

A Guide to Allusions/Words Used in “*Poem For My Father*” by Quincy Troupe

By Sheila Brush

Quincy Troupe’s *Poem For My Father* uses many allusions and terms related to baseball, boxing, jazz and African American history. If you’re not a sports fan or a jazz fan, some of these may be new to you. Below is a copy of the poem with the lines numbered and allusions/words highlighted, followed by a list of explanations

Although Troupe doesn’t refer by name to “the old negro baseball league” until the next to the last line of the poem, Quincy T. Troupe Sr.’s history in the Negro Leagues is the basis for the poem. Until 1947, when Jackie Robinson famously broke the color barrier, baseball players of color were not allowed in the Major Leagues. If they wanted to make a living as ballplayers, they had to play in the Negro Leagues, often augmenting that work with work in Mexico, Canada, the Dominican Republic and Cuba, all of which had their own leagues. Quincy Troupe Sr., a skilled catcher and switch hitter, was one of those players.

Salaries and travel conditions in the Negro Leagues were often poor. Most of the players never had the opportunity to prove their skills against white players, although Troupe did play in some barnstorming exhibition games against white teams. However, after Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier, a few other former Negro League players did get the opportunity to play in the Major Leagues, even though they were past their prime playing years. Quincy Troupe Sr. made his Major League debut on April 30, 1952, with the Cleveland Indians. At 39, he was one of the oldest rookies in MLB history.

Troupe was also a great historian of baseball. After retiring, he authored a book *Twenty Years Too Soon: Prelude to Major-League Integrated Baseball*. He also compiled a valuable photograph and motion picture collection – in fact, he supplied almost all of the Negro League footage shown in the Ken Burns documentary *Baseball*

Glossary

Line 1: curve – a type of baseball pitch

Line 7: chitlin circuit – chitlins are a soul food dish made out of pig’s intestines; chitlin circuit was the name given to the small juke joints, bars and theaters, mainly in the South, where African Americans could perform during the Jim Crow era

Line 8: hipster – a jazz musician or fan

Line 9: bebopping a knee-dip stride in the charlie parker forties -- *Bebop* or *bop* is a style of jazz developed in the early-to-mid-1940s in the United States. The style features compositions characterized by a fast tempo, complex chord progressions with rapid chord changes and numerous changes of key, instrumental virtuosity, and improvisation.

Knee-dip stride – dance step

Charlie Parker -- an African American alto sax player and composer, considered along with Thelonius Monk and Dizzie Gillespie to be one of the creators of the bebop style of jazz. Miles Davis made his professional debut with the Charlie Parker Quintet from 1944-48.

Line 13: african obeah man -- Obeah is perhaps the oldest of all Afro-Creole religions in the Caribbean. Its name is derived from the Ashanti words Obay-ifo or Obeye, meaning wizard or witch. Obeah man means a medicine man or shaman.

Line 15: cherokee – One of the largest indigenous tribes at the time of European colonization of the Americas, the Cherokees originally lived in North Carolina and Georgia. In the 1830s-1850s, the US government drove them out of their ancestral homeland and forced them to move west of the Mississippi. Quincy T.

Troupe Sr.'s mother was Cherokee. (*Confounding The Color Line: The Indian-Black Experience in North America*)

Line 19: ink blotter news

Line 20: american blues -- Blues is a music genre and musical form which was originated in the Deep South of the United States by African Americans around the 1860s. It is associated with the newly acquired freedom of the former slaves. Blues incorporated spirituals, work songs, field hollers, shouts, chants, and rhymed simple narrative ballads. Many elements, such as the call-and-response format and the use of blue notes, can be traced back to the music of Africa. The origins of the blues are also closely related to the religious music of the Afro-American community, the spirituals. Early blues frequently took the form of a loose narrative, often relating the racial discrimination and other challenges experienced by African Americans. The blues form is ubiquitous in jazz, rhythm and blues and rock and roll.

Line 20: sponging—Lying about why something occurred or why you did something, so as to justify a bad event or action.

rococo – A very ornate decorative style

Line 30: yardbird solo – Yardbird was Charlie Parker's nickname

Line 31: riffing – playing a repeated musical phrase or rhythm typically supporting a solo improvisation (as in jazz)

Line 34: bud powell -- Earl Rudolph "Bud" Powell (1924-1966) was an American jazz pianist and composer. Along with Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, and Dizzy Gillespie, Powell was a leading figure in the development of modern jazz. His virtuosity led many to call him the Charlie Parker of the piano.

