The Brooklyn Dodgers Community
1941-1957

Between 1941 and 1957, Brooklyn came together as a community. The greatest uniting force was the Brooklyn Dodgers, their baseball team that played at Ebbets Field in Flatbush. The people of Brooklyn didn't just cheer for the Dodgers, they lived by them. Radio came at the right time for Brooklyn, and it became pervasive in the borough as soon as families could afford to have one. What came through those speakers during the long, summer days, was baseball.

Writer Gerald Eskenazi, who grew up in Brooklyn and thus as a Dodgers fan, remembers the feeling of baseball on the radio taking over his Brooklyn neighborhood:

> The Dodgers consumed not only me, but the people in my neighborhood, of all walks. Listening to the Dodgers on the radio was a daily event. There was an older man across the street—"old" to me back then; who knows? maybe he was fifty, maybe sixty—known as Mr. Tin. I think it was short for Mr. Tinefsky. Well, every Dodger game found him sitting in a green beach chair on the Brooklyn street, outside his four-story walk-up apartment house. He kept a little brown Motorola portable radio in his lap, and he wore a green eye shade. He'd turn on the Dodger game while holding court on the Brooklyn sidewalk. He spoke with a Yiddish accent, but the Dodgers had become his team in his road to Americanization—thanks, I'm sure, to radio.[1]

[1] Eskenazi, Gerald, and Inc ebrary. 2005. *I Hid It Under the Sheets: Growing Up With Radio*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 78.

The Dodgers were the emblem and gem of Brooklyn in midcentury New York City. They symbolized the distinct difference between their borough and Manhattan next door. Determined to be a respected and self sufficient ball club, the Dodgers adopted several policies and habits to bolster community support and differentiate themselves from the Yankees and Giants. "They were determinedly un-Yankee-like," says Scott Simon author of *Jackie Robinson and the Integration of Baseball*. "The Dodgers cultivated working-class fans by playing their games on Sundays, the only full day off for many laborers. Ticket prices were cheap so as to leave sufficient budget for beer from which the team made its real money." Additionally, the Dodgers stadium, beloved Ebbets Field, was characteristic of the organization's Brooklyn pride. If a home-run was hit to right center field, a rare feat since the wall was 403 feet from home plate, the ball might strike an advertisement from Abe Stark: "Hit Sign, Win Suit." As Simon says "while Yankee sluggers got tailored on Fifth Avenue, journeymen Dodgers slugged for Abe Stark's sign."[2]

Between the years of 1913 and 1941 the Dodger's were notoriously poor performers. Simon recounts one occasion in 1926 when the team "contrived to have three base runners arrive at third base at the same time." Due to the team's potential for antics like this, as well as often bobbling ground balls and throwing to the wrong base, the Dodgers were given the nickname "Dem Bums" by their own fans. "Only a team greatly loved" could maintain such a nickname, explains Simon,[3] though the name was often used alongside "stinking" as in "I'm never going to buy another ticket to see them stinking bums"

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[2] Simon, Scott. 2002. *Jackie Robinson and the Integration of Baseball*. Hoboken, N.J: J. Wiley & Sons, 38.
[3] Ibid, 37.

and seldom alongside the word "beloved."[4] However, in 1938, Larry MacPhail arrived as new president and executive manager of the club. He came from Cincinnati and brought with him night games, a slew of new signings, and radio broadcasts. Suddenly, things turned around, and in 1941 the Dodgers won the pennant.[5] They then lost to the Yankees in the World Series and so began a new era in Brooklyn baseball: perennial disappointment.

Eskenazi described the team as "good, if failed, gods—always blowing it at the final moment."[6] None the less, the tides in Brooklyn had changed. Though year after year the Dodgers failed to ultimately succeed, losing six world series to the Yankees between 1941 and 1956 and winning only one, their fans remained, adopting the phrase "wait 'til next year!"

