**Emergence Colleagues**

**Only yesterday E-Missive from Roger Malina, March 4 2024**

1. In praise of anecdotes
2. Anecdotes from Rick Bretell to Gyorgy Kepes in Honor of Tom Linehan
3. Ode to Pan
4. Stolen Review of Only Yesterday A and H Emerged

**A: IN PRAISE Of ANECDOTES**

I just started reading Frederick Lewis Allen’ s 1931 book “Only Yesterday’ and realized that my father was 19 at Texas A and M and soon to be a graduate student at Caltech attending communist parties. My father was born in 1912 and lived through every chapter in the book.

I remember my father telling me an anecdote about Jack Parsons who recited, on a balustrade, the “ode to pan” at a dis-communist party. Read on below. Hard to believe the struggle in the 1920s to let women show more than their ankles when wear a dress and that ‘rouge’ was immoral on the lips and cheeks.

The anecdotal, to quote Fred Turned, can/may capture the emergence of the arts at humanities at UTDallas better than any accurate history.

Emergence doesn’t fit into history. Sometimes dismissed as the “zeitgeist’ or the “air du temps”.

**B. From Gyorgy Kepes to Rick Bretell to Tom Linehan**

I have blogged extensively about the topic of ‘disremembering’. Rick Bretell, a key instigator in the arts and humanities at UTD, told me about rich Texans buying Kepes’s artwork. After all Kepes taught a the University of North Texas in the 1940s; he lived on the other side of the tracks as he was Jewish.

Huh, rich Texans bought paintings from Jews on the other side of the tracks? (in Germany they just stole the Jewish art)

But UTD didn’t exist yet so could not welcome him as a refugee, as UTD was later to welcome Rick Bretell and and and. UTD welcomed a Holocaust Center when all other Texas universities refused to host one. The Arts and Humanities emerged at UTD as a refugee camp.

I am learning to write anecdotally, connecting dots that were unconnected at the time. (mild apophenia)

After all after arriving at UTDallas in the 20teens I fell in love with the hard humanities, advocated by Dennis Kratz, the Rainer Schulte Center for Translation Studies ( translating concepts from art to science or to art to technology) and the acknowledgement that Tom Linehan made that the world around us doesn’t respect the borders of disciplines to create…and Bonnie Pitman ‘do something new’ <https://www.dosomethingnew.org/> who became a refugee because she couldn’t work as a museum director 60 hours a week when she fell sick.

Which brings me to anecdotes about Tom Linehan, instigator of the arts and technology. I had welcomed him, and his boyfriend, to our family home in Provence. I was director of the astronomical observatory of Marseille. I moaned that I would soon have to retire as the required retirement age in the civil service universities was 65.

He said well come to Dallas I can get you a job. He did. And we are hoping to get some of his anecdotes for this emergence anecdotal disrememberance.

I had appointed Tom Linehan to the Editorial Board of Leonardo in the 1990s when he came to my attention at SIGGRAPH. He engineered funding for Leonardo from a Architecture and Design Company that had a history of publishing anecdotal thinking. He taught at the Ringling Brothers School of Art and Design. My son Xavier is now an A.I.Imagineer at Disney a universe that tom linehan opened up before AI was called AI.

Anecdotes are subject to mild apophenia, find and imposing patterns on unrelated facts. But they are related in the anecdote writer’s mind and now you the reader’s mind.

