The Cultural Nexus of Sport and Business: The Relocation of the Cleveland Browns

Thesis

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Abstract

On November 6, 1995, Arthur Modell announced his intention to transfer the Cleveland Browns to Baltimore after the conclusion of the season. Throughout the ensuing four months, the cities of Cleveland and Baltimore, along with Modell, National Football League (NFL) officials and politicians, battled over the future of the franchise. After legal and social conflicts, the NFL and Cleveland civic officials agreed on a deal that allowed Modell to honor his contract with Baltimore and simultaneously provided an NFL team to Cleveland to begin play in 1999. This settlement was unique because it allowed Cleveland to retain the naming rights, colors, logo, and, most significantly, the history of the Browns.

This thesis illuminates the cultural nexus between sport and business. A three chapter analysis of the cultural meanings and interpretations of the Browns’ relocation, it examines the ways in which the United States public viewed the economics of professional team sport in the United States near the turn of the twenty-first century and the complex relationship between the press, sports entrepreneurs and community. First, Cleveland Browns’ fan letters from the weeks following Modell’s announcement along with newspaper accounts of the “Save Our Browns” campaign convey that the reaction of Cleveland’s populace to Modell’s announcement was tied to their antipathy toward the city’s negative national notoriety and underscored their feelings toward the city’s urban
decline in the late 1990s. Second, analysis of media presentations from November 1995, through February 1996, emphasized that Cleveland’s social identity, and the movement to save the team, illuminated a complex symbiotic relationship between the press and the public. Finally, chapter three considers the paradoxical images and presentations of Modell as a sports entrepreneur from his purchase of the Browns in 1961 to the relocation of the team, and to his selling of the Baltimore Ravens in 2003. These discussions demonstrate the contradictory visions of sports entrepreneurship in the popular press and express the public’s segmented perspectives of sport as a business and as a community identifier.

The business of sport is unique as it attracts an amalgamation of personal feelings, intense emotions, and passionate viewpoints. Many, however, continue to grapple with the evolution of the business side of sport in the United States. The common sports follower reifies the view that professional team sport is a pastime, rather than a business. Perpetuations of this notion illuminate why many in modern society still differentiate more common actions of industry from the business practices of professional teams sports. It also, however, illustrates why this nexus is complex and difficult for scholars to correctly examine. Even if members of the civic community—whether rational or not—overvalue traditional sporting heritages, they are still affected by the motives of sports entrepreneurs. These three chapters exemplify the perceived connotations of the role of traditional business practices in United States sport. The public disregards the entrepreneurial role of sport when it interferes with traditional sporting practices and
regionalism, suggesting that professional team sport continues to be mythicized as a pastime.
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Introduction

Stephen Hardy’s 1986 call to elevate sport history from scholarship pertaining to the “changing issues in the social environment” to “ongoing issues within the sport industry” has contributed, albeit minimally, to studies about the complexities of the United States sports marketplace and sports entrepreneurship.¹ Scholars have examined the business of professional team sport, the ways in which executives run their enterprises, and the approaches of large institutions and governing bodies.² Additionally, franchise relocation has been examined by historians with much attention focused on Walter O’Malley’s uprooting of Major League Baseball’s Brooklyn Dodgers in 1958.³

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Recent NFL relocations (Browns, Oilers, Raiders, and Rams) contributed to scholarship on the relationship between owners and communities who offer them substantial public subsidies to build lavish sporting stadiums and arenas. Less research, however, has been done on the cultural nexus between sport, business and community identification.

Professional team sport may delineate a relationship between sport and urban areas. Economist Charles C. Euchner has expressed that sports franchises have held metropolitan areas captive over threats of team relocation because of the intense emotional hold that urban citizens have on professional sports clubs. Sport historian Michael Danielson studied this relationship in his work Home Team. He noted that professional sports have special connections with urban places, are communally based, maintain connections with both an individual and collective experience, and triggers many issues within metropolitan areas. “Emotional attachment to home teams underlies the intensity of many issues involving major league sports,” wrote Danielson. He continued that this played out most specifically in franchise relocation. “Losing the home team is a wrenching experience for fans in a particular locale,” he explained.


Euchner articulated that entrepreneurs have used professional team sport to hold cities hostage and overvalue the economic benefit of sports arenas to major United States metropolises. See his Playing the Field, especially 211-212.


Ibid., 10.
franchise relocation can illuminate not only the importance of sport, but many characteristics of that particular region.

This thesis examines the cultural nexus between professional team sport, business and community identification, specifically with regard to franchise relocation. There is a unique and complex symbiotic relationship between the United States public and the business of professional team sport, specifically American football, as compared to other industries. Professional team sport has been mythicized as a pastime since the beginning of organized sport in the late nineteenth century. Scholars have correctly noted the fabricated economic impact of professional sports for urban areas and highlighted the importance of sport to many civic communities. Many perspectives on the business of sport, however, are simplified. Many believe that the business side of sport ruins traditional sporting culture, whereas others assume that the economics of sport are more important than any other aspect of our sporting culture. This thesis attempts to highlight the reason that these assumptions generally overvalue both the pros and cons of business in sport by examining the nexus between sport, business and culture.

Many continue to grapple with the evolution of the business side of sport. For example, individuals and groups react differently to team relocations than the movement of other businesses, and others interpret the motives of sports entrepreneurs through a

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8 See Euchner, Playing the Field; Delaney and Eckstein, Public Dollars; deMause and Cagan, Field of Scheme; Rosentraub, Major League Losers.
9 Jon Morgan assess that the true spirit of sport is fan enthusiasm, see Jon Morgan, Glory for Sale: Fans, Dollars and the New NFL (Baltimore, MD: Bancroft Press, 1997), 309-325; Additionally, James Quirk and Rodney D. Fort express that “The key to understanding modern-day pro team sports is to follow the money trail . . . The behavior of leagues, team owners, and players is best understood in terms of simple economic self-interest . . . the rule is ‘the public be damned.’” See James Quirk and Rodney F. Fort, Pay Dirt: The Business of Professional Team Sport (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), xvii. Also individuals within American sports culture typically refer to sports as a business, specifically during times of free agency, for example, when Peyton Manning signed with the Denver Broncos in 2012, his decision was referred to as a business, see “What next for Peyton Manning after Colts departure?” World Sports Blog, Mar. 7, 2012, http://worldsport.blogs.cnn.com/2012/03/07/what-next-for-peyton-manning-after-colts-departure.
prism shaped by nostalgia and what is expected of those controlling the many national pastimes. Sports entrepreneurs are expected to conform to traditional sporting culture or do whatever they can to maintain conventional regionalism in professional team sport. The popular press and many followers of professional sport vilify sports entrepreneurs when they adapt the sports landscape for economic profit. Thus, the common sports follower reifies the view that professional team sport is a pastime, rather than a business. Perpetuations of this notion illuminate why many in modern society still differentiate more common actions of industry from the business practices of professional team sports. It also, however, illustrates why this nexus is complex and difficult for scholars to correctly examine. Even if members of the civic community—whether rational or not—overvalue traditional sporting heritage, they are still affected by the motives of sports entrepreneurs. Thus, this thesis also argues that while many may attempt to segment professional sport as a business or as a pastime, it should be represented more fluidly, as the relationship between business, sport and community is complex. This thesis uses the relocation of a storied franchise in the second half of the twentieth century as a case study to analyze this cultural nexus.

On November 6, 1995, Arthur B. Modell announced his intention to move the National Football League’s (NFL) Cleveland Browns to Baltimore after the conclusion of the 1995 season. Modell was introduced as the “owner of the Baltimore Browns” at a make-shift conference podium built on the site of a future 70,000 seat football facility to be built by the Maryland Stadium Authority in downtown Baltimore. “The fans have supported the Browns for years, but frankly, it came down to a simple proposition. I had
The deal supposedly assuaged the Browns’ deteriorating economic position and provided the team with a new playing facility in Baltimore that was badly needed as the sixty-year-old Cleveland Municipal Stadium worsened on the shores of Lake Erie. Modell explained that the team lost millions in previous years and that the Baltimore deal was “far beyond the capacity” of any deal that Cleveland could offer. The deal included a $200 million stadium with 108 luxury boxes, 7,500 club seats, fifty Personal Seat Licenses, and $75 million toward a new training facility. Modell defended his decision by explaining that he wanted to avoid “demanding something” from Cleveland officials and being “accused time and time again of being an extortionist.” He continued that the decision had “been a very, very tough road,” and he could “never forget the kindness of the people of Cleveland.” His announcement attempted to quell anger and resentment from the Northeast Ohio community.

Upon hearing the news, Cleveland Mayor Michael R. White, however, fashioned a different approach. He explained that Modell had taken the team to Baltimore “like a thief in the night . . . before [they] had a chance to make an offer.” “We have been wronged,” he stated. He initiated an activist tone, elucidating that the city had been dealt with dishonorably and they would not back down peacefully. “We are going to do what it takes,” he demanded of the Cleveland community, “the principle of how we’ve been treated is worth fighting for.” Immediately, the metropolis hired a legal team and prepared for a court battle to attempt to keep Modell and the Browns in the city through

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10 Timothy Heider, Tom Diemer and Evelyn Theiss, “Browns Bolt Modell Warned Mayor, Governor a Month Ago Deal Announced in Baltimore,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Nov. 7, 1995, 1A.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
the end of their lease with Cleveland Municipal Stadium, which ran through the end of the 1998 season.

Modell’s and White’s words and actions on November 6 preceded a tenuous four month period for Cleveland and Baltimore football fans, the city’s civic officials, and NFL owners, and the commissioner’s office. The citizens of Northeast Ohio began a movement to retain the team that came to be known as the “Save Our Browns” campaign, while Cleveland’s civic leaders and politicians fought the relocation through the courts and behind-the-scenes negotiations. Ultimately, by February 1996 the NFL and Cleveland civic officials agreed on a deal which allowed Modell to honor his contract with Baltimore and simultaneously promised an NFL team to Cleveland to begin play in 1999. The move marked a monumental shift in the landscape of the NFL, as the Cleveland club was one of the storied franchises in the history of the league. This settlement was most unique, however, because it allowed Cleveland to retain the naming rights, colors, logo, and, most significantly, the history of the Browns.\(^{13}\) No other notable franchise shift encompassed a similar arrangement. Civic activism, along with pressure from public officials and NFL owners, played a significant role in the final agreement. Additionally, Modell was vilified in media coverage as a betrayer of Cleveland fans and was repeatedly portrayed in a negative manner before, during and after the relocation.

A three chapter analysis of the cultural meanings and interpretations of the Browns’ relocation, this thesis examines the ways in which the United States public viewed the economics of professional team sport in the United States near the turn of the

\(^{13}\) The settlement was similar to the 1960 decision by MLB to grant Washington D.C. an expansion franchise when the Senators moved to Minneapolis and became the Minnesota Twins, see Rader, Baseball, 199. For an insider’s look at the Browns move, see Michael G. Poplar, Fumble! The Browns, Modell and the Move: An Insider’s Story (Cleveland, OH: Cleveland Landmarks Press, Inc., 1997).
twenty-first century and the complex relationship between the press, sports entrepreneurs and the community. First, Cleveland Browns’ fan letters from the weeks following Modell’s announcement along with newspaper accounts of the “Save Our Browns” campaign relate that the reaction of Cleveland’s populace to Modell’s announcement is tied to their antipathy toward the city’s negative national notoriety and underscores their feelings toward the city’s urban decline in the late 1990s. Second, analysis of media presentations from November, 1995, through February, 1996, emphasize that Cleveland’s social identity, and the movement to save the team, had a symbiotic relationship with the national press’ vilification of Modell, the business of professional team sport, and the “new NFL.” Finally, chapter three considers the paradoxical images and presentations of Modell from his purchase of the Browns in 1961, to the relocation of the team, and to his selling of the Baltimore Ravens in 2003. These discussions demonstrate the contradictory visions of sports entrepreneurship in the popular press and express the public’s segmented perspectives of sport as a business and as a community identifier.
Chapter 1

“We're throwing every pot and pan at the issue”: Cleveland’s Civic Activism and the “Save Our Browns” Campaign

In November 1995 a four-month struggle that pertained to the future of the National Football League’s (NFL) Cleveland Browns began. Although rumors of Art Modell’s discontent lingered throughout the summer and into the early days of the 1995 season, publications speculating a Browns move did not become serious until November 3, when Cleveland Plain Dealer reporters explained that there was a “hand-shake deal” in place to move the Browns to Baltimore and play in a new $200 million stadium built by the Maryland Stadium Authority. Cleveland Mayor Michael White expressed that this was simply a rumor, but did acknowledge that the failure to pass the upcoming “Sin-Tax” extension—which would fund the renovation of Cleveland Municipal Stadium—could cause the franchise to relocate.¹

Going into the 1995 season, the Browns and its fans aspired for a successful season because of the team’s playoff appearance the previous year. By November, however, the team was 4-4, struggling to hold on to a winning record. News of a perceived deal between Modell and Baltimore led to a struggle at the gate for the franchise on November 5 when the team faced-off against the Houston Oilers. Inside Cleveland Municipal Stadium, the attendees did not mirror the traditional raucous

¹ Timothy Heider and Mary Kay Cabot, “Browns Move in the Works, Modell Confirms Discussing Deal to Relocate Team to Baltimore,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Nov. 4, 1995, 1A.
Cleveland crowd that had earned them the name “Dawg Pound.” “This is more like a funeral than a football game,” explained thirty-year season-ticket holder Tony Schaefer.\(^2\) The crowd, already short 20,000 fans as many did not attend the game, thinned more when the Browns trailed at halftime 17-7. In the second half of the game, remaining fans “barked X-rated anti-Modell chants,” threw firecrackers onto the field and lit Browns apparel on fire in the stands.\(^3\) The Browns lost 37-10.

Outside of the stadium, supporters of the “Sin Tax” extension handed out pamphlets and urged people to vote for the tax as they believed it would keep the Browns in Cleveland. The vote was passed on November 7, yet the decision to transfer the team had already occurred. On November 6 Cleveland Browns owner Art Modell stood atop a podium at a makeshift conference area near the perceived construction site of a future NFL stadium and proclaimed he “had no choice” but to move the half-century old franchise to Baltimore, Maryland.\(^4\)

Immediately, Cleveland’s citizens fought the move through activism and legal negotiations in a movement that came to be known as the “Save Our Browns” campaign. After four months of the negotiations, the NFL and Cleveland officials agreed to a deal that allowed Modell to honor his contract with Baltimore and simultaneously placed an expansion franchise in Cleveland to begin play in 1999. This settlement was unique because it allowed Cleveland to retain the naming rights, colors, logo, and, most significantly, the history of the Browns. In the last quarter of the twentieth century,

\(^2\) Kevin Harter, “Gloom, Anger Fill the Stands; Browns Fans Full of Emotion About Modell, Possible Move,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Nov. 6, 1995, 1A.
\(^3\) Ibid.
\(^4\) Timothy Heider, “Browns Bolt; Modell Warned Mayor, Governor a Month Ago Deal Announced in Baltimore,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Nov. 7, 1995, 1A; in an news story following the announcement, Modell reportedly explained that the deal was made to ensure that his family would be financially secure whenever he dies; see Miriam Hill, “Estate Planning as Motivation? Decision to Move Team May be Driven by Modell’s Age: 70,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Nov. 7, 1995, 7A.
numerous professional franchises transferred and their identity followed. The NFL’s Raiders’ colors and logos moved back and forth between Oakland and Los Angeles, the Rams legacy moved to St. Louis and Houston, Texas, who eventually was given a replacement team, bid adieu to the Oilers and its history when they left for Nashville, Tennessee, in 1997. The relocation of the Browns, thus, offers a unique perspective to the ways in which team movement in the United States articulates the nexus between culture and the business of sport.

The reaction of Cleveland’s populace to Modell’s announcement illustrates the importance of professional football to a failing United States rust-belt metropolis and suggests the residents’ antipathy toward the city’s negative national notoriety, while underlining their feelings toward the city’s urban decline in the late 1990s. Cleveland’s economy degenerated in the late twentieth century due to financial woes of the 1970s and 1980s. Additionally, agonizing professional sport seasons throughout the latter half of the 1900s contributed to the nickname “Mistake on the Lake.” The removal of the Browns underscored the city’s demise and transfixed a national audience to the plight of the failing city.

In this chapter, three narratives are integrated. First, it explores Cleveland and its popular view as a city encompassing a “culture of losing” because of the deterioration of its economy and its many losing professional sports seasons. Second, it analyzes the beginning of the “Save Our Browns” campaign and suggests that its construction offered a reaction against Cleveland’s popular negative image. Furthermore, it interrogates the ways in which the campaign’s growth illuminated an intersection between the Browns and citizens’ individual, family and community identity, and mirrored class and gender
relations in the late twentieth century. Finally, it assesses the “Save Our Browns” campaign in relation to power and rise of authority in the NFL, specifically in terms of the image of Mayor Michael White and the settlement between the city, Modell and the NFL bringing a new team to Cleveland.5

From the “City of Champions” to the “Renaissance City”

In contrast to the Chicago Cubs, who have been known as “lovable losers” in popular culture due to failing to win a World Series in over a century, Cleveland historically has been considered one of the most “miserable cities in which to be a sports fan” in the second half of the twentieth century.6 Resentment toward this “culture of losing” is witnessed through the actions of Browns’ fans after Modell’s announcement and suggests the ways in which Northeast Ohioans connected the actions of their sports franchises to the greater good of the civic community. They felt that by being labeled “losers” on the playing field, they were similarly depicted in economic, business and social matters.

Additionally, the removal of the Browns suggests that Northeast Ohioans exalted their “blue-collar” ideals to mask the underbelly of Cleveland’s urban decline of the late twentieth century. The loss of the franchise, they believed, discredited their identity and

5 Detailed analysis of the “Save Our Browns” campaign littered the front pages and sports sections of the Cleveland Plain Dealer the Akron-Beacon Journal, and the Columbus Dispatch. Furthermore, many of the letters written during the tenuous four-month period of the campaign can be found at the Pro Football Hall of Fame (PFHF).

highlighted the negative aspects of the region. Aligning with a supposed “renaissance” of downtown Cleveland, the movement of the Browns supporters suggests the ways in which Northeast Ohio citizens believed that the loss of the Browns diminished the positive steps taken by the city in the past decade.

Historically, popular references viewed Cleveland as an area of urban decline, similar to much of the “rust-belt.” The city thrived as a manufacturing center in the early twentieth century. This was epitomized by the construction of the Terminal Tower which was built in the late 1920s and “conveyed visions of a prosperous and grandiose future for Cleveland.”7 Cleveland’s economic potency, however, quickly unraveled when the stock market crash of 1929 led the United States into the Great Depression. By the time America was ready to enter World War II, Cleveland’s population dropped for the first time. This trend continued.8

Although Cleveland emerged from World War II as a weakened member of the “rust-belt,” it believed it was the “Best Location in the Nation” because of its successful professional sports franchises and perceived economic recovery. Returning from wartime duties, athletes such as Bob Feller reinvigorated a sports culture to the Lake Erie city and led the Indians to win the World Series in 1948. Also, the emergence of the All-America Football Conference (AAFC) offered entrepreneur Mickey McBride a franchise eventually named the Browns who won all four AAFC titles and beginning in 1950 continued to win championships when it joined the NFL. Additionally, the Cleveland Barons, of the American Hockey League, continued its on-ice successes. Finally, Cleveland emerged as a perceived racially harmonious metropolitan area when the

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8 Ibid., 28
Browns integrated professional football with the inclusion of Marion Motley and Bill Willis on the team in 1946 and the Indians of MLB broke the color barrier in the American League with Larry Doby and then brought in legendary pitcher Satchel Paige. Along with the cultural images of success through sports, Cleveland’s population reached its peak in 1949 at nearly one million and ranked seventh in the nation. These sports instances, as well as a perceived economic revival, caused some Cleveland residents to describe the city as the “Best Location in the Nation” and not part of the larger problem facing many metropolitan areas in the United States in the postwar era.9

By the 1960s and 1970s, however, violence from the Civil Rights Movement, a degenerating economy and national embarrassment of a river caught on fire led to Cleveland being an area depicted as poor and desolate. Cleveland became the first major city to enter a financial default since the Great Depression when it did so in 1978. Its population also rapidly changed from nearly 10% black to 36.6% by 1965 as part of the larger white-flight movement in the United States.10 Race riots, as part of the greater Civil Rights Movement, contributed to the image of Cleveland as a degenerating Midwestern city.11 The Hough Riots began on July 18, 1966, when workers at a white-owned café in the Hough neighborhood supposedly hung a sign and spoke racist rhetoric toward black customers which led to five days of rioting and violence. Sport historian Phillip C. Suchma states that the Hough Riots “triggered a sense of fear among many of Cleveland’s residents, and perhaps more importantly among the city’s business

10 Suchma, “From the Best,” 200-201.
11 The Hough Riots were not as well-known as other riots, such as Watts, or protests and marches in the south during the Civil Rights Movement. For an account of the greater Civil Rights Movement, see John Lewis, Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1998).
community.” The degenerating city was then also viewed in the national media as racially tumultuous. Its economy and population followed the turmoil.

