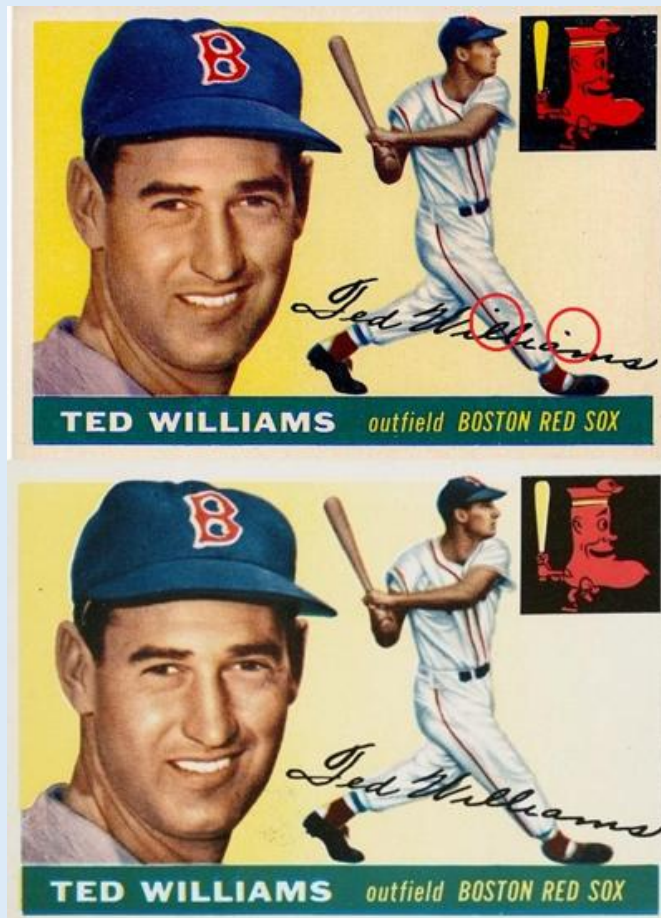


Variations that recently came into a better light



By George Vrechek



Ted Williams signature can be found with or without dots over the letter "i" on his 1955 cards

Variations in sports cards have been around since the first tobacco cards were issued. The 1887-1890 Old Judge issue probably holds the world record for variations with thousands of versions of some 500 baseball players. However, amazingly some variations don't get discovered by the wider collecting community for many years – as in 60 years or more.

Over the years, many collectors have been involved in reporting variations including Jefferson Burdick, Buck Barker, Bob Lemke, Ralph Nozaki, Dick Gilkeson, Mike Cady and me. Some published sources take the position that only variations that have attracted higher prices need to be listed. Price guides and master set checklists are not necessarily intended for the same audience. The Net54 website has threads where collectors weigh in on the subject and share images. On the other hand, variation collectors may not

announce to the world what they have found until they have enough of the harder cards in hand.

You can find junk wax era print differences and variations listed on eBay for ridiculous amounts – or best offers. Be careful not to click on any buttons.

Let's take a look at some of the variations which have come to my attention for the first time in the past few years and how they relate to variations discovered earlier. Keep in mind that there are about a bajillion variations, and this report is limited to interesting ones that were new to me. I also confined my scope to regular Topps and Bowman baseball sets between 1948 and 1980. Collectors of Kellogg's, Post, Red Man, Hostess, Leaf and Royal Dessert sets and their many variations will have to wait for another article.

I define "variations" as **pre-press** set-up changes that found their way onto cards sold to the public, as opposed to "print differences" which appeared **during** a print run.

Sometimes the distinction gets blurry.



Snider's signature is missing a dot over the "i" on some cards. The 1967 Topps card of John Briggs has a robust dot over the "l" in the standard version on the left. The dot disappeared on the version on the right.

Player signature issues

You wouldn't think that a black dot or two would make much difference to people, but when the subjects are star players and there aren't too many instances of a variation, collectors notice...eventually.

It took collectors a while to notice but the 1955 and 1967 Topps baseball cards had variations involving a player's signature. If a signature included a dotted "i," it may have

been airbrushed out by an eager proofreader who didn't realize that the speck was part of the player's signature. Maybe the goofs came about by not copying everything in a signature onto the photo. "No dot" versions are typically scarcer.

