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Sadness in Brooklyn: The American Housing Act of 1949 and the Brooklyn Dodgers Move to Los Angeles

By: Patrick Spranger

Table of Contents

1. Introduction- 3
2. A Changing City- 6
 - 2.1 Mass Transit Decline- 8
 - 2.2 Racial Changes within Brooklyn- 9
 - 2.3 Walter O'Malley and Race- 17
3. The Decline of Ebbets Field- 20
 - 3.1 Changes in Other Cities- 24
4. Title I of the American Housing Act- 26
 - 4.1 Private Land Offers, and the Necessity of Title I- 30
 - 4.2 Parking Needs in Brooklyn- 35
 - 4.3 Robert Moses and Title I- 38
 - 4.4 Final Disagreements on Title I- 40
 - 4.5 Sports Center Authority Project Failure and Ultimate Move- 42
5. Conclusion- 48

1. Introduction

During the first game of the 1956 World Series, Los Angeles County Board Supervisor Kenneth "Kenny" Hahn sat with Washington Senators Owner Calvin Griffith, to discuss a move of the last place Washington Senators to Los Angeles. While sitting in his box, Walter O'Malley noticed the two men talking. Frustrated with his ongoing talks with New York City politicians, O'Malley was curious to see what Hahn and Los Angeles would offer a prominent franchise such as the Dodgers. O'Malley scribbled a note, summoned an usher, and ordered the usher to bring the napkin to Mr. Hahn. The note on the napkin read "Don't do anything until you have spoken to me." The World Series followed this meeting with the Dodgers losing yet another seven game series to their rivals the New York Yankees. Two days after this tough defeat, O'Malley was in California meeting with Los Angeles officials to discuss a possible move.¹

On May 28, 1957, the National League owners voted to allow the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Giants to move from Ebbets Field (Ebbets) and the Polo Grounds, respectively, giving both franchises permission to relocate if the teams felt it was in their best interest to do so.² The owners' vote changed the course of baseball history by allowing two premier east coast franchises to relocate 2,400 miles to the West Coast. More than 60 years later, the Dodgers' move continues to be seen as a great tragedy by some, particularly those now elderly fans who still have memories of the Dodgers playing at Ebbets.

Discussion of the Dodgers focused primarily on the tragedy of the move, usually shown through the prism of the heartbroken fan. Most of the literature has focused on the move itself,

¹ Michael Shapiro, *The Last Good Season: Brooklyn, the Dodgers, and Their Final Pennant Race Together* (New York: Broadway Books, 2004), 309-311.

² Joseph M. Sheehan, "Dodgers, Giants Win Right To Shift if They So Desire: Two-Club Move to Coast Needs Only Petition to Head of League" *New York Times*, 29 May 1957, 1.

which was formally announced on October 8, 1957.³ This thesis will look at this event from the standpoint of a business that had to consider the political and economic situation of New York City.⁴ The thesis will also examine how race and changing demographics played a significant role in the Dodgers' move. I will argue that Dodgers' owner, Walter O'Malley, had reservations about just relying on the Brooklyn fan base, which was becoming more African American, to fill Ebbets. Rather, he felt that a new stadium and parking revenue, deriving from predominantly white fans from the suburbs, would make him far more money than just filling the seats at Ebbets Field.

From the end of World War II there was a significant increase in the number of people moving from major cities to the suburbs.⁵ Brooklyn was not exempted from this national trend: hundreds of thousands of residents left New York City and moved to Connecticut, Long Island, and New Jersey. Those fleeing the city often were white middle and upper class people.⁶ They were replaced by poorer blacks, predominantly from the South. The result was a financial drain on New York and its businesses, including the Dodgers. Ironically the Dodgers' success in overcoming decades of prejudice in professional baseball significantly contributed to the Dodgers winning the National League Pennants in 1947, 1949, 1952, 1953, 1955, and 1956, and winning the 1955 World Series Champions. Despite this, the Dodgers did seem to follow a quota

³ Emanuel Perlmutter, "DODGERS ACCEPT LOS ANGELES BID TO MOVE TO COAST: Team Will Play in California in '58 After Representing Brooklyn Since 1890 CITY TO SEEK NEW CLUB Wagner Will Name Group to Get Replacement--Rights to Territory Uncertain Dodgers Forsake Brooklyn for Los Angeles, Leaving Sorrowing Flatbush Her Legends and Heroes" *New York Times*, 9 October 1957, 1.

⁴ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 235-238.

⁵For more information about the economics please see in particular Neil J Sullivan, *The Dodgers Move West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), and Carl E. Prince, *Brooklyn's Dodgers: The Bums, the Borough, and the Best of Baseball, 1947-1957* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996),

⁶ Jackson, 290-295.

system, which limited the number of minority players on the team.⁷ The Dodgers were much more open to integration than most other baseball teams; however, this progressive thinking stopped at the baseball diamond, and did not expand into the stands, or the owners' box.

This work will be broken up into two parts: first, how the changing demographics of New York City affected the Dodgers and the perception of their owner, Walter O'Malley. For example, O'Malley interpreted Brooklyn's changing demographics as a threat to his business, even at times mentioning that the new Black and Puerto Rican residents of Brooklyn did not pay their way to the ballpark. This led to O'Malley devoting an entire decade to examining the best alternative to replacing Ebbets with a new ballpark that had to include access to both (a) public transportation that had access to Long Island, and (b) a minimum of several thousand parking spots.⁸ I will show that O'Malley also did not believe the team could be adequately supported by a fan base whose access to Ebbets was limited to the subway; all of these factors influenced O'Malley's attempts to build a new Brooklyn stadium.⁹

The second portion of this thesis will examine Title I of the American Housing Act of 1949.¹⁰ Several sections of that law gave O'Malley hope that Title I could be used to support his goal for a new stadium. For example, subsection (b) of Title I's definitions stated that "Redevelopment plan means a plan, as it exists from time to time, for the development or redevelopment or a redevelopment or project area, which plan shall be sufficiently complete (1) to indicate its relationship to definite local objectives as to appropriate land uses and improved

⁷ Rick Swaine, *The Integration of Major League Baseball: A Team by Team History* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2012), 34-44.

⁸ Sullivan, 48. As will be further developed, the seven hundred parking spots then serving Ebbets were insufficient for the projected number of fans who would be commuting from the suburbs.

⁹ Marvin Durslag, "A Visit With Walter O'Malley," *Saturday Evening Post*, May 18, 1960, 104.

¹⁰ *American Housing Act of 1949*, 42 U.S.C. § 1070 (July 15, 1949).

traffic, public transportation, public utilities, recreational and community facilities, and other public improvements.”¹¹ O’Malley believed and hoped that he could fashion an argument that Title I applied to his new ballpark. This thesis will examine the politics behind the move and the attempts to use Title I funding for a new Dodgers stadium. The later chapters will demonstrate how a racially changing local fan base, along with O’Malley’s inability to coerce Title I funding for a new ballpark, influenced O’Malley’s move out of Brooklyn. Like so many other white residents during this period, the Brooklyn Dodgers owner left for greener, or more accurately, whiter, pastures.

2. A Changing City

From the early 1930s through the Dodgers move, there was an ever-changing landscape in New York City and its surrounding areas. There were major transportation initiatives within the five boroughs allowing residents easy and much faster access to parts of Long Island, Westchester County, and across the Hudson River into New Jersey. The George Washington Bridge (GWB), completed in 1931, connected Fort Lee, New Jersey with Washington Heights in Manhattan.¹² The Triborough Bridge (Triboro), completed in 1936, linked Queens (through Astoria - then called Long Island City), Manhattan, and the Bronx.¹³ The Westside Highway and the Henry Hudson Bridge (HHB) linked the Bronx with uptown Manhattan.¹⁴ Importantly, the HHB provided an easy solution for traveling from New York City to Westchester County and further upstate. In 1939 the Bronx-Whitestone Bridge linked the Whitestone area in Queens with

¹¹ *American Housing Act of 1949*, P.L. 81-171, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 63 (1949): 420.

¹² "George Washington Bridge: A Feat of Man’s Ingenuity" *New York Times*, 18 October 1931, 124.

¹³ Robert Caro, *the Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York, New York: Knopf, 1974), 440-443.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 552.

the East Tremont area of the Bronx.¹⁵ These new bridges contributed to New York gaining the reputation as a car-friendly state and tell the legacy of Robert Moses.¹⁶

Bridge construction was not alone in making car travel between and among boroughs easier than it had ever been; during this era there was a focus on expanding the number and quality of roads and freeways. As a result, travel by car, became a major component of living in New York City and Long Island. The 1930s brought the construction of the Northern State (NSP) and Southern State (SSP) Parkways.¹⁷ The NSP runs through Queens and is connected with the Grand Central Parkway (GCP) which connected parts of Queens and continued east through Nassau County, including Mineola and Westbury.¹⁸ The GCP whose western terminus is the aforementioned Triboro, linked with the Wantagh State Parkway (the Wantagh), built in 1929. This brought travelers to Robert Moses' pet project Jones Beach, a large outdoor recreational area that contained vast amounts of beachfront. Later an 8,200 seat arena would be built in 1952.¹⁹ The SSP connected Queens with Elmont and Nassau Valley Streams in Nassau County and would connect to the Belt Parkway (the Belt).²⁰ Moses built several more important highways including the Interborough (now named the Jackie Robinson Parkway), the Laurelton, and the Gowanus in Brooklyn.²¹ The attitude of the Parks and Triborough Bridges Authority (Moses would later acquire power over Tunnels in 1946) was to build more highways connecting Woodbury to Commack.²² The Southern Parkway stretches from Valley Stream in Queens

¹⁵ Khaled M. Mahmoud, *Advances in Cable-Supported Bridges* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2006), 145-146.

¹⁶ Robert Moses was head, at one time, of twelve different New York government agencies. He would remain in power until 1968 when Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority was merged to form the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. For more information please see Robert Caro's *The Power Broker*.

¹⁷ Caro, 299-304.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 340.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 308-10.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 340.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 341.

²² *Ibid.*, 330.

through Oyster Bay in Nassau County.²³ The development of these areas into new suburban residential centers led to a need for more automobiles and, thus, even more highways.

