

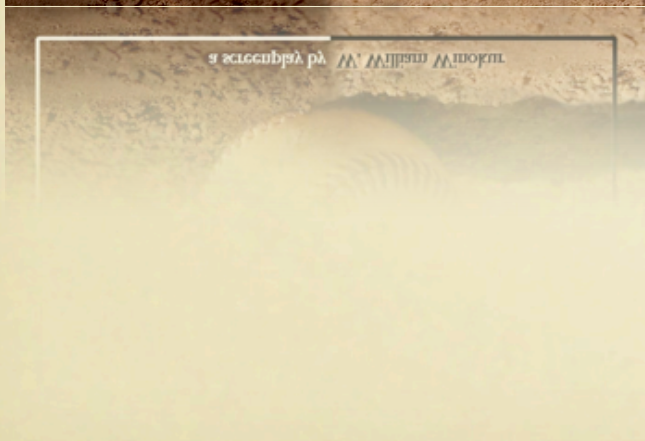
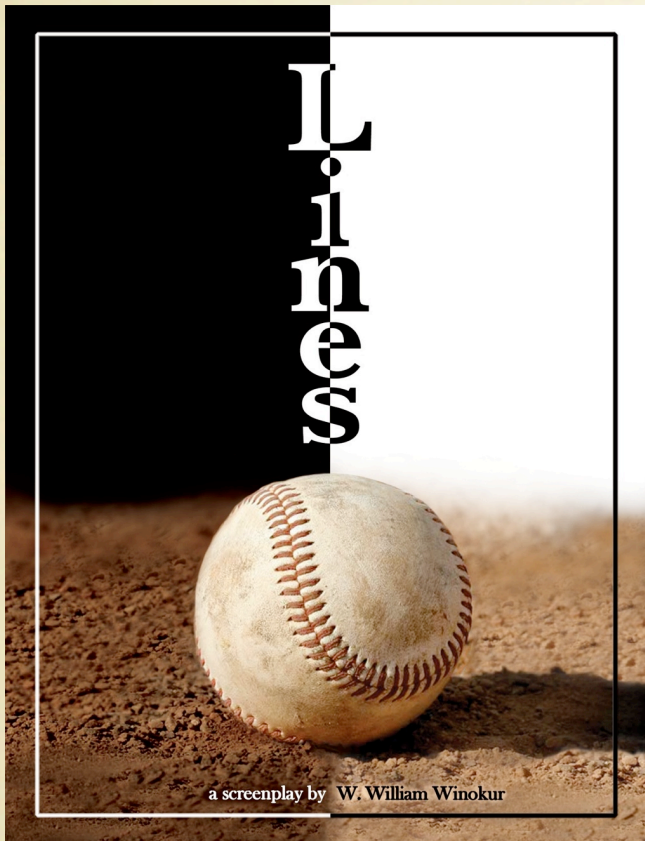
SYNOPSIS

Inspired by a true story, *Lines* tells the tale of an unlikely friendship that is forged, lost and resurrected.

African American Willie Kendricks and Louis Buchner, the son of German immigrants, meet on a sandlot in Pittsburgh's East Hill. The Great Depression is in full swing. Despite the social segregation that surrounds them, they become friends, and share a dream of playing professional baseball. But the Major Leagues aren't open to African American ballplayers, no matter how gifted. Even during WWII, when many of these ballplayers join the armed forces and left rosters depleted, teams preferred to recruit midgets and one-armed white players rather than allow the color line to be crossed.

Undaunted, Willie joins the legendary Homestead Grays. His naivety is tested as the Grays barnstorm through the deep South. Back home in Pittsburgh, as both Louis and Willie prepare to ship off to war, there is a tragedy in the local mine which claims the lives of both of their fathers. Racially motivated blame for the accident drives a chasm in their friendship. While a medic in the 761st Black Panthers, Willie is recruited by the Shadowmen—an all-black baseball team playing in the European Theatre of Operations. A chance encounter between the two men's platoons in the Ardennes Forest brings their rift to a nearly irreversible end.

In a championship series against an all-white Third Army team—played in front of 50,000 spectators at Nuremburg's Soldier Field—their friendship is given one last chance to heal, but each must make sacrifices they had never dreamed possible.



