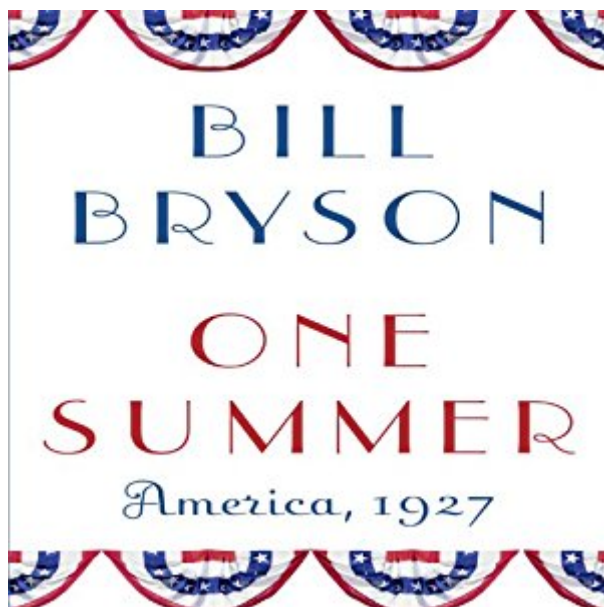


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# One Summer: America, 1927



## Synopsis

Audie Award Finalist, History, 2014 One of the most admired nonfiction writers of our time retells the story of one truly fabulous year in the life of his native country - a fascinating and gripping narrative featuring such outsized American heroes as Charles Lindbergh, Babe Ruth, and yes Herbert Hoover, and a gallery of criminals (Al Capone), eccentrics (Shipwreck Kelly), and close-mouthed politicians (Calvin Coolidge). It was the year Americans attempted and accomplished outsized things and came of age in a big, brawling manner. What a country. What a summer. And what a writer to bring it all so vividly alive for us in this certain best-seller.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"One Summer" is a marvelous history and revelatory accounting of so many things we think we know. I was especially interested to read the real story of Herbert Hoover. History has blurred and made mythological our idols and heroes. Bryson demystifies and sheds light on times past that reflect so much of today. So much is common for today... Hoover, for example, was so intent on self-aggrandizement, he made certain newspapers get press releases of any of his activities. If anyone wrote anything uncomplimentary, he'd retaliate with long winded criticisms. The book is well written, as any Bryson book is, and it left me feeling I was now an insider to our history and, now, cannot be surprised at the antics of our leaders.

I feel giddy (lack of a better term) finding a new great writer. My favorite historical fiction writer is

Laura Hillanbrand(Unbroken and Seabiscuit) nevertheless, I love Bryson. I love his style, breezy, folksy and I love how he opens a curiosity, i.e. in a year he is going to have his worse year yet. The main character is Charles Lindbergh and during the reading, I kept asking what's the big deal. Bryson explains beautifully how Lindbergh's feat was incredible and his use of his tours around the nation, it accelerated the emergence of aviation and America started to take the lead in aviation. The summer of 1927 was an amazing time because of some giants in the world, beginning with Babe Ruth (being a baseball fan this resonated with me) The 1927 Yankees possibly the best baseball team ever. It talks about the foolishness of prohibition and how one man spearheaded it. The start of talkies and the impact of radio -especially interesting was the invention of television. There is so much rich information that any review will not do it justice. I especially love the unknown trivia that came out, Babe Ruth's alleged rumors that he slept with Lou Gehrig's wife and the Lindberghs having several wives. I loved it!

If ever a book should have an accompanying CD, Bill Bryson's "One Summer, America 1927" is that book. Cue the music, maestro:-- "Seventy six trombones led the big parade," which begins in May with Lindbergh & the first trans-atlantic flights, followed by--"Take me Out to the Ball Game," with June's Babe Ruth, and his peerless peers including Lou Gehrig, continuing with-- "It's a Grand Old Flag," in which we meet August's vacationing President Calvin Coolidge and those around, before, and after him, concluding with--"Darth Vader's March," September & summer's end---whose brutal solemnity echoes Sacco & Vanzetti's lives, the height of the Klu Klux Klan, and the prosecution (& persecution) of anarchists, Fascists, and those thinking differently. The almost 500 pages of "One Summer, America 1927" can hardly contain these events and these men, and it doesn't even try to. The book is as fractal as the coast of Maine. A character or theme is introduced: don't go away, it won't have its arc completed where it first appears, but is followed in asides & interludes in succeeding pages. Like life itself, where happenings are spread out & we just learn to pick up the theme & follow it when it re-appears. There's Henry Ford and his story; the financial gang of four whose summer of 1927 plotting & playing probably pushed the economy over the cliff in 1929; Clara Bow, that darling girl whose voice sadly for her & us all twanged harshly upon the ear when talkies arrived; the gallant & ambitious & competitive & at times manipulative aviators who did not make it across the Atlantic (peace be on their memories). And Herbert Hoover, who combined a genius for egotistic self-promotion with extra-ordinary management skill, a fine man for disasters, untouched it would seem with the milk of human kindness. We elected him president in 1929. Oh, and Al Capone & the rooting, tooting story of Prohibition and the remarkable woman, lawyer Mabel Walker