By 1970 the overall population decreased to nearly 750,000 and its national rank dropped to twelfth. The most vivid image of Cleveland during the era, however, may be its burning river. The Cuyahoga River had caught fire multiple times in the twentieth century; however, the most famous—on June 22, 1969—attracted a national audience when photographs of the waterway were publicized in the national media as representative of the city and displayed the area as polluted. Some state that the fire spurred the Environmental Movement and led to the creation and the passage of the Clean Water Act in 1972. The city had become a joke in the national media.

The opening to Hollywood’s Major League displayed Cleveland as a polluted, empty, and desolate town. The city—along with its struggling professional sports franchises—articulated to the nation a model of the failing of the “rust-belt.” Many in Cleveland, however, began to see the area as the “Comeback city,” a popular slogan offered by the local press. In the 1980s, Cleveland came out of its default, they were named an All-America City three times, and the construction of Key Tower (then and now the tallest building in the city’s skyline) offered to city residents a future of hope and prosperity. The population, however, continued to plummet. By 1980, it was at 570,000 (nineteenth in the nation) and ten years later was just over 500,000 (twenty-third in the

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12 Suchma, “From the Best,” 205-206.
13 “The History of Cleveland Timeline.”
15 Cleveland became the comedic centerpiece of the Hollywood feature Major League which depicted the team as losers who shocked MLB, see Major League, directed by David S. Ward, Morgan Creek Productions, 1989.
16 Suchma, “From the Best,” 27.
The “comeback” never materialized, and entering the 1990s the city continued to be seen as a deprived metropolitan area.

By the 1990s, Cleveland’s civic leaders expected that the region was to be the “Renaissance City,” and they highlighted that this revival was illuminated by the city’s new entertainment infrastructure. The Indians moved in to Jacobs Field and the National Basketball Association’s (NBA) Cavaliers opened Gund Arena in 1994 in the area which became known as “Gateway Plaza.” In 1995, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame opened and entertained an international audience. The same year, the Cavaliers were notified by the NBA that they would host the league’s All-Star Game in 1997, typically a social and civic uplift to major league cities. The city, however, was best publicized on a national stage when the Indians, who had been considered a joke for much of the second half of the twentieth century, won MLB’s American League pennant before losing to the Atlanta Braves in the 1995 World Series. Overall, there was an appearance of a revitalization of the downtown area; however, again the overall population declined.18

When Art Modell announced he would move the Browns, the “Save Our Browns” campaign leaders’ and participants’ envisioned a Cleveland near an economic turnaround. Mayor White explained that “I thought that we just might have turned the corner. And we turned the corner—and there was Art Modell,” suggesting that the city was experiencing a renaissance at the time of the devastating announcement.19 Fan letters corroborate the mayor’s thoughts. Kirt W. Conrad wrote that “Cleveland is a city on the

17 “The History of Cleveland Timeline.”
move,” yet explained that Modell’s relocation largely hurt the chances at an economic revival. An editorial in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* explained: “What is particularly galling about The Move is that it came in a memorable year when Cleveland seemed to have overcome, finally, its status as the cheapest joke in a cheap comedian’s routine.” The editorial continued, “With the opening of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, the Indians’ trip to the World Series and some long-overdue recognition of efforts to rebuild neighborhoods, Cleveland emerged as a world-class city.” Evidently, Cleveland’s citizens believed Modell’s move perpetuated Cleveland’s long-time image as a failing “rust-belt” metropolis. This suggests that the city despised, not only the loss of their football team, but the damage done to its urban environment and its expanding culture. They believed they needed to represent a culture incongruent with what they believed was their national image as a “miserable city.” This displays opposition toward a “culture of losing” which resonated throughout Northeast Ohio for the latter half of the twentieth century.

“*No Holds Barred*” November: Identity, Class and Gender

Prior to Modell’s announcement of a forthcoming relocation, Mayor White initiated an activist tone in Cleveland by proclaiming that the city would provide a “no-holds barred” campaign against the Browns and Modell to save the team, igniting what would become a four-month struggle by Cleveland civic officials, entrepreneurs and

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21 “The Art of Deception, Modell’s Efforts to Justify Flight to Baltimore Won’t Wash; Clevelanders Deserve Better for their Years of Loyalty,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Nov. 7, 1995, 8B.
members of the community to fight for the retention of the Browns.\textsuperscript{22} The relocation of
the team provided a medium for fans to express the ways in which professional football
aligned with their personal, family and community identity, and illuminates a class and
gender divide highlighting the notions of a “blue-collar,” working-class masculinity
haunting the U.S. American man.

On November 9, Mayor White coined the “Save Our Browns” campaign when he
originally appealed to 120 Browns fan clubs—known as the “Browns Backers
Worldwide” (BBW)—which had a membership of over 46,000 to start a letter-writing
movement to the NFL offices and the other twenty-nine franchise owners in the league.\textsuperscript{23}
The local Cleveland chapter, headed by Bob Grace, vowed to distribute over 10,000
telephone and fax messages. One leading figure, Kenneth George, treasurer of the 400-
member Atlanta BBW chapter, explained that “The key is to keep up the pressure . . .
Moving the Browns will rip our hearts out.”\textsuperscript{24} Two days after the campaign began,
Browns’ beat writer Mary Kay Cabot reported that fans sent hundreds, if not thousands,
of faxes, telephone messages, and letters to the NFL offices. The letter writing campaign
became one of the most successful protest-measures of the movement.\textsuperscript{25}

Two days later, Mayor White mobilized “at-home” campaigners. Three-hundred
fans arrived at the Cleveland Convention Center on November 11 to listen to the rallying
cry of White and learn what they could do to derail Modell’s plan. Coined White’s “300
shock troops,” the group organized and implemented the campaign’s coming

\textsuperscript{22} Timothy Heider, “Mayor Fights Browns Move ‘Not The Final Act’ Leaders Work To Derail Move,”
\textit{Cleveland Plain Dealer}, Nov. 5, 1995, 1A.
\textsuperscript{23} V. David Sartin, “White, Fans Launch Drive to Recover the Browns,” \textit{Cleveland Plain Dealer}, Nov. 10,
1995, 22A.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25} Mary Kay Cabot, “Browns Fans’ Drive Uses Phone, Fax,” \textit{Cleveland Plain Dealer}, Nov. 12, 1995, 12A.
demonstrations. The following day, a gathering outside of Cleveland Municipal Stadium, labeled the “Leave the Name, Save the Game” rally, organized the group’s first action. They sent a caravan of fans to travel to Pittsburgh to demonstrate outside of Three-Rivers Stadium, where the Browns would be playing the NFL’s Steelers in a nationally televised Monday Night Football game. At the rally, fans arrived at noon and ate hot-dogs provided by a local food distributor, drank hot-chocolate and bought buttons reading “Art Lied,” sold by a local fan hoping to raise enough money to construct a protest billboard in Baltimore. More significantly, Duane Salls, the co-chairperson of the “Save Our Browns” campaign, along with organizer Arnold Pinkey, prepared to sell a round-trip bus ticket to Pittsburgh to fans for $7.50 and pleaded for other supporters to rally around Cleveland City Hall on Monday night where a City Council meeting would be commencing. The game between Cleveland and Pittsburgh, played on November 13, ended with a Steelers 20-3 victory. Despite the thrashing, however, outside of the stadium eight buses full of fans along with an additional 300 carloads of supporters chanted “Save our Browns!” and Mayor White’s slogan “No team, no peace!” and overall displayed their aversion to the recent news of a Browns departure. One fan, Dawn Dempsey, pulled her twelve-year-old son out of school to go on the trip, explaining that she and her husband wanted him “to grow up as a Cleveland Browns fan,” suggesting the importance to the Dempsey family identity. Although fans later expressed that the national broadcast all but ignored the demonstrations outside of the stadium, the protest first displayed the efforts of White and the Cleveland contingency.

27 Afi-Odeliae Scruggs and Desiree F. Hicks, “Browns Fans Take Protest on the Road,” Cleveland Plain Dealer Nov. 14, 1995, 10A.
After Modell’s announcement, Browns fans fought the relocation through the court system. For example, Cleveland resident Howard Beder filed a class action lawsuit against the Cleveland Browns Inc. on behalf of himself and others “similarly situated”—all those who purchased season tickets for the 1995 season. Beder spent $626 for two tickets to the home games that year. He stated that prior to his purchase, Modell proclaimed to all season-ticket holders that he would not move the franchise, that he would honor the stadium lease with the city through 1998, and that he would uphold a moratorium on discussions of the team’s relocation throughout the season. Beder claimed that Modell misrepresented himself and his business and acted in a fraudulent manner by attempting to procure fans’ business for the 1995 campaign. Beder stated that the team leaving the city “devastated the Cleveland Browns’ 1995 home season . . . and rendered [his] tickets of little or no value.”29 That the local and national press followed this case indicates the wide-reach of the “Save Our Browns” campaign. Although the case was not settled until 2001, after a 1998 trial court reversed a 1995 summary judgment decision in favor of the franchise, the fans continued to battle the loss of the team.

In the middle of November 1995, campaign organizers instituted the beginning of the “Save Our Browns” Petition Drive, the most wide-reaching achievement of the movement. Announced at a local McDonald’s in downtown Cleveland on November 15, “Save Our Browns” leaders hoped to have over two million signatures by the end of the month to send to Modell and other NFL owners. Present at the announcement, Mayor White stated that the action would “be the largest petition drive in the history of America” and explained that he had “a feeling the NFL is getting ready to have a Big

29 Beder v. Cleveland Browns Inc., Court of Common Pleas, Cuyahoga County, Ohio, Nov. 6, 1995.
Mac attack,” aligning his protest with the iconic McDonald’s hamburger. McDonald’s had recently canceled their advertising contract with the Browns and produced a sixty second radio ad to protest the relocation. The petition drive ultimately delivered over two million signatures which were taken to the NFL meetings in January 1996 to provide evidence of a significant movement happening in Northeast Ohio.

The second organized demonstration of the “Save Our Browns” campaign, following the arguably unsuccessful Monday Night Football protest, occurred prior to the home game versus the Green Bay Packers on November 19. Two days prior, Mayor White urged fans to continue to come to the home games to prove to the nation that they deserved a team. “This Sunday, the eyes of America will be on Cleveland,” he explained, “It’ll be up to the citizens of this community to let everyone in the country know that we’ve been wronged.” Sunday’s gameday also began with inspiring news for the campaign, as Clevelanders learned that the Cleveland chapter of the NFL Players Association Retired Players Organization pledged its support for the “Save Our Browns” campaign, stating “We decided we’ll do whatever we can.” The initial reaction of the “Save Our Browns” campaign had already spread its influence. The game against the Packers, however, presented the most significant movements of the day.

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30 Anjetta McQueen, “2 Million Names To Go, Please; Mayor White Kicks Off 2-Week Browns Petition Drive at Area McDonald’s,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Nov. 16, 1995, 1B.  
31 Marla Ridenour, “Battle to Hold on to ‘Browns’ Name Gains Steam-Fans, Others Are Working to Keep it in Cleveland,” Columbus Dispatch, Nov. 12, 1995, 1E.  
32 On the same day of the announcement of the “Petition Drive,” Browns’ mascot, Seth Tasker, quit his job and started a non-profit organization to keep the team from moving and promote fan interests in professional team sport. Tasker’s involvement evolved into a proposed boycott of the Super Bowl from the “upstart coalition of sports fans,” which claimed over 100,000 members. Following an early January 1996 announcement of the boycott, the “Save Our Browns” campaign leaders quickly renounced their involvement with the organization, stating they wished to win the hearts of the NFL, not intimidate them, see V. David Sartin, “Boycott of Super Bowl Proposed; Group Wants NFL To Keep Browns Here,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Jan. 9, 1996, 1B.  
33 Vickers, “White Asks.”  
Before and during the game, Browns fans demonstrated that they would not watch the franchise relocate without a struggle. Driving into the downtown area, one would have witnessed flashing street signs that read “SAVE OUR BROWNS . . . STOP ART,” fans holding signage that read “Merry X-mas Cleveland, from Uncle Scum,” and “Hey, Art, Dr. Kevorkian now offers group rates,” suggesting that the Browns owner should contact the infamous medical doctor known for assisted suicide for terminally-ill patients. Additionally, “Save Our Browns” supporters distributed over 70,000 orange armbands and 70,000 orange placards to display at the game, nearly all local and national business advertisements in and out of Cleveland Municipal Stadium were blacked out, airplanes flew over the lakefront area publicizing phone numbers in which distraught Browns’ fans could call, and even the Ohio Communist Party appeared, praising the visiting Packers for their socialistic ownership model.35

The largest movement, however, was the “Million Fan March,” originated by Cleveland radio broadcaster Mike Trivisonno. The march, however, only attracted 5,000 participants who walked eight blocks from an area known as “The Flats” west of the stadium. They urged other fans to avoid the game, shouting “Don’t go in” to the incoming crowds and excited the angry mobs near the gates of Cleveland Municipal Stadium. The Cleveland Plain Dealer, however, presented a much gloomier depiction of the day occurring inside the stadium, most likely contributed to by the over 17,000 unused tickets and the poor performance of the team. “Under gloomy, November clouds, the Stadium looked duller than usual without illuminated advertisements and billboards,” reported the Cleveland newspaper. Losing the game 31-20, the team did not attract

35 Rob Oller, “Fans on Hand Vent Anger At Modell,” Columbus Dispatch, Nov. 20, 1995, 1D.
excitement in the stadium to equate the growing enthusiasm of the “Save Our Browns” campaigners outside.\textsuperscript{36}

Following the exhilaration of the initial large protest within the city, the “Save Our Browns” campaign scored its first victory on November 24, when a local judge granted a preliminary injunction on the Browns. This temporarily blocked the team’s move to Baltimore. A trial was later set for February 12, 1996, to decide if the Browns could legally break their lease with the stadium which would extend through 1998. After the victory was handed down by Common Pleas Judge Kenneth Callahan, “Save Our Browns” supporters expressed that they were establishing a framework for other cities to battle franchise relocation in the future.\textsuperscript{37}

The protest before the Packer game and the initial victory in court transformed the November 26 game against the Steelers as the most significant demonstration of the “Save Our Browns” campaign thus far. During the week, city and campaign leaders planned for a large “Fan Jam” before kickoff of the one o’clock contest that Duane Salls explained was “another way to gain the continued support of the many NFL fans here in Cleveland as well as in other cities such as Pittsburgh.”\textsuperscript{38} He called for those not interested in attending the game to donate their tickets so the city could fill the stadium, expounding that “It is vital that we continue to send the message . . . that Cleveland does support their NFL team.”\textsuperscript{39} Salls and the campaign leaders succeeded when 67,269 fans


\textsuperscript{38} “City Celebrates with a ‘Fan Jam’,” \textit{Cleveland Plain Dealer}, Nov. 25, 1995, 15A.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
walked through the turnstiles on Sunday afternoon. Before entering the stadium, however, fans attended the rally that began in nearby Huntington Park.

Emceed by television star and Cleveland native Drew Carey, who also removed all Browns signs and apparel from his weekly sitcom *The Drew Carey Show*, the pre-game rally included notable political figures and “Save Our Browns” organizers who invigorated the crowd going into the Browns-Steelers game. For example, the mayor of Brook Park, a suburb of Cleveland, Thomas J. Coyne announced that “The first city to successfully block a transfer of their franchise will be Cleveland, Ohio,” which attracted thunderous applause from the crowd. Ohio State Representative Troy Lee James described the situation as a “totally unsatisfactory plight,” and said “Please know that you are not alone in this situation.” Philip M. Brent, writing on the behalf of Mayfield Village Mayor Bruce G. Rinker, thanked White for a special briefing on the Browns’ situation given earlier that morning. He stated, “The Village is committed to doing everything in its power to assist you in your efforts to preserve the NFL’s presence in Northeast Ohio.” He also provided White with suggestions on ways to improve the protest movement such as branching out to counties across Ohio and establishing a presence on the World Wide Web. Twenty members of the Convention & Visitors Bureau in Cleveland signed a letter of congratulations to Mayor White expressing their “appreciation for representing the city and its citizens.” Finally, Mary Michel of the Kent Area Chamber of Commerce congratulated White on the victory from the “Sin Tax”

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40 Mark Rollenhagen and Ron Rutti, “Rally a Bright Spot on Glum Day; ABC Comedian Stirs Up Crowd Before What Might Be Last Steelers Game,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Nov. 27, 1995, 1A.
41 Ibid.
42 Troy Lee James, letter to Mayor White, Nov. 15, 1995, see PFHF Browns Protest Letters.
43 Mayfield Village Finance Department, letter to Mayor White, Nov. 8, 1995, see PFHF Browns Protest Letters.
44 Dave Nolan and Convention and Visitors Bureau of Greater Cleveland Staff to Mayor White, Nov. 8, 1995, see PFHF Browns Protest Letters.
ballot and wished for “good luck” in the fighting of the city in the following months. Again, however, the on-the-field Browns continued their losing ways, falling to the Steelers 20-17.

In the first two weeks of December, the Browns played away games, losing to the San Diego Chargers 31-13 and the Minnesota Vikings 27-11; however, the “Save Our Browns” campaign continued its resistance to Modell’s move to finish the preceding month. White announced he and the movement were “throwing every pot and pan at the issue” of the relocation of the Browns. On November 29, NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue, facing mounting pressure from Browns and other NFL fans distraught over “franchise free agency” and “franchise hopscotching” of professional football teams, spoke in front of Congress to ask for a potential antitrust exemption so that the league could deal with the issue of franchise relocation. “Save Our Browns” campaigners sent 300 fans to protest outside of the Capitol to “focus more national attention on the team’s planned move to Baltimore.” Also appearing at the meeting, which was held before the Senate Judiciary Committee’s Antitrust, Business Rights and Competition Subcommittee, was Mayor White and “Save Our Browns” leader Bob Grace, along with former Ohio Senator and astronaut John Glenn, Ohio Senator Mike DeWine, and Houston, Texas Mayor Bob Lanier. The NFL’s Houston Oilers were also in discussions of a team transfer, leading to their 1997 move to Nashville, Tennessee.

45 Mary Michel and Kent Area Chamber of Commerce, letter to Mayor White, Nov. 8, 1995, see PFHF Browns Protest Letters.
46 Ken Denlinger, “Cleveland Makes Case on Hill for Browns; ‘We’re Throwing Every Pot and Pan at the Issue’,” Washington Post, Nov. 15, 1995, B09.
47 Tom Diemer and Af-Odelia E. Scruggs, “Tagliabue May Seek Antitrust Exemption,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Nov. 29, 1995, 4B.
During the hearing, Tagliabue mentioned that fan support was significant to the dealings of the NFL but could not promise that he would be able to stop Modell’s transfer of the Browns. Cleveland supporters chanted “Save our Browns,” wore orange and brown jackets, sweatshirts and buttons that read “Dawg Gone” with an image of a broken dog-bone, and “woofed” and cheered, especially when Mayor White sent a message to Modell, stating “Art, you ain’t heard nothing yet.” White also emphatically stated that if Congress allowed the Browns to move to Baltimore, then “no NFL city [was] going to be safe.”

Similar action occurred outside of Capitol Hill. In what, according to John Glenn was “Dawg Pound weather” (i.e., it was cold and damp), Clevelanders “hooted, hollered and woofed on the lawn” and decked themselves out in “traditional Dawg Pound garb,” including scarves, jerseys, jackets and a homemade brown firefighter’s hat embezzled with a dog bone.

The hearing at the Capitol marked the end of November and the completion of a month of activism by the “Save Our Browns” campaign. The “no-holds barred” approach outlined by Mayor White extracted all of the energy from Northeast Ohio and presented Browns supporters as dedicated yet hurt, and suggests the ways in which their personal identity was connected to the team in Cleveland. “Cleveland is not the biggest city, nor the most glamorous. However, we are hardworking people, proud people and we will fight until the bitter end,” explained a fan in a letter written to Commissioner Tagliabue the day Modell announced the move. Another fan wrote “We’ve grown up with the

49 Tom Diemer, “Fan Loyalty ‘Counts’ With NFL, But Commissioner makes No Promise at Senate Hearing,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Nov. 30, 1995, 8A.
50 Halle Shilling, “Fans Rally at Capitol to Keep Browns in Cleveland,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Nov. 30, 1995, 8A.
51 Ibid.
52 “Browns Fan,” letter to Paul Tagliabue, Nov. 6, 1995, see PFHF Browns Protest Letters.
Browns, as did our parents and as should our children.” The feelings of those involved in the “Save Our Browns” campaign underlined the importance of the team to their personal identity and the relation of the Browns to the “blue-collar,” working-class community and the masculine attributes of following a professional sports franchise. These sports teams identify what citizens believe distinguish them from other cities and regions, and defend their city from national embarrassment, such as Cleveland’s nickname “Mistake on the Lake.”

