Icon Uncovered: Representations of Dodgers' Owner Walter O'Malley during the Team's Move West

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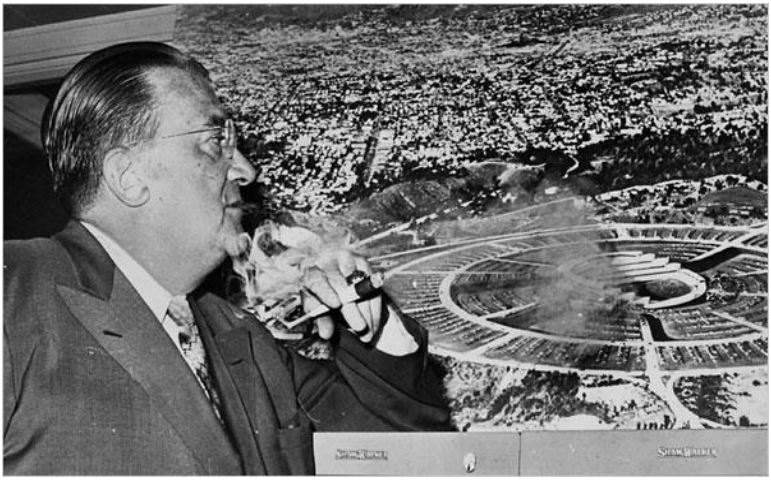


Figure 1: Walter O'Malley moved the Dodgers to Los Angeles and a new ballpark at Chavez Ravine, New York Times Associated Press, 2007.

"It was O'Malley, you know, who cold-bloodedly uprooted the Dodgers from fertile Flatbush and transplanted them in Los Angeles. He'll harvest a bumper crop of greenbacks even though the only irrigation he will have will be the tears of the fans in Brooklyn."[1]

- Arthur Daley, Sports Columnist, *New York Times,* 1958

[1] Arthur Daley, "Sports of the Times: In O'Malley's Alley*," New York Times*, 18 April 1958.

"A peerless pioneer… Although he wasn't the first to appreciate the potential gold mine for major league baseball in the Golden State he is the only one with enough guts and determination to put it over."[2]

- Brevan Dyer, Sports Journalist, *Los Angeles Times*, 1958

Walter O'Malley was a polarizing figure in the press during his life and career as president and owner of the Dodgers. Most famously remembered for relocating the team from Brooklyn to Los Angeles in 1958, O'Malley's public image changed drastically from coast to coast as evident in print culture. New York newspapers portrayed O'Malley as a businessman who viewed the ownership of the Dodgers franchise as an opportunity to turn a profit. The Brooklyn local paper depicted O'Malley as a lawyer who took advantage of beloved team figure and baseball legend, Branch Rickey, to gain control of the Dodgers.[3] The team's continued success on the field under O'Malley eased the public concerns that the franchise would falter under his direction, but the New York newspapers were never more than cordial with the man they dubbed "The Gaelic Machiavelli."[4]

In California, Los Angeles was a growing city desperate for professional baseball.[5] As rumor spread that O'Malley was considering LA as a possible new home for the Dodgers, Los Angeles papers accused O'Malley of using the city as leverage in negotiations with New York to

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[2] Braven Dyer, "Dream Lives for O'Malley: Dodger Boss Envisioned Coastal Move in 1954," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 April 1958.
[3] Roscoe McGowen, "Purchase of Rickey's Dodger Stock by Partners Looms," *New York Times*, 24 October 1950,37.
[4] Arthur Daley, "Sports of the Times: The Dodger Touch Dubious Validity Adroit Campaign Westward Ho?," *New York Times*, 25 February 1957, 30.
[5] Cary S. Henderson, "Los Angeles and the Dodger War 1957-1962," *Southern California Quarterly*, Vol. 62, Fall 1980, pp 261-289.

build a new stadium for the team in Brooklyn. At the time, the most westerly franchise in Major League Baseball were the Kansas City Royals, but the league had plans to expand to the west coast.[6] Since O'Malley was regarded as a shrewd businessman, journalists in Los Angeles approached the subject of O'Malley, and the possibility of a professional baseball team moving in, with a healthy dose of skepticism. After a while, however, talks with city officials became more serious, and soon O'Malley was portrayed as a daring spirit and innovative sports owner, a visionary willing to take a risk and bring one of the National League's most respected organizations to the west coast of the United States.[7]

Analyses of O'Malley, his business model, and his motivations behind the relocation of one of the longest tenured teams in organized professional baseball construed the controversial public figure as being driven by both the dollar sign and the overall good of the team and its players. Many argued that O'Malley relocated the Dodgers out of Brooklyn despite the team being among the most profitable in the National League, when he could not reach a satisfactory agreement with New York City officials in his pursuit to build a new stadium.[8] This perspective reflects the New York reporters' beliefs that "Judas" O'Malley refused to compromise with New York City officials to keep the team in Brooklyn because of the potential for higher profits in Los Angeles.[9] In contrast, others argued that political figures in both cities, and LA fervor for major

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[6] Neil J. Sullivan, *The Dodgers Move West*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 92-93.

[7] Michael D'Antonio, *Forever Blue: The True Story of Walter O'Malley, Baseball's Most Controversial Owner, and the Dodgers of Brooklyn and Los Angeles*, (New York: Riverhead Press, 2009).

[8] Harvey Frommer, *New York City Baseball: The Last Golden Age: 1947-1957*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1980), 5.

[9] Ibid., 9.

league baseball, helped influence O'Malley's decision to move the team out west.[10] This reveals how O'Malley's public persona was similar to and different from the one cultivated in the New York press. In great contrast to their counterparts in New York, Los Angeles newspapers worked in tandem with the government to bring the Dodgers to southern California while portraying O'Malley in a much more favorable light.

In the pursuit to evaluate O'Malley's reasons for relocating the Dodgers, his motivations in the final decision to move the team have been overlooked. The contention that O'Malley was a greedy owner who unnecessarily relocated the franchise from Brooklyn fails to consider the possibility that O'Malley's desire to keep the team fiscally successful was not based on concerns about his personal financial gain. The debate illustrates O'Malley as a victim of a tug of war between political figures in New York and Los Angeles and focuses on his pursuit to build a stadium as well as the belief that the new sports arena was meant to be his lasting legacy to Major League Baseball. O'Malley's desire to ultimately be remembered as an owner who provided Dodgers fans with a team that competed for the National League Pennant on a yearly basis is not given proper attention. Walter O'Malley was a baseball owner most interested in establishing a winning team.

