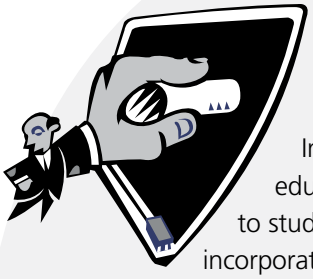
ART WORKS.
arts.gov

RAC
REGIONAL ARTS COMMISSION OF ST. LOUIS

the 411

At The Rep, we know that life moves fast—okay, really fast. But we also know that some things are worth slowing down for. We believe that live theatre is one of those pit stops worth making and are excited that you are going to stop by for a show. To help you get the most bang for your buck, we have put together **WU? @ THE REP**—an IM guide that will give you everything you need to know to get at the top of your theatergoing game—fast. You'll find character descriptions **(A/S/L)**, a plot summary **(FYI),** biographical information **(F2F)**, historical context **(B4U)**, and other bits and pieces **(HTH)**. Most importantly, we'll have some ideas about what this all means **IRL,** anyway.

CU@therep!



The Teacher's Lounge

In an effort to make our educational materials accessible to students and easy for educators to incorporate into the classroom, our study guide is written in a student-oriented format. We hope that you will circulate this guide among your students in the weeks preceding your visit to The Rep, encouraging them to browse it before and after class and as time allows, using it as a launch point for both pre- and post-performance discussions. You may also want to visit our website, **www.repstl.org**, for additional information including activity suggestions and behind-the-scenes information. Any materials, either from this guide or from our website may be reproduced for use in the classroom. As always, we appreciate your making live theatre a part of your classroom experience and welcome your feedback and questions.

NEATO!

WELCOME!

The desire to learn, insatiable when awakened, can sometimes lie dormant until touched by the right teacher or the right experience. We at The Rep are grateful to have the opportunity to play a role supporting you as you awaken the desire for learning in your students.

The Tuskegee Airmen fought a battle in the air against a world enemy, but they also fought a battle on the ground against a home enemy. Their battle for equality opened the doors for all groups struggling against bias. The current generation owes these heroes, many of whom came from St. Louis, so much and yet knows so little about them. This play is a wonderful opportunity for your students to learn important American history and to see its direct relevance to their lives.

It would be a good idea to take a minute on the bus to give your students these quick theatre etiquette reminders:

- This show has no intermission; there will be time for bathroom breaks before the show.
- The actors can hear the audience and appreciate the laughter, gasps and quiet attention to action. However, talking, moving around and eating is very distracting to others and can dampen the energy of what is happening on stage.
- Pictures, phone calls and texting are not allowed at any time during the performance.

Live theatre won't allow your students to take a passive role—they must work with us to create the experience which takes the learning deeper. Our unique ability to fuse words and images onstage allows your students to explore new ideas as well as excites their imaginations. We will do our part so your students will be stirred to understandings and self-awareness while delving into new and familiar worlds. You are doing your part by using The Rep to extend your intellectual and aesthetic curriculum. Thank you!

Marsha Coplon
Director of Education

REP EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Director of Education	Marsha Coplon
Associate Director of Education	Sarah Brandt
Education Programs Manager	April Strelinger
Study Guide Writer	Laura Schlereth

A/S/L

CHET SIMPKINS: a timid, young African-American man

OSCAR: a young African-American and no-nonsense race man

J. ALLEN: a young Bahamian who is very British and very proud

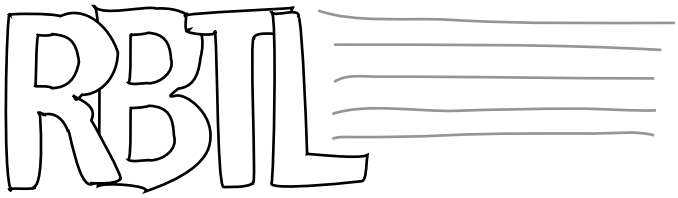
W.W.: a street-wise African-American zoot-suiter from Chicago

CAPTAIN O'HURLEY: a white Bostonian with a chip on his shoulder

BOMBER PILOT REYNOLDS: a white Midwesterner

BOMBER CO-PILOT SHAW: a white Southerner

THE TAP GRIOT: an African-American tap dancer living out the inner lives of the various characters through dance; he taps emotions, good and bad, that the soldiers are not permitted by the times or circumstances to express



HONOR AND INTEGRITY

There's no question our troops are held in high regard in the U.S. This play examines people who are working for the greater good, even when those very people are viewed as not good enough by many around them. What do you think W.W. meant when he said: "There are worse ways to die than falling out of heaven…Oscar died making a difference." Countless soldiers make the ultimate sacrifice fighting for our country, and *Fly* reminds us each one of them has a face, name, family and a story. Why do you think tales about war are usually so moving?

