

Spring Forward



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Michael Downing is obsessed with Daylight Saving, a loopy idea that became the most persistent political controversy in American history. Almost one hundred years ago, lawmakers across the country first debated, ridiculed, and then passionately embraced the possibility of saving an hour of daylight. To this day, no one can say for sure why we are required by law to change our clocks twice a year, or who first proposed the scheme.

Downing unravels the worldwide confusion occasioned by decades of clock manipulation. He sifts through a century of Congressional hearings and contemporary newspaper reporting to offer a portrait of public policy in the 20th century, a perennially boiling stew of unsubstantiated science, profiteering masked as piety, and mysteriously shifting time-zone boundaries. It is a true-to-life social comedy with Congress in the leading role, surrounded by a supporting cast of opportunistic ministers, movie moguls, stockbrokers, labor leaders, educators, sports fanatics and farmers. This dizzyingly hilarious debate seems destined to continue for as long as we ask one another, "What time is it?"

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