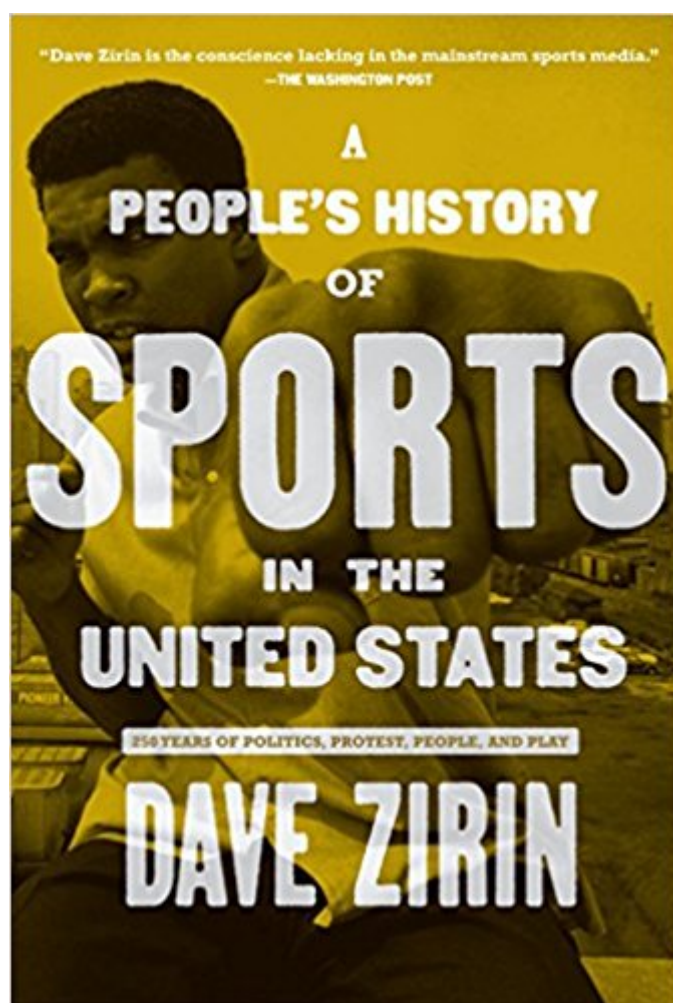


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# People's History Of Sports In The United States: 250 Years Of Politics, Protest, People, And Play (New Press People's History)



## Synopsis

In this long-awaited book from the rising superstar of sportswriting, whose blog *Edge of Sports* is read each week by thousands of people across the country, Dave Zirin offers a riotously entertaining chronicle of larger-than-life sporting characters and dramatic contests and what amounts to an alternative history of the United States as seen through the games its people played. Through Zirin's eyes, sports are never mere games, but a reflection of—and spur toward—the political conflicts that shape American society. Half a century before Jackie Robinson was born, the black ballplayer Moses Fleetwood Walker brandished a revolver to keep racist fans at bay, then took his regular place in the lineup. In the midst of the Depression, when almost no black athletes were allowed on the U.S. Olympic team, athletes held a Counter Olympics where a third of the participants were African American. *A People's History of Sports in the United States* is replete with surprises for seasoned sports fans, while anyone interested in history will be amazed by the connections Zirin draws between politics and pop flies. As Jeff Chang, author of *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, puts it, “After you read him, you’ll never see sports the same way again.”

## Book Information

Series: New Press People's History

Paperback: 320 pages

Publisher: The New Press (September 15, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1595584773

ISBN-13: 978-1595584779

Product Dimensions: 5.4 x 0.8 x 8.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 30 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #114,721 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #150 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Miscellaneous > History of Sports #648 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Pop Culture > General #4472 in Books > History > Americas > United States

## Customer Reviews

Zirin (*What's My Name, Fool!*), writer of a politically minded online sports column, examines the intersection of sports and politics, chronicling the struggles of America's oppressed, starting with Choctaws playing lacrosse and slaves in the South, and reaching all the way to a critique of Michael

