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The Devil's Snake Curve — A Book About Baseball

Mike Sonksen · Thursday, October 2nd, 2014

For baseball fans this has been a big week. Southern Californians are excited that both the Dodgers and Angels won their respective divisions. Then there's the retirement of future Hall of Famer New York Yankee Derek Jeter and his classy farewell. He went out in style getting an RBI single in his final at bat. Furthermore, the Kansas Royals made the playoffs for the first time in 29 years. All of the reasons and more are why the book, *The Devil's Snake Curve* by Josh Ostergaard is a book for the times.

This unique book from Coffee House Press offers an alternative American history through the lens of 150-years of baseball. The brief episodes which make up the heart of the book tell a story about baseball very few know. Meticulously researched, this book reveals the shadow history of baseball connecting colonialism, capitalism and militarism in ways that most baseball fans and casual observers would never realize.

What's more is the author draws many of these connections directly to the legacy of the New York Yankees. He writes, "I have come to believe the history of baseball is a history of questions, and anecdotes and events that raise still more questions. Its boundaries have dissolved and all the teams have merged into one that matter more than the rest—the Yankees."

Among many anecdotes, Ostergaard reveals that the former Yankees owner from the mid-20th Century, Del Webb, was also a contractor that built the first Japanese-American internment camp during World War Two. There are countless stories in the book about the dark side of the Yankees, whether he's writing about Babe Ruth, Billy Martin, or their former owner, George Steinbrenner. The author grew up a fan of the Kansas City Royals and admiring their franchise player, George Brett. He compares the Royals to the Yankees and ruminates on why smaller cities have not had the same level of success as the Bronx Bombers. In between his memories of watching the Royals, he also includes a few of his own memories playing baseball in his youth.

The author composes *The Devil's Snake Curve* in an episodic approach that follows more of a collage format rather than a direct narrative. In his end notes he reveals other influential books and musical albums that have followed this format, like *Paul's Boutique* by the Beastie Boys and *Holy Land* by DJ Waldie. He explains his rationale behind using this approach. He writes, "I became fixated on the notion that narrative itself was somehow dictatorial and claustrophobic, and that reading a traditional story was akin to spending a weekend in a cave with Joseph Stalin."

The nonlinear narrative employed by the author works very well with the subject matter and the marriage of the personal and political that define this book make it one of the most fascinating books ever written about baseball.

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