



The Poet: The Life and Los Angeles Times of Jim Murray

Steven Travers

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Forget Ring Lardner, Grantland Rice, and Jerome Holtzman. Jim Murray of the *Los Angeles Times* was the single greatest sports columnist who ever lived—period. Known for his highly descriptive metaphors and phrasing—e.g., “a strike zone the size of Hitler’s heart”—Murray was a poet. *Time* magazine sent the Connecticut native to Hollywood in 1948 to cover the movies. But it was at the *Los Angeles Times* (1961–1998) that Murray made his mark. The paper had experienced tremendous growth, and Murray had free rein to cover virtually any topic in his sports column. He defended pitcher Don Drysdale against accusations of poor sportsmanship, waxed rhapsodic about Willie Mays, and praised light-heavyweight champion Archie Moore as “the Rembrandt of boxing.” But Murray’s influence was greatest when he spoke out against segregated college football in the South. After being subjected to several of Murray’s public scoldings, the University of Alabama finally allowed Bear Bryant to erase the school’s long-standing color line. Steven Travers provides an in-depth look at a man whose influence went far beyond the baseball diamond and the boxing ring.

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