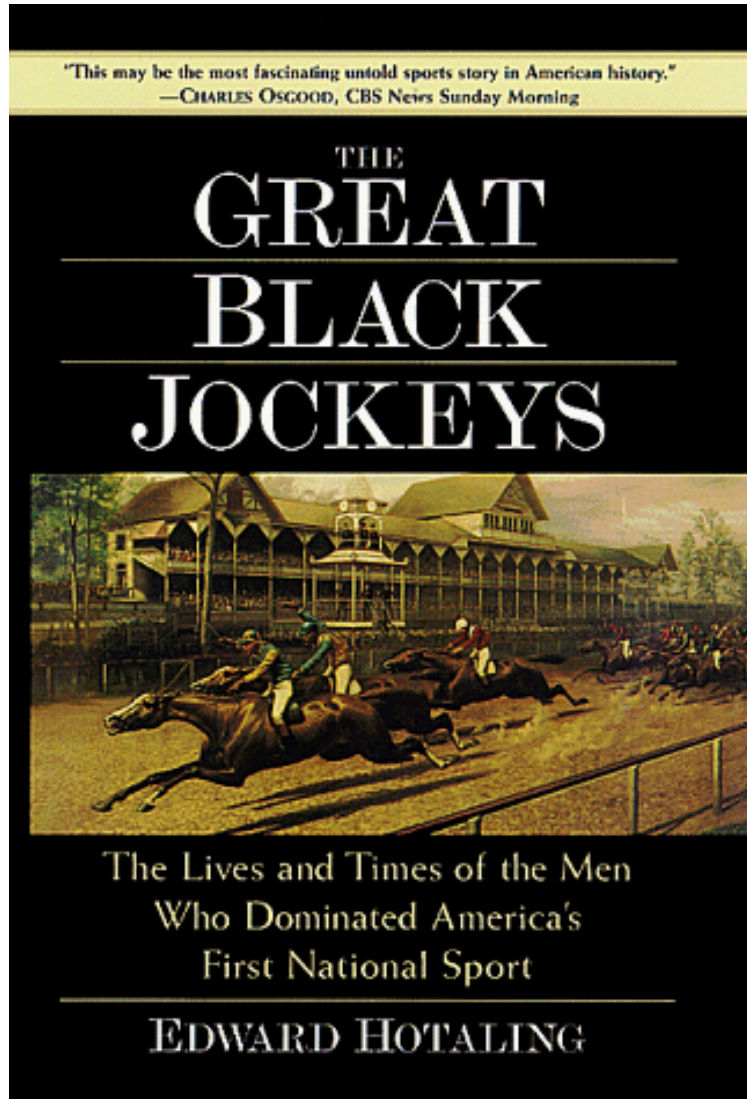


The Great Black Jockeys

Edward Hotaling

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More than a century before Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in major league baseball, black athletes were dominating America's first national sport. The sport was horse racing, and the greatest jockeys of all were slaves and the sons of slaves. Cheered by thousands of Americans in the North and South, they rode to victory in all of the major stakes, including the very first Kentucky Derby. Although their glory days ranged from the early 1700s to the turn of the 20th century, the memory of these great black jockeys was erased from history. Who were these athletes and why have their names vanished without a trace? "This may be the most fascinating untold sports story in American history. We are lucky that it is so well told now by Mr. Hotaling in his wonderfully written book." — Charles Osgood, anchor, CBS News Sunday Morning

The Great Black Jockeys is the first book about the lives and times of the forgotten men whose extraordinary skills were a wonder to behold, men with names like "Honest Ike" Murphy, Abe Hawkins, Willie Simms, Austin Curtis, Jimmy Winkfield, and dozens more. This is also a story of a young country where whole towns turned out in cleared fields to cheer and place wagers on magnificent horses and the men who rode them, and where the greatest athletes in the land were the property of others. For fleeting moments on the racecourse black riders in colorful silks tasted the glory and freedom that slavery had denied them. In *The Great Black Jockeys*, the exploits and courage of America's earliest and best athletes are finally remembered.

