

Here's a more scholarly explanation of the origins of this project, one focused on the intersection of popular culture and political culture. This is based largely on the excellent essay by **Eric Avila**, "**Suburbanizing the City Center: the Dodgers Move West.**" But I would also recommend, and hope to write about, two other important studies that touch on these issues, Neil J. Sullivan's *The Dodgers Move West* and Michael Shapiro's *The Last Good Season*.

Avila's larger project: *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*: Avila is exploring the role of culture in the decline of the New Deal political culture and the rise of the new conservatism in the late 1960s. He argues that, whatever its ugly sides, the heterogeneous (but "white"), rough and ready, street-level masculine, working-class culture of streetcars, ball parks, amusement parks, and the like underwrote the organizing and electoral campaigns of the New Deal. As more and more middle-class, white Americans moved to the suburbs, a more homogeneous (and even whiter), sanitized, safe and secure, privatized, and disciplined culture emerged, epitomized by Disneyland. The chapter at hand adds Dodger Stadium to the new, emerging, white middle class, family-centered, culture that underwrote the new conservatism.

"Killing the Slum Tradition" in city and sport: The process, crucially, also involved the destruction of familiar cultural spaces and places (creative destruction). Just as Hollywood struggled to abandon its association with inner-city, working-class, and immigrant communities, so Los Angeles attempted to rid its downtown and surrounding neighborhoods of immigrant and especially Chicano influences. (By implication, something of the same redefinition was, we shall see, reshaping major league baseball.) Defeating a New Deal-tinged plan for public housing in poor neighborhoods, including the Chicano neighborhoods in the Chavez Ravine (where Dodger Stadium would be built), a coalition of conservative politicians and downtown financial interests looked to use the cleared Chavez Ravine site to lure a major league baseball team to LA.

The Trolley Dodger Experience and its Demise: The Dodgers and Ebbets Field played a central role in the identity of Brooklyn and Brooklynites. Named for the practice of local fans *dodging* the nine streetcar lines that served Ebbets Field, the Dodgers enjoyed a close familiarity with their fans, who also played stickball on the relatively auto-free streets of Brooklyn. A smallish park, seating only 32,000, Ebbets Field accommodated a fan base many of whom knew each other. In the days before TV, only those fans attending the games knew the players well in all their idiosyncrasies and prowess (radio listeners knew of their exploits but not their actual appearance). Fans participated as well as spectated, as with Hilda Chester and the "Sym-phoney" band. A note of danger and potential for violence surrounded the park and the games, as fans booed or even pelted umpires with rotten fruit, players fought each other or umpires, and occasionally fans joined in. Although Hilda Chester suggested the presences and role of women, Ebbets Field accommodated a largely male culture. Indeed, baseball in the early 20th century responded to and promised to resolve a crisis of masculinity (closing of frontier, routinization of work, women's suffrage), placing the heroics of white males in the forefront. But postwar suburbanization and the great migration of African Americans out of the South and into the cities of the industrial heartland disrupted these practices and patterns. Walter O'Malley, taking over ownership of the Dodgers (from Branch Rickey, who brought Jackie Robinson into the major

leagues), worried about the increasingly cramped confines of both Ebbets Field and its surrounding neighborhoods. Parking, for fans who moved further out on Long Island or to New Jersey, was in especially short supply (seven hundred spots). Not just crowding and congestion, but the changing demography of the neighborhood (476,094 whites out, 93,091 nonwhites in, from 1950 to 1960) changed the Ebbets experience and worried O'Malley. Oral histories reveal that fans, too, recognized and resented the changes. Tensions rose in the ballpark, especially as more black fans attended following Robinson's debut.

“The” O'Malley (in Brooklyn that means devil) and the Search for Profits: Demographic change also worried O'Malley because he (like many MLB owners) shared the city with other teams (Giants, Yankees). When the Boston Braves left town for Milwaukee, the benefits of opening new, exclusive markets became clear. As the Braves rose in the standings (and the Dodgers slipped), O'Malley worried that the Braves' enhanced revenues would give them a permanent advantage. Television played a role too. O'Malley, unlike most owners, embraced TV broadcasts as a new source of advertising revenues. But TV also reduced attendance as fans stayed home to watch. But, crucially, television made O'Malley acutely aware of national markets and especially untapped markets for baseball in California. The other shows and advertisements on TV must also have impressed upon O'Malley the shifting focus of popular culture from individuals to families. That made the rough male culture of Ebbets a liability; indeed, Ebbets came to seem a forbidding place. O'Malley loved Norman Bel Geddes' design for a new park in Brooklyn, with all the modern amenities. And he was willing to build the park with his own funds. But NYC, and Robert Moses, would not use eminent domain (under the 1949 Housing Act) to find him a location. So Southern California looked all the more alluring.

Urban Renewal in LA: Recentralization and Major League Status: O'Malley found willing partners in LA's financial elites, eager to shore up their downtown investments in the suburbanizing metropolis. Popular desire for “big league status” aided the effort. Financial elites secured the election of the pro-development Mayor Norris Poulson in 1953 and Poulson centered his campaign on the New Dealer Mayor Fletcher Bowron's public housing program (also part of 1949 Housing Act). Bowron had secured the clearance of Chavez Ravine, with promises to the evicted that a new place was being built for them. Attacked as creeping socialism, the public housing plan was cancelled; baseball was touted as the more “American” alternative. The baseball park, however, was part of a larger plan. Arguing that a healthy downtown was essential for city and regional health, financial elites prepared to use the powers of eminent domain (the 1949 Housing Act made it possible to extend this governmental power to non-governmental agencies) to turn downtown LA into a cultural center, buoying its economic vitality and political importance (while undercutting the view of LA as a city without culture). Of course, culture did thrive in the city's ethnic neighborhoods, but few elites cared about that. Eventually several high culture institutions appeared on Bunker Hill, thanks to the efforts of Buffy Chandler (wife of LA *Times* publisher) in raising private funds. Dodger Stadium then would be the popular cultural complement to Bunker Hill, valued by elites for both its multiplier effects and its psychological value in the competition with other cities. As in many cities, sports stadia seemed crucial in the new service-oriented economy where tourists and tourist dollars became crucial.