C. Ode de Pan, that I had never read until now:

**Thrill with lissome lust of the light,
O man! My man!
Come careering out of the night
Of Pan! Io Pan!
Io Pan! Io Pan! Come over the sea
From Sicily and from Arcady!
Roaming as Bacchus, with fauns and pards
And nymphs and satyrs for thy guards,
On a milk-white ass, come over the sea
To me, to me!
Come with Apollo in bridal dress
(Shepherdess and pythoness)
Come with Artemis, silken shod,
And wash thy white thigh, beautiful god,
In the moon of the woods, on the marble mount,
The dimpled dawn of the amber fount!
Dip the purple of passionate prayer
In the crimson shrine, the scarlet snare,
The soul that startles in eyes of blue
To watch thy wantonness weeping through
The tangled grove, the gnarled bole
Of the living tree that is spirit and soul
And body and brain — come over the sea,
(Io Pan! Io Pan!)
Devil or god, to me, to me,
My man! my man!
Come with trumpets sounding shrill
Over the hill!
Come with drums low muttering
From the spring!
Come with flute and come with pipe!
Am I not ripe?
I, who wait and writhe and wrestle
With air that hath no boughs to nestle
My body, weary of empty clasp,
Strong as a lion and sharp as an asp —
Come, O come!
I am numb
With the lonely lust of devildom.
Thrust the sword through the galling fetter,
All-devourer, all-begetter;
Give me the sign of the Open Eye,
And the token erect of thorny thigh,
And the word of madness and mystery,
O Pan! Io Pan!
Io Pan! Io Pan Pan! Pan Pan! Pan,
I am a man:
Do as thou wilt, as a great god can,
O Pan! Io Pan!
Io Pan! Io Pan Pan! I am awake
In the grip of the snake.
The eagle slashes with beak and claw;
The gods withdraw:
The great beasts come. Io Pan! I am borne
To death on the horn
Of the Unicorn.
I am Pan! Io Pan! Io Pan Pan! Pan!
I am thy mate, I am thy man,
Goat of thy flock, I am gold, I am god,
Flesh to thy bone, flower to thy rod.
With hoofs of steel I race on the rocks
Through solstice stubborn to equinox.
And I rave; and I rape and I rip and I rend
Everlasting, world without end,
Mannikin, maiden, Maenad, man,
In the might of Pan.
Io Pan! Io Pan Pan! Pan! Io Pan!**

D. IN RETROSPECT

REVISITING FREDERICK LEWIS ALLEN'S

ONLY YESTERDAY

David M. Kennedy

"Every account of [the 1920s] begins with Frederick Lewis Allen, Only Yester-

day," William E. Leuchtenburg declared in his own widely acclaimed book on

the period, The Perils of Prosperity. Leuchtenburg magnanimously praised

Allen's work as "a social history written in such a lively style that academi-

cians often underrate its soundness."' They may have underrated it, but they

nevertheless required their students to read it. Allen's several books, wrote

Richard Hofstadter in 1952, had for more than two decades "been among the

most popular books assigned for reading in American colleges."2 Only

Yesterday sold more than half a million copies from the time of its publication

in 1931 to Allen's death in 1954, and it is still in print today.3 More than any

other single work, it has for longer than half a century shaped our under-

standing of American life in the 1920s.

Hofstadter agreed with Leuchtenburg that Allen's colorful, kinetic prose

accounted for much of Only Yesterday's appeal. Allen wrote. according to

Hofstadter, with a "feeling for the concrete and vivid" and a "firm sense for

the relevance of the past."4 This judgment echoed the comments of Only

Yesterday's first reviewers. John Chamberlain applauded Allen for a "style

that is verve itself." Compared with William Preston Slosson's The Great

Crusade and After, published one year earlier than Only Yesterday, Murray

Godwin found Allen's volume "far fresher, more vivid, better organized, and

more flowing in structure and style." No academic historian, Godwin gratui-

tously added, "could do so fine a job."6 Stuart Chase demurred only slightly.

"This may or may not be a great book," he wrote, "but it is a marvelously ab-

sorbing one."7 Crowning this chorus of adulation, the New York Times later

eulogized Allen as "the Herodotus of the Jazz Age."8

Allen appraised his own aspirations and accomplishments more modestly.

"A contemporary history," he warned, 'is bound to be anything but

definitive." 9 He shied away from being identified as a historian, preferring

309

310 REVIEWS IN AMERICAN HISTORY / June 1986

stead to call himself a "retrospective jo

described Only Yesterday in its subtitle as "an informal history of the

nineteen-twenties."