Similar to other fan bases in U.S. American sport, Browns fans personal identity was connected to the football team. Economist Charles C. Euchner explained that the emotional hold a team has over its city “stems from its ability to embody and enhance the city’s identity,” and can “overwhelm all the other ways that a city’s residents think about themselves . . . and creates a vivid symbolism of a common interest.” Princeton University professor Michael N. Danielson stated that the connections between sports and citizens are “communally based” and that because of this close association, professional team sports is viewed as a “distinctive business.” Historically, city residents have identified with their professional sports teams, and when teams were relocated their fans experienced a loss of personal identity. Eucher explained, in fact, that an expert witness in the eminent domain legal case against the relocation of the Oakland Raiders to Los Angeles noted the ways in which Oakland fans felt feelings of loss similar to an

54 Michael N. Danielson explained that “professional teams not only represented cities, they became symbols of the places where they played.” He suggests that this is seen through team names such as Brooklyn as the “trolley dodgers,” Boston and its Irish heritage related Celtics, and the Vikings of Minnesota mirroring the region’s Scandinavian roots. See his Home Team: Professional Sports and the American Metropolis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 8.  
56 Danielson, Home Team, 5.
individual losing a member of a family. The witness even cited the Kübler-Ross model of the five stages of grief in relation to the ways in which fans reacted to the team’s transfer. Additionally, when Walter O’Malley moved the Brooklyn Dodgers to Los Angeles in 1958, the New York borough felt as if its personality had been robbed, and when Robert Irsay uprooted the Baltimore Colts to Indianapolis in the middle of the night in 1984, Baltimore residents believed their team and a part of their daily lives had been “stolen away.”

The “Save Our Browns” campaign articulated the ways in which Clevelanders believed their identity was connected to the Browns and the intersections of class relations in Cleveland with fears of franchise relocation. Northeast Ohioans prided themselves off of the perceived ruggedness of their football team and the supposed “hard-nosed” representation of their community. Writer Susan Faludi noted that “for the working class spectator, ‘supporting’ his team was also a way of fighting against marginalization” and a way to grapple with the perceived economic downturn of their economy and the deterioration of the urban life. Browns fan Jennifer L. Roach of Lima, Ohio, aptly explained that the fans were the ultimate losers in the team’s transfer “especially those blue collar workers who spend their hard-earned money year after year to support [the] team.” This suggests that that city’s identity correlated with the blue-collar, working-class attitude of the “average citizen” and that the team leaving left them with a hole in their lives. Likewise, fan Erica Lynn Opeth stated that “If the Cleveland

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57 Ibid., 5, 189.
60 Jennifer L. Roach, letter to NFL, Nov. 12, 1995, see PFHF Browns Protest Letters.
Browns did go, it would be like a part of my soul leaving,” and Michael Dickson penned “When Art Modell announced the move, it was like a part of me, and the collective soul of Northeast Ohio, died. We are still grieving, and angry.”

Fans reacted as if they experienced a larger loss in their lives as explained by fan Tom McGraw who wrote “This is like losing a member of the family.” He went on to complain that his children “were to be the next generation of Browns’ fans” and now this “senseless change” disrupted the family’s character. News anchor John Telich described his experience at the final Browns home game later in December. He stated “It’s something unlike I’ve ever experienced before.” He explained that he saw on the field former Browns’ greats such as Jim Houston and Brian Brennan and that it was evident that “they came back for a funeral. It was like an open invitation to a funeral.” Faludi explained the ways in which super fan John “Big Dawg” Thompson was affected by Modell’s move. “It was like finding out your best friend has terminal cancer and you have just three times left to visit him,” said Thompson in an interview with Faludi in the years following the “Save Our Browns” campaign. He continued that at the last game he expressed “Today, it all ended and my best friend died.” Thompson’s emphasis on a consanguine relationship with the Browns suggests that these individuals, not just angered over losing the opportunity to watch professional football, felt a shift in their everyday lives due to the Browns’ exodus.

61 Erica Lynn Opeth, letter to NFL, Nov. 12, 1995, see PFHF Browns Protest Letters; Michael Dickson, letter to Tagliabue, Nov. 9, 1995, see PFHF Browns Protest Letters.
It is also evident that the blue-collar, working-class nature of the original protest movement within the “Save Our Browns” campaign correlated with gender relations in U.S. American society. Corresponding with the combination of the rust-belt failure, the implications of feminism and the changing nature of Cleveland’s demographic community, the campaign—while being directed by politicians and entrepreneurs—articulated a bottom-up approach of Cleveland’s civic community and the ways in which the “Save Our Browns” campaign represented an example of the continuing crisis of manhood in the United States city.

Many of the campaigners’ self-identified as members of a “blue-collar community” and the organization of protests at perceived lower class venues, such as the downtown McDonald’s, identifies the ways in which lower class individuals fought for the retention of the Browns in Cleveland. According to historian Bruce J. Schulman, in the 1970s men faced new societal conditions, including “renegotiating family roles at home and confronting women in the workplace, the political arena, the club, and the classroom.” Historian Nancy MacLean examined this interconnection between women entering the workforce in the 1980s as representational of a crisis in manhood. She

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65 Throughout the four-month “Save Our Browns” campaign, many letters and newspaper stories referred to Cleveland as a “blue-collar” community or expressed how they were “hard-working” people. For example, see “Browns Fan,” letter to Tagliabue, which stated “we are hardworking people, proud people and we will fight until the bitter end”; Jack Patrick, letter to NFL, Nov. 13, 1995, see PFHF Browns Protest Letters which explained “we are a hard working family, who put a lot of attention into honesty and fair play”; Joseph J. Jiamboi (General Manager of Canton Comfort Inn), letter to Tagliabue, Nov. 17, 1995, see PFHF Browns Protest Letters which stated that “you must realize that the average fan, the guy paying your bills, who has to rework his budget just to take his family to an NFL game, is sick of the place money has taken in the sport.”

66 Michael A. Messner articulated that the second “crisis of masculinity” began in the post-World War II era, and continues today. He argued that American football was used as a means to counteract male’s anxieties of growing equality in the workplace. See his “Sports and Male Domination: The Female Athlete as Contested Ideological Terrain,” in Out of Play: Critical Essays on Gender and Sport, ed. Michael A. Messner, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 36-37.

explained that many tradeswomen observed that men believed that if females could do the job, it was not a masculine profession, thus females grappled with entry to many vocations within the manufacturing industry.\textsuperscript{68} Although twenty-three years had passed since the Equal Rights Amendment (1972) attempted to bring equality to women—it failed at the federal level—equity had still not been established, as evidenced by the need for the Labour Relations Act of 1995.\textsuperscript{69} Masculinity within the workplace was still proposed as the norm, thus Schulman’s analysis of masculinity in the 1970s still was in place in the 1990s: “notions of manhood needed to be worked out; they could no longer be assumed.”\textsuperscript{70} The blue-collar, working-class Clevelander who protested the movement of the Browns suggests that masculinity and working-class status was tied to the NFL team. Possibly fighting for the retention of its individual and family identity, the male members of the “Save Our Browns” campaign also struggled to hold on to virile attributes which they believed made them a part of the perceived masculine blue-collar, working-class community.

Although many women were represented in the “Save Our Browns” campaign, a large proportion of their letters affirm that following professional football—or in this case, fighting for the retention of a pro football team—aligned with societal norms of gender in United States society. As sociologists Michael A. Messner and Donald F. Sabo articulate, as men in sport align with traditional male roles, women are segmented into conventional feminine roles.\textsuperscript{71} Additionally, sociologist Lois Bryson explicated that when

\textsuperscript{68} Nancy MacLean, \textit{Freedom is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 275-283.
\textsuperscript{70} Schulman, \textit{The Seventies}, 177.
\textsuperscript{71} Michael A. Messner and Donald F. Sabo, \textit{Sport, Men and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives} (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1990).
sport is identified as male, women become the trespassers or anomalies.\textsuperscript{72} Moreover, as Nick Trujillo noted, football “has reinforced a form of masculinity.”\textsuperscript{73} For example, many letters expressed patriarchal grievances such as Nancy Antle Chilcote who penned “You broke my husband’s heart today” or Kathleen Jacobs who wrote to the NFL owners “Didn’t your mother teach you any better?”\textsuperscript{74} Moreover, fan Debbie Gardner annually took her son Tyler to Browns games for his birthday while the father remained at home. She still, however, articulated this as abnormal, expressing “what can a mom do with a boy, like dads do . . . for us, it was the football game.”\textsuperscript{75} Additionally, many men who wrote letters expressed that their distressed feelings were abnormal, suggesting an interpretation of masculinity that they saw as concrete: blue-collar, working-class men do not show emotion. \textit{Cleveland Plain Dealer} columnist Lou Mio wrote that the final Browns home game later in December was “enough to make grown dawgs cry.”\textsuperscript{76} “On the darkest day in Cleveland sports history,” wrote one fan, “I have seen grown men cry.”\textsuperscript{77} Fan Dan Anderson stated, “I cried during the announcement . . . a 24-year-old masculine American man crying,” clearly identifying the action as an aberration.\textsuperscript{78} John “Big Dawg” Thompson was continuously shown in the crowds of the final games crying.

\textsuperscript{74} Nancy Antle Chilcote, letter to NFL, Nov. 6, 1995, see PFHF Browns Protest Letters; Kathleen Jacobs, letter to NFL, Nov. 13, 1995, see PFHF Browns Protest Letters.
\textsuperscript{75} Lou Mio, “Memories Will Never Leave Us, NFL Owners May Vote This Week on the Browns’ Move to Baltimore, But No One Can take Away the 49-Year History of Great Players and Loyal Fans,” \textit{Cleveland Plain Dealer}, Jan. 14, 1996, 1A.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} “Browns Fan.”
\textsuperscript{78} Dan Anderson, letter to Tagliabue, Nov. 9, 1995, see PFHF Browns Protest Letters.
He responded “I don’t mind it,” suggesting that he had to defend his tearful emotions, as a member of a supposed blue-collar, working-class masculine community.\(^{79}\)

“Just as shipyard workers derived strength and closeness from their Save Our Shipyard campaign,” explained Faludi, male members of the “Save Our Browns” campaign might have found “a source of old-fashioned masculine rejuvenation in the organization.”\(^{80}\) The identity, class and gender relations of the movement illuminate the fascinating nexus between the cultures of professional sports teams with those who control its business. Those “blue-collar” members of the “Save Our Browns” campaign organized with political elites and entrepreneurs, who most assuredly had differing motives to the retention of the team. While the fans desired a continuation of its family identity, the civic elite, through its leadership role in the campaign, perpetuated the myth of professional team sport as a pastime rather than a capitalistic business. The crisis of manhood in a perceived blue-collar community presented an environment ready for activism and desire for the retention of masculine identity.

**“The Blitz” of December: A Movement Reignited**

Following two weeks of road games and continuing growth of the movement, December 1995 marked the end of the football season. The “Save Our Browns” campaign, after a lull period during the team’s travels, however, reignited and offered the most memorable protests and demonstrations of the movement.

Scant “Save Our Browns” activity occurred in the first week of December. By the end of the month, however, professional football disappeared from Cleveland until an

\(^{80}\) Ibid., 213.
expansion franchise returned in 1999. In the press, journalists expressed that, while “the sideshow [was] impressive,” the “Save Our Browns” movement would not keep the team in Cleveland. Some believed that Cleveland officials should look to sway an existing NFL franchise also in financial difficulty to move to Cleveland, a strategy, however, that many saw as hypocritical to the ideology of the “Save Our Browns” campaign. Nevertheless, the Cleveland contingency continued to increase demonstrations leading to the final home game, which was to ensue on December 17.

On December 9, leaders of the “Save Our Browns” campaign said they prepared a “blitz in the coming weeks designed to show fan support for keeping the Browns in Cleveland.” Movement organizers explained that they looked for revenue streams to fund a trip to Atlanta, Georgia, in mid-January to the annual NFL meetings, where owners would presumably vote on the Browns relocation issue. As of December 9, only Bay Village, a local suburb of Cleveland, made a $1000 donation to the “Save Our Browns” campaign; however, the Cuyahoga County Mayors and City Managers Association soon adopted a “resolution of support” to the campaign. The most important statement of the day, however, was an announcement of “Orange and Brown Day,” to commence on Friday, December 15, at 11 a.m. in the downtown center. Campaign leaders wrote to superintendents of all area public school districts encouraging them to prepare “‘Art’ work” and for students to bring it to the rally Friday morning. Additionally, campaign leaders created large orange postcards, pre-addressed to NFL

81 Bud Shaw, “Real Money Only Way to Sway NFL,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Dec. 7, 1995, 1D
82 Ken Roesenthal, “Thievery is the Way, Cleveland,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Dec. 1, 1995, 2D; Bud Shaw, “City Deserves Football, Not Bucs,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Dec. 10, 1995, 2D; Mark Rollenhagen and Stephen Koff, “Cleveland Fighting to Keep Itself in the Game; White Attaching Move of Browns on Many Fronts,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Dec. 10, 1995, 1A
83 John Funk, “Browns Fans Prepare Late-in-the-game Rally; Committee to Save Team Plans Events to Keep the Pressure On,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Dec. 10, 1995, 8A.
84 Ibid.
owners and league officials, reading “As a fan of NFL football, I want you to vote against moving the Browns from Cleveland because,” to be signed by Cleveland supporters at the downtown rally.\textsuperscript{85} Browns fans filled these cards with reasons ranging from the destruction of the city due to the Browns’ departure, anger at the proliferation of economics at the center of professional sports, and overall resentment of losing their personal identity as attributed to the team moving. Evidently, “Save Our Browns” campaigners continued to believe they could retain the legacy, if not the actual team, from relocating to Baltimore.

Mayor White also continued his struggle to fight for Cleveland. After returning from Capitol Hill Mayor White “crisscrossed the country,” traveling to Baltimore, Dallas, Columbus, Washington, and New York—and met with Commissioner Tagliabue—to discuss the plight of Clevelanders in the battle against Modell and the Browns and the overall disenfranchisement of professional football fans in the United States.\textsuperscript{86}

On December 14, representatives from eleven United States metropolitan areas convened at a two-day conference designed to discuss issues of franchise relocation in professional team sports. Organized by Mayor White, and held in Cleveland, the meeting included delegates from Chicago, Cincinnati, Denver, Detroit, Green Bay, Houston, Minneapolis, Pittsburgh, Pontiac, Seattle and Tampa, many cities who had been threatened with a team transfer by a franchise. Seattle Mayor Norman Rice explained that they looked to “make a difference in the life of our franchise [Seahawks] and the life of our cities,” and Mayor Lanier of Houston stated “We’re outgunned,” in reference to their

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
position against the NFL. Mayor White discussed the importance of the “Save Our Browns” campaign to the attendees before touring the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. The meeting suggested the reach of the “Save Our Browns” campaign and articulated its national status by mid-December. It additionally reified the ways in which Cleveland civic officials believed it to be a “renaissance” city. White’s tour of the Rock Hall illustrated the city’s persistence to showcase itself as a world-class city, a view they had attempted to create for the past half century.

The final home game played at Cleveland Municipal Stadium occurred on December 17. Hosting the in-state rival Cincinnati Bengals, the team looked to end its lowly season at home before beginning games the following year in Baltimore. “Save Our Browns” activity reached its zenith and was presented in the national press as evidence of a problem with the “new NFL.” Multiple groups and demonstrations organized on the morning of the game, including Pro Football Hall of Famer Dante Lavelli who marched with fans from Burke Lakefront Airport just east of the stadium. Additionally, the “Save Our Browns” group convened at Huntington Park and began the day with the viewing of a video featuring former players and highlights of the team throughout its history. Mayor White also spoke and issued a message to Modell asking “Art Modell, are you listening? . . . Cleveland has something to tell you.” He then led the crowd in a chant of “It’s not over!” White’s message expressed that he was not guaranteeing that the Browns would remain in Cleveland, yet the city had “shown the

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89 This theme is fully analyzed in chapter two.
91 Lou Mio, “A Fan Farewell Final Game, A Mix of Sadness, Rage, Cheers for Browns,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Dec. 18, 1995, 1A.
country what Cleveland and Greater Cleveland are made out of;” continuing to suggest the ways in which White and the city believed they were molded from their blue-collar lineage.  

Simultaneously, a more radical approach to the “Save Our Browns” campaign emerged. A rally before the final game on East Ninth Street included a mock hanging of the Browns’ owner and fans who chanted “Hang him, hang him.” The crowd tied the fake Modell to a “make believe electric chair” and also made sure his stepson David Modell—an executive with the Browns—“hanged in effigy.” Faludi has suggested that Browns fans galvanized in reaction to Modell’s paternalistic move to economically protect his adopted son. These angered fans said that he was not his true son; they were Modell’s sons who had now been betrayed. The movement of the team illuminates the gendered attitude of professional sport as Cleveland’s exaggerated behavior articulates the ways in which its notion of masculinity culturally intersects with professional team sport. Moreover, a website named the “Burn Art Modell Page” was created and included an updated description of the lawsuit against the team and downloadable anti-Modell songs and “a daily Modell joke.” This represents the growing anger toward Modell and the disenfranchisement of the fans. It also expounds the problematic nature of fan enthusiasm and the emotions of franchise relocation. Later, after the Browns had become the Ravens and activist activity had lessened, another website entitled the “Modell Death Watch”

92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
illustrates the ways in which sports fandom problematically affects sports fans’ interactions and associations with professional sport.\textsuperscript{96}

Inside Cleveland Municipal Stadium, the Browns defeated the Bengals 26-10, giving Browns fans one last victory in the aging facility. In the second half of the game, however, fans began a demolition of the stadium by dismantling seats and bleachers for souvenirs and throwing fire crackers onto the field. Officials had to have the teams play at only one end of the field because of the raucous crowd near the east end-zone “Dawg Pound” area. Following the game, the destruction of the bleacher area continued, fans lit fires, and others openly wept as the prospects of never watching the team again. John “Big Dawg” Thompson, made famous for being the fan to help begin the “Dawg Pound” a decade earlier, stayed in the stadium through the evening before being forced to leave by stadium management. He later explained that “All of a sudden the game ended.” By the end of the night, the team’s time in Cleveland had run its course.\textsuperscript{97}

The week following the Browns’ final home game offered an escalation in events and activities geared toward saving the legacy of the Browns, as fans had become aware that saving the actual team was unlikely. On December 18, “Save Our Browns” campaign leaders unveiled a new avenue for collecting petition signatures. A local pizzeria—Gepettos Pizza and Ribs—revealed its “Bone Petitions,” Petsmart allowed fans to include an image of their pet on a “Save Our Browns” petition, and a local photography store created the “Babies Against the Browns’ Exit” petition drive, which enabled fans to

\textsuperscript{96} This theme is fully analyzed in chapter four.
include a picture of their young child with their name. The business extension into the community illustrated the wide reach of the movement and the intersection of the movement of the Browns to many aspects of the campaigners’ individual lives.

Further intensifying the movement, American Greetings Corporation aided “Save Our Browns” campaigners by constructing thirty “oversized greeting cards” that were to be signed by fans and sent to Commissioner Tagliabue and the other twenty-nine NFL owners urging them vote against the move during the following month’s NFL meetings. Reading “All Cleveland Browns fans want for the holidays is their football team in Cleveland,” the cards messages expressed the significance of the sport to the community and illustrated the ways in which Modell’s greed problematized the business of sport. The cards included a quote from the vilified owner reading “We have built this business on the trust of fans. If we treat that as if it doesn’t count, it isn’t going to wash.” “Save Our Browns” leaders attempted to present Modell as a manipulator and Cleveland as the victim to create a sympathetic environment toward the plight of Clevelanders going into the new year.

The 1995 year ended with little movement toward the “Save Our Browns” campaign; however, Mayor White issued a letter to the Northeast Ohio community on December 24, preparing them to keep up the fight going into the January 17, 1996, NFL meetings in Atlanta. Presented as Cleveland’s “two-minute drill,” White expressed that pride was the central facet of the community’s fight toward franchise relocation. “For all the wrong reasons, we have been provided the opportunity to show the nation what we’re made of,” explained White. He articulated that the city was gearing itself toward

98 “Save Browns Petitions At Stores Now,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Dec. 19, 1995, 2B.

