

No Games Finally Gets Some Love (and Ink)

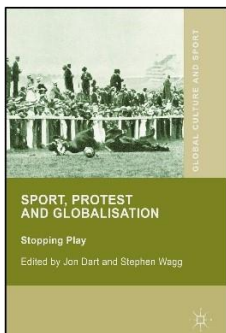
In 2011 No Games Chicago was given its only recognition – when they were honored by the Chicago Audubon Society with its Audubon Protector of the Environment Award. “Held every two years in Spring, Chicago Audubon Society (CAS) honors people and organizations who have made valuable contributions to conservation, the protection of migratory birds and other wildlife, and have helped to conserve, preserve and enhance the varied habitats and open spaces of the greater Chicago region.”

[\[https://www.chicagoaudubon.org/environmental-awards\]](https://www.chicagoaudubon.org/environmental-awards)



Joan Levin, Rachel Goodstein, Tom Tresser, Merle Tresser, John Viramontes, Pat Yeray, Karen Kass (not present Bob Quellos, Francesca Rodriguez, the Insider)

In 2016 Kostas Zervas published his account of No Games Chicago in an article “Chicago 2016 Versus Rio 2016: Olympic ‘Winners’ and ‘Losers’” in the collection *Sport, Protest and Globalisation – Stopping Play*, edited by sports and Olympic scholars Jon Dart and Stephen Wagg. [\[https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-981-16-5094-9\]](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-981-16-5094-9)



He concludes: “Beyond its academic significance, the case of Chicago 2016 bid reveals how grassroots activity, if unifying around a single cause, despite lack of financial and personal resources and limited communication channels, can take on, and beat, a very powerful organization (IOC), its supporters and the world’s most powerful man (US president Barack Obama)...We owe much to those academics who write against the mainstream, and more importantly, to those individual activists in the hosting and bidding cities, whose stand against the Olympic machine, its authoritarianism and censorship. Those who form activist groups and coalitions and raise their voices against the Olympic Industry embody the Marxian notion of ‘praxis’- acts which shape and change the world.”

The No Games crew was glad to see this piece, published in the Chicago Reader, on August 3, 2016. Ben Joravsky was the only Chicago journalist who worked for a mainstream media platform who had consistently and persistently called out the Bid as a terrible idea. His column was headlined “These gold-medal dissenters stood up to Daley’s Olympic boondoggle dreams” and was sub-headlined “Whereas most of the city’s financial and civic elite were ready to lead us off the financial cliff.” [<https://chicagoreader.com/columns-opinion/these-gold-medal-dissenters-stood-up-to-daleys-olympic-boondoggle-dreams> - Illustration by Bobby Sims]



“In the summer of 2009, at the height of Mayor Daley's push to host the 2016 Summer Olympics, I had a conversation with an alderman that resonates with me to this day. Under pressure from the International Olympic Committee, Daley had just strong-armed the City Council into unanimously voting to write what amounted to a blank check to cover all cost overruns for hosting the games.

Yes, the alderman said, he knew it would probably bankrupt the city. But he supported the bid in public and voted for the blank check anyway because he didn't want to upset the mayor or look like the local version of unpatriotic. "Besides," he predicted, "Rio's getting the games." "And if you're wrong?" I asked. He paused and said, "We're screwed."

Well, it turns out the alderman was correct on two fronts: Rio did get the games—the opening ceremony is Friday. (Oh, where did those seven years go?) And we would have been screwed had the IOC awarded the games to us.

If you recall, Daley insisted it would cost no more than \$3.8 billion to host the games. Last I saw, the estimate for the Rio games was \$14.4 billion. Hey, Chicago: imagine paying for that baby with your property tax bills.

My aldermanic buddy was by no means the only silently skeptical Olympic flag-waver back then. And the perverse thing is, they all knew Daley's Olympic dreams were folly. They knew they would saddle us with unspeakable debt. And yet, like that alderman, our corporate, civic, and media elite signed on anyway. Let's face it, folks: When it came to Daley, everybody in Chicago was a rubber stamp.

Well, not everybody. At this point, I'd like to distribute some symbolic gold medals to the few intrepid souls who had the courage to tell the mayor the Olympics were a terrible idea—to tell the emperor he had no clothes.

