



One Summer: America, 1927

Bill Bryson

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A *Chicago Tribune* Noteworthy Book

A GoodReads Reader's Choice

In *One Summer* Bill Bryson, one of our greatest and most beloved nonfiction writers, transports readers on a journey back to one amazing season in American life.

The summer of 1927 began with one of the signature events of the twentieth century: on May 21, 1927, Charles Lindbergh became the first man to cross the Atlantic by plane nonstop, and when he landed in Le Bourget airfield near Paris, he ignited an explosion of worldwide rapture and instantly became the most famous person on the planet. Meanwhile, the titanicly talented Babe Ruth was beginning his assault on the home run record, which would culminate on September 30 with his sixtieth blast, one of the most resonant and durable records in sports history. In between those dates a Queens housewife named Ruth Snyder and her corset-salesman lover garroted her husband, leading to a murder trial that became a huge tabloid sensation. Alvin "Shipwreck" Kelly sat atop a flagpole in Newark, New Jersey, for twelve days—a new record. The American South was clobbered by unprecedented rain and by flooding of the Mississippi basin, a great human disaster, the relief efforts for which were guided by the uncannily able and insufferably pompous Herbert Hoover. Calvin Coolidge interrupted an already leisurely presidency for an even more relaxing three-month vacation in the Black Hills of South Dakota. The gangster Al Capone tightened his grip on the illegal booze business through a gaudy and murderous reign of terror and municipal corruption. The first true "talking picture," Al Jolson's *The Jazz Singer*, was filmed and forever changed the motion picture industry. The four most powerful central bankers on earth met in secret session on a Long Island estate and made a fateful decision that virtually guaranteed a future crash and depression.

All this and much, much more transpired in that epochal summer of 1927, and Bill Bryson captures its outsized personalities, exciting events, and occasional just plain weirdness with his trademark vividness, eye for telling detail, and delicious humor. In that year America stepped out onto the world stage as the main event, and *One Summer* transforms it all into narrative nonfiction of the highest order.

One Summer: America, 1927 Details

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From Reader Review One Summer: America, 1927 for online ebook

Paula says

I have very mixed feelings about this book. I gave it 3 stars because I did like the wealth of information in the book. But I felt like that information was presented in a very disjointed way. Going month by month was OK, but I felt like the titles on the sections were misleading--I was expecting a whole section to be about the section heading--not so. And all the little "aside" stories thrown in were interesting, even if not familiar, but also seemed to just pop up anywhere in the book. Maybe I just expected too much from the book, knowing that it's a bestseller and by Bill Bryson, but I ended up feeling disappointed by it.

Kemper says

If you think that you had a busy summer, consider 1927:

Charles Lindbergh crossed the Atlantic and became a national hero. Babe Ruth broke his own home run record on a Yankees club that would be remembered as one of the best baseball teams ever assembled. The Midwest was devastated by extensive flooding and the Secretary of Commerce Hebert Hoover was in charge of recovery efforts. A routine murder trial in New York became a media sensation for reasons no one can explain. Sacco and Vanzetti were executed and sparked outrage around the world. Prohibition was still in effect but that didn't stop Al Capone's criminal empire from reaching the height of its power.

Capone also attended a boxing match between Jack Dempsey and Gene Tunney that would captivate the nation and still be controversial today. A young engineer with the awesome name of Philo T. Farnsworth made a critical breakthrough that would lead to the development of television, and another entertainment milestone occurred when the first full length motion picture with sound began filming. After building 15 million Model Ts, Henry Ford's company ceased production and began creating the Model A. In South Dakota, the work of carving four president's faces into Mount Rushmore began. Last but not least, four bankers had a meeting in which they made a decision that would eventually start the Great Depression.

And yet Bryan Adams picked another summer to immortalize in song...

Bill Bryson's book is packed with the details of these events and many more along with plenty of related stories and anecdotes. It should read like a trivia book of 1927 factoids, but what makes it more than that is the deft way that Bryson establishes the history of what came before as well as the long term impact. For example, he doesn't just tell the story of Lindbergh's historic flight and of his subsequent fame, he also lays out in a succinct manner how America had been trailing the world in aviation up until that point as well as how it changed things afterwards.

It's that context that makes this more than just a list of events, and he also goes to some effort to add depth in several places like describing how horrifyingly racist American society was in those days with the Ku Klux Klan enjoying a reemergence while even supposedly high-brow publications like *The New Yorker* would casually use ethnic slurs. By the time he tells the readers about how outlandish eugenics theories became influential which resulted in tens of thousands of people being legally sterilized in the United States, the reader can understand all too well how it could happen in that kind of environment.

In fact, one of the things that jumped out at me about this is that most of the popular figures of 1927 were basically assholes. Charles Lindbergh's boyish good lucks and piloting skill got the press to overlook that he was about as interesting as white bread, and he'd show a nasty streak of anti-Semitism later in his life that would severely tarnish his image. Henry Ford was also a notorious anti-Semite, and he was also the kind of ignoramus that despised people with educations or scientific background. His refusal to consult any types of experts led him to waste millions on schemes like trying to start a rubber plantation in South America and shutting down his assembly lines to retool for the Model A with no clear plan as to what exactly they'd build. (After reading about Ford's stubborn mistakes, I can't believe the Ford Motor Company managed to survive long enough to make it to the Great Depression, let alone still be in business today.)

Herbert Hoover led a life that should have made him one of America's most fascinating presidents. He was a self-made success story who had traveled the world as a mining consultant and was credited with a relief effort that fed millions in Europe during World War I. Yet he seemed to take no pleasure in anything other than work and one long time acquaintance noted that he never heard him laugh once in 30 years. Calvin Coolidge believed so much in limiting the role of government that he spent most of his presidency napping and would refuse to take even the most of innocuous of actions like endorsing a national week of recognition for the importance of education.

It's funny that since the book describes so many people as either being unlikable, unethical or downright criminal that one of the few that seems decent was Babe Ruth. While all of the Babe's bad habits are laid out here, he also comes across as one of the few that did what he was good at with an exuberant zest for life and generous spirit that was sadly lacking in many of his contemporaries. The guy may have enjoyed his food, liquor and women to excess, but he never hid who he was. Plus, he was fun at parties!

Bryson's look at the events, large and small, that made up one pivotal summer is an interesting read that provides a clear window to the past while being highly entertaining.

Diane says

This is a fun and interesting look at America in the 1920s, but specifically the summer of 1927. It is remarkable how much happened in a few short months:

"Babe Ruth hit 60 home runs. The Federal Reserve made the mistake that precipitated the stock market crash. Al Capone enjoyed his last summer of eminence. *The Jazz Singer* was filmed. Television was created. Radio came of age. Sacco and Vanzetti were executed. President Coolidge chose not to run. Work began on Mount Rushmore. The Mississippi flooded as it never had before. A madman in Michigan blew up a school and killed 44 people in the worst slaughter of children in American history. Henry Ford stopped making the Model T and promised to stop insulting Jews. And a kid from Minnesota flew across an ocean and captivated the planet in a way it had never been captivated before. Whatever else it was, it was one hell of a summer."