The #106 1955 Topps Frank Sullivan card got noticed a few years ago with about five different versions of the dot/no dot Sullivan signature. Herman Wehmeier's 1955 Topps card #29 appeared a few years later without a dot and an asterisk next to "life" on the back of his card. However, #2 Ted Williams recently came to my attention for the first time with not one, but two, missing dots removed from "Williams."

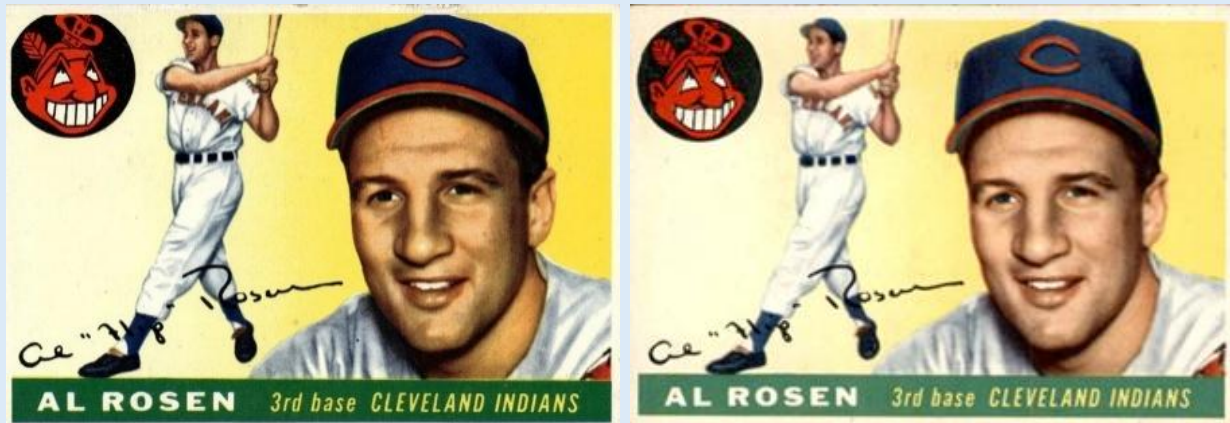
Also, Duke Snider's #32 1954 Topps card has been found without a dot above the "i" in Edwin.

The 1967 Topps set included #237 Mike Ryan without a dot. Now I see that #267 John Briggs has been identified with a more obvious "no-dot" version.

Another version of the same problem was the discovery of "loops in the sky" on 1954 Bowmans #12 Erskine and #210 Roe. The errant "loops" came from the intruding flourished signatures of Jensen and Robertson above them on the print sheets.