Newspapers are crucial in understanding the Dodgers' relocation from Brooklyn to Los Angeles, as they provide a perspective of the general social atmosphere in each city. Newspapers from New York and Los Angeles developed two different images of O'Malley, based not only on his personality, but on each city's agendas. These perspectives have come to influence how scholars approach O'Malley's life and career and have helped historians

[10] Cary S. Henderson, "Los Angeles and the Dodger War 1957-1962", *Southern California Quarterly*, Vol. 62, Fall 1980, pp 261-289.

understand his impact on baseball and the greater sports world. By comparing and contrasting O'Malley's image in New York and Los Angeles we see how newspapers can provide insight into how reporters and editors influenced the information presented to the public. Personal biases and conflicting agendas led New York's press to portray O'Malley as a businessman running a baseball team and as someone whose primary goal was maximizing team profits. The Los Angeles media depicted a pioneering team owner unafraid of risk if it meant the best deal for his ball club.

Many consider Walter O'Malley one of the most influential franchise owners in the history of American sports.[11] He was the first owner who competed for as many news headlines as his star players. Before him, most owners ran their teams in general anonymity, with players and coaches drawing the public interest. It was O'Malley who helped usher in an era where team owners exert incredible influence, not only the teams they own, but over affairs that take place in the cities where they reside. Through his decision to relocate the team, O'Malley helped alter the landscape of professional sports in the continental United States and helped bring the country closer together by bringing Major League Baseball to California.[12]

The O'Malley and the Mahatma

Walter Francis O'Malley was born in 1903 in New York City to first-generation Irish Americans Edwin O'Malley and Alma Feltner.[13] Edwin was a local politician

[11] Andy Mccue, *Mover & Shaker: Walter O'Malley, The Dodgers & Baseball's Westward Expansion,* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 2014), xiii.
[12] Peter Ellsworth, "The Brooklyn Dodgers' Move to Los Angeles: Was Walter O'Malley Solely Responsible*?," A Journal of Baseball History and Culture*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Fall 2005) 19-40.
[13] Mccue, *Mover & Shaker* 3.

associated with the city's infamous social club Tammany Hall and Alma worked as a professional stenographer.[14] Walter attended the University of Pennsylvania before pursuing a law degree at Columbia Law School with the intention of one day becoming a judge.[15] Upon graduation, O'Malley returned to New York where he soon found work with the Brooklyn Trust Company, the bank assigned to manage the Brooklyn Dodger's team finances. In 1933, Brooklyn Trust's chairman George McLaughlin who had taken notice of O'Malley, entrusted him to be the team's financial advisor. O'Malley had distinguished himself as a savvy bookkeeper and in 1942 was promoted to team legal advisor when team General Manager Larry Macphail unexpectedly resigned to join the armed forces and fight in World War II.[16] O'Malley quickly became an integral part of the team's front office and a respected voice within the organization. A member of several social clubs in Brooklyn, O'Malley lived a relatively quiet life with his wife Kay up until his unexpected takeover of the Dodgers franchise.

The Dodgers organization is one of the oldest franchises in the National League, and calling Brooklyn home meant having one of the largest group of, and many argued, most devoted fans in all of baseball.[17] Famous for having three men end up on the same base, "The Bums" were a reflection of the blue-collar, rough around the edges, denizens that called Brooklyn home.[18] The borough struggled to escape the shadow of the more cosmopolitan Manhattan, home to the hated Giants, or to reach the levels of success enjoyed by the Bronx-based Yankees. "The

[14] Ibid., 4.
[15] Ibid., 16.
[16] Ibid., 35.
[17] Ellsworth, "The Brooklyn Dodgers Move to Los Angeles," 20.
[18] Peter Goldenbock, *Bums: An Oral History of The Dodgers, (*New Jersey: Summer Game Books, 1986), 8.

Bronx Bombers" rose to prominence under the leadership of athletes like Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig who helped lead the team to multiple championships while the Dodgers perennially floundered near the bottom of the National League Standings.[19]

All of this changed after World War II, when the Dodgers came under the guidance of Branch Rickey, a lifelong baseball man who established the St. Louis Cardinals as perennial contenders. "The Mahatma"[20] was considered one of most innovative thinkers and one of the best executives in the game.[21] His template of using minor league clubs as a way of developing young talent for big league teams was copied and is still the common practice today.[22] Most famously remembered for his role in signing Jackie Robinson and helping to racially integrate baseball, Rickey reorganized the Dodgers organization from top to bottom and instilled a winning culture. His system ensured that the team had a pool of talented and well-coached individuals to help supply the big league club with homegrown talent, fueling competition and improving the team. Rickey's model was essential in turning around the Dodgers' fortunes and in establishing the team as worthy opponents to their cross-town rivals, and to newspaper reporters.

Rickey's tenure as Dodgers President came to a sudden and unexpected halt in the fall of 1950, when Walter O'Malley "dropped a small bombshell into the meeting [with the board of directors of the Dodgers]" about buying out Rickey's shares and becoming majority owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers.[23] Very little was known about

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[19] Ibid., 9.
[20] A nickname given to Branch Rickey during his tenure with the Dodgers Professional Baseball Organization.
[21] Goldenbock, *Bums*, 63.
[22] Sullivan, *The Dodgers Move West*, 32.
[23] Ibid.

Walter O'Malley when he unexpectedly announced his acquisition of the team shares. Being an unknown commodity caused concern in New York newspapers, and these feelings were compounded when it became obvious that his gaining control meant the dismissal of Branch Rickey. Unfamiliar with O'Malley, reporters were convinced that his baseball acumen was inferior to Rickey's. Uncertainty of O'Malley's intentions, and the belief that the Dodgers could not maintain the levels of success reached under Rickey, heightened journalist's anxieties regarding the new majority owner. It also set the tone for the relationship O'Malley would have with the city's newspapers going forward.[24]

Although he was a lifelong New York resident, a member of numerous Brooklyn institutions like the New York Subway Advertising Company, and part owner of the Brooklyn Borough Gas Company, the press depicted O'Malley as an unknown. The manner in which O'Malley acquired the Dodgers caused uneasiness among reporters who were assigned to cover the team. The *New York Times* characterized the group of reporters as "skeptical scribes" regarding O'Malley's baseball qualifications, or lack thereof.[25] Caught by surprise at the suddenness of the buyout, these reporters turned a wary eye to O'Malley and the way he did business.

