

Bill Bryson has a new book: THE SUMMER OF 1927. He has focused on the year 1927 which he justifiably describes as the apogee of the 1920s and reviews the various events and personages which stand out in this era: His primary discussion is about Lindbergh's remarkable flight from NYC to Paris and its significance. The list is lengthy: Coolidge's decision not to

run for reelection; Babe Ruth hits 60 home runs; the first public appearance of television; the first talking movie; Dorothy Parker; Al Capone; lots more. But he makes a major omission which this email is about

In 2009 Bryson returned to Des Moines to receive an honorary degree from Drake University which he attended but from which he did not graduate. It is the only school he attended which I did not. (See attachment re Bill Bryson). The award would demonstrate that the pay off from being a Drake dropout rivals that of being a Harvard drop out – e.g. Gates and Zuckerberg'

Bryson was also asked to give the **Martin Bucksbaum distinguished lecturer address. Previous lecturers included Wynton Marsalis and Ken Burns. I wish to point out here that these two speakers dealt at some length with the subject that Bryson omits in his book.**

In the afternoon before the lecture Bryson conducted a question and answer seminar. During the seminar I reminded him that he was in fact at one time my paper boy to which he responded; "Yeah. and you still owe me two dollars and forty cents" which generated a great wave of laughter including from me. Afterwards, I gave him three dollars and told him to keep the change.

As an prelude to describing what Bryson left out of his book and the significance there are these quotes:

Bing Crosby.. "Louis Armstrong is the beginning and end of music in America"

Ken Burns.. "Louis Armstrong is to music (I did not say just jazz) what Einstein is to physics and the Wright brothers are to transportation"

At the conclusion of the millenium LIFE MAGAZINE named four musicians among the 100 people who mattered. Only one-LOUIS ARMSTRONG- was from the 20th century.

The 1920s are mostly named the “Jazz Age” How could Bryson omit what is universally described by music journalists/historians as the ROSETTA STONE OF JAZZ MUSIC.This from Gary Giddins;

“On November 12, 1925, in Chicago, Armstrong embarked on the most influential recording project in jazz ,perhaps in American music. Over the next three years he produced the sixty-five sides (not including those by singers or similar bands in which Armstrong appeared as a sideman) generally known as the Hot Fives and Hot Sevens. If Armstrong had put music aside after the December 12, 1928 sessions, he would not have exerted the full measure of his charisma as a singer; would not have recorded the dozens of nonpareil big band performances; would not have enjoyed the pop hits and movies; would not have matured and mellowed over time into an even more expressive instrumentalist and singer; would not have achieved international renown; would not have earned the nickname Satchmo. BUT HE WOULD STILL BE THE MOST EMINENT FIGURE IN JAZZ HISTORY”

(Note: the 1927 output included such masterworks as Potato Head Blues and Struttin’ with some Barbeque)

A short shift in subject matter. Bryson writes of two notable 1895 Amherst College graduates: Calvin Coolidge and Dwight Morrow. He starts out viewing Coolidge as a clown, then grows fond of him. Coolidge is getting a fresh and positive break from revisionist historians .. But I cannot dismiss Bryson’s treatment .of Dwight Morrow .Bryson does not get much beyond Morrow’s role as Lindbergh’s father-in-law and describes him as a “hopeless souse”

.What Bryson probably does not even know is that Dwight Morrow is the greatest ambassador we ever sent to Mexico. Morrow brokered and resolved the Cristero Rebellion ,a revolutionary postscript to the Mexican Revolution which claimed well in excess of 100,000 lives. It showed few signs of ending before Morrow arrived and negotiated its end with the church and the government.

I guess I will keep the book it will serve as a “hopeless” supplement to the definitive work on the period, notably Frederick Lewis Allen’s ONLY YESTERDAY.

But I may try to get my three dollars back .Maybe he did not deliver the paper for a few days.

Bill Peverill