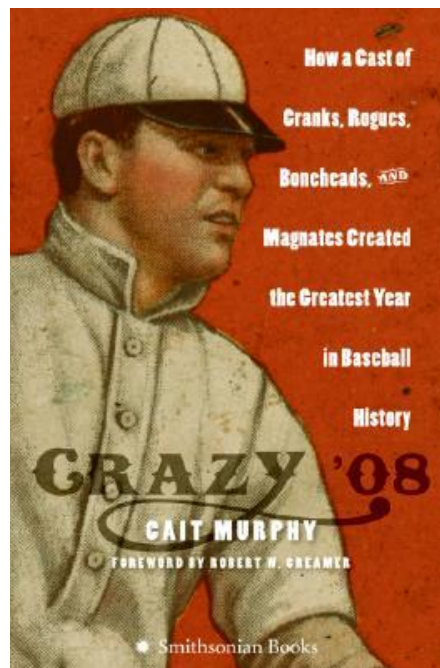




Crazy '08: How a Cast of Cranks, Rogues, Boneheads, and Magnates Created the Greatest Year in Baseball History

Cait Murphy

Download now

Read Online ➔

Crazy '08: How a Cast of Cranks, Rogues, Boneheads, and Magnates Created the Greatest Year in Baseball History

Cait Murphy

Crazy '08: How a Cast of Cranks, Rogues, Boneheads, and Magnates Created the Greatest Year in Baseball History Cait Murphy

From the perspective of 2007, the unintentional irony of Chance's boast is manifest—these days, the question is when will the Cubs ever win a game they have to have. In October 1908, though, no one would have laughed: The Cubs were, without doubt, baseball's greatest team—the first dynasty of the 20th century.

Crazy '08 recounts the 1908 season—the year when Peerless Leader Frank Chance's men went toe to toe to toe with John McGraw and Christy Mathewson's New York Giants and Honus Wagner's Pittsburgh Pirates in the greatest pennant race the National League has ever seen. The American League has its own three-cornered pennant fight, and players like Cy Young, Ty Cobb, Walter Johnson, and the egregiously crooked Hal Chase ensured that the junior circuit had its moments. But it was the National League's—and the Cubs'—year.

Crazy '08, however, is not just the exciting story of a great season. It is also about the forces that created modern baseball, and the America that produced it. In 1908, crooked pols run Chicago's First Ward, and gambling magnates control the Yankees. Fans regularly invade the field to do handstands or argue with the ump; others shoot guns from rickety grandstands prone to burning. There are anarchists on the loose and racial killings in the town that made Lincoln. On the flimsiest of pretexts, General Abner Doubleday becomes a symbol of Americanism, and baseball's own anthem, "Take Me Out to the Ballgame," is a hit.

Picaresque and dramatic, 1908 is a season in which so many weird and wonderful things happen that it is somehow unsurprising that a hairpiece, a swarm of gnats, a sudden bout of lumbago, and a disaster down in the mines all play a role in its outcome. And sometimes the events are not so wonderful at all. There are several deaths by baseball, and the shadow of corruption creeps closer to the heart of baseball—the honesty of the game itself. Simply put, 1908 is the year that baseball grew up.

Oh, and it was the last time the Cubs won the World Series.

Destined to be as memorable as the season it documents, *Crazy '08* sets a new standard for what a book about baseball can be.

Crazy '08: How a Cast of Cranks, Rogues, Boneheads, and Magnates Created the Greatest Year in Baseball History Details

Date : Published March 13th 2007 by Smithsonian (first published March 1st 2007)

ISBN : 9780060889371

Author : Cait Murphy

Format : Hardcover 384 pages

Genre : Sports, Baseball, Sports and Games, History, Nonfiction

 [Download Crazy '08: How a Cast of Cranks, Rogues, Boneheads ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Crazy '08: How a Cast of Cranks, Rogues, Bonehea ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online Crazy '08: How a Cast of Cranks, Rogues, Boneheads, and Magnates
Created the Greatest Year in Baseball History Cait Murphy**

From Reader Review Crazy '08: How a Cast of Cranks, Rogues, Boneheads, and Magnates Created the Greatest Year in Baseball History for online ebook

Troy Soos says

Although the 1908 baseball season was memorable, this book is not. Cait Murphy did an admirable job of research, but her writing is uneven and she indulges in some odd digressions that repeatedly halt the narrative (e.g., she gives us seven pages about serial killer Belle Gunness and eight pages on anarchism).

