A lot happened in 1927, as it does in just about every year. Charles Lindbergh made a solo, nonstop flight across the Atlantic. Babe Ruth swatted 60 home runs. Millions of Americans were devastated by the flooding of the Mississippi River basin. Nicola Sacco and Bart Vanzetti were electrocuted for a crime they may not have committed.

In “One Summer,” Bill Bryson, the author of books about science, travel and the English language, provides a lively account of 1927’s events and its cast of characters, both well known and long forgotten. A synthesis of previously published work, the book is an old-fashioned narrative history. Bryson presents no overarching analysis, nor does he go beyond conventional wisdom. Acknowledging that it is “reasonable” to ask why Lindbergh’s flight to Paris “transfixed the world,” for example, Bryson writes that “all that can be said is that for some unknown reason” it evoked “a moment of sublime spontaneous, unifying joy on a scale never before seen.” He indicates that “talkies” exposed moviegoers around the globe, often for the first time, to American voices, vocabulary and values. And he cites the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan as evidence that “The Roaring Twenties” was also “The Age of Loathing.”

Bryson does a commendable job setting the context for his tales. In 1927, he indicates, Americans were “the most comfortable people in the world.” The United States held more than half the world’s supply of gold, made 80 percent of its movies and 85 percent of its cars. Eleven million of the nation’s 26.8 million households contained photographs; 10 million owned a car (there were more cars in Kansas than in France); almost 18 million had a telephone. And the stock market shot up by a third in 1927.

Curiously, Bryson points out, the United States was far behind several European countries in aviation. In 1927, France operated nine airlines, British carriers flew almost a million miles a year and Germany boasted 151,000 passengers. America had no scheduled passenger air service, no licensing system and no requirements for training.

Bryson, alas, has relatively little to say about the millions of Americans who lived in poverty. And, except for a claim that an action of the Federal Reserve precipitated the stock market crash of 1929, he does not focus on the causes of the Great Depression. “One Summer” is filled with blunt assessments of its sub-

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