The city's newspapers portrayed O'Malley as little more than a "47-year old Brooklyn lawyer," but this was misleading.[26] O'Malley had been part of the Dodger organization for more than five years and was well-respected in the front office. He and Rickey agreed that the

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[24] McGowen, "Purchase of Rickey's Dodger Stock by Partners Looms," 37.
[25] Roscoe McGowen, "Thompson and Bavasi Are Named Vice Presidents of the Dodgers," *New York Times*, 3 November 1950, 34.
[26] Roscoe McGowen, "Rickey Partners Exercise Option to Buy 25 Percent Share in Dodgers," *New York Times*, 25 October 1950, 46.

Dodgers required a sound business model to succeed. The model included investments in the farm system, and various other ways of maintaining a winning team, but the press almost exclusively wrote that his attraction to baseball was financial. It was a form of public entertainment that was also a highly lucrative business if run correctly.[27]

New York journalists implied that much of O'Malley's desires to buy the team were driven by personal rivalries.[28] O'Malley was depicted as seemingly "ready to sink gracefully into the presidential chair, kept warm all those years by [Rickey]" by the reporters assigned to cover the team. [29] He was constantly "battling" with Rickey in the front office before officially taking over the team in 1950.[30] He would challenge what he felt were unnecessary expenditures, including Rickey's disastrous attempt to establish a professional football franchise in Brooklyn. This proved to be Rickey's key misstep and his dire financial situation allowed O'Malley to step in and purchase the majority shares of the team.[31] The football team also cost the Dodgers in excess of one hundred thousand dollars and left the front office in a financial hole that O'Malley pounced to fill.[32]

The belief that losing Rickey would hurt the Dodgers was almost unanimous in the local newspapers.[33] Under his guidance the Dodgers "developed their unexcelled farm system, and became the model for

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[27] Ibid.
[28] Harold Burr, "Rickey Expected to Take Third Strike at Dodger Directors Meeting Tomorrow," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 17 October 1950, 16.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., 30.
[32] Lou Niss, "Odds are 10 to 1 Against Rickey Remaining With Flock," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 18 October 1950, 23.
[33] Ibid.

professional baseball providing a successful template for any organization from the front office to the lowest minor league affiliates."[34] His methods and techniques were adopted by almost every team and his baseball knowledge was thought to be unparalleled.[35] Rickey saw baseball as a way of teaching young men life lessons and the game as a way of instilling moral values of fair play and comradery.[36] He was the catalyst for turning the Dodgers into a model baseball organization.[37]

Branch Rickey's departure left O'Malley as the sole target for media questions and ire. "All eyes are now turned on O'Malley," Frank Schroth wrote in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagl*e.[38] He knew all too well that the press was going to hold him to the standards set by Rickey.[39] "You may be sure," he told the *New York Times*, "that for the next seven or eight years Mr. Rickey will be credited with the victories of the Brooklyn ball club and that its losses will be charged to somebody else."[40] With his baseball acumen constantly under scrutiny, O'Malley knew all too well who that somebody would be.

With so many unanswered questions, the press grew increasingly suspicious of O'Malley's intentions. "He evades talk of the future" complained *Eagle* reporter Mcgowen in regards to O'Malley's ideas for the baseball team.[41] With little information to go on concerning him and

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[34] Editorial, "Rickey's Departure is Great Loss, but We Wish O'Malley Best of Luck," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 27 October 1950, 10.
[35] Sullivan, *Dodgers Move West*, 29.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ellsworth, "The Brooklyn Dodgers Move to Los Angeles," 23.
[38] Schroth, "Rickey's Departure is Great Loss, but We Wish O'Malley Best of Luck," 10.
[39] Ibid.
[40] McGowen, "Rickey Partners Exercise Option to Buy 25 Percent Share in Dodgers," 46.
[41] McGowen, "Purchase of Rickey's Dodger Stock by Partners Looms," 46.

his plans going forward, the newspapers presented him as a businessman who seized an opportunity when it became available and who was proving to be too secretive for comfort.[42] The *Eagle* was more succinct, "The bloodhounds in the press were in no mood for frivolity."[43] O'Malley's secrecy was not going over well with a press used to dealing with an open and affable Rickey. The new owner was reported as being out of his element and out of his league. They believed O'Malley's leadership and business tactics would lead to a decrease in the quality of play on the field. The press feared that a return to mediocrity would be the ultimate insult to Dodger supporters.[44]

Over the next few years, O'Malley's relationship with the press became more familiar, but did not reach the same level of comfort that the papers had with Rickey. Although the team's continued success on the field eased concerns about O'Malley's competence, the press still concentrated on O'Malley's propensity to complain about team finances. "Perhaps this is a dull story to you" harped O'Malley in an interview with the *Brooklyn Eagle*, but it was a "dull story" the newspapers constantly ran.[45]

Coverage of the Dodgers was extensive in New York City's periodicals during the 1950s. Their continued success, despite initial fears to the contrary, made them a popular topic in the news. Regardless of this, the papers had a tendency to only run stories that featured O'Malley complaining about team revenue. "Our 1951 figures are not ready yet, but in 1950 we lost money in nine minor

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[42] McGowen, "Rickey Partners Exercise Option to Buy 25 Percent Share in Dodgers," 46.
[43] Harold Burr , "Rickey Expected to Take Third Strike at Dodger Directors Meeting Tomorrow," 21.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Tommy Holmes, "Baseball Red Ink Bath to O'Malley of Flock," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 6 November 1951, 13.

leagues" he told the *New York Times.*[46] The press interpreted these complaints as misleading, especially with contradicting information being reported by the federal government in their ongoing anti-trust investigation of Major League Baseball. The government's inquiry found the Dodgers amongst the most profitable teams in the league in the years leading up to 1950.[47] New York State Representative and chairman of the judiciary committee, Emanuel Celler found that "the Dodgers made in excess of one million dollars profit from 1947- 1950".[48] The press characterized these discrepancies as more than mere coincidence, and the depiction of O'Malley as a cold capitalist became more than just a portrayal; it became a description of his personality and a revelation of his true intentions.

