FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Sports & Recreation

Baseball and the American Dream: Race, Class, Gender, and the National Pastime
Robert Elias, editor
M.E. Sharpe
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In his preface, Elias notes that baseball "offers a common denominator that cuts across conflicting ideologies. Baseball provides and also illustrates some of the best that America has to offer. It also features some of the more disturbing characteristics of society."

Elias has assembled a collection of essays on how different demographic groups fit into the "dream" concept via America's game. In three categories, the book examines "Dreams and Diversity: Race, Ethnicity, and Baseball"; "Material Dreams: Class, Economics, and Baseball"; and "Gendered Dreams: Women and Baseball."

As with any anthology, there are varying degrees of value. Some contributions are less scholarly, but that seems to enhance their credibility. For example, almost fifty years after Jackie Robinson broke the "color line," Dusty Baker and Orlando Cepeda wrote eloquently of their difficulties fitting in during the pre-civil rights era as, respectively, African-American and Latino players. Other essays consider the love of baseball by America's Japanese community, even during their unjust internment during the Second World War. Curiously, there is nothing recognizing the contributions of other immigrant groups.

The section on economic aspects concentrates on how much the game has changed in the half-century following Bobby Thompson's dramatic "shot heard round the world" in 1951. Historian Jules Tygiel notes the chauvinism of such a phrase: it reflected "America's post-war arrogance" because it assumed "that people across the globe cared about all things American, including [baseball]." Many of the contributors agree that the game has moved from one of a community-based business, in which the players lived among their fans, to today's free-agency culture with mind-boggling salaries and frequent personnel movement. We no longer root for teams, but for individuals.

Sports in general, and baseball in particular, has always been a guy thing. So it is a

welcome surprise to encounter the essays presenting the contributions of women to the history of the game—as fans, as players (including a piece by a former member of the All American Girls Baseball League on the veracity of A League of Their Own), and otherwise challenging the exclusion of women from America's Game.

Among the writers represented in this enlightening book are Leonard Koppett and Roger Kahn, two of the game's greatest sportswriters, and Andrei Codrescu, a Romanian émigré who used baseball as a way of "becoming an American."

Ron Kaplan