Willebrandt, who laid him low for income tax evasion. Leading off? Those ill-fated lovers of the 1927 Sash Weight Murder case. Bryson is the drum major of this parade, high-bouncing, gold-hatted, & be-plummed with curiosity, fascination, a passion for details, and writing his most readable prose. Stepping back, however, several themes run through:--his love of baseball and the noble science of boxing. You want to know who else was on Babe's 1927 Yankee team? Here are their bios, every one (pp. 219-222) with names in bold-face type. And the scores of almost every game, as well as the size & shape of the bat-boy and the changes, intrigues, and drama of baseball's resurrection when the Babe first came to bat.--the sense of America's proud high noon, between the wars, when symbolically with Lindbergh's flight and literally, America become a dominant world force, the leader, and by-and-large, we did so in benign ways--the darkness at noon in America as well as abroad, the virulent anti-Communism, anti-Fascism that saw enemies in butchers and bakers; the more horrible, if this is possible, anti-Semitism that saturated Lindbergh the hero, that imbued Henry Ford, that was almost a common-place in thought and language; and the ugly, cruel, devastating discrimination against African-Americans. "One Summer, American 1927" can be read lightly, in the human interest of the stories and revelations of let's say unusual details ("He liked his head massaged with Vasaline when he was breakfasting") and going from the top-of-one-wave to the next in achievements & celebrations. This is, however, also a book about serious & enduring issues, ones that can slow down the turning page and quiet the ebullient music. "What can be said," writes Bryson, summing up Lindbergh with information emerging after his death, "is that the greatest hero of the twentieth century was infinitely more of an enigma and considerably less of a hero than anyone had ever supposed." (p.441) So it goes, for many about whom Bryson writes. Yet, the heroism & the greatness were there too as "One Summer, American 1927" can help us see. Any negatives? At times, unlike some of Bryson's earlier books, the writing seems stitched together, giving here and there a sense of some cut-and-paste, edited by that high-bouncing drum-major. None-the-less, this is an ambitious, grand, and often wise book from one of our well-loved authors. "American muse," wrote Stephen Vincent Benet in the invocation to his "John Brown's Body," "whose strong & diverse heart, So many men have tried to understand...." Readers may feel Bryson has invoked this muse and that she has, in her strong & diverse way, answered.

Several books have been written dealing with a particular year and author Bill Bryson has favored us with a most entertaining work on the summer of 1927. Not the entire year, but just the summer and what a summer it was. The majority of the book concentrates on Charles Lindbergh and his solo flight from New York to Paris. Without reading the book one may wonder what the author can

tell us that hasn't been previously noted regarding Lindbergh, Babe Ruth, Calvin Coolidge, Al Capone, Herbert Hoover, and several others. Author Bryson writes of the famous and infamous with interesting anecdotes that won't be found in school history books. The Babe and Lou Gehrig and the the root of their estrangement. Silent Cal, the man who apparently didn't want to be president. Lucky Lindy, the man who rose to instant celebrity, wasn't comfortable with it, and had his reputation come crashing down. Ruth Snyder and Judd Gray go to the electric chair following the clumsy murder of Snyder's husband. Singer Al Jolson and his loathsome sense of humor. Jack Dempsey and Gene Tunney, Sacco and Vanzetti, Gutzon Borglum, Henry Ford, and numerous others you should become familiar with are all here. This book has 456 pages of text and none of it is boring. If you happen to be a history teacher you can liven up your class with interesting stories your students will enjoy. History comes alive in this book and a general reader who is interested in history will find this an enjoyable read. Treat yourself!

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