A Home with a Translucent Dome

When New York newspapers became aware of O'Malley's desire to build a new stadium in 1953, they construed it as another of O'Malley's schemes to maximize his bottom line. Although reporters agreed that Ebbets Field needed an upgrade, they believed it to be more of a luxury than a necessity. As far as they were concerned, the Dodgers were financially secure, and Ebbets was aged, but usable. O'Malley had grand plans for a new stadium in Brooklyn; the most ambitious involved a 50,000 seat stadium with a retractable clear dome that would be closed

[46] Sports Editor, "Dodger Chief Says Farms Lose Money: O'Malley Points to $284,000 Deficit for 1950, Denies System is a Monopoly," *New York Times*, 7 November 1951, 42.
[47] Editorial, "Celler Releases Dodgers figures: Representative Charges Club Included Football Losses in Reporting on 1950," *New York Times*, 8 November 1951, 39.
[48] Ibid.

in inclement weather.[49] Negotiations with New York City officials began slowly and intermittently during the 1953 season, but O'Malley quickly grew frustrated when his ideas were not as widely accepted as he had anticipated. Talks about relocation started circulating in the community, heightening fears about what O'Malley was willing to do to increase team profits. "We will consider other locations only if the club is unsuccessful in building a new stadium in Brooklyn"[50] he told reporters, but media attitudes towards him took a noticeably negative turn after news spread, and their depiction of the new owner degenerated from a consummate businessman to a greedy tycoon.

The New York newspapers' biased representation of O'Malley was easy to see when compared to their depiction of New York Giants owner, Horace Stoneham. The Giants were an organization that, like the Dodgers, played in an antiquated stadium and suffered from declining attendance.[51] Their situation was truly bleak,



[49] Shapir

[50] Walter , 16 August 1955, 17.

[51] Sullivan, 119.

considering Stoneham had neither the capital nor the inclination to fund a new stadium.[52]

Figure 2. Dodger owner Walter O'Malley and Giant owner Horace Stoneham leave LaGuardia Airport, New York Daily News, 1957.

Most of the Giants' revenue came from the eleven home games, where they hosted the rival Dodgers, as Brooklyn fans helped fill the cavernous Polo Grounds.[53] The falling profits caused Stoneham to also publicly appeal for a new stadium, but unlike O'Malley, the press did not depict him as greedy nor his pleas as being unnecessary. The *New York Times* stated that the Giants were "sorely in need of a new stadium. And indeed the Polo Grounds were in an advanced state of disrepair."[54] His situation was "untenable" and Stoneham garnered much more sympathy than O'Malley did, but almost as little help regarding his issues.[55]

O'Malley was pleased to find Stoneham amenable to a move, if necessary, after Commissioner Frick approved expansion to the West Coast in 1956.[56] In his negotiations with New York officials, O'Malley repeatedly warned them that Giants would also be forced to relocate alongside the Dodgers because of their dependency on the rivalry to generate revenue. Reporters depicted O'Malley as the puppeteer behind the scenes directing Stoneham and

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[52] Ibid., 121.
[53] Sydney Gruson, "O'Malley is Fearful of a One-Team City," *New York Times*, 20 August 1955, 1.
[54] "San Francisco Mayor Consults Here With Giants and Dodgers," *New York Times*, 11 May 1957, 16.
[55] Joseph Sheehan, "New York's Baseball: An Analysis of the Factors Behind Possible Shift by the Giants and the Dodgers," *New York Times*, 30 May 1957, 32.
[56] Joseph Sheehan, "Dodgers, Giants Win Right to Shift if They So Desire," *New York Times*, 29 May 1957, 1.

ultimately controlling the fate of both teams.[57] Stoneham may have been a willing follower, but it was O'Malley making the deals and deciding the fate of both organizations.

Information was scarce regarding the stadium negotiations, because most communication took place via personal correspondence. That, however, did not stop the newspapers from scrutinizing and almost universally presenting O'Malley's requests as a way of swindling the city and taking advantage of a public law for personal gain.[58] Tri-borough Commission president, and O'Malley nemesis, Robert Moses pointedly asked O'Malley, "Are you saying that if you don't get your way, you'll just pick up your marbles and leave?" It was the question on the minds of the every reporter and Dodgers fan and Moses did not mince words.[59] He indicated that if the city used Title I to condemn land, said land had to be used for public works and city works. "A private baseball stadium simply isn't a public purpose, even with, a parking garage," according to Moses who was arguably the most influential individual in New York during the era.[60] He swayed the press and convinced them that O'Malley was leveraging the team's popularity while seeking to take advantage of New York and its taxpayers. The newspapers endorsed Moses' beliefs and argued that O'Malley wanted the city to condemn land and then essentially give it to him at little or no cost.[61] Moses had his personal plans for the city of New York and

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[57] Gruson, "O'Malley is Fearful of a One-Team City," *New York Times*, 20 August 1955, 1.
[58] Robert Moses, "Robert Moses on the Battle of Brooklyn," *Sports Illustrated*, 22 July 1957, 26-28, 46-49.
[59] Robert Moses to Walter O'Malley, Meeting at Moses' Gracie Mansion on Long Island.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Arthur Daley, "Sports of the Times" *New York Times*, 20 January 1953, S2.

a private baseball stadium in the heart of downtown Brooklyn, was assuredly not part of them.[62]

O'Malley took his pleas for a new stadium public, with the hopes of garnering support, but the press hardly helped him in his cause. He complained to former *Eagle* editor Frank Schroth that his "problem is to get a new ballpark. One well located and with ample parking accommodations. This is a must if we are to keep our franchise in Brooklyn."[63] The papers reflected the opinions of other O'Malley opponents, suggesting that O'Malley was asking for land to be gifted to him so that he could go through with his plans. "It is obvious that O'Malley thought that we can somehow go out and condemn property for a new Dodger Field just where he wanted it. Writing down the cost and… helping finance the stadium."[64] This became the most common portrayal of O'Malley in the press and the most widely believed idea regarding the situation. Regardless of what O'Malley said, the general consensus was that he was trying to take advantage of the city.[65] Abe Stark, president of the New York City Council called O'Malley a "robber baron" in the *Times*.[66] "Pirates" was the term used to describe O'Malley and his fellow owners who "brushed aside" the public desires in their pursuit of personal gain.[67]

