



PROJECT MUSE®

---

*Damn Yankees: Twenty-Four Major League Writers on the  
World's Most Loved (and Hated) Team* by Rob Fleder (review)

Adi Angel

NINE: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture, Volume 21, Number 2,  
Spring 2013, pp. 152-154 (Review)

Published by University of Nebraska Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/nin.2013.0019>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/520262>

has its place in this text. But while the interview appears to have yielded some interesting information, the way in which it is presented, in the form of an unedited transcript, makes that information difficult to locate and process. A full page-and-a-half anecdote detailing Kiuchi's unfortunate refusal of an offer by the Red Sox to become Daisuke Matsuzaka's translator—as well as how “Mat was in the same office with me and that's when we started talking about ‘you know it's quite interesting to see how some random things happen with the globalization of Major League Baseball’”—precedes any statement by Horn other than, “Oh, okay” (97). Although explaining the genesis of the project to an interviewee may be a good way to commence an interview, it is not germane to this portion of the text, especially when presented in this manner.

Although *Packaging Baseball* attempts to take on a subject much in need of study—a subject which led its authors to say, “Okay, let's write an academic book on this, so we could talk about things that many people, typical baseball fans, were not really talking about” (97)—this work fails. This is particularly unfortunate, as its failure leaves a gap in the literature which it ought to have filled.



**Rob Fleder. *Damn Yankees: Twenty-Four Major League Writers on the World's Most Loved (and Hated) Team*. New York: Ecco, 2012. 304 pp. Cloth, \$27.99.**

*Adi Angel*

Rob Fleder invited twenty-four writers to contribute their feelings about the Yankees without devolving into “the never-ending bar-stool chatter that sustains baseball fans,” focusing instead on the “idea of the Yankees” (2). As a result, Fleder brings together the memories and remembrances of many notable contemporary authors (many of whom are familiar names from *The New Yorker* and *Sports Illustrated*), including Jane Leavy, Colum McCann, Pete Dexter, and Roy Blount, Jr. While many of the stories are overwhelmingly friendly to the home team, Fleder has compiled a selection that ranges from the introspective to the genuinely funny, from the historical to the sentimental. The result: a collection that simultaneously seeks to dismantle essentialist conceptions of the Yankees, while casually reifying many of the stereotypes, tales, and glories of Yankee lore and fandom. Accessible, funny, and delight-

fully self-aware, *Damn Yankees: Twenty-Four Major League Writers on the World's Most Loved (and Hated) Team* appeals to baseball fans of all stripes, not just the "bleacher creatures."

The contributors to this volume were asked to reflect on the Yankees conceptually, allowing for visceral and, at times, honest and funny reflections on the game of baseball as a whole. Invariably, the trope of baseball as a representation of America weaves itself into the stories, but not always sentimentally. Reading this collection, two things become clear: it is almost impossible to talk about the Yankees without eliciting an impassioned response to "The Boss," George Steinbrenner, and it is equally unimaginable to talk about the Yankees without talking about the city they call home. New York establishes the binary language upon which fandom relies: it is always about *us* and *them*. Steinbrenner, too, represents a challenge to the cognitive dissonance of the average Yankee fan: he is *us*, but throughout this collection he is unequivocally *them*. Enshrined in perpetuity in the House That He Built, the legacy of the "brigand shipbuilder from Cleveland" (51) hangs tenuously between the memories of those of us who survived him and the annals of Yankee lore yet unwritten. Steinbrenner's presence in all but a handful of the narratives collected here should, then, come as no surprise.

While the repeated references to Steinbrenner offer a glimpse into the id of the modern Yankee fan, the strength of this collection lies in the independence given to the contributors. Jane Leavy opens her contribution, "Sully and the Mick," with an anecdote about how she listed Frank Sullivan as dead in her Mickey Mantle biography. "Mickey murdered the ball, sure," Leavy writes, "but I killed Frank" (132). Dan Barry reminds the reader that there was a time when being a Yankee fan meant developing a keen sense of humility, as they "fac[ed] two opponents every time they stepped onto the field: the American League team of the moment and the Yankees team of the past" (210). Humor and healing go hand-in-hand, the past ever present, and each author in this collection navigates the past with an astute awareness of the present.

While it is, perhaps, unfair to single out any one of these entries, Will Leitch's "An Innocent Abroad" captures with nearly perfect candor the message behind this collection. Leitch, like many other New Yorkers, is a transplant, and his experience of leaving home and moving to New York is recounted humorously through the sights and sounds of the bleachers of the Cathedral in the Bronx. With Mark Twain's shadow looming throughout, Leitch writes of the "communal comedic concertos" (127) with the erudite ear of a fan. Ultimately, Leitch reminds the reader of the real reason New York flourishes: the blue collar community that calls New York City home and that doesn't easily fit the narrative of the vibrant city of wealth. Ultimately, there

are reasons to laugh with, and at, the absurdity of grown men with painted stomachs. Somewhere along the line, the Yankees became synonymous with Steinbrenner, with the hyperreality of excess, with the money and power and win-at-all-costs attitude, rather than with the people who fill the cheap seats. Leitch reminds the reader that it isn't that simple.

Rob Fleder brings his years of editorial experience with *Sports Illustrated* to bear in *Damn Yankees* as he weaves the varied submissions into a narrative that evokes the entire emotional spectrum. The humorous tone is often supplanted by the sonorous facts of life: the passing of legends, the fears of uncertain times, the mistakes that yield friendships. There will always be new ways for people to find fault with the Yankees or with the inequitable system that has, at times, seemed to favor the large-market teams. There will always be something to be said about a city, a team, or a player with which people will take issue. Ultimately, this is where Fleder's collection is most successful. Worthwhile reading for any fan, *Damn Yankees* succeeds in finding the ground between a celebration and a critique, all the while making accessible the bright lights, the big city, and the stories behind the pinstripes.



**Charlie Bevis. *Jimmy Collins: A Baseball Biography*. Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2012. 238 pp. Paper, \$29.95.**

*Ron Kates*

In the wake of Ron Santo's passing, Bill James offered a spirited endorsement for the Cubs third baseman's inclusion in the Baseball Hall of Fame. Among other arguments, James posited that Santo's offensive and defensive statistics outshone a number of already-inducted third basemen, specifically, and ballplayers in general. James and other baseball writers often single out turn-of-the-century star Jimmy Collins as a prime example of a player—a third baseman to boot—whose reputation outshone his actual accomplishments, leading critics to emphasize Santo's merit in competition. In his biography of Collins, Charlie Bevis documents not just Collins's playing career, but also his business acumen, devoting a good portion of the book to discussing how Collins negotiated contracts to his favor, then invested heavily in real estate throughout his hometown of Buffalo, New York. Despite some redundancy in emphasizing Collins's success off the field, Bevis presents a certain divergence from the typical trajectory of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century