2.1 Mass Transit Decline

While the infrastructure on the roads was being improved, the foundation of New York City – mass transit - was falling apart. Fans attending games at Ebbets Field historically used two primary modes of transportation. The first was the Brooklyn trolley car. Brooklyn trolleys provided both the source of the Dodgers’ name (a joke referring to how all Brooklynites had to dodge the trolley cars) and the main source of transportation in the borough. Several trolley lines serviced Ebbets Field: the Franklin Avenue Line (through 1945), the Tompkins Avenue Line (through 1947), and the Flatbush Avenue Line (through 1951).²⁴ However, this method of transportation was steadily being replaced by buses. The second mode of transportation was the subway. The BMT Brighton Line, which had the B and Q trains, ran through parts of Manhattan and Brooklyn and provided access to Ebbets Field. Despite buses replacing trolley cars, these two modes of transportation hadn’t changed since Ebbets Field inception in 1912. For all the commentary regarding transportation issues, within Brooklyn most of the local population relied heavily on the subway and trolley car systems.

One, perhaps unintended, consequence of the substantial spending on highways and bridges was the dreadful underfunding of the public transportation system. This problem was two-fold. First, public transportation failed to get any additional state funding for many years.

²³ Ibid., 304.

²⁴ “Buses Replacing Nostrand Ave. Trolleys; Horsecars Opened Flatbush Line in 1882” *New York Times*, 31 March 1951, 12.

For example, from 1940 through 1953, not a single new subway car was purchased.²⁵ Second, from October 27, 1904 through July 1, 1948, the bus fare was not raised from five cents.²⁶ During that forty-four year period, any politician who threatened to raise the fare faced an almost certain death blow to being re-elected. New York had a strong union base and most union members did not support the fare being increased. For example, Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia did not favor increasing the subway fare because it was a no-win situation politically.²⁷ While the fare was finally raised in 1948, more than four decades of lost revenue significantly hurt the New York City Transit Authority (NYCTA). Some examples were: old equipment was not repaired or replaced, new buses were a rarity, and the establishment of new bus routes were often inadequate to keep up with the new population.

In general, the new residents of Brooklyn often did not have cars and needed access to public transportation. Thus, they could not attend games at Ebbets unless they were willing to devote a significant amount of time traveling from home to the ballpark. Former mediator Theodore Kheel blamed the inadequate mass transit system in Brooklyn on Robert Moses. In a 2007 interview with the *New York Times* Kheel stated that “This is precisely the wrong time to deify Moses ...he was hostile to mass transit and hostile to poor New Yorkers.”²⁸

2.2 Racial Changes within Brooklyn

An understanding of the racial changes in Brooklyn, requires an examination of urban decline that, began as a national trend in the late 1930s and early 1940s. For purposes of this

²⁵ James K. Cohen, “Structural versus Functional Determinants of New York’s Fiscal Policies Toward Metropolitan Transportation, 1904-1990,” *Social Science History*, 15, 2. (Summer, 1991): 188.

²⁶ William R. Conklin “Subway Fare 10 Cents July 1, City Surface Lines 7 Cents; Mayor, Board Approve Rise” *New York Times*, 21 April 1948, 1.

²⁷ Clifton Wood, *722 Miles: The Building of the Subways and How They Transformed New York* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 224-226.

²⁸ Michael Powell, “A Tale of Two Cities.” *New York Times*, 6th May 2007, CY1.

thesis, “urban decline” is defined as the process by which a city loses its middle-class and high-income residents. Some national examples of such urban decline were decreases in residents of Boston and Chicago, respectively, with increases in nearby Brookline, Massachusetts and Newton-Evanston, Illinois.²⁹ In post-WWII New York, residents of the five boroughs began to move to Westchester, Long Island and Levittown.³⁰ Why did the national trend favor persons moving into the suburbs? The first reason was the simplicity of travel due to the rise of the automobile as the primary method of transportation, accompanied by the increase in highways funds. This national trend would continue through the 1940s into the 1950s. It would reach its apex with the passage of the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956, which appropriated more than a billion dollars to fund the construction of new and improved highways.³¹ New roads created new businesses, both industrial and cottage - such as gas stations and motels, across the new national highways. Americans were now able to travel more conveniently and drive longer distances to their destinations. They would also be able to move to outer suburban areas and commute to work. Gas prices remained low through the 1940s never going above .50 cents a gallon after World War II. As a result transportation using a car was cheap for the average American to use.

A second reason for urban decline was social legislation such as The Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 (G.I. Bill).³² This bill had two significant provisions. First, it paid for a college education for all who completed their military service. The second, and perhaps more impactful provision, was the availability of Veteran Administration (VA) loans to veterans purchasing homes. While all military members were technically allowed to apply, there were

²⁹ Jackson, 152.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 234-238.

³¹ *National Interstate and Defense Highways Act*, 84 U.S.C. § 627 (1956)

³² *Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944*, 58 U.S.C. § 284 (1944)

some distinct, and unfortunate, racial differences in the way the VA handled the applications for white versus Black applicants. For example, the VA allowed local offices to dictate who received VA mortgages and educational opportunities.³³ Thus, even in New York, Black residents would have difficulty in obtaining VA loans to purchase homes. Additionally, white veterans who wanted to become, for example, an electrical, plumbing, or engineering tradesman, were given access to first rate trade schools (insuring employment) while African Americans were often denied access to these same trade schools.³⁴ One result was Blacks would go to trade schools that, while accredited by the VA, were, for all intents and purposes, scams that offered little to no training for a job.³⁵ The overall result was African Americans took only a minimal leap forward, while whites, armed with both VA mortgages and better schooling, could move into upper class and middle class societies. And those societies were becoming suburban, not urban.

The third major reason for urban decline were the national housing laws. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) contributed to a shift in segregation because of its colored coded system, with red being the worst color grade.³⁶ (Thus, the term redlining.) The presence of one African American within a neighborhood would automatically earn a neighborhood a D rating. This gave white property owners justification to keep Blacks out of their neighborhoods. This new housing coding system favored Long Island, Westchester County and other City suburbs. For instance, under the grading system, in 1940 Brooklyn had no neighborhoods that were in the

³³ Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: WW Norton, 2006), 124-125.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 134-135.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 137.

³⁶ There were four colors to determine the perceived stability of housing within a particular neighborhood. There were four letter grades A-green, B-blue, C-yellow, and D-red. A-grade represented the best neighborhoods where FHA Mortgage insurance was almost a given whereas D-grade represented the worst grade. For more on this please see paragraph on *Crabgrass Frontier*, 200-203.

top class (A rating) and 42% of Brooklyn was considered hazardous (D rating).³⁷ By comparison, 37% of Lower Westchester was considered green (A rating) and only 8% were in the hazardous category.

Thus, the Federal Housing Administration, the G.I. Bill, and the FHA favored residential areas that had a large amount of land with a low-density, white populations over traditional, high populated cities with any minorities. While these three laws played a role, there is no doubt, both nationally and within New York State and New York City, that the FHA played a pivotal role in the lack of African American opportunities. The reason is simple: housing values increased dramatically over the next generation. African Americans were not given access to newer areas because of racially biased legislation in both the private sector and government policies. As it pertains to Brooklyn, the new infrastructure provided more opportunities for the white middle class to move outside of New York City. With cheap housing beginning to appear in other parts of the state, New York City began to feel the full effect of this as tax revenue began to shift to the suburbs. To better illustrate this, we will look at census data from 1940 and 1960 for several counties, including Nassau, Westchester, Suffolk, and the five boroughs that make up New York City.³⁸

³⁷ University of Richmond "Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America." Richmond.edu <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=12/40.6582/74.0032&opacity=0.8&sort=99,95,104&city=brooklyn-ny>

³⁸ University of Richmond "Mapping Redlining in New Deal America." Richmond.edu <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=12/40.9360/-73.8250&opacity=0.8&city=lower-westchester-co.-ny>. The following towns are included in Nassau: Elmont, Valley Stream, Glen Cove, Garden City, Rockville Centre, Oceanside, Long Beach, Hempstead, Freeport, East Meadow, Hicksville, Levittown, Plainview, and Massapequa. The following towns are considered part of Westchester County: Yonkers, New Rochelle, White Plains, Port Chester, Ossining, and Peekskill. The following towns are in Suffolk: Huntington Station, Commack, Dix Hills, Deer Park, West Babylon, Hauppauge, Brentwood, Bay Shore, Centereach, Holbrook, Medford, East Patchogue, and Shirley.

The late 1940s and 1950s experienced a significant increase in the American population, an increase highlighted in California. In 1940, California's population rose from 6,907,387 to 15,717,204, in 1960, an increase of more than 225%. New York State's population increased from 13,479,142 in 1940, to 16,782,304 in the 1960s, a mere 25%. New York City experienced only a slight population increase from 7,454,995 in 1940 to 7,781,984 in 1960. Of greater significance, at a time when there was a significant population increase nationally, Kings County (Brooklyn) decreased from 2,698,285 in 1940 to 2,627,319 in 1960. While this was a small decline, the story was much different with the three suburban counties. Westchester County's population increased from 573,558 in 1940 to 808,891 in 1960. There was a significant increase in population in Suffolk County; the population was 197,355 in 1940 but more than tripled by 1960 to 666,784. Lastly, Nassau County also experienced a more than triple-fold population increase from 406,748 in 1940 to 1,300,171 in 1960. So while the population of New York City as a whole increased by a small amount during the post-WWII "baby boom," the population did not increase nearly as much as it did in Long Island.³⁹ The result of this population movement was there was a growing demand to move out into the suburbs. This was dangerous for New York City as they began to lose tax revenue from their local residents.

The population demographics also tell an important story about New York City and the suburbs. The Black population in New York City increased significantly from 1940 to 1960, especially after World War II. The total population of African Americans was 458,445 in 1940 and represented 6.2% of the total city population.⁴⁰ In 1960, the African American population increased to 1,087,931, representing 14% of the total population. The numbers of Blacks moving

³⁹ U.S. Census Bureau. Statistics, 1960. Prepared by Social Explorer.

⁴⁰ U.S. Census Bureau. Statistics, 1940. Prepared by Social Explorer.

into New York City was a vastly different story than its Long Island counterparts. In all five New York City boroughs, the African American population increased dramatically in four of the five boroughs. In the Bronx in 1940 the African American population was 23,529 which represented 1.7% of the total population, whereas in 1960 there 163,896 African Americans representing 11.5% of the total population. In Kings County, the population went from 107,264 to 371,405 more than tripled. In New York (Manhattan), the African American population went from 298,365 representing 15.8% in 1940 versus 397,101 and 23.4% of the population.⁴¹ In Queens, 25,890 2.0% in the 1940s versus 145,855 8.1% in 1960s.⁴²

Long Island towns such as Glen Cove, Great Neck, Rockville Centre, and most famously Levittown, had restrictions on African Americans buying houses. A *New York Times* article on the 25th Anniversary of Levittown states: "The whites-only policy was not some unspoken gentlemen's agreement. It was cast in bold capital letters in clause 25 of the standard lease for the first Levitt houses, which included an option to buy. It stated that the home could not 'be used or occupied by any person other than members of the Caucasian race.'"⁴³ In Nassau, and Suffolk Counties, the 1960 African American population percentages did not significantly differ from 1940. In 1940 the total population in Nassau County, Westchester County, and Suffolk County was 1,177,661 with the African American population being 53,273 (4.5%). In 1960 the total population was 2,775,846, with the African American population percentage wise remaining around the same. (4.8%) The percentages did not change, yet the county's population, as a whole, almost tripled in some areas.⁴⁴

⁴¹ U.S. Census Bureau. Statistics, 1960. Prepared by Social Explorer.

