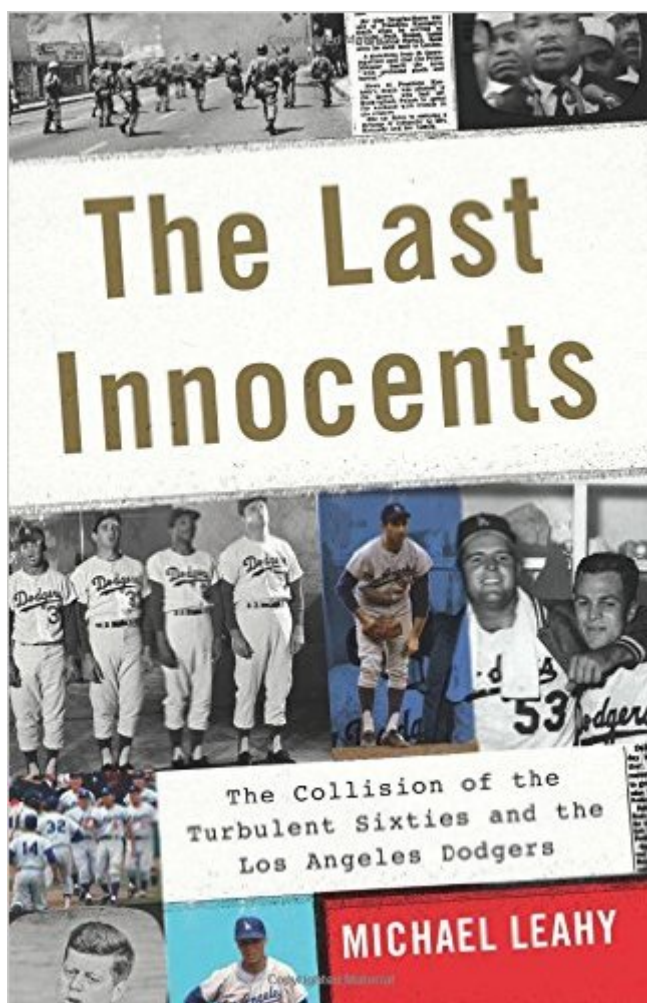


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# The Last Innocents: The Collision Of The Turbulent Sixties And The Los Angeles Dodgers



## Synopsis

From an award-winning journalist comes the riveting odyssey of seven Los Angeles Dodgers in the 1960s—a chronicle of a team, a game, and a nation in transition during one of the most exciting and unsettled decades in history. Legendary Dodgers Maury Wills, Sandy Koufax, Wes Parker, Jeff Torborg, Dick Tracewski, Lou Johnson and Tommy Davis encapsulated 1960s America: white and black, Jewish and Christian, wealthy and working class, pro-Vietnam and anti-war, golden boy and seasoned veteran. *The Last Innocents* is a thoughtful, technicolor portrait of these seven players—friends, mentors, confidants, rivals, and allies—and their storied team that offers an intriguing look at a sport and a nation in transition. Bringing into focus the high drama of their World Series appearances from 1962 to 1972 and their pivotal games, Michael Leahy explores these men's interpersonal relationships and illuminates the triumphs, agonies, and challenges each faced individually. Leahy places these men's lives within the political and social maelstrom that was the era when the conformity of the 1950s gave way to demands for equality and rights. Increasingly frustrated over a lack of real bargaining power and an iron-fisted management who occasionally meddled in their personal affairs, many players shared an uneasy relationship with the team's front office. This contention mirrored the discord and uncertainty generated by myriad changes rocking the nation: the civil rights movement, political assassinations, and growing hostility to the escalation of the Vietnam War. While the nation around them changed, these players each experienced a personal and professional metamorphosis that would alter public perceptions and their own. Comprehensive and artfully crafted, *The Last Innocents* is an evocative and riveting portrait of a pivotal era in baseball and modern America.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As a child born in New York to a family that lived and died with the Brooklyn Dodgers — were my life — and lo and behold when the Dodgers moved to Los Angeles after the 1957 season — my family moved right along with them. So the time period covered in this amazing — detailed — no holds barred — story of the 1960s era Los Angeles Dodgers — is now being read and reviewed by a Grandfather — who as a kid — not only went to at least one-hundred games at the L.A. Coliseum and Dodger Stadium — during this time frame — but I watched games on TV — never went anywhere without my transistor radio listening religiously to Vince Scully — and I ran and got the Los Angeles Times from the corner liquor store every morning for the sports section — and my Dad brought home the Herald Examiner every night from his job in downtown L.A. — and the sports section went directly to me upon his entry into our house. (Note: these are the two newspapers most frequently quoted in this book.) I still have in my possession my handmade notebooks with reams of 3-hole-punched notebook papers with yellowing scotch tape holding on to pages of the actual headlines and articles that are recounted in this wondrous work of art by author Michael Leahy. This book is akin to a gift floating down from heaven for a lifelong Dodger fan from this era. It is so well written — that I literally couldn't stop reading it. If they filmed a movie of my reading this book — they would show tears of joy — as flashbacks took me from my Grandfatherly couch — magically back to the most wondrous days of my youth. Going from my Little League and Babe Ruth games to the Coliseum and Dodger Stadium to see my heroes up close and personal in action. And please make no mistake — the author — truly brings those dreamy days — back — in exquisite detail.