If the press would have had access to O'Malley's personal correspondences, they may have better understood his intentions. "My big wish, Jimmy, is to get the ball club

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[62] Robert Moses, "Robert Moses on the Battle of Brooklyn," *Sports Illustrated*, 22 July 1957, 26-28, 46-49.
[63] Editorial, "Dodgers Slate Games in New Jersey Park," *New York Times*, 16 August 1955, 38.
[64] Robert Moses to the *New York Times*, 20 October 1953.
[65] Arthur Daley, "Sports of the Times: Men in Motion," *New York Times*, 25 August 1955, 29.
[66] C.P. Trussell, "O'Malley Says City Balks Dodgers' Plan," *New York Times*, 27 June 1957, 1.
[67] Ibid.

back close to the fans.... We've drifted apart from the little people,"[68] he wrote to a friend. Having access to this material might have also shed light on O'Malley's motivations and plans regarding the team and concerns about the future of the franchise. O'Malley wanted to maintain the level of success that Dodgers fans had grown accustomed to; somehow, that was obscured by the growing resentment towards him.[69]

O'Malley implored reporters that a new stadium was necessary to turning a steady profit. Columnist Arthur Daley told of how "He [O'Malley] kept pounding away for years at the hopeless inadequacy of outmoded Ebbets Field as the home for the Dodgers."[70] This did not improve his standing with the press, who rarely took the information provided by O'Malley at face value. Newspaper editors argued that with the team being profitable, the only reason O'Malley had to build a new stadium was to make himself more money.[71] Daley voiced this belief in the *New York Times*, "Admittedly Ebbets Field was a wretchedly outmoded baseball arena… But it still could ring a lively tune on the cash register, approximately a third of a million dollars."[72]

Leaving for Levittown

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[68] Walter O'Malley to Jimmy powers, *New York Daily News*, 29 October 1950, 46.
[69] Sullivan, *The Dodgers Move West*, 34.
[70] Arthur Daley, "Sports of the Times: The Dodger Touch Dubious Validity Adroit Campaign Westward Ho?," *New York Times*, 25 February 1957, 30.
[71] John Lardner, "Would It Still Be Brooklyn without the Dodgers? No-o-o! Says a fan. The Bums add something to the scene that should not be lost through lack of a ballpark. Would It Still Be Brooklyn?," *New York Times*, 26.
[72] Arthur Daley, "Sports of the Times: It's His Own Description," *New York Times*, 14 October 1957, 37.

O'Malley's concerns regarding attendance were not unfounded. Fan turnout had steadily declined after a high of 1.8 million fans in 1947.[73] The Dodgers were falling behind several other teams, most noticeably the Milwaukee Braves, who were enjoying huge successes after relocating from Boston.[74] Brooklyn was undergoing demographic change as families moved from the city to the suburbs, like the massive Levittown in Nassau County, eroding the team's local fan base.[75] O'Malley felt that a new stadium in downtown Brooklyn would spur attendance because of its centrality to downtown and its accessibility through a number of different public transportation hubs.[76] This idea became vital to his pursuit to attain the parcel of land on the corner of Atlantic and Flatbush, because of the proximity to multiple subway stops and rail lines. Building the stadium in that location would allow fans who had moved out of the city the option of driving in or taking public transportation to the new stadium. In O'Malley's mind, the site was perfect to bring fans back to the watch the games in person, while providing ample parking space and modern amenities that fans desired. He was convinced the Dodgers and Brooklyn would benefit equally, almost, with the construction of a new sports facility.

The back and forth regarding a new stadium went on until 1957 with little headway in any direction. The newspapers still portrayed O'Malley as a glutton grasping for more than the city felt comfortable giving, and as someone using the Dodgers as leverage to get a better deal.[77] In the *New York Times*, Stark voiced the popular opinion "What he [O'Malley] has developed is pitting city

[73] Sullivan, *The Dodgers Move West*, 43.
[74] Ibid., 44.
[75] Goldenbock, *Bums*, 467-469.
[76] McCue, *Mover & Shaker*, 68.
[77] Editorial "O'Malley a Sound Poker Player," *New York Times*, 16 April 1956, 16.

against city in an unsportsman-like civil war."[78] Daley argued that "This 'Gaelic Machiavelli' has been playing for big stakes with the Board of Estimates, civic leaders and interested voters."[79] The situation grew more tenuous when O'Malley agreed to sell Ebbets field to a real estate firm in 1956, and only signed a three year lease.[80] When discussing games in Jersey City, O'Malley "that he hoped to build a stadium on Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn before 1958."[81] The papers took this as an ultimatum and chastised the Dodgers owner further for his insisting to build "his home with the 'translucent dome,'" as Daley mused about the situation in the *New York Times*. "Maybe [O'Malley] is just continuing his war of nerves by demonstrating what will happen if he doesn't get what he's after."[82]

California Comes Calling

With negative headlines O'Malley seriously questioned if New York even really wanted the Dodgers to stay in Brooklyn and whether the people of the borough even cared. George McCllellan, a national politician, told the *Los Angeles Times* that O'Malley felt "ill-used" by New York politicians and that he "did not want to go where he wasn't wanted."[83] In late 1956, O'Malley agreed to a deal

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[78] Abe Stark to C.P. Trussell, "O'Malley says City Balks Dodgers Plan: O'Malley Decries Sabotage," *New York Times*, 27 June 1957, 1.
[79] Arthur Daley, "Sports of the Times: The Dodger Touch Dubious Validity Adroit Campaign Westward Ho?," *New York Times*, 25 February 1957, 30.
[80] Robert Murphy, *After Many a Summer: The Passing of the Giants and Dodgers and a Golden Age in New York Baseball*, (New York and London: Union Square Press, 2009), 141.
[81] Arthur Daley, "O'Malley Confers On Jersey Games," *New York Times*, 23 August 1955, 25.
[82] Arthur Daley, "Sports of the Times: Pie-in-the-Sky?," *New York Times*, 9 February 1956, 43.
[83] George McCllelan to the *LA Times*, 25 August 1963, C1.