⁴² U.S. Census Bureau. Population Density, 1960. Prepared by Social Explorer.

⁴³ Bruce Lambert, "At 50, Levittown Contends With Its Legacy of Bias" *New York Times*, 28 December 1997.

⁴⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. Population Density, 1940. Prepared by Social Explorer.

Suburban housing codes differed from major metropolitan areas for another reason: the presence of any Black residents. Realtors knew this practice and created new suburban zoning laws that enforced racially segregated towns. For instance, in Levittown there were no Black residents until 1960. When asked about this, William Levitt responded "We can solve a housing problem or we can try to solve a racial problem. But we can't do both."⁴⁵ This was the policy – albeit unspoken - of most realtors outside major cities. One way realtors could keep Blacks out of newer towns was to have a sponsorship system where two members of the community would have to sponsor a new family that wanted to buy a house. When a new township was formed, there were only white residents, few of whom, if any, were willing to sponsor a Black family into an area. Another unsavory practice was for realtors to state that Blacks could purchase a house at the asking price only if paid for in cash.⁴⁶ These realtors, were clearly motivated by the FHA coloring code system and their own racial prejudices. The result was new segregated towns that expanded vastly in wealth and left major cities with less money, including New York.

During the 1950s, the Black population in Brooklyn increased from 240,000 to 340,000, with approximately 340,000 whites leaving.⁴⁷ Some examples of whites leaving include Italians, whom moved from Crown Heights and Flatbush, to Queens and the suburbs. Crown Heights through the early 1950s was primarily a Jewish area mixed with Italians. By 1957 the population in Crown Heights became 25% African American, who migrated from down south and the

⁴⁵ Richard Lacayo, "Suburban Legend William Levitt," *Time*, March 7th 1998, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,989781-2,00.html>

⁴⁶ As a result of mortgages, not being available to African Americans their opportunity to succeed in the post war boom was hampered. In fact one of the reasons whites did well was their house was the fastest growing asset. African American's were kept out of this booming market.

⁴⁷ Jason Sokol, *All Eyes Are Upon Us: Race and Politics from Boston to Brooklyn* (New York, New York: Basic Books, 2014), 46-47.

Caribbean.⁴⁸ The Black population also increased in both Crown Heights and Bedford-Stuyvesant during the 1940s. According to Robert Caro, “During the seven years since the end of WWII, they had been evicted from their homes in New York City for public works—mainly Robert Moses’ public works—some 170,000 persons.”⁴⁹ Many residents from these projects, along with other residents of New York, would be put into new public housing projects helped mainly by the passing of the American Housing Act of 1949.⁵⁰ Public housing in Brownsville, originally meant to be integrated, became a stopover for white Jews and Italians whom had more opportunities to move once suburban housing became available.⁵¹ Many would be relocated into Brownsville where 4,000 units of public housing were built in the late 1940s.⁵² Projects included the Brownsville Houses and the Van Dyke Houses (called at the time the Brownsville Housing Extension).⁵³ In addition any persons that were already on the housing lists were put into the Brownsville housing, which were among the worst housing projects due to the high crime and the vast turnover rate. Through the early 1950s, the housing project would house both whites and blacks.⁵⁴ Whites, generally speaking, got better jobs because of more opportunity and as a result they were forced to vacate the housing projects because of strict income maximums. Since the highest earners left these projects the replacements were poor African Americans whom were systematically kept out of higher paying jobs. The end result was poor African Americans were left in these apartments with the city, not providing any chance at upper mobility.

⁴⁸ Wendell E. Pritchett, *Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews, and the Changing Face of the Ghetto* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 115-116.

⁴⁹ Caro, 967.

⁵⁰ For more information about this topic see the chapter on Title I.

⁵¹ Pritchett, 115-118.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 83.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 97-100.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

The first wave of whites to the suburbs left because of FHA and VA loans. The second wave left because of red-lining. Poorer Blacks would be granted loans in East Flatbush and Bedford-Stuyvesant, but often would not get any additional loans to increase the value of their houses. Bankers would not give any loans to Blacks and whites in integrated neighborhoods, which explains the decline in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Flatbush, and Crown-Heights. Bedford-Stuyvesant and Brownville each once had a significant Jewish population. New techniques such as block busting began to emerge within these newly formed Black houses.⁵⁵ The remaining residents within Brooklyn neighborhoods were not given access to FHA loans, which in turn, led to a lack of home improvements. It is in this environment that Walter O'Malley and his Dodgers' franchise found itself trying to make a profit.

2.3 Walter O'Malley and Race

Many within the Dodger's community had an unfavorable view of both Ebbets and its newly emerging fan base. Martin Stahl, a young fan at the time, remembers visiting the ballpark:

The last time I attended a game there was in 1956. I remember nothing about the game, not even the score or who the opposing team was. I remember the condition of the Stadium through the place looked old and rundown and it was obvious that nobody was doing anything about it. The seats were worn out and uncomfortable. The whole place needed to be painted. The area below the box seats, where the concession stands were, smelled of urine. Years later I found out that this was due to completely worn out plumbing that needed to be replaced. The bathrooms were not being properly maintained either. I also remember that the area was poorly lighted. It was a day game but it still seemed dark there below the stands. The neighborhood was run down. (It was in the process of turning into a ghetto.)⁵⁶

⁵⁵ In Bedford-Stuyvesant, whites often feared their housing value would plummet and, as a result, would often sell their houses for fire-sale prices around \$2,500. In turn realtors would sell the house for \$20,000 plus fees to Blacks. Once African Americans moved in, loans would rarely be given out for extension or housing redevelopment to anyone within Bedford- Stuyvesant. For more information see *All Eyes Are Upon Us: Race and Politics from Boston to Brooklyn*, 52-56.

⁵⁶ Martin Stahl, email to the author, May 2, 2015.

While Martin was referring to the economics of the area, other residents showed their prejudices. One such resident, John Belson stated, “you go to a Sunday Doubleheader and the dominant smell in the ballpark was bagged fried chicken. Between games out came the brown paper bags with the fried chicken in it. You had a different crowd. It was no longer a unified crowd.”⁵⁷ Herb Ross commented “When the blacks started coming to the game, a lot of whites stopped coming (to Ebbets)... I guess O’Malley was like everyone else in Brooklyn: As long as you’re not my neighbor, as long as they went home at night to wherever they lived, it was okay. But once they started to live in the neighborhood, then the neighborhood started to ‘change’; it was time to move out.”⁵⁸

Walter O’Malley made comments about race and believed that the new Black and Puerto Rican Dodger fans would be unable to support the team, financially, because they lacked the economic means to do so. More to the point, he saw how integration affected the perception among white fans that Ebbets Field, once a safe environment to bring your family to watch the Bums, was no longer a safe environment because of racial integration (or increasing numbers of Black fans). Put simply, O’Malley believed that white fans were scared to attend Dodgers games. Several of the people O’Malley interacted with made mention of race. For example, O’Malley once commented to journalist Melvin Durslag that “He (O’Malley) went to the ballpark one day, and a Puerto Rican fan urinated in a beer bottle and threw it out on the field. And O’Malley said to me ‘What the hell am I doing here. These aren’t the old lovable Brooklyn fans you see.’”⁵⁹ O’Malley expressed more of this racial view to his General Manager, Emil “Buzzie” Bavasi, when O’Malley said “Look out your window. What do you see? You see about 600-700 people

⁵⁷ Peter Golenbock, *Bums: An Oral History of the Brooklyn Dodgers* (New York: Pocket Books, 1984), 561.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 561-562.

⁵⁹ Melvin Durslag, *Ghosts of Flatbush* Produced by Rick Bernstein. (2007: HBO), DVD, 73rd minute.

lined up across the street. That's the unemployment office. Look at them, they're black and they're Puerto Ricans. They don't pay their way. They don't pay to come to the ballpark. Why are we catering to these people?"⁶⁰ His comments to Bavasi were not an isolated instance of O'Malley's racism.⁶¹ Peter Golenbock, who had interviewed numerous former Dodger executives and players, noted "There was another aspect to the Ebbets Field crowd besides its small size that disturbed O'Malley. He didn't like its racial makeup. It wasn't the same going to see a game at Ebbets Field anymore. The white Brooklyn fan was not driving in from his new home in the suburbs."⁶² Simply stated, Walter O'Malley did not like the stands being full of Blacks and Puerto Ricans. And if the Dodgers were to stay in Brooklyn, then O'Malley would accept nothing less than a new stadium providing sufficient parking and access to mass transit. O'Malley felt he had found the ideal location on the corner of Atlantic and Flatbush Avenue in Downtown Brooklyn.⁶³

The decision to move to a new stadium was a calculated decision to move out of a racially changing neighborhood lacking access to the newly most valuable commodities: parking and access to the Long Island Railroad (LIRR). While residents of Brooklyn had ample transportation options within the borough, the recently transplanted Long Islanders would most benefit from the new transportation options.

⁶⁰ Bavasi Buzzie, *Ghosts of Flatbush*.

⁶¹ Mr. Bavasi was then quick to point out that he did not believe O'Malley was a bigot: "Don't get me wrong, Walter wasn't a racist. If you were a minority that can pay the five or ten dollars to get into the ballpark, he was all for it. But, if you couldn't afford it, Walter wasn't a fan of yours. Walter was all business." *Ghosts of Flatbush*.

⁶² Golenbock, 560.

⁶³ Some irony here that 50 years later the "ideal location" O'Malley dreamed of became the 19,000 seat Barclays Center, home to the Brooklyn Nets. The venue hosts concerts year round and is near the 2,3,4,5 B, Q, D, N, R, and W trains and the LIRR Atlantic Terminal. The Brooklyn Arena Local Development Corporation owns the Barclays Center.

