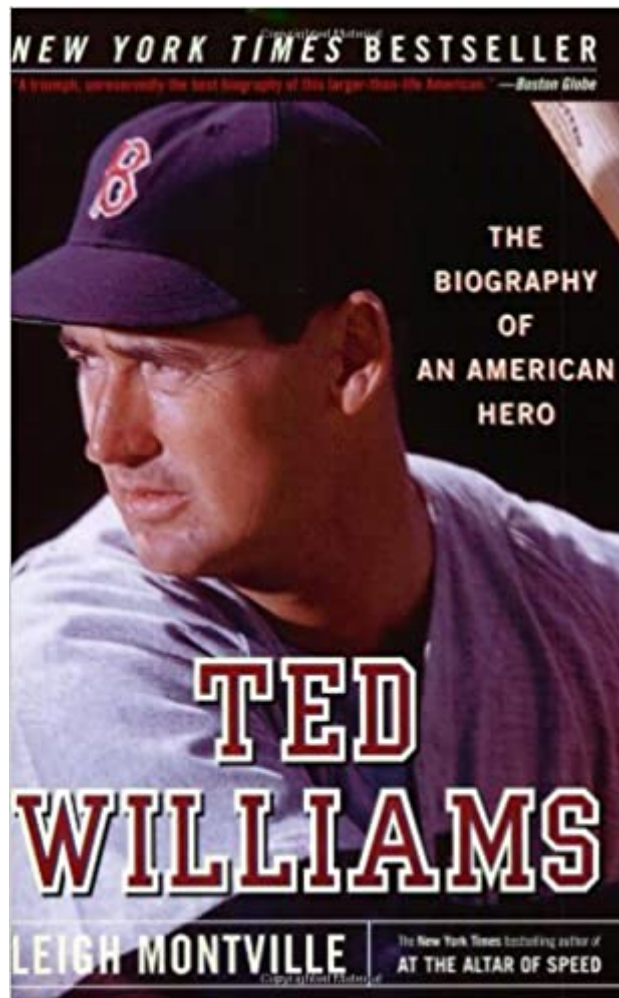




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Ted Williams: The Biography Of An American Hero



Synopsis

The Kid. The Splendid Splinter. Teddy Ballgame. One of the greatest figures of his generation, and arguably the greatest baseball hitter of all time. But what made Ted Williams a legend – and a lightning rod for controversy in life and in death? – Still a gangly teenager when he stepped into a Boston Red Sox uniform in 1939, Williams's boisterous personality and penchant for towering home runs earned him adoring admirers and venomous critics. In 1941, the entire country followed Williams's stunning .406 season, a record that has not been touched in over six decades. Then at the pinnacle of his prime, Williams left Boston to train and serve as a fighter pilot in World War II, missing three full years of baseball, making his achievements all the more remarkable. Ted Williams's personal life was equally colorful. His attraction to women (and their attraction to him) was a constant. He was married and divorced three times and he fathered two daughters and a son. He was one of corporate America's first modern spokesmen, and he remained, nearly into his eighties, a fiercely devoted fisherman. With his son, John Henry Williams, he devoted his final years to the sports memorabilia business, even as illness overtook him. And in death, controversy and public outcry followed Williams and the disagreements between his children over the decision to have his body preserved for future resuscitation in a cryonics facility--a fate, many argue, Williams never wanted. With unmatched verve and passion, and drawing upon hundreds of interviews, acclaimed best-selling author Leigh Montville brings to life Ted Williams's superb triumphs, lonely tragedies, and intensely colorful personality, in a biography that is fitting of an American hero and legend.

