

***New Jersey Fan Club: Artists and Writers Celebrate the Garden State*****Edited by Kerri Sullivan****New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2022****316 pages****ISBN: 9781978825604****DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14713/njs.v9i1.320>**

*New Jersey Fan Club: Artists and Writers Celebrate the Garden State* edited by Kerri Sullivan is a diverse look at New Jersey, the state everyone loves to hate. The book takes on and often breaks stereotypes in an attempt to define a state that, from the essays, illustrations, and photographs the book contains, ultimately cannot be fit into neat parameters. The book developed from Sullivan's collaborative Instagram account, where contributors share photographs and stories about the diverse places and experiences they have encountered around New Jersey. These various perspectives "celebrate the state's natural, cultural, and historical treasures through the eyes of an ever-changing group of residents and transplants." *New Jersey Fan Club* takes the same collaborative approach; the book's main argument is that "there is no singular New Jersey experience." The book is primarily essay, though the topics vary from lived experiences to the state's history. The collection also includes graphic narrative, photography, and interviews as contributors navigate what it means to be from the Garden State.

The collection aptly begins with Matthew Taub's essay "Why Do They Hate Us?" Taub interviews a cultural historian, a journalist, and an artist to answer this question. He argues that New Jersey's "infamy is driven by New Yorkers"; artists and entertainers often knock New Jersey for not being New York. As well, Taub argues that because New Jersey is not New York, "there is a fixed point at which New York's energy stops and New Jersey's begins." Often seen as "flyover country," the reality is that New Jersey is a complex and diverse state. This, however, has not translated to other parts of the country for whom New Jersey is the butt of jokes. Taub also discusses New Jersey's reputation as having "no history," despite the truth that New Jersey is

steeped in history from Native American place names to its Revolutionary War contributions and beyond. Finally Taub contends that New Jersey's artists and entertainers are "bigger" than those of New York: "think Clarence Clemons's immense saxophone versus the Strokes' wiry guitars. . . ." Perhaps from New Jersey's bad reputation comes the need to define a place through art and music in an immense way, whereas New York is already defined as "*the big city.*"

Several of the essays define the state by experience: going down the shore in the summers or going to one of New Jersey's many malls or diners, but "On Immigration and Sandwiches: The Story of One Beloved Restaurant, One Central New Jersey Suburb, and One Child of Immigrants" by Pooja Makhijani explores the infamous New Jersey debate—does Central Jersey exist? In a state that is divided into north and south, those living in Central Jersey often are forgotten. Makhijani begins by outlining her childhood growing up in Edison, New Jersey, and her love of submarine sandwiches from the Tastee Sub Shop. (The Tastee Sub Shop was visited by President Obama in 2010.) She ties the history of the submarine sandwich, a sandwich of immigrants, to the area's history as a working-class town. In the mid-twentieth century, immigrants, mostly Italian, Irish, and Polish, flocked to Edison to work in the assembly plants and brought their cuisine with them. Beginning in the 1970s, "a wave of Asian immigrants arrived in New Jersey as a result of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. . . ." Today, Edison's dominant population is Asian. Makhijani argues that Central Jersey is frequently forgotten because it has always been where immigrants have settled. According to U.S. Census data, "the I-95 Corridor shimmers orange, purple, and green, signifying 'Black,' 'Hispanic or Latino,' and 'Asian,' in stark contrast to the map's wide swaths of blue, marking 'White,' in the northwest and southwest." Makhijani argues that "racism often makes the most obvious invisible." So, while the controversy is still one that New Jersey grapples with, Makhijani shines a new light onto the debate.

Another controversy of New Jersey is what to call the processed meat known by some in the state as Taylor ham and by others as pork roll. “Garden State Breakfast Pie” by Stacey Mei Yan Fong is a recipe and interview that marries the various sides of the debate. Fong developed recipes for each state in a project titled *50 pies, 50 states*. Fong “was in the process of applying for [her] green card” when she decided to “bake fifty pies, each one representing each state and its culinary trends or history.” She had visited New Jersey several times and was familiar with the state’s debate. The recipe calls for four slices of Taylor ham and four slices of Case pork roll, uniting the various parts of the state that refer to the meat by different names. While I’m not sure the breakfast pie will end the argument, it is a tribute to New Jersey’s favorite breakfast staple.

The collection has many essays that discuss the history of the state. “A History of New Jersey, in Artifacts” by Brittney Ingersoll is a photographic history that captures artifacts from the battleship *New Jersey* to a letter from Frank Sinatra to the Hoboken Public Library. “New Jersey Black History Sites” by Jacquinn Sinclair highlights sites such as stops on the Underground Railroad, African American Heritage Museums, Black cemeteries, and Black sporting venues such as Hinchliffe Stadium in Paterson. Popular in the 1930s, the 10,000-seat stadium was “the home stadium to the New York Black Yankees and the New York Cubans.” Michael C. Gabriele’s “The Golden Age of Racing” discusses the history of cycling in New Jersey and its own venue, the Newark Velodrome, an “oval track with a seating capacity of 12,500—opened on April 16, 1911,” which was the “center of racing in America.”

While this review cannot discuss all the wonderful essays and artwork in the book, *New Jersey Fan Club* is successful in that it tackles the issues of the state in several ways. The attention to personal narrative, especially, allows the reader to see the state through the various lenses each writer adopts. The essays and photography telling the history of the state offer the reader not only

interesting facts, but a way to center New Jersey in a larger context beyond its state lines. Because of this, the book is a much-needed contribution to studies of New Jersey. Ultimately the book delivers on its claim that there is no one New Jersey experience; rather, the history, the culture, and the controversies that make New Jersey make it a special place to call home. Residents of the state will find themselves in many of the narratives presented, and those not lucky enough to call New Jersey home will walk away with a newfound respect for the Garden State.

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