EMOTION

Emotions play such a big role in this play that there's even a character based solely on representing them—the Tap Griot. Why do you think the playwrights decided they needed this character? Racism is such an extreme issue in terms of emotions and safety. Here these men were being discriminated against because of their skin color, yet they could never act on their anger or despair or else they'd be in physical danger. Also, being in the armed forces, emotions were not encouraged so as not to cloud their thinking and ultimate goal. What was the most emotional part of the play for you? Why do you think it affected you as much as it did?

FORGIVENESS

The Tuskegee Airmen are fighting for a country that doesn't even fully respect their own rights at the time. Violence against African-Americans based on hate was all too common. Pilot Shaw admits his father committed some of this violence, and he doesn't deserve W.W. and Chet's air cover, but the other pilots in their charge haven't done anything wrong and need the protection. What do you think was going through W.W. and Chet's minds when Shaw made his confession? Why does forgiveness require such strength of character?

SPOILER ALERT!

IT'S THE PRESIDENTIAL Inauguration in 2009 and the elderly but exuberant Dr. Chet Simpkins, a Tuskegee Airman, is witnessing history. Reporters are hurling questions at him about the "big day," and how he "paved the way." Simpkins says he's proud to be part of such an emotional, historical event, and he mentions how his old war buddies would have loved to have seen the day.

JUST THEN, the Tap Griot, a mystical tap dancer who is symbolic of the characters' emotional state, transports Chet back to the summer of 1943. Chet and the Tap Griot are now on a train traveling through the U.S. picking up young men, including W.W., a boisterous charmer from Chicago; Oscar, a straight-laced husband who is leaving behind his pregnant wife; and J. Allen, a Brit who has sailed from Barbados. The train takes them all to Tuskegee, Alabama, where they'll learn to be pilots for the Air Corps. We learn that Oscar is by his own definition "a no-nonsense RACE man" who will do "anything and everything for (his) people," J. Allen is from the British West Indies, and W.W. doesn't mind going by W.W.W. for "what women want." It's obvious everyone is wary and not willing to trust each other just yet.

CAPTAIN O'HURLEY ENTERS and expresses his certainty that most of them won't make it through training. In fact he brags that the class before them had a "wash-out" rate of 69%, a number he plans on topping with their class. O'Hurley runs them ragged, which only make things tenser and more competitive between the trainees. Oscar, J. Allen and W.W. act as if they already know a great deal about aviation, but it soon becomes obvious that the more modest Chet is the most informed. He learned about planes when he first started as a janitor at Roosevelt Field in Long Island. He's now a licensed pilot. The others are impressed with Chet, but his abilities make them even more insecure about not making it to the top of the class and getting possibly washed out. They become more competitive with each other, continuing to bicker and even almost coming to blows. Then, amidst all their fighting, they each eventually reveal their reason for joining the Air Corps. W.W. did it to impress a girl. J. Allen did it to honor his father who never saw the world past the Caribbean but was fascinated by planes and flying. Oscar did it to show white racists what "his people" are capable of. After this, the atmosphere is still tense, but Oscar offers Chet vector tricks in exchange for helping him land a trainer. Chet agrees.

AFTERWARDS, O'HURLEY TAKES them all up in the air individually to try actually flying the planes, but they all do terribly except for Chet. Their classes continue to be tough, and they struggle to keep up with everything, but they eventually begin to learn. W.W., J. Allen, Oscar and Chet all manage to avoid wash out. Eventually O'Hurley makes W.W. cadet leader, a decision no one understands. At first, W.W. enjoys his position of power and has no problem lording it over the others. However, that changes when he admits to everyone that O'Hurley only chose him because he thought it would break the spirit of the group.