The year is 1932. Ten year old Willie Kendricks and Louis Buchner meet on a sandlot in one of Pittsburgh's poorest neighborhoods. Years earlier, Willie's father moved his family from Alabama in search of employment in the industrial North. Louis is a second generation American--his grandfather came from Germany at the turn of the twentieth century. Both boy's fathers work the mines of the Susquehanna Valley. To the white union laborers like Louis' father, these relocated blacks from the South are a threat to their jobs. Though Pennsylvania was a "free" Northern state, segregation is still society's norm. Despite these class distinctions, Louis and Willie's love of baseball and their youthful innocence makes them fast friends.

One day, Louis is goaded into an abandoned mine by several of his white friends. The entrance caves in and his "friends" quickly take flight. Through a small hole in the darkness, Willie's hand reaches in to rescue a tearful Louis from harm. The two boys swear to be blood brothers forever.



Homestead Grays - Champions of 1941

With Willie on the sandlot's mound and Louis as his catcher, they spend hours honing their skills, dreaming of playing professional baseball. Willie is clearly the better ballplayer, but only Louis can ever hope to play in baseball's Major League. Though the "Gentlemen's Agreement" to exclude blacks from was never written, it was a line as impossible to cross as if it had been made of cement.

As the years pass, and their friendship grows, Willie earns a position on the legendary Negro League team, the Homestead Grays. Playing with the likes of Satchel Paige, Cool Papa Bell, Ted "Double Duty" Radcliffe, Buck Leonard and Josh Gibson, teams like the Grays and Monarchs fielded some of the greatest players to ever play the game. There were many in "white" society who were bothered by Major League Baseball's exclusionary policies, but none of the owners of Major League clubs seem willing to change the status quo. Louis, not subject to baseball's color line, is drafted by the Pittsburgh Pirates farm team.

The Homestead Grays hit the road, touring the South in a series of tournaments known as barnstorming. Though Willie has had to deal with bigotry his whole life, little prepares him for the depth of racial hatreds that he experiences in the Deep South. But though their bus often gets pelted, and they are often denied room and board, times are not all bad for Willie and his traveling teammates. The Grays are welcomed as heroes in many of the black neighborhoods and rural towns they visit. In one such layover, Willie falls for a beautiful young woman whose dad knew Willie's father and his brief tenure with the Birmingham Black Barons.

Back in Pittsburgh, a tragic mine collapse claims the lives of Louis and Willie's fathers. Though Willie's father had nothing to do with the accident, he and other black miners are blamed. Sadly, even Louis gets caught up in the need to find fault for the tragedy, and buys into management's explanation of events surrounding the disaster. Unbeknownst to Louis, it was his own father's dereliction of duty that caused the deaths of a dozen miners.

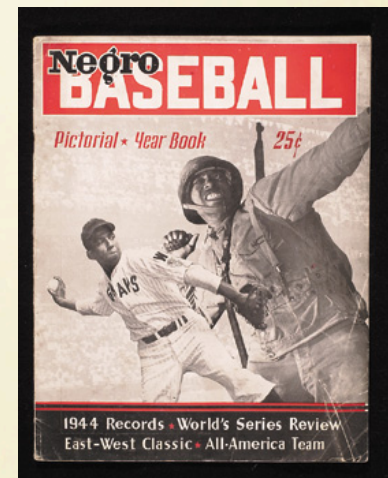




Tensions continue to run high in the mines, but such hostility is soon dwarfed by America's involvement in the war raging in Europe and the Pacific. Willie and Louis both enlist and just like baseball at home, the armed forces refuse to integrate blacks.

Willie serves in the 761st Tank Battalion—the “Black Panthers,” while Louis is a sniper in a rifle company in the Third Army. Arriving in France, via Omaha Beach, the Black Panthers are given the following greeting by Lt. Gen. George S. Patton: “Men, you're the first Negro tankers to ever fight in the American Army. I would never have asked for you if you weren't good. I have nothing but the best in my Army. I don't care what color you are as long as you go up there and kill those Kraut sons of bitches.”

