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# 7

## INTRACITY TEAM RELOCATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN BALTIMORE

*Jessica R. Murfree and Walker J. Ross*

Both the playing of sports as well as the business of sports have pronounced impacts on the natural environment (McCullough et al., 2020). Some of the ways in which sport changes the natural environment around it include altering landscapes to accommodate playing fields, constructing venues to host events, increasing transportation to competitions, requiring the consumption of resources, and creating harmful byproducts (e.g., waste, pollution, and other emissions). These effects burden the communities that host sport teams and events, but these impacts are not necessarily distributed equally. Some people and some communities have historically experienced more hardship than others as a result of the environmental impact of sport and will continue to do so as long as injustices exist. Baltimore, Maryland, offers a case of this unequal distribution of environmental impacts as a result of professional sport teams—particularly due to the relocation of the Baltimore Orioles and Ravens from predominantly White, suburban Baltimore to the city center, where the revitalization efforts will largely benefit White residents over the non-White residents in nearby neighborhoods. In this chapter, we explore the history of sport team intracity relocation and environmental discrimination in Baltimore. Additionally, we provide a discussion on what can be learned from examining this community.

### **Stadium Relocation in Baltimore**

The history of sport in Baltimore spans multiple sports and events, from the glamour of the Preakness Stakes to the physicality of lacrosse. Still, perhaps no two sports represent the history of professional sport in Baltimore better than baseball and football. As home to the Baltimore Orioles of MLB and the Baltimore Ravens of the NFL, Baltimore has carved out its place in American sport history through the multiple World Series and Super Bowl championships that each club has won.

While the Orioles have maintained a presence in Baltimore since 1954, football has taken several forms in Baltimore. Before the Ravens moved from Cleveland to Baltimore in 1996, the Colts resided in Baltimore from 1953 (there were previous iterations of the Colts prior to this) through 1984, when the team infamously moved to Indianapolis overnight (Wilson, 2014). All three teams (Orioles, Colts, and Ravens) at one time or another played in and shared a home field, Memorial Stadium, which is one of the subjects of this chapter.

Opened in its final form in 1949, Memorial Stadium was a multipurpose venue built for hosting both football and baseball in the Ednor Gardens–Lakeside neighborhood of northeast Baltimore. This residential neighborhood is just outside of the city center of Baltimore, which was on trend for a time when many cities were building stadiums in suburban areas. It was a suitable host for both teams until then—Colts owner Robert Irsay began negotiations with the City of Baltimore improve to the venue or construct a new one. When those negotiations failed, Irsay moved the Colts overnight to Indianapolis in 1984, which rattled local politicians and citizens alike. Suffering from this loss of the Colts, local politicians immediately planned a new stadium in a former warehouse district and railyards in downtown Baltimore for the Orioles. This ballpark, Oriole Park at Camden Yards, opened in 1992 (Smith, 2001).



**FIGURE 7.1** Baltimore Memorial Stadium. (Photo by James W. Rosenthal, Historic American Buildings Survey, Library of Congress)



**FIGURE 7.2** Oriole Park at Camden Yards. (Photo by Chris6d is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0)

The NFL returned to Memorial Stadium in 1996, when Cleveland Browns owner Art Modell relocated the franchise to Baltimore as the Ravens. After two seasons, the Ravens opened a new downtown stadium next to Oriole Park at Camden Yards. The Orioles and Ravens still occupy these stadiums today, while Memorial Stadium was finally demolished in 2002 after several years of abandonment.

The Orioles and Ravens moved approximately 3.5 miles from the Ednor Gardens-Lakeside neighborhood to downtown Baltimore. Their moves followed a trend of professional sports teams relocating from the suburban outskirts to new facilities in the hearts of cities (Schneider, 2018). The moves in Baltimore were largely touted as being the result of the declining status of Memorial Stadium as well as a desire to keep Baltimore as a major sport city (Smith, 2001). Many teams might suggest that their intracity stadium moves are due to accessible land, desired economic opportunities, or locations closer to fanbases, but it is possible that these stadium moves are also partially the result of environmental discrimination (Banzhaf et al., 2019). The remainder of this chapter explores this concept in the case of the Orioles, Ravens, and the city of Baltimore.