99 “Browns Fans, City Send Special Cards to NFL,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Dec. 21, 1995, 15A.
persuading NFL owners to vote against relocation, and for action in Washington D.C. to begin to construct a limited antitrust exemption for the NFL to deal with team movement. “The two-minute warning is upon us,” explained White, who urged fans to continue to call, write and fax the NFL offices. This letter attempted to rationalize the large-scale movement of the cities’ governmental leaders. White urged the community to remember the simple objective, “to keep our team, its name and our colors.” Many, however, saw White’s efforts as fleeting and some began to question his motives. Was he fighting for the team, or was it a politician’s agenda to be reelected? Answers to these questions emerged as the “Save Our Browns” campaign entered 1996 and a final ruling on the relocation of the Browns left the community questioning whether they won the fight.

“We don’t have a ripple, we have a wave”: January and the “Save Our Browns” Campaign

Mayor White stood in front of 200 people at the Cleveland City Hall rotunda and shouted “I have a message for Art Modell. We have a message for the NFL. You ain’t seen nothin’ yet.” At the “Two-Minute Warning Rally,” “Save Our Browns” leaders announced their plan for the upcoming two-week push toward the January 17 NFL meetings, when a supposed owner vote on the relocation of the Browns was to take place. By the end of the month, Mayor White provided a multiple-front attack on the NFL; however, his motives were questioned, suggesting that the nexus between business, sport and politics illustrates the many uses of sport. Browns’ fans simply wanted their team and

100 Michael R. White, “Browns Fans Begin the 2-Minute Drill,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Dec. 24, 1995, 1C.
101 Michael K. McIntyre, “‘Save Our Browns’ Kicks Off Two-Week Campaign,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Jan. 1, 1996, 1A.
to retain its identity, Mayor White was caught between saving the team, being reelected and constructing his future image in Cleveland, and Modell and the NFL offered sweeping changes to the ways in which the cultural nexus between sport and business would evolve going into the twenty-first century.

“They all have their different assignments to do,” explained “Save Our Browns” spokesperson Gary Christopher. The second week of January illustrates the ways in which the community and its leaders expanded the “Save Our Browns” campaign. From January 9-11, campaign organizers sent 21,000 oversized postcards to NFL owners and executives. One day was signified as “Internet Day.” Through the organizations’ webpage, Northeast Ohioans could send a message to 750 individuals or organizations through a single link. Additionally, Ameritech Cellular Services created the “NFL Hotline” at Tower City near the city’s center where fans could make calls to NFL teams and the NFL offices. Many fans, however, found NFL owners to be reluctant to discuss the matter. Jack Kent Cooke, the owner of the Washington Redskins, supposedly told a “Save Our Browns” leader to “mind his own business” and many other callers were disconnected. On January 16, the “Save Our Browns” campaign bought multiple full-page ads in the USA Today that published contact information for the NFL offices and the other twenty-nine NFL owners. An escalation of campaign involvement was evident; however, national approval declined. Pittsburgh Steelers’ owner Dan Rooney explained that the “Save Our Browns” were “hurting their cause” because their phone and tax lines

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102 Jonathan Gaw, “Battle Over Browns Goes On-Line, Fans Encouraged to Send Messages on Internet to NFL Teams, Politicians, Newspaper, Sponsors,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Jan. 11, 1996, 1B.
were jammed for a week because of the *USA Today* article.\(^{104}\) In response, the “Save Our Browns” campaign ended the telephone and fax movement because of the backlash from NFL owners.\(^{105}\) Marginal resentment toward the campaign grew, as did negative attitude toward Mayor White.

On January 12, Cleveland added Maryland and the Maryland Stadium Authority to its lawsuit against Modell and the Browns. They proclaimed Maryland Stadium Authority chairperson John Moag and Maryland Governor Parris Glendening conspired with Modell to relocate the Browns to Baltimore. “Art Modell and John Moag got together one day, got together on a secret runway, with a secret handshake, and a secret knock, and a secret deal,” explained Mayor White in an interview.\(^{106}\) Governor Glendening retorted that “remember that the mayor of Cleveland is up for re-election . . . he has to do these kinds of things” and Moag stated that “The Save Our Browns effort has become the Save Mayor White campaign.”\(^{107}\) Many commentators expressed that, while White put substantial energy into the “Save Our Browns” campaign, he ignored the failing city schools in Cleveland.\(^{108}\) White responded to this in his December 24, letter and simply expressed that the city would eventually turn its attention to the schools.\(^{109}\)

\(^{104}\) “Bucs-To-Cleveland Rumors Heating Up-Owners Might Delay Vote on Browns’ Move,” *Columbus Dispatch*, Jan 17, 1996, 1D.

\(^{105}\) Marla Ridenour, “Owners Are Reluctant to Offer Hope to Cleveland Contingent,” *Columbus Dispatch*, Jan. 18, 1996, 2D.

\(^{106}\) “Defiant Cleveland Seeks More Money, Adds Defendants to Suit-Fight to prevent Browns from Moving is Escalating,” *Columbus Dispatch*, Jan. 13, 1996.


\(^{108}\) “Focus that Energy, What if the Sort of Passion Sparked by Fear for the Browns Could be Brought to Bear in Creating Hope for the Kids?” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Nov. 16, 1995, 10B; Many of the letters found in the PFHF expressed resentment toward Modell and excitement for the “Save Our Browns” campaign; however, some did express this notion of the problematic nature of expressing so much energy to saving a football team while the city decayed in other areas; for example see Anne Kistemnaker, letter to Tagliabue, Nov. 13, 1995, see PFHF Browns Protest Letters.

\(^{109}\) White, “Browns Fans Begin the 2-Minute Drill.”
This suggests the importance of sports to the legacy of politicians and city leaders and articulates a rationale for civic leaders to intensify the nexus between business and sport. While many Northeast Ohioans assumedly differentiate in political motives, the Browns offered community cohesion. Mayor White’s efforts toward the “Save Our Browns” campaign, whether for political advantages or not, provides evidence to the significance of professional team sport and the ways in which professional sports entrepreneurs can hold a city captive.\textsuperscript{110} Political entanglements notwithstanding, by the middle of January, the “Save Our Browns” campaign, while launching its largest crusade against Modell, also began to lose steam.

“Save Our Browns” leaders and contributors began their last effort toward the retention of the Browns when they sent their leaders to Atlanta on January 15. Mayor White flew into the Atlanta airport, where he was greeted by cheering Browns fans and on the first day of the meetings (January 16), nearly 200 fans arrived in the southern city. John “Big Dawg” Thompson was invited to speak on behalf of Cleveland fans and attempted to speak to the twenty-nine voting owners. During the speech, Thompson “began to cry . . . and someone yelled out ‘Take your time, Big Dawg!’”\textsuperscript{111} The stories of individuals crying over the loss of a professional football team corroborates the notion of a perceived blue-collar masculinity—one that represents the “hard-nosed” representation of the community, yet acknowledging the importance of the team—encapsulated the loss of the team and continues to highlight the loss of a personal identity through the relocation of the Browns.

\textsuperscript{110} Eucher, \textit{Playing the Field}, 14.

\textsuperscript{111} Stephen Koff, “Browns’ Fans Deliver a Hit, Contingent Appeals for Owner Loyalty,” \textit{Cleveland Plain Dealer}, Jan. 17, 1996, 8A.
Other events at the owners’ meetings consisted of evidence that the “Save Our Browns” campaign had created a large-scale movement over the then three-month period. On the evening of January 16, Modell spoke to the NFL owners to plead his case for relocating his team. Outside the Stouffer Renaissance Hotel, “fans lined the roadway to the hotel in silence for 15 minutes, holding small flashlights.”

This mirrored a candlelight vigil, rather than a franchise relocation protest. Earlier in the day, Browns fans delivered over 2.2 million signatures from the aforementioned petition drive. In what was visualized as a presidential motorcade, a motorized caravan escorted by a police motorcycle transported the petitions and “Save Our Browns” leaders brought the signatures, which were taped to brown paper and rolled into numerous bundles, to the front doors of the Renaissance hotel. The bundles were loaded onto hotel luggage carts and pushed into the lobby where they were unrolled onto the floor and presented to NFL executive and vice-president of labor relations Harold Henderson. Mayor White stated to Henderson “I hope that you will see by this rally and by what has happened here that these are not just ordinary fans of the NFL . . . These are people who through generations have grown up with this team . . . It is a part of their life, a part of their home, a part of their community.”

White’s message reinforced the notion of the nexus between the business of professional team sport and the Browns as a community identifier. “Save Our Browns” leaders attempted to extract the humanistic side of franchise relocation. The conclusion of the NFL meetings, however, strengthened the notion that the business of the NFL overshadowed the idea of a traditional sporting culture in big-time U.S. American sport.

112 Ibid.
113 Ibid.
Modell spoke to the NFL owners and explained that he had no choice but to relocate the Browns because of the lack of action by politicians in Cleveland. “It was clear tonight that the political people in Cleveland didn’t do what they should have done before it came to this point,” explained New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft. New York Giants co-owner Robert Tisch stated that the Browns “showed on the board that they meet the criteria to move.” Owners also showed hesitance toward blocking the move because they feared that Modell would file an antitrust lawsuit against the NFL, as his contract with the Maryland Stadium Authority dictated. A decision to delay a vote reflected the growing owner hesitance toward the “Save Our Browns” campaign. NFL owners stated that it would have a decision by mid-February before the February 12 trial date set for the injunction of the Browns to play out their stadium lease in Cleveland through 1998.

Although protests toward the relocation of the Browns continued, rhetoric describing the “Save Our Browns” campaign and the efforts of Mayor White weakened the excitement of the prior months’ campaigns. Cleveland Plain Dealer writer Bud Shaw expressed that Clevelanders had lost their dignity through the recent negotiations. He called Mayor White’s efforts in Atlanta “comic overkill,” and satirized the “candlelight vigil” and called the “Save Our Browns” campaign a “twisted civil rights slogan.” He explained that “compromise, not victory, was always the most realistic and unspoken goal,” and that the citizens of Cleveland, who had helped vault Mayor White to the

115 Timothy Heider, Stephen Koff and Tony Grossi, “City, NFL Try to Work Out Deal Vote Delayed; Modell Seeks Quick Decision,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Jan. 18, 1996, 1A.
116 Bud Shaw, “Nothing’s Changed but Cost of Dignity,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Jan. 19, 1996, 1D
national stage, were “getting doused with a cold bucket of reality.” The “Save Our Browns” supporters invigorated a national audience to the plight of fans involved in franchise relocation and eventually retained their legacy, yet, its reactions to the eventual compromise expresses the relationship between fandom and the ways in which the business of professional team sport progresses. This nexus uses the unbridled reactions from sports fans to promote its agendas; however, many Northeast Ohioans were left contemplating if their efforts were worth the four-month struggle.

Knuckle Under? February and the End of the “Save Our Browns” Campaign

On February 6, 1996, a hearing before the U.S. House of Representatives welcomed John “Big Dawg” Thompson to speak during a conversation about professional team sport and franchise relocation. Thompson pleaded that fans needed rights to protect themselves from “secret deals” of sports entrepreneurs. This “Fans Rights Bill” was endorsed by Ohio Senator and former astronaut John Glenn who looked to allow the NFL to have a limited antitrust exemption for dealing with franchise relocation. Discussions at Capitol Hill foreshadowed a final decision by the NFL to end the four-month struggle of the “Save Our Browns” campaign.

On February 9, 1996, a deal was approved by Cleveland, the Browns and the NFL that ended the four-month struggle over the future of the franchise. The agreement allowed Modell to honor his contract with Baltimore and the Maryland Stadium

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117 Ibid.
Authority by moving the team; however, it granted the city of Cleveland the rights to the Browns legacy, including the colors, logo, and most significantly, the history of the Browns, and promised the city that a team, under the name “Browns,” would begin play in Cleveland by 1999. Eventually, an expansion franchise was granted and the city built a new stadium on the location of the then-demolished Cleveland Municipal Stadium.\(^\text{120}\)

Former Browns employee Michael G. Poplar suggested that because Modell had stated they would be a “lame duck” team if they were forced to play out their lease at Cleveland Municipal Stadium, that the NFL attempted to “remove all emotion” from the decision and allowed the Browns to move to Baltimore.\(^\text{121}\) Additionally, mounting pressures from antitrust lawsuits from the state of Maryland presumably led to the final decision.\(^\text{122}\)

An illustration of John “Big Dawg” Thompson hugging Mayor White in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* was representational of the success of the “Save Our Browns” campaign.\(^\text{123}\) Many members of the Northeast Ohio press, however, felt as though the fans had not been given what it deserved in the resolution. *Cleveland Plain Dealer* writer Joe Dirck explained while the “Save Our Browns” campaign displayed much community pride, that by giving into Modell and the NFL, they, specifically Mayor White, contributed to the larger problem in sport—that business overshadowed and diminished


\(^\text{121}\) Michael G. Poplar, *Fumble! The Browns, Modell and the Move: An Insider’s Story* (Cleveland, OH: Cleveland Landmarks Press, 1997), 310; also columnist Richard Sandomir explains that the “lame duck” team would have been bad for all parties and that Modell easily relinquished the team’s legacy when asked, see his “How Compromise Built Cleveland a New Stadium,” *New York Times*, Feb. 12, 1996, C4.


\(^\text{123}\) Koff, Heider and Grossi, “NFL Owner OK Deal,” 1A.
traditional sporting practices.\textsuperscript{124} Even Senator Glenn expressed that “the people of Cleveland deserved champagne;” however, “they ended up with a load of lemons.”\textsuperscript{125} A *Columbus Dispatch* editorial explained that if Cleveland had “stuck to its guns and enforced its stadium contract” it would have been “hard to imagine any judge who has to stand for re-election in Cuyahoga County ruling in Modell’s favor.”\textsuperscript{126} In the end, however, the NFL was able to put in place two franchises, one in Cleveland and one in Baltimore. In the press, the decision to “knuckle under” was critiqued as a way for Mayor White to express victory, while not challenging the powerful NFL. This illuminates the ways in which political motives within franchise relocation outweigh traditional fandom and civic activism.

Danielson noted that “public officials have been involved in efforts to lure teams and block their departure” and “federal and state courts have grappled with efforts to block teams from moving and to prevent leagues from abandoning places with teams.”\textsuperscript{127} These interactions are done sometimes for the greater good of the civic community, but often for political motives such as being reelected. Cities and politicians are often “held captive” by its professional sports teams who demand new facilities or threaten to relocate. Political leaders “recognize that attachments to teams are emotional, visible, and usually intense.”\textsuperscript{128} Thus, political leaders must adhere to the owners’ demands or face the consequence of being the one who allowed a hometown team to jump ship and transfer to a new city.\textsuperscript{129}

\textsuperscript{124} Joe Dirck, “Loyalty Rewarded with Real Cynicism,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Feb. 11, 1996, 1B.
\textsuperscript{125} “Glenn is Unimpressed with Deal on Browns,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Feb. 15, 1996, 12A.
\textsuperscript{126} “Dead Ball Foul-Modell Kicks Cleveland in the End Zone,” *Columbus Dispatch*, Feb. 18, 1996, 2B.
\textsuperscript{127} Danielson, *Home Team*, 14.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 14-15.
\textsuperscript{129} Euchner, *Playing the Field*, 14.
“Mayor Michael White accomplished what he intended . . . a future that includes NFL football,” explained *Cleveland Plain Dealer* writer Bud Shaw. He continued that the problem was that White misinformed the citizens involved in the “Save Our Browns” campaign. “He hid his intention—a compromise—behind evangelical speeches that led people to believe they were fighting for a great and irresistible moral cause.”^130^ Faludi noted that members of the “Save Our Browns” campaign developed a militaristic and activist grassroots tone; however, its main leadership encompassed White and other business leaders.^131^ Fans lionized Mayor White at the beginning of the campaign, as he directed the beginning of the movement. When the “peace treaty” was presented to the press and the Cleveland community; however, many questioned the original motives of the mayor.

“You are a hero—the one who tried everything in his power to preserve our team,” wrote Linda Zeltner.^132^ Bob Zeltner penned “we stand behind you all the way.”^133^ Dave Nolan, a member of the Convention and Visitors Bureau of Greater Cleveland, offered his congratulations to Mayor White and offered his assistance to him in the coming months.^134^ These messages followed Modell’s announcement of a forthcoming move and Mayor White’s effort toward the passing of the “Sin Tax” the following day. In the immediate aftermath of Modell’s November announcement, Mayor White garnered substantial local support and was presented as the one to galvanize the Cleveland

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^132^ Linda Zeltner, email to Mayor White, Nov. 6, 1995, see PFHF Browns Protest Letters.
^133^ Bob Zeltner, letter to Mayor White, Nov. 7, 1995, see PFHF Browns Protest Letters.
^134^ Dave Nolan and the Convention and Visitors Bureau of Greater Cleveland Staff, letter to Mayor White, Nov. 8, 1995, see PFHF Browns Protest Letters.
community. Throughout the four-month period of the “Save Our Browns” campaign, similar sentiments toward the Cleveland mayor persisted.

The tone, however, adapted when Mayor White and the “Save Our Browns” campaign “gave in” to the demands of Modell and Maryland, suggesting Cleveland supporters felt they were shortchanged by its political leaders. A Cleveland Plain Dealer article days before the February 9 resolution presented White as “possibly the most popular politician in America” because of his efforts in saving the Browns for Cleveland.\footnote{“Cash from Benny, Under the Wire,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Feb. 4, 1996, 3C.} Many critics of Mayor White suggested, as White was known for not being a sports fan upon his election, that he was fighting for the team’s legacy in order to position himself for reelection in 1997, which he won. This notion was accentuated with the deal between the city and the NFL. Many in Cleveland, according to Bud Shaw, expected Mayor White to “fire his silver bullet” and fight Modell in court to keep the team in Cleveland. Shaw continued that the resolution should not have been called a “victory” and that White acted like a conservative politician, rather than an aggravated fan, as he had been presented in the media throughout much of the “Save Our Browns” campaign.\footnote{Shaw, “Speeches,” 1A.} The intersection between the presentations of Mayor White as a hero and eventually as an uninspiring political figure articulates another way in which the cultural nexus between sport and business is heightened through franchise relocation. The grassroots efforts of the “Save Our Browns” campaign was ultimately overshadowed by Mayor White and those that made the final deal, although it was presented that “Big Dawg” persuaded Congress to push the NFL to allow Cleveland to retain the team’s legacy. The image of the White/“Big Dawg” embrace publicized this fabricated idea and
attempted to construct Mayor White as a participant of the grassroots movement and presented him as an individual who also felt the loss of personal identity through the loss of the team. Many continued to question, however, his ultimate motives and the ways in which the political leaders agreed on the deal.

**Conclusion**

This chapter illustrates the reaction of a “rust-belt” city to the loss of a professional sports franchise and articulates the ways in which these responses suggest the cultural ties among sport, business, personal identity, gender, class and community. The Save Our Browns campaign encompassed the unification of a slighted community which felt that the loss of their NFL team equated to the demise of their home. Browns fans expressed a loss of personal identity that they had achieved by living in Northeast Ohio for much of their lives. Moreover, they unified as activist groups to combat, if not overshadow, the prolonged feelings of the city’s urban decline. The conclusion to the four-month struggle led many to question the importance of professional sports. In what ways did the relocation of the Browns signify a larger evolution of the nexus of business and sport? The Cleveland Browns, which had been a team with a historically strong following, relocated. Many examiners and writers on professional football offered that this represented any team in the NFL could transfer to a new city.
Chapter 2

Looking at Losing: Presentations of the Media’s Narrative of the Cleveland Browns’ Relocation

After the Browns relocated to Baltimore, many considered that any professional franchise was in danger of being relocated as the Browns had been one of the storied teams in the second half of the twentieth century. This chapter considers the national view of the relocation of the Browns. It analyzes the multiple interacting influences presented in the popular press before, during and following the team’s displacement. A study of the differing narratives of the media during the Cleveland Browns’ relocation offers insights into the business and social culture of the NFL and the perceived economics of professional team sport at the end of the twentieth century.

