



SUPREME COURT JUSTICE ROOKIE CARDS

Patric M. Verrone

LUCY VAN PELT SAID, “Beethoven wasn’t so great. . . . Have you ever seen his picture on a bubble gum card?”¹ Although appearance on a bubble gum card or any form of trading card may not be an authoritative definition of greatness, it does connote a level of fame and celebrity, especially for certain people who are not professional athletes. Nearly half of the 114 justices who have served on the United States Supreme Court have appeared on trading cards. This article surveys those cards, highlighting each justice’s first or “rookie card.”²

The trading cards that many of us (including Lucy) know are the 2½-by-3½-inch cardboard rectangles traditionally sold in a pack, sealed in a

Patric Verrone practiced law in California and Florida before taking up his current occupations: writing for and producing television programs, serving in leadership roles in the Writers Guild of America, and creating figurines of historical figures (including Justices of the U.S. Supreme Court). Copyright 2024 Patric M. Verrone.

¹ Charles Schultz, *A Charlie Brown Christmas* (CBS television broadcast, Dec. 9, 1965). Although Ludwig van Beethoven never appeared on a bubble gum card, he did appear on a handful of German tobacco cards between 1893 and 1934, and dozens of other trading cards since 1996, missing the bubble gum card era.

² In sports card collecting circles, rookie cards include requirements that are not relevant to non-sports figures (e.g., reaching the major leagues). For the purposes of this article, a justice’s rookie card is simply their first appearance on a collectible card. See James Beckett, *Beckett Rookie Card Encyclopedia: The Definitive Resource for Every Rookie Card Ever Made* (Beckett Media, 2014). See also *infra* note 20.

waxy wrapper with a stick of powdered, pink, practically inedible bubble gum. The ubiquity of this model is largely due to the popularity of cards produced by Topps Chewing Gum, Inc. (and its corporate successors under various names), which has dominated the baseball card market since the early 1950s and only finally abandoned the gum insert in 1992.³ But even without the gum, collectible cards with images of famous people (sports and otherwise) have antecedents going back to the mid-nineteenth century. A direct lineage is traceable to cards that were inserted in cigarette packs and, before that, to business advertisements called “trade cards.”⁴ Even earlier are Civil War-era album cards with portraits of military and government leaders. These cards were a variation of the earliest collectible card, the paper-on-cardboard photograph known as the *carte-de-visite* or CDV, which first appeared in 1859.⁵ This is where the search for Supreme Court justice rookie cards begins.

Among the first great collecting obsessions in America, CDVs provoked what became known as “cartomania.” Poet Oliver Wendell Holmes, father of a Supreme Court justice with the same name, called these card-portraits the “sentimental ‘green-backs’ of civilization.”⁶ Americans of the 1860s and ’70s filled albums with celebrity images, side by side with CDVs of friends and family. As the generations passed, most have deteriorated or were discarded. Although this would seem to be a recipe for rarity and collectability in our time, CDVs have not become either exorbitantly valuable or extensively catalogued. Further, because very few of these cards had a printed date on them, it is difficult to determine when precisely they were produced. Still, CDVs of Supreme Court justices do exist.

³ For an early history of Topps, see David Hornish, *Modern Hobby Guide to Topps Chewing Gum: 1938 to 1956* (2013), archive.org/details/ModernGuideToToppsChewingGumPublishedCopy2.0. For a more general appreciation of card collecting see Brendan C. Boyd and Fred C. Harris, *The Great American Baseball Card Flipping, Trading, and Bubble Gum Book* (Ticknor & Fields, 1991).

⁴ J.R. Burdick, *The American Card Catalog: The Standard Guide on All Collected Cards and Their Values* (Nostalgia Press, 1988) (reprint of a catalogue first printed in 1939).

⁵ William C. Darrah, *Cartes de Visite in Nineteenth Century Photography* (W.C. Darrah, 1981).

⁶ Oliver Wendell Holmes, “Doings of the Sunbeam,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, July 1863, p. 8.

Supreme Court Justice Rookie Cards

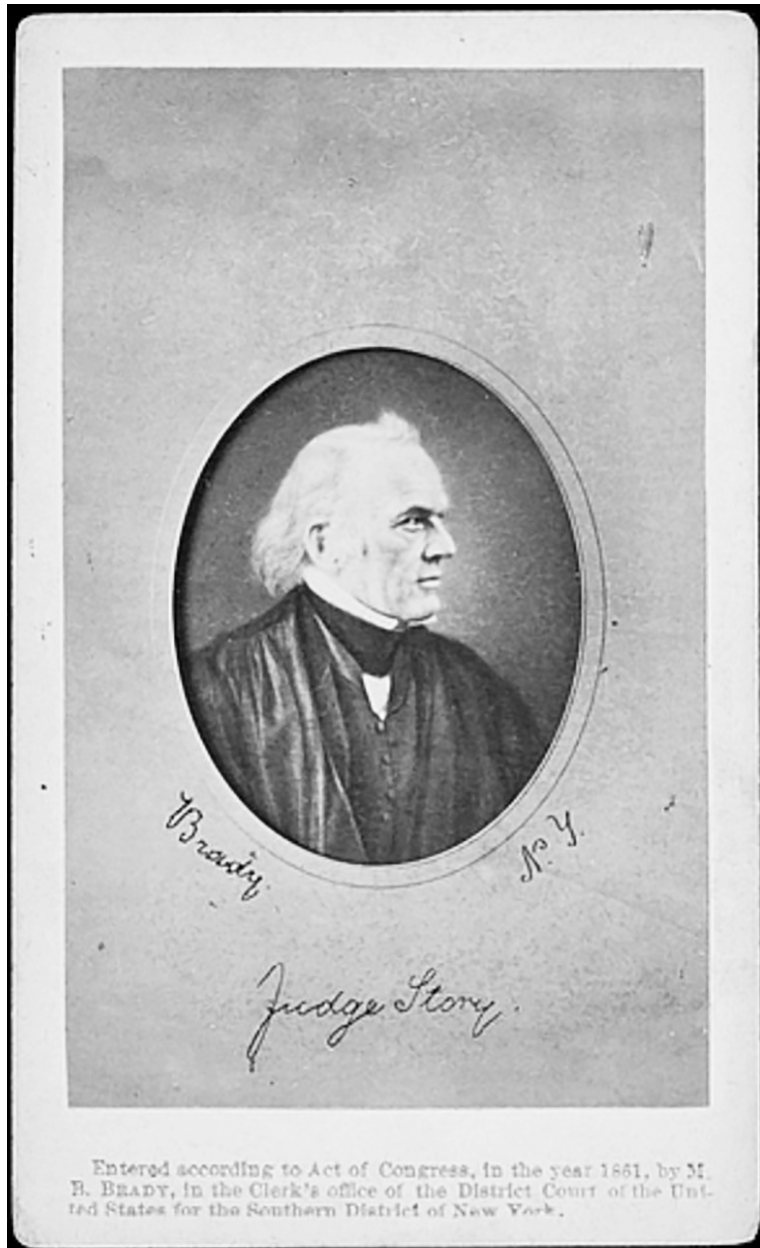


Figure 1: Joseph Story (1861).

