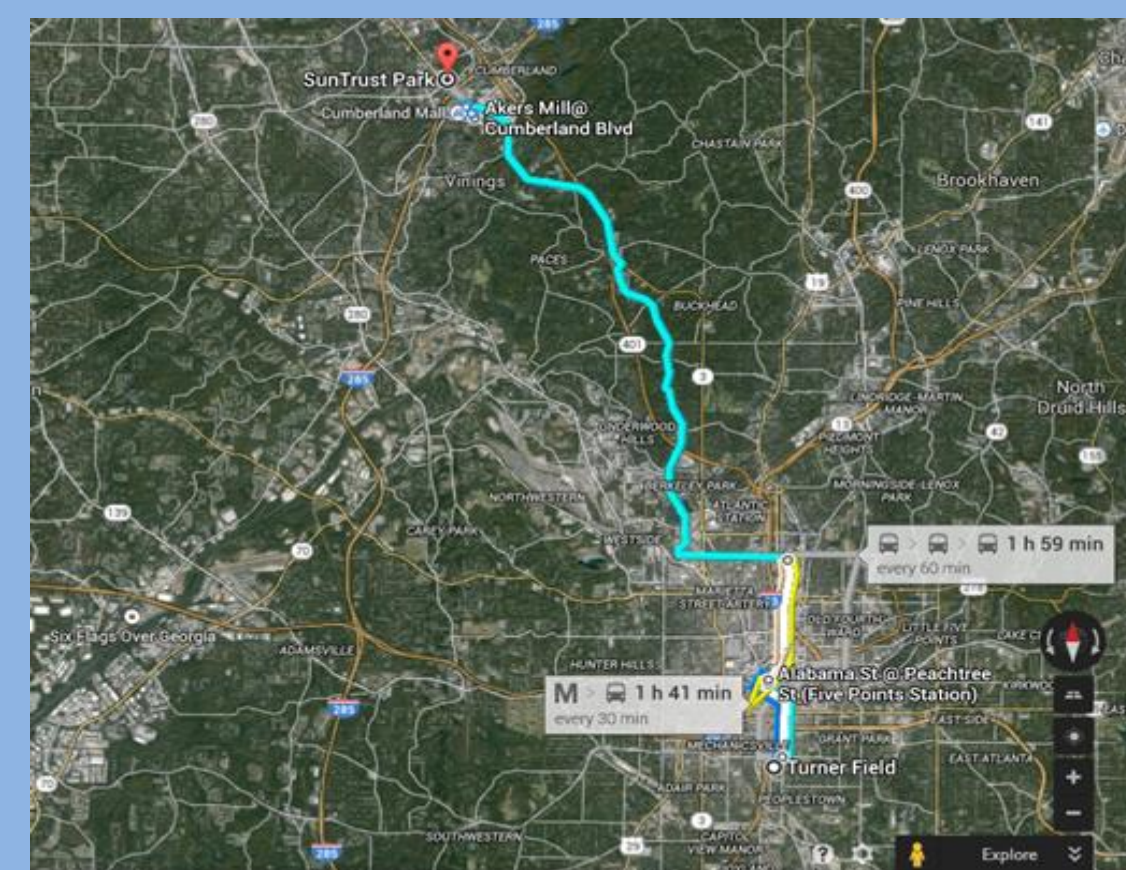
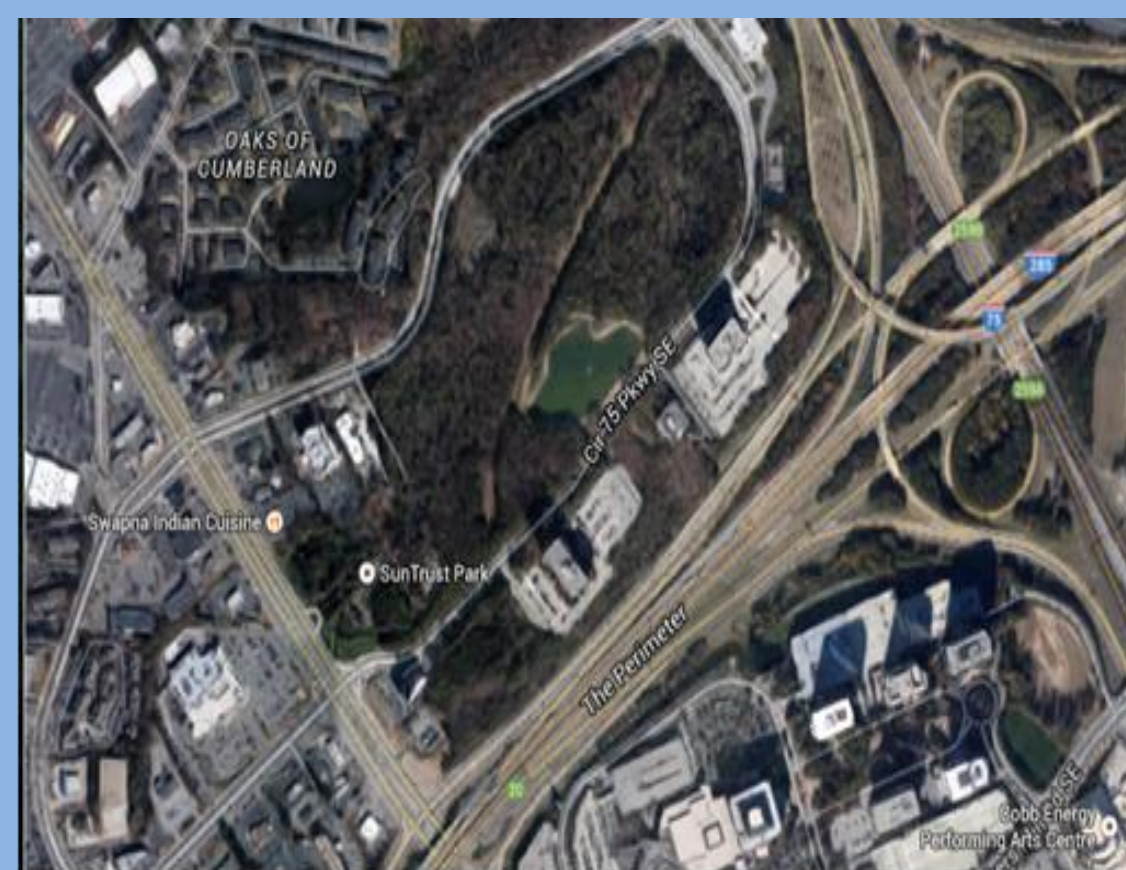