## Civil Rights and Baltimore

From the 1830s, when both enslaved and free people of color shared the community, to 2015 protests outside of Oriole Park after the murder of Freddie Gray

(Johnson, 2015), Baltimore has been influenced by movements for civil rights throughout its history. The city saw decades of segregation and social injustice, both *de jure* and *de facto*, via Jim Crow laws, redlining of Black residents, and gentrification (Olson, 1997). In the 1960s and 1970s, White residents fled the city, resulting in Black residents comprising the majority of the population. Yet, during this period, Black residents represented less than 30% of city council membership (Pietila, 1979). Black residents constantly fought discriminatory policies and practices. Over time, Black residents in Baltimore did have victories in their long fight for civil rights through national-level policy changes in the form of the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, but this fight was never completely over. Unfortunately, many Black households still experience deep economic and social inequity today.

There are numerous specific examples of discrimination in public life over the course of Baltimore's history in schools, housing, policing, and employment. These elements of racial discrimination actively contribute to the environmental injustices in Baltimore. A few examples related to environmental injustice are worth highlighting for this chapter. Highway projects touted to bring urban renewal and economic activity to Baltimore disproportionately displaced and segregated Black neighborhoods, as did other highway projects across the United States (Archer, 2021). This not only destroyed these neighborhoods, but it also placed a pollution burden upon these neighborhoods located so close to busy highways. Proximity to traffic is considered an indicator of environmental justice from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Discrimination also existed in many areas of sport and recreation, including access to parks, playgrounds, basketball courts, tennis courts, pools, and beaches. For example, Black golfers were limited in their access to courses or even barred completely (Wells et al., 2008). Citywide protests and lawsuits in the 1940s and 1950s led to courts overturning Baltimore policies on racial segregation in parks and pools (Wiltse, 2009). Indeed, the history of Baltimore is very much a history of discrimination and the fight against this discrimination. With this history in mind, we can begin to take a deep dive into the concept of environmental discrimination within this community.

## **Environmental Discrimination and Injustice in Baltimore**

Ultimately, societal factors that altered the landscape of the city of Baltimore, including their major teams' movement within the city, have resulted in further racial discrimination. As seen through the Civil Rights Movement, where there is racial discrimination of any kind, there are social and environmental injustices. White flight (and perhaps White return, as defined below), the gentrification of the city's neighborhoods, and environmental racism all have ties to the Orioles' and Ravens' short-distance relocation and contribute to such injustice. As detailed in the sections below, these byproducts of historical racial segregation have resulted in increased environmental discrimination.

### ***The Round Trip of White Flight***

White flight refers to the large-scale migration of White people from urban to suburban areas in the 1950s–70s, coinciding with the American Civil Rights movement. The term “flight” denotes how suddenly and swiftly the movement to the suburbs took place, as more and more Black and Brown people came to reside and work in city centers. By the 1970s, the White majority in the heart of Baltimore had dissipated (Short, 2006). Across the United States, Black populations’ “Great Migration” inward to the heart of metropolitan cities from more rural areas was simply a byproduct of opportunity. Elements of the perfect storm that produced the explosion in Baltimore’s Black population included White affluence and residential mobility, a decline in European immigration due to the World Wars, and plenty of available manufacturing and transit jobs that brought more appeal than agricultural labor (Cassie, n.d.; Depro et al., 2015; Frey, 1980).

The end of World War II saw industrial epicenters like Baltimore surge in economic productivity, a time when business and political leaders in the area hunted for major-league sport franchises to echo such growth. However, Miller (1992) wrote, “After the war, middle-class whites had accelerated their flight to the suburbs. With them went industry, jobs, and a large proportion of the city’s tax revenues” (p. 188). As a simultaneous consequence, Baltimore’s opportunities for employment siphoned more Black people into the city while also experiencing more poverty, crime, and racial tension. The search for major-league teams to compete in Baltimore was viewed explicitly as a way to invest in, revitalize, and improve the city’s appearance, or in more certain terms, bring wealthy White people back—and it did.

More recently, the selective nature, or freedom, of White mobility in the United States has seen a return to city centers, which is mirrored in today’s urban gentrification and discussed in the next section (Zapatka & Beck, 2021). In fact, we suggest that like White flight, there is a more recent phenomenon we will call *White return*: as the heart of Baltimore’s Black population declines, the affluent White millennial population rises (Yeip, 2015). By 2010, and as Baltimore’s entire population diminished, White Americans made up less than 30% of Baltimore’s population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). However, the ones returning, perhaps inpouring, are White millennials. Specifically, Baltimore is seeing a resurgence in young (mid–20s and 30s), educated, White people who move for work and can afford the luxury apartments in places where industries once stood (Zhang, 2019). Referred to as a “disappearing act” by David McFadden (2018) for the Associated Press, Baltimore’s Black roots are steadily deteriorating. Likewise, Michael Snidal (2017) of Baltimore’s Citizens Planning and Housing Association, Inc. (CPHA) penned an op-ed to the *Baltimore Sun* calling for the city to enforce and uphold equitable policies to combat “reverse migration” (para. 3) and “Black flight” (para. 1).

