



The Poet

Steven Travers

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Forget Ring Lardner, Grantland Rice, and Jerome Holtzman. According to author Steven Travers, Jim Murray of the *Los Angeles Times* was the greatest sports columnist who ever lived—period. Known for his highly descriptive metaphors and phrasing—a strike zone the size of Hitler's heart, so painfully honest he could spot George Washington two answers in a lie detector test, the only pitcher I know who thinks of Homer as a Greek poet and not a lucky swing by a banjo hitter—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. Like the city, the paper was experiencing tremendous growth, and he was given free rein to cover virtually any topic in his sports column. Murray 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 his 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 longstanding 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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