In part, "informal" meant that Allen largely exempted himself from dealing

with the usual historical topics of politics and diplomacy. It also meant that

he was unconstrained by the respect for rules of evidence and argument that

is beaten into graduate students. Years later, Allen acknowledged that his

"best sources" for Only Yesterday had been "the daily magazines and news-

papers of the period." Yet he conceded that these very sources "do not help

much" in the effort "to observe clearly the life and institutions of one's own

day," because "they record the unusual, not the usual." 11

Allen had in fact relied on other than simply journalistic sources, including

Robert S. and Helen Merrell Lynd's pioneering sociological work, Middle-

town, Charles A. and Mary R. Beard's Rise of American Civilization, Stuart

Chase's Prosperity, Fact or Myth, Silas Bent's Ballyhoo, Walter Lippmann's

A Preface to Morals, and Joseph Wood Krutch's The Modern Temper. In-

deed, so thoroughly did he digest the findings and opinions of these other

authors that some reviewers complained that Only Yesterday amounted to

little more than a survey of other surveys.

But if Allen stood on the shoulders of earlier students of the 1920s, he

added his own distinctive contribution to the emerging image of the decade.

That contribution derived from Allen's own keen observations of the lives of

his contemporaries, and, as he acknowledged, from inventive reliance on

journalism, especially "feature" articles, human interest stories, and, despite

his disclaimers, the raucous sensationalism of the increasingly popular

tabloids. His book focused on "the changing state of the public mind," and he

plunged unhesitatingly into explorations of private sentiments and mass

moods.12 No supply-side analyst of how or why popular literary works were

crafted, he instead conjectured fearlessly about what readers were thinking

and feeling as they turned the pages of The Education of Henry Adams or

Main Street. In a similar vein, he imaginatively projected himself into the

brain of a flapper, from which vantage he explained the allegedly self-

conscious semiotics of her dress and demeanor. Elsewhere he sweepingly

summed up his countrymen's emotional state as "weary" or "unhappy" or,

most famously, as "disillusioned." Citing some overheard conversations and a

handful of Broadway plays, he proclaimed that in the realm of sexual

behavior and attitudes "an upheaval in values was taking place." 13 While few

professionally trained historians would have dared to erect such lofty

generalizations on such a flimsy evidentiary foundation, Allen's towering

thematic structures, somewhat miraculously, have continued to stand for

more than fifty years.

KENNEDY / Revisiting Frederick Lewis Allen's Only Yesterday 311

For all the license that his posture of "retrospective jour

him, Allen still shared some of the objectives of the traditi

sought, his preface explained, not only to "tell" but also to "interpret" the

1920s. More important, he strove to find "some sort of logical and coherent

order" in his subject - to present the events of the decade "woven into a pat-

tern which at least masquerades as history."14

Readers might be forgiven for not immediately discerning that pattern. So

richly ornamented was the fabric Allen wove that it might seem at first to be

merely a fanciful arabseque, wildly eclectic and devoid of any consistently in-

forming logic. What possible interpretive scheme might hold in balance such

prodigiously diverse items as the tragedy of Woodrow Wilson's failure to

secure ratification of the Treaty of Versailles and the triumph of Jack

Dempsey over Georges Carpentier? The execution of Sacco and Vanzetti and

the founding of Simon and Schuster? The Red Scare and Mah Jong? The Ku

Klux Klan and Emil Coue? Flappers and Tut-Ankh-Amen? The Model A and

the Pig Woman? Flag-pole sitters and H. L. Mencken? Prohibition and the

Teapot Dome scandals? The Big Bull Market and Charles Lindbergh? Dion

O'Bannion and Calvin Coolidge? The rise of radio and the collapse of the

Florida land boom? To add to the confusion, Allen portrayed everything in

the 1920s as in constant and simultaneous motion, ascending and falling on a

roiling sea of change. Stocks, hemlines, and Al Capone's income went up;

automobile prices, necklines, and the public's interest in politics went down.

Yet like an opulent oriental carpet, on close inspection Allen's elaborately

crafted portrait of the 1920s did reveal a controlling design. The very

organization of the book provided a clue to what was predominantly on

Allen's mind. After a breezy evocation of the texture of everyday life in 1919,

touching on fashions, food, sports, music, movies, and drinking habits, Allen

began in earnest with a moving account of Wilson's doomed struggle to

shepherd the United States into the League of Nations. This was immediately

followed by a description of postwar labor disorders, race riots, and the Big

Red Scare - a frantic series of episodes at last terminated when the country

began "to regain its sense of humor" as the American people gratifyingly

"were coming to their senses." 15

Allen then punctuated his story with two chapters containing the sort of

social history for which he is justly renowned. Here he described in fetching

detail the emergence of the radio industry after the pioneering broadcast by

station KDKA in East Pittsburgh on November 2, 1920, the rise of mass spec-

tator sports, the waves of fads in games and popular entertainments, and,

most notoriously, the "revolution in manners and morals," especially as it af-

fected women.