Steven Belanger says

I've been a little crazy myself, in the last year or so, amassing a collection of 1908-1911 T206s from various sources, and displaying them in my office. 'cuz I'm awesome and exciting like that. From behind SGC- or PSA-graded cases peer the faces of Jack Pfeister, Hooks Wiltse, Red Ames, Dave Brain, Red Murray, Solly Hofman, Clark Griffith, Dots Miller, Fielder Jones, Chief Meyers, Laughin' Larry Doyle, Lee Tannehill, Harry Steinfeldt, Wild Bill Donovan, Nap Rucker, Doc Crandall, Wee Willie Keeler, Al Bridwell, Rube Marquard, Frank Smith, and Cy Seymour. And Joe Tinker, from a 1911 T205. All of them played baseball in the year wonderfully carzy baseball year of 1908. They played for the teams most covered in this book: the Chicago White Sox; the New York Giants; the Detroit Tigers; the Chicago Cubs; the New York Highlanders (soon thereafter known exclusively as the Yankees). I've got their T206s, and they're all in this book.

And it is captivating reading. Like the cards themselves, the book is a time capsule of 1908. Life. Baseball. People. Living conditions. It's all there. The book is not just about baseball. In it you see the personalities of all these guys, plus the more popular players I can't afford: Ty Cobb; Honus Wagner; Eddie Plank; Frank Chance; Christy Mathewson; Walter Johnson, and so many more. You see a typical day and a typical life in 1908--equal parts gritty, harsh, hard, yet alluring.

Countless of these guys played baseball because otherwise they'd be digging and dying in the Pennsylvania mines. They're spotted by scouts and managers playing for semi-pro or mine teams in the middle of nowhere, for teams of towns with populations less than 500. They're typically given one chance, and one chance only, by a system in which the teams don't have to sell them to the major league team, and often didn't. The manager--who was a manager, a general manager, a scout, and a bookkeeper, all in one--would take one look at a player, and say Yes or No based on a five-minute appraisal. The players in this book (and in The Glory of their Times, which will be reviewed soon, too) all say that better players than they did not play major-league baseball not because they lacked the skill--but because they lacked the good fortune.

Honus Wagner politely declined to play baseball in 1908, he says, so he could go home to his farm and raise his chickens. Turns out, this was a salary clash behind the scenes. He played it quietly, like a gentleman, and he got the money he wanted. A similar salary dispute--and not a disagreement about his likeness being sold with tobacco products--led to his insistence that his T206 baseball cards be destroyed. They were. Only about 50 supposedly survived the purge. The one known to be in the best condition is worth, literally, millions of dollars. I don't have that one, naturally. So I instead got Honus Wagner's constant double-play partner, the second basemen to his shortstop: Dots Miller.

Ty Cobb was despised by his peers, his own teammates, the umpires, and the fans. He was considered the second-best player in the majors, behind Wagner--who was the equal to Cobb as a hitter and as a baserunner,

but who was a Gold Glove-caliber fielder at every position, and very well-liked to boot.

Christy Mathewson lost a lot of very important games towards the end of that season.

Fred Merkle's mental lapse wasn't the only reason the Giants missed the playoffs that year. A rookie pitcher beat them three teams in the final ten days of the season. Mathewson lost a lot of close games--but still won over 30. The Giants were 10-6 in their last 16 games. And so on.

A team could lose their chance to make the playoffs by half a game due to a rain-out. And it happened in 1908. The rule that all necessary, rained-out games must be played at the end of the year didn't go into effect until 1909. Unbelievable.

