

Give Me A “Ball Park Figure”:
Creating Civic Narratives Through Stadium Building in Newark, New Jersey

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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I came to this project interested in the question, what can narratives about baseball stadiums reveal about the development of Newark, NJ spanning the twentieth century? From this question arose an exploration of narratives that offered insight into competing interests within the city, definitions of civicness, the employment of nostalgia as an argumentative strategy, and how urban development plans are constructed and sold to citizens. The primary focus of this history is centered on two baseball stadiums in Newark, NJ, Ruppert Stadium, built in 1926 and demolished in 1967 and Bears and Eagles Riverfront Stadium, completed in 1999, sold in 2016, and is now slated to be replaced with mixed use retail space and condominiums. The narratives fashioned to support both stadiums construction and maintenance are strikingly similar. For both stadiums, for over a century, Newark mayors, councilmen, successful businessmen, community organizers, newspaper columnists and reporters, and local citizens all craft, repurpose, and used these civic narratives to further their own varied agendas. It is through these crafted narratives about these stadiums that I explore the competing views of the city and the competing visions for its future.

For my mom, my life-long cheerleader

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1926. Concrete and steel. Wrap your eyes around 435 feet of frontage three stories high. Inside, enclosed by sixteen-feet high concrete walls. Steel towers by 1930, let there be light. Walk through one of the six turnstiles; you enter into the large rotunda where wide runways lead you down to your section. Right, left, behind, grandstands, 15,000, bleachers, 2,000. Pay your 40 cents for a bleacher seat; it's over on your left. Don't worry you will have a fine view, even the furthest bleacher seat allows you to be only 175 feet away from home plate. Headed for the grandstand? Once you put your 65 cents down you head to the right, situated one floor under the club offices. It was 85 cents for the box seats, not that you could afford it, but it's behind home plate and on the third baseline. Look out. Brown dirt then the green expanse. Sod, irrigation hidden beneath. Look out further, the scoreboard, the clock on top. Come back in, back to the dirt, with 306 feet chalk foul lines on each side, three plastic pads, three bases, come closer, an isosceles right pentagon, home plate. Home. 26 Wilson Avenue, Newark, New Jersey.

1999. Concrete and steel. A brick façade, 300,000 bricks in all. 9,000 cubic yards of concrete and 700 tons of structural steel. Inside, three plastic pads, three bases, come closer, the same isosceles right pentagon, home plate. 395 feet from home plate to the centerfield wall. \$8 will get you in. Head through eight turnstiles, a view of the field everywhere you look. Your seat, one of 6,014. Through the concourse, your choice of five concession stands. Home. 450 Broad Street, Newark, New Jersey. Home. A new kind: condominiums.

This story began for me on my ride home from work at Rutgers University Newark. Every day I took a left onto Broad Street in Newark and there it was, Bears and Eagles Riverfront Stadium. At least once a week I had the same thought: what a strange name for a baseball stadium. What do a bear and an eagle have to do with one another or baseball or Newark? An assignment in my last class for my doctorate offered an opportunity to answer my weekly stadium-naming question. The answer was more than I bargained for. The result, one dissertation later, I have a good idea why they named that stadium on Broad Street Bears and Eagles Riverfront Stadium; the name was not about one stadium, but two. The name I discovered is one part of a century-old strategy used in Newark and cities across the country and around the world. It is a way to build and maintain sports stadiums using a narrative imbued with civicness, boosterism, and nostalgia. The name was my way in. But once inside the metaphorical and literal walls of both of these Newark baseball stadiums, I began to see the narratives constructed through them. How competing interests, definitions of civicness, and urban development plans for the city were being played out. How the economic condition of the city, its social and cultural state, and its future trajectory was all there, enveloped in baseball stadiums. I went looking for a simple answer and found a new way to look at cities and their stadiums.

It truly is an epidemic. It has spread around the world. It is an epidemic we often attribute to the twentieth and twenty-first century, but no, this epidemic, the building of stadiums, takes hold in the eighteenth century. They are so prevalent you might not even notice them. Today, stadiums are scattered among the landscapes of cities and towns across the United States and around the world. They are of course buildings, but they are

other things too. They are structures where people congregate to watch events of all kinds. They are public spaces where communities gather, where communities are formed, reinforced, and dismantled, sometimes simultaneously. They are spaces of community activism. They are extensions, representations, and commodities of the cities in which they are located. They are places of consumption, of entertainment, of production, and of values. What we build is who we are. If buildings can represent a city and its communities, then by extension so do stadiums. The choice of how a city is represented is an exercise in power; contestation soon follows. Here is where things get interesting, in the conflict. Politicians, developers, residents, and entrepreneurs, where their agendas align and where they clash are where the stadiums narratives are created. In the struggle over urban development and the messaging of those plans, stadiums can be focal points; they can be used as tools to that end.

There are the narratives we tell ourselves and there are narratives we tell to others. Those narratives we tell to others, they shape the way people view us. Scale that up, and the narratives people tell about their city, it shapes the view of the city and the people who reside within it. A city's narrative is not a singular one; it is an amalgamation of competing narratives that offer a revealing look into the state of a city. Yes, its problems and assets, but also its residents, city officials, and businesses, and the imagined paths to the city's future aspirations. Stadiums are representations of the cities they are in. They allow us insight into the construction of communities; how they are comprised, how they are changing, and their desires. Stadiums can reveal and offer space for contesting social norms, potentially shifting the cultural and social direction of the city.

One of the most important avenues to understanding what a stadium can offer is in the narratives told about its physical construction and maintenance. I call these stories civic narratives. These civic narratives reveal not only what the city is, but what those who are trying to establish and assert the stadium's civic narratives imagine the city to be now and in the future. Civic narratives set around the construction of a stadium help us understand the development choices of people in the cities. These civic narratives are often written with language that use ideas of civicness, boosterism, and nostalgia. The construction of these civic narratives becomes even more revealing when one narrative from a previous generation is laid upon another, as was the case in Newark.

These stadiums are engendered with meaning by virtue of, as urban historian Dolores Hayden states, with the "power of place." Hayden defines the "power of place" as the "power of ordinary urban landscapes to nurture citizens' public memory, to encompass shared time in the form of shared territory."¹ Spaces are of memory; memory as a force that both preserves the historical and the cultural while simultaneously creating and changing it. The power of place empowers these stadiums as places of cultural activity and representations of cultural change, and as Hayden argues, they can be cultural storehouses of historical events and a place of transformation.² She describes place as having the ability to "nurture this more profound, subtle and inclusive sense of what it means to be an American."³ This approach to space further solidifies its link to community identity. They are connected in a way that makes them dependent on one another and also shaped and reshaped overtime through that relationship. Space is not

¹ Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 9.

² That transformation, what happens when you enter a stadium and why, can be considered, in part, by using the basic principles of symbolic anthropology, with a focus on Victor Turner's concept of liminality.

³ Hayden, *The Power of Place*, 9.

historically or culturally significant by virtue of its existence. A space must be recognized as valuable. A space is not singular; it is a network of memories, histories, and purposes. Spaces are producers and consumers; they are places of power.

Though space is physically fixed, the power within it is in perpetual motion, constantly being negotiated. This can be understood through David Harvey's idea of "politics of place construction." Harvey states, "material, representational and symbolic activities which find their hallmark in the way in which individuals invest in places and thereby empower themselves collectively."⁴ The power of place, as Hayden contends, is based on that premise. That "people invest places with social and cultural meanings, and urban landscape history can provide a framework for connecting those meanings into contemporary urban life."⁵ Spaces are not passive; they are alive with the cultural acts and the shifts that occur within them. Spaces are not static; their meaning, purpose, power dynamics, and construction are constantly changing.

This understanding of space can be directly related to stadiums. Christopher Thomas Gaffney in *Temples of the Earthbound Gods: Stadiums in the Cultural Landscapes of Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires* asserts that stadiums and cities undergo changes that are "related to larger political, economic, and social processes...stadiums are barometers of these changes and that by looking at stadiums as places and spaces of cultural process, sites and symbols of dynamic social interaction, we gain unique insight into who and what we and others are."⁶ He argues that stadiums are "places of community interaction, repositories of collective memory, loci of strong identities, sites

⁴ Hayden, *The Power of Place*, 78.

⁵ Hayden, *The Power of Place*, 78.

⁶ Christopher Thomas Gaffney, *Temples of the Earthbound Gods: Stadiums in the Cultural Landscapes of Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), xix.

for ritualized conflict, political battlefields, and nodes in the global system of sport”⁷ Just as a city does not have a singular narrative, nor does a stadium. Multiple and simultaneous narratives come from a stadium and can reveal layers of interaction and lines of connectivity we might not otherwise see.

It is not surprising that a civic narrative would arise from a stadium. Stadiums are spaces for civic ritual. They are often referred to as temples, cathedrals, and churches because they are often considered sacred sites/spaces.⁸ These sacred sites “function as spaces for the celebration of ritual, becoming a reference point of convergence and a presence to create around themselves urban centers of practical significance.”⁹ John Bale, the scholarly authority on the relationship between place, space, and sport, stated, “it is the stadium that modern urban rituals take place... Sports perform the same human and social functions as real religions, it should be analyzed if it were one.”¹⁰ A narrative about a stadium would hold very little power unless the stadium itself was revered in some way by the community the narrative was directed towards. A significant amount of this power

⁷ Gaffney, *Temples of the Earthbound Gods*, 4. Gaffney also stated, “over time, the relationships between teams and their fans became associated with the spaces that hosted their fans. As soccer took on more rigid spatial and institutional boundaries, the stadiums that emerged accrued sedimented layers of history and meaning, senses of topophilia and topophobia, that were integrated into a larger network of associated spaces and formed part of the histories of neighbors and regions of the city. Linked with other spaces of masculine performance, soccer stadiums developed as vernacular public spaces that allowed for the expression of highly localized urban identity. In a remarkably short time soccer games went from a novel leisure activity to a type of ritualized, interurban warfare” (Gaffney, *Temples of the Earthbound Gods*, 140).

⁸ There is a vast amount of texts that exclusively cover religious references in sports or have sections dedicated to the relationship between stadiums and religious terminology/metaphors. Most of them are attributed to baseball.

⁹ William H Swatos, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society* (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 1998), 152.

¹⁰ John Bale, *Sport, Space, and the City* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 3 and 66. Bale also states that “undoubted religious character aids in an appreciation of the devotion, which some people show towards it. From a topophilic perspective few would deny that Tuan’s recognition of a ‘sacred place’ as being one possessing ‘overpowering significance (Tuan 1974) must undoubtedly apply to the...stadium.” (Bale, *Sport, Space, and the City*, 69)

stems from the memories that come to be associated with a stadium, both individual and collective.

For this history, I will focus on ideas of collective or cultural memory by way of nostalgia. These terms are sometimes used interchangeably and, depending on whose definition you use, their distinctiveness can be indistinguishable. Daniel A. Nathan in *Saying It's So: A Cultural History of the Black Sox Scandal* uses Maurice Halbwachs's understanding of memory. He writes, as "collective memory is a cultural terrain where certain narratives and images are routinely scrutinized, debated, and reevaluated. In this way collective memory, like other phenomena that engage cultural politics, occupies space that is frequently contested and deliberated."¹¹ Marita Sturken reiterates this point in *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*. She writes, "Memory is crucial to the understanding of a culture precisely because it indicates the collective desires, needs, and self-definitions. We need to ask not whether a memory is true but rather what its telling reveals about how the past affects the present."¹² These ideas about collective memory attempt a re-creation of things said and things done. Nostalgia, I think, is a different variation of collective memory, in that it is grounded in constructed distortion.

Nostalgia is a crafted recollection of the past, created to fit a prescribed narrative of the present. Nostalgia is not about the past, but what is deemed important in the present. Michael Kammen in *The Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* contends, "Nostalgia, with its wistful memories, is

¹¹ Daniel A. Nathan, *Saying It's So: A Cultural History of the Black Sox Scandal* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 61.

¹² Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 2.

essentially history without guilt.”¹³ Nostalgia is coated history; often the coating is sugar. It is what we want the past and present to be. Inevitably, because the past can be a commodity, it is stylized to fit an agenda. This can create a powerful narrative. Nostalgia can be represented in the physical form of monuments. Bale’s work, which draws from the theoretical models of human geography and the theories of David Harvey, Christian Bromberger, Donn Parkes and Nigel Thrift, Yi-Fu Tuan and others, established the model that has allowed scholars to not only view a stadium as a place that “generate[s] a love of a place, a sense of place-loyalty, place-bonding, and other kinds of localism, but also...amount to sacred places, worthy, perhaps of future protection and preservation like other revered monuments and buildings of yesteryear.”¹⁴ There is often a romanticized tone and sentiment attached to stadiums. That version of a stadium is often paired with a nostalgic view of the city in which it is located. Pairing the two allows for a stadium to create narratives of civicness in support for that stadium, because it takes a distorted idealized version of a city and claims that a stadium will allow that non-existent desired city to exist again.

¹³ Michael Kammen, *The Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 688. Callum Ingram in “Building Between Past and Future: Nostalgia, Historical Materialism and the Architecture of Memory in Baltimore’s Inner Harbor” furthers this notion when he states “Broader city-wide efforts to draw selectively from history are no less common but have received less critical attention. While commercial nostalgia generally uses local design elements to establish a material anchor in a community through a carefully composed historical aesthetic, urban regeneration projects instead strive to limit the proliferation of historical markers in order to establish a coherent urban ‘visual identity’. This visual identity can be crucial to cities’ ability to market themselves as consumable objects, displacing complex histories and ongoing processes of oppression with an unambiguous and easily consumed whole. As an alternative to a more complex engagement with the past, this nostalgia industry turns upon the materials of history to construct a future consisting of things as they are believed or wished to have been.” (Ingram, 320)

¹⁴ Bale, *Sport, Space, and the City*, 6-7. Bale’s coined the term “sportscape.” Sportscape is widely used among scholars as an expression of the place stadiums have within cities. He asserted that stadiums are residents of the cities where they are built, implying a power dynamic in the relationship between a stadium, city, and its human residents. Using stadiums as a form of cultural analysis requires the deciphering of that power relationship.

As I said, the civic narratives constructed about Newark's baseball stadiums center on ideas of civicness, boosterism, and nostalgia. I have categorized these narratives as civic because they are intrinsically linked to the city. That is, all of these narratives involve the indirect and direct role the municipal government, and by extension of those the government does business with and the lives of residents who are represented by them. This connection results in the interconnected fate, prosperity or decline, between the choices of those in elected political offices and the people who reside in the city. The narratives also involve the formation and place of communities within the city. A city at its core is a collection of people whose actions related to the city are civic actions. The actions, of the residents, elected officials, and the businesses that flow in and out of the city are civic. In the history presented here, who determines which actions best serve the city, what those actions are, and the manipulation of these civic actions is at the heart of the story. The civic narratives that emerge when trying to build baseball stadiums will show the ways the perception of Newark is used by the municipal government as a justification for financial support of a private business, how official government resolutions and proclamations reinforce segregation in the city, and the way elected officials try to convince residents that their decisions with taxpayer money is sound.

It is not surprising that a baseball stadium would be a place where ideas about civicness would take place. Nineteenth-century public parks were a direct response to the emergence of industrialized cities. Renowned park designer Fredrick Law Olmstead wanted to parks to be a "conception of democratic recreation" that would "serve as a gentle but effective school for citizenship." As John Kasson argues in *Amusing the*

Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century, at the turn of the century, places of amusement superseded the parks as the new gathering spaces for the masses. Places like Coney Island were “designed not according to the civic values of cultural elites but according to the commercial values of entrepreneurs determined to attract a mass audience...to entertain rather than to uplift.”¹⁵ I think the baseball stadium was balance between the two. It was accessible to mass audiences and its primary purpose was amusement, but it also was restrained by the cultural values imposed in the early parks. Victorian values of hard work, temperance, morality, and self-discipline were a significant part of the way the game was promoted. Within a stadium, top-down civic duty could be instilled under the guise of inclusion, assimilation, or patriotism. In Newark’s stadiums we will see all three.

Sociologist Miriam Greenberg contends in *Branding New York: How a City in Crisis Was Sold to the World*, that New York City branded itself out of the 1970s perception that the city was drug filled, crime ridden, and dangerous. She maintained that this was done through urban boosterism, where “modern media and marketing were used to promote and sell a particular image of the city.”¹⁶ According to Greenberg, historically boosterism was “largely an American phenomenon, launched by the showmen, entrepreneurs, and chambers of commerce of frontier towns and newly industrialized cities that by the late nineteenth century were caught up in fierce competition with other cities for residents, workers, industries, and investments.” The boosters countered the perception of their city by presenting “an enticing, all-encompassing, and carefully edited

¹⁵ John Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 12, 15, and 26-7.

¹⁶ Miriam Greenberg, *Branding New York: How a City in Crisis Was Sold to the World* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 21.

image of the city-in-miniature, or the ‘city as a whole.’” The result of this effort was narrative map, one which entertained as well as educated, enticed as well as disciplined, imposing a modicum of coherence and order on an unfamiliar world of constant flux.” What is left by out by boosters in this crafted version of the city is any “reference to underlying structural inequalities, such as the poor labor or housing conditions faced by most of the working population in these industrializing cities.”¹⁷ Boosters, who benefited financially and/or politically wanted to ensure a vision of the city that continued to produce these benefits. Their efforts are crucial in the building of the stadiums.

Urban development is key when thinking about boosterism and stadium building. Geographer John Rennie Short in “Urban Imagineers: Boosterism and the Representation of Cities” contends that boosters

saw their main civic duty as encouraging economic growth that benefited their business interests. The line between civic and business interests was imperceptible, since the business elite dominated the civic discourse... These urban boosters are, in fact, urban imagineers who give shape and substance and imagery to the city and seek to influence the (re)presentation of the city.¹⁸

The boosters, who often work within the frame of the municipal government, are able to direct the city’s development, course, and priorities. Their message of mutual benefits, civic duty, and nostalgic invocations gives them significant power. This history will demonstrate that Newark’s early twentieth-century boosters and those from the late twentieth and early twenty-first century are strikingly similar. The civic narrative crafted around both stadiums seeks to highlight capitalistic ventures and downplay the myriad

¹⁷ Greenberg, *Branding New York*, 21-22.

¹⁸ John Rennie Short “Urban Imagineers: Boosterism and the Representation of Cities” in *The Urban Growth Machine: Critical Perspectives Two Decades Later*, eds. Andrew E. G. Jonas and David Wilson, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 37 and 40.

costs to the residents. This is where conflict arises, between crafted narratives and stark realities of urban life, between the interest of developers and city residents.

The question for me is: how do these boosters sell this version of the city, this urban development plan, their vision of the future, to residents, some of whom are living a contradictory reality? An answer that emerged was nostalgia. Nostalgia is the thread that runs through this nearly hundred years of history in Newark. In this context, nostalgia acts as a form of civic memory. It is civic memory, as Newark historian Clement Price argues, that “emerges out of the social landscape of the community writ large. It acknowledges that citizens and settlers usually remember what is most important to their personal lives and to the emotional fabric of their own families and neighbors... Civic memory takes us deeply into the realm of community emotions, into the essence of what people feel most deeply about.”¹⁹ What is used as ammunition, used with the purpose of constructing an alternative narrative is a good indicator of what holds real power. Innovations of the past, not an account of the past that seeks accuracy, but an idealized nostalgic rendering was consistently used in these narratives and continuously in support of stadium ventures.²⁰

Timothy Jon Curry, Kent Schwirian, and Rachael A. Woldoff argue in *High Stakes: Big Time Sports and Downtown Development* that an urban development strategy

¹⁹ Clement A. Price “Epilogue: History and Memory: Why It Matters That We Remember” in *Baltimore '68: Riots and Rebirth in an American City*, eds Jessica Elfenbein, Thomas Hollowak, and Elizabeth Nix (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 263 and 264.

²⁰ Nostalgic feelings are applied to a variety of topics. In Daniel Cavicchi’s *Tramps Like Us: Music and Meaning Among Bruce Springsteen Fans* he explained “The idea of Springsteen fans having a connection with Bruce Springsteen and his music may seem to be an obvious explanation of fandom. But among Springsteen fans, the idea of connection means more than just having an affinity for Springsteen’s music; it means making the music a deeply felt part of one’s life, of having an ongoing, shared relationship with Springsteen the artist. Indeed, fans talk very specifically about the process of forming a connection with Springsteen and what it means to be ‘touched by the music’” (Cavicchi, *Tramps Like Us*, 41). This is why nostalgia works in terms of fandom, including baseball. In this case baseball becomes part of the personal narratives of people’s lives. It is engrained in their relationship to themselves and to others.

of the late twentieth century was to build entertainment venues, such as stadiums, in the downtown of cities. These “redevelopment projects must do more than just enhance the urbanscape. They are expected to create jobs, stimulate business, attract new investment to the downtown area, make the city more lively and user friendly, and enhance the fiscal health of the city government.”²¹ As I hope to show, stadiums are not built because they are secure, non-risky economic ventures or a foolproof urban development strategy. They are built for profit—monetary, political, social, cultural, or other forms of profit. How they are built and all the meaning layered in between the turnstiles and the nosebleed seats, that is where I found my story.

Note on Sources

In detailing the history of these two stadiums I relied heavily of New Jersey’s papers of record for their respective time periods, the *Newark Evening News* (1883-1968) and the *Star-Ledger* (1939-present). There is limited information about the political leanings of the newspapers, but the *Newark Evening News* has been described in some editorials as conservative. In the only history of the paper written by one of its longtime reporters, Douglas Eldridge, he contends that the *News* “leaned Republican in philosophy.”²² Many of the articles used in the first section, particularly prior to the 1940s, do not have author bylines and there is little opinion on matters related to the stadium outside the editorials and weekly columns. The first section is constructed from

²¹ Timothy Jon Curry, Kent Schwirian, and Rachael A. Woldoff, *High Stakes: Big Time Sports and Downtown Development* (Columbus, OH, The Ohio State University Press, 2004), 37. *High Stakes* also argued “Another factor in the burgeoning city entertainment market is the increased affluence of the middle and upper middle classes. Whose discretionary income is often spent on entertainment...in 1997 more than 22 million people attended professional major league sports contests, most of which were played in urban ballparks, stadiums, and arenas” (Curry, *High Stakes*, 13).

²² Douglas Eldridge, “The Rise and Fall of the Newark News: A Personal Perspective.” *New Jersey History* Vol. 104, no. 1/2 (Spring/Summer 1986), 38.

hundreds of newspaper articles that provided the basic facts of the building of the stadium that have not been published anywhere else. They also are the only public statements that I have found of those involved in the project: the city boosters, politicians, city officials, the owner, and, to a small degree, some Newark residents. It is in these statements that we see how those with political and/or economic power in Newark crafted a narrative to link this stadium to civicness. The first section offers a history of stadium building in Newark and how through that building we can see the interplay among civicness, boosterism, and nostalgia all funneled through a baseball stadium.

Much of my dialogue for the second section of the narrative is found in the *Star-Ledger*. The newspaper coverage on the stadium that would be built in the 1990s focused on the who, what, when, where, and what that was taking place. There are rarely criticisms or critiques on the construction of the stadium by the reporters in their articles, with some exceptions; Diane Walsh's twenty plus articles among them. Limited context is often present, but community voices, neutral parties, and average citizen's views on what they have experienced ranged from minimal to completely absent. Of the over two hundred articles on the Bears, Eagles, and new stadium, only five articles had quotes from an academic or economist. There was a marginal amount of discussion on significant factor to the story, the economics or revitalization impact of stadiums. The *New York Times* also provided additional coverage of Newark with some regularity in the 1990s and early 2000s. Though the *Times* articles were less frequent they were longer and more extensive in terms of context and critique. These newspapers, particularly the *Star-Ledger*, were the mouthpieces. The articles were filled with direct quotes from politicians, officials, business elites, and sometimes residents all attempting to establish

the civic narrative of Newark in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. As Joanna Cagan and Neil DeMause argues in *Field of Schemes: How the Great Stadium Swindle Turns Public Money Into Private Profit*, public sentiment for a stadium project is strongly influenced by how the media frames project. Even when “critical of some fine point of a deal, they seldom question the need for a new stadium, invariably editorializing against legislators who hunker down behind the public opinion polls. In this context, public opposition is presented as a mere temporary obstacle to the inevitable course of progress, which will ultimately-should ultimately-result in a new sports facility being built.”²³ Unlike other types of development projects, stadiums rely on public support to be successful; here you cannot avoid the reality of swaying public sentiment.

²³ Joanna Cagan and Neil DeMause, *Field of Schemes: How the Great Stadium Swindle Turns Public Money Into Private Profit* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1998), 111.

Section One: Ruppert Stadium

Baseball as Business: Harry F. Sinclair and the Federal League

As the nation attempted to sew itself back together after the Civil War. As the effects of the Industrial Revolution steadily took hold of more and more aspects of city life. In the midst of change and unrest, on the grassy fields of Newark and in cities and towns all over the country, baseball games were being played. Baseball's invention is usually marked as 1839. Its rise in popularity and professionalization was rapid. Only thirty years later, in 1869, the amateur sport for the first time fielded an all-professional team, the Cincinnati Red Stockings. In less than a decade, in 1876, the first (openly) professional baseball league was established, the National League, followed by, in 1900, the American League. The two league winners would compete against one another in the first World Series in 1903. Historian Steven A. Riess argues that baseball, as it emerged as a national game in the Progressive Era, was more than entertainment. Baseball provided an ideology that "spoke directly to some of the needs of Middle America to secure order in its distended society."²⁴ This ideology "claimed that baseball was an indigenous American game which had originated in the countryside and that it typified all that was best in our society. It asserted that crowds included people from all walks of life, that owners were benevolent citizens who operated their franchises out of concern for the public interest, that players came mainly from rural regions, and that the sport was open

²⁴ Steven A. Riess, *Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture in the Progressive Era* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 6.

to anyone with talent and perseverance.”²⁵ This mythos was hardly true, but its power held.

Baseball was a reflection of many larger shifts happening across the country. As the center of the nation’s economy shifted to urban centers, with manufacturing superseding agriculture as the country’s primary economic engine, baseball acted as a response to the change. It was a means to hold on to the Victorian ideals that were rapidly slipping away in the new modern era. Baseball could be a solution. It could teach children and newly assimilating immigrants the traditional Victorian values of individualism, hard work, temperance, morality, and self-discipline. Baseball was a tool, a powerful one, to contend with new forms of labor, incoming immigrants, shifts in political power, and changing gender roles. In a rapidly changing world, baseball could be a familiar and stabilizing force.

The power baseball yielded did not go unnoticed. If the new sport could act as a response to the altering social and cultural forces of the new century, then politicians and business elites supposed the sport could be used on the local level as well. Baseball could be used to sway opinion on local agendas and divert, redirect, or redefine issues within a community. Historian Steven A. Riess was one of the first to recognize the connection among politicians, businesses, (particularly trolley companies), real estate developers, and baseball team owners. This group, in cities and towns across the country, formed mutually beneficial relationships. Municipal governments offered inside information and tax benefits and in exchange the politicians “used the franchise as a source of honest graft and patronage, as an inducement to encourage people to travel on the traction routes they

²⁵ Riess, *Touching Base*, 7.

operated, and to improve their public image.”²⁶ The public image was shaped, in large part, through the idea of hometown pride. The idea of community was a powerful narrative where “local clubs were expected to encourage a sense of community by helping promote hometown pride and boosterism through fan identification with the home team.” Reiss further argues that baseball was “portrayed as a valuable source of community integration because it instilled civic pride in the hearts of fans. Club owners took advantage of traditional urban rivalries and boosterism to generate interest in their teams...They rooted for the local stalwarts to defeat their opponents from out of town or, in large metropolises, different sections of the city and thereby defend their community’s honor.”²⁷ Baseball was and is a multi-purpose vehicle for shaping identity. That identity can then be used to influence economic, social, and cultural actions and decisions on the national and local level. Newark was one of many cities where the political and business elite embraced baseball and the ideology that came with it.

The first professional baseball game in Newark, though no Newark team was on the field, was played on May 7, 1883, between Brooklyn and Pottsville. A year later, Newark fielded its first professional team, the Newark Domestics, which was sponsored by Newark’s Domestic Sewing Machine Company. The name of Newark’s first team represented the city’s move towards large-scale industrialization. These new businesses saw it as advantageous to connect with baseball through team sponsorship. As baseball took hold in the community, Newark continued to grow. The increase in industry required new immigrant labor, which resulted in a population boom. The number of Newarkers grew from 136,508 in 1880 to 246,070 in 1900 and the upward trend

²⁶ Steven A. Riess, “The Baseball Magnates and Urban Politics in the Progressive Era,” *Journal of Sport History* (May 1974): 61.

²⁷ Riess, *Touching Base*, 5-7 and 18.

continued into the 1920s. These demographic, social, and economic shifts in Newark were seen on the streets and in the newspapers. The Domestics soon shared the sports pages with the Newark Adriatics, the Newark Eureka's, the Newark Americus, the Newark Lafayettes, the Newark Pioneers, the Newark Trunkmakers, the Newark Little Giants, the Newark Colts, the Newark Sailors, the Newark Indians, the Newark Cubans, and the Newark Peppers. The connections among industrialization, immigration, and baseball further solidified the influence and prominence of the fairly new sport. This was a signal to politicians and business leaders that baseball might be a lucrative venture.

Local newspapers early on saw that there was a profit that could be made from this new sport. In Newark, the *Newark Daily Advertiser* and *Newark Daily Mercury* began to record daily box scores to increase sales. As interest increased, the press coverage expanded to game recaps, and before long there was detailed coverage in articles and columns of not just the games, but on the players and managers, the leagues, and on the game itself. Nationwide sportswriters “engaged in a public relations campaign to better the national pastime’s public image in order to retain the middle-class audiences and encourage the interest of the working class...A concerted effort was made to demonstrate that baseball was an integral part of American life and not just a frivolous misuse of valuable time better spent in more gainful pursuits.”²⁸ Baseball quickly evolved from an informal game on green spaces to a for-profit business. The business of baseball, the leagues owners, they were making money and so were industry ventures spawned from the game. Print media, including newspaper and magazines, would benefit greatly from the increased popularity of baseball.

²⁸ Riess, *Touching Base*, 17.

By the early 1900s, baseball was an emergent entertainment force. Fans of the game were not just watching the games in person they were reading accounts and analysis, thus expanding the game beyond local coverage. There was a national audience and publications seized on the trend. A product of the trend was the first monthly baseball magazine founded by Jacob Morse in 1908, *Baseball Magazine*.²⁹ *Baseball Magazine* chronicled the evolution of the game through the first half of the twentieth century. The magazine covered professional teams as well as minor league teams, including Newark's. It is in 1914 that Newark featured prominently in baseball's national coverage. It is then when the city of Newark is linked to one of the first significant turning points for Major League Baseball, the formation of the Federal League.

Much has been written about the Federal League, which was comprised of a group of wealthy businessmen who sought a way to profit from professional baseball. The most common way to profit was team ownership, but that was limited by the number of teams playing in the league and by the teams that were for sale at any given time. The solution to the problem of limited team availability for ownership came in 1912 when major league baseball had its first players strike. This group of wealthy businessmen saw the strike as an opportunity. They believed that they could use the discontent among players and fans to form their own league. This new short-lived third league was known as the Federal League. From 1914-1915 *Baseball Magazine* printed twenty-four issues related to the Federal League, including a series of articles titled "Famous Magnates of the Federal League: A Series Devoted to the Leaders of the New Circuit." The Famous

²⁹ Fred Ivor-Campbell, "F.C. Lane," Society for American Baseball Research (SABR), <http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/089be8f3>

Magnates series profiled the wealthy businessmen who were the architects of this new league. One of those men was Harry F. Sinclair, owner of the Newark Peppers.

Sinclair's ten-page feature was titled "Harry Sinclair, Oil Wizard." The first paragraph read:

In early March there joined the Federal League a man whose courage, daring and ability would well-nigh assure the success of any enterprise. A born fighter, a cool but adventurous plunger, a gambler who has won and lost fortunes and never turned a hair, a man still young in the face of all his dizzying feats, whose blood yet warms to the spice of danger, a man in a million for a cause offering heavy risks and long profits, that is Harry Sinclair, owner of the Newark franchise.³⁰

All of Famous Magnates series were tabloid pieces: sensationalized dramatic biographies that reinforced the emerging notions of manliness, not unlike those qualities associated with Theodore Roosevelt. Gail Bederman in *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*, argues that Roosevelt embodied "two contradictory models of manhood simultaneously – civilized and the primitive masculinity. Combining manliness and masculinity, civilization and primitive, Roosevelt modeled a new type of manhood for the American people, based firmly on the millennial evolutionary ideology for civilization...a collective imperialistic manhood for the white American race."³¹ Sinclair embodied the self-entrepreneurial, individualistic, and hard-working Victorian ideal along with the adventurous, daring, primal desired form of masculinity that materialized at the turn of the century. The modern era had altered society; masculinity was earned in leisure rather than just work. By extension, the average man could tap into this version of masculinity by associating

³⁰ F. C. Lane, "Famous Magnates of The Federal League - Harry Sinclair, Oil Wizard," *Baseball Magazine*, Vol. XV, no 4 (August 1915), 28.

³¹ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 44.

himself, through fandom, with the team owned by a man who embodied the duality of the old and new “ideal” man.

The *Baseball Magazine* article recounted that at only thirty-eight years old Sinclair had gambled away and lavishly spent his inheritance. The realization that he could no longer live the lifestyle he was accustomed spurred him to go into the oil business. The article contended his firm White and Sinclair, “of which he is an equal partner, today control property worth more than twelve million dollars in the state of Oklahoma alone...while his holdings of oil property in Mexico, California and elsewhere are varied and immense... [and he] owns the largest oil farm in the world.”³² Sinclair was young, wealthy, ingenious, and a quasi-self-made man. He was portrayed as having an enviable celebrity lifestyle, but also having worked for his wealth, even if the reason he had to work was his gambling problem. This portrayal was a way for the average working fan to connect to him and his team. Baseball fans, particularly those who lived in and around Newark where his team would be located, were eager to see how his business acumen and young adventurous persona would translate to the new Federal League team and how they could share in this identity.

A year after the article was published, in the midst of securing a team and players for his Federal League team, Sinclair established Sinclair Oil. Sinclair Oil is still in operation, with its green Brontosaurus dinosaur logo visible on gas stations across the country. A little over a decade after his baseball business venture ended in 1929, he was convicted and went to prison for his involvement in the Teapot Dome scandal. But before Sinclair Oil and the corruption in the Warren G. Harding administration, Sinclair wanted

³² Lane, “Famous Magnates of The Federal League,” 106.

to own a baseball team and he wanted that team to be located in the New York metropolitan area.

Sinclair realized that the market in New York was saturated with both major league and minor league baseball teams. His solution was to look across the Hudson to New Jersey. Sinclair did not know anything about the business of baseball or New Jersey; he needed a partner for his baseball venture. He needed someone who knew the game and who could run the daily operations of the team while he maintained his oil business. He found one in former major league baseball executive and New Jersey native, Patrick T. Powers. To establish a new team they needed to buy an existing one. When Sinclair entered the baseball business the Federal League had just finished its inaugural season. After some negotiations, Sinclair purchased the Indianapolis Hoosiers, the 1914 Federal League Championship team. He moved what had been the best team in the Federal League out of Indiana to New Jersey. The team was renamed the Newark Federals or Feds, but they were better known as the Newark Peppers. It was a nickname they received when Powers commented to the *Newark Evening News* that players would have to show “pepper” in order to win.³³

The next order of business was deciding where they were going to play. Newark was an emerging metropolis with a large and still growing populous. It was connected by public transportation to smaller but growing New Jersey cities as well as to New York City. *Sporting Life*, a weekly national newspaper that covered sports generally, but with a particular focus on baseball, reported the “question of the location of the Newark grounds has been considered and the field is practically limited to three sites. Sunday base ball

³³ Robert Peyton Wiggin, *The Federal League of Base Ball Clubs: The History of an Outlaw Major League, 1914-1915* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2009), 197.

also stamps Newark as an advantageous place to locate, and is said to have influenced the Feds considerably in their choice.”³⁴ In cities across the country Sabbath laws prohibited Sunday baseball, an issue when profitability for those games, often double-headers, was high. Newark’s Mayor Raymond in the *Newark Evening News* on March 12, 1915 stated, “The workingman ought to have his Sunday for himself, for recreation and amusement, because that is what makes for good citizenship. So far as I am concerned personally, I will not interfere with any decent Sunday amusements unless I have to.”³⁵ This made the city a perfect location if there was an existing suitable stadium for the team to use. But there was no stadium and the limitations as to where they could build a new stadium within the city’s limits were insurmountable for Sinclair and Powers. Ultimately, with approval from Federal League President James Gilmore, they decided to build a new ballpark not in Newark, but in the neighboring town of Harrison. Harrison Field would cost \$100,000 and seat over 20,000 fans. The stadium in Harrison would be a ten-minute walk from Broad at Market streets, Newark’s main intersection. It would be close to the Manhattan Tube (now known as the PATH), which connected the stadium to the neighboring New Jersey cities of Jersey City within five to ten minutes and to Hoboken in twelve minutes. The Tube would also, in a twenty-minute trip, connect the stadium to Ninth Street or Christopher Street in Manhattan.³⁶ Harrison provided all that Sinclair and Powers were looking for.

The local press in Harrison not only recorded the stadium’s construction, it editorialized the project. A February 1915 article titled “Harrison Gets the Ball Park”

³⁴ “Kansas City Transfer?” *Sporting Life*, February 13, 1915, 8.

³⁵ Paul Stellhorn, “Depression and Decline, Newark, New Jersey, 1929-1941” (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 1982), 38.

³⁶ Newspaper clippings related to the Newark Peppers, File Folder Peppers, National Baseball Hall of Fame Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown, New York.

asserted that the stadium would be good for the city. It cited quotations from five of Harrison's councilmen who praised the decision to build a stadium in the city. They touted that it would create union jobs, that residents would be given preference for those jobs, and that it would offer the city a platform to advertise the city to a national audience and as a result it would encourage business investment. These are still frequently given reasons used in support of stadium building efforts. It was also the case, as historian Steven A. Reiss contends, that a "local franchise was regarded by people as a reliable index to a town's status." That having a team, particularly in a small town like Harrison "was a sign that the city was progressive and growing."³⁷ The local councilmen in Harrison did have some reservations. They would have to give public land, including two streets, for free to the project and that there was no guarantee the land would revert back to the town if the stadium failed. Sinclair and Powers argued that many cities would love an opportunity to have someone build a stadium in their town; it was a threat to leave the city. Ultimately, reservations were put aside, land and tax incentives were given, and any other city roadblocks to the project were removed.³⁸ The lure of the positive impact a stadium trumped the prospect of failure.

In March 1915, *Sporting Life* published an article on the new stadium in Harrison. It claimed that it "will have a field bigger than the Polo Grounds...there will be no better ball field anywhere in the country when the new grounds are opened to the public." The article continued to recount Federal League President James Gilmore comments while passing through Newark to visit the site for the stadium. Of Newark, he stated, "Well, I must say that I am surprised...I was always under the impression that Newark was a little

³⁷ Reiss, *Touching Base*, 19.

³⁸ Newspaper clippings related to the Newark Peppers, File Folder Peppers, National Baseball Hall of Fame Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown, New York.

place, something like a suburb of New York, but what little I've seen of it today has been sufficient to change that impression to a belief that it is one of the coming great cities of the land.”³⁹ A stadium is more than an enhancement to a city; it becomes an extension, a resident of the city in its own right. A stadium and city are inseparable. In selling a stadium to investors, to city officials, to residents of the city, touting the assets of the city is a necessity.

Even though the team would not play within the city limits residents of Newark considered the team to be theirs. Daniel A. Nathan in *Rooting for the Home Team: Sport, Community, and Identity* states, “sports and identity formation are often intertwined, that who we root for represents our communities and us...sport is a place where community and identity come together. Sports are a way that disparate communities define, understand, and represent themselves to themselves and to others.”⁴⁰ In tying the new stadium in Harrison to the neighboring cities, Newark first and foremost, Sinclair and Powers were able to leverage those who hold some measure of power in those cities. They also attracted consumers at all economic levels. If a stadium is presented by the team owners as a benefit to the city, and residents believe that what benefits the city benefits them, then those residents can apply pressure through political action and consumption to push for what is now seen to them as a personal and beneficial investment towards the stadium. This is one aspect of how stadiums get built.

Two days before opening day for the Peppers, a fundraiser was held in Krueger Auditorium in Newark. Newark was a beer-brewing mecca in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The large-scale German immigration to Newark in the mid-1880s

³⁹ Edmund Gearhardt, “Newark Nuggets,” *Sporting Life*, March 20, 1915, 9.

⁴⁰ Daniel A. Nathan, *Rooting for the Home Team: Sport, Community, and Identity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 7.

had resulted in several successful brewery operations. Their owners, the beer barons of Newark, extended their reach in the city beyond the doors of their breweries. They engaged in various cultural, social, and philanthropic activities. Gottfried Krueger built an auditorium in 1885 that was considered the “center for the city’s social and intellectual life.” Initially named Saenger Hall, it was at first frequented by the city’s famous German singing societies. After a fire in 1894, it was rebuilt and renamed Krueger. The Auditorium housed Woodrow Wilson’s campaign for New Jersey governor, Jacob Haussling’s run for mayor, and hosted dinners attended by Presidents Taft, Cleveland, Roosevelt, and Wilson as well as William Jennings Bryant.⁴¹ The Peppers held a “Dollar Dinner.” It was described by the local Harrison press as being in “honor of the city’s new baseball team. After the 900 or so dignitaries and fans were seated, Manager Phillips and his players entered in single file to a standing ovation from the audience.”⁴² Of the 900-plus in attendance, according to newspaper reports, “were leading officials of the West Hudson towns and hundreds of other residents.”⁴³ Along with contributions to attend the dinner, prizes were also donated from local fraternal societies.⁴⁴ It was a Newark team playing in neighboring Harrison, fundraising with officials from other neighboring NJ towns. A baseball stadium was a way to temporarily shift identities. Financial support

⁴¹ Charles Cummings, “State’s Largest City Is Home to Its Best and Brightest Music Halls,” *Star-Ledger*, October 23, 1997.

⁴² Robert Peyton Wiggins, *The Federal League of Base Ball Clubs: The History of an Outlaw Major League, 1914-1915* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2009), 197.

⁴³ Reiss, *Touching Base*, 19.

⁴³ Newspaper clippings related to the Newark Peppers, File Folder Peppers, National Baseball Hall of Fame Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown, New York.

⁴⁴ Newspaper clippings related to the Newark Peppers, File Folder Peppers, National Baseball Hall of Fame Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown, New York.

could be generated beyond Harrison and Newark residents and businesses by obliquely framing the stadium so that each city could claim it as “theirs.”⁴⁵

On opening day for the Peppers a *New York Times* headline read “Baseball Fever Hits Newark Hard.” The accompanying story began, “Newark and its surrounding hamlets were seized with a violent attack of baseball yesterday, accompanied by a high fever and laryngitis. The ailment can be directly traced to the opening of the Newark Federals at their new, roomy park in Harrison.” The story added that “25,000 Jersey folk” had attended the game and described the scene as

Everybody in Newark and its environs quit work when the whistle blew at 12 o’clock, put on their new Spring spangles, and got ready for the big parade. It was just like Fourth of July or circus day.

Almost every man and boy in town walked in the parade carrying big banners welcoming the Federal League to Jersey, and those who couldn’t walk rode in automobiles. The cavalcade of cars ranged from those of the vintage of 1900 right up to the coffee-grinder models which you get with cigar coupons. There were jitneys, too, and auto trucks decorated with bunting. The long line of baseball fans was punctuated with numerous brass bands and drum corps.

All the uniformed amateur baseball teams from the entire countryside walked till they were tired. Then there were droves of Boy Scouts. There were no Girl Scouts in the parade, but they lined the sidewalks scouting the male population in the parade. A band of Scotch bagpipers added all the rare musical notes which the brass bands and the drum corps failed to furnish. The Elks and the Eagles and other fraternal organizations completed the parade. A fine body of men...

There were enough floral horseshoes and shower bouquets to go around the whole Newark team...

...It remained for the Federal League to introduce a real new one in having girl ushers in the grand stand. That’s why a lot of young men didn’t see very much of the ball game. And if you care to know what a big police force they have in Newark and Harrison, you should have attended yesterday’s game.

Mayor Thomas L. Raymond went out to the pitcher’s box and hurled over the first ball, which was a strike. Right then and there the crowd began to develop laryngitis. The crowd was bubbling over with excess noise and they turned it loose on every play.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Unlike many stadiums today, the stadiums built in and around Newark in the early twentieth-century were constructed on vacant land or land that did not require the removal of residential homes. Though not devoid of controversy, residential displacement was not an issue for Newark’s stadium.

⁴⁶ “Baseball Fever Hits Newark Hard,” *New York Times*, April 15, 1915, 12.

Though framed as a community experience, the “everybody in Newark” was a “male population parade.” The women, including the Girl Scouts who were not marching with their Boy Scout counterparts, were regulated to lining the sidewalks “scouting the male population” or were ushers at the game, where their presence was blamed as pulling the males attention to them and away from the game. Masculinity was being performed on the field and in the stands, often by way of opposition to the females on the periphery of the game. The Newark community portrayed in the press at this point was male rather than family centered. Baseball was still in transition into what would become a part of the city’s civic narrative.

Soon thereafter the fever broke. The Peppers were not the champions they were the year prior. By mid-season game attendance was on a steep decline. The economic recession caused by World War I had forced baseball owners, including Sinclair, to lower ticket prices. Sinclair, in order to attract fans to generate some income, attempted to pair the Peppers’ games with popular bicycle races. Newark was a global destination for bicycle racing; the Newark Velodrome alone drew tens of thousands of fans a year. But it did not work. Sinclair threatened to leave New Jersey in an attempt to get a trolley line connected to the stadium installed. Fans attending the games that walked over from Newark complained about the narrow footpath on the Center Street Bridge and of the unpleasant smell they endured while crossing. Essie May Roush, wife of Peppers player Edd Roush, stated that the Passaic running under the bridge “was an ugly, smelly river because of the dye water from the silk mills north of Newark. You had to hold your nose

as you went across.”⁴⁷ No trolley line came, nor did the fans. The same was true for teams across the country. Low attendance and the resulting loss of income, in combination with financial cost of antitrust lawsuits with the National and American leagues, forced the Federal League to fold after the 1915 season, after only three years in operation.⁴⁸

Despite its short run, the Federal League had a significant impact, nationally and within Newark. The League represented part of the philosophical change taking place in sports. Sport, as with other forms of leisure, had evolved from an unorganized or semi-organized form of entertainment to a structured business operation. For Newark, it was a localized version of the new national vision of baseball’s business potential. It was a validation that Newark could be considered a city ripe for economic enterprises. Newark could be a destination city: one that had a strong diverse economy, a municipal government that favored investment in leisure, an active, wealthy, and powerful group of business owners, a large population, and a city that already had established cultural attractions. Newark was in its Golden Age. Newark historians place Newark’s peak at about 1917. For Newark, this was its time to shine and baseball was that national stage to present its economic prowess and potential to business investors and developers.

Federal League President James Gilmore stated on opening day for the Peppers, “the motto, ‘Newark Knows How’ cannot be disputed, for the citizens of Newark and the surrounding towns do know how. Newark is a big league city in every sense of the word,

⁴⁷ Wiggins, *The Federal League of Base Ball Clubs*, 253.

⁴⁸ Wiggins, *The Federal League of Base Ball Clubs*, 253 and Dennis Purdy, *Kiss ’em Goodbye: An ESPN Treasury of Failed, Forgotten, and Departed Teams* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2010), 229. For more on the antitrust lawsuits see Nathaniel Grow’s “Insolvent Professional Sports Teams: A Historical Case Study,” *Lewis & Clark Law Review*, 18, no. 2 (2014): 345-384.

and will be one of the best cities in the Federal League.”⁴⁹ The slogan Gilmore had used, “Newark Knows How,” appeared in print as early as 1912.⁵⁰ But its best-known association is with Newark’s 250th Anniversary Celebration in 1916, when it was chosen as the official slogan and later turned into the Celebration’s “souvenir song.” The city’s anniversary celebration was a showcase for the city. The 250th anniversary celebration was a year-long citywide event that included parades, a historic pageant with 4,000 actors that chronicled a version of Newark’s history, and was witnessed by 40,000 residents and the committee had events scheduled nearly daily.⁵¹ The celebration was reported all over the country. Newark’s 250th was planned by the Committee of One Hundred, a group comprised primarily of city’s business elites. Newark historian Paul Stellhorn argues the “business elite’s civic pride included a traditional belief in the city’s uniqueness, but mainly consisted of faith in its supposed economic advantages.”⁵² Newark’s business community had seen consistent and significant growth in the first two decades of the new twentieth century. The city’s close proximity to New York City, its expanding infrastructure of trains, bridges, and roads, and its active ports signaled to them that the trend upward of economic prosperity would continue. With their own economic interest at stake, the group became the primary city boosters.

Federal League president Gilmore was keenly aware that the 250th celebration could be used to promote the Federal League and attempted to tap into the booster spirit being generated. Just as Gilmore was using the city to sell the Federal League, the

⁴⁹ Newspaper clippings related to the Newark Peppers, File Folder Peppers, National Baseball Hall of Fame Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown, New York.

⁵⁰ It was used as a title in an article about a fashion show in Newark in the nationally distributed *Gentlemen’s Fashions* magazine, part of Croonberg’s Gazette of Fashions magazine line. The slogan also appeared in an editorial comment from Newark postal workers in *The Postal Record: A Monthly Journal of the National Association of Letter Carriers*.

⁵¹ For more on the 250th events, see the *Official Guide and Manual*, 1916.

⁵² Stellhorn, “Depression and Decline,” 14.

boosters subsequently saw they could use baseball to sell a narrative of Newark as a destination city. The Federal League and Gilmore, and the national media that covered baseball, bought into the idea being sold by the boosters. In *Baseball Magazine's* editorial section the "Newark Knows How" slogan appeared in the description of Newark as a baseball city. The article portrayed Newark as New York's smaller neighbor, but with the capacity to draw large crowds for baseball. For the opening of the field in Harrison the *Newark Evening News*' had estimated that the largest crowds for a baseball game in Newark had been 11,290, but for the opening in Harrison "five thousand people, accompanied by a half dozen bands, paraded the streets, and an overflow crowd packed the grounds with 27,000 people."⁵³ The Federal League could not compete directly with major league teams by operating in the cities in which their teams were located. Instead, during its short operation, it located teams in places it claimed had been overlooked and that these cities could do even better than their larger neighbors. Newark's neighbor New York City was viewed as an influential city that would only support major league teams. Newark, not considered to be in the same echelon, was deemed a minor league city:

The fact that its population, as revealed by the census, is around 350,000, with a suburban and closely affiliated population equally numerous, makes no difference. A city with a population of 700,000 people is Minor so long as sixteen major league magnates decide to call it so. At least it was before the advent of the Federal League. Newark began bravely. She fairly outdid her mighty neighbor in baseball enthusiasm for a banner opening. How her interest will endure we cannot say. But if Newark and her sister cities, Baltimore and Buffalo and Kansas City, do not fairly embrace the opportunity which is now theirs and prove their worth to rank at Major League caliber, then we will admit that certain Major League magnates really know something after all, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding.⁵⁴

⁵³ F.C. Lane, "Editorials," *Baseball Magazine*, Vol. XV no. 2, (June 1915), 15.

⁵⁴ Lane, "Editorials," 15.

The Federal League chose teams for cities and promoted them to the city's politicians and businessmen as emerging destination cities. The desire to make Newark a destination city spans well into the twenty-first century. Politicians, city and county officials, and local businessmen embraced this narrative. For the year that the Federal League coincided with Newark's anniversary celebration, there was a dual national marketing campaign for the city. The Committee of One Hundred and the Federal League used one another to sell a narrative of Newark as a destination city. It was a narrative that benefited both their interests.

At this time Newark was not on the fringe in baseball circles, but made a claim to be close to the center. Advocating being at the center of baseball circles, Newark and its leaders argued it should be seen as a premier urban destination. The city's business elites, city government, local press, and residents through editorials advocated for this through boosterism. As Newark's profile rose nationally and baseball's dominance as the national pastime took hold, baseball in Newark was seen as a tool that could be used. Politicians, officials, businessmen, and, to a lesser extent, communities and residents in Newark, used baseball to advocate for their desires and attempted to shape the city's direction. The narratives crafted are sometimes contradictory, but mostly fused baseball with ideas of civicness, boosterism, and nostalgia to shape the city's development. As defined by Mayor Thomas Raymond in a speech he gave for the 250th celebration, boosterism was a "new broader civic consciousness." That civicness should entail building up and expanding numerous aspects of the city, "from transportation systems to libraries, to museums, cultural programs, and better schools."⁵⁵ For the boosters, Newark was already

⁵⁵ Stellhorn, "Depression and Decline," 14.

a business city and a cultural center. Their job was to show the rest of the country that Newark was ripe for all forms of investment and they could do it through baseball.

Bears in Transition

1908-1925

The Newark Peppers had put Newark into the national spotlight. That experience would shape how Newark boosters would utilize baseball in their efforts going forward in regards to the city's development plans. The team, and the stadium they played in, would be the vehicles for narratives that would emanate from these boosters. In the early to mid-twentieth century, two primary teams played in the city, the Bears and the Eagles. The Eagles did not come to Newark until 1936, but the Bears began playing in Newark in 1916. They were preceded by the Sailors (1902-1907) and then the Indians (1908-1916). For most of 1908-1916, the Newark Indians played in Newark at Wiedenmayer's Park, which was located in the Ironbound neighborhood. The earliest recorded game played at Wiedenmayer's Park was 1904. George W. Wiedenmayer, a Newark beer baron, built the park. The George W. Wiedenmayer Brewery opened in 1880 and at its peak it was one of the largest breweries in the state. It encompassed three buildings, a stable, and a cold storage center. Like other industrial businesses at the time, Wiedenmayer built a baseball field on his grounds for his employees, their families, and local children to use and for watching sporting events.⁵⁶

The Indians had played in several professional leagues before Brooklyn Dodgers owner Charles Ebbets bought the team in 1913. At the time the franchise was valued at

⁵⁶ Jean-Rae Turner, Richard Koles, and Charles Cummings, *Newark: The Golden Age* (Columbia, SC: Arcadia Pub, 2003), 30 and 98. The earliest recorded date of a game being played there is 1904. The stadium burned down in 1925.

\$113,000. After the sale, the Brooklyn-owned team continued to play in Newark in 1913 and 1914. In June of 1915 the team was sold for \$5,000 and moved Harrisburg Pennsylvania when the new Federal League team, the Peppers, proved to be more popular among the few fans attending games.⁵⁷

The Indians came back to Newark after the Federal League disbanded. Instead of returning to the aging Wiedenmayer's Park, they played their home games at the year-old Harrison Stadium, which was recently vacated by the Peppers. Though the new stadium was in decent condition, it still had transportation issues. The stadium was close to public transportation, but there was no direct access to the ballpark. The local press reported that if the Indians agreed to play at the stadium, the city of Harrison would make improvements, including "adequate trolley service to the park entrance."⁵⁸ As more money would need to be invested to improve the stadium, the local press reiterated the narrative coming from Harrison's local officials that "both town and club have much to gain by having the new park in operation."⁵⁹ Though the city of Harrison had not paid for the stadium's construction, it had given land to the project and tax incentives. Having an empty stadium, a visual reminder that Harrison could not support a business venture, in this case baseball was not an option for the city.

The Indians were not a good team. After finishing in last place in 1917 the Indians were rebranded and renamed. The new name, the Bears, did not improve the team or attendance at the games and in the winter of 1919 the team was transferred to Syracuse.