There followed a carefully researched narrative (according to Allen, the

312 REVIEWS IN AMERICAN HISTORY / June 1986

first comprehensive account) of the Harding scandals, a history of the early

advertising industry, and then another descent into what Allen called "a series

of tremendous trifles - a heavyweight boxing-match, a murder trial, a new

automobile model, a transatlantic flight." The "striking" thing about these

events, Allen noted, "was the unparalleled rapidity and unanimity with which

millions of men and women turned their attention, their talk, and their emo-

tional interest" to them.16

The phrase "mass culture" would later be invented to describe the

phenomena that struck Allen as so unprecedented. Allen, of course, could not

be expected to employ that term, but it powerfully testifies to his skill as a

social observer that he identified the emergence in the 1920s of frenetic, fickle,

media-induced consumerism on a colossal scale. A novelty to him, this kind

of behavior seemed in the post-World War II era to have become a perma-

nent feature of affluent democratic culture. Unfamiliar with such behavior,

and not much given to analytical explanations in any event, Allen blamed

this "carnival of commercialized degradation" on hyperaggressive advertising

("ballyhoo"), and on the contemptible tabloids, which "presented American

life not as a political and economic struggle, but as a three-ring circus of

sport, crime, and sex."17 Yet he believed that the carousel of ballyhoo and the

bizarre eventually lost its momentum as the decade proceeded. It was slowed

most notably by the genuine heroism of Charles A. Lindbergh, whose

unadorned simplicity reminded jaded Americans what the right stuff really

looked like. Once again, a distracted public showed signs of returning to its

senses - though Allen ominously concluded this section of his book by antic-

ipating the levitation of the Big Bull Market into its "sensational phase" less

than a year after Lindbergh's flight.18

Allen next turned his attention to "The Revolt of the Highbrows," concen-

trating especially on the scoffing cultural criticism of H. L. Mencken and the

social satires of Sinclair Lewis. (Conspicuously absent was any mention of

some of the highest brows of all, T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. And like many

of his contemporaries in the 1920s, Allen took no notice of William

Faulkner). This chapter, though attenuated and curiously selective, is in a

sense the spiritual heart of Only Yesterday, for here Allen could summon

onto his pages his intellectual brethren - those writers who shared his sense of

disillusionment that Americans in the postwar decade were obsessed with

business and monkey-business, to the neglect of serious public affairs. Allen's

master motif for the decade was the common lament of these authors for the

transient vanity of wartime idealism. "Disillusionment," he conduded simply,

"was the keynote of the nineteen-twenties."19

Like virtually everything else that materialized in the turbulent twenties,

even the "offensive against Babbittry spent itself, if only because the novelty

of rebellion wore off."20 Allen therefore moved on, in his concluding hundred

KENNEDY / Revisiting Frederick Lewis Allen's Only Yesterday 313

pages, to describe the accelerating whirligig of distractions an

beset the republic as the decade approached its climax - includi

and crime, the Florida real estate craze, and, most conspicuous

Market and the Crash of 1929.

So frequently foreshadowed, now finally at center stage, the story of the

steep rise and spectacular fall of the stock market was the denouement toward

which Only Yesterday built not only chronologically but also thematically.

Coming conveniently in the last year of the 1920s, the Crash tidily wrapped

up Allen's history of the decade. But the catastrophe of Black Tuesday also

neatly clinched the moral judgment that informed Allen's entire work - "that

nobody during the Twenties really had a good time and that we deserved the

Crash," as one reviewer put it.21

By the time the reader reaches Allen's conclusion, the "pattern" of Only

Yesterday - the "logical and coherent order" that Allen sought to bring to his

narrative - is clear. Fugue-like, the storyline has mounted to the crescendo of

the Crash by alternating discussions of serious public issues (the fate of the

League, Sacco and Vanzetti, the lack of probity in the Harding administra-

tion) with descriptions of the incessantly diverting ephemera of mass culture

(the Hall-Mills murder trial, Red Grange, and Rudolph Valentino). Between

the covers of Only Yesterday Allen conducted a running debate with himself

about the sobriety and rationality of the American people. Faced with the

grave necessity of managing a modern state, they proved distressingly suscep-

tible to all kinds of frivolous distractions - some of them insidious, like the

Red Scare, but most of them harmless, like Mah Jong and crossword puzzles.