A Sweetheart Stadium Deal and its Controversies: To prod New York officials, O'Malley bought Wrigley Field in south central LA, suggesting the Dodgers might play there. Chavez Ravine, however, entered the conversation and seemed much more promising. But a bitter fight erupted over plans to hand over the 315-acre site to O'Malley despite the clause in the city's deed that said the site must be used for "a public purpose." Mayor Poulson simply leaned on a compliant California Housing Authority (purged of "communists") to change the wording. By the end of 1957, the deal was signed. O'Malley got the 315 acres in exchange for the nine-acre Wrigley Field site. He also got mineral rights, a 99-year lease, and all parking and concession revenues, plus \$4.7 million in land preparation costs (he also had to construct a youth center nearby). Opposition rose up and demanded a referendum on the deal, resulting in Proposition B, falsely touted as up or down on baseball in LA (instead of just up or down on the sweetheart deal). No one, oddly, branded the deal as "creeping socialism," or illicit government subsidy; O'Malley later linked Dodger Stadium to other great public projects in LA (RRs, aqueduct, harbor). A telethon, studded with Hollywood celebrities, touted the deal (the TV station, eager to broadcast Dodger games, lent support). Opponents highlighted the impropriety of the government taking someone's property and handing it over to a private interest. But the deal passed, if narrowly. Opponents went to court, where they won. But the US Supreme Court reversed that decision in October 1959.

Evictions and the Shift from Class Conflict to Racial Conflict: To proceed with construction, the city still had to evict a few stubborn residents who remained in Chavez Ravine. The evictions got television coverage and divided opinion, some siding with the evicted, others offering racial explanations for their intransigence (or "barbarity"). This is linked to Avila's larger argument about shifting political cultures, at the center of which is the shift from class to race. Labor did not help. A couple of unions protested the evictions, but the main labor organization supported Dodger Stadium, eager for the jobs (and perhaps the games). Up and down the social scale, many people racialized the whole affair.

Baseball (and the white working class) Suburbanized: Dodger Stadium opened April 10, 1962, hailed as the Taj Mahal of baseball, and fulfilling O'Malley's Bel Geddes fueled dreams. Seating 56,000, Dodger Stadium used modern materials, concrete, steel, plastic, and eliminated columns, standardized field size (i.e., LF and RF equidistant from home plate), and was a single-use, self-contained development that sealed itself off from the rest of the city. The vast parking lot, of modern, state of the art design, sealed Dodger Stadium's isolation and discouraged any intimacy between fans, neighborhood streets (there were none), and the players/team. Located close to freeways (like Disneyland), Dodger Stadium encouraged a privatized, automobile experience (quite unlike walking Brooklyn Streets or taking its streetcars, both public experiences). Traffic cops and a "spatial regime" of directed movement guided fans to their section of the seating. The stadium attracted families and promised wholesome, clean, safe entertainment, even touted as a cure for delinquency and crime. A newly respected, suburbanized white working class joined middle class fans in embracing the new family-oriented, wholesome experience. The stadium also aspired to be a new sort of "town square," pulling the suburbanized metropolis together.

Dodger Fandom: Racial Identity and Communal Cohesion: The modernist design and ambitions of Dodger Stadium might imply a universal, homogenized fan base. But racial tensions over the stadium deal discouraged that, as did the desires and interests of ethnic and racial minorities. Blacks long played and loved baseball in Southern California, established their own leagues, and rejoiced when the Dodgers broke the color line with a local boy, Jackie Robinson. Blacks fully supported the stadium deal, three to one. Then black sports editors held up black Dodgers (Gilliam, Roseboro, Neal, Wills, the two – unrelated – Davises) as models and chided them when they did not live up to the ideal. Chicanos had an even longer association with baseball and the sport became central to community life in the barrios, especially on Sundays after church in public parks. Not unlike the early baseball clubs, the Chicano baseball clubs took on community responsibilities, sponsoring fundraisers, dances, charities, reflecting the overlap of cultural and political institutions. Baseball also helped Chicanos maintain ethnic identity and cohesion, like earlier ethnic groups (some of whom looked for assimilation but others who favored ethnic solidarity). Even in the wake of the evictions, ethnic newspapers called for support for the stadium deal and the Dodgers. Even as Chicano newspapers called on the Dodgers to sign more Mexican and Latino players (that awaited the 1970s with Mota and Guerrero), Spanish language broadcasts of Dodger games secured big audience and profits. But the idea of baseball as “communal glue” ignores the relative exclusion of women. The placing of a venue of male competition and skill at the center of civic culture and downtown LA should be seen as an illicit, public subsidy for male athletes, fans, and companies selling to them.

Further Ironies of “Communal Glue”: Dodger Stadium perhaps provided some communal glue for a suburbanizing metropolis, but it did so in the wake of the destruction of a well-established community, the burying of a program of public housing for low-income residents, and the abandonment of depopulating Brooklyn to its fate. And all sorts of ethnic and racial tensions accompanied its history, even as baseball strove (like the movies) to “kill the slum tradition” in the process of “whitening” downtown LA. Dodger Stadium was both producer and product of the changing political cultures of late 20th century U.S. The final irony is the absurdity of the team’s nickname in the automobile metropolis.

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