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# Only yesterday: An informal history of the nineteen-twenties

*Frederick Lewis Allen*

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**Only yesterday: An informal history of the nineteen-twenties** Frederick Lewis Allen
ONLY YESTERDAY- AN INFORMAL HISTORY OF THE NINETEEN-TWENTIES by FREDERICK LEWIS ALLEN. Originally published in 1931. Contents include: INTRODUCTION by Roger Butter field Ix PREFACE xill I. PRELUDE MAY, 1919 i II. BACK TO NORMALCY 15 III. THE BIG RED SCARE 45 IV. AMERICA CONVALESCENT 76 V. THE REVOLUTION IN MANNERS AND MORALS 88 VI. HARDING AND THE SCANDALS 123 VII. COOLIDGE PROSPERITY 159 VIII. THE BALLYHOO YEARS 186 IX. THE REVOLT OF THE HIGHBROWS 226 X. ALCOHOL AND AL CAPONE 245 XI. HOME, SWEET FLORIDA 270 XII. THE BIG BULL MARKET 290 XIII. CRASH 3 XIV. AFTERMATH 1930-31 339 APPENDIX ON SOURCES 358 363. INTRODUCTION: IT is now twenty-five years since Only Yesterday was first published and it is time to say what has long been apparent that this is an American classic. It is by far the best account of all that happened in the United States during the wonderfully wacky 1920 5. It established a pattern for books of social history which other writers have imitated but have not been able to improve. It has been widely read and enjoyed more than half a million copies have been issued in the United States, England, Italy, Japan and Russia. The demand continues and no doubt it will continue, as long as Americans want to read wise and witty books about their past. Frederick Lewis Allen, who wrote this book, was a Harvard trained editor and connoisseur of human behavior who mixed the fascinating little details of history with the deeds of famous men. In Only Yesterday he wrote of Mah Jong and H. L. Mencken, of Couism and Calvin Coolidge, of Listerines flights of advertising fancy and Lindberghs flight to Paris. In his mod est preface to the original edition Allen suggested that time might make some changes in his judgments of major events. Yet one of the remarkable things about this book is the way it stands up in the light of later research. Since it was published we have had complete and scholarly accounts of the Wall Street crash of 1929, of the Harding scandals, of prohibition, o the politics and diplomacy of the period. Yet none of these books has essentially changed the overall picture that Allen gave us. And all of them have drawn on his facts and his interpreta tion. Of course Only Yesterday is very fortunate in its general sub ject. It deals with the most delightful decade that has occurred In the lifetime of anyone present. I am prejudiced in this re spect, and so is anyone else who was lucky enough to grow up in the twenties. If you compare the ten years that followed World War I with the ten that came after World War II, how can there be any choice Which menace would you rather have Al Capone or Joe McCarthy Which oracle from Detroit-Henry Ford or Charles E. Wilson Which homerun hitter the mighty Babe Ruth, or Mickey Mantle, with his bubble gum, and cheeks of downy yellow Which kind of national scandal do you prefer Teapot Dome with its gushers of oil and foun tains of dollars, or the one and a half mink coats that got passed around in Harry Trumans Washington The comparisons could go on forever, and they would all be in favor of the twenties. Take the writers alone Scott Fitz gerald, and Sinclair Lewis in his prime, and the young Hem ingway, and Thomas Wolfe...

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