with Chicago Cub owner Phillip Wrigley to purchase the Los Angeles Angels of the Pacific Coast League and Wrigley Field West.[84] O'Malley claimed that it was an investment in territorial rights, but the press saw it as definitive proof that he was preparing a move to Los Angeles.[85] The *New York Times* lamented "The Dodger owner holds all the cards he needs…If he doesn't get a reasonable facsimile of what he wants in Brooklyn, he'll be able to get it in Los Angeles that's for sure."[86]

New York media fears about O'Malley had merit. Besides his inconsistencies regarding team finances, O'Malley also began hosting "secret meetings" with Los Angeles City officials in the Dodgers Spring Training facility in Vero Beach, Florida.[87] Los Angeles Councilman Ken Hahn and Mayor Norris Poulson flew to Florida to meet with O'Malley with the intent of luring the Dodgers to the West Coast.[88] Although there were conflicting reports regarding the specifics, the meetings opened at least the dialogue that would eventually become an agreement to move the team. It did not take long for press officials to become aware of the meetings, and New York's reporters wasted no time in declaring O'Malley the ultimate villain.[89] The excitement of the Los Angeles press was almost palpable. Although they viewed it as the ultimate longshot, LA reporters approached O'Malley with a cautious optimism and willingness to listen that he had not received from New York City for a long while.

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[84] Sullivan, *The Dodgers Move West,* 113.
[85] Arthur Daley, "Sports of the Times: The Dodger Touch Dubious Validity Adroit Campaign Westward Ho?," *New York Times,* 25 February 1957, 30.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Harvey Fetter, "Revising the Revisionists: Walter O'Malley, Robert Moses, and the End of the Brooklyn Dodgers," *New York History,* Vol 89, No 1 (Winter, 2008), pp 57-74.
[88] Ibid., 65.
[89] Sullivan, *The Dodgers Move West,* 82-83.

Los Angeles was a town yearning for professional baseball in 1957.[90] The growing metropolis and its leaders were convinced that the only way to announce their new status as a modern city was to have a Major League Baseball team to call its own. Mayor Poulson proudly exclaimed that by 1955, "Los Angeles had undergone tremendous growth and had become the nation's second largest city."[91] When the possibility of the Dodgers coming to Los Angeles presented itself, newspaper reports in Los Angeles were almost unanimously in support of doing virtually anything to secure their arrival. The *Los Angeles Times* was a staunch advocate of any attempt to bring the Dodgers to southern California. When O'Malley began negotiations with city officials, the press was initially cautiously optimistic about the team, and wary regarding the man himself. Where the New York media depicted O'Malley as greedy, the Los Angeles press portrayed him as a risk taker and pioneer. They were willing to depict O'Malley in a more favorable light if it meant the possibility of the Dodgers moving to Los Angeles.

The possibility of a Dodger move to the Los Angeles seemed like a dream scenario to the city's beat writers in late 1955. National League President Warren Giles told the *Los Angeles Times* "the story about the Dodgers leaving Ebbets Field for the Coast was news to me."[92] This was all the while he and O'Malley toured Los Angeles, judging its potential as a home for a major league franchise.[93] When O'Malley unexpectedly bought the Angels and Wrigley Field in downtown Los Angeles, cynicism turned to hope, "I'm more optimistic than ever.

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[90] Braven Dyer, "O'Malley's Wit and Drive Make Hit With L.A. Press," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 May 1957, D1.
[91] Henderson, "Los Angeles and the Dodger War 1957-1962," 269.
[92] Frank Finch, "Bums to Stay Put—O'Malley," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 November 1955.
[93] Ibid.

We've reached the realistic stage," Los Angeles Mayor Poulson told the *Los Angeles Times*.[94] O'Malley was praised for his "charming wit and tireless drive" by columnist Braven Dyer.[95] The complements were in stark contrast to what was being reported in New York. One can only wonder how the scribes in the Big Apple felt as Dyer wrote that it was "O'Malley, not Rickey, who almost became the man to sign the first Negro for major league baseball," before a deal to sign a Cuban shortstop fell through in 1945.[96]

The depiction of O'Malley in the *Los Angeles Times* was cautious, but cordial. The press was willing to set aside personal attitudes and try to understand "Wise Walter" and the relocation situation.[97] Recognized as the "shrewdest owner in the National League," the Los Angeles press depicted O'Malley as a clever business mogul, looking to secure the best possible deal for his franchise.[98] Sure, he was leveraging the Dodgers for a better deal from New York, but if things there did not work out, then Southern California would make an ideal alternative.[99] Mayor Poulson told the *LA Times* "O'Malley is a smart operator as well as a smart baseball man… He's going to get what he wants in Brooklyn, or he's

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[94] Editor, "Bums May Arrive in 1958- Poulson," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 August 1956.
[95] Dyer, "O'Malley's Wit and Drive Make Hit With L.A. Press," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 May 1957, D1.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Walter O'Malley to Frank Finch, "O'Malley Proclaims: L.A. Must Prove Itself Ready for Major Ball," *Los Angeles Times*, 05 March 1957, C1.
[98] Ellsworth, "The Brooklyn Dodgers' Move to Los Angeles: Was Walter O'Malley Solely Responsible?," 32.
[99] Editor, "City, County Join to Lure Dodgers Here," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 February, 1957.

going to get it in Los Angeles."[100] O'Malley told Fitch "I don't know what kind of city Los Angeles is, but I'm spending more money than anyone in history of minor league ball to find out."[101] The press characterized O'Malley as a savvy baseball man, but not a dishonest businessman as he came to be seen in New York.[102] "He knows baseball" Joe Crider a Los Angeles attorney said about O'Malley. "He is keen, forthright, genial, frank and outspoken."[103] Reporters in New York would have vehemently disagreed.

