



# Forty Million Dollar Slaves: The Rise, Fall, and Redemption of the Black Athlete

*William C. Rhoden*

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From Jackie Robinson to Muhammad Ali and Arthur Ashe, African American athletes have been at the center of modern culture, their on-the-field heroics admired and stratospheric earnings envied. But for all their money, fame, and achievement, says *New York Times* columnist William C. Rhoden, black athletes still find themselves on the periphery of true power in the multibillion-dollar industry their talent built.

Provocative and controversial, Rhoden's *\$40 Million Slaves* weaves a compelling narrative of black athletes in the United States, from the plantation to their beginnings in nineteenth-century boxing rings to the history-making accomplishments of notable figures such as Jesse Owens, Althea Gibson, and Willie Mays. Rhoden reveals that black athletes' "evolution" has merely been a journey from literal plantations—where sports were introduced as diversions to quell revolutionary stirrings—to today's figurative ones, in the form of collegiate and professional sports programs. He details the "conveyor belt" that brings kids from inner cities and small towns to big-time programs, where they're cut off from their roots and exploited by team owners, sports agents, and the media. He also sets his sights on athletes like Michael Jordan, who he says have abdicated their responsibility to the community with an apathy that borders on treason.

The power black athletes have today is as limited as when masters forced their slaves to race and fight. The primary difference is, today's shackles are often the athletes' own making.

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