LATER ON, all the guys, on a well-deserved leave, go to a bar to blow off some steam. However, when they arrive, they're told that "colored" must enter in the back even though they're officer candidates. Everyone is taken aback, especially Oscar who is furious. Instead of letting it ruin their night, they cross the street to a general store for some pop. While discussing their favorite kind of beers, it becomes apparent that Chet is only 17 instead of 18, and therefore not old enough to be in the Air Corps. He doctored his ID to say he was born a year earlier. The other three contemplate turning

The cast of Fly. *Photo by Sandy Underwood.*

him in for fear of being kicked out for knowing about the lie. However, in a first-time spirit of unity, they all agree to keep Chet's secret and stick together.

NEXT, THEY'RE ALL taking their final in-flight test, and despite encouragement from the others, J. Allen fails. O'Hurley immediately kicks him out and shocks everyone by making a racist remark. J. Allen almost hits him but stops himself.

CHET, OSCAR AND W.W. later graduate, and three months after getting their wings, they're flying over in Europe. In the air they act as escorts to bomber pilot Reynolds and bomber co-pilot Shaw, who are at first shocked at seeing black pilots but then are impressed and grateful for their sharp flying skills. During the mission, Oscar saves their lives but then is killed by enemy fire.

LATER, AS W.W. AND CHET are packing up Oscar's personal effects, Shaw and Reynolds come in and tell them about an assignment to fly over Berlin the next day. They got their pick for an escort and requested Chet and W.W. Everyone is terrified by the dangerous mission on the enemy's home turf.

DURING THE MISSION, Shaw becomes unnerved and apologizes to W.W. out of nowhere. His apology is for a black man his father and his friends once terrorized and killed when Shaw was a kid. Shaw asks for W.W.'s forgiveness who grants it in the form of protection. Soon after, W.W. is shot and verges on unconsciousness. Chet keeps talking to him to keep him awake. The air controller then comes on and tells them they're clear to land. Chet and W.W. recognize the voice as J. Allen. They land safely, and later are awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for heroism or extraordinary achievement in aerial flight.

THE TAP GRIOT THEN brings Chet and the audience back to 2009 where Barack Obama is being sworn in as the first black president of the United States. Chet compares the day to "walking on air."

Trey Ellis

Ricardo Khan

AS THE WRITERS OF *FLY*, Ricardo Khan and Trey Ellis weren't necessarily trying to give a history lesson, but rather create a story that resonated with audience members on a more personal level. "The goal was to tell a story that makes it clearly a piece of theatre," said Khan in a 2012 interview. "We wanted to bring to life this American story."

THERE LIKELY WEREN'T two writers more prepared for the task. Khan is the co-founder and creative advisor at the Crossroads Theatre Company in New Brunswick, NJ, which won the 1999 Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theater. Khan has also served as a director/writer-in-residence at the Lincoln Center Institute in New York City, and as a visiting professor for the graduate school for theatre at the University of Missouri in Kansas City. He was co-chair of the National Endowment for the Arts' theater advisory panel in 1989 and from 1996–2000 was the President of Theatre Communications Group. He also formed the multi-national writers' collective called The World Theatre Lab, involving nearly 30 international writers. Trey Ellis is a writer and professor at Columbia University, who penned the acclaimed novels *Platitudes* (1989) and *Right Here, Right Now* (1999), which won the American Book Award. As a screenwriter, he has enjoyed success with the Emmy-nominated HBO television movie *The Tuskegee Airmen* (1995) and the film *Good Fences* (1993) starring Danny Glover and Whoopi Goldberg which was shortlisted for the PEN award for Best Teleplay of the year. Also an accomplished essayist, Ellis has been published in *The New York Times*, *Vanity Fair*, *GQ*, *Playboy*, *The Washington Post* and *The Los Angeles Times*.

FOR KHAN, THE INSPIRATION for *Fly* began with a photograph. "It was a photo of the Tuskegee Airmen. I was stunned," he has said. "I wanted to know who these men were."

AFTER BEING COMMISSIONED by the Lincoln Center Institute in 2005, *Fly* had its world premiere at Khan's Crossroads Theatre Company in 2009, which received a glowing review from *The New York Times*: "The history of the Tuskegee Airmen is inspiring enough on its own. But Trey Ellis and Ricardo Khan's retelling of their story, as produced by the Crossroads Theater Company in New Brunswick, is a superior piece of theatrical synergy."