Walter O'Malley mentioned some of the fans' criticism about race. Speaking with writer Roger Kahn, O'Malley expressed concern that some fans felt he moved for racial reasons. Discussing the move to Los Angeles he said: "They called me carpetbagger...One man wrote I left because I believed the colored, Puerto Ricans, and Jews were taking over Brooklyn. Lies. Pejoratives lies. My son, Peter, came home from Penn and said, 'Dad, what are we going to do? The things in the paper are terrible.'"⁶⁴ O'Malley comments to several reporters and his own general manager appear to show that he contradicted his own point. O'Malley was at least hesitant with the growing Black population, if not outright racist. Although he hired many African American ballplayers, it does appear that, so far as filling a stadium with African Americans, he believed that Dodgers needed the white fan to compete against other franchises.

3. The Decline of Ebbets Field

The environment surrounding New York City and how that affected the Dodgers is an important component to consider. O'Malley viewed Ebbets Field as antiquated for several critical reasons with the most important reason being attendance. Despite being second in National League in attendance, O'Malley knew seating at Ebbets was limited to 35,000 seats. Compared with the Braves' Milwaukee County Stadium which could hold 44,000 fans the Dodgers were limited. In 1960, Walter O'Malley interviewed with the *Saturday Evening Post*. O'Malley brought up the criticism of moving the Dodgers despite good attendance.

Yes, we were drawing a million people a year," he (O'Malley) answered, "and the Milwaukee club was drawing two million people. There's a difference of one million attendance, right? (Braves Owner) Lou Perini, who owns Milwaukee, is a wealthy man. He is not looking for dividends. If he draws a million people more than we do, at an average admission of two dollars, he has two million dollars a year more to put into his

⁶⁴ Roger Kahn, *The Boys of Summer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 430.

organization for things like absorbing farm-club losses, for salaries in the front office, salaries to players, bonus money to attract new players, scouting and all of that.⁶⁵

In 1953, the Milwaukee Braves, a second division team that had just moved from Boston, set a new attendance record of 1,826,397 patrons, in the first season in their new home, a record that they would later break several times.⁶⁶ This increased attendance was made possible, in part, because Braves' fans could easily travel to and had ample parking at the ballpark; conversely, in Brooklyn, there were less than 700 parking spaces for paying fans to come out to the ballpark.

The emerging notion a new Ebbets Field was needed was illustrated by the growing importance and necessity for more parking space to accommodate their fans. With many Brooklyn residents moving to Long Island, the car was an important aspect of the 1950s. In 1910, there were 458,500 cars registered in the United States.⁶⁷ There were 49 million cars registered at the start of the 1950s, and 78 million by the end of the decade.⁶⁸ There was also increased funding for highways nationwide to 25 billion dollars in 1956.⁶⁹ For the many Dodgers fans who moved out of Brooklyn, limited mass transportation options to the ballpark posed a difficult obstacle to overcome. Without ample ability to travel to the baseball games from Long Island, white fans that had the finances to support the team were unable to attend without a significant hassle.

Droves of overwhelmingly white fans, already had moved to the suburbs of Long Island. Housing in the suburbs was primarily inhabited by white, middle class families, many of whom had benefitted from the educational, employment, and home financing opportunities afforded by

⁶⁵ Durslag, 104.

⁶⁶ "Atlanta Braves Attendance, Stadiums, and Park Factors," n.d., <https://www.baseball-reference.com/teams/ATL/attend.shtml>

⁶⁷ James J. Flink, *the Automobile Age* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1988), 26.

⁶⁸ William H Young and Nancy K. Young, *the 1950s*. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004), 251.

⁶⁹ Young, 256.

the GI Bill. This growth in Long Island contributed to a dwindling fan base unwilling to travel to Brooklyn to see their beloved Bums. No one knew and understood this more than Walter O'Malley; if the Dodgers were going to remain in Brooklyn, he had to find a way to attract the white Long Island crowd.

Historian Peter Ellsworth, in defending Walter O'Malley, would be first to point out the deterioration of the Dodgers' home park. "In 1955 Ebbets Field was hardly a relic, but it had aged poorly. Structurally the stadium was unsound. Moreover, by the 1940s the plumbing was so bad that the walkways often smelled of urine. The 30,000-seat stadium was also one of the smallest in Major League baseball. Ebbets Field had narrow aisles and seats."⁷⁰ Ellsworth concluded that the absence of adequate parking near Ebbets Field, contrasted with the more than 14,000 parking spots in Milwaukee, and the lack of alternative, effective transportation for fans, resulted in the inability of Ebbets Field to financially sustain the Dodgers past the 1957 season.⁷¹ If the Dodgers wanted to remain competitive with the Braves, they had to move into a new stadium.

Walter O'Malley, whom had a background in engineering, desired a modern, cutting edge stadium and in the early 1950s hired the famed architect Buckminster Fuller to design a replacement for Ebbets Field. Fuller designed a geometric dome, which would have been the first of its kind, ten years before the Astrodome was opened in 1965. The stadium would hold 52,000 people and be built on O'Malley's ideal location in Downtown Brooklyn, and be completed in

⁷⁰ Peter Ellsworth, "The Brooklyn Dodgers' Move to Los Angeles: Was Walter O'Malley Solely Responsible," *Nine: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture* 14, No 1 (2005): 20-21.

⁷¹ Walter O'Malley to Walter Rothschild, May 26, 1955, Box 1, Folder 6, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

time for the 1960 season.⁷² This dome was to be 600 feet in diameter, with seating to be served by escalators. The ceiling was designed to be retractable and would be made from “translucent fiberglass petals opening and closing to the sky.”⁷³ Using the natural nightlight would enhance the ballpark rather than regular light towers, so the players would be able to see the ball better than in most other ballparks. In addition to seating 17,000 more than Ebbets Field, the domed stadium would serve as an arena providing year round entertainment as its proposed capacity supersede New York’s existing performance arenas.⁷⁴

Adjacent to the meat market that would give way to the new dome was access to the LIRR. The Atlantic Avenue station provided a connection for all the major train lines from Long Island, most importantly the lines serving Levittown, Long Beach, Hicksville, and Bethpage. These train lines were part of a new expansion by the LIRR to connect Brooklyn with several newly booming areas in Long Island and they could reach Manhattan when working properly. However, the most important part of the dome was not what was on the inside, but the transportation advantages it would have over Ebbets Field.⁷⁵ The question became how can a baseball owner convince a city to build him a new stadium?⁷⁶ The answer came in the form of one of the most important laws in 20th century America, The American Housing Act of 1949.

⁷² Walter O’Malley ideal location for a new stadium was in downtown Brooklyn. I will go into greater detail in the next few chapters.

⁷³ Richard Buckminster Fuller to Walter O’Malley, June 14, 1955, Box 1, Folder 4, Walter O’Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

⁷⁴ Carnegie Hall located between 56th and 57th streets on 7th Avenue its main hall fits just under 3,000 patrons. Radio City Music Hall located on 6th Avenue fits nearly 6,000 patrons. Finally, Madison Square Garden located on 8th Avenue between 49th and 50th streets held nearly 18,500 patrons.

⁷⁵ Michelle Cohen, “A Buckminster Fuller Dome Almost Kept the Dodgers in Brooklyn,” April 4th, 2016, www.6sqft.com/a-buckminster-fuller-dome-almost-kept-the-dodgers-in-brooklyn/.

⁷⁶The LIRR was also known to have major problems with no less than 10-15 trains being cancelled daily. In *The Power Broker*, Robert Caro posits that this was from a lack of funding for the transit company and the resultant failure to improve the infrastructure. (Caro, 934-39)

First though, let us examine other teams that moved during the same time period in the early 1950s.

3.1 Changes in Other Cities

In other cities, stadium politics were sometimes a preemptive move. This held particularly true in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Milwaukee County Stadium (County Stadium) was originally built for a minor league baseball team. However, the stadium was designed with features that would allow it to add more seating after the 1953 season. The city of Milwaukee intended to use their own finances to build a new ballpark to attract a major league team. The construction costs were approximately \$5.9 million and paid for through bonds. As writer Gregg Hoffman states:

The ballpark, whose cost was initially put at \$5 million, was the first in the country to be paid for by public funds. The funds came from a combination of City and County of Milwaukee bonds. As for the site, the US Congress in 1949 approved the leasing of 22 acres of federally-owned land for \$1 a year and the county bought another 98 acres. A federal agency, the National Production Authority, also had to approve the construction after it had banned any new recreational facilities because of the need for steel and other materials for the Korean War. The stadium project was approved because groundbreaking had taken place a week before the ban was put into effect.⁷⁷

Milwaukee wanted to build this stadium. However, there were never any plans to turn the stadium over for private ownership. Milwaukee wanted to lease the stadium out to a new team.

The stadium attracted the interest of two baseball teams, the St Louis Browns and Boston Braves. At the time the Browns were still trying to force the Cardinals to move out of St. Louis and almost succeeded but for the purchase of the Cardinals by Gussie Bush.⁷⁸ The Browns did try to move to Milwaukee. However, Boston Braves owner Lou Perini ended up moving the

⁷⁷ Gregg Hoffman, "County Stadium (Milwaukee, WI)," n.d., <<https://sabr.org/node/27389>>.

⁷⁸ Todd Eschman, "How St. Louis very nearly became the Browns' town," *Belleville News-Democrat* 2nd May 2016, <<https://www.bnd.com/sports/mlb/st-louis-cardinals/article74983902.html>>.

Braves to the city of Milwaukee because they had the territorial rights to move there.⁷⁹

Performing a delicate balancing act, Perini managed to convince the National League owners to allow him to move the team securing unanimous consent, including that of Walter O'Malley.⁸⁰

The Braves ultimately moved from Boston to Milwaukee in the middle of spring training on March 13, 1953, right before the start of the season.⁸¹

Having opened while under construction in 1953, County Stadium provided more than 14,000 parking spots for Milwaukee fans to attend a baseball game. Milwaukee also built the stadium in hopes of attracting a Major League baseball team, which ended up being the Braves. This deal was not used with any federal funding, however the stadium was financed by the City of Milwaukee. The lease deal was also favorable to the Braves. In a later memo about a new stadium, Walter O'Malley hints that the lease deal between Milwaukee and their city was \$25,000 per year in the mid-1950s.⁸² Lawsuits in 1965 revealed that the Braves paid \$200,000 a season to lease County Stadium from Milwaukee in the 1960s.⁸³

In St. Louis there were two National League teams, the Cardinals and the Browns. The Cardinals were in financial trouble due to their owner Fred Saigh being tried and convicted on tax evasion charges in 1953. Anheuser Busch's Gussie Busch planned on keeping the Cardinals in St. Louis and Saigh sold the Cardinals to Busch despite better offers from buyers out of town. Owner Bill Veeck, realizing he could not compete with Busch, needed to move the team. Veeck

⁷⁹ The Braves AAA team played in Milwaukee. That is how the Braves had territorial rights.