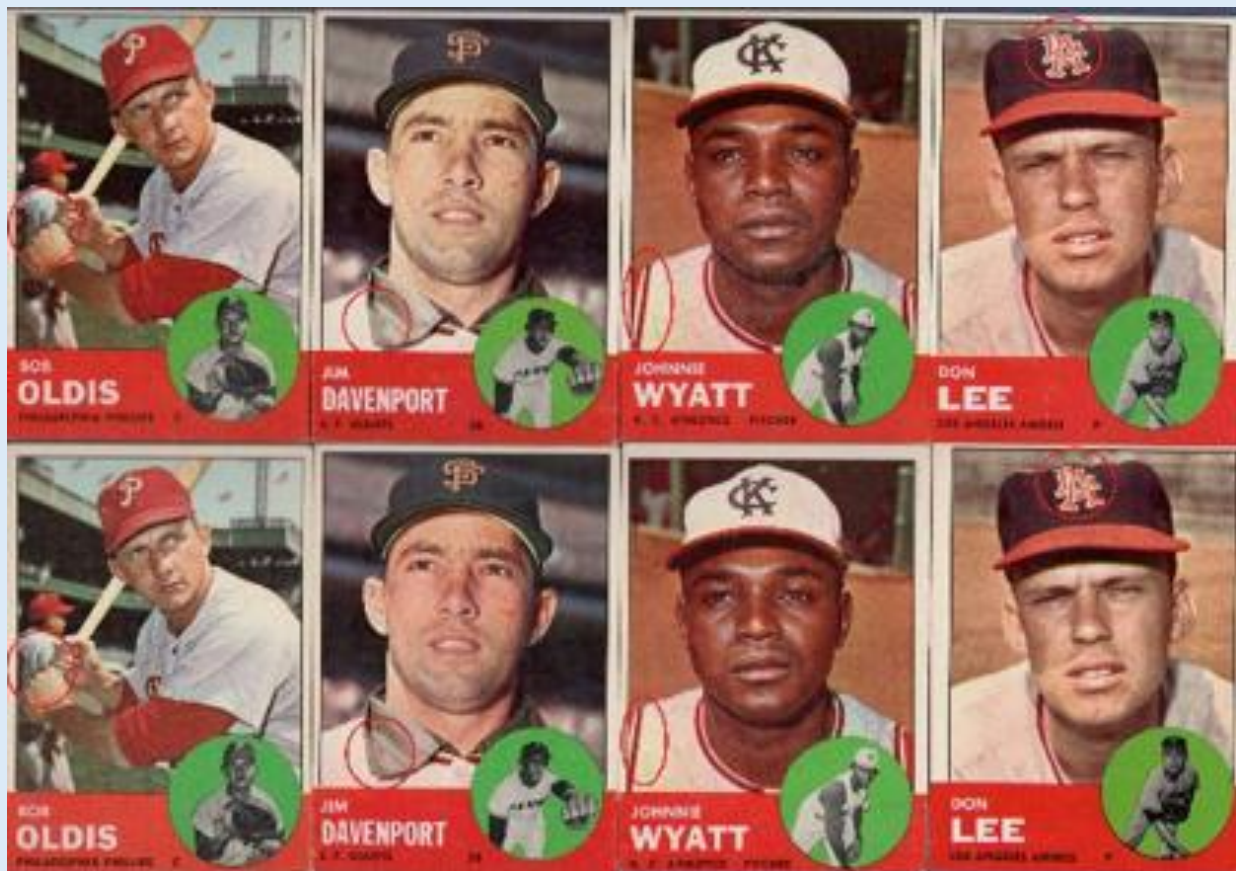


Cropping differences and A/B sheets



Rosen's Indian logo and the top of his hat while batting moved off the frame of some cards.

A few years ago, I learned of cropping differences in the layout of a few logos on the 1955 Topps. Herm Wehmeier #29, Jackie Robinson #50 and Bob Grim #80 were noticed with cropped team logos. Now Al Rosen #70 has joined the club.



These 1963 Topps show how the photos shifted slightly on A and B sheets.

In 2010, I noticed that 11 Topps 1963 baseball cards (372, 376, 386-8, 404, 409, 413, 438-9 and 445) had slight photo cropping variations as a result of appearing in one row on different sheets of a print run. The 1962 Topps “green tints” from the second print run also had variations in cropping. The 1952 Topps Mantle, Robinson and Thomson with stitches pointing left or right on the baseball image on the back were an even earlier discovery of the results from moving stuff around when laying out duplicate cards in the same print run on A and B sheets. The Mantle variations also have differences on the front. Alignment and cropping differences seem to surface more when Topps used two images on one card as in 1955, 1956, 1960 and 1963.

Cartoon goofs

Cartoons on Topps cards were not spared changes either. 1970 Topps #303 Alyea had a ball in his cartoon. He also wound up with a “no ball” and “partial ball” versions. Recently, alert cartoon fan Roy Carlson reported a 1968 Topps #208 Willie Davis variation with two answers instead of a question and an answer. How can you take a cartoon seriously that gives you two different answers?

TOPPS 303 GARRABRANT R. ALYEA
HT: 6'3" WT: 215 BATS: R
THROWS: R BORN: 12/8/40
HOME: RUTHERFORD, N. J.

Brant's a strong hitter with a good stroke. He became the 1st player in A.L. history to hit a homerun on the 1st pitch to him in the majors. Averaged 21 HRs a year in 8 years in organized baseball.

BRANT PITCHED BRIEFLY IN 1962.