Ballplayers played amidst terrible conditions, on the field, physically, and otherwise. It was common for teams to play exhibition games during the season, on travel days between cities, in small towns. They played 154 games that counted, minus rainouts, plus perhaps a dozen or more games that didn't count. And the stars were expected to play in all of them.

Very good teams counted on their HOF starting pitchers to the extent that such pitchers pitched both games of a doubleheader, or for three or more consecutive days, or in relief--often all in the same week. The end of 1908 saw Mathewson, Plank, and Three-Finger Mordecai Brown pitching all of the final dozen or so games.

Most games had just one umpire. (!) So players would do things like miss third base by fifteen feet as they were running home, and the lone umpire was looking elsewhere. The league finally bent and put two umpires on each game.

Spitballs were legal. Pitchers openly spit and loaded up the ball. Players were expected to use the very same one ball all game long. Games were often stopped so a player could go into the stands and retrieve a foul ball.

And so on. Not just baseball: the serial killer of the Chicago-area farms--a large, unattractive woman who lured men to their deaths through soliciting for romantic partners in the paper--gets its own chapter. This situation, which I will make into a novel someday, has never been conclusively solved. Some say the woman escaped capture.

Vaudeville--very popular. Popular New York players could make a second career--or a first--on vaudeville stages during the off-season. Many of them did. One of them, Mike Donlin, left baseball for the stage. And then came back, of course.

The writing is crisp, and clear, and very authoritative--and with a slight bite and attitude. It is very quick reading, though I cannot say that non-baseball fans will love it, too. I think you have to be a fan to read it, but there's a lot of history and 1908 reality here, too.

Les says

Watching Ken Burn's Baseball series has rekindled my love for this great game. I have always been a huge fan of the dead-ball era and (along with my home state, MN Twins) have been a Cubs fan since I was 10. Crazy 08 captures the last season the Cubs won the world series, 1908. The book seemed like it would be a perfect fit.

I only finished this because of the era and the colorful nature of the players themselves. The book is thoroughly researched and the author made sure that she stuck every fact and story in the book. Giving context for a sport is admirable, but somethings are just tangential and do not need to be addressed in one book. The crazily inconsistent use of tenses drove me buggy. And in an effort to make this yarn a real corker I'm sure, she attempts a voice that would be fun and precocious coming from a middle school student but is god-awfully annoying in this context. Also, the premise (see subtitle) is unnecessary, unconvincing, and just a distraction. 1908 was a hell of a season for ball and was replete with some real jim dandy players. Let them speak for themselves.

Johnny says

This is my second reading of the book and I still get so enthralled into what is arguably the best season of baseball. The Times and characters come alive as the season winds down with the final game of the season in the NL being a replaying of a game called on a controversial call and fan pandemonium. It is hard not to get excited when the National League is decided in a one game play off between the Cubs and the Giantd, with the Pirates only a game behind them. The American League is even closer with the Tigers beating the Cleveland Naps by a 1/2 game for the pennant.

This is a book I have and will recommend to any history, baseball or really anybody with a passing interest in sports

Chris Corrgan says

There are parts of this book that are really good, but for the most part the author is too heavy with folksy vocabulary. Also, some of the asides she takes seem out of place. The last chapter is especially jarring. Gambling in the game makes minor appearances in the book, but that is the topic on which she concludes.

The advantage the book has is that is the picture she paints of the atmosphere of the New York and Chicago in the heat of the pennant race.

Steven Peterson says

Cait Murphy observes that 1908 is an important season in the history of baseball in America. She closes the book with the statement (page 288): "In the sweep of baseball's history, 1908 is not the end of an era, nor the beginning of one. It is, however, the end of the beginning." She starts the work by answering why she explores 1908 (page xiii): "The best season in baseball history is 1908. Besides two agonizing pennant races, it features history's finest pitching duel, hurled in the white heat of an October stretch drive, and the most controversial game ever played." I'm not sure that I buy 1908 as the apogee of baseball; however, Murphy does make a nice case.