When I was a kid back in the 1960s, I wanted to be a baseball player. My buddies and I would study the statistics on the bubble gum cards, which sometimes would include a fun fact about the athletes, like an unusual hobby or accomplishment. We didn't think about the money; as the saying goes, we would have played for nothing. We also didn't consider the tensions of the era, protected from bad news about war, racial problems and assassinations by our youth and innocence. Michael Leahy forces us to open our eyes, retrospectively, with his masterful recap, *THE LAST INNOCENTS: The Collision of the Turbulent Sixties and the Los Angeles Dodgers*. If Roger Kahn made Dodger nostalgia a cottage industry with his classic *THE BOYS OF SUMMER*, then Leahy — author of *WHEN NOTHING ELSE MATTERS: Michael Jordan's Last Comeback* and *HARD LESSONS: Senior Year at Beverly Hills High School* — offers a much gloomier view. He focuses on a handful of players — stars and scrubs (with all due respect) — to represent how

difficult life could be on and off the field. He gives readers a glimpse of the heroic Sandy Koufax that has heretofore gone unreported in such depth. Most of the material deal in generalizations, commenting on his toughness in the face of unyielding pain. They do not go this deeply into Koufax's persona and how he was perceived by his teammates, which was overwhelmingly positive, but laced with a tinge of darkness that makes him all the more human (there is enough on Koufax in this book's 450-plus pages to make for a stand-alone biography). Other profiles include California native Wes Parker, who was brought up with a silver spoon in an otherwise broken home. Leahy reveals him to be a terribly insecure young man.

This was a must-read because author Michael Leahy and I were forged in the same approximate crucible. We're the same age, both grew up in Los Angeles as Dodger fans in the Koufax Era and were affected deeply in our teen years by the Turbulent Sixties. Also, we both made our careers in journalism. I suspect our paths diverged with the emergence of New Journalism in the hands of Truman Capote, Tom Wolfe and the like. And therein lies my sole criticism of Leahy's "The Last Innocents." I was blown away by Capote's "In Cold Blood," wondering how he could get inside the heads of the two killers and write non-fiction as if it were a compelling novel. Ultimately, I came to reject New Journalism because it rang false. The authors of this trend throw us an enormous amount of personal detail, insights, thoughts, perspectives and moods that can't possibly be fact-checked or perhaps even sourced. In other words, it reads like fiction because to some degree, it IS fiction. And this is what Michael Leahy has written. He was 10 years old in 1963, yet he tells us unequivocally what Maury Wills, Sandy Koufax, Wes Parker, Don Drysdale and many others were thinking and feeling at that time. Yes, Leahy spent time talking with Wills and some of the others, but that was half a century later. Memories stray. Wills had been through drug and alcohol addictions. Drysdale was dead. Koufax refused to talk about himself. Leahy has compiled an impressive mass of sources at the end of the book. He relied on a lot of old published stories to document his facts, but Leahy concedes those "facts" sometimes are fiction (e.g., the Bob Hunter newspaper article that claimed Koufax would quit unless he got a \$90,000 salary).

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