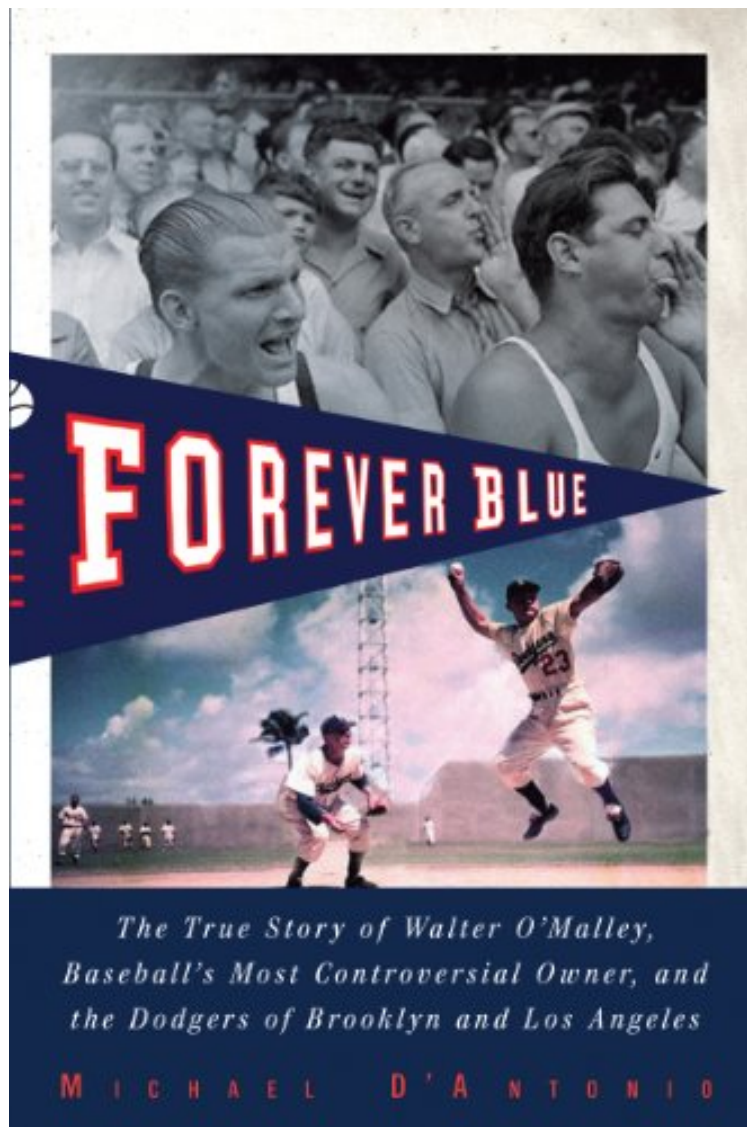


(Free pdf) Forever Blue: The True Story of Walter O'Malley, Baseball's Most Controversial Owner, and the Dodgers of Brooklyn and Los Angeles

## Forever Blue: The True Story of Walter O'Malley, Baseball's Most Controversial Owner, and the Dodgers of Brooklyn and Los Angeles

*Michael D'Antonio*

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**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** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Forever Blue: The True Story of Walter O'Malley, Baseball's Most Controversial Owner, and the Dodgers of Brooklyn and Los Angeles:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Before there was "The Donald" there was "The O'Malley" By Roger