The book begins with some context, looking at the earlier years of the National League and American League just after the turn of the century. She also looks at the evolution of gloves and bats and the other artifacts of the game. There are glimpses of stadia of the time.

Also nicely done are the character sketches of some key figures from 1908--from Manager John McGraw of the Giants to John Evers and Frank ("Husk" or "The Peerless Leader") Chance of the Cubs to Honus Wagner and so on. The book takes a chronological look at the season thereafter, from opening day through the great replay of the tie game (when Fred Merkle didn't touch second base, leading to a tie score) to a brief afterword on the World Series (not much time spent on it, since it was a blowout, with the Cubs winning their last World Series over the Detroit Tigers).

Some interesting tidbits are scattered throughout: the seemingly large number of players who committed suicide (pages 66-67), the amazing variety of interests of Cubs' players on one train trip (if accurately portrayed by a reporter)--"Doc" Marshall reading a book on dentistry, Johnny Evers reading a biography of Savonarola, two players discussed how to raise alfalfa, Ed Reulbach reading a chemistry book, five playing poker, and so on.

There is the portrayal of some of the great moments of the season, for instance, Young Fred Merkle not touching second base after an apparent game-winning hit against the detested Cubs (pages 189-191).

There are also several "time-out" inserts that provide interesting side-bar discussions. One of these looks at Chicago and its bawdy politics of the early 1900s; another examines the howler that Abner Doubleday invented the game of baseball. An Epilogue briefly describes what happened to key players after the 1908 season, including Mordecai "Three-Finger" Brown (there is a picture of his misshapen hand in the volume, suggesting how he might have created interesting movement on his pitches), Frank Chance, Hal Chase, Fred Merkle, "Cy" Young, and so on.

All in all, a nice detailed view of a fascinating season in baseball history.

cheeseblab says

From a standpoint of telling the stranger-than-fiction story of one of the oddest and most remarkable seasons in the history of God's Game, this is a fine book, and that's why I'm getting it for my son-in-law the Cubs fan (shhh, don't tell!) for his birthday.

On the other hand, Murphy's editor did her no favors by failing to restrain her impulse to stretch every routine rhetorical single into a two-sacker (as she would be inclined to put it, except that she'd probably strain for something even more "colorful"). Presumably she's trying to give a flavor of early-twentieth-century sportswriting to her prose--I've seen such historical transrhetoricism tried before, and I've never seen it done satisfactorily, except occasionally in fiction.

Another absolutely maddening stylistic element: bouncing verb tenses, at the paragraph level and sometimes even at the sentence level. In a self-serving Q&A (one wonders who asked the Qs; well, no, one doesn't) at the back of the paperback edition, she claims a method to this madness, but I suspect you'd find if you charted throughout the book that she's inconsistent even withing the rules of her own inconsistency.

Patrick Murtha says

The material is fascinating, the research is good, and anyone who enjoys baseball history or, indeed, social history of this time period will benefit from reading Crazy '08. But - and it is a big but - Cait Murphy's

writing style is amateurish, cutesy-casual, and faux-hip, amounting to a deeply misguided attempt to sound early 21st Century while describing the early 20th Century. It does not work.

Murphy has not made a strong case that 1908 was the greatest baseball season ever. How great could it be with a blah World Series that she dismisses in a couple of sentences? The pennant races WERE great (although she gives short shrift to the American League as compared to the National), the human dramas were definitely compelling, and it would in no way diminish the choice of subject if the 1908 season were simply GREAT as opposed to the GREATEST. But that's the world of non-fiction marketing nowadays: Everything has to be a game-changer, everything has to be a turning point ("Cod, the fish that changed the world!"). It grows ridiculous.

Dave says

As a writer, Cait Murphy's a hell of an editor. But as a researcher, she puts a lot of writers to shame. This book reads like a compilation of research, really, and she put in her time, for sure.

The story took me a place and time I hadn't much considered, and made parallels between a raucous, epic baseball season and society at large. You see the seeds of the Black Sox scandal planted and starting to bloom, you see organized labor infiltrating the heretofore insulated world of professional sport, you see behind-the-scenes machinations creating the conditions ripe for something big to happen that season and over the course of future seasons. And all the while we catch glimpses of that year's presidential race, which took a back seat to the National League pennant race between the Giants and Cubs.

