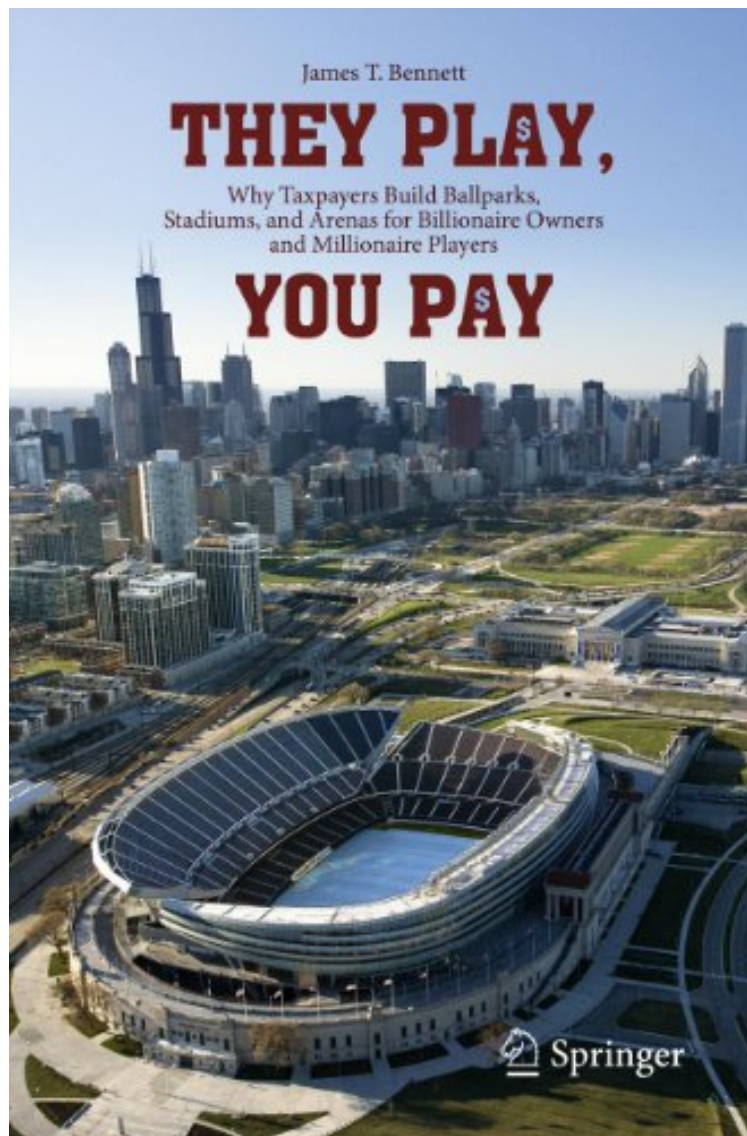


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## They Play, You Pay: Why Taxpayers Build Ballparks, Stadiums, and Arenas for Billionaire Owners and Millionaire Players

James T. Bennett

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**James T. Bennett : They Play, You Pay: Why Taxpayers Build Ballparks, Stadiums, and Arenas for Billionaire Owners and Millionaire Players** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised They Play, You Pay: Why Taxpayers Build Ballparks, Stadiums, and Arenas for Billionaire Owners and Millionaire Players:

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Good information, but repetitive. The author makes the same points over and over again. Valid points to be sure, but it comes across as a string of episodes.

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Excellent overview of government funding of sports stadiums.

By Efre Sepulveda. Mr. Bennett's treatise on the public subsidy of sports stadiums is a 207-page summary of how taxpayers throughout the decades have indirectly put money into the coffers of billionaire owners and millionaire players. The book takes us through three phases of stadium building history. The first era was the time when owners pretty much ponied up their own funds to purchase land and build their ball parks. Included in this group were Jacob Ruppert, the legendary owner of the Yankees who oversaw the building of the "House that Ruth Built" in 1923, C.H. Ebbets who bought land piecemeal to build Ebbets Field for the Dodgers and Clark Griffith, the owner of the Washington Senators who coordinated the construction of Griffith Stadium. The second era was the time when municipal governments totally subsidized the construction of stadiums at taxpayers expense. At first, government merely built access to stadiums. The first person to receive government money for this was Walter O' Malley who got the City of Los Angeles to build up infrastructure for his new park in Chavez Ravine. By the late 1960s, "cookie cutter" stadiums at public expense were built for teams like the Philadelphia Phillies (Veterans Stadium), Pittsburgh Pirates (Three Rivers Stadium) and the Atlanta Braves (Fulton County Stadium). The final phase is where we are at today with the formation of "public-private" partnerships that are prevalent to this day. Taxpayers are told that the projects would be beneficial to the economic health of their cities, but as the author shows, many of the parks have foster little growth for the area around them. What is worse is that in many cases stadium projects overrun their costs to major degree and in the case of the Marlins and their new stadium in Miami, the taxpayers are on the hook for billions of dollars in payments. In the case of Atlantic Yards in Brooklyn, merchants and homeowners were forced off their property by eminent domain to build the palace called Barclays Center. Other debacles in stadium projects that are a burden to taxpayers include Great American Ballpark in Cincinnati and PNC Park in Pittsburgh. James Bennett is to be commended for exposing the odious world of sports facility construction and wonders why the taxpayers are footing the bill for projects that could be funded by private means from multi-billionaires. He rightly chastises Jerry Jones, the owner of the Dallas Cowboys for asking the city of Arlington, Texas to help finance his palace. This is a good book that is relevant to the question of why the poor taxpayers are giving out corporate welfare. Five Stars.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A Solid Condemnation of Government Subsidies of Sports Arenas.