Maybe by doing so I can encourage a few other brave dissenters to break from the ranks the next time another mayor proposes a really bad idea.

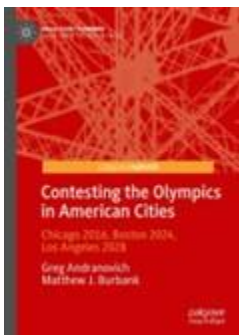
No Games Chicago: A coalition of activists, led by Tom Tresser and Bob Quellos, that questioned the city's estimates and showed up at hearings to debate Daley's boosters. The group even sent a delegation to Europe to petition the IOC to vote against Chicago's bid. I'm pretty sure the No Games crowd got no credit for turning the tide against the games — you wouldn't want to encourage other citizens to think they could actually beat City Hall from time to time. We knew Daley's Olympic dreams would saddle us with unspeakable debt. And yet our corporate, civic, and media elite signed on anyway. But Daley took them seriously—at least, he had undercover cops spy on the group. In 2015, after Mick Dumke and I reported on the spying, Quellos filed a Freedom of Information Act request, asking the police department to release its files on No Games. More than a year has passed and

Quellos is still in court, fighting city lawyers to force the police to turn over those files. In some ways, you might say the city's Olympic bid is still wasting your tax dollars.”

Ben also lifted up the long-time human rights activist Pat Hill and Chicago’s cops who protested back in April of 2009. He also reserved some praise for his own employer, the Chicago Reader.

“**The Reader:** I know you're thinking—the fix is in! But consider this: As far as I can tell, the *Reader* was the only media outlet in town that did not contribute to Chicago 2016, the not-for-profit committee Mayor Daley created to oversee the bid. You can look it up on Chicago 2016's . It looks like every media outlet kicked in a little something to the Olympic cause—upwards of \$100,000 in some cases. That included the *Sun-Times*, the *Tribune*, and the major TV stations. In 2009, Ben Eason, who then owned the *Reader*, told me it wasn't principled opposition that kept him from contributing to the cause. It's just that no one asked him. For all I know, he might have thrown in with all the other media lemmings as they led us off the cliff if only Daley's fund-raisers had called...Anyway, enjoy your gold medals, fellow dissidents. As No Games activist Francesca Rodriguez put it: You "medaled without doping." As always, I wish there were more of you out there.

The No Games leadership was grateful to Ben and his plain speaking and hard-hitting reporting. They often expressed the wish there more Ben Joravskys out there.



The most complete academic treatment of the Battle for the Bid came out in 2021, twelve years later. *Contesting the Olympics in American Cities: Chicago 2016, Boston 2024, Los Angeles 2028* [<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-981-16-5094-9>] is a thorough investigation of the anti-Games organizing in these three cities. The authors are [Greg Andranovich](#), Professor of Political Science at Cal State Los Angeles and [Matthew Burbank](#), Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies and Faculty and Professor of Political Science at the University of Utah.

They conclude:

“Efforts by community groups to negotiate benefits for their residents from the promise of Olympic-related development are not uncommon in the public processes surrounding Olympic bids in American cities. What was more notable about the case of the Chicago bid for the 2016 Olympics, however, was the creation of the No Games Chicago opposition. While the concerns of NGC were firmly rooted in mitigating the impact of the 2016 Olympics on their neighborhoods and their city, the creation of NGC was also something more. This organization not only opposed the Chicago bid because its members feared the negative consequences of holding a mega-event, but this grassroots group blazed a new trail by explicitly raising issues about the IOC, the host city contract, and the promises of the local bid committee. The actions of NGC to raise difficult questions about Olympic finances and who would pay helped to shift the conversation about the nature of the Chicago bid. Furthermore, NGC also developed innovative oppositional tactics, such as attending IOC meetings in protest, and developed connections to activists in other cities such as Vancouver, London, and Rio de Janeiro. As such, No Games Chicago marked an important transition in Olympic opposition.”

No Games Chicago was pleased to see scholars Andranovich and Burbank laying out the major elements of the Battle for the Bid and lifting up their work as impactful and transformational. The No Gamers often said that’s exactly how it felt when they were in the thick of it.