I've always loved history, and Bryson does a marvelous job of weaving together different stories and putting events in context. For example, Prohibition was still going on in 1927, but Bryson goes back to 1920 and explains how it came about. Or take the story of Charles Lindbergh. Before Bryson covers that first famous flight to France, he gives a brief history of aviation and explains how deadly and dangerous it had been. Those kinds of details really make the book fly, if you'll forgive the pun.

There are so many interesting stories in this book, but here are the Top 5 Things I Learned from *One*

Summer:

1. That Henry Ford was an ignorant jackass. "He was defiantly narrow-minded, barely educated and at least close to functionally illiterate. He did not like bankers, doctors, liquor, tobacco, idleness of any sort, pasteurized milk, Wall Street, overweight people, war, books or reading, J.P. Morgan and Co., capital punishment, tall buildings, college graduates, Roman Catholics or Jews."
2. How ridiculous Prohibition was, and that it lasted for 13 years! "The 1920s was in many ways the most strange and wondrous decade in American history, and nothing made it more so than Prohibition. It was easily the most extreme, ill-judged, costly, and ignored experiment in social engineering ever conducted by an otherwise rational nation... It made criminals out of honest people and actually led to an increase in the amount of drinking in the country."
3. That Babe Ruth was a hot mess. "The most brilliant, headstrong, undisciplined, lovable, thrillingly original, ornery son of a bitch that ever put on a baseball uniform."
4. How widespread bigotry was. "Of all the labels that were applied to the 1920s -- the Jazz Age, the Roaring 20s, the Age of Ballyhoo, the Era of Wonderful Nonsense -- one that wasn't used but perhaps should have been was the Age of Loathing. There may never have been another time in the nation's history when more people disliked more other people from more directions and for less reason."
5. The incredible impact that American films had, especially after talking pictures were created. "Moviegoers around the world suddenly found themselves exposed, often for the first time, to American voices, American vocabulary, American cadence and pronunciation and word order. Spanish conquistadores, Elizabethan courtiers, figures from the Bible were suddenly speaking in American voices — and not just occasionally but in film after film after film. The psychological effect of this, particularly on the young, can hardly be overstated. With American speech came American thoughts, American attitudes, American humor and sensibilities. Peacefully, by accident, and almost unnoticed, America had just taken over the world."

I listened to 70 percent of this book on audio CD, and then my car CD player broke. While I enjoyed finishing up with a printed copy, I did miss Bryson's voice. If you like audiobooks, I highly recommend his narrations.

I've lost track of how many Bill Bryson books I've read, but it's never enough. I love his humorous and clever style, and I hope he keeps writing for several more decades.

Dedra says

A five star review from an avowed fiction reader for a non fiction book is pretty rare. But this book kept me just as enthralled as a great novel. What a summer 1927 was and what a storyteller Bill Bryson is! From the fascinating little known facts about Charles Lindbergh's flight (and all the disastrous attempts before him) that I had to read aloud to my husband saying, "Did you know this?" to the gossipy stories about Babe Ruth, Calvin Coolidge and some really stupid murderers, I couldn't put this book down. Don't let the size of this book stop you. When I finished it, I wished it were longer.

Jason says

Well it only took me TEN months but I am telling you all that this was the book of the year for me. It took me a few days (I kept picking it up and putting it down) but once I got into it - total immersion from start to finish. Originally I was questionable as to why the author picked 1927 as a type of narrative structure, but as I began reading it it became clearer to me. I was wondering why he didn't go further back into the decade. The author uses the events of one faraway summer to expand on the ways and mores of an America (yet) untouched by depression and the spectre of another World War.

If anything, besides being a phenomenal read, this book has stoked the flame of my interest for all-things twenties. I plan on trying to decipher the administration of Warren Harding and all his scandals as well as unearthing the tangled, somewhat troubled legacy of Charles Lindbergh. A true American hero...or was he?

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN 2013.

Carol says

One Summer America, 1927 is clearly not a walk in the woods but a lazy stroll down memory lane. You may not know everyone who has a role in these pages but you're bound to be familiar with at least a few. Lindbergh, Hoover, Coolidge, Sacco and Vanzetti, Babe Ruth, and Sikorsky. Bryson gives us a tease on some and more detail on others. Unfortunately he jumps all over the place in these histories even though all his characters have something to do with that one summer. It's a bit confusing and makes for jerky reading.

I had to wonder how and why Bryson chose this particular summer to write about. I don't think he randomly selected 1927 as Douglas Brinkley (Washington Post) writes in his scathing review. He likens Bryson's to birthday cards from the year you were born, a token of the times.

Our book group wouldn't go so far as to be negative and all thought they learned something and will use One Summer America, 1927 as a stepping stone for some research on whatever figure captured their attention. Mine would be Calvin Coolidge as most of the others were more than I need or want to know.

Perhaps I'm used to the Bill Bryson of the Thunderbolt Kid A Walk in the Woods. Something just seemed off here. I particularly missed his laugh out loud humor and blend of fact with a good story. I did enjoy the prologue but wasn't quite certain how it fit. I finally decided to listen to In a Sunburned Country

Sam says

In his first major book published in 1989, Bill Bryson took a roadtrip around the United States in his mother's aged car. His account of 1980s America was honest, biting, and pee-your-pants funny. Yet looking back on that early book from the vantage of Bryson's more recent works, one is surprised to remember just how cynical Bill Bryson used to be. The 1989 book on America was titled "The Lost Continent." Now, in 2013, Bryson seems to have finally found the United States in his newest labor, *One Summer: America, 1927*.

The book (which is released everywhere in October) takes stock of a giant range of subjects representative of

the diversity of America itself. The common thread that bind Bryson's topics together are their coalescence in America between May and September of 1927. Most time is devoted to a handful of particularly important events: Charles Lindbergh's famous achievement and the early days of transatlantic flight; Babe Ruth's record-breaking season that changed baseball forever; the great Mississippi Floods; the Sacco and Vanzetti trial that altered opinions of America worldwide; the beginnings of Mount Rushmore; Calvin Coolidge's odd and surprising presidential choices; and scads of other bits and bobs from the roaring twenties. From the booming cinema industry to the poor decisions made by a select few bankers on Long Island that led to the Great Depression, Bryson explores how the seemingly random events of the summer changed our history. Bryson covers impressive ground here. Much research and consideration obviously went into this project. In the hands of most other writers, such a book might lose cohesion. Bryson deftly bounces from one topic to another, elegantly imbricating his many narrative snapshots, until they ultimately form a full picture of "one hell of a summer" that perhaps shaped world history more than any other of the twentieth century.