By bronx book nerd. As a rabid baseball fan, I have been very happy at the building of new retro parks by baseball teams. The builders take a lot into account, and provide a lot of amenities and secondary entertainment. I was not aware, however, of the amount of public subsidy that these stadiums receive. Professor Bennett has done an outstanding job of cataloging the gouging of municipalities done by team owners, most of whom are very wealthy. This is not the way it used to be, as at the beginning of the 20th century ballparks were built and financed by private money. The owners would purchase the land by negotiating with local homeowners, pay for construction on their own and reap the benefits of ticket sales and concessions. Today, professional sports franchise owners threaten to move to another city if a new stadium is not built for them. The local governments cave in, or willingly provide the owners with what they want, and finance the stadiums through taxes on hotels and rental cars, or a very small sales tax. This last item will go unnoticed by the average taxpayer. Throughout Bennett raises the fundamental question of why government should finance the private sports industry. There seems to be no economic rationale, as economic studies that are properly done show that local benefits are marginal and even negative. The pro-subsidy studies tend to wildly inflate multiplier effects and distort other factors. The other major question that Bennett poses is about opportunity costs. If cities can come up with ways to finance a \$200 million stadium, why not use that money instead for education or public safety? The accounts of the abuse of eminent domain are disturbing, as pro-stadium advocates have no qualms about displacing solid neighborhoods that don't comply with professional planners views on what good neighborhoods look like. To be honest, the book covers just about every single arena since the 1950's that has been a beneficiary of subsidies, and at times it felt like a bit too much. However, it also seemed as if just about every story had something interesting to offer about owner or elected official's shenanigans or heroic attempts by local opponents of the subsidies. Bennett also writes throughout with humor and sarcasm, which helps to get through the thicket of arena descriptions. The book may have benefited if the description of how the pro-subsidy advocates inflated their projections was interwoven with the text of individual arena accounts. This card was held until the end of the book.

They Play, You Pay is a detailed, sometimes irreverent look at a political conundrum: despite evidence that publicly funded ballparks, stadiums, and arenas do not generate net economic growth, governments keep on taxing sales, restaurant patrons, renters of automobiles, and hotel visitors in order to build ever more elaborate cathedrals of professional sport—often in order to satisfy an owner who has threatened to move his team to greener, more subsidy-happy pastures. This book is a sweeping survey of the literature in the field, the history of such subsidies, the politics of stadium construction and franchise movement, and the prospects for a reprivatization of ballpark and stadium financing. It ties together disparate strands in a fascinating story,

examining the often colorful cases through which governments became involved in sports. These range from the well-known to the obscure—from Yankee Stadium and the Astrodome to the Brooklyn Dodgers—move to Los Angeles (to a privately built ballpark constructed upon land that had been seized via eminent domain from a mostly Mexican-American population) to such arrant giveaways as Cowboys Stadium. It examines alternatives that might lessen the pressure for public subsidies, whether the Green Bay Packers model (in which the team's owners are local stockholders) or via league expansions. It also takes a look at little-known, yet significant, episodes such as President Theodore Roosevelt's intervention in the collegiate football crisis of 1905—a move that indirectly put the federal government on the side of such basic rule changes as the legalization of the forward pass. They Play, You Play is a fresh look at a political and economic puzzle: how it came to be that Joe and Jane Sixpack in the Bronx and Dallas subsidize the Steinbrenners and Jerry Joneses of professional sport.

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About the Author James T. Bennett is Eminent Scholar and William P. Snavely Professor of Political Economy and Public Policy at George Mason University, and Director of The John M. Olin Institute for Employment Practice and Policy, where he specializes in Public Choice Theory, Political Economy, Labor Economics, and Public Policy. Previously, he served on the faculty of George Washington University. He is the author of dozens of scholarly articles and has served as editor of the Journal of Labor Research, on the board of the Journal of Austrian Economics, and as a referee for such journals as Economic Inquiry; of Economics and Statistics; Public Choice; Public Finance Quarterly; Journal of Economics and Business; and American Economic Review. He is the author or editor of more than twenty books, including From Pathology to Politics (Transaction), Unhealthy Charities (Basic Books), The Politics of American Feminism (University Press of America), Stifling Political Competition (Springer, SIPC Series), Not Invited to the Party (Springer), and The Doomsday Lobby (Springer/Copernicus).