⁵⁷ Fred Bendel, "Brooklyn Pennant Luck Would Make Jersey City," *Newark Evening News*, April 30, 1932, 16.

⁵⁸ Newspaper clippings related to the Newark Peppers, File Folder Peppers, National Baseball Hall of Fame Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown, New York.

⁵⁹ Newspaper clippings related to the Newark Peppers, File Folder Peppers, National Baseball Hall of Fame Giamatti Research Center, Cooperstown, New York.

Newark would be without a team until March, when Roy Mack, son of Hall of Famer Connie Mack, bought a team in Akron for \$25,000 and transferred it to Newark.⁶⁰ The team kept the Bears name and would again play at Harrison Park, with a yearly rental fee of \$5,000, until August 1923, when a fire destroyed the stadium and all of team's equipment. Wiedenmayer's Park would suffer the same fate in 1925 when that wooden stadium burned down.⁶¹

In January 1924 the most recent and fairly new owners of the Bears, William Ashton and Bernard Moan resold the Newark franchise for \$65,000 to a group of twelve Newark businessmen headed by Michael McTighe and Corbett McCarthy. The group of twelve stated they would invest \$350,000 for a stadium. Prior to the sale's official announcement, in December, McTighe and McCarthy hosted a dinner for the local sports reporters at the Newark Athletic Club, where they claimed they would be "giving the city a ball team worthy of the name and stadium that should become the pride of the public." Sports geographer John Bale argues, "Collective identification, especially when coupled with success, makes people feel better and engenders a sense of place pride. Local pride emerged as the most frequent cited reason for supporting a football club – exceeding the influences of family and peers."⁶² If the new owners could establish pride in the team, they thought it would translate into success. The new ownership group had planned to build its stadium on one of three locations on Frelinghuysen Avenue near Weequahic Park. This location borders the Newark suburbs and is approximately twenty miles from Harrison Stadium. The new owners contended that the new stadium would also host

⁶⁰ Gus Bock, "Newark Baseball History Has Aspects of a Novel," *Newark Evening News*, April 14, 1928.

⁶¹ United States Congress. House. Committee On The Judiciary. Subcommittee No. 5. Study of Monopoly Power. Washington, U. S. Govt. Print. Off, 1951, 1326.

⁶² Bale, *Sport, Space, and the City*, 56-57.

football games in the fall, with some prominent colleges already expressing interest, soccer in the winter, and possibly boxing matches in the summer.⁶³

Until this new stadium was built the team played at the Meadowbrook Oval, also known as the Asylum Oval. The Meadowbrook Oval on South Orange Avenue in Newark was partially owned by the Newark Board of Education. It had previously leased the field to semi-pro teams.⁶⁴ The Oval was built in 1915, but by the 1920s it was described as a “substandard field” that “filled the need for baseball games whenever other suitable facilities were not obtainable.”⁶⁵ The proposed stadium near Weequahic Park never materialized. In March 1924, it was reported that the Bears permanent home field would be the Meadowbrook Oval and that grandstands and bleachers were being rushed into construction in order to be ready for Opening Day in April.⁶⁶ A few weeks later, the *New York Times* cited business manager Bernie Moan, who had sold the team but remained on as manager, who stated that the team would play its weekday games at the Oval and its Sunday games at Hyatt Field in Harrison, since the Board of Education would not permit a professional team use of the park full-time or on the Sabbath.⁶⁷

The Bears had limited success. The *Newark Evening News* ran nearly daily cartoons depicting the Bears inadequacies and dysfunction. But in January 1925 a new storyline emerged. Bernie Moan, the team’s former owner and then business manager,

⁶³ When the sale was announced league president Toole had estimated that the group would pay \$75,000 for the team and would invest \$425,000 for a replacement baseball park that would open in 1925 and that the stadium would hold 36,000 fans. “Newark Franchise Sold to Syndicate,” *New York Times*, December 8, 1923, 16, “Syndicate Obtains Newark Franchise,” *Associated Press*, January 31, 1924, “Announces Sale of Newark Ball Club,” *Newark Evening News*, December 7, 1923, and “Newark Baseball Club to Build Stadium for 30,000,” *Newark Evening News*, December 1923.

⁶⁴ “Newark Now Expects to Use Two Grounds,” *New York Times*, April 11, 1924, 25.

⁶⁵ Alfred M. Martin and Alfred T. Martin, *The Negro Leagues in New Jersey: A History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2008), 28.

⁶⁶ “Meadowbrook Field Leased,” *New York Times*, March 20, 1924.

⁶⁷ “Newark Now Expects to Use Two Grounds,” *New York Times*, April 11, 1924.

restated the desire for a new ballpark. He declared that the Meadowbrook Oval was not in acceptable for condition for minor league baseball. He declared to Bears players, “Maybe some of you players dislike the Newark park. Well, I don’t hesitate to say that last season I dreaded playing there. But this year I’m going to make myself like it and you fellows can do the same. Newark is a wonderful baseball town and the fans have been very loyal to give the team the support they did under the conditions that existed. If nothing else you fellows owe it to the fans to go there and give them the best you have.”⁶⁸ Moan was angling for a new stadium by claiming a Newark team should not have play in a substandard stadium, while simultaneously praising the city and its fans. Newark was not a substandard city, so he asked why should the team that represents the city play in a substandard field.

The franchise made its case that it wanted a new location to play. The conversation was accelerated by the fact that the Board of Education was going to tear down the Meadowbrook Oval to start construction in May for a new high school, West Side High School.⁶⁹ The team scouted locations both in the city and in suburban towns with easy access to the city. They wanted a seating capacity of 10,000 with room for expansion. By March, the press reported that the Newark Baseball Club was in negotiations the Pennsylvania Railroad to lease a section of land for five years at \$2,500 a year. The location was on Frelinghuysen Avenue near Weequahic Park and was accessible to trolley and bus lines. In addition to the leased land, it would also be necessary to buy some city-owned land in order fit a stadium. The city would agree to exchange parcels of land in an effort to straighten out the line of the industrial site area.

⁶⁸ “Rabbit Whitman, Holdout, Is Practicing with Bears,” *Newark Evening News*, March 27, 1925.

⁶⁹ “Bears after Five-Year Lease of West Avenue Acreage for Ball Park,” *Newark Evening News*, March 18, 1925.

The stadium was framed as part of a larger infrastructure and zoning plan for the city.

The stadium was squarely placed inside the architecture of the city plans; it was a distinct part rather than an addition.

By April, at the start of the 1925 season, the Weequahic site again never materialized and no other replacement location was found. Moan claimed that he got a “dirty deal” in Newark and that he had received an offer and intended to move the team. On May 11, it was reported that the team had an option to purchase land in Newark owned by Gillen Insurance Company for \$46,000. The ball field would be named Gillen Field with a 6,000-seat capacity and it was projected to be ready by June.⁷⁰ The *Newark Evening News* was skeptical a field could be ready in three weeks, saying of the groundskeeper, if he could do it, he would be a “miracle man” since the site conjured images of “No Man’s Land” since it was “littered with rubble [sic] of every conceivable description.”⁷¹ As predicted, those plans did not materialize either. On May 16, 1925, 28 games into the season, the team was moved to Providence, Rhode Island. They would be the “newest incarnation of the Providence Grays.” The Grays first game was held at Kinsley Park, Rhode Island, on May 23, 1925 in front of 10,000 fans. They defeated Jersey City, 4-2.⁷² Two days after it was announced that the team would be moved, a familiar face to Newark baseball, P.T. Powers, former owner of the Federal League’s Newark Peppers, expressed a desire to buy the Bears and bring them back to New Jersey. To compete with an offer from a Baltimore group, he offered to pay in cash a little more than half the asking price of \$100,000 and guaranteed to have a 10,000-seat ballpark built

⁷⁰ “Stuyvesant Avenue Site for Ball Park,” *Newark Evening News*, May 11, 1925.

⁷¹ “Bears’ Field Looks Hopeless, But Kennedy Is Optimistic,” *Newark Evening News*, May 12, 1925.

⁷² Kerry Keene, “Jimmie Foxx Also Graced The Ball Yard Of Providence The Hall-Of-Famer Played For The Grays For Nine Weeks During The 1925 Season,” *Providence Journal*, October 19, 1995.

in 1926, while also claiming to have an interest in buying and renovating Harrison Stadium for the Bears to play there.⁷³ No deal was made; the team finished the season in Providence and in the off-season they were moved to Reading, Pennsylvania.

Daids the Baseball “Bug” Builds a Stadium

1925-1927

During the 250th Anniversary Celebration, Mayor Raymond had called on the city boosters to make Newark a “Master City.” Of Newark, he said, “not only does it excel in commerce and industry, but it dominated by a lofty and aspiring soul which places it by the side of the world’s fairest cities.”⁷⁴ Through the nineteen-tens, Newark continued to grow, especially upwards, as skyscrapers occupied by businesses filled out the skyline. Newark historian Paul Stellhorn attributed some of this growth to the “active cooperation of a municipal government manned by sympathetic political elite who shared the business community’s dreams and aspirations.”⁷⁵ Mayor Raymond was a strong believer in this philosophy. Raymond believed that the “city’s economic health required an activist government that was closely allied with the business community. What he developed was in its very essence a booster government, intervening in every aspect of city life, pushing along its development by government initiative and expenditure.”⁷⁶ As the Bears exited, Raymond returned as Newark’s mayor for a second term in 1925. With his second term came his philosophy to create the master city and a booster government

⁷³ “Negotiations for Sale of Bears Now Under Way” *Newark Evening News*, April 29, 1925.

⁷⁴ Thomas McCabe, *Miracle On High Street: A History Of St. Benedict’s Preparatory School, Newark, New Jersey* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 55.

⁷⁵ Stellhorn, “Depression and Decline,” 14-15.

⁷⁶ Stellhorn, “Depression and Decline,” 18.

with an emphasis on civicness. Raymond's view on the role a municipal government and a new iteration of the Bears would converge to form a baseball stadium.

September 1925

In September 1925 the *Newark Evening News* reported that someone had purchased the Bears for a rumored \$75,000; the actual price would be \$65,000.⁷⁷ Charles Davids, who made his money in the advertising business, described himself as a “self-confessed baseball bug” from Bayside, Long Island.⁷⁸ He purchased the Bears franchise and players from Reading, Pennsylvania, where the club had been moved after they finished the season in Providence. He intended on moving the team back to Newark to “put Newark back in the baseball map.”⁷⁹ Davids also purchased a plot of land for \$125,000 that was described by the press as land that was once a meadow down by the Passaic.⁸⁰ Its days as a meadow were long gone. The land was located on Wilson Avenue in the heavily industrialized Ironbound neighborhood, within the footprint of the recently burned down Wiedenmayer's Park.⁸¹ Davids contended:

We hope to have a modern park erected before the 1926 season opens and the plant will not only be within the limits of Newark but will be within a fifteen or twenty minute ride of Market and Broad Streets... Architects are now working on plans and eventually we expect to have a park that will seat 20,000 fans... we are figuring just now on stands of concrete and steel that will be up-to-date in every respect.⁸²

⁷⁷ “Ruppert Stadium to Be Torn Down,” *New York Times*, October 17, 1952, 37.

⁷⁸ A bug or c/krank is another term for fan.

⁷⁹ “Juvenile Fans to Be Weekly Guests of Bears Next Season, First Rule of Owner Charles Davids,” *Newark Evening News*, September 11, 1925.

⁸⁰ “Close Reading and Newark Deal with Final Payment of \$65,000,” *Newark Evening News*, January 20, 1926.

⁸¹ “Former Bear Team is Switched from Providence to Reading,” *Newark Evening News*, December 8, 1925 and Michael Benson, *Ballparks of North America: A Comprehensive Historical Reference to Baseball Grounds, Yards and Stadiums, 1845 to Present* (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company, 1989), 279.

⁸² “President of Club on Visit Here Tells of Plans for Park,” *Newark Evening News*, September 11, 1925.

Davids, as with the owners of Newark baseball teams that preceded him, praised Newark for its dedication to baseball. But more importantly, he asserted the narrative which began with advent of baseball in Newark and which will be repeated continuously into the twenty-first century, that baseball had a positive transformative power. Davids claimed, "It is my belief that Newark can be made, what it was a dozen years ago, the best minor league city in the country. Presidents of International League clubs have told me during the last few months what a great baseball town this city was in days gone by. We are going to try and change that was to is and I believe that it can be done or I wouldn't attempt to bring baseball back here."⁸³ Davids inferred that the city wanted to be a baseball town and that the designation "baseball town" came with economic prosperity and pride. He also used notions of nostalgia to shape the very recent past in favor of his proposed investment. The narrative in support of a new stadium was crafted from the false claim of baseball's success in Newark. Not even fifteen years prior Newark was viewed as having baseball potential, but the actual results were that the Federal League lasted a year in the city and the Indians/Bears had bounced around Newark until it became financially beneficial for them to be moved out of state. The inaccuracy of the narrative did not hinder it from being repeated and expanded upon by Davids, city officials, and those who would financial benefit from stadiums construction and success. This is nostalgia in action. Sociologists Fabio DaSilva and Jim Faugh argue the "receiver of the nostalgic message is left only with vague impressions and feelings...which makes it possible to present numerous discrete details without

⁸³ "President of Club on Visit Here Tells of Plans for Park," *Newark Evening News*, September 11, 1925.

analysis.”⁸⁴ Nostalgia is as much about diverting attention away from one aspect of the past as it is directing attention to another. Nostalgia distorts the past and turns it into currency.

Dauids had chosen Newark because of its public transportation system and its close proximity to Manhattan and neighboring New Jersey cities. But the choice of location for the stadium within Newark was a curious one. Dauids had nixed the site at Frelinghuysen Avenue that had been optioned by former Bears manager McGinnity, who had planned to build in that location a \$300,000 stadium before dying of cancer. He also stated that the team would not play at Harrison Stadium. The spot he picked was within the footprint of Wiedenmayer’s Park, but the fact that a baseball stadium once stood there did not mean it was a good location for one. The issues that came with this location were well documented and unresolved. According to the *Newark Evening News*, Dauids was “advised not to rebuild in Wilson Avenue, as Newark’s population was moving westward.”⁸⁵ In the East Ward, where the stadium was set to be built, what had been enclaves for German, Polish, Lithuanian, Portuguese, and other European immigrants was being replaced by industrial sites. That immigrant population, now one or more generations of Newarkers, were able to move to more desirable homes and neighborhoods that resided on the border of suburbs or to those suburbs.

The Ironbound, having become more industrial rather than residential, had limited public transportation within the neighborhood, making it fairly inaccessible to other parts of Newark, as well as to visitors from outside the city. When the location was announced it was referred to by Newark City Commissioner John Howe as “Dauids’ Folly,” for its

⁸⁴ Fabio DaSilva and Jim Faught, “Nostalgia: A Sphere and Process of Contemporary Ideology,” *Qualitative Sociology* Volume 5, no. 1 (1982): 50.

⁸⁵ Fred Bendel, “Bears Usually Profitable,” *Newark Evening News*, January 15, 1950.

location “showed poor foresight, for the core of fans within fifteen years would be on the outskirts.”⁸⁶ Davids never publicly stated why he chose location. It is possible, likely probable, that any location at or near Frelinghuysen Avenue would have been too expensive. As I have said, those who were economically mobile were moving to the outskirts of the city or to the suburbs. This meant a location that required multi-acres of green space in a desirable residential area would be too cost prohibitive. The stadium’s location, chosen because of affordability, ignorance, or something in between, would impact the stadium’s success in its immediate and long-term future. Into the mid-twentieth century for Newarkers and the suburban Essex County residents, it would be almost easier to travel to New York to see major league teams than to go to the stadium in the Ironbound.⁸⁷

December 1925

The location concerns were cast off. Newark was to have a new stadium within the city limits. On the December 17, 1925, architect William J. Fitzsimmons designed a stadium that he described as being “not only utilitarian, but also beautiful.”⁸⁸ The design was printed in the *Newark Evening News* at the top of the first page of the sports section; it spanned three columns. The sketch featured a large and impressive frontage of the stadium, 435 feet across and three stories high. In front of the structure he drew groups of people, including women and children. This was a shift from early descriptions of the Peppers games, where it was primarily men and boys at the stadium. This space would be a space for men and families alike. There were cars driving past the entrance, showing its

⁸⁶ Randolph Linthurst, *Newark Bears: The Middle Years* (Trenton, NJ: White Eagle Printing, 1979), 4.

⁸⁷ Randolph Linthurst, *Newark Bears* (Trenton, NJ: White Eagle Printing, 1978), 93.

⁸⁸ “Newark Baseball Owners Await Contractors’ Bids,” *Newark Evening News*, December 17, 1925.

accommodation to the new widespread accessibility and desirability of automobiles. In the background, in the left corner, a factory with a smokestack peaks out just beyond the stadium's walls; a note that this stadium fits within its industrial neighborhood. The proposed stadium would hold 17,000 seats with the ability to expand another 12,500. It was to have six turnstiles leading into a large rotunda and from there runaways to get to seats.⁸⁹ This stadium would not be a ballpark; it would be a modern stadium in a modern city. This stadium was modeled from the new stadium designs for both major and minor league teams being built all over the nation in the early 1900s. No longer were stadiums being built from wood that was prone to fires. New material, steel and concrete, enhanced the safety of the structures, but also allowed for architects to utilize the technology and engineering that were building skyscrapers. Architects could craft more expansive stadiums than they ever could before.

January 1926

On January 11, 1926, in front of a crowd of 300, Charles Davids took a shovel to the ground, turned over the dirt, and contractor Thomas J. Scully of Glen Ridge, New Jersey, and his men went to work on a stadium that was estimated to cost \$300,000. The hope was that it would be completed by opening day in April. It was not. Instead, it was mostly completed, but ready to use on May 15, 1926.⁹⁰ But before what would be a series of problems, there was excitement. The *Newark Evening News*, with a photo of the stadium's construction, reported "the men at work on the new field seem to be as

⁸⁹ "Newark Baseball Owners Await Contractors' Bids," *Newark Evening News*, December 17, 1925.

⁹⁰ "Stadium is Started, First Earth Turned," *Newark Evening News*, January 11, 1926.

enthused over the erection of the stadium.”⁹¹ The excitement was found in the editorial section of the *Newark Evening News*:

Davids wants a good ball club here. He is a baseball fan but also a business man and in order to have customers for his new park, now being built in Wilson avenue, he is out to serve up a good brand of baseball... Previously, players were moved up to MLB or other teams, wasn't about a team winning. Now all of this is to be changed. The Newark club is to be run as a business proposition. In order to get the fans out Davids is going to get together the strongest possible club.

The lines demarcating business, baseball, and city had seemingly vanished. Davids' rhetoric was repeated in the press, appropriated by city officials and businessmen, and soon became the stadium's dominant storyline. It was a narrative where baseball, and by association, the stadium was not only to benefit the city, it would be an indispensable part of the city. This narrative became even more ingrained as the building of the stadium stalled.

Public Funding, By Way of Not Taxes, but the Citizens Committee

March 1926

Enthusiasm at the construction site was short lived. Before they even broke ground the Ironworkers Union stated they would not work for contractor Thomas J. Scully because of a previous payment grievance between him and the union. Thomas Sherlock, the business agent for the union, stated the issue stemmed from Scully using non-union workers on the building of the Newark Board of Education's City Field a few months prior. The contract between Scully and Davids did have a provision for the employment of only union labor. A few days later the dispute was resolved, though it was never reported what concessions, if any, were made. A few weeks after the initial dispute

⁹¹ "Progress of Work on Newark Baseball Stadium," *Newark Evening News*, February 9, 1926.

was resolved, in March two hundred workers staged a strike over delays in payroll; a total that amounted to about \$18,000 a week.⁹² It became clear with the payroll delays that Davids was running out of capital. Creditors began to threaten lawsuits. The creditors informed Davids that “unless the club is allowed to continue its contract for the building of the new stadium the assets of the company will depreciate in value.”⁹³ The *Newark Evening News* detailed the financial situation; when organized in November 1925, the Newark Baseball club had a “capital stock of \$600,000, in 6,000 shares of \$100 each. Of this amount, \$394,600 has been issued...the club has obligations against it in excess of \$200,342.97, not including a mortgage of \$115,000.”⁹⁴ Davids had grossly underestimated the cost of building the stadium. The initial investment of \$600,000 was not going to cover the cost of construction. The stadium’s completion was in jeopardy. The day after the financial situation ran in the newspaper, a group of Newark residents and business owners met to devise a plan to complete the stadium.

Thomas Miner, a prominent Newark businessman who owned Miner’s Empire Theater, convened what was called a Citizens Committee, on which he served as Chairman. He made a public call to residents and to the business community in Newark and its suburbs to buy stock, a seven percent non-voting preferred stock or common stock, into the stadium to raise the money needed to complete the stadium. The Committee thought it would need to raise \$125,000 and believed it could reach the goal in three to four days. The price of a share of stock ranged from \$10 to \$10,000. Miner gave \$5,000 on behalf Miner’s Empire Theater and declared, “I have never met Mr.

⁹² “Belated Pay Roll Arrives and Men Resume Work on Ball Park,” *Newark Evening News*, March 16, 1926.

⁹³ “Equity Receiver for Baseball Club,” *Newark Evening News*, March 19, 1926.

⁹⁴ “Equity Receiver for Baseball Club,” *Newark Evening News*, March 19, 1926.

Davids, but any man who has put as much money into a Newark proposition as he had and then needs some cash he should be given it by Newarkers. Davids is in an unfortunate position and he must be helped. He has gone a great way in building a stadium and has what appears to be an excellent squad of ball players getting in readiness to start the season. We must show Mr. Davids that ‘Newark Knows How.’”⁹⁵ Just as President Gilmore had done ten years prior with the promotion of the Federal League, Miner invoked the nostalgic version of Newark. It was a Newark of resiliency, ability, and determination to bring about positive forces for the city, forces that improve civic life. It was the Newark of Mayor’s Raymond’s “Master City.” Miner issued a challenge to residents. It was a call to remind residents that Newark has been overlooked as a city, but that they can prove it was a city that developers of all kinds, including baseball owners, should invest.

The stadium could be seen as an effort to stop, reverse, or distort the image of the city’s trajectory. Newark had reached its peak by about 1917 and in the following decades saw a slow but steady exodus of wealthy residents and business elites to the suburbs. With their departure went Newark’s tax base. A stadium is a large physical representation of capital, a visual cue for success even if the reality is something different. Unlike taxes, this was a call for individual direct monetary action. Mark Boyle in “Growth Machines and Propaganda Projects” built on David Harvey’s assertion that “the ideology of locality, place and community has become central to the political rhetoric of urban governance” and others have “identified a new and quite distinctive phase in the historical use made by urban elites of projects designed to assert new forms of civic identity and pride...[that these] projects are typically represented in terms of

⁹⁵ “Stadium Will Go On, Aid Being Planned,” *Newark Evening News*, March 20, 1926.

efforts made by local elites to refashion collective emotion and consciousness within cities in order to legitimate political projects that function primarily in their interests.”⁹⁶ It was a way for residents to feel as though they were making a personal investment, not for a stadium, but for the larger civic consciousness. It was an effort to improve the city, and by extension themselves.

Within three days they had raised \$80,000 in pledged support, close to the \$125,000 goal. The city’s wealthiest residents and local companies had bought stock. The list included the *Newark Evening News*, which reported each day the stock buyers names and the amount of stock they bought. The newspaper offered no reason for why they printed the names and the dollar amounts of the pledges. It could have been an effort to offer positive promotion for the investors, to pressure those who had yet to invest, but likely it was a way to increase sales: some people would buy the paper to see who had given money the previous day. The *Newark Evening News* benefited if the stadium project was a success and they could report on the popular game of baseball. Some of the names on the initial list of stock buyers were City Commissioner Howe, who only a few months prior had referred to the location of the stadium as “Davids folly,” Louis Bamberger, founder of Bamberger’s department store and one of the city’s greatest philanthropists, and beer baron Christian Feigenspan. They each gave \$5,000. The other local newspaper, the *Star-Eagle*, gave \$2,500. There is no mention in any article or in the city of Newark’s official documents that Commissioner Howe’s stock purchase posed a conflict of interest as a city official. Howe would not only buy stock, but in his official

⁹⁶ Mark Boyle, “Growth Machines and Propaganda Projects, A Review of Readings of the Role of Civic Boosterism in the Politics of Local Economic Development,” in *The Urban Growth Machine: Critical Perspectives Two Decades Later*, ed. Andrew E. G. Jonas and David Wilson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 55.

capacity as commissioner would lobby on several occasions in support of the stadium.

John Conway Toole, president of the International League, in which the Bears played, considered Newark's membership in the league to be an asset. He stated in response to the stock campaign, "What you men are doing is unique in baseball. You have welcomed a stranger, Charles Davids, president of the Newark club into your midst... He spent a small fortune, but circumstances turned against him. Now you have to come to the rescue with purely unselfish motives. It is the most remarkable thing I have ever seen in baseball."⁹⁷ It is never stated in the press or from Davids why he ran out of capital, especially only three months after starting construction. He could have miscalculated the cost of building a stadium, including wages for union workers, construction material that was now concrete and steel instead of wood, or he could not have afforded it from the start. Toole's use of word "unselfish" is seemingly a diversionary tactic to move attention away from Davids. Instead of the focus being on the fact that Davids was wealthy, that the reason for lack of funds to complete the stadium was his fault, and that monetary contributions were going into his pocket since the stadium was privately owned, the attention was put on populace. Those who bought stock would at best get a small return, meaning they were essentially asking residents to donate to a wealthy businessman's profit-making investment. Calling stock buyers unselfish was a means to praise them and also encouraging the act itself. It validated the act of stock buying as a something positive that others should emulate. It can also be seen as a means to communicate with those men on strike; a way to put pressure on the unions by framing the act of the strike as selfish, rather than on a wealthy business owner's delaying payroll for working-class families.

⁹⁷ "Fund for Stadium Increased \$14,700 Total Now \$80,000," *Newark Evening News*, March 23, 1926.

Dauids' public statements steered attention away from the strike and he used the opportunity to place himself not as the business owner, but alongside those who were buying stock. His response to the fundraising effort was, "I didn't run away from the situation because I believe in Newark. I would not want one cent from you men unless I had reached the end of my cash resources. I did not ask for any popular stock subscription for the club. I have apathy toward stock subscriptions. I have put every possible asset I possess into the club. You have lifted me out of a tremendous despair because for several days I had been at pretty low ebb."⁹⁸ The focus was now on residents as valued contributors to the building process. The narrative of supporting the hometown team was being echoed by Davids and the Bears league president Toole, and also by city leaders. Board of Education chairman Mr. Cavicchia stated, "Newark has some civic pride... Its sportsmanship was displayed when business houses and individuals came to the rescue of the ball club."⁹⁹ This is one of many statements by city officials to connect civicness or civic pride to the stadium. This language is used to explain the need for the stadium, to call for support, and to push against opposition.

Over the next two months the Citizens Committee continued to sell stocks. Additional contributors included the owners of the two other department stores, L.S. Plaut and Hahne & Company, the third local newspaper, the *Sunday Call*, and the brewery owners, the Wiedenmayer family. In a letter to the editor, signed "A Davids Rooter,"

I have noticed with a great deal of interest just who subscribed to the fund for the purchase of the shares of stock...in looking over the names I saw few of our really big moneyed men. To those few who have subscribed a world of praise is due; to those who have not, censure is their reward. How any men can resist the

⁹⁸ "Fund for Stadium Increased \$14,700 Total Now \$80,000," *Newark Evening News*, March 23, 1926.

⁹⁹ "Baseball Stadium Fund Now Past Mark of \$100,000," *Newark Evening News*, March 23, 1926.

call of civic pride such as this movement clarions forth is beyond me... There are in our city many men who could have ended this drive immediately after it got under way if they had deigned to dive into their one-way pockets and drag forth a little cash. No, they wouldn't be guaranteed a certain return right away, so away with the proposition. Let the bootblack and the newspaper man put their money forward, as they have without question thus far. It would be a blot and a stain on the name of Newark if they fail to raise the money, solely because a bunch of moneyed magnates wouldn't dive down; perhaps they're afraid of tangling their fingers in the fishhooks in the better of their pockets.¹⁰⁰

This letter exemplifies how a narrative that purports that civicness is tied to baseball can achieve the desired result of building a stadium. The “rooter” iterates the power of the Newark resident, first, the ability for the individual to invest and thus own a piece of the stadium through the stock. Second, he mentions their power as consumers. For the businesses that have not donated, they can be boycotted; consumers can inflict an economic consequence. The populace that had bought into the narrative that the stadium is a worthwhile project can drive it forward and push back by pressuring the business elites to fulfill their desired outcome. The stock subscriptions were an ingenious tactic to get residential buy-in by offering a real investment opportunity that offered the illusion of some modicum of power in the process. Civicness by way of economic investment keeps the stakes but changes the frame.

Contributions also came in from outside the city. In a statement to the *Newark Evening News* the committee thanked Newarkers and the suburban towns “for citizens throughout the county have been very generous in their response” and from Davids the response was that the “spirit of Newark in aiding his cause reflected not only civic pride, but a brotherhood of man... I am deeply grateful to the citizens of Newark and the surrounding municipalities for their responsive spirit on my behalf. For several days I felt as the Allies must have felt during the darkest hours of the World War when they stood

¹⁰⁰ “To the Editor,” *Newark Evening News*, March 26, 1926.

with their back to the wall. I was in the same sort of position. Then the allied forces heard the cry ‘the Yanks are coming’ and their cause was saved. Now the Newark ball club is saved.”¹⁰¹ Hyperbole only reinforced the narrative that civicness was expected as part of one’s duty as a city resident and an American. Adding “American” into the mix reinforced a commitment to the project.

Sales of stock continued. The *Newark Evening News*, along with names provided short notes as to why an individual bought stocks. Among those who gave were public school teachers, five and six-year-old children who used their birthday money to buy stock, and a Boy Scout Troop. It was reported that some contractors and material men “expressed willingness” to accept stocks as payment.¹⁰² In the notes with the pledge, those who contributed often used similar language when they explained why they wanted to be part of the effort. The phrases “civic pride” or “civic matter” were often used and included sentiments similar to a “proposition should be considered as a Newark Institution and not just a sporting enterprise.”¹⁰³ The Citizens Committee decided that inside the stadium it would place a bronze tablet with the names of those who bought stock in the stadium, while Davids stated he would have an annual date to celebrate those who gave.¹⁰⁴ As geographer Brian Osborne argues, “mythic-history through orchestrated commemoration and controlled spectacle’ work to shape social memory, by focusing on specific events and places.”¹⁰⁵ The stadium, through commemoration, would reinforce

¹⁰¹ “Need Only \$7,000 As Minimum Fund for Newark Bears,” *Newark Evening News*, March 27, 1926 and “Fund for Bears Subscribed, More Will Be Sought,” *Newark Evening News*, March 29, 1926.

¹⁰² “Stadium Fund Goes Forward as Court Aids,” *Newark Evening News*, March 31, 1926.

¹⁰³ “Further Pledges Swell Total for Bears’ Field Fund” *Newark Evening News*, April 10, 1926.

¹⁰⁴ “Fund for Bears Subscribed, More Will Be Sought,” *Newark Evening News*, March 29, 1926.

¹⁰⁵ Maureen M. Smith, “From ‘The Finest Ballpark in America’ to ‘The Jewel of the Waterfront’: The Construction of San Francisco’s Major League Baseball Stadiums,” in *The Rise of Stadiums in the Modern United States: Cathedrals of Sport*, eds. Mark Dyreson and Robert Trumpbour (New York: Routledge, 2010), 120.

the narrative that it is a public space owned by the citizens. Ownership promoted pride and preservation; vested interest can often translate into economic success.

Each day the *Newark Evening News* reported the new pledge total with updated numbers of firms and individuals who contributed. On March 23, four days after Davids' financial troubles were reported, the first total was published: \$80,700 from 27 firms and individuals. The total increased each day by about \$5,000 to \$10,000. By March 31, the total reached \$135,275 from 291 firms and individuals and by April there was an additional \$21,000 in pledged subscriptions from an additional 182 firms and individuals, with some buying stock for the second time. The committee increased its goal of \$125,000, which it had surpassed, to \$175,000.

April and May 1926

The *Newark Evening News* continuously reported Davids' gratitude for the financial assistance. In one such instance, the paper reported Davids encouraging his players to go to church the coming Easter Sunday to "give thanks to God for enabling me to weather this financial storm."¹⁰⁶ The reporter noted that Davids had wiped a tear from his eye and said,

Boys, I can't tell you in words the agony and suffering I experienced when I found myself face to face with disaster. I had used every available penny of cash and had reached the point where it appeared my castles in the air and dreams of success in baseball were about to be demolished. Let me tell you that I was inclined to lose faith. But today we stand on the threshold of a bright future... Newark is my town. I am going to sell my home at Bayside, Long Island, and I'm going to live in Newark.¹⁰⁷

The reporter described the scene: Davids speaking from the heart for nearly an hour,

¹⁰⁶"Davids Urges Team Attend Church Sunday," *Newark Evening News*, April 1, 1926.

¹⁰⁷"Davids Urges Team Attend Church Sunday," *Newark Evening News*, April 1, 1926.

during which he “spent most of that time in heaping praise upon the Newarkers who came to his financial rescue. At times he was so pathetic in trying to impress upon the players the mental anguish that he suffered that some of the hardboiled veterans of the club could be seen to brush away a stray tear.”¹⁰⁸ The article reads as though the reporter was moved by Davids’ pledge and presents it to the reader as more of a rallying cry than a version of what took place. It is presented as a narrative of suffering and sacrifice for something greater, for Newark, for the citizens, all accomplished via a baseball stadium. Suffering for a building, for concrete and steel? No, the narrative is suffering for yourself. The stadium is your stadium. Your contribution is valued and its reward will be personal.

The narrative was further solidified in the newspaper with more accounts of Newark’s glorified nostalgic past used as both a goal and a guide to prosperity for the city. As opening day approached an article written in the style of an old man talking to a young boy was printed. It recounted the history of one of the early baseball teams in the city, the Newark Little Giants, who were champions forty years prior. “My, oh my, but that was a ball team, boy! And with only twelve or thirteen players for the whole season. It was not a team of stars, at that, but the boys had that something – morale, pep or maybe it was just team work – that surely won ball games.”¹⁰⁹ The story hit all the customary notes, of underdogs, a team rather than one of two star players, morale, and scrappiness, not unlike the city of Newark itself. Narratives of teams are often used as representations or as metaphors of the cities in which they are located. Newark is not a star like New York City, but a city whose assets are in its collective effort. That it has the ability, as in every single sporting event, to win a game if it works as a team towards a common goal.

¹⁰⁸ “Davids Urges Team Attend Church Sunday,” *Newark Evening News*, April 1, 1926.

¹⁰⁹ “Little Giants: Record for Bears to Shoot At,” *Newark Evening News*, April 6, 1926.

It took three weeks of fundraising to lift the work stoppage that had started the sale of stock subscriptions. After work had stopped on March 15 because of lack of funds to meet payroll, on April 5, after back pay was issued with the money raised in the stocks, work resumed on the stadium. There were enough funds to continue construction, but the Citizens Committee was still short \$30,000 of the new goal of \$175,000. Thomas Miner, chairman of the Citizens Committee who made the initial appeal, again reached out to Newarkers, this time from his sickbed. The *Newark Evening News* informed readers that Miner was “broken in health as the result of his tireless efforts of the last few weeks to raise enough money to complete the Bears stadium at Wilson avenue [sic] is beseeching the Newark fans not to fall now with victory in sight.”¹¹⁰ The article reported that doctors refused him permission to speak to anyone, that the phone was taken from his room, but despite his doctor’s orders he felt he needed to appeal to Newarkers, reminding them that “any subscription over \$10 is heartily welcomed.”¹¹¹ The next day it was announced that the sickbed plea raised \$2,305 in a single day. By the end of the effort, it had raised \$147,040.

Even with the new cash flow the stadium was not going to be completed in time for opening day. The contingency plan was for the games to be held for a few weeks at School Stadium, which was used primarily for high school sporting events. As with every step in the process of building this stadium, there was an issue. As with the Meadowbrook Oval, the Board of Education, which owned the stadium, did not want a professional sports team to use it fulltime. But Board of Education President Mr.

¹¹⁰ “Miner Appeals to Ball Fans: Trustee of Bears’ Fund Makes Request for Last \$30,000,” *Newark Evening News*, April 7, 1926.

¹¹¹ “Miner Appeals to Ball Fans: Trustee of Bears’ Fund Makes Request for Last \$30,000,” *Newark Evening News*, April 7, 1926.

Cavicchia, a public supporter of the stadium, stated: “I consider the baseball situation now as a civic matter.”¹¹² Cavicchia, in order to secure the rights for the team to play on school property, lessened the importance of baseball as a business and enhanced baseball as an activity for the betterment of the city. An activity that would benefit the city, including children who attend games, he argued was something that the Board of Education, an entity of the municipal government, should support. Cavicchia was able to convince his fellow board members to agree to the use of the stadium with the stipulation that the team would prevent any gambling within the stadium. The Bears officials agreed to a squad of special detectives and asserted “severe measures would be taken with anybody found guilty of attempted gambling.”¹¹³ The Board of Education, reinforcing its commitment to the value of baseball, would get 12.5 percent per ticket rather than its usual 35 percent rental fee.¹¹⁴ The final part of the agreement was that there would be no Sunday games. The Sunday ban, a Board of Education restriction and not a city ordinance, was revisited a week later. Sunday games, the double-headers, as they were for the Peppers, were the moneymaking games. Playing these games was particularly critical for the cash-strapped Davids. Board President Cavicchia again appealed to the Board, “I can’t see any harm in letting people sit out in the open to watch a ball game. I have children and I would rather see them sitting in that stadium watching a game where they would see clean sport and healthy athletes, than under the trees in Weequahic or Branch Brook Park.”¹¹⁵ Whereas the park, argues John Kasson in *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century*, in the 1800s was designed to “provide cultural

¹¹² “Special Meeting to Act on a Plea,” *Newark Evening News*, April 8, 1926.

¹¹³ “Special Meeting to Act on a Plea,” *Newark Evening News*, April 8, 1926.

¹¹⁴ “Special Meeting to Act on a Plea,” *Newark Evening News*, April 8, 1926.

¹¹⁵ “Stadium Given Bears Sunday,” *Newark Evening News*, April 15, 1926.

leadership for an urban-industrial society; to present a model of social order, cohesion, and tranquility for a fractious people; to elevate public taste and reform public conduct...not simply to amuse but to instruct their users in lessons of aesthetic taste and social responsibility and to inspire them with a respect for cultural standards,”¹¹⁶ to Cavicchia the baseball stadium had superseded the park as a venue for lessons in morality and civicness. City Commissioner Howe gauged baseball’s importance by its popularity in the media: “When a conservative paper like the *Evening News*, which reaches a half a million people, gives the whole front page to this it must be something worthwhile. It does more to advertise the city than anything else.”¹¹⁷ The Board did not grant permission on the record, but an arrangement was made so that games were played on Sundays.

Local Newark newspaper articles declared an Opening Day that “promises to surpass any that has even been hold in Robert Treat’s town,” that there is a “spirit and enthusiasm” in the city, and that there will be a record attendance of 20,000. The city, for its part, subsidized the additional trolleys and cross-town bus routes that were added to School Stadium. Mayor Raymond and Commissioner Howe would throw out the first pitch. To start the festivities, prior to the game, there was an automobile parade arranged by the Morgan Motor Car Company and Newark Auto Trade Association with a brass band.¹¹⁸

The day after Opening Day, the *Newark Evening News* headline read “Opening Day Leaves Many Vivid Impressions: Interest of Feminine Observer Captured by Gay

¹¹⁶ Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 11.

¹¹⁷ “Stadium Given Bears Sunday,” *Newark Evening News*, April 15, 1926.

¹¹⁸ “Shaping Plans for Taking Fans to and from Opening Game,” *Newark Evening News*, April 12, 1926; “Newark’s Baseball Opening Day Looms as Brightest in History,” *Newark Evening News*, April 13, 1926; “Parade is Planned for Bears in May,” *Newark Evening News*, April 13, 1926; and “Record Crowd Expected for Bears’ Opener,” *Newark Evening News*, April 14, 1926.

Panorama as Bears Get Under Way – Waste of Flowers on Mere Men Deplored.” The review of the day, by Frederica Howell, had the usual men selling hot dogs and fresh roasted peanuts. But with her touted feminine perspective she observed that there were not many women in attendance, but seemingly all the men in the city were there. This was not unlike the coverage of the first game of the Federal League, with an article stating that during the pre-game parade women lined the sidewalks “scouting the male population.” She went on to state that the “waste of flowers” was a horseshoe shaped floral arrangement with a ribbon with the word “Success” printed on it; but of course “mere men” did not want flowers.¹¹⁹ The *New York Times* description of the game recounted the players in their white uniforms with red and blue trim and the band playing “The Star-Spangled Banner.” The most striking addition in the *New York Times* account was its report that a live bear “was brought out on the field by spectators and marched along with the group. It was adopted as a mascot by the Newark Bears and for the rest of the game sat on their bench.”¹²⁰ The “wasted” floral horseshoe must have been very extravagant to distract Howell from reporting a live bear on a baseball field.

Opening Day at Davids Stadium was scheduled for May 15, but an additional \$20,000 was still needed to complete the stadium. There continued to be public appeals for stock subscriptions, particularly small amounts. The Citizens Committee reasoned that small stockholders were more likely to serve as financiers and through their investment, be motivated to attend games, i.e. spend additional money.¹²¹ Despite the financial deficit, construction continued with teams of horses pulling machines leveling dirt, masons setting concrete blocks, and ironworkers welding steel frames.

¹¹⁹ “Opening Day Leaves Many Vivid Impressions,” *Newark Evening News*, April 15, 1926.

¹²⁰ “15,000 See Newark Beat Buffalo, 7-6,” *New York Times*, April 15, 1926.

¹²¹ “Need \$20,000 for Stadium of Bears,” *Newark Evening News*, April 28, 1926.

But controversy was never far away. In early May the architect William Fitzsimmons claimed he had not been paid for his work, not an uncommon theme in the history of Davids Stadium construction, and brought a lawsuit for payment of what he claimed was the agreed upon price of six percent of total cost of the stadium. When he brought the lawsuit the total cost of the stadium was \$360,500 calculating him a fee of \$21,630. The suit was resolved in July when a jury decided he was owed only \$3,500 for his design.¹²² Even though the stadium was not complete, a second Opening Day occurred on May 15 to a crowd of 16,000. Not even two weeks after, during a rivalry game with Jersey City with a crowd of 18,300, a stadium riot broke out. A fan, aiming a glass bottle at an umpire, struck a member of the Citizens Committee, knocking him unconscious. It was initially thought it had fractured his skull. It was described as “about everything that could happen except a murder or suicide took place at the bargain bill. Even the netting in front of the grandstand caught fire while the second game was on and it was necessary to organize a volunteer bucket brigade headed by Wilbur Crelin (Bears executive) to extinguish it.”¹²³ Davids Stadium was off to an eventful start. Now it just had to sustain a crowd.

1927

One baseball team, one stadium, and two years later, even with the stock subscriptions, Charles Davids was broke. Davids told the *Sunday Call* newspaper, which had reported he was at a rest camp in Adirondacks to “steady himself after the rocks of financial disaster began tumbling upon him, and he saw his life savings swept away in the

¹²² “Architect Moves in Suit Against Bears’ Team,” *Newark Evening News*, May 4, 1926; and “Decides Bears Owe Architect \$3,500,” *Newark Evening News*, July 10, 1926.

¹²³ “Fans Resent Stadium Riot” *Newark Evening News*, May 24, 1926.

crash of the ball club,” of his bankruptcy and having to sell his home to pay off his last debt: “I was seized with a hobby and it swept me away. With a half million dollars at my command I could have invested my fortune in a venture to which there was no risk attached... But I would have a ball club. Well – you know the story. They are about to take that toy from me. And with it will go all my savings.”¹²⁴ It certainly was a costly toy. By all accounts Davids was invested and wanted success for his Bears business venture. But stadium building and team ownership, particularly on the minor league level, is a difficult way to make a profit. Davids’ bankruptcy could have been the result of not having enough capital to even start this business venture, or that his business acumen was in advertising and he could not translate those skills, or that baseball in Newark was not going to be profitable for anyone or some combination of these three or something else entirely.

In May 1927 the Citizens Committee again came together to prevent the Newark Baseball Club from going bankrupt. Seventy Newark citizens, including bankers, city officials, and businessmen “pledged their moral support.”¹²⁵ Commissioner Howe went as far as to say “it is an important matter to the city of Newark that the Newark Baseball Club be relieved of its obligations” and continued with that Newark was indebted to Davids “for coming into the city and bringing with him a good baseball team and stadium.”¹²⁶ The former Mayor of Montclair, New Jersey, Hoard McConnell declared that “this was a case where capital investment was needed to save the investment. The advertising value alone in Newark is worth thousands and thousands of dollars.”¹²⁷ Just

¹²⁴ “Owner of Bears Tells How Hobby Swept Away \$500,000” *The Sunday Call*, September 1927.

¹²⁵ “City Leaders Pledge Bears Their Backing,” *Newark Evening News*, May 18, 1927.

¹²⁶ “City Leaders Pledge Bears Their Backing,” *Newark Evening News*, May 18, 1927.

¹²⁷ “City Leaders Pledge Bears Their Backing,” *Newark Evening News*, May 18, 1927.

as it was in Harrison, the optics of an empty stadium and the failure of a business venture as public as a baseball team was not good for anyone invested in Newark. The plan was to sell an additional \$575,000 in stocks. Within hours of the announcement of the sale on May 31, Commissioner Howe, Thomas Miner, and other members of the Citizens Committee purchased additional stocks.¹²⁸ The following day a detailed description of the financial state of the Newark Baseball Club was reported. It was obvious that the previous approach was not a sustainable business model. In 1926 the Club had made \$346,647 and after operating expenses had a net balance of more than \$99,000. The assets of the club totaled \$1,505,309 in which \$955,000 is equated to the stadium and \$475,000 to the franchise and players. The difference between the assets and liabilities was \$970,233, which amounted to the corporation's net worth.¹²⁹

The stock sale efforts were in vain. On August 2 it was announced that the Newark Baseball Club would be sold at public auction in September. Shortly before the auction, in the same *Sunday Call* article where he spoke of his bankruptcy, the paper quoted Davids as saying, "I'm broke now-flatter than I've been in many years, but just mark my words, in five years I'll be a millionaire."¹³⁰ Along with the Bears, he was also forced to sell the team he owned in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and his home. Even after the sale of his two teams he could not stay away from baseball. He went back to the advertising business, rebuilding his lost savings. In 1932 he attempted to buy a team in Jersey City, but the deal fell through.¹³¹ Charles Davids died on October 24, 1941 of a heart attack at 66. Even though Davids had failed, he brought not only a new stadium to

¹²⁸ "Bears Club Bonds Go on Sale Today," *Newark Evening News*, May 31, 1927.

¹²⁹ "Ball Club Earned \$346,647 in Year," *Newark Evening News*, June 1, 1927.

¹³⁰ "Owner of Bears Tells How Hobby Swept Away \$500,000," *Sunday Call*, September 1927 and *Newark Evening News*, October 28, 1927.

¹³¹ "Charles A. Davids, Bears Ex-Owner," *Newark Evening News*, October 25, 1941.

Newark, but renewed in the city the narrative of civic investment by way of stadiums. Davids' failure, even his name, is all but lost in the nostalgic retelling of the stadium. As sociologists Fabio DaSilva and Jim Faught argue "by transporting artifacts, unencumbered by the negativity of the past, they may now be used to fictionalize past and present experience. As presently constituted, nostalgia requires a collective emotional reaction toward, if not an identification with, a symbolization of the past."¹³² The stadium, which would be renamed Bears Stadium after it was sold, would be cited over the course of the twentieth century in Newark for a range of initiatives. It was the Swiss army knife for development projects using the narrative of civicness. This history of the stadium, with its failures, union strikes, and bankruptcies is of course not the history that is called upon when an argument needs to be made for a development project. Building and maintaining stadium is a unique development project because its symbolic value can be shaped from nostalgia. A failed office tower, hospital, or even a place of leisure like a shopping complex, does not garner the same emotional resonance. Their failures as a development project cannot be hidden behind nostalgia.

The Block Era

1928

As Davids receded from Newark, during the first week of September 1927 Paul Block stood inside the stadium in front of a crowd of over five hundred people. Block was the owner of numerous local newspapers around the country, including one in

¹³² DaSilva and Faught, "Nostalgia," 48-49.

Newark, the *Newark Star Eagle*.¹³³ Block offered the highest bid at the auction, \$360,000, making him the new owner of Newark Baseball Club. As part of the agreement Block had to refund the Citizens Committee \$147,040 and pay off the remaining debt, bringing the total cost to \$507,040.¹³⁴ Block said at the sale:

I bought the Newark baseball club because of my great interest in baseball, but that is not the only reason. I bought [it] because I think that the baseball fans of Newark are entitled to a good team, and, although the present team has done as well as possible, I have hopes that a way may be found to add to its strength for next year and for the future... I also bought it because I heard that the citizens who subscribed nearly \$150,000 last year in order to help complete the stadium, and who received no stock in return and were only expecting to get their money back, were placed in a position where, under the receiver's sales, they might get but a very small percentage of their subscriptions by sharing in whatever dividends would be declared by the receiver.¹³⁵

By stating that Newark was “entitled” to a good team, not just in the present but in the future, endeared him to Newark residents. The most significant part of the sale was the return of the money that had been invested through the stock sales. His approach was not Davids, which was to plead for assistance through a message of poverty; Block instead rewarded the behavior of fans’ investment in the team. This gesture likely would solidify the fan investors as continuous paying fans in the new regime and perhaps also improve sales of his newspaper.

The following day the *Newark Evening News* ran an article with the headline “Ruppert Looms in Bears Sale.”¹³⁶ The article claimed that Jacob Ruppert, owner of the

¹³³ At the time of his death in 1941, he owned fourteen newspapers including *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *Toledo (Ohio) Blade*, *Toledo Times*, *New York Evening Mail*, *Newark-Star-Eagle*, *Brooklyn Standard-Union*, *Los Angeles Express* and *Detroit Journal*. He also is credited with pioneering the use of advertisement in print media, which he began when he acquired the rights to sell national advertising space in a William Randolph Hearst’s publication; of whom he had a close relationship to. He also had connections to presidents Calvin Coolidge, Herbert Hoover and Franklin Roosevelt, along with other politicians and notable celebrities. For more on Paul Block Sr. see *The Publisher: Paul Block: A Life of Friendship, Power and Politics* by Frank Brady.

¹³⁴ “Block Buys Bears, Bid \$360,000,” *New York Times*, September 7, 1927.

¹³⁵ “Block Purchases the Newark Club,” *New York Times*, September 8, 1927.

¹³⁶ “Ruppert Looms in Bears’ Sale,” *Newark Evening News*, September 8, 1927.

major league New York Yankees, was behind the purchase of the team and that Block “acted more or less in the role of the good Samaritan on the advice of City Commissioner John Howe.”¹³⁷ The article claimed it was a gesture to “calm the financial heartbeats” of those who bought stock.¹³⁸ Neither Block nor Ruppert ever confirmed this assertion. It is not clear why Block rather than Ruppert, both New York based, would be a more “calming force” and there is no mention in Block’s biography that he ever owned another baseball team.

After the stadium was renamed Bears Stadium in January 1928, Block toured the stadium outlining improvements already needed for a ballpark that was not yet two years old. Davids budget shortfalls had resulted in some necessary additions and repairs. Block increased the capacity to 17,500 by adding additional bleacher seats. He outlined plans for “concrete walks from every ticket booth to the main entrance. The new walks should be a relief to the baseball fans who during the last two seasons have been forced to go through mud and dust.”¹³⁹ One of the two the most notable additions was a scoreboard. It was located above the new bleachers in centerfield and, along with score, modeling the trend in the major leagues, it showed balls and strikes and scores from other games within the league.¹⁴⁰ The other significant addition was lighting. On August 7, 1930 a crowd of about 15,000 watched Newark’s first nighttime baseball game, five years before any

¹³⁷ “Ruppert Looms in Bears’ Sale,” *Newark Evening News*, September 8, 1927.

¹³⁸ “Ruppert Looms in Bears’ Sale,” *Newark Evening News*, September 8, 1927.

¹³⁹ “Much Needed Improvements Being Made at Bears’ Park,” *Newark Evening News*, February 1, 1928.

¹⁴⁰ “Much Needed Improvements Being Made at Bears’ Park,” *Newark Evening News*, February 1, 1928.

major league baseball game. In all, Block had invested an additional \$250,000 into the stadium over the four years he owned it.¹⁴¹

Splitting the Diamond: The Bronx and Brooklyn Infiltrate Newark

1931-1936

On November 12, Paul Block announced, “I have sold the Newark Baseball Club to my friend Colonel Jacob Ruppert... [he will] be able to do more for the Bears than I could. After all, I am only a newspaperman.”¹⁴² It is not clear, as suspected by the *Newark Evening News*, if Ruppert was behind the operation from the start and/or why Block would be used as a front, if he was. Regardless, Block had resigned, and the team and its assets, most notably the stadium, were sold. All the capital stock was officially sold to the East Realty Company, which was owned by Jacob Ruppert. There is no mention of the reason for this, but it is possible this was done for tax purposes. No definitive price was every reported; it is estimated that he paid between \$500,000 - \$600,000.¹⁴³ In the private business papers of the Newark International Baseball Club a piece of paper dated January 1, 1932 with East Reality Co. written at the top itemized the value of the stadium: Land: \$125,000, Stadium: \$311,805, Concrete Block Wall: \$17,88, Bleachers: \$18,574, Seats: \$36,000, Scoreboard: \$2,756, Press Box: \$1705, Heating Plant: \$3,073, Total: \$516,794. If this estimate is accurate, it would confirm the estimated purchase price. Block had bought the team, stadium, and debt (including the stocks

¹⁴¹ “Holds Block Didn’t Assume Seat Bill,” *Newark Evening News*, March 1928; “New Newark Club Deal Up; Court to Hear Move to Lift Receivership and Reorganize,” *New York Times*, February 4, 1927; “Receivership Ends for Newark Bears” *New York Times*, February 11, 1927, and “Newark Bears Are Bought by Yankees’ Owner,” *Newark Evening News*, November 12, 1931.

¹⁴² On November 18 he signed his resignation letter, the entire letter read, “I, Paul Block, do hereby tender my resignation as Chairman of the Board of the Newark International Baseball Club.”

¹⁴³ Robert Cvornyek, *Baseball in Newark* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2003), 31.

bought by residents) for about \$500,000. He invested approximately an additional \$250,000 on maintenance and upgrades. I did not find any material related to the profit he made during his four years of ownership, so we do not know if he made a profit, broke even, or, like Davids, lost money on his investment.

