Transplants: The Los Angeles Dodgers and the San Francisco Giants — both formerly of New York City — lined up for a pre-game ceremony honoring longtime Phillies announcer Harry Kalas last week. Mark J. Terrill/Associated Press

This baseball book is designated to be a hit

By GLENN C. ALTSCHULER
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For the Brooklyn Dodgers’ final game of 1957, organist Gladys Gooding played "Don't Ask Me Why I'm Leaving," "How Can You Say We're Through?" and "Auld Lang Syne." A few weeks later, team owner Walter O'Malley, the most hated man in Brooklyn, flew to the West Coast on a plane emblazoned with the words Los Angeles Dodgers.

The relocation of the Dodgers, along with the Giants, was the catalyst for a crisis in America's national pastime. The big apples in the Big Apple anointed lawyer William Shea to get a National League team back. When he was rebuffed, Shea endorsed a proposal to create a third league, with franchises in New York, Houston, Dallas, Denver, Toronto, Miami and Minneapolis.

Michael Shapiro, a professor at the Columbia School of Journalism, tells the fascinating might-have-been story of the Continental League. The upstart league was the brainchild of Branch Rickey, the legendary executive who invented the minor leagues and brought Jackie Robinson to the Dodgers. To insure that no team won it all, year after year, as Casey Stengel's New York Yankees had, Rickey decreed that in his league, each team would get an equal share of all television revenues — and a fair shot at a thrice-yearly draft of all young prospects.

Baseball, Shapiro demonstrates, knew how to protect its antitrust exemption in Congress and play the game of continental divide and conquer. Right after the Pittsburgh Pirates beat the Bronx Bombers in the 1960 World Series, major league baseball co-opted the owners Rickey had recruited by adding four teams — the New York Mets, the Houston Colt .45s, the Los Angeles Angels and the Washington Senators — and promised to add more.

"I set out to get a team for New York three years ago," Bill Shea said, "and this is it." The Continental League was dead before a single game had been played.

National Football League Commissioner Pete Rozelle, Shapiro points out, stole Rickey's ideas, pooled TV revenues, and football zoomed past baseball as the most popular sport in America. In 1960, 34 percent of Americans chose baseball as their favorite spectator sport, with only 21 percent selecting football. Twelve years later the percentages were reversed: 32 percent football, 21 percent baseball.

Would it have happened anyway? Probably. Fast-paced and action-packed, football is much more telegenic than baseball. Even though it didn't do the Continental, Shapiro acknowledges grudgingly, baseball hasn't done all that badly. Attendance is higher than it's ever been, despite high ticket prices and steroid scandals. Franchises now sell, on average, for about $472 million. And, most amazing of all, small market teams, like the Florida Marlins and the Tampa Bay Rays, win pennants and World Series.
To millions of Americans, baseball on a sunny summer day remains just what Branch Rickey said it was: "a game of great charm in the adaptation of mathematical measurements to the timing of human movement." The nation’s most venerable and venerated game, baseball isn't anywhere near the bottom of the ninth.

**Bottom of the ninth**

**Branch Rickey, Casey Stengel, And the darinh scheme to save Baseball from itself**

By Michael Shapiro

Henry Holt, $25

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**By GLENN C. ALTSCHULER**

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