Repeatedly, as they began to tire of trivia and get serious again about life,

Americans were once more diverted, like kittens in a catnip shop, by a new

fad, by speculative mania, or by "hysterial preoccupation with sex." 22 Unable

to knuckle down for long to the task of running the republic, they did in a

sense bring the Crash - and the ensuing Great Depression, the full scale of

which Allen could not clearly see in 1931 - upon themselves.

And yet if Allen was critical of his countrymen, he was also tolerant,

generous, and at bottom an optimist. He had more in common with the sym-

pathetic satirizing of Sinclair Lewis than he did with the rasping mockery of

H. L. Mencken, though he clearly shared both men's disappointment at the

failure of Americans to be finer chaps. Only Yesterday was in the end a gentle

Jeremiad, delivered not stridently, but in the voice of Increase Mather reborn

as a reform-minded Unitarian (Allen was, in fact, an Episcopalian). The

book's humane warmth has probably been among the major determinants of

its durability.

Much of the book's warmth was kindled by the sense of intimacy with his

readers that Allen skillfully cultivated. In the opening sentence of his first

chapter he beckoned his readers to join personally in his journey back into

314 REVIEWS IN AMERICAN HISTORY / June 1986

time by addressing them in the second person. He employed this device fre-

quently in subsequent pages, particularly on those occasions when he was

compelled to deal with the kind of numeric data that deadens so many con-

ventional histories. "Pick up one of those graphs with which statisticians mea-

sure the economic ups and downs of the Post-war Decade," he suggested at

the introduction of his discussion of Coolidge prosperity, and then proceeded

charmingly and succinctly to summarize the history of business activity from

1920 to 1931.23

This sort of artful writing came naturally to Allen, a journalist of con-

siderable accomplishment. A tall and tweedy Bostonian, the son of an

Episcopal minister, he had prepared at Groton and graduated from Harvard

in 1912. Like his eminent contemporary, Franklin Roosevelt, he felt that this

education obligated him to a life of public service (though where Roosevelt

had edited the Crimson, Allen, perhaps significantly, wrote for the

Lampoon.) He worked for a time at the Atlantic Monthly and at Century

Magazine, served in Woodrow Wilson's war administration (at the Council

of National Defense), and then in 1923 began his long association with

Harper's Magazine, rising in 1941 to the editorship, a position he held until

the year before his death in 1954.

Allen's field of vision, for all its comprehensiveness, was severely bounded

by the view from the New York editorial offices of Harper's. The limitations

of that perspective are evident when one considers what's left out of Only

Yesterday. Allen's gaze penetrated scarcely at all into what one of his favorite

authors, F. Scott Fitzgerald, called "that vast obscurity beyond the city." Out

there where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night, some 31

million farmers - almost one in three Americans - toiled and dwelled in

1920. Few of them appeared in Allen's account, except as quaint spectators at

the Scopes trial. Allen noticed black victims of race riots in Chicago and

Tulsa, but the great majority of blacks who lived in the Old South were as in-

visible to him as was Faulkner. Perhaps even more surprising, the immigrants

who teemed through lower Manahattan were somehow shielded from Allen's

eyes; the historic ending of unrestricted immigration in 1924 scarcely war-

ranted a mention.

What Allen did see with vivid clarity were the lifestyles of Harper's readers.

He could write about them so deftly, and speak to them so intimately,

because they were so familiar to him. They were both his audience and his

subject matter. Knowing their tastes and habits, he could make easy reference

to places like "Sauk Center" (sic) without further explanation, confident that

the encoded meaning of the name would be easily decrypted by his readers.