### ***Gentrifying Baltimore and Losing Baltimoreans***

Typically, the gentrification process leads to communities, neighborhoods, or entire cities displacing groups of people. More often than not, that exchange has been lower socioeconomic communities for wealthier communities. Given the overlap of socioeconomic status and race in America, that exchange is also traditionally poorer, marginalized, communities of color for more affluent White communities. This mirrors Baltimore's desire to *revitalize* the city with the attraction of major-league sports. However, the actions to gentrify Baltimore's neighborhoods are characterized as upgrading and rejuvenation (McFadden, 2018). Yet, compared to other gentrified cities in the United States, Baltimore is fairly unique. Where most cities gentrify and displace communities of color, mostly White neighborhoods in Baltimore are the ones being gentrified—a commitment to continuously invest in White communities, people, schools, and businesses (Meehan, 2019). Not only does this uphold segregated norms of decades past but it also attracts wealthier White people to already predominantly White neighborhoods.

In some regards, gentrification is seen as a good, necessary thing. Often, gentrification leads to increased home values, education rates, and income levels, all considered positive community factors (Mullenbach & Baker, 2020). For example, the Abell Foundation, a Baltimore organization dedicated to social, economic, and environmental preservation, contrasted gentrification with neighborhood decline despite acknowledging Baltimore's racial, political, and economic polarization (Mallach, 2020). Yet, the close association of gentrification with race, and frankly the optics of that association, are largely why it is such a contested issue. Since the acquisition of major-league football and baseball teams, Baltimore's city leadership has given numerous indications that the goal of investment has been in White communities and for White people. As opposed to actively displacing families belonging to minoritized racial groups and marginalized socioeconomic groups, Baltimore's gentrification deliberately attracts younger White professionals who are flocking into the city (Zhang, 2019).

As discussed, (un)intentional racial segregation practices are maintained so long as the same patterns of gentrification persist. This also helps us explain why more and more Black and Brown families are leaving the Baltimore area altogether (Zhang, 2019). It is no surprise that Baltimore's census data is seeing a decline in poorer White families, Black individuals and families, and Latinx individuals and families (Mallach, 2020). Even in an era post legal racial segregation, urban planning decisions still contribute to racially divided trends, team relocations included. City decision-making around where to build major-league stadiums—which includes decisions on where to develop and invest money in supporting the teams—illustrates these practices. Additionally, race-based decision-making disguised as renewing or upgrading neighborhoods propagates environmental justice issues where a city's major sport teams and venues attract and follow the movement of its affluent residents and employers. That is why Camden Yards, formerly industrial warehouses and railyards, and today's home of the Orioles and Ravens, is credited as being the

site of Baltimore's urban *revival*, a "strategic hamlet of gentrification and displacement ... a [cathedral] to economic and racial apartheid" (Zirin, 2015, para. 4).

### ***Yesterday's Discrimination Leading to Today's Injustices***

Through the Great Depression and both World Wars, American sports grew as a refuge for participants and spectators alike. These are some reasons why sport in the United States remains so revered and essential to American culture. The once-booming Black urban population of 1940s Baltimore saw the cultural amplification of Negro Leagues baseball and the murmurings of a soon-to-be integrated Major League as a hopeful forecast of upward mobility and equality (Leffler, 1992). Memorial Stadium brought such hopeful excitement to the city: a new, multiuse football and baseball park to rival other large sport markets like New York City and Philadelphia. However, Black baseball teams and fans were often priced out of competing at Memorial Stadium, and still had to find other opportunities for equitable play. The alternative for Black baseball enthusiasts and the Negro Leagues' Black Sox was an additional stadium, Maryland Baseball Park, located in a rocky, unlit area that was either expensive to commute to or unsafe to walk to (Leffler, 1992). The former Maryland Baseball Park site is just a few blocks away from M&T Bank Stadium, the current home of the Baltimore Ravens.