# Relocation of the Atlanta Braves: Exploring the Consequences of the Braves Leaving Downtown Atlanta

Robert J. Rodriguez, Department of Geography & Planning, West Chester University

## Abstract

The Atlanta Braves decided to relocate to the suburbs in Cobb County rather than remain at their current downtown Atlanta location. On the surface the Braves decision to relocate seems like a business decision because Atlanta officials refused to pay \$350 million to renovate the current stadium of the Braves, Turner Field. Neighboring Cobb County offered to pay \$400 million of public funds to help build an entirely new stadium in their own county. It is unprecedented for professional sports teams to leave downtown areas for the suburbs. This project explored the Braves' decision to do so for the 2017 season. Furthermore, this project suggests the decision to relocate is a poor decision based on the public funding of sports venues and how race and class differ in Cobb County versus Fulton County. The methods of this project are consistent on proving with statistical significance that there is a difference of proportions in African Americans around SunTrust Park versus Turner Field, which allows discussion on how race could have influenced the decision to relocate.



- The new stadium will be located at intersection of two major highways I-285 and I-75, which will create heavy traffic on game days.
- Outside of The Perimeter, which is away from the heart of Atlanta
- Public transportation from Atlanta would take about 90 minutes and require transfers into different transportation systems

## Race, Class and the Decision to Relocate

The Braves have cited a lack of consistent mass transit options to and from Turner Field; however the new location has limited mass transit options. Getting from Atlanta to the new ballpark will be difficult since the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) doesn't extend north into Cobb County. There are no plans to extend MARTA into Cobb County. According to officials the solution is moving people in and around Cobb County and surrounding counties from our north and east where some Braves fans travel from, and not moving people into Cobb County by rail from urban Atlanta. This "solution" could be interpreted as racially charged because Atlanta is a majority black city. Figures 1 and 2 show the differences in percentages of the areas surrounding SunTrust Park and Turner Field. For the many reasons the Atlanta Braves organization have decided to relocate it would be difficult to overlook possible racial reasons. There is inadequate attention given to the role interracial class antagonisms play in the economic development of inner city areas. While it would make a lot of sense to redevelop the Braves fan experience in Atlanta, a majority of Braves fans are white and from the suburbs. It may be easier for Braves executives to appeal to white fans if the ballpark was not in a neighborhood that is 89% black.