⁸⁰ Glen Gendzel, "Competitive Boosterism: How Milwaukee Lost the Braves" *The Business History Review* 69, (1995): 535.

⁸¹ William Povletich, *Milwaukee Braves Heroes and Heartbreak* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2012), 5.

⁸² Walter O'Malley File Memorandum re New Stadium, January 29, 1957, Box 2, Folder 2, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

⁸³ Gendzel, 543.

wanted to move to Baltimore, which required approval from the other American League owners. While such an approval was normally seen as a formality, because of previous disagreements with Veeck the owners' vote was 4-4, short of the necessary 6 votes of the American League Owners vote Veeck need. It was widely believed that Veeck had alienated the owners of the Yankees, Red Sox, and Indians, a belief that proved true when the owners approved the Browns' move to Baltimore after Veeck sold his ownership shares at the end of the 1953 season. As a result the Browns moved to Baltimore and became the Orioles.

The Baltimore Orioles began as a minor league team, but in 1954 graduated to the major league level and started playing in the American League at Memorial Stadium. Like the Braves in Milwaukee, the stadium, which they shared with the National Football League's Baltimore Colts, was originally built as a multipurpose stadium to host multiple sporting events. The seating was expanded once both the Colts and Orioles moved to Baltimore. In exchange, both teams were given lease deals that were believed to be around \$100,000 a season.

After the approval, attendance increased significantly and the Braves became the first team to draw over 2 million people in the mid- to late-1950s. Noticing these attendance increases, O'Malley hoped to emulate the Baltimore and Milwaukee stadium deals and obtain his own stadium from New York City.

4. Title I of the American Housing Act

Due to a severe housing crisis in the United States after World War II, Congress began debate on a new housing bill. Next to the G.I. Bill, The American Housing Act of 1949 would become, pivotal, in the nation's ability to build housing. It allowed the Federal Government to spend billions of dollars to acquire land and build housing on the land, changing the landscapes of communities forever. On the national level this was an important change. In New York City

Robert Moses used the provisions in Title I to expand his vast highway all across New York. Title I allowed cities to clear areas and build facilities in order to improve housing within a particular area.

The American Housing Act of 1949 was one of the most seminal laws in the middle of the 20th century. As early as 1945, Congress had attempted to pass a National Housing Act. The two Housing Acts passed in 1934 and 1937 were important pieces of legislation, but had limited impact for several reasons. First, the legislation only addressed low-cost housing rather than other elements such as temporarily removing residents and improving infrastructure. The second, and more obvious, reason was the limited amount of money appropriated in the law. The United States Housing Act of 1937 stated “The Authority is authorized, on and after the date of the enactment of this Act, to enter into contracts which provide for annual contributions aggregating not more than \$5,000,000 per annum, on or after July 1, 1938, to enter into additional such contracts which provide for annual contributions aggregating not more than \$7,500,000 per annum, and on or after July 1, 1939, to enter into additional such contracts which provide for annual contributions aggregating not more than \$7,500,000 per annum.”⁸⁴ The Housing Act of 1949 allowed up to \$500,000,000 to be spent on housing.⁸⁵ The most impactful portion of the earlier housing laws was the creation of the Federal Housing Administration. These bills were a small band aid in terms of solving a national housing crisis that only worsened with the population boom after World War II.

⁸⁴ “Housing Act of 1937” 50 U.S.C. 888, September 1, 1937

⁸⁵ Housing Act of 1949 S 1070 — P.L. 171," 416.

In January 1949, the newly elected House enacted a new discharge rule, limiting the power of House committees to squash bills and keep them from reaching the House floor.⁸⁶ When senators on that Committee threatened to use the antiblockage rules to force a vote on the floor, the House Rules Committee voted 8-4 to permit debate on the House floor.⁸⁷ The debate included discussion on several major bills including farm legislation, housing funding per room (capped at \$1,750), and housing construction, as well as about funding the improvement of existing housing and public housing.⁸⁸ Two-to-one grants from the federal government to State governments was also discussed. Finally, the amount of new housing to be built was reduced to 810,000 units from the 1,050,000 that the liberal base in Congress wanted which was a significant compromise that allowed passage of the legislation.⁸⁹

Discussion on racial segregation occurred throughout the debate on this bill. There was a joint proposal made by Ohio Senator John Bricker and Washington Senator Harry P. Cain barring discrimination or segregation in any public housing unit, an amendment defeated by a vote of 49-31.⁹⁰ Ironically, the vote on this amendment was not supported by most civil rights advocates.⁹¹ While they might have agreed with the amendment, they correctly assumed that because of Southern Democrats any addition to this bill barring discrimination would ultimately fail. Thus, the bill as enacted included no language that barred discrimination and resulted in the

⁸⁶ The Senate passed a bill in both the 79th and 80th congresses, however the House of Representatives' bills would be stopped by one or more committees. For example, the Banking and Currency Committee would not discharge the bills for discussion by the full House in 1946 or 1948.

⁸⁷ "Housing Act of 1949 S 1070 — P.L. 171." In CQ Almanac 1949, 5th ed., 04-273-04-286. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1950.

⁸⁸ American Housing Act of 1949, 424.

⁸⁹ "Passage of Vital Housing Bill In House Big Truman Victory" *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 1 July 1949, 6.

⁹⁰ Clayton Knowles, "Big Housing Bill Passed By Senate; Bar on Bias Fails." *The New York Times* (1923-Current File), 22 April 1949.

⁹¹ Senator Bricker and Senator Cain both voted against the American Housing Act. They put this amendment in the bill to stop the advancement of the Housing Act.

continuation of the Jim Crow era in the South.⁹² In addition, federal funding would be used for farming upgrades in the South, but not for housing. Therefore, the Southern Caucus successfully prevented the use of federal money for public housing to benefit African Americans, preserving the status quo on race.⁹³

The bill was also opposed by landlords, housing associations, and real estate brokers who believed that low cost housing would attract “undesirables” such as Blacks and Puerto Ricans.⁹⁴ In addition, due to racist stigma attached to public housing, long term residents opposed housing projects being located in their neighborhoods. On the economic front, those opposing the legislation believed that housing values would be lowered by the spate of new construction, and rents would decline because of the influx of low income families receiving housing the housing associations saw African Americans as a threat to their housing values. The housing authorities worried on renters would see renters paying a minimum amount for housing. This, they feared would scare potential renters away from their neighborhoods, and reduce the amount new renters paid. The bill was voted and approved on June 28th, 1949 with a conference set to begin within the senate. Representative Edward H. Rees’ amendment would have stripped all housing language, but failed by a margin of 209 to 204. Had that amendment passed this bill would have

⁹² Alexander Von Hoffman, "A Study in Contradictions: The Origins and Legacy of the Housing Act of 1949." *Housing Policy Debate* 11, no. 2 (2000): 307-309.

⁹³ Arnold R.Hirsch, "Searching for a "Sound Negro Policy": A Racial Agenda for the Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954." *Housing Policy Debate* 11, no. 2 (2000): 399-401.

⁹⁴ You can find an example of this in art from that time. One prime example is the movie *A Raisin in the Sun*. This movie, made in 1961 and starring two of the most famous black actors of the day, Sidney Poitier as Walter Lee Younger and Ruby Dee as his wife Ruth Younger, tells the story of the Younger family trying to buy a house in a white area of Clybourne, Illinois. A prominent member of the whites-only Clybourne Park Improvement Association (a thinly disguised front for the city housing authority) offers Poitier’s character money to not purchase the home. Based on many real-life examples, the movie showed the city government-backed attempts to keep Black residents out of all white neighborhoods, in this case with the promise of money. Portier’s character ultimately decides to move into the neighborhood in dramatic fashion, despite the obvious threat “I sure hope you people know what you’re getting into.” This portends that the Improvement Association would not make their move into the neighborhood so easy and induces violence and intimidation tactics that most housing authorities would use in the late 1950s and 1960s.

become an ineffective, token bill. After that defeat the conference between the House and Senate bill began with the final bill tally being 228 votes to 185 votes.⁹⁵ This legislation would become the primary law O'Malley used in an attempt to get the city to purchase him a new stadium.

4.1 Private Land Offers, and the Necessity of Title I

The Dodgers' ballpark search was well known by real estate companies. While Charles Ebbets had hidden the fact he was purchasing land, O'Malley did not have that same luxury. The first known offer to sell land to O'Malley was made in 1952 by realtor George C. Johnston who offered to sell 523 lots on Eliot Avenue between 69th Place and 76th Street in Rego Park for \$1.00 per square foot or a total of approximately \$1,000,000.⁹⁶ O'Malley never responded to Johnston's offer. Two years later, Spencer C. Young wrote a letter to O'Malley offering to sell 174 acres of land owned by him and currently utilized by the Jamaica Race Track.⁹⁷ The offer price was \$15,000 per acre for a total cost of \$2.6 million. O'Malley responded that a baseball owner was not interesting in land for \$15,000 an acre "unless there's oil on it."⁹⁸ Finally, the Frank H. McCurdy Real Estate Company, represented by its president Robert J. Quinn, offered to sell O'Malley a site at Luna Park in exchange for 10% of the profits.⁹⁹ O'Malley rejected the offer, stating Luna Park did not have enough parking and the rental agreement was out of line for

⁹⁵ Clayton Knowles, "House Passes Housing Bill; Low Rent Section Retained, A Major Fair Deal Victory" *The New York Times* (1923-Current File), 30 June 1949.

⁹⁶ George C. Johnston Jr. to Walter O'Malley, October 27, 1952, Box 1, Folder 3, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

⁹⁷ Spencer C. Young to Walter O'Malley, September 30, 1954, Box 1, Folder 4, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

⁹⁸ Walter O'Malley to Spencer C. Young, October 7, 1954, Box 1, Folder 4, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

⁹⁹ Robert J. Quinn to Walter O'Malley, May 4, 1955, Box 1, Folder 5, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

a Major League baseball team.¹⁰⁰ These offers demonstrate that Walter O'Malley did not have any interest in private land offers. Either the offers were too expensive for only the land, or the location did not provide adequate space for a stadium and a parking garage. Also these offers did not include a mechanism for the cost of the actual stadium.