The galvanization of the Cleveland population against Modell’s move and the press’ outrage illustrated a complex symbiotic interaction between the press and the public. The uprising in Cleveland led media critics and fans to question the actions of other professional sports entrepreneurs and provided a platform at the turn-of-the twenty-first century for sustained criticism of the great American spectacle. The questions that emerged about the industrial practices of the NFL and other professional sports leagues from the Browns’ move to Baltimore and from several other high-profile franchise relocations flowed from the social dynamics in Cleveland and in the larger American society during this period. Franchise relocation raised larger questions, in Cleveland and
beyond, about social class and economic mobility in the post-modern American economy. The local activism generated in Cleveland about a football team abandoning a city impacted a larger national debate on the economic and social practices of what sport historian Michael Oriard has labeled the “new NFL.”\(^1\) Oriard’s “new NFL” rests on “three cornerstones;” labor peace, television contracts, and stadium revenue. The Browns’ relocation clearly illuminates the third prong of this “new NFL,” raising questions about the public reaction to rampant franchise relocation and the proliferation of personal seat licenses (PSLs) as avenues for new revenue streams.\(^2\)

**NBC’s NFL Pregame Show**

On December 17, 1995, the Browns played host to their divisional and interstate rival Cincinnati Bengals in the last home game of the season. Entering the 1995


\(^2\) This chapter gleans information from three regionally-based perspectives to efficiently contextualize various viewpoints. Eight newspapers were read from the first of November, just five days prior to Modell’s announcement, to the end of February 1996. I also read the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* from the first of September through the same end date in order to examine the pre-announcement environment throughout Cleveland. To attain the local perspective of the move, I utilized the *Cleveland Plain Dealer, the Akron Beacon Journal, the Columbus Dispatch*, and the *Canton Repository*. Nationally, the *New York Times* and *USA Today* were read to highlight interpretations seen throughout the country. Finally, I drew on the *Washington Post* and *Baltimore Sun* to develop narratives of the Browns’ move at their destination city. Along with the daily papers, *Sports Illustrated* and *Newsweek* were helpful in expanding the scope of the national storyline. No source was more helpful to begin this study than the *National Broadcasting Company*’s (NBC) portrayal of Modell and team relocation in their pregame and halftime shows of the Browns’ final home game. Furthermore, television broadcasts by WEWS News Channel 5 in Cleveland on December 18, 1995, and December 24, 1995, provided insights into the social environment of the city and how the local media illustrated the situation; *NBC NFL Pregame Show*, Television, National Broadcasting Company, Dec. 17, 1995; *NBC NFL Halftime Show*, Television, National Broadcasting Company, Dec. 17, 1995; *Modell Interview*, Television, WEWS Cleveland News Channel 5, Dec. 18, 1995; *Save Our Browns*, Television, WEWS Cleveland News Channel 5, Dec. 24, 1995; While this study focuses on the way in which the media portrayed the story in Cleveland and its relationship with the “new NFL,” there were additional narratives that will not be examined, such as the tension between Maryland governmental officials and the Maryland Stadium Authority over the construction of a new football facility, the schism between stadium supports and Washington Redskins owner Jack Kent Cooke, and an abbreviated narrative of Baltimore residents who were hesitant to receive a football franchise in the same manner in which they lost the Colts in 1984.
campaign, the Browns had aspirations of a deep playoff run; however, going into the
game against the Bengals, Cleveland had lost six straight contests and owned a paltry 4-10
record. Nevertheless, the Browns handled the Bengals on the field. The team led 17-3
at halftime, 26-3 going into the last quarter of play and 26-10 as the final gun sounded.
Unfortunately, fans did not spend much time celebrating the victory in the stands.
Attendees of the game mourned the imminent loss of the team by crying, chanting and
dismantling seats and bleachers for souvenirs. After the game, players commiserated with
fans around the perimeter of the playing field where “Delirious fans greeted them with
hugs and high-fives and slaps on their shoulder pads.” Following the game, many fans
remained in their seats unable to mentally leave behind their team, while others continued
the demolition of the bleacher area. By the early evening, the stadium was emptied, and
the Browns’ stay in Cleveland had run its course.

Television studio pregame and halftime shows on December 17, 1995, provide
the most important analysis of the effects of the Browns’ relocation throughout
professional team sport. NBC broadcasted the Browns/Bengals regionally; however, its
pregame and halftime show for the Sunday lineup of NFL games focused on the Browns’
relocation. On what sports broadcaster Greg Gumbel described as a “surreal day for the
Browns [and] for all football fans,” commentators criticized Modell’s decision to relocate
the Browns and forecasted the greater context of the transfer. As the pregame show
opened, commentator Bob Costas stated that the NFL viewed the Browns’ situation as
“only the most extreme example of a recent spate of franchise hopscotching that imperils

3 Mary Kay Cabot, “Affair to Remember Emotional Browns Pound the Bengals,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Dec. 18, 1995, 1C.
4 Joe Dirck, “Fans’ Final Cheers Ring With Civility,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Dec. 18, 1995, 1B.
5 Pregame Show.
the league’s good name.” Later in the program, Gumbel announced what was occurring was the “worst action in sports; more action in the courts than on the field.” Depictions of the NFL involving tensions between business professionals, owners and high-priced lawyers helped deter the sport from the “common fan” and highlighted the interworking of the business of professional team sport. The pregame show also highlighted why the event garnered substantial national attention through interviews with Bengals’ owner Mike Brown and former Browns’ quarterback Brian Sipe. Brown, son of legendary Browns’ coach Paul Brown, provided context to the illustrious history of the franchise, and Sipe demonstrated the nationwide following of the team. He spoke about his week-long travels visiting various “Browns Backers” clubs throughout the United States during the prior week. By examining the history of the distinguished franchise, the national press applauded the “common fan” and simultaneously victimized the owners.

The most critical comments from NBC’s broadcast came from Pro Football Hall of Fame tight end and former Chicago Bears coach Mike Ditka and play-by-play broadcaster Costas. Ditka, known for his colorful commentary, maltigned Modell for his treatment of professional football fans in Cleveland, stating Modell “made the greatest mistake that he ever made. He tried to execute a plan that makes no sense . . . he’s made a reputation in this community [and] he destroyed it with one greedy move.” Ditka continued, “And that move was based solely on one thing, [and] nothing else: money,” suggesting that capitalistic avarice was central to the Browns’ dilemma. Similarly, in the game’s halftime show, Costas provided social commentary on the event. He explained that although Modell had provided numerous social and economic uplifts to the

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6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
Cleveland metropolis during his time as owner, all of his good-willed deeds had “been washed away in one monumentally ill-considered act . . . [and he] has become his sport’s and his generation’s, Walter O’Malley.” 9 By comparing Modell to the often decried Dodgers’ owner, Costas presented Modell as a figurehead for the era’s business concerns.

Ditka and Costas also alluded to the fragile standing of the NFL as a result of the Browns’ change of address. Costas affirmed that the league was cautious about “franchise free agency” and Ditka explained that the situation was strictly about greed and warned other NFL owners about the social consequences of team relocation. He explained, “I want to say this to some of the other owners in the National Football League . . . don’t make the same mistake. Fans do not forget.” 10 This lasting statement by Ditka highlights the numerous narratives of the national media concerning the expanding concerns of the “new NFL.” This consisted of rampant franchise relocation and the expanding business relations of the gridiron game. Furthermore, the national media denounced the “new NFL” because of its effects on the “common fan.” 11

Why did the media react in such disparaging fashion? Why did the national rhetoric castigate Modell while praising Cleveland’s football fans? How did the social and economic dynamics of Cleveland throughout the last half of the twentieth century make Modell’s decision less of a surprise in financial terms than the media and the public

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10 Pregame Show.
claimed? The history of professional football in Cleveland reveals the backdrop against which Modell’s fateful decision developed.

A Brief History of the Cleveland Browns

Professional football briefly appeared in Cleveland in the 1920s; however, a sustainable team did not arrive until the Cleveland Rams were established in 1937. Although the Rams left for Los Angeles after the end of World War II, professional football in Cleveland continued. The newly formed All-America Football Conference (AAFC) provided a franchise to Arthur “Mickey” McBride in 1944 who, in turn, hired legendary coach Paul Brown to run the fledgling team on the field. The Browns remained in the AAFC until the Conference’s demise after the 1949 season and then joined the NFL as part of the settlement between the two football leagues.12

Following the merger, the business relations of the Browns shifted. In 1953, a group of sport entrepreneurs led by David Jones bought the club from McBride. This marriage lasted only seven years as Art Modell procured the franchise in 1961 for $4 million dollars.13 In his examination of professional sport in post-World War II Cleveland, sport historian Phillip C. Suchma explained that Modell, who had not been a football magnate prior to purchasing the Browns, quickly positioned himself in the


13 During the seven years of the Jones’ group ownership, the Browns reportedly made $3.4 million. This was nearly six times the amount that they paid McBride for the franchise. See Adelman, The Business of Professional Football.
foreground of the franchise and looked to be more involved with the day-to-day operations of the team. The firing of Coach Paul Brown, following the 1962 season, cemented Modell as the leader of the team. Modell established himself as not just a successful professional sport business tycoon, but built on his sport connections to become a civic leader in Cleveland. Suchma stated that Modell became “one of Cleveland’s most active and respected civic leaders . . . and used his new image to branch out his business efforts into non-sport related ventures.” The team was successful throughout the period of Modell’s ownership and, going into the 1990s, was considered one of the illustrious franchises of the NFL.

While the Browns were not members of the “first generation” of NFL clubs, they became central to the league’s success after World War II. The Browns dominated the AAFC, winning all four championships during the Conference’s abbreviated tenure. The team became one of the most profitable clubs when it entered the NFL in 1950 as success on the field continued. The club won NFL championships in 1950, 1954, 1955, and 1964, and produced legendary players such as Otto Graham and Jim Brown. Under Paul Brown, the franchise was 214-158; reached a nine and five record in playoff contests; and won a combination of seven AAFC and NFL championships. Following the 1964 title game, however, Cleveland never won another NFL Championship, nor have the Browns ever played in a Super Bowl, as the championship game for professional football was dubbed beginning in 1967. After Modell usurped Brown as the face of the franchise, the club had many “heartbreaking moments,” from Brian Sipe throwing an interception on a blustery day against Oakland, to John Elway’s ninety-eight yard drive in the final

moments of the 1987 AFC Championship, to Earnest Byner fumbling away a chance at the Super Bowl the following year in the same game. These poignant moments have been passed down through generations of Cleveland fans who have become accustomed to “waiting until next year.”

While Browns fans have been distraught by failing to reach a Super Bowl, the team maintained a strong following. Since the 1980s, the Browns’ followers have been known as “extreme fans,” both in the stadium and out. In the stands, the east end zone bleacher area became known as the “Dawg Pound” after players Hanford Dixon and Frank Minnifield popularized the slogan on the field. John “Big Dawg” Thompson became the most well-known fan. Thompson, dressed in a brown Browns jersey, covered his face with a dog mask and held a large white dog-bone in his front row seat of the “Dawg Pound.” Out of the stadium, the team garnered a nationwide following from displaced Clevelanders. The Browns Backers Worldwide was established in 1984, and by 1990 had over 60,000 members and over one-hundred clubs throughout the world. The goal of the organization was to “actively support and positively promote the Cleveland Browns.”

Thompson and the Browns Backers were part of a movement during the 1990s for NFL teams to highlight their “super fans” and celebrate them as members of

the team and community.\footnote{Thompson, along with Fireman Ed of the New York Jets, the Hogettes of Washington, and countless rabid fans following the Oakland and Los Angeles Raiders are examples of the “super fans” of the 1990s. See Visa Hall of Fans, Pro Football Hall of Fame, Canton, OH.} After the November announcement of the team’s forthcoming move, the citizens of Cleveland fought for the retention of their beloved Browns and the local press extensively covered this social battle.

\textbf{The Local Media and the Browns}


In the immediate aftermath of Modell’s move, local journalists believed that the imminent demise of the Browns would send “shockwaves all over the country,” and that this relocation was “not your typical franchise shift.” They pointed out that Cleveland’s fans’ support for the team was legendary and that their counterpart in “every NFL city realize[d] that if it [could] happen here, it [could] happen anywhere.” Their struggle to save the Browns, they further insisted, “could lead the nation to a healthy and overdue re-examination of the role of professional sports in society.” One author noted that “Clearly, things have gotten out of whack.”\footnote{Joe Dirck, “We Should Refuse to Play NFL’s Game,” \textit{Cleveland Plain Dealer}, Nov. 12, 1995, 1B.}
Local animosity toward Modell, however, began months before his November announcement. Throughout the summer and during the early weeks of the 1995 NFL season, Cleveland sportswriters anticipated future problems with Modell. Earlier in the year, he proclaimed a moratorium period on negotiations with Cleveland officials. The press responded by taking the first step toward vilifying the owner. They painted Modell as a “disgruntled patron” who had “hurt feelings,” establishing the rhetoric that set up a larger backlash in the ensuing months.20

During the autumn, events throughout Cleveland distracted both the media and the public from the Browns dilemma. The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame opened, the Cleveland Cavaliers received the 1997 All-Star Game and the Cleveland Indians came within two victories of a World Series championship. Additionally, the Cavaliers traded former all-star and fan favorite Mark Price before the beginning of the NBA season. These events attracted much of the attention of the local press during the months of September and October, adding to the shock of Clevelanders when Modell proclaimed the team’s move.21

Throughout the Indians’ playoff run, stories about the renovation of Cleveland Municipal Stadium increased in the press due to an upcoming vote in the November elections. In what became known as the “Sin Tax Extension,” Cleveland officials hurriedly promoted “Issue 5” of the November ballot. Extending the tax on cigarettes,

20Dick Feagler, “For mum Modell. It’s a case of hurt feelings,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Sept. 1, 1995, 2A. For an anecdotal version of the “Modell situation,” see Kevin O’Brien, “Modell just has too much to think about,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Sept. 3, 1995, 3C in which O’Brien displays Modell as a disgruntled restaurant patron who was not willing to answer questions regarding relations with the establishment.
alcohol and other forms of supposed vice-ridden entertainment was to provide the revenue for the city to finance a renovation of Cleveland Municipal Stadium. There was a paucity of support for the tax allowance in the press prior to November 6; however, approval of the bill increased following Modell’s announcement and the issue was passed on the ballot the following day. While the “Sin Tax” passed, Modell had no intentions of breaking his deal with Baltimore for a “last-ditch effort” by Cleveland officials. The quick reversal of support for the tax displays the importance of the Browns to the Cleveland populace.22

Following Modell’s announcement, one popular narrative of the press was the prediction of future deterioration of Cleveland due to the Browns’ departure. “I thought that we just might have turned the corner. And we turned the corner—and there was Art Modell,” explained Cleveland Mayor Michael White a week following the announcement.23 This narrative of Modell hampering Cleveland’s urban revival helped spur national negativism toward Modell and franchise relocation.

Cleveland’s financial woes of the late 1970s and 1980s, along with agonizing professional sport seasons, contributed to the nickname given to Cleveland “Mistake on the Lake.” Sport historian Suchma has explained that the depiction of the downtown area consisted of “smoke-stained buildings, a polluted lakefront, a desolate downtown stricken

with crime and devoid of nightlife, and an attitude of hopelessness.”

Public narratives in the press of the city’s “renaissance” appeared from this time period until the mid-1990s and attempted to reinvigorate the civic identity of the formerly potent rust-belt metropolis. Cleveland officials and business professionals deemed the city a growing area of urban potential and emphasized the construction of many new sport and entertainment facilities as key examples. The city constructed a new baseball stadium and a basketball arena for the Indians of Major League Baseball and the Cavaliers in the area which became known as “Gateway Plaza.” Furthermore, in 1995, a national audience witnessed the opening of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame near the shores of Lake Erie. The revitalization of the downtown area was highlighted extensively by the local press and began to infiltrate national rhetoric. However, the creation of these city landmarks did not provide as much nationwide publicity as the events of October 1995.

Throughout most of the second half of the twentieth century, the Cleveland Indians were perennial losers and subject of public ridicule. Thus, when the club clinched the American League Central Division championship on September 8, 1995, the city benefited from national coverage. Though the Indians eventually lost the World Series to the Atlanta Braves, the press depicted the franchise’s achievements as another step toward the restoration of the city. Although success in professional baseball and the improvement of the infrastructure of the downtown area provided for social uplift, the city still had numerous underlying social and economic problems. Cleveland endured a decaying school system and failed to adjust to a new “technology based service

economy” emerging at the end of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the city’s “renaissance” was continuously seen through the narrative of the local press as it verbally lambasted Modell for hampering the city’s progression during the tenuous four month period of the Browns’ relocation.

The narrative of Cleveland’s push to retain its team was the most prominent story of the four month period. Rumors of the Browns’ relocation emerged at the beginning of November. *Cleveland Plain Dealer* articles from November 4 through November 6 illustrated the growing negative rhetoric surrounding Modell and the positive narration of Mayor White and the “Save Our Browns” campaign. Upon hearing rumors of an announcement coming the following week, White proclaimed Cleveland would stage a “no-holds-barred” campaign to keep the team and the popular slogan became “No Team, No Peace.” Quickly, the overwhelming sentiment of the city’s citizens consisted of feelings of betrayal. Throughout the remainder of the season, White and Cleveland officials protested NFL meetings, met with Commissioner Paul Tagliabue and organized the Cleveland population for a push to save the team after the end of the season. Throughout the ensuing weeks, White and the campaign organized a massive protest letter-writing movement, distributed thousands of telephone and fax messages to NFL owners and officials, handed out orange postcards and ribbons for protestors to wear at

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26 Suchma, “From the Best,” 406; Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland*, 190.
games and NFL meetings, and sent numerous caravans of fans to Pittsburgh for a Monday Night Football broadcast and to Atlanta and Dallas for the NFL meetings.  

White organized 300 Clevelanders as his “Shock Troops,” whom he deemed “his army” and became the leaders of the campaign. He proclaimed “We are trying to mobilize every single person—every man, woman and child . . . to rally to this cause to save the Browns.” The local media commended White and the “Save Our Browns” campaign. In doing so, they established their stance toward the relocation of the Browns. The Cleveland press published more examples of civic activism as the weeks progressed. The stories increased the awareness of the situation by the national media and escalated the condemnations of Modell. For example, the Cleveland Plain Dealer published stories about: “Orange and Brown” Day which by the Save Our Browns campaign established in the second week of December; a website devoted to compiling a petition to save the team entitled the “Burn Art Modell Page,” and a site called “The Fans Against Neglect,”—for “disillusioned fans of professional sport.” They additionally printed articles about the advertisements of local and national businesses protesting the move—including McDonald’s, a local pizzeria called “Geppetto’s,” the American Greetings Corporation, and Petsmart. Finally, they circulated a narrative of the “Two-Minute Warning Rally” by the campaign held in the middle of January. By February, the actions of Clevelanders helped sway the NFL to grant the city a new team and allowed them to keep the Browns’ legacy.

29 Afli-Odelia E. Scruggs and Desiree F. Hicks, “Browns Fans Take Protest on the Road,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Nov. 14, 1995, 10A.
Platform for a National Audience

The Browns’ relocation garnered national attention because of their place in NFL lore and their strong following. Greg Aiello, the NFL’s Director of Communications, mentioned that the amount of fan support following Modell’s announcement would be a factor and “it [did] not go unnoticed” by NFL officials upon receiving thousands of letters, telephone calls and faxes. Furthermore, Aiello stated “We’re not surprised that the fans in Cleveland care about the Browns, as evidenced by their attendance figures.” The NFL publicly acknowledged the “Save Our Browns” campaign in the weeks following the announced move, suggesting the importance of societal involvement to the final agreement four months later.

Other displaced NFL clubs toward the end of the twentieth century did not receive such exposure. For example, Aiello explained that the response of the Browns’ relocation attracted a stronger reaction than the events following the transfers of the Rams and Raiders in 1995. Specifically, during the same months which saw Modell’s “betrayal” of Cleveland, Bud Adams, owner of the Houston Oilers, organized a move to Tennessee. His rocky relationship with Houston officials finally boiled over and an offer of a new stadium in Tennessee was enough enticement to relocate the club. A rally to save the


32 Mary Kay Cabot, “Browns Fans’ Drive Uses Phone, Fax,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Nov. 12, 1995, 12A.
Oilers reportedly attracted only sixty-five individuals from the Houston area, and there was no national outcry for the city’s justice, as in Cleveland.\footnote{Cabot, “Browns Fans’ Drive,” 12A; There was more civic activism in Nashville to support the new stadium referendum than in Houston. See Michael T. Friedman and Daniel S. Mason, “‘Horse Trading’ and Consensus Building: Nashville, Tennessee and the Relocation of the Houston Oilers,” \textit{Journal of Sport History} 28 (2001): 281-284; Timothy W. Smith, “Modell Faces Hurdles Before Browns Move,” \textit{New York Times}, Dec. 10, 1995, 53.}

There was a lack of civic activism from the Houston contingency. This displays the importance of the Browns’ move onto the national stage. While explaining the importance of the civic attitude of Cleveland on the national environment, \textit{Washington Post} columnist Michael Wilbon explained that “the coolest thing about this whole messy episode is Cleveland’s self-empowerment.” He suggested that White was able to extract all of the energy of the “Dawg Pound” and demand changes from NFL officials. Wilbon further applauded Cleveland for proving people wrong who had previously stated they were “wasting their time.” “Given the deep despair we saw coming out of Cleveland since mid-autumn,” he explained, “three years without football in the larger scheme of things is a simple tick of the clock.” Cleveland kept a legacy that “will wear orange and brown . . . have Jim Brown and Marion Motley and Otto Graham as its ancestors . . . play in a new stadium, and be called the Browns.” Wilbon commended the city for fighting for their team more effectively than the Baltimore residents in 1984 who “might have saved the blue horseshoe, the name ‘Colts’ and the legacy of [Johnny] Unitas and [John] Mackey for the city of Baltimore,” if they were as strong as the Cleveland populace.\footnote{Michael Wilbon, “Is Everybody Happy?” \textit{Washington Post}, Feb. 10, 1996, H01; Kevin Allen, “Cleveland fans react with anger, sadness,” \textit{USA Today}, Nov. 7, 1995, 3C; “Fans would cheer move to keep teams in town,” \textit{USA Today}, Dec. 4 1995, 12A; Sandomir, “Owners,” S1.}

The lionization of Cleveland’s citizens suggests that the forthcoming critiques of the economics of professional football were profoundly influenced by the involvement of the local population. The national media became attached to the predicament of
Cleveland’s fans and expressed that they had been abused by Modell. Furthermore, nationwide opinion suggested that if the Browns left the city, no franchise in the league was safe.