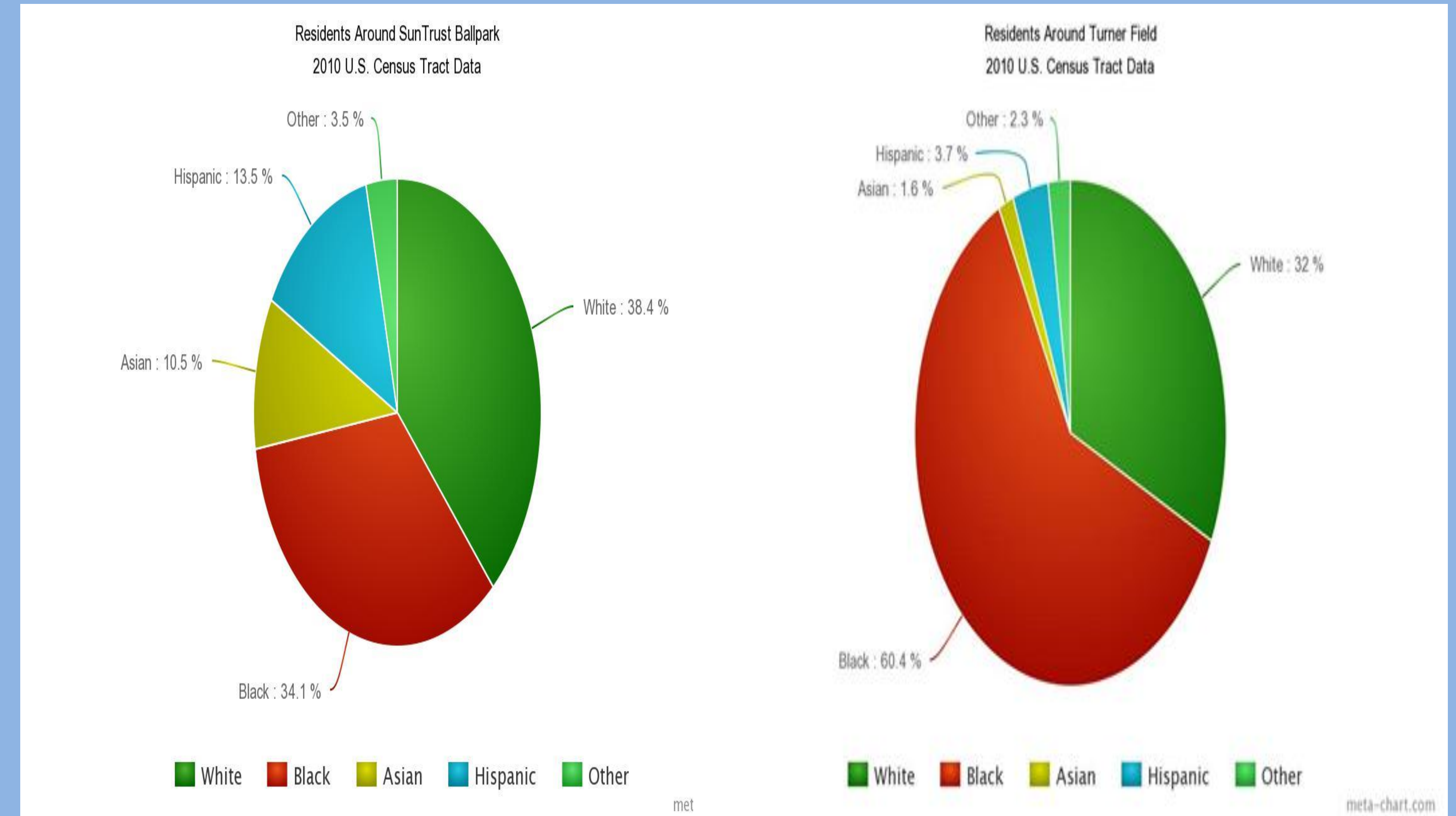


Figure 2

Figure 1

## Methodology

Data collected includes 2014 estimated United States Census data from Fulton County and Cobb County. The Surrounding racial composition of Turner Field and new SunTrust Stadium are vastly different; however for there to be discussion on whether or not the racial composition had any effect on the move it must be proven that there is a difference in proportions of the two populations of the two locations. Even though it may make sense to move the stadium closer to the Braves fan base the decision to relocate could have been influenced by racial and ethnic rates of Fulton County and Cobb County.

A two-sample difference of proportions test can be used to determine whether two populations or groups differ significantly on some single characteristic.

1. Stating the null hypothesis: No difference between the proportions of the African American population in Fulton County versus Cobb County.

2. Alternate hypothesis: There is a difference of proportions of the African American population in Fulton County versus Cobb County.

3. Set the level of significance:  $\alpha = 0.05$

4. Compute the test statistic:  $Z_p = \frac{p_1 - p_2}{\sigma_{p_1 - p_2}}$

Inputs:

	Fulton County	Cobb County
Proportion of African Americans	.44( $P_1$ )	.26( $P_2$ )
Population Size	984,293( $N_1$ )	717,190( $N_2$ )

5. Make a decision: In a two-tailed test after the z-score has been calculated (test statistic) it must be converted into a p-value, which is then compared to the set level of significance. If the p-value is greater than the level of significance the null hypotheses will be accepted; adversely if the p-value is less than the level of significance the alternate hypotheses will be accepted.