On August 5th, 1921, Pittsburgh's KDKA sent the first ever broadcast of a baseball game over the airwaves. The same year, Westinghouse had produced the first radio that was affordable for an affluent American family.[7] These two events mark the beginning of a meteoric rise of radio in the first half of the 20th century. According to Susan Douglas in her book *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination*, radio came to baseball at the perfect moment: "The marriage between radio and sports occurred at the end of a nearly fifty-year process in which a national sporting culture became one of the centerpieces of American life." She goes on to explain how by the 1920's, not only was baseball "the

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[4] Kahn, Roger. 1993. *The Era, 1947-1957: When the Yankees, the Giants, and the Dodgers Ruled the World*. New York: Ticknor & Fields, 17.
[5] Ibid, 18.
[6] Eskenazi, *I Hid It Under the Sheets,* 25.
[7] Silvia, Tony. 2007. *Baseball Over the Air: The National Pastime on the Radio and in the Imagination*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 20.

national pastime" and commercialized, "sports had become embedded in school curriculums, the Olympics had been revived, basketball had been invented, and the middle classes were taking up golf and tennis." These trends were solidified in post-World War I America, and just then, radio allowed for sports broadcasting to begin.[8]

Tony Silvia, author of *Baseball Over the Air*, says that with the creation of baseball broadcasts "the games would come alive with sound and spirit: the sound of the crowd, the crack of the bat and the spirit of the fans. Fans would become long distance participants."[9] However, the marriage of baseball and radio was not immediately the harmonious one that it would grow to be. Initially, their were several forces in resistance, among them were many baseball owners, as well as much of the newspaper industry. Owners feared that with the radio, fans would not feel any need to pay for tickets when they could listen to the game at home. Newspapers, which had long been the primary source for anyone who did not make it to the ballpark for a particular game, feared that they would lose business to the immediacy of the radio. "So much did the both groups believe radio would hurt their business that they became allies," says Silvia.[10] However, by 1929, a majority of American families with electricity owned radios, and more and more people were enjoying the games from the privacy of their homes.[11]

The last three teams to refuse to radio broadcast were all from New York: the Yankees, Giants, and Dodgers. Not until 1939—just one year after the arrival of MacPhail as

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[8] Douglas, Susan J. 2004. *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination*. Minneapolis, Minn; London: University of Minnesota Press, 200.
[9] Silvia, *Baseball Over the Air,* 21.
[10] Ibid, 21.
[11] Tygiel, Jules. 2000. *Past Time: Baseball as History*. New York; Oxford [England]: Oxford University Press, 73.

president of the Brooklyn organization—did New York have baseball on the radio, and as Silvia says, "there would be no turning back."[12] This was all part of MacPhail's impact on baseball in New York City. Brooklyn's turn around was in no way coincidental, it was a result of the changes that MacPhail made. He installed lights at Ebbets Field and cleaned the park. He reconfigured the Dodgers' minor league system, signing several future stars including Hall of Famer Pee Wee Reese. Most influentially though, according to Curt Smith in his definitive history of broadcasting titled *Voices of the Game*, "in late 1938, within months of his arrival, [MacPhail] violated the inviolate. The Dodgers, MacPhail said, would *not* renew the radio abridgment." This move forced the hands of the Yankees and Giants who would have preferred for "MacPhail to sail up the Hudson River, leaving the boycott intact. Fail that, acquiescence; they must broadcast too."[13]

MacPhail bet his salary that his radio gamble would pay off; his contract stated that his pay would rise with home attendance.[14] And it did. This was because of a give and take that came with radio: "baseball sold radios—tens of thousands of them—and, in return, radio sold the game of baseball to new legions of fans."[15] Instead of diminishing attendance, the radio broadcasts increased interest in the Dodgers and attendance boomed. Though radio became a successful and profitable medium for many clubs, Brooklyn, thanks to MacPhail, had something that the other clubs did not: Walter "Red" Barber.

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[12] Silvia, *Baseball Over the Air*, 21.
[13] Smith, Curt. *Voices of the Game: The First Full-Scale Overview of Baseball Broadcasting*, 1921 to the Present. South Bend, Ind.: Diamond Communications, 1987, 39.
[14] Ibid, 39.
[15] Silvia, *Baseball Over the Air,* 21.