D. Launius There is no doubt but that Walter O'Malley (1903-1979), known to nemeses and fans alike as "The O'Malley," was one of the most significant forces in major league baseball (MLB) between the 1940s and the 1970s. He gained partial control of the Brooklyn Dodgers in the early 1940s, pushed out the two other members of the Dodger troika—including Branch Rickey—and then assumed sole ownership for the rest of his life. He supported the integration of MLB—although he did not instigate it—fought repeatedly with Jackie Robinson and never really made up, sought a new baseball stadium in Brooklyn but ran afoul of New York public works guru Robert Moses, engineered the movement of the Dodgers to Los Angeles in 1958, built a great baseball park with a lot of political help in Chavez Ravine after ousting Hispanic squatters, and oversaw a terrific baseball team that dominated the National League in the early 1960s. In the process O'Malley earned the ire of the whole of Brooklyn, at least partially inappropriately, gained the admiration of movie stars and others who wanted to bask in the glory of the Dodgers as they arrived in luxury in the third inning and left before the end of the seventh, and held the fierce loyalty of such true believers as manager Walter Alton and Buzzie Bavasi. Through all of this, O'Malley created a superb organization that ensured success on the field and generally positive relations outside the lines. But O'Malley was neither universally liked nor respected; some even considered him evil. I don't mean the Brooklynites who still condemn him to a special place in hell for spiriting the Dodgers to the West Coast. That story is much more complex than most people appreciate. I am speaking of those inside the MLB power structure. Longtime Dodgers broadcaster Red Barber, for example, characterized O'Malley as "the most devious man I ever met" (p. 335). I tend to believe Barber, in part because of how O'Malley entered the story of Charlie Finley that I researched a few years ago. The characterization of Oakland's owner Charlie Finley, who also had his share of troubles with MLB's most powerful owner, was extremely negative. Finley believed, quite rightly, that for decades O'Malley had manipulated baseball and its commissioners in manners that suited the Dodgers and himself. He believed Commissioner Bowie Kuhn, for example, served as a mere puppet to the powerful Dodger owner. And there is no doubt but that he was right. Michael D'Antonio's "Forever Blue" is a passable biography of Walter O'Malley. It is mostly, but not exclusively, about baseball and the Dodgers. D'Antonio gained access to O'Malley papers held by the family and therefore could bring to bear insights not available in any other account of his life. Unfortunately, while he uses these materials I'm not convinced that a real historian rather than a journalist, could not have employed them to write a much more satisfying biography. Until someone does so, this will probably have to suffice. It's not a bad book, although I think overly apologetic toward an MLB stalwart that has a lot of warts on his face; I just believe the subject is so rich and the opportunity so great that there is much more to be done.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A one-sided view, but a good book. By Robert A. Byrne. *Forever Blue*, by Michael D'Antonio, tells the story of why (or perhaps, how) the Dodgers packed up and left Brooklyn for Los Angeles. The Brooklyn Dodgers were as integral part of their community as any baseball team has ever been. The Dodgers provided the borough with a central identity that remains unique among other baseball crazy cities. After several decades of ineptness, Larry MacPhail came over from the Cincinnati Reds and led the Dodgers to their first World Series in twenty-one years and only the third ever. Branch Rickey succeeded the old redhead and the Dodgers played in six World Series over ten seasons; finally winning their only title in 1955. Then, after the 1957 season, Walter O'Malley ripped the heart out of Brooklyn and moved the team to Los Angeles. It was a radical move that opened up the west coast to major league baseball. Kansas City had been the westernmost team before the Dodgers and Giants arrived in southern California in 1958. No one denies that Walter O'Malley, who had pushed Rickey out of the ownership picture, was making money from the team. O'Malley was a shrewd operator whose father had been a Tammany Hall official. But Ebbets Field, opened in 1913, was an aging grand dame. Cars had replaced trolleys (the team's nickname was shortened from "Trolley Dodgers", referring to the fans who had to avoid being run down at the confluence of trolley tracks outside the stadium) and there was limited parking at the stadium. O'Malley didn't believe Ebbets Field would be a viable option for his team in the future. He had built a winner: now he wanted a new stadium to play in. Therein lies the rub: there are two sides to this story. O'Malley wanted the government to acquire land in Brooklyn (at much less cost than he would have to pay privately), whereupon he would fund and build a new stadium. Robert Moses, the most powerful politician in New York City, wanted to use the site for a different purpose. He preferred a site in Flushing Meadows, where Shea Stadium would be built a few years later. O'Malley wasn't interested. In their fields, both men largely always got what they wanted. O'Malley had complete control of the Dodger organization and was an influential voice among the owners. Robert Moses was an appointed, not elected official, but he made the decision on highways, bridges and public housing projects. That meant big projects went through him. Some put the blame on O'Malley, painting him as a greedy millionaire who betrayed a community and stole the Dodgers. Others point the finger at Moses, whose out of control ego wouldn't let him compromise and forced O'Malley to accept Los Angeles' offer. The truth probably lies somewhere in between, though the moderate viewpoint seems scarce. This book is very much pro-O'Malley. Which is not surprising, since the author had access to materials in the O'Malley family archives. That's not to say it's all wrong. But the reader does come away seeing O'Malley as a businessman, faced with an untenable situation, offering a reasonable solution but being rebuffed by a power mad politico. Essentially, Moses forced him to reluctantly move his