MAJOR AND MINOR LEAGUE BATTING RECORD

YEAR	TEAM	LEA.	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	AVG.
1962	Geneva	N.Y.-P	104	455	104	145	21	5	32	116	.319
1963	Peninsula	Carol.	140	488	87	124	20	5	16	71	.254
1964	York	East.	129	420	50	108	25	1	13	76	.257
1965	Hawaii	P.C.L.	142	527	89	142	26	4	27	84	.269
1966	Washington	A.L.	8	13	3	3	0	0	2	6	.231
1966	Hawaii	P.C.L.	139	467	57	102	17	2	21	66	.218
1967	York	East.	84	286	28	62	13	2	5	34	.221
1967	Montgomery	South.	39	140	21	34	3	1	9	25	.243
1968	Buffalo	Int.	87	297	34	75	7	0	31	61	.253
1969	Washington	A.L.	53	150	18	40	11	1	6	23	.267
1969	Washington	A.L.	104	237	29	59	4	0	11	40	.249
Major League Totals			3 Yrs.	165	460	50	102	15	1	69	.255

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TOPPS 208 WILLIE DAVIS
OUTFIELD L. A. DODGERS
HT: 6'2" WT: 181 Bats: Left Throws: Left
Born: April 15, 1940 Home: Los Angeles, Cal.

The fleet-footed outfielder had another fine season last year as he paced the Los Angeles Dodgers' offensive attack. He topped the club in runs scored, total hits, doubles and triples. Additionally, Willie swiped twenty bases, which also gave him the team lead in that department.

MAJOR & MINOR LEAGUE BATTING RECORD

YEAR	TEAM	AB	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	AVG.
1955	Green Bay	30	4	0	0	0	1	.133
1959	Reno	513	187	40	16	15	90	.365
1960	Spokane	624	216	43	26	12	75	.346
1960	L. Angeles	88	28	6	1	2	10	.318
1961	L. Angeles	339	86	19	6	12	45	.254
1962	L. Angeles	600	171	18	10	21	85	.285
1963	L. Angeles	515	126	19	8	0	60	.245
1964	L. Angeles	613	180	23	7	12	77	.294
1965	L. Angeles	558	133	24	3	10	57	.238
1966	L. Angeles	624	177	31	6	11	61	.284
1967	L. Angeles	569	146	27	9	6	41	.257
Maj. Totals 8 Yrs.		3906	1047	167	50	83	436	.268

Q - WHICH DODGER PITCHER LED THE STAFF IN WINS IN 1967?
A - CLAUDE OSTEN - 17.

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Alyea's fastball disappeared on you. Davis' 1968 Topps cartoon has a variation where an "A" was corrected to be a "Q."

Printing differences or layout changes?

The 23 1969 Topps white-letter variations have been known for ages, perhaps because they were not found on every card in the print run that would otherwise have yellow lettering. The 1958 Topps issue has 33 yellow name/white name variations. Collectors concluded that differences in the pre-press set-up caused the variations rather than ink running out during the process and joining a sea of blotches and color differences (printing differences.)

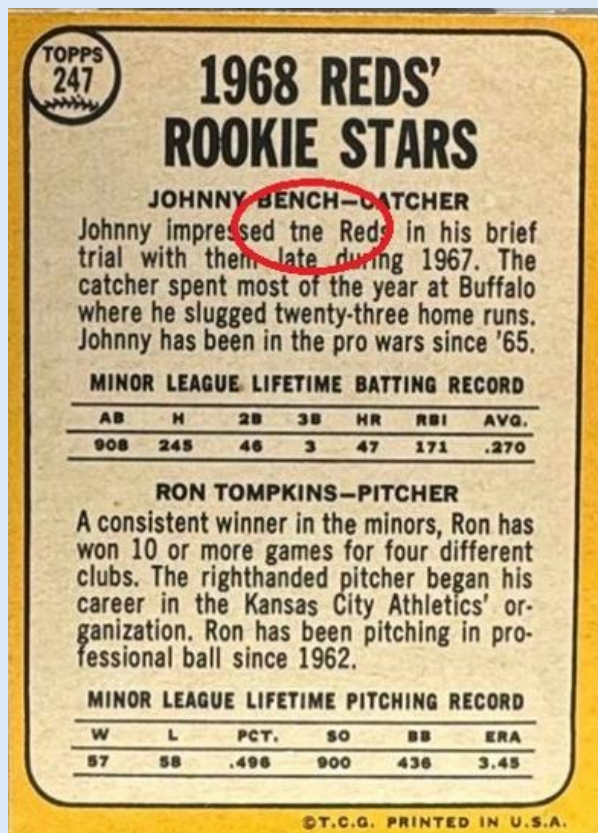
However, Mike Cady noticed a 1976 #300 of Johnny Bench, who wound up with a surprising white star on his card rather than a yellow star. His uniform color might be missing the same yellow ink that his star lacked. However, the rest of the card looks good as to the use of yellow as do similar All-Star cards in the set. Is it a printing difference, a variation or a “one-off” piece of scrap? Let me know if you figure it out, because I have seen a 1959 Topps Hank Bauer with the opposite yellow/white issue.



