

# The big change: America transforms itself, 1900-1950 *by* Frederick Lewis Allen



**ISBN:** 0060913231

**ISBN13:** 978-0060913236

**Author:** Frederick Lewis Allen

**Book title:** The big change: America transforms itself, 1900-1950

**Pages:** 308

**Publisher:** Harper & Row; 1st Perennial Library ed edition (1986)

**Language:** English

**Category:** Americas

**Size PDF version:** 1297 kb

**Size ePUB version:** 1247 kb

**Size FB2 version:** 1628 kb

**Other formats:** azw rtf lrf txt

Subtitled America Transforms Itself 1900-1950, this is a historical narrative (first published in 1952) describing the transformation which took place during the first 50 years of this century in the American way of life and what caused it. 7 cassettes.



## Reviews of the **The big change: America transforms itself, 1900-1950** *by* Frederick Lewis Allen

**Tantil**

I've read all of Frederick Lewis Allen's books and haven't been disappointed in any of them. If you're interested in actual facts about the early 19th century in this country then read all of his book. You'll be saying the same as I did..."I never knew that", It's an excellent read as so much of it applies to

today's economic crisis.

### **Iraraeal**

The real Big Change available at last!

The E Star edition for kindle is the original Frederick Lewis Allen book, with no editing and rewriting. The previous kindle edition was a fraud, rewritten by someone in order to push his crackpot Federal Reserve Conspiracy Theories, which had no place in the original, But now the original book is available for Kindle..and for just 99 Cents. Be sure it's the E star edition..

### **Throw her heart**

I was very disappointed, i had enjoyed both Only Yesterday & Since Yesterday; this book however was a horse of another color. by the time I had plowed through the endless diatribe regarding the Federal Reserve System, i had lost all interest in the book

### **Beazezius**

I first read this 50 years ago. It is a well-written book with first-hand experience.

### **Kison**

I wish I'd known that this book was written ages ago.

### **VizoRRR**

I was very satisfied with the book. It was very interesting. And it came promptly, and was in good condition.

### **Knights from Bernin**

Summary: A social history of the United States from 1900 to 1950 chronicling the expansion of the middle class, the technological changes that occurred, and the impact of two World Wars and the Depression.

Want to know what life was like for your grandparents or great grandparents, and the changes they saw in their lifetimes? This is a great book for understanding what the U.S. was like during the first half of the Twentieth Century. It was fascinating for me, as someone born two years after this work was first published in 1952. The book ends just before I began and the last chapters describe well the Baby Boom years of the early 1950s, and describe well the changes my own parents saw in their growing up years.

Frederick Lewis Allen was a popular, rather than academic historian who served in a variety of editorial positions including editor-in-chief of Harpers Magazine from 1941 until shortly before his death in February of 1954. He was a contemporary of such popular historians as Allen Nevins, Douglas Southall Freeman, Bernard DeVoto, and Carl Sandburg. The Big Change was his last work, and a National Book Award finalist in 1953. He also wrote histories on the decades of the 1920's (Only Yesterday) and 1930's (Since Yesterday) as well as an economic history of the U.S. from 1890 up to the Depression (The Lords of Creation). All of these works have been re-published recently by Open Road Integrated Media.

While not having read the other works, I sense that this book is a synthesis of all of them that not

only summarizes each of the periods covered by the others, but does so with an eye to the transformation of the United States from an economy with a small percent of very rich who lived in extravagant homes and vast disparities of wealth and poverty to a post-World War II economy with a huge expansion of consumer goods, mass communication via radio and TV, and changing cities with the vast migrations from rural to urban setting, including Blacks (called Negroes in Allen's time) from the Jim Crow South.

The first part of the book covers the beginning of this period, describing the technology of the period, including the beginnings of the automobile age, the robber barons and their wealth and a relatively limited government, at least until Teddy Roosevelt. Part two chronicles the changes Roosevelt and the muckrakers brought, the growth of mass production, including the revolution Henry Ford led, the 1920's as the last gasp of the old order, the grinding experience of the Depression, and the acceleration of economic and social change brought on by the war experience. The third part talks gives an economic and social description of the country at the end of the period, describing the growing middle class, the reduction of wealth disparities due to progressive taxes, and the alternative form of luxury spending of the period known as the expense account. He also chronicles the leveling influence of education, mass media, and the wide availability of goods once the exclusive preserve of the wealthy.

He concludes with the apprehensions of the early years of the Cold War and McCarthyism, the concerns about an increasingly large government and large corporations, and the growth of educational and economic opportunities for many and the vibrancy of private organizations and individual initiative in the country. Discussions of racial faultlines anticipate both the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's, and the growing affluence anticipates the counter-culture reaction of the later 60's and early 70's.

His style is very readable, even a bit "chatty". The origin of the book was a Harpers article and it has the feel of a well-informed communicator who knows his audience well enough to engage with them directly. Reading this nearly 65 years after it was first published brings home to me how much we have changed since then—the complexities of a post-Soviet, post 9/11 era, the boom in information technology and the interconnectedness of everything, and the social changes of an increasingly diverse nation. This is a transformation I've lived through and makes me wonder who will write "Big Change II." Whoever that may be, Allen's book provides a great jumping-off point.

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Disclosure of Material Connection: I received this book free from the publisher via Netgalley. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own.

If Frederick Lewis Allen wrote a dictionary, I would read it. The guy had a writing style that was unsurpassed; it remains in a genre of its own. Only a few writers are in this group: John McPhee, Frederick Lewis Allen, and Edna St. Vincent Millay. There is an urbane spirit at work here, one that transcends time. I won't bore you with details about the book, such as how it's organized, or how thorough it is. Just read it for the quality of the writing, and you'll pick up some knowledge and ideas you may not have had when you picked the book up.

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