Jordan as an apolitical athlete. There are many worthy and deserving stories of courage and conscience in this vast canvas; however, the telling suffers from Zirin's term paper-like prose that relies far too much on overly long quotes from source material. For example, three pages about NFL player Dave Meggyesy has a short introductory paragraph by Zirin and then excerpts Meggyesy's autobiography for the bulk of the section. This book would have been more engaging and logically organized as a reference book with entries on each athlete or group, rather than a linear historical narrative of sports. (Sept.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

This account by blogger Zirin ([edgeofsports.com](http://edgeofsports.com)) is not really a "people's history" so much as it is a 250-year chronicle of the nexus between sports and politics in America. True to its blog roots, the book has a casualness to it (Zirin details the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, for example, without naming the crime for which they were convicted), yet the author has done his legwork (and cites sources). More important, he shows how powerfully sports and politics, with a touch of class warfare, have interacted over the centuries, much to the denial of both sides that there's any connection. Most of the story, unsurprisingly, takes place after the Civil War, with Zirin tracing the development of the major sports in the context of the political events of their times. Emphasis is given to the sixties, particularly Muhammad Ali's role in the advancement of racial equality. A thought-provoking, contrarian take on American sport. --Alan Moores

As someone who has studied the politics of sports in the past, I was still able to learn a lot from this book. Zirin uncovers many underrecognized figures and events and sheds light on their role within the larger context of the time. Like other reviewers, there were a few things in the last couple chapters about the 1990s and 2000s that made me raise an eyebrow because he gave them greater importance than I'm aware of them really having or focused on less significant aspects - the one that stands out is focusing on the Williams sisters' dad rather than their own groundbreaking roles in tennis. Other than that, the structure of the book is straight-forward and Zirin's writing is distilled and easy, though obviously left-leaning.

Zirin is a compelling writer and does an effective job bringing to life the often tenuous yet important intersection of sports and politics. In addition to outlining this history, he does an astute job profiling activist athletes including stars such as Muhammad Ali, Arthur Ashe, Martina Navratilova and lesser

known yet courageous athletes such as Abdul-Raouf and Craig Hodges. This is a must read for sports fans, social justice activists and anyone interested in history of sports and politics in the U.S.

Great book. Provides such critical context for understanding the landscape of sports and culture today.

Zirin has educated me on the lives of athletes in America who have stood bravely against the tide of prejudice and greed. Athletes such as Tommie Smith, Jack Johnson, and Pat Tillman are Zirin's sample sizes in this book, that show how these athletes have sacrificed their reputations, livelihood, and even their lives, for their belief in the cause of justice.

I have long appreciated Howard Zinn's *People's History of the United States* since I was first exposed to it. I have also been an avid reader of Dave Zirin's columns and books, with its emphasis on sports and politics in America. Unfortunately, there is little relationship between the concept of a "people's history" and Zirin's account of sports. Moreover, while this is something of a history it is overwhelmingly focused on the post-World War II intersection of sports and politics, with something about class warfare but never quite enough. He emphasizes the 1960s and 1970s and discusses the icons of the era such as Muhammad Ali, Bill Russell, and John Carlos and Tommie Smith. At some level this is more of a counter narrative to the dominant reverence for sports and sporting figures in the United States. It takes aim at the ruling elite in sports and their shortsightedness. There is quite a lot about labor relations, race relations, and other assorted divisive issues. This is a relatively straightforward short introduction to the subject, but there is little here that gets below a surface discussion. There is considerable overlap with what is contained in this book and what Zirin has to say about these same subjects in other books that he has written, especially *"Bad Sports"* (2010) and *"Welcome to the Terrordome"* (2007). This book is interesting, and certainly worth reading, but there are other issues that deserve serious consideration not covered here in any appropriate manner. These include subjects of class, ethnic identity, immigration, and the like. There is also considerably more to be delved into concerning the race and labor issues that Zirin does explore. As it is, this book is a useful introduction to a counter history of sports in America.

very fascinating book.

Good read

Dave Zirin always provides an interesting take on sports in America, and this book is no exception. I especially liked his chapters on the early years of baseball in America.

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