

The Geographical Review

VOLUME 98

April 2008

NUMBER 2

SEPARATE BUT EQUAL? DESEGREGATING BALTIMORE'S GOLF COURSES*

JAMES E. WELLS, GEOFFREY L. BUCKLEY,
and CHRISTOPHER G. BOONE

ABSTRACT. Between the time of its opening, in 1923, and 1956, when the last vestiges of official segregation were swept away by the courts, the Carroll Park Municipal Golf Course in Baltimore, Maryland, figured prominently in the struggle to desegregate the city's recreational facilities. In this article we use historical sources to examine how access to Carroll Park was shaped by issues of race and ethnicity during the first half of the twentieth century, focusing specifically on the role the park played in the struggle to desegregate Baltimore's golf courses. We also consider how this victory ultimately contributed to desegregation at the city's other recreational facilities, including ball fields and swimming pools. *Keywords:* Baltimore, civil rights, environmental justice, segregation.

From birth in a colored ward to burial in a colored cemetery, Negroes lived an almost entirely separate existence bounded on all sides by racial discrimination.

—Edgar Jones and Jack Levin, [1960] 2003

Situated on 170 acres of former industrial land approximately 2 miles southwest of the Inner Harbor of Baltimore, Maryland, Carroll Park is a historically significant public space. In theory at least, the park has been open to all visitors, regardless of race or ethnicity, since its establishment in 1890. In reality, sections of the park have a long history of segregation. The park's golf course, located on the western end of the property, serves as an important example. As the first such facility in Baltimore to admit African American players, Carroll Park took center stage in the movement to desegregate all of the city's municipal golf courses. Perhaps more important, desegregation of the city's public golf courses eventually led to the abolishment of restrictions at other recreational facilities, including ball fields, playgrounds, public swimming pools, and city beaches.

* This research was supported by two grants from the National Science Foundation: DEB 0423476 and SBE-HSD 0624159. We thank Craig Colten and two anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful comments and sage advice.

✉ MR. WELLS is a doctoral student in geography at Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas 66506. DR. BUCKLEY is an associate professor of geography at Ohio University, Athens, Ohio 45701. DR. BOONE is an associate professor of geography at Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona 85287.