The Bears new owner, Jacob Ruppert, made his fortune in the brewery business. His grandfather Franz, a Bavarian immigrant, opened a brewery in New York City in 1850/1851. In 1867, the year Jacob was born, his father opened his own brewery, The Jacob Ruppert Brewery. At the age of 19, Jacob began working at his father's brewery. He then joined the National Guard, rising to the rank of colonel. He went on to serve four terms in the United States Congress representing New York before taking over his father's brewery in 1915 after his death. He continued to amass his fortune by investing in real estate in Manhattan. In 1922 he purchased the New York Yankees baseball team and a year later built them a stadium, Yankee Stadium, in the Bronx.¹⁴⁴

Ruppert had purchased the Newark Bears to use the club as a farm team for the Yankees. Ruppert was one of the first major league owners to start a farm system. The newly created farm system functioned by way of major league teams purchasing minor league teams and using those minor league teams as way of developing young baseball players in the hopes of eventually moving them to play on the major league team. Branch Rickey, General Manager for the St. Louis Cardinals, devised the farm system and the result was four straight championships from 1928-1931. Despite opposition of the farm

¹⁴⁴ See Ronald A. Mayer, *The 1937 Newark Bears: A Baseball Legend* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), Marshall Smeiser, *The Life that Ruth Built: A Biography* (New York: Quadrangle, 1975), and Steve Steinberg and Lyle Spatz, *The Colonel and Hug: The Partnership that Transformed the New York Yankees* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015).

system from organized baseball's first commissioner, Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, Ruppert began his own farm system and its centerpiece was the Newark Bears.¹⁴⁵

1932

On January 2, 1932, a lease agreement was signed between the two companies Jacob Ruppert was president of, The East Realty and the Newark International Baseball Club, for an annual rent of \$15,000 for a ten-year term. Again, there is no explanation within the papers why the financial arrangement was made in this way. But with the agreement signed, on January 8 Bears Stadium was renamed Ruppert Stadium.¹⁴⁶ By late March, a few weeks before his first Opening Day as owner of the Bears, Ruppert was asked to evaluate his farm system and his new team. He offered nine points, and with his last point he remarked, "there are unmistakable signs of a great baseball revival in Newark with the fast young team we are putting there. I realize Newark is an industrial city and the workers cannot take time off in depression years to see baseball. But we have turned the corner there."¹⁴⁷ Ruppert was framing his new team as an escape during the Great Depression. Of course this was not a charitable offer. It was a way to market his business interest in one of the few forms of business that was reasonably successful during the Depression. The nationally published *Baseball Magazine* contended that baseball was "an impregnable industry...strongly entrenched and...vitally necessary to

¹⁴⁵ James DiClerico and Barry J. Pavelec, *The Jersey Game: The History of Modern Baseball From its Birth to the Big Leagues in the Garden State* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 85.

¹⁴⁶ "Ruppert Stadium Is New Name Of Baseball Park in Newark," *New York Times*, January 9, 1932, 23.

¹⁴⁷ Fred Bendel, "Colonel Ruppert Strong for Chain Store Baseball," *Newark Evening News*, March 28, 1935.

the public welfare.”¹⁴⁸ Ruppert was utilizing baseball’s most effective sales pitch during the Depression.

During the first year of Ruppert’s ownership, the “fast young team” that he promised to field had produced a championship. In response to that championship, for first time, the City of Newark officially acknowledged in a government document one of Newark’s professional baseball teams. It did so in a resolution issued by the Board of Commissioners:

The City of Newark, acting on behalf of the people of Newark, extend to the members of the Newark team their official congratulations for bringing the championship to the City, together with their sincere wishes for final victory in the Junior World Series, and Be it further resolved that this Board urge the people of Newark to display their civic pride in the accomplishment of the Newark Baseball Team by attending all the games being played in this City and encouraging the players on to victory by their cheers and plaudits.¹⁴⁹

This is the first document issued by the city that connected civic pride not to baseball as a sport, but to attending baseball games as a civic duty. This is the city’s official narrative that encouraged residents to make an economic contribution to this business, for them to expose themselves to a form of entertainment and its ideologies and morals.

After this resolution no others were issued, nor was there any mention of the team in other documents including the minutes from Board meetings until 1939. In that time span the team won another Junior League World Series in 1937. Not only did the team win, but the 1937 team is considered to be one of the greatest minor league teams in history, having had a record-breaking year. In 1939 a request from to the city from the

¹⁴⁸ Steven A. Reiss, “Profits in Major League Baseball, 1900-1956,” in *Baseball in America and America in Baseball*, ed. Donald Kyle and Robert Fairbanks (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2008), 102. For more on baseball and the Great Depression see Charles Alexander, *Breaking the Slump: Baseball in the Depression Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

¹⁴⁹ Resolutions and Proclamations, September 28, 1932, City of Newark Archives and Records Management Center, Newark, New Jersey.

Newark International Baseball Club was made to display fireworks at Ruppert Stadium. At the bottom of the letter was a stamp printed on the letterhead of the Centennial Emblem from the National Baseball Centennial Commission. The request was filed between St. Lucy's Celebration of Madonna Della Nova, a Catholic church located in Newark's North Ward, its predominantly Italian neighborhood, and Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church, another Catholic church located a little over a mile away from the stadium in the Ironbound. Permission was granted for the churches and for the stadium to have fireworks. Newark baseball was connected via stamped letterhead via the Yankees, to the MLB orbit, while also nestled, at least from the city's perspective, in between the other civic city events of the summer. Newark, through its baseball team, on the local level and the national stage, represented a civic-minded city. Baseball was a vehicle for the city. If the city needed baseball to show its prominence as a city through its affiliation with MLB, which came with national press coverage, it could use the Bears. Or baseball could be a Newark-centered civic activity that brought together the community, at least the ethnic white community, through support for the home team. Baseball was a vehicle for the most useful narrative needed.

The Eagles Fly Into Town

1936

Before the 1937 championship and the fireworks, the Bears got a stadium-mate. The Bears had not been the only team playing with Newark on their jersey. In 1932, the Newark Browns, an all-black baseball team, played in the East-West League for one season. The following year, in 1933, the Newark Dodgers, another all-black team, was

established as an independent team. In 1934 they joined the Negro National League, in which they played the 1934 and 1935 seasons. Alfred M. Martin and Alfred T. Martin in *The Negro Leagues in New Jersey: A History* states the Dodgers “became one of the finest attractions in Newark. They played before thousands every Sunday...making Newark the most lucrative baseball city in the East.”¹⁵⁰ The Dodgers success did not go unnoticed. In 1936, Abe and Effa Manley, owners of the Brooklyn Eagles who also played in the Negro National League, purchased the Newark Dodgers and consolidated the two teams and moved them from Brooklyn’s Ebbetts Field to Ruppert Stadium. The team was named the Newark Eagles.¹⁵¹ In Newark, the Eagles would be a communal point of convergence for the African-American community. For African-Americans, Ruppert Stadium was a public space that usually did not include them as the public. But when the Eagles played, the space was claimed for their community and their expressions of civicness was formed and influenced.

Since Robert Peterson’s pioneering book on the Negro Leagues, *Only the Ball Was White: A History of Legendary Black Players and All-Black Professional Teams*, was published in 1970 scholars have taken up the task chronicling this nearly lost history and demonstrating its significance in larger historical contexts. One of the most critical understandings to come from Negro League scholarship is that Negro League baseball is not a parallel narrative to major or minor league baseball. The institution’s history and significance comes from its role as a cultural and community gathering space as a black-owned and/or black dominated business.

¹⁵⁰ Martin and Martin, *The Negro Leagues in New Jersey*, 86.

¹⁵¹ Cvornyek, *Baseball in Newark*, 63.

Black professional teams had been playing since the 1880s, but there was no successful black league until Rube Foster formed the Negro National League in 1920. In 1923 a rival league, the Eastern Colored League (ECL), was established. The ECL lasted until 1928 and the Negro National until 1931. In 1933 the Negro National was restored and a second Negro American League was created in 1937.¹⁵² The Newark Eagles played in the Negro National League. Cultural critic Gerald Early describes black baseball as the

intersection of baseball and black people—where, despite terrible adversity, the African American’s belief in the American promise of liberty and self-fulfillment remained true—is where the idea of black urban community emerged in 1920... Negro League baseball was always about that for black folk: it symbolized the power of non-protest organizing, of teamwork, of saving yourself through your own effort. Baseball was about black people coming into the modern age as an organized, industrial, urban people.¹⁵³

It was a separate space where African Americans could temporarily transcend the restrictions of Jim Crow America and in that space express themselves in the way of their choosing, celebrate their baseball heroes, and take part on their own terms in America’s pastime.

As a business institution, Roberta J. Newman and Joel Nathan Rosen write in *Black Baseball, Black Business: Race Enterprise and the Fate of the Segregated Dollar* that black baseball was a “nexus in a web of businesses that made up a segregated economy, both de facto and de jure. It and a handful other ventures such as black-owned insurance companies, the black press, and the ‘ethnic’ beauty industry.” Money generated from the local Negro League team would provide investment capital for the other black-

¹⁵² Donn Rogosin, *Invisible Men: Life in Baseball’s Negro Leagues* (New York: Atheneum, 1983), 5.

¹⁵³ Gerald Early, “Why Baseball Was the Black National Pastime,” in *Basketball Jones: America Above the Rim*, ed. Todd Boyd and Kenneth L. Shropshire (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 39-40.

owned businesses or teams and fans would patronize their businesses.¹⁵⁴ But a business owned and/or supported by the black community, even one that received significant support had to contend with the reality of limited finances. This meant a few things, such as significantly lower salaries for players. The numbers vary by team and player, but on average a Negro League player in the 1920s received a monthly salary of about \$230 and in the 1930s about \$170; the Great Depression had a significant impact on the league. A white major league player would have received \$5,000-\$7,000 in the same time period.¹⁵⁵ If you compare the salaries from the major leagues, by 1942 the “average salaries on the Yankees were about eight times those of the Newark Eagles...and by 1946 the Yankees:Eagles wage ratio was 4:1.”¹⁵⁶ Even with the lower salaries teams frequently could not make payroll, though Effa Manley noted she consistently paid her players on time. Negro League teams with small budgets had limited options for transportation, and this was especially important because without their own fields, they had to travel more frequently, often adding additional non-league or barnstorming games to earn a living wage. Besides additional travel, not having a field meant paying rent and other fees to play games. For almost all Negro League teams, including the Eagles, there was no true home field. Even describing the field as shared would imply a sense of equality that did not exist. Manley cited the difficulty of “erratic scheduling.” Postponement or cancellation of games, she said, was “not in our hands. We do not own the parks.”¹⁵⁷ In Newark, an example of this was having Eagles games scheduled at Ruppert Stadium and

¹⁵⁴ Roberta J. Newman and Joel Nathan Rosen, *Black Baseball, Black Business: Race Enterprise and the Fate of the Segregated Dollar* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2014), 3, 28.

¹⁵⁵ Robert Gardner and Dennis Shortelle, *The Forgotten Players: The Story Of Black Baseball In America*, (New York: Walker & Company, 1993), 45.

¹⁵⁶ Stephen Shmanske and Leo Kahane, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Sports Economics Volume 2: Economics Through Sports* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 9.

¹⁵⁷ John Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues* (New York: Da Capp Press, 1992), 317.

to have them canceled to accommodate a boxing match between Rocky Graziano-Tony Zale. Manley wrote, “most times we have to play where we can. And rain could play further havoc with the schedule.”¹⁵⁸ Negro League teams were cultural and socially important to the black community, but as a business venture they were precarious at best.

The establishment of the baseball color line nationally varies, but in Newark in 1887. Newark’s first professional team, the Little Giants, had two African-American players on the roster. On July 14, 1887 an exhibition game was scheduled in Newark between the Little Giants and the all-white Chicago White Stockings. The White Stockings manager, Adrian “Cap” Anson refused to play the Newark team if the two black players played. The Newark team agreed, barring the players and later that same day the International League, in which the Little Giants were a member, voted to exclude blacks from all league play.¹⁵⁹ This act signaled to Newark’s small black community that it was not part of the emerging cultural institution. Citywide in Newark historian Kenneth Jackson described the years from 1860-1910 as “years of invisibility” for the African-American community in the city.¹⁶⁰

Newark, like many East coast cities, had experienced large waves of European immigration in the 1800s. The first wave of immigrants was mostly Irish and German immigrants, with the Germans establishing “Germantown” in the Ironbound neighborhood. “By 1865, a third of Newark’s population was of German descent, and between 1840 and 1870, Newark’s overall population had increased from 17,290 to

¹⁵⁸ Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 317.

¹⁵⁹ Cvornyek, *Baseball in Newark*, 63.

¹⁶⁰ Kenneth Jackson and Barbara Jackson, “The Black Experience in Newark: The Growth of the Ghetto, 1870-1970,” *New Jersey Since 1860: Findings and Interpretations* edited by William C. Wright Papers at the Third Annual New Jersey History Symposium (December 4, 1971), 38.

105,059.”¹⁶¹ Among Newark’s population of 105,059 in 1870, only 1,789 were African-American, accounting for 1.7% of the population. By 1910, African-American residents accounted for 2.7% of the population, 9,475 people. It was not until 1930 that the city’s African-American population had a substantial increase. Newark’s population in 1930 was 442,337; among them 38,800 were African American, 8.8%. In 1940 the percentage rose to 10.7%. A census map from 1940 has African Americans living almost exclusively in a concentrated area of the city where 90% to 100% of the residents in that neighborhood were African-American.¹⁶² Even though Newark’s black population was small, the Manley’s were attracted to Newark for the same reasons other baseball businessmen were: it was an industrial city with a large and expanding population, including a large influx on black migrants that had begun to stream into Newark during the start of World War I.

Almost no Negro League teams owned their own stadium. As a result, Negro League teams had to play on a wide spectrum of facilities. They ranged from dirt fields during barnstorming games to major league fields like Yankee Stadium. When the Manley’s landed in Newark they sought out the best available field in the city, Ruppert Stadium. They brokered a lease with Bears’ Vice President George Weiss. According to its terms, the Bears received twenty-percent of the gate admission. Manley noted that most parks on the circuit charged twenty percent or less.¹⁶³ In addition to the admission percentage, the Eagles had to cover all overhead costs, including but not limited to ticket

¹⁶¹ Jackson and Jackson , “The Black Experience in Newark,” 38-39.

¹⁶² Clement A. Price, “The Struggle to Desegregate Newark: Black Middle Class Militancy in New Jersey, 1932-1947,” *Jersey History* 3 & 4 (1981): 216.

¹⁶³ Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 320.

sellers, ushers, ballpark police, and any other game-day expenses.¹⁶⁴ Ruppert Stadium was never Eagles Stadium. It was not referred to in that way in a city government document or in the press, including the black press. Even though the stadium was not designated as the Eagles in any formal capacity, a feeling of ownership, according to Eagles fans, was generated within Newark's black community.

Though it was not officially sanctioned, Ruppert Stadium did operate as a semi-segregated space. The extent of segregation in a stadium during a Negro League game varied. Hall of Fame player James "Cool Papa" Bell, who played for various Negro League teams, described his experience in Birmingham, Alabama. He said, "there were always lots of whites in the crowd, but they were separated by a rope. You could be sitting right next to a white man, but that rope was always there."¹⁶⁵ There was no rope or separate section at Ruppert Stadium, but from Effa Manley's view, as she wrote in her autobiography, "We survived, but we never did draw too well. Whites? Just a few. Not enough to speak of. At that time the races just didn't mix much. So it was a losing proposition from the beginning."¹⁶⁶ There are other accounts of whites fans at Eagles games. In interviews I conducted with Hall of Fame sportswriter Jerry Izenberg and with Newark native Paul Kiell, both remember going to Eagles games as young men, and having the experience not be uncommon.¹⁶⁷ In addition to attending Eagles games, when Jackie Robinson became the first African-American player in MLB in the twentieth century, Kiell recalled during our interview, "my father wanted to go over to Brooklyn

¹⁶⁴ James Overmyer, *Queen of the Negro Leagues: Effa Manley and the Newark Eagles* (Lanham, MD.: The Scarecrow Press, 1998), 106.

¹⁶⁵ Dave Zirin, *A People's History of Sports in the United States: 250 Years of Politics, Protest, and Play* (New York: The New Press, 2008), 57.

¹⁶⁶ Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, 320.

¹⁶⁷ Newark native Philip Roth has written autobiographically about his experiences of attending Bears games. Though baseball appears in his other novels, it is in his novel devoted solely to baseball *The Great American Novel* where he writes about the Negro Leagues, their fans, and the integration of baseball.

and see a Dodger game, but I wanted to go to Ruppert Stadium because Jackie Robinson was playing.” I asked him, why did you want to see Robinson? He responded, “That was the phenomenon; a Negro player was in the league. It’s funny, I remember asking my father how come there were no colored players, the word was colored then, and he was anything but a racist, anything but, came out with a stereotype. Said their bodies weren’t built for baseball.”¹⁶⁸ As in many nostalgic retellings, the uncomfortable or negative attributes to the memory are contextualized in a way that marginalizes or negates them, in this case racism or the “othering” of African-Americans.

Negro League baseball was a difficult business venture, but to look at it only in terms of a business would be missing one of the main functions of the team in Newark and, arguably, for every city with a Negro League team. The stadium for the African-American community was its own extension of Newark, a future Newark. It was a public space where the ideals of the community could be played out. Poet and playwright Amiri Baraka, who was born and raised in Newark, wrote in his autobiography, the “Newark Eagles would have your heart there on the field... But these were professional ballplayers. Legitimate black heroes.” For Baraka it was not only the players on the field, it was the communion of Newark’s black community at the game:

There was a sense of completion in all that. The black men (and the women) sitting there all participated in those games at a much higher level than anything else I knew. In the sense that they were not excluded from either identification with or knowledge of what the Eagles did and were. It was like we all communicated with each other and possessed ourselves at a more human level than was usually possible out in cold whitey land...” We were wilder and calmer there. Louder and happier, without hysteria. Just digging ourselves stretch out is what and all that love and noise and color and excitement surrounded me like a garment of feeling. I know I thought that’s the way life was supposed to be... In the laughter and noise and colors and easy hot dogs there was something of us celebrating ourselves. In the flying around the bases and sliding and home runs

¹⁶⁸ Paul Kiell, interviewed by Laura Troiano on March 6, 2013.

and arguments and triumphs there was more of ourselves in celebration than we were normally ever permitted. It was ours.¹⁶⁹

It was a public space outside of the small black community where the black community could be temporarily free from the burden of being a marginalized minority. Clement Price, in the film *Before You Can Say Jackie Robinson*, explains: “Negro baseball would come to represent what was in many ways the best in the separate world of black America. It was a business, it was a ceremony, it was a means by which blacks...in the first half of the twentieth century, would become a modern people.”¹⁷⁰ It was a chance to fully participate.

The ritual of attending a baseball game served an essential role for the African-American community. The idea of congregation, as defined by Earl Lewis in *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth Century Norfolk Virginia*, can offer a way to understand the significance of attending a game for African-American Eagles fans. Lewis argues, “segregation led to congregation and a measured autonomy.” Segregation, the ability for whites to restrict African-Americans, meant that they held the vast majority of power. But segregation “also vested blacks with the power to redefine aspects of their own existence.” Congregation would be a way to redefine the power structure. The act of congregation “was important because it symbolized an act of free will, whereas segregation represented the imposition of another’s will...congregation in a Jim Crow environment produced more space than power. They used this space to gather their cultural bearings, to mold the urban setting.”¹⁷¹ Eagles fans congregated. They came to Ruppert Stadium in larger numbers, in terms of percentage, than Bears fans. According

¹⁶⁹ Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of Leroi Jones* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1997), 35-37.

¹⁷⁰ Clement Price quoted in *Before You Can Say Jackie Robinson*, not released film, 2012.

¹⁷¹ Earl Lewis, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth Century Norfolk Virginia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 90-92.

to Effa Manley's biographer James Overmyer, the Eagles "appear to have outdrawn the extremely successful Bears by nearly two to one within their respective racial groups...the wildly popular Bears' annual attendance of a little more than 200,000 from 1932 through 1938 represented about 1 of every 3.5 white residents in Newark and adjacent communities, while the 32,646 the Eagles drew to Ruppert Stadium in 1939, by comparison, was 1 of every 2 African-Americans in those communities."¹⁷² Ruppert Stadium functioned as a space for congregation. It allowed those identities and definition of civicness to be determined by the groups occupying the space.

This is not to say there was no conflict within the space in determining what that identity should entail. As Davarian Baldwin argues in *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, The Great Migration, and Black Urban Life*, "playing fields were not just sites of cohesion between black players and fans; they also became sites of class conflict over competing visions of racial respectability and pride. As baseball became a profession, its black entrepreneurs consistently tried to divorce the sport from its 'rowdy' past to attract a more respectable clientele and express a particular vision of respectable race pride."¹⁷³ There were uninhibited crowds at Ruppert Stadium, but existing in that seemingly unrestricted expression was the tension of trying to prove equality through attempts at class equity. But even with this conflict, Baldwin notes, the "playing fields were continually spaces of solidarity and technological innovation and exchange, especially among athletes of color...a playing field [is an] expression of the migration experience and more general desires for equitable urban spaces of recreation and

¹⁷² James Overmyer, "Something to Cheer About: The Negro Leagues at the Dawn Of Integration," in *The Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and American Culture, 1997* Alvin L. Hall, ed. (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2000), 64.

¹⁷³ Davarian Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, The Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 225.

labor.”¹⁷⁴ Ruppert Stadium for Eagles fans was a space to exert economic power through consumption and cultural power through self-identification and, simultaneously, in a segregated space, be reminded of the limitations embodied in being black in Newark. It is because of racial segregation, the positive and negative impact it had, that the Eagles narrative does not run parallel to the Bears. This is not to say that those who attended Bears games did not have similar sentiments. There was a community created while the Bears were playing and efforts at assimilation among the immigrant fans in the stands. The efforts to shape ideas of civicism are enacted in the stadium, no matter who is playing; the space of a stadium can invoke power.

On the Radio

As with night baseball, the technological advances brought another significant change to the way baseball was consumed. Chief among them was the increased popularity of the radio. The first broadcast of a baseball game was the 1921 World Series, with separate broadcasts from WJZ in Newark and KDKA in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. According to James Walker in *Crack of the Bat: A History of Baseball on the Radio*, the Newark broadcast was an instant re-creation of the game from “reports circuitously relayed from the Polo Grounds by telegraph to the *Newark Call*’s newspaper office and then by phone to the WJZ’s announcer Thomas Cowan from broadcast.” Walker argues that newspapers, like the *Newark Call*, “saw radio as an inexpensive way of promoting the newspaper and establishing a beachhead in the new medium. Covering the World

¹⁷⁴ Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes*, 226 and 228.

Series was a sure way to gather public attention for the new radio venture.”¹⁷⁵

Broadcasting the games was another way the media, as with the surge in magazines and newspapers, to profit from the sport. As radio grew in popularity and the ability to broadcast games live or live-delay became possible, the reaction among many baseball executives was fear. Owners worried that broadcasting games over the radio would discourage fans from coming to the stadium. This fear sparked fierce debate among baseball owners. The reaction by the New York metropolitan area major league teams was to install a five-year radio blackout on major league games. The ban was not lifted until 1939.

Much of the radio debate centered on major league teams, but some minor league teams, including the Bears, broadcasted their home games. Evidence of the Bears popularity and perceived economic generator, the team was solicited by WINS radio station in 1933 to broadcast their games.¹⁷⁶ The following year a new radio station, WNEW, took over the Bears broadcast with the addition of an announcer, Earl Harper. Harper was exceedingly popular during his broadcasting years. Randolph Linthurst in his three-book set that chronicled every game played by the Bears described Harper as a “great ‘hypo’ for the fans, particularly women. He was not a real student of the game and he exaggerated... The fans loved Harper’s broadcasts, however, and he had a big following.” Linthurst did not say why women in particular liked him, but added that women who listened to the games “learned their baseball from his broadcasts.” Harper was also beloved by children, who carried the nostalgic memories of him and his baseball broadcasts into adulthood. For many of those children, Harper was their introduction to

¹⁷⁵ James Walker, *Crack of the Bat: A History of Baseball on the Radio* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 22.

¹⁷⁶ Walker, *Crack of the Bat*, 54.

baseball.¹⁷⁷ Games at the stadium were broadcasted with a delay and away games were recreated with telegraphic reports. Linthurst writes, “During the simulated broadcast, Harper would tap the microphone so it would sound like the bat was connecting with the ball.”¹⁷⁸ The limitations of technology simply pushed broadcasting creativity forward.

In 1936, Newark was selected as a case study into the relationship between radio and attendance at games. In the nationally published *The Sporting News* magazine the “On the Radio Airlines” section ran the headline “Attendance Survey Favors Radio.” It read, “a survey conducted in Newark N.J. has convinced club officials that the broadcasting of games helps to swell crowds rather than reduces attendance, and as a result all contests, both at home and abroad, are reported, play-by-play over Station WINS. The attendance last year is reported to have been 16 per cent better than in the previous season when broadcasting was not permitted.”¹⁷⁹ The article claimed that fans did not listen to the radio or attend games. The radio was not competition with the live game experience. How true that assertion was is debatable. But for a few years in Newark the Bears had the radio market to themselves. Once the five-year MLB ban was lifted in 1939 the Bears had to compete with MLB teams for fans to the stadium, as they always had, and now also on the radio. The Bears’ concern for the new competition on the radio reached their ownership. In the minutes of New York Yankees’ Board of Directors on October 24, 1939 George Weiss, Bears’ Vice President and director of the Yankee farm system, asked that the Yankees “compensate its Newark Minor League club for any

¹⁷⁷ Linthurst, *Newark Bears*, 6 and *Newark Bears: The Middle Years*, 5.

¹⁷⁸ Linthurst, *Newark Bears*, 5-6. The broadcasts were sponsored by General Mills and the Atlantic Refining Company.

¹⁷⁹ “On the Radio Airlines,” *The Sporting News*, April 30, 1936.

negative effects on attendance coming from the Major League club's broadcasting contract."¹⁸⁰ There is no note indicating if any compensation was provided.

Radio was not only seen as a detractor from the live game experience. It was also viewed as a way to keep fans connected when they were not able to attend games. It was a medium that could reinforce fan devotion to a team or keep the team in the community consciousness even with those not interested in baseball but who could not avoid the broadcast. As Jerry Izenberg described, "on summer nights you could pick a block in the city—any block—and in a world without air conditioning you could hear the sound of Earl Harper's play-by-play through the open windows, walk the length of that block and not miss a pitch."¹⁸¹ Variations of this memory are attributed to other teams, most frequently to walking a block in Brooklyn while listening to a Dodgers' game. For any team, in any city, this type of memory places baseball literally within a community and inside your home. Much of the power of stadium narratives derives from how deeply baseball is engrained within the community and home. The narratives can make an argument that support is a civic duty because baseball is part of the civic fabric.

Though not considered direct competition, the Eagles also were eventually able to broadcast their games from Ruppert Stadium on a local radio station. Eagles owner Effa Manley cultivated a friendship with the first black sportscaster, Sherman "Jocko" Maxwell.¹⁸² Maxwell, in the early 1930s had a five-minute Saturday sports segment on two local radio stations called "Runs, Hits and Errors" where he read game scores. The show was later expanded to include sports interviews. Manley had asked him to promote Eagles games on the radio, which he agreed to do. Not long after, he got the job as the

¹⁸⁰ Walker, *Crack of the Bat*, 169.

¹⁸¹ Jerry Izenberg, "A Great Baseball Town Reawakens," *Star-Ledger*, July 16, 1999.

¹⁸² Newman and Rosen, *Black Baseball, Black Business*, 107-108.

public address announcer for the Eagles home games at Ruppert Stadium. In addition to his announcing Eagles games he attended other Negro League games, kept scores, and solicited scores from people who attended games that he could not. From the scores and accounts he wrote articles about the games and then sold them to national publications, mainly African-American newspapers and magazines. Accurate records or records at all of Negro League games are sparse. A considerable amount of what exists today is due to Maxwell. New Jersey sportswriter Jerry Izenberg wrote, "Jocko was on his own mission. He let the world know what was going on in places like Ruppert Stadium and Forbes Field and Comiskey Park when the 'other' teams (which meant blacks) took over from the regular tenants. And in his way, he made the part of America that would listen know all about these black knights of the open road."¹⁸³ Effa Manley wrote in her autobiography, "In line with this suspiciously apparent 'freeze-out' policy was the practice of the majority of the white sports writers (at least those few who did bother to make an occasional appearance at one of our games) who persisted in writing condescendingly of the players, and the crowds."¹⁸⁴ To combat this treatment she asked Maxwell to help recruit white sportswriters through his membership in the New York Sportscasters Association, to publicize Eagles games.¹⁸⁵ Maxwell never received payment from the local radio station. The only money he is known to have received was \$7 per ad spot for Newark based Ballantine Beer. Maxwell stated, "There was no money

¹⁸³ Bruce Weber, "Sherman L. Maxwell, 100, Sportscaster and Writer, Dies," *New York Times*, July 19, 2008.

¹⁸⁴ Effa Manley, Leon Herbert Hardwick, and Robert L. Cvorneyek, ed. *Negro Baseball...Before Integration* (Haworth, NJ: Saint Johann Press, 2006), 44.

¹⁸⁵ Bob Luke, *The Most Famous Woman in Baseball: Effa Manley and the Negro Leagues* (Washington DC: Potomac, 2011), 86.

involved. No salary ever in any sports. Never asked. They never gave me any.”¹⁸⁶ I have not found any mention of the Eagles paying Maxwell either.

Effa Manley did not stop at radio advertisement. She cultivated additional avenues for publicity, mainly outside the mainstream media, which generally did not cover the Negro Leagues. Manley bought placards with dates for game days to distribute around the city; she hired a sound truck, a vehicle with a sound speaker, to promote the Eagles games on their game days. Pastors on Sundays were said to have blessed their congregations wished them a good time at the Eagles game (the start time of Eagles games took into account Sunday mass), and through her many networks within Newark and Harlem, encouraged attendance by word of mouth.¹⁸⁷ In a new city, with a small black population, Manley had to work hard to get a foothold in the city.

The War at Home Front/Field

1937-1946

In a one-page letter dated January 15, 1942, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt wrote to baseball Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis, “I honestly feel that it would be best for the country to keep baseball going.” With that letter baseball went to war. Baseball players, including players on the Bears and Eagles, were called to serve, reducing the quality of play on all levels. There were restrictions on night baseball; lights had to be turned off an hour after sundown so workers on shifts past nightfall could not

¹⁸⁶ Matt Rothenberg, “Jocko Maxwell: Voice of the Negro Leagues,” <http://baseballhall.org/discover/jocko-maxwell-voice-of-negro-leagues>

¹⁸⁷ Martin and Martin, *The Negro Leagues in New Jersey*, 10.

attend games.¹⁸⁸ There was gas rationing and the later ban on pleasure driving that limited fans to the one form of public transportation to get to the inconveniently located stadium, the 31 bus. The travel ban applied to teams as well. While most major league teams traveled by trains, the Eagles, like many other Negro League teams, traveled to games by bus. The Negro League teams fought the ban, citing the fact that in some cities their players were not allowed to ride on public transportation and in cities they could, it would be too cost prohibitive. The league argued that that they were giving entertainment to minorities who were “in great need of wholesome recreation.” The teams eventually won the right to use their buses.¹⁸⁹

But despite these obstacles, for both the Bears and the Eagles, the war years were some of the highest in attendance and most lucrative. In 1941, the Eagles were able to raise their ticket prices for bleachers seats from forty to sixty cents amounting to \$60,000 in income.¹⁹⁰ Newark’s declining manufacturing industry was now rejuvenated by the equipment needed for the war. Newark’s economy, as in many cities, was severely impacted by the Great Depression. The war manufacturing boom brought more jobs and attracted new residents, some of whom would become new baseball fans. With new manufacturing jobs, servicemen passing through Newark to ship out from the ports or airport, and with a need for distraction, baseball in Newark profited from the war.

¹⁸⁸ “Night Baseball Flickers,” *Newark Evening News*, May 18, 1942. Randolph Linthurst also stated “Many of the defense plants were in operation 24 hours a day on a three-shift basis, providing little opportunity for a great number of workers to attend games.” The Bears, for these workers played some morning games. “The earliest start for a baseball game in Newark history- 9:30 a.m.” Linthurst, *Newark Bears: The Middle Years*, 50 and 65.

¹⁸⁹ Manley and Hardwick, *Negro Baseball...Before Integration*, 59-60

¹⁹⁰ Luke, *The Most Famous Woman in Baseball*, 79.

1937-1939

In 1937 the Newark Bears won their second championship as a Yankee farm team. The 1937 Bears are widely considered to be one of the greatest minor league teams in history. The team took over first place on May 16, one month after the start of play, and stayed there for the rest of the season. They finished with a 109-43 record, 25½ games ahead of second place Montreal. After winning the 1937 championship, the team arrived at Newark Penn Station and was welcomed by 5,000 fans and a brass band playing “Happy Days Are Here Again.”¹⁹¹ On the heels of the celebration, in 1938 the stadium’s rental agreement was renewed for an additional ten years; beginning at the end of the first agreement, in 1942, and ending in December 1951 for an annual sum of \$30,000.¹⁹² It was double the price of the original agreement.

What seemed like a secure future for the Bears changed abruptly when Jacob Ruppert died in 1939. Upon his death there were discussions about the sale of the Yankees, including its farm teams. At this point the Yankees owned, along with Newark, teams in Kansas City, Binghamton, Norfolk, Akron, and had contracts with ten additional teams.¹⁹³ Even with a possible ownership change or because of it, as the baseball season approached, the City of Newark decided to declare on April 3, 1940 its first half-holiday in support of the Bears Opening Day. City employees were given a half the day off to attend the Opening Day game. The resolution declared that the opening game is “always an event of great importance to the city of Newark.”¹⁹⁴ Neighboring Jersey City had been

¹⁹¹ Linthurst, *Newark Bears*, 57 and 76.

¹⁹² Yankee Baseball Collection, Box 1, Folder Newark Club, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library.

¹⁹³ Linthurst, *Newark Bears*, 1 and 3.

¹⁹⁴ Resolutions and Proclamations, April 3, 1940, City of Newark Archives and Records Management Center, Newark, New Jersey.

declaring half-day holidays since the 1920s. In Atlanta, “mayors frequently declared a half-day holiday for municipal employees so that they could go to the opening game, while companies like Coca Cola, the most important firm in Atlanta, closed its plant and gave tickets to their employees. Businesses that released their workers to attend the game were cited by the daily papers.”¹⁹⁵ In Newark, taxpayer money was not used to build the stadium and the stadium and the team was privately owned, meaning the city did not have a direct financial stake in the team, but still contributed financially by way of city employee time. An explanation for this is that baseball held a lot of political capital. Sportswriter Jerry Izenberg remarked of Opening Day: “the mayor of Newark, if he chose not to be reelected, could ignore the Bears’ home opener.”¹⁹⁶ Opening Day games for the Bears had always been recognized in the press as having some significance, and by the municipal government, which officially acknowledged it through a proclamation or resolution since the Davids’ era, while also having a city official throw out the first pitch at the game.

The Eagles’ Opening Day was never officially recognized by the city as a holiday with the same half-day offer to city employees, but there were two resolutions issued for their Opening Day in 1946 and 1948, which were called in the resolutions “Eagles Day.” The mayor and other white dignitaries often attended Opening Day, sitting in Effa Manley’s box. Much like the Bears, Opening Day for the Eagles was a “rite of renewal.” But the Eagles and Bears do not have parallel narratives. Eagles’ Opening Day was a chance to celebrate the black community and the ceremonies “usually featured a black school band, sometimes professional entertainers from Harlem night spots and always an

¹⁹⁵ Reiss, *Touching Base*, 20.

¹⁹⁶ Overmyer, “Something to Cheer About,” 64.

American flag color guard (the Attucks Guard from Newark's black American Legion post)... It frequently celebrated black aspirations for equality.”¹⁹⁷ Civicness and citizenship have different definitions at the respective opening days.

Civic Duty in the Bleachers

There are commonalities between the Bears and the Eagles in terms of direct civic action inside Ruppert Stadium. Both organized charitable events to support the war effort. Where the teams differ is Manley saw Eagles games as an opportunity to promote causes that affected the black community and to encourage activism towards those causes among the fans.

Effa Manley was not the first woman to bring a civil rights cause to a Newark baseball stadium. According to historian Steven A. Reiss, “suffragettes occasionally sponsored professional ball games to advance their cause. The first such affair was held on 25 June 1914 at a Newark ball game at which 2,000 suffragettes gathered to hear Ella Reeve Bloor deliver a feminist lecture.”¹⁹⁸ Manley, before she had come to Newark, had organized women, as well as men, in Harlem to participate in the “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” campaign. The movement that began in Chicago demanded that white storeowners hire black employees in the stores in which the black community patronized.¹⁹⁹ Manley, a member of the NAACP, also organized in Ruppert Stadium a “Stop Lynching” campaign. At the game NAACP-sponsored buttons with the “Stop

¹⁹⁷ Overmyer, *Queen of the Negro Leagues*, 64.

¹⁹⁸ Reiss, *Touching Base*, 28.

¹⁹⁹ In 1934, Effa and Lucille Randolph joined other Harlem bourgeois women to form the Citizens League for Fair Play, whose objective was to get Harlem's retailers, particularly Blumstein's department store, to hire more black workers. The actions were labeled the “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” campaign. It worked. (Newman and Rosen, 78). For more on “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work,” see “*Or Does It Explode?*” *Black Harlem in the Great Depression* by Cheryl Lynn Greenberg and *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* by St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton.

Lynching” slogan were sold for a dollar apiece. There is a press photograph of Manley selling one of these buttons to Newark’s mayor. In addition, she made the public address system in Ruppert Stadium available to the New Jersey branch of the NAACP and during games held collections for the organization.²⁰⁰ The team also played benefit games for the NAACP and for the local African-American fraternal organizations, like the Elks Lodge.

In 1940, the Eagles began playing benefit games in support of Newark’s only black hospital, Booker T. Washington Community Hospital. The hospital was established in 1927 by Dr. John Kenney in response to the barring of African-American physicians and nurses from working in hospitals in New Jersey and for the African-American community to have a clean and safe place to be treated. In a press release before the benefit game, Effa Manley stated, “This hospital is the only one in the State offering an opportunity for colored physicians and nurses to get hospital training. This is a civic responsibility no one should shrink and everyone should be proud to meet.”²⁰¹ A fan’s obligation at an Eagles’ game, according to Manley, went well above cheering.

The Eagles and Bears also formed “Knothole Gangs.” A Knothole Gang is usually associated with major and minor league baseball. It is a team-sponsored club for children that markets the team through free or discounted tickets and other promotional activities and giveaways. The origins of the name knothole gang and the first “gang” are disputed, but the name is commonly thought to have derived from children watching games outside a stadium through holes in the fences. The St. Louis Cardinals are considered the first to create a knothole gang as early as 1917. In 1950, the Brooklyn Dodgers brought their knothole gang to a twenty-five minute television show before

²⁰⁰ Luke, *The Most Famous Woman in Baseball*, 75 and Overmyer, *Queen of the Negro Leagues* 58-59.

²⁰¹ Overmyer, “Something to Cheer About,” 66.

home games with the *Happy Felton's Knothole Gang*. The show had boys in the outfield in Ebbets Field before games competing in baseball skills drills like catching pop-ups and fielding ground balls. All the boys received baseball equipment and promotional material but the winner got to return the following day to meet and talk with his favorite Dodger player.²⁰² The Eagles and the Bears Knothole Gangs provided free or discounted game tickets to children. The Bears had relationships with the public, private, and parochial schools throughout the city, along the YMCAs and YMHAs, and through them were able to distribute tickets in an effort to cultivate fandom among the children. Newark native Irwing Halper, who attended the elementary school at the Monmouth Street School, recalled, "I believe because my school was a little underprivileged they gave us the knothole ticket games. Instead of it being ten cents it was five cents."²⁰³ Nat Bodian, who is a primary contributor to the blog *Old Newark Memories* and is also graduate of the Monmouth Street School, joined the Knothole Gang based out of the school and wrote, "on certain days of the baseball season we would be bussed from the front of Monmouth Street School to the Newark Bears (Ruppert) Stadium on Wilson Avenue to watch the Newark Bears baseball games."²⁰⁴ Eagles superstar Monte Irvin as a child was a Bears Knothole Gang supporter.²⁰⁵ The Eagles, in addition to free and discounted tickets, held charity games for Newark Camp for Underprivileged Children and Newark Student Camp.²⁰⁶

²⁰² For more on the St. Louis' knothole gang origins see Bill Borst's *Baseball Though a Knothole – A St. Louis History*. For more on Happy Felton, see the *New York Times* obituary on Oct. 22, 1964. Videos of the show are available online.

²⁰³ Irwing Halper, interviewed by Laura Troiano on March 6, 2013.

²⁰⁴ "Old Newark," <https://www.oldnewark.com/memories/thirdward/bodianmonmouth.htm>

²⁰⁵ Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 59.

²⁰⁶ Bon Golon, *No Minor Accomplishment: The Revival of New Jersey Professional Baseball* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 15 and Luke, *The Most Famous Woman in Baseball*, 24 and 27. Effa Manley's charity work extended beyond Newark and Harlem, in 1937 she also organized a

Both teams held benefit games in support of the war. In 1941 Effa Manley invited the entire all-black 372nd Infantry Regiment, 2,500 men, from Fort Dix in New Jersey to the Eagles Opening Day. Newark's mayor declared the occasion "372nd Day." In a postscript to the post commander she added that white members were also welcome, if there was room. The Bears wartime efforts, in line with the team's history, are better documented. In 1940 businessman and philanthropist Louis Bamberger through the L. Bamberger and Company Co-Workers Association in conjunction with the Newark Club of the International Baseball League held a charity game for the American Red Cross. The Board of Commissioners of City of Newark issued a resolution promoting the game "because of the unprecedented demands made upon its resources by the devastating European war, is urgently in need of additional funds to support its humanitarian ministrations."²⁰⁷ The Board's resolution also "respectfully urge all municipal employees as well as the citizens of Newark in general to attend this benefit baseball game and thus respond individually to this local appeal of the American Red Cross."²⁰⁸ In 1942, another Red Cross and Navy Relief benefit game attracted a crowd of over 16,000. Along with benefit games, native Newarker Ron Citron recalled what he described as a "very fond memory" that "During the second World War if you sold the most bonds and stamps you were rewarded by getting a pass to go down to Bears Stadium and that was my first baseball game."²⁰⁹ This was a further sowing of the Bears into the civic fabric.

relief committee for 1937 floods in Ohio and Mississippi, (Luke, *The Most Famous Woman in Baseball*, 26-7).

²⁰⁷ Resolutions and Proclamations, July 24, 1940, City of Newark Archives and Records Management Center, Newark, New Jersey.

²⁰⁸ Resolutions and Proclamations, July 24, 1940, City of Newark Archives and Records Management Center, Newark, New Jersey.

²⁰⁹ Ron Citron, interviewed by Laura Troiano on March 6, 2013.

The Bears also used the baseball program sold at games to promote the war effort. A message inside a 1945 program “entitled *Baseball and the War* concluded that ‘by continuing baseball, by keeping our spirits and morale high, we show Hitler and Hirohito we know how to win a war just as much as we show him this when our bombs blast Berlin.’”²¹⁰ Patriotic wartime rhetoric could be used in the same way civic duty was used in the stadium in the years before the war; civic duty, now patriotic duty, could be served by attending baseball games. In the war years Paul Kiell recalled, “If the ball got hit into the stands you had to return it... It was the patriotic thing to do.”²¹¹ He went on to say that the “war and having the same team brought the city together... [but that] I think there was more patriotic feelings during 9/11, then during the war by far.”²¹² Kiell did not say in what way he experienced the patriotism through sports on 9/11, but it can be a reminder that sports can act as a vehicle for various types of messaging, and can relay a message loudly and clearly to millions of people.

During the early war years Newark continued to issue resolutions for half-day holidays on Opening Day for the Bears, using the same or very slightly altered language. In 1944, as the Allied forces gained a foothold in Europe, the city issued a proclamation that came from the desk of the mayor rather than the Board of Commissioners. Mayor Vincent Murphy issued a proclamation that placed Newark into the national context, as

²¹⁰ Cvornyek, *Baseball in Newark*, 44.

²¹¹ Paul Kiell, interviewed by Laura Troiano on March 6, 2013.

²¹² Paul Kiell, interviewed by Laura Troiano on March 6, 2013. On September 13, 2001 *New York Times* ran the article “In Times of Crisis, Debates About Whether to Play Game” by Richard Sandomir. Sandomir traced the history of professional games postponement in the wake of national crisis like the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. and noted at this point all but the NFL had postponed their games in the wake of 9/11. It was not until the New York Jets, who in standing in solidarity with their quarterback Vinny Testaverde after told his teammates “Guys, I love you all, but I’m from New York and I’ve had people die in the World Trade Center, so I won’t be on that trip to Oakland with you guys,” and the team decided to forfeit the game, did the NFL postpone the games slated for that Sunday,” http://www.espn.com/blog/new-york-jets/post/_/id/62982/how-the-01-jets-stood-tall-in-the-aftermath-of-the-911-attacks.

one of many cities that were “preparing for the advent of the popular American pastime of baseball.” On the proclamation “sports time” was in the original text. It was crossed out and pastime was hand-written in, the choice then connected Newark to a nationally celebrated experience. He went on to state that supporting Bears baseball, a “wholesome American sporting activity,” provides recreation and is “also is making its definite contribution to the morale-building program of our war effort.” Baseball was sold as a form of patriotism. Supporting baseball financially and engaging in the social activity and mythos reinforced that the experience was part of one’s civic duty. In the second to last paragraph he again connects baseball to the war by citing that a way to know we are winning the war is the suspension of the night game restrictions. To further solidify the connection, it read “this should afford many of our war workers who, during the day, are very rightly giving their entire time to greater productivity on the home front, the opportunity to witness night baseball.”²¹³ The stadium had been established as a space where identities could be shaped, and during the war years, the focus shifted to national rather than local civic obligations via baseball support.

The Bears continued to play in 1945, but there was no acknowledgment of their Opening Day from the city. In 1946, Mayor Murphy issued a new proclamation that had much of the same language as 1944. It repeated the importance of baseball as a morale-building program, but instead of for the war, it was changed to for “youth and adult alike.”²¹⁴ It ended with “Happily now, with the war emergency over, the Bears can proceed to provide night baseball as well as day games and I am sure that this will afford

²¹³ Resolutions and Proclamations, April 13, 1944, City of Newark Archives and Records Management Center, Newark, New Jersey

²¹⁴ Resolutions and Proclamations, April 15, 1946, City of Newark Archives and Records Management Center, Newark, New Jersey.

many more Newarkers the opportunity to witness and encourage this sport.”²¹⁵ The benefit for success in war was the returned gift of baseball.

A few days after the Bears’ proclamation was issued in 1946, one of only two proclamations was issued for the Eagles. The Eagles games were not described as a “morale-building program,” they were called “season’s activities.” It went on to state, “Newark, in common with other American cities, is strongly devoted to this popular pastime and its promotion through representative sources.” The language is seemingly an attempt to justify official support by arguing that devotion to baseball allows for official support of the Negro Leagues, thus implying that some form of justification is needed for this act of support. It is baseball we are supporting first and foremost. It ends with Mayor Murphy asking “our citizenry” to

take due note of this occasion. This team has demonstrated its ability in the sphere of baseball and has drawn the deserved attention and support of a large element of our population. We trust, therefore, that our Newarkers will evince interest in this occasion, from a recreational and sports perspective, with resultant encouragement to the “Eagles,” whom we wish a successful season.²¹⁶

Murphy offered reasons and excuses for white fans to attend the game. The proclamation reads as though it is addressed to white residents. The word “our” is not used in reference to the team; it is “this team” and “the Eagles.” The only “our” used is “our Newarkers.” The reference implies that these Newarkers are not already fans of the Eagles, leaving the assumption that they are white. The reason/excuse for a white fan to go to an Eagles game, according to this proclamation, was for a “recreational and sports perspective,” for the sake of seeing baseball in another way, that new way being played by black players.

²¹⁵ Resolutions and Proclamations, April 15, 1946, City of Newark Archives and Records Management Center, Newark, New Jersey.

²¹⁶ Resolutions and Proclamations, April 29, 1946, City of Newark Archives and Records Management Center, Newark, New Jersey.

The line of reasoning became that the team had demonstrated some ability and that it was worth watching. This team certainly did have some ability. Anyone who saw them play could plainly see that. During the 1946 season, which would conclude with an Eagles championship, the team had four future Hall of Fame players on its roster. (A total of eight Eagles' players are in the National Baseball Hall of Fame, along with Effa Manley.) The Eagles' 1946 championship is Newark's only professional league championship of any kind. Most interesting is Mayor Murphy's mention that white Newarkers should support this team because an "element of our population" supports them.²¹⁷ This other "element" was the fastest growing demographic in the city, African-Americans. The African-American population had gone from being 1.7% of the population in 1870 to 10.7% in 1940 and it was still growing. Marginalization of communities of color of course did not end after World War II, but the war had begun to change things. Black servicemen, including Eagles fans and some Eagles players, returned from fighting discrimination against the Nazis to face the same discrimination they had left. What had changed is that some of the servicemen's exposure overseas had reinforced and inspired new ways of fighting for equality within the United States. The Civil Rights Movement appeared in many forms in Newark, including in baseball. Integration in baseball was coming, and that would have serious ramifications for the Eagles.

August 1946

Attendance at Negro League games had reached an all-time high during the war years, valuing the league at \$2 million. In the major leagues, from 1945-1946 attendance

²¹⁷ Resolutions and Proclamations, April 29, 1946, City of Newark Archives and Records Management Center, Newark, New Jersey.

had risen from 10.8 million to 18.5 million. In the minor leagues in the same time span, attendance had risen from 10.7 million to 32.7 million.²¹⁸ In 1946 the Yankees had made a \$250,000 profit from its farm system with about “\$100,000 from the twenty percent rental fee they charged for use of their ballparks in New York, Newark, Kansas City, and Norfolk to Negro League teams; and \$45,000 from radio. In addition, the Yankees earned \$75,000 from local television, the first MLB team to make money from the new medium.”²¹⁹ Even with climbing attendance numbers and increasing profits, in August 1946 a growing number of articles were being published related to the effect the newest technological invention to impact baseball, television. Fear was present in the language of some articles. Some authors felt they needed to remind readers that experts predicted the financial collapse of baseball when the radio began to broadcast games, but instead there was record attendance. In Newark, articles cited that in 1945 the Bears’ attendance for the year was 120,767, and even with the 1946 season not complete the attendance number were already 225,938. The *Newark Evening News* declared, “And current prognosticators who think television will keep the fans at home. They can be wrong.”²²⁰ They were not wrong.

September 1946

New Jersey hosted its first and only professional baseball championship in September 1946. As a reminder of the secondary status of the Eagles in Newark, the first game of this championship was held in New York at the Polo Grounds because of a

²¹⁸ Steven A. Reiss, “The Profits Of Major League Baseball, 1900 to 1956” in *Baseball in America and America is Baseball* eds. Donald Kyle and Robert Fairbanks, eds., (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 111.

²¹⁹ Reiss, “The Profits of Major League Baseball,” 116.

²²⁰ “Public at Bat,” *Newark Evening News*, August 27, 1945.

scheduling conflict with the Bears.²²¹ The series went the full seven games with the Kansas City Monarchs and Eagles alternating wins. Effa Manley captured the feel of game seven in her edited autobiography:

TIME, Sunday, September 29, 1946

PLACE, Ruppert (Bears) Stadium, Newark, New Jersey

OCCASION, The staging of the seventh and deciding game of the 1946 Negro World Series between the Kansas City Monarchs, kingpins of the Negro American League; and the Newark Eagles, champions of the Negro National League.

Banks of crazily arrayed clouds drifting lazily o'erhead this warm and humid autumn afternoon – the kind of a “typical baseball day” which for generations has symbolized that perfect setting long associated with the diamond sport - Ruppert Stadium's weather-beaten stands are jammed to capacity - More than 13,000 vociferous baseball fanatics fill every available seat in the ball park.

Tis a colorful crowd, indeed, in every respect - Thoroughly good natured, ‘out for a good time,’ and not caring one whit who knows of it – The fans are predominantly black, but one doesn't find it terribly difficult to spot a white patron or two sprinkled here and there among the huge hot dog-eating, beer-guzzling gathering.

Folks have assembled here from all walks of life: sedate middle class physicians, school teachers civil service employees - Beauticians and barbers from the neighborhood salons - Swaggering political bigwigs, surrounded by the usual retinue of fawning ward heelers and hangers-on - expensively dressed, cigar-chewing numbers barons, accompanied by their bevy of beautiful, flashily-gowned consorts - Scores of the famous (and near famous) from throughout the theatrical world - Assorted sportsmen and hustlers of every conceivable stripe all blending into some weird kind of a human mosaic - Intertwined with the thousands of non-descript domestics, garbage collectors and other “just plain, ordinary people” from all over the city of Newark, and metropolitan New York.

Perched in my customary seat in the cramped press box, atop the grandstand, it seems as if I am dying a thousand deaths. The realization has swept slowly over me that a years-long dream is about to come true -- IF - Suddenly, I become aware of something else - rather eerie quietitude has descended over the entire ball park - It seems that everyone of these 13,000-plus fans has come face to face with the abrupt fact that he or she is sitting in on baseball history in the making.

²²¹ Luke, *The Most Famous Woman in Baseball*, 128.

My eyes are riveted to the playing field - Souell fouls off one pitch the suffocating tension is mounting steadily Next, a ball - I lower my head - How much can the nervous system take?

Then, as if from another world, I hear the sickening, cracking sound of bat striking ball - I'm almost afraid to look up - Has Souell homered?

From somewhere I muster enough courage to raise my eyes -- just in time to see our huge first sacker, Lenny Pearson, fondly squeezing that little old round white ball - Souell has popped up.

THE GAME IS OVER The Newark Eagles are World Champs!

I recline in my seat, thoroughly drained – too numbed to move.²²²

Manley's account is imbued with significance; groups of people from all races and classes gathered together to witness an event of historical significance. The press' recounting is devoid of all of that essence. There is nearly no mention of the Newark Eagles beyond box scores in the *New York Times* until 1946. At the bottom of the page thirty-eight, in a four sentence article titled "Eagles Win Negro Title," the paper reported that 7,200 fans watched Newark Eagles beat the Kansas City Monarchs to become champions of the Negro National League.²²³ The *Newark Evening News* had one article in the sports section; the headline "Eagles Hit In Clutches." It read that the Eagles "added the big laurel wreath to their already decorated brows." The rest of the article was a brief recap of the game. There is no excitement or ownership of the team in the article. There is no sense that this article appeared in the paper of the city in which it is located.²²⁴ There is no official acknowledgment from the city of the championship. In the spring of 1947 only a Bears proclamation was issued.

²²² Manley and Hardwick, *Negro Baseball...Before Integration*, 35-38.

²²³ "Eagles Win Negro Title," *New York Times*, September 30, 1946.

²²⁴ "Eagles Hit in Clutches," *Newark Evening News*, September 30, 1946.

End of Two Eras

1946-1950

On April 15, 1947 Jackie Robinson stepped onto the Ebbets Field in a Brooklyn Dodger uniform, and with that act broke Major League Baseball's color line. Three months later, on July 5 Newark Eagles' superstar Larry Doby played his first game for the Cleveland Indians, making him the second African American in the twentieth century to play Major League Baseball. It was a significant step in the fight for racial equality; it was a deathblow to the Negro Leagues. Effa Manley wrote, "There was a growing swell of racial pride that was sweeping headlong across Black America, and Jackie Robinson and his Dodgers were at the center of it. Robinson rapidly was developing into a great national hero, and much of everything else sort of paled in insignificance."²²⁵ Manley quickly realized the reality of baseball's integration; the best Negro League players were going to MLB. In response she became one of most prominent voices to fight against MLB executives poaching Negro League talent without compensating the Negro League team that had the ballplayers under contract. For her efforts she received \$15,000 from the Cleveland Indians for Larry Doby. That of course did not compensate for the lost revenue from the attendance decline. But her discontent got her some compensation, whereas the Kansas City Monarchs received nothing from the Dodgers for Jackie Robinson.