The earliest definitively dated CDV of a Supreme Court justice is an 1861 image of Justice Joseph Story (Figure 1) by the E. Anthony Company of New York.⁷ Edward Anthony was among the most prolific publisher of CDVs at the height of cartomania, with 3,600 cards released per day.⁸ These included scores of portraits taken by noted photographer Mathew Brady and attributed to “Brady’s National Portrait Gallery.” An Anthony catalogue of Brady’s portraits from November 1862 lists nine CDVs of justices, past, present, and future.⁹ Besides Story, other past justices included the late Peter V. Daniel and Confederate Assistant Secretary of War John A. Campbell (Figure 2).¹⁰ Three sitting justices included in the “Statesmen, Lawyers, Physicians, & Others” section of the catalogue were Chief Justice Roger Taney (Figure 3), and Justices Nathan Clifford and James M. Wayne.¹¹ There were also three future justices, including Secretary of Treasury Salmon P. Chase (Figure 4), listed among “The President and Cabinet,”¹² and secessionist Congressman Lucius Q.C. Lamar (Figure 5).¹³ The third future justice was listed among the hundreds of officers and soldiers who fought for the North or the South: Colonel John Marshall Harlan of the 10th Kentucky Infantry (Figure 6).¹⁴ If CDVs are considered collectible cards, then these would be the earliest Supreme Court justice rookie cards.

⁷ This card is the rare case where the date is stated in its copyright, “Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1861, by M.B. Brady, in the Clerk’s office of the District Court of the United States for the Southern District of New York.” An example of the card from a Harvard Law School collection is digitally available at curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/joseph-story/catalog/73-FAL279796_URN-3:HUAM:INV114320_MDDL.

⁸ William and Estelle Marder, *Anthony: The Man, the Company, the Cameras* (Pine Ridge Publishing Co., 1982), p. 88.

⁹ *Catalogue of Card Photographs Published and Sold by E. & H. T. Anthony* (Nov. 1862).

¹⁰ *Id.* at 7. The catalogue misspells “Judge Daniels” and calls Campbell “Judge of Ala. late of the U.S. Sup. Court.”

¹¹ *Id.* at 7-8.

¹² *Id.* at 6. Numerous different CDVs of Chase are known, including some which he autographed.

¹³ *Id.* at 7. Lamar, a lieutenant colonel in the Confederate Army, was about to be appointed Minister to Russia.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 5. Another future justice in uniform on a CDV that was not listed in this catalogue was an officer of the 20th Massachusetts Infantry, Lieutenant Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. son of the poet of the same name (Figure 7).

Supreme Court Justice Rookie Cards

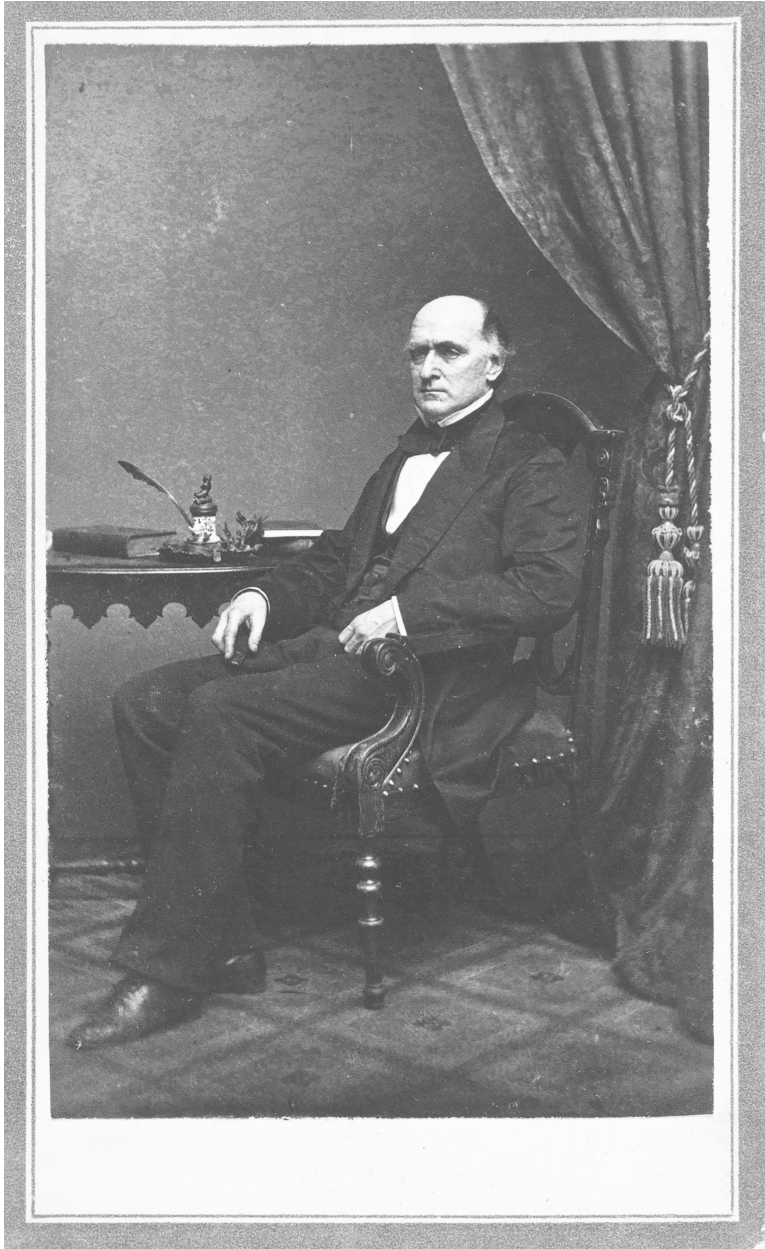


Figure 2: John A. Campbell (circa 1862).