It was a fun read, even if I knew how it ended — and even if one of the pillars of the narrative collapsed joyously last year. Besides, the last-place teams in 1908 were the Cardinals and Yankees; what's not to love for a Cubs fan?

Ken Heard says

Murphy argues that 1908 is the best baseball season ever, what with close pennant races in both divisions, Merkle's bonehead play against the Cubs and the subsequent makeup game that decides the National League pennant, the very beginning of structured salaries for players, the hint of gambling and the bizarre nature of the times. Interesting perspective with loads of other sources for further reading.

MacK says

Such is my affinity for baseball, and baseball history, that on seeing this book in a Barnes and Noble the subtitle alone was almost enough to make me buy two copies.

Murphy's affection for the woebegone Chicago Cubs makes this chronicle of their last championship season a wistful reminiscence more than taut mystery. None the less, she does a marvelous job fleshing out the faded box scores into more than mere numbers on a page. The old names and sepia images of Ken Burns' documentary or your grandfather's shoe box come to life as complex individuals. Honus Wagner, "Three-Finger" Brown, poor Fred Merkle, each receives their due as people first and ballplayers second.

Beyond the National League Pennant race, Murphy seems to lose her drive. A few of her historical tangents become so tortuous that the whole point of the book becomes lost. The American League race is given short shrift. But, despite this she still manages to engage each reader in the unique reality of forgotten figures. (Devoting one whole chapter to the evilness and skulduggery of early day Yankees is a savvy move)

The occasional long-winded anecdote aside, Murphy's book captures a year in America better than most history books, and a love of baseball that can easily see every fan through the most desolate of winters.

Peggy says

A very entertaining book about baseball. Mostly set in 1908, the last year the Chicago Cubs won The World Series. The author includes many interesting stories about other teams; although it is mostly about the rivalry between the Cubs and the New York Giants.

I checked the book out of the library expecting it to be just about the Cubs, but it is so much more. I learned about the "Merkle game", Tinkers to Evers to Chance, how gambling has always seemed to be connected with sports and many fascinating facts about legendary players such as Honus Wagner, Christy Mathewson, Mordecai "Three Fingers" Brown and many more.

I would definitely recommend this book to anyone who is a fan of baseball.

Leonora says

I can't deal with the overwrought writing style in this book, maybe I will revisit it another time.

Tung says

Crazy '08 is a nonfiction account of the 1908 baseball season where three teams vie for the NL pennant up until the very last game of the season. The book focuses on the Cubs (and their Hall of Fame crew of Tinker, Evers, Chance and "Three Finger" Brown) and the (then) New York Giants (led by the immortal Christy Mathewson and infamous John McGraw), and recounts the ebbs and flows of their records over the entire season before ending in the much-noted last World Series championship for the long-suffering Cubs. It was unfortunate that I read this non-fiction baseball book after reading Game Six by Mark Frost (another non-fiction baseball book) because this one suffered mightily in comparison. Murphy's prose is riddled with quotes from newspapers or books from the time period, and while all non-fiction authors cite references from the period they are covering, I haven't read any that cite as often as Murphy does. Because of that, her accounting of events comes off more as a relating of someone else's account, rather than as her own perspective. My second criticism of the book is that it employs a ridiculous structure called "time outs" where she breaks up her baseball narrative to describe non-baseball context (e.g. corruption in the city of Chicago at that time). A good non-fiction author would simply fold that relevant information into the narrative without specific "time out" chapters. It is exacerbated even further by time-outs that had no relation to anything (e.g. a chapter on serial killer Belle Gunness which the author admits was irrelevant but too interesting to her to pass up). Finally, Murphy notes on numerous occasions that 1908 is the greatest baseball season ever -- as if by constant repetition she will convince the reader of that statement's veracity; her narrative should make that case without the repetition, and unfortunately, it did not do that. Overall, while

the teams and the time period were interesting, and the cast of baseball characters unique, the writing felt disjointed and unconvincing. This is a pass for me.