As with all his 2000s work (A Short History of Nearly Everything, Thunderbolt Kid, At Home), One Summer delivers fewer of the snort-out-loud moments on each page that his earlier travel writing traded in. While his 1990s books never shied from sophomoric views in order to achieve big belly laughs, here Bryson paints with a finer brush. We have a more sedate, cerebral Bryson, a wiser man tired of yelling and jabbing at the world's woes and absurdities, who instead leans back and surveys our history with a light grin and marveling chuckle. Yet Bryson still has a contagious and giddy delight in the obscure and astonishing facts of our world, and his matured voice, which he has finally perfected in this decade, is charm and ease itself.

As always, I can't wait for what Bill Bryson will come out with next.

Goran Skrobonja says

OK, this is the 5th Bill Bryson's book I translated to Serbian (the previous ones being A Short History of Almost Everything, Made In America, At Home and Down Under) and I am delighted again. Once there was a series of thin volumes called "Bluff Your Way" or "Bluffer's Guide to..." covering a wide range of themes with sparse facts and humorous approach; well, Bryson uses the similar formula in his non-travelogue titles like this one, but with more ambition, more research and definitely more humor. That's why his "narrative non-fiction" reads like a funny story, and makes us all learn a lot about the things we did not fully understand (like aviation, baseball, TV and sound movies) but they made an integral part of our lives since we were born. Maybe not everyone is interested in recent history of America, but I am quite sure most of the readers will find many fun-facts about various things they even didn't know they didn't know... So, kudos for Bryson. The Serbian translation will be available this Spring, published by Laguna, Belgrade.

Jim Fonseca says

A non-fiction work centered around events of one particular year but about the 1920's in general. It's really a collection of mini-biographies and vignettes of the major players and events of the 1920's. Fifty photos are included. The two main characters threaded throughout the book whose stories provide a framework for the whole are Charles Lindbergh and Babe Ruth.

If you read this book, here's what you'll get:

Stories of early aviation and how the US was way behind Europe in scheduled commercial air travel

The “sash weight murder” and the rise of the tabloids. (For young people, sash weights were heavy iron pipes used in the mechanism of wood windows.)

Prohibition, flappers and Al Capone (who really only had a 3-year reign as gangster king)

The Bath, Michigan school bombing that killed 44

The first national radio broadcasts and networks

NYC became the world’s largest city; the skyscraper boom

The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927

The Stock market “buy-now, pay-later” bubble leading up to the 1929 crash despite rapid economic growth, the decline of debt and zero inflation

Were the 1927 Yankees the best team ever? – Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb, Lou Gehrig

Henry Ford, the Models T and A; the rubber boom and his Fordlandia settlement in Brazil; tires only lasted 2000-3000 miles in those days

The Florida real estate boom and the one-two knock-out hurricanes of 1926 and 1928

Sacco and Vanzetti and the bombings before and after their trials

Calvin Coolidge’s surprise announcement that he would not run for a second term

1927 was the peak year for Broadway shows; Show Boat created the musical as we know it

Mt. Rushmore; flag pole sitting; the rise of boxing and Jack Dempsey drew bigger crowds than baseball games

Talkies started; Clara Bow was out due to her heavy Brooklyn accent

An era of bigotry: the resurgence of the KKK especially in Indiana; rumors of the Pope moving the Vatican to Indiana (how’s that for early fake news?); eugenics; national origin legislation that reduced the immigration of people who were not northern Europeans

A golden age of writers: Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Faulkner, Joyce, Woolf, T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound

Of course Bryson gives us a very engaging style; it reminds me of The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair that Changed America (or vice-versa). Really worth a read.

Arminius says

1927 has to be one of the most fascinating years in American history. Americans were rich and hungered for celebrities. The first celebrity status was thrown on to an unwillingly participant Charles Lindbergh. His flight across the Atlantic made him the most famous man in the world. Wherever he would fly huge crowds would await to see him. In fact, his appearance at the National Mall in Washington D.C attracted the largest crowd to ever gather there.

Also, Babe Ruth changed Baseball by producing more home runs than anyone else had. In 1927 Ruth set a record by hitting 60 homeruns in one season. He along with first basemen Lou Gehrig led the Yankees to a 110 win season and a sweep of the Pittsburgh Pirates in the World Series. This team is generally regarded as baseball's greatest team.

1927 also saw one of boxings most memorable happenings. Boxing heavyweight champion Jack Dempsey lost his title to relatively unknown but talented former light heavyweight champion Gene Tunney. In the much anticipated rematch what is known as "the long count" occurred. Dempsey, after being badly beaten through the 7th round of the fight, landed a vicious hook on Tunney's jaw. Tunney dropped but the referee refused to count until Dempsey moved to a neutral corner. This gave Tunney extra recovery time and on the count of nine he stood up continued the fight and easily outpointed Dempsey to retain the title.

Henry Ford is described as a bungler in the book. He stopped production of his famed Model T automobile in 1927 to produce a new model called the Model A. However, he closed all production of the Model T before he even started production of the Model A. This allowed General Motors to overtake Ford Sales, a status it never relinquished. In one of the Ford's other foolish moves he established a community in the jungles of Brazil modeled after a typical American community in order to produce his own rubber cheaply for Ford tires. The very harsh conditions caused this ridiculous effort to fail and wasted millions of dollars of Ford's money.

A secret meeting was held in New York of the world's banking leaders Hjalmar Scacht of Germany, Benjamin Strong Americas New York's Federal Reserve Chairman, Montagu Norman of England and Charles Rist of France met and decided to lower interest rates which inflated the stock market and according to the author indirectly led to the crash that occurred later.

I admire the American ingenuity and brilliance of the people of the 1920's. However there were plenty of crack pots as well. For example, a man known as Shipwreck Kelly would climb to the top of a flag pole and just sit there in what was appropriately known as flag pole sitting. A more sinister man by the name of Wayne Wheeler headed the Anti Saloon league. He insisted that alcohol be denatured which made it poisonous, and blurted that "those who drank it and died deserved what they got."

A more shocking event occurred in a Supreme Court Ruling. In an 8 to 1 ruling the Court decided that Carrie Buck was of such "feeble mind" that she should be sterilized. Remarkably this court possessed such giants of the day as Oliver Wendell Holmes, former President William Howard Taft and liberal icon Louis Brandeis. The only dissent came from Justice Pierce Butler. This ruling gave the states the right to perform surgery on healthy people against their will.

I could go on with story after story but this review would be too large then so I will leave it this. I will just end this with this book was fantastic.

Miranda Reads says

When I picked this up, I had no idea that it would be so interesting

We travel forwards and backwards in history but all events converged to a significant moment during 1927. Unlike *A Short History of Nearly Everything* or *At Home: A Short History of Private Life* where Bill Bryson looks into the full picture behind centuries of research, we have an account in extreme detail about regarding a single year.