> She had, for almost two years now, baited him. In the halls, in the elevator, even in his own office, into which she romped now and then like a circus horse, she was constantly shouting these silly questions at him. "Are you lifting the oxcart out of the ditch? Are you tearing up the pea patch? Are you hollering down the rain barrel? Are you scraping around the bottom of the pickle barrel? Are you sitting in the catbird seat?"
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> It was Joey Hart, one of Mr. Martin's two assistants, who had explained what the gibberish meant. "She must be a Dodgers fan," he had said. "Red Barber announces the Dodgers game over the radio and uses those expressions—picked 'em up down South." [16]

Red, nicknamed after the color of his hair, was born in Columbus, Mississippi in the winter of 1908. He was the son of William Lanier Barber, a locomotive engineer, and Selena Martin, an English teacher—Red credited her for his "ear for language" and said his father was a "natural storyteller." Barber's radio debut came at the University of Florida when one of his house mates asked him to read a paper, "Certain Aspects of Bovine Obstetrics," on WRUF, the University's radio station. This led to his announcing Florida's opening football game in 1930, a debut he called "undoubtedly the worst broadcast ever perpetrated on an innocent and unsuspecting radio audience."[17]

Despite his humble beginnings, Barber was remembered and hired when, in 1934, Larry MacPhail convinced his then team, the Cincinnati Reds, to broadcast the games. "On

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[16] Thurber, James. "The Catbird Seat." *The New Yorker* 14 Nov. 1942: 17. Print. 17.

[17] Corbett, Warren. "Red Barber." In *The Team That Forever Changed Baseball and America The 1947 Brooklyn Dodgers*. Phoenix, Ariz.; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 287-88

Opening Day [Barber] broadcast the first Major League game he had ever seen. 'that was the most joyous day of my life, next to my wedding day,' he remembered." Barber was enough of a success in Cincinnati, that when MacPhail went to Brooklyn and introduced radio broadcasts, he brought Red along with him.

In Brooklyn, Barber capitalized on the existing "dem bums" community; all he had to do was tap into it. First though, he had to learn about his new home:

> When I took the job I knew nothing about Brooklyn. I didn't know that it was a borough, or even that New York City had such things as boroughs. I knew nothing—and that turned out to be a blessing, because I decided I had better start learning something about the place. Eventually, I made it a point to find out everything I could about it. Whenever we had an off day, Lylah [Barber's wife] and I would take the baby and jump in the car and drive aimlessly through Brooklyn. We didn't take a map. We just drove, in and out and all around, and I learned about Brooklyn.

Barber made it his business to exemplify the borough of Brooklyn. He did not just want to tell Brooklynites what the score was, he wanted to interact with them, and so he did:

> When I went to Ebbets Field each day to broadcast, I'd ride the subway and then I'd walk from my subway stop to the ballpark. I really think I got the feeling of Brooklyn by walking along and talking to the people who stood in front of the stores. I'd stop and visit with them as I made my way to Ebbets Field. I'd go into a delicatessen for a sandwich and a bottle of pop, and I'd talk with the people there as I ate. I began to know Brooklyn, the sense of it, the feeling of it, the tempo of it… I became totally involved. In time, despite my southern accent, and maybe even because of it, I felt I

> was as much a part of Brooklyn as the fellow who had been born there. I didn't broadcast with a Brooklyn accent, but I did broadcast with a Brooklyn heart.[18]

It was said that by 1941, after only two years of his broadcasts in Brooklyn, "you could walk up a street and hear the game through one open window after another and never miss a pitch… In traffic you'd hear it from a hundred cars."[19]

Barber was pervasive, but he was made even more so by improvements to radio technology. In 1946, GE invented the first clock radio, around the same time car radios were becoming more and more common, and by the early 1950's transistor radios made the whole experience a portable one.[20] Due to it's rapidly increasing availability, Jules Tygiel, author of *Past Time: Baseball as History*, says, "the radio had, in a very important sense, democratized Major League Baseball, transmitting a more intimate sense of being at the game to millions who could never attend."[21]

It wasn't only the sheer prominence of Barber's voice that fostered community in Brooklyn at the time, Barber's style was one that begged for an open conversation. For Brooklyn, the Dodgers were not just celebrity, they ball club had an aura of attainability, of encouraging fantasy, that was particular to the borough. Brooklynites were real people, as Simon says, "Manhattan was a destination. But Brooklyn was where the city *lived*… Manhattan was New York's crown. Brooklyn was the city's heart and lungs."[22] Robert Creamer, Red's partner in writing his biography, writes,

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[18] Red Barber qtd. in Silvia, *Baseball Over the Air*, 115-16.
[19] Robert Creamer qtd. in Silvia, *Baseball Over the Air,* 119.
[20] Silva, *Baseball Over the Air,* 21-22
[21] Tygiel, *Past Time,* 73.
[22] Simon, *Jackie Robinson and the Integration of Baseball,* 34-35.

