

an excerpt from

THE CIVILIANS'

IN THE FOOTPRINT: THE BATTLE OVER ATLANTIC YARDS

written by Steven Cosson from interviews by the company¹

music and lyrics by Michael Friedman

Co-written by Jocelyn Clarke

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FORT GREENE MOTHER and her adult daughter FORT GREENE DAUGHTER on two stoops outside their homes. FORT GREENE MOTHER sings.

WHITE PEOPLE

FORT GREENE MOTHER

Remember the time the tenant came to me one time
Saying he bought Tide at the bodega
And he didn't really think it was Tide.
And I said, "You don't buy Tide from the bodega."
Only reason you'd shop at the corner store is they'd let you get stuff on credit
But they don't do that much anymore.

FORT GREENE DAUGHTER

August of 2001, I moved back into my parents' building here in Fort Greene. And I'm like, I look around and I'm like wait! Where did all the Black people go?

She sings.

Remember the lady who said
They were selling drugs outta the Kennedy Fried Chicken
And I'm like "The Chicken Box? No, the drug spot is a couple doors down.
That bodega that has like two bottle of juice,
And guys sitting on crates, and the guy who pulls up in the Cadillac
That's the drug spot! Not the Kennedy Fried Chicken!"

FORT GREENE MOTHER

Now Fort Greene Park, I would never have taken them there when the kids were little because there was the beer bottles and those were the moms you were talking to (*she screams as one of the junkie moms*) "Shakeen get inside! I gotta go beat his ass!" Those were the people I would be talking to then. But now, the new people they don't wanna talk. Well, they wouldn't wanna talk to me because they're mostly white moms and if it's a Black person they are there as a nanny. And the nannies know I'm not a nanny, so they ain't gonna talk to me.

FORT GREENE DAUGHTER

The new people coming in were a different type of person, you know? Like they bought this and they own the block! Like "I dunno who you are but I'm sure you can't afford to live here." And sure enough, and a couple of them were Black too! It was like "Hi," (*she says it weakly*) it wasn't like "Hi I'm new to the neighborhood, who are you," you know?

She sings.

Remember that girl who came jogging down Myrtle Avenue?
It was like 11 o'clock at night!
Jogging down Myrtle in her short shorts

WHITE GIRL JOGGER comes jogging by.

WHITE GIRL JOGGER
(spoken)

Um, is Myrtle Avenue that way?

FORT GREENE MOTHER

And I'm like "It's that way—"

JOGGER jogs off in the direction indicated.

FORT GREENE MOTHER and DAUGHTER

But I don't think you want to jog down Myrtle Avenue!"

Projections of the book covers for Fortress of Solitude and Motherless Brooklyn. JONATHAN LETHEM enters and sits at the A.R.E.A. café table and eats the bagel.

JONATHAN LETHEM

It's seen as an unspoken notion that I'm comfortable as a kind of face of Brooklyn or a representative because of my books, Fortress of Solitude, Motherless Brooklyn, etc. But my feelings are actually quite uncomfortable and I dodge. Because I'm still very close to the person that avoided it for so long. So the first thing I heard was they were going to build an arena. And I thought, "You know, that could be kind of marvelous." And then I learned what they had in mind and I became outraged. And I guess my moment came... I wrote a strategically beguiling, incensed, tricky letter, a public letter, to Frank Gehry. Playing the artist to artist card. Saying "Your fame and your dignity, your primatur of quality and the sexiness of having a Gehry building is being used in a cause of pure unbridled corruption." I wrote things that I felt, you know, that if read and taken to heart would make the entire project shrivel and disappear. This didn't happen (*laughs*). You know I'm a sports fan. My mother was a Dodgers fan. She went to Dodgers games. She taught me to love the Mets because they were *instead* of the Dodgers. The key thing to understanding is... it isn't really a sports story. The reason the Dodgers still loom so large is that their name was not the New York Dodgers. Their name was the Brooklyn Dodgers. And that is to say what the Dodgers are a simplified emblem of is something that people are mourning even though many of them don't know they're mourning it, which is that Brooklyn used to be its own city. And that is what is so much at the heart of so much of this complexity in Brooklyn identity is this doubleness of shame and pride that we were once our own city with our own vital urban centers. This doubleness of "We're proud to be New Yorkers. We're angry to be New Yorkers. We're really Brooklynites." And it's this conflicted stolen identity that I think meant... This team is just 25 guys who went to LA and became another team. But the *Brooklyn* Dodgers spoke to Brooklyn as a city unto itself. And if they had been named differently it wouldn't have meant anything at all.

ⁱ Company includes Marsha Stephanie Blake, Greg McFadden, Melanie Nicholls-King, Joaquin Torres, and Colleen Werthmann