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Stadium Consumption: **The Selling of Cleveland Municipal Stadium**

The construction of Cleveland Municipal Stadium in 1931 was a landmark event in the growth of the city of Cleveland. Cleveland had grown in population in the previous three decades to become the sixth largest city and third largest metropolitan area in the United States. An increased national importance as an industrial and manufacturing center accompanied this growth. Much of the change resulted from the Progressive visions of the Tom Johnson administration in the early twentieth century. Foremost among Johnson's ventures to redevelop Cleveland was the Group Plan of 1902. Almost twenty-five years after the initiation of this scheme, the city of Cleveland decided to use the northern portion of land it had designated for construction of a large sports venue. The culmination of Cleveland's growth during this period was the 1931 completion of Cleveland Municipal Stadium.

Before construction could begin, however, civic leaders needed to convince fellow politicians, local businesses, and city and county residents that a municipally owned stadium on the lakefront was the best possible use for the designated land. They lobbied fellow politicians and businessmen for development of the lakefront and the creation of new land via landfill and mounted a public relations campaign designed to sway public opinion with promises of increased entertainment, sporting, and other cultural activities. They created the mindset that a publicly owned stadium would provide a focal point of communal activity in the "living" center of Northeast Ohio and promote a positive image of Cleveland nationally. Furthermore, they hinted at attractions that would only be possible with a new stadium of this size (such as hosting the 1932 Summer Olympics). The 'selling' of the construction of Cleveland Municipal Stadium was on a grand level, one intended to convince each citizen that his or her support fulfilled a civic responsibility.

Scholars such as G. Edward White and Harold Seymour have emphasized the importance of the concrete and steel ballpark in promoting and stabilizing professional baseball in the early 1900s. The relationship between these ballparks—as well as sport in general—and the city is deeply rooted in the ideas of Progressive urban development. Cleveland Stadium was the last of these great concrete and steel structures of the first half of the twentieth century. What Stephen Hardy examined in his study of Boston, and what Steven Riess and Gerald Gems explored in their work on Chicago, I attempt here in my study of the impact of Cleveland Municipal Stadium. I argue that the acceptance of a new stadium was a conscious act of civic duty on the part of the politicians, businesses, and residents of the community it was meant to serve.

The paper is based on the manuscript collections of William R. Hopkins and Daniel E. Morgan, the *Cleveland Press*, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, and other local newspapers.