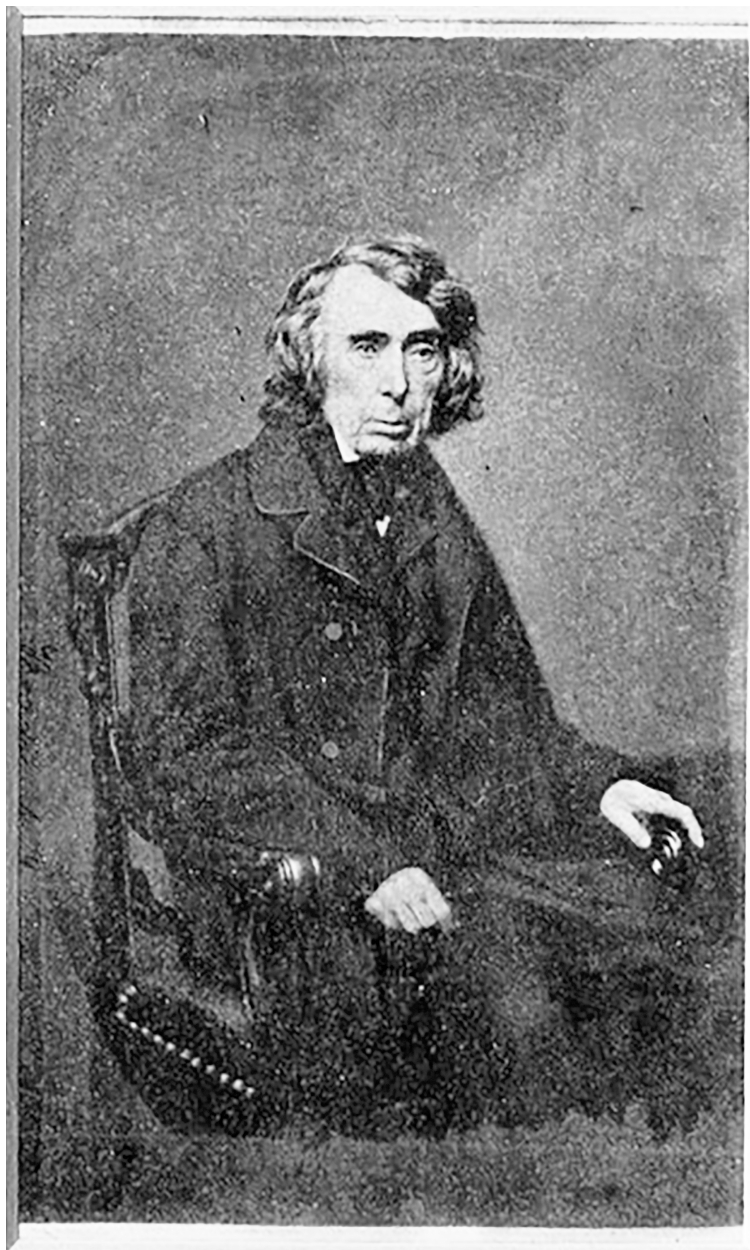


Figure 3: Roger Taney (circa 1862).

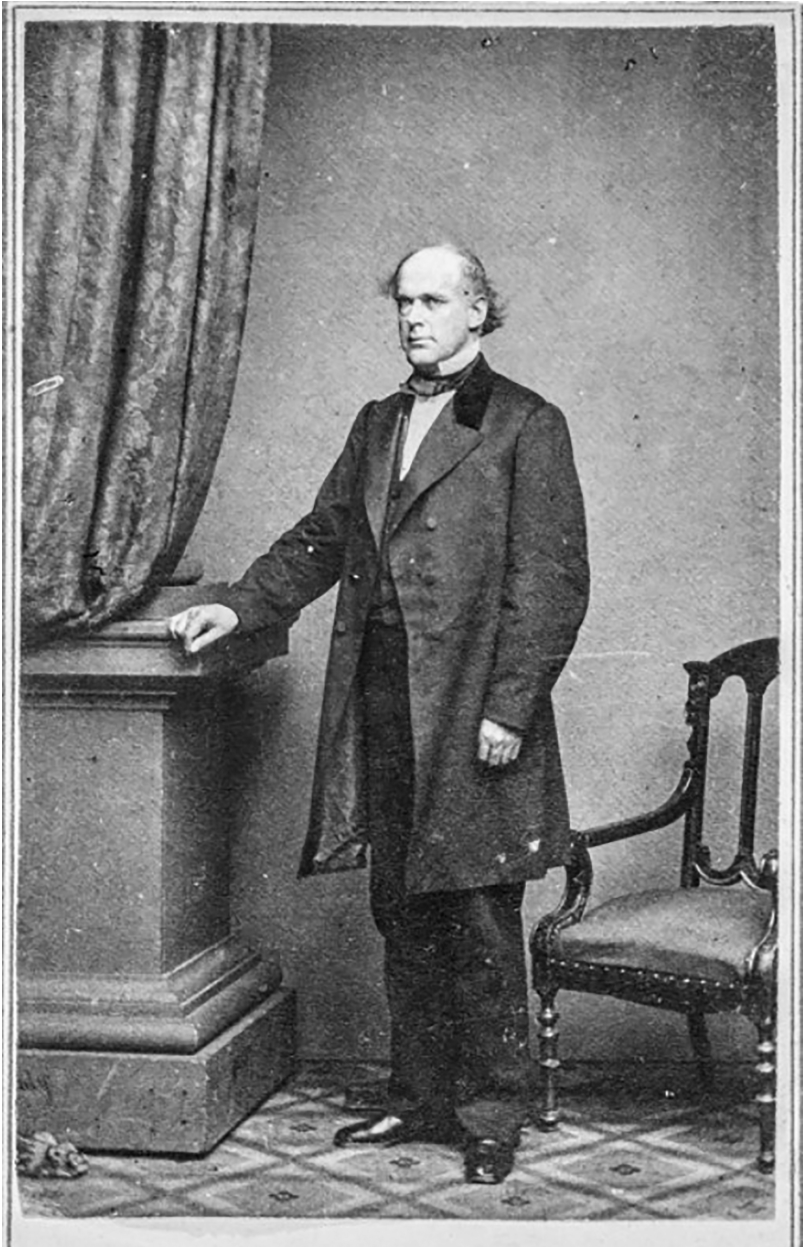


Figure 4: Salmon P. Chase (circa 1862).