We have **Charles Lindbergh crossing the Atlantic** - a person whose fame started in 1927 and who's fame haunted him throughout the rest of his life. Picture mobs of fans that never dissipate. Funny, how such a popular man became only a footnote after nearly a hundred years.

America became enraptured in the first big **tabloid driven murder trial** (Ruth Snyder murdered her husband and did an extremely poor job of covering it up). **Al Capone** continues what he does best - smuggling booze and murder. **Herbert Hoover** does a incredible job with relief efforts from the Mississippi basin flood.

There's so many fun micro-histories covered in this novel. They read somewhat like vignettes but he connected them so well that the full novel was completely cohesive. I hope that someday there will be a sequel of the same nature.

Audiobook Comments

Read by the author and it was a delight to listen to. He was so enthusiastic about his book - made it a lot of fun!

Brandon says

With the summer of 1927 being one of America's most historic, celebrated non-fiction writer Bill Bryson took a long, hard look at everything that went down that year in his acclaimed 2013 release, *One Summer: America, 1927*. Events covered include:

- *Charles Lindbergh becoming the first man to cross the Atlantic Ocean alone in an airplane – without stopping for refueling or for navigational purposes.*
- *The sensationalization of crime and the rise of the tabloid.*
- *Babe Ruth breaking his own record for home runs in a single season.*
- *The beginning of the downfall of ruthless mobster and bootlegger Al Capone.*
- *A meeting among financial minds that ultimately planted the seeds for the legendary stock market crash of 1929.*

- *The debut of the first "talking picture" exploding out of Hollywood.*

..and so much more!

I had such a tremendous experience with Blake J. Harris' *Console Wars* that I began seeking out other acclaimed non-fiction to digest. On a routine trip to the local bookstore, I spotted Bryson's *One Summer* and decided to give it a shot.

I learned so much from this book! Did you know that the only reason the steering wheel was shifted from the right side of the car to the left so that the "lady of the home" could avoid stepping onto the road? Were you aware that Henry Ford was an ignorant anti-semitic? I sure didn't. In fact, it seemed most people were anti-semites as racism and bigotry ran wild during the roaring twenties.

Of all the subjects studied, I found Henry Ford to be the most fascinating. A giant egotist, the man frequently shunned advice from anyone who claimed to be an expert in any given field. One of his biggest blunders involved completely stopping production on his immensely popular car the Model T to concentrate on designing and producing his next creation, the Model A. The only problem? He didn't know what the Model A was. He completely shut down operations without a clue on what he would manufacture. This led to massive job losses and a huge decline in business (no cars to sell=no revenue).

His other ridiculous idea involved buying a huge chunk of land in South America and creating a model American community that would produce the rubber required for his vehicles. Dubbed "Fordlandia", the venture failed spectacularly. He seemingly did zero research into the climate and location and appointed dangerously under-qualified men to oversee the operation. How the Ford Motor Company survived is astounding.

One of the biggest obstacles with writing non-fiction has to be getting the flow or style right. Obviously Bryson has a wealth of experience with writing non-fiction, but I'm sure it's always a delicate balance when trying to stay somewhere between page turning prose and blatantly regurgitating facts. While Bryson does a fine job, there were still moments (albeit few) when I found my mind wandering and skimming over long patches of information without digesting anything. Bryson has clearly done his research so there's a wealth of knowledge crammed into a tight four hundred plus pages – probably why it took me a few weeks to get through the book. It's a style that I find is best absorbed in small bursts.

That being said, I had such a great time with this book that I picked up two of Bryson's earlier releases (*A Short History of Nearly Everything* and *At Home: A Short History of Private Life*) this weekend while on vacation. I look forward to reading more of what he has to offer.

Also posted @ Every Read Thing

Larry Bassett says

It has been a long time since I have read a Bill Bryson book so when I happened upon an opportunity to win an ARC of *One Summer: America, 1927*, I jumped at the chance. Bryson is nothing if not prolific. He cranks them out. C-SPAN's Book TV has an eight minute interview with him about his most recent effort: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AEEx_GC...

Since I received the ARC of *One Summer* just a month before publication, I was not able to read the entire 448 page book prior to its publication. But I do want to say a few words about it even after publication since Bill Bryson is, for me, a Blast from the Past with this summer of eighty-six years ago. Two central events of the book are the Lindbergh flight from NYC to Paris and Babe Ruth's sixty home runs. The Prologue covers many of the unsuccessful efforts to fly between Paris and NYC. But many more events are covered in this three-ring circus of a book. The action never stops. It would be hard to say that many of these tabloid news events warrant so much attention so many decades later. However, the entertainment value is high. If you are a Bryson aficionado, you don't want to miss this one.

Bryson, you will not be surprised to hear, was not totally fixated on the year 1927. He covers some of the family history of Charles Lindbergh. He writes of the lives and presidencies of a snoozing Calvin Coolidge and a self-aggrandizing Herbert Hoover. Coolidge was actually President in 1927. As the Commerce Secretary Hoover was appointed the head of relief efforts in response to the unprecedented Mississippi River flood of 1927 during which the great river was in flood stage for over 150 days.

U.S. population in 1927: 120 million

U.S. v. Sullivan: 1927 Supreme Court case that established the legality of the IRS pursuing tax evasion charges against criminals for ill-gotten gains.

The Spirit of St. Louis took off from Roosevelt Field, Long Island, NY at 7:52 am on May 20, 1927 and landed in Paris 33½ hours and 3600 miles later.

With Lindbergh temporarily unavailable, what America needed was some kind of sublimely pointless distraction, and a man named Shipwreck Kelly stood ready to provide it. At 11 am on June 7, Kelly clambered to the top of a 50-foot flagpole on the roof of the St. Francis Hotel in Newark, New Jersey, and sat there. That was all he did, for days on end, but people were enchanted and streamed to Newark to watch.

Bryson detours from Lindbergh for a while to begin to tell us the story of the life of Babe Ruth who was born in 1895 leaving some distance to be covered before we arrive in the signature year of 1927. But even diversions have their own diversions in this homegrown history of many years rolled somehow into one. The segues from the Spirit of St. Louis to Shipwreck Kelly to The House that Ruth Built to radio coming of age are not always smooth.

It takes some effort of imagination to appreciate how novel radio was in the 1920s. It was the wonder of the age. By the time of Lindbergh's flight, one-third of all the money America spent on furniture was spent on radios. Stations sprouted everywhere. In a single day in 1922, the number of American radio stations went from 28 to 570.

And as Babe Ruth is sold by the Boston Red Sox to the New York Yankees, we slip nimbly into pages about New York City.

In 1927, New York has just overtaken London as the world's largest city . . . By 1927, New York had half the nation's skyscrapers . . . The canyon-like streets and spiky skyline that we associate with New York is largely a 1920s phenomenon.