Brian says

This was, hands down, the very best baseball book I have ever read! Intermingled with some of the history of the very early 20th Century, and containing an epilogue describing life after the 1908 baseball season for a great number of the people in this book, it was exactly the kind of book I most enjoy reading and the essence of the book I wish I could write myself. If you are in any way interested in baseball history, this is a "must read."

bup says

Her title calls it "The Greatest Season in Baseball History," and she makes an excellent case for it. And she's done her homework - the vast, broad research that informs her narrative is really impressive. From a serial killer in Indiana to anarchist terrorism to race riots in Springfield, IL, to the presidential race, she provides context that makes the whole thing more understandable. Oh, she also seems to have read, and references, about 3,487 baseball books, and read every document at the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

Murphy also writes really well - she has many nice turns of phrase, some of which involve 50 cent words, some of which involve period slang, that create an intelligent but entertaining mishmash read.

Finally, 1908 is great subject matter. The National League's 3-way race that has all three within a game of each other on the last day of the season, and it's been just about that tight for a month and a half - what better drama could you ask for? Oh, yeah, the Merkle game. Well, you got it. The Merkle game occurs in the midst of that.

Basically, if you're a baseball fan, and interested in its history at all, this is a must-read.

Scott says

It's funny. I read this book awhile ago, but it somehow never made it on to my Goodreads list. Every now and then, some random part would come to mind, and I would think "oh, that's right - this is one of the books I forgot to put on my list. I should add it one of these days." One day, I finally remembered while I was logged on, and viola, added.

Fast forward to November 2016. The Cubs win the World Series, and this of course this makes me (and everyone else) think of 1908. I remembered this book, and thought it might be a good time to re-read it, especially since I don't remember it that well.

And now I think I know why - I don't think I ever actually read this book. I clearly read the intro, because it turns out that every tidbit I remember can be found there. But I must have stopped there, and then somehow convinced myself that I had read the whole thing, because everything after the intro has been new to me. It's not a big deal, but it's funny (to me, at least) because it's so out of character. I'm one of those people who can name every book they ever started but didn't finish, and yet I was somehow CONVINCED that I had read

this cover to cover.

And it's my loss, too, because here's the thing - this book is great. I'm so glad I picked it back up again. It's rich, colorful, and extremely well-written. But what really hooked me - and this is key - is that the author also spends a lot of time discussing the period itself and other relevant events that were happening at the time. Every chapter has "Time out" sections that discuss non-baseball happenings in 1908, and it really serves to add a great deal of context - context that is often missing from baseball books that treat the game as if it happens in a vacuum.

For example, lots of books about this period (often referred to as the "deadball era," 1900-1919) discuss John McGraw, and they all discuss his temperament in the context of how it effected his managerial style and the actual games. What most books won't tell you is stuff like this: back then, players usually got dressed in their uniforms at the hotel and then either made their way to the field themselves or were taken by horse-drawn carriage. In Pittsburgh, the team was often taken to the field along a route that went through a busy market. And McGraw and other players would use this opportunity to openly taunt Pirates fans. Fans attacking players and vice versa, police escorts, police being needed to clear the field - all of that was common in 1908. Can you imagine the Cubs, in uniform, being taken, en mass, to the field to play the Indians in the World Series, winding through busy streets, yelling at fans? A lot of books leave stuff that like out, but to me, not only is that stuff relevant, it's the stuff I'd rather read. I already know the 1908 Giants were good. And there's only so many ways you can write about someone having a high batting average, or a low ERA. In order to really make a book like this stand out, you need to give the reader context beyond player performance and outcomes. And this book does that very, very well.

In this regard, this book reminds me more of Devil in the White City, or a Bill Bryson book. It also reminds me of October 1964 (another great baseball book that expands beyond the players and the game). Highly recommended for anyone who is interested in early 20th century history.