Bench's 1975 card has a star on the front that was found in white.

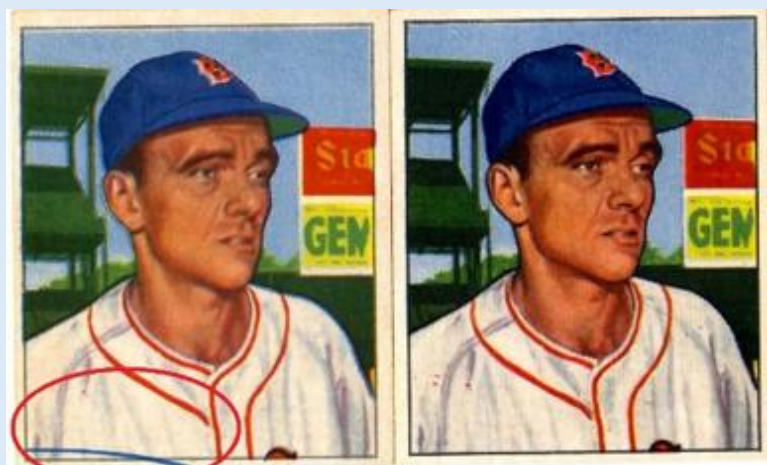
Typo fixes

Johnny Bench's rookie card (1968 Topps #247) can be found with text on the back that reads “Johnny impressed the Reds...” To a much lesser extent, you can find the card with “Johnny impressed tne Reds...” The truncated “h” might have been overlooked as a printing difference, but it sure looks like an “n” to me. PSA identified this at one time as a variation, graded 18 of them, but now mentions on their site, “Johnny Bench/Ron Tompkins-Error (No Longer Grading)” after grading about 15,000 Bench rookies.

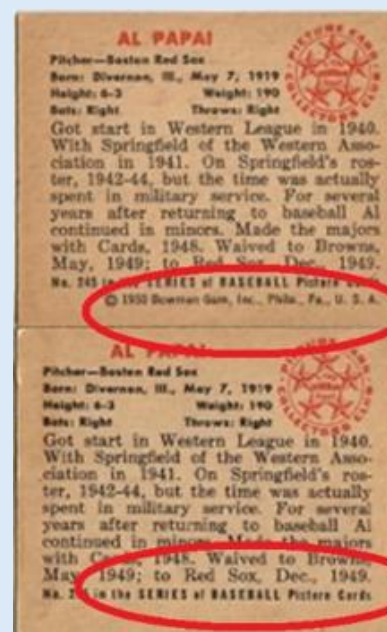


Bench's rookie card appears to have a typo that was corrected.

