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### Beneath Dodger Stadium

The typical diehard Dodger fan is married to their trustee blue cap and clean, white jerseys. One wearing the color “azure” shares the blue blood of a nation: the most loyal fanbase in baseball. Bobbleheads and posters consume the shelves and walls of bedrooms. The aging fan pledges Dodger allegiance with their treasure of memorabilia hidden beneath the clothes and tennis rackets of closets. Sacred is the worship of blue in Los Angeles as is the love for the athletes on the field sporting it--eternally tied to the heart of the hills gliding just above downtown.

The gem of a stadium sits adjacent to, yet distant from lively neighborhoods and rushing freeways, nestled between the heights of “Blue Heaven.” Upon entering one notices the grand view of the southern skyscrapers peeking in, opposite to the distant and noble mountains. Drawing devout fans from their stressful, tiresome lives, Dodger stadium radiates its attractive and welcoming place of worship--the diamond the pulpit, the stadium the congregation. Only there does the fan realize their true “home away from home.”

The “Blue Heaven”--the third oldest major league ballpark--has stood for almost sixty years. Many who bleed blue do not have the slightest idea about its plentiful history.

They cannot be blamed. It is difficult to ponder a past while watching a game in paradise.

Amongst a skyline of palm trees, sixteen thousand cars parked on smooth asphalt extends an electric atmosphere--fed by the blinding lights and buzzing crowd--to the outskirts of stadium property. It is the epitome of modern Los Angeles.

Passing the edges of this magic, another world emerges, exposing a shockingly different past. Its subtle remains have stood nearby--mostly unnoticed--for more than a century. Elysian Park, just north of the ballpark, cradles an arboretum with some of the oldest trees of their kind in California. A series of secluded streets lying along the 110 freeway still remain unpaved. Remnants of a cute, semi-rural village hint at the prior existence of an entire community--Chavez Ravine.

Nurturing financially-troubled Mexican-Americans in its cozy hillsides above a rapidly developing Downtown, Chavez Ravine grew into a close-knit community with over a thousand families (Podair 165). Small homes and agricultural plots swept across the barren lands. The construction of a Catholic Church and elementary school created the focal points of the village (McCue 48). Families threw aside the importance of wealth, going about their simple and peaceful lives. Children and their friends carelessly mingled in the gravel streets (Street Scene in Chavez Ravine, Los Angeles (Calif.) | UCLA). Neighborhoods could depend on one another for survival during times of economic hardship. Every asset of community and tradition stemmed from residents' relationships with one another and the ties to their land--whether they formally owned it or not.

Dodger Stadium sits directly in place of the century-old Chavez Ravine community--almost every home, church, and plot of land *seemingly* sacrificing itself for Major League Baseball. Current residents of neighboring communities and staunch Dodger fans

believe the bright blue “LA” caps are tainted with a darker history--they “know” the story behind the construction of Dodger Stadium involves destruction. The eviction of all Chavez Ravine residents made way for one of the largest projects in Los Angeles--the removal of eight million cubic yards of earth (McCue 47). Bulldozers crashed through homes and buildings while residents watched in dismay.

“The people were dispossessed so that [the] Dodgers [could] have the most modern baseball temple in the world constructed at that site” KFWB Radio said in 1959 (Podair 184). A quick search on the internet verifies this “truth” about the beloved Dodger Stadium. Electronic articles and newspapers all recount the exact same story about Chavez Ravine--the Brooklyn Dodgers needed a new place to call home, and an “eyesore” of a community was destroyed at the onset of their arrival to Los Angeles (Henderson 281). The landmark mural located along the Los Angeles River in the Tujunga Wash of the San Fernando Valley, “The Great Wall of Los Angeles,” depicts Dodger Stadium wrecking Chavez Ravine and forcing a resident out of her home (Podair 197). Former residents and activists often appear in rallies, preaching against the Dodgers organization for ripping apart their families and their neighborhoods within Chavez Ravine without a reasonable cause (Parson 342). The slogan, “Save Chavez Ravine for the People,” initiated their fight (Parson 341).

The events surrounding the Arechiga family’s eviction--widely spread across every platform imaginable--was central to Chavez Ravine committee activism. Receiving multiple eviction notices in 1951, the Arechigas remained on “their” property for nearly a decade before the commencement of Dodger Stadium construction (Podair 173). A formal condemnation process was imminent.

The morning of Friday, May 8th, 1951, Los Angeles County sheriff's deputies responded to the Arechiga resistance--a family barricade inside each of their two homes. The daughters in the family, Aurora Vargas and Glen Walters, kicked and screamed as the officers physically carried out of their home. Walters had been handcuffed for her resistance. The mother of the family, Mrs. Arechiga, comforted her granddaughters as they "wailed hysterically" (Podair 181-182). The senior Arechiga stood strong until a bulldozer in front of his house threatened him to leave. A popular photograph showed the destruction of his ancient home as he reluctantly watched. Reporters and cameramen broadcast it all live.

The passing week revealed the Arechigas pitching tents on a vacant lot across from the site of their bulldozed homes. Purposely attracting bypassers and media, each family member sought advocacy and sympathy, "We have nowhere else to go. We don't know where we're going to sleep tonight" (Podair 182).

Sympathy they did get.