6. State a conclusion: A determination will be made based on if the relocation of the Atlanta Braves stadium could have been related to the proportion of the African American population in Fulton County versus Cobb County.

## Results

z-value	240.9
P-value	0.00001
Interpretation	Statistically significant, reject null hypothesis that sample proportions are equal

- Cobb County has a lesser proportion of African Americans than Fulton County; the difference of proportions is statistically significant and the results are consistent with geographic theories
- It is important to note that the results do not suggest the Braves relocation plan was in fact due to the difference of proportions in African Americans in Fulton County versus Cobb County. Rather the results suggest that the difference of proportions could have been one of the reasons based on statistical significance.

## Conclusion

It should be concerning that a new precedent may have been set by the Atlanta Braves. The professional sports fan experience is already becoming an exclusive experience that lower middle class and low-class Americans cannot enjoy. In the future the Braves might only attract the upper middle class and high class residents of the Atlanta metropolitan area; which may be good for business. However, it is possible new stadiums built on public funding are contributing to inequality because some residents may not be able to attend events at the stadiums they help build with their own tax money. It's impossible to look at the team's relocation plans without raising the questions of race and class that play into discussions about most big public projects like sports venues. The Braves claim that the new location puts them closer to the "geographic center" of their fan base, i.e. white, middle-class suburbanites. Baseball has always been America's favorite pastime, but in Atlanta it could be considered the white, middle-class Americans' favorite pastime when the Braves open their season in 2017.