Bill Christman says

Cait Murphy admits she is a National League fan and her book Crazy '08, is evidence that she offers as the greatest pennant race is the NL's 1908 contest. The Giants, Cubs and Pirates were in the three teams until the end. The American League in 1967 offers a similar situation with the three teams fighting for the pennant but Cait Murphy shows that the 1908 season to be the beginning of the modern era.

The men leading the Cubs and Giants are similar in their competitive nature. John McGraw is fascinating to me because I feel he is so out to win he would do anything. Bending rules is fine. He should have been the one to help break the segregation in the sport for no other reason than he wanted to win so bad and wanted the best players for himself.

To me what made baseball great was the pennant race. Unlike other sports the season meant something because only the top teams went to postseason. No wild cards, no playing for seeding in a playoff tournament. Each day, each game had an impact. Like a small river carving out a canyon, one game's slowly carved the story of the season. The main moment in this season is the play known as Merckle's boner. The play in a game in September where Carl Merkle was on first and forgot to touch second on a game winning hit. He was forced out and the run failed to count. The play is instilled now as baseball legend. Cait Murphy is right when she points out that traditionally up to that point, the runner did not have to touch the base. The rule was not enforced and therefore Merckle was just going with the custom. The rule become one in fact after the play cost the Giants the makeup game, and the pennant. Fred Merckle's play led to more unified rule enforcement across the league.

For a great story it comes down to a late game that means everything, like the Merckle game at the end of the season. But to me I am also influenced by the reliever and famed baseball flake Sparky Lyle, the author of *The Bronx Zoo*, about the 1978 NY Yankee season, when he heard Yankee announcer Phil Rizzuto lamenting that the Yankees lost a rain shortened game in Baltimore. Lyle's response, "Christ we lost opening day too." This is the point I love and a reason I love a baseball season more than any other sport. In no other sport does one play every day. In no other sport is the balance between the long term of the season and the goal of winning this one game so difficult especially when there were pennant races and no wild card the conflict was harder. How much do you use this reliever? Should you give your starters a rest? When? Against which teams? In the NBA and the NHL the balance is also there but not to the same extent. There almost always a day off in between games and half the league makes the playoff. In football the weekly games are more events, where the story is created before each game by publicists and writers. In baseball the grind of the season and the ensuing results write their own tale with embellishments. The sport is dominant over the media.

There is so much about the game up to 1908 that seems strange, but Murphy offers the insight that this is the end of the beginning of major league baseball and a new version is beginning that is more familiar to modern eyes. The issue of gambling is very evident in Murphy's book. The seeds for 1919 are in the clear and what is depressing is that the powers that be in baseball ignore the problem until it blew up in their face, very similar to the steroid scandal at the turn of the millennium. This seems to prove my point that the powers that be in baseball hate change, and that baseball's one moment of being ahead of the curve, Jackie Robinson and the color line, was an anomaly for the great game.

In 1908 there was more going on than a crazy pennant race and one of the things I enjoy in a good baseball book is the digressions some authors make to show that the season is not taking place in a vacuum. Cait Murphy does this with nice little segments at the end of chapters. In 1908 Teddy Roosevelt was leaving the Presidency, the Great White Fleet was sailing the world, and the Presidential election was around the corner. One of the early digressions is about a serial killer, a woman who it is discovered has killed her boyfriends and husbands. This is stuff one can see the players talking about, joking about, and referencing in their interactions on the long train rides, in the clubhouse and dugouts. It helps put one into the time Cait Murphy is talking about. This helps make Murphy's book about the old days of baseball an excellent read.