Food donations poured in. Stadium supporters moved to the defensive, claiming the situation as, "needless, sadistic cruelty." The public contributed their share, "Free America... Something like this makes you wonder" (Podair 183).

The Dodgers and their owner, Walter O'Malley, became the clear targets. They would be associated with the televised images of the forcible removals, with Arechiga family members being carried down flights of stairs, and bulldozers leveling cherished homes that had stood for generations (Podair 188). The Dodgers were responsible for the destruction of an innocent community of marginalized peoples and their homes.

Simple myths often endure longer than complex truths.

Travel back a decade to the late 1940s, and a younger Los Angeles. World War II and Cold War defense spending triggered booming industrial and economic prosperity. Population had grown from a million to a million and a half--a fifty percent increase--in under a decade. The number of available housing units could not match an exponential growth rate: a mere thirty two percent increase (McCue 48). A sizable portion of the city's population, including veterans, epitomized financial instability while living in huts scattered through city parks and streets.

Chavez Ravine could not keep pace with overwhelming population growth. Roaming animals, trash, wooden shacks, and poor Mexicans prevailed--an eyesore of a community by elite Angeleno standards. Liberals among the elite felt the need to improve housing conditions, while conservatives sought a cleaner, more appealing city. Chavez Ravine became central to the ever-increasing public improvement efforts in Los Angeles (McCue 49).

The onset of the public housing craze catalyzed Congress's push towards domestic prosperity with the Public Housing Act of 1949. The Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles was funded \$110 million by the federal government to build ten thousand units, a third of which had been scheduled for Chavez Ravine (McCue 48). Dubbed the "Elysian Park Heights," the urban renewal project stood at the forefront of Ravine residents' hopes for improved living conditions.

The project launched into action in 1950. The City of Los Angeles offered landowners ample compensation through cash settlements, most of which had been accepted (McCue 50). Bulldozers tore down structures and leveled ancient hillsides. Nearly every family had left by the third year of the project, promised to return to their freshly constructed public housing units in place of their once comfortable homes.

Construction never began. Public housing became associated with communism and a heated liberal-conservative battle occurring in Los Angeles. John Holland of Los Angeles City Council said, “Public Housing follows the Communist pattern. These are the people who are trying to wreck America” (McCue 49). The notion stuck with voters.

The federal government eventually sold the city of Los Angeles the land it had acquired for public housing, including a \$1.3 million deal for Chavez Ravine. The once-praised urban renewal project ended in an instant.

By 1953, the community of Chavez Ravine had already been reduced to rubble. Walter O’Malley and the Brooklyn Dodgers had barely begun their search for a new stadium at this time, merely scouting the Chavez Ravine site several years later. The mythmakers continued to release reports critical of Dodger Stadium’s construction, “the bulldozers were called in to shove the poor Mexicans out and clear the land for a baseball stadium” (McCue 50). The Arechigas boosted the rampant sensationalism.

The morning of May 13th, 1951 brought about shocking news. Far from being poor and homeless, the Arechigas owned seven other homes within Los Angeles, one of which was within walking distance (Podair 189). Their claim, “We have nowhere else to go. We don’t know where we’re going to sleep tonight” was a blatant lie. Fighting to minimize these revelations, they received immense criticism. The denunciation of the Arechigas’ other properties discredited them and their allies, standing in the way of a civic improvement to Los Angeles--Dodger Stadium (Podair 193).

A chain reaction initiated by the Arechigas in the Chavez Ravine community resulted in greater instances of corruption. Alice Martin, one of the other evictees, was revealed to have

underhandedly worked with the Citizens Committee to make a public show of resistance, reinforcing the connection between Dodger Stadium and the destruction of her community (Podair 196).

For decades, Chavez Ravine--the little village within the northern hills--sat under the radar. Why, when the Dodgers came to Los Angeles, did Chavez Ravine suddenly need to become the city's center of attention? Vincent Flaherty of the sports column, *The Examiner*, reaffirmed, "During the whole drawn out and unsavory business, the Dodgers, through no fault of their own, have been made the fall guys" (Podair 194).

The loss of Chavez Ravine rippled through Latino Los Angeles, leaving behind an anguished and bitter legacy. "There are people who will not even step into Dodger Stadium," observed the son of an evictee (Podair 197).

The bitterness is misdirected. Los Angeles City officials are to blame for the eviction of thousands of marginalized neighborhoods within the Ravine. It is understandable that the Dodgers have been most closely linked in historical memory of the disturbing images of 1959 evictions (Podair 197). A ballpark occupies the Chavez Ravine site--not a public housing project.

Yet Dodger Stadium cannot be blamed for the destruction of Chavez Ravine, let alone the eviction of the remaining residents. It had no relevance to Dodger Stadium but was merely the city taking possession of land to which it already had title, for the purpose of making improvements (Henderson 282). The failed Public Housing Project of the mid 1900s was the culprit behind the destruction of the community.

Indeed, the modern-day site of Chavez Ravine carries an unappealing history; Dodger Stadium and the Dodger Franchise, however, carry a different past altogether. The Brooklyn team found the best empty site in Los Angeles they could hope for, jumping on the opportunity to play in an eternally thriving city. Modern-day residents of Chavez Ravine may well constitute the Dodgers' most loyal and reliable base of fans since the team's move to California (Podair 197). The history behind the Blue Heaven should be celebrated.



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