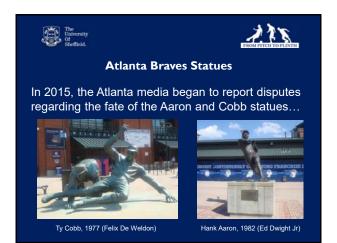




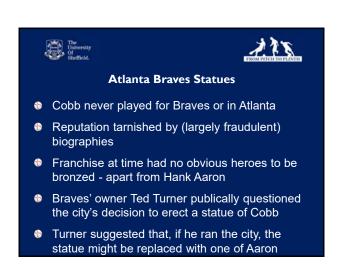


Atlanta Braves

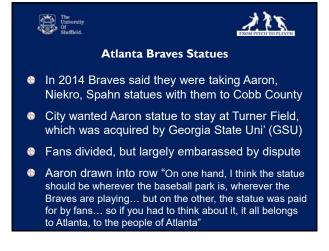
- In 2013 Braves announced move out of city to a new ballpark in Cobb County, for 2017. Why?
 - Traffic problems
 - Mostly white fans, mostly drawn from Northern suburbs as opposed to majority black districts by Turner Field
 - Desire to create ballpark village with retail/hospitality/real estate around ballpark
 - Turner Field surrounded by freeways and districts seen as unsuitable for such development...















Atlanta Braves Statues

- In 2016 city authority claimed to have found documentation proving they owned the statue
- The Braves argued that Aaron should decide statue's fate, but faced with negative publicity in putting a city hero in an impossible position they backed down and commissioned a new Aaron statue for their new ballbark







Atlanta Braves Statues

- Meanwhile Braves declared that they were not taking Cobb statue with them – because they didn't own it!
- City Authority didn't want it either...
- Nor did GSU...
- In the words of the Atlanta Journal Constitution,

"Everybody wants The Hammer, nobody wants The Peach"





Atlanta Braves Statues

- The Ty Cobb museum in his home town of Royston, GA were very upset by this!
- They asked for the statue to be moved to Royston, and it was re-erected there in 2017







Conclusions

- Statues act as political symbols, monuments not just of celebrated figures, but to values that society wishes to preserve and celebrate, and, by dint of absence or removal, those they wish to forget or ignore
- The Braves' intentions for their statues upon their move from Turner likewise tell much about which parts of their past they wanted to celebrate at their new ballpark





Conclusions

- Ty Cobb's statue was removeable, his legacy treated as best forgotten
- Braves did not attempt to claim ownership, unlike with Aaron's statue
- Cobb's statue inherited from a past in which his sullied reputation was possibly less embedded
- Unsurprising that the city of Atlanta/the stadium authority didn't fight to retain the statue either

The University Of Sheffield.



Conclusions

- Since erecting Cobb's statue, Atlanta Braves acquired franchise heroes, and no longer needed a tainted homestate legend for reflected glory
- To reinforce this point, after arriving in Cobb County the Braves unveiled a statue of Bobby Cox, their most successful manager







Conclusions

- Cobb's transmutation to 'hometown hero' mirrors non-franchise-funded baseball statues, often found in small towns, where a home-grown sports star is biggest claim to fame (e.g., Christy Matthewson in Factoryville, PA)
- Civic-sited sports statues are less common in big cities, where there will be a wider choice of potential heroes from politics, industry and celebrity - and where political considerations over who is honoured may face greater scrutiny





Conclusions

- Cobb gives Royston an identity, a unique brand, a sense of place and history
- The rehabilitation of Cobb's sculpture forms part of Royston's campaign to rehabilitate Cobb
- Coinciding with Charles Leerhsen's recent research that supports a more generous interpretation of Cobb's life, rescuing his statue a perfect opportunity for further civic boosterism







Conclusions

- Osmond (2007) describes statues as 'hollow icons' - they can simultaneously hold different meanings for different groups - which is part of their appeal to sports organisations
- A sports statue allows different communities that coalesce around a sports organisation to simultaneously perceive ownership of the team's heritage, identity and territory, so moving that statue disrupts multiple claims and assumptions, reopening divisions and conflict





Conclusions

- The arguments over the original Aaron statue at Turner Field cut to the heart of conflicts around who actually owns a sports organisation
- Fans regularly visiting Turner Field, and therefore seeing Aaron's statue, were a largely distinct entity from residents living within walking distance of Turner Field but who rarely visited the ballpark (and, indeed, from out-of-town fans who interact purely through broadcast media





Conclusions

- Aaron's statement that "the statue was paid for by fans... it all belongs to all Atlanta", so conflating these groups, made little sense when donations were collected in 1982, but even less in 2017
- Ironically neither the Braves nor the stadium authority sought opinions of fans or local residents for or against the statue being removed
- Nor were fans or local residents particularly vocal in terms of organised protests, threads on social media or comments reported in the media





Conclusions

- Given Aaron's status as a black hero and barrier breaker, and the predominantly afro-American ethnicity of Turner Field's neighbouring districts, this might seem surprising
- Yet with the stadium site marooned within freeways, few local residents would encounter the statue unless attending a ball game
- A monument invisible to a community cannot become symbolic





Conclusions

- Civic figures were the most vocal in the statue dispute, notably the mayor and stadium authority
- No economic motivation to keep statue. Artwork was gifted to them. In fact a maintenance cost
- The stadium authority most likely fought to keep the statue for symbolic political reasons
 - Braves deserted Atlanta city for suburbs
 - Aaron's statue became the possession that divorcing couples fight over with far greater venom than its material value merits





Conclusions

- One can never ignore issues of race in Atlanta
- Million dollar sports franchise with predominantly white ownership and fans, were leaving a majority black city for a prosperous suburb - and trying to take the statue of a black hero with them
- This offered the city authority a free hit in terms of being seen to defend black interests. If they were unable to keep baseball in Atlanta, they could at least retain baseball's and Atlanta's black heritage





Conclusions

- The replacement Aaron statue is a more appropriate totem for the Braves new home...
- Aaron's statue at Turner Field, and the plaque that accompanied it, carried multiple messages
 - heroic figure,
 - barrier breaker,
 - specific moment of record-breaking glory Aaron's
 715th home run, an individual feat that could be cast as a Braves' achievement





Conclusions

- New Aaron statue at Truist Park depicts this same scene, carrying this achievement to a new site
- Plaque lists just Aaron's name and sculptor Ross Rossin, neglecting both the site and city of Aaron's monumental homer, and his role in the integration



of a populace previously segregated along racial





Conclusions

- Truist Park is in outer-suburbia: the precincts surrounding it, whilst built in a retro style, are new
- Other MLB franchises have built retro ballparks, essentially faux-heritage stadiums, within authentic downtown locations
- The Braves built an entire faux-heritage neighbourhood around their ballpark!
- They control of all aspects of this ersatz locale, most crucially income streams...





Conclusions

- ...but also the suitably sanitized environment, which has none of the edginess, grime, or wear and tear of true urbanity
- The new Aaron statue at Truist Park, similar in style to that left in Atlanta, but cleaner, shinier, on Braves' land and under their ownership, is the perfect fit







Stride, C.B. (in press) Movable, removable - or immovable? Baseball statues and ballpark relocation. In Ramshaw, G. & Gammon, S., ed. Baseball and Heritage: People, Place, and Promotion. Bloomsbury Academic, London, UK.





The Sporting Statues Project Dr Chris Stride and Dr Ffion Thomas

Resources and publications:
Articles (academic and populist) and the statues database can be found at www.sportingstatues.com

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