



The Glory and the Dream: A Narrative History of America, 1932-1972

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Award-winning historian and biographer William Manchester, author of *The Last Lion*, an epic three-volume biography of Winston Churchill, brings us an evocative and powerful exploration of the American way of life from 1932 to 1972. Covering almost every facet of American culture during a very diverse and tumultuous period in history, Manchester's account is both dramatic and surprisingly intimate--with compelling details that could only be known by a dedicated historian who lived through and documented this fascinating time in history.

For several decades, William Manchester was the most popular and highly regarded historian and biographer of his time--and this book provides the reader with a powerful example of the reason for that reputation.

"There is no fiction that can compete with good, gossipy, anecdotal history--the inside story of who said or did what in moments of great tensions or crisis... I think you ought to read this history and weep, read it and laugh, read it and don't repeat it." --Anatole Broyard

The Glory and the Dream: A Narrative History of America, 1932-1972 Details

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Garnette says

Really compelling history, from the very beginning. Manchester excels at detailed descriptions of selected events that give the flavor of the times and identify the turning points of history. The book begins with the Bonus March on Washington where Patton and MacArthur led U.S troops against destitute World War I veterans and their families who were seeking early payment of military bonuses. The sharp contrast between the poverty of the people during the Depression and Herbert Hoover's elaborate, formal seven-course family meals in the White House vividly illustrates the failure of government to recognize, let alone respond to, the suffering of the people. So often history appears to repeat itself but we never seem to learn its lessons. In both the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II and the anti-Communist attacks of the McCarthy Era, the government, pushed by extremists, violated the civil rights of innocent people in a witch hunt that in the end did nothing to protect against the admittedly real threats to U.S. security. The book kept my attention throughout (which is saying a lot for a 1400 page book!) and brought back many memories from my distant childhood (school bomb drills, Sputnik, the moon shot, the contraceptive pill, the Vietnam war.) The American story unfolds almost cinematically, each significant event or policy logically leading to the next. It strikes me how different that is from watching the daily news, a cacophony of voices vying for attention, impossible to tell which developments are significant and which are entirely transitory. We require distance to see things clearly (how much distance? On reflection, I'd guess at least 20 years), which leaves observers of contemporary world events (and politicians themselves) stumbling in the dark. As this book was published in 1984, the coverage of the later years (Vietnam, protests, Watergate) lacks the benefit of historical perspective. But current politics validates his conclusion, that America vacillates between a love affair with change and a nostalgic desire to return to a better past that has been lost. A thoroughly enjoyable read.

Dayla says

This is so well written. And why wasn't it possible to have someone like William R. Manchester write a student version of this book. I have had this book since I borrowed it from a boyfriend, but now friend of mine in 1981. It took me 25 years to finally get around to reading it. So Bob M, let me know if you want me to mail this back to you. And I guess Bob M, it is out of the question for me to ask if I can borrow the companion book. Just kidding.

Sean O says

I'm not sure it's possible to adequately review a 1300+ page narrative history of the middle of the 20th Century. So I'm not sure I'm going to try.

This book however is a beautiful skeleton.

On it I will hang Atkinson's "Liberation" trilogy, Halberstam's "The Fifties," "The Children," and "The Best

and the Brightest," "All the King's Men," and "All the President's Men."

If you want to know what happened in America from 1932 to 1972, this is the place to start.

Chris Gager says

I have to move over to this edition to finish my review as I've used up all my allotted characters in the one I was reviewing under! Well, it IS a long book crammed full of interesting stuff.

So, we're headed for the election of 1972 and Watergate as the semi-insane Nixon heads for China before he returns to subvert our democracy. Screw him ... and Kissinger too!

- Why so much space devoted to the exploits of Clifford Irving? Low blow: he calls Nina van Pallandt the "most distinguished fornicatrix of 1972"!

- By "Poland water" does he mean "Poland Spring" water(a Maine product)?

The end arrived rather abruptly last night as I failed to include in my endgame calculations the fact that this book has about a hundred pages of notes and index! DUH! Anyway, it had to end somewhere so the whole unfolding endless Watergate saga is only getting started in this book. As the book was being rounded into shape the saga continued but Manchester really couldn't into except to refer to the outcome sort of vaguely. His story of the 1972 Presidential race was interesting. I voted for McGovern - the first public election vote I ever cast I think. Poor George was snake-bit by circumstance and his own poor judgment. Nevertheless, it's a testimony to how clueless American voters can be that the odious Nixon did so well. But - the turn-out was quite low also.

Hard to give any overall impressions - history is a muddle from too-close up. One thing about American history is pretty clear, however, and that is that we are CONSTANTLY at war with the outside world and with each other. So ... much ... violence ...

4.75* rounds up to 5*.

Robert W says

A two volume history of the U.S. from 1932 to 1974. Manchester confesses to being a "generational chauvinist"; the generation in question being the World War II generation. These volumes are very readable, and while some of the information has been contradicted or made more complete by subsequent findings, overall it is very useful. What seems weird to me, as a man a generation or two younger than Manchester, is his emphasis. He gives a lot of ink to sixties radical personages like Angela Davis, and the events surrounding their lives. I think a man writing in the mid-70s of his generation must have seen these people as really important, in the same way, say, that Barry Goldwater or Adlai Stevenson were important. But it's hard to see that today—the 60s radicals were interesting, and in some parts of the world (France and Germany, for instance) important figures then and in the future. But unlike the leaders of the Civil Rights movement, 60s radical didn't actually succeed in changing our society in any major way (except the feminist movement), nor did they gain temporal power. In this case, he overestimates the 60s and the baby boomers

(some of their representatives of them). But he misunderstands the cultural changes wrought by this generation—the importance of music to them (he can't quite see the importance of Elvis, for whom he has an irrational loathing, and of rock in general), the way they greatly relaxed generations of rigid taboos, whether consequential (the role of women and non-white persons in society) or trivial (the idea that men don't have to wear a tie). These are minor and slightly unfair criticisms of a highly engrossing book. Reading about the Roosevelt administration here is especially interesting—probably the best part of the book. His attempt to write an encyclopedic book about everything that happened in America is an overreach, but an honorable one.