As Robinson, Doby, and other Negro League stars donned their new MLB uniforms (for both major and minor league teams), attendance at Negro League games began to plummet. For the Eagles, attendance had gone from 120,393 in 1946 to 57,000

²²⁵ Manley and Hardwick, *Negro Baseball...Before Integration*, 94.

fans in 1947.²²⁶ At the start of the 1948 season the city of Newark issued the second of two resolutions for the Eagles. Mayor Vincent J. Murphy, on the Eagles Opening Day, threw out the first pitch for the game and declared it “Newark Eagles Day.”²²⁷ Though still a day of celebration, the stark reality for the Eagles and all Negro League teams was that their league was in a free fall. Teams that were located in the same city as a major league team, particular ones with former Negro League players now on the team suffered even greater attendance and revenue losses. Negro League teams that drew 2,000 fans at venues like Yankee Stadium or the Polo Grounds were considered successes in 1948; some games in major league ballparks were only drawing 700 fans. The Eagles attendance had dropped by 85,000 from 1946 to 1948.²²⁸

In November 1948, buried at the bottom, in an article that was a total of eight sentences long, the *New York Times* reported that the Eagles had disbanded. It read that the team “played their games at Ruppert Stadium, home of the Newark Bears of the International League.”²²⁹ It was not Eagles’ stadium as much as they were not Newark’s team. Effa Manley quoted in the *New York Times* “We are not quitters, but it is just impossible for us to continue.” In commenting on Branch Rickey signing Jackie Robinson she said “the gullibility and stupidity of Negro baseball fans themselves in believing that he [Rickey] has been interested in anything more than the clicking of the turnstiles.”²³⁰ Manley dismissed the notion that Rickey signed Robinson to bring equality to baseball while simultaneously reminding Negro League fans that their Negro League

²²⁶ Paul Horowitz, “Sports in the News,” *Newark Evening News*, May 1, 1948, 11.

²²⁷ Resolutions and Proclamations, May 5, 1948, City of Newark Archives and Records Management Center, Newark, New Jersey.

²²⁸ Lawrence D. Hogan, *Shades of Glory: The Negro Leagues and the Story of African-American Baseball*, (Washington DC: National Geographic, 2006), 357.

²²⁹ “Newark Eagles Disband,” *New York Times*, November 10, 1948, 40.

²³⁰ “Newark Eagles Disband,” *New York Times*, November 10, 1948, 40.

owners were not primarily concerned with the economics of their teams, but that they understood these teams served a greater purpose. Integration would cost the African-American community something that was valuable and theirs. The Eagles and their service to Newark had ended. Effa Manley sold the team W.H. Young who moved the team to Houston, TX in 1949. After the 1950 season the team was moved to Nashville then New Orleans until they were finally disbanded in 1952.²³¹

Bears are “Down to the Last Out”

October and November 1947

The Eagles were not the only team heading out of Newark. But unlike the Eagles, it would be a much slower curtain call for the Bears. There was considerable change happening in the Yankee organization that would directly impact the Bears and thus, Ruppert Stadium. In 1945, Jacob Ruppert’s estate had sold the New York Yankees to Dan Topping, Del Webb, and Larry MacPhail for \$2.8 million. MacPhail was bought out by the other two owners in 1947. But a Yankee ownership change was low on the list of changes that were impacting the city. Newark’s Ironbound and the rest of the city was in a period of transition; the city had shifted to a postwar decline. In 1946 it was announced that the Port Authority of New York received nearly a \$4 million contract to build a bus

²³¹ Neil Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball: The Rise and Ruin of a Black Institution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 376. Baseball’s contribution to ending Jim Crow segregation did not end with the demise of the Negro Leagues. As Bruce Adelson argued in *Brushing Back Jim Crow: The Integration of Minor-League Baseball in the American South*, “Integration helped heighten southern blacks’ interest in baseball while also leading many to demand an end to conditions they had long endured: segregated ballpark seating, separate stadium entrances for whites and blacks, and the absence of African American ballplayers on the remaining holdout clubs. The collective action – boycotts and protests – by local African Americans forced changes and opened doors in places where blacks’ concerns had long been ignored or suppressed by team management and the white political structure. Integrated minor-league baseball proved to be an effective catalyst for many black southerners seeking to reform their own communities,” (Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball*, 11-12).

terminal located on land just south of the stadium. The location included a strip of land obtained by the Authority that was part of the twenty acres of land owned by the Bears. The stadium and its parking lot only occupied a portion of the acreage owned by the team. The Yankee organization received numerous letters from real estate agents sent on behalf of clients interested in industrial investments in the Ironbound that included the land owned by the team.

In a Western Union telegram sent to New York Yankee owner Dan Topping, Irving Feist of Feist & Feist Real Estate and Insurance wrote “Local papers report interest on your part disposing of Newark Bears Team and Newark Stadium would appreciate opportunity of discussing this matter with you” Feist was subsequently directed to George Weiss who responded to Feist and the other letters he received with similar language. They all read that the organization had not yet decided if they were going sell the land, but that if it were to be sold it would have to be for the entire plot. If their clients were interested they could submit offers to be presented to the Yankees’ Board.²³²

Despite the speculation of the sale in the press and the inquiries directed to the organization, at this point they were considered only rumors for the general public. The city of Newark, as it had done continuously since 1940, except for 1945, declared Opening Day for the team as Bears Day. They issued a proclamation similar to 1946, but with the addition of the importance of night baseball.

Rumors of the Bears exit continued in the press throughout the 1947 season, as did the conversations happening internally within the organization. In November 1947 a contractor was brought in to assess the repairs needed in the stadium, which by his

²³² Yankee Baseball Collection, Box 1, Folder Old Newark Material, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library.

account was in serious disrepair. It seems as though the Yankees had elected to minimally maintain the twenty-year-old stadium. In a detailed two-page assessment the contractor submitted to the organization he listed that the bleacher stands that were made of wood were rotting, “stands are breaking away and floors are caving in” and “if they are not fixed someone will be injured.” There was faulty plumbing causing overruns and a dumbwaiter that had been put in two years prior but never worked properly. This resiled in workers having to carry beer and soda up steps (there is no ramp in the stadium) and as a consequence it was noted by the organization, “most of our help have quit on account of the loading that is needed.” Management modified nearly all of the suggestions, opting to instead make minor repairs and replace structures where it was only absolutely necessary. More repairs were suggested in early 1948, and again management optioned for the bare necessity.²³³ Ruppert Stadium was falling apart and though there was some attachment to the stadium the attachment had not generated enough money in ticket sales to maintain it or convince Yankee management to invest more capital.

April 1948

April in Newark still meant Opening Day for the Bears. Much of the language used in the proclamation issued in 1948 remained the same from previous years. The notable difference was in the second line “Whereas, the Newark Bears Baseball Team has become an Integral part of the City’s’ sport and civic life...I hope our citizens will note fully the importance of this occasion. Our team has reflected much credit on our City

²³³ Yankee Baseball Collection, Box 1, Folder Old Newark Material, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library.

in past years and all of us eagerly look forward to a still greater season of baseball accomplishment.” It was a signal of the reality of the situation. The Bears were on their way out of Newark if they did not draw bigger crowds to the stadium. A representation of Newark through the greatness of the Bears, and with that a representation of the greatness of Newark was slipping away. Ruppert Stadium and its mythos of European immigrant groups coming together, assimilating to their new country through baseball within the walls of the stadium was no longer a reality. There were no large waves of European immigrants coming in, and those immigrant families, now second and third generation, were leaving not just the Ruppert Stadium, but Newark itself; they were migrating out to the suburbs.

On April 29, 1948 the *Newark Evening News*’ sports columnist Hy Goldberg in his column Sports in the News speculated on the fate of the Newark Bears as attendance dwindled. He described the situation as the Yankees looking at a “large blob of red ink on the pale in the ledger devoted to the Newark account.” Goldberg noted not only have fans stayed away from the stadium so far this year, with only 7,000 paying fans and 7,000 children with donated tickets attending opening day in 1948, but that four days later only 300 fans showed up for the Tuesday game. The decrease in attendance was a trend that began in 1946. Mid-column there was a subheading “Monument of Ignorance” where Goldberg asked why was there this loss in attendance? His answer was “mainly geographical.” He surmised that problem came from the location of the park in the less populated outer edge of the East Ward with only one bus line and limited street access that caused traffic jams. He went on to state that the “late George Stallings, when he was managing in the International League, called the stadium a monument to ignorance...

[Davids] took ill advice when he selected the site. The original Newark park was located there in the early 1900s, and Davids advisers, heedless of the mass movement of the population toward the suburbs picked the same spot.” The criticism of the location in the Ironbound had been voiced since the early 1900s. The rationale here was that for the stadium to be successful it needed to be located where people live. If it is difficult to get to the stadium they will lose fans to other sports stadiums or the numerous other entertainments vying for their money and attention. Goldberg continued, “we refuse to believe Newark and the suburbs have no baseball fans. Perhaps they have no civic pride as far as their home team is concerned, but they do go to ball games, usually in the Yankee Stadium, the Polo Grounds, or Brooklyn. They gather around to watch semipro clubs like the South Orange Giants and the East Orange club, or the high school teams throughout the various communities.” The two minor league teams he listed were not in Newark, but were instead located in its suburbs. Civic pride, as it had been used by Newark’s municipal government, was used to shame, guilt, to spur attendance at games. It was not an interest problem; people are going to see baseball. Residents attended local semipro teams or high school teams, but that did not constitute or promote civic pride according to the city government.

Goldberg’s solution was to build a new ballpark on the outer edge of Newark, in the Vailsburg neighborhood or in the border cities of Irvington or East Orange. The idea was to move the stadium where the Bears fans of the previous decades, the European immigrants and their decedents, had moved. The Bears were not looking to adjust to the changing city and its changing demographics. There was a fixation through the language of the press and city government to recapture rather adapt. According to Goldberg,

Professional ball clubs play in city-owned stadiums throughout the minor leagues, notably in Jersey City, Syracuse and Baltimore...Failing to persuade the politicians, we believe it would be worthwhile for the Yankees to build their own arena. The investment would pay dividends promptly. The pleasure of sitting in a nice, clean, new ball park would set the turnstiles a-whirling, and over a 10-year period the stadium would pay for itself. We're not too familiar with the tax, but wouldn't the cost be a necessary expenditure?²³⁴

Tax dollars, money that could be instead used for schools, infrastructure, or other services, in this argument is superseded for the "necessary expenditure" of a stadium. A stadium here is essential to civic life and thus a worthwhile tax expense.

Goldberg's article made its way to the Yankees organization. George Weiss received a letter dated the day after the article ran from Harry Taylor, president of the East Orange real estate agency that was selling Weiss' residential property in Short Hills. Weiss' home sale was one possible indication that the Yankees were seriously considering leaving Newark. The letter mentioned Goldberg's article and requested a meeting to discuss the "possible relocation of the Newark baseball club nearer to the center of activity in the heart of Suburban Essex." Like Goldberg's rationale, if the stadium was to be sustained by the previous fans, they had to move with the white flight out of Newark. The agent wrote, "I am confident that, if it is in the center of the Essex County area, which has a population of 1,500,000, the ball club would meet with greater success." He sent a follow-up letter in July in which he again stated that "it did seem to me that the patronage would be tremendously increased were you to relocate, for there is no denying the fact that the present location does not offer facilities comparable to those which would be available near to the seat of the baseball population, which, in my opinion, is not actually in Newark, but in the suburbs perhaps." Newark's white middle-class population was moving to the suburbs thus baseball needed to move with them. A few

²³⁴ Hy Goldberg, "Sports in the News," *Newark Evening News*, April 29, 1948.

weeks later, Goldberg included in his column two reader responses to the story. One commented that before the Yankees had bought the Bears the “team was Newark’s own,” but as a Yankee farm team they are “just an experimental team for its bigger brother.” The second reader commented that a “new stadium at a more convenient location would be a big help in drawing more attendance, but the real issue was the playoff system.”²³⁵ Both of these articles were clipped and filed by the Yankee organization.

May and June 1948

Irving Feist, who had inquired about the sale of the team and the stadium in October 1947 reached out again in May 1948 to request information on the minimum requirements for a new stadium. Weiss responded that “steps are being taken to obtain information relating to the construction of a stadium suitable for professional baseball, football, and other outdoor sports events,” but that any new space must have a minimum seating capacity of 16,000, that it is of the “utmost importance that transportation facilities, public carriers and private automobiles be adequate” and that there be a parking facility for 2,000 cars.²³⁶ The insistence on parking facilities on that scale was a blatant signal that any new stadium would be located out on the city’s outskirts or in the suburbs; the city center did not have that kind of space. Feist would meet with the Yankee baseball executives to discuss possibilities. That conversation was recounted in an interdepartmental letter from the Bears’ business manager Parke Carroll to the Bears’ Vice President and director of the Yankee farm system George Weiss. Feist had told Carroll that Newark’s Mayor Murphy wanted a new stadium and for it to be located

²³⁵ Hy Goldberg, “Sports in the News,” *Newark Evening News*, May 14, 1948, 30.

²³⁶ Yankee Baseball Collection, Box 1, Folder Old Newark Material, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library.

where Schools Stadium currently stands. Feist had suggested to the mayor that to compensate with the lack of parking in that area a “2-story parking structure be erected adjacent to the proposed new stadium to be used to relieve the downtown parking situation when the stadium was not in use.” The estimated cost would be \$100,000 per year to pay for the new structure. Carroll responded when Feist “wondered out loud if a triple-A ball club could pay such rental. I assured him it was not possible.” There was also the suggestion of a team paying twenty percent of the gross receipts as to repay the cost, to that Carroll responded “was to invite bankruptcy.” Carroll went on to state that a “properly managed a stadium might bring in \$30,000 to \$40,000 from outside rental.” Carroll informed Weiss that the real intention of this meeting was the formality of exploring the possibilities for a new stadium, but that Feist was interested in obtaining the ability to sell the property for development.²³⁷

As conversations were happening with those interested in buying pieces of the twenty acres of land, the Newark Baseball Club had begun to appraise the team’s assets. Allied Maintenance Company was hired to study the “possibility of salvaging certain equipment and materials now incorporated in the Ruppert Stadium Newark, should [the team] wish to discontinue the use of that park within two years.” The team also hired the Newark based Fielder-Hannoch Appraisal to conduct an official appraisal of the property. The Yankees received the report in June 1948; the assessment of the market value of the property concluded

The subject property is located in the easterly end of Newark, a section which has been devoted to industry. There is no indication that the utility should or will change except to intensify the demand for the same purpose. Excellent railroad and highway facilities, good bus service from residential sections, and an industrial imprint of long

²³⁷ Yankee Baseball Collection, Box 1, Folder Old Newark Material, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library.

standing which discourages residential use, gives the subject land its chief benefits.... In our opinion the 20 acres of land which represents the subject property is worth Two Hundred Thousand (\$200,000) Dollars.

While the eight-page appraisal included detailed research accounting for utilities and water lines, recent comparable property sales, and precise measurements of the property tracts garnered from a series of deeds, contracts, and indentures, it was clear from the first page in the first paragraph that the person crafting the appraisal saw the value of the space as more than a monetary one. The appraisal began with:

The cold appraisal of real estate for its highest and best use has no respect for drama, romance or sentiment, and 262-320 Wilson Avenue, Newark, New Jersey, is 20 acres of industrial land first and foremost and then it may be mentioned, merely in passing, that it is the home of the Newark Bears, in the fee ownership of the Newark International Baseball Club Inc. We dare not mention the names of Iron Man Joe McGinty, Buddy Rosar, Charlie Keller or the many other top men in baseball who kicked up some of the dust of this 20 acres of Newark's heart, for which we now seek a valuation, without fanfare or ceremony. Those data may be interesting to some, most likely to you and me, but it has nothing to do with the case at hand.

The appraiser, knowing this would be seen by the Yankee organization, chose to begin the appraisal with what he determined to be the true value. The messaging around nostalgia and civicness were used because they worked. A person trained to evaluate space as land could not see the stadium as simply a piece of land. Instead, he saw "Newark's heart."

Behind the scenes, internally within the Yankee organization, there were continuous discussions about the sale of the stadium. Despite this, Ruppert Stadium was still in use and that year the Bears made playoffs. But even a winning team playing a rivalry game against Jersey City in August only attracted 1,179 fans. The total number of fans for the season by August was only 130,000, which was among the lowest in the league. No one was certain why the attendance had dropped so much and so quickly. It

was likely a combination of an aging and inconveniently located stadium, more accessibility to MLB teams, and primarily the newly affordable availability of televisions.²³⁸

October and November 1948

The number of newspapers articles on the Bears departure continued to increase. Countering these claims, the President of the International League Frank Shaughnessy declared, “There isn’t the slightest notion to take the Bears out of Newark, after all, where could we go that would be any better?” He added, “Newark is big enough to make a comeback. It is a big city, a great city, and I am sure something can be worked out.” In the eyes of baseball owners and league officials Newark was a city on the decline, if not in some ways already reaching a bottom point. A little less than two decades later, much of the country would view Newark that way as well. But at this point Shaughnessy still had a vested interest in the team remaining in Newark. There were only eight teams in the league and Newark and Jersey City were the only ones close enough to draw fans from the tristate area. When Shaughnessy was asked about the impact radio and television was having on the game he responded, “some form of baseball legislation could eliminate this menace.”²³⁹ If it was not clear a few years prior, it was clear now that television was not radio; television was impacting attendance of all sporting events. A few days later Dan Topping, the President of the New York Yankees, also denied the team was moving. Bears business manager Parke Carroll contended that Newark “cannot be dismissed from the baseball map” while also acknowledging the television was having some impact, “but

²³⁸ “Bears Attendance Will Set Loop Low,” *Newark Evening News*, August 19, 1948, 38.

²³⁹ “Says Bears Will Remain,” *Newark Evening News*, October 1948.

that it is too early to establish a definite view on that problem.”²⁴⁰ Some baseball executives were in denial; others did not want to admit there was a problem they had not figured out how to solve. But the reality was that Newark was changing and the way people across the country were consuming baseball was changing, and the result of that combination was getting harder to deny.

By October, the press, city officials, and Yankee ownership were disseminating competing narratives on the Bears departure. In October a letter from the Chamber of Commerce of the City of Newark was sent to Parke Carroll referencing reports in the press that the team would not be transferred. The letter claimed this report was met by the Chamber as “gratifying news” and that if the Chamber could aid in growing attendance it would. Even while the Yankees and the city government were denying and deluding themselves about the inevitable move, the press was expressing a different narrative. The influence of the press was great enough that, as a result of a *Newark Evening News* article, the Newark Baseball Club felt compelled to release a statement that read, “in reference to today’s story to the effect that the Newark franchise will be moved out of the city, the club has reached no decision in respect to plans for 1949. A statement of policy will be made in the near future.” If fans thought the team was leaving, that might discourage them from attending games. That was enough incentive for the Yankees to counter the press’ assertions. If the City of Newark saw the team as a valuable entity, both economically and civically, than it also had to work with team to dispel the notion of the Bears exit.

On November 8, 1948 a draft of an announcement regarding the sale of the team was sent internally to Parke Carroll. It read, “The Newark Baseball Club is for sale. This

²⁴⁰ “Bears Stay Says Topping,” *Newark Evening News*, October 13, 1948.

includes the International League franchise, players to be agreed upon, Ruppert Stadium and the twenty odd acres of land on which the stadium is built and adjoining parking space. The Yankees feel that, following seventeen years of continuous operation, a change in ownership will be beneficial as is invariably the case in baseball operations. Interested parties may secure further information from General Manager Parke Carroll at Ruppert Stadium.”²⁴¹ A few days later the news became public. There were conflicting reports of what this notice of the sale actually meant. Was the team leaving or were the Yankees trying create leverage with the municipal government? Threatening to leave is a tactic still used by team owners often in order to get a new taxpayer-funded stadium.

On November 11, 1948 the *New York Times* ran the headline: “Report Topping Set to Sell Newark Club.” In the accompanying article, Dan Topping, co-owner of the Yankees, stated, “It doesn’t look like we’re going to move the club in 1949, but it is for sale.”²⁴² The *Newark Evening News* headline read “Offer Bears for Sale” and included quotations from Parke Carroll on the benefits of ownership change. The following day’s article offered a re-cap of Parke Carroll’s press conference. Carroll claimed, “no discussion or thought of transferring the Bears had come up and that the Yankee owners would continue to operate here if no buyer was found.” The *News* suggested that the team’s reluctance to discuss a price was a possible indication of an “effort to stimulate local cooperation.” On the list of complaints were smog, limited bus service, and the continuous problem of limited parking. Topping reiterated that the team was not moving. He stated, “We had an authentic survey of [the] Newark population area which shows, for one thing, that on three highways, Nos. 24, 25, and 29 (no including the Oranges,

²⁴¹ Yankee Baseball Collection, Box 1, Folder Old Newark Material, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library.

²⁴² “Report Topping Set to Sell Newark Club,” *New York Times*, November 11, 1948, 40.

Montclair and other suburban areas) Newark has a potential drawing population of \$750,000.” The article continued, “Yankee officials seem to think that baseball should be a local enterprise... They point out that in other cities the chambers of commerce and civic organizations get behind ball clubs and assist in promotion.”²⁴³ The Yankees, though they were and are a private business, were making the case that city should devote financial resources to improve their bottom line. A few days later, the *Newark Evening News* reported that the International League had approved the Bears sale and for the franchise to move out of Newark. Television was cited as having a negative impact on attendance for the Jersey City team, drawing a similar possible conclusion for Newark.²⁴⁴ International League President Frank Shaughnessey called for the “cessation of night games and for a home territory rule that would ban televised regular-season major-league games beyond a fifty-mile radius.”²⁴⁵ The writing was on the wall. The Bears were going to leave unless something was done.

January 1949

1949 began with Carroll claiming that no offers for the Bears had been received, but the real possibility of the move began to elicit a more vigorous response from city government. Frank Shaughnessey claimed that the team might move to Montréal or Queens, New York. Former Newark Mayor, now the Commissioner of Public Works, Meyer Ellenstein expressed displeasure that the team’s issues were not directly brought to him. He responded that he can “eliminate nuisances which the Bears say have made their

²⁴³ Fred Bendel, “Hook Baited with Bears Nets Yanks Not a Nibble,” *Newark Evening News*, November 12, 1948, 15.

²⁴⁴ Fred Bendel, “Newark Franchise Shift Ok’d by Loop,” *Newark Evening News*, November 15, 1948, 26.

²⁴⁵ William Marshall, *Baseball’s Pivotal Era, 1945-1951* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 257.

operations here a losing proposition... I'm a little upset about all this talk that they move out of Newark. The club is a definite asset to the city... Transportation can be corrected, and the smoke and smells I've been hearing about can be eased too."²⁴⁶ Hy Goldberg's column in the *Newark Evening News* was less optimistic. It read, "so when the City Commission meets with the Messrs, Carroll and Shaughnessy tomorrow morning, there will have to be some talk on ways and means of reviving the fans' interest. In a town wherein professional football, professional basketball and a league franchise in the Negro National League all died slow deaths, this sounds like quite a chore."²⁴⁷ The Ironbound neighborhood with its large manufacturing plants and trash disposal facilities has since the 1800s, had substantial environmental, pollution, and transportation issues. (It still does.) It is in the context of reviving fans interest that the conversations about solving those issues are highlighted by the municipal government and in the newspaper.

The City Clerk in a four-page single-spaced report summarized the meeting. Parke Carroll spoke first. He wanted to "paint a picture of the problems of the club he represents and why they were considering moving their franchise to another city." The club had spent on average \$250,000 annually to operate in the city. Despite this financial commitment, Carroll stated it was "becoming increasingly difficult to get good ballplayers to come to Newark because of the disagreeable conditions, such as lack of enthusiasm, lack of attendance, etc." Carroll explained that a "baseball club should be an integral part of a community in that it furnishes enthusiasts of baseball with a means of wholesome recreation. He said the club should be called upon to aid in combating juvenile delinquency and...part of communal life and interest the people of Newark."

²⁴⁶ "Ellenstein, Newark, Offers Aid to Bears," *New York Times*, January 17, 1949, 25.

²⁴⁷ Hy Goldberg, "Sports in the News," *Newark Evening News*, January 18, 1949, 49.

This argument placed baseball into the national conversation of juvenile delinquency and enhanced baseball's status as a valuable civic entity. Carroll was offering baseball as a solution to what was becoming a national concern.²⁴⁸ Commissioner Keenan responded by listing factors that led to this situation, the first being the ballpark's location. But with fifty percent of the state's population living within twenty miles of Newark, there was consensus among the men at the meeting that there had to be a solution to this problem.

The city offered a multipronged approach. Transportation that directly impacted the stadium would be modified. They added routes to the previous one direct bus line, and for fans that have to transfer buses; they did not have to pay an additional seven-cent fare. They instead paid a fourteen-cent round-trip. Buses would also have signs promoting the games. The city agreed to move a city-owned dump adjacent to the stadium where they burned trash. The smoke and foul odors were a major issue at the park with the smoke sometimes coming into the outfield and being so thick it delayed games. They also agreed to put signs on the highways promoting the team and to impress upon the newspapers to "cooperate in every way by giving publicity to those days designated by the clubs." Along with the newspapers, suburban municipalities, primary and secondary schools, and every civic, fraternal, service and pleasure club would be asked to promote the team. These institutions would remind their members that baseball was "essential to the city" and a supporting the team a "civic duty." Ralph Villani, the Commission chairman, contended, "We don't want to lose the club. We regard it as a civic asset and we would regard it as a black eye to our community if the club should be

²⁴⁸ For more on the response to juvenile delinquency in Newark into the 1960s see Mark Krasovic, *The Newark Frontier: Community Action in the Great Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016) and Julia Rabig, *The Fixers: Devolution, Development, and Civil Society in Newark, 1960-1990* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016).

transferred to another city. We urge you to give us another chance and we will prove that the club can remain here as a happy and profitable enterprise.” The Commission promised to “stir up civic, fraternal and other groups, and also suburban officials to cooperate in support of the Bears.”²⁴⁹ It was a marketing blitz effort.

A few days later, on January 25, Hy Goldberg responded to City Commissions efforts to keep the Bears in Newark in his “Sports in the News” column. He surmised the commission “can’t take the fan by the nape of the neck and escort him to the stadium. There are other means, for instance as practiced in Jersey City each opening day. Fortunately, Newarkers haven’t attained that point in political dictatorship.”²⁵⁰ Comparing the efforts of the city to physically bringing people to games against their will offers a window into the extensive and vigorous campaign the city enacted to gain attendance at the games. Wheels of government uncharacteristically, moved swiftly. The day after Goldberg’s column, which was a week after team ownership met with city officials, the Newark City Commission adopted a two-page resolution. It referred to the Bears as ‘Home Team’ of Greater Newark, embracing all the communities of Essex County, West Hudson, and parts of Union County.” Reiterating its promise to expand the fan base to the increasingly growing suburbs, many who moved there from Newark. The resolution continued with the assurances the city gave to the team about improving transportation and included “this great American game of baseball, represented by organized baseball, has endured for more than a century as part of our community life, and should be preserved for the present and for the future life of our baseball enthusiasts

²⁴⁹ Roscoe McGowen, “City Officials to Confer on Newark Club Today,” *New York Times*, January 19, 1949, 37; Roscoe McGowen, “Newark Officials Plan to Aid Bears,” *New York Times*, January 20, 1949, 40; Fred Bendel, “All to Cooperate on Bear Problem,” *Newark Evening News*, January 19, 1949.

²⁵⁰ Hy Goldberg, “Sports in the News,” *Newark Evening News*, January 25, 1949.

and it is our public and civic duty to foster and encourage wholesome outdoor recreation by advocating, publicizing and supporting organized baseball.” This resolution would be sent to “all municipalities and the various civic, social, industrial, business, labor and other organizations; school authorities and students of all secondary schools and colleges, and that they be invited to join this movement for planned assistance to a greater Newark baseball team.” The effort to get people to a stadium is being called a “movement.” This plays into the idea of civic duty, an effort to galvanize support and move that support into action. It further solidifies the idea of the power of connecting civicness and baseball by those in civic government.

The press reported that along with the proclamations, was a motion to run direct bus lines to North Newark, Clinton Hill, and Valisburg, neighborhoods closest to the suburbs, that the continuation of the “civic holiday” for city employees on opening day, and that there be an investigation into the building a direct ramp to the Pulaski Skyway. Carroll had also requested the city find a radio sponsor for home and away games, a cost of \$62,000, a significant amount for the time, and that local Merchant Associations advertise opening day. “Commissioner Ellenstein suggested a merchant’s group sponsor a history of baseball operation in Newark to be used especially in secondary schools.” Also to be planned was a “Newark Bears Festival” and an Essex Civic Council Night at the stadium.²⁵¹ It is never stated why the city puts this much effort into saving the team. They did not have a direct financial stake in the team nor was there seemingly a public outcry to save the team. It could be the narratives they derived from baseball had proved useful in shifting conversations and attention to and from other changes happening in the

²⁵¹ “Boost for Bears,” *Newark Evening News*, January 26, 1949.

city. I think it stands to reason that they city saw the team as a powerful tool, one that they did not want to relinquish.

By 1949, it was becoming too clear to even those who did not want to see it that the Bears time in Newark was coming to a close. Across the major and minor league teams had started realize the danger and the potential benefits of television. MLB had begun to televise many of their games and some minor league followed suit. Even the Bears had planned to televise their games.²⁵² But it was too late. Only 11,000 fans attended Opening Day 1949; they had expected 20,000. The next three games drew 403, 174, and 210 respectively.²⁵³ The team tried numerous promotional events, including day game where they offered orchids for female fans.²⁵⁴ None of it worked. The Bears were done in Newark.

June 1949

On June 21, the *Newark Evening News* reported that President Shaughnessy considered moving the Bears to Quebec, that there is no chance of the Yankees coming back and that no other franchise would operate in Newark because the “general demise of Newark as a professional sports town is one of the chief contributing factors to the collapse of the franchise.” He stated, “The town just doesn’t seem to have any civic pride in any professional sports any more.” Shaughnessy placed the blame on Newark as a city rather than his league, the Yankees, or that technology, populations, and entertainment and cultural trends had changed over time. By placing the blame on the city, he could continue to sell his league and the way they do business to other cities.

²⁵² “Television Spreading in Top Minor Loops,” *The Sporting News*, April 20, 1949.

²⁵³ Marshall, *Baseball’s Pivotal Era*, 258.

²⁵⁴ “City Has Pledged Support for Team,” *Newark Evening News*, January 19, 1950.

The City commissioners responded by announcing July 12 as Newark Municipal Officials and Employees Night at the stadium, while Parke Carroll claimed that Shaughnessy did not speak for the team when he said Newark lacked civic pride.²⁵⁵ Damage control by the Yankees in case a deal within the city government or a Newarker could be struck. Meanwhile the press had reported that League President Shaughnessy was searching for a new city for the Bears. Parke Carroll claimed “the board of directors of the Newark Bears has not discussed moving the club out of Newark since last February and is not considering a switch now.” Shaughnessy had written the league’s intention to move the team to Newark’s City Clerk and those comments were made public. He had criticized “Newark’s civic pride” because of the low attendance at games. He added that it is “pretty farfetched to blame the Yankees for the loss of baseball interest in your city.” He did not give an explanation as to why the Yankees had no blame in how they ran their baseball operation or maintained their stadium. He ended the letter asking for solutions so that the team could stay.²⁵⁶ A month later the Yankees were reassuring fans that the team would play out the rest of the season in Newark, but that “Newark Night” was postponed. Mayor Villani responded to the cancelation of “Newark Night” by taking over it over and establishing a committee to “make it a big affair.”²⁵⁷ A signal that the Bears were important enough that the city’s mayor was involved in keeping the team in the city and that the municipal government was going to continue to focus on the population leaving the city rather than the steadily increasing black population coming to the city. There is no mention of any incorporation of any element of Negro baseball in

²⁵⁵ “Last Year for Bears?,” *Newark Evening News*, June 21, 1949 and “City Backs Bears Team,” *Newark Evening News*, June 30, 1949.

²⁵⁶ “Shag Hears About It,” *Newark Evening News*, June 28, 1949.

²⁵⁷ “Bears Will Stay Here, Says Yankee Farm Head,” *Newark Evening News*, July 11, 1949.

these efforts to save the Bears nor was there any effort at all, not even a meeting, by the city government that I have seen to save the Eagles or some form of Negro baseball. The effort to save the Bears with arguments centered of civicness and nostalgic language indicates that it is not about saving baseball and the function they claim it serves, it is about preserving a narrative about Newark. If they wanted to save baseball, why were there no efforts to engage the new populace that could help support it?

On June 25, 1949, “the *Newark Star-Ledger* announced that it was dropping the Bears from the International League standings and listing them instead under exhibition baseball, “because they obviously don’t belong in triple A competition.” This was a symbolic gesture that was intended to represent the fans unhappiness with the quality of the team and their pending. The Bears responded to this insult by asking the paper to recall their sportswriter Jim Ogle, who reported on the team for the paper.²⁵⁸ A month later, on August 23, Mayor Villani’s postponed “Newark Night” was held. “Twenty-three ushers were on-hand to assist the 6,885 spectators that showed up for the festivities. Comedienne Martha Raye, boxers Rocky Graziano and Charlie Fusari and some beauty queens were in attendance. An orchestra, a home run hitting contest and \$1,000 in prizes kept things interesting... The next night attendance plummeted to 375.”²⁵⁹ The lure of beauty queens and celebrities was only temporary. The city in an effort to reclaim a past did not focus or did not want to focus on how to fit the Bears into the future, if that was even feasible or beneficial to anyone.

²⁵⁸ Marshall, *Baseball’s Pivotal Era*, 258.

²⁵⁹ Linthurst, *Newark Bears: The Final Years*, 81.

November and December 1949

By November Hy Goldberg speculated on the Bears sale in relation to other minor league teams. The Yankees had a real asset in Newark; the land the stadium resided on. Goldberg thought it “wouldn’t appear to be an economical operation for someone to buy a ball park and tear it down to make way for a plant.”²⁶⁰ He could not imagine that the value of the land was great enough to warrant the cost of buying the stadium, demolishing it, and then developing another operation. Not soon after the column ran, though it had not become final, it was reported that the team, with a price tag of \$150,000 would likely be moved to either to Springfield MA to become a farm team for the Chicago Cubs, who with the disbandment of their New England farm team had left another stadium empty, this one recently built for a \$100,000. Or the team would be moved to New Haven, Connecticut, and operate as an independent team. The *New York Times* reasoned that it was the “advent of television and the accessibility of New York’s major league parks.” The Bears home attendance its last season was below 90,000. There is no singular answer as to why the Bears were no longer profitable in Newark, and that fact undeniable. In 1946 they had a gross income of \$334,615, gross expense of \$383,094, and a net profit, when adding cost of player contracts and income taxes, of \$74,171. In 1947 the net income had decreased by \$93,193 and the net profit was down to \$20,191. That was the last year they had a profit. Income continued to decrease and in 1948 the net profit was \$-33,607 and in 1949 \$-32,623.²⁶¹ Factors for their demise include the emerging popularity of television, both as a form of entertainment and the ability to watch baseball on from home. Lack of public transportation to the stadium, lack of parking and limited road

²⁶⁰ Hy Goldberg, “Sports in the News,” *Newark Evening News*, November 1949.

²⁶¹ United States Congress. House. Committee On The Judiciary. Subcommittee No. 5. Study of Monopoly Power. Washington, U. S. Govt. Print. Off, 1951, 1629.

access to the stadium, coupled with ease of getting to New York City to see three different MLB teams. Newark's population shifts, white flight in conjunction with a growing African-American population that was not targeted by the Bears. A post-war Newark economy resulted in a rise in unemployment and an exiting upper-middle class tax base. It is possible that lack of investment by the Yankees in the maintenance of the stadium or the new entertainment venues and experiences for residents to choose from could also be factors. The narrative of Newark's municipal government, the press, the executives of the International League were very similar. Their reasoning for the Bears demise centered on the lack of participation by the populace. The economic gain flowed in one direction; the economic blame flowed in the other.

Life After the Bears and Eagles: 1950-1967

January 1950

In the first week of January Jack Sheehan, chain director of the Cubs, visited Newark and met with Commissioner Ellenstein and Newark Board of Education officials to assess whether the team could remain in Newark. Sheehan toured Schools Stadium, which had good transportation options and parking, but lacked the size, grandstand roofing, and lighting system required for a minor league team. The Cubs also inquired about the use of Ruppert Stadium, but it would need numerous costly repairs.²⁶² A few days later the Yankees issued statement:

The Yankees regret that they have been forced, through obvious circumstances, to withdraw from Newark of the International League. The club has done its best to give Newark fans winning baseball. Seven league championships attest to the success of the club's efforts. There does not seem to be any reason to reiterate why we are withdrawing from Newark. The attendance just did not warrant

²⁶² "Cub Solon Moves On," *Newark Evening News*, January 5, 1950.

keeping a team there. The ball park will be used for various other sports with preference given to independent baseball.

The Yankees continued the narrative that they were “forced” to leave because of attendance. The team did their part, winning championships, but the fans did not do theirs. The Bears were sold to the Chicago Cubs and they would not remain in Newark. The team would be moved to Springfield. Jack Sheehan of the Cubs stated that the reason the team would be moved was because the municipal government and local businesses gave financial support to the team. He stated

civic leaders in Springfield had co-operated whole-heartedly in the deal... [and that] local backers have pledged a load of \$125,000 to the Cubs. The city which owns the Springfield ballpark granted the Cubs a new 20-year lease to rent the park. The old lease was to expire in 1951. Rent on the park has been reduced. The city council also granted the Cubs a 15-year option to purchase the park, replacing an option due to expire in 1957. The Cubs previously had requested the city council to extend additional financing to improve the park. In view of the other concessions, however, the Cubs will not press this request.

It was reported, “no price was mentioned but, since only the franchise-and no players or property-was involved, the sale price might have been as low as \$50, 000,” but that the total cost of the franchise, players and transfer would total \$450,000-\$500,000.²⁶³ This would not include Ruppert Stadium or the twenty acres of land.

Fred Bendel, who had been reporting for the *Newark Evening News* on the Bears at least since they were sold to the Yankees in 1932, reflected on the Bears leaving Newark. While Newark, he wrote, “has lost its franchise four times since the turn of the century, the investors usually have made profits... A glance over the history of Newark in organized baseball indicates very clearly that the lack of foresight in planning for a

²⁶³ Roscoe McGowen, “Yankees Sell Newark Franchise; Cubs Will Place Team in Springfield, but Take No Bear Players,” *New York Times*, January 13, 1950, 34 and “Cubs Buy Bears; to Move Out,” *Newark Evening News*, January 12, 1950.

permanent home of the Bears was a deciding factor in the transfer of the franchises.”²⁶⁴ A common answer to the baseball woes of Newark was its location. But also he notes that baseball has been profitable to those who own the teams that play here and even more could have been made if better decisions were made on stadium location. The Bears were one of many minor league and major league teams who impacted by changes in urban areas as a result of expanding suburban spaces. As Bruce Kuklick pointed out in his study of Philadelphia’s famed baseball stadium Shibe Park, professional baseball and the urban city emerged nearly simultaneously. The result of that was that ballparks were built to fit into the urban landscape, both figurative and literally. The game was also marketed as being in service for the residents of the city.

Sports entrepreneurs built their stadiums in the towns and argued that the game reduced the tensions of industrial work. In the late twentieth century, however, the heirs of these entrepreneurs vacated their facilities because they could not cope with the crime, traffic, and racial problems of the workplace. They moved to suburban facilities. Restrictive street patterns might not constrain the new grounds, but these stadiums were not “natural.” They were often not parts of neighborhoods.²⁶⁵

The Bears left Newark during the earlier years of the movement to suburbia, this trend of moving stadiums out of urban centers never reversed course with few exceptions.

1951

In 1951 it was cars not players that circled what was once the grassy diamond of Ruppert Stadium. The stadium now held stock car auto races and as it had since the

²⁶⁴ Fred Bendel, “Bears Usually Profitable,” *Newark Evening News*, January 15 1950.

²⁶⁵ Bruce Kuklick, *To Every Thing A Season: Shibe Park and Urban Philadelphia, 1909-1976* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 177. It took till the 1970s for Shibe Park to be torn down. Kuklick wrote, “The city still stalled. Apparently “plans” for future use had to precede razing, and no such adequate plans existed. Whereas officials had few qualms about destroying small single-family dwellings in North Philadelphia, they delayed for as long as they could with the huge old building. In the late spring of 1976 the neighbors demonstrated about the danger of the park as a fire hazard and a haven for winos and junkies” (Kuklick, *To Every Thing A Season*, 186).

1940s, continued to host boxing matches. The post-Bears field schedule also included international soccer matches and other local sporting events. As the stadium served its occupants du jour, there were reports that President of the International League Frank Shaughnessy was in talks to bring a team back to Newark. The International League was attempting to separate themselves from Major League Baseball to become an “independent pre-major class league.” The new Newark team could then be an independent team rather than a farm team for the Yankees and could again play at Ruppert Stadium. The plan hinged upon the New York Giants price of the Ottawa franchise, which would be the team brought to Newark, and the New York Yankees rental fee for use of Ruppert Stadium.²⁶⁶ On October 31, 1951 the first lines of a *Newark Evening News* article read “An angel appeared on the streets of Newark yesterday afternoon. The angel’s name was Louis Baselice, and he had big brown eyes, broad shoulders and some six foot three inches of flesh and blood under his thinning hair... The angel came without wings. However, if rumor hath it true, he did come with the prime requisite for earthbound angels – a fat checkbook.”²⁶⁷ A dream man to bring a once thought lost dream into reality. But was this a dream of anyone but sportswriters writing these articles? Was there really a desire for baseball to come back to Newark? Could there be a desire so great to call a potential investor an angel?

As the perspective new owner/angel toured Ruppert Stadium, Hy Goldberg pondered this question of desire in his “Sports of in the News” column. He wrote, “We encountered very little reaction from the customers when the Bears were whisked away

²⁶⁶ Fred Bendel, “Newark Baseball Back?: ‘Shags’ Says There’s Plan,” *Newark Evening News*, October 27, 1951. and Fred Bendel “Newark Baseball Hinges on Stadium, Rent, Ottawa Price,” *Newark Evening News*, October 30, 1951.

²⁶⁷ Bill Dougherty, “May Back Renewal of Organized Ball,” *Newark Evening News*, October 31, 1951.

to Springfield Mass. They were mourned by a few stray letter writers and that was all, except for a postcard campaign inaugurated by a fan in East Orange to bring a ball club back to Newark.”²⁶⁸ Perhaps it was not lack of civic pride, perhaps it was just loss of interest all along? Could this really be true? Had baseball be detached from Newark’s civic fabric? Despite the evidence, both in the lack of pushback by all but a few fans when the team left, and the overwhelming evidence supplied by the lack of attendance at games for the last few years of the Bears playing in the city, City Hall, for reasons unexplained by them, wanted more evidence. In November, a survey was proposed to gauge the interest of business organizations by seeing if they would buy tickets to defer costs accumulated by low attendance, an issue that plagued the Bears.²⁶⁹

The survey would take the form of the Junior Chamber of Commerce ability to sell 100,000 tickets. As the data from the survey was collected Mayor Villani enthusiastically worked to make this new team a reality. He appointed his secretary “to sound out the other civic groups.” After much speculation it was revealed that Irving Feist, who had for years solicited for the sale of the Bears, was head of the investment group looking to bring the team back. By December, city government believed that the major hurdle to bringing a team back to Newark was the New York Yankees. The asking price for Ruppert Stadium was \$325,000. They were also willing to rent for \$50,000 a year, but would not agree to a long-term lease and wanted the option to rent to stock car races and other events while the team was out of town. This agreement was not acceptable to the potential new owners who wanted at least a three-year lease. A counter deal offered by Weiss was for a rental free season if the Yankees could retain the

²⁶⁸ Hy Goldberg, “Sports in the News,” *Newark Evening News*, October 31, 1951.

²⁶⁹ “Does Newark Want a Team?” *Newark Evening News*, November 29, 1951.

concessions of food, cigars, cigarettes, and drinks, as well as parking. This deal was also rejected.²⁷⁰ On December 28 the *New York Times* reported that investors would no longer seek to bring a team to Newark. Along with the issues with the stadium rental the 100,000 tickets could not be secured. Businesses and residents alike did not want support a Newark baseball team. The *New York Times* described Newark as a city without “sufficient local interest and adequate conditions.”²⁷¹ A yearly conclusion completed.

June-December 1952

In the summer of 1952 a storm blew the stadium’s grandstand roof off landing on a nearby industrial building. It was estimated that it was \$200,000 worth of damage.²⁷² The Yankees did not think it was worth investing additional money to repair the stadium. On October 16th the Yankees announced, “The park will be torn down and the property offered for sale for real estate.”²⁷³ During the regular monthly meeting of the Board of Education on October 28th the Chairman of the Committee on Newark School Stadium and Untermann Field, Mrs. Nusbaum, recommended for consideration that the Board “immediately investigate the possibilities of purchasing Ruppert Stadium” and that a special committee be formed to do so. The recommendation was supported by the Ironbound Manufacturers Association, East Side High School, the Lions Club of the Ironbound, the Ferry Street Merchants Association, and the Ironbound Improvement League. Reasons to support this purchase included the need for more recreational and

²⁷⁰ Fred Bendel “Yankees Hold Newark Key,” *Newark Evening News*, December 4, 1951 and Fred Bendel, “Parley Set Today on Bears Baseball,” *Newark Evening News*, December 10, 1951.

²⁷¹ “Lack of Fan Interest in Newark Ends Plan For Return of International League Club,” *New York Times*, December 29, 1951, 1.

²⁷² “Heat Wave Eased by Quickie Storm; Ruppert Stadium Grandstand Is Unroofed,” *New York Times*, June 20, 1952, 25

²⁷³ “Ruppert Stadium to Be Torn Down,” *New York Times*, October 17, 1952, 37.

playfield spaces in the Ironbound; only one school among at least eight had adequate play areas in the neighborhood, it would give East Side High School its own home field, and allow for athletic programs for the elementary schools in the area. The field could also be used for sports leagues for adults in the community. The BOE asserted that the property, which would include the surrounding acreage, could be used for storage including trucks and cars, and serve as a warehouse and shop for needed mechanics. It was also proposed that the stadium could serve professional sport programs, taking in revenue from the stadium and that the Board “could sponsor such programs for the good of all Newark citizens.” Lastly, they claimed the value of the land in relation to the purchase price was too good to pass up.²⁷⁴

A few weeks later on November 17 a special meeting was held to determine if the Board would buy the stadium. The reasons for purchasing the stadium that were given at the October meeting were reiterated. The price of the ballpark was not known at the time of purchase, but the chairman of the Special Committee, Mr. DePiano stated “This beautiful ball park, which originally cost \$1,500,000 to construct, can be purchased today for approximately \$300,000. (The Pittsburgh Board of Education dedicated a new stadium in September to serve its high schools. The cost of the stadium, which will seat 10,000 was \$1,000,000. The Bears’ Stadium has a seating capacity of 19,000.)” After the reasons were presented, DePiano informed the Board that they had to consider the purchase before the 19th, the meeting was held on the 17th, because the owners, not stated in the minutes, but this would be the Yankees, were having a “tax problem” and required a quick closing. The Counsel did ask the Chairman about the price, and he

²⁷⁴ Minutes from Board of Education Newark Public Schools, November 17, 1952, Newark Public School Archives.

responded that it was not known, but would be negotiated after the purchase was authorized. It was also added by the President of the Board, Ricigliano that this space “would help prevent juvenile delinquency.” This is of course the same claim the city made to keep Ruppert Stadium and the Bears in operation. The resolution, which appropriated \$325,000 for the purchase of the stadium and for the emergency repairs, was voted on and approved unanimously.²⁷⁵ It was an unexpected and curious development. In less than three weeks the Board of Education had bought an aging stadium. Longtime Bears supporter, former Mayor, and then-current City Commissioner Ellenstein, who also the Director of Revenue and Finance, described the purchase as “unnecessary.” Dr. John Herron, Superintendent of Schools, defended the decision as necessary of the purchase, also citing storage issues for school supplies and lack of fields for students to play on.²⁷⁶ It was a large investment for storage and for an additional field when most of the high schools and many of the middle schools had fields of their own.

The asking price of the stadium was \$300,000; it was negotiated down to \$275,000. Dr. John Herron said he would invite Robert Moses, New York City Park Commissioner and Construction Coordinator to help determine “the fullest use of the property and the landscaping.” On November 26 an ordinance providing the \$325,000 bond issue was passed on first reading by the City Commission. Present at the reading was a “large delegation of manufactures from the so-called Ironbound Section...and church and civic groups appeared at the meeting. All urged adoption of the measure.” The Ironbound had limited recreational and/or green spaces, so a stadium was preferable

²⁷⁵ Feist & Feist, who had long been interested in the property, requested that they be part of the negotiations, their request was denied. “Ruppert Stadium Deal,” *New York Times*, November 18, 1952, 27, “Ball Park Sale Near,” *New York Times*, November 19, 1952, 40; “Yankees to Sell Newark Stadium,” *New York Times*, November 20, 1952.

²⁷⁶ “Newark Ball Park Joins New League,” *New York Times*, November 23, 1952, 58.

to another industrial plan. Ellenstein, who had called the acquisition “unnecessary,” now said he “did not oppose proper recreational facilities for the area,” he then introduced the ordinance which received a unanimous approval.²⁷⁷ Two years later the stadium was renamed Memorial Stadium in honor of those “who lost their lives in the defense of freedom.”²⁷⁸

March 1953

It had been three years since the Bears left Newark, but the local newspapers continued to speculate, surmise, justify, and try to cope with their departure. In an article titled “Upheaval in Baseball,” Newark is listed as a town who lost its team, the reason cited as changing habits and population shifts;” code for the city African-American population was rising and its tax-base, the white population, were moving out to the suburbs. Television, which had affected all baseball teams attendance, was a factor he stated, but there are other reasons. He ends with “Compounding the comedy is the demand for a Congressional investigation...If there is anything baseball doesn’t need—or the country, either, for that matter – it’s another Congressional investigation.” The Congressional investigation he referenced was the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Study of Monopoly Power hearings chaired by Rep. Emmanuel Celler in 1952. The hearings were held to discuss three bills that addressed antitrust laws and baseball. MLB had been exempt from antitrust law since 1922 when the Supreme Court ruled that “baseball involves ‘purely state affairs,’ with only incidental effects on interstate commerce. Consequently, baseball contracts, which were in restraint of trade, were

²⁷⁷ “Acts on Stadium Deal,” *New York Times*, November 27, 1952, 32.

²⁷⁸ Bruce Buck, “Memorial Stadium Faces Demolition,” *Newark Evening News*, June 25, 1967, 16.

outside the purview of Federal laws such as the antitrust laws.” By 1951 baseball was operating across state lines. Baseball owners feared their exempt status would be overturned in one of the many pending lower court cases, so they turned to Congress to prevent that from happening. After “16 days of hearings, with 33 witnesses, more than 50 exhibits and a total of 1,643 pages of transcript [the] subcommittee was never able to agree on a report or to report out the bills.” A year later, the Supreme Court ruled on a case involving the *New York Yankees* that because baseball had developed a business around the original 1922 ruling and because Congress did not enact legislation to overrule it, the exemption would stand.²⁷⁹ Both the Bears and the Eagles were mentioned during the hearings. The Eagles in reference to compensation to Negro League teams for their players and the damage integration had inflicted on the Negro League. For the Bears, it was the viability of the minor league system, particularly in areas with MLB teams.²⁸⁰

March 1961

On the other side of the Hudson a new *Major League Baseball* team was moving to town, the New York Metropolitan, also known as the Mets. This new team needed a

²⁷⁹ “When Congress Faced Baseball and Struck Out,” February 15, 1995 “All the members were lawyers. There were those who looked at the question from a legal standpoint and opposed the bills. There were others who recognized the legal argument but who advanced a concept based on the belief that baseball was more of a sport than a crass commercial enterprise.”

²⁸⁰ Harry Simmons, baseball historian and publicity director of the International Baseball League, testified when asked about transfer of the franchises from Newark and Jersey City—whether or not it was due to the televising of the major league ball games and the radio broadcasts.” He responded that “Well, it was due to a great many things. Television and radio unquestionably entered into the picture. Jersey City and Newark are right across the bay from New York, and you could not miss seeing major-league games on television, you could not miss hearing major-league games on radio. Then, too, another factor was the increase of night games in the major leagues. For many years the Giants, Yankees, and Brooklyn only played seven night games during a season. The Giants and Yankees increased that number to 14, and Brooklyn increased it to 21. Our games are almost all played at night, with the exception of Sunday dates. That competition, an AAA against a major league, just couldn’t work. It was just a natural thing, and we could not possibly defend it, and you could not do anything,” Study of Monopoly Power, 1951, 137.

place to play. A few days after the Mets received its official certificate of membership into MLB an article ran in the *Newark Evening News* with the headline “Philanthropic Cities.” It stated that New York City was going to build the team a municipal stadium “having reversed its original position that better uses could be found for its money, such as new schools and hospitals.” It went on to remind readers “New York did not originate the idea that baseball and other professional sports are underprivileged enterprises that must perish if the public does not provide modern playing facilities.” An adage familiar to any city whose team wants to build, replace, or upgrade their stadium. Always included in this reasoning is that it will spur businesses like restaurants and hotels around the stadium and in the end it will “benefit the taxpayers;” the author using the quotation marks. In Newark, City Council President Bontempo, with an empty and disintegrating Ruppert Stadium, was advocating for a new municipal sports arena, but built with private money on “land obtained under the urban renewal program;” another way of to obtain taxpayer money for stadium construction. The article ended with the fact that it has not be determined that there was even a need for this stadium (or want), but that the “project at least would be an indication that private enterprise in sports has not wholly disappeared.” If the city could not make a sound argument for the necessity of baseball, it would instead advocate for one as a representation of development.

Four days later a second article ran with the cost of New York’s new stadium. What began with an original \$15 million estimate had risen to \$25.5 million. The projected opening in 1962 quickly became an in impossibility. Shea Stadium opened two years later in 1964 with a price tag over \$28 million. Subsequent millions more were invested into the stadium throughout its duration. It was torn down and replaced with the

\$900 million dollar Citi Field in 2008. But back in 1961, the article conveyed a sense of buyers remorse speculating if the taxpayers “wondered” if the Mets could have also played in Yankee Stadium. And that the taxpayers “can only look wistfully” at the money that could have been spent on schools and hospitals, and that they only have “nebulous hope” that this investment will yield a profit of some kind. In Newark no Major League stadiums were underway suggesting that “private investors are more prudent than city councils.”²⁸¹

As Shea Stadium was being built in Queens, Ruppert Stadium was being sold again. The Board of Education, for \$180,000, sold the stadium to the only bid received, an industrial development company Hanson & Hanson Inc. The developers stated they planned to quickly begin construction of a 170,000 square-foot plant to be leased to Vita Foods Inc. of New York. The plant would be used for packing cherries and olives in their kosher food division and it was estimated that it would bring three hundred jobs.²⁸²

Five days later, Newark’s City Council asked the Board of Education to postpone the sale. The Council argued that since the land would no longer be used for educational or recreational purposes it should revert back to the city.²⁸³ This postponement would last until 1967.

June 1967

Ruppert Stadium was finally slated for destruction.

²⁸¹ “Philanthropic Cities,” *Newark Evening News*, March 13, 1961 and “The Costly Mets,” *Newark Evening News*, March 17, 1961.

²⁸² “Newark Plot Sold for Industry Plant,” *New York Times*, August 25, 1961, 37. In 1960 they purchased 425,00 sqft of buildings in Jersey City, “Jersey City Deal Made for Plant,” *New York Times*, August 20, 1960.

²⁸³ “Land Sale Questioned: Newark City Council Asks School Board for Delay,” *New York Times*, August 26, 1961.