In contemplating the proposed benefits from Title I, there was very little discussion about neighborhood improvement or slum clearance. In fact, the possible use of Title I to clear depleted housing was not debated like other portions of the law. So, while it is clear that the Housing Act was to provide relief to population density issues within the United States, there was little concern about using it to improve neighborhoods themselves. However, for Robert Moses neighborhood improvement was never a motive when he contemplated using Housing Act funding to accomplish his goals. In fact, seeing as NYC's housing numbers did not increase after Moses received this funding in the early 1950s, it is evident that Moses never intended to use this federal money for housing. Did Robert Moses go against the intent of the legislation or was the federal government grant of Housing Act funds for non-housing purposes evidence of a *de facto* expansion of the legislative intent? The answer is Moses received Title I for highway and bridge expansion, along with construction of Lincoln Center, congress fully aware of intentions. Thus Congress consented to the Housing Act being used in this approach.

I do believe Walter O'Malley loosely interpreted the legislation in the hopes of using those federal funds for something other than housing. There is nothing in the legislative history that would support the notion that the framers of the Housing Act had contemplated the use of federal money for a sports stadium or, for that matter, any recreational space. Further, there's no

¹⁰⁰ Walter O'Malley to Robert J. Quinn, May 25, 1955, Box 1, Folder 5, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

evidence to suggest any intention to use the Housing Act for any other confiscatory purposes other than housing. The only discussion remotely related to that was in the Senate and House conferences about an amendment to give displaced families housing preference. A House Amendment requiring that preference be given to families displaced under the slum clearance program when new dwelling units were built in the same area was deleted in the conference report. Therefore, I believe O'Malley's argument was not applicable to this law, despite his intention to use it. However past Housing Acts did mention slum clearance. Title I was clearly a way to help blighted neighborhoods. We turn to the United States Housing Act of 1937 for guidance: "The term 'slum' means any area where dwellings predominate which, by reason of dilapidation overcrowding, faulty arrangement or design, lack of ventilation, light or sanitation facilities, or any combination of these factors, are detrimental to safety, health, or morals... The term 'slum clearance' means the demolition and removal of buildings from any slum area."¹⁰¹ Slum and blight affected housing. And it can easily be argued that roads and highways providing easy access to a neighborhood fall under the Title I provision. However, nowhere within the language of the act does there appear anything to support a Title I claim for a new sports stadium.

Despite the absence of a clear dictate, cities expanded on the legislative intent and used the promise of housing to obtain funding. It is in this expansion that O'Malley saw a way to get New York City to pay for parking, land, and possibly a stadium that he could own or have rented to him at a significantly discounted price. O'Malley must have also seen how Title I funding was used for highways, public parks, and roads. Although Robert Moses had traditionally used eminent domain to acquire land for massive projects and funded them through bonds, the usage

¹⁰¹ Federal Housing Act of 1937 P.L. 75-412, U.S. Statutes at Large 50 (1937): 888

of federal money proved there was a way one could use bonds for future projects.¹⁰² Indeed, with the federal government paying two dollars for every one dollar spent by New York City, spending surged in the 1950s and Moses continued to shape the contours of New York.

Before the passage of Title I, O'Malley considered the prospect of building a stadium, however starting in 1951 O'Malley saw a potential opportunity with Title I funding. O'Malley argued that a new Dodgers stadium and garage would increase parking. More importantly Title I funding could eliminated the meat market, which for that area was a health hazard. The newly vacated land would allow O'Malley or NYC to purchase the land cheaply. Further, because the proposed stadium was likely to have a roof, it would compete with the smaller Madison Square Garden to attract different revenue generating events such as concerts, political events, and non-baseball sporting events.

It is clear that O'Malley would have tried a different approach if not for the Housing Act, and it only takes one year after its enactment for him to appreciate the opportunity it provided: it became the best possible way for O'Malley to get his stadium within the confines of Brooklyn. He shares his thoughts with David Rockefeller, who was a Senior Vice President at Chase National Bank. In his letter O'Malley sent a brochure on a new stadium, railroad terminal, and parking facility in downtown Brooklyn, with a brochure showing Downtown Brooklyn area being improved.¹⁰³ Rockefeller seemed to respond well. However, even having the support of a Rockefeller was not of ultimate importance as it needed to pass muster of the most powerful man in all of New York City and the architect behind using Title I provisions, Robert Moses.

¹⁰² Caro, 551-561.

¹⁰³ Walter O'Malley to David Rockefeller, August 17, 1954, Box 1, Folder 4, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

The most interesting provision of the Housing Act for O'Malley appears in Section 102: "In connection with any project on land which is open or predominantly open, the Administrator may make temporary loans to municipalities or other public bodies for the provision of public buildings or facilities necessary to serve or support the new uses of land in the project area."¹⁰⁴ The question of what constitutes a public good merits addressing. The clear intention of the Act was to provide funding for projects that would improve housing conditions in certain areas. Moses used the argument that highways would provide a better way to drive around the city. In fact, Section 102 paved a path to get such substantial federal funding for his projects. While other cities had planning concepts only, Moses brought concrete plans to Washington D.C. Many in Congress were impressed with Moses's grand ideas and gave him exactly what he wanted when it came to funding, even when the projects called for the deletion of existing housing considered "dilapidated."

Walter O'Malley first attempted to have the city put a new ballpark in the Fort Greene area in late 1952. In a letter to George V. McLaughlin, chairman of the Triborough Bridges and Tunnels Authority, O'Malley wrote:

I have been interested in the success of the Battery garage which, I believe, cost approximately \$3,000 a car to build. There are one or two sites in Downtown Brooklyn where a steady night show that a parking garage would be successful, particularly if supplemented by patrons of a sports stadium. Automobiles from Brooklyn, Queens, and Long Island could be left in Brooklyn and the passengers would have a short ride to Manhattan. A combination parking garage and ball field would make an improvement that could justify Title I section.¹⁰⁵

Robert Moses wrote a response to O'Malley, dismissing the idea that Title I could be used in Fort Greene. "We do not believe that the law would permit the use of the Fort Greene Title I area

¹⁰⁴ *American Housing Act of 1949*, P.L. 81-171, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 63 (1949): 414-415.

¹⁰⁵ Walter F. O'Malley to George V. McLaughlin June 12, 1953, Box 1, Folder 3, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

to establish a new ballpark in any case. It is true that the New York Coliseum is part of a slum clearance at Columbus Circle under Title I but this project was specifically authorized and declared to be a public purpose by State law adopted under the Home Rule sections of the (New York State) Constitution.”¹⁰⁶ In addition, the Vice President of the Triborough and Tunnels Authority William Tracy agreed with this conclusion in a letter he sent to O’Malley.¹⁰⁷ In a response O’Malley laid out what he wanted from the city to Vice-President Tracy:

It is my belief that a new ballpark should be built, financed, and owned by the ball club. It should occupy land on the tax role.... The only assistance I am looking for is in the assembling of a suitable plot and I hoped the mechanics of Title I could be used if the ball park were also to be used as a parking garage. It was my hope that that use would be of sufficient civic importance to justify condemnation under Title I even though the parking garage and the ball park would be privately owned by the ball club.¹⁰⁸

Despite this setback to win support for use of Title I, Walter O’Malley remained determined. He knew from the Fort Greene example that the only way to gain support for Title I was to stress the need for parking in Brooklyn.

4.2 Parking Needs in Brooklyn

Because of Robert Moses and his obsession with the automobile in the 1950s, public transportation took a back seat during this era causing a demonstrable need for more parking in Brooklyn. There were a host of public transportation infrastructure problems resulting in several train crashes on the LIRR causing passenger deaths. Many residents from Long Island needed commuting options and parking was a major component of the “new” New York City. If O’Malley could show that a new stadium would improve “traffic, public transportation [and]

¹⁰⁶ Robert Moses to Walter O’Malley, June 22, 1953, Box 1, Folder 3, Walter O’Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

¹⁰⁷ William J. Tracy to Walter O’Malley, June 23, 1953, Box 1, Folder 3, Walter O’Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

¹⁰⁸ Walter O’Malley to William J. Tracy, June 25, 1953, Box 1, Folder 3, Walter O’Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

recreational... facilities” in a neighborhood, the Housing Act could be used to acquire the necessary land at, and, in turn, be cheaply sold to the Dodgers. The parking garages remained key because O’Malley planned to argue that they would contribute to reducing Brooklyn’s parking problems. This was a clever – and perhaps unintended – way of using the Act to get a new stadium, as well as additional parking, thus turning the very existence of the Brooklyn Dodgers into a public good.

But putting ballpark parking aside, how could a garage be used for the public good? First, commuters needed day time parking. As the trend in the Major Leagues was to play more night games because of league-wide attendance decline, empty garages could be used during the day to reduce the parking crunch in Brooklyn by about 2,000 cars. Additionally, night time parking would help the new housing being built within the area and alleviate the shortage of parking for the remaining residents. O’Malley also argued that the Dodgers team itself was a sufficient reason to access the Title I provision of the Housing Act, that they were a public good.¹⁰⁹ This was a major theme in his letter about what public good would be served in building a new stadium; moreover, the nearby meat market was already planning on moving and with those businesses being relocated, the underlying land could be acquired by the city, without relocating many people. Thus, O’Malley saw this option as a profitable solution for both his team and New York City.

O’Malley’s broad, self-serving, and profit-driven interpretation of the Housing Act did have public benefits. A new parking garage could take approximately 2,000 to 3,000 cars off the streets at a time when there more automobiles in Brooklyn than ever. With the meat market

¹⁰⁹ Walter O’Malley to William J. Tracy, June 25, 1953, Box 1, Folder 3, Walter O’Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

planning to move out of the area the possibility for redevelopment opened near Atlantic and Flatbush. However, could this type of project fall under Title I? Based on the language and the legislative history, certainly the parking would have fallen under this agreement. The fact that so many highways were built using this act allows us to conclude that a parking garage would be allowed. The second question is whether using act funds to acquire the land from the meat markets could be used for a stadium. This question is much more difficult to answer. In a general sense, it could be argued that building a new stadium would bring a tremendous amount of value for business and housing surrounding the stadium. The downside, however, was that federal funds earmarked for projects in housing would be redirected toward O'Malley's stadium project. Rightfully Robert Moses was suspicious of O'Malley reasoning. In a letter to Moses, O'Malley wrote the cost of building a garage would be approximately \$3000 a spot with the total project costing around \$6,000,000. O'Malley informed Moses that the Dodgers would be willing to pay for some of the land, or construction and declared further that: "I want a new baseball stadium. You want a parking garage to ease a public problem. It is my hope that we can combine the two needs, using public authority to assemble park and private money to finance it."¹¹⁰ The garage in short would justify the use of Title I. However, in a letter dated November 2, 1953, Moses responded by informing O'Malley that the garage could possibly be justified using public funds, but that adding a stadium would be hard to justify.¹¹¹

4.3 Robert Moses and Title I

¹¹⁰ Walter O'Malley to Robert Moses, October 28, 1953, Box 1, Folder 3, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

¹¹¹ Robert Moses to Walter O'Malley, November 2, 1953, Box 1, Folder 3, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

Robert Moses was concerned about traffic and the potential that a new stadium could turn downtown Brooklyn into a congestion nightmare. In addition, studying the language of the bill there was never a thought for a full stadium to be used as part of this bill. Using Title I to obtain land for a stadium and then sell it back to Walter O'Malley may have been a stretch, if not impossible because even if New York City obtained the land and built the stadium, housing would not be built on that land. The stadium had nothing directly to do with housing and improving the area directly.