1950 Bowman – a blue streak.



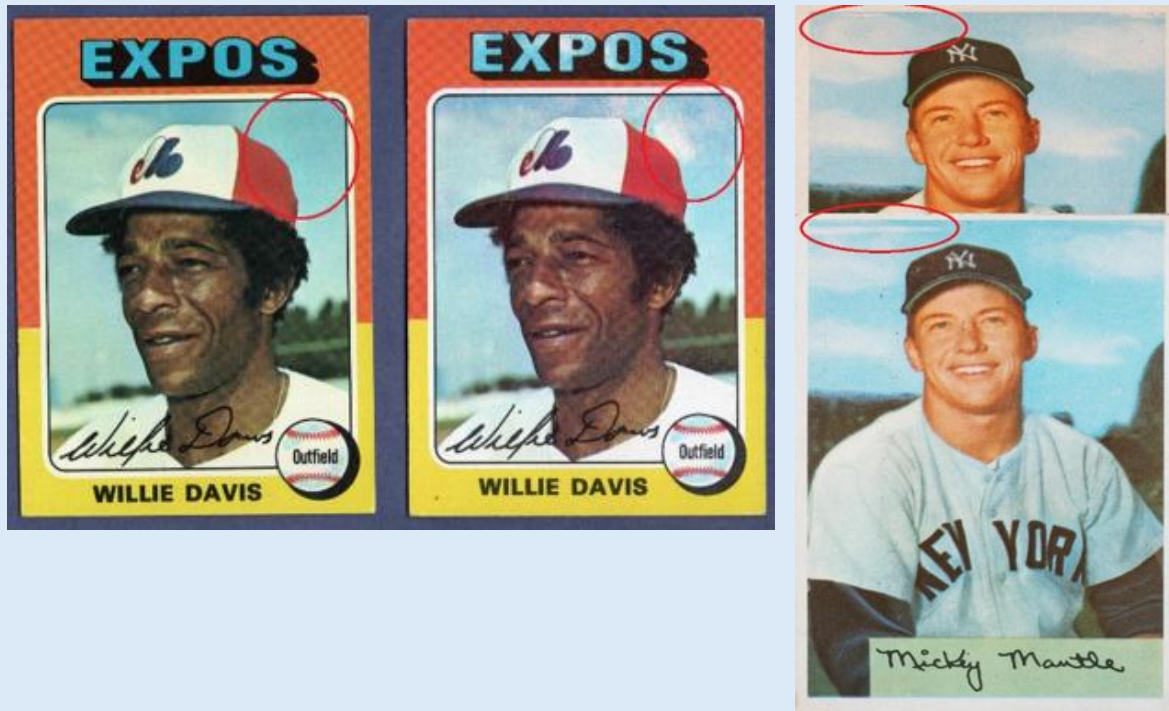
Papai's 1950 Bowman comes in four versions involving the copyright on the back and a blue streak on the left bottom front.



Bowman had their own plethora of variations in 1954 and a few mix-ups in 1955. Cards #181 to 252 in the 1950 Bowman set were initially printed without a copyright line on the back and then corrected.

Within the last few years, card #245 Al Papai was identified as having an occasional blue streak at the bottom of his image. Initially, it was found only on the copyrighted version. Now it appears that the same blue streak made its way onto the no-copyright version as well. We seem to have a strange four-way combination of a printing difference on the front and a variation on the back.

Clouds



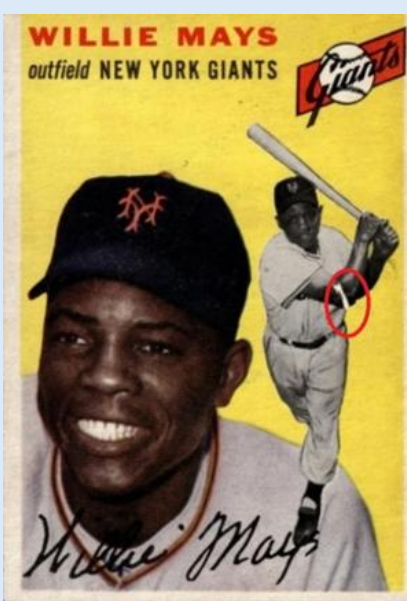
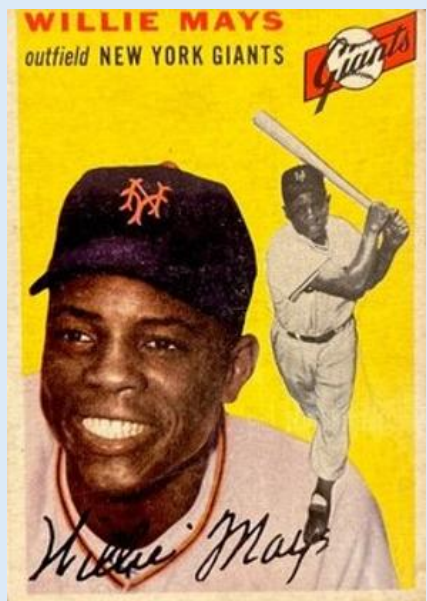
Willie Davis clouds – variation or printing difference?

