

A Hundred Years of *Current History*

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The history of this magazine mirrors the history of the modern world. *Current History* first appeared in 1914, the hinge year that abruptly ended what the historian Eric Hobsbawm called the “long nineteenth century”—an age that had begun in revolution and drew to a close with a period of deceptive peace in a Europe lulled by imperial complacency. The ensuing world wars ended centuries of European domination and gave rise to new complexity in international affairs: the Cold War, decolonization, the spread of democracy, and American leadership in the pursuit of global political and economic order. The age demanded a sustained effort to observe and explain the profound changes transforming every region of the world. This has been the mission of *Current History* throughout its first century of publication.

It began life as a supplement to *The New York Times*, which created the magazine, mixing analysis, reportage, and documentary materials, to provide war coverage in greater depth than a daily newspaper could offer. The first issue, dated December 12, 1914, led off with a 50-page essay by George Bernard Shaw, “Common Sense About the War,” as well as commentaries from numerous other eminent “men of letters,” including H.G. Wells, G.K. Chesterton, and Arthur Conan Doyle, plus one eminent suffragette, Christabel Pankhurst.

JOSHUA LUSTIG is *Current History*'s managing editor.

Soon after *Current History*'s founding, George Washington Ochs Oakes, the brother of *Times* publisher Adolph S. Ochs, became editor. Following the war, the magazine's format evolved to include articles on contemporary topics both foreign and domestic. In 1923, Ochs Oakes, assisted by Harvard historian Albert Bushnell Hart, formed a “board of associates,” comprising 12 scholars from “leading American universities” who would write a “Monthly Survey of World Events.” This group included the prominent historians Allan Nevins, Charles A. Beard, and Sidney B. Fay. Their successors, *Current History*'s contributing editors, have included many distinguished scholars, from the historian Oscar Handlin to the China expert O. Edmund Clubb, to the authors of several of the essays appearing in this anniversary issue.

FROM TROTSKY TO CHURCHILL

The roster of writers who have contributed over the years is both impressive and eclectic. In 1919, *Current History* featured a two-part account by Leon Trotsky of “How We Made the October Revolution.” Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. Du Bois wrote on African-American and African affairs in the 1920s and 1930s. The muckraking journalist Ray Stannard Baker discussed the consequences of the Treaty of Versailles in 1924, after serving as Woodrow Wilson's press secretary during the Paris peace conference. Beard, in 1926, wrote “Heroes and Villains of the World War,” an influential revisionist account of the war's origins.

From *Current History*'s archives...

“The time has now come to pluck up courage and begin to talk and write soberly about the war. At first the mere horror of it stunned the more thoughtful of us; and even now only those who are not in actual contact with or bereaved relation to its heartbreaking wreckage can think sanely about it, or endure to hear others discuss it coolly. As to the thoughtless, well, not for a moment dare I suggest that for the first few weeks they were all scared out of their wits; for I know too well that the British citizen does not allow his perfect courage to be questioned; only experienced soldiers and foreigners are allowed the infirmity of fear. But they certainly were—shall I say a little upset? They felt in that solemn hour that England was lost if only one single traitor in their midst let slip the truth about anything in the universe.”

George Bernard Shaw “Common Sense About the War,” December 1914



Charles Lindbergh penned “The History of the Atlantic Flight as Told By Himself” in 1927. Theodore Dreiser in 1929 pondered the role of women under communism. H.L. Mencken weighed in with acerbic “Notes on the New Deal” in 1934. John Dewey contributed on a variety of subjects, ranging from “Religion in the Soviet Union” to “Why Have Progressive Schools?” A young Norman Cousins served as books editor and regularly contributed review essays before becoming editor of the *Saturday Review* in 1942.

Winston Churchill warned against appeasement and summoned British resolve to “save civilization” in a 1938 essay, “What Can England Do About Hitler?” As another world war loomed, authors from Reinhold Niebuhr to Lewis Mumford assessed the dangers in *Current History*. After the United States entered the war, the magazine’s coverage of events abroad continued, albeit in a shrunken pocket-sized format due to paper rationing. Madame Chiang Kai-shek in 1940 contributed “China Unbowed.” The journalist Walter Lippmann contemplated “The Future of Germany” in 1943.

HISTORY IN THE MAKING

That same year, Daniel G. Redmond, the current publisher’s grandfather, bought *Current History*, and since then it has remained independently owned by the same family, with no institutional affiliation and with uncompromising editorial autonomy. Under the editorship of Carol L. Thompson from 1955 to 1991, the journal assumed its present shape, with its distinctive organizing principle of a monthly rotating focus on the world’s various regions, interspersed with special issues on topics such as, most recently, humanitarian intervention, the travails of democracy, and the future of capitalism.

After World War II, important figures in the burgeoning field of international relations contributed to these pages, including E.H. Carr and Hans J. Morgenthau; in 1968, the latter delivered a devastating analysis of the “US Misadventure in Vietnam.” While *Current History* has always had its share of prominent scholars among its contributors, it has also featured the work of up-and-comers, not a few of whom went on to prominence themselves. The historian John A. Lukacs wrote

on “The Resurgent Fascists” in 1951. Francis Fukuyama cowrote an essay on “Israel and Egypt After Camp David” in 1979 (and he returned to these pages in 2011 with a piece on democratic transitions). As an assistant professor at Stanford, Condoleezza Rice contributed a 1986 essay on “The Soviet Military Under Gorbachev.”

William W. Finan Jr. succeeded Thompson as editor in 1991; Alan Sorensen took over the editorship in 2006. In recent years, contributors have ranged from political scientists such as John Mearsheimer to experts from other fields like the cognitive scientist Steven Pinker and the Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph F. Stiglitz. Most of the contributing authors, though, are area studies specialists whose appraisal of developments is informed by deep regional expertise.

Generations of scholars and students, policy makers, journalists, and general readers have relied on *Current History* for empirically grounded analysis of international affairs. The magazine’s long-standing motto, “History in the Making,” reflects the ambition, now a century old, to offer nothing less than the history of the present. ■

From the archives
of *Current History*...

“There must be not only a desire for peace, but a will for peace, if peace is to be established forever. If out of a hundred men ninety-nine desire peace and trouble no further, the one man over will arm himself and set up oppression and war again. Peace must be organized and maintained. The present monstrous catastrophe is the outcome of forty-three years of skillful, industrious, systematic world armament. Only by a disarmament as systematic, as skillful, and as devoted may we hope to achieve centuries of peace.”

H.G. Wells
“The Peace of the World”
April 1915

HISTORY IN THE MAKING
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years
1914 - 2014