Erik Graff says

This is probably the best social history of the United States of America I have ever encountered. It begins with the radio listings for a typical evening in 1932, proceeds to the Bonus Marchers and through the Depression and the wars, hot and cold, until 1972, its time of composition. So impressed have I been with this book that I've given it as a gift to several people and will pick up copies of it whenever I chance upon them. Most particularly this is a great thing to give to anyone over sixty as so much of it will remind them of their own experiences, both private and public.

Note that while a two volume edition is pictured here, the same ISBN applies to a one volume edition as well.

James says

This is history that reads like a novel. Beginning with the advent of the Roosevelt administration in 1932 William Manchester chronicles the cultural history of America through the subsequent four decades ending with the beginning of the second Nixon administration. Through all those years Manchester highlights the events that animated the American people and had a profound impact on life in America. Whether it was life during the depression, the home front of WWII, the rise of corporate America, or the turbulent sixties with protest and more war the book provides a clear if breathtaking narrative of the immensity of change. His coverage includes the famous whether they are political like Truman and McCarthy or cultural icons like Hepburn and Tracy. Fads are not neglected as evidenced by discussions of Swing music, victory gardens, and hula hoops. The major social movements range from the bonus marchers to *The Silent Generation* to the *Woodstock Generation*. For those readers, like myself, who experienced some of those events (the fifties and sixties in my case) the book becomes an interesting blend of history and nostalgia. But no matter what your age, Manchester is a good historian and writer who is a joy to read.

John says

WHAT IT IS: A left-leaning "narrative history" of the United States from 1932-72.

WHAT I LEARNED: I learned what I already knew from the Preacher in Ecclesiastes: "... there is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9). The "National Indignation Conventions" in Dallas in 1961 and 1963 sound a lot like this year's Tea Parties. The opening year of the FDR and Kennedy administrations have unmistakable parallels to the opening year of the Obama administration. An oil spill off of Santa Barbara in 1969 could be this year's Gulf of Mexico oil spill -- along with the determination that this is going to change the way we do things. (From the book: "... drilling leases in the Santa Barbara Channel were suspended.

Then the petroleum industry began applying pressure.")

WHAT I LIKED (WITH RESERVATIONS): William Manchester uses details to bring history to life, particularly the major events. Sometime, in describing lifestyles from various years, he goes into too much detail for my taste. And I wish there had been pictures. I don't think I enjoy any writer of history and biography more than I enjoy Manchester. I only wish he were around to write a narrative history of the United States from 1972-2012.

Mont says

THE GLORY AND THE DREAM:

A NARRATIVE HISTORY OF AMERICA 1932-1972 By William Manchester

1973

Read June 25, 1992

Reading Notes

“ Whither is fled the visionary gleam?/ Where is it now, the glory and the dream?” - -Wordsworth

1. Rendezvous with Destiny (32-41)

Rock Bottom. The bonus army is routed by MacArthur disobeying orders.

Sheer boredom nearly drove Eisenhower to the point of resigning his commission, and it was in these years that he developed the habit of reading Western pulps. Across the Potomac at Fort Myer, George S. Patton, Jr. could be observed playing polo Wednesdays and Saturdays at 4 p.m.. Riding his own horses, he had collected 400 ribbons and 200 cups, he also pursued steeplechasing, fox hunting, skeet shooting, and flying. The US had the 16th largest army behind Czechoslovakia, Turkey, Spain, Romania and Poland. It was the worst equipped of the world's armed forces.

Because the long expansion of presidential power had not begun, Congress was Washington's focal point.

Hoover had contempt for mobs . “Above all, beware the crowd! The crowd only feels; it has no mind of its own which can plan. The crowd is credulous,

it destroys, it consumes, it hates, and it dreams--but it never builds.”

The Cruelst Years. Roosevelt was a universal joint, or rather a switchboard, a transformer through which the energy and intelligence of other people flowed.

Cartoonists drew savage caricatures of Eleanor. “Eleanor can bite an apple through a picket fence. Wounded by her mother her father, her mother in law and her husband she now embraced all humanity.

The building of Father Coughlin's empire had been a brilliant one man accomplishment in media manipulation, exploiting aspects of the national character which were then but little understood: American innocence, the nation's yearning for simple solutions, its joiner complex, and the carnival instinct for collecting shiny junk. He could have sold anything.

He chose to peddle hate. Huey Long owned Louisiana. Every state judge was in his

pocket, including the entire supreme court. All policemen reported directly to him. He alone held power over the schoolteachers, tax collectors, state government, banks and the governor. His legislature outlawed democracy. Huey would decide who had been elected to what. He called out the militia and entered the city at the head of his troops, like Caesar.

Some felt Roosevelt was behind the assassination of Long. In the long run the disappearance of the Kingfish from the national scene certainly brought FDR relief from a serpentine threat. Long was one of the very few men of whom it can be said that had he lived, American history would have been dramatically different.

Sometimes when the fire is low and the bourbon just right, the images and lost notes may drift down from the past, evoking memories for those who were then alive of what 1939 was like for a quite ordinary

American in that year. "God looks after children, drunkards, and the United States."

Norman Thomas: He was the American Isaiah, the nation's conscience, the voice of the mute, the advocate of the dispossessed, the patrician rebel, the prophet who spoke out when theirs fled into silence. He was an evangelist. It was in his blood, in the bone of his bone. The planks in his presidential platform were public works, unemployment insurance, minimum wage laws, low cost housing, slum clearance, the five day week, abolition of child labor, health insurance for the aged, civil liberties

The secret of a good life is to have the right loyalties and to hold them in the right scale of values. The value of dissent and dissenters is to make us reappraise those values with supreme concern for truth. "I suppose it is an achievement to live my years and feel that one has kept the faith, and to be able to sleep at night with reasonable satisfaction. It is an achievement to keep the idea of socialism before a rather indifferent or even hostile American public.