REVIEW WRITER Anita Gates has special praise for the character of the Tap Griot who "taps emphatically" as "part sublimated anger, part empowerment. ... The Griot is just the kind of risky theatrical device that could go embarrassingly wrong, but in *Fly*, the execution is as inspired as the concept," she says.

KHAN EXPLAINS THAT the Griot, which in West African tradition is a person charged with sharing oral history through music and storytelling, is meant to use tap dancing to tell part of the story and add fluidity to it. "He expresses emotions that words cannot," he has explained. "We did that to add a contemporary feel and to help young people relate to the experience."

THE PLAY WENT ON to be produced at Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C. in the fall of 2012. Sharing this story and its powerful message at a historic and treasured American site was a message that Khan has described as being inspired by one Tuskegee Airman in particular: Roscoe C. Brown, Jr. a commander of the 100th Fighter Squadron in the 322nd Fighter Group. In his 80s when he first worked with Khan and Ellis, Brown taught the playwrights about how the airmen overcame bigotry by not holding onto to the excuse of bigotry and aspiring to be the best no matter what. As Brown once told them: "Excellence overcomes prejudice."

MUSKETEER: an early type of infantry soldier equipped with a musket

HANNIBAL CROSSING THE ALPS: one of the major achievements of the Second Punic War in 218 B.C.

DICTY: high-class or haughty

HINCTY: conceited or snobbish

ABYSSINIAN POLO: American slang for the game of craps

STIPEND: a fixed or regular pay

CONK: the head

BRITISH WEST INDIES: the islands and mainland colonies in and around the Caribbean that were part of the British Empire

MARCUS GARVEY: a Jamaican-born black nationalist who created a "Back to Africa" movement in the United States and became an inspirational figure for later civil rights activists

JESSE OWENS: an African-American track and field athlete who participated in the 1936 Summer Olympics, where he achieved international fame by winning four gold medals

JOE LOUIS: an African-American professional boxer and the World Heavyweight Champion from 1937 to 1949

JIVE: swing music or early jazz

ZOOT SUITER: a man who wore a suit with baggy, tight-cuffed trousers and an oversized jacket with broad, padded shoulders and wide lapels, first popularized in the early 1940s

CALISTHENICS: exercises designed to develop physical health and vigor, usually performed with little or no special apparatus

HYDRAULIC: operated by the pressure created by forcing water, oil or another liquid through a comparatively narrow pipe or orifice

NAACP: the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; an African-American civil rights organization in the United States, formed in 1909

HELEN OF TROY: a Greek mythology figure who was considered to be the most beautiful woman in the world and whose abduction by the Trojan prince Paris brought about the Trojan War

VECTOR: the direction or course followed by an airplane or missile

CHARLES LINDBERGH: an American aviator who made the first solo nonstop flight across the Atlantic Ocean in 1927

TOURNIQUET: a compressing device used for stopping bleeding by forcibly compressing a blood vessel

LINDY HOP: an American jazz dance that evolved in Harlem, New York City, during the 1920s and 1930s

RED TAIL: a member of the Tuskegee Airmen

SARSAPARILLA: a soft drink flavored with an extract of a root belonging to the genus Smilax, i.e. root beer