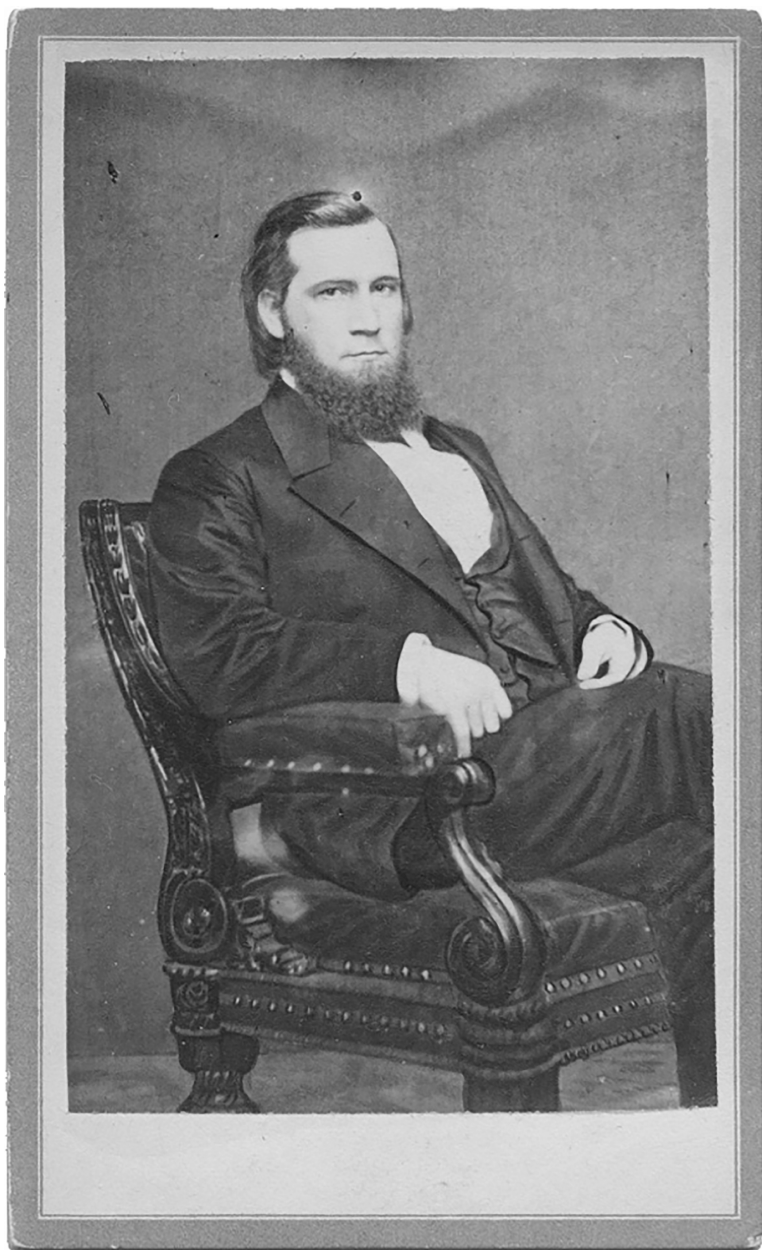


Figure 5: Lucius Q.C. Lamar (circa 1862).

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Figure 6: John Marshall Harlan (circa 1862).



Figure 7: Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.

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The fading of the CDV fad in the late 1870s coincided with the rise of a new form of paper collectible: the tobacco card. Cigarette manufacturers in the 1880s needed something to stiffen their product's packaging. They began using small cards with the likenesses of actors, sports stars, and historical figures. U.S. presidents appeared on many cards, as did presidential candidates. In anticipation of the 1888 presidential election, the W. Duke, Sons & Co. tobacco manufacturer (the same Washington Duke for whom Duke University is named) issued a series of 25 cards called "Presidential Possibilities." These included incumbent president Grover Cleveland, eventual winner Benjamin Harrison, future president William McKinley, and Chief Justice of the United States Melville W. Fuller (Figure 8). Although it is unclear that Fuller ever had any presidential aspirations, this card was not only Fuller's rookie card but also the first non-CDV card of any Supreme Court justice.¹⁵

Melville Fuller may not have had presidential aspirations, but two other chief justices did. Both were Republican nominees for the presidency before they served as chief justice, both ran against Woodrow Wilson, both lost, and both showed up on contemporary collectible cards. The first chief justice to run was William Howard Taft, in 1912. He first appeared on the 1910 Ward's Tip-Top Bread Presidents Card #26 (Figure 9), distributed in loaves of bread during his single term as president. Taft went on to appear on over 200 trading cards, more than any other member of the Supreme Court.¹⁶

The other future chief justice to run for president was Charles Evans Hughes, who resigned as associate justice to oppose Wilson's reelection in 1916. During that campaign, Rider & Dickerson, a Chicago printer, produced a three-paneled oversized card, showing an image of a man's face in red and blue ink in the middle and two transparent sheets on the sides (Figure 10). When the red sheet was folded over the face, it blocked the

¹⁵ Fuller's image would go on to appear on only one other card, some 133 years later: Radiant Historic's "Historic Autographs Famous Americans" card #58 in 2021.

¹⁶ For the most comprehensive list of Taft's cards see *The Trading Card Database* at www.tcdb.com/Person.cfm/pid/42936/William-H.-Taft. This website describes itself as "an archive of trading cards and all things trading card related." Launched in 2008, it lists over six million cards dating back to 1863. Images of most of the post-1929 cards mentioned in this article can be found by searching the "Non-Sport" portion of the database at www.tcdb.com/ViewAll.cfm/sp/Non-Sport.