The most engrossing sports stories have a way of sneaking up on you. They explore issues much broader than competition, who won, and who lost; they are sports stories because they take place on the fields of play, but the light they shed illuminates much more than the athletic arena. On one level, *The Great Black Jockeys* is certainly about sports--indeed, racing was America's first national sport. But it's also about much more than that. It's an absorbing history, at times tragic, at times inspiring, of a nation in transition and the complex interrelationship between sports, society, attitudes, and race. The overriding tragedy here is that this particular story essentially ends just after the turn of the 20th century. Before that, black riders dominated the game. In slave days, race riding could be a route to freedom. It was certainly a route to fame and a share of fortune. Whether a match race for bragging rights in the field, or a leg of the prestigious Triple Crown, black riders had at least a fair shake. Isaac Murphy, whose winning percentages have never been matched, won a trio of Kentucky Derbies. Jimmy Winkfield won back-to-back Runs for the Roses in 1901 and 1902. Yet, no black rider has piloted a winner in a major American stakes race since 1909. What happened? By introducing us to a forgotten chapter in sports history and a host of deserving athletic legends sadly overlooked by time, Hotaling explores what did happen, and why a sport that witnessed blacks and whites competing as equals for so long at the highest levels suddenly locked the starting gate. The story Hotaling tells is as fascinating as it is painful, a story of opportunity unsaddled by prejudice and fear, and never significantly remounted again. "This is not black history," he makes clear. "It is not white history. It is American history." And like so much of American history, it's more complex than black and white. --Jeff Silverman

From Booklist

More than 200 years before Jackie Robinson broke the color line in professional baseball, black athletes, then slaves, dominated what was then and for a long time afterward America's most popular sport: horse racing. Black jockeys continued to be a major force in thoroughbred racing until the early part of this century, when they all but disappeared from the sport. Hotaling tells the stories of the greatest of the black riders, from Austin Curtis, who was born midway through the seventeenth century, through Jimmy Winkfield, who died in 1974. They are fascinating stories, previously untold, and they constitute a very significant contribution to the history of race and sport in America. Hotaling's politically correct explanation for the current paucity of black jockeys (racism) seems too easy and too easily arrived at, though it might be largely true. Still, one can understand Hotaling's caution: as a young reporter, he asked the questions that led Jimmy "The Greek" Snyder to utter his now-infamous remarks about black athletes--remarks that brought about the immediate destruction of Snyder's career. Dennis Dodge "This may be the most fascinating untold sports story in American history. We are lucky that it is so well told now by Mr. Hotaling in his wonderfully written book. It is more than a sports story, though. It is a human story. These were exceptional athletes who competed successfully against their white counterparts and more than held their own. Yet how many Americans today, how many racing fans even, realize that the winning jockey in the first Kentucky Derby was a black man? These African American jockeys, great as they were, were driven out of the sport and then out of history. It was as if they were never there. To read Hotaling's book is to discover important missing pages of history. Not just sports history but American history."— Charles Osgood, anchor, CBS News Sunday Morning

"Rich and masterfully written. Hotaling displays a keen sense of the interplay between culture, power, and history as he uncovers the enormous experiences and achievements of African American jockeys and restores them to their rightful 'space' in sports history. What emerges clearly in this work is a key element of the American narrative—that is, how the most ordinary lives are made extraordinary through an individual's sense of agency."— Anne Butler, Ph.D., director, The Center of Excellence for the Study of Kentucky African Americans, Kentucky State University

"The Great Black Jockeys is a fascinating journey into a little-known part of African American and American sports history."— Ira Berlin, professor of history, University of Maryland

"Congratulations on your achievement. It is a real contribution."— Henry Louis Gates, chair, Afro-American Studies Department,