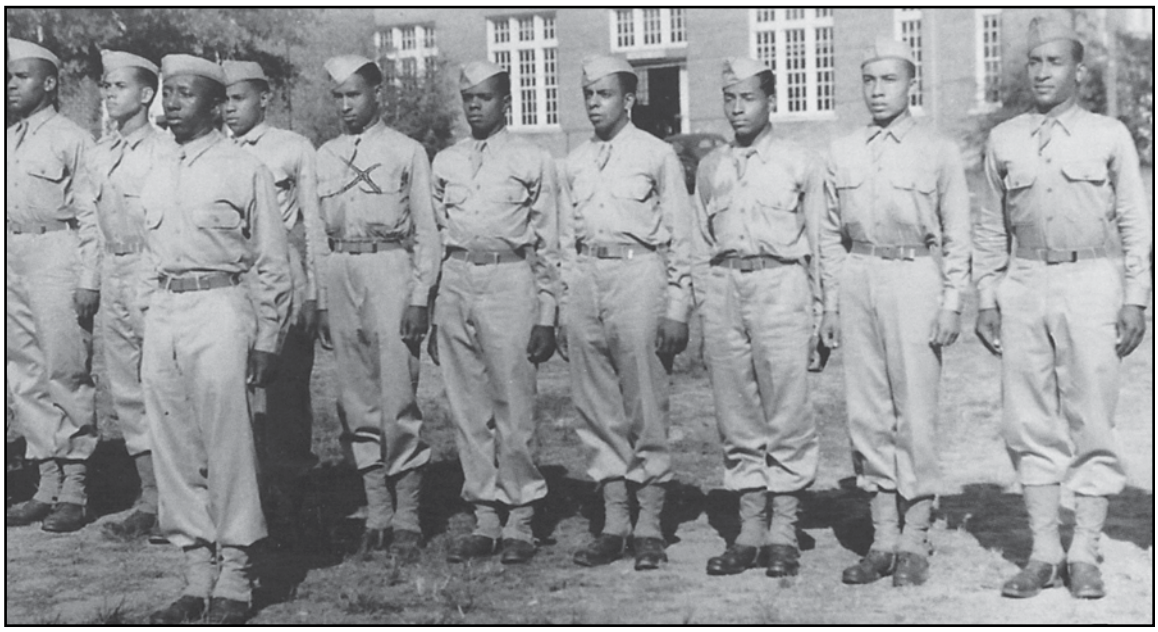
BTW

If you liked *Fly*, check out these two films, based on the Tuskegee Airmen:

***The Tuskegee Airmen,* 106 minutes, HBO Home Video, 1995.** Starring Laurence Fishburn and Cuba Gooding Jr., this film tells the story of the "Fighting 99th," the first squadron of black American pilots.

***Red Tails,* 125 minutes, 20th Century Fox, 2012.** Cuba Gooding Jr. is back, this time with Terrence Howard, to tell the story of the Tuskegee Airmen on the Italian front in 1944.

THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN



Before 1940, African Americans were prohibited from flying in the U.S. military because many believed they lacked the skills and qualifications for combat. However, as the U.S. began feeling the pressure of entering another World War, civil rights organizations called for more equality, which resulted in an all African-American squadron being trained at the Tuskegee Army Air Field (TAAF) based in Tuskegee, Alabama, in 1941. Called the "Tuskegee Experiment," the Army Air Corps program trained African Americans to fly and maintain combat aircraft. The first aviation cadet class consisting of 13 individuals began training in July 1941, and five completed training nine months later in March 1942. From 1942 through 1946, 992 pilots graduated from TAAF, and 450 served overseas in either the 99th Fighter Squadron or the 332nd Fighter Group.

HIGH APTITUDE IN HIGH ALTITUDE

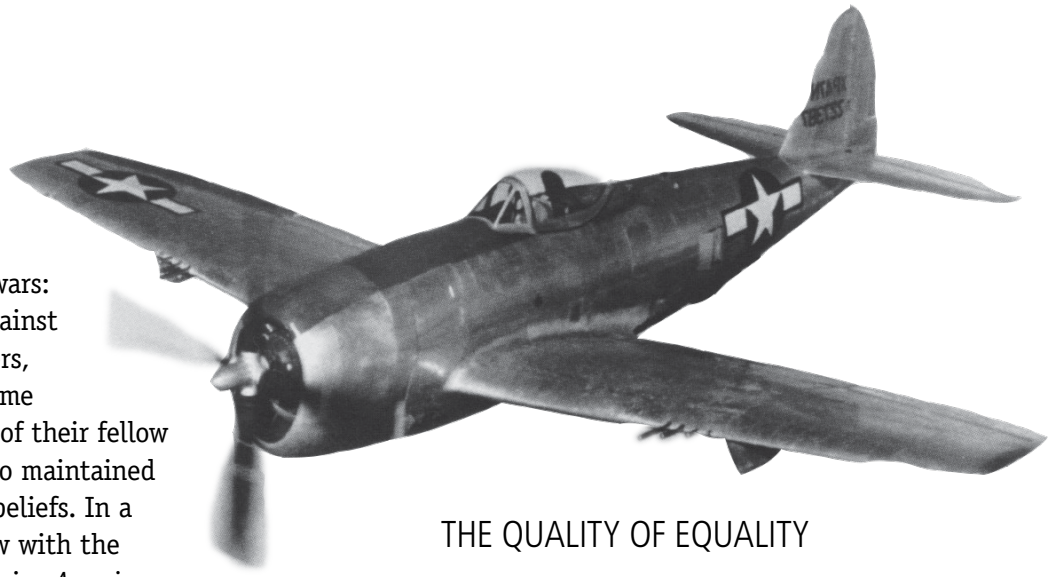
The Fighter Groups were eventually transferred together to the Ramitelli Air Strip, near Foggia, Italy in early 1944 becoming the only four-squadron fighter group performing bomber escort missions in the 15th Air Force. The Group was highly effective successfully completing 200 of its 205 bomber escort missions without losing a bomber to enemy aircraft, an unprecedented record.