Hitler declared war on the United States. Dean Acheson who thought Hitler was acting with colossal folly wrote, "At last our enemies, with unparalleled stupidity, resolved our dilemmas, clarified our doubts and uncertainties, and united our people for the long, hard course that the national interest required."

2. Sacrifice and Transformation (41-50)

They wonder whether once upon a time it was really possible to wear the country's uniform with pride, shoulder a rifle, and righteously shoot to kill. There was such a time and these were its men. By the winter of 1943-44 the foot soldier had become a veteran of war, a skilled foot soldier who would have been valued by Alexander the Great or Napoleon. Combat makes a man suspicious of all warrior legends. He was a beast of burden.

Frankie's talent, or lack of it, had become a burning issue, like Patton's slapping of a soldier. The hero of the hour was supposed to be a strapping, GI in full battle array leaping through surf to storm an enemy shore. Frankie looked as though he had been strained through a condom. By the end of the war Sinatra was the most hated man in the army.

"The British walk the earth as if they own it. The Americans walk the earth as if they don't give a damn who own it."

They broke out a couple of bottles of whiskey and settled in for a wake. (Re Democrats in election of 48)

Truman was advised that the White House was in imminent danger of collapse. Truman became concerned because of a noticeable vibration in the floors in his study. The great chandeliers in the east room had been tinkling when there was no breeze and could hear the walls creaking. Inspectors found blackened beams, burned by the British in 1814, had never been replaced, were about to give way; frescoed ceilings weighing 70 lbs to the square foot were sagging six inches. The next tenant would have air conditioning, fireproofing and multiple outlets for television cables.

A cabal of Puerto Rican fanatics tried to assassinate the President in Blair House. The plot failed in spite of Harry Truman, who kept running around trying to get a better view of what was going on.

Kinsey: The staggering truth was that men and women knew more about gall wasps than each other. Human beings were even uninformed about the erotic behavior of members of their own sex, and therefore had no way of knowing whether or not they normal. To a disciple of truth, this was unacceptable.

Sometimes when the wind is right and the London night plays tricks with the memory, one can almost hear the flak, the Luftwaffe armada droning overhead, and the din below. With a little imagination you can see the searchlights shining up. It is then, in fancy, that you can picture the lone figure of a gallant young American defying annihilation to tell his countrymen, thorough the static and the sputter of short-wave, what he felt they must know: "This-- is London"... "So long and good luck" (Edward R. Murrow) Gesticulating, nodding, perspiring, glancing at the clock and fumbling always for another cigarette.

Murrow was one of the few men in public to stand up and question Senator McCarthy.

Joseph McCarthy Was a prime specimen of what has been called the Black Irish: the thickset, bull shouldered, beetle browed type found on Boston's Pier Eight and in the tenements of South Chicago. He lacked the genius of Huey Long and the faith in himself.

What he had going for him was a phenomenal ability to lie and an intuitive grasp of the American communications industry. That and ruthlessness. If he had a creed it was nihilism, a belief in nothing, or next to nothing.

None of his sloganeering and billingsgate would have mattered much had it not been for one painful fact: McCarthy had kindled a fire in America's grass roots. Even as his facade was torn asunder, as his fellow senators took his accusations apart one by one and exposed his lies two by two till he sat exposed (and grinning) before them, his support grew and stiffened across the land. The evidence was unmistakable. Gallup consistently found that 50 percent of the public had a favorable opinion of the senator and thought he was helping the country; only 29% disapproved of him and 21% had no opinion at all.

3. Sowing the Wind (51-60)

By 1951 MacArthur had become a deity for many Americans. He had learned every soldierly virtue, with one exception: he made a poor second in command. We shall never know what was in his mind that terrible winter after the Chinese came into the war. This much seems certain: he had lost his fighting spirit. Protest was clearly alien to such an outlook. For professors, hostility to McCarthyism was the great passion of the time, but students weren't much interested. Most undergraduates found the issue boring. A dominant characteristic of students in the current generation is that they are gloriously contented both in regard to their outlook for the future. Few of them are worried. They were prepared to embrace the status quo; they would obey the law, pay taxes, fulfill their military obligations, and vote, though thereafter politics would be none of their concern.

They would conform to the dictates of society in their dress, speech, worship, choice of friends, length of hair, and above all in their thought. In exchange they would receive all the rights and privileges of the good life.

By the early 50's the average American family was watching TV between four and five hours a day. Television was returning people to the home, whence he had lured them, but destroying the home in the process.

Those interested enough to monitor television fare waged bitter disputes over who was responsible for its tasteless sludge. No one was, there simply wasn't enough talent to fill all those empty hours, and the very size of the waiting audience meant that concepts comprehensible to the majority had to be banal.

Communication revolution. Paperback books and television.

Not only had Eisenhower no politics; he had no religion, no conspicuous guiding principles, and few known views on most of the great issues of his time. For the second time in four years he was being offered the most powerful office in the world, yet the men making the proposal had no idea what he would do with it if he got it. "If all that

Americans want is security, they can go to prison." Ike will dismay them with awkward straggling sentences that wander over the landscape in defiance of all grammatical and syntactic rules.

The most important fact in Dulles's life was his membership in the Presbyterian church. He regarded his religiosity as a great strength. In fact it was an encumbrance.

The Eisenhower siesta extended from 1953-1957 when Americans who had assumed that their technical supremacy would never be challenged were dismayed to learn of Sputnik. This time would come to be remembered as an uncomplicated, golden time, mourned as lost childhoods are mourned. If it was never that splendid, neither was it as flatulent as intellectuals made out.