Memorial Stadium, formerly Ruppert Stadium, today is deserted and deteriorating. Its glamor long since gone and the heavy steel ball of demolisher eager to topple its sagging walls. The former home of the famed Newark Bears is now a nesting place for pigeons. The parking lots packed with autos, but now they are an endless row on row of junked vehicles... The scoreboard along the outfield fence reads of a game long ago completed: Weequahic – 26, Central – 0. Broken glass, rusted cans and pieces of brick and wood strewn about the stands and in the concrete ramps. The nine tall poles which once held hundreds of lights for night play, now hold nothing. Paint is peeling everywhere and splinters protrude from almost every seat.²⁸⁴

Longtime sports reporter for the *Newark Evening News*, Willie Ratner, penned the headline “Newark Teams of Long Unloose Flood of Memories.” That Tuesday he reflected on article that appeared in the Sunday edition, that Memorial Stadium, formerly known as Ruppert Stadium, Bears Stadium, Davids Stadium, and on the land of Wiedenmayer’s Park, was to be demolished.²⁸⁵ No article was printed in the *Newark Evening News* that reported the actual date of the demolition.

July 1967

On July 12 Newark had erupted in four days civil unrest resulting twenty-six people killed, which included a 10, 12, 16, and 19 year old boys, ten people in their twenties, and all but one fireman and one police officer were Newark residents. National Guardsmen and police killed most of those who died, some of whom were shot in their homes at their windows. There were more than 700 additional people who were injured and millions of dollars’ worth of damage. Not even two weeks later the city council approved funds for the construction of Ironbound Stadium. The *Newark Evening News* claimed that this project was evidence of the confidence in Newark’s economic future by

²⁸⁴ Bruce Buck, “Memorial Stadium Faces Demolition,” *Newark Evening News*, June 25, 1967, 16

²⁸⁵ Willie Ratner, “Newark Teams of Long Ago Unloose Flood of Memories,” *Newark Evening News*, June 27, 1967, 42

business and labor even after the “recent disorder.” The city announced that the new stadium would be part of the “meadowlands development program” to replace Memorial Stadium (formerly Ruppert Stadium) which was now slated to become an industrial site. It would be located on St. Charles and Berlin Streets. Mayor Addonizio said the project was “important to the community and will be an indication that we are moving.” When asked about “schools, housing and public works, the mayor said proposals are now being refined into specific plans and recommendations.”²⁸⁶ The meadowlands development project was an effort to spur industrial growth in the city on vacant city land, which in Newark was 1,500 acres of inhabitable meadowland. In late July the company responsible for the development, *Newark Industrial Development Corp*, had approved twenty new plants at a cost of \$28 million that would employ 9,600 and two other applications worth \$800,000 and 300 additional jobs. “The biggest obstacle to coordinated reclamation of the meadows has been lack of money for soil stabilization and acquisition of privately owned acreage. After long delay, the Department of Housing and Urban Development has approved a grant of \$27 million for these purposes. As is Washington’s way, the grant has a number of conditions attached, but NIDC is trying to cut through the red tape.” They went on to state that the importance of the meadowlands project to Newark is incalculable. It has been estimated there is enough reclaimable land to create 60,000 new jobs and \$6 million a year in new city revenues. This may be optimistic but actual gains amounting to only half the estimates would go a long way toward solving some of Newark’s biggest problems.”²⁸⁷ No detailed report for how this revenue would be generated was presented. By August, after several increases in the

²⁸⁶ “Council Acts to Speed Work on Two Recreation Projects,” *Newark Evening News*, July 25, 1967, 1, 10.

²⁸⁷ “Hope for Newark,” *Newark Evening News*, July 28, 1967, 8.

previous months, the cost of the Ironbound Stadium had reached \$4.9 million. When it was conceived in the early 1960s, it was originally budgeted for \$1.8 million.²⁸⁸ We will see that figure continue to rise in the coming years.

Back in July, the *Newark News* had reported that the Board of Education had deeded the stadium to the Newark Housing Authority to complete the “demolition work with federal funds as part of the meadowlands urban renewal project.”²⁸⁹ In 1952 the Board of Education had purchased the stadium for \$275,000, they borrowed an additional \$50,000 for repairs bringing the total to \$325,000. We do not know how much money they invested after that, but we can assume because of the noted poor state of the stadium additional money would have been needed to be invested with additional funds for general maintenance and operation of the stadium. By 1967, they finally sold the stadium for not the original \$180,000, but for \$125,000 and the Housing Authority had to pay for the demolition.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸ “Ironbound Center Cost is Going Up,” *Newark Evening News*, August 10, 1967, 11.

²⁸⁹ Bruce Buck, “Memorial Stadium Faces Demolition,” *Newark Evening News*, June 25, 1967, 16.

Section Two: Bears and Eagles Riverfront Stadium

A Whole (not so) New Ballgame

The Bears and Eagles had left and Ruppert Stadium was gone. What remained of these two teams was no longer found on Wilson Avenue. But they were not gone. They were preserved, memorialized, revered. The teams' significance would be encapsulated and subsequently reinforced through storytelling and in various forms of written recollections and memories. This section begins in the early 1990s. Each year, starting in 1990, the *Star-Ledger* published multiple articles on the Bears, Eagles, or both. Many spotlighted players and games, but often they were focused on the impact the teams had on shaping the many communities of Newark. Clement Price described Newark in the early part of the twenty-first century as “a city that over the last fifty years became increasingly disjointed. Its civic culture was extremely compromised. The riots took its toll on the city with respect to neighborhoods and a sense of cohesiveness in the city.”¹ This void left an opening. What would civicness look like in the post-1967 Newark? And of course, how and who could benefit from defining that civic narrative? In the first part of this history I looked at the ways civicness was employed in regards to Ruppert Stadium. In this second section, the civicness in the era Ruppert Stadium returns. This time it will be repackaged as another variation of a nostalgic retelling of the past to be used to advance the building of a new baseball stadium. It is now a story of ways you can use and consume the past to sell a vision of a future.

¹ Golon, *No Minor Accomplishment*, 116.

Newark Buys What the Stadium Craze Is Selling, and They Are Not the Only Ones

Cities across the United States and around the world had bought in; many are still buying. It is the early 1990s and after two decades of economic instability; with gasoline shortages, a stock market crash, and high unemployment, there are cities tracking on a steep decline. From this reality a trend emerged. They are places that are called industrial or rust belt, sometimes called legacy cities. These are places where manufacturing was the dominant economic engine, in the industrial departure, there came urban unrest from communities, primarily communities of color who had been marginalized for decades. These cities lacked jobs, had failing public schools, and crumbling infrastructure and were without the tax base to even begin to resolve these problems. In those cities, an answer as to how to stimulate the economy materialized. A solution, build a stadium. And they did. In city after city, no matter where it was located, no matter how large or small it was, if it had any other unique features or needs, or if they could afford it. In city after city a stadium emerged from the skyline.

These stadiums were often built as a part of a larger downtown and/or waterfront development project. Whether they were or are the economic stimulant some claim they are, that of course is complicated, but that fact never made the sales pitch. According to Cagan and DeMause, this trend of using public money to finance stadiums began in the late 1940s early 1950s. Prior to that, most stadiums were privately built and owned by team owners. But by the 1990s, 77% of stadiums and arenas in the United States were now being with public money.² They described the typical scenario for a city proposing to build a stadium.

² Cagan and DeMause, *Field of Schemes*, 30.

A municipality will float hundreds of millions of dollars in municipal bonds in order to afford the massive initial expenditure and then payoff the bonds with increased taxes, lotteries, or even general city funds. Because of their guaranteed nature, the repaying of those costly loans has taken on a central role in many cities' budgets for years after the initial stadium deal. By shackling themselves to these massive debts (and often massive cost overruns), cities may very well have allowed the further deterioration of local schools, roads, and public services. In many cases the bond issue runs years longer than the team's lease, raising the specter of local governments, ten or 20 years hence, still having to pay off the costs of stadiums for teams that have since fled for greener pastures-or still paying off bonds on old stadiums while building new ones with even higher price tags.³

This type of urban development can be even more financially devastating for cities already in a state of deterioration due to neglect and other economic forces. But seemingly, no matter how many examples of failure there are when it comes to stadium building, cities continue to gravitate to them as a solution and Newark can be counted among them.

A New Jersey Meadow Becomes a Sports Mecca

New Jersey, like many states before and after it, had cities who embraced this national trend. Prior to the baseball stadium boom of the 1990s, New Jersey had already begun investing taxpayer money into sports stadiums. The second half of the twentieth century saw massive increases in the profitability of sports for team owners and for the media. In particular, basketball and football were growing as professional leagues, expanding with new teams, while simultaneously experiencing considerable growth in popularity both nationally and internationally. New Jersey embraced the trend by attempting to attract teams to the Garden State by offering to build those teams places to play. One of the most noteworthy examples of New Jersey's commitment to the building

³ Cagan and DeMause, *Field of Schemes*, 30.

of sports venues was the construction of the Meadowlands Sports Complex in East Rutherford, New Jersey.

The complex began with Giants Stadium. An open-air stadium built in 1972; developers' original proposal was to build a stadium that could lure the New York Yankees away from the Bronx. They were not successful in getting the Yankees, but they were able to get the other resident of Yankee Stadium, the NFL football team, the New York Giants. The New York Giants played their first home game on October 10, 1976 in a new stadium built in Meadowlands Sports Complex, which they named Giants Stadium. On September 6, 1984, Giants Stadium got a second occupant, another professional football team, the New York Jets. The stadium was torn down in 2010 and was replaced that same year with MetLife Stadium; also an open-air stadium without a roof.⁴ It is still the home field for both football teams. The New York Giants also have their practice facility and headquarters at the Meadowlands, called the Quest Diagnostics Training Center. MetLife Stadium hosts more than football games. The multiuse concept of a stadium is often touted as one of the benefits of a stadium to a city. MetLife Stadium is a popular venue for large concerts, other sporting events, including international soccer matches, and most notably it was the location of the 2014 NFL Super Bowl; making it the first Super Bowl to be played in an open-air stadium in a cold weather city.

The Meadowlands Sports Complex is more than just a football stadium. If you walk directly behind MetLife Stadium you would be at the Meadowlands Racing & Entertainment. It is a horseracing track operating since 1976. To get to the next building on the complex, starting back at MetLife Stadium, if you crossed the street, then took a

⁴ A summary of the controversial decision not to build a roof can be found in John Brennan's article "Why doesn't MetLife Stadium have a roof? 'They have the answer,'" *NorthJersey.com*, February 2, 2014.

right onto Road D, followed the road around parking lot 26, you would continue onto East Peripheral Road and in a total walking time of ten minutes you would see the indoor arena the Izod Center your left. It was first named after former New Jersey governor Brendan Byrne, it was renamed the Continental Airlines Arena, then the Izod Center. As with the Meadowlands, it hosted concerts, the circus, and other large performance events. It was once the home of the New Jersey Nets, the NBA basketball team that moved in 2012 to the Barclays Center in Brooklyn, NY and also the previous home to the New Jersey Devils, the NHL hockey team that moved to the Prudential Center in Newark in 2007. The Izod Center unexpectedly and controversially closed in 2015. It has yet to be determined what will become of the arena, but as of August 2016 it is being used by musical acts as a rehearsal space before they perform locally or go on tour.⁵

If you continued on East Peripheral Road for four hundred feet and made a left onto Arena Road, in a less than five minute walk you would be at the most recent addition, the American Dream Meadowlands, or better known by its previous name, Xanadu. The complex is still under construction and has already totaled a cost of over \$2.5 billion and is expected to reach \$5 billion. Construction began in 2004 on what has been branded a megamall and entertainment venue. But the project has been mired by bankruptcy, ill-advised financial decisions, and political controversies. Not an uncommon list of issues for arena building. The key features of this venue include: more than 400 retail stores and restaurants, a 639,000-square-foot indoor amusement and water park complex, an indoor ski and snowboard park with a slope that is 12 stories high and 800 feet long, an observation wheel similar to the London Eye, 200-foot “drop ride” similar to

⁵ For more information on the closure and financial situation of the Izod Center, see Lilo Stainton’s article “What Was Behind the Sudden Decision to Close Izod Center’s Doors?” *NJ Spotlight*, May 19, 2015 and an update its new use in 2016 can be found on NorthJersey.com.

bungee jumping, a performing arts center that seats 2,400 to 3,000, a professional regulation size ice rink, a 180,000-square-foot movie complex with IMAX and 4-D screens that seats 5,000 and offers dine-in services, an aquarium featuring more than 10,000 fish and other sea life, and a 18-hole miniature golf course.⁶

The project is on its third developer, Triple Five. The project has continuously run out of money; stopping construction. In June 2015, New Jersey's state finance board approved the plan to sell up to \$675 million in tax-exempt bonds for the project. The bonds are "backed by a \$390 million grant from the state... the goal is to issue the bonds...with roughly \$800 million in net proceeds going toward the project. The rest of the investment will come from private sources...and that's all on top of the \$2 billion that has already been spent on the project."⁷

Under normal circumstances, after the mall opens, Triple Five would pay the state a number of taxes, including sales taxes, generated by the American Dream Meadowlands. Under New Jersey's Economic Redevelopment Grant program, however, the state will take just a portion of that tax revenue and pass the rest on to the bond investors to pay back the bonds. As a result, \$1 billion in tax revenue collected at the American Dream Meadowlands mall will not be sent to Trenton to fund essential state programs, but will be diverted to the bond investors...In addition, the Triple Five Group will not pay traditional property taxes on the complex for decades, instead making payments in lieu of property taxes...to East Rutherford - much of that revenue will also be used to repay the bond investors. Ultimately, East Rutherford residents will see little benefit...their local schools will receive nothing under the agreement. It should be noted that New Jersey taxpayers have already paid a reported \$80 million in road and infrastructure improvements in support of the American Dream Meadowlands project. In addition, the new mall will be located on valuable state-owned land within the Meadowlands Sports Complex.⁸

⁶ John Brennan, "American Dream developers unveil long-awaited makeover, target 2016 opening," *NorthJersey.com*, April 28, 2014 and Craig McCarthy, "American Dream Brings On Big Snow For 12-Story Indoor Ski Park," *Star-Ledger*, May 17, 2016.

⁷ Erin O'Neill, "Financing for American Dream Meadowlands gets state OK; project to open in 2017," *NJ.com*, June 10, 2015.

⁸ Michael Doherty, "N.J. Shouldn't Have to Cough Up \$1B to American Dream Mega-Mall," *Star-Ledger*, June 2, 2016.

In 2016, Triple Five Group development company submitted a proposal to add to the \$1.9 billion already spent, by selling “\$1.15 billion in high-yield bonds, also known as junk bonds, to finish the project. The company is also seeking \$1.5 billion in loans.” They claimed that if they received the remaining \$1 billion, the latest in a long series of opening dates would be 2017, and again that deadline has passed. In December 2016 WNYC, the New York affiliate of NPR, along with *NJ Spotlight* and *Bloomberg Businessweek* published a five-part audio series with companion articles on story of the complex. Since their report, the bonds have not been sold and New Jersey officials want to propose a resolution to force construction to continue, having been dormant for years, or relinquish the project so officials can find a new use for the space.⁹ Billions spent, much of it taxpayer money in limbo.

The Meadowlands Sports Complex sets the stage for a statewide embrace of the economic development plan centered on stadium building. Cities like Rutherford believed that these stadiums would create a positive economic ripple effect. They bought into the narrative that stadiums bring visitors to a city; investors and developers want access to these visitors so they build hotels and retail stores. Small businesses already in the city and new small businesses will get a boost from these visitors of both the stadium and now of the new development projects. Jobs will be created by the construction of not only the stadium, but also from these new development projects. These development projects will include office buildings because companies will now want to locate here. The economic growth will raise property value and it will continue to increase because

⁹ The audio series can be found at: <http://www.njspotlight.com/stories/16/12/15/benefiting-from-the-american-dream/>. See also in the *New York Times* Charles Bagli’s “After Many Missed Deadlines, New Jersey Megamall Is Again Taking Shape,” December 13, 2016 and detailed coverage in the *Star-Ledger* and *NorthJersey.com*.

the perception of desirability will surge so a city once seen as declining or stagnant will suddenly look prosperous, then be prosperous. All of this happens by building a stadium. It is a basic but effective sales pitch. Making and maintaining positive economic stability, and ideally growth, that is difficult and complicated, so having a “quick fix,” like building a stadium as the city’s urban redevelopment plan is too much of a lure for many cities to ignore. Robert Baade, a professor of Economics and Business, states, “I think in some ways that resembles city attitudes with regard to this thing. I think that people who make decisions about these things say to themselves that we believe there is an economic impact because we really can’t take the chance that there isn’t one. In part I think that’s a reflection of the state of urban America.”¹⁰ Cities can be desperate for solutions, and building a stadium is viable enough that it can be sold to its residents.

Newark is one of many cities to craft narratives to build a stadium. Baseball stadiums are not important because baseball is played there. They are important because baseball stadiums are both a reflection of, and a builder of communities. Eric Avila in *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* compares the stadium experience of the Dodgers in New York in the first half of the twentieth century to their current home in Los Angeles, after 1957:

Unlike Ebbets Field and the Brooklyn Dodgers, which reinforced a tighter sense of community among residents of Brooklyn, Dodger Stadium and the Los Angeles Dodgers belonged to a more nebulous agglomeration of cities and communities within an ever-expanding, decentralized urban region. Within the postwar configuration of urban sprawl in Southern California, the advocates of a downtown stadium emphasized the ways in which that institution could impart a sense of regional identity to an amorphous collection of suburban communities connected only by an evolving freeway system.¹¹

¹⁰ Cagan and DeMause, *Field of Schemes*, 41.

¹¹ Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 176.

What happened in Los Angeles and what happened in Newark is not that there is no longer significance in the relationship between the community and the stadium. What changed is what constitutes this community and what its values are. For Newark, we can see communities that were forged through a baseball stadium by way of immigrants and migrants assimilating through the idea of a hometown team via civicness. Rooting for a team provides “people and communities with common reference points and can foster solidarity and the creation of social identities.”¹² But as feminist Miranda Joseph argues, “to invoke community is immediately to raise questions of belonging and of power.”¹³ At the turn of the twenty-first century, civicness was filtered through an idealized version of that past and with that came a struggle over power. In both eras and in both stadiums these narratives are being contested. In the new stadium, the conflict merges the old with the new. To understand Newark story, it is helpful to see beyond the Meadowlands, to the other stadiums, minor league baseball stadiums that would influence Newark.

Minor-League Baseball Gets or Take a Hit

New Jersey does not have its own Major League Baseball team. Starting in the 1950s, as the Bears exited Newark, MLB began to expand, particularly to states in the west and south. The New York City metropolitan area was already flushed with teams, having the New York Yankees, the New York Mets (formed in 1962), the New York Giants (until 1957, when they moved to San Francisco), and the Brooklyn Dodgers (who also left for the west coast in 1957; they went further south to Los Angeles).¹⁴ A

¹² Nathan, *Rooting for the Home Team*, 2.

¹³ Nathan, *Rooting for the Home Team*, 7.

¹⁴ Many of the Negro League teams had disbanded by 1950. In the New York/New Jersey area, the New York Black Yankees were the last to disband in 1959.

consequence of the MLB expansion was that there was a growing need for farm teams and stadiums for those teams to play in. New Jersey, as it had in the early part of the twentieth century, would again embrace local farm and minor league teams.

Prior to the minor league baseball boom of the 1990s, minor league games were being played in small aging stadiums. Team owners were reluctant to upgrade or see the need to compete with the increasing popularity of professional sports and other forms of entertainment. Some of these owners assumed that they did not need promotional nights like Friday Fireworks or 99 cent Wings on Wednesday, in order to attract fans; the baseball, they assumed or wanted to assume, was enough. The trouble was the factors that were driving the entertainment business were accessibility, variety, and affordability. Two national trends had taken hold in the 1950s, allowing various forms of entertainment industries to offer these factors to their patrons. They were, the rise in suburban culture, and equally as important in its impact in how people consume sporting events, the television. The ability to watch major league games in your own home greatly reduced attendance at ballparks, just as it had with the Newark Bears.¹⁵

Nationally, in regards to baseball, the 1950s saw more minor league teams being placed in suburban towns whose population could not support them. Highways and the ever-growing reliance and preference for cars made it possible to go beyond the local option and travel to the stadium of your choice. A major league ballpark suddenly became as accessible as the minor league park in town, making it more difficult to have a viable local team.

¹⁵ See Congressional hearings: "Study of Monopoly Power," 1952, "Broadcasting and Televising Baseball Games," 1953, and "Organized Professional Team Sports," 1957.

Things began to change in the early 1990s. Major League Baseball was again experiencing labor disputes. Labor unrest resulted in strikes, lockouts, and even the canceling of the 1994 World Series. MLB players' contracts had grown exponentially, not only making the game more expensive to attend, which would be an important factor, but additionally baseball, unlike other professional sport, has a particular mythos ingrained in its culture. Former MLB Commissioner A. Bartlett Giamatti, in his poetic meditation on sports generally and baseball specifically, offered an illustration of this in his book *Take Time for Paradise: Americans and Their Games*. He writes, "If baseball is a Narrative, it is like others – work of imagination whose deeper structures and patterns of repetition force a tale, oft-told, to fresh and hitherto – unforeseen meaning."¹⁶ The unforeseen meanings, the illusions that manifest from these constructed imaginary narratives, are one of the many unwritten rules both on and off the field; you need to maintain the illusions. So when players on the diamond are seen not as young men playing solely for the love of the game, but instead as a businessmen with astronomical salaries, the major leagues are suddenly viewed differently by fans. Minor leagues were now considered the antithesis of what was perceived as problematic with the major league game. The minor leagues were now touted as an experience that was close to home, where the other fans at the game were members of your community, it was affordable, with ticket prices averaging \$8, and it was a field where young men were being paid hardly anything, they were seen as playing because they wanted no other profession, they loved baseball too much to do anything else.

¹⁶ A. Bartlett Giamatti, *Take Time for Paradise: Americans and Their Games* (New York: Summit Books, 1989), 90.

“Back to the Minors”

On October 1992, the *New York Times* headline read “Back to the Minors: It’s a Major New Market for Baseball.” The article was a feature on Frank Boulton, founder and first CEO of the Atlantic League of Professional Baseball.¹⁷ The Atlantic League is comprised almost exclusively of teams in the northeast. It is an independent professional baseball league unaffiliated with Major League Baseball. This new independent league would have the Newark Bears as one of their inaugural teams. In the 1992 article Boulton asserted “twenty-seven million Americans went to see minor-league baseball this year. What attracts people? Affordable family entertainment.” In cities without major league teams, independent professional league games could be the “biggest attraction for miles.”¹⁸ Twenty-seven million people attending these games were nearly ten million-person increase from the 17.5 million reported in 1984. Mr. Boulton theorized that the “sudden movement of ball clubs to the New York City region also reflects new mandates by professional baseball to upgrade and enlarge ballparks, and a willingness by communities and investors to do just that.”¹⁹ If professional baseball teams were not going to improve their stadiums and the stadium experience, than minor league baseball was prepared to fill that void.

The results of Boulton’s strategy did not play out the same way in every city that would join the Atlantic League, including Newark. But, if you look at his current ventures, particularly the Long Island Ducks, you can see his vision actualized. As he

¹⁷ Boulton resigned the office of CEO in 2013, but is still the owner of two teams in the Atlantic League, the Long Island Ducks and the Bridgeport Bluefish.

¹⁸ Charles Strum, “Back to the Minors: It’s a Major New Market for Baseball,” *New York Times*, October 8, 1992.

¹⁹ Charles Strum, “Back to the Minors: It’s a Major New Market for Baseball,” *New York Times*, “October 8, 1992.

states, “I started to see this critical mass—areas that wanted baseball with the demographics and corporate bases to support it. Cities were getting ready to make public investments in it. It was changing, and we were right on the cusp of it.” Written in 2013, the *Forbes* article reported that the Ducks “expect to gross an estimated \$9.6 million this season and will clear about \$3.5 million before taxes. The team will sell roughly 5,500 tickets a game at its county-owned, 6,000-seat ballpark during the 70-game home season. Ticket sales account for 40% of revenues (the county takes a buck a ticket), with food, merchandise and sponsorships bringing in the rest—parking is free.”²⁰ In 2015, the average attendance was 5,269 fans. “The Ducks have averaged 101.5% capacity at 6,002-seat Citibank Park since the ballpark opened in 2000.”²¹ Not unlike the cities they are located in, some stadiums are prosperous and some stadiums are not. There is no simple formula to determine in which city a stadium might be a positive economic force. These stadiums are multimillion-dollar investment and their impact is often a mixed bag, but Newark was willing to take that risk.

What Does It Take To Start A Renaissance?

You need a plan. A multipronged plan. Mayor Sharpe James had a plan; Newark was to undergo a renaissance. To actualize that vision, Newark had to become a “destination city.” This call for Newark to transform into a destination city is not unlike Mayor Raymond’s assertion in 1916 that Newark would be a “Master City.” Mayor James realized that, as New York had done in the 1970s/1980s, that Newark needed to

²⁰ Tom Van Riper, “Bush League Bonanza: Frank Boulton Builds An Empire In Baseball’s Minors,” *Forbes.com*, July 24, 2013.

²¹ BlueClaws official website, http://bridgeportbluefish.com/contact/front/?staff_id=22 and <http://ballparkdigest.com/2015/09/21/2015-independent-attendance-by-average/>

reclaim and redefine its own image. Perception was a driving force for a city's economy; Newark's perception problem severely limited its opportunities for tourists' dollars to boost the economy. To change that course the city would be repackaged as an all-encompassing destination city. "Newark as a Destination" would be the actual theme/title of Mayor James' State of the City Address in 2001. It is important to note that even though it was sold as Newark as the destination, it was only a small part of the city that would be the focus of this makeover, the downtown. It is also the section of Newark that is the most populated by non-residents.

Newark is not unique in its urban development strategy. As Alison Isenberg argues in *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It*, downtowns are significant because of the

hybrid public-private nature of urban commercial life – the evident intermingling of cultural and commercial – that so often provided the space for mobilizing competing visions of the future and for contesting values such as civic responsibility and citizenship....[and] On the eve of the 1960s civil disorders, the downtown's status as the city's heterogeneous commercial district was in particular flux. For those who desired it, downtown's district held a symbolic resonance that went beyond its economic potential to investors, as it embodied hopes for the supposed liberal openness of America's democratic ideals.²²

The downtown is a gathering space for a community. In Newark, it is literally where the city's community developed; it was the landing spot for the founders of the city. But things changed, cities changed. As a consequence of the rise of suburbia in the 1950s, urban unrest of the 1960s, and economic decline in the 1970s and 1980s, many downtowns, including Newark, were left to deteriorate. But downtowns were too valuable a real estate to completely abandon. In *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*, Sharon Zukin contends, "In the 1970s developers began to build

²² Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 41 and 201.

downtown shopping to compete with suburban malls, highlighted cultural attractions like museums and theater, and in the 1980s there was a move towards creating “cultural districts, ethnic tourist zones, and artists’ lofts [which] presented a clean image of diversity for mass consumption.”²³ A downtown would be a new place of convergence. Not for the reinforcing of community bonds by residents of the city, but as a convergence for consumption tailored to non-residents. A downtown’s prosperity now hinged on attracting visitors and businesses, rather than producing economic opportunities and incentives to residents, who, in many of these cities, have lower median income, meaning less disposable money for consumption.

These shifting trends nationally will manifest in various ways locally. Newark politicians, officials, and business leaders right from the start were publicly stating the connection Newark was to have with other cities whose stadiums were deemed successful. The two most cited examples by Newark officials were Oriole Park at Camden Yards in Baltimore, which opened in 1992, and Jacobs Field, renamed Progressive Field, in Cleveland, which opened in 1994. Both are *Major League Baseball* stadiums located in the downtown of a city that was considered to have some level blight.

²³ Sharon Zukin, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5. Zukin’s assertion is developed from what she called “consumption-biased spatial complexes.” In her article “Socio-Spatial Prototypes Of A New Organization Of Consumption: The Role Of Real Cultural Capital” in *Sociology* Vol 24, no. 1 (1990), she argues “The recent proliferation of new market-based consumer goods and experiences, and the high visibility of such consumption-biased spatial complexes as ‘gentrification’ and ‘Disney World’, call attention to the real, rather than the symbolic, role of cultural capital in contemporary service economies. Cultural capital is linked, on the one hand, with the circulation of financial capital in investment and production. It is related, on the other hand, to new demands more affluent consumers make of the consumption process (e.g., demands for authenticity and security), and a changing nature of consumer products. These observations suggest a new organization of consumption, most marked at the high end of the market, that has to be examined in terms of spatial embeddedness, which locates consumption in space and localizes specific features of a service economy; the social creation of new relations between cultural producers and consumers, especially a relation of mediation; and the role of new consumer products and practices in instituting circuits of cultural capital that articulate with more traditional economic circuits. Gentrification and Disney World are described in terms of these three concepts, suggesting their role as socio-spatial prototypes of a new organization of consumption,” (Zukin, “Socio-Spatial Prototypes Of A New Organization Of Consumption,” 37).

Eric Avila argues that by the mid-1950s “‘blight’ became invoked as a strategy for privatized, downtown redevelopment and not, as it once had been, for improving the living conditions of the urban poor.”²⁴ Politicians in struggling economic cities could utilize the multiple connotations of the word blight; blight as both a result of poverty and a problem to be solved, are parlayed into the construction of a stadium by claiming it was major economic stimulant. In Cleveland and Baltimore, stadiums were sold as a solution for blight in their respective downtowns, and we will see the same strategy in Newark a few years later.²⁵

The type of stadium building that came as a solution to urban blight was influenced by Chicago architect Philip Bess belief that “To speak logically about the effects of sports facilities on community development should be to speak as much about community as about development.”²⁶ Joanna Cagan and Neil DeMause asserts that “Bess set out to design a ballpark that would reverse the trend started in the 1960s of isolating sports facilities from their surrounding neighborhoods and would instead be truly urban-a facility that would provide an anchor for a neighborhood revitalization that served not just visiting sports fans, but local residents as well.”²⁷ The style of stadium this produced was adopted by Newark and cities like Baltimore and Cleveland stadiums; it was the emergence of the “retro ballpark.” Daniel Rosensweig in *Retro Ball Parks: Instant History, Baseball, and the New American City* states that retro ball parks “at once commemorate and commodify cultural forms from earlier years of the final century of the

²⁴ Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*, 164.

²⁵ For more on Cleveland, which also include comparisons to Newark see Philip Suchma’s “If They Built It? Stadium Dreams and the Rustbelt Realities in Cleveland” in *The Rise of Stadiums in the Modern United States: Cathedrals of Sport*, ed. Mark Dyreson and Robert Trumpbour (New York: Routledge, 2010).

²⁶ Cagan and DeMause, *Field of Schemes*, 137.

²⁷ Cagan and DeMause, *Field of Schemes*, 138.

millennium. They thus create an important juncture between the past and future.”²⁸ This style of ballpark commodifies historical references as a means to validate the existence of the stadium.²⁹ The use of historical references and nostalgia are an essential part of the story of what becomes Bears and Eagles Riverfront Stadium. Nostalgia, as defined by Fabio DaSilva and Jim Faught, “represents an unfulfilled search for community or, better yet, a quest for communality that ostensibly will arise from sharing the same referent of gratification (idea, materiality, or their nexus) in recreating an earlier real or mythical experience”³⁰ The ability to not only cherry pick the past, but to additionally to modify what you have selected to make it an even more desirable part of a narrative that you are using to sell something. This makes nostalgia a powerful tool. As Newark’s attempts to get support to build a stadium and then tries to fill it, nostalgia becomes a well the developers and politicians continuously pull from.

These ballparks also do something else. They are a means to purport a new kind of downtown “slumming.” This new slumming is not all that dissimilar from the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century, where Lewis Erenberg states where “up-towners could easily buy an experience, where they could vicariously partake of a wilder imaginary world.”³¹ Further argues by Chad Heap in *Slumming: Sexual and Racial*

²⁸ Daniel Rosensweig, *Retro Ball Parks: Instant History, Baseball, and the New American City* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005), 12. He further states that the “Retro ball parks facilitate the shift from the Fordist to the post-Fordist city by providing a host of meaningful cultural forms. From the creation of a sense of regional variation, to architectural gestures highlighting the uniqueness of a particular location, to simulated urban promenades and the injection of thousands of relics or souvenirs of a previous order, these stadiums offer a link to an increasingly elided past which is nonetheless perceived to be more stable and authentic than the present,” (Rosensweig, *Retro Ball Parks*, 45).

²⁹ Famed architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable in *The Unreal America: Architecture and Illusion* said in regards to the “retro” architectural movement that “Nothingness is transformed into enduring images. Architecture is illusion as reality...Illusion is now retro-nostalgia, schlock substitutes, themed parodies.” It is architecture new way of crafting an illusionary narrative, (*The Unreal America*, 181).

³⁰ DaSilva and Faught, “Nostalgia,” 50.

³¹ Lewis Erenberg, *Steppin’ Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 253.

Encounters in American Nightlife, these experiences “firmly embedded in bourgeois ideology, actively created the very balance of pleasure and danger that, in alternate guises of benevolent reform and amusement seeking, it both pretended to rectify and exploited.”³² In cities like Baltimore, Cleveland, and Newark, where the population had been segregated, with African-Americans left in the inner city by way of suburbanization, stadiums became, and still are a way, to encourage visitation to the downtown of cities. Part of the selling point can be visitors can have an urban experience, urban as a euphemism for gritty and dangerous, but do it in a safe and controlled way. As Zukin contends, there was a “desire for authentic urban experience [that] began as a reaction to the urban crisis of the 1960s when cities were looked at as diseased.”³³ As Rosensweig described it, these parks offer a sanitized urban experience and do so in part, by using the familiarity, real or imaginary, of a shared past. “In short, the nature of this revived, urbanesque space requires that many of the loose ends (the unpredictability and the diversity) of the old city be tied up-consciously kept out of sight or at least contained-so that the downtown ball-park experience can be more comfortably consumed. To many, this transformation is representative of a positive evolution. Families can now attend ball games unworried about harassment.”³⁴ It was the thrill of the urban and the family friendly experience all coupled into one.

Oriole Park at Camden Yards was designed to be reminiscent of baseball stadiums from the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. It also incorporated in the design, to add to the historical feel of the ballpark, existing historical structures. Camden Station

³² Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 23.

³³ Zukin, *Naked City*, 4.

³⁴ Rosensweig, *Retro Ball Parks*, 12.

built in 1856 and the Baltimore & Ohio Warehouse, built in 1899, are part of the structural features the stadium is built around and incorporated into. These buildings serve as office space, souvenir shops, and bars.³⁵ Camden Yards is a piece of a larger revitalization effort of Baltimore's waterfront. The same can be said for Cleveland. Cleveland, with their stadium the city was looking for a way to replace one history with another. The neighborhood of the ballpark "for a whole generation a symbol of urban decay and danger (first the site of race riots, then home to a ramshackle market, drug dealers, prostitutes, and boarded-up buildings), bridges a host of dual worlds. As it undergoes transition, it brings into contact the often-distant realms of the legitimate and illegitimate, the alive and the dead, the decaying and the gentrifying, the black and the white."³⁶ With a new ballpark a city has the opportunity to write a new narrative while erasing an old undesirable one.

Downtowns become, as Rosensweig states, "Disneyfed urban space...making urban life quaint, a consumable relic of a purer, yet somehow improved-upon past. It allows modern visitors to the city an opportunity to seek a way out of hyper-reality through the appropriation of the fading voices of the dispossessed or vanished. It gives them a chance to try on costumes, accents, and behaviors of people from other classes,

³⁵ Paul Shackel, ed., *Myth, Memory, and the Making of the American Landscape* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2001), 225. Erin Donovan furthered explained the choice to preserve these structures and to incorporate them into the new stadiums design was "made by architects and planners, rather than historians or archaeologists, [so] decisions regarding preservation were based on aesthetics rather than historical significance. The warehouse now incorporated into the structure of the baseball stadium proves an ideal example of this rationale. The original structure, constructed in 1898 as part of the B&O Railroad's Camden Yards, was initially intended to function as a warehouse...prior to incorporation into the stadium, it served instead as an abandoned reminder of the working-class American people who resided in small houses in the vicinity of the warehouse and worked for the railroad; it represented a bygone day of industrialization in the inner cities," (Shackel, *Myth, Memory, and the Making of the American Landscape*, 228).

³⁶ Rosensweig, *Retro Ball Parks*, 45.

other races, other time periods.”³⁷ Baseball stadium downtown slumming marginalizes the residents who live there by investing financially not in them, where it is most needed, but in attractions for outsiders, while simultaneously ignoring the current economic realities and ignoring the long legacy disenfranchisement. Baseball again, as it had in the transition from Victorian to modern era, would serve as a solution to the ideological conflicts of middle class America.

A Destination City in Progress

It would be financially unpredictable in a city struggling economically and it could be potentially exploitive, or at a minimum, marginalizing venture. For Mayor Sharpe James, he saw something else; he saw the idea of a “destination city.” It was an answer to the continuously seemingly unsolvable economic and perception problems that plagued the city. But, in order to be that, it would need attractions. The largest would be the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC). It is an impressive edifice that opened in 1997 and has since attracted over ten million visitors. But NJPAC could not stand-alone for Mayor James’ plan to succeed. Waterfront revitalization plans were being put into action in cities across the country in the 1990s, and they were often connected sports stadium or arena with other anchor attractions. Newark’s plan was to connect NJPAC to a new sports complex along Passaic River. Newark’s sports complex would include a 6,000-seat baseball stadium for a minor league team. The stadium would have the capacity to expand to 15,000 in portable seating for special events, concerts, and graduations. It would have 20 luxury skyboxes which would be leased to all the corporations who would decide to move to Newark as part of, and in response to the

³⁷ Rosensweig, *Retro Ball Parks*, 167.

revitalization effort spurred on from the sports complex construction; at least in theory. Alongside the baseball stadium, a second stadium would be built. This one would also have 6,000-seats, but it would be for soccer. The soccer stadium would be the home field for the Jersey Dragons, an existing team who were members of the United States Interregional Soccer League.³⁸ It was to be Newark's renaissance by way of a sports complex; it was all planned. Now it was a matter of how to sell it.

A Sports Complex on a "Hot Site"

Newark officials, politicians, and business leaders wanted to change the narrative of the city. Like Cleveland and Baltimore, they wanted to replace a perception of urban unrest, violence, danger, decay and call upon a history, a designed history, of glory, achievement, and pride. Newark is an old city; there are a lot of prosperous and celebrated events to choose from. It would just be a matter of finding the right mix of narratives. The first order of business was to find a location for the sports complex. Samuel F. Crane, president of the Regional Business Partnership, a group who describe themselves as "broad-based member organization that offers a range of services to strengthen the region's business infrastructure and revitalize New Jersey's largest city," stated "We have a very hot site that is being looked at very strongly right now." That site was Riverbank Park. Riverbank Park is located at 27 Somme Street, situated along Raymond Boulevard and the Passaic River. Newark is a ward city, first designated by

³⁸ The team began their inaugural season in April 1994 playing at JFK Stadium in Harrison, NJ, and later moved in 1995 to Elizabeth High School's Williams Field in Elizabeth NJ. The team only lasted three years, folding in 1996. The North Jersey Imperials, who played in Bayonne and the Dragons, both draw very small crowds. "N.J. Soccer Team Starts Play Tonight," *Star-Ledger*, April 15, 1994 and "Pro Soccer Must Still Face Major Problems," *Star-Ledger*, August 13, 1995.

number, now by cardinal direction. Riverbank Park brings us back to Newark's East Ward, back to the neighborhood of Ruppert Stadium, back to the Ironbound.

It is not hard to see why the original location for the sports complex was chosen. The residential/commercial section Ironbound is a densely populated neighborhood. In the 1990s, it was estimated that there were 40,000 residents, among them is a notable Hispanic population. Riverbank Park is part of the Essex County Department of Parks. It is the oldest county park system in the country, and Riverbank is the smallest park in the system. It encompasses 10.77 acres of land.

The park is basically rectangular and is surrounded by a sidewalk and an iron fence, and is lit by modern light poles. The front of the park, along Market Street, is set back from the street by a strip of grass which provides a buffer between the hard edge of the pavement and the rows of sycamores encircling the park...[the main path] divides the park roughly in half...Consisting of a wide, curvilinear sidewalk, the path extends through a naturalistic area, which contains informal plantings of mature and stately Chinese elm trees and shrubs. The park [contains a] baseball field with its unique grandstand...lit tennis courts, a basketball court, playground, playground shelter and fieldhouse. In the southeast quadrant is the soccer field surrounded by the 1/5 mile long jogging track.³⁹

The proposed sporting complex was to sit on 8 of the 10.77 acres.

The park was acquired by Essex County in 1907 and was expanded in 1926. The original and the expansion were both designed by the Frederick Law Olmstead firm. Riverbank is one of several parks in the Essex County Department of Parks that were designed by the firm. There are seven in Newark alone, Branch Brook Park and Weequaick Park are the most notable.⁴⁰

As Ruppert Stadium was being torn down a new stadium was going up in Riverbank Park. In 1965, two years before Ruppert Stadium demolition, the City Council

³⁹ National Register of Historic Places, Riverbank Park, Newark, New Jersey, National Register #98000351.

⁴⁰ National Register of Historic Places, Riverbank Park, Newark, New Jersey, National Register #98000351.

approved \$1.8 million dollars for the construction of Ironbound Stadium. It was the stadium that was going to be built with the “meadowlands development program.” Mayor Hugh Addonizio and his administration considered it cost prohibitive to keep Ruppert Stadium without a professional baseball team to occupy it. Instead, Ironbound Stadium was to be what the Board of Education proposed when they originally purchased Ruppert Stadium, a space for young people to participate in recreational activities. It would be a stadium for all the schools in Newark to use.⁴¹

By 1975, the cost of Ironbound stadium had ballooned to \$6 million. The reason for this was a combination of expansion projects, including an indoor ice skating rink, cost over-runs, the use of “defective and worn-out parts” in the construction, the cleaning of soccer fields “disfigured by oil seepage from a nearby industry,” regular maintenance, and vandalizing of the sports complex. The vandalization was frequent and exceedingly destructive. Remnants of the destruction included but were not limited to “broken glass from panels...charred wood and empty beer cans...the remnants of basins, toilet bowls and urinals, all of which...[were] ripped from the walls and smashed.” In order to stop the vandals security guards and watchdogs had to be brought in.⁴²

Throughout the 1970s to the early 2000s, the park would face a series of challenges. In 1987, phenols, PCBS, and other pollutants were found in the soil around the stadium and in grounds of the park, including the soccer and baseball fields. The park was temporarily closed in 1989 and then again, multiple times, in subsequent years. City Council President Henry Martinez, who represented the East Ward, and who would be an

⁴¹ “Picture Brightens at Recreation Center,” *New York Times*, December 28, 1975.

⁴² “Picture Brightens at Recreation Center,” *New York Times*, December 28, 1975.

important figure in the building of the sports complex, questioned the original decision to build this stadium. He states in a 1989 article in the *Star-Ledger*,

Back then we had Ruppert Stadium on Wilson Avenue. They had plenty of parking; they had dozens of events there. You could have 20,000 people in the stands. The owner wanted to give the stadium to the city for \$1. He also offered us \$500,000, which was half of the estimated cost to fix up that stadium. But the city declined. I don't know why. I was one of the people fighting to get the city to agree. The stadium was sold, demolished and housing built on the site. Instead we bought this site, near former chemical plant, with only 32 parking spaces. So now, people are paying for the mistakes of the past.⁴³

This version of events as stated here by City Council President Henry Martinez differs from what was reported in the *Newark Evening News* and the *New York Times*. There is also no mention of a \$1 deal in the minutes of Newark City Council meetings, but in the minutes of the Board of Education there is a record of transferring the land to the city for the minimum dollar payment. But if you look at this statement not as a record of events that occurred, but as the shaping of a narrative, it can be seen as groundwork being laid that would preclude Ironbound Stadium as evidence against the building of a new stadium. Instead, it invokes a stadium (Ruppert Stadium) that is not only deemed as successful, but has a nostalgic element that can drawn upon as support for a new stadium, even if it has little or no relevancy in the present, especially as compared to Ironbound Stadium, which is physically located in the place they want to build a new stadium. This is where our story merges. Ruppert Stadium, its first life as a space that shaped ideas of civicness, community, and in many different ways, what defines a hometown team. In its second life, the idea of Ruppert Stadium, repurposed as a monument to the past, redefined to serve as a means to rally support for another stadium and to shape a vision of what the community of Newark is comprised of in the twenty-first century.

⁴³ Frederick Byrd, "Newark Cleaning 'Polluted' Ironbound Stadium," *Star-Ledger*, December 24, 1989.

The Fight for Riverbank: A Tale of Two Uses

May 1995 - March 1996

Conversations to build a sports complex were purportedly happening with the major stakeholders as early as 1994, but it was not until 1995 that there was wide-scale reporting. The first mention of this complex appears in the *Star-Ledger* in April 1995. It was a summary of a press conference held in Atlantic City the day before. The press conference was called to announce the establishment of the Atlantic League of Professional Baseball; a professional baseball league that would operate independently from Major League Baseball. Mayor Sharpe James was there, and as he would do continuously over the next decade plus, voiced his support for former New York Yankees catcher Rick Cerone bringing one of the new teams, in this new league to Newark. The team would be named the Newark Bears. As we know, the first Newark Bears were a New York Yankee farm team that left the city in 1950. Cerone asserted that the name Eagles, after Newark's illustrious Negro League team, was also considered, though it seems unlikely it would have been chosen. Cerone was a former Yankee whose father loved the Bears. With the financial backing from Essex County and the City of Newark, Cerone would bring a baseball team to Newark and build them stadium in which to play.

Only a few months after this press conference the proposed baseball stadium morphed into a multi-use, multi-sport sports complex. Rick Cerone claimed, "the one concern of the county and city, especially in the Ironbound section, is they would love to be able to play world-class-level soccer there." East Ward Councilman Martinez reinforced that sentiment: "I just think soccer would be a home run for them. It may turn

out that the baseball may become secondary in this area.”⁴⁴ By December the opening line of a *Star-Ledger* article read, “Plans to build a stadium and bring minor-league baseball back to Newark are fading faster than a sinking line drive. What began as a proposal for a \$12 million baseball stadium that also would be used for soccer has mushroomed into a plan to build two separate facilities - with an estimated price tag of \$20 million.”⁴⁵ A single stadium was “ruled out because of conflicts between field dimensions and scheduling for soccer and minor-league baseball.”⁴⁶ The stadium was growing in size and in price, all without an official proposal being announced to the public.

By March the *Star-Ledger* reported that the pace of the project was frustrating Rick Cerone. Cerone described it, “I think it was a lot easier trying to hit a 95-mile-an-hour fastball.”⁴⁷ The frustration even caused him to look for a temporary or new location entirely. “I’m going to have a franchise in Northern New Jersey; that’s as plain as I can say it. Newark is still my personal choice because it was my home, but I’ve been dealing with other cities in northern New Jersey that would love to have this opportunity.” He added, “I think Newark can still happen rather quickly, I just hope they city doesn’t lose something that it really should have.”⁴⁸ Continuously, in many variations, officials would repeat what eventually became a mantra, that the stadium was a gift and an asset.

So why the threats? There was pressure from the upstart league, the Atlantic League of Professional Baseball, the league the Bears would be playing in, to at least

⁴⁴ Patrick Jenkins, A.K. Ruffin, and Rudy Larini, “Dreams No Longer Far Afield as 2 Cities Pursue Ballparks” *Star-Ledger*, June 15, 1995.

⁴⁵ Rudy Larini, “Plan For Ballpark In Ironbound Hits A Slump,” *Star-Ledger*, December 18, 1995.

⁴⁶ Rudy Larini, “Plan For Ballpark In Ironbound Hits A Slump,” *Star-Ledger*, December 18, 1995.

⁴⁷ Rudy Larini, “Plan For Ballpark In Ironbound Hits A Slump,” *Star-Ledger*, December 18, 1995.

⁴⁸ Rudy Larini, “Plans For A Minor-League Ballpark Still Facing Difficulties In Newark,” *Star-Ledger*, March 31, 1996.

start construction of a stadium. They required a stadium be built by 1997 to secure entrance into the league.⁴⁹ Cerone was also contending with the lack of financial commitment from the city and the county. Words alone do not build stadiums. There were also issues regarding the logistics of the proposed location. The primary concern at this point in the project was parking. Parking in a densely populated neighborhood in a major city without a parking garage was going to be an issue. Officials initial strategy was to include the approximately “600 public parking spaces within a half-mile and roughly 6,400 within 1 1/4 miles,” reasoning that a “shuttle buses could be used to bring fans to the ballpark from the more distant lots.”⁵⁰ To call it sufficient for those attending games was a stretch. As for the residents, their parking needs were not included in this solution.

April 1996

Exactly a year later another press conference was held. On April 4 the City of Newark, Essex County officials and the Essex County Improvement Authority (ECIA) formally announced their plans for the sports complex. The Essex County Improvement Authority would manage the construction of the sports complex. On the official ECIA website they describe themselves as a “public body corporate and politic, constituting a political subdivision of the State of New Jersey, and was established as an instrumentality exercising public and essential governmental functions to provide for the public convenience, benefit and welfare and shall have perpetual succession.”⁵¹ The *Star-Ledger*

⁴⁹ Rudy Larini, “Plan For Ballpark In Ironbound Hits A Slump,” *Star-Ledger*, December 18, 1995.

⁵⁰ Rudy Larini, “Plans For A Minor-League Ballpark Still Facing Difficulties In Newark,” *Star-Ledger*, March 31, 1996.

⁵¹ Essex County Improvement Authority, <http://www.ecianj.com/index.php/home/mission>

more clearly explained that they function as “an agency authorized to issue bonds for county capital and redevelopment projects.”⁵² Executive Director of the ECIA, Thomas Banker gave an overview of the project. He explained it consisted of three separate facilities, a baseball stadium with a 6,000-seat capacity but could expand to 15,000, a soccer stadium with a 6,000-seat capacity but could expand to 12,000, and a recreational facility located on the other side of Raymond Boulevard, to replace Riverbank Park. The replacement park, located on Brill Street, would include a multipurpose field (AstroTurf). The cost of the complex was projected to be \$18 to \$22 million.

According to a reporter present, Mayor James had “sauntered into the press conference lugging two baseball bats over his shoulder and bragging about his .469 batting average as a schoolboy player at Southside High School, (now called Malcom Shabazz) High School.” He said to audience “this city has had a legacy of great minor league baseball. Minor league baseball belongs in the state’s largest city. It belongs where we once had Ruppert Stadium (home of the old Newark Bears).” As he had before and would continue to do, he pushed the narrative of historical relevancy in this project. We should build a stadium now because we had great baseball teams in the past and we loved them.⁵³ I see this as a non-military “hearts and minds” campaign. There is a civic memory of a beloved stadium that in a nostalgic retelling represents a successful Newark community. There is also a desire to solve complicated financial problems with a singular solution. If placed together, belief can be powerful.

⁵² Rudy Larini, “Baseball-Soccer Complex to Rise in the Ironbound Will House Newark Bears; Officials Also Detail Plan for New Jail,” *Star-Ledger*, April 4, 1996.

⁵³ Rudy Larini, “Ballpark Figure: Proposed Newark Sports Complex Could Cost \$22 Million City,” *Star-Ledger*, April 4, 1996.

If at this rollout presentation you wanted the “mind” position of the campaign, a detailed economic argument rather than the “heart” argument, you were out of luck. There was no definitive financial plan included in the presentation. From the outset, Essex County and the City of Newark claimed they could not fund a project of this size without numerous financial backers. Newark Business Administrator Glenn Grant stated in December of 1995 “Fundamentally, the city is supportive of the project. However, I’m not saying we would be supportive to the tune of \$5 million.”⁵⁴ But as the months passed backers had dwindled and the tune changed. This forced officials during the presentation to acknowledge that their “funding plan was being studied,” but that the County would commit, along with the city of Newark, a pledge of \$5 million each. In the initial agreement Essex County would not commit to the project without the Newark Board of Education as a financial partner with a commitment of \$5 million. That commitment was revoked citing that it would not be in the best interest for the district, which in the previous year was taken over by the state because of “fiscal mismanagement and poor student performance.”⁵⁵ The project would need to seek private donations, along with the hope that they might receive a commitment from the state government. The state’s Economic Development Authority had “provided a \$4 million loan to help build the stadium for the Trenton Thunder.”⁵⁶ Newark was optimistic that too would receive a similar commitment.

⁵⁴ Rudy Larini, “Plan for Ballpark in Ironbound Hits a Slump,” *Star-Ledger*, December 18, 1995.

⁵⁵ Rudy Larini, “Plans for a Minor-League Ballpark Still Facing Difficulties in Newark,” *Star-Ledger*, March 31, 1996. See also “Baseball-Soccer Complex to Rise in the Ironbound Will House Newark Bears; Officials Also Detail Plan for New Jail,” April 4, 1996 and “Ballpark figure: Proposed Newark sports complex could cost \$22 million,” both by Rudy Larini in the *Star-Ledger*.

⁵⁶ Rudy Larini, “Plan for Ballpark in Ironbound Hits a Slump,” *Star-Ledger*, December 18, 1995.

The New Jersey Minor League Forefathers

Elected officials and those financially invested in the Newark sports complex needed a local example to justify the sports complex: they used Trenton Thunder. Trenton's stadium was seen an example of the positive economic force a stadium could have in a depressed New Jersey city. Because of this frequent invocation, I think it is important to put Newark's stadium in the larger context of New Jersey minor league baseball stadium building. As of 2017, there are five active minor league or independent league baseball teams in New Jersey. The two minor leagues teams, those that are part Major League Baseball, are the Trenton Thunder, a Double-A affiliate of the New York Yankees, and the Lakewood BlueClaws, a Class-A affiliate of the Philadelphia Phillies. The one remaining team in the Atlantic League of Professional Baseball is the Somerset Patriots. The other two teams play in the CanAm League (Canadian American Association of Professional Baseball). They are the New Jersey Jackals, who play at Yogi Berra Stadium located on the campus of Montclair University, and the Sussex County Miners.

The three most recent failed baseball teams in New Jersey are Atlantic City Surf, who folded in 2009, the Newark Bears who folded in 2014, and the Camden Riversharks who folded in 2015. There are many commonalties between Atlantic City, Newark, and Camden. Howard Gillette in *Camden After the Fall: Decline and Renewal in a Post-Industrial City* explained that for Camden "as the suburbs of South NJ gained political strength, wealth, and population, Camden became poorer and weaker politically. By the 1980s there were no more Great Society bailouts, cities were left to fend for themselves with little political strength to survive." Even Camden's waterfront revitalization effort

was not enough to buoy the city; tourists only stayed in the “safe area,” which meant that development did not go any further than the “tourist zone.”⁵⁷ Minor league baseball in New Jersey has truly been a mixed bag. Some teams, from their inception, have been a money generating business that has spurred development around them. Other teams struggled from the start, but have managed to stay afloat, and other teams failed from the start till they closed their gates. There are parallels between the teams that succeed and failed, but there are no safe bets either way. That fact is often left out of the narrative told to residents of the city they are being built in. But this is what we know now. In early 1990s, minor league baseball was resurging after decades of decline. These teams were going to be sold to the residents of the places they would be located in, in a variety of ways. Sometimes that sales pitch was part of an idealistic version of a not so distant past.

New Jersey foray into baseball stadium building in the 1990s began in the state capital, Trenton. It is situated on the Delaware River, with Pennsylvania directly behind right field. It has a brick façade and green roof and awnings. You are standing in front of Mercer County Waterfront Park now named Arm & Hammer Park.⁵⁸ This is the home field of the Trenton Thunder, who since 2003 have been a Double-A affiliate of the New York Yankees. Prior to the Yankees, they were affiliated with three other MLB teams.⁵⁹ With a \$17.5 million price tag and a seating capacity of 6,150, the stadium opened a few weeks after the start of the 1994 season.⁶⁰ The venture is viewed as a success. The team has frequent game sellouts, there is currently a waiting list for season tickets, and there

⁵⁷ Howard Gillette, *Camden After the Fall: Decline and Renewal in a Post-Industrial City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 94 and 143-144.