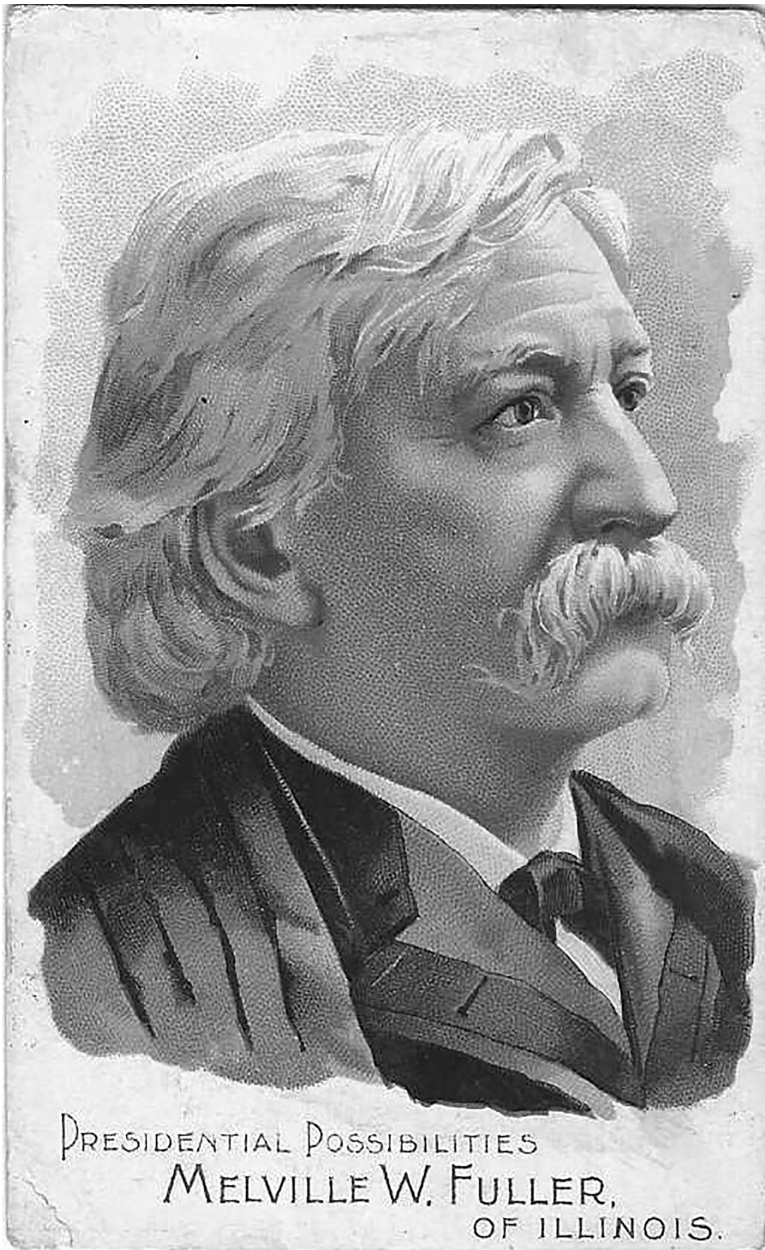


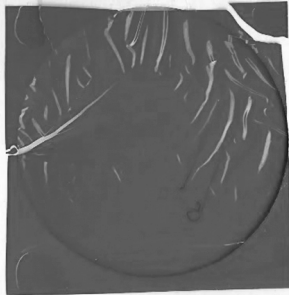
Figure 8: Melville W. Fuller (1888).



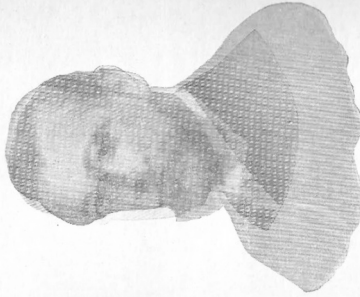
Figure 9: William Howard Taft (1910).

WOODROW WILSON

Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States and the Democratic nominee for re-election to that office, was born at Staunton, Virginia, Dec. 28, 1856. He entered Davidson College, North Carolina, in 1873, but gave up study for some time when his health failed; graduated from Princeton College in 1879. He studied law at University of Virginia, and practiced at Atlanta

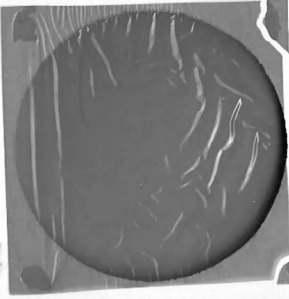


in 1882. He became professor of philosophy and law at Princeton in 1880, and he was chosen president of Princeton in 1902. He was elected Governor of New Jersey, Nov. 8, 1910, and he resigned that office March 1, 1913. He was nominated for President in Democratic National convention, 1912, and was elected Nov. 4, 1912. The Democrats again made him standard bearer of their party, June, 1916.



CHARLES EVANS HUGHES

Charles Evans Hughes was born at Glens Falls, N. Y., on April 11, 1862. He graduated from Brown University at 19 and had conferred upon him the A. B. degree. Graduated in law from Columbia University Law School and carried off the prize fellowship. He was admitted to the New York bar in 1884. He gained nation-wide prominence as counsel to Armstrong Insurance



Committee. This work revolutionized the insurance business. He was Governor of New York from 1907 to 1910, and was appointed Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, May 2, 1910. He resigned the latter office shortly after his nomination by the Republican National Convention, June, 1916.

Figure 10: Charles Evans Hughes (1916).

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red ink, and the face was Wilson's. Applying the blue sheet revealed Hughes. By some rookie card definitions, this card does not qualify,¹⁷ but it still merits mention as an early justice card.

Aside from Taft's presidential cards, it would be decades before another justice appeared on a trading card. When it did eventually happen, it turned out to be a rookie card in the classic sports sense. Byron "Whizzer" White was on card #21 in the 1955 Topps All-American Football card set when he played for the University of Colorado Buffaloes. This card also has the distinction of being a "rookie error card" because the initial printing had an incorrect biography on the back – that of Louisiana State's Gaynell Tinsley. Similarly, Tinsley's card (#14) had White's bio, including mention of his Rhodes Scholarship. A subsequent printing corrected the mistakes on both cards. Of the four cards, the original, incorrect version of White's card is the most collectible and expensive.¹⁸

As most avid baseball card collectors know, legendary Hall of Famer Ted Williams refused to appear on a Topps baseball card in the 1950s. As some also know, in 1959 Topps' chief competitor, Fleer, issued a set of cards of *only* Ted Williams. And as a very select group know (now including the reader), Chief Justice Earl Warren had his rookie appearance in that set. Card #78 "Honors for Williams" features a photo of Warren with Williams and U.S. Speaker of the House Joseph Martin. Although Warren would appear on a handful of other cards in the years to come,¹⁹ this is Speaker Martin's rookie – and only – card.