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Customer Reviews

Leigh Montville's *Ted Williams: The Biography of an American Hero* is the definitive biography that baseball fans have been waiting for. Montville, who was a sports columnist for the *Boston Globe* and then a senior writer for *Sports Illustrated* is an admitted Red Sox and Williams fanatic, and his passion for his hero rings clearly from every page, along with his clear baseball expertise. But Montville does not hide Williams's flaws. The young Williams was temperamental and justified bad behavior with batting prowess that could excuse just about anything. Quick to anger, "the Kid" had a gift for foul language, too. Montville's study offers inside accounts of Williams's obsessive development as a hitter and his constant struggle to perfect his swing (mistakenly called "natural" by sports writers with little understanding of his extensive preparation). The chapter on 1941, perhaps the greatest year in his career, draws on research and interviews never before published. Montville lets whole passages stand uninterrupted--from Williams's manager, Joe Cronin, from his teammate Dom DiMaggio, and from other players and baseball officials who tell the story of Williams's quest for a .400 batting average. The tale of the final day of the season (when he refused to be benched and went six for eight in a double header to jump from .39955 to his final total, .406) is as pulse-pounding as any thriller. Alongside its essential focus on Williams's baseball life, the book also delves into his military service during both World War II and the Korean War, his passion for sports fishing, and his commitment to helping children through the Jimmy Fund. Finally, Montville devotes a chapter to the controversy after Williams's death, exposing the back-and-forth among Williams's heirs in the bizarre decision to freeze his body in a cryogenic warehouse in Scottsdale, Arizona. Montville's biography makes a good case that Williams was, if not the greatest hitter ever to play the game, certainly among them. For his focused, scientific approach to hitting, Williams is unmatched in the history of the game. His life, marred perhaps by a temper and occasional immaturity that soured his reputation in Boston, is one of true sports greatness. Early in the book, Montville argues that Williams is less appreciated today than he might be because he played out most of his 19-year career in the era before televised highlights. But with Montville's efforts to capture first-hand accounts of Williams's achievements, *The Splendid Splinter's* legacy is assured.

--Patrick O'Kelley --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Montville, who also penned the bestselling bio about racer Dale Earnhart (*The Altar of Speed*), covers all of Williams's heroic achievements--a Hall of Fame baseball career, two tours of duty as a Marine fighter pilot, an unmatched thirst for the thrill of the outdoors. But thanks to the author's ability to track down new sources of information, Montville presents a more nuanced portrayal of the baseball star than many previous biographies. The Kid, as Williams was known, is brought to life

with portraits supplied from the people who made up Williams's very compartmentalized life. Distinct recollections of his former teammates, fishing buddies, former lovers, caretakers, family members and brothers in arms coupled with Montville's ability to display each memory in its own context gives readers an extraordinary glimpse into Williams's complex psyche. Though he admits to worshipping Williams as a youth, Montville's crisp prose holds nothing back when it comes to exposing Williams's many flaws, his heartbreaking final years and the controversy surrounding his death. Relying on his years as a sports writer, Montville is also able to subtly shift the tone of the book to fit Williams's personality as he evolved from an energetic youth to a cantankerous star, from America's bigger-than-life legend to a bedridden invalid. Sure, Teddy Ballgame was an American icon, but Montville's ability to show the darker and lighter human sides of Williams is a pretty remarkable achievement in its own right. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Not being a Boston Red Sox fan, I for decades had been denying the greatness (or trivializing it) of Ted Williams. This book changed that as fast as a Williams line drive whizzing past my ear. I went from denial to fan boy in a couple chapters. I am now a full fledged card carrying member of the All Time Teddy Ballgame fan club. The book is incredibly well written. Terrific insider stories and nuanced profile of the real legend. The subject is so fascinating in that his pursuit of perfection made him the very best at everything he touches, from baseball to fishing and business all the way to the hall of fame. The hitting legend is dissected, the grumpy reluctant superstar revealed, the complex relations with family exposed. The intimate nature of the stories makes this a world class book. The military service detail in the book also reveals Williams to be truly worthy of his "American Hero" status. Considering he spent his prime years in service of our nation, only to return to baseball to perform at ALL WORLD levels as the very best this nation had to offer truly make this a very satisfying read. Terrific book about an American legend.

Perhaps the first important thing to understand about this fine book is that it is not principally a baseball book. Only roughly one-third of it covers Ted Williams's major league career. The rest of the book focuses not only on other events - his fishing expeditions, his struggles in family relationships, his financial entanglements among them - but also on painting a vivid personality portrait. Much of the book is built upon oral interviews Montville conducted with people who personally knew Ted Williams. Montville does not attempt to hide or significantly transform those building blocks in his narrative - a great deal of the book consists of direct quotes from those