4. Reaping the Whirlwind (61-68)

Historians tended to believe that in the long run the Bay of Pigs was really a blessing that because of it Kennedy became disillusioned with experts and was better equipped to face the Cuban Missile crisis 18 months later

The Kennedy's were very outdoorsy. Not since TR had so ardent an advocate of the strenuous life lived in the White House. There was touch football, and sailing off Hyannisport, and Jackie's water-skiing. One or another of them was enthusiastic about nearly every sport. Pierre Salinger was an apostate.

LBJ defined his philosophy of leadership with his favorite Biblical quotation from Isaiah "Come now let us reason together", but he confessed that he liked to show a little garter while doing it, and in practice he persuaded other men to join what he called his consensus less by reasoning with them than by imploring bullying and begging them, and he was not above outright extortion. "A Machiavelli in a Stetson."

He spoke of my army, my government, and my taxes. To make certain that no one forgot who he was, he had the presidential seal emblazoned on his cuff links, his boots, his twill ranch jackets, even on plastic drinking cups.

LBJ speaking manner did not help. He suppressed his natural warmth and earthiness and tried to appear solemn and humble instead. What came through on the TV tube was unctious and sanctimony. Instinctively people realized that whatever the real Lyndon Johnson was like, this one was a fake. The feeling that he was a mountebank was heightened.

Goldwater was a man of absolute integrity, and one of the most charming politicians ever to run for the Presidency. Handsome, leonine, silver haired, with the black horn rimmed spectacles which were his trademark. Goldwater represented a love for the best of the past

and defiance toward the worst of the present. In his crisp low southwestern drawl he remained the country of American maxims and ethical certitudes which had lost their validity but not their fascination. It was his special talent that he could make them seem both plausible and relevant.

Away from the Senate he was a mishmash of anachronisms. For all his summonings of the legends of the past, he was a major general in the Air Force Reserve, a hot jet pilot, and a tremendous admirer of sophisticated technology. He was an expert radio ham. He was also a superb photographer; a volume of his desert studies had been issued.

"In your heart you know he's right", read the billboards. There was some truth to it. In his three books and 800 newspaper columns he had tackled many sacred cows which deserved it. The difficulty was that he had said and done and written so many other things some of them bizarre. (sell TVA for \$1, cities as sin steeped Babylons, elimination of NLRB and new Supreme Court. Here Americans knew in their hearts that he was wrong.

In 1966 The Sound of Music became one of the greatest hits in movie history. People went around saying, "You better believe it." Television was now almost 100 percent color. The two pro football leagues merged. The Valley of the Dolls and How to Avoid Probate were best sellers. Cabaret and Mame were big on Broadway. The summer of 1966 was spoiled for a lot of travelers by the longest and costliest airline strike ever; 5 major airlines were grounded for 43 days. That fall the Dodgers lost 4 in a row-The World Series- to Baltimore. A wacky bumper sticker in California announced: Mary Poppins is a Junkie.

Labor troubles left New Yorkers without newspapers for 279 days. After 190 years superstition finally killed the two dollar bill.

The Year Everything Went Wrong: 1968. Annus Horribilus.

5. Nixon, After All (69-72)

Nader's Lebanese immigrant father was the local populist. Customers at his Sweet Shop complained that the proprietor never let them eat in peace. His father was always lecturing them about the wrongs, the inequities, the injustices of the system. Like many immigrants, he was a more ardent Democrat than the natives. He went on about the crimes of the Interests and was forever threatening to sue them. In time nearly everyone there tuned him out, with one exception: his youngest son Ralph. In 1938, at the age of 4, Ralph Nader was a tiny spectator when lawyers harangued juries in the local courthouse. At 14 he became a daily reader of the Congressional Record. He won a scholarship to Princeton, where he refused to wear white bucks or other symbols of sartorial conformity and staged a protest against the spraying of campus trees with DDT. He was

locked so often in the university library after hours that he was given a key. In 1955 he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, graduated magna cum laude, and admitted to Harvard Law School, which he described as a high priced tool factory turning out servants of power.

His reputation as a puritan grew. He forswore the reading of novels; they were a waste of time. So were movies; he would limit himself to two a year. He scorned plays, tobacco, alcohol, girls, and parties. He opened a private law practice in Hartford which rapidly became a source of free legal advice of the poor. Nader set himself up as a watchdog of the National Traffic Safety Agency and he went after the meat packers; the result was the Wholesome Meat Act of 1967. FDA, Union Carbide, banks, supermarkets, pulp and paper mills. Unlike the muckrakers of the Lincoln Steffens era he believed in working within the system. He was a linear thinker, an advocate of law and industrial order. Nader's Raiders. He gave many lectures. There was never any flourish at the end. He would simply stop talking and pivot away. College audiences gave him wild ovations, but he never turned back to acknowledge them. If asked to autograph a book he would curtly reply No Ralph is so afraid of being tuned into a movie star of having his private life romanticized, that he has renounced his own private life.

He was an impossible customer. To a waitress he would say when ordering. "Is the ham sliced for each sandwich? Is that genuine or processed cheese? Do you eat sugar? It is absolutely useless, no food value." To an airline stewardess he said the only thing you should be proud to serve on this whole plane is the little bag of nuts. And you should take the salt off the nuts.

His ultimate goal he said was nothing less than the qualitative reform of the industrial revolution. Yet for all his evangelism, his devotion to the public good, and his monastic life, Nader's impact on society was questionable. At times he seemed to know it. "We always fail, The whole thing is limiting the degree of failure." His audience applauded him but few felt compelled to get involved, to follow his example or even his advice. They went right on driving big Detroit cars, eating processed foods, coating themselves with expensive cosmetics and smoking poisonous cigarettes.

So it was that after intervening in foreign conflicts for a third of a century, the people of the United States turned inward once more, seeking comfort in insularity and renewal in isolation. "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."