Sixteen years passed before another justice appeared for the first time on a card. In 1975, Chief Justice John Marshall graced card #27 of a 30-card set produced by the "Trading Card and Poster Society" for Big Boy Family Restaurants. Called "A Great American," the card series highlighted famous politicians, inventors, and explorers with a painted portrait on the front, and, on the back, a biography of the great American, accom-

¹⁷ Because it was a standalone card and not part of a set. Hughes' "true" rookie card is #15 in a 1993 set "Horse Star Daily Racing Form 100th Anniversary" as Governor of New York. See www.tcdb.com/ViewCard.cfm/sid/113758/cid/7825788/1993-Horse-Star-Daily-Racing-Form-100th-Anniversary-15-Charles-Evans-Hughes.

¹⁸ Dan Hitt, ed., *Beckett Football Card Price Guide Number 31* (Beckett Media, 2014), p. 538.

¹⁹ See www.tcdb.com/Person.cfm/pid/42984/col/1/yea/0/Earl-Warren?sTeam=&sCardNum=&sNote=&sSetName=&sBrand=.

panied by a drawing of “Bob” – the overalls-wearing mascot of the restaurant chain.

A year later, Christian Hansen produced a similar series of cards, also called “A Great American.” These 1976 cards were slightly smaller in size but larger in number (50 cards). Hansen, whose address (printed on the card backs) was identical to the Trading Card and Poster Society’s, appears to have been affiliated with, if not an alter ego of, that company. In addition to another John Marshall card with new artwork and a longer biography on the back, this set included the rookie card of the first Chief Justice, John Jay (#21). The 1976 set was distributed by Rainbo Bread, whose own logo and motto (“Good things are goin’ on”) replaced the Bob’s Big Boy illustration on the back. Although Chief Justice Jay’s cards started a year later than Chief Justice Marshall’s, Jay has appeared on nearly three times as many cards in the nearly half-century since.

Between 1977 and 1979, the Swiss publisher Editio-Service S.A. released a very large card set featuring important individuals and events from World War II. Printed in Italy, the oversized, square cards were distributed through mail subscriptions in 106 “decks” of 24 cards each, for a total of 2,544 cards. Two of those cards featured a photograph and biographical information of James F. Byrnes. The later of the two cards (Deck #112, Card #03) was titled “James Byrnes 1879-1972 Roosevelt’s Faithful Lieutenant” and detailed Byrnes’ various government offices and positions during World War II. Although this card was more specifically focused on Byrnes, under some rookie card guidelines,²⁰ the lower-numbered, earlier released card in the set (Deck #111, Card #11 “Office of War Mobilisation”) would be considered his rookie card. Other guidelines consider both as Byrnes’ rookie cards. Neither card mentioned Byrnes’s brief tenure on the Court (less than 15 months).²¹

²⁰ There is lively debate about what even constitutes a rookie card. See Victor Roman Sr. *Rookie Card Guidelines & Best Practices*, [truerookiecards.com/ \(https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Q4W1vPO17AJphP7_d1DqRG2xEpUTsA-Zc6lzdfoXWr4/edit\)](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Q4W1vPO17AJphP7_d1DqRG2xEpUTsA-Zc6lzdfoXWr4/edit); *Pre-War Rookie Cards Often Difficult to Determine*, prewarcards.com/2018/08/04/pre-war-rookie-cards-often-difficult-to-determine/.

²¹ Note that the Byrnes cards appeared in Decks 111 and 112 of a “106 deck set” because there were no decks numbered 89 to 100.

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The first set of cards to feature multiple justice rookie cards was similar in design to the Edito-Service set and was issued soon after it in 1979. Called “The Story of America” and printed by the Panarizon Publishing Company USA,²² this set was issued in 94 decks of 24 cards, each with a graphic layout nearly identical to the World War II cards. There were ten cards in the set that mentioned the U.S. Supreme Court or specific justices by name, but only seven had a justice’s image. Card #09.09 (Deck 9/ Card 9), “The Merryman Case,” featured G.P.A. Healy’s painting of Roger Taney; card #33.06 had a Louis Brandeis portrait by Eben F. Comins; card #36.05 was a group photo of the Burger Court (Warren Burger, William Brennan, Potter Stewart, Byron White, Thurgood Marshall, Harry Blackmun, Lewis Powell, William Rehnquist, and John Paul Stevens); card #53.03 was a photo of Felix Frankfurter; and card #89.05 was called “The Supreme Court Chooses Cases,” and included an 1885 drawing by Joseph Keppler of William Woods, Samuel Blatchford, John Marshall Harlan, Horace Gray, and Samuel Miller, though none was mentioned by name on the back. Card #59.24 was the first card to feature Justice Thurgood Marshall alone on the card front. Some rookie card purists might consider it a better choice than the Burger Court card (despite its higher number, Marshall was the sole justice on the card). There was another card in the set (#66.04) entitled “The Warren Court,” which claimed in a caption on the back to depict “Chief Justice Earl Warren in his law chambers.” In fact, it was a photo of Chief Justice Warren Burger in the Court’s law library. Does that make this card Burger’s solo rookie card – and an error card at that? Considering that this set is not listed on the Trading Card Database or in any non-sport card price guide, arguably these cards should not count at all.

The next phase of justice rookie cards started in 1987 during the “Trivial Pursuit” board game craze. A 1987 trivia card game called “Motto” included 1,000 cards with images of famous individuals from politics, sports, and the arts. Among them was card #711, “Former U.S. Chief Justice Warren Burger” (correctly identified this time). In 1991, another card game appeared called “Face to Face: The Famous Celebrity Guessing Game.” It contained 800 cards, each with a face and a number on the front and the

²² Despite its name, Panarizon Publishing Company USA printed its cards in Italy.

letter F (presumably for “Face”) on the back. Oddly, if you didn’t know to whom the face belonged, there was nothing on the card itself to help you guess. If there was a master list of the 800 identities, it hasn’t survived in card collector circles. According to the Trading Card Database list of cards in the set, the face on card #3 was that of Sandra Day O’Connor, making it her rookie card. The only other justice in the set was card #739, Thurgood Marshall.

Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase has already been mentioned as the subject of several *cartes de visite* in the 1860s. If one doesn’t consider CDVs eligible for rookie card status, one would have to wait 130 years for Chase’s image to appear on a collector card. Pro Set, a Dallas-based trading card company specializing in professional football cards, released a 1992 set of “Guinness Book of Records” cards. There were 100 cards in the set and card #34 “Money worth a fortune!” highlighted the “highest-value bank note in circulation.” That note was the 1934 Federal Reserve \$10,000 bill, which bears an engraved portrait of Chase. The card included a disclaimer – “Photography on the front not legal tender” – but made no mention of whether it qualified as Chase’s rookie card.

Also in 1992, the floodgates of justice rookie cards opened with the release of “Americana Historic Trading Cards” by Starline, Inc. These cards were sold in packs of 12 cards (36 packs to a box) in classic sports card fashion. Of the 250 cards in the set, 17 bore the likenesses of individual justices and one (#213) featured the entire 1992 Rehnquist Court. The rookie cards in the set included Anthony M. Kennedy (#122), Antonin Scalia (#123), David H. Souter (#124), Oliver Wendell Holmes (#134), William O. Douglas (#157), and William J. Brennan (#235); plus the first solo cards of Harry A. Blackmun (#126), John Paul Stevens (#127), and William H. Rehnquist (#129).²³

Rounding out 1992, a political card set called “Decision ’92” was produced by AAA Sports, Inc. under its trademarked brand, “Wild Card.” According to the packaging, each pack held eight trading cards from the “Special Election Edition” devoted to either “The Candidates!” or “The Issues!” with a “Billionaire Ross Perot Special Subset.” Card #90 of the 100-

²³ The other justice cards in the set were John Marshall (#56), Thurgood Marshall (#59), William Howard Taft (#70), Sandra Day O’Connor (#125), Byron White (#128), Salmon P. Chase (#131), Earl Warren (#156), Warren Burger (#171), and John Jay (#177).

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card set showed a photo of Justice Clarence Thomas at his confirmation hearings from the year before and only the words “Sexual Harassment.”²⁴ Despite the ignominious title, this is Thomas’s rookie card.

From 1994 to 2001 the Grolier Company (known for its encyclopedia) issued a subscription card set like the Panarizon set from the early eighties. It was so similar, it had the same name, “Story of America.” Like the earlier “Story of America” cards, these were issued in decks on a monthly subscription basis. Larger than most cards ($6\frac{1}{4} \times 4\frac{13}{16}$ inches), they were published in 126 decks of 20 each (2,520 total). There were five justice rookie cards: #92.03 Joseph Story, #95.02 Hugo Black, #97.02 James Wilson, #101.01 Benjamin N. Cardozo, and #128.03 Ruth Bader Ginsburg,²⁵ plus the first solo cards of John Marshall Harlan (#102.03) and Lewis Powell, Jr. (#125.04).

In 2004, the Upper Deck Company, famous for revitalizing the sports card industry in the 1990s with its higher quality product, issued a series of cards called “History of the United States.” Sold as a complete unit or “factory set,” it included a card called “The Civil Rights Act of 1875”²⁶ bearing a photo of the Supreme Court that held the law unconstitutional in the *Civil Rights Cases*.²⁷ Though none of the justices was mentioned by name, these were the earliest appearances on a card of Morrison R. Waite (who was chief justice when those cases were decided) and Joseph P. Bradley, Stephen J. Field, and Stanley Matthews. For all but Field, this was their only appearance on a card to date.

The Topps Company joined the U.S. history card publishing trend in 2006 when it released two sets of cards depicting the “Signers of the Declaration of Independence” and the “United States Constitution.” These cards were distributed in packs of 2006 Topps Baseball cards. The front of the Declaration set featured the signer’s name and a small engraving along the bottom of the card, with the rest devoted to a section of John Trumbull’s

²⁴ Some cards in the set did not mention the person on the card by name on the front. For example, card #83 showed Walmart founder Sam Walton and the words “Wealthy in America,” and card #91 had Arnold Schwarzenegger with the title “A Troubled House.”

²⁵ Ginsburg’s card is from deck 128, despite there being only 126 decks, because Grolier skipped over decks 103-115.

²⁶ Designated card RR09, it was part of the “Reconstruction and Reform” subset.

²⁷ 109 U.S. 3 (1883).

painting “Declaration of Independence.” The backs of the 56 cards could be assembled to create an image of the Declaration itself. Inexplicably, the Constitution set also featured Trumbull’s Declaration painting on the front, along with the name, engraved image, reproduction signature, and a coded set of letters “SC” followed by the signer’s initials. The backs of these 42 signer cards could be assembled into an image of the first page of the Constitution. The only justice rookie card in the Declaration set was Samuel Chase, while the Constitution set contained three: Chief Justice John Rutledge (SC-JR), and Justices John Blair (SC-JB) and William Paterson (SC-WP).

A controversial innovation in 21st-century trading cards has been the “relic card.” This is a card that has layered into it an actual piece of paper or other material associated with the subject of the card, such as a real swatch of a ballplayer’s jersey or an original document clipping with a celebrity signature. The earliest relic card to feature a justice was William R. Day’s 2009 Topps Mayo Football Americana Relics card. This card requires a lot of explanation. Topps named the set “Mayo” not after the condiment, but after the “Mayo Cut Plug” tobacco product that included sports-themed insert cards in the 1890s. The “Americana Relics” subset focused on U.S. government leaders of that era, specifically during the Spanish American War. For example, a card in the series featured William McKinley with a one-inch square fragment of the White House floor. The Day card recognized his service as McKinley’s Secretary of State and negotiator of the treaty that ended the war in 1898 with a tiny piece of a tree. There is no further explanation in the Topps promotional material describing what exactly this tree signified. Further, this was an extraordinarily rare card. It appeared only once in every 33,000 packs and there is no photo of the card in any collecting database.

Under the guidelines of the card collecting community, few collectors count relic cards as true rookie cards, chiefly because they are not typically in the main run of the set.²⁸ However, to date, Justice Day has *only* appeared on relic cards²⁹ so, at the very least, his 2009 relic card should be

²⁸ “A rookie card must appear in the base set. This principle is foundational to the rookie card.” Roman, *Rookie Card Guidelines and Best Practices*, p. 5.