MEN OF HONOR

The 99th Fighter Squadron received two Presidential Unit Citations for outstanding tactical air support and aerial combat; the 332nd Fighter Group received the Presidential Unit Citation for its longest bomber escort mission to Berlin, Germany, on March 24, 1945. The 332nd Fighter Group also achieved an unprecedented aerial victory in June 1944, when two of its pilots discovered a German destroyer in the harbor at Trieste, Italy. Pilot Lieutenant Gynne Pierson attacked the destroyer, using only the aircraft's 50-caliber machine guns, causing it to explode and sink.

A GREAT CONTRADICTION

Sadly, the incredible accomplishments of the Tuskegee Airmen and other black service members were not appreciated by much of the country they risked their lives to protect.



Many considered them to be fighting two wars: one abroad against the Axis powers, and one at home against many of their fellow Americans who maintained deeply racist beliefs. In a 1999 interview with the PBS history series *American Experience*, Vernon Jarrett, an African-American journalist who was an influential commentator on race relations, politics, and African-American history and founded the National Association of Black Journalists, discussed the time:

"World War II exposed a great contradiction in American life," he said. "Here you were fighting Hitler, the world's premier ideologue of racism. And in your own country, if you were a black soldier in a uniform, you had to be very cautious about your life. They were still lynching African Americans, hanging them up, setting them on fire, shooting them like they were garbage and dogs, during World War II. You couldn't even get an anti-lynching bill passed during World War II."

After the war, 24-year-old Captain Harold Montgomery returned home to reclaim his old job with the U.S. Post Office Department. During his service, Montgomery had led a heavy weapons company up the western coast of Italy through relentless German fire. However, a large plaque that honored postal employees who served in the war did not include his name—or any African American veteran's name for that matter. Adding insult to injury, Montgomery was also informed that he would not be receiving the pay raise that was given to returning white soldiers. Montgomery promptly quit and went back to the military, serving in Korea and rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel.

THE QUALITY OF EQUALITY

Unfortunately, many of the black airmen who elected to remain in the service experienced segregation with little opportunity for advancement. However, due to many white units being undermanned and in need of the experienced and skilled personnel, President Harry Truman finally enacted Executive Order Number 9981 in 1948, which demanded equality of treatment and opportunity in all of the United States Armed Forces, one of the first steps toward racial integration and social change in the U.S.

TRUE TRAILBLAZERS

The sacrifices the Tuskegee Airmen made and the battles they fought overseas and at home are still very prevalent in our nation's memory, as then-Senator Barack Obama stated in 2007, when the Tuskegee Airmen received the Congressional Gold Medal: "My career in public service was made possible by the path heroes like the Tuskegee Airmen trail-blazed." That trail eventually led to Obama's inauguration only two years later as the first black President of the United States, a ceremony attended by many Tuskegee Airmen veterans who received personal invitations.