Once the deal was completed to move the team in October of 1957, the Los Angeles media hailed O'Malley as a risk taker and trailblazer who accepted the best deal available to him. "He knows a good thing when it's dangled in front of him." said Dyer who also wrote "O'Malley is bringing the Dodgers here to make money, but that isn't all… I think that Walter O'Malley regards this move a challenge, a pioneering step which will ultimately establish him as the most progressive owner the game of baseball has ever known."[104] O'Malley told the *Los Angeles Times* that "it didn't seem to him that he was given proper support by [New York officials]."[105] To the Los Angeles press, O'Malley was willing to take a chance and help the city grow as a "sports center."[106]

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[100]Frank Finch, "Bum-Giant Feud Due to Move Here," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 March 1957, C1.
[101] Frank Finch, "L.A. Must Prove Itself Ready for Major Ball," *Los Angeles Times*, 5 March 1957, C2.
[102] Editor, "Bums May Arrive in 1958-Poulson," *Los Angeles Times*, 5 May 1957, C1.
[103] Braven Dyer, "O'Malley's Wit and Drive Make Hit With L.A. Press," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 May 1957, D1.
[104] Braven Dyer, "Baseball Pioneer: L.A. Move Challenge to O'Malley," *Los Angeles Times*, 9 June 1957, D6.
[105]Editorial, "O'Malley Tells of Reasons for Moving," *Los Angeles Times*, 9 October 1957, C2.
[106] Ibid.

A Place to Call Home

Obtaining land that Walter O'Malley considered a suitable site, was at the heart of the matter in his negotiations with either New York or Los Angeles. New York's reluctance to meet O'Malley's demands opened the door for Los Angeles. The city offered roughly 300 acres in Downtown Los Angeles, named Chavez Ravine, after O'Malley designated it appropriate for construction during a helicopter ride over the city.[107] Officials had struggled to come up with an appropriate use for Chavez Ravine for some time, with little agreement about what to construct on the large parcel in downtown. Ideas for public housing had been shot down because the notion was considered too "socialist" during a period when the American public was almost opposed to anything that could be related to the Soviet Union and communism.[108] When O'Malley judged the site as ideal for his intentions, Los Angeles city officials worked to do what New York officials failed to do regarding land in Brooklyn.[109] They overcame any obstacles, legal or personal, and seized the land using the government's ability to claim imminent domain, with the intention of selling the land to O'Malley at a highly discounted price. O'Malley would then privately fund construction of a new stadium and pay taxes for its use.[110]

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[107] Ellsworth, "The Brooklyn Dodgers' Move to Los Angeles: Was Walter O'Malley Solely Responsible?," 23.
[108] Henderson, "Los Angeles and the Dodger War 1957-1962," 267.
[109] Ibid., 269.
[110] Sullivan, *The Dodgers Move West*,128.

There was some dissension amongst Los Angeles reporters, but it was a vocal minority. Columnist Paul Zimmerman asked if "O'Malley's original requests to Los


FINAL DAILY NEWS 5¢
NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER
Vol. 38, No. 91 New York 17, N.Y., Wednesday, October 9, 1957 WEATHER: Fair, cloudy.

DODGERS GO TO L. A. NEXT YEAR

Move Ends NL Ball in N.Y.

Story on Page 8

Dodger Double-Bill: Two Moving Pictures

Figure 3. New York Daily News October 9, 1957 Front Page.

Angeles [were] outlandish?"[111] Businessman Ted Cronin called O'Malley "a very cute customer" who was looking to steal "a parcel of real estate" in either L.A. or Brooklyn.[112] Los Angeles Councilman John Holland led a campaign to rescind any deal the city had made with O'Malley concerning Chavez Ravine. Proposition B was introduced to voters, but failed when the public overwhelmingly voted in favor of it.[113] Despite the objections, however, proponents felt the cost was justified

[111] Roger Norton, letter to the editor, "Boon to L.A.," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 January 1958.
[112] Ted Cronin, "Cronin's Corner," *Los Angeles Times*, 30 June 1957, C3.
[113] Sullivan, *The Dodgers Move West*,153.

because it had brought the Dodgers to Los Angeles.[114] Dyer adamantly stated "Our city and county officials are doing the right thing."[115] To the writers covering the story, O'Malley, the consummate businessman, had just negotiated the deal of a lifetime, but it was beneficial to both parties. Mayor Poulson certainly thought the cost was justified, arguing that "Los Angeles can have the Dodgers, but the city must stretch a point here and there to get them."[116] Councilman Charles Navarro called it a "Comic Opera bid" that benefitted only O'Malley.[117]

The 300 acres Los Angeles gifted O'Malley is still a sore spot for many people in Los Angeles. Chavez Ravine was home to a small and tight knit group of mostly Mexican-American families up until the early 1950s when the city designated the land be repurposed for civic use. Most of the residents in the community had agreed to relocation settlements with the city, but twenty families refused to leave and still lived in houses they had constructed themselves.[118] Deemed "squatters" by the county, the families were forcibly removed from their homes so that construction could begin on Dodger Stadium in 1960.[119] Although the city's voters showed their support for the team by voting for Proposition B and approving the city's agreement with O'Malley to swap Chavez Ravine for Wrigley Field, paving the way for construction of Dodger stadium and how the city dealt with the families from the community, was never properly rectified by either the city

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[114] Frank Finch, "O'Malley's Edict," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 November 1957, C1.
[115] "O'Malley's Wit and Drive Make Hit With L.A. Press," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 May 1957, D1.
[116] Norris Poulson to *Los Angeles Times*, 18 May, 1957, A1.
[117] Carleton Williams, "Mayor Signs Dodger Ticket to L.A.: Jubilant Officials Hail Move," *Los Angeles Times*, 9 October 1957, A1.
[118] Thomas Hines, "Field of Dreams History: The Battle of Chavez Ravine," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 April 1997.
[119] Henderson, *Mover and Shaker*, 278.

or the team. Recently the team, in conjunction with the city, announced plans to rename Elysian Parkway, the main street leading up to Dodger Stadium, Vin Scully Way, after the team's longtime play by play announcer. Support for the measure has been almost unanimous because of the community's admiration for Scully, but it also permanently erases any hint of what the area was before Dodger Stadium was constructed.[120]


Line-ups for Opener at Coliseum Today

Los Angeles Times 9 A.M. FINAL

L.A. GREETS DODGERS: 90,000 FANS EXPECTED

U.S. Investigates L.A. Dope Killing

Shake-up of Defense Held Vital

City's Welcome to Begin With Ceremonies, Parade

FANFARE MARKS L.A. BIG LEAGUE DEBUT

LINE-UPS FOR OPENER TODAY

INDEX OF FEATURES

Figure 4. Los Angeles Times Morning Edition Front Page April 18, 1958.