⁵⁸ The company bought the naming rights to the park in 2012 and owns the rights till 2032.

⁵⁹ Founded in 1980 in Glens Falls, New York, the team was previous affiliated with the Chicago White Sox, the Detroit Tigers, and the Boston Red Sox, before being acquired by the Yankees.

⁶⁰ Robert Strauss, “Hoping Ball Parks Succeed In Speeding Urban Revival,” *New York Times*, September 26, 1999.

has been development in the form of built stores and office buildings that have been attributed to the stadium presence in the area. The affiliation with the Yankees, coupled with being located in the New York City and Philadelphia area, is an important part of the team's success. Local Yankee fans can come to their local ballpark to see prospects that are heading to the majors and rehab games for players already on the Yankees. In 1998, Robert Prunetti, an executive in Mercer County stated, "the Trenton Thunder has changed the perception of the city of Trenton to people, the market and investors. People are no longer hesitant to come to Trenton and they're no longer hesitant to invest in it."⁶¹ Baseball can change a city's narrative. One successful business venture can open the door to others.

Building a stadium in urban areas, particularly in cities perceived as crime-ridden, dangerous, or having a greater than national average percentage of residents under or near the poverty line, is going to be a recurring theme. It will be essential for any city that has this reality, or perception of this reality, to make the city seem as marketable as it can to developers, while also arguing that the stadium will itself spur a revitalization movement in location it is built. Prunetti went on to say that since the team has been in Trenton "there has been a \$3.5 million investment in a hotel-nightclub next to the ballpark and the office space in the area is fully rented."⁶² These statistics and the economic impact the baseball stadium has had on the Trenton's economy, as with nearly every stadium, is contested. The impact the stadium has had on Trenton economy broadly is debatable. Development around the stadium has been stagnant since its initial burst. As for

⁶¹ Diane Walsh, "Stepping up to the plate of success – Newark banks on ballpark for revitalization," *Star-Ledger*, April 8, 1998.

⁶² Diane Walsh, "Stepping up to the plate of success – Newark banks on ballpark for revitalization," *Star-Ledger*, April 8, 1998.

reputation change, that is hard to gauge, but there has not been a shift that has been newsworthy. Lastly, measuring quality of life of residents, an abstract concept, means there is not a singular statistic you can point to. That is why these stadiums are continuously funded; it is hard to definitely measure success, thus hard to disprove it, with the exception of a stadium being vacated. As for the success of the stadium itself and the team that plays there, in 2015 the Thunder sold a total of 347,231 tickets, averaging 4,960 fans a game in a stadium with a 6,341-seat capacity.⁶³ Compared to other teams in the area, those are above average numbers.

Trenton was not the only minor league team established in the early 1990s. 1994 also marked the opening of Skylands Stadium. Opening unfinished was barely an issue after having filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in 1993 after inclement winter weather caused substantial overruns on the \$9 million stadium.⁶⁴ The stadium was originally built for the New Jersey Cardinals, the Class-A minor league team of the MLB St. Louis Cardinals. The team occupied the park until 2005, when they were sold and moved. The team was replaced with the Sussex Skyhawks, an independent league team that folded after the 2010 season. From here, Skyland's troubles only increased. Right from the start private ownership had a fractious relationship with the township where the stadium was located. Frankford Township is part of Sussex County and is located on the northern most tip of New Jersey. In the original agreement the township controlled non-baseball events. Ownership, Skyland Management stressed to the township that for the stadium to be financially viable they would need to host numerous non-baseball events such as concerts or other sporting events. Problems arose when the management company tried to book an

⁶³ "Minor League Baseball Attendance in 2015," Baseballpilgrimages.com, <http://www.baseballpilgrimages.com/attendance/minor-leagues-2015.html>

⁶⁴ Ruth Bonapace, "After 16 Years, Minor League Baseball Returns," *New York Times*, June 19, 1994.

event. The process first required a \$200 application fee, then a lengthy period for the event to be evaluated, which would sometimes result in stipulations that cut profits or caused event promoters to pull out. One such request to host a concert resulted in a lawsuit between the township and the management company.

The management company changed its name to Millennium Sports Management, but its relationship with the township remained the same. After numerous failed financial investments, over stock compensation to investors, and a property tax fight with the township that resulted in a lot of back taxes, Millennium sold its stake in Skyland in 2013. To complete the \$950,000 sale, Millennium had to first pay to \$160,000 in back taxes. The stadium was sold again later that year for \$850,000, which included the stadium, twenty-eight acres of land, and a liquor license.⁶⁵ On Memorial Day, May 25, 2015, with a crowd of 3,819, the Sussex County Miners, whose black and gold logo included a pickaxe meant to pay homage to Sussex County's mining history, won their home opener in the CanAm League against the New Jersey Jackals.⁶⁶ In the 2015 season they sold 56,988 tickets, averaging 1,187 tickets a game in a stadium with 4,200-seat capacity.⁶⁷ These numbers are less than the average. Between these two teams are some good things that can come from a stadium construction, and some not so good things.

⁶⁵ Joe Moszczynski, "With Deal Closed, New Skylands Park Owner Exploring All Possibilities," *Star-Ledger*, April 7, 2013 and Joe Moszczynski, "Skylands Park Gets New Owners With Hopes Of Baseball Returning In 2015," *Star-Ledger*, October 10, 2013.

⁶⁶ Carl Barbati, "Miners Win Home Opener," *New Jersey Herald*, May 25, 2015.

⁶⁷ "Minor League Baseball Attendance in 2015," *Baseballpilgrimages.com*, <http://www.baseballpilgrimages.com/attendance/minor-leagues-2015.html>

Gambling on Stadiums: Funding with the Casino Reinvestment and Development Authority (CRDA)

Back at that the April 4 official announcement; there were two more parts of plan that had to still be presented. As I said, they had no official funding plan, but they did state that they hoped to receive funds from the New Jersey Economic Development Authority (EDA) and \$3 million from the Casino Reinvestment and Development Authority (CRDA).⁶⁸ The Casino Reinvestment Development Authority was created in 1984 “to spark the revitalization of urban areas throughout New Jersey. The formula was simple: Take profits from casinos and plow them into poor areas of the state, particularly Atlantic City, home to the casinos and the CRDA.” The CRDA had previously given the city of Newark \$900,000 towards the Riverfront Parking Garage project. The CRDA had been linked to the Newark sports complex project from as early as the 1995, often in the same conversation as the CRDA’s funding other baseball stadiums in New Jersey. James Kennedy, then Executive Director of the CRDA, stated that a “baseball stadium is considered an eligible activity because the statute that created the CRDA specifies sports arenas as eligible activities.” And fund stadiums they did. By 1998 the CRDA would spent over \$16 million on baseball stadiums. They first gave two million to the Trenton Thunder. The CRDA does not officially acknowledge this money was given on their website or on the phone call I had with the current director, but there are numerous newspaper articles that include CRDA representatives stating money was given, though they cite varying amounts. The contribution also appears in the New Jersey Casino

⁶⁸ The Economic Development Authority had aided in the financing of the Trenton Thunder’s Stadium. The CRDA and their contributions to construction projects in New Jersey was chronicled in *Star-Ledger* that ran a May 4, 1997, “Atlantic City Shell Game – New Jersey Cities Get Less in Casino Aid as Hotels Get More.” The article claimed that one third of the money earmarked for community developed has instead gone into hotels, among many other findings of impropriety within the organization.

Control Commission report “Casino Gambling In New Jersey: A Report to the National Gambling Impact Study Commission,” January 1998.⁶⁹ They do acknowledge that they provided the majority of funding, which was reported in the newspapers as \$9 million, but in the Commission report it is listed as \$11,550,000, for Atlantic City’s baseball stadium at Bader Field airport. In Atlantic City, the city would provide the remaining \$3 million for the cost of the 6,100-seat ballpark. Atlantic City’s stadium was announced at the same press conference that introduced the Atlantic League and the Newark Bears. To those investing in Atlantic City it was important that Newark’s stadium be built. Atlantic City’s team, the Surf would also be a member of the Atlantic League of Professional Baseball, and Atlantic City officials were “antsy about approval of a stadium proposal in Newark [it was needed] in order to help ensure the viability of the new league.”⁷⁰ The success of one team, particularly teams in cities that were economically depressed, was thought to impact or be an indicator of success for other teams. Part of the reason these narratives for stadium building are successful is because they are layered and personalized. Layered in the sense that thin evidence, such as Trenton’s initial development around the stadium and crowds at the games, coupled with the building of

⁶⁹ Recognition of the CRDA’s contributions to Newark based project can be found on their website, <http://www.njcrda.com/> and in relation to the parking garage in the *Star-Ledger* article, “Casino Funds Advance for Garage in Newark,” by Patrick Jenkins on September 9, 1989. The Trenton Thunder are not listed on the CRDA website as a funded project, Thomas Meehan, the Director of Project Implementation and Management for the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority, said on a phone call on August 24, 2015, that he has no recollection of the CRDA giving money to the Trenton Thunder. But, Michael Cole, a lawyer from the CRDA stated in a *Star-Ledger* article “Top state court allows building of resort tunnel - Trump loses attempt to stop rival’s project,” on August 3, 1999 that the Trenton Thunder’s stadium was in fact funded by them. It is also reported in numerous articles in the *Star-Ledger*, a selection of articles include, “Casino Authority Takes Major Step For Minor League Ball In Atlantic City,” May 10, 1995, “Plan For Ballpark In Ironbound Hits A Slump,” December 18, 1995, and “Plans for a minor-league ballpark still facing difficulties in Newark,” March 31, 1996. May 3, 2003, the *Las Vegas Sun* reported from the *Associated Press*, that the CRDA had funded the Trenton Thunder’s baseball stadium.

⁷⁰ Rudy Larini, “Plans for a Minor-League Ballpark Still Facing Difficulties in Newark,” *Star-Ledger*, March 31, 1996.

stadiums in Atlantic City and Sussex County, the narrative could declare a sense a New Jersey success, seen through the lens of an idealized New Jersey pride.

The final part of this plan that was presented at the April 4 rollout event was not about baseball, but about politics. To avoid \$297 million in federal fines for overcrowding and unsafe conditions in its jails, Essex County would have to close one jail in North Caldwell and another in Newark, and build a 2,800-bed jail for \$200 million. The arrangement between the city and the county could be seen as a financial contribution for the sports complex in exchange for the new Essex County Jail to be located within Newark's city limits. It was a stadium for a jail.⁷¹ This agreement would surface again later as a point of contention.

Mayor Sharpe James stood at the podium on that April day and cited the many hours he spent at Ruppert Stadium; there he declared this stadium was "a natural move. We're going to bring that heritage back. Baseball belongs here." James was the most prolific in his use nostalgic language to sell, justify, and promote this new sports complex. The use of heritage is purposeful. This idea originated in the 1950s and it spurred what is termed the "heritage phenomenon."⁷² The concept of heritage, as Paul Shackel states in *Myth, Memory, and the Making of the American Landscape*, "connotes integrity, authenticity, venerability, and stability."⁷³ David Lowenthal in *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* wrote "History explores and

⁷¹ Diane C. Walsh, "Freeholders Balk on Issuing Bonds for Stadium Project," *Star-Ledger*, August 16, 1996.

⁷² See Michael Kammen's *In the Past Lane: Historical Perspectives on American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁷³ Shackel, *Myth, Memory, and the Making of the American Landscape*, 10. He went on to state "Heritage is essential for creating community and cultural continuity. A nation uses heritage to create collective memory, to look for more innocent and carefree days. We remember what we perceive as good and forget the rest. Heritage can create a national mythology based on even the smallest kernel of truth. False notions of the past may be upheld in order to create and sustain national mythology," (Shackel, *Myth, Memory, and the Making of the American Landscape*, 10-11)

explains pasts grown ever more opaque over time; heritage clarifies pasts so as to infuse them with present purposes.”⁷⁴ He went on to say in a 1998 lecture at the National Museum of American History, that heritage is a “malleable body of historical text subject to reinterpretation and easily twisted into myth...in the case of urban conservation, the problem of changing meanings and symbolism is intensified by the fact that structures are often saved to promote economic development or to create nostalgia.”⁷⁵ You can argue that in the case of Newark’s stadium it was both economic development and nostalgia. If we imagine that heritage, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues in *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*, is “one of the ways locations become a destination,”⁷⁶ then this new stadium, as James defined it, is noteworthy based on the potential meaning that could be attributed to it. James enacted what Anouk Belanger described in her article on the indoor arena Molson Centre in Montreal, now called Centre Bell, where she argued that in “many instances the promotional juggling of culture and memory is performed to promote traditions and lifestyles that are supposed to be locally rooted. Instead, there is a great deal of invention behind these traditions, so that the selling of heritage places entails a construction of a ‘quasi-authentic’ quality.”⁷⁷ The connection to the past and the connection to the city is all created to establish a connection with the community. Because it is created it can be shaped and implemented to fit a continuously changing reality at each stage of development.

⁷⁴ David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), xi.

⁷⁵ Shackel, *Myth, Memory, and the Making of the American Landscape*, 229.

⁷⁶ Dyreson and Trumbour, eds. *The Rise of Stadiums in the Modern United States*, 120-121.

⁷⁷ Anouk Belanger, “Sport Venues and the Spectacularization of Urban Spaces in North America: The Case of the Molson Centre in Montreal,” *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, Volume 35, no. 3 (September 2000), 387.

It's Official... Residents React

June and July 1996

After the announcement in April, Newark's City Council was required to vote on the proposal. Before they voted they would hold a "Hearings of Citizens" to hear the opinions of their constituents. The meeting was held on June 19; only an audio recording exists of this meeting. These are some of the concerns, words, and voices from that meeting.

Into the night, past midnight, it was now the community's turn to speak.

Parking and traffic. What about the children, the elderly, where will congregate? Why not build in the abandoned parts of the city in an effort to reduce crime? We tried and failed to prevent an incinerator⁷⁸ being built in the Ironbound, bringing trash from all over New York and New Jersey, the pollution, the smell, hasn't the Ironbound shouldered enough burden? No one asked if we wanted this stadium. A replacement park by the river, how could you put kids there its toxic? "We want the park to stay with the public who pays for it and uses it. We want the \$1.2 million to refurbish the existing fields...and we don't want the jail in our community." "It is a travesty." "An outrage." Newark is not Trenton; there will not be \$1 parking across the street from a stadium.

⁷⁸ The incinerator, which sits on 25 acres in the Ironbound was completed in 1990 with a price tag of \$340 million. Since its inception claims were made to the community that the plant, which would process over 2,000 tons of garbage a day, would burn clean emissions and the taxpayers of Essex County \$4-\$5 million a year. The trash would come from both New Jersey and New York City. From its proposition, activists have been fighting first to prevent its construction, but after that loss, to have the plant operate at higher environmental standards. In 2009 several environmental groups, including the ICC filed a lawsuit against the owner of the plant, Covanta for violating federal air pollution standards. The following year the parties agreed on a settlement at included that the company had to provide \$875,000 to be used for green spaces in the Ironbound, as well as meet other safety standards. Since 2010, environmental groups continued to pressure the company to reduce the amount of mercury emissions. In 2012, the company agreed to install "baghouse" filters over the stacks. At that time it was one of only two plants in the state without filters, the other was in Camden. Coverage of the incinerator can be found in *The Star-Ledger*, *New York Times*, and *NJ Spotlight*.

“Unfortunately at that ball field you don’t see a lot of people who look like they come from Trenton.”

Councilman Martinez responds that the new park will be a better park.

“The purpose of doing this in this area, there were many locations we looked at outside Newark [Trenton] ...turned that whole area into a boom town. All of the businesses within that community would basically die, the funders basically came up with a proposal to build that baseball stadium...[its] packed every single night...they are building new shopping malls in that area because of the boom that the Trenton Thunder has given them. If you wanted to go to a restaurant today in that Trenton area you probably would need a reservation.” We can have a riverwalk connecting to NJPAC. This community likes soccer, this will bring more soccer to the Ironbound. It will be better. With the stadium approved other things can be approved for the community, “full speed ahead because of the stadium proposal.”

Councilman Rice is undecided.

The project will affect more than just the East Ward I have gone to some of the public meetings, and “there are a lot of questions that need to be responded to.” “It gave me an opportunity to see who the real actors were besides Rick Cerone...you get to know these people’s politics, this is a bad guy, this is a good guy, put money behind this one...it becomes clear that a lot of people are going to walk away making a lot of money...” The majority of the in the community should want the stadium, but it sounds like it is already

a done deal, everything is being fast tracked. If this doesn't work out in the next ten years, the city people, the money people, they are out.

A month later, on July 8, a special session of the City Council was called. It was open to the public with the intent to discuss the sports complex plan. The price for acquisition of land and construction would consist of two agreements so the city and county share responsibility of debt that was not supported by grants. The cost would be \$22 million and “city and county are responsible for \$19 million through bonds issued through the ECIA... [and] that the authority also received a verbal commitment from the Casino Reinvestment and Development Authority for the remaining \$3 million.” The projected net cost per year would be \$400,000-\$500,000. The ECIA stated at this point that they would try to use local people for its construction, a point intended to gain public support for the project, and the proposed estimations of revenue each year was placed at \$1 million, with the city and county splitting that revenue to pay down the debt over twenty years.⁷⁹

One by one the Council raised their concerns. For Councilmen Tucker it was the necessity for an affirmative action agreement and details of repayment of debt. Councilmen Kennedy echoed these concerns, he wanted to know if the county will be doing the hiring of the construction and other laborers, and voiced that he is annoyed that the council and the community are not involved in the process. Councilwoman Crump asked why are there only elected officials sitting on the board to make decisions? Banker, ECIA executive director replied that they want the people who have a financial stake and

⁷⁹ Special Session of City Council, July 8, 1996; Barry Carter, “Stadium Plan Wins Support in Newark,” *Star-Ledger*, July 9, 1996.

that will have more public forums, claiming that they already held public sessions the year before which was the reason the project was expanded to include a soccer stadium. Councilmen Branch asked Banker “What is the long term benefit to the city?” Banker responded “Nothing short of a major engine in Newark’s revitalization.” Banker listed the performing arts center, an improved Penn Station, and a ballpark will all be connected by waterfront and that waterfront ballparks have “made a world of difference in cities” like Cleveland, Baltimore, and San Antonio, “generating a whole new stream of economic activity.” It was a common response that drew parallels to only one part of a larger reality.

The question of the relationship between the sports complex and the jail was then brought to the floor. Banker asserted that “legally there is no connection between the projects,” but the mayor signed a memorandum of understanding with the county executive about the two projects, no legal connection, not a condition precedent, they stand on their own merits. No contractual or financial connection. Councilwoman Crump pressed Banker on that fact that if there is no relationship between the two projects why are they both in the same memorandum of understanding? From the Councils’ concern about the connection between the project, statements such as “nobody is stupid” and “somebody was not being truthful, somebody has not given us all the information” could be heard from the Councilmen/woman.

A little over an hour into the session, Councilman Martinez gave nearly a fifteen-minute speech:

This is perhaps the most positive project to ever come before the city of Newark. Based upon public meetings that were held...have led to this plan...we went to the community and we listened to their concerns...and it is sad that the Newark Star Ledger on July 4 printed an article that is like a year and a half old, by

Barbara Kulka she talks strictly about the baseball stadium, never mentions and all of us have to remember in this particular community the culture leans to soccer, soccer would be the money make in this project, not baseball...we know that the Trenton Thunder stadium did for Trenton, we know what Sussex County stadium did for Sussex County. We are not voting on a sludge treatment plant, we are not voting on an incinerator, we are not voting on a medical waste treatment plant, we are voting on something that's positive. The community concerns were addressed, they said they wanted soccer...a duplex stadium...I would not support this project if it was strictly a baseball stadium.

As if soccer was the main "community concern." Even though he states that community opposition is resolved, he went on to state that the community is not losing park space, they are getting more space. It would remove homeless people, though he does not say how. He goes on to claim that the area needs beautification; the incinerator that he voted yes to was an eyesore. He reminded the Council and the attending public that people say they don't want to come to Newark, "here is an opportunity to say come to our community... This is a project that is going to bring a tremendous amount of public attention to the city of Newark. This is going to be boom town." Using more comparisons to Cleveland and Trenton; he argued minor league stadiums provide family oriented and affordability entertainment and that the East Ward is getting a real deal from this. "This is going to make money. Money in the community and it is going to make money within the stadium. It is not going to cost the city any money. If nobody shows up at the stadium...it will cost us a half a million dollars a year." He seemingly offered every reason he could think of to the residents he represented with the hope that something might land.

Councilman Carrino responded that the Council should care about the people who live in the neighborhood of the proposed stadium. He said that their concerns had not been answered. He reiterated that when elected officials try to get people to come into Newark, it is always with a downtown project, and yet "when you talk about Cleveland,

they never talk about inner city Cleveland, where things aren't moving at the pace they should move." The attractions in the downtown, he declared, aren't going to attract people into the wards. "We can find big money, but not little money." – can't get a building taken down in the wards, but can build a stadium. Back in Cleveland, they are looking to recall the mayor even with the "great things" being done there. Carrino stated he had a lot concerns about the stadium, that he is not comfortable, and he feels like he has to play politics. He stated that he believed that projects in his ward would not be completed if he did not vote in favor of the stadium. Carrino's concerns were followed by the members of the Ironbound community.

There were many dissensions from the community when they were permitted to speak. They ranged from the transparency of the project, to the limited public information being disseminated, to the nearly non-existent public participation in the process. There were voices of approval, such as the Athletic Director of East Side High School who saw the project as an upgrade, not a loss of space. Riverbank Park is subpar, "an accident waiting to happen" on the fields. That the sports complex would be an opportunity for the kids of Newark to play on a good field; that we can't turn our backs on these kids. The Council approved the resolution 7-0 with two abstentions. The two abstentions came from West Ward Councilman Ron Rice, he stated he "thought the project was being rushed and did not think the community concerns were being addressed" and East Ward Councilman Henry Martinez, who represented the Ironbound. He strongly supported the

building of sports complex in his district, but abstained from voting because he was a consultant/lobbyist with the ECIA.⁸⁰

A “SPARK” Ignites the Sports Complex Plan

The proposal won the support of the City Council, but this proved only to be the beginning of the fight over what should happen to Riverbank Park. Environmental groups began to come out in opposition to the building of a sports complex on the park, including the New Jersey Conservation Foundation, the New Jersey Environmental Lobby, the New Jersey Audubon Society, the Great Swamp Watershed Association, and others. But, the most vocal and powerful oppositional force was a group first known as River Bank Park Coalition, but who quickly changed their name to the Save the Park at Riverbank (SPARK). One of SPARK’s most vocal leaders was Nancy Zak, who served as its coordinator. SPARK, manned by volunteers, became a sub-committee of the Ironbound Community Corporation (ICC), a non-profit organization that provides social services to Ironbound residents. The ICC lent administrative support and staff, which included Zak, who is the Community Outreach Director at the ICC, in their effort to prevent the demolition of Riverbank Park. Beyond the work of the park, SPARK’s defined their mission as to foster a revived sense of community and unity within the Ironbound and across the city. Volunteers were not only from the Ironbound or the East Ward, but came in from the West and Central wards. Zak remarked that the impact of this cross-ward cooperation stretched beyond the efforts to save the park, “some very interesting things happened, members who never had any experience working with black

⁸⁰ Minutes from Special Session of City Council for Baseball Stadium, June 19, 1996 in Newark Archives and Records Management Center, Newark, New Jersey and Barry Carter, “Stadium Plan Wins Support in Newark,” *Star-Ledger*, July 9, 1996.

people, then eventually as they went through this fight they became much much more open because of this fight.”⁸¹ SPARK saw this as a fight as one larger than a park. It was about the community having a voice in development projects.

The sports complex project was well underway when Zak and SPARK first heard of the plan. In an interview I conducted she started by saying, “We found out about the whole thing very late. We were sort of kept in the dark about the whole project.” SPARK, she said, had found out about the plans not from their local councilman, but from the ex-director of the ICC Victor DeLuca, now the current mayor of Maplewood; one of the twenty-two municipalities that comprise Essex County. Maplewood and the surrounding towns are considered the suburbs of both Newark and New York City. DeLuca did not learn of the stadium through his political connections, nor through his connections at the ICC. He had read about the plans in the local suburban newspaper, the *News-Record of Maplewood-South Orange*. As Zak said, “so the story of what they were going to do and what the plan to do was told in the suburban neighborhood, but not to the people in the community.”⁸² As I have previously noted, there was reporting on the stadium in the *Star-Ledger* prior to the reporting in Maplewood, but it was limited.

This scenario is not surprising. Timothy Jon Curry, Kent Schwirian, and Rachael A. Woldoff, in their *High Stakes: Big Time Sports and Downtown Development*, argues that “Most political power is held in the suburbs, so their interests become prominent in downtown redevelopment, rather than current residents.”⁸³ This is especially not surprising in Newark, where the distribution of tax income in Essex County between

⁸¹ Nancy Zak, interviewed by Laura Troiano on August 13, 2015.

⁸² Nancy Zak, interviewed by Laura Troiano on August 13, 2015.

⁸³ Curry, Schwirian, and Woldoff, *High Stakes*, 40.

Newark and the suburbs has been a point of contention since as early as the 1900s.⁸⁴ The relationship between Newark and its suburbs is complicated by the huge wealth inequalities. According to a 2014 study that averaged the last five years of census data, Short Hills, a community within Essex County, located a town over from Maplewood, is the wealthiest town in the United States, with 69 percent of residents with an annual income over \$150,000, and with a median household income of \$224,524. Whereas Newark has a median household income of \$30,960.⁸⁵ It is not hard to see with this disparity where political control and interests would be in Essex County.

SPARK was mobilizing by the summer of 1996. Zak recounted that city officials involved with the project “had already had a bunch of meetings, even some meetings in the neighborhood, but they were invitation only, closed door meetings so they could say they had a community meeting about it. It was very much an uphill battle because every single politician, except for Ron Rice Sr., who was on the council, everybody else on the City Council and on the Freeholders level had signed on to it. You had the City and the County united.” In response, SPARK organized a large meeting in the Ironbound neighborhood where it was decided that they would try to fight to stop the construction of the sports complex in Riverbank Park.

August 1996

Handwritten signs with “Put the stadium somewhere else. Put our children first, not last” began to appear on trees in the Ironbound. On the first day in August SPARK

⁸⁴ Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

⁸⁵ “Here Are the 10 Richest Towns in America,” *Time*, May 15, 2014 and DataUSA, <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/newark-nj/>

scheduled rally at noon on the steps of City Hall. SPARK advertised rally in English, Spanish, and Portuguese and included that they had commissioned a bus to bring people from the Ironbound to City Hall. Resident Stephen Powell, in response to being asked about who benefits from the stadium, answered in the *Star-Ledger*, “to take an existing vital public community resource and turn it over to private interests for the gain of a few is morally bankrupt.”⁸⁶ Executive Director of the Ironbound Community Center (ICC) Joseph Della Fave reiterated that they are not against the building of the stadium in another location, “this is a park issue, not a baseball issue.”⁸⁷ ⁸⁸ Andy Cappon, a member of SPARK, urged the Essex County Freeholders Board to consider alternate sites. SPARK attempted to attend all of the public hearings, but meetings with the Essex County Freeholders and the Newark City Council were often held simultaneously. There was the added issue that residents are not allowed to speak at City Council meetings unless granted permission by a councilman. There was is no record that I have found of Ironbound’s Councilman Martinez, a supporter of the stadium, granting that permission to SPARK; SPARK was able to secure speaking time at meetings through other council members.

The fight over this park was reported beyond the local New Jersey newspapers.

Articles appeared in the *New York Times*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Press of Atlantic City*,

⁸⁶ Diane C. Walsh, “Freeholders Balk on Issuing Bonds for Stadium Project,” *Star-Ledger*, August 18, 1996.

⁸⁷ Rudy Larini, “Neighbors Call Newark Park too Precious for Pros, Baseball Club Welcome but not at Riverbank,” *Star-Ledger*, August 1, 1996.

⁸⁸ Less than a year later, in May of 1997, *The New York Times* reported that “Joseph Della Fave, the executive director of the Ironbound Community Corporation, said the group was notified late Friday that it would no longer receive \$155,000 annually to provide meals for the elderly nor would it get an additional \$15,000 for a transportation program for the elderly. Instead, the county said, two other community groups in the North Ward and Central Ward would be given the contracts for the programs in his area. He contended that the group was being “targeted for political retribution for opposition to the sportsplex proposal.” Essex County officials denied this claim citing “poor county audits” and claims that the new providers could provide the service cheaper and to more people. Ronald Smothers, “A Newark Group Says It Lost Aid Because It Opposed a Ball Park,” *New York Times*, May 6, 1997.

and even inspired a column in the *New York Daily News*. The columnist for the *Daily News* wrote, the sports complex “they call it progress. I call it an obscenity.” She went on to write, “authorities say River Bank Park has deteriorated. Well, whose fault is that? I don’t think neighborhood kids looking for fun say, “Hey! Let’s go deteriorate the park!” She ended the column by putting the sports complex in the wider perception of Newark, “last time I visited, a couple of years ago, River Bank didn’t strike me as, in the words of one councilman, “a shambles.” Especially considering what a lot of Newark looks like. Using this logic, they should turn most of the city into a stadium... And it’s not exactly as if Newark has nowhere else to put a sports complex. They could build on the site of all those housing projects they keep blowing up.” Even in the New York newspapers it was a fight over how Newark was to be seen and who was determining what that image looked like. This reinforced the perception problem Newark faced and the competing forces attempting to reshape it.

By mid-August, the Essex County Freeholders were forced to postpone their vote on what was now going to be an \$11 million bond sale in support of the stadium. Comments and petitions from SPARK members, along with a pending environmental study of possible contamination at the proposed replacement park on Brill Street was enough to delay the vote on the sports complex. A delayed vote for the stadium also meant a delayed vote for the \$200 million bond for the jail. The representative for the Ironbound, Freeholder Joseph Parlavecchio stated “you’re not getting a jail without a stadium and a new park.”⁸⁹ Lines were set.

Freeholder President, who would later become Essex County Executive, Joseph DiVincenzo, a position he still holds, was in support of the stadium and promised a vote

⁸⁹ Diane Walsh, “Freeholders Balk On Issuing Bonds For Stadium Project,” *Star-Ledger*, August 16, 1996.

the following month. In addition to the vote postponement, the ECIA still only had a “verbal commitment” from the Casino Reinvestment and Development Authority.⁹⁰ The *Star-Ledger* reported that in February the CRDA had a unanimous vote to approve \$3 million for the Newark sports complex. They reported again on the February vote in May.⁹¹ Public officials would continue to reference the CRDA’s \$3 million contribution even through the groundbreaking.⁹² There is no evidence that shows that any money was given to support the stadium. As of 2017 the CRDA officially claimed to have given financial to support eight projects in Newark, including Branch Brook Park and the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC), but not the stadium⁹³

Competing Visions for a Park Escalate

Fall 1996

On September 3 a special meeting of the Freeholders was held and was described in the *Star-Ledger* as “pandemonium.” Freeholders assumed that delaying the vote for more environmental testing would please the residents, but instead “many of the forty

⁹⁰ Rudy Larini, “Neighbors Call Newark Park too Precious for Pros, Baseball Club Welcome but not at Riverbank,” *Star-Ledger*, August 1, 1996.

⁹¹ George Jordan and Patrick Jenkins, “Casino Money Flows for Newark Stadium” *Star-Ledger*, February 19, 1997.

⁹² On the same brief phone call with Thomas Meehan, where I asked about the money to the Trenton Thunder, my main purpose of the call was to see if the CRDA eventually gave the money to the project. He said “a verbal commitment is not a commitment and there is no record of any money given.” Unlike with the Trenton Thunder, there is no reporting that I have found that lists the CRDA giving money for Riverfront Stadium. The last mention of the CRDA contributed to Newark is in the *Star-Ledger* article published on May 4, 1997, “Atlantic City Shell Game – New Jersey Cities Get Less in Casino Aid as Hotels Get More.” The article stated that in February 1997, the “CRDA board hurriedly approved \$3 million for the proposed baseball stadium in Newark - ahead of a public referendum in Newark on the project. The Newark stadium was fast-tracked because the fledgling Atlantic League, which included Atlantic City’s team and others, needed a sixth team. Atlantic City Mayor Jim Whelan, a serious baseball fan who likes to visit the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y., was eager to get his team rolling, said [CRDA Director] Kennedy.”

⁹³ Charles Cummings, “Knowing Newark – Arts, Sports and Technology Link Hands to Revitalize the City,” *Star-Ledger*, January 20, 2000.

spectators jumped to their feet in defiance... Leaders of the Save River Bank Park Coalition confronted freeholders after they adjourned yesterday's five-minute meeting. 'Why did you make us come all the way up here,' shouted Zak. 'Don't walk away from us,' she screamed." Those opposed to the stadium reiterated it is not the stadium itself, but its location that they are against.

SPARK used the window created by the vote delay to disseminate their message to as many peoples they could. Thousands of fliers and letters were dispersed throughout the Ironbound neighborhood. Thirteen clergy members from thirteen places of worship that included Presbyterian, Baptist, Lutheran, and Catholic churches wrote a letter to the Essex County of Freeholders and the Newark City Council voicing their opposition to the building of the sports complex at Riverbank. They stated, "Our interest in this matter is rooted in our general concern for the welfare of the people of Ironbound, the quality of life in the community, and the factors that enhance community life in the broadest definition of this term. In short, we are interested in this as a public policy matter that directly affects the lives of the people we know and serve." The four-page letter outlined the same concerns SPARK had voiced. Members of SPARK also went into these churches to speak at their meetings and held their own meetings in these churches to encourage residents to attend the hearing of the Essex Country Freeholders on October 15, when the fate of the park would be decided. These community meetings were reported on in a local tri-lingual magazine *Ironbound Voices* with article titled "Riverbank Park Fight Gains Steam," "Should Riverbank Park Be Just a Memory?" and "Can Residents Be Ignored? Let Me Count The Ways."⁹⁴ Each article has quotes from

⁹⁴ Diane Walsh, "Community Coalition Gathers Support to Save City Park and Stop Sportsplex," *Star-Ledger*, October 6, 1996.

residents against the project as well as the concerns continually voiced by SPARK, most prominently the lack of community involvement in the planning for the sports complex. SPARK was attempting to disseminate their own narrative; to assert the necessity of community engagement in development projects.

The story takes an unexpected turn on October 9 when Essex County Executive James Treffinger ordered barricades to be erected at the entrance of Riverbank Park, closing it indefinitely. Treffinger cited the closure was necessary based on the findings that toxic levels of mercury, arsenic, cadmium, and lead were found in the soil at Riverbank Park and that further testing would have to be done. The closure came as a surprise. A few days prior it was reported that the replacement park, on Brill Street, was the suspected location of the toxins, not Riverbank. The results from EcolSciences Inc., the company that had conducted the testing at the two sites reported that the replacement park on Brill Street had “relatively minor contamination” that could be “corrected for several hundred thousand dollars” and that Riverbank Park’s contamination was “ten times greater than any heavy metal levels found at the Brill Street site.”⁹⁵ Treffinger, in response to the closure of the park, added that the “problem will be solved as soil is removed during construction.”⁹⁶ There was no mention of either site being cleaned independent of the stadium.

⁹⁵ Diane Walsh, “Treffinger Closes Park After Soil Tests Uncover Toxins Proposed Ironbound – Stadium Site Contaminated with Lead, Mercury,” *Star-Ledger*, October 10, 1996.

⁹⁶ George James, “Baseball, History, and the Future Clash in a City Park,” *New York Times*, December 1, 1996.

Brownfield to Green a Field

The discovery of toxic chemicals at the site his stadium was of little concern to Rick Cerone. Perhaps he saw Bridgewater's transformation from a site designated an EPA brownfield into a very successful ballpark as a good model to follow. Newark residents could easily follow the progress Bridgewater's stadium construction less than forty miles away. During the initial coverage of the sports complex, the articles in the *Star-Ledger* frequently chronicled Newark and Atlantic City. By 1996, reporting shifted to simultaneously tracking Newark's progress with Bridgewater's move to build a minor league baseball stadium. The Somerset Patriots, located in Bridgewater, the central part of New Jersey, were, like the Newark Bears, one of the six inaugural teams in the Atlantic League of Professional Baseball. They also opened their stadium in 1999. They have one other thing in common, Chairman of the Patriots, Steven Kalafer, would also briefly co-own of the Newark Bears. That is where the similarities stop. A juxtaposition of these teams, can offer insight into the trajectory of the Newark Bears.

The Somerset Patriots are arguably the most successful baseball team in New Jersey. In June 2015 the stadium was named "The Best Independent Minor League Ballpark" in North America. According to Bob Golon in *No Minor Accomplishment: The Revival of New Jersey Professional Baseball*, its "suburban middle-class demographics, willing politicians, and open space in need of development, [it] had just the right combination of ingredients that make for a successful minor-league or independent baseball franchise."⁹⁷ Golon contends that the population in the small town of Bridgewater is an "ideal spot for a baseball team looking to attract a fan base of young

⁹⁷ Golon, *No Minor Accomplishment*, 89-90.

families with few other sources of local entertainment to distract them.”⁹⁸ It was what supporters of Newark’s stadium had dreamed of for themselves.

Building a stadium starts with funding. Denise Coyle, County Freeholder of the Somerset County Board, wanted to transform an EPA designated brownfield site into something useful for the town. The American Cyanamid Company, a chemical manufacturing facility, had dumped 800,000 tons of chemical waste on the property. Coyle said she had chosen this to be the site for the stadium because “a dying, decrepit dump that was just a drain on a community [could become] mixed-used retail, office, and condominium living space.”⁹⁹ Coyle liked the idea of the reclaimed site, but was not willing to finance that stadium using \$17.5 million of taxpayer dollars. Coyle said, the “ballfield had to make social sense, economic sense, and it had to make community sense.” The agreement that they made was that the stadium debt was not to be paid with taxes, a response to community opposition of tax-payer funding of the stadium, instead, if the stadium generated at least fifty percent attendance; that would cover the cost. It would reach that goal and then some.¹⁰⁰

The team’s official attendance figures puts the number of fans per game as 5,300 and 370,000 fans per season since 1999. The official team website contends that the Patriots have set single game attendance records multiple times, most recently on July 3, 2009 with 8,537 fans. The park generates additional income in naming rights. After only being open one year, Somerset Ballpark was able to attract a corporate sponsor and the park was renamed in 2000 Commerce Bank Ballpark. In 2009, Commerce Bank became

⁹⁸ Golon, *No Minor Accomplishment*, 90.

⁹⁹ Golon, *No Minor Accomplishment*, 91.

¹⁰⁰ For more on the use of taxes in the building of the stadium see Joe Tyrrell, “Tax Foes Seek Vote Over Plans for Ballpark,” *Star-Ledger*, September 4, 1996 and Joe Tyrrell, “GOP ‘Hands’ Won’t Wash the Others Tax For Group is Leaning to Dem Hopefuls,” *Star-Ledger*, September 8, 1996.

TD Bank, and the ballpark name was changed to TD Bank Ballpark and the already \$3.5 million for the naming rights over a 15-year period was extended.¹⁰¹

TD Bank Ballpark also brings in revenue through a wide variety of both sporting and non-sporting events including: the college baseball championship tournaments for the Big East and the Northeast Conference, along with selective high school baseball games. The stadium has previously been the temporary home field for other professional sports teams including Sky Blue FC Women's Professional Soccer team, the New Jersey Pride, a major league lacrosse team, and the New Jersey Fire, a professional cricket team. The stadium continues to host charity events and fundraisers, as well as "big name concerts acts such Jessica Simpson, Willie Nelson, Jerry Lee Lewis and Tony Bennett. TD Bank Ballpark has also been the site for The Big Apple Circus every March before the start of the baseball season."¹⁰² In addition to the events at the stadium, it relies on the local business community, who has put up office complexes, retail stores, and who have bought luxury suites. They also draw fans from the students and staff on Rutgers New Brunswick campus.¹⁰³ In 2015, the Somerset Patriots sold 347,770 tickets, averaging 5,191 a game in the 6,100 seat capacity ballpark.¹⁰⁴ These numbers were well above average.

¹⁰¹ "Patriots Officially Mark TD Bank Ballpark Name Change in Bridgewater," *NJ.com*, April 8, 2009 and the Somerset Patriots' official website: <http://www.somersetpatriots.com/about-td-bank-ballpark#nav-ballpark>.

¹⁰² Somerset Patriots' official website: <http://www.somersetpatriots.com/about-td-bank-ballpark#nav-ballpark>.

¹⁰³ Golon, *No Minor Accomplishment*, 103.

¹⁰⁴ "Minor League Baseball Attendance in 2015," Baseballpilgrimages.com, <http://www.baseballpilgrimages.com/attendance/minor-leagues-2015.html>.

The Public Meeting – October 15

Back in Newark, Cerone described the toxic findings as a slight contamination, claiming the “project itself will clean up Riverfront Park. If two feet of dirt are taken off the site, and two feet of dirt are brought in, that will clear it. I expect to be in the ground by May 1, which will give us plenty of time [before the new league begins play in 1998].”¹⁰⁵ The *Star-Ledger* reported that Thomas Banker, the executive director of the ECIA, said that the “asphalt used in the construction and special soil for the field will help contain the heavy metals.”¹⁰⁶ A contaminated park to them was an easy problem to solve with a sports complex.

As reported in the *New York Times*, “opponents contend that the closing was a ploy to remove the park from the community and start work on the complex without interference from opponents.”¹⁰⁷ Arnold Cohen, a spokesman for the Ironbound Committee Against Toxic Waste stated in the *Star-Ledger* “the only time we get a clean-up in the Ironbound is when they want to develop.” Resident Stephen Powell reiterated the point, claiming that the county had “found a back-door way of getting what it wanted.”¹⁰⁸ Nancy Zak echoed this when speaking on the county’s strategy to stop SPARK, she claimed,

They also tried another tactic. They pulled out heavy metals from where the smelters used to be, which were buried underground, like eight feet, they were not moving any place. This was really done, it wasn’t something that supposed to be done, they were getting annoyed at SPARK so they went in and they pulled these heavy metals and said your parks contaminated, we have to close it. They found

¹⁰⁵ Joe Tyrell, “Ex-Player Says Newark Ballpark is Near - Cerone Predicts May Groundbreaking,” *Star-Ledger*, November 19, 1996.

¹⁰⁶ Diane Walsh, “Treffinger Closes Park After Soil Tests Uncover Toxins Proposed Ironbound – Stadium Site Contaminated with Lead, Mercury,” *Star-Ledger*, October 10, 1996.

¹⁰⁷ George James, “Baseball, History, and the Future Clash in a City Park,” *New York Times*, December 1, 1996.

¹⁰⁸ Diane Walsh, “Treffinger Closes Park After Soil Tests Uncover Toxins Proposed Ironbound – Stadium Site Contaminated with Lead, Mercury,” *Star-Ledger*, October 10, 1996.

lead on the end, mostly from car exhausts, there were hot spots of lead, these heavy metals were not going anywhere, they didn't fence off the park, they said it was closed, but people still used it.¹⁰⁹

People continued to use the park despite the closure. SPARK, along with the ICC, placed a Christmas tree in December and coordinated trash pick-up since an official closure meant the county would not provide sanitation services. They also organized save the park graffiti.

Members of SPARK were anxious about the pending public meeting in the Ironbound with the Essex County Freeholders on October 15. The meeting was seen as potentially the last forum in which opposition could be raised before there was a final vote to build the sports complex on Riverbank Park. Joseph Parlavecchio of the Freeholders and Joseph Della Fave of the ICC and SPARK had a phone conversation prior to the meeting to layout concerns and ground rules for the meeting. From a memo recapping the phone conversation, SPARK requested that the Freeholders publicize the meeting in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, that no presentations were to be made, that the "meeting will go as long as necessary so all who wish to speak will have the opportunity to do so," that SPARK can designate, with advanced notice, speakers who will be allow to make 5-10 minute statements, that when the environmental assessment reports were completed that they would be made immediately available to the public, that "if the 'replacement' site is too contaminated, the 'Sportsplex' project would be canceled, that the replacement park be completed before work begins on stadium, and the final bullet point was "re-creating a 'Win-Win' situation: there is no opportunity at this time to try to resolve reach compromises, or create alternatives to the Project plans (e.g., finding a different site for the stadium complex) because of the positions of the County Executive

¹⁰⁹ Nancy Zak, interviewed by Laura Troiano on August 13, 2015.

and Mayor.” At the end of the letter, not included in the bullet points was the request for the Freeholders to inform the public that the stadium is linked to the jail.¹¹⁰ It was shaping up to be a long and contentious meeting with little chance of compromise being found.

SPARK did not leave it to the Freeholders to disseminate information on the hearing. They distributed flyers that read: “\$22 Million of Your Tax \$\$\$ At Risk! No Riverbank Park For Your Children! Traffic & Parking Congestion from 2 Stadiums For Your Community! Is this what you want for your Children, for your Community, with your Taxes? LET’S SAY NO!!!” Included on the flyer was a phone number for SPARK.

On October 15 at 7:30 p.m. there was not one, but two simultaneous hearings, one with the Essex County Freeholders and other the Newark City Council. Both were set to hold votes that night on sports complex project. The choice to have these hearings at the same time was vehemently opposed by activists who claimed, “They are dividing and conquering. We can’t appear at both meetings, all of this is coming at the 11th hour and the community has not been informed.”¹¹¹ Over four hundred people attended the five-hour public hearing of the Freeholders; the meeting that had originally been publicized. Diane Walsh recounted the scene in her article in the *Star-Ledger* the next day titled “There’s No Baseball in Newark Yet, But the Crowd Is Already On Its Feet.” She reported eighty people signed up to speak and that four out of every five speakers objected to the proposed plan. There were “shouts from scores of opponents often drowned out those who used their three minutes to speak in favor the plan... Boos accompanied Rick Cerone...and surprise greeted the news that, besides the controversial

¹¹⁰ Flyers, SPARK Personal Archive.

¹¹¹ Diane Walsh, “Freeholders, Newark Council Clear Ironbound Sportsplex Neighborhood Critics - Fear Toxic Contamination, Parking Congestion,” *Star-Ledger*, October 17, 1996.

replacement of facilities River Bank Park, the project entails improvements to Independence Park, also in the Ironbound... A surprised Zak said city and county officials were trying to ‘steal’ Riverbank Park and “now you’re trying to fiddle around with Independence Park.” SPARK members accused Parlavecchio [the freeholder representative for the Ironbound] of “pushing their names down on the speakers list in favor of proponents of the plan.” Parlavecchio contended that, “We’re tired of hosting the incinerator, the methadone centers and the half-way houses. We want some of the economic development projects.”¹¹² In an effort to quell opposition, Freeholder President Joseph DiVincenzo avowed to “begin construction on the replacement park before awarding contracts for the stadium...[and] also invited Newark Business Administrator Glenn Grant to update the freeholders on the cleanup of Ironbound stadium and construction of a municipal pool for the community.”¹¹³ This was far less than what SPARK had asked for.

There were residents and members of the community who did not share SPARK’s view. They considered the loss of the park a fair concession for the value a stadium would bring to the city. At the hearing, support for the project came from not only residents, but from a labor union executive, the athletic director and baseball coach of a local high school, and developers, one of whom declared his company was ready to invest \$15 to \$20 million to construct a parking garage. The idea for a garage was met with opposition from SPARK member Irene DeOliviera, “who wanted to know what

¹¹² Diane Walsh, There’s No Baseball In Newark Yet, But The Crowd Is Already On Its Feet,” *Star-Ledger*, October 16, 1996. The incinerator referenced in the above quote refers to a \$290 million county garbage incinerator erected in the Ironbound ten years prior to the stadium. The Ironbound committee opposed locating in their neighborhood and lost.

¹¹³ Diane Walsh, “Freeholders, Newark Council Clear Ironbound Sportsplex Neighborhood Critics - Fear Toxic Contamination, Parking Congestion,” *Star-Ledger*, October 17, 1996.

neighborhood properties would be condemned and how many residents would be displaced to make way for the parking garage.” No answer was given.

Much like the previous public meetings, opposition was prominent and loud, with scattered voices of support. Essex County Freeholders approved the sports complex unanimously. Justification for the building of the stadium centered on the stadium as an “opportunity to revitalize the city just as waterfront development saved Baltimore, San Antonio and Cleveland.”¹¹⁴ These were the same simplified or incomplete comparisons they had given since the projects conception, and still without real details. Freeholder Sheila Y. Oliver of East Orange stated, “It’s going to take bold courage and decisions not necessarily pleasing everyone to move the urban portions of this county into the 21st century.”¹¹⁵ The “urban portions” are positioned as the problem, placed into contrast with the rest of the largely suburban Essex County. After the vote, Zak recalled, “We had felt really betrayed. Everyone had come out, everyone had spoken out, like massive support for the park being kept and then the votes came out the next day and the results were completely opposite.” After the vote SPARK realized, “We need to stop this and the public process was not working.”¹¹⁶

Over at the City Council Meeting, on the second vote, they had held the first vote in July, the City Council approved the project 7-1. Councilman Martinez again abstained because of his role with the ECIA, but unlike his abstention at special session of the City Council, Councilman Rice this time voted against the project, citing “I don’t think the

¹¹⁴ Diane Walsh, “Freeholders, Newark Council Clear Ironbound Sportsplex Neighborhood Critics - Fear Toxic Contamination, Parking Congestion,” *Star-Ledger*, October 17, 1996.

¹¹⁵ Diane Walsh, “Freeholders, Newark Council Clear Ironbound Sportsplex Neighborhood Critics - Fear Toxic Contamination, Parking Congestion,” *Star-Ledger*, October 17, 1996.

¹¹⁶ Nancy Zak, interviewed by Laura Troiano on August 13, 2015.

people had enough input.”¹¹⁷ Two days after the vote to approve the complex the following editorial was published in the *Star-Ledger*:

The city of Newark and the Essex County freeholders have approved a \$22 million baseball and soccer complex at River Bank Park in the city’s Ironbound section. There was considerable opposition from some members of the Ironbound community, but this was the right decision. At least it will be the right decision if the city and county deliver on their promise to make the sportsplex the first step in a riverfront redevelopment project, like those that have succeeded so well in Cleveland and Baltimore. The community’s concern that the sportsplex will cost residents a valued public park and bring congestion, traffic and other problems to the area should not be dismissed or trivialized. Much of the anger could have been avoided if the community had been brought into the planning process a lot earlier...This project must attract visitors and dollars from around the region without making the city’s own feel they’ve been pushed aside. The city must be moved into the big leagues. We think Newark can handle the competition.¹¹⁸

Residents outside the Ironbound saw limited options being presented to change the city’s direction. This was a real option and would affect their community by way of tax dollars, not their parks, streets, and air quality. Tax dollars are real, but they were going to Newark anyway, so why not to a plan that might work and that they might even be able to enjoy? That seemingly was enough for some people.

Let’s Vote On It!

December 1996

SPARK changed tactics after the October 15 meeting. Taking advantage of the 1996 presidential elections, the coalition, stationed themselves outside polling sites and launched a month long signature drive. They distributed flyers that read, “Your Taxes:

¹¹⁷ Diane Walsh, “Freeholders, Newark Council Clear Ironbound Sportsplex Neighborhood Critics - Fear Toxic Contamination, Parking Congestion,” *Star-Ledger*, October 17, 1996.

¹¹⁸ “Editorial,” *Star-Ledger*, October 18, 1996. The editorial continued by stating “Proper planning now can avoid the traffic jams and other problems the community fears. The sportsplex is being built around one minor league baseball team. But for the riverfront to thrive, it must have the right mix of recreation, entertainment and business facilities. Those running the sportsplex must be aggressive about bringing events to the venue, and they must not forget the community when it comes to deciding how the sportsplex is used.”

Up? Your Park: Down? Is this what you want for your community, for your children? We can stop this foolish plan. YOU CAN HELP!” These flyers, as with the previous SPARK messaging, focused on the idea of family and children, a direct response to the claims by stadium supporters that the stadium would provide affordable family entertainment and a space for school organized sports that would benefit the children of Newark. They said this while simultaneously reminding citizens of where their tax dollars were going and not going. The flyer also urged residents to call their elected officials, Treffinger and Mayor James, their phone numbers were listed, and to attend public hearings. They were able to get 3,200 signatures on a petition, above the minimum 15% of registered voters required to force a citywide referendum to determine whether the city could sell \$11 million in bonds to finance their portion of the stadium.¹¹⁹ The referendum was estimated to cost the city anywhere from \$250,000 to \$500,000.¹²⁰

SPARK’s argument centered on the loss of the largest green space in the Ironbound, and that despite claims by developers that mass transit would be sufficient, resident parking, which was already challenging, would become impossible in the neighborhood. County and city officials in the initial proposal had included the replacement park less than a mile from Riverbank Park. But those against the plan cited the “location is less convenient and children would have to cross a busy street to reach it.”¹²¹ A proposed overpass across the street was also included in the project, but it was not enough to persuade residents who were in opposition of the plan.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Nancy Zak, interviewed by Laura Troiano on August 13, 2015.

¹²⁰ George Jordan and George Berkin, “Petitions Ask Vote on Ballpark,” *Star-Ledger*, December 15, 1996.

¹²¹ George James, “Baseball, History and the Future Clash in a City Park,” *New York Times*, December 1, 1996.

¹²² Rudy Larini, “Neighbors Call Newark Park too Precious for Pros, Baseball Club Welcome but not at Riverbank,” *Star-Ledger*, August 1, 1996.

SPARK had previously filed a lawsuit against the city and county in an attempt to block the sports complex. On December 16, 1996, the same day it was announced that the coalition had enough signatures to force a referendum, their case was dismissed. Judge Alvin Weiss of Superior Court ruled that the project could continue because city and county officials had “agreed to have the stadium plans reviewed by the State Department of Environmental Protection and the National Park Service.”¹²³ The ruling had a silver-lining for SPARK, even though the project could proceed, an ordered adherence to obey all the regulations would later provide a favorable result in the effort to save the park.

January and February 1997

The coalition was able to secure a referendum on the stadium, with the City Council voting unanimously to let the residents of Newark vote on whether to allow authorization of \$22 million bond, half of which would come from the Essex County, for the minor-league baseball stadium. The impact of the results to the referendum was contested prior to it even taking place. Councilman Henry Martinez remarked that Essex County had authorized bonds prior to the vote taking place, and intended to proceed without city support if necessary. SPARK’s lawyer Ira Karasick argued, “Mr. Martinez and other stadium supporters were trying to discourage residents from participating in the vote by playing down its importance.”¹²⁴ According to Zak, this behavior is one of many attempts by the Councilman to sway opinion. She recalled that “he appeared at some of the public hearings holding a plastic bag full of syringes, and he says this is what I found in Riverbank Park and this is why we have to get rid of that park, it’s a mess.” She went

¹²³ Terry Pristin, “Stadium Foes Can Force Vote,” *New York Times*, December 17, 1996.

¹²⁴ Terry Pristin, “Vote Set on Baseball Bonds,” *New York Times*, January 15, 1997.

on to say “this is a story that happens a lot, where you sort of let something go down, you de-invest in a particular thing because you know you want it for something else. It happens with housing, it happens with open space parks, you have some future development in mind and then you back track and make your case by letting it fall into rack and ruin. So it is not unusual that that was the way it was done.”¹²⁵ To offer a narrative to support a project sometimes competing or manufactured evidence was utilized. Essex County Executive Treffinger continued to assert “the only way that piece of land can be remediated is if those two projects are built.”¹²⁶ What this said to the community is that the stakes for this project are you risk your children becoming ill from playing in a contaminated park or you support the project. We can afford a stadium, but not to ensure the safety of the park.

