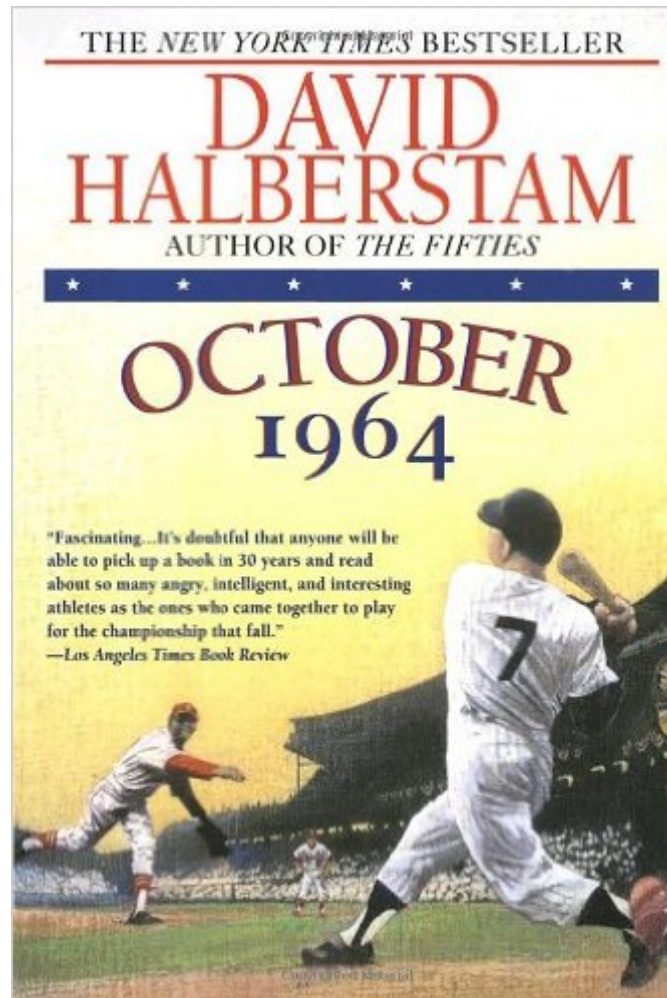


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October 1964



Synopsis

THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER THE BEST SPORTS BOOK OF THE YEAR "October 1964 should be a hit with old-time baseball fans, who'll relish the opportunity to relive that year's to-die-for World Series, when the dynastic but aging New York Yankees squared off against the upstart St. Louis Cardinals. It should be a hit with younger students of the game, who'll eat up the vivid portrayals of legends like Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris of the Yankees and Bob Gibson and Lou Brock of the Cardinals. Most of all, however, David Halberstam's new book should be a hit with anyone interested in understanding the important interplay between sports and society."--The Boston Globe "Compelling...1964 is a chronicle of the end of a great dynasty and of a game, like the country, on the cusp of enormous change."--Newsweek "Halberstam's latest gives us the feeling of actually being there--in another time, in the locker rooms and in the minds of baseball legends. His time and effort researching the book result in a fluency with his topic and a fluidity of writing that make the reading almost effortless....Absorbing."--San Francisco Chronicle "Wonderful...Memorable...Halberstam describes the final game of the 1964 series accurately and so dramatically, I almost thought I had forgotten the ending."--The Washington Post Book World "Superb reporting...Incisive analysis...You know from the start that Halberstam is going to focus on a large human canvas...One of the many joys of this book is the humanity with which Halberstam explores the characters as well as the talents of the players, coaches and managers. These are not demigods of summer but flawed, believable human beings who on occasion can rise to peaks of heroism."--Chicago Sun-Times

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Customer Reviews

In the ESPN.com vernacular of the present day, "October 1964" has recently been debunked (but lovingly) by columnist/author Rob Neyer. While the two giants who square off in David Halberstam's tale of an evolving America in 1964 are the suffocating white Establishment (the Yankees) and the young minority upstarts (the Cardinals), Neyer's contention is that this watershed really occurred one year earlier. That was, after all, the year the Yankees were memorably swept by the Los Angeles Dodgers in the World Series. However, Halberstam's take on the demise of the Establishment Yankees is the more accurate one. The '63 World Series was won single-handedly by a couple of white guys, Koufax and Drysdale. Yes, the Dodgers did have five black regulars in the starting lineup, but apart from the second inning of the opening game, they just didn't hit, or make history the way Koufax did. The 1964 World Series was won by the heroics of men that the Yankees didn't understand, by men who couldn't play for the Yankees, by virtue of who they were. The Yankees could accept being struck out 15 times by Sandy Koufax, but when they struck out 13 times against Bob Gibson -- on whom their sole scouting report was woefully inaccurate -- it was an outrage. Gibson wasn't supposed to have courage, or determination! Lou Brock wasn't supposed to get more hits in the Series than Mickey Mantle! And yet, the '64 Yankees didn't go quietly in the Series, and in fact they scored more runs than St. Louis. Mantle had an incredible seven games. The Yanks had more walks and homers than the Cardinals, and their pitching (behind white youngsters Jim Bouton and Mel Stottlemyre) basically matched St. Louis out for out. At least on paper. The Series turning point came when the Yanks' lone black pitcher, Al Downing, gave up a grand slam homer to a Southern good-ol'-boy, Ken Boyer. This is why "October 1964" is a great book. It's no mystery as to who the heroes are -- the book frontpiece is a team photograph, and that team isn't the Yankees. However, the bad guys gave it a mighty effort. 40 years later, it's hard to remember how much the Yankees represented a world that simply had to end. As someone born well after '64, I didn't even know at first that spring training in Florida was segregated that late. The struggles of Gibson and Brock and Flood and Bill White were relatively new stories when Halberstam first told them. Since Halberstam's skill is in creating whole lives in three or four pages, these mini-biographies are the heart of the book, and not the more desultory game descriptions that reduce the World Series to a sequence of monochrome postcards. The best anecdote in the book has little to do with the World Series. Yankee pitcher Ralph Terry, then a rookie, brashly introduces himself to a few old men watching a baseball game. "Well, Ralph," one of the men says. "my name is Cy Young. And these fellas over here next to me are Zack Wheat and Ty Cobb." If you subscribe to the theory of baseball as social history, "October 1964" is a book you'd do well to have on your