Chris Gager says

Time for some non-fiction and judging from the ratings this was a good choice. This is another found/rescued book - from where I don't know. I've read into it a bit - last night - and it's pretty damned good so far. The Depression, The New Deal, World War II, post-war prosperity and growth, Korea, Civil Rights, Vietnam, the 60's ... YIKES! Only 40 years and so much going on... So far my main impression is of how much 1932 looks like today. The Republican Party still wants to blame the victims of capitalist predation and excess, and that old American exceptionalism(?) and mythology is still going strong - love the rich - hate the poor. Ugh! Thank God for F.D.R. - and how interesting and pitiful(for us) is it that so many righties still vilify him! As for me, I was born in 1946 and "came of age" in the 60's. I'm a baby boomer 60's guy all the way!

Inching along as the war goes better and the cranked up US economy is "leading" the way to an unprecedented posterity post-war. Why did the USA win the war? Production, baby ... Meanwhile, FDR is fading fast health-wise.

- This is not the correct cover image for the book I have but that one does not appear on G'reads. Close

enough...

Reading about the 100 days of Roosevelt and his brain trust as they literally save the USA from chaos. Soon the business-conservative push-back will begin. The republican Party(Harding-Coolidge-Hoover - oh my!) was as much of a horror show back then as it is now. Also - Eleanor Roosevelt - great human being!

- Not a great human being? Westbrook Pegler, the Rush Limbaugh of his time.

Moving on a bit as the Depression persists and is exacerbated by the Dust Bowl. What a pile of woes! Then there's the inevitable push-back from "business interests" to the "socialist-communist" remedies being proposed by Roosevelt. Still goin' on today of course. Bernie Sanders is the new FDR and we do need him, but I'm not sure he'd be able to get much done given the divided and fractious state of American political culture.

- Wow - seems like Walmart would have been right at home in the economy of the 1930's!

- The Republican Right vs FDR was like the Tea Party vs Obama ... ever the cynical lying bastards.

Still creeping along - still very readable and fascinating. So many parallels to today's political world, including FDR's battles with a VERY conservative Supreme Court, even worse than today's.

Didn't get too far in last night as I focused on Le Carre' instead. This is going to take a while no matter what. Don't want to get into info overload.

And another night passes with minimal "progress" page-wise. Each page has so much to pay attention to that the go-slow method is required. Last night it was labor troubles and triumphs of themed-30's. One of those Chicago police riot thingees happened back then. People were killed. Sound familiar? 1968!

This is my only book right now so perhaps I'll try to focus on it exclusively. Right now we're in the approach to WWII - already raging in Europe and the Western Pacific. Isolationist sentiments are waning a bit but are still a problem for Roosevelt -holding him back, though he's doing everything he can short of declaring war to help the allies, especially Britain. The war will temporarily hold back the right-wing/anti progress crowd but of course they'll be back in spades after the war ends.

- The right-wingers = viciously anti-Roosevelt, anti-Obama, anti-Clinton. The beat goes on ... American insanity!

So now the war is on and the right v. left political stuff takes a back seat. The author is shifting from one setting to another for an overview. First came the Pacific War, about which he had some seriously personal experience type knowledge. I was looking at some family home movies that my nephew has very kindly put up on line and the earliest go back to the early 40's - and then came WWII and there're my mother, father and older siblings living in Florida while he got trained as a Naval officer. He eventually wound up in the Pacific along with Mr. Manchester. The book and the family movies are side-by-side right now!

Last night my reading covered the death of FDR and it had me in tears. A VERY great American, though not thought well of by the tighty-righties. A few years ago an internet poll anointed R. Reagan as the greatest of American presidents! People are idiots ... Anyway, the war grinds on though the Germans are about done for. Eisenhower is too trusting of the Russians and the Cold War was the result. Would've happened anyway, I suppose. The war in the Pacific is also winding down but the slaughter of Okinawa and Iwo Jima will lead to

Hiroshima and Nagasaki> Alternative ways of ending the war and of dealing with the bomb were discussed and presented to Roosevelt, but then he died ... Except for Teller, most of the physicists(i.e. Oppenheimer) involved did NOT want it used, at least not on civilians.

1945 - The war(s) end with a bang - literally - two of them, in Japan. Incredibly, it was not a sure thing that Japan would surrender after that. The super-wacko militarists wanted to fight to oblivion! So now the boys are coming home, the atomic cat is out of the bag(Stalin probably knew more about it than Truman thanks to effective spying) and will be born soon. That probably won't be mentioned by the author! Meanwhile, Europe is in ruins and millions are dead. Fascinating ...

The wars are over and it's back to the home front for all kinds of economic troubles for Harry Truman to deal with. Labor strife was a big one, with the newly powerful unions flexing their muscles. Meanwhile the possibly too-rapid demobilization of the draftee military is causing a lot of problems as well, especially since Russia wasn't really demobilizing at all! Troubles ahead. Truman is struggling but will come back strong upon re-election time.

So now it's peace time but it's not very peaceful as Europe struggles to get back on its feet and the Russian presence looms. The U.S. comes to the rescue(of course) with the Berlin airlift and the Marshall Plan. It's all about our VERY productive economy. With so much wealth it was possible to share and a good thing we did too. Americans abroad are generating so much backlash due to boorish American swagger while at home the prelude to the 60's begins as teenagers become more and more "owned" by themselves and their own culture. People get ready ...

We're almost to the '50's now: McCarthyism, Korea, Eisenhower and the Cold war. Meanwhile, Harry T. has decisively beaten the winner of the foregone-conclusion-according-to-the-pollsters Presidential election of 1948. THAT was amazing! I find it just as easy to dislike whitey-white Republicans and southern racists(like Strom Thurmond - who ran as a Dixiecrat Independent in '48) as I do these days. Thank God for "The Late George Apley," which helps me to cut them some slack ...