March 1997

Officials, including Mayor Sharpe James, argued to cancel the referendum, citing the “expected \$500,000 cost [w]as a waste of money because the sports complex would be built regardless of the outcome.”¹²⁷ Undeterred, SPARK launched a marketing effort to sway voters. SPARK wrote its own protest song to the tune of “Take Me Out to the Ball Game.”

Take Rick out of the ball game
 Take Rick out of Park
 Building that stadium is out of line
 Use our tax money on things that are fine
 Oh let’s fight, fight, tight for our neighborhood

¹²⁵ Nancy Zak, interviewed by Laura Troiano on August 13, 2015.

¹²⁶ George Jordan and Patrick Jenkins, “Casino Money Flows for Newark Stadium,” *Star-Ledger*, February 19, 1997.

¹²⁷ Dawn Onley, “Voters Approve Bonds to Build Sports Complex – Newark to Get Two Stadiums,” *Star-Ledger*, March 12, 1997.

They can't keep us in the dark
 Oh, it's one, two, three strikes you're out
 When you're up against Spark!

To go along with the song, SPARK made flyers that read, "These Politicians Want To Play Games With Your Money." There was a photo underneath with a background of dollar bills and photos with the heads of Treffinger, James, and Martinez wearing baseball hats with dollar signs on them with the caption "Sharpe James, Hank Martinez and James Treffinger want to spend \$11,000,000 of your money for a stadium Newark can't afford. On March 11, tell them the time for games is over."

The text, also duplicated in Spanish, read:

If Newark politicians have their way, \$11,000,000 of your money will be used to build a stadium we don't need, and can't afford. Newark residents weren't asked what they wanted. Were you? These politicians want to give away a public park where Newark children play to make room for a stadium built to benefit people who don't live here. And, on top of the \$11,000,000 tax bill, Newark residents will still have to pay to use the stadium!¹²⁸

The remaining text of the flyer declared that the politicians connected to the project had made these plans without community input and that it was clear they did not care about the community's voice thus far, and to make them hear their voices, you must vote.

Supporters of the stadium created their own propaganda material. A group calling themselves "Soccer Yes! Inc. Business Partnership, who had a Newark zip code on the return address but are not on any business listings that I have found, sent a folded brochure with the cover, "For Newark...For Our Children. On Tuesday March 11 Vote for Newark. Vote Yes! It's Our Turn!" The text is surrounded by three photos, the first a little boy who could be described as Latino wearing a baseball cap with a baseball glove

¹²⁸ Flyer, SPARK Personal Archive. The remaining text on the flyer read "Sharpe James, Hank Martinez and James Treffinger don't care about your opinion-- in fact they don't think your vote counts. They've made their plans behind closed doors, and now they want you to pay the bill--all \$11,000,000. Send these politicians a message: NO MORE GAMES. VOTE NO ON MARCH 11--SAVE RIVERBANK PARK."

in one hand and baseball cards in the other. The second photo is of Mayor James surrounded by a group multi-ethnic, multi-racial children holding baseball bats and soccer balls. The last photo is of Treffinger surrounded by a group of smiling African-American children. Inside the brochure is a drawing of soccer stadium and baseball stadium, side by side with the text “On Tuesday, March 11 Vote Yes: For Soccer, For Minor League Baseball, For New Recreation Facilities, For Jobs, For New Opportunities – New parks and recreation AT NO COST to Newark taxpayers.” The narrative now included photo evidence that children loved baseball. These photographed children are so happy about this stadium that they are hugging these politicians. These photos are claiming that in the end, these politicians are doing it for the children. There is, in the text, an economic message of jobs and a claim of no taxes to Newakers, but the primary amount of space is devoted to photos of happy children. The “hearts and minds” strategy appears again.

The vote had a 10% turnout. Approximately 73% of those who voted in favor of allowing the city of Newark to issue \$11 million in bonds in accordance Essex County. Mayor Sharpe James stated the election was a victory, “I’m pleased that both sides had an opportunity to vote in a democracy and we respect both sides. We will take into consideration all of the concerns by all of the participants. I would like to believe that now we have one team and we will build something that all of us will be proud of, not only for the young and old, but for the generation yet to be born.”¹²⁹ James added, “this neighborhood we’re talking about will be a better neighborhood. We’re talking about

¹²⁹ Andy Newman, “Stadium Survives Referendum,” *New York Times*, March 12, 1997; Dawn Onley, “Voters Approve Bonds to Build Sports Complex,” *Star-Ledger*, March 12, 1997.

replacing an eyesore and toxic site with a state-of-the-art community recreational (complex).”¹³⁰ This was rhetoric not unlike Councilman Martinez.

Zak’s view was that they had a lot of money to spend on the campaign and that the “wording on the ballot is very confusing, and of course you had Rick Cerone riding around [promoting the stadium]...it was sort of reduced to do you like baseball and you are voting for a baseball stadium and no one was going to vote against that, and people in the other parts of the city they didn’t realize that they were voting to displace a park. They just knew that they were voting for a baseball stadium. We won the vote in the east ward, but not citywide.”¹³¹ Even though Mayor James and Rick Cerone voiced their relief that the sports complex would move ahead, SPARK was not finished.

Even with the election loss, Zak stated that there was something gained by the experience. Councilman Martinez and other the democrats had pushed the project, but it still lost in the East Ward. “The referendum was a loser, but it was still a big moment for the Ironbound, because we people realized that we could beat...the political establishment.”¹³² While they were battling in the courts, at council meetings, and at the polls, they had simultaneously pursued other angles.

History Is Called Into Action

This is where historic preservation became the park’s white knight. Using the significance of park’s designers, the Olmstead Firm, with assistance from Newark Preservation and Landmarks Committee and Olmstead associations, including the

¹³⁰ “Donald Wittkowski, “Newark Voters Ok Sports-Complex Referendum,” *Press of Atlantic City*, March 12, 1997.

¹³¹ Nancy Zak, interviewed by Laura Troiano on August 13, 2015.

¹³² Nancy Zak, interviewed by Laura Troiano on August 13, 2015.

National Association for Olmsted Parks (NAOP), a proposal was drafted to have the park declared a historic site. Cited in the application was not only the park's connection to Olmsted, but that it was an important and historically significant contribution from Newark's City Beautiful Movement. They also referenced the fact that park still had an architectural structure from the original design, the Fieldhouse. The park was expanded in 1926 and after the expansion they continued to add architectural features and remodeled original structures. In 1929, Arthur Dillon, a Newark native, remodeled the Fieldhouse. Dillon also designed the still intact Grandstand in 1930. The proposal continued to outline historical events that had taken place in the park such as the appropriation of the park by the army from December 1941 to February 1944. It was used as an "anti-aircraft observation post operated by a searchlight battalion of the United States Army... In February 1944 the Army vacated the Park and demolished their structures. The United States government paid for the restoration of the ballfield."¹³³ The proposal argued this was more than a park; it was a reflection of Newark's storied history.

In the months following the vote, SPARK had continued to find alternative methods to stop construction. As they had all along, SPARK enlisted the help of the community and the community responded. "We had girls scout, we had teachers, we had classes doing letters, we had photographers doing photos, we had people interested in history connecting to different historical associations, even nationally like national Olmsted association. We were getting allies all over the place."¹³⁴ They also established a

¹³³ National Register of Historic Places, Riverbank Park, Newark, New Jersey, National Register #98000351.

¹³⁴ Nancy Zak, interviewed by Laura Troiano on August 13, 2015.

phone tree. If anyone saw bulldozers in the park, they we were ready to call the National Park Service, which had agreed to issue a cease and desist order.¹³⁵

Throughout the fight SPARK had continuously sent material, including the letters from members of the community, to Bruce Babbitt, who was the United States Secretary of the Interior, and to National Park Service (NPS) headquarters in Philadelphia. NPS was responsible for all parks that were built with funding from the Green Acres Program. Part of the State of New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, the Green Acres Program was created in 1961, to “meet New Jersey’s growing recreation and conservation needs. Together with public and private partners, Green Acres has protected over half a million acres of open space and provided hundreds of outdoor recreational facilities in communities around the State.”¹³⁶ The Essex County Department of Parks had received funding for Riverbank Park from the program, and within the guidelines of the program, an extensive document, it stated that the

Department’s primary objectives are to prevent a net loss of parkland (including but not limited to, the quantity, quality, and accessibility of parkland), to discourage the use of parkland for other than recreation and conservation purposes, particularly when a feasible and reasonable alternative is available, and to ensure that the public is adequately compensated for the market value of the parkland to be disposed or diverted.¹³⁷

This meant that if Riverbank Park was to be used as the location for the stadium, a replacement park had to not only met the acreage criteria, but also must be considered the same quality by NPS.

¹³⁵ Nancy Zak, interviewed by Laura Troiano on August 13, 2015.

¹³⁶ State of New Jersey Department of Environment Project official website:
<http://www.nj.gov/dep/greenacres/index.html>

¹³⁷ NJ DEP Green Acres Program Rules – N.J.A.C. 7:36-26.10 (b), 2009-2011, pg. 125.

It is unclear whether the originally proposed replacement park would have been accepted. The reason for the indeterminacy stems from the ECIA unwillingness to go through the process. Zak recalled,

They were supposed to go to Philadelphia and present their plan for replacing the park, but they didn't go because they didn't think they had to go. They didn't think there would be a challenge... Developers finally went to Philadelphia and NPS said it would take two to three years to review their proposal and they were furious. The developers still didn't give up. They recruited Senator Robert Torricelli, supposedly a green senator, to petition Secretary Babbitt to exempt them from the requirements, but he said no.¹³⁸

It was a bureaucracy and it was paperwork that prevented a park from being demolished for a stadium.

Change of Plans: No Other Possible Location Really Means We Found Another

Location for the Stadium

October 1997

In many ways Newark's revitalization plan began on October 18 when New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) had its opening night. The *New York Times* set the stage with a "Newark Hopes for Revival Far Beyond Arts Center," it read:

The lure is the new \$180 million New Jersey Performing Arts Center, a glimmering glass-shelled structure that is opening on Oct. 18 on a formerly desolate renewal tract in sight of the towers of Manhattan, across the bleak industrial flats and the Hudson River. In one of the country's great urban gambles, Newark is pinning a good part of its battered hopes for a comeback on the arts, specifically on this arklike complex of concert hall and theater, rehearsal space and food concessions. Planners hope it will set off a downtown commercial and residential revival in a city still struggling to recover from the shattering riots of 30 years ago.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Nancy Zak, interviewed by Laura Troiano on August 13, 2015.

¹³⁹ Ralph Blumenthal, "Newark Hopes for Revival Far Beyond Arts Center," *New York Times*, October 15, 1997.

The article put Newark in the conversation with New York's Lincoln Center and other cities like San Jose, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh, who were using the arts "in the hopes of improving civic fortunes and polishing civic images." There were questions as to whether non-Newark residents would attend performances and if Newarkers would be able to afford tickets. As noted in the article, NJPAC is supposed to be one piece of a larger revitalization plan. David Nasaw, professor of history at Graduate Center of the City University of New York in Manhattan, maintained, "What's around it? If nothing, nothing's going to happen." I conducted an interview with architect and urban planner Janet Marie Smith, who is currently the Los Angeles Dodgers' Senior Vice President of Planning and Development, and was also a key figure in the Baltimore Orioles organization during the building of Oriole Park at Camden Yards and for the Boston Red Sox during their renovation of Fenway Park in Boston. She states,

One of the risks is there a goal to move a park downtown to bring people into the center city helps populate restaurants and hotels and put feet on the street and take advantage of mass transit system, road system, and often parking that is already there. What I don't think it does, without a financial tether that forces it to happen is to draw other investment... You can have anchors like museums and performing arts centers but where are all the little things that tie them together?¹⁴⁰

That was what Newark saw that it needed the little things. But it also needed some of the big things to take up the "nothing" to which Nasaw alluded. Rutgers University Newark, located in the heart of Newark's downtown, started construction of a new law school; it opened in January 2000. There were also discussions on redeveloping the Hahne's department store. Closed in 1987 the building spanned over nearly an entire block. A few attempts and twenty years later, the renovated Hahne's opened in January 2017. The new Hahne's is a combination of market rate apartments and commercial space. Some of the

¹⁴⁰Janet Marie Smith, interviewed by Laura Troiano on March 12, 2014.

amenities include an on-site Whole Foods, a Barnes & Noble, a new restaurant by renowned chef Marcus Samuelsson, and a Petco. The developers L+M are in the process of renting the rest of the commercial space. The other key feature of the project is Rutgers University's Express Newark. Express Newark's mission is "provide state-of-the-art interdisciplinary public learning spaces where artists, community residents, and community partners will create visual, spoken word, and electronic arts, foster democratic dialogue, and effect positive transformation. All of their collaborations, experimentation, and innovation will be done in partnership with RU-N faculty, staff, and students."¹⁴¹ It is one of several development projects that Rutgers University Newark is undertaking.

On NJPAC's opening night the fight over Riverbank entered into its final act. SPARK's alliance with Secretary Babbitt, and more importantly, the National Park Service, which had already paid dividends, gave its last and most important payout. NPS informed the ECIA that it required the county to provide "more information to determine if the project aligned with federal guidelines for urban parks" before it would permit the transfer of a public park to a public-private venture. Though ECIA Executive Director Thomas Banker stated that he thought that they did meet the federal requirements but delays stemming from the federal bureaucratic regulatory process could jeopardize the entire project and that they would pursue another location for the stadium.¹⁴² Even though City and County officials had claimed that Riverbank Park was the only possible

¹⁴¹ Carla Capizzi, "Express Newark, RU-N's Arts Incubator, Now Open in Historic Former Hahne's Department Store, Is Bringing New Synergy to Newark's Arts District," *Rutgers University Newark*, January 6, 2017.

¹⁴² Nikita Stewart, "Reopening of Newark Park Ends Long Fight - Activist Instrumental in Renovation Effort," *Star-Ledger*, November 6, 2003 and Diane C. Walsh, "County Urged to Find Temporary Site for Baseball Team - Newark Fears Delay Could Make it 'Strike Out,'" *Star-Ledger*, October 17, 1997.

location, with Cerone quoted as saying, “that’s the only site we have,”¹⁴³ to no one’s surprise, another site was found. As Zak said, “In the beginning they said there was no place else to put this baseball stadium, in the entire city, no place else to put it. And that was so grating because we all knew that it was ridiculous.”¹⁴⁴ The new site would have the stadium’s entrance on Broad Street, enclosed by Division Street, Bridge Street, and Route 21 McCarter Highway. The location would be directly next to a ramp to Route 280, and it was thought that it could potentially still be connected to a proposed riverfront development project along the Passaic River.

Back in the Ironbound, the students at a local elementary school, the Oliver Street School, wrote and presented a play recounting the story of the fight over Riverbank Park titled “Making Sparks Fly: A Play About How Ironbound Saved its Historic Treasure Riverbank Park.” The performance was attended by members of SPARK along with residents of the Ironbound, and was funded by a grant from Rutgers’ Eagleton Institute for Civic Education. Meanwhile, during the park’s closure due to the soil contamination, the children in the community created murals and SPARK was able to get Essex County to hang them at the construction site. The effort to save the park had connected soccer and baseball leagues that had been fighting for space with each other and with SPARK; it galvanized girl scouts, teachers and their students, and brought together volunteers of all races, ethnicities, and ages in the Ironbound and across the wards. It also resulted in SPARK becoming more aware of land use in the Ironbound, and the needs of those in the community for that land. They became more active in gaining available land, in the development of land, and they became engaged in community planning in regards to

¹⁴³ Rudy Larini, “Plans for a Minor-League Ballpark Still Facing Difficulties in Newark,” *Star-Ledger*, March 31, 1996.

¹⁴⁴ Nancy Zak, interviewed by Laura Troiano on August 13, 2015.

zoning along with providing input in the City of Newark's Master Plans. As Zak stated, it was "A wonderful moment of community solidarity."¹⁴⁵

But the fight was still not over; even after successfully preventing the stadium from being built they still had another problem. After conceding that the park would not be the location of the stadium in October 1997, County Executive James Treffinger, pledged that Riverbank Park "is not going to stay boarded up." But Essex County Freeholders claimed that cleanup was dependent on the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection ruling on the park's national landmark status that was petitioned by SPARK.¹⁴⁶ The park had remained officially closed since October 1996, but as I said, was still being used by the community. SPARK again called on its allies; they enlisted scientists from New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) and Rutgers University and the Olmstead associations to aid in complying with the original historical design, which would be necessary for its landmark status, and from members of the community, they asked them to form a committee to aid in the cleanup and reopening of the park.

The petition for landmark status was approved in Trenton, the state capital, needing only a final signature. It languished there until after the park was declared a historic site in National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places on April 16, 1998. New Jersey eventually approved its landmark status on October 29, 1999. It is uncommon for a site to be declared historic first by the NPS, then by its respective state. Riverbank Park was re-opened in 2001 with a two-day re-opening celebration that included a commemorative program with a welcome page that began with

¹⁴⁵ Nancy Zak, interviewed by Laura Troiano on August 13, 2015.

¹⁴⁶ Diane C. Walsh, "County Urged to Find Temporary Site for Baseball Team – Newark Fears Delay Could Make it 'Strike Out,'" *Star-Ledger*, October 17, 1997.

Riverbank Park is a precious resource for our community, an oasis of green in a sea of concrete. It is also an historic park, one of the small urban parks designed by the Olmsted Firm, and now on the National Historic Register. We celebrate today not only the reopening of our park for the community, but also .the community spirit that allowed us to wage a difficult but successful fight to save it. That spirit of unity, cooperation, and concern is as priceless as the park itself. Without that spirit this park would be gone. With that spirit, there is nothing this community cannot accomplish together.

This is the encapsulation of the narrative SPARK used to combat the building of the stadium at Riverbank. It was a battle of whose historical narrative was more in line with the idea of civicism and community. In the two pages that followed the welcome pages are letters from Essex County Executive James Treffinger citing that the community has made this project “stand out.” That the “citizens took the initiative to research ideas and present innovative plans to the county.” He described the park as one of “Essex County’s most valued landmarks” and that this has been an effort to “preserve this vital neighborhood resource.” On the following page, Freeholder President Joseph DiVincenzo echoed Treffinger’s description of a “treasured park,” and the commitment of a “unique community.” Politicians who had once saw no reason to preserve this land, who were content on creating a manufactured historical monument (the stadium) at the expense of an actual landmark were now singing a different tune.

It felt like a happy ending. That turned out to be the wrong feeling. It was soon discovered that the contractor who had done the park’s rehabilitation, Marsellis-Warner Corporation, had used replacement soil that was contaminated with PCBs, arsenic, and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons.¹⁴⁷ Marsellis-Warner had to pay \$2.2 million in

¹⁴⁷ Nikita Stewart, “Reopening of Newark Park Ends Long Fight Activist Instrumental in Renovation Effort,” *Star-Ledger*, November 6, 2003.

remediation costs and additional money for oversight monitors. The second clean up would cost Essex County \$1.84 million.¹⁴⁸ The park was re-opened in November 2003.

SPARK was incorporated as a 501c3 in 2003. As a non-profit organization in 2004, it began running two programs. The first is a cultural arts program. The second is a community-learning program. The community-learning program, in partnership with the Newark Public Schools, brings 5th grade students from six elementary schools in the neighborhood to the park to teach lessons on environmental science and civics. Part of the civic lessons includes the history of park and the fight over the baseball stadium. Over 2,000 students have gone through the program. Zak contended, “We want to keep telling the kids because they get a sense of pride in their community.” The hope is that pride of place will take hold and remain with them throughout their lives. She went on to say, “Everyone knows that engagement and involvement, and good quality programs, that is where the stewardship takes hold.” The students are the park’s best hope for its continued survival. Zak ended our interview by saying, It’s a story of hope. That’s why I think it needs to get told, because people can really feel great about it.”¹⁴⁹ The park’s slogan, which is prominently featured on its website is “Where History Lives.” It was SPARK’s shaping of the historical narrative – along with relentless energy to organize and make use of every avenue of power that the political system allowed them -- that changed the direction of an urban redevelopment plan.

Along with Riverbank Park’s renovation, Essex County also decided to block housing development on the land originally designated as a replacement park for Riverbank on Brill Street and instead agreed to still fund the replacement park. The

¹⁴⁸ Nikita Stewart, “Reopening of Newark park ends long fight Activist instrumental in renovation effort,” *Star-Ledger*, November 6, 2003.

¹⁴⁹ Nancy Zak, interviewed by Laura Troiano on August 13, 2015.

original plan to link the stadium to NJPAC by way of a riverfront would take a step in that direction. Riverfront Park, a 12.33-acre waterfront park that opened in 2012.¹⁵⁰

Revitalization Through A Baseball Stadium: Now Playing on Broad Street

While SPARK turned its attention to the rehabilitation of Riverbank Park, the stadium project was very much alive, and still consumed, which had been the case since its inception, with a myriad of problems. Unlike Riverbank Park, which is part of the Essex County Park Department of Parks, this new site would have to be purchased from private landholders, the largest being the Archdiocese of Newark.

¹⁵⁰ “Riverfront Park is the only public green space in Newark along a waterfront. It displays sparkling amenities, including a baseball field, two playgrounds, tennis and basketball courts, an open grassy area and a turf soccer field...” The city of Newark formed Newark Riverfront Revival (NRR), “an initiative...[that] aims to connect every Newarker to their river...NRR has built support for Newark’s riverfront by taking hundreds of people on boat and walking tours, hosting dozens of outreach events, organizing design education programs for youth, and staging a City Hall exhibition.” The Trust for Public Land recently announced that a “new health and wellness trail is slated to break ground by the end of 2015.” <http://www.essexcountyparks.org/parks/riverfront-park/about>, <https://www.tpl.org/our-work/parks-for-people/newark-riverfront-park>. George Jordan in “Newark On Move With New Buildings - Baseball And Pancakes Are Among The Treats,” *The Star Ledger*, June 13, 1999 wrote the “Joseph P. Minish Passaic River Waterfront Park and Historic Area is on its way back, thanks to the efforts of Newark officials who directly lobbied the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. After months of false starts, the Army Corps will begin work in late August on new bulkheading along the river at Center Street. The original starting date was fall 1997. There is no timetable and no money in place for the final phases of the project: the pedestrian walkway and benches, plazas and landscaping along the riverfront. The project’s total cost is projected to top \$76 million. The Army Corps wanted to kill the project because it did not meet the agency’s “cost/benefit” analysis, according to Newark officials. Until the city lobbied Army Corps officials in Washington, the agency’s regional office in New York was insisting the work be funded by city, county and state taxpayers. The bulkheading in downtown Newark is part of an effort to control flooding throughout the Passaic River basin. City officials believe the park eventually will go a long way toward transforming Newark’s riverfront into a festive market teeming with people, restaurants and gift shops. Newark officials, however, are backing away from their initial publicly stated plan for parkland and public spaces along 9,200 feet of the river from Bridge Street south to Brill Street. The city and private developer this month plan to propose a new 15-story office tower on the waterfront for lease to the FBI.” For more on the blocking of housing development see Barry Carter’s “Developer and Newark Spar Over Riverfront Land,” *Star-Ledger*, January 27, 2002.

April 1998

On the first Sunday in April the *New York Times* published an article detailing New Jersey's minor league baseball trend, complete with a chart listing the teams, their new stadiums, and the ticket prices for the games. Tickets for games range from \$3 to \$12, but the price to build these stadiums reached multi-million dollar status. This minor league boom, the article argued, "arose largely in response to soaring demand for small-city franchises. Minor-league teams that have a major-league affiliation drew 34.7 million fans last year, the best season since 1949. Since 1985 they have built 86 new stadiums."¹⁵¹ The question posed in this article had been the same one posed continuously in the planning and building of the new stadium in Newark is this going to be a successful business venture? The article pointed to the same evidence as those promoting the stadium, the success of the Trenton Thunder, the sellouts with standing room only.

The counterpoint was that the market is saturated with not only other minor league baseball teams, but with two professional baseball teams and other forms of entertainment located in close proximity to these stadiums. On the Friday of that same week the *Times* ran a second article on minor league baseball in New Jersey, focusing on the creation of the new minor league, the one the Newark Bears would be a part of, the Atlantic League. It again framed the situation as the

new league's birth, along with its high stakes -- unheard of in the world of independent franchises, where shoestring budgets, old parks and bankruptcies are more the rule -- has created in its initial cities or locales an interlocking system of hopes, fears and ambitions. Baseball experts say that in a market where there is so much major and minor league baseball already, the Atlantic League's ambitions

¹⁵¹ Laura Mansnerus, "The Bases Are Definitely Loaded," *New York Times*, April 5, 1998.

are testing the limit of baseball both as a recreational drawing card and a spur for economic revitalization.¹⁵²

It was not only the millions of dollars invested in the stadium that were at stake; it was a crucial piece in the future of the city success. Those were the stakes presented: either the city remained economically depressed or it built a stadium.

Sandwiched between the *Times* articles, Mayor Sharpe James, at a news conference held in a skyscraper that framed him with an aerial view of the stadium, professed, “It’s a great day for children, senior citizens, for renewal of the family and it’s a great day for business in Newark. Hotels will be bustling with teams. Restaurants above and below (Route) 21 will be busy.” County Executive James Treffinger, who would co-officiate the stadium’s groundbreaking on May 6, stated that the stadium “will bring more people into Newark and send a loud signal that Newark is back in business, not only during the day, but at night and on weekends.” ECIA executive director Thomas Banker added the importance of transportation as an ingredient to baseball successes. Plans for NJ Transit’s new light rail that would link the stadium and NJPAC to Penn Station where fans from New Jersey and New York City could easily arrive at the stadium. For those driving to the game, parking lots of local companies were intended to accommodate fans.¹⁵³ The proposed soccer stadium, which early in the process was declared by officials to be the money generating sport, was reduced to a footnote, a brief mention that in the off-season there can be the possibility of soccer. Another soccer stadium, Red Bull Arena, home of the Major League Soccer (MLS) team the New York Red Bull opened in 2010, not in the Ironbound, but in Harrison, New Jersey. It is less than a mile from

¹⁵² Kirk Johnson, “Play Ball!: Now Where Are the Teams?” *New York Times*, April 10, 1998.

¹⁵³ Diane Walsh, “Stepping Up to the Plate of Success – Newark Banks on Ballpark for Revitalization – New ‘Old’ Stadium Will be Home to the Bears,” *Star-Ledger*, April 8, 1998.

Riverbank Park (about a fifteen minute walk), literally right across a car and pedestrian bridge. It is so close many fans eat in the Ironbound before attending Red Bulls games. Red Bull Stadium in 2015 averaged 19,657 fans a game.¹⁵⁴

The architectural design of the stadium was an essential element to marketing the stadium as urban revitalization byway of nostalgic language and homage. As renowned architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable contends, “mythmaking is a legitimate function of architecture. The line between sentimental unreality and nostalgic idealism, between planning professionalism and shrewd marketing, is increasingly blurred.”¹⁵⁵ To realize this vision, in 1995 the city hired the architectural firm who specializes in actualizing this blurred vision, HOK (renamed Populous). As I said, the firm had previously designed Coors Field in Denver, Progressive Field in Cleveland, Oriole Park at Camden Yards in Baltimore, and AT&T Park in San Francisco. Maureen M. Smith, in her study of the construction of AT&T Park, described HOK as a firm that “seek[s] to evoke meaning from the sport that creatively link civic identity, community and the baseball team... HOK contend that their urban ballparks evoke connections between cities and sporting landscapes...modern twists and amenities in their ballparks...take shape ‘in deference to baseball’s historic link to urban America.’”¹⁵⁶ For Newark’s stadium, Tom Tingle of HOK described the key features for the new stadium as setting the entryway at field level “so visitors will immediately see the diamond,” an elevated concourse so that while walking around the stadium or at the concession stands you can always see the field,

¹⁵⁴ <http://soccerstadiumdigest.com/mls-attendance-2015/>

¹⁵⁵ Huxtable, *The Unreal America*, 44.

¹⁵⁶ Smith, “From ‘The Finest Ballpark in America’ to ‘The Jewel of the Waterfront,’” 118. Smith argues that new urban ballparks serve as a “critical piece in the reconstruction of the team’s history and identity...the ballpark is a sporting topography to be explored for the multiple ways it serves as both a space/place and lens from which to view the construction of a collective identity and heritage rooted in the urban nostalgia skillfully utilized by the business of baseball...” (Smith, “From ‘The Finest Ballpark in America’ to ‘The Jewel of the Waterfront,’” 121).

including space “for a novelty shop and a museum with memorabilia,” and having the stadium be interchangeable for other events, like football and soccer. Freeholder President Joseph DiVincenzo expressed that he would like city and county colleges, high schools, and community leagues of both baseball and other sports, to be able to make use of the stadium. In order to reinforce the connection with the past and its “Brick City” nickname, Tingle said the “stadium will be built with stone and earth color bricks, much like NJPAC. There would also be a tower in the design and...the skylight will be green when the Bears win and red when they lose. The steel truss work on the outside of the stadium hopes to capture the feel of parks from bygone eras.”¹⁵⁷ Nostalgia is not about remembering the past as much as it is reconstituting and consuming it in a desirable and personal way. To create a ballpark that incorporates historical evocations is taking that nostalgic consumption and making it literal. Civicness is being defined through consumption rather than community engagement, activism, or other charitable acts that are associated with term.

May 1998

The voice of sports for many in New Jersey and the entire tristate area is the Hall of Fame sportswriter and columnist Jerry Izenberg. He wrote more than thirty articles on the importance of the two baseball teams that played in Newark, the Bears and Eagles, and on the importance of the new stadium and what the new Bears could offer Newark. On May 6, the day of the groundbreaking of the new stadium, he penned the article in the *Star-Ledger*, “Repairing a Hole in the Soul,” where he began with

¹⁵⁷ Diane Walsh, “Stepping Up to the Plate of Success – Newark Banks on Ballpark for Revitalization – New ‘Old’ Stadium Will be Home to the Bears,” *Star-Ledger*, April 8, 1998.

They just don't get it, these urbanologists and sociologists who understand the inner city so well that they were the ones who gave us the concrete coffins called housing projects, effectively turning neighborhoods into massive transient warehouses. How could they? These were never their neighborhoods any more than this was their city... How can you possibly explain to academicians that this really isn't about economic patterns, although the new park surely will fit as a tiny slice of the greater economic mosaic Newark is struggling to create? Nor is it about economic studies, which can be made to say anything you want and generally say what the guy paying for them wants said. Today's groundbreaking is about the healing of an emotional hole in the soul of a city.¹⁵⁸

Izenberg goes on to reminisce of the Bears and Eagles of old and the stadium they played in, Ruppert Stadium. He concluded with the experience of being inside Ruppert Stadium and how that experience transcends from the individual and spreads across people and communities to become engrained into the fabric of the city's culture. He declared that there can be no monetary value attributed to that. "In this town and against a backdrop whose loss no academician can measure, both franchises marched to the sound of a drummer whose cadence went measure for measure with the heartbeat of the city...a place where baseball fostered a sense of community that reached into the very soul of the city."¹⁵⁹ He ended the article with,

You can't trace Newark's emergence as a troubled city with no department stores and the disappearance of its theaters and restaurants to the loss of a ballclub. But you sure as hell can get some idea of what has happened to its identity. The void was so deep and so wide and so measured by time that the memory of its impact belonged to fewer and fewer each year. Even that memory was becoming a wake with nobody left to mourn. Without memories to build upon from the ballfield to the classroom, generations of kids have grown up in this city, believing that the garbage isn't supposed to be picked up regularly, that education has to be second rate and that because of where they live there is nothing that belongs to them - whether it's dignity, identity or even their own ballclub for which to root. There used to be a ballpark in this town. Today, they will start to build another. If you don't understand why, then you don't understand what has happened to this city.

¹⁵⁸ Jerry Izenberg, "Repairing a Hole in the Soul," *Star-Ledger*, May 6, 1998.

¹⁵⁹ Jerry Izenberg, "Repairing a Hole in the Soul," *Star-Ledger*, May 6, 1998.

Izenberg's narrative is a variation on the "hearts and minds" methodology enacted by the politicians and developers. In his very first statement he goes for the mind, casting doubt on what economists and academics are asserting by creating a false comparison; if these "academics" did not get public housing right how could they be trusted to know anything else related to urban development? He continued this discreditation by asserting as outsiders, that their opinions are bought by whoever commissioned their research, though he does not say who is "paying" for these academics study results. That these academics who do not understand the value of baseball, in particular, the nostalgic retelling of Newark's baseball past, results in their assessment as one that is invalid because nostalgia is the essential determining factor for the stadium's success. His conclusion, in line with his assessment of academics, refuted the generally accepted academic conclusion that you connect the city's decline with the exodus of its department stores and entertainment venues, and also its ball clubs.

Putting his effort to discredit experts non-partial evidence aside, what is left is his question on the loss of identity and whether that can be reclaimed with a new stadium. Daniel Nathan argues "the idea that rooting for local athletes and home teams often symbolizes a community's preferred understanding of itself, and that doing so is an expression of public pride and pleasure, a source of group and personal identity. It's about sharing something, about belonging."¹⁶⁰ For Izenberg, it is more than a stadium. It is the link between the Newark in its Golden Age and a referendum on the city's decline. Having a team with the word Newark across their jersey can be a symbol of the Newark that was, and the Newark that can be. It is a veneer that politicians, developers, and those

¹⁶⁰ Nathan, *Rooting for the Home Team*, 2.

invested in changing Newark's perception, can spread over some of the undesirable realities of the city.

As Jerry Izenberg imagined the possible meanings of the groundbreaking of the stadium, on May 6 government officials gathered shovels in hand, on Orange Street to lift dirt and take a photo on land that was not quite theirs yet. Formal offers were made to three of the six largest landowners of the stadium's proposed location; none were finalized. Not included in the three offers was the Catholic Community Services, the largest of the landholders, owning sixty percent of the property, whose land included the space that would be necessary for the light rail line to be completed. They would eventually be paid \$3.42 million for the land. Executive Director of the ECIA, Thomas Banker maintained that total cost of the land would amount to more than \$5 million and that they intended to excavate the foundation in June.¹⁶¹

Even with no land having been purchased by this point they held their groundbreaking celebrations; "they ate hot dogs and popcorn, sang renditions of "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" and listened to a moving rendition of "Casey at the Bat" in an asphalt-covered parking lot yesterday as they broke ground for Newark's new \$22 million stadium."¹⁶² Included in the celebrations were affirmations of the importance of the stadium in the city's effort at revitalization. "County Executive James Treffinger said the stadium is "an important catalyst for the continued revitalization of the city. Newark Mayor Sharpe James told the 'naysayers' who doubt the effectiveness of the project: 'We

¹⁶¹ Diane Walsh, "Newark Baseball Stadium Going Up," *Star-Ledger*, August 30, 1998.

¹⁶² Diane Walsh, "Home, Sweet Home - Newark Bears Break Ground For New Stadium - Parcel Acquisition Offers Continue," *Star-Ledger*, May 7, 1998.

say to them we believe this is a city poised for greatness and we believe the renaissance is for real.’’¹⁶³ This is what they were after all along.

July and August 1998

Speeches have been made, shovels had been placed in the ground by politicians, and Mayor Sharpe James claimed “never have we been closer to being in the ground.” But in the *Star-Ledger*, an article read “Ambitious Signs Adorn Still Vacant Lots Around Newark.” It chronicled pending development projects in Newark including the stadium, a waterfront park, which they hope to eventually connect to the stadium, a proposed Coca-Cola plant, a revitalization effort for a South Ward industrial park, an IHOP, and a new firehouse in the Central Ward. The reporters stated

There are signs of Newark’s comeback all over town. Crime is down significantly, crowds at New Jersey Performing Arts Center are exceeding expectations, real estate firms are snapping up major office buildings and momentum is building for erecting a new downtown sports arena for the New Jersey Nets and Devils. Then there are the other signs: billboards in front of vacant lots announcing projects that have not yet gotten off the ground months after politicians in hardhats mugged for the cameras and delivered speeches at ceremonial groundbreakings...In his inaugural speech earlier this month, Mayor Sharpe James spoke of these projects in the present tense, making it sound as though many of the projects and initiatives he trumpeted were all but complete. But at least half a dozen haven’t even started, and a few are in jeopardy of not starting at all this year.¹⁶⁴

The narrative being sold conflicts with reality on the streets of Newark. To address this disconnect, the boosters of the stadium had to create a narrative that had to convince residents that reality is a less important concern than the possibility of a future created by an idealized nostalgic past. Mayor James narrative did just that. A month later James

¹⁶³ Walsh, “Home, Sweet Home.”

¹⁶⁴ George Jordan and Jesse Drucker, “Ambitious Signs Adorn Still Vacant Lots Around Newark,” *Star-Ledger*, July 12, 1998.

played down the delays in stadium construction, he said “upon the completion of this stadium, the northern end of Broad Street will be transformed into affordable family entertainment and provide jobs for the Newark community. Our youth and young-at-heart will be able to enjoy the kind of excitement I felt as a young boy watching the Newark Bears and Eagles play baseball at Ruppert Stadium.”¹⁶⁵ There was again a return to nostalgic memories, personal and collective, in order to divert importance from whatever aspect of reality does not fit the narrative of success. After many years and many changing paths, and still without all the land being purchased, construction began on August 30, 1998.

Early 1999

The Bears spent the first half of their season playing at Skylands Park in Sussex County while the final stages of construction were completed to make it game ready. The stadium was not complete when it opened. Luxury suites, ticket offices, permanent locker rooms and some concession stands were not finished until 2000. By late February, Jerry Izenberg, as he had done so many times before, waxed poetically about Newark’s glory days of baseball: “But standing at the rim of the excavation below, you could feel a promise of soft summer nights and memories as yet unborn . . . of Newark’s knothole gangs (the Bears’ children’s promotional club that gave out free and/or discounted tickets) resurrected after a half-century of hibernation . . . of a place where whatever was good in the old Newark, whatever is good in the new Newark and whatever can be best in the future Newark can merge into a single, joyous horizon. Once this was a baseball town. Now, it is going to be one again.” Izenberg, after reminding his readers of those

¹⁶⁵ Diane Walsh, “Newark Baseball Stadium Going Up,” *Star-Ledger*, August 30, 1998.

glorious Bears, reminded the reader that the man who is bringing the Bears back to Newark still does not have a lease for the stadium.

Izeneberg voiced his concerns directly to Treffinger, DiVincenzo, and James in his articles. He called the ECIA handling of the lease with Cerone “a textbook study of arrogance and ineptitude.” Cerone was quoted supporting this statement through his frustration with how the stadium is being built and what he has to pay for. He stated, “they screwed up because they lost the original site - Riverbank Park - which would have been free. They made a terrible mistake. They keep making mistakes and they want to come up with a lease that makes me pay for everything they did wrong. I’m here every day and answering questions they should answer for the builders and I’m not even allowed in the weekly construction project meetings.” Cerone meant free for him, it would be a zero on his business ledger for cost, but certainly for the residents of the Ironbound or anyone who wanted to use Riverbank Park, there was a cost to the stadium being located there. Izenberg ended the article with, “Clearly, this isn’t about money as much as it is about competence. There is no mystery to getting this done. College professors who have never even used a public restroom in New Jersey can insist this ballpark will have no economic impact on the city - which is why nobody with half a brain is asking them to build a stadium. This ballpark - geographically, economically, and more important, socially - is the perfect counterbalance to the Performing Arts Center down the block. It ensures something for everyone.” Izenberg, as he did in the past, shifted the focus away from fundamental problems of the stadium’s construction delays, and placed it on the abstract “professors” who are elites that cannot understand or see what “ordinary” people can. That value can exist beyond numbers. Cerone, who is

literally profiting from the stadium is a “good guy” who is getting a raw deal, and the “professors” who have arguably no impact on this project, evidenced by the fact that the project went on, are designated the antagonists. Izenberg is the only reporter at the *Star-Ledger* to take a personal stance in an article on the stadium, including direct criticism.¹⁶⁶ I have yet to find reported in the *Star-Ledger* or anywhere else a commissioned report or study by economists on the potential economic impact of the stadium in Newark.

June 1999

As opening day drew closer, the cost of the stadium continued to increase. By June the price tag had increased to \$34 million, a far cry from the original \$12 million proposal more than a half a decade ago. The increase, according to new ECIA Executive Director William Abele, was due to the change in location and change in the construction schedule in order to make up for the delay caused by the move and to have it ready in July. The increased cost equated to more taxpayer money, another \$1.6 million a year, not only for the construction cost, but also for the lost revenue from ticket and concession sales. Essex County Executive James Treffinger said in mid-June, “We knew from the start that this was an investment in the development and revitalization of Newark, which pays its own dividends. The revenue that will be generated will not begin to meet the investment until the second or third year. We still think it will pay for itself, eventually.”¹⁶⁷ Taxpayers would only have what he thought to go on since, as I said, there was no formal study of the economic impact of the stadium to be found. When the cost of

¹⁶⁶ Jerry Izenberg, “If You Build It, They Will Come...So Build It Already,” *Star-Ledger*, February 28, 1999.

¹⁶⁷ George Jordan and Diane Walsh, “The Costlier House that Essex Built Ballpark’s Cost tops \$33 Million,” *Star-Ledger*, June 16, 1999.

the project nearly triples, one moves from knowing an investment will be a good one, to thinking it will be, to eventually it becomes just hope.

July 1999

Parking was a major sticking point in stopping the construction at the first location. Parking, even in a new location continued to be an issue. Three days before opening day, and temporary plans for parking were still being finalized. Back in mid-June, the ECIA claimed that they were trying to secure about 2,700 parking spaces in a six-block radius by negotiating deals with office buildings and existing parking lots and garages close to the stadium at a rate of no more than \$4. The long-term plan was to build a 700-space parking deck on land next to the stadium on Bridge Street.¹⁶⁸ If they cannot get a private company to build and operate that garage, it would require more taxpayer money.

Parking was not the only concern; Cerone did not have a lease until a few days before opening day. The first year of the lease had all profits going to Cerone because of the delay in opening the stadium. The long-term lease that began in 2000, had two five-year renewal options, and Cerone and the Essex County Improvement Authority would divide the revenues from the concessions and the luxury boxes. Cerone received all the revenue from the Bears merchandise sales and stadium advertising, but the improvement authority had exclusive rights to sell the name of the facility. William Abele claimed “calculated [that the] agency could receive \$1.27 million in 2000, based on an average attendance of 4,000 at the 68 home games. His calculation [took] into consideration the

¹⁶⁸ George Jordan and Diane Walsh, “The Costlier House that Essex Built Ballpark’s Cost tops \$33 Million,” *Star-Ledger*, June 16, 1999; Diane Walsh, “Newark Has Parking in Line for Opening of New Stadium,” *Star-Ledger*, July 13, 1999.

ticket sales, \$250,000 from the naming rights, \$375,000 from the luxury boxes and revenue from the concessions.”¹⁶⁹ We would later see how off they were.

Opening Day

July 16, 1999

Riverfront Stadium, as it would be called, was set to open on July 16th. Six articles about the new Newark Bears and their new stadium appeared in the *Star-Ledger* on opening day. On page one, a nearly 1300-word article titled “A Great Baseball Town Reawakens,” by Jerry Izenberg where he placed this opening day in juxtaposition to the opening days of the past, he wrote, “Tonight, they take down a 50-year-old “No Game Tonight” sign.”

Social change killed the Eagles. Calculated Yankee greed killed the Bears. And when that happened, there first came an awful silence, followed by a social void that could not be filled. The twin entities that gave this city name-recognition value from Syracuse to Los Angeles were gone, leaving behind a magnificent stadium to die, its bare bones bleaching in the sun and rusting in the winter.

Using similar and sometimes identical language from other pieces he wrote, he offered a tribute to Ruppert Stadium and the value he thought it had for Newark and its residents. He personified the stadium, giving it a heart and soul, and claimed that it was a shared heart and soul of the entire city. He ended the article “The heart and soul of this city’s entertainment dollar finally finds a value rooted in the return of its long-gone self-esteem. I grew up in this city when baseball was the core of its very fiber... So I know that when baseball left this town, a lot of things left with it... [but] Once again, the uniform shirts say ‘Newark.’”¹⁷⁰ The legacy, a celebrated legacy, trumps, at least for a night, some of

¹⁶⁹ Diane Walsh, “Once Bears See the Wealth, They’ll Have to Share It,” *Star Ledger*, August 20, 1999.

¹⁷⁰ Jerry Izenberg, “A Great Baseball Town Reawakens,” *Star-Ledger*, July 16, 1999.

the distressing realities of the present, at least that is the hope of those trying to sell that narrative.

Diane Walsh, who was the primary reporter covering the stadium, focused not on the past but the claims that the stadium would be a catalyst for economic development in the future. In her first sentence, the stadium is 85% complete, \$11.9 million over budget, and is the most expensive minor league ballpark to date, but “yet officials believe it’s worth every penny to help revitalize Newark.” She continued with quotes from James and Treffinger as they touted the rebirth, revitalization. She continued with quotations from Andrew Zimbalist, a well-regarded sports economist. Zimbalist, unlike Newark officials, asserts, “It’s very rare to build a baseball stadium with public money and generate enough money to pay off the debt service. In all probability city and county residents will have to subsidize the facility.”¹⁷¹ This is the one of the rare articles with an economics expert’s opinion. Mayor James’ response to questions about its economic impact, “We can’t have all the answers on Opening Day.”¹⁷² Perhaps a city should have had these answers before Opening Day, when over \$30 million has not already been spent.

The article concluded with details of the lease with Cerone, the Essex Freeholder President Joseph DiVincenzo affirmed that both the community and corporations need to be present for the stadium to succeed and that the Mayor had concerns about the “number of minority members Cerone had hired for upper-management jobs with the team. “Cerone declined to address James’ concerns or release the number of minorities he has hired. But the former Yankee catcher said that James and the public can get their answer

¹⁷¹ Diane Walsh, “Newark Counting on its Ballpark, Regardless of Unexpected Costs,” *Star Ledger*, July 16, 1999.

¹⁷² Diane Walsh, “Newark Counting on its Ballpark, Regardless of Unexpected Costs,” *Star Ledger*, July 16, 1999.

at tonight's opener. 'Come tomorrow and see who's here.'" The issue of minority and local hiring was one that was raised since the projects inception. The numbers of jobs for local residents or minorities in the building on the stadium were not made public.

The last featured article came from Brad Parks. It was a feature piece Rick Cerone titled "Pride of Newark - The Dream Builder - Thanks To a Former Yankee and a Native Son, The Bears Can Go Home Again." The article chronicled Cerone's childhood in Newark, his father's love of the Bears, his professional playing career, and his minority ownership in other minor league baseball teams. Park wrote, the Blue Rocks, the other team Cerone owned a piece of,

were in the midst of building a stadium in an abandoned waterfront area of Wilmington, Del. Shortly after the Blue Rocks opened for business, so did a few restaurants and nightclubs. Before long, an area the urban planners quit on years ago suddenly came alive. And Cerone thought: Why can't Newark do this? From idea to reality. For the better part of four years, Cerone found out all the reasons Newark couldn't do that. If it wasn't zoning problems, it was money problems. If there wasn't a politician yelling at him about parking, there was a neighborhood shooing him away.¹⁷³

"Shooing away" is a narrative that again underscores the competing narrative that communities should have a say in development and their concerns should not be superseded by the promise of economic vitality from a for profit development or private-public partnership. After all the reflecting in the newspapers, of days past, of team owners, of economic revelations, that night, there was to be a baseball game.

One by one, ticket in hand, they came. Some went for hot dogs, others for t-shirts. Clowns roamed through the stands and painted children's faces, while Uncle Sam made his way through the crowd on stilts. Bagpipers playing. 7:05, Hall of Famer and former Newark

¹⁷³ Brad Parks, "Pride Of Newark - The Dream Builder - Thanks to a Former Yankee and a Native Son, the Bears Can Go Home Again," *Star-Ledger*, July 16, 1999.

Bears player walked to the pitchers' mound, Yogi Berra was to throw the first pitch, well, two first pitches, the first, a little astray, a little too close to Phil Rizzuto's head, standing at home plate, Rick Cerone, the catcher, pulled in the second. Mayor James is wearing a Bears uniform; just like the players, violet shirts, white pants and white and violet caps. The master of ceremonies had "county and city elected officials line up along the first base line." Former players are there too. "Cerone invited several Eagle players, Jim Carter, a former pitcher from Princeton, and Bo Wallace, a former catcher from Elizabeth. From Crater, 'This is good. It means we're all together.'" "James noted the diversity of the crowd. Cerone said Riverfront will be distinct among ballparks because most minor league facilities are filled by white suburbanites. "You're going to see whites, blacks, yellows, Latinos here because that's what this city has to offer." He stood on home plate before game: "This is America at its best. When you see youngsters coming to a ballgame with gloves in their hands, hoping to catch a ball, it's worth any amount of money we spent to make it possible." Before the game begins, a video recounting the history of the Bears and Eagles. Rock music flows from the speakers, the Bears take the field. "At exactly 8:25pm, the crowd made history by doing the ballpark's first wave." They won, 9-8 and the fans even got an extra inning.¹⁷⁴

Newark's City Council, as it had done over a half a century ago, passed a resolution declaring July 16, 1999 as Newark Bears Day. Opening day was a sellout, but after that ticket sales were not as robust as predicted or hoped for. By the end of the season, in September, at the request of the mayor, the Council authorized, despite some objections, "\$70,000 worth of tickets and food to give away to residents for the last eight

¹⁷⁴ Diane Walsh, "First Pitch First Wave Newark Revels In It All" *Star-Ledger*, July 17, 1999 and In Newark, a Carnival as Bears Return, With Bats, July 17, 1999.

home games.”¹⁷⁵ Even with the lower than projected ticket sales, Cerone wanted to raise the price of a ticket from \$8 to \$9. He claimed it kept pace with other teams. This increase sparked months of argumentative dialogue in the press. Cerone claimed “What they said was strictly for politics. They’re talking about discouraging crowds and their No. 1 revenue source is the skyboxes, and as we sit here today they have not even put a lease schedule together or price schedule.” Treffinger and Abele disagreed, with Treffinger claiming, “Mr. Cerone continues to want public money to finance his private profit-making. This stadium is not about putting profits in his pockets. This stadium is about the revitalization of Newark.”

In the face of failure the narrative began to shift. Public officials blamed the private part of their partnerships. There was even an op-ed piece in the *Star-Ledger* that voiced opposition to the increase, alluding to the fact that it is only one season in, and if you want more fans, it is harder to bring them in if they have to pay more. You can always charge them more the following season, and with the extra dollar, maybe they will buy more food or a souvenir.¹⁷⁶ The cracks between Cerone and officials had been widening for years, now they were just becoming a little more visible to the public.

Disagreements between Cerone and officials did not end at ticket prices. The skyboxes went up for sale after the 1999 season for \$22,000 to \$27,500, depending on size and view of the field. Each was equipped with a wet bar and a lounge and some would be named after former Bears and Eagles players. Banker said “some of the

¹⁷⁵ On May 1 2002, the City Council again approves the purchase of Bears tickets, this time 900, then a 1,000 more in 2003.

¹⁷⁶ Diane Walsh wrote a series of articles in the *Star-Ledger* on this fight, “County Blocks a Rise in Price of Bears Tickets,” *Star-Ledger*, October 31, 1999, “Skyboxes, Ticket Sales Spur Stadium Feud,” November 2, 1999, and “Riverfront Stadium to Lease 20 Luxury Suites - Rentals Are Expected to Raise \$375,000 for Newark and Essex County,” November 5, 1999. The editorial, “Too Much to Bear,” was printed on November 2, 1999.

prospective tenants are considering using memorabilia from the old Newark Bears so the facility can reflect the sports history of the city.”¹⁷⁷ The disagreement came when the decision as to whether those who leased the skyboxes would have to provide their own furniture for it. After much back and forth, it was decided, the position officials took from the start, that furniture would not come with the lease and that the use of local vendors would be encouraged. Cerone would lease his own box. It was first reported the city and the county would not lease a box, later reports asserted that Mayor James would lease his own box. The arguments continued as to whether the marketing campaign to sell the skyboxes was robust enough; Cerone said the ECIA was lax, they of course disagreed, but no sales tells its own story.

November brought news of a new neighbor for the stadium. The communication company IDT signed a \$4 million-a-year, long-term lease bringing 1,000 employees to city and was to take over the Mutual Benefit building which includes a 800-space parking deck.

By moving from Hackensack to Newark, IDT is to become the commercial office anchor of northern Broad Street, an area city officials believe could undergo a revival. It is where the minor-league Newark Bears played their first full season this spring in Riverfront Stadium, just a short stroll from the New Jersey Performing Arts Center and NJ Transit trains at the Broad Street Station. The James administration sweetened the deal for IDT by pledging a tax abatement worth about \$700,000 next year and to finance a 500-stall parking deck. Newark would float bonds to finance construction, and the new garage would then be leased to IDT for use by its employees. Revenue from lease payments and off-hour usage, such as parking for the nearby minor league baseball stadium, would go toward repaying the bonds, officials said.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Diane Walsh, “Riverfront Stadium Signs First Luxury Box Leases - Arena Owner Says Ticket Sales Are Sluggish,” *Star-Ledger*, March 2, 2000

¹⁷⁸ Jordan George, “IDT Will Make Newark Its New Headquarters - Huge Realty Deal Gives City Shot In the Arm,” *Star-Ledger*, November 16, 1999.

The new stadium would get potential fans and possible a place for people to park. This is what supporters of the stadium project were hoping for.

2000-2001

The first year had lost money. In the press Cerone and officials attributed it to having half the season played in Sussex while Riverfront Stadium was made to be at least “fan ready.” There were also significant cost overruns. Buying the land and expediting the construction was largely cited, though at a Newark City Council meeting on December 8, 1999 a motion was requested that the Newark Housing Authority “provide a written statement justifying why it selected the current contractor to develop at the former Columbus homes site in light of the fact that the contractor is allegedly not licensed by the U.S. department of housing and urban development (H.U.D.) and the contractor is allegedly responsible for submitting substantial cost overruns to complete the riverfront stadium in downtown Newark.”¹⁷⁹ The city was giving tax abatements to wealthy corporations and hiring contractors who overcharge and who are not licensed.

Back from infighting, the team attempted to generate fan interest. After their first season the Bears had a contest where the winner received \$500 and tickets to see a game in a luxury suite for a theme song for the 2000 season which would be played during games, in marketing campaigns, and during game broadcasts. The theme given was a song that will “sing the Bears’ praises and fun of a night out at the Den.”¹⁸⁰ By March 2000, the team leased two of its 20 luxury boxes, and in the lease agreement twenty-five percent of the boxes profits went to Cerone and the rest to the city and county to be used

¹⁷⁹ Minutes from Newark City Council Meeting, December 8, 1999 in Newark Archives and Records Management Center, Newark, New Jersey.