When the Orioles and Ravens relocated to their respective parks at Camden Yards in the mid-1990s, after the Ravens spent just two seasons at Memorial Stadium, the plot that remained sat empty for four years. This abandonment coincided with the demographic shift in the neighborhoods surrounding Memorial Stadium, that is, *White return*. Eventually, the stadium was demolished, and the area was transformed into many things, including senior-living apartment complexes, a YMCA, a predominantly Black all-girls high school with a history of police brutality ("Eastern High School," 1970), and portions of Johns Hopkins University and medical centers (Kelly, 2021). Additionally, the area had places for dining, shopping, and business, among others.

Today, the area where Black Baltimoreans were discouraged from occupying space and playing baseball is now almost fully a retirement community with plans for a new \$15.3-million hospice care center (Kelly, 2021). How a city landscape changes over time helps explain the environmental injustices that remain. For example, Memorial Stadium-area neighborhoods fall in the 80–90th percentiles on the EPA's People of Color Population Index. Likewise, the Memorial Stadium site falls in the 95–100th percentiles on their Environmental Justice Demographic Index, which accounts for a cumulative score for areas' low-income and minority percentages. On the contrary, the Camden Yards site, where the Orioles and Ravens currently compete, sits at the 60th-and-below percentiles on the People of Color Index and between the 60–90th percentiles on the Demographic Index (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2021).

Areas experiencing urban and economic blight are the spaces that historically need more safe, well-lit, affordable, and accessible greenspaces for sports, recreation, and leisure activities (Floyd & Johnson, 2002; Mullenbach & Baker, 2020). An opportunity to build and invest in such space existed as Memorial Stadium



began to deteriorate structurally. When Memorial Stadium was thriving, Black Baltimoreans could neither live in the area nor play baseball there. Due to the teams' relocation and the area shifting to a predominantly Black neighborhood, the opportunity for accessible sport and recreation was short-lived as the area became used for other purposes (Noor et al., 2021). For example, access to the YMCA sport and recreation services requires a paid membership.

In the case of Baltimore, it becomes easy to see how communities bearing disproportionate burdens of harmful environmental effects are affected by teams' intracity relocation. Essentially, a wake of injustice can be left by this movement. Ultimately, centuries of racially discriminatory practices contributed to the environmental injustices accentuated by the Orioles and Ravens moving to Camden Yards. As mentioned, there is a myriad of reasons why professional sport teams relocate. Regardless of their intentions, there are greater, observable socio-environmental symptoms of team and venue relocation that mirror and accentuate historical discrimination practices in the United States still to this day. For example, the lasting effects of racial segregation ordinances still led to minimal neighborhood integration in Baltimore (Yeip, 2015). Likewise, Boone and colleagues (2007) explored environmental injustices related to the distribution of parks and greenspaces in Baltimore and found the neglected and developed areas remain split along historical, racial boundaries. These boundaries are well-defined in Baltimore and are referred to as the "Black butterfly and the White 'L'"—indicative of the two shapes made on the map of Baltimore by over a century of racism in the city's policies and government (Brown, 2016). To this day, despite some line-blurring, the butterfly and *L* shapes persevere (Yeip, 2015).

Remaining outcomes of a racially segregated Baltimore contribute to extensive environmental injustices beyond team relocation. For example, White neighborhoods in Baltimore benefit from concentrated tax increment financing (or TIF) that brings hundreds of millions of dollars to those areas, public schools with greater access to resources, areas protected from highways and major polluters, and access opportunities such as bikeshares and greenways (Brown, 2016). Likewise, Black neighborhoods are often under-resourced, redlined, food deserts plagued by police brutality.

### ***Environmental Injustice via Urban Decay and Renewal***

One of the observed impacts of the intracity relocation of the Orioles and Ravens is the notion of urban decay and gentrification around the stadium itself and subsequent environmental changes. Urban decay is considered to be when a functioning city or part of a city begins to lose functional ability (Grogan & Proscio, 2001). It is often marked by population decline, loss of jobs, instability, increased pollution, deterioration of buildings and infrastructure, and a general decrease in the quality of life. Additionally, it is associated with the previously mentioned White flight. Addressing urban decay requires urban renewal: investing in the construction of homes, businesses, and other projects through targeted investment to bring economic stability to an area (Caves, 2004). However,

decision-making regarding such investment often highlights existing social and environmental inequities. Urban renewal often creates gentrification that has been shown to help White residents and harm non-White residents (Parks, 2016). Thus, White residents who have been afforded social mobility (i.e., through wealth and good health) may return to these renewed areas where newer, higher-value spaces are now available.