And now on to the end of the Truman years, McCarthyism and Korea. NOT a happy time in American history. Once again, the Republican Party can be easily cited for its villainy in supporting McCarthy. While the author does try to give some feel for the evolving culture, his main theme is political history. Lots to learn here!

- The description of the post-war suburban culture reminded me of my Aunt and Uncle in their little 1950's development in a former peach orchard in Glastonbury, Ct - Uncle Bob(an Army pilot, I think) worked at Pratt and Whitney, I think - a junior executive. Later they moved on and up. My parents and older siblings already had a house near downtown Shrewsbury, Ma on Brightside Ave. and didn't need to look for a house. Lucky ...

The political mire of the early 50's now is giving way to the election of 1952. A weakened Truman decides not to run and asks Stevenson, who finally accepts. Eisenhower is likewise reluctant but answers the call after Bob Taft comes oh so close in his final try. Then there's the Nixon thing ... the Checkers speech is coming up. Stevenson gets labeled an "egghead" for being smart and funny. Apparently there's such a thing as too smart for the American voter. The level of campaign discourse drops as Ike gains ground and the era of my beginning awareness of outside "things" begins. Mainly it's television: Howdy Doody, Wild Bill Hickok, Search for Tomorrow, The Secret Storm, Roy Rogers, The Lone Ranger, Arthur Godfrey, Bob Crosby, Dinah Shore, Andy's Gang, Mighty Mouse and on and on...

The Republican Party - ever ready to take the low road. The whole "Democrat Party" thing started back in the 50's - I didn't realize that.

Adlai Stevenson - a smart and funny guy but TOO sarcastic to be a national politician. It's not politically nice to make fun of dumb-ass Republicans I guess. Boo-Hoo!

And now Ike's been elected and the true 1950's will kick in. By the way, the Republicans accusing the Democrats with being "traitors" is nothing new. One does get weary of it, however. I love that Bernie Sanders has attracted so many young folks to the political fray. All that Republican/ "conservative" B.S. is new to them!

And now for the peaceful mid-fifties after Joe McCarthy has been brought low by Joseph Welch. What a shame for the Republican Party that they feared, tolerated and even supported that bat-shit crazy McCarthy. A sad period for our country and its legacy is still with us to some extent. Some people on the right still think it's a relevant criticism to call someone a "communist" ... sheesh. Grow up dudes!

The mid-1950's: Eisenhower has TWO serious medical issues but runs again in 1956 and wins easily. The cold war goes on as Khrushchev takes over in Russia and disarmament talks go nowhere. You can see that Reagan might have copied Ike's personality - very winning and engaging. This book is huge but it could've been MUCH larger -so much is left out or glossed over. On the home front my family is in it's death throes as constituted coming out of the 40's. My father can't-won't stop drinking and my mother's at her wit's end. Divorce and relocation from Massachusetts to Colorado in 1957 ...

- I'm not so sure that all that many people were ever convinced that smoking was harmless!

- a boo-boo: Jean-Paul Aumont s.b. Jean-Pierre Aumont

- As the 50's edge towards the 60's the author begins to sound increasingly like a fuddy-duddy when it comes to culture.

Last night - the culture of the late 1950's = all about being white, middle class, consumerist, Republican, conformist and fearful(of the bomb). Look out ... here come the sixties!

The 50's roll onward and Ike's administration is soiled by the Goldfine-Adams scandal. Again ... the names do ring a bell but I really didn't know what was going on. The Marine recruits dying in a swamp - I remember that one. Nixon getting almost killed in S. America - don't remember that. Anti-Americanism ... The Suez thing rings a vague bell. And of course Sputnik and the Edsel and it's lemon-sucking mouth of a grille. I well remember watching that blinking light pass overhead in the skies above Boulder - late 1950's. And then the failed launch on the first U. S. attempt - boom! NASA created in 1958 and the Space Races is on. I didn't recall that Ike had so many health problems after that first big one. Poor guy - he did his best and really spoke prophetically and with prescience near the end of his administration.

Now on to the final section: "Reaping the Whirlwind" after the U-2 fiasco, Castro and the oh-so-close-was-it-a-steal(Texas and Illinois???) 1960 election. I'm paying more attention now that I'm a grown up 14 years old and in a Connecticut boarding school. Still a bit more protected/isolated than being in a Denver High School - probably TJ. And out of my mother's hair... So, now it's time to go as the Civil Rights movement will bring on the sixties. My brother was one of those Freedom Riders and did a bit of jail time in Mississippi. Yale Divinity School marchers in New Haven get a shout out. College kids in Berkeley start pushing ... payola, Charles Van Doren, the Congo, Caryl Chessman, the Clutter family, Metrecal, Dulles

dies, that Mikoyan mustache, Chris Herter, Castro and Batista - just like that Billy Joel song.

And now the 1,000 days of JFK. His "reign" didn't last long but it was action-packed: The Bay of Pigs fiasco and CIA incompetence and dishonesty. Civil Rights craziness in the South: Freedom Riders, death in destruction in Mississippi as James Meredith tries to enroll at Ole Miss in Oxford. Walker Percy covered this event in "The Last Gentleman"(gotta read that again) and even named his protagonist after the incompetent governor(Barnett) of Mississippi at the time. And then comes the Cuban Missile Crisis. Sheesh - it's a wonder we're all still alive!

- The author says that the New left came to be a threat to democratic institutions later in the 60's. Well ... let's see him show that. Convince me ...

- I remember watching the inaugural of JFK on TV. It was VERY cold and windy that day. I remember seeing JFK standing up trying to help Robert Frost read his poem in the glaring sunlight.