> The broadcast from Brooklyn had something beyond the drama of the ballgames. They reflected the working, striving, hopeful, fearful, anguished human quality that was in the borough. Human beings lived in Brooklyn and came to Ebbets Field. Human beings played in the uniforms of the Dodgers…"[23]

Barber was tapping into the reality, the grit, of the city of Brooklyn, and he was doing so with honesty, and compassion. He looked at the success of soap-operas, which many people thought baseball could never surpass in popularity, and he "recognized that drama of the real-life variety was compelling and that he could use that as an advantage to engage the audience's imagination—and loyalty."[24]

Ebbets Field, the home of the Dodgers that was smack in the middle of Flatbush, also contributed to Red's ability to create community.[25] The park was small, it seated only 32,000 fans, barely half of Yankees Stadium or the Polo Grounds where the Giants played. But the small size offered something special to Brooklyn fans. "Red Barber described Ebbets Field as such an intimate ballpark that 'you could see the perspiration on the players' faces, you could hear what they said.' And that's how it and the other old ballparks sounded," says Douglas, "not like huge stadiums with announcers and undifferentiated crowd noise in the background but like places with layered soundscapes." Not only were the sights and sounds of the game at the fingertips of fans within Ebbets Field, but one could hear all of these sounds in Barber's broadcasts. "You could hear individual fans yelling 'all right!' and hawkers calling, 'Wanna buy *ice*? Wanna buy *ice*?'… You not only

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[23] Creamer, qtd. in Silvia, *Baseball Over the Air,* 117.
[24] Silvia, *Baseball Over the Air,* 117.
[25] Simon, *Jackie Robinson and the Integration of Baseball,* 38.

heard the bat hitting the ball but also heard the ball going into the catcher's mitt… and all of these sounds pulled you into a public event that connected you to a larger community."[26]

In Brooklyn, summer days were filled with these sounds. They filled the gaps between the sounds of passing cars and lawn mowers. The sound of the broadcast mixed with the "smell of the barbecue grill, the feel of the summer air on your skin, the sight of dusk, the sounds of kids yelling in the neighborhood."[27] Barber helped build these connections between the home and the ballpark, "Oh man, it couldn't be a nicer afternoon. This is the one we've been waiting for. This makes it feel like it's spring and baseball and no more measles and free tickets to the circus."[28]

Barber may be most remembered for using expressions that became household terminology in Brooklyn. Many of his expression he brought north from his childhood, such as "can of corn" (pronounced "cana corn" by Barber), which referred to an easily caught fly ball. The expression came from old grocers who would stack cans of food on high shelves in the back of the store. When a customer needed something, a runner would go to the back and retrieve the item. Corn must have been on a high shelf, so runners would knock it down with a stick, and catch it, like an easy pop fly.[29] Other "Barberisms" included, "sitting in the catbird seat," when a batter or a team was in a favorable position; the game "is just as tight as a brand-new pair of shoes on a rainy day."; "They'll tear up the pea patch before the day

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[26] Douglas, *Listening In,* 204.
[27] Ibid, 204.
[28] Barber, qtd. in Douglas, *Listening In,* 204.
[29] Fuller, Linda K. *Sportscasters/Sportscasting: Principles and Practices*. New York: Routledge, 2008. Print. 125.

is over," for a game in which a team is hitting a lot; and, of course, for a bases loaded situation: "the bases are FOB—they're full of Brooklyns."[30]

Not only did these colloquialism boost Barber's likability, they became part of Brooklyn's vocabulary. They belonged not to just Barber, or old fans, or radio listeners, they belonged to the community of Brooklyn and all its inhabitants. As Silvia says, "the 'language' learned on those Brooklyn streets was distinctly American, the effect of which was to transcend racial, ethnic, and economic lines for the legions of new immigrants to population center like New York. Sports in general, and baseball in particular, became a 'powerful social glue'"[31]