asset to California. Keep in mind this was happening in the mid-fifties and city-team stadium battles hadn't yet become the norm. This was relatively new territory. Both men used the press and the political process to their advantage. O'Malley threw down the gauntlet when he sold Ebbets Field to a private developer in 1956. The team could stay for a few more years, but there was no doubt a new stadium had to happen. The question became, "Where?" The book indicates that Los Angeles lobbied hard for O'Malley, who consistently put them off, saying he wanted to stay in Brooklyn. But he kept his options open and when he finally accepted that Robert Moses wasn't going to give in to him, the owner packed up his toys and went to his new home. All was not easy-peasy for O'Malley once he arrived in LA. The team initially played in cavernous Memorial Coliseum (current home of USC football) and he faced legal challenges that could have left him without a new stadium. Video footage of poor Hispanics being evicted from Chavez Ravine so that O'Malley could have his stadium survives to this day. BTW, this is favorably explained in the book and a good example of the pro-O'Malley view it takes. One thing I really liked about his book is the look at gives at the pre-O'Malley Dodgers and how he went from a complete outsider to owner. O'Malley and Moses both had it within their power to keep the Dodgers in Brooklyn. But neither chose a path that led there. In 1957, The Kansas City Athletics (once based in Philadelphia, soon to be playing in Oakland) were the farthest west a team had to go. In 2012, there are ten teams further west than KC (home of the Royals). Baseball was changed when the Dodgers and Giants moved west. The Giants, owned by Horace Stoneham, are an important part of the story. Baseball wanted a second team to move so that the Dodgers would have a geographical rival, as well as giving visiting teams more games when they flew all the way to Los Angeles. However, the book doesn't give much attention to the Giants: this is the Dodgers' story. Forever Blue is a good book. I'd guess that the picture it paints is rather incomplete, really just giving Walter O'Malley's side of events. But I believe it does tell a significant part of the story and it does convey what an emotional issue it was. I am looking for another book on the subject with a different slant to get a more balanced overall picture of things, but I liked this one.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. MYTH BUSTER By crafty lefthander I was in second grade when the Dodgers moved to Los Angeles, a midwesterner that didn't ever care what uniform they wore. Still, in a time when the New York media dominated all things that did not emanate from political Washington, most of America, or at least its baseball fans, were sucked into the belief that Walter O'Malley was some kind of ogre. Didn't he after all, rob Brooklynites of their treasured franchise? And then I came across the subject of economics. To quote Milton Friedman, "The purpose of a business is to make money for its owners." Faced with dwindling attendance, and unable to draw 30,000 during the 1956 World Series, a fan base moving to the suburbs, and no place for those fans to park their cars if they were to go to a game, O'Malley was unable to work out a deal for a new ballpark with the master power broker of New York, Robert Moses, who had his own agenda and own personal favorites. Instead, the Dodger owner opted, as any sensible businessman would, to accept an astonishing good deal from the City of Los Angeles, which, like many cities attempting to lure, or even keep major league franchises, shoved it up the taxpayer's fanny. It is not in the too distant past that Illinois, scared that the White Sox would move to St. Petersburg, rolled over and built the American League team a new stadium. Ah, corporatism at its finest! At least the new owners of the Cubs, the Ricketts, of whom most fans are not fond, are using their own dough to rehabilitate Wrigley Field and the surrounding area. It is of course, hardly unusual for a business to move its base of operations from one city to another. Even before the Dodger move, the Braves moved from Boston to Milwaukee, the Athletics from Philadelphia to Kansas City, the Browns from St. Louis to Baltimore. I'm sure their fans in those abandoned cities were disappointed, as have been other fans many times since. But there was hardly the hue and cry caused by the Dodger departure. This was New York! But the Giants were on their way out of the Polo Grounds as it was, the only question was in which direction, towards Minneapolis-St. Paul or the City By The Bay. The author of this enlightening book, although having full access to Walter O'Malley's papers, did not, I believe, set out to rehabilitate him. O'Malley did not need the makeover. The old corporate lawyer was, like the rest of us, imperfect. He had his likes and dislikes. He liked to make money, and was reluctant to spend too much on his employees. He made no long-term guarantees. Walter Alston managed the club based on 23 one-year contracts. He was a wheeler-dealer at times, but so what? So was the man he pushed out the Dodger door, Branch Rickey. So was George Steinbrenner, and so are, in these times, Mark Cuban and Jerry Jones and yes, Magic Johnson and the current group that owns the Dodgers. So was another baseball fan who once owned a franchise, George W. Bush. None of it, legally done, is sinful. As Walter O'Malley knew, it's just good business.

Read Michael D'Antonio's posts on the Penguin Blog From the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist comes a revealing biography of "one of the most polarizing figures in baseball history" (The New York Times). If ever there was a figure who changed the game of baseball, it was Walter O'Malley, owner of the Dodgers. O'Malley was one of the most controversial owners in the history of American sports, altering the course of history when he uprooted the Dodgers and transplanted them from Brooklyn to Los Angeles. While many critics attacked him, O'Malley looked to the future, declining to defend his stance. As a result, fans across the nation have never been able to stop arguing about him and his strategy until now. Michael D'Antonio's Forever Blue is a uniquely intimate portrait of a man who changed America's pastime forever, a fascinating story fundamental to the history of sports, business, and the

American West. Michael D'Antonio's newest book, *A Full Cup: Sir Thomas Lipton's Extraordinary Life and His Quest for America's Cup*, is now available from Riverhead Books.