

Brendan C. Boyd and Fred Harris, *The Great American Baseball Card Flipping, Trading and Bubble Gum Book*. New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1975. Illustrated. 272 pp., \$2.95.

Actually, the illustrations are reproductions of old baseball cards, reprinted with the permission of Topps Chewing Gum, Inc. Indeed, the book itself is an illustration—a colorful picture of the adolescent lives of the authors, viewed through a catcher's mask, which relates impressions gained by accumulating almost every baseball card printed over the years. The opening salvo of the book consists of a nostalgic litany of Eisenhower era events and names, which presumably was designed to get the reader in the appropriate mood for a sporting journey through the past. It is a punctuated journey, one which comments stingingly and sometimes rather humorously on the artifacts that are baseball cards.

That baseball cards are artifacts is an interesting concept in and of itself. The entertaining chapter on the rise of the Topps Company and the accompanying wealth accumulated by the Shorin family indicates that many young, impressionable Americans used their " . . . well-established line of credit which meant getting a nickel or dime from your mother, . . ." (p. 27) to stockpile their own wealth: an ingrained knowledge of baseball lore and trivia—a knowledge that is peculiarly American; a knowledge that persists to the extent that many former card-flippers distinctly remember that Don Mossi did indeed have 4:00 shadow. even though they forget anniversaries, deadlines, and other mundane issues. The '60's generation can sing all of the Beatles' lyrics; the '50's folks recall that Smokey Burgess was fat: "Not baseball fat like Mickey Lolich

or Early Wynn. But FAT fat. Like the mailman or your Uncle Dwight.” (p. 195).

The meat of the book is 200 pages of “Profiles,” thumbnail sketches of hundreds of ballplayers and their idiosyncratic careers. The *Boston Globe* thought enough of this part of the book to reprint a portion of it as a cover story in its Sunday magazine section a few months back. While none of the biographical tidbits are “heavy” history, they are good examples of the social history of baseball. For example, a further understanding of the plight of man will not be gained by analyzing the fact that “Al Zarilla is the only player in the history of the American League to hit two triples in one inning.” (p. 178). Yet, it happened, and to Al Zarilla fans (and undoubtedly to Al himself) it is an important historical event which deserves notice.

The few minor errors, such as spelling Nelson Chittum’s last name as Chitholm, calling Bronco Horvath “Bruno” and adding an “h” to Tito Francona’s last name, are to be expected in a work of this type and do not detract from the overall quality of the effort. In fact, with the amazingly accurate bulk of statistics, the authors are to be credited for their diligence.

The arrival and popularity of such a book may open innovative areas of study. For example, did baseball cards, football cards, and the like help shape young minds? Can cards be seriously considered as historical artifacts? And, perhaps most importantly, can the information on the backs of the cards be analyzed to determine if they aided or hindered the development of reading skills, values, prejudices, and world-views? We get the impression that some kids did little but read capsulized biographies. Were they well written? Did they teach good grammar? Did they spur on budding mathematicians?

The book has been published in both hard and soft covers and is unlikely to become dated, by its very nature. It will probably have sequels and may even be used in American sport history courses to illustrate yet another of the many social history phenomena included in the realm of Sport.

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