²⁹ 2010 Razor Cut Signature Edition and 2019 Leaf Metal Pop Century. Both have clipped signatures embedded in them and neither currently shows an image in *The Trading Card Database*.

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considered his first card. The same is true for three other justices who have appeared only on relic cards. Justice Sherman Minton was on a 2010 Razor Cut Signature Edition with an embedded signature. Chief Justice Fred M. Vinson has been on four relic cards, all with embedded signatures, starting with a 2011 Leaf Cut Signature Edition.³⁰ Not counting Lucius Q.C. Lamar's CDV mentioned earlier, his first appearance was on a 2023 Historic Autographs Civil War Confederate Cut Signatures card with embedded signature.

In 2009, Upper Deck celebrated 20 years of trading card production with a massive 2,500-card set predictably named "Upper Deck 20th Anniversary." Although there were only 500 individual subjects in the set, each one appeared on five cards. Two members of the Supreme Court had rookie cards in this set: Justice Stephen G. Breyer (cards #711-715) and Chief Justice John G. Roberts (cards #2041-2045).

The next year, Upper Deck included a card of newly appointed Justice Sonia Sotomayor in their 2010 Baseball set.³¹ Card SB 191 showed Sotomayor throwing out the first pitch at a game between the New York Yankees and the Boston Red Sox on September 26, 2009. A lifelong Yankees fan, Sotomayor wore a team jersey, making her the first justice to appear on a trading card in a sports uniform.³²

This period also saw a new entrant in the Supreme Court justice trading card world: "Supreme Court Sluggers" printed by Green Bag, Inc., the publishers of this very journal.³³ Although the inaugural SCS card of Chief Justice Roberts was beaten to rookie card status by a few months, the series has produced the first card of these justices: Abe Fortas (2011), Arthur J. Goldberg (2011, sharing a card with Baseball Hall of Famer Marvin Miller), Samuel A. Alito (2012), James Iredell (2013), and Elena Kagan (2016). The cards are notable for their original artwork, invocation of

³⁰ The others were Leaf Metal Pop Century 2019, 2020, and 2023.

³¹ Part of the "Season Biography" subset, a 200-card chronology of important events in the 2009 baseball season. Sotomayor and Barack Obama (who appeared on two cards) are the only non-baseball players in the set and she is the only woman.

³² Although the Yankees won the game 3-0, Sotomayor did not participate in the decision.

³³ Ross E. Davies and Craig D. Rust, "Supreme Court Sluggers: Behind the Numbers," *Green Bag 2d* (2010), pp. 213-226, ssrn.com/abstract=1542215.

other historical trading card designs, and the extensive research used to create the statistics that appear on the backs.

Also in 2010, the author of this article created a limited edition set of “Supreme Court Justice Trading Cards.”³⁴ The set included a card of every justice to date and, as such, any justice who had not had a card by then now had one. However, because the cards were privately printed and sold only as a complete set, they do not meet the most rigorous rookie card guidelines.

The record for longest period between appointment to the Court and appearance on a trading card belongs to Chief Justice Oliver Ellsworth, appointed by President George Washington in 1796, who took 221 years to appear on card #193 in a set called “Pieces of the Past” issued by The Bar in 2017. William Cushing and Thomas Johnson are the only justices without cards who were appointed earlier than Ellsworth, so they have the best chance to break his record.

Returning to relic cards, Harlan F. Stone became the most recent chief justice to make a first appearance on a card when he showed up on card IL-7 of the 2021 Upper Deck Goodwin Champions Impactful Legacies Stamp Relics set. This card had embedded in it a 1948 U.S. postage stamp honoring the recently deceased chief.³⁵ Although postage stamps are much more common than game-used equipment, authentic signatures or historic tree bark, this card (in addition to being physically thick) is still considered quite rare. Stone’s appearance leaves Edward D. White as the only Chief Justice of the United States never to have appeared on a rookie trading card.

The latest trend in Supreme Court justice trading cards has been the publication of a card whenever a new justice is appointed. This has be-

³⁴ The cards are mentioned in Nick Vossbrink and John Racanelli, *Supreme Court Justice Trading Cards and Their Appurtenances* (2022), sabr.org/research/article/supreme-court-justice-trading-cards-and-their-appurtenances/. The set was updated with the five justices appointed to the Supreme Court since original publication of the cards, and a new edition was printed in 2021.

³⁵ The stamp is Scott catalogue number 965, provoking the question: Which justices have appeared on postage stamps? An October 2022 *USA Today* article has some answers. George Petras and Veronica Bravo, *Ruth Bader Ginsburg Joins Bench of Supreme Court Justices Honored with Postage Stamp*, www.usatoday.com/story/graphics/2023/10/01/ruth-bader-ginsburg-commemorative-usps-stamp/70889466007/.

Supreme Court Justice Rookie Cards

come the mission of the Decision Political Trading Cards series, produced during the presidential election seasons of 2016 and 2020. The first appearances in this series were: Neil Gorsuch in 2017 on card #268, released as an update to the Decision 2016 set; Brett Kavanaugh on card SCOTUS9 of the Decision 2020 Supreme Court Justice Portraits subset in 2020; Amy Coney Barrett on card #18 of an update to the Decision 2020 set called “Decision Direct Holiday” in late 2020; and Ketanji Brown Jackson on preview card #P13 of the 2022 Decision Midterm Madness set. Quickly produced, these cards have flooded the market of justice cards with small print run alternatives, variant versions, and generic relic editions.³⁶ To date, Justice Jackson has 39 cards listed on the Trading Card Database, nearly all from subsets of the 2022 Decision series.

Collecting a set of Supreme Court justice rookie cards would seem to be an achievable goal, at least as compared to a similar collection of Washington Senators baseball rookie cards. The CDVs and early cards of Fuller, Taft, and Hughes are scarce and comparatively expensive, but only the one-of-a-kind relic cards are genuinely out of reach. If the Decision Political Trading Cards publisher stays in business, newly appointed justices will grow the set going forward, but the appearance of vintage cardboard collectibles of the more obscure justices of the last 250 years does *not* seem to be in the cards.



³⁶ For example, a piece of an American flag is embedded in the “God Bless America Flag Patch” subset of Decision 2022 cards. Justice Jackson alone has nine such cards, each differentiated only by a variation in the color of the card’s border.