He could illustrate the erosion of mannerly behavior by describing the "flap-

pers and their wide-trousered swains [who] took the porch cushions out in the

boats and left them there to be rained on, without apology." 24 For those unac-

KENNEDY / Revisiting Frederick Lewis Allen's Only Yesterday 315

quainted with the details of Sinclair Lewis's upbringing, or without access to

the waterside pleasure pavilions of the summering rich, Allen's book must

have seemed like a report from a distant country.

If Allen's upscale provincialism was confining, it was not smug. He did not

simply chronide, and he certainly did not uncritically celebrate, the manners

and morals of his subject-readers, and his history did more than cater to their

presumed prejudices. He repeatedly donned the mantle of the objective

scholar, setting the record straight, for example, about the conditions that

underlay the Boston police strike, or the laughably small size of the Commu-

nist party that had inspired the Big Red Scare. Here Allen exceeded the usual

mission of the journalist, even a retrospective one. He assumed instead the

role of the historian, who seeks not merely to record the novel and trumpet

the sensational, but to discover the subtextual and to explain the ordinary.

Yet even as an analytic historian, Allen stayed safely within the limits of

the conventionally liberal, urban outlook of his day. He displayed a

magnanimous sympathy for labor and for the victims of the Red Scare, but

he showed little interest in understanding religious fundamentalism, which he

dismissed as an archaic vestige scorned by "civilized opinion." 25 The Ku Klux

Klan rightly merited his vigorous condemnation, but the forces that produced

it did not merit much of an explanation. This omission was especially unfor-

tunate, because the cultural tide that washed up the Klan ran sharply counter

to the flood of modernity that Allen found so fascinating and so apparently

irresistible. "We are a movement of the plain people, very weak in the matter

of culture, intellectual support, and trained leadership," Klan Imperial Wizard

Hiram Wesley Evans lamented in 1926. "One by one all our traditional moral

standards went by the boards, or were so disregarded that they ceased to be

binding. The sacredness of our Sabbath, of our homes, of chastity, and fi-

nally even of our right to teach our own children in our own schools funda-

mental facts and truths were torn away from us. Those who maintained the

old standards did so only in the face of constant ridicule." 26

This was no less an authentic voice of the 1920s than Sinclair Lewis's, but

Allen did not hear it. Had he attended to it, and discussed both the ebb and

flow of the clashing currents that Lewis and Evans represented, he would

have made his narrative less one-dimensional, given it more texture and dra-

matic interest - and rendered it more complete and more accurate. He would

also have robbed future historians of the chance to discover what Only Yes-

terday masterfully obscured: that the 1920s did not witness the utter triumph

of urbane "modernism." Fundamentalists, traditionalists, "dries," and all

varieties of "hicks" still lived, and they dung tenaciously to values and mores

utterly different from those whose seemingly unimpeded ascension Allen

recorded.