George Vecsey of the *New York Times* helped shape the public opinion of Modell in the months following the announced move. “The overwhelming theme of 1995 has been greed, and nobody personified it more than Art Modell. He has reminded us that we are all suckers that even the NFL is a pitiful, helpless giant that cannot control the base urges of its owners,” Vescey thundered. The national media demonized Modell as a “greedy entrepreneur” who did not care for the fans of Cleveland. Just as Ditka expressed the Browns were moved solely for greed, writers in the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *Sports Illustrated* chastised Modell for only considering the monetary effects of relocating the team. The *Associated Press* commented, “The winner from this subsidy shell game: Browns’ owner Art Modell. He gets all money from concessions, luxury suits, club seats and parking, $40 million a year.” George Thomas of the *New York Times* asked, “What ever happened to respect for the league’s history and cooperative spirit?” Former NFL player and NBC analyst, Chris Collinsworth, remarked in *USA Today* and NBC Pregame Show and NBC Halftime Show where commentators clearly mourned for Cleveland’s citizens. Also see Michael Hiestand, “Analysts decry move by Browns,” *USA Today*, Nov. 8, 1995, 2C which quoted former NFL player and current TV commentator Chris Collinsworth as saying “The idea of packing that team up, and its 50 years of tradition, and leaving probably the best football fans in America [is] unconscionable.”

See Allen, “Cleveland fans react with anger, sadness” who quoted WKNR-AM sports radio broadcaster Doug Johnson as saying “If the Browns can leave, it means this could happen to any team.” Also see “Fans would cheer move to keep teams in town,” in which the Associated Press commented “If the Cleveland Browns can walk out of town after a half century of support from some of the country’s most loyal fans, no sports team is safe in any city. This could happen anywhere. And is. Houston’s football and baseball teams want to move. So do the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, the Seattle Seahawks, the Arizona Cardinals and possibly the Cincinnati Bengals. In hockey, the Quebec Nordiques moved to Denver and the Minnesota North Stars have moved to Dallas.”

Vecsey, “And the Winner,” S3.

Associated Press, “Your Taxes help put team owners on EZ street,” 10A.

Today, “when I see shots of owners’ boxes, I think about lawsuits and internal bickering. . . Sports is an escape, but now it’s worse than reality.” Modell was framed as the enemy of football fans and was depicted as the leader of everything that was considered wrong with the business relations of the “new NFL.”

The “New NFL” and the National Media

The national media illustrated the Browns’ relocation as a microcosm of the problems with the “new NFL” and the economics of professional team sport. Throughout the four-month period, columnists derided Modell and other owners in the NFL who considered moving. This suggests that the national perception was negative toward economics of sport overshadowing traditional sporting culture and practices. Because professional sport has been mythicized as a pastime, many continue to grapple with the differentiation between sport as a business and as a community identifier.

On September 19, 1995, a New York Times article expressed the start of a war between the NFL and Dallas Cowboys owner, Jerry Jones. NFL Properties, the NFL’s marketing sector, sued Jones in hopes of ending “deals to ‘undermine existing NFL sponsorship or licensing contracts.’” Jones spurred the action by constructing his own corporate sponsorships rather than following the trend of the other teams in the league.

On November 7, 1995, Jones’ counter suit for $750 million in federal court accused the NFL of preventing his team and other clubs from pursuing their own marketing deals.

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40 Hiestand, “Analysts decry move by Browns.”
The popular press channeled resentment of Jones’ legal battle into their narration of the Browns’ situation. Jones “helped set the climate for the bold moves and attacks we are seeing and will see,” stated New York Times columnist Thomas George, just one day after Modell’s announcement. The Browns’ relocation not only affected the Northeast Ohio population, it transformed the entire scope of professional team sport.

Jones’ new marketing procedures allowed him to alter the interworking of free-agency in the league. Dave Anderson noted that he “turned the salary cap into a dunce’s cap,” and his “express deals with Nike and Pepsi-Cola and American Express enabled the Cowboys’ owner to circumvent this season’s $37.1 million salary cap by using his cash flow to pay huge signing bonuses to Deion Sanders and others.” Likewise, when questioned why he chose to move the Browns, Modell explained that competing in the “new NFL,” where he paid a $5 million dollar signing bonus to wide receiver Andre Rison, led him to bankruptcy, and ultimately led to an inevitable relocation to a city where he could increase revenue. Although there was some dispute as to whether Modell was, in fact, bankrupt, his proclamation fuelled the national media’s attacks on free agency, signing bonuses, and other symptoms of the “new NFL.”

Jerry Jones’ new business model reshaped the economics of the game, making it necessary for teams to look for new avenues of profit. In a November Sports Illustrated column, Pittsburgh Steelers’ owner Dan Rooney explained that Jones had escalated the NFL revenue stream to a “new level.” He explained that Jones was “on a different plane

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44 Diane Solov and Ted Wendling illustrate Modell as a lavish spender in his personal life and explain that his claim that he could no longer afford to stay in Cleveland for business “didn’t have the ring of truth.” See their “Browns’ Woes Run Deep; Modell’s Spending, Debt Show Stadium Not the Only Issue,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Jan. 7, 1996, 1A.
with what he can do with players,” mainly because the Cowboys had a surplus of money to offer star players exorbitant signing bonuses. “So now you have this frenzy of teams looking for better deals, because they’re afraid they’re going to get left at the post,” explained the longtime Steelers’ owner.\(^{45}\) This new environment led to a rash of franchise relocation, or threats of team transfers. During the 1990s, nine NFL teams moved, threatened a transfer or were rumored to relocate due to rising costs of running a team and facility contract disagreements. In this era, Al Davis shifted his Raiders back and forth between Los Angeles and Oakland, the Los Angeles Rams transferred to St. Louis, the Browns moved to Baltimore, and Houston to Tennessee; however, during the four month period of the Browns’ dilemma, numerous teams were rumored to be relocating. Tampa Bay and Seattle considered leaving for better facilities elsewhere, Chicago nearly moved to Gary, Indiana, and an extension of a city tax to fund a new stadium was needed to keep the Bengals in Cincinnati.\(^{46}\)

“Franchise Free Agency,” as identified by *Sports Illustrated* columnist Peter King, created a “disturbing era” in the NFL. Buffalo Bills’ owner Ralph Wilson, Jr., expressed in an *USA Today* article that the NFL’s credibility had been shaken throughout the 1995 season. He illustrated that “fans used to believe that [the] league stood for something. Stability. It’s all crazy . . . All of this is hurting [the] league.”\(^{47}\) Wilson was an established member of the NFL owner hierarchy. Along with New England Patriots’ owner Robert Kraft and Bengals’ owner Mike Brown, tenured members of the league desired for the NFL to remain in its traditional locations. Supported by prominent


\(^{46}\) Gordon Forbes, “Economically, Modell has no choice,” *USA Today*, Nov. 7, 1995, 6C.

\(^{47}\) King, “Down,” Chuck Johnson, “Modell turns Browns fans blue over move,” *USA Today*, Nov. 6, 1995, 3C.
individuals associated with the NFL, the national press illuminated the delicate structure of the league due to teams constantly moving to increase their profitability.

Similarly, the press satirically critiqued “franchise hopscotching.” New York Times columnist Richard Sandomir remarked, “So you thought that only players could declare themselves free agents? Think again.” Sandomir continued, “You’ve got a sports franchise, a unique, valuable asset. Use it!” To do this, the New York Times author suggested that the owners “Threaten, wheedle, cajole and blackmail [their] way to fantastic riches!” Finally, he reminded the owners that they did not “have to sit around in those crummy box seats in that creaky old stadium or smelly arena.” “Remember you’re the boss!” concluded Sandomir as a detailed reminder that Modell and the other NFL elites were in total control of this “new NFL.”

By comparing team relocation to “blackmail,” the press inferred those NFL owners manipulated city officials and their fans in order for their own monetary gain—a major theme argued by economist Charles C. Euchner is his noted work Playing the Field.

Moreover, Sports Illustrated writer Rick Reilly constructed an anecdotal piece denouncing the “sports’ brand of economics” by comparing franchise relocation to a local restaurant moving for better facilities and wealthier clientele. Reilly’s character entered a local “falafel joint,” and was dismayed by the owner’s, Achmed, business strategy. While upholding national stereotypes of minority business owners as “swindlers” and “schemers,” Reilly explained that the strategy mirrored the business of professional team sport during the 1990s. The fictive Achmed explained that this was the way in which he “maximized profits.” He stated to Reilly that he learned this from “your NBA” and that it

49 Euchner, Playing the Field, specifically 210-211.
is comparable to the two-dollar-and-twenty-five cent price of a twelve ounce soft drink at a Golden State Warriors game, and a three dollar plain hot dog at “your famed Madison Square Garden.” Achmed continued to detail that the average NBA game charged a family of four nearly two-hundred dollars. Furthermore he asked Reilly, “Did you know what the top ticket for your worst football game, the Super Bowl, went up another $50 this year, to $350?” Achmed was astounded that attendance at this game had not decreased because of the price escalations. “From this I have learned that the American people, they will support any habitual activity as though it were a jihad [sic],” explained Achmed in response to why he demanded price escalations of Reilly’s traditional lunch order. Reilly suggests that the price of big-time sports events exceeded its worth and the U.S. American public was exploited by escalating prices of tickets and concessions. 50

When Reilly questioned Achmed about how he was allowed to demand public revenue to fund his business, Achmed replied “This I learned from your Art Modell of the Cleveland Browns. He, too, has a private enterprise, but he demanded these things from Baltimore and got them. It never hurts to ask.” Achmed was angered by the public officials in the city in dealing with his restaurant’s profitability. He continued, “Do you know that I get no share of the parking on the street in front of my establishment? Nor from the billboard advertising that sits high above my roof?” He stated that the city decided to use money to support a new crossing guard for a nearby intersection rather than fund his business. Because of that decision, Achmed declared “I must leave. I have no choice.” 51 Reilly’s use of satire allowed the reader to compare the progression of

50 See Rick Reilly, “A Matter of Dollars and Nonsense: Here’s what would happen is other businesses bought into pro sports’ brand of economics,” Sports Illustrated, Nov. 13, 1995, 114 for quotes and the satirical take on franchise relocation from Rick Reilly.
51 Ibid.
professional team sport in the 1990s to more relevant occurrence in their lives. The mockery of the business of sport by the *New York Times* and *Sports Illustrated* suggests how the United States population viewed, not only the Browns’ relocation, but the role of economics in professional team sport. While very few voices in the press displayed approval, the choice to continually quote negativism toward Modell and franchise relocation confirms how the national media shaped public rhetoric to condemn the “new NFL.”

The use of Personal Seat Licenses (PSLs)—when a patron pays for the right to purchase season-tickets at a sporting venue—by NFL clubs throughout the 1990s also drew poor reviews from the national press. PSLs were considered another prong of the economic upheaval in professional team sport near the end of the twentieth century. According to national columnists, the use of PSLs was another way for NFL owners to survive in the new era of escalating player salaries and free agency. Teams needed inventive ways of generating capital in order to compete with the larger market teams in the league. Bud Shaw of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* derided the way in which new stadiums were built in NFL cities. He stated, “PSLs are a lesser evil than taxpayer money, but barely.” This sentiment insinuates that the extortion of a city’s citizens for the “greed” of millionaire NFL owners and officials was at the forefront of the wrongdoings of the “new NFL.” In Reilly’s satirical piece, “Achmed” describes why he added fifty dollars to Reilly’s lunch order by stating, "Oh, loyal sir, it is the latest thing I learn from

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52 Nearly all of the “old guard” of NFL owners disapproved; however, younger owners differed. San Diego Chargers owner, Alex Spanos, stated “I think it’s the greatest move that Art Modell can make. When anyone can make out a check for $50 million, it just shows you how much football is really wanted around the country…When the owners can get what they want…I believe that they have that right to make that move.” Although this sentiment was seen, the resounding opinion was negative. See Johnson, “Modell turns.”

your American football teams. It is a fee you must first pay me in order to enjoy the privilege of paying me even more later.” NFL teams, in the 1990s, were “demanding that the public ante up big for the privilege of hosting major-league teams,” explained Newsweek writer Marc Levinson. Additionally, they demanded a “better lease, a tier of skyboxes or a whole new stadium—or some other city will.”

PSLs played a substantial role in the demands for increasing profit for team owners. The creation of PSLs and other mechanisms to increase revenues led the local and the national press to question exactly for whom was the game of professional football? Increasingly, the press and public wondered whether the NFL was entertainment for the “common fan” or an amusement for the rich and corporate elites?

**Social Class and the “New NFL”**

As the twenty-first century neared, the mainstream media focused on the social class divisions present in professional football. After the agreement to place a club in Cleveland to begin play in 1999 in a new stadium, a Cleveland Plain Dealer article mentioned how the new team and new stadium would not be for the “common fan.” In a city stereotyped for its “blue-collar” worker and tough economic times, the problem of escalating ticket prices was obvious. The public feared that no one except wealthy individuals would be able to watch the new Browns play. The story indicated that the new venue would have higher ticket prices, include expensive PSLs, and focus its attention on luxury boxes and corporate sponsors. This prediction came true; the new stadium required fans to purchase a right to buy season tickets ranging from five hundred

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to thousands of dollars.\textsuperscript{56} Many members of the media in Cleveland stated that this destroyed the community aspects of the Browns and hurt their value to much of Cleveland’s population. One Cleveland citizen stated that the new deal meant that he would not ever get to see the inside of the stadium, because it was too expensive for his family. If not everyone could afford to buy professional football in the city, then who was the team for?\textsuperscript{57}

Sports marketer Rick Burton outlined the growing cost of an NFL game during the 1990s. He demonstrated that from 1991 to 1998 the cost of attending an NFL game rose over sixty percent. The Fan Cost Index of the NFL indicates that for a family of four to attend a game in 1991 it cost a little over $150. By 1998 the figure rose to nearly $250, and increased to nearly $600 by 2005 for the league’s most successful teams.\textsuperscript{58} The NFL, however, continued to sell out games well into the following century.\textsuperscript{59} Dick Fenlon of the \textit{Columbus Dispatch}, derided the new class divide in professional football. He stated, “The NFL, God’s gift to the rich and famous, knows it has you, no matter what. It knows that you’ll idolize its players and drink the sponsors’ suds and line up to buy its overpriced, officially sanctioned shirts and socks no matter how it treats you.” Fenlon continued by describing the league’s market approach: “So the NFL caters to the


\textsuperscript{59} According to James T. Reese and Robin D Mittelstaedt, NFL Attendance rose .5% in 2000 from 1999. There has, however, been a trend of poor performing teams to have worse attendance. For example the Arizona Cardinals and Jacksonville Jaguars witnessed a 10% attendance decrease in 2000 from 1999, see their “An Exploratory Study of the Criteria Used to Establish NFL Ticket Prices,” \textit{Sport Marketing Quarterly} 10 (2001), 224-225.
fat cats of the world. It treats them like kings and you like dogs, and even with the Art Modell thing, you still don’t quite get it, do you? There you stand, outside in the cold with your nose pressed against the window looking in, drooling. Just as Achmed poked fun at the U.S. American people for failing to disassociate themselves from his restaurant no matter his business strategy, the media expressed that the NFL’s fan base, the “common fan,” was being exploited and manipulated by growing concerns of league and team profitability.

The media harshly criticized the business elites of the league, yet the NFL was able to sustain profitability largely because of luxury boxes and corporate sponsors. Few teams showed substantial profit off of luxury boxes in the 1980s; however, economists James Quirk and Rodney D. Fort revealed that throughout the 1990s many teams benefited from new luxury suites from stadium renovations or in the establishment of new facilities. Many cities looking to enter the professional team sport monopoly used luxury boxes, PSLs and corporate sponsors as avenues to fund new stadiums to entice teams to relocate.

The Cleveland media was not the only press indicating potential problems with not only the Browns’ new team, but the entire league. The New York Times, Newsweek and USA Today all expressed that fans were now alienated from professional football because it was too expensive to attend a game. Richard Sandomir of the New York Times explained that professional football was no longer about winning a Super Bowl ring;

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60 Fenlon, “NFL Saves Its Best.”
62 See Oriard, Brand, 149-162 for an analysis on “Stadium Games” in the “New NFL;” See Euchner, Playing the Field for a detailed look at how “major league cities” yearn for professional team sport and the tactics of the cities in persuading teams to relocate.
rather it was a medium for greedy owners to “unleash a geyser of cash from the sale of luxury boxes, club seats, food, concessions and parking.”\textsuperscript{63} Former NFL Commissioner Pete Rozelle feared for the future of the league, stating that the business model of the “new NFL” that emerged at the turn-of-the-century “may be the biggest problem the league has ever faced. . . . It’s very serious.”\textsuperscript{64} The problematic “new NFL” was not just a consequence of media fabrication; Rozelle, along with numerous league owners and public officials, showed that the dilemma infiltrated the national political scene.\textsuperscript{65}

Many public officials expressed the need for a creation of a “Fans’ Rights” bill because of the influence of the national press and the backlash toward Modell and the “new NFL.” Ohio Senator and former astronaut John Glenn pushed Congress for a bill to limit the interactions of teams if those interactions negatively affected the NFL’s “common fan.”\textsuperscript{66} Additionally, many news media endorsed the creation of a limited antitrust exception for the league to “prevent the type of heavy franchise movement that has struck the NFL,” stated \textit{USA Today} writer Jarrett Bell.\textsuperscript{67} Fans and news media were willing to allow the league to increase its power, while harnessing the clout of the “greedy” owners. In the minds of the public, in this instance, the authoritative NFL was more honorable than the “billionaire owners.”\textsuperscript{68}

Business monopolies, which throughout United States history have been targeted as sinister ways of controlling the marketplace, became desirable to the NFL nationwide

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{65} “‘Poor’ team owners cry on taxpayers’ shoulders,” \textit{USA Today}, Feb. 9, 1996, 12A; Levinson, “Field of Schemes,” 60.
\item\textsuperscript{66} “Glenn is Unimpressed with Deal on Browns,” \textit{Cleveland Plain Dealer}, Feb. 15, 1995, 12A.
\item\textsuperscript{67} Jarrett Bell, “Congress could put brakes on NFL moving van,” \textit{USA Today}, Nov. 30, 1995, 1C.
\item\textsuperscript{68} Sandomir, “Owners,” S1; “‘Poor’ team owners,”; Larry Weisman, “Decision on Browns going right to the wire,” \textit{USA Today}, Jan. 20, 1996, 3C; Levinson, “Field of Schemes,” 60.
\end{itemize}
fan base. An editorial in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* affirms this view. Writer Richard De Uriarte explained that “Like it or not, the NFL is no longer the cozy little socialist monopoly that it was 20 years ago.”69 This reifies the notion that the business of sport differs from traditional big-business patterns. Much of the United States public still does not accept that professional team sport is a business. The media expresses this viewpoint by highlighting the plight of Clevelanders in their battle and the damage done to the communal aspects that surrounded their professional football team. When compared to other businesses, the press and the public imagine that sport is a distinctive medium. The ugly side of the professional game appears when economics become front-page material, particularly during the case of the Browns’ relocation, offering insights into the meaning of sport for a large portion of the U.S. American public. Although the business aspect of the league remained stable, the negative reaction of the press dealing with fan alienation has been present throughout the past decade and the present day. Fans do not appreciate business matters interfering with traditional sporting practices and rituals, and the fact that attending a game has become so costly suggests why the media expressed that the sport of professional football may not be for anyone except large companies and the upper class.