Prohibition in the U.S. lasted thirteen years. One of those years was 1927 so Prohibition gets a chapter in the book. There is no lack of stories about Prohibition and Bryson tells many of them – poisons being added to some forms of alcohol and padlocked establishments having customers enter through the back door are a couple of examples. The phrase “giving a hand” (applause) to an entertainer was allegedly coined during Prohibition and was probably uttered several times in the summer of 1927!

You may think that with four seasons in a year, each would have three months. You will not be surprised, I am sure, to learn that for the purposes of his book Bill Bryson extended the summer of 1927 to five months – May through September. I can only wonder if, when asked about this, Bryson said, “So sue me!” The connections of the book to the summer of the title are not always self evident. You just have to go along for the ride.

The flight of Commander Richard Byrd from New York to Paris weeks after Lindbergh is given some considerable attention although Byrd arrived in Paris by train since the plane was forced to land in the ocean along the coast of France. Evidence is given of serious misinformation given by Byrd and his chief pilot Bert Acosta about the trip; foremost is the fact that the co-pilot Bernt Balchen actually did almost all of the actual piloting as a result of the lack of skill of the pilot Acosta who knew nothing about flying on instruments, an integral part of the journey.

Cramming events of other years into 1927 continued with abandon:

For Warren G. Harding, the summer of 1927 was not a good one, which was perhaps a little surprising since he had been dead for nearly four years by then. Few people have undergone a more rapid and comprehensively negative reappraisal than America’s twenty-ninth President. When he died suddenly in San Francisco on August 2, 1923 ... he was widely liked and admired. ... At the time of his death President Harding was on the brink of being exposed as a scoundrel and a fool.

If you like tabloid journalism and “Ripley’s Believe It or Not,” I can almost promise that you will like *One Summer*. Although it is somewhat long, it’s an easy read that seems determined to amaze and amuse. Frippery may be too strong a word but no one should expect too much of consequence from this book. The ARC I read was missing the bibliography and notes from the end, additions that may be of value to those who are interested in pursuing the historical aspects of the book. But I think you will likely find *One Summer* more entertaining than stimulating.

More weak tangents to 1927: boxing and Fordlandia. Fordlandia was a failed Henry Ford development in Brazil in 1928. There were some well known boxing matches in that era, but, again, a summer 1927 connection is a stretch. But, hey, it’s just the title of the book so I probably shouldn’t be so demanding about the content as long as it is interesting. Much of it is interesting without dwelling overlong on many of the topics. We are talking blurbs here of a page or two for those with a short attention span. History in the form of birdshot.

The August segment of the book leads off with a twenty page story of Sacco and Vanzetti, the Italian anarchists convicted of a payroll robbery and murder that occurred in Massachusetts in 1920 and culminated in their execution in August of 1927. After dipping briefly into the announcement of President Coolidge that he will not to run for re-election in 1928, we find ourselves in the story of the carving of Mount Rushmore in South Dakota. Zip, zip, zip. We move quickly.

Silent films turned to talkies in the 1920s and Clara Bow morphed from the It Girl to the has-been because

her voice just would not do on screen – “the vocal equivalent of nails on a blackboard.”

Few difficult questions are asked in *One Summer*. However, one question directly related to the book was asked: “Were Sacco and Vanzetti innocent?” Bryson equivocates and vacillates. He names some who thought they were guilty and boldly states:

Many people closely involved in the case, then and later, concluded that Sacco and Vanzetti were certainly guilty of *something*.

For himself, Bryson says,

Across such a distance of time, it is impossible to say anything with certainty, but there are grounds for suspecting that they were not perhaps as innocent as they made themselves out.

He did not specifically note the positions of the tabloids that were often evidently a trusted source. This is one place I wish I had the final edition complete with notes. I am sure Bryson must have been more forthcoming there. But, here again, I am probably taking this book too seriously. It is not investigative journalism by any means. To call it “fluff” is too cruel for me but I am sure that some would use that appellation!

In fairness I should note that serious consideration and topics are not totally absent from *One Summer*. In the section titled “Summer’s End,” the Ku Klux Klan and eugenics are examined in some detail. The information about the eugenics movement in the 1920s and 1930s is chilling. In 1927 a U.S. Supreme Court case (Buck v. Bell) was decided 8 to 1 in favor of eugenic sterilization.

Altogether at least 60,000 people were sterilized because of Laughlin’s efforts. At its peak in the 1930s, some thirty states had sterilization laws, though only Virginia and California made wide use of them. It is perhaps worth noting that sterilization laws remain on the books in 20 states today.

But it does not take much imagination to recognize that even these “serious” topics had a strong tabloid appeal: ignoble aspects (for the KKK) and prurient (for eugenics).

Also toward the end of the book, methods of communication make a strong pitch for notice: radio, nascent television, popular authors like Zane Grey and Edgar Rice Burroughs. The popular authors outsold the F. Scott Fitzgeralds of the time. RCA, NBC and CBS are early entries in mass communications.

In writing about writers, Bryson makes an attempt to pin his subjects down to the summer of 1927 since this is, after all, the alleged focus of his book.

Among serious writers of fiction, only Sinclair Lewis enjoyed robust sales in the summer of 1927. *Elmer Gantry* was far and away the bestselling fiction book of that year. The novel sold 100,000 copies on its first day of sale, and was cruising towards 250,000 by the end of the summer ...

...

Hemingway produced no novel in 1927. He was mostly preoccupied with personal affairs – he divorced one wife and wed another ...

...

Also well received, but not runaway commercial successes, were *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* by a new writer named Thornton Wilder, and *Mosquitoes* by another newcomer, William Faulkner.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, the other American literary giant of the age – to us, if not to his contemporaries – produced no book in 1927.

Since I have drifted into culture, let it be noted that Bela Lugosi opened on Broadway in the play *Dracula* in September 1927. He made his entire career from that character. We take a brief stroll down Broadway in the neighborhood of, but not the block, of 1927. And we are told that the heyday of Broadway ended about that time with the advent of the talking pictures. The movies took the Broadway audiences, actors and writers. So says Bill Bryson.

I have said a couple of times that it would be interesting to see the Notes that appear in the final edition. Seems to me that Bryson may have occasionally sacrificed facts for a good story. He covers his ass, as they say, with phrases such as “according to one authority” and “it has been suggested” and many other variations on the iffy vernacular. You may have noticed I have reverted to some maybe’s myself! Maybe is just another way of being flexible.

If you are from Chicago or Indiana, you may be pleased to hear that these two locations get some special attention from Bryson. Actually, you may not be pleased since a lot of the attention is on crime and corruption. You might not agree that Al Capone was a model citizen.

Capone has also many times credited with the line, “You can get a lot farther with a smile and a gun than you can get with just a smile,” but it appears he probably never said that either.

The Prologue tells of Lindbergh’s life before The Flight and the Epilogue his life after. In one short paragraph, Bill Bryson lists the events and people of the summer of 1927 that he observed for 450 pages. As any good tabloid, the Epilogue exposes some quirks and tells how the people died.