Another feature of early radio broadcasts was the re-created game. When a team travelled for an away game, it became common for their home broadcaster to broadcast the game from home. Standing and looking over the shoulder of a Morse code translator, Barber and other broadcasters were challenged with imagining the visual experience of the game from sparse information. Douglas called it "one of the most impressive acts of broadcasting in any genre."[32]

While Barber was no exception in terms of producing these re-creations, he was an exception in terms of his style. In an effort to attract audiences, most broadcasters tried to make their re-creations as realistic as possible. They used recorded crowd noises, clapped two pieces of wood together to simulate the crack of that bat, and played recorded organ music. "My reaction was just the opposite," said Barber. "I wanted my audience to know at

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[30] Corbett, "Red Barber," 290.
[31] Silvia, *Baseball Over the Air,* 120.
[32] Douglas, *Listening In,* 210.

all times that I was doing a re-creation."[33] While some broadcasters would improvise when the Western Union wire went out, saying batters were fouling off dozens of pitches, Barber was known to calmly tell his audience that the wire was out, and go through the scores from around the league.

To do these re-creations effectively, Barber committed himself to memorizing the visuals of the players, he could then do the broadcast "from a series of mental pictures." Barber said that he "mentally photographed every player—how he looked, how big he was… I memorized the idiosyncrasies, the habits… I memorized how each pitcher pitched. So as I stood in the studio I saw the game."[34]

In the Bronx, Mel Allen's career was also taking off as the broadcaster for the Yankees. While Barber and Allen sometimes worked together to broadcast big games, they were rivals, and their differences were vital to the community that grew around Barber in Brooklyn. While both broadcasters came from southern backgrounds—Allen was from Alabama—they had tremendous stylistic differences. Smith explains that "Barber was the critics' choice; Allen, the orb of Everyman. Detached, Barber reported; involved, Allen roared. The Ol' Redhead broadcast as a prim and orderly phoneticist, born of the South's polite, decorous respectability; The Voice cheered even a hard-hit ground ball."[35] That was just the difference, while Allen was apt to hype up every second of the game, Barber concerned himself with an honest portrayal, he was a reporter.

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[33] Barber, qtd. in Corbett, "Red Barber," 289.
[34] Ibid. 289.
[35] Smith, *Voices of the Game,* 46.

In 1947, Barber shared the broadcasting booth with Allen for the fourth game of the World Series between the Dodgers and the Yankees. Allen did the first four and a half innings of the game, and then Barber took over the mike. At the time, the Yankees' pitcher, Bill Bevens, hadn't allowed a hit. There was an accepted rule among many broadcasters at the time, Barber refers to them as the "Hoodoo school," who would never mention that a pitcher had a no-hitter going for fear of jinxing them. In his book, *The Broadcasters*, Barber explains the moment:

> Allen was of the hoodoo school, one of its staunch members. There would have been no question at all had he had the mike. Allen would have cut his throat before he'd state that Bevens had given no hits.
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> As the Dodgers started batting in the sixth I thought, "What am I? A dealer in superstitions, or a broadcaster? People all around the world are tuning in and don't know what has happened in earlier innings."
>
> … I said to myself, "I am a reporter."
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> When I leaned into the mike in the sixth inning and said that Bevens had given one run, so many walks, and no hits, the breath gurgled in Allen's throat like a country boy trying to swallow a chinaberry seed.[36]

After the 1942 season, in which the Dodgers won a record 104 games and still lost the pennant to the Cardinals on the last day of the season, MacPhail called a press conference. He announced, tearfully, that he was reenlisting in the army as a lieutenant colonel, he was 52. The Dodgers named Branch Rickey, former Cardinals executive, their

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[36] Barber, *The Broadcasters,* 159.

new General Manager by November 1st.[37] Between 1943 and 1950, Rickey led the Dodgers to two pennants, losing both World Series to the Yankees. The most significant mark that Rickey left in Brooklyn, and in baseball, and in the country, was his signing of Jackie Robinson in 1947; Robinson was the first black man to ever play in the Majors. In his first season, Robinson had the best batting average, and won the National League Most Valuable Player award.[38]

Walter O'Malley was a partial owner of the club through the 1940's. In 1950, an ongoing feud with Rickey led O'Malley to buy out the rest of the shares and become owner and General Manager of the Dodgers. He took over just in time for the 1951 season, which was a tipping point for Brooklyn.