Delimited geographically by the Hudson and East Rivers - or perhaps by

316 REVIEWS IN AMERICAN HISTORY / June 1986

Cape Cod and the Hamptons - and restrict

ban and suburban subscribers, Allen's vision had temporal limits as well. He

contributed to an artificial chronological isolation of the decade that has

proved perversely persistent. Like a magus summoning Excalibur from the

depths, Allen commanded the 1920s to arise unanchored and unbridged out

of the lake of time. Bounded by the latitudes of the Great War and the Great

Crash, the decade formed what Allen called "a distinct era" - a little island in

history, unlapped by waves from the past.27 Virtually everything that hap-

pened in the 1920s, therefore, had only proximate causes. Rarely did Allen

forge an explanatory chain whose links ran back more deeply into the past

than 1917. Nowhere was this radically abbreviated historical perspective

more apparent than in Allen's discussion of the alleged "revolution in man-

ners and morals," a concept that he almost single-handedly planted in the

popular as well as the scholarly literature about the 1920s. "A number of

forces," Allen wrote, "were working together and interacting upon one

another to make this revolution inevitable." Yet in his account none of those

forces had been in motion for very long: the war and its "eat-drink-and-be-

merry-for tomorrow-we-die spirit"; the Nineteenth Amendment and the con-

comitant liberation of women from housework and for wage labor; the popu-

larization of Freud's works; and finally "prohibition, the automobiles, the

confession and sex magazines, and the movies."28

Few historians today would take this as even a minimally adequate expla-

nation for the history of manners and morals in the 1920s, and few would be

comfortable with confining the discussion of women to a treatment of their

dress and sexual habits. Allen had little appreciation of what is by now a

richly elaborated understanding of the deep roots of modern sexual practices

in the nineteenth century and even earlier. He had even less inclination to

view women's history as anything other than sexual history. What's more, as

he did in so many realms, he vastly exaggerated the role of the war in precipi-

tating sexual change. And by speaking of a "revolution" in manners and

morals, he almost certainly exaggerated the extent of the behavioral transfor-

mations he described.

What had assuredly changed was the volume and pitch of public discussion

of sexual topics. A new candor about sexuality had burst into the sources

upon which Allen primarily relied - the mass-circulation magazines, best-

selling books, and popular plays that he imaginatively mined and mistakenly

took for sure guides to actual behavior. In so doing, he created a monument

of historical hyperbole that it has taken several generations of subsequent

scholars to scale down to its proper dimensions.

Allen's freewheeling, inventive style of historical argumentation in Only

Yesterday contrasted vividly with that of William Preston Slosson in The

KENNEDY / Revisiting Frederick Lewis Allen's Only Yesterday 317

Great Crusade and After, which Slosson had the great misfortune to publish

at almost the same time that Allen's book appeared. A volume in the

respected History of American Life series edited by Arthur M. Schlesinger

and Dixon Ryan Fox, The Great Crusade was the work of an academic

historian then an associate professor at the University of Michigan. Where

Allen was selective, anecdotal, judgmental, and unfailingly interesting,

Slosson was comprehensive, scientific, objective, and a trifle boring. If

Allen's prose lilted musically along, Slosson's soldiered stolidly forward.

Yet for serious students of the 1920s, Slosson's book still repays the effort

of reading it, probably more handsomely than does Only Yesterday. Despite

his title, Slosson did not resemble Allen in making the European war the

ultimate cause of the events of the postwar decade. He had a far keener sense

than Allen of the deeper historical context of the 1920s. He consequently did

not elevate the specifically postwar theme of "disillusionment" into his con-

trolling explanation for the ills of the age. Nor did he neglect, as Allen did, life

beyond the Hudson. The Great Crusade offered sensitive chapters on "The

Changing Countryside" and "The South in Black and White." Its chapter on

"The American Woman Wins Equality" passed quickly over the colorful

trivia of feminine fashions and changing tastes in cosmetics, unlike Only

Yesterday, and instead probed the political implications of the Nineteenth

Amendment and recounted the debate among feminists about the wisdom of

the Equal Rights Amendment. Like Allen, Slosson paid a great deal of atten-

tion to prohibition, automobiles, spectator sports, and the efflorescence of

advertising. But he also included cogent discussions of immigration, educa-

tion, and the truly revolutionary mechanization of agriculture (its dimensions

suggested by the ten-fold increase in the use of tractors in the decade) - sub-

jects that Allen, much more interested in middle-class urban lifestyles and a

supposed revolution in sexual habits, had ignored altogether.

For all its considerable virtues, The Great Crusade and After has long since

passed out of print, and probably goes unread today even by specialists. Con-

signed to even deeper oblivion is a massive compendium of information

about the 1920s, Recent Social Trends, the report of a special presidential

research committee published in 1933. With its attendant monographs, it con-

tains a small treasury of data, compiled by more than two dozen eminent

social scientists, about every conceivable aspect of American life in the

postwar decade.

That Only Yesterday survives in print while these two impressive works

have languished not only constitutes an imposing compliment to the power of

Frederick Lewis Allen's pen. It also sadly suggests that the reading public

prefers style to substance in its historians, and doesn't mind if they are a bit

blinkered, a little preachy, and good-naturedly given to the spinning of

318 REVIEWS IN AMERICAN HISTORY / June 1986

myths. All this can be overlooked if they are colorful writers and stick to

popular subjects. Frederick Lewis Allen was, and he did. Therein lies much of

the explanation for Only Yesterday's enormous readership, and for its

longevity.

E-MISSIVE is a form of public JOURNALING.