**Conclusion**

Cleveland’s battle over losing the Browns created a platform for the media to criticize the expanding economics of the gridiron game. Browns’ fans showed the connection that a “major league city” has with its professional sport franchises. Additionally, they highlighted the perceived problems of the “new NFL” and the

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69 Richard De Uriarte (Editorial), “Will the Field Ever be Level?” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Nov. 22, 1995, 11B.
widening social class divide present throughout the sport. Modell and other owners were portrayed as the figurehead for the business of sport becoming more important than the sport itself. NFL games became events not associated with the “common fan,” but with wealthy individuals and corporate sponsors. The media’s perception illustrates the alienation of many fans due to a socioeconomic class divide. Moreover, the city of Cleveland fought the “new NFL” and was able to retain its team’s legacy producing a new, but not better, franchise.
Chapter 3

Images and Meaning of Sports Entrepreneurship: The Polarization of Art Modell’s Representation

Chapter three articulates the images and meanings of sports entrepreneurship in relationship to the cultural nexus of sport and business. In this chapter, the cultural nexus is envisioned as the intersection between the ways in which the United States press and popular culture perceives the business of sport, but more specifically the influences the press regards as significant to assess the positives and negatives of the professional sports industry and entrepreneurship. These relationships importantly illustrate the perceived problematic connection between business and sport in the United States.

Franchise relocation in the United States sports industry typically causes segmented and often passionate viewpoints and opinions of team owners, administrators and civic officials. Presentations of these sports entrepreneurs yield insights into cultural meanings of professional sport in the United States. The pursuits of business professionals in professional team sport illuminate not only the importance of sport to social groups, but the ways in which populations and communities regard the place of business and economics in the sports industry. Of particular interest is the case of former
Cleveland Browns’ and Baltimore Ravens’ owner Modell, who relocated the Browns to Baltimore following the 1995 National Football League (NFL) season.¹

This chapter examines the paradoxical images and meanings of sports entrepreneurship through the lens of the ways in which the national press, but mainly the press in Northeast Ohio and the Baltimore and Washington metro areas, envisioned the economic and social impact of Modell’s business decisions before, during and in the aftermath of the transfer of his team. These discussions illustrate the ways in which the contradictory visions of sports entrepreneurship articulate the publics’ divergent perspectives of professional sport as a business and as a community identifier. The cultural nexus of business and sport published in popular culture has been problematically influenced by traditional sports regionalism and successes, principally of on-the-field achievements. These problems have lessened our understanding of professional sport and trivialized more comprehensive accounts and scholarship on the sports industry. Three themes and narratives are analyzed to explicate this cultural nexus. First, it explores Modell’s representation as a civic promoter and a contributor to the NFL beginning with his purchase of the Browns in 1961. Second, it illustrates his maligned image in Northeast Ohio and nationally upon the transfer of the team in 1996. Finally, it

¹ Frequently occurring since the middle of the twentieth century, franchise relocation is a significant facet of the United States sports industry. Specifically, the NFL expanded the market of professional football and the dominance of the league in the 1990s when four clubs transferred to new cities (Browns, Oilers, Raiders, and Rams). A scant amount of scholarship has been written on these movements except for Friedman and Mason’s look into the transfer of the Houston Oilers to Tennessee. For an analysis of professional team sport relocation prior to the Browns’ move see Charles C. Euchner, Playing the Field: Why Sports Teams Move and Cities Fight to Keep Them (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1994); Michael T. Friedman and Daniel S. Mason, “‘Horse Trading’ and Consensus Building: Nashville, Tennessee and the Relocation of the Houston Oilers,” Journal of Sport History 28 (2001): 271-291; Neil J. Sullivan, The Dodgers Move West (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); The settlement was similar to the 1960 decision by MLB to grant Washington D.C. an expansion franchise when the Senators moved to Minneapolis and became the Minnesota Twins, see Benjamin G. Rader, Baseball: A History of America’s Game (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 189-203.
analyzes the transformation of Modell from an avaricious entrepreneur to his role as a Baltimore and Washington metro areas sports icon in the years following his arrival.²

Platform for a Study

On October 12, 2011, longtime actress Patricia Modell died. “Pat” Modell was the wife of Arthur Modell, the current minority owner of the NFL’s Baltimore Ravens. She had a twenty-two-year career in motion pictures and on television, appearing in programs such as People’s Choice, General Hospital, Twilight Zone, and Maverick. “Art” Modell remained an iconic figure to American football followers as he infamously moved the Cleveland Browns to Baltimore following the 1995 NFL season. Undoubtedly, Pat Modell’s death was newsworthy. It also, however, constructed a platform for discussions of the images, meanings and legacy of the former Browns’ and Ravens’ owner.³


News stories from different publishers illustrated the life and significance of Pat Modell, who once held the record for the most television appearances by a woman. The stories, however, also mentioned Art Modell’s polarized image in NFL lore. Baltimore and Washington metro areas publications delivered messages of condolence to the Modell family and asserted that both Pat and Art were upstanding, moral, and gracious philanthropists. The articles mentioned the Modell’s charities, the provision of financial assistance to impoverished populations, and the upstanding manner in which they controlled and ran the Ravens franchise. In contrast, writers from Northeast Ohio displayed lingering resentment toward him. When asked in his weekly column “Hey, Tony!” if it were time to forgive Modell for relocating the Browns due to the passing of his wife, Cleveland Browns’ columnist Tony Grossi responded “I think it’s time to consider Robert Irsay for the Ravens Ring of Honor.” These polarizing reactions to and rhetoric about Modell offer a glimpse of the ways in which he has been discussed since the day he announced that he would transfer the Browns to Baltimore. They also created an important area of research about the shifting and fluid images of sports entrepreneurs and the ways in which these individuals represented fragmented images of the professional sport/business cultural nexus.

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4 This record was eventually broken by her friend and star actress, Lucille Ball, see “Soap star Patricia Modell dead at age 80,” October 12, 2011, http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-31749_162-20119428-10391698.html.
The Civic Promoter and NFL Business Leader

The representations of Art Modell from 1961 through 1996 demonstrates the ways in which populations have viewed sports entrepreneurship during eras of successful business and traditional sporting practices. Beginning in the 1960s, he became a positive symbol of a failing rust-belt city, as well as a popular representation of the flourishingly successful NFL; thus, his image represented the perceived purity of sport, rather than the disparaged business entanglements of later years.

While an NFL club in Cleveland briefly appeared in the 1920s, a permanent franchise was non-existent until the founding of the Cleveland Rams in 1937.7 The Rams, however, were hardly financially successful even losing reportedly $40,000 in 1945 despite winning the NFL championship.8 After that season, its owner Dan Reeves pressured the NFL to allow him to relocate his team to Los Angeles. Professional football, however, remained in the rust-belt city when the fledgling All-America Football Conference (AAFC) offered a team to Arthur “Mickey” McBride in 1944. McBride hired famous Ohio State University football coach Paul Brown to run the team and the Browns won AAFC titles in all four years of the conference’s existence. The Browns remained in the AAFC until the Conference’s demise following the 1949 season and joined the NFL the following year.9 In 1953, an entrepreneurial group headed by David Jones bought the team from McBride and successes continued on the field in the NFL. It was Brown,

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7 Coenen, *From Sandlots to the Super Bowl*, Appendix A. For a better description of professional football in Cleveland prior to the Browns’ inception, see Suchma, “From the Best,” 35-38; 60-95.
however, who was the “alpha and omega of the Cleveland Browns franchise” during his tenure as head coach.\textsuperscript{10}

Art Modell purchased the Browns from Jones in 1961 for nearly four million dollars. A New York Jewish advertising man, he was initially perceived as a “carpetbagger,” unworthy of owning the city’s most successful professional franchise and his image stood in sharp contrast with the lionized Brown. Modell’s image as an “advertising man” and his Jewish heritage initially led the Cleveland press to label the owner as greedy, similar to popular anti-Semitic stereotypes throughout the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{11} The media additionally depicted his representation as the potential reason for the future urban decline of the rust-belt and blue-collar city, a fear of Cleveland civic officials from the end of World War II, which, according to sport historian Philip C. Suchma, was due to a failing manufacturing sector and more discussion than action in political committees.\textsuperscript{12}

Initially, Modell publicized a potentially strong relationship with Brown and expressed a desire to befriend the legendary coach for the betterment of the franchise; however, Brown became distraught due to the “hands-on” approach of the new owner. Modell frequently appeared on the field, in the locker room and at practice, becoming a ‘player-owner.’ Likewise, Modell feared that he could never position himself atop the organization with Brown still on the sidelines. During his post-coaching career, Brown informed a reporter that he approached him and explained that the Browns could never be his because “as long as you are here . . . whenever anyone thinks of the Cleveland

\textsuperscript{10} Suchma, “Losing Is a Work of ‘Art’” 38.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 38-39.
\textsuperscript{12} After the Cleveland Indians of Major League Baseball won the World Series in 1948, the city deemed itself the “City of Champions.” Their successes in professional baseball, football, and minor league hockey vaulted them to the top of the sports world at midcentury. See Suchma, “From the Best,” 88-113.
Browns, they think of you.” Modell reportedly continued “Every time I come to the stadium, I feel that I am invading your domain, and from now on there can only be one dominant image.” Thus, he fired Brown following the 1962 campaign.

Upon the removal of the coach, Modell and the franchise continued to succeed with star running back Jim Brown. Brown’s early retirement, however, left a void in Cleveland’s sporting image; Modell filled that void. Furthermore, during the late 1960s and 1970s, Modell became a ‘civic promoter’ for the Lake Erie metropolis. The media embraced him and his connections with affluent civic boosters and officials allowed him to differentiate himself from his old New York persona. He became not only a leading professional sports owner, but a positive civic entrepreneur for Cleveland. The successes of the Browns in the 1960s—winning the NFL Championship against the Baltimore Colts in 1964—along with his amicable relationship with the press allowed Modell to circumnavigate his stereotyped New York and Jewish image. Although the Browns struggled throughout most of the 1970s, by the end of the decade he was known as “Cleveland’s most active and respected civic leader,” especially in the profitable vaulting of a landmark downtown Cleveland hotel and the financial successes of old Cleveland Municipal Stadium.

The NFL Contributor

Parallel to his maturation in Cleveland, Modell became a well-known owner in the NFL. As the proprietor of the NFL champions in 1964, Modell also evolved into a

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15 Information from this paragraph is taken from Art Modell’s profile on the Baltimore Ravens webpage. Thus, it is representational of the ways in which he and the Ravens believe he is remembered. See
well-known commodity throughout the NFL landscape. In 1962, he helped negotiate the
NFL’s first national television contract with the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS).
In 1967, he was elected NFL President (the position only lasted until 1969) and he
chaired the Owners Labor Committee, which negotiated the league’s first collective
bargaining agreement. In 1969, Modell served on the NFL-AFL Merger Committee that
intended to merge the two rival leagues of the prior decade. He agreed to transfer his
team to the new American Football Conference (AFC) along with the Pittsburgh Steelers
and Baltimore Colts to provide a competitive balance in the dual-conference league, a
move that was nationally presented as quite generous. He was also well regarded for his
contributions to NFL Films; he worked with legendary NFL commissioner Pete Rozelle
and became the organizations first chairperson. Finally, in 1970, Modell was a
‘negotiator’ on behalf of the NFL with the American Broadcasting Company (ABC). His
contributions led to the creation of the longstanding and successful television program
*Monday Night Football*. He also “volunteered” his Browns to play in the inaugural game
against Joe Namath and the New York Jets. Visibly, popular history lauded the Browns’
owner through the last quarter of the twentieth century. His affairs as a leading NFL
official placed him in the ‘inner-circle’ of the NFL owners’ hierarchy. Routinely, he
noted his work as important to the future of professional football and the NFL, and many
journalists from both Northeast Ohio and the Baltimore and Washington metro areas

“Baltimore Ravens-People-Art Modell,”
http://www.baltimoreravens.com/People/Staff/Executive/Art_Modell.aspx. Baltimoreravens.com;
Additionally, information from the Cleveland and national press corroborate much of this information. See
Jamie Turner, “The league that changed football: American Football League’s birth was 50 years ago,”
*Cleveland Plain Dealer*, August 5, 2009,
http://www.cleveland.com/browns/index.ssf/2009/08/theLeague_that_changed_footba.html; Suchma,
agreed; however, his positive rhetoric was legitimized because of his close connection with the daily press.

Sport historian and English professor Michael Oriard explained that during labor disputes of the 1970s, the sports sections of the press were “in the owner’s pocket.” The press illustrated a belief that the fans would have to “pay for whatever the players won” during the 1974 players’ strike. The notion that the players’ demands would equate to higher ticket prices was “one of those distortions that acquired the status of self-evident truth,” according to Oriard.16 The sportswriters, however, demonstrated this belief that the owners and fans were the “victims” in the labor dilemmas of the decade. This relationship was best seen between Modell and the Cleveland Plain Dealer. The local press frequently gave Modell a platform to express his concerns over the rise of player salaries and the demands of the player’s union. Specifically, Oriard explained that on July 14, 1974, the Cleveland Plain Dealer interviewed Modell and the story published in a full two-page story in the Sunday Sports Section in which the author derided the players by insinuating they were looking for more money than they needed to survive in the NFL.17 The article illustrated the NFL owners as the unfortunate losers during the strike, and the players as the greedy scoundrels. Likewise, the local press paid tribute to Modell for his gracious move to the AFC during the NFL-AFL merger—not acknowledging that he most likely agreed to a move to join a supposedly weaker AFC. Furthermore, he stated several days after the announced league realignment that each team that moved to the

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16 Oriard, Brand NFL, 80, 82.
17 Ibid., 82.
AFC would receive two to three million dollars in compensation for the ‘cordial transfer.’18

Finally, Modell’s image was enhanced in the national press following the successful 1983 antitrust lawsuit against the NFL by Oakland Raiders’ owner Al Davis. Davis’ victory in court allowed the infamous owner to transfer his franchise back-and-forth between Oakland and Los Angeles in the 1980s and 1990s.19 Likewise, when the upstart United States Football League (USFL) sued the NFL for antitrust violations, Davis was the only league owner to vote on the USFL’s side.20 Davis’ rivalry with the NFL and its owners was publicized in the media, often with Davis as the enemy. Modell was one of the NFL owners who opposed the weakening of the league through franchise relocation and rival organizations. He publicly lambasted Davis, voted against the Raiders’ relocation and offered words of condolences to the fans displaced by the revolving Raiders franchise. Additionally, he spoke in favor of traditional NFL regionalism rather than “franchise free-agency.” He explained that he “would much prefer the Oakland Raiders instead of the Los Angeles Raiders and the Baltimore Colts instead of the Indianapolis Colts,” setting himself up to be a target of hypocrisy a decade later.21 Though he later moved the Browns for his own economic gain, his stance as an upholder of traditional regionalism in the league marked him as a leader in the NFL owner hierarchy. Clearly, throughout the second half of the twentieth century, Modell was one of the most popular, successful and opinionated owners in the league, and his

18 Suchma, “Losing Is a Work of ‘Art,’” 44.
21 Oriard, Brand NFL, 98-100, 104-105, 127-128.
role as a sports entrepreneur was celebrated throughout the NFL landscape, specifically in Northeast Ohio.

**The Denigration of Modell**

In the early 1990s, Modell was seen as an exalted figure to Northeast Ohioans. According to journalist and author Susan Faludi, Clevelanders expressed a consanguineous relationship with the Cleveland Browns’ owner; however, by the end of the decade he was a ‘fallen father figure.’ When he moved the Browns to Baltimore following the 1995 NFL season, Cleveland’s citizens and city officials fought for the retention of the team through legal maneuvering and civic activism. The national press tarnished his image by comparing him to other infamous sports entrepreneurs and established him as representative of the problems of professional team sport in the 1990s. Northeast Ohioans also disparaged the former civic promoter, his image became tarnished as “evil,” and he was known as a “betrayer.” The shift in the ways in which the press viewed sports entrepreneurship suggests that business decisions were viewed through an anti-business lens. The press, and sports followers, examined sports entrepreneurship as a positive image when professional sport enhanced the civic identity; however, when free enterprise adapted the traditional sports landscape, a negative persona was constructed, suggesting the ways in which traditional sporting practices adapted the ways in which the press viewed the cultural nexus of sport and business.

Modell was vilified in national culture following the announcement that he would relocate the franchise. Cleveland’s dilemma was accentuated by the national press.

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because of the strong following of the team the previous two decades and the strong civic activism and response by Northeast Ohioans in the months following his announcement of an imminent move to Baltimore. The national press did not approve of the illustrious Cleveland franchise being uprooted for perceived monetary gain. He was compared to the decried former Brooklyn Dodgers’ owner, Walter O’Malley, who infamously moved his team to Los Angeles in 1958. The comparison to O’Malley, who came to personify the vilified sports entrepreneur because of the ardent following of the Brooklyn franchise upon his move, suggests that the national media favored traditional regionalism in the professional team sports landscape. Additionally, upon his announcement, the national media asserted that he and other NFL entrepreneurs of the 1990s were the reason for the troubling shift toward the “new NFL.” This “new NFL” explained expanding economics of the gridiron game and included escalating ticket receipts, massive franchise relocation and the proliferation of personal seat licenses (PSLs). Because he moved the Browns to better his revenue from stadium operations, the national media denounced the “new NFL” and the role of sports entrepreneurship, similar to the ways O’Malley was illustrated as a villain in popular culture.

The media asserted that Modell was a symbol for the business of sport overshadowing traditional sporting regionalism and practices. George Vecsey’s commentary in the *New York Times*, which insisted that nobody better represented the ‘greed’ of professional sports in the mid-1990s than Modell, illuminated the ways in

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23 Peter Schmuck, “Modell’s Hall snub has analogy in baseball’s O’Malley,” *Baltimore Sun*, December 10, 2007; For depictions of the way in which O’Malley was vilified see Roger Kahn, *The Boys of Summer* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006).
which the press viewed the role of economics and traditional business practices in professional team sport.\textsuperscript{26} The blossoming of the “new NFL” during the late 1980s and early 1990s was represented, in part, by the grandiose stadium deals completed by powerful NFL owners such as the Dallas Cowboys’ Jerry Jones. In what was described as the “Jerry Jones effect,” many owners in the league tried to maximize their profits to stay competitive by signing free agents and offering substantial signing bonuses to star players.\textsuperscript{27} Modell was often criticized for his poor management of the Browns’ salary, leading him to look for profitability in other areas. Additionally, the era of “franchise hopscotching” or “franchise free agency” as coined by \textit{Sports Illustrated} journalist Peter King, created a new “disturbing era” in the NFL; Modell was again blamed as the entrepreneur to create the ‘delicate’ environment in professional team sports near the end of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{28} Finally, the “new NFL” saw the expansion of PSLs and costly season tickets as a way to maximize profits for franchise owners. Critics of his decision to relocate the Browns stated that his goal was to install PSLs and other forms of price gouging within a new stadium deal in the Baltimore and Washington metro areas to be built upon the arrival of the Ravens. Although many NFL franchises and sports entrepreneurs of the 1990s acted in similar fashion to the vilified Browns and Ravens owner, Modell typified the resentment toward the perceived problems of the professional sports/business cultural nexus. Some offered that the “new NFL” problematically


transformed the league, and professional sport in general, into a class-oriented system.

“The absurdity of Cleveland losing the Browns fed perfectly into the growing disenchantment around the country with professional sports in general,” explained *Cleveland Plain Dealer* journalist Joe Dirck.29 The press insinuated that only those fortunate enough to be able to afford PSLs and costly season tickets were able to remain fans of their favorite NFL franchise; Modell headlined this notion.