Televised broadcasts of the game had been on the rise since 1947, and by 1951 many American homes had televisions. Radio held its own against the new rival, Mel Allen commented on the competition: "In '51 and '52 they were both giants—both hating each other's guts… they were both great vehicles for the game."[39] But in 1951, the Dodgers were at the height of their reign in Brooklyn, though they had never won a world series. Broadcasting was at its height, with Barber and Allen both mastering their art in different ways. And the Dodgers started the season like they meant business.

"The National League pennant race of 1951 belongs to the ages," says Roger Kahn. "There has been nothing like it before or since. Nor will it come again. Summarizing the 1951 race is akin to summarizing *King Lear*. Before anything else, your effort will diminish

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[37] Tygiel, *Past Time,* 107-08
[38] Ibid, 113.
[39] Ibid, 151.

majesty."[40] On August 11, the Dodgers played a double header against the Braves. After the first game, they were thirteen and a half games ahead of the Giants, the pennant was theirs to lose, and so they did. After that day, the Dodgers played only average baseball, while the Giants went a remarkable thirty-seven and seven. A comeback win by the Dodgers, completed by a Robinson home run in the fourteenth inning, left them tied with the Giants at the end of the season. A three game playoff ensued to decide who would go to the World Series.

The two New York teams split the first two games, and headed to the Polo Grounds in Manhattan for the rubber match. The Dodgers took an early lead, and held on for a four to one advantage going into the bottom of the ninth. The Giants knocked home a run with a few hits, and when Bobby Thompson stepped up to the plate, there were two runners on and one out. Giants broadcaster, Russ Hodges, made the following call:

> Branca throws again… there's a long fly ball… it's gonna be… I believe… the Giants win the pennant… the Giants win the pennant… the Giants win the pennant… the Giants win the pennant.[41]

Thomson had hit a home run that sent the Giants to the World Series and ended the Dodgers season. Barber commented on Hodges famous call, referring to him as an "out and out rooter," "unprofessional," and finally saying "I think he said it seven or eight times. I don't think that's reporting."[42] This was in line with the modesty that Barber was loyal to, despite the excitement of the moment. For the *Herald Tribune*, Red Smith wrote:

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[40] Kahn, *The Era,* 268.
[41] Tygiel, *Past Time,* 150.
[42] Halberstam, David J. "Called Shot May Have Set Tone for the Future." *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, C.A.), October 03, 2001, Commentary.

> Now it is done. Now the story ends. And there is no way to tell it. The art of fiction is dead. Reality has strangled invention. Only the utterly impossible, the inexpressibly fantastic, can ever be plausible again.

The season ended with heartbreak for Dodgers fans, made no better by the Yankees beating the Giants in six games. Many people abandoned the Dodgers at that moment. Eskenazi describes walking home from school with the "heavy burden of being a Dodger fan":

> It was ten blocks from my high school to my house. As I got near my corner, I saw Mr. Tin sitting there, and I imagined how crestfallen he must have been. Instead, he was wearing a Yankee's cap. The son of a bitch had switched allegiances because of one swing—and the body hadn't been cold for fifteen minutes. Mr. Tin never spoke of the Dodgers again, and I never again saw him outside with his radio when the Dodgers were playing.[43]

1951 was the first of several punches to the borough of Brooklyn. The next season though, the Dodgers managed to fend off a late rally from the Giants to win the pennant. They went on to lose to the Yankees in the World Series, saying again "wait 'til next year." But the next year, the Dodgers, though running away with the pennant and setting several offensive records, lost to the Yankees again.[44] O'Malley refused to renew Red Barber's contract after the 1953 season, and a few days later, the Ol' Redhead was signed into contract with the crosstown Yankees.

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[43] Eskenazi, *I Hid It Under the Sheets,* 78.
[44] Kahn, *The* Era, 313.