Apart from Lindbergh’s airplane in the Air and Space Museum in Washington and Babe Ruth’s bat and sixtieth home run ball in the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, almost nothing remains from the summer of 1927.

To that short list of objects you might now add this book, *One Summer: America, 1927* by Bill Bryson. But to fill 450 pages Bryson had to stretch out the summer to much of the year and the era to all the years the people of 1927 lived. You shouldn’t expect him to do justice to such an extended period. He has entertained me, as he has done in some of his previous books, but he has neither made my spirit soar nor my mind marvel nor my pulse quicken. He has written a three star book that entertained without enthralling and that informed without compelling.

Matt says

There are some very obvious qualities to look for when choosing a history book. Accuracy is one thing. You want the facts to be factual. Analysis is another. You want there to be some meaning to the facts presented.

Storytelling, though. Storytelling is the thing. And it's hard to find.

So often in my reading, I've found that narrative takes a backseat to academic qualities such as primary source sifting. It's a shame, because I think storytelling is the paramount quality of a good history book. Yes, factual facts are important. Yes, interpretation and analysis are important. But if you can't tell a good story, why am I wasting my time? I'm a decade and more finished with school, so reading is a pastime, not a punishment.

Bill Bryson is a storyteller, first and foremost. I'm not sure how he did his research for *One Summer: America 1927*, but I'm guessing it didn't include a lot of digging in dusty libraries. A glance through the Notes and Bibliography shows a heavy reliance on secondary sources. Thus, the value here isn't primarily on new discoveries or understanding; rather, it is found in Bryson's ability to entertain while informing.

One Summer is a garrulous slice of Americana. A series of snapshots in time. The calendar provides obvious structure, and each month is given a chapter, including September. (It must have been an Indian summer). Promotional material for the book claims that the 20th century became the American century during the Summer of '27. This is a pretty ambitious (and questionable) assertion, and one that Bryson's text does nothing to support. *One Summer* doesn't have a thesis statement. It is content to be a fun read (though tackling some dark subjects).

The May to June to July to August to September chronology provides the only narrative framework. This is the work of a talented raconteur. (I feel like I would heartily enjoy having a drink or ten with Bryson). It is a collection of unconnected stories that Bryson doesn't make the slightest effort to stitch together. Instead, he is content to cover one subject and then jump to the next. It works because Bryson is a great writer working with good material.

One Summer covers a lot of ground. Early on, aviation is the focus. Bryson covers the many attempts (some doomed) by aviators to win the Orteig Prize for the first nonstop flight between New York and Paris. Eventually, the prize went to a youngster from Minnesota named Charles Lindbergh. The fame he achieved was singular, intensely focused, almost unimaginable today in an age of fragmented media. For a moment, Lindbergh had almost the entire world at his feet (and clawing at his clothes, and rooting through his garbage). Bryson's evocation of that weight on his shoulders is top notch.

Perhaps the most packed category is crime. Bryson covers two trials in particular that captured national attention. One, the Snyder-Gray murder, has faded with the years. It has, however, left a gruesome remnant: an infamous picture of murderess Ruth Gray in the electric chair at Sing Sing. The other, featuring the anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti, is still argued over today. Bryson does a nice job of weighing the facts of the case and suggesting further reading. Since America was in the midst of Prohibition, Al Capone also gets his moment upon the stage. (I appreciated this. For as many gangster movies I've have consumed, I really didn't know squat about the historical Capone).

I've hidden that picture of Ruth Snyder beneath the spoiler tag. It's not super graphic, but it's not puppies, either.

(view spoiler)

Since this is '27, the transcendent Yankees get their due. Bryson mostly follows the larger-than-life Babe Ruth. As with Lindbergh and Capone, Ruth at first seems too obvious a character to write about. I mean, what's left to say about the Babe? Bryson is so skilled at delivering anecdotes that this never became a problem.

Almost at once [in his first year of professional baseball] Ruth displayed the outsized appetite for which he became famous. The notion of being able to order whatever he wanted in hotel dining rooms was a treat he never got over. He also quickly discovered sex. He had no shyness there either. A teammate named Larry Gardner recalled walking into a room and finding Ruth on the floor having sex with a prostitute. "He was smoking a cigar and eating peanuts and this woman was working on him," Gardner said in a tone of understandable wonder.

How's that for a word picture? (Please don't ask how long I spent figuring out the mechanics of that little scene).

Famed batsman and lover, George Herman Ruth

In the political arena, Bryson gets the chance to highlight slightly more obscure personages. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover is introduced after he is put in charge of relief efforts when the Mississippi flooded, submerging some 23,000 square miles. His achievements – actual and perceived – helped him snag the presidential nomination the following year. The man he replaced as Chief Executive was Calvin Coolidge. Silent Cal, as Bryson notes, is having a bit of a modern moment as the posthumous standard bearer for a certain strain of libertarianism. Coolidge spent the summer of 1927 doing what he did best: Next to nothing. Unless you count wearing a ridiculous cowboy hat while on a long vacation to be the best use of a president's time. If so, then, Coolidge is our greatest president ever.

Rumors that Coolidge's hat actually caused the stock market crash are...possibly true

I liked *One Summer* best when it covered people like Hoover and Coolidge, historical figures that I don't know a lot about. Bryson certainly whetted my appetite to do further reading on both. Even with a well-known figure like Lindbergh, Bryson managed to present an interesting factoid or two that I had missed. I've read A. Scott Berg's *Lindbergh*, which is widely regarded as *the* Lindy bio. However, this is the first I've learned about Lindbergh's many illegitimate children. Turns out he was the Robert Baratheon of early aviation!

As I read through the various story arcs – space is also devoted to Al Jolson, boxing, flagpole sitting, and eugenics – I tried to discern a theme. I'm not sure one exists. If there is, I think it has to do with the intoxicating effects of a spectacle. Whether it was a salacious murder or a dude sitting atop a pole or a youngster piloting a rickety plane across the Atlantic, Americans showed an insatiable appetite for distraction.

(Of course, this is hardly an American trait alone. Take the French. The French went just as insane over Lindbergh as the Americans. And in 1914, Parisians hardly noticed themselves thundering towards world war because they were so enraptured with the murder trial of Madame Caillaux. Obsession with spectacle is part of the human condition).

One Summer is content to be an enjoyable, if not exactly memorable romp through the past. It does not have much to say beyond the story it is telling. I certainly thought Bryson's scope could have been expanded to include more viewpoints. To put it more bluntly, this is a book that is curiously race-free, to the extent that it talks at length about Al Jolson and *The Jazz Singer* without ever mentioning the rather mentionable fact that Jolson performed in blackface.