¹⁸⁰ “Newark Bears Will Pay \$500 for a Team Song,” *Star-Ledger*, February 10, 2000.

toward the \$1.6 annual debt payment. The first sold was to Prismatic Development Corp, the Fairfield, New Jersey, construction company who with a \$14 million contract built the stadium. They signed a three-year lease for \$27,000 annually. In July, four months after they signed the lease, two of Prismatic's bids, worth \$28.4 million, were selected to build the jail that had been linked to the stadium since its inception, now with an increased in cost from \$200 to \$225 million.¹⁸¹ Emar Group, an insurance company leased the second box. The company is located less than fifteen miles from Newark in Livingston NJ and is headed by Emil Solimine. The "firm frequently does business with local governments." There lease, for an 18-seat suite, cost \$24,750. Marketing consultants claimed commitments for other leases, including the mayor, though none were confirmed. By September only thirteen of the twenty boxes had been leased and naming rights had still not been sold.¹⁸²

For the team's second opening day in April 2000, in addition to the luxury boxes being completed, there were some other new additions to the stadium. There were new items at the concession stands; The Club House was open selling Bears merchandise, along with a picnic area, an upscale bar serving seafood, a Kid Zone with an obstacle course, a speed pitch machine, and a video arcade. During the 2000 season the team also began having day games to attract business people, seniors, and school groups. The most notable addition was a mural that honored the Newark Eagles. The mural featured six of the most prominent players: Larry Doby, Ray Dandridge, Max Manning, Monte Irvin, Leon Day, and Willie Wood. The mural was placed in NJ.com Eagles Nest located in left

¹⁸¹ Jonathan Schuppe, "Fairfield Company Locks Down Prison Bids," *Star-Ledger*, July 20, 2000.

¹⁸² Diane Walsh, "Riverfront Stadium Signs First Luxury Box Leases," *Star-Ledger*, March 2, 2000 and Rudy Larini, "Ballpark Crowds Dwindle in State," *Star-Ledger*, September 4, 2000.

field.¹⁸³ This is one of the few spaces where race is directly addressed in the stadium, and it is an idealized, uncomplicated nostalgic rendering of the past and by extension the present. Daniel Rosensweig saw a similar avoidance at Oriole Park at Camden Yards. In a majority African-American city where parts of the neighborhood of the African-American community were razed to build the park and develop out the tourist centered Inner Harbor, in the ballpark race is sanitized. He states, “images of, and sounds from, African-American culture have been carefully articulated in and around these parks in order to code these new spaces as different from suburbia. Simply put, in places like the Gateway, ‘blackness’ has come to replace blacks. Yet ultimately, this replacement seems to articulate utopian longings for racial solidarity even as the renewed infrastructure of baseball, and indeed of the city, helps reestablish a color line.”¹⁸⁴ A similar argument can be made for Riverfront Stadium, where the community that owners are trying to attract are primarily white suburbanites and where race is present, like the mural, it depicts the Black History Month style of history, where it is the celebration of non-controversial, superficial acknowledgement of an acceptable and/or beneficial contribution made by African Americans.

Lack of African-American representation in the ballpark was certainly not the biggest issue facing Riverfront Park. Skepticism of the stadiums viability and whether revitalization was actually happening had started to mount. Dan O’Flaherty in June wrote an article, “Newark’s Failing Economic Policies” in the *Star-Ledger*. He claimed that Newark’s economy, despite its proximity to New York was deteriorating because of

¹⁸³ Barry Carter, “Center for the Baseball Arts – This Season, Riverfront is Dressed to the Nines,” *Star-Ledger*, April 27, 2000 and Barry Carter, “Daytime Baseball: Bears Aim to Draw Business Clientele,” *Star-Ledger*, May 25, 2000.

¹⁸⁴ Rosensweig, *Retro Ball Parks*, 19.

failed economic development policies. He cited a decline in job growth and high unemployment. Yet he viewed the biggest issue as the city's consistent tax reduction for development projects through abatements, sometimes including additional subsidies. For this he referenced the parking garage for IDT. In the piece he advocated for tax abatement reform, but wrote, more than once, "There is no renaissance."¹⁸⁵

Years later Sharpe James in his memoir *Political Prisoner: You Can Be Indicted, Arrested, Convicted and Sent To Prison without Committing a Crime: A Memoir*, responded to the criticism of tax abatements. The abatements were a source of conflict between him and the City Council, where he wrote that a "majority of the members of the Council supported tax abatements, accepting my philosophy that it was better to grant a tax abatement to a developer who would take a vacant lot and turn it into a tax-generating property rather than let the lot remain vacant, generating no revenue for the city."¹⁸⁶ He continued that Newark had "had been under the gun for so many years," and as a result the companies who applied for the tax abatements were from outside the city. They were the "investors who were fueling Newark's renaissance." But this meant benefits to outsiders and he claimed "many in Newark weren't happy about that. In exchange, though, Newark would benefit from the services, the new housing, new stores and strip shopping malls that they brought. They get a tax benefit, but we get a new image. It was a tradeoff that we could not turn down. You can't be dying of cancer and then want to debate the cure. We were changing the landscape of Newark. We were making Newark a

¹⁸⁵ Dan O'Flaherty, "Newark's Failing Economic Policies," *Star Ledger*, June 4, 2000.

¹⁸⁶ Sharpe James, *Political Prisoner: You Can Be Indicted, Arrested, Convicted and Sent To Prison Without Committing a Crime: A Memoir* (Newark, NJ: Nutany Publishing Company, 2013), 135.

destination city, Newark was on a roll.”¹⁸⁷ Newark’s transformation into a destination city, or what he also called Newark’s renaissance, was not going to be free.

To see this vision you need to connect a lot of dots to get there, but he reasoned that in order to get the affordable housing and other services residents would have to subsidize consumer driven development projects. The success of these projects would in turn change the perception of Newark. This would spur more development projects, the success of those projects would raise property value, that would then result in more development, for the sake of this argument condominiums, and since there is now demand to build, you can force the developer to include some units for affordable housing, but also the influx of new people to the city will raise the tax base and allow more services, though likely those services will be for the new residents, but there is a chance they can trickle out to the other wards. As James wrote,

Some citizens began complaining that everything was happening downtown and nothing was happening in the neighborhoods. They failed to realize that a vibrant downtown would serve the entire population and create jobs as well. My administration’s response was to build and rehabilitate housing in every ward and neighborhood. We challenged the Newark Housing Authority, to which I eventually was able to appoint commissioners, to tear down abandoned high-rises and replace them with new townhouses.¹⁸⁸

This is process of urban development relies heavily on a system of consumption in cities that often have a large segment of the population that lives at or near the poverty. Tax abatements and the courting of outside residents was seen as essential to if this plan was to succeed, but leaves out the present population and their needs and wants.

By September 2000 it did not seem as if this plan was going to succeed. Articles were appearing in the *Star-Ledger* about the lack of fans attending the games; only about

¹⁸⁷ James, *Political Prisoner*, 136.

¹⁸⁸ James, *Political Prisoner*, 134.

3,100 people per game, about half of the stadium's capacity.¹⁸⁹ An issue not only for the owner of the team but also for the city and the county, whose liable annual debt, a total of \$34 million, was partly reliant on ticket sales. But County officials claimed that they knew they would not meet their goals in the first few years, Joseph DiVincenzo, Essex County Freeholder president went as far as saying that they may never collect enough revenue to pay the annual debt, "Could I live with that? Yes, because long range it's helping to move the city of Newark and Essex County forward."¹⁹⁰ The political liability for failure had tempered the language previously used by officials. It became about self-sacrifice for the greater good, wealthy county, Essex County, would take on a financial loss for the potential gains the stadium could offer Newark and Essex Country. The feelings of Essex County taxpayers, whose money would be paying for this sacrifice were not included in with DiVincenzo comments.

At a Newark City Council meeting in September a motion was requested that Rick Cerone and the ECIA be invited to a "future special conference to discuss the city's use of Riverfront stadium," while also publicly commending Essex County Freeholder President Joseph DiVincenzo "for his knowledgeable insight, as a former, star semi-professional baseball player and devoted fan, that attendance at Newark Bears games could increase enormously through a better Job of marketing and promoting the team and stadium to the local Corporate community and Essex county citizens."¹⁹¹ Even with the

¹⁸⁹ Newark was not the only New Jersey Stadium dealing with dwindling attendance. The Atlantic City Surf, in their new stadium, is only attracting about half of its capacity as well. But within the Atlantic League of Professional Baseball Clubs, which the Bears and Surfs were members, the Somerset Patriots in Bridgewater, New Jersey, and the Long Island Ducks of Central Islip, New York, are filling their ballparks.

¹⁹⁰ Rudy Larini, "Ballpark Crowds Dwindle in State," *Star-Ledger*, September 4, 2000.

¹⁹¹ Minutes from Newark City Council Meeting, September 6, 2000 in Newark Archives and Records Management Center, Newark, New Jersey.

reality that the stadium might not make a profit, with DiVincenzo publicly stating that fact; officials continued their narrative and supported it with self-congratulations.

The Bears organization was not helping the situation. At that same City Council meeting there was also a motion “expressing indignation at the insensitive remarks” made by Bears General Manager Kevin Reynolds’ in the *Star-Ledger*. The article read that Kevin Reynolds, the Bears’ general manager said, “the team faces the daunting task of trying to overcome Newark’s image as a city rife with crime and decay - a place still striving to emerge from the shadow of its devastating 1967 riots. Putting a stadium in a city with 33 years of negative history, it’s not going to happen overnight,” Reynolds said. “We’re just one little business trying to resurrect the city.”¹⁹² Nostalgia is about selective historical retellings. The civic insurrection that occurred in Newark in 1967 is evoked in narratives attempting to shape the perception of the city as something that needs to be overcome rather than something that was built upon in the community work that occurred in the years that followed it. This understanding of 1967 and the years that followed can be seen in Reynolds’ use of the word resurrect. It implied that the city was currently dead, and that baseball was the reviving force. This stadium was the solution for Newark, and if it did not work, it was Newark’s (which included its history) fault.

¹⁹² Minutes from Newark City Council Meeting, September 6, 2000 in Newark Archives and Records Management Center, Newark, New Jersey and Rudy Larini, “Ballpark Crowds Dwindle in State,” *Star-Ledger*, September 4, 2000.

What's in a Name? Bears and Eagles Riverfront Stadium: Naming Rights and Nostalgic Invocations

2001

In February 2001 Mayor Sharpe James gave his fifteenth State of the City address. It was the speech with the theme of “Newark as a Destination.” It listed Riverfront Stadium as a location that makes the city a destination. “Everyone sees the downtown progress” he said.¹⁹³

In May of 2001 Riverfront Stadium got its new name, Bears and Eagles Riverfront Stadium. It was not the corporate name that came with \$250,000 of sponsorship dollars. Nevertheless, this new name would not promote a company but instead it would try to generate capital in a different way, by connecting the city’s history to the stadium in the hopes of solidifying its longevity and financial success. As Jonathan Schuppe wrote, it “was more than a symbolic bridging of past racial divides, or a nod to Newark’s former life as New Jersey’s baseball capital. It was an attempt to generate more enthusiasm about the present-day Newark Bears.” To celebrate the name change representatives from the teams that would now bear the name of the stadium, Yogi Berra for the Bears and Larry Doby for the Eagles were invited to participate in the ceremony. Despite the segregation that prevented the teams from playing, Doby stated, “We need to bring Newark back to that community spirit.”¹⁹⁴ Sportswriter Jerry Izenberg described the revealing of the new name “the cloth at the top of the ballpark fell away and the new name, it uncovered sparkled above the outline of the stadium like the fulfillment of a long- standing promise. And now there is a new sign facing Broad Street and it does not

¹⁹³ Nikita Stewart, “Changes in Newark Create New Demands: Improvement Makes Residents Want More,” *Star-Ledger*, February 1, 2001.

¹⁹⁴ Jonathan Schuppe, “Remember When: Bears Rename Stadium, Hoping to Rekindle Newark’s Glory Days,” *Star-Ledger*, May 9, 2001.

run from history. What it really says is “this is who we were” and for those old enough to treasure the memories, it is a powerful kind of magic.”¹⁹⁵ Robert Cvorneyek, in his article “Your Bears to Our Bears: Race, Memory, and Baseball in Newark, New Jersey,” ends with “only time will tell if the symbolic inclusion of the Eagles and the recognition of the team’s legitimate claim in Newark’s contested baseball history will generate the additional support needed to pack the 6,000 seats at Bears and Eagles Riverfront Stadium.”¹⁹⁶ We know it did not; but to make an addition to the stadium name is a commitment to making the historical connection as part of the team’s success.

Amid the rhetoric of the city’s resurgence, in July 2001 *Star-Ledger* headline read, “In Newark, a Limited Renaissance.” It showed that investment was primarily confined to the downtown area, leaving out the vast majority of the city. The deals for these stadiums, was supposed to include, for taxpayer money, jobs, job training, improvements in the public schools, and private sector investment. “While many residents share the task force concerns about Newark’s image, and its economic, social and cultural role in the region, they are mostly concerned, appropriately, about economic and environmental health where they live. They want more attention paid to open space, recreation, youth services and historical preservation. They welcomed the opportunity the meetings offered to share their views and hoped more outreach by city leaders would be made to solicit their input and make them feel connected to the renaissance.”¹⁹⁷ The veneer of a new stadium was starting to wear off.

¹⁹⁵ Jerry Izenberg, “Berra, Doby Hoping New Name is a Sign an Old Rift is Healed,” *Star-Ledger*, May 9, 2001.

¹⁹⁶ Robert Cvorneyek, “Your Bears to Our Bears: Race, Memory, and Baseball in Newark, New Jersey” in *The Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and American Culture 2001*, ed. Alvin Hall (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company), 111.

¹⁹⁷ Richard Roper, “In Newark, a Limited Renaissance,” *Star-Ledger*, July 1, 2001.

2002

In February, in honor of the Newark's Black History Month celebration, the city had commissioned the Newark based communication company The Writing Company to research, write, and design, what the company described on their website as "a historic overview filled with an in-depth narrative, vintage photos and fun facts that brought to life the local history of segregated baseball." On the last page of narrative text in the booklet is a photo of Bears and Eagles Riverfront Stadium, with its new name centered in the photo. The text reads:

Newarkers saw firsthand the fruits of that legacy on a July night in 1999 when pro baseball returned to the Newark. The new Newark Bears were opening a state-of-the-art, 6,200-seat ballpark, Bears and Eagles Riverfront Stadium. The minor league team is a member of the independent Atlantic League, which stocks its rosters with former major and minor leaguers seeking a route back to the big leagues. In the process, they're getting a second chance, much like the City of Newark is enjoying a second chance to introduce a new generation to a game that left the city such a proud sports history. The stadium, whose brick façade reflects the city's working-class roots, features a mural depicting the great Newark Eagles players in an area on the third base side called "The Eagles Nest." The players on that mural overlooking the field must have liked what they saw that July night as an integrated team – a global assembly of White, African American, Latino and Caribbean players – took the field. And maybe – just maybe – they cracked a smile when the Bears won the game as a dramatic 10th inning; walk-off home run sailed into the darkness and fireworks exploded over the field. Baseball lived again in Newark.

Cerone again attempted to raise ticket prices even as it was reported that the ECIA had "lost more than \$1 million on the Bears deal each of the past three years."¹⁹⁸ This news did not prevent Mayor James two months later from declaring that another arena was going to be built in the city. Again, the City of Newark and Essex County officials, along with investors, had plans to bring two teams from the Meadowlands Sports Complex, the New Jersey Nets of the NBA and the New Jersey Devils of the NHL, to

¹⁹⁸ Matthew Futterman, "Minor-League Baseball May See Hike In Ticket Cost," *Star-Ledger*, March 27, 2002.

Newark. The New York Yankees were also in the mix as part of merge that occurred in 1999 called the YankeeNets. The deal to bring these two teams in Newark would also include the YankeeNets taking over the debt for Riverfront Stadium. After months of negotiations the deal fell through with the Nets opting for Brooklyn over Newark. Riverfront Stadium would still be the debt of the County and City. But the plan for an arena did not die. The city in 2003 pitched what they described as a \$550 million “urban village” anchored by the arena. Though James stated the plan was “not predicated on the arena... [but was instead] predicated on the demand for housing in downtown areas.” The urban village would be 13-acres that would include “midrise and high-rise housing, parks and retail spaces stretching along Mulberry Street... The project would be just blocks from commuter lines and PATH trains and near a planned light-rail line.”¹⁹⁹ As with many of these forms of urban development in the city, it did not manifest in the ways it was presented.

The city of Newark contributed \$210 million for the new plan with revenue generated from leasing land at Newark Liberty International Airport to the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. Though that cost was reduced when Prudential purchased the naming rights for 105.3 million, the original deal with the YankeeNets only called for \$35 million from the city.²⁰⁰ Editorials in the *Star-Ledger* referred to polls from Fairleigh

¹⁹⁹ Ronald Smothers, “Newark Sets Out for ‘Urban Village,’ *New York Times*, November 15, 2003.

²⁰⁰ Richard Jones, “For Former Newark Mayor, Arena’s Opening is Tough to Savor, *New York Times*, October 26, 2007. The basics of the deal can be found in the *Star-Ledger*, “What’s Next in the Newark Sports Arena Deal,” May 9, 2002. From its proposition until it was built there was political controversy. Whose taxes were contributing to the stadium, how much, and who should pay for the infrastructure needed, an issue, which put the suburban Essex county suburbs in opposition to Newark, often appeared in articles in the *Star-Ledger*. The *Star-Ledger* reported on April 10, 2012 that in addition to the \$210 million the city contributed to the arena, it has also spent an additional \$10.8 million on plain-clothes police officers and homeland security personnel for the arena from 2007 to 2012. Mayor Cory Booker stated, “The arena still stands as perhaps the best guarded facility in the city of Newark.” For more information on

Dickinson University and the *Record of Hackensack*, whose findings resulted in resident opposition to the stadium by 2-to-1 margins. In addition, a Newark resident wrote, “A Newark arena wouldn’t benefit any New Jersey taxpayer. Residents of our area were told that a trash incinerator would benefit taxpayers. Not so. Then we were told that the Newark Bears would benefit the city and taxpayers. Not so. How would an arena benefit taxpayers? Newark residents will soon be hit with a tax revaluation. Some will be paying two or three times their present taxes. How will an arena help them?”²⁰¹ Even with a failing baseball stadium, political leaders thought they could agree to a deal that would put even more millions into a new sports arena; they were right.

With Riverfront Stadium losing money and the new arena still in its early stages, there was to be an election for mayor of Newark. A debate was held and James took the opportunity to say that these sports projects were “proof of his ability to create jobs and economic opportunity, and lead the city toward a continued renaissance.” Along with competing crime statistics and listings of the failures of the public schools, Riverfront Stadium and the sports arena were a prominent part in mayoral election candidate talking points during the televised debate. Mayor Sharpe James and challenger Cory Booker sparred over the economic impact of these sports facilities in May 2002. James would tout the Riverfront Stadium and the new arena, as how his decisions that lead to an economic success. He stated, “Today is a great day for the city of Newark, and this arena will prove to be one of the great economic engines of our city.” Booker’s response to this claim was “Mayor Sharpe James has not shown the ability to bring projects to empower our people.” Booker cited Bears and Eagles Riverfront Stadium as an example, saying,

the community opposition to the arena see “The Auditor: An Inside Look at the Week in New Jersey,” *Star-Ledger* November 17, 2002.

²⁰¹ “Editorial - Reader Forum” *Star-Ledger* July 21, 2002.

“we have minimum-wage jobs, pushing hot dogs and taking tickets.”²⁰² On May 14 James won his fifth term as mayor.

During the summer of 2002 Rutgers University’s Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies conducted a survey of Essex County suburban residents on their willingness to come to the new proposed arena. The results stated that 5.2% said a new arena would prompt them to come to Newark, “12 percent said they’d travel to Newark for better nightlife and entertainment, while 6.4 percent cited better shopping... [and] the biggest portion of those questioned - 37.3 percent - said nothing would entice them to step foot in the city on a social outing.” Dennis Gale, the founding director of the Cornwall Center, stated, the “businessmen and the politicians who have a sincere interest in Newark’s future, I think they see the Newark arena as one great big boost. In other words, it’s going to be catalytic. That may be true. But right now, the percentages from these surveys don’t look all that good. Moreover, the findings raise the question of whether the millions of dollars earmarked for the project, which has stalled in the Legislature, could be more effectively spent on less costly draws, such as stores and galleries.” Mayor James responded by saying, “We would expect a better report from the Ku Klux Klan in handpicking 330 persons out of an Essex County population of more than 800,000. How about studying how many non-Newarkers have been mugged or killed attending events at the Newark Museum, Newark Public Library, Bears and Eagles Stadium, Penn Station, Symphony Hall or New Jersey Performing Arts Center? My survey shows zero.”²⁰³ The article provided other quotes on how residents of Essex County perceptions of Newark changed once they came into the city and experienced

²⁰² Jeffery Mays and Kimberly Brown, “Debated Newark’s Future: Mayoral Candidates Focus on Schools and Crime,” *Star-Ledger*, May 9, 2002.

²⁰³ Mark Mueller, “If Newark Builds Arena, They Still Might Not Come” *Star-Ledger*, July 14, 2002.

these new attractions, but those poll results reinforced a sustained narrative about Newark. That Newark is dangerous, that investment does not lead to economic gains, and that the city is not a place to visit.

A few days after the article was published, editorial responses were printed in the *Star-Ledger*. Steven Diner, who at the time was the provost of the Rutgers University Newark campus, wrote:

It is no secret that many suburbanites remain wary of Newark despite its cultural attractions, its significant educational institutions, a strong corporate base and a dramatic drop in crime. Thirty years ago, the same fears were expressed about downtown New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Washington. Five years ago, those who wrongly predicted that the Performing Arts Center could never attract suburbanites cited these negative views of Newark. Newark's experience with the arts center, and the experience of revitalized cities across America, suggest that an arena would contribute to a vibrant downtown and spur further development of restaurants, shops and entertainment and further reinvestment in the city's neighborhoods. Moreover, an arena would appeal to and enrich Rutgers-Newark's growing student body and those of neighboring colleges and universities - 26,000 students in all. If we wait for suburban views to change before creating attractions like the arena, the city will never change. The lesson of revitalized cities is that attractions change a city's image, not the other way around.²⁰⁴

The other editorials, as with Diner's, were less about support of the stadium, and more on the need and also the prospect that Newark could be revitalized. The editorials showed that it was difficult for the suburbs of Newark to see the benefits of these stadiums for themselves. Some tried to make the point in the editorial section of the *Star-Ledger* that the Bears have "been playing crowds thinner than a politician's promises... It is a great place to celebrate a grand old pastime. And if you live in Essex County, you own it, so you might as well enjoy it."²⁰⁵ But others stated they did not want to experience the new venues; they were unhappy that their taxes were increased by \$10 million to deal with the Essex County budget short fall.

²⁰⁴ 2002 - Editorial, "Reader Forum," *Star-Ledger* July 21, 2002

²⁰⁵ "That's Entertainment!" *Star-Ledger*, September 21, 2002.

2003

In November 2002 news broke that Rich Cerone was close to a deal to sell half of his stake in the Bears to Steve Kalafer, an automobile dealer and owner of the very successful competing New Jersey baseball franchise the Somerset Patriots in Bridgewater.²⁰⁶ In January 2003 the deal became official. Kalafer purchased the fifty percent with an option for another forty-five percent. The price was not made public, but it was estimated that the team was likely worth \$3 million. Though not originally reported, along with Kalafer, Marc Berson, a real estate developer based in Milburn, a suburb of Newark, was also part of the ownership deal. Kalafer claimed his approach was to make fans of the people who live and work in the city, unlike Cerone's vision where fans would travel from the suburbs. "Kalafer wants every Newark Bears game to feel like a community festival. He wants restaurants from the Ironbound section and the city's famous hot dog sellers to have booths at the stadium. He wants his mascot, Ruppert, in the schools and slapping hands with children in the stands." Even though in some comments his emphasis is on Newark, we can see when he was asked he said, "This is a building year. During the next two years, we will be reintroducing the Newark Bears to the Essex County community and to the city of Newark." The emphasis, what is listed first on his list, is the Essex County community. He is quoted again in the article referring to NJPAC's success with suburbanites. His other team, the Somerset Patriots, is located in the suburbs.

Kalafer claimed that the first part of the new strategy was to market to Newark residents, the second part was to bring more community events to the stadium, and the third phase was to renegotiate the contract with the county and city regarding luxury

²⁰⁶ "The Auditor: An Inside Look at the Week in New Jersey," *Star-Ledger*, November 17, 2002.

boxes and the cooperate naming rights, putting more power into Bears ownership and decreasing the revenue to the county for the sale of both the naming rights and the boxes. The team would also now be in charge of stadium maintenance. It would also have one other responsibility, that until now had been controlled by the ECIA, the overseeing of the Atlantic Hall of Fame, “an area at the stadium where the ECIA has been hanging pictures of the old Bears team...[the new Bears team] would add displays, but those exhibits would have to be approved by the ECIA.”²⁰⁷ All of these changes were an effort to control the historical narrative being presented at the stadium. A Hall of Fame is a direct message to fans about what and whom they should deem as important. It is a powerful argument that can be made directly to anyone who views it. The photos selected, the text that accompanies it, the orders the photos are placed in is a constructive narrative that asserts value to people and ideas and can be used for profit in a stadium where the owner wants fans to consume.

Attendance continued to decline, but the city and county, with such a huge financial investment already, continued to invest in the infrastructure around the stadium. In October 2003 it was reported that Newark and Essex County would spend \$3 million and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey would contribute another \$6 million for a parking garage next to Riverfront Stadium. Officials claimed that parking was a major factor in the lack of attendance and that the garage was not solely for the stadium, but for other downtown businesses, both customers and company employees. Once the other major infrastructure project was completed, which was the light rail. The new

²⁰⁷ Matthew Futterman, “Cerone Sells Bears to Auto Dealer,” *Star-Ledger*, January 16, 2003; Nikita Stewart, “Plan Would Give Bears More Control,” *Star-Ledger*, July 1, 2004.

garage would also serve as a park and ride.²⁰⁸ This project was also not without political controversy. The money for this project was originally earmarked for other projects, including the creation of the waterfront park that was the proposed replacement park in the Ironbound. The parking project would eventually be approved, costing \$6.9 million with the Port Authority contributing the majority of the money. It opened in June 2004.²⁰⁹

2004

The *Star-Ledger* began the article, “It was a bright spring day five years ago when Newark and Essex County officials gathered downtown to break ground for a minor-league baseball stadium. The \$36 million Newark Bears stadium was celebrated as more than a ballpark: It was a tool of urban re-engineering they said would reverse the fortunes of downtown’s hard-scrabble northern fringe. It didn’t happen that way.” It went on to cite that sports bars and restaurants that did not open around the stadium, and the many properties in the vicinity are still for sale. Steven Diner, then provost of Rutgers University-Newark, in reference to Riverfront Stadium he stated, “It wasn’t enough. It’s only in the summer. It’s a relatively short season. The key to everything is housing. If more people live there, the other things will follow... We have the potential of becoming the NYU of New Jersey, an urban campus in the biggest city in the state. We want to bring students into the neighborhood. Everything comes together around this, in a sense.” The article reiterated the fact that Riverfront Stadium was never able to produce the economic impact, including downtown development and jobs, promised when taxpayers

²⁰⁸ In 2006, the light rail, which had been part of the Riverfront Stadium project from nearly its inception, began operation. The cost of the project, funded primarily by New Jersey Transit, was \$207 million. Jeffery Mays, “Newark Looks to Score with New Parking Deck,” *Star-Ledger*, October 29, 2003.

²⁰⁹ Jeffery Mays, “Newark Extends Deadline for Taxes,” *Star-Ledger*, November 13, 2003 and Nikita Stewart, “At Bears Stadium, Parking’s on Deck,” *Star-Ledger*, May 7, 2004.

footed the bill for the stadium. As storefront owner across from the stadium asserts “Everybody leaves at night. You can’t have a community without people living in it.” Promises by developers, corporations, and politicians are regularly un-kept.²¹⁰ Diner’s comments are the only mention of housing I have found thus far. Though officials claimed from the outset that this stadium was primarily for Newarkers, the lack of investment in affordable housing around the stadium, which potentially would house fans of the game and instead on parking and a light rail to Penn Station showed that the focus was primarily on getting suburbanites and non-residents to the game.

Even though ownership had just changed hands, another lengthy article appeared in the *Star-Ledger* in July 2004 titled, “They Want to Get You Out to the Ballgame: New Bears Owners Try to Fill the Stadium.” The article began with these two sentences, “On Opening Night five years ago, 6,000 fans jammed into a new baseball stadium along the Passaic River in Newark. But the nostalgic enthusiasm over baseball’s return to Newark after a 50-year absence was not enough to keep the Newark Bears & Eagles Riverfront Stadium filled.” It chronicled the team’s inability to attract the needed average of 4,000 fans a night to break even, and the additional cost of \$1.6 million annually the city and county has to pay on top of the original \$36 million. New ownership hoped that “proper marketing, good customer service and the development of the area surrounding the stadium can bring people back.” The plan, as it is with many stadiums, is that the stadium will bring in the development around it rather than having a simultaneous effort to surround the stadium with affordable housing, stores, restaurants, and other urban development projects.

²¹⁰ George Jordan, “Delay of Game: Newark’s Minor-League Baseball Stadium Was Supposed to Spark a Rally on the City’s Northern Fringe,” *Star-Ledger*, April 22, 2004.

The failure of the Bears at this point was blamed on Cerone's lack of business experience and the original marketing campaign. Gus Heningburg, a public policy consultant who worked on public policy issues in the city since the 1960s, including the negotiating the state medical school and hospital less than two miles from the stadium in the 1960s. Heningburg acknowledged, "Cerone and elected officials who supported the stadium believed the public would recall the city's baseball teams - the Newark Eagles of the Negro League and the Newark Bears of the International League. He said the "assumption that was made was that Newark has a baseball history and it would be automatic. The fact is there were probably 10 people alive who watched the Newark Bears." The resonance of the Bears and Eagles were not passed down to the next generation in the way it that made it a profitable narrative. Cerone was also criticized for focusing on luring suburban fans rather than city residents and local businesspeople. The new strategy emphasized local theme nights, including "town nights," such as Irvington or Bloomfield nights, which are Newark border cities, along with ethnic based theme night including Hispanic and Italian heritage, and building relationships with local non-profits, schools, and businesses. There was an effort to sell food at the stadium from local restaurants, along with changing the official stadium beer to Budweiser, who has a brewery within city limits and along with New Jersey microbrew for \$2. Berson claimed that he wanted the stadium to act as a public space for the community, he said, "We don't own the stadium. We just live in it."²¹¹ This was an effort to sell imaginary ownership to the community. If the community feels like they are stakeholders, part of the public fabric

²¹¹ Nikita Stewart, "They Want to Get You Out to the Ballgame: New Bears Owners Try to Fill the Stadium," *Star-Ledger*, July 11, 2004.

of the city perhaps that will translate in investment in its care byway of attendance at games.

2007

The Bears continued to struggle to get fans into the stadium and to run their finances in the black. Co-owner Steve Kalafer, whose father was a batboy for the original Bears, divested himself from the team in 2005 and returned to his other business ventures, his car dealership where he is the founding chairman of 17 franchises, his life as Academy award winning producer of documentary films, and the owner of the exceedingly successful baseball team the Somerset Patriots. In a *New York Times* article he said, “When I came in, I believed with all my heart that the Bears could be just as successful in Newark as the Somerset Patriots in Bridgewater. I just had no idea how broken it was, not the city, but the franchise infrastructure. There was no community involvement whatsoever... If there is not a community infrastructure, it’s empty within six weeks.”²¹² The narrative was shifting again, with the primary focus on the communities of the present, rather than the nostalgic communities of the past. Clement Price reaffirmed the necessity of this in an interview nearly five years prior where he contended that “when you start something in Newark, you really must introduce yourself to the city through interaction with clergy, educators, foundations, people who have long affiliations with the city, and also-not-for-profits...some organization that puts a human face, and a civic face, on the organization” and the fact that they had not to this point he said “really is problematic.”²¹³ It was supposed to be a community baseball stadium, but

²¹² Harvey Araton, “Did Newark Bet on the Wrong Sport?” *New York Times* August 21, 2011.

²¹³ Golon, *No Minor Accomplishment*, 116.

the community officials and developers they sold did not exist. They were constructed as the nostalgic narrative that was supposed to lure them to the stadium. They wanted this community, a different community than the one they actually had in Newark.

Efforts were still being made to connect the stadium to Newark's past. On September 13 and 14, 2007 Newark's baseball history, particularly its Negro League history, was celebrated in the city by the Newark Preservation & Landmarks Committee city and county officials and other members of the Newark community. The tribute included a historical marker placed at what was the location of Ruppert Stadium on Wilson Avenue, another historical marker, a plaque, placed on Effa Manley's home at 71 Crawford Street, and a large plaque on the center island on Eagles Parkway at Lincoln Street in the center of Collage Place, a city housing development along with streets being named for Eagles players.

The following day the stadium unveiled its "ring of honor." Among the fourteen baseball inductees were Eagles, Bears, and pre-Bears baseball players, and Eagles owner Effa Manley, as well as sportswriter Jerry Izenberg. Essex County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo said, "You can't move forward unless you remember the past. We're doing what other stadiums have done. We want to teach the history." John Brandt, general manager for the Newark Bears, contended, "this is about their achievements on the field and off the field also." The names of the fourteen honorees will be placed on raised panels that will be installed below the press box behind home plate and are can be seen anywhere in the stadium. Brandt noted the stadium would have a small history room open to the public that featured sports memorabilia and history about Newark's local teams and players. The final event was the baseball game on the night of September 14, where

there were presentations of proclamations by the county and city and remarks from players prior to the game. A longtime *Star-Ledger* journalist also wrote a piece that day where he stated, the two teams “will share more than the history and stories that bind them. They are part of the permanent display on a wall high above home plate and below the press box.”²¹⁴ Historian Kirk Savage has states that public monuments “offer an anachronistic experience: a face-to-face encounter in a specially valued place set aside for collective gathering... [it] speaks to a deep need for attachment that can be met only in a real place, where the imagined community actually materializes and...is confirmed in a simple but powerful way. The experience is not exactly in the realm of imagination or reason, but grounded in the felt connections of individual to collective body.”²¹⁵ The ring of honor was designed to celebrate individual achievements, but also to place all those who came into the stadium as part of that achievement. It was a way to create a collective body, thus increasing the people invested in its sustained success.

The public monuments alone would not stop the criticism of the stadium. Editorials continued to question the revitalization efforts in Newark. Speaking directly to Essex County suburban taxpayers, one piece read through your taxes you are paying for some of this revitalization effort so you might is well enjoy it. Joseph DiVincenzo is quoted as describing the Riverfront Stadium and the Prudential arena as an “invitation to the city,” and chance to see “it’s safe and secure... [and] they’ll come back.”²¹⁶ As I have said, Newark has a complicated relationship with its suburban neighbors that dates back

²¹⁴ “Newark Celebrates Legends of Negro League,” *Star-Ledger*, September 6, 2007; Barry Carter “Newark’s Own Wall of Fame,” *Star-Ledger*, September 15, 2007 and Elizabeth Moore, “Newark to Honor Local Hall-of-Famers,” *Star-Ledger*, September 9, 2007.

²¹⁵ Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 4.

²¹⁶ Paul Mulshine, “You Built It, So You Might as Well Come,” *Star-Ledger*, September 20, 2007.

to the at least the 1800s. During the initial conversations about what would be Riverfront Stadium, along with conversations about NJPAC and the new arena, there were always the question of will people from the suburbs come into Newark for attractions. Sharpe James wrote in his memoir about the issue during the construction of NJPAC:

Looking around the room at the CEOs, I said, “That’s where we are right now. I’m of the opinion that White people have these fears, and they’re not going to come to Newark if they have to park on the streets; and we’re not going to paint the roads yellow. But we do need parking:’ I suggested that Newark lease the Military Park garage to the arts center. The private group came up with a \$10 million budget to renovate it, and the garage became an integral part of NJPAC where one could buy coffee or tea and pay for one’s parking in a well-lit, air-conditioned, people-friendly facility.”²¹⁷

This sentiment was echoed in the survey conducted by Rutgers Cornwall Center, where over 37% of polled would not come to Newark for any reason. We do not know the racial or class breakdown of those polls, no copy, including in Cornwall’s archives, has been found. As we have seen, stadium supporters bet incorrectly that they could draw a base beyond the residents Newark; they could not draw a Newark base either. They wanted and felt they needed to attract large amounts of people from the surrounding suburbs and/or keep them in the city to attend games after work. We have seen it proved to be exceedingly difficult. Not even nostalgia could overcome years of disconnect between the city and the outlying communities; and resentment flowed both ways. As Robert Beauregard argues in *Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of U.S. Cities*, “When we discuss urban decline or read how others perceive it, we engage with highly charged stories built up of layers of subjective impressions, not emotionally flat renditions of objectively specified conditions... Separating race from poverty and white flight in this way... [is a] futile act. Race was increasingly the glue that bound together all of the

²¹⁷ James, *Political Prisoner*, 133.

perceived problems of the declining cities.”²¹⁸ Jerry Izenberg claimed, “My Newark Bears didn’t need the suburbs; they were totally supported by the city... I still believe that baseball could have made it again in Newark. They just did everything wrong.”²¹⁹ Of course, Newark of the 1940s is not Newark of the 1990s and 2000s, but the animosity and racial and class divides certainly still existed.

In the *Report for Action* from the Governor’s Select Commission on Civil Disorder State of New Jersey, a “government-sponsored report on the causes, effects, and potential remedies to the civil disturbances of 1967,” spoke on this divide. The report focused on the disconnect between the city and the suburbs citing that this division has had and can continue to have serious repercussions for both groups. It stated, “suburban residents must understand that the future of their communities is inextricably linked to the fate of the city, instead of harboring the illusion that they can maintain invisible walls or continue to walk away.” This is not to say that suburbanites not coming to a baseball game will lead to urban unrest, but many suburbanites do not see it as a benefit to their communities to consume in Newark. The wall on Newark’s borders, one that racially and economically segregates Newark and its border cities from the rest of Essex County’s suburban cities, still exists.

²¹⁸ Robert Beauregard’s *Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of U.S. Cities* quoted in Howard Gillette’s *Camden After the Fall: Decline and Renewal in a Post-Industrial City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 61.

²¹⁹ Harvey Araton, “Did Newark Bet on the Wrong Sport?” *New York Times* August 21, 2011.

The Final Stretch

2008

It was September, the end of the 2008 season, the team averaged below 3,000 fans a game, the second lowest in the Atlantic League, but more problematically, the Bears were bankrupt. The Bears had lost \$1.1 million in 2006, \$1.3 million in 2007, and more than \$872,000 in 2008.”²²⁰ Owner Marc Berson filed for bankruptcy after accumulating more than \$4.6 million of debt to his creditors. Berson said in court papers “he has invested \$1.5 million in equity and loaned another \$3.5 million to the team... [and the] the prospect for a Bears baseball team ever playing again at the Stadium are remote.” The editorials in the *Star-Ledger* were filled with speculation as to why the Bears had failed. Theories ranged from suburban fans not wanting to come to Newark because they viewed the city as unsafe, to the economy not being strong enough to support minor league baseball, to the stadium being too big, to lack of parking, too much traffic, poor public transportation, lack of attendance decreased demand for season tickets, and one editorial asked, “Is it naïve to think a team can ever revive the spirit that made Newark one of the nation’s great minor league baseball cities in the 1930s and ’40s?”²²¹ Spirit was the part of the nostalgic narrative that in many ways the stadium’s success was hung on.

Newark’s perception as an undesirable city was even used as a punch line in the national media. “Jay Leno compared Newark with war-torn Kosovo.” As the new indoor arena opened and hockey fans traveled to Newark, ESPN’s lead hockey analyst at the time, Barry Melrose, told fans not to venture outside the arena, “especially if you got a wallet or anything, because the area around the building is awful.” The game show

²²⁰ Jeffery Mays, “Bears Hopeful Judge Will Say ‘Sold. Play Ball,’” *Star-Ledger*, November 11, 2008.

²²¹ Kelly Heyboer, “A Bear Market for Baseball in the State’s Largest City?” *Star-Ledger*, November 12, 2008.

“Who Wants to Be a Millionaire” had a multiple-choice question “what is Hades and one of the possible choices was Newark.” Even Rick Cerone contributed to this narrative by citing the shooting incidents as one reason the stadium on Broad Street is failing, calling Newark the “Wild, Wild West.” Newark city officials reacted to this spur of attacks. Many of these comments were veiled, and some not so veiled, racist and classist narratives. Essex County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo called Cerone’s remarks “out of line.” This was not the only instance where Cerone described Newark in this way. After selling the team he said “I was disappointed for Newark in the way we did. Regardless, we accomplished something great in Newark. We built a beautiful ballpark. There was nothing but dilapidated buildings in the area when we got there. There were hypodermic needles on the ground. We sought to change that.”²²² Cerone frames his narrative where he built a beacon, a stadium that would light the dark and dangerous space around it. In this telling, he is not at fault for the failures of the stadium, Newark is.

Regardless of this negative press and continuous failure as a business venture, there was still a desire to keep the Bears playing and stadium open. There was talk of including community events, to add a restaurant as a way to keep the stadium open on non-baseball days.²²³ Though he had previously stated that recouping the money invested did not matter as long as Newark had a potential economic generator (the stadium), the current reality promoted a change in opinion. Essex County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo now said getting the four years of back rent was his first priority. “The Newark Bears went through a four-year stretch without paying rent to the county, but has

²²² Jeffery Mays, “Newark Leaders Defend City’s Reputation After Spate Of Violence,” *Star-Ledger*, October 29, 2008 and Golon, *No Minor Accomplishment*, 115.

²²³ Kelly Heyboer, “A Bear Market for Baseball in the State’s Largest City?” *Star-Ledger*, November 12, 2008 and Jeffery Mays, “Bears Hopeful Judge Will Say ‘Sold. Play Ball,’” *Star-Ledger*, November 11, 2008.

paid rent this year...the county is owed \$867,884 in back rent. It is a staggering amount of money that was allowed to accumulate as debt, but so much of county and city funds had been invested, that letting the stadium fail at that point seemed like the less prudent decision. A long-term payment schedule was set up and the team made its first payment of \$2,000 on Oct. 1.” According to court documents, the money was supposed to be paid in small sums until 2011 and larger payments will be made after that. A second priority was making sure there was a baseball team in Newark next season.²²⁴

2009

The Bases Loaded Group was the next owner of the Bears. It bought the team for \$100,000 and assumed \$1 million in liabilities, most of which was the back rent owed to the Essex County Improvement Authority.²²⁵ The group was comprised of James Wankmiller, a former corporate lawyer from Philadelphia, Tom Cetnar, a former Newark cop who once served as general manager for the team, and Gary Veloric, who founded the J.G. Wentworth investment company. Standing in Riverfront Stadium, their coaches were dressed in redesigned pinstripe uniforms, a nod to baseball uniforms of the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, along with patches from the first Bears and the Eagles. At the press conference, in a room where a photo of Ruppert Stadium hung on the wall, James Wankmiller, president and CEO of Bases Loaded Group, proclaimed “We’re going to resurrect that, pay homage to the past.”²²⁶ Even though this

²²⁴ Jeffery Mays, “Bears Hopeful Judge Will Say ‘Sold. Play Ball,’” *Star-Ledger*, November 11, 2008 and Jeffery Mays “Newark Bears Seek Bankruptcy Protection Next Season in Jeopardy as Baseball Team Owes More than \$4.6 Million,” *Star-Ledger*, October 30, 2008.

²²⁵ Guy Sterling, “Baseball Team Set to be Sold for \$100K Purchase of Bears Gets Judge’s Approval,” *Star-Ledger*, November 14, 2008.

²²⁶ Philip Read, “Owner Feels Bullish on Bears’ Future,” *Star-Ledger*, January 8, 2009.

narrative and these invocations had not worked for over a decade, they were still viewed as powerful and worth the effort of trying to establish.

On the first Opening Day for Bases Loaded on May 2009 it rained. It rained hard. In front of a sold-out standing room only crowd, dressed in a Bears jacket, General Colin Powell threw out the first pitch right after the rain stopped long enough for Patti LaBelle to sing the national anthem.²²⁷ A little more than a year later, the Bears ownership would change again, twice.

2010

By October 2010 the Bears were changing not only ownership, but also leagues. Thomas Cetnar, the former Newark police officer who was part of the Bases Loaded ownership group, took majority control from Frank Boulton, founder of league the Bears were playing, the Atlantic League of Professional Baseball. Boulton had taken over the team after Bases Loaded left. The Bears would now play in the Can-Am. Ownership claimed the reason for moving leagues was to have a shorter season which would allow the stadium to host more outside events.

2011

Another year, another owner. This time it was Doug Spiel, a pain management physician, and his fiancée, Danielle Dronet, the owner of a marketing and public relations firm. They were part of ownership group who bought the team in 2010 with Tom Cetnar as the majority owner, but things dissolved quickly within the group. According to the *Star-Ledger* in late May “Spiel and Dronet filed suit against Cetnar and Garrett in

²²⁷ Steven Politi, “New Ownership Group Investing in the Bears,” *Star-Ledger*, May 3, 2009.

Superior Court in Essex County, asking for injunctive relief that would expel them from the ownership group and terminate their relationship with the team. In the suit, Spiel and Dronet claim to have invested more than \$1 million in the team while Cetnar used them as his “personal piggy bank,” syphoning money from the business account for personal his personal use. As the team “hemorrhage[d] money,” Spiel and Dronet stated in court papers that they had to use their personal funds to cover payroll. Terms of the ownership change were not disclosed, and Cetnar declined to discuss the agreement.” Not making the situation any better, the average attendance in 2010 was approximately 200 people a night, in a stadium that seats 6,000.²²⁸

On July 29, 2011 the *Star-Ledger* ran a lengthy feature article, “Now Playing: A Comedy of Errors - How Court Battles, Unpaid Bills and a Would-Be Reality Show Sidetracked a Franchise.” The first sentence read, “Only this isn’t fiction. This is the Newark Bears, a beleaguered franchise if ever there was one, from the front office to the playing field.” In five parts, Brittain chronicled the story that began with Spiel and Dronet wanting to “create a reality TV show built around the Bears and their own family, which they say is like a modern-day “Brady Bunch.” It would be called “The Real Spiel,” and if the plot goes as planned, the show will be picked up by a network, bring fans back to the stands and help rescue the team. A couple of networks have already shown definite interest, the couple said, adding they’re confident they can make the Bears succeed where so many others have failed.” The article goes on to cover the Tom Cetnar’s past, his criminal history, he was convicted and served jail time for official misconduct and theft made of the couple, and the claims he made on Spiel and Dronet, that they promoted a

²²⁸ Amy Brittain, “In Buyout, Couple Ready to Step Up to the Plate for the Newark Bears,” *Star-Ledger*, July 7, 2011.

non-existing charity. Brittain cited court papers that noted “several team employees, who spoke anonymously for fear of losing their jobs, said they didn’t have confidence in her leadership. She sometimes signed e-mails with encouragements, like ‘Have a rock’n day’ and those employees said they doubted her professionalism... Suddenly, the team was promoting ‘Fashion Frenzy Friday’ and ‘Boys & Toys’ days, and baseball seemed like an afterthought, those employees said.” The article ended with general manager Mike Torrez being fired after claims he “bad-mouthed Spiel to the players” and that he cautioned players about signing the TV-release forms.²²⁹

Publicity for the Bears did not get any better. In August, Harvey Araton in the *New York Times* posed the question, “Did Newark Bet on the Wrong Sport?” He wondered if Newark should have chosen soccer instead of baseball. On October 1, 2011 the *Star-Ledger* ran an article “Last Stop, - Newark - Bears - Give Us Your - Tired, Your - Washed Up, Your - Desperate. And, - Oh Yes, Your - Most Recently – Arrested.” The photo and caption that ran with the article read “Lineup of Shame.” The article recounted the litany of both washed up former major leaguers and criminal activities of players, staff, and owners of the Bears. There was the pitching coach, former Yankee Jim Leyritz who was acquitted in 2011 of DUI manslaughter charge from 2007 that killed a 30 year old mother of two.²³⁰ In 2012, they replaced Leyritz with Ozzie Canseco, who also played for the Bears. “Bears co-owner Danielle Dronet says Ozzie wanted to return to the Bears to help the organization turn the “brand around,”²³¹ and he would be doing that with a rap sheet that included various battery convictions, possession of anabolic steroids,

²²⁹ Amy Brittain, “Now Playing: A Comedy of Errors - How Court Battles, Unpaid Bills and a Would-Be Reality Show Sidetracked A Franchise,” *Star-Ledger*, July 17, 2011.

²³⁰ “Jim Leyritz acquitted in Florida,” <http://espn.go.com/mlb/news/story?id=5829184>

²³¹ Chris Opfer, “Last Stop, - Newark - Bears - Give Us Your - Tired, Your - Washed Up, Your - Desperate. And, - Oh Yes, Your - Most Recently – Arrested,” *Star-Ledger*, October 1, 2011.

and who was arrested on a DUI charge in Florida where he had previously been arrested eight times since 1995. Other members of the organization with histories that include criminal and/or illegal behavior included: “Jose Canseco, admitted steroid user; Carl Everett, arrested for aggravated assault [he allegedly pointed a gun at his wife]; Dwight Gooden, an admitted cocaine addict, jailed for violating probation; Elijah Dukes, convicted of assault, battery and resisting arrest [he was accused of hitting his pregnant girlfriend].” Lastly, former owner and former Newark cop, Tom Cetnar, was also convicted and served jail time for official misconduct and theft.²³² These Bears are promoting a different kind of history, one more in line with the misconceptions of Newark as a crime-ridden city. But here the narrative is flipped, with the cop and some of the players as the ones committing the crime.

2013

In 2013 the Bears only averaged 500 people per game. The owners claimed “capital improvements to the stadium and repairs after Hurricane Sandy had sapped precious resources the team wanted to spend on personnel” and in September “burglars stole computer equipment, memorabilia and several flat-screen televisions still in boxes.” On top of all this, Spiel added, “What happens when you give away thousands of free tickets and nobody comes? What’s that tell you?” The owners claimed that city and county officials did not attend games either, and they had free suites and free tickets and only utilized them a few times a year. They even tried hiring the popular sports attraction,

²³² Chris Opfer, “Last Stop, - Newark - Bears - Give Us Your - Tired, Your - Washed Up, Your - Desperate. And, - Oh Yes, Your - Most Recently – Arrested,” *Star-Ledger*, October 1, 2011 and “Ozzie Canseco arrested on DUI charge in Fla,” <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/jan/15/ozzie-canseco-arrested-on-dui-charge-in-fla/>.

female dancers, named the Honey Bears, but even they could not save them. The Bears were to be dropped from the Can-Am League and it was uncertain if they would play another game at Riverfront Stadium.²³³

2014

As they were each year, the gates were open in April at Riverfront Stadium, but instead of an opening day game, they were having an auction. Bill collectors and employees seeking late paychecks were calling, meaning everything must go. Up for sale were uniforms, landscaping equipment, office furniture, the team's 56-passenger team bus, "whirlpools, massage tables, exercise equipment and training supplies were for sale, right down to a gross of adhesive athletic tape. In the concession areas, people checked out freezers, ice machines, convection ovens, grills, and pretzel and sausage display cases...Some were there to collect memorabilia." Reporter Mark DiIonno wrote, "If you build it, they will come." That was a variation of the signature line from the 1989 baseball film *Field of Dreams*, which, if nothing else, proved it was easier to attract ghosts to a cornfield in the middle of Iowa than it was to attract live fans to downtown Newark."²³⁴ This narrative again puts blame on Newark, as a city and by association, its residents, as the problem, and not on city officials, developers, owners, or city planners.

On June 15, 2014, Michelle Kaske and Terrance Dopp in the *Star-Ledger* illustrated the economic reality of the failed baseball stadium venture in "Diamond in a Rough Patch - Sitting Empty, Riverfront Stadium Continues to Cost Newark Millions."

²³³ David Giambusso, "Co-Owner 'Pretty Positive' Bears Will Play In '14 - Newark's Team Has Been Dropped From Can-Am League" *Star-Ledger*, November 30, 2013; Dan Barry, "Newark Bears' Items Going, Going: Newark Bears Are Holding a Liquidation Auction," *New York Times*, April 24, 2011.

²³⁴ Jeff Goldman, "Defunct Newark Bears Plan To Sell Everything From Uniforms To Team Bus," *Star-Ledger*, April 10, 2014 and Mark DiIonno, "There is No Joy in Newark, the Bears Have Cashed Out" *Star-Ledger*, April 27, 2014.

They started the article with, “Newark, where more than a quarter of residents live in poverty, is stuck paying \$1 million a year on bonds for a baseball park that’s lost its main tenant.” They go on to detail Newark’s financial state, with the city facing a “budget shortfall of as much as \$94 million and is at risk of falling under state oversight. Moody’s Investors Service cut its rating to three steps above junk last month, citing depleted reserves and budget gaps.” Newark’s statistics are depressing, with “28 percent of the population lives below the poverty level, compared with about 10 percent statewide, according to the Census Bureau. The median household income of \$34,400 is less than half the state average. Newark registered 111 homicides in 2013, the most since 1990.” The parking garage runs in the black, but the city must still pay \$14 million of principal and interest payments through 2029, according to bond documents. Annual payments exceed \$1 million through 2020 before declining.”²³⁵ It was millions of dollars to build on ideas that never existed.

2016/2017

The stadium is currently being used by local college and high school baseball teams, but that arrangement was not financial sustainable. In early 2016 the stadium was floated as a possible location for a northern New Jersey casino, but on March 20 it was reported that the stadium was sold to a New York City developer, the Lotus Equity

²³⁵ Michelle Kaske and Terrance Dopp, “Diamond in a Rough Patch - Sitting Empty, Riverfront Stadium Continues to Cost Newark Millions,” *Star-Ledger*, June 15, 2014. In September 7, 2012 *Atlantic Monthly* published “If You Build It, They Might Not Come: The Risky Economics of Sports Stadiums” by Pat Garofalo and Travis Waldron. The piece explained one of the reasons why these stadiums do not succeed is due to the way the payment system is structured. “Stadiums and arenas are financed with long-term bonds, meaning cities and states will be stuck with the debt for long periods of time (often 30 years). And while cities make 30-year commitments to finance stadiums, their commitments to government workers and other local investments are often made on a year-to-year basis, meaning that, just as in Glendale, it becomes easier to eliminate public sector jobs and programs than to default on debt incurred from arenas.”

Group, for \$23.5 million. The Lotus deal is being marketed as a development project that would place Newark into the 21st century urban revitalization trend. Instead of building stadiums, cities are building “mixed use,” residential and commercial, high-rise towers. Baye Adofo-Wilson, Newark’s Deputy Mayor for Economic and Housing Development, declared that the stadium “was part of a previous attempt to revitalize the downtown... It didn’t work out. We had to come up with a new idea.” How new the idea is, is debatable when we hear echoes from the past in Ben Korman, founder of Lotus Equity Group, comments: “We have the ability to create a vibrant, multifaceted downtown destination for residents and visitors... we understand this is a unique opportunity to harness the city’s incredible energy to build an enduring economic driver for generations to come.”²³⁶ From this statement it is unclear how many lessons were learned from the building of Bears and Eagles Riverfront Stadium.

I did not know that history, selectively packaged through nostalgia, would be used as evidence to support not one, but multiple urban development projects centered on stadiums. I did not know that the construction and use of stadiums, including the narratives created about them and for them, could offer such a wide and expansive lens into ways to think about cities and the urban development that takes place within them. I did know there was going to be questionable political decisions and use of taxpayer money. These are stadiums and this is New Jersey. This dissertation attempts to expand what we consider when we think about stadiums, urban development, civic narratives, nostalgia, and the place of historical context while simultaneously trying to put all of those things in conversation with one another. Much of the scholarship that exists

²³⁶ Dan Ivers, “Former Newark Bears Stadium Sold To NYC Developer for \$23M,” *Star-Ledger*, March 20, 2016.

approaches these ideas separately, but when they are put together they reveal new ways to think about the role of stadiums in urban development, presently and historically.

Newark has changed in the ten years since I first saw that Bears and Eagles Riverfront Stadium sign, but the language used in support of that stadium has not gone away in Newark and in other cities, it has just been repurposed to other urban redevelopment projects, which I think is a good reason to keep reconsidering these civic narratives.

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