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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Frederick W. Turner. *When the Boys Came Back: Baseball and 1946*. New York: H. Holt, 1996. xiv + 290 pp. \$27.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8050-2645-0.

Reviewed by Steve Rundio
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In 1946, major league baseball was a game played by sixteen teams divided into two leagues. In those simpler days, there were no teams any farther west than the Mississippi. But changes were on the horizon, for both baseball, and the country. *When The Boys Came Back: Baseball and 1946*, by Frederick Turner, investigates and recreates the 1946 season. In doing so, Turner provides us with insights into some of the factors which would have profound influence on the future of baseball.

The book is divided into three distinct and logical parts, "Spring Training," "The Race," and "The World Series."

Spring Training is a time of hope, of renewal. Even the worst of teams could find reason for optimism. The 1946 season was especially one. World War II was over. The nation eagerly anticipated a return to normalcy, and so did baseball. The sorry spectacle that had passed for major league baseball during the war would soon be replaced with the genuine article when the "real" ballplayers traded their military garb for baseball uniforms.

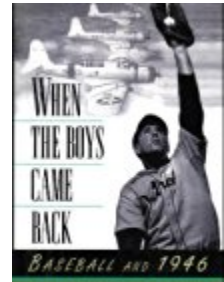
Euphoria would be tempered with reality however, both in the country itself and in the baseball community. Post-war America would experience profound changes, as would post-war baseball. Turner describes these changes, portraying sport as a mirror of the larger society. What was occurring in baseball had been happening or would happen in the community at large. For example, Jackie Robinson was playing in Montreal in, the Dodger's Triple A team. Soon the major leagues would be integrated, followed by the military, and ultimately the entire nation. There were approximately five hundred major leaguers who served in uniform in World War II. Remarkably, only two were killed. Some of the returning veterans saw their skills erode from disuse, whereas

others honed their skills by playing ball while in the service. They would replace the majority of the players who, for a variety of reasons, were not able to serve in the military and were pressed into duty on the ball-field during the war.

There were many instances of courage in the comebacks, and the degree of success varies. Warren Spahn returned from the experience of a combat infantryman to achieve immortality of the mound. Another left handed pitcher, Lou Brissie, a veteran of the Battle of the Bulge, would struggle to overcome a damaged leg. His measure of greatness rests in the fact that he managed to overcome his wound, and with the aid of a brace, pitch again as a member of Connie Mack's Philadelphia Athletics.

Bert Shepherd crashed landed his damaged P-38 in Germany, where German surgeons had to amputate his badly injured foot. He was unsuccessful in his attempt at a comeback in Washington. Phil Marchildon, another of Connie Mack's pitchers, enjoyed a measure of success on the mound following his release from a German POW camp. The stories of individual struggles from the battlefield to the ball-field alone could provide the basis for a book. This reviewer was left with the feeling that the author might have easily and profitably focused on this aspect of the year 1946.

The returning GI expected a better life, and the ball player was no different. Both issues, such as the guarantee of one's job being there upon return made the owners nervous. Tony Lupien incurred the wrath of the Phillies when he invoked the provisions of the GI Bill to protest his being sold to a minor league team. Other players resented the arbitrary manner in which their salaries were determined. The author recognizes the first crack in the heretofore solid wall of the reserve clause appeared dur-



ing this period.

The sharpest blow came from south of the border and the Mexican League's organizer, Jorge Pasquel. Turner relates this often forgotten challenge to the magnates and their reaction to that challenge. (Mike Weingardner, in his novel *The VeraCruz Blues*, captures the mood of the Mexican League quite well and provides in spirit what Turner deals with in fact.)

Another crack in fortress baseball appeared when Robert Francis Murphy, attempted to unionize major league baseball. Although his attempt did not succeed, his pioneering efforts would be a harbinger. Turner manages to ferret out the beginnings of the looming era in which the owners would begin to lose their absolute power over their players.

In Part Two, "The Race," Turner does a nice job of recapping both the American and National league battles for their respective pennants. His retelling of the steady march of the powerful Red Sox with Ted Williams and company is not new but still compelling. Their counterparts in the National League, The St. Louis Cardinals, had a more difficult time, and here too, Turner does a creditable job of recreating the season. (It should be noted however, that anyone wishing to learn about that era, and especially the Brooklyn Dodgers, would be advised to read Roger Kahn's *Memories of Summer*.)

Part Three retells the story of the first real world series since the beginning of the war. St. Louis and Brooklyn were deadlocked at the end of the regular season and were forced to playoff for the pennant which the Cardinals ultimately won.

The Red Sox brass, in the meantime, gathered a team of American League stars to play a game against the Sox to keep them sharp. The game was a failure at the gate with only 1,966 fans attending on a cold raw October day. Turner recalls that another disaster occurred on that day when Micky Haefner hit Ted Williams on the elbow, causing it to swell twice its normal size. Adding insult to injury, Ted developed a chest cold. The subsequent events remain etched in the memories of every baseball historian, Williams failure in what was to be his only World Series appearance and the dash to home plate by Enos Slaughter in the seventh and deciding game of the Series to give the underdog Cardinals the World Series Championship. Turner allows the reader to experience the joy of the Cardinal locker room and to feel the disappointment on the Red Sox side of the field.

In summary, this book does a credible job or recounting the 1946 season and the special place it has because of the returning players. The historian can find some nuggets here (although the author mistakenly describes Joe Page as a right-handed pitcher [p.109].) For the sociologist, baseball reflected the same struggles, successes and failures that every veteran faced upon returning from wartime. Baseball was still our national pastime in 1946 and it reflected the larger society for those who choose to look for it. Turner obviously does.

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