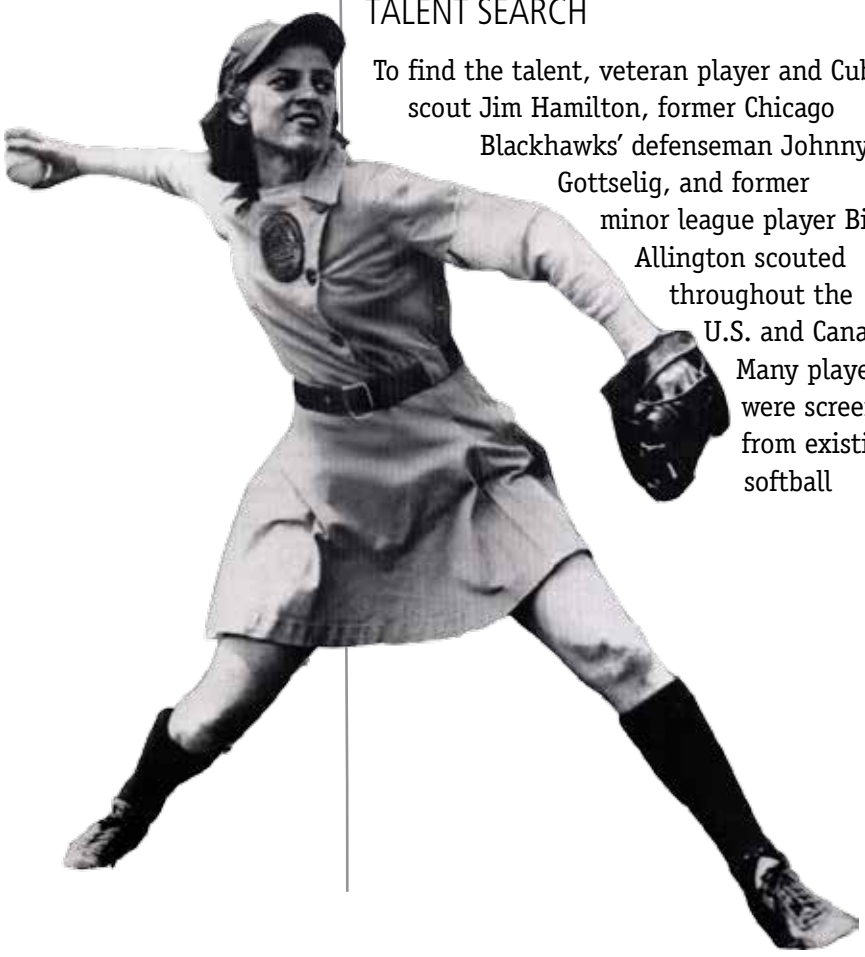
B4U

THE ALL-AMERICAN GIRLS PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL LEAGUE

War changes a country. Priorities shift and things that seem so important to people are put into perspective. Much like the U.S. depended on African-Americans to help supply the air forces, the U.S. depended on women to keep the American spirit alive on the homefront. As the men went off to war, ladies took on many new roles including playing the country's beloved sport of baseball. By the fall of 1942, many minor league teams disbanded due to the war's draft of young men. Philip K. Wrigley, owner of the chewing-gum company, had inherited the Chicago Cubs' major league Baseball franchise from his father, and decided to search for an alternative in case the same would happen to the major leagues. Eventually came the idea of a girls' league to play in major league parks.

TALENT SEARCH

To find the talent, veteran player and Cubs' scout Jim Hamilton, former Chicago Blackhawks' defenseman Johnny Gottselig, and former minor league player Bill Allington scouted throughout the U.S. and Canada. Many players were screened from existing softball leagues throughout the country, and there were try-outs in dozens of major cities. Of these, only 280 were invited to the final try-outs in Chicago where 60 were chosen to play in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL). Four non-major league cities near the League headquarters were selected to host the teams—the Racine Belles and Rockford Peaches in Illinois, the Kenosha Comets in Wisconsin, and the South Bend Blue Sox in Indiana. Wrigley funded half the operational costs of each team and all over-budget expenses, while the host city directors agreed to pay the other half of operational costs.



GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Teams consisted of 15 players, a woman chaperone and manager/coach, which was usually a notable male sports figure to gain public interest. The first managers were Gottselig and former major league players Bert Niehoff, Josh Billings and Eddie Stumpf. Besides skills, players were also expected to meet high moral standards. After daily practices, the women attended charm school classes to learn proper etiquette, personal hygiene and dress code; each player also received a beauty kit and instructions on how to use it. Special uniforms were designed for the players by Mrs. Wrigley, art designer Otis Shepard and Chicago softball star Ann Harnett. The uniform consisted of a one-piece short-skirted flared tunic fashioned after the figure skating, field hockey and tennis uniforms of the time, as well as satin shorts, knee-high baseball socks and of course, a baseball hat. Each team had its distinct color and symbolic patch.

PLAY BALL!

League play officially began on May 30, 1943, with South Bend playing in Rockford and Kenosha playing in Racine. A total of 108 games were played in the regular season, which ran May-September. The team that won the most games during the regular season was declared the pennant winner. The top teams then competed in a series of playoff games to win the League Championship. At the end of the first season, the Racine Belles beat the Kenosha Comets in a five-game series to become the first World Champions.