At the time of the Memorial Stadium construction, Ednor Gardens-Lakeside was an established, pristine, and stable community. The Waverly neighborhood on the western edge of the stadium was likewise experiencing planned residential and commercial growth as the city center declined. This area was a desirable location for the stadium as it would protect the value of the surrounding properties while providing a safe environment for mostly White spectators. However, as the teams left and Memorial Stadium deteriorated, so did the neighborhood around it. By leaving the Ednor Gardens-Lakeside neighborhood, both teams left behind a blighted stadium that only contributed to the environmental decline of the immediate blocks around the stadium. What were once bustling parks and playgrounds became unmanaged plots and high-density housing.

Ultimately, both teams moved only a couple of miles to the city center of Baltimore just west of the Inner Harbor, an area that was previously an industrial site, dockyards, and railyards. This was an area of urban decay with all of the previously mentioned markings (including pollution and environmental degradation), but it was already set on a path of renewal by creating greenspaces, recreational areas, and office developments. These stadium projects were set to be part of the efforts to renew one specific section of this area, but with these renewal efforts came the prospect of gentrification. These renewal efforts would not benefit Black and Brown residents in nearby neighborhoods. Instead, it was a reinvestment in an already predominantly White area within the city. The city's reinvestments created further opportunities for young, affluent, White individuals to move in. Thus, the environmental restoration efforts achieved as a result of the renewal were not for the previous residents as much as it was for new residents moving in.

Back in Ednor Gardens-Lakeside, Memorial Stadium sat empty for several years and turned into a nuisance that had to be demolished. The area that was once unwelcoming to Black residents and professional baseball players had since seen a shift in racial demographics. Black flight (away from the heart of Baltimore) and White return (to the city center) transitioned Ednor Gardens-Lakeside into a predominantly people of color neighborhood. In Memorial Stadium's place, the area was leveled and replaced with a YMCA, playground, youth baseball field, apartments, and businesses (Stetka, 2020). Stadium Place, as it is now called, is a renewal effort of the Memorial Stadium site that will hopefully benefit the residents of the neighborhood in an environmentally just way for generations to come, and not further encourage the cyclical process attracting and supporting solely newer, White residents.

## Conclusion

The once brand-new Camden Yards area is now considered historical and revered, but not everyone was excited about the move. As Baltimore's teams began to look elsewhere in the city for stadiums, Memorial Stadium's neighbors began to worry about a changing neighborhood resulting from the economic impact lost—particularly the loss of stadium-supported businesses and workers moving out (Traum, 2007). The demolition of Memorial Stadium and the teams' relocations toward Baltimore's Inner Harbor struck mostly a nostalgic response from opposing residents and fans. Memories of a memorial for war veterans coupled with a familiar fondness toward America's favorite pastime sparked a longing for tradition through the Waverly and Ednor Gardens-Lakeside communities (Degraci, 1991). While some were excited for an opportunity for *upscale* retail and dining in their quintessential neighborhood, others were concerned about what those developments would do to their community (WBAL-TV 11 Baltimore, 2022). However, the motive for the Maryland Stadium Authority to build in the Camden Yards district was not based on memories or nostalgia, but an economic opportunity that fell on racial lines (Durlington et al., 2009; Gearhart & Hunt, 2000). Opposition to the Ravens' later development in Camden Yards was muddled by the excitement for the NFL to return to Baltimore in a more permanent way, again highlighting the economic motivation above the community's financial and environmental burdens (Whiteside, 1996). It is hard to ignore that an increasingly diverse neighborhood was abandoned, leaving behind a deteriorating stadium in favor of a new development in a gentrifying area of Baltimore that is rapidly becoming less diverse.

Although various factors can explain why Baltimore's major men's professional sport teams relocated and why racial discrimination in Baltimore has led to demographic shifts within its neighborhoods, the environment may have played a role in these changes. Namely, that access to a clean environment for sport and recreational opportunities varies according to the racial composition of neighborhoods. Investment made in improving environmental resources in the benefit of sport prioritizes White residents, both current and future. Both the Orioles and Ravens have played a role in the environmental transformation of their communities via the original opening of Memorial Stadium, the decline of Memorial Stadium, and their relocation to Camden Yards. The new venues have led to new investments in the area that have improved environmental access and amenities to the benefit of White residents in both neighborhoods at different periods. However, in the decline and abandonment of the Memorial Stadium site, an environmental nuisance was left to a newly Black neighborhood. Regardless of intentionality, it is without a doubt that the burdens of environmental degradation are most harmfully felt in non-White communities. The history of the Orioles and Ravens in Baltimore is a striking example of this phenomenon.

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