

Dodgers 2020: The thrill of victory – and the agony of injustice

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By [Peter Dreier](#)



Image by Dodgers Facebook | Dodgers celebrate their victory in the 2020 World Series

As a longtime Dodgers fan, I'm thrilled that they won their first World Series in 32 years. But the victory is somewhat bittersweet because, despite the players' remarkable triumph on the field

and their camaraderie as teammates, I can't ignore the reality that Major League Baseball in general, and the Dodgers in particular, remains rife with injustice.

Billionaire owners rack up profits while blue-collar ballpark workers suffer. Black players are underrepresented. And even the baseballs themselves carry a whiff of sweatshop labor. America's pastime is past due for a reckoning.

The pandemic, and President Donald Trump's mishandling of it, forced Major League Baseball to shorten the season to 60 games and play games under very difficult COVID-19 circumstances. It was a season without fans in the seats. The MLB Players Association insisted on precautions to protect the players and the support staff. Even so, a number of players, concerned for their safety, refused to participate and took the season off. And, inevitably, quite a few ballplayers caught the virus.

One was the Dodgers star third baseman and union representative, Justin Turner, who tested positive and was removed from the final game in the 8th inning. Shockingly, he was allowed to briefly appear on the field to participate in the post-game celebration with his teammates, putting everyone at risk. Nobody will be surprised if other Dodgers (or members of their families) test positive in the next week.

One solace is that during the postgame ceremony, many of the 11,400 fans in the stands in Arlington, Texas greeted MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred, who was presenting the trophy to Dodgers' owner Mark Walter ([net worth: \\$4 billion](#)), with loud boos as the representative of the greedy baseball owners. Despite the shortened season, the team owners —almost all of them billionaires—will profit from the season's TV revenues, including \$1 billion from the World Series alone. The players will continue to make huge salaries, thanks to the players union. But the roughly 40,000 stadium workers in 30 ballparks, including Dodger Stadium, who were laid off when the pandemic hit - the folks who sell the hot dogs and beer, take the tickets, clean the stadiums, show fans to their seats, and help park the cars – lost their jobs and were left high and dry, subject to the mercy of the nation's economic and public health crisis. Without steady incomes or health insurance, many have had a tough time paying rent and medical bills.

It would have been nice if a few of the Dodgers gave a shout-out to baseball's blue-collar workers, criticized MLB for screwing them over, and demanded that some of the owners' World Series revenues be redirected to help these workers.

The Dodgers were the first team to put an African American on a major league roster — Jackie Robinson in 1947 — and for the next decade added more Black players that led to the Dodger dynasty (six pennants in 10 years) before they left Brooklyn for Los Angeles in 1958.

But here we are in 2020 and Mookie Betts is the only African American on the team. In fact, the number of Black athletes on major league rosters has declined precipitously — from 18.7 percent in 1981 to 7.8 percent this season.

To their credit, the Dodgers have one of the few Black managers, Dave Roberts, but there are few African Americans among major league executives and team owners. A number of former and current players recently founded a group called The Players Alliance to address issues of racial injustice. MLB should do more to help financially-strapped cities and inner-city schools restore and expand baseball fields, pay for baseball coaches in public middle schools and high schools, and fund Little League and other youth programs in communities of color. It should encourage the training of Black minor and major leaguers to become Little League coaches and middle-school and high-school coaches after they retire and train and hire more Black and brown managers, coaches, and general managers in the minor leagues to create a pipeline into the major leagues.

It is also hard to ignore the harsh reality that every baseball used during the regular season, including the World Series, is produced in a factory in Costa Rica where workers toil in shameful sweatshop conditions, including low pay and chronic workplace injuries. Even worse, the factory is partly owned by MLB which, along with Peter Seidler, purchased the Rawlings sporting goods company in 2018. Seidler, the nephew of former Dodgers owner Peter O'Malley, is the San Diego Padres general partner as well as the managing partner of Seidler Equity Partners, a Los Angeles-based private equity investment firm with more than \$2 billion in assets under management.

Most of MLB's billionaire owners inherited their wealth or made their fortunes in real estate, banking, and media. With the average value of major league teams skyrocketing from \$286 million in 2002 to \$1.85 billion today, owners have made windfall profits. They use part of those profits to curry favor with politicians. In just the past six years, MLB owners have contributed \$20.4 million to candidates for president and Congress ([75% to Republicans](#)) and even more to candidates for state and local offices. In return, the owners get federal, state, and local governments to provide subsidies to build stadiums at taxpayers' expense. For example, the entire World Series was played at the Texas Rangers' new Globe Life Field in Arlington, Texas, built at a cost of \$1 billion, half of which came from local taxpayers. It is time to end these government giveaways to baseball's corporate moguls.

These corporate boondoggles have a long history. To entice the Dodgers to move from Brooklyn to Los Angeles in 1958, the city offered the team a 352-acre vacant downtown parcel with easy access to several freeways. It is hard to forget that the site of Dodger Stadium was once a thriving neighborhood, Chavez Ravine, comprised of single-family homes, mostly owned by Mexican American families, which the city razed in the 1950s under the misguided redevelopment policy of "slum clearance" The entire episode was such a sordid tale of profit over people that some former residents, their children, and grandchildren still refuse to attend Dodgers games.

I still love the Dodgers and the game of baseball. But, like many fans, I find that the business of baseball makes the game harder and harder to enjoy.

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The views and opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Forward.