Now moving inexorably nearer the "end"(of THIS story). Much good about JFK is spoken of but also the not-so-good(NOT including his sexual addiction and the personality and physical changes wrought by his treatment for Addison's disease). Who knows if the author knew about these in 1972. Meanwhile, the far right persists endlessly with their fear of commies and nasty personalized political agendas. The only states won by Goldwater in 1964 outside of Arizona(his home) were in the deep south. Figures ... meanwhile, in his later years Mr. G. became considerably more mellow politically. So, Kennedy dies and Johnson takes over, misleading the public about Vietnam. I joined the Navy in late 1965 as the big and rapid military buildup was happening. By 1967 the war was raging ... I was there but only on the mainland(Saigon) for a few days. The rest of the time I was floating offshore on a spy ship.

Didn't read that much in here last night. The doo-doo is getting deeper for LBJ and the USA: Civil Rights and Vietnam continue to dominate...

Things are picking up now - Vietnam-wise - and the terms "escalation" and "credibility gap" come to the fore as Johnson takes to bullshitting while speaking to the public. One can have some sympathy for the guy. He KNEW that if he backed out that the right-wingers/hawks would crucify him for wimping out in the face of Commie aggression and expansion. What to do???? As for me I got booted out of college for non-attendance at classes and wound up 1-A very quickly. I was told by my draft board(this is in 1965) that I'd be drafted in October, when I turned 19, so I enlisted in the Navy in September. I wound up in 'Nam in January of 1967. BUT ... generally pretty safe on a ship off-shore most of the time.

Still mired in Vietnam and Civil Rights - white backlash - "race rioting(Watts and many more) - Black Power - more escalation ... It's a bit breathtaking how fast the US went from sort of controlled involvement to (almost)all in in Vietnam. By the time I joined up in Sept./69 the draft rolls had doubled and by the time I got to Nam a bit more than a year later there were hundreds of thousands of Americans there. It was crazy AND awful and SO unnecessary and destructive in so many ways. Looking back from the present I was moved by the feeling of looking at an unfolding train wreck. Back in the day I was young and more detached - just surviving - going along. All for pretty much nothing ...

Getting close to the end now with the beginning of 1968 - a whopper of a year for sure. I was in a peaceful and far away place - Hawaii - but still in the Navy so ... Learning about drugs and the new rock 'n' roll. As the author talks about the culture of the 60's he begins to sound a bit like a fuddy-duddy. He was too old to "get" it I guess - he's overly negative about that whole "trip" for sure. I got it pretty well but never went all the way to hippie-hood. No LSD for me! Most everything else, though... He also brings up the Pueblo

"disaster." The guys on that ship(it was much smaller than the one I was on - we were about the same as the Liberty - the one that got attacked by the Israelis during the '67 war) were in the same part of the (secret)Navy that I was. We all worked for NSA.

- The author' "look" at 60's counterculture lacks perspective but that's mostly because he was writing while it was still actually going on - into the 70's.

- Keeps writing "hippy" instead of "hippie" ...

The disastrous year of 1968... The author makes the unbelievable implication that the election of Nixon was a good thing. A stabilizing thing - Bullshit! As he describes sixties unrest and cultural craziness deepens he reveals his inner fuddy-duddy and a lack of historical objectivity. It was what it was - I don't care if he wants to turn his nose up at it. He's into the myth of American exceptionalism I guess - it's that "We're so special" thing. I guess he feels that young sixties people somehow soiled that image! He writes of Diahann Carroll starring in "Julia" as if it was a big advance for civil rights!

- Describes Sirhan Sirhan as "a swarthy little Arab" - sounds racist to me!

Now we're full on into the 1970's and the next chapter is titled "Nattering Nabobs." If that rings a bell you know how old you are! Nixon and Agnew - how I hated both of them and how low both assholes were brought! Unfortunately, resentful Republicans have been trying to exact revenge ever since. The politics of polarization = another legacy we have those two boobs to thank for(along with Haldeman, Erlichman, Mitchell etc.).

- Uh-oh, he's down on Irish patriots - maybe he needed to read more history!

- WTF is "acid" rock??? It's all just rock and roll ... expanded. I never took acid but loved the music.

- It's not "the" Iron Butterfly, just Iron Butterfly.

- It's unfair to label Manson's crew "a band of hippies" - it's a smear on flower children. There are going to be sleaze-balls and crazies in most any group if it's big enough. Read "Drop City" for a realistic look.

- Chappaquiddick - now I hate Ted Kennedy all over again! I worked in the kitchen of a restaurant(dishwasher) in Edgartown that was about 100 feet from the Chappaquiddick ferry landing in the summer of 1963. My boss was in a scene in "Jaws." TK came in one night with friends for dinner. I snuck a peek but only saw his back.

I suppose whoever edited this book got tired after a while - understandable I suppose. Angel Davis gets described as a "dusky twenty-six-year-old beauty"! and he writes "The Cream" instead of just "Cream." Like I said - dude was WAY over thirty!

Now we're rounding into the homestretch as Vietnamization will stagger to it's ignominious conclusion and the Nixon administration will eventually dissolve into the swamp of it's moral turpitude. The right-wingers these days rant idiotically about the "dictator" Obama and staunchly defend a President who REALLY took steps toward serious subversion of law and democracy. My aunt and uncleI(both deceased), wealthy upper-middle-classers in suburban Connecticut never stop defending Nixon and Agnew and the rest. According to them the were all "railroaded."

- Kent State showed the dark side of right wing patriotism and dishonesty. Denial of the the truth/reality leads to destruction. The righties keep wanting to live in a fairyland. Kent State should never have happened and blaming the dead students is sickening.

- More faux pas by grandpa Manchester: it's just Grand Funk Railroad, not "the" Grand Funk Railroad. He describes rock "jamborees" as "steeped in sin"! Calls drug dealers "pushers" - HEY! marijuana(mostly what they sold) is NOT heroin! That said, the one time I sold some pot to a guy as a favor to his sister(a friend) I DID feel uncomfortable about it.

Painted Desert Dreamer says

This two-volume book was one of my first non-fiction reads. I read everything written by William Manchester for the next six months.