1955 was finally "the next year" for Dodgers fans. They beat the Yankees in seven games to claim their first ever World Series victory.[45] Unfortunately for Dodgers' fans, the excitement was short lived. They lost to the Yankees in the series the following year, and O'Malley was not satisfied with the profits he was making. He wanted to build a new domed stadium in Brooklyn. Many fans supported this, but the city did not. Robert Moses was concerned with the traffic that a new stadium would bring to Brooklyn:

> "If I let you build your domed stadium, your ballgames will create a China Wall of traffic in Brooklyn. No one will be able to pass."
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> "Where would you prefer that we relocate?" O'Malley said.
>
> "I have a lovely parcel of land in Flushing Meadow, at the old World's Fair site in Queens."
>
> O'Malley looked steadily at Robert Moses. "If my team is forced to play in the borough of Queens, they will no longer be the Brooklyn Dodgers."[46]

O'Malley's words here may seem to show his pride for Brooklyn, but at the end of the 1957 season, he and his Dodgers packed their bags and moved to Los Angeles. The flourishing community, raised by the the voice of Red Barber on the radio, had been abandoned. Branch Rickey later said that "it would be a crime against a community of three million people to move the Dodgers. The baseball club in any city in America is a quasi-public institution, and in Brooklyn, the Dodgers were public without the quasi."[47] Abe Stark, the same Abe Stark that had the "Hit Sign, Win Suit!" beyond right center field at Ebbets Field, now the president of the borough of Brooklyn, said that a baseball team

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[45] Ibid, 326.
[46] Ibid, 336.
[47] Qtd. in Burns, Ken, *Baseball*, PBS Home Video; 2004. Film. Inning 7. 1:52:50.

"belongs to the people of the city."[48] But O'Malley, who "lusted for California gold,"[49] had made his decision.

There were several reasons that the Dodgers left Brooklyn, and people cite several additional reasons for the borough's subsequent decline. Tommy Hawkins, a publicity chief for Peter O'Malley, Walter's son, cited the closing of the Navy Yard and the decline of Coney Island as equally responsible for the decline of the borough, and he says "that adds up to a lot of loss and the people of Brooklyn unfairly focus all their disappointment on the O'Malley family," but Kahn disagrees. According to him, "Walter O'Malley schemed and hustled and, frankly, lied his way out of Brooklyn. He earned his loathing."[50]

Emotions aside, it was clear that O'Malley sought greener—at least with money—pastures in Los Angeles. The rise of the automobile was a feature he wanted to capitalize on, and Brooklyn's Ebbets Field only had room for 750 cars. Since the rise of the automobile, the working class who had once been central to the Dodgers attendance, were moving to the suburbs, and "found a trip to the ballpark a chore rather than an escape."[51] Unable to build the new stadium he wanted in Brooklyn, O'Malley decided to pursue an altogether new market.

"The Era" as Roger Kahn refers to it, ran from the year 1947 to 1957. During that time, he says "the Yankees, the Giants, and the Dodgers ruled the world." "The Era ended," Kahn says, "when it was time for the Era to end and that, I believe, is everlastingly part of its beauty and its glory." There were several moving parts that led Brooklyn to peak when

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[48] Ibid, 1:54:56.
[49] Kahn, "Brooklyn's Side of the O'Malley Saga."
[50] Ibid.
[51] Silvia, *Baseball Over the Air,* 149.

it did. The country was just beginning to think of baseball as its own past time. New York City was the industrial center and Brooklyn was its working class residence. Radio exploded into popularity and Red Barber gave Brooklyn fans just the honesty and familiarity they needed. MacPhail supported the working class community that supported his Dodgers in return. The window of opportunity for this utopia closed almost as suddenly as it opened though, with suburbanization and the rise of television. As Kahn says, "it was time for the Era to end."

Just over two years after the Dodgers played their last game in Flatbush, the city tore down Ebbets Field. In Kahn's opinion, there was "no reason on earth" to do so.[52] In his documentary series, *Baseball*, Ken Burns writes for his narrator this beautiful description of the event:

> On February 23rd, 1960, a brass band played Ol Lang Syne, and two hundred die hard fans watched as a two ton wrecking ball, painted to resemble a baseball, began to demolish Ebbets Field in Brooklyn. The home of the Dodgers from 1913 to 1957… For 44 years, since Charles Hercules Ebbets had built his park on a garbage dump called Pigtown, Ebbets Field had united the hopes of Brooklyn.[53]

[52] Kahn, "Brooklyn's Side of the O'Malley Saga."
[53] Burns, Baseball, Inning Eight, 0:01:00.

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