Rick says

The book has a long sub-title, *How a Cast of Cranks, Rogues, Boneheads, and Magnates Created the Greatest Year in Baseball History*. Long sub-titles tend to stretch a point, sometimes wittily (Dr. Strangelove, Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb), sometimes not. This one strains to suggest more madcap fun than it delivers and its glib tone can't gracefully or convincingly manage the shifting from the high sunshine of major league's coming of age with its numerous dark shadows. There is the exuberance that leaves some in riotous throngs dead. There is the reminder of the nation's and major league baseball's racist ban on players of color. There is alcohol consumption with no restraint coupled with a tendency to madness that reaps crops of suicides. There is the steady drum-beat of rumors about gambling's influence on the game—always dismissed as an impossibility and therefore investigated the way one might investigate the likelihood of the moon's surface being comprised of green cheese, which is to say not at all. A satire or a brilliant social history might have been able to balance this with a time when spitters were legal, college men and coal mine escapees were teammates. A time when vaudeville was a good second career for this year's hero on the ballfield, when players brawled with each other, fans, umpires, managers and whomever riled them up and everyone strove to do just that—abusive profanity was the lingua franca of the game. A time when one ball could see two teams through nine innings—wonder why ERAs are so low, errors so high, try

seeing that stained, misshapened and torn sucker after it came off the pitcher's hand or the hitter's bat? It's an era when pitchers sometimes threw both ends of a doubleheader, where a 17 inning game could be played in less than three hours with both starters going the distance. A season when Ed Walsh (40 wins, 6 saves, and nearly 400 innings pitched), Honus Wagner, Ty Cobb, Rube Waddell, Christy Mathewson, Mordecai "Three-Fingered" Brown, and Cy Young were stars. It was an era, finally, where sportswriters wrote very bad poetry about double play combinations that yet, on occasion, found immortality: "These are the saddest of possible words: Tinkers to Evers to Chance." The year is 1908, the last year the Chicago Cubs won the World Series. Ever. It's a year when the New York Yankees are synonymous with prolonged ineptitude and the Chicago Cubs are the very personification of arrogant excellence. Says Chance on his way to the last game of the regular season, a winner take all game with the New York Giants in New York, "Whoever heard of the Cubs losing a game they had to have?" Four generations of Cub fans that's who. But that is the long now of the past century. Back then things were different. The Cubs have not only been in the Series before, they've won it! And in Crazy '08 they knock off the Tigers in five games. A bad series, Murphy writes without bothering to recap at all. So anti-climatic after the Merkle game and two pennant races that have three teams each chasing each other to the very last afternoon of the season. But if I'm a Cub fan I want the inevitable spelled out in some detail. Up three games to one, is victory inevitable? Maybe for this Cubs team but for all the ones that followed not at all. Sure I enjoyed the Marxist madness of the end of the Merkle game—the one that ended in a declared tie and had to be replayed on the last day of the season. It ended in a declared tie because in this late September classic the Giants and Cubs were tied for first place and tied in the bottom of the ninth. The Giants though have the winning run on third with two outs. The runner got there thanks to the runner on first, Fred Merkle, a rookie first baseman playing only because of injury. Merkle singled the run to within 90 feet of home and then Al Bridwell delivered the sharp single that should end the game with a Giants victory. The winning run in fact does come jogging home to a celebratory reception. Merkle starts for second base, sees the crowds in center field and right, already on the outfield grass because in those days that's what they did with overflow crowds, put them in the outfield behind a rope and a few policemen. Merkle sees the joyous mob and veers off at a dead run for the clubhouse, not coming anywhere near second base. Johnny Evers is now calling for the ball from his centerfielder. Evers knows that if he gets the ball and steps on the bag before Merkle it's a force out and the third out of the inning, automatically nullifying the run that's already in the dugout. The third base coach for the Giants sees this unfolding and rushes onto the field and grabs the ball from the Cubs fielder and heaves it into the stands. By the time the field is overrun by fans. The two umpires are lost in the crowd. Another ball is tossed toward the infield and the Cubs retrieve, stomp on second, and demand the result the rules require. Eventually they get it and the game is replayed and true to Chance's words, which didn't jinx the Cubs then but have ever since, the team wins the replay and, in short order, the Series. A very fun read for baseball fans, but neither the social history nor baseball masterpiece it might have been. It Merkles before it gets there.

Patrick Abdalla says

As a baseball fan and a writer, I have to say this is one of the best books on the sport ever written. Murphy's wit shines through as she takes you through a season that center's on some of the game's biggest legends and forgotten stars.