Line 35: josh gibson -- Joshua Gibson (1911-1947) was an African American baseball catcher who played in the Negro leagues. He also played in the Dominican League and the Mexican League and was a manager in the Puerto Rico Baseball League. Baseball historians consider Gibson among the best power hitters and catchers in baseball history. A spectacular power hitter, he was known as the "black Babe Ruth"; in fact, some fans at the time who saw both Ruth and Gibson play called Ruth "the white Josh Gibson". He never played in the Major League. In 1972, he became the second Negro league player to be inducted in the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

Line 41: fastball – baseball pitch

Line 41: slider – baseball pitch

Line 44: satchel paige – Leroy Robert "Satchel" Paige (1906-1982), an African American professional baseball pitcher, was one of the most famous and successful players in the Negro leagues. He and Troupe Sr. played with and against each other and were friends for many years. At age 42 in 1948, Paige made his debut for the Cleveland Indians; to this day, this makes him the oldest debutant in Major League history. Paige was the first black pitcher to play in the American League and the seventh black player to play in Major League Baseball. In 1948, he became the first former Negro League player to pitch in the World Series. His career spanned five decades; he retired in 1965 at the age of 59, after pitching his last game against the Boston Red Sox. In 1971, Paige became the first African American to be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Line 44: hesitation pitch – a pitch developed by Satchel Paige in the 40s to destroy hitters' timing. He used it for years in the Negro Leagues, but it was declared illegal in the Major Leagues.

Line 49: the brown bomber – Nickname given to Joe Louis (1924-1981) an African American professional boxer who competed from 1934 to 1951. Louis is widely regarded as one of the greatest and most influential boxers of all time. He reigned as the world heavyweight champion from 1937 until 1949. He was known for his right cross.

Louis's cultural impact was felt well outside the ring. He is widely regarded as the first person of African American descent to achieve the status of a nationwide hero within the United States, and was also a focal point of anti-Nazi sentiment leading up to and during World War II because of his historic rematch with German boxer Max Schmeling in 1938. He was instrumental in integrating the game of golf, breaking the sport's color barrier in America by appearing under a sponsor's exemption in a PGA event in 1952.

Line 50: sugar ray robinson – Sugar Ray Robinson (May 3, 1921 – April 12, 1989), was an African American professional boxer who competed from 1940 to 1965. Often regarded as the greatest boxer of all time, pound-for-pound, he was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1990. He was known for his left hook, which is the best punch to throw for a knock-out.

Line 51-52: chono pozo -- Luciano Pozo González (1915-1948), known professionally as Chano Pozo, was a Cuban jazz percussionist, singer, dancer, and composer. Despite only living to age 33, he played a major role in the founding of Latin jazz. He co-wrote some of Dizzy Gillespie's Latin-flavored compositions and was the first Latin percussionist in Gillespie's band.

Line 52: cuban conga -- ^[1]_[SEP]The Cuban conga drum is a narrow, single-head drum that comes in a variety of heights and diameters. The conga's closest, most recognizable predecessor is the makúta drum, a tall, barrel shaped drum used in private religious ceremonies of Bantu origin. The conga drum also has some traceable Nigerian roots in the Lucumí bembé drum, a slightly smaller conga-like drum. The conga drum was introduced in Cuba by the thousands of enslaved Africans brought over predominantly from the Bantu-speaking Congo region of Africa during the 17th and 18th centuries. Towards the end of the 19th century, rumba and other forms of drum-centric music began to develop, and alongside them, the conga drums and other respective instruments. During the 1930s, the conga drum became a part of the ensemble format used for playing the popular Cuban dance genre known as Son, and later went on to make an enormous impact on American Jazz music in the 1930s and 40s.

Line 53: cool papa bell jumping into bed before the lights went out -- James Thomas "Cool Papa" Bell (1903-1991) was an African American center fielder in Negro league baseball from 1922 to 1946. He is considered to have been one of the fastest men ever to play baseball. Stories of his base running speed are legion, advancing two and even three bases on a bunt and beating out tappers back to the pitcher. Satchel Paige is the person who told the story about sharing a room with Cool Papa and seeing him flip the light switch and then jump into bed before the light went out. Bell was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1974.