The Los Angeles press hailed O'Malley as an innovator for relocating the Dodgers to southern California and for privately funding the construction of a new stadium. O'Malley was commended for changing how sports teams did business with the cities they called home. He proudly told Paul Zimmerman "to reiterate that this will be the first baseball park built by private enterprise since 1923. We're trying to get back to proprietorship instead of

[120] Steve Dilbeck, "Vin Scully Avenue? The street leading to Dodger Stadium may be renamed for the broadcaster," *Los Angeles Times,* 28 January 2016, D1.

the trends towards socialism."[121] The construction of Dodger Stadium at Chavez Ravine was considered by the press to be O'Malley's lasting legacy to the Dodgers and to major league baseball. He had achieved his "baseball dream," a stadium erected solely for baseball with attention paid to every seat designed to maximize the fan experience.[122] Columnist Jim Murray proclaimed that Dodger Stadium was a "Taj Mahal, a Parthenon, a Westminster Abbey of baseball" and one that would last for generations.[123] He argued that, "Ted Williams might have had the vision to see a ball curve from sixty feet, but O'Malley had the vision to see three decades ahead."[124]

O'Malley was depicted as a visionary and as the most the most progressive owner in all of baseball" by southern California media.[125] Actor Don Page called O'Malley "a man of ingenious foresight." According to the LA press, O'Malley was the catalyst for bringing professional baseball to not only Los Angeles, but also San Francisco, paving the way for professional sport expansion throughout the western United States. Murray exclaimed that "O'Malley brought baseball kick and screaming into the 20th century."[126] O'Malley came to be regarded as ultimate voice of authority concerning all things baseball through the reports of sports journalists in Los Angeles. He attained a level of respect in LA that he never enjoyed in

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[121] Paul Zimmerman, "Dodger Stadium to Change Trend," *Los Angeles Times*, 5 June 1959, C1.
[122] "Versatile Executive: O'Malley's Background in Law, Finance, Engineering Helpful," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 April 1962, F17.
[123] Jim Murray, "Monument to Walter," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 April 1962, F1.
[124] Jim Murray, "O'Malley a Name for the Hall of Fame," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 August 1979, C1.
[125] "Dodger Stadium to Change Trend," *Los Angeles Times*, 5 June 1959, C1.
[126] Jim Murray, "Walter's Way West," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 February, 1961, C1.

New York. Walter Frances O'Malley had a "deep-seeded love for the game of baseball" and had come to be regarded as a consummate baseball man.[127]

A Lasting Legacy

Even after more than a half century, O'Malley's influence can still be felt and, in a strange parallel, Los Angeles is once again embroiled in controversial team relocation discussions involving the most popular sports league of the era. The National Football League is returning to Los Angeles after more than twenty years of not having a franchise in the nation's second largest sports market.[128] Two of the league's thirty two franchises are preparing to move from their current homes in pursuit of newer playing facilities and the possibility of higher revenues in Los Angeles. The Rams are on their way back to Los Angeles after a two decade stint in St. Louis. Their owner Stan Kroenke has constantly cited a need for a new modern stadium to replace the Edward Jones Dome, in order to attract fans.[129] This would enable the organization to maintain a competitive team on the field, echoing O'Malley's reasons from more than fifty years ago. In San Diego, owner of the Chargers NFL franchise Dean Spanos has been embroiled in a decade-long battle with the city over public funds to help in the construction of a new stadium in downtown San Diego, to replace the Chargers current, aging home.[130] Spanos has constantly expressed

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[127] Murray, "O'Malley a Name for the Hall of Fame," C1.
[128] Bill Shaikin, "NFL relocation questions: Why can't the Rams, Chargers and Raiders all move to L.A.?," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 January 2016, D2.
[129] Jim Salter, "Rams owner Stan Kroenke rips St. Louis market as he seeks LA move," *Denver Post*, 6 January 2016.
[130] Tom Krasovic, "Did Bolts Really Try to Get SD Stadium*?," San Diego Union-Tribune*, 5 January 2015.

the belief that a new stadium would help the franchise increase attendance and revenue, allowing for more spending on the team. A better team on the field would benefit the community, justifying any public expense the team needed.[131]

Wealthy team owners exert considerable influence over city officials who work to try and reach a favorable agreement with the teams without compromising city finances. These kinds of relationships between owners and the cities began with O'Malley and the precedent he established when relocating the Dodgers. *St. Louis Post Dispatch* writer Benjamin Holcolm recently lamented that a task force set up to keep the Rams in St. Louis "moved mountains… secured naming rights... they did so much,"[132] only to have Kroenke and the NFL leave for the lucrative market in Los Angeles. In San Diego, Spanos has threatened to relocate the team for years if voters did not introduce and pass a referendum that subsidizes the construction of a new modern stadium for the team.[133] Reports in *USA Today* indicate that Spanos has repeatedly "misled or cut off talks" with city officials who have frequently voiced a desire to reach a compromise with him to keep the team in San Diego.[134] Ultimately it will be up to Spanos to make a decision about where he wants his team to be. Walter O'Malley made his decision about the

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[131] Ryan Phillips, "Dean Spanos , the Chargers, and the NFL are Lying to You," *USA Today Sports,* 12 January 2016, http://thebiglead.com/2016/01/12/dean-spanos-chargers-nfl-relocation-lying-to-you/ (Accessed 8 February 2016).

[132] Benjamin Holcolm, "The view from St. Louis: A great sports town gets a raw deal while Stan Kroenke and the NFL cash in," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* 12 January 2016.

[133] Matt Hall, "Chargers At Most Have Had 2 Legit Proposals Not 9," *San Diego Union-Tribune,* 5 January 2016.

[134] Philips, "Dean Spanos, the Chargers, and the NFL are lying to you," http://thebiglead.com/2016/01/12/dean-spanos-chargers-nfl-relocation-lying-to-you/ (Accessed 8 February 2016).

Dodgers nearly half a century ago, setting an important precedent for the relationship between today's professional sports franchise owner and the city where a team resides.