Michael Poplar articulated the rhetoric explaining the business decision to transfer the Browns to Baltimore in his insider account of the relocation entitled *Fumble!* Poplar, an accountant who served as vice president and treasurer of the Cleveland Stadium Corporation from 1975 to 1996, explained that upon the announcement of the incoming team relocation, many franchise employees and other civic entrepreneurs felt that Modell received a “sweetheart deal” with the Maryland Stadium Authority.30 Poplar inferred that Modell’s decision to move the team was a complex combination between the adaptations of economics in the NFL and the ways in which his decisions within other business ventures ultimately led to financial ruin. Additionally, he elucidated that many other individuals within Northeast Ohio were more responsible for the move than many had assumed. Poplar established a negative framework for the ways in which the business decision was viewed in Northeast Ohio and nationally, a necessary bandage to a intricate entrepreneurial decision which left Modell “with no choice” but to move his club to Baltimore. Poplar’s viewpoint, however, hay have reflected the opinion of a disgruntled employee, as it became apparent through the work that he was bothered by the loss of

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29 Joe Dirck, “Loyalty Rewarded with Real Cynicism,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, February 11, 1996, 1B; Also see Bud Shaw, “The Speeches Were Better than the Deal,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, February 10, 1996, 1A; Bill Livingston, “New Browns Won’t Be for Average Fan,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, February 9, 1996, 1D.
30 Poplar, *Fumble!* 283-328.
jobs from Cleveland Stadium Corporation employees (including his own). His assumptions then—whether apologetic toward Modell or accusatory—relied on personal feelings of resentment toward losing a job, not of an accurate economic assessment of Modell, Cleveland and the Browns. The work, however, did establish the foundation for the ways in which the local press discussed the Browns’ relocation in the following decade throughout Northeast Ohio. Modell was still viewed as a vilified entrepreneur and overall the evolving entrepreneurial decisions were disparaged.

Undoubtedly, however, Modell has been disparaged in Northeast Ohio. In contrast to his popular image during the Browns’ successes of the 1960s and his auspicious business ventures of the 1970s and 1980s, his image evolved into a ‘hated’ sports entrepreneur. The creation of a “Save Our Browns” campaign successfully saved the team’s legacy—including the colors, logo and history of the Browns—but he had no intentions of breaking his deal with Baltimore and Maryland officials, thus his image was maligned as a betrayer and enemy of the city. For example, in letters to Modell and the NFL found at the Pro Football Hall of Fame Bob Wokoun of North Royalton, Ohio, wrote “Yes I would like to hang him (Modell) for this.”31 Lakewood, Ohio, resident Joyce Harry described Modell as “despicable,” and Mrs. A. Quainy of Mantua, Ohio, compared him to a “cheating spouse.”32 These ‘hated images’ of Modell have been normalized in Cleveland rhetoric. In the intervening decade, his name sparked vehement attitudes and behaviors from segments of Northeast Ohio’s population. He was seen as a

31 Bob Wokoun, letter to Paul Tagliabue, Nov. 8, 1995, see Browns’ Fans Protest Letters, PFHF
32 Joyce Harry, letter to Paul Tagliabue, Nov. 9, 1995, see Browns’ Fans Protest Letters PFHF; Mrs. A. Quainy, letter to National Football League, Nov. 9, 1995, see Browns’ Fans Protest Letters Collection PFHF.
betrayer of the city, his name rooted in evil, and his image painted as a greedy, loathsome, entrepreneur.

Furthermore, discontented Browns’ fans created a website entitled *Modell Death Watch* following his exodus in 1996. Comprising “a glance at Art Modell’s latest known Death Status,” the webpage included images of the famous December 4, 1995, *Sports Illustrated* cover showing a caricature of him punching a Browns’ “Dawg” in the gut, an image of Cleveland Municipal Stadium, a photograph of a Browns’ fan protesting the teams’ move with profanity-laced signage, and a picture of him holding the Lombardi Trophy after winning the Super Bowl with Baltimore along with a caption reading “There is no justice.” Moreover, while using a satirical image of sexual assault, and affirming hegemonic masculinity in the business of sport, the *Modell Death Watch* includes an illustration of a cartooned Modell performing a sexual act on a cartooned dog along with the subtitle “This needs no caption.”

Additionally, the website lists numerous links to stories about Modell throughout the past decade and a half. Finally, there is a link which provides viewers the opportunity to link the *Modell Death Watch* to their website and a “quick view” of the “latest known Death Status” of the disparaged owner. With cartooned images of the deprecated former Browns’ owner, and links to relevant pages regarding images of Modell, the website affirms the disdain of Modell to segments of Northeast Ohioans. It also reifies the notion that the cultural nexus between business and sport is represented by extreme and passionate social opinions which problematically promote violent images and rhetoric toward scorned entrepreneurs.

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34 Ibid.
From Greed to Hall of Fame

Initially, Modell’s image in the Baltimore and Washington metro areas was polarized; some presented the arrival of the Ravens as a substantial success for the region while others believed it was another example of avaricious sports entrepreneurship. A 2009 documentary entitled *The Band That Wouldn’t Die* summarized the Baltimore Colts’ marching band which continued to play following the team’s relocation in 1984. Upon the arrival of the Ravens in 1996, the band changed their name to Baltimore’s Marching Ravens. *Washington Post* columnist Ann Hornaday explained that the film portrayed Art Modell as a hero, the one who meshed the lost culture of the Colts with the Ravens. This articulates the recent positive image of him throughout the Baltimore and Washington metro areas. This representation, however, was fluid. Initially, the area press stressed reluctance toward materialistic sports entrepreneurship, thus, affirming the regions’ contradictory stance toward the professional sports/business cultural nexus. While as a sport entrepreneur he was initially disparaged, the media exalted him following achievements of the team and the city’s social uplift.  

At first Modell was poorly presented in the Baltimore and Washington metro areas’ press. “The welcome Modell received in Baltimore was not even close to what he had expected a city that had wanted a team so badly after owner Robert Irsay took the beloved Colts to Indianapolis in 1984,” explained *Washington Post* columnist Ken Denlinger in 1998. He continued, “Mixed with the cheers was anger, from Baltimorians [sic] troubled by getting a team the same way they lost one and taxpayers upset that

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35 *The Band That Wouldn’t Die*, directed by Barry Levinson, (Severn River Productions, 2009).
36 Ironically, the team played ten halftime shows for the Cleveland Browns after being hired by Art Modell; Ann Hornaday, “Colts Left Town, but Film Salutes the Band That Played On,” *Washington Post*, Oct. 8, 2009, C01.
Modell would be recipient of one of the all-time sweetheart deals on a stadium. “There was, however, minimal excitement for the return of professional football in the region. *Sports Illustrated* columnist Kelly Whiteside explained that the city immediately attached themselves to the new team and Modell was “considered a hero in Baltimore.” The Baltimore and Washington metro areas were excited for on-the-field sport; however, they still were cautious about the civic image of the new Ravens’ owner. The press’ depiction of the fragmented reactions by Baltimore and Washington residents parallels the ways in which the press discussed him as a sports entrepreneur in the immediate years following the Ravens’ arrival. The $222 million stadium the Maryland Stadium Authority built offered upset-Baltimore residents with ammunition toward the business of professional team sport. They believed taxpayer money was not an appropriate way to fund a “recreational” center. Additionally, fans were still distraught with losing the Colts in 1984 and this suggests that even the ‘winners’ in the relocation of the Browns to Baltimore felt animosity toward the business of professional sport overshadowing traditional sporting regionalism.

In January 2001, *Washington Post* writer John Feinstein wrote an editorial that foreshadowed the potential effects of the Baltimore Ravens winning Super Bowl XXXV

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versus the New York Giants the following week, suggesting a shift in attitudes toward Modell due to traditional sporting practices and successes. He explained “There will be a whole lot of revisionist history spun about . . . Modell . . . especially if the Ravens win.”

Toward the end of the twentieth century, distraught feelings toward him in the Baltimore and Washington metro areas lessened. In December, 1999, he agreed, in principle, to sell a large minority share of the Ravens to billionaire Steven Bisciotti. As the Ravens were bettering their on-field success, this business decision was exalted as a way for the team to attain better players, and increase their chances of winning a Super Bowl. In 2001, the team won Super Bowl XXXV. Images of Modell hoisting the Lombardi Trophy helped promote him as an icon of the city. Baltimore fans regained their vigor and ardent football spirit from the days of Johnny Unitas and John Mackey and the 1958 NFL Championship contest. Modell was regarded as the one who brought professional football back to the city and the antithesis to the defamed Irsay. Soon, he became a well-known sports figure in the Baltimore and Washington metro areas.

In 2004, the NFL owners and administrators paid tribute to Modell at his final league meeting and celebrated him as a historic and exalted member of the NFL owner hierarchy. When Modell sold the majority of the franchise in 2003 he remained a central figure to the organization, showing up at practice and frequently discussing player

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personnel with General Manager Ozzie Newsome. While honoring his long NFL career, Commissioner Paul Tagliabue called Modell “one of life’s unforgettable characters” and over 300 individuals at the meeting gave him a standing ovation upon hearing that the sale of the Ravens would be official within one month. Following the meeting, members of the NFL owner hierarchy—including Wellington Mara, Dan Rooney, Lamar Hunt, and Bill Bidwill—embraced Modell and shared their memories of the controversial owner.\(^{43}\)

The Baltimore story depicting this gathering was pro-Modell and highlights the fluidity of the ways in which the press and public viewed sports entrepreneurship. The article made no mention of the controversial side of the relocation of the Browns/Ravens, similar to the ways in which many Cleveland/Northeast Ohio based stories have avoided the positives of professional football returning to Baltimore.\(^{44}\)

Furthermore, on October 23, 2007, Art Modell was honored and celebrated by the Babe Ruth Museum Birthplace and Sports Legends Museum in Baltimore. “Mr. Modell’s decisive act to return the NFL to Baltimore has had a profound impact on our City and his generosity has greatly improved our community,” explained the Executive Director of the museum Mike Gibbons, a stark contrast to the popular rhetoric in the Baltimore and Washington metro areas toward Modell just one decade prior. Although the Ravens have not won another Super Bowl since the 2000/2001 season, they remained one of the most potent franchises in the league, reaching the playoffs numerous times. His image, at least in the Baltimore and Washington areas, evolved into a city promoter and NFL


contributor, and, as he is no longer the majority owner, his positive image will likely remain in the region.\textsuperscript{45}

The fluid representation of Modell’s image is best presented annually during the Pro Football Hall of Fame selection process. As of 2012, he has not been enshrined in the Hall of Fame. “I’m getting my name in the Hall of Fame this year. I’m going to federal court and changing my name to ‘Exit,’” explained Modell during the annual voting for the Hall of Fame in 2001, satirizing his misfortunes at becoming an enshrined member of the American professional football world.\textsuperscript{46} Every autumn, the Pro Football Hall of Fame announces their preliminary list of individuals to be considered for enshrinement the following year. When he, who has not returned to Cleveland since he announced the move to Baltimore due to safety concerns, reached a finalist list in 2002 for enshrinement consideration, Cleveland sports writer Tony Grossi gave an “impassioned speech” on behalf of the \textit{Cleveland Plain Dealer} and all Northeast Ohioans as to why he should never be given professional football’s greatest honor.\textsuperscript{47} He explained that Modell was responsible for the destruction of Cleveland’s civic image and to the current economic downturn of the aging city; he often compared Modell to Baltimore villain Robert Irsay. In contrast, most \textit{Baltimore Sun} and \textit{Washington Post} journalists identify Modell as important to the continuation of professional football and lionize him as a philanthropist

\textsuperscript{47} Former Browns’ Tight End and current (as of 2012) Raven’s general manager Ozzie Newsome was elected to be enshrined into the HOF in 1999. He asked Art Modell to present him at the ceremonies; however, he did not attend because of the safety concerns of he and his family, see Leonard Shapiro, “They’re Off to See the ‘Wizard of Oz’: Newsome; Ex-Browns Tight End To Enter Hall of Fame,” \textit{Washington Post}, Aug. 7, 1999, D04; Les Levine, “It’s still ‘hall of shame’ for Modell,” \textit{Cleveland Jewish News}, Oct. 20, 2011, http://www.clevelandjewishnews.com/features/sports/local_sports/article_50035900-fb2a-11e0-858b-001cc4c03286.html.
for the Baltimore and Washington metro areas. In 2003, *Baltimore Sun* writer Mike Preston explained that Modell was unfairly removed from consideration in both 2002 and 2003 because of illegitimate disagreements with the contributions of Modell to the NFL. He stated that the relocation of the Browns along with player personnel decisions, which Northeast Ohioans hold as other reasons for Modell’s Hall of Fame absence, were not enough to outweigh his contributions such as *Monday Night Football*, the nationalized television deal and his efforts toward alleviating the NFL-AFL impasse.

These pendulum effects of Modell’s representation in the Baltimore and Washington metro areas offer insight into the cultural meanings of sports entrepreneurship. He was castigated as a covetous entrepreneur, and unworthy of his perceived financial riches; however, his positive image propagated upon the club’s on-the-field success, suggesting the inconsistency to the cultural nexus of business and sport.

**Conclusion**

In *Baltimore Sun* journalist Jon Morgan’s work on the “new NFL,” *Glory for Sale*, he asserted that through rampant “franchise hopscotching” the true nature of professional sport—glory and fan enthusiasm—was lost. This assessment was flawed as a result of the common problem of looking back at history through a biased lens. Professional team sport has been a way for affluent entrepreneurs to accumulate capital since the late nineteenth century. Specifically, one can look at A.G. Spalding and his

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efforts toward commercializing sport through the Chicago White Stockings, the National League and his sporting goods conglomerate as an example of the proliferation of sports business during the industry’s nascent years.\textsuperscript{51} Professional team sport as a pastime has been mythicized throughout the twentieth century, an image the industry of sport undoubtedly encourages. This meaning is represented through Modell’s relocation of the Cleveland Browns and its aftermath. Hid image and representation shifted from positive, to negative, and finally to a polarized national appearance.

These adaptions are an effect of the inconsistent perceptions of the sports/business cultural nexus. Sports entrepreneurs are relegated as successful business professionals when their agenda matches the traditional United States sporting culture; however, as the business of sport interferes with the customary pastimes, their image is denigrated. The Baltimore and Washington metro areas’ rhetoric describing Modell significantly changed when the team beat the New York Giants in Super Bowl XXXV. Additionally, the Northeast Ohio population still disparages the owner for making a traditional business decision and their extreme and unnecessary images of Modell displayed lingering effects of their hesitance toward the business of professional team sport.

Epilogue and Conclusion

“The reconstruction from the NFL’s great disaster is complete,” explained the Cleveland Plain Dealer on September 12, 1999.¹ That evening, in front of a primetime national audience, the new expansion Cleveland Browns hosted the Pittsburgh Steelers in the newly constructed Cleveland Browns Stadium on the site of the old Cleveland Municipal Stadium. Although the Browns were easily defeated by the Steelers (they lost 43-0), professional football was returned to the scorned rust-belt city. Three years prior, following the aftermath of the tenuous four-month period following Art Modell’s announcement of the Browns’ relocation, a new stadium—costing between $220-$250 million—was agreed upon by Cleveland and the NFL. The league agreed to loan $48 million to the project.² The “new NFL,” of course, expanded the ticket pricing. The team announced that 55,320 of its seats would be owned by individuals with Personal Seat Licenses (PSLs). It proclaimed, however, that it was among the league’s cheapest PSL price, but it was still “an expense that Browns fans never had to pay in the 50 years since the team was founded.” In December, 1996, the team announced that single game tickets would range from $17-$65, which was $10 higher than the highest price in 1995. They also agreed that PSL prices would range from $250 to $1500. The community, however,

¹ Tony Grossi, “Are You Ready for Some Football? The Wait is Finally Over for Browns, Their Fans,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, Sept. 12, 1999, 18S.
² Arnie Rosenberg, “Changed NFL deal is approved: White, league officials say owners also are likely to OK amended plan to bring football back to Cleveland in ’99,” Akron Beacon Journal, Mar. 9, 1996
did benefit from the team agreeing that the popular “Dawg Pound” tickets would sell for $30 and not necessitate the purchase of a PSL.³

The end of the “Save Our Browns” campaign left Cleveland without professional football for three years and gave Modell a new lavish facility in Baltimore. The newly named “Ravens” won the Lombardi Trophy by defeating the New York Giants in Super Bowl XXXV in 2001 and the expansion Browns—playing in a new stadium as well—began a long streak of losing. Today, Browns fans express that the team has never reigned the thrills of the “old Browns,” or to some, the “real Browns.” The failing of the metropolitan area also continued. In fact, the day before the completion of a deal for a new stadium, Cleveland City Schools announced a $52 million budget cut, laid off 160 teachers, and cut many high school sports.⁴ The population also continued to dwindle. In the 2010 census, Cleveland’s population dipped to under 400,000 and what was once the seventh largest city in the United States ranked at forty-fifth.⁵ A city that has been plagued by its professional sports teams, the “culture of losing” resonates for many of Cleveland’s citizens due to the powerful nexus between professional sports and personal and community identity.

Moreover, the “new NFL” expanded. Currently, “franchise hopscotching” continues to distract many who perceive the economics of sport as a nuisance to the traditional sporting culture. In 2012, there are thirty-one stadiums in the league (the Giants and the Jets share a facility). Of those, twelve stadiums were built in the 2000s and nine in the 1990s, totaling over two-thirds of the playing facilities constructed in just over

⁵ “The History of Cleveland Timeline.”
the past two decades. This emergence of stadiums indicates a need for club owners to expand their profitability through the inclusion of expensive luxury suites and club seating, and the inclusion of PSLs. In the present day, however, many of the franchises playing in older stadiums are pressuring their cities to build new facilities. For example, the Minnesota Vikings have called the Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome home since 1982. In 2012, the stadium was regarded as ‘out-of-date’—the collapse of the roof in December 2010 providing a clear example—and a new stadium was considered a necessity by many Vikings’ and city officials.

The financing of NFL stadiums has proven to be one of the most crucial elements of professional sports financing in the twenty-first century. As stadiums become more luxurious their costs rise, leaving city officials and taxpayers as the ones to fund their construction. Cities and taxpayers still regard the ownership of an NFL team as representative of elite status among United States metropolitan areas. The mythicized nature of the economic benefits of these lavish football arenas, however, has been affirmed by scholars. Many cities struggle to pay the bill of the facility, thus, other areas of the civic community are neglected. Additionally, the large amount of money allocated to professional sports accentuates a socioeconomic class divide in sports fandom. Whether this division will ever financially weaken the dominant NFL remains to be determined; however, the cultural impact of the “new NFL” is clear.

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8 This is a major theme presented by Charles C. Euchner, see his Playing the Field: Why Sports Teams Move and Cities Fight to Keep Them (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993).
These relationships between the press, community, and the business of sport articulate the view of sports entrepreneurship near the turn of the twenty-first century in United States sport. Sport historian Dilwyn Porter argued that the successes of sports entrepreneurs were based on “their ability to negotiate a profitable relationship with the media.” Historically, examples such as Walter O’Malley and Pete Rozelle (who helped market the Super Bowl and *Monday Night Football*) highlight this symbiotic partnership.⁹ O’Malley, a lambasted figure, is represented in history as a negative example of sports entrepreneurship. Rozelle, however, is remembered as a heroic figure in NFL lore every year during the Super Bowl and milestones of celebrations of *Monday Night Football*. Both individuals acted within the market of the sports industry; however, each event garnered differing attitudes from the press. To identify sport as a more serious medium—both socially and scholarly—the representations of sports entrepreneurs should be examined holistically, rather than relying on the successes and failures of traditional sporting practices. For example, the public should judge sports entrepreneurs based upon the ways in which they contribute to the strengths and weaknesses of culture and society, similar to the ways in which other businesses are evaluated. The social impact of sports fandom and the emotional hold a franchise has over populations notwithstanding, sports entrepreneurs positively and negatively impact general populations. Expanding tax dollars, the losses and gains of job opportunities, and the peripheral economic benefits of professional team sport—although largely mythicized in the history of big-time sport in the United States—all shape the ways in which sports entrepreneurs succeed or fail. Their

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historical successes, however, still rely upon on-the-field successes and personal feelings of sports fandom.

The business of sport is unique in that it generates extreme regional pride and fan enthusiasm; however, its owners still rely on traditional business practices to continue their franchise. Furthermore, the press and the United States public still largely rely on traditional sporting successes of athletes, teams, and entrepreneurs when analyzing their economic and social significance for segments of the United States population; it is time we more fully recognize the limitations of such perspectives. Franchise relocation, and sport in general, sparks social segmentation, cultural meaning, and positive societal change. This is an important tool with which to better understand sport in society; however, the fragmented images of the business of sport, entrepreneurship and franchise relocation typically results from emotional meanings and understandings which suggests that the public still does not consider sport, specifically the NFL, as a business.¹⁰

The complex relationship, however, also highlights the importance of understanding the connection between sport, business and community. Although many hold on to nostalgic views of sports as a pastime, their emotional attachments are strong. Whether these connections are rational or based on wistful views of sport and community identification, they can lead to significant social movement, social change, or affect communities and populations. Thus, actions within the sports marketplace affect those who consider sports a significant aspect of their lives, suggesting that sport cannot be viewed as either strictly a business or a pastime.

¹⁰ Euchner articulated that entrepreneurs have used professional team sport to hold cities hostage and overvalue the economic benefit of sports arenas to major United States metropolises. See his Playing the Field, especially 211-212.
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