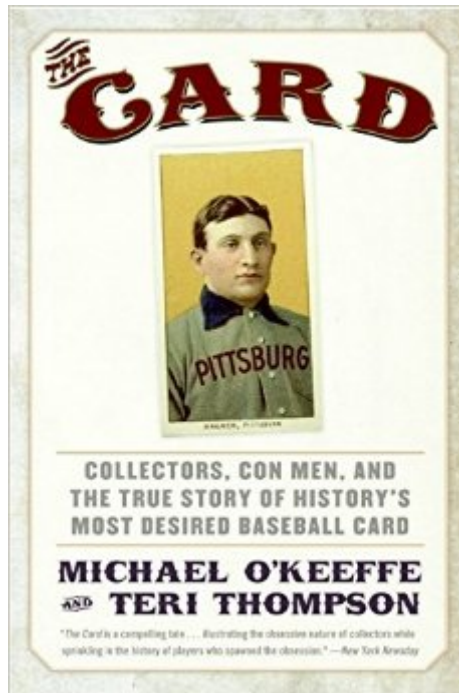


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The Card: Collectors, Con Men, And The True Story Of History's Most Desired Baseball Card



Synopsis

Only a few dozen T206 Wagners are known to still exist, having been released in limited numbers just after the turn of the twentieth century. Most, with their creases and stains, look like they've been around for nearly one hundred years. But oneâThe Cardâappears to have defied the travails of time. Its sharp corners and still-crisp portrait make it the single-most famousâand most desiredâbaseball card on the planet, valued today at more than two million dollars. It has transformed a simple hobby into a billion-dollar industry that is at times as lawless as the Wild West. Everything about The Card, which has made men wealthy as well as poisoned lifelong relationships, is fraught with controversyâfrom its uncertain origins to the nagging possibility that it might not be exactly as it seems. In this intriguing, eye-opening, and groundbreaking look at a uniquely American obsession, award-winning investigative reporters Michael O'Keeffe and Teri Thompson follow The Card's trail from a Florida flea market to the hands of the world's most prominent collectors. The Card sheds a fascinating new light on a world of counterfeiters, con men, and the people who profit from what used to be a pastime for kids.

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Customer Reviews

It is the most valuable piece of cardboard in the whole world: the T206 Honus Wagner PSA 8 NM-MT. It was printed in 1909 to be included in cigarettes from the American Tobacco Company, and shows a stiff and blocky young man with his hair parted in the middle, with a "Pittsburg" [sic] shirt buttoned all the way up. It isn't much to look at, but it was most recently sold to an anonymous collector for over two million dollars. This is all true, but also it is unbelievable; there must be

something wrong here somewhere. And there is something wrong, all over the place in the world of sports collectibles, according to the story in The Card: Collectors, Con Men, and the True Story of History's Most Desired Baseball Card (Morrow) by sports journalists and investigators Michael O'Keefe and Teri Thompson. You don't have to be interested in sports or collectibles to find this book amusing and enlightening, as it profiles collectors and their obsession with accumulation, and as it casts doubt on the integrity of many aspects of the enormous sport collectible market. The authors admit that "Wagner's baseball card seems to have become more significant to twenty-first century baseball fans than Wagner himself." That's really too bad, for Wagner was a fine baseball player, inviting comparison with Babe Ruth and Ty Cobb, both of whom were selected with Wagner as inaugural entries into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1939. Cigarette companies in the 1880s started putting them into packs of ten cigarettes. Honus Wagner is the rarest card of the 1909 - 1911 set produced by the American Tobacco Company; There are around fifty of Honus Wagner's cards, each of them valuable, but most in poor condition.

Now that Bill Mastro has pleaded guilty to fraud and admitted trimming the Gretzky PSA 8 Wagner card, the book is a bit dated. But the book is still an interesting read that can be picked up for just a couple dollars. I have been a pre-war card collector for about 15 years, but only recently picked up this book. At just over 200 pages before the notes section, the book is a quick read and can easily be finished in a day or two. The book essentially drifts among three different topics -- the PSA 8 Wagner card specifically, a history of the card collecting industry and a profile of Wagner's career and place in baseball history. One point I disagree with the author about is the premise that Wagner would be almost completely unknown today were it not for his T206 card. Author Michael O'Keefe goes so far as to claim that Wagner would be almost completely forgotten today, like other Hall of Famers Tim Lincecum, Mike "King" Kelly and Roger Bresnahan, were it not for his T206 card. Sure, the card has helped Wagner's eternal fame. But he is also an inner circle Hall of Famer; Bill James rated Wagner as the second best player of all-time in his most recent ranking of players. Even if the T206 Wagner card was not scarce relative to the rest of the set, he would still be a very famous name in baseball history. I also thought O'Keefe wasted some space in the book by devoting a section to scammers John Cobb and Ray Edwards and their efforts to convince the card collecting community that their fake T206 Wagner is real. The history of baseball cards in the book can be found in more detail in Dave Jamieson's "Mint Condition" book. But I did learn some things about Wagner the man in this book. The recollections from Wagner's granddaughter in this book were interesting.

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