The Bath School. Sacrificed by a man who didn't like property taxes

With that said, this is not a sepia-toned trip down nostalgia lane. Bryson does not try to convince us that America in 1927 is some perfect moment to which we should all want to return. Indeed, his retelling of half-forgotten terrors – such as the bombing of the Bath School by frustrated taxpayer Andrew Kehoe, killing 38 elementary-school students – subtly reminds us that the past is never too far in the past.

David Sherwood says

I have always been a fan of Mr. Bryson. He writes with a friendly, witty style that I really like. I also admire him for what he has done for my country (England), in terms of protecting its rural landscapes and history.

It is not easy for me to criticize a Bill Bryson book, but with "One Summer: America 1927", I have not got past the prologue before sadly putting the book down.

The reason, Mr. Bryson has made two statements I think are misleading when there is no reason to do so.

Page 17, Paragraph 2, sentence 2. Mr. Bryson writes - "The development of air-cooled engines - America's one outstanding contribution to aviation technology in the period".

Air cooled engines were in use from the start of powered flight and used in great numbers throughout the First World war. What Mr. Bryson means is the development of the radial engine, which was much more reliable than previous engines. I agree, it was a pivotal moment. The only problem here is that the breakthrough was done by Professor A.H. Gibson and Samuel D. Heron, who, under the auspices of the British Royal Aircraft Factory, came up with the breakthrough design of the aluminium, cast cylinder head and cooling fins and cast iron or steel -sleeved cylinder linings. Please see <http://www.enginehistory.org/air-cool...> for full details.

The second issue regards the description of Alcock and Brown's Vickers Vimy aircraft. On Page 15, Paragraph 3, Sentence 2, Mr. Bryson describes the Vimy as "little more than a box-kite with a motor".

The Vimy was a twin-engined heavy bomber that went into service in late 1918 -1919, too late to see action in WW1. It was capable of carrying a 2,400lb bomb load. While the aircraft is very much of its time, it certainly was not "a box-kite" and it had more than one motor! See <http://www.militaryfactory.com/aircra...> for details.

Some may think I am being very picky, I might agree, were it not for the fact that I am certain there is much in the book that, unlike aviation history, I do not know. After reading the Prologue, I am left with the feeling that if I carry on, I am being spun a yarn. That much of what I am reading is probably not quite true, light on detail or to use modern parlance, had a spin put on it. What is believable and what is not?

Yes, I like Mr. Bryson's take on things and for a travelogue that is fine. For a book that covers living history, I, for one, need to know that what I am reading is being presented accurately. It may have a personal take on it, fine, but do I want to carry on and read a book I can no longer trust, to be a reasonably accurate portrayal of events? I'll let you know

James says

A definite return to form for Bryson after the disappointing 'At Home - A Short History of Private Life'.

Who would have thought that there was so much happening in one country in one year? Written with Bryson's more than usual trademark wit and with his skill of telling otherwise forgotten, obscure or neglected stories in an entertaining, informative and engaging way.

As usual he conveys these stories (connected more or less by the year 1927) with his usual wide-eyed delivery - sharing his fascination with the facts and stories he has unearthed along with the reader.

Jason Koivu says

I know I'm Johnny-come-lately on the Bill Bryson bandwagon, but I am fast becoming a full-fledged fanclub member!

Honestly, I'd read just about anything that dude wrote. In fact, if I can convince him to write my obituary, I'm going to throw myself in front of a bus the first chance I get just so I can read it!

The title of *One Summer: America, 1927* explains pretty clearly what's between the covers. And oh boy, what a whole heck of a lot happened that year! Here's some of the highlights >>>>

Charles Lindbergh's historic flight across the Atlantic

The Great Mississippi Flood

The worst national disaster in U.S. history at the time, affected well over half a million people.

The advent of television

First real talkie, The Jazz Singer

Brings about the sudden death of silent films.

President Calvin Coolidge

Least hard working US President of all time.

Babe Ruth broke the current home run record

Lindbergh's story and that of flight in general takes up a large portion of this book. Babe Ruth and the Yankees also feature prominently. The tragic trial of Sacco and Vanzetti is discussed at length. But it's not *just* a book about the historic events of '27 or a relating of the principle players and their doings, but rather an all-era-encompassing work that takes in the broad epic of America's strange, exciting, dangerous, and in the very least, interesting happenings.

Bryson is a great storyteller. Here he does an excellent job in putting the reader into the time and place, giving you a feel for the general undercurrent of the people, the importance of an occurrence and its aftermath.

But it's not all about 1927. What led up to the big happenings that year are just as important to the greater understanding of the thing, and Bryson sets the table admirably. He also placates the curious by giving us the epilogue of the major players and events of this time, so the reader gets that comforting closure.

All in all, *One Summer* is a very satisfying way to endure a history lesson!

David says

Content: 5 stars

Audio Book: 1 star

This is a fun, entertaining book by a great author. Bill Bryson has put together a set of intermingled stories about the big stories during the summer of 1927. These stories include Charles Lindbergh, his solo flight across the Atlantic and the aftermath, Al Capone and his brief career as the top mobster in Chicago, the story of prohibition, the flooding of the Mississippi River, the Yankees and their home-run hitters Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig, the trials of Sacco and Vanzetti, the building of Mt. Rushmore, and many others.

The stories do not begin in 1927. Instead, Bryson gives the context into which each story played. Sometimes this required backing up to a decade or more, to give the relevant history. For example, Babe Ruth did not suddenly appear on the scene in 1927, nor did Charles Lindbergh suddenly become an aviator. (By the way, Charles Lindbergh's exploit took advantage of his excellent navigation skills.)

In Bryson's hands, each story becomes a fascinating marvel, so well told, with a tone of understatement instead of over-the-top hype. Unlike his travel books, this book is not humorous. There are no crazy jokes, no sarcasm. Instead, the book is a steady stream of interesting history, constructed so as to keep your attention riveted.

So, given that it is such a good book, why do I give it only three stars? Well, I didn't read this book--I listened to the audiobook, which is narrated by the author. Bill Bryson has a very pleasant voice, so shouldn't

I enjoy the audiobook? Maybe, but this voice is very soft, and worse yet, he speaks in an uneven volume, alternating a normal volume with an almost inaudible volume. But, that is not the worst of it. Random House Audio, the book's publisher, produced a set of audio files that were recorded at a very low volume. It is obvious that Random House Audio has some very very poorly-trained recording engineers. I used the software program "Audacity" to check on the volume level, and saw that the waveform could be increased by 8 or 9 decibels without fear of much clipping. Wow! Random House Audio, you can do a much better job!!

Carmen says

The more things change, the more they stay the same.

[Insert Snake Plissken gif here]

Bill Bryson takes a look at almost everything going on in the summer of 1927. Think Sacco and Vanzetti, Charles Lindbergh, Babe Ruth, Al Capone, the invention of TV and talkies, Coolidge, Hoover, and Henry Ford.