Walter O'Malley estimated he needed approximately 2,000 parking spaces in Brooklyn to service fans driving to Ebbets and, in fact, could even survive on as few as 1,400 spaces if necessary – only 700 more than already existed.¹¹² Such a small difference made the threat of moving the team 2,500 miles sound preposterous. A review of O'Malley's personal papers reveals, however, that the subject of adequate parking began to consume his thinking as he considered the options for a new Dodgers' ballpark. But, his thinking expanded from merely providing an adequate parking lot for fans, to providing a place where O'Malley could profit from the parking itself.

The parking garage had been around New York City since the early 1920s and was part of the City's fabric.¹¹³ Owning a parking garage would provide year-round revenue. For example, when there weren't any events at the baseball stadium, an Ebbets garage would be a secure option for motorists. However, there was an even more enticing motivation for O'Malley to have a parking garage. Since parking in Brooklyn was considered difficult, O'Malley hoped

¹¹² Walter O'Malley to Walter Rothschild, May 26, 1955, Box 1, Folder5, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

¹¹³ Parking continues to be an issue across New York City. This has become even more of a problem with new parks blocking streets in Manhattan and the Citi Bike program and the individual Bike lanes.

that alleviating parking woes would provide enough reason for Title I to be used as a public good. Eventually downtown Brooklyn became an option. In a letter to Moses, O'Malley argued that parking could help the public particularly on non-baseball game days and times.¹¹⁴

However, although a compelling argument on paper, the parking angle, and the ability for quick travel into Manhattan had two serious flaws. The first was the traffic that a 2,000-3,000 parking garage would cause the area. The second was the garage would help suburban commuters and not Brooklyn residents, thus having few links to housing. This was a difficult sell for City politicians, including Moses. The final result was that there was little likelihood that this garage would satisfy Title I restrictions, whether built in Fort Greene, or anywhere within Brooklyn.

O'Malley coveted parking garages that would be part of the new stadium development because he would own and reap the profits from the estimated several thousand parking spaces that would be created. These parking garages would permit transplanted Long Island Dodger fans to enjoy their team in a new stadium. Applying today's standard that "between three and four people are expected to occupy every car coming to a spectator sports venue," the Dodgers could expect an additional 15,000 to 20,000 fans to attend every game even if only half of the new parking spots were used. As a result, increased attendance alone would account for the additional 17,000 seats the "Pleasure Dome" would provide.¹¹⁵ This anticipated seating would provide much needed revenue to the Dodgers organization. However, the one thing O'Malley needed most of all was Moses to agree that this satisfied the requirements of the Housing Act. In

¹¹⁴ Walter O'Malley to Robert Moses, August 17, 1954, January 8, 1954, Box 1, Folder 4, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

¹¹⁵ Paul Steinback, "Casting Lots" *Athletic Business: Elevating Facilities, Enriching Programs, Empowering Leaders*, February 2014.

fact, the balance of this paper will show that Moses did not believe this argument and would argue against these points until O'Malley took the Dodgers to Los Angeles.

4.4 Final Disagreements on Title I

O'Malley believed that if the Dodgers were to be considered one of the elite teams in baseball, they had to move into a new stadium and, in 1956, he forced a confrontation in his quest for a new stadium. The Dodgers sold the rights to Ebbets Field and the land underneath to real estate investor Marvin Kratter. The Dodgers, in turn, were granted a lease for the next two years to use Ebbets Field. After 1957, Mr. Kratter was not required to lease the stadium back to the Dodgers. O'Malley used this to pressure the city that a new stadium was needed.¹¹⁶

It's clear that O'Malley wanted to own both the land and the new stadium, rather than simply obtain a lease. Unlike in Milwaukee, where the city owned the rights to the stadium, O'Malley wanted more. Granted, the Dodgers owned Ebbets Field and the land on it. However, O'Malley wanted to go against the trends in baseball, that the Braves established, in which the team received a favorable lease on a new stadium, with the right to keep the entirety of the gate revenue. Instead, he expected Title I to help finance him a new stadium. As early as 1947 O'Malley knew he needed a stadium and he spent the next decade attempting to get it.

Real Estate developers thought they could offer land within Queens to get the Dodgers. Some of the offers were laughable and contained excessive per acre costs. Some offers did not have enough land to contain a stadium, and others had enough land for the stadium but not for the parking required. Some offered a decent price per acre, but did not contain enough parking for 14,000 people which O'Malley required in order to move the Dodgers to Queens. Indeed, as

¹¹⁶ Nick Ravo, "Marvin Kratter, 84; Once Owned Ebbets Field," *The New York Times*, 9 December 1999, 62.

demonstrated, parking within Brooklyn was the main motivation for O'Malley. The fact that so many developers knew the Dodgers needed land showed that the public was aware of the situation with Ebbets Field, especially since the story became a topic of discussion among New York's newspapers. For example, even as early as 1954, it was reported that the Dodgers could move to Los Angeles because O'Malley had commented that a Major League Baseball team would be there before 1960.

As stated above, Robert Moses controlled the purse and the organizations that could help O'Malley build a stadium. All this Title I discussion was perfectly acceptable to Mayor Wagner and Brooklyn Borough President John Cashmore. Although O'Malley needed a way to get the city funding, he also needed to convince Robert Moses. However, it appears Moses was not on board with using Title I funds in this manner. In a letter about possible stadium relocations in Columbus Circle and Fort Greene, Moses dismissed that Title One and the Bridge and Tunnel Authority could get into the baseball business. "We do not believe that the law would permit the use of Fort Greene Title I area to establish a new ball field in any case...Our Slum Clearance Committee cannot be used to speculate in baseball enterprises."¹¹⁷ This remained a significant obstruction for O'Malley. This leads to an important question: why wouldn't Walter O'Malley use his own money to build a new stadium? Given that some of the private land offers that he received were asking for as much as \$15,000 an acre, he knew that six million dollars for a ballpark would be allocated just for the land costs.¹¹⁸ As a result, O'Malley quickly realized that he would need the help of the government to build the stadium. He realized this as early as 1947,

¹¹⁷ Robert Moses to Walter O'Malley, June 22, 1953, Box 1, Folder 3, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

¹¹⁸ Spencer C. Young to Walter O'Malley, September 30, 1954, Box 1, Folder 4, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library

but at that time was more concerned about designing the stadium, than acquiring the land. His efforts only focused on that portion in 1951 two years after the Housing Act was passed, when his the focus shifted to Title I.

4.5 Sports Center Authority Project Failure and Ultimate Move

Until the Sports Center Authority in 1956 the focus remained on ways to get Title I funding. This was the theme throughout much of his correspondence with banks and politicians. In addition, O'Malley wanted to continue to meet with Robert Moses, who often would avoid these attempts to meet due to government business. It was only at this point that O'Malley began threatening to move and hoping he could pressure the City by selling the land under Ebbets Field in turn for a two-year lease.

The last possible chance to gain a new stadium was with an idea called the Brooklyn Sports Center Authority Project. Located on the corner of Atlantic and Flatbush, the proposal aimed to improve the Long Island Railroad station and surrounding area. The structure of the station needed to be reinforced and the roads expanded. The removal of the meat market buildings in back of the station was a top priority, as the meat markets brought grime and filth to the area, especially in the form of rats. Since this area was being revamped alter O'Malley saw this as a possible way to capture Title I funding. O'Malley argued that a brand new stadium could be owned by the city with land purchased using Title I. The Dodgers also offered to purchase the land from the city as well. Brooklyn Borough President John Cashmore sent O'Malley a letter he received from the Long Island Railroad (LIRR) board member Tracy S. Voorhees.¹¹⁹ In this letter to LIRR President Tom Goodfellow, Mr. Voorhees discussed the

¹¹⁹ John Cashmore to Walter O'Malley, January 24, 1956, Box 1, Folder 5, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

rehabilitation of the Flatbush area and indicated that the area near the station (the meat markets) would need to be removed. Voorhees also added in a letter to Cashmore that, “it will serve to keep the dodgers in Brooklyn, and to clean up the mess and unsanitary conditions of the meat market area back of the station.”¹²⁰ Based on this letter it seems plausible that the Dodgers, the LIRR, and John Cashmore would back a plan to use Title I funds to clean up the area and build a new station.

On January 12, 1956 *The New York Herald Tribune* discussed the potential for a new Ebbets Field approved by John Cashmore to be located near Flatbush and Atlantic Avenue. The Brooklyn Borough president approved the area “after study of a six months’ survey designed to find a new ball park for the Brooklyn Dodgers after the 1957 season.”¹²¹ Robert Moses responded the next day with a scathing letter to the City Editor of *The Herald* offering a long rebuttal to the three paragraph article and accused the paper of causing “official dissension.” According to Moses, the buildings where the meat markets stood could not be converted to any other type of building except housing.¹²² Moses continued:

As to the Dodgers, Title one of the National Housing Act cannot be used for a Dodger Field as such. Whether such a Field can be regarded as an incident in a huge, general neighborhood clearance and whether it could be largely built over railroad tracks, which would involve enormous expense, and whether private funds could be obtained for any big project in this part of Brooklyn, are all questions which could be answered after the consultant’s report and after the Slum Clearance Committee, City Planning Commission, and Board of Estimate have their say. Whether a city-owned sports center could be built and for seasons, or events rented to other organizations is another question.¹²³

¹²⁰ Tracy S. Voorhees to John Cashmore, January 13, 1956, Box 1, Folder 5, Walter O’Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

¹²¹ “Cashmore Okays New Ebbets Field,” *New York Herald Tribune*, January 12, 1956, B1.