Mantle's clouds question

The ink needed for blue skies and white clouds seems to come and go with the wind at times. Clouds on the 1975 Topps card of #10 Willie Davis were identified as constituting a possible variation. It looked to me like a printing difference rather than a variation.

I was asked to add my two cents recently to another cloud in the sky question. However, this time it was Mickey Mantle's clouds, so I needed to get more serious.

The 1954 Bowman Mantle cloud appears on a small percentage of his cards in the upper left-hand corner. It seems to be a consistent white streak. To me, it looks like the blue ink didn't do its job. I would call it a minor printing difference, but I wouldn't kick it out of my binder. If you want to spend some money on a more noticeable printing difference from 1954, you can find Willie Mays' "toothbrush" on his elbow in the Topps set.



Mays' toothbrush on his elbow?

Checklists

From 1961 to 1972 Topps would print a checklist for each series in advance of the series being issued and then again with the series when issued. Small changes and corrections to checklists were made when setting up print sheets. Dick Gilkeson's *Baseball Card Variation Book Vol II*, first issued in 1989, listed 70 such variations. In the ensuing years, 15 more variations have been identified. Every checklist issued in those years had at least one variation (except apparently one card: the 1972 checklist for Series #1).

Card #192 from the 1968 Topps set for the Third Series checklist pictures Carl Yastrzemski. Gilkeson and others noted that Yaz's hat was cropped differently on two versions, but years later collectors noticed that each of those two cards had two different variations of text on the back giving you four versions of the same checklist.



Yaz's hat moved and the text changed on the back of these checklist cards to create four versions.

Alert readers might ask what happened to card #192 when Topps used that series to create the confusing Milton Bradley golden-backed set. Fortunately, Topps just skipped checklist card #192 and double-printed checklist #107 in the Milton Bradley issue. It had taken collectors years to figure out that the #49 Brinkman and #66 Cox variations with yellow letters had come from the Milton Bradley special issue and not the regular 1968 Topps set.

1956 team cards

Sometimes you can find that cards will cost you nothing to cross off your want lists. I found one such example on a great checklist site that tries to cover every set and every variation, a virtual mountain of minutiae. They list and picture six variations for each of six 1956 Topps team cards (11, 72, 85, 90, 95, 100). However, there are only a lousy five variations of each card. The sixth card described as a gray-backed dated team card is even depicted but doesn't exist, based on what I know. If you are looking for them, you can safely scratch six cards off your list.



Finally, here is a card that only exists in one version like this – a dated team card with a white back.

Even these relatively recent finds can be exhausting to read about, and they were created in an era when manufacturers didn't have ulterior motives to have us chase rare variations. Topps was not enthused about spending money to fix errors in their sets. They knew there would be some errors; let them remain uncorrected. When Fleer and Donruss rushed into the market in 1981, they wound up correcting many errors and creating a deluge of variations. It was like getting a chocolate milk shake every day – too much of a good thing for variation collectors to digest.

Observations

You might well conclude that the minor differences in most of these cards should be ignored. Ignoring variations for the die-hard vintage master-set collector is hard to deal with. Think of the silly prices still obtained for a 1958 Topps Pancho Herrar(a) or a 1957 Topps Gene Bake(p). And those cards are probably not even variations but printing differences.

The most thorough (and free) compilation of sports card variations that I know of is the online Baseball Card Variation Vol II Book found at <https://baseballcardvariationsguidebookvol2.wordpress.com/>. The listings cover the major sports cards issued from 1933 to 1999; however, no one can ever be sure they have seen them all when it comes to variations.

Thanks to Al Richter, Mike Cady, Tom Billing, Patrick Prickett, Ken Morganti, Rick Lyons, Larry Leonard and others for their input on certain variations.



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