What struck me most about this book is that the things going on in 1927 aren't that much different than the things going on today.

In the autumn of 1927 [Hoover's] opponents, of whom there were many, began floating the notion that Hoover couldn't legally run because he hadn't been resident in America for the proceeding 14 years, as the Constitution required.

Recently, people try to claim Obama isn't an American.

Illinois imposed no restrictions on the sale of tommy guns, so they were available to the general public in hardware stores, sporting goods stores, and even drugstores. The wonder is that the death tolls in Chicago weren't higher.

Gun control AND the murder rate in Chicago are still big issues.

Polyamory 1927

His private life was equally unorthodox in that he and another man shared the affections of a woman who had once been Baird's girlfriend, was now the second man's wife, and who found it impossible to choose between the two. In true British fashion, the arrangement to share was agreed between all three over a cup of tea.

Nowadays polyamory is becoming more accepted. The Ethical Slut: A Guide to Infinite Sexual Possibilities is published in 1997. The most recent issue of Time magazine (September 21, 2015) leads with "IS MONOGAMY OVER?" across the top.

Palmer was so pleased with the publicity his raids generated and the fear they instilled that he ordered a second, larger set of raids in the new year. This time some 6,000 to 10,000 people (accounts vary widely) were arrested in at least 78 cities in 23 states. Again, there was much needless destruction of property, arrests without warrants, and beating of innocent people.

The Red Scare leads to thousands of arrests without warrants or probable cause. Still happening today, but not with people feared as communists.

...but the knowledge that terrorists could mount coordinated violence on such a scale left many Americans distinctly unnerved. (Referencing the anarchist bombings of prominent officials)

Still dealing with terrorism and the fear of it today.

A *lot* of the book deals with the overwhelming hatred of Jewish people, black people, and immigrants. Still dealing with all that shit today.

The mark, which had traded at about 4 to the dollar before the war, now shot up to 600,000 to the dollar. By summer, the exchange rate was 630 BILLION marks to the dollar and inflation was so rampant that prices were doubling daily, sometimes hourly. People needed wheelbarrows or baby buggies to carry enough paper money to conduct even the simplest transactions.

Germany 1927 or Argentina 1998-2002?

In the book, we see that Warren G. Harding fathers a child out of wedlock.

We still have scandals with American presidents who can't seem to keep their penis in their trousers.

A German man in St. Louis who was believed to have spoken ill of his adopted country was set upon by a mob, dragged through the streets tied up in an American flag, and hanged. A jury subsequently found the mob leaders not guilty on the grounds that it had been a "patriotic murder."...

Restaurants stopped serving German food or gave it non-German names; sauerkraut famously became liberty cabbage.

Freedom fries, anyone? LOL

In 1927, Americans were not terribly popular in Europe and not popular at all in France... The result of all this was quite a lot of anti-American sentiment, especially in France, where the struggling natives had to watch American tourists - many of them young, noisy, and made obnoxious by wine and no doubt sometimes also by nature - living like princes and living it up on Europe's debased currencies.

Still tons of anti-American sentiment abroad for various reasons.

1927, Andrew Kehoe blows up a school.

Altogether, forty-four people died that day: thirty-seven children and seven adults.

Today: school shootings.

...

Besides this, you have some interesting facts about famous people that perhaps you didn't know before.

Both Henry Ford and Charles Lindbergh were anti-semitic. Both were admired and respected by Hitler.

Babe Ruth slept with any woman he could, including the wives of other men and the wives of his teammates.

At a party in his rooms at the Book Cadillac Hotel in Detroit, Ruth famously stood on a chair and shouted, "Any woman who doesn't want to fuck can leave now."

Clara Bow, the famous movie star,

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dxo_99...

also seemed to be happily and unabashedly promiscuous - sleeping with 6 different men in the production of just one of her films. I admire her gumption. :) LOL Bryson details much more of both Ruth and Bow's exciting love affairs in the book.

It's funny to see how the concept of "morality" was being set up and played with in the 1920s. I mean, we all know how Prohibition turned out.

The national murder rate went up by almost a third after Prohibition was introduced.

Also, boxing was taking off in popularity among white people for the first time, which raised moral concerns about how white women might become... um... excited by the sport.

The Reverend John Roach Straton saw a worrisome threat to morals in allowing members of the weaker sex to gaze upon "two practically naked men, battering and bruising each other and struggling in sweat and blood for mere animal mastery."

In fact, as it turned out, that was very much what women wanted, and the person they most keenly wished to see glistening and lightly clad was the French boxer Georges Carpentier. He was, by universal female consent, an eyeful.

...

However, the book is not a total win.

There is A LOT of stuff on aviation and flight. While this was interesting to me, it may not be to other people.

And there is A LOT of stuff on baseball. I have no interest in baseball. Zero. Zilch. None. Reading Bryson ramble on and on and on about baseball and baseball games was making me sleepy. And this wasn't some "little parts" of the book. It's not only a huge portion of the book, but it's scattered all throughout the book (same with the aviation stuff).

You're warned. If you're not enamored of aviation and baseball, you might struggle to get through this book.

...

Tl;dr - As a history tome, this is fascinating and fun. Bryson is right to take a simple three months out of one year and focus exclusively on that for his book. Any more than that and it would have been too overwhelming. As it is, it is just right. Bryson can focus on an entire range of subjects but not let it get out of hand. I loved learning about historical figures, I loved getting a thorough glimpse into the past, and even though some things were disturbing to read about (eugenics in particular), I feel like I learned a lot - the number one lesson being that the human race is still dealing with a lot of the same problems as it was ~90

years ago.

However, I'm happy to report that flying in a plane is about a billion times safer than it was in 1927. You wouldn't BELIEVE how many people die or disappear in planes in this book. Tons. Tons of people. o.O It was just accepted that if you fly, you might die. I'm so grateful for modern air travel!

Mike says

Only one man could take Charles Lindbergh's 1927 transatlantic flight, Babe Ruth's record setting home runs, the worst flooding in US History, a surprise announcement by President Coolidge, the execution of two Italian anarchists, the introduction of taking motion pictures, television and the electric chair and dozens of other totally unrelated events that happened during the Summer of 1927 and connect the dots. Of course, I'm talking about Des Moines' own, Bill Bryson.

Several years ago I picked up a copy of Bryson's, *The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid* and became so struck with his ability to put words on a page I immediately had to anoint myself as the President of the International Bill Bryson Fan Club. Within a few weeks I had devoured everything BB had ever written and eagerly awaited being one of the first to read his newest works that followed.

This time, I was able to read a publisher's advance copy of *"One Summer, America, 1927"* a full month prior to the book's introduction to book stores.

While you may think that the events of the Summer of 1927 are not, high on your list of things to know, please do yourself a favor and pick up this book. I promise you will find yourself LOLing and wanting to reread passages aloud to anyone within an earshot. Even cataract surgery could not force me to put down this book!