offering their personal remembrances. In one place a transcript of an interview with Ted Williams's third wife Dolores (this one not conducted by Montville) is reproduced entirely verbatim, though extending for several pages. By contrast, much of the day-by-day of Williams's playing career is presented in highly summarized form. In some places whole seasons are condensed into very brief, cursory treatments. The book is no less interesting for this, though I as a fan wanted more material about the drama of baseball games and pennant races. I found myself feeling that my wife (who is not a baseball fan) would enjoy it. This is basically a portrait of a man who comes of age having developed one passion - to be the best in the world at what he did, which in his case was hitting a baseball. Essentially abandoned by his father, ignored by his mother, the young Williams took refuge in obsessing over how to hit. He received tutelage from friendly older male figures (and indeed never seemed to learn fully how to relate to the opposite sex). The young Williams practiced hitting endlessly, even working constantly to train his visual skills when away from the baseball diamond. He mastered certain things in life - how to break down a problem, analyze it, master it, practice it, excel at it - but never fully understood the rudiments of critical human relationships. He never learned to control his temper. Nor could he understand the ways of those journalists who made sport of tearing down those of high athletic achievement. Sometimes one recoils from Williams's personality, but I felt mostly empathy for him. He was clearly a highly intelligent man even if largely uneducated, as evidenced by his ability to analyze problems ranging from hitting to fishing to combat aviation. He gave generously to family members even when he had little to offer in terms of personal guidance. He was relentless in his determination to comfort afflicted children, from the kids who benefited from his Jimmy Fund, to a young lady he met late in his life who had suffered from a cerebral hemorrhage. Sadly, Williams' failure to form strong family relationships meant that he was ultimately betrayed and exploited by his own kin in his final years. The last few chapters are painful to read, as he is made to sign endless autographs for his son's financial purposes, is dragged to a baseball function practically from his deathbed, and is finally placed in cryonic storage and his remains brutalized. The whole story reads as a terrible tragedy, a genuine hero undone by his flaws. I came away from the book appreciating Williams for the rare excellence that he represented in his chosen areas, and believing that his life had shown him little of the mercy he warranted for his entirely forgivable mistakes.

As Montville's book makes clear, Ted Williams was haunted by internal demons, and despite the book's thoroughness there is no logical explanation. Ted's off-field life is captured in one paragraph in the first chapter. "He preened. He pouted. He could be unbelievably kind. . . He could be cold and

remote. . . There were holes in his psychology that could be debated and studied nightly be academics. . . .He was brilliant. He was dense." The more thoroughly one looks at his life, the more mysterious it becomes. One thing is clear though--he was a joy to watch. I lived and died with the fortunes of the Red Sox in the late 40's and early 50's, and Ted was my idol. I always arrived at games several hours beforehand to watch all the pregame activities, including batting practice. Oh that swing! The only comparable thing I've seen since then was the way Bart Starr threw a football in warm-ups. When Ted came to bat, after the boo-birds were drowned out, the growing tension in the crowd became palpable. Everyone from the hawkers carrying baskets of cokes up and down the aisles to the hot dog cooks in the back of the grandstand froze to see what would happen. But back to the question: How could Ted, with his superior intelligence and admiration for the character of teammates Bobby Doerr and Dom Dimaggio, be so unequivocally blind to the flaws in his own character? Why did he kaleidoscopically shift moods from good humor and generosity to selfish rage in an instant? Why did Ted, who in his own mind was always right about everything, never argue with the umpires or his managers? Finally, what was he so angry about? While one could obviously blame it on his nearly parentless childhood, it isn't obvious that he was abused or rebellious. His troubles seemed to erupt after he became a pro. This book takes us through all the flying fur with the sports writers, wives and anyone else who do didn't do things the way Ted wanted them to. There isn't all that much about baseball itself. One lingering question not addressed in the book is why his first manager with the Red Sox, Joe Cronin, didn't clamp down on him right away. And after teams started employing an extreme shift, why didn't he insist that Ted bunt or go to left? It is one thing to give your star some slack, as Red Auerbach did with Bill Russell, but going to left would have been better for the Red Sox team (as well as Ted's batting average). As interesting as this book is, it has some flaws. It is often rather disjointed and sometimes jumps back and forth in chronology. It is if the author assembled a pile of notes and then just pasted them up one after the other. Still, all in all, a very good book about baseball's greatest hitter.

Once I wrapped my head around the fact that it was a withdrawn library book (I just hope the recipient with dementia doesn't try to return it to the library whence it came!), I gave it as a gift. The large print really helps with this particular person's failing eyesight.

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