The first season was successful; game attendance was strong and the teams were well received by fans in the four cities as well as the press, who were amazed at the women's talent. The players also showed a patriotic spirit, as many had husbands, brothers and other relatives serving in the war, by playing exhibition games to support the Red Cross and the armed forces, as well as visiting wounded veterans at Army hospitals.

During the 1944 season, it soon became clear that the war would not force major league baseball to disband, and Wrigley no longer felt the need to support the girls' league. He sold it to Chicago advertising executive, Arthur Meyerhoff, who promoted the League with great enthusiasm. Fans responded positively and game attendance remained strong, even for a few years after the war ended; new teams had been added including the Chicago Colleens, Milwaukee Chicks and the Minneapolis Millerettes.

HISTORICAL HALL OF FAME

According to AAGPBL's website, one League highlight occurred when an estimated 10,000 people saw a 1946 Fourth of July double-header in South Bend. The League peaked in attendance during the 1948 season, which attracted 910,000 paid fans, but attendance unfortunately declined in the following years. However, the memory of that special time in baseball and U.S. history remains strong. Modern audiences are probably most familiar with the AAGPBL from the popular, critically acclaimed film *A League of Their Own* (1992), starring Geena Davis and Tom Hanks—who immortalized the famous line: "There's no crying in baseball!" which is ranked 54th on the American Film Institute's list of the greatest film quotes of all time. The film was selected for preservation in the United States National Film Registry by the Library of Congress as being "culturally, historically or aesthetically significant."

When it comes to the League's special place in our culture, AAGPBL probably states it best: "The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League gave over 600 women athletes the opportunity to play professional baseball and to play it at a level never before attained. The League operated from 1943 to 1954 and represents one of the most unique aspects of our nation's baseball history."

IRL

A LONG JOURNEY: THE DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL POLICY

The Tuskegee Airmen were asked to serve in the armed forces despite the awful racism prevalent in our country during that time. Although World War II feels like a long time ago, discrimination against minorities unfortunately still exists, as evident in the recently overturned "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) policy regarding the service of homosexuals in the military.

Signed into law in 1993 by President Bill Clinton, DADT prohibited military personnel from harassing or discriminating against closeted homosexual or bisexual service members or applicants; however, openly gay or bisexual individuals were barred from service. Here's a timeline that explains the journey of DADT from its predecessor legislation to its repeal:

1950: President Harry S. Truman signs the "Uniform Code of Military Justice," which sets up discharge rules for homosexual service members.

1982: President Ronald Reagan states in a defense directive that "homosexuality is incompatible with military service."

1992: During his run for president, Bill Clinton promises to lift the ban.

1993: DADT is introduced as a compromise. Congress eventually inserts text in a bill that requires the military to abide by regulations set up in President Ronald Reagan's defense directive, but President Clinton issues a directive that prohibits military applicants from being asked about their sexuality. Gay rights activist criticize the policy for forcing homosexuals into secrecy, preventing full acceptance.

2003: Two years after his presidency, Clinton calls for an end to DADT.

2008: By the 15-year anniversary of DADT, more than 12,000 officers had been discharged from the military for not hiding their homosexuality. Presidential candidate Barack Obama campaigns for a full repeal of the law, a pledge that was backed by a large majority of Americans, according to public opinion polls.

2010: In May, the House and a Senate committee approved an amendment that would end the ban but only after the Pentagon conducted a study to reveal how the repeal would affect armed forces' "military readiness." The report, released that November, concluded that service members found homosexuals in the military to be a low risk to the military's effectiveness.

2010: Senate Republicans filibustered a December 9 vote to repeal the DADT policy. House Democrats moved ahead with their own repeal.

2010: On December 15, House lawmakers again approved a bill to repeal DADT, resulting in new momentum for the initiative in the Senate. On December 18, the Senate voted 65-31 to repeal DADT sending to President Obama a bill ending the 17-year ban on openly gay men and women serving in the military. President Obama released a statement that said, "It is time to recognize that sacrifice, valor and integrity are no more defined by sexual orientation than they are by race or gender, religion or creed." Obama signed the bill on December 22. Before the law is able to be officially enacted, the Pentagon updates various policies and regulations as well as develops education and training programs for troops.

2011: The repeal takes effect on September 20, and DADT ends.