While some in America questioned whether professional sports should continue given the gravity of the War effort, President Roosevelt felt strongly that the national pastime was important for morale. Hundreds of Major League players however, were enlisting and depleting their teams' roster. Instead of tapping the enormous talent pool of black ballplayers, the Major Leagues chose to draft white players, many of which had questionable ability (including midgets and several one-armed players). Paraphrasing a writer of the time, “Blacks could appear on the killed-in-action lists of Pearl Harbor, but God forbid their names appeared on a Major League box score.”



By default, Willie becomes his platoon's medic. He takes his responsibility very seriously, and while he has no formal training, he is a naturally caring and constantly puts himself in harms way to help his fallen comrades.

Louis and Willie's paths cross as the Allies press their advance across the fabled Siegfried Line. How far apart their lives have grown becomes quickly evident. One of Louis' men has been gravely wounded. His mates refuse to let a black man touch him, even if that man is a medic. Louis senses the injustice and risk to his comrade, but he remains silent. His commanding officer sends Louis on a mission to bring back a white medic from headquarters.

While waiting, the wounded G.I. recognizes Willie and pleads with him for aid. Willie saves the his life, though his wounds will soon deprive him of his sight. By the time Louis returns, Willie confronts him saying that when it comes to equality, either Louis is part of the solution or part of the problem. Louis tries to apologize, but Willie cuts him short and says the only apology should be to the wounded G.I. who would have bled to death waiting for a white medic.

Not only did baseball at home carry on, but it even followed the G.I.s to war. Besides tanks, guns and bullets, millions of bats, gloves and baseballs were shipped overseas by the War Department. By mid-summer of 1945, over 200,000 G.I.s (the largest baseball league of all time) were competing in the Pacific and European Theaters of Operation (ETO). Willie runs into some of his teammates from the Homestead Grays who have formed a team from African American units of the Third Army called the "Shadowmen." They are in need of a second pitcher, and Willie is the answer to their prayers.

The War finally ends, but millions of soldiers remain in Germany as an occupying force. The two best teams in the Third Army, the 71st Division (the Red Circles) and the Shadowmen will face off in the ETO Championships. The series will be played at Soldier's Field in Nuremberg, Germany. A few years earlier, the very same stadium hosted massive Nazi rallies--now Allied tanks ringed the field. The first four games are hotly contested and leave the teams with two victories apiece. Willie will take the mound for the Shadowmen in the fifth and deciding game.



The evening before the game, several of Willie's teammates, including their starting catcher, are wounded when a freshly uncovered shell is accidentally detonated. The Shadowmen's aging coach was once a catcher, but it's clear he is not up for the physical demands of such an important game.

But there is someone else who can play catcher at the level required, there's just one problem--he's white.

Louis has returned to Germany, on his own dime, after an emotional meeting back home with the soldier Willie saved. The blinded G.I. opens Louis' eyes to the truth about the mining disaster that claimed his father's life. Louis knows how badly he has treated his childhood friend and prays that he will have one more chance to make amends. Louis will cross the color and suit up for the Shadowmen.



Spitting on his shoes and aiming for his head when he's up—Louis' opponents are going to take every opportunity to show their disdain for his decision. In the seventh, with the 71st Division up by a run, a light rain begins to fall. The manager of the Red Circles pressures the umpire to call the game; guaranteeing victory for his team. After a heated exchange, the white players, touched by the tenacious play of the Shadowmen and the noble stance that Louis made, choose to play on in spite of the ump's ruling. They want to win the game legitimately, or not at all. The men will settle their differences on the diamond.

In a hard collision at home plate, Louis badly aggravates a shoulder wound. If he keeps playing, he may cause permanent damage which, at the very least, would end his baseball career with the Pittsburgh Pirates. Louis realizes that this is his chance to prove the mettle of his friendship. Meanwhile, a scout sent by Branch Rickey of the Brooklyn Dodgers has approached Willie in the dugout with an unusual proposition. The Dodgers are searching for the first African American to break the color line since the 1890s.

Will either man achieve his dream to play in the Major Leagues, or has each found a higher purpose through life's trials and tribulations?