Up to that point, I had read only historical fiction. I had not had any formal education since the sixth grade, and because of books, such as this, I have been able to educate myself. I am a mother of grown children and I am currently a freshman attending University. Life!!!

Harold says

This is anecdote as history -- in this case the history of the US from 1930 to 1972. As such, it is the most evocative history I have read. Starting with the most vivid, visceral description of the depression and continuing through Watergate, Manchester delivers the zeitgeist of the United States through an incredibly tumultuous period in its history. He reports not only on historical events, but on the slang, the culture, the fashion, and the emotion of the time. He loves to tell a good story, and tells it well. And he picks some great bits, like the time Nixon stopped Joe McCarthy from beating up Drew Pearson in the men's room. This is a charming read, but I am not convinced it is an insightful or even accurate history. The book is an immense 1400 pages, and there are more of those pages devoted to Clifford Irving's hoax about Howard Hughes than about the King assassination, or about Johnson's first 100 days in office, for example. And there were several events which I have read about elsewhere which were either inaccurate or incomplete. Nonetheless, the book is reasonably balanced in its outlook, a lot of fun to read, and evocative in its prose. In short, for most of those years, a lot better than the country it reports on.

Piker7977 says

Wonderful. Just wonderful.

Having been born in the 1980s it is nice to read a narrative history of the generations who came before me.

This is an engrossing history beginning with the start of the Great Depression and ending with Watergate. The histories enclosed in the chapters include military, economic, political, and social events.

This section may require a spoiler alert

This (semi-leftist) narrative turns over a lot of stones and uncovers some ugly truths about the past American ages. I think it is written with an overall cynical tone. Manchester seems to hold the Roosevelt and Kennedy administrations in a very high regard. Truman and Eisenhower sometimes take a beating but the reader is left with an overall "meh" impression of their presidencies. LBJ and Nixon are scathingly described.

I personally think the presidential campaigns were the best parts of this tome. The military sections were interesting and often critical of military leaders (especially those of the Vietnam War). After reading the sections dedicated to the social histories I would call my parents and ask them about "steelies", "...and little lambs eat ivy", "coonskin hats", etc.

The American portraits and period montages were also wonderful additions. They helped put the writing in perspective with the people and times.

I found a couple of passages exceptionally interesting. William Manchester's views at the time of writing this history are now being challenged by modern historical viewpoints.

1. Manchester's view of Douglas MacArthur is almost sympathetic. MacArthur now carries controversy even those who view him in high regard.
2. During the LBJ years the Gulf of Tonkin incident/resolution receive more space than the Civil Rights Act of 1964. LBJ's legacy appears to be going through a little renaissance today whereas Manchester views are not flattering.
3. He describes the roles of automation and computers in the late 60s and early 70s as mechanisms of slot. The reader gets the impression these devices make American society lazy and could lead to a Bradbury type downfall. (As I write this on a laptop.)

I just loved this work. The history of these 40 years is almost written as the life of a star. A bright beginning with the birth of the Roosevelt administration, a violent supernova type rupture of society through 1966-1968, and the burnout decay through the Watergate years during the Nixon administration.

I can't wait to read more of Manchester's work.

Peter Hoff says

As is often the case, it is good to know the source of a book's title, which in this case is taken from William Wordsworth's poem "Ode: Intimations of Immortality": "Whither is fled the visionary gleam? / Where is it now, the glory and the dream?"

So if you are looking for a star-spangled history of the mid-twentieth century (1932-1972), go elsewhere. One gets a distinct sense that Manchester wrote the book for the sake of catharsis, having just lived through the disaster that was Richard Nixon's presidency, on top of the pain and agony that was the nineteen sixties in America.

Manchester, as he often does, starts off like the proverbial house afire, and then eventually bogs down. His portrait of the Great Depression should be required reading for anyone who did not experience the era first-hand--and that's almost all of us these days. World War two was another extreme challenge. Manchester himself fought in it and was wounded at Okinawa. But somehow that war comes across as mostly a triumph.

Then we are off to Truman, Korea, Eisenhower, the Fifties, Joe McCarthy, and the dubious rise of Richard Nixon.

Manchester's moment-by-moment account of the Cuban Missile Crisis is the most riveting and insightful episode of the book. He treads lightly on the JFK assassination, about which he has already devoted many hundreds of pages in another book. But overall, his account of the sixties presents it as what it was in one of its most enduring terms, a "bummer." Yes, the outcomes of the civil rights struggles, the women's movement, the beginnings of gay liberation, and LBJ's Great Society legislation, brought very positive changes for the country. But the agony of what we went through to achieve them, combined with the tragedy of Viet Nam, brought back memories of a very tough and depressing time indeed.

And finally Nixon. Watergate must have been unfolding right before Manchester's eyes as he completed this book, published in 1974. The administration's descent into raw immorality and crime is about as ugly a picture as any American would want to face. Still, Manchester credits fully Nixon's achievements in opening China and reaching detente with the Soviet Union. And he leaves us with Wordsworth's question as an open one. Where indeed is the "visionary gleam?" Can we regain it.

Ironically--and one of Manchester's chief virtues is his eye for irony almost everywhere he looks, the book could almost have been written today. The names have changed, but many visions and dreams are just as powerful now, as are many disappointing aspects of the American character.

David Bruns says

Manchester's book is a massive tome - 1300 pages - that provides a narrative history of 1932 to 1972. He starts with the Depression and ends with Watergate. It is worth the workout; however, if you can get the two volume version that is much easier to physically handle.

He does a fantastic job of putting each era into perspective and getting behind the scenes into what made the country tick at each point in our history. For example, you get a rundown on what people were reading, wearing, watching at the movies or TV and listening to on the radio. Beyond the breadth of topic, the amazing part of his writing is how he is able to offer this kind of depth on a consistent basis over the 40 year span.
