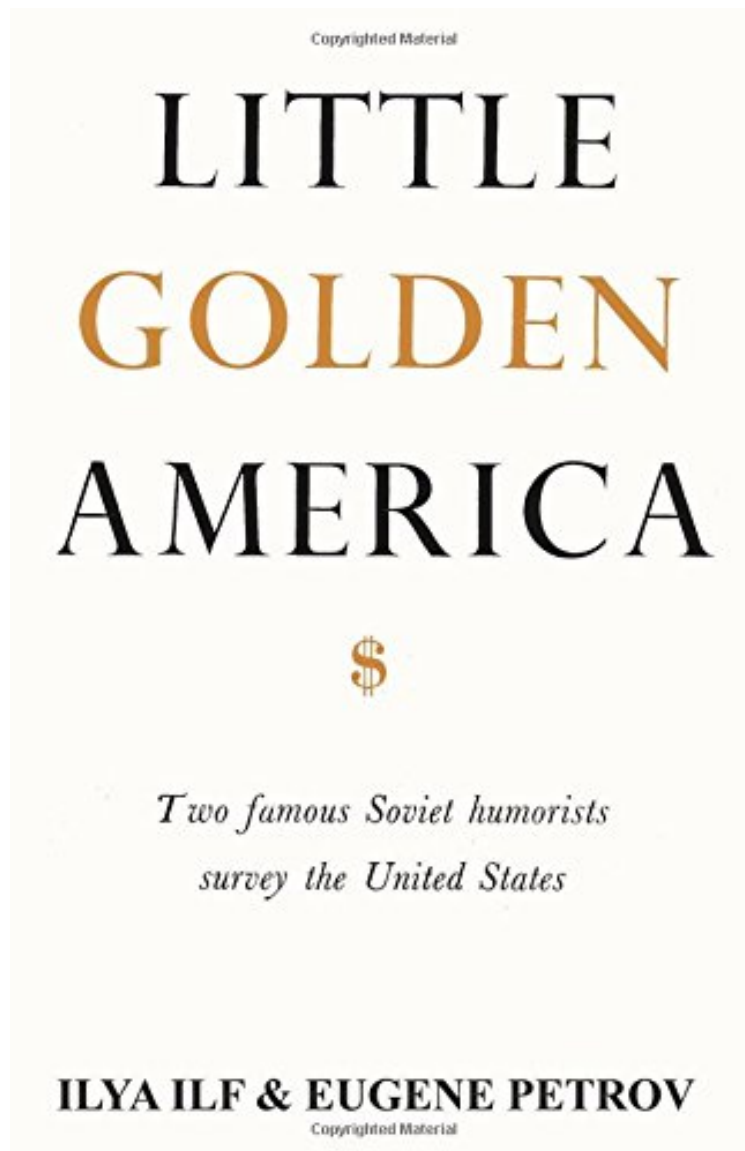


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Little Golden America: two famous Soviet humorists survey the United States

Ilya Ilf, Eugene Petrov
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Ilya Ilf, Eugene Petrov : Little Golden America: two famous Soviet humorists survey the United States before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Little Golden America: two famous Soviet humorists survey the United States:

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is very interesting to read about America 30's and to compare with present time. This book will help you to do that.¹² of 12 people found the following review helpful. America Then and Now By Toni This is a great book, a pleasure to read. If you buy this book you should however skip the foreword, which doesn't do the book any justice. "Little Golden America" is a factual description of a trip through the US taken by two Soviet writers in 1935. Ilf and Petrov were already known to their public back home and it is no surprise to read, that this book, which was to prove to be their final one, had a great success in the Soviet Union. It is however more surprising, that the book got published in their home country, as it neither glorifies nor condemns the American way of life. It is merely the description of what they encountered during their trip: great roads, the enormous technological advance that America had over the USSR (and probably over all of Europe), and the helpful and honest people they've met. But it also describes the triviality of Hollywood (hm, has there been any change since then?) and last but not least the ridiculous advertisement campaigns which materialized through the billboards scattered over the entire length and width of America. Here is just one example: "Redwood City - Climate Best by Government Test". What I found even more intriguing by reading this book is that more than 70 years on this book still makes you nod your head in recognition when going through certain passages. And it makes you wonder why is it, that mankind keeps doing the same mistakes over and over again. I have bought both "Little Golden America" and "Ilf and Petrov's American Road Trip". Make no mistakes; these are not one and the same book. While "Little Golden America" contains the translation of the entire original text, "Ilf and Petrov's American Road Trip" is a photo-essay, "a reconstruction of their photographic travelogue", and thus does not contain the entire text. So if you want to have a complete picture of what the authors described, it is worth having both volumes. My only less positive comment on this edition of "Little Golden America" would be that the print is quite small, but you can get over this minor detail.⁵ of 7 people found the following review helpful. An interesting look back from a different perspective By Notvinnik The introduction to this edition was not very satisfactory. Somehow the idea of two Soviet authors of this era having the freedom and resources to undertake such an adventure privately seemed unlikely. A little web searching came up with an extract from a different English edition of their book, "Ilf and Petrov's American Road Trip", [regrettably I'll have to ask you to google it, as removed my cut and paste link, but try Google books and you'll find it]. From the introduction to this we find that they were, in fact, traveling as special correspondents for Pravda, which is not particularly surprising, but which you wouldn't know from reading the text. Thus, there is an unfortunate but inevitable aspect of Soviet propaganda to this account. Coming from a time before the Cold War, or even WWII, it has a different focus, as the USSR was still officially prepared to learn from the West, and perhaps from the USA in particular. Still, the authors arrived with an official axe to grind, and this would shape their conclusions. That said, they were sharp observers, and a foreign perspective is often a good way to learn things about ourselves. Their account is quite interesting, with its reportage on the America of its time now a nostalgic look at the way it was. In late 1935 into early 1936, Soviet humorists Ilf and Petrov embarked on a coast to coast auto tour of America, recording their observations with wit and an eye for interesting detail. They bought their own American car for the purpose, but were aided by an obliging American couple, sixty-ish retired engineer "Mr. Adams" and his much younger wife "Becky"; it was Becky who did most of the actual driving. The Adams even left their two year old daughter with a nursemaid for two months in order to make the trip. Although Ilf and Petrov spoke some English, it helped that their companions were fluent in Russian. Mr. Adams had lived and worked in the Soviet Union, and we're told "studied Marx and Lenin, read Stalin's speeches, and subscribed to Pravda." In fact, from the link which I can't give you, we discover that "Mr Adams" was actually Solomon Trone, a Latvian born engineer who had worked for General Electric in the Soviet Union, while "Becky" was his American wife Florence. As Americans, we are sometimes too insistent on being praised by foreign visitors. The authors' summing up, that America is an interesting place to visit, but they wouldn't want to live there, may rub some people the wrong way, but that would be unfair to them. Much of what they do is simply to describe what they see, and it is, after all, the middle of the Great Depression. They see unemployment, the loss of savings, and homelessness, as they pick up more than one hitchhiker. They find political corruption in Chicago (well of course), a lack of interest in "high culture" everywhere, and find many of the American amusements vulgar and anti-intellectual. They see Indians living in poverty on their reservations, and find Blacks oppressed all over the country. Still, when the authors talk about the blandness of the admittedly plentiful normal American cuisine, I couldn't help thinking of the genocidal Ukrainian famine of 1932-33 (the authors were originally from the Ukraine). They write of unjust treatment of the workers in America, but are returning to a country of large scale purges and political repression. It makes the book less trustworthy, as there are limits to how honest they *can* be, even if these are their real opinions. They are also generous with their praise, however, much of it based on the character of the Americans they meet. They find Americans to be open, friendly, generous, helpful, honest, hard-working, full of integrity, and probably a host of other virtues that I'm forgetting at the moment. Indeed, these parts are almost embarrassing to read, as one wonders if we still deserve such praise in the early 21st century. They admire the efficiency of American industry, business, and agriculture, and the quality of American made goods. They marvel at how businesses concentrate on providing first rate service in order to get customers to return. And they find the roads to be the best they have ever seen, even before development of the Interstate highway system. The men nervously want to keep their speed down to forty or fifty mph, maybe thirty, while Becky wants to go a bit faster. Although they

visit large cities, most of their stops are in small towns, which they find to be very similar in all parts of the country, the "petrol" stations, the diners with their #1, #2, and #3 breakfasts, the local movie theaters, the drugstores that serve food and sell many things other than drugs. They also find that they can save money by staying, not in hotels, but in "camps" and private homes. Apparently at the time it was very common for people to put out signs advertising "rooms for tourists", rather like a bed and breakfast, but perhaps less expensive. Their westward journey begins in New York City, and takes them through the Midwest and West; the stop in Las Vegas is interesting primarily because it is so obviously unlike the modern image we have of it. They spend some time in California, and head back through the southern states, with a quick day trip into Mexico, before heading back to New York. If there is a rushed feel to the last part of the book, it probably reflects the fact that the "Adamses" were in something of a hurry to get back home. The book is at its best when they simply record their experiences. They discover tomato juice ("the best drink for a Russian") and canned beer. In Hannibal, MO, they stop at Mark Twain's childhood home, and feel sorry for the two elderly ladies making a precarious living selling souvenirs. They take a ferry boat past the huge pylons of the still uncompleted Golden Gate bridge, and marvel at the Boulder dam. At a college football game, they are at first baffled, then become excited as they begin to catch on to what it's all about. They are disgusted by a bullfight in their brief detour into Juarez Mexico, and charmed by the French part of New Orleans. As I came to the end, I felt that I'd gotten a little extra insight into the America where my parents grew up, a period of instability and possibility, when nobody really knew what was coming.

Oдноетазhnya Amerika (One-Storyed America) First published in the U.S.S.R. 1936. Little Golden America. First published in England in 1944. Translated from the Russian by Charles Malamuth This is one of the most popular books ever published in the Soviet Union. It remains popular in Russia today. We Americans cannot figure out what makes it so popular. It is a good book, interesting and well written, but does not contain anything so outstanding as to make it the most popular book ever written. Yet almost every Russian seems to have read or to be familiar with "Little Golden America". It describes the adventures of the two authors, Ilya Ilf and Eugene Petrov, who arrived in New York City on the passenger ship Normandie. After one month in New York, they bought a car and started traveling around the United States. They went to Chicago and San Francisco and then swept back through the Southern States. When they arrived back in New York to return to Europe, they said that they had traveled ten thousand miles.