¹²² Robert Moses to City Editor, January 13, 1956, Box 1, Folder 5, Walter O’Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

¹²³ Ibid.

Based on previous evidence this was going to be a difficult sell for O'Malley who wanted to own the stadium, or own the land. However the LIRR station did provide an opportunity to the Dodgers for the funding O'Malley so desperately wanted.

In February there was a bill that seemed to satisfy all the parties involved. The bill essentially called for the City of New York to improve the land for the LIRR and in doing so could use the land for a massive land improvement. In fact, in an attempt to make the proposal more appealing, John Cashmore insisted that this project was part of a major improvement to the area. "This Sports Center is only a small part of the tremendous improvement which we are attempting to plan and carry out in the neighborhood of the Long Island Railroad Terminal."¹²⁴ The Dodgers were planning on loaning the Sports Center Authority \$2,000,000 for land and an additional \$2,000,000 loan for a 2,500 seat parking garage.¹²⁵ The Dodgers also stated they could run the stadium but did not necessary demand they own the stadium, just the land. This deal was eventually approved by the New York State Legislature and the New York Senate on March 21st and signed by Governor Harriman on April 21st.

Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce President S.T. Williams saw the stadium proposal as a way to have the entire area revitalized for the Long Island Railroad. In his letter he urged the quick appointment of a chairman and two board members as the act required. According to Williams, "the conditions that make the sports center necessary as part of a general improvement of this central Brooklyn area become more demanding each day."¹²⁶ Without the construction of

¹²⁴ John Cashmore to Arthur M. Tolchin, February 24, 1956, Box 1, Folder 5, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

¹²⁵ A.H. Patterson to Al Taurone, February 16, 1956, Box 1, Folder 5, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

¹²⁶ S.T. Williams to Mayor Robert F. Wagner, March 21, 1956, Box 1, Folder 5, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

a new Dodgers stadium, the motive for building and improving the LIRR station reduced and the focus remained on track and mechanical improvements.

A memo to be presented at the first meeting of the Brooklyn Sports Authority illustrates that Moses had major concern with the project and the site location.¹²⁷ According to Moses the site remained “wholly impractical from the (New York) constitution, physical, and financial aspects. It magnifies the Stadium, eliminates the public improvements and will end, in my opinion, in failure.”¹²⁸ This single statement showed that Moses was not budging from the belief that the stadium (and thus the Dodgers) were the biggest beneficiaries of this plan. In Moses’ eyes Title I was being manipulated to help a private enterprise rather than a public entity. There was a significant amount of planning that went into the demolition of the meat markets and when the stadium construction would start and finish.¹²⁹ Those that supported the Sports center Authority such as Walter O’Malley, the LIRR board and Brooklyn Borough President John Cashmore believed clearing the land would allow for a stadium, a new railroad station, and parking for both entities. However, because Robert Moses believed this proposal was destined to fail, and it became a self-fulfilling prophecy. This is all evident in several important actions to follow in 1956 and 1957.

Robert Moses stated the Board of Estimate, which he controlled, did not want to release funds to the committee at the end of 1956. In addition, Moses wanted the project to focus on

¹²⁷ Appointed the Brooklyn Sports Authority were Charles J Mylod, Robert E. Blum, and Chester A. Allen. Mylod was president of Goelet Realty Company, Blum was the vice president of Martin’s & Strauss department stores, and Allen was president of the King’s County Trust Company.

¹²⁸ Robert Moses to Brooklyn Sports Center Authority, July 25, 1956, Box 1, Folder 6, Walter O’Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

¹²⁹ Charles Mylod to Walter O’Malley, August 1, 1956, Box 1, Folder 6, Walter O’Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

housing instead of a new Dodgers stadium.¹³⁰ The authority requested \$250,000, but only approximately \$40,000 was allocated.¹³¹ As a result the authority could not fully evaluate the proposal in early 1957, and thus their report was extremely limited only giving broad estimates to the cost of building a stadium.¹³² As it turned out, this report was printed several months after the Dodgers were given permission to move by the National League.

A strong argument can be made that O'Malley was going to move once Los Angeles gave him the offer of 300 acres. O'Malley wrote to newspaper writer Frank D. Schroth and admitted right before the 1957 season started that he was focusing his energies on the move and admitted that his friend, Chester Allen, had been a disappointment with the Sports Center Authority Project.¹³³ In another letter, O'Malley expressed frustration over the prospect of more land surveying writing that "The politicians have shown beyond a shadow of a doubt that they are not with us in our hopes to build a new Dodger stadium."¹³⁴ O'Malley was at the point of no return and had decided to move no matter what the City offered. While he did have tough negotiations with New York, the fact that he could own the land in Los Angeles made moving easier than staying and fighting with city officials. It appears the prospect of owning his own ballpark became too tempting and once Los Angeles was willing to give him free land and the ability to own the parking, the move was going to happen. Indeed, Los Angeles had always tempted O'Malley. As early as 1953 he mentioned to Chicago Cubs Owner Phil Wrigley about

¹³⁰ Robert Moses to Robert F. Wagner, December 7, 1956, Box 1, Folder 7, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

¹³¹ Shapiro, 236-238.

¹³² "Brooklyn Stadium and Other Developments" August 1957, Box 2, Folder 2, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

¹³³ Chester was a friend of Walter O'Malley who was on the Sports Center Authority committee. Walter O'Malley to Frank D. Schroth, March 23, 1957, Box 2, Folder 1, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

¹³⁴ Walter O'Malley to Frank Schroth, March 26, 1957, Box 2, Folder 1, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

the possibility of a major league team moving there. Following the 1956 World Series O'Malley met with L.A. city officials, the most influential being Norris Poulson.¹³⁵

Ironically, and fortunately for O'Malley, the situation he found in Los Angeles was completely opposite from New York City. Los Angeles had held Chavez Ravine for public housing. However, Norris Poulson, the newly elected mayor of Los Angeles, did not like the fact the city owned this land using Title I, as he viewed public housing as socialism.¹³⁶ As a result Mayor Poulson wanted to use the land for some purpose other than housing. The City and mayor fought to use the land, not for housing, but potentially a ballpark. A public referendum was held and 60% of the voters rejected public housing on the site and instead voted to let the city use the land for other purposes. However, the courts had previously ruled that L.A. must honor its contract and build housing in line with Title I.¹³⁷ Finally, a compromise was reached where the city would purchase the land for an undisclosed sum and housing projects elsewhere within the city would be completed. The land in turn would be used for a public good. The small amount of residents who remained there did so as squatters. When Walter O'Malley visited Los Angeles, in late October 1956, the city offered the land to the Dodgers. Once this offer was made O'Malley's tone began to change as indicated in his letters. For example, in a letter to John Cashmore at the end of 1956, O'Malley writes: "Sorry there was not better news on my return regarding the stadium but let's be patient little longer and if things do not seem to be working out we will have to be practical and reluctantly go elsewhere."¹³⁸ Given that Cashmore was one of the biggest supporters of a new Brooklyn stadium, the fact O'Malley divulged this information demonstrates

¹³⁵ Walter O'Malley to Robert Moses, December 17, 1953, Box 1, Folder 3, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

¹³⁶ Sullivan, 80-81.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 84.

¹³⁸ Walter O'Malley to John Cashmore, December 7, 1956, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

he seemed to have moved on regarding his hopes of staying in Brooklyn. And, in early 1957, O'Malley told Frank Schroth that the press needed to limit their discussion about the Dodgers stadium issue and focus on the baseball season.¹³⁹ According to Neil J. Sullivan, what mattered more to O'Malley was not the cost of building a new stadium, but the unwavering need for him to own the stadium: under no circumstances did he want New York City – or any city for that matter - to own both the ballpark and the land that the Dodgers would call home. Sullivan concluded that “For O'Malley, saving money in the construction of a new stadium mattered less than gaining control over the new ballpark.”¹⁴⁰ In Los Angeles he accomplished that goal. After battling with Robert Moses, it appears O'Malley saw the writing on the wall and was ready to move. It is thus ironic that the Housing Act gave the Dodgers their new stadium, albeit on the West Coast instead of in Brooklyn.

“Conclusion”

The Brooklyn Dodgers have been a topic of endless books and countless studies. This examination of the Dodgers showed that many white, middle and working class people were leaving Brooklyn. Walter O'Malley, who knew that Ebbets Field was in decline, hastened his desire to acquire a new ballpark. He needed only to see other teams moving to locations, acquiring new ballparks usually through favorable lease agreements such as the Braves had with the city of Milwaukee. As a result O'Malley felt he had to have a new stadium. Without one, O'Malley felt the Dodgers would fall behind other teams in the National League. That's where an unusual idea came into play, using the American Housing Act of 1949 to acquire his ballpark.

¹³⁹ Walter O'Malley to Frank D. Schroth, March 21, 1957, Box 2, Folder 2, Walter O'Malley Brooklyn Dodgers records, Brooklyn Historical Society, The Othmer Library.

¹⁴⁰ Sullivan, 195.

O'Malley wanted to use language regarding "area blight" to acquire land near Atlantic Avenue and Flatbush Avenue and build a brand new geometric dome with an income earning parking garage consisting of around 2,000 parking spots. Although a novel ideal, especially given the current landscape of how baseball teams built stadiums and given the purpose of the legislation, O'Malley hoped to use Title I provisions to acquire land. For example, this was not done in places such as Milwaukee. However, in Los Angeles the city gladly handed over 300 acres of free land to the Dodgers to build a stadium. St Louis followed in a few years, building a stadium for the Cardinals in 1966. As it turned out, a new model had been established partly because of the Dodgers and O'Malley.

It's clear that the Dodgers were not going to stay in Brooklyn remaining at Ebbets Field. The park foundation could not be expanded and there would have been no room for parking. In addition to that, it would be more profitable to acquire land and build a stadium. Robert Moses was not a baseball fan and did not necessarily believe that Title I could be used for this purpose. He made his position abundantly clear. It's also clear that Moses, whom in modern times has become the villain, may not have been wrong. While it's clear he manipulated the American Housing Act for his own purposes, the fact a stadium and parking garage got lumped into a housing bill was something that legislatures could not have possibly foreseen. The bill's primary goal was to add to the nation's housing stock. However, O'Malley needed a way for the city to give him land at a significant discount and this was the best option available. Right or wrong, Moses saw this for what it was and would not allow the Dodgers to manipulate Title I for their own profit and to weaken his own power over New York City.

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