shelf, and one worth reading every few years.

I recently reread David Halberstam's "October 1964," about the World Series between the New York Yankees and the St. Louis Cardinals. As other reviewers of this book on .com have noted, it is social history of a high order. Halberstam uses the World Series of 1964 as a foil to discuss race relations in the decade, both inside baseball and out, for the Yankees represented an approach to society reflective of a status quo that had much more to do with police brutality against civil rights workers in Selma than the Yankees would care to admit. Meantime, the Cardinals expressed much more of the changing climate in America. As Halberstam points out, it looked as if all the ingredients of a great team were coming together for the Cardinals in the early 1960s. The team had all of the attributes of its successful teams of the past, excellent pitching, great defense, and speed. But there was something more that was critical to the Cardinals success in 1964, as Halberstam emphasizes, how the team bridged the racial divide in the United States to create a cohesive unit. Everyone who visited the Cardinals locker room recognized that something was different from other teams. The African American, White, and Latino players seemed to have an easier relationship than elsewhere. No question, many of the premier players for the Cardinals were African Americans in 1964--Bob Gibson, Lou Brock, Curt Flood, and Bill White--and they certainly helped set the tenor of the clubhouse. But southerners like Ken Boyer and Tim McCarver were also committed to the successful integration of American life and brought that perspective to the team as well. This relative racial harmony was significant for the Cardinals and stood in striking contrast to the problems present with the Yankees and other major league teams. One anecdote about the Cardinals offered in "October 1964" elucidates this issue. Curt Flood recounted a story in "October 1964" of going to Cardinals spring training camp in Florida in the latter 1950s and finding himself sent to an African American boarding house in another town, instead of staying in the same hotel where his white teammates were housed. A sensitive and thoughtful man, Flood was both hurt and angered by this situation and when the opportunity presented he said something. When the Cardinals owner, August A. Busch Jr., saw him at the training camp and struck up a conversation Flood let slip that the situation of the black players was not the best. Busch was genuinely surprised that Flood and the other black players were not staying at the main hotel with the "rest of the guys" and promised to do something about it. He went out and purchased a hotel in St. Petersburg where all the Cardinals could stay together with their families during spring training. In later years, players from other teams recalled visiting that hotel to see members of the Cards and finding cookouts taking place with entire families, black and white, together. The fact that they lived together for several weeks during spring

training may have broken down the barriers of prejudice more than any other action the Cardinals could have taken. The team was, without question, more successful in integrating its players than many other major league clubs. This contributed to the success of the team on the field and the attraction of the team off it. Halberstam emphasizes that the match between the Cardinals and Yankees in 1964 had symbolic value far beyond the match-up on the field. The Cardinals were a well-integrated team with excellent African American players. The Yankees had failed to integrate until the mid-1950s and then only modestly so. Indeed, their first African American player was St. Louis native Elston Howard and he only came up to the Yankees in 1955. A superb player, the Yankees ballyhooed Howard's breaking of the color line on the team by saying that he was a true "gentleman," and thereby appropriate to wear Yankee pinstripes. One wit observed that this was so much nonsense, after all since when did baseball players have to be "gentlemen?" The Yanks in 1964 were also a franchise on the verge of collapse, with aging superstars and not much down on the farm to call up to the majors. Their best player, Mickey Mantle, was nearing the end of his Hall of Fame career, and his replacement in the outfield would be Bobby Mercer, a decent journeyman player but not someone who would carry on the tradition of Ruth-DiMaggio-Mantle. The Cardinals victory in the World Series in 1964 symbolized for Halberstam the death of the old manner of baseball, and thereafter every championship team would have African American stars as a critical element to success. It is an excellent discussion of the subject, well-written and thought-provoking.

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