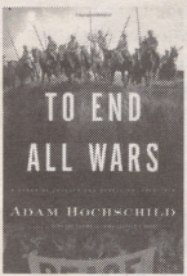


How The Great War set the stage for too many more to come

BY COLE MERKEL
STAFF WRITER



To End All Wars:
A Story of Loyalty
and Rebellion
1914-1918 by
Adam Hochschild

One century ago, a thin line separating France and Germany served as the battlefield for a four-year gridlock that cost, conservatively, 8.5 million lives and permanently maimed, dismembered and injured some 21 million more individuals. World War I was touted as “the war to end all wars,” yet the debilitating conflict served as a template for all future warfare, indelibly altering war by mechanizing it, launching it on a global scale and distorting the boundaries of what is morally acceptable on and off the battlefield. These are the reasons World War I is important to consider in global study; we still feel the reverberations of those four years as we wage war to this day.

Adam Hochschild writes history like it is fiction, and in “To End All Wars: A Story of Loyalty and Rebellion 1914-1918,” this observation is particularly true. Hochschild seamlessly threads together an account of World War I in Britain by recreating stories of British generals, conscientious objectors, authors, activists, socialists and soldiers to portray an England divided from within. His introductory section, “Dramatis Personae,” portrays Britain the decade before the war riding high on a fresh wave of Imperial militarism, simultaneously threatened by socialists trying to bring universal suffrage and equality. He tells these, and all stories in the book with a deep compassion for the individuals experiencing them through first-hand accounts and keen analysis.

Alongside these individual stories, Hochschild splices historical analysis of battlefield methodology, the implementation of industrial war technologies and the public and political reactions to the war in Britain, Germany, Russia and France. At the heart of Hochschild’s argument is a scathing critique of Imperialism. A decade earlier, bombing and shooting civilians had not only been acceptable but actively practiced in the “moral” partition of Africa. Suddenly, when the industrial weaponry was turned on

Europeans by Europeans, that veneer of morality totally disintegrated, transforming Europe into the barbarous continent.

Adding to the barbarous madness of total war, there was very little threat between Europeans before the war began. Germany and Britain in particular were each others’ best trading partners and the three monarchs at the epicenter, Kaiser Wilhelm II, King George V and Tsar Nicholas II, were all first cousins. The war exploded into existence when a series of secret defense treaties, signed by these hyper-paranoid, power-hungry leaders, were called into action. These pieces of paper plunged the continent into the maelstrom of bloodshed and gore that would steal countless lives while destroying the mainland continent physically, industrially and politically.

In the wake of this realization, it becomes nearly impossible to deny that the imperial-capitalist economy’s ever-expanding demand for resources and labor was the source of this infighting, which became the bloodiest conflict the world had ever seen. Historical bias always being 20-20 in hindsight, this observation is easier to make today than it would have been in 1914.

Hochschild never sugar-coats the casualties or the conditions of battle. This book does not present a glorification of war. It describes the horrors in gruesome detail: the smells, the sounds, the excruciating pain of gangrene and trench foot, the writhing agony of troops suffocating through mustard gas, and other new technologies that brought about this terror.

The author especially contrasts the soldiers’ experiences (and that of their families) in the war with the commander, Douglass Haig who from his comfortable French villa foresaw unconditional victory as the sole outcome to the war and sent millions of soldiers, as if they were pawns, to their deaths. Surprisingly, a higher percentage of British officers lost their lives in World War I than their soldiers. In spite of these statistics, Haig and his counterparts were still hell-bent on

destroying the lives of citizens in the name of national honor. Hochschild painfully recounts this total disconnect between reality and the commanders calling the shots.

The Treaty of Versailles did little to ensure peace on the continent; the humiliation Germany was subjected to by being forced to accept blame for cause of the war, the reparation payments the country was forced to pay on a decimated

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economy, as well as the repatriation of German colonies to Britain and France, served only to accelerate the rise of Nazism and the outbreak Second World War. As Hochschild argues in his last few pages, the destructive militarism of World War I, as well as the disregard for human life only contributed to a bloodier war and unconscionable genocide.

Perhaps the most striking effect of World War I though, one discussed only passively by Hochschild, is the propensity it gave the United States to enter the stage as the world’s police force. Not only was the U.S.’s last-minute entry into the war a morale booster and fresh perspective on trench warfare, President Wilson’s participation at the Paris Peace Conference allowed America to flex its newfound muscle, not only as an economic superpower but a moral peacekeeper and global conflict moderator. The United States entered the world’s stage as Europe’s imperial light was extinguishing. It’s to our own detriment that we assumed the position without learning lessons from Imperialism’s demise.

Creating a space we all can share National Coming Out Day occasion for letter of solidarity

BY AMY LAM
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

In acknowledging and recognizing everyone in our communities, this year’s National Coming Out Day will not just be a coming out day for LGBTQ people, but also for their supporters.

On October 11th, more than 30 community and organizational leaders of color in Oregon signed a letter of support to “Come Out for Our Families.” In part, the letter states that “LGBT families of color are part of the fabric of our community and members

of our own families.

Unfortunately, some of our LGBT family members do not feel our community’s full support. So, in honor of National Coming Out Day, we are coming out as friends, family and public allies of LGBT families of color.

The campaign is spearheaded by Standing Together, a project of Basic Rights Oregon, and aims to raise the visibility, experiences and public support for LGBTQ families of color. The letter will be published this month in Portland’s major ethnic newspapers - the Asian Reporter, the Portland Observer, the Scanner and El Hispanic News.

Carmen Rubio, the executive director of the community organization Latino Network, was one of the signers. “You have to be visible and take a proactive position in saying, ‘I support the LGBTQ members of my community,’” said Carmen.

Since 2009, Carmen has worked with the Latino Network to become more inclusive, and that included participating in the Uniting Communities project at the Western States Center, which works to help racial

justice and immigrant rights groups support the LGBTQ individuals in their communities.

“Because we are a progressive community organization, we take it for granted that we are inclusive, and that we are already allies. But it’s very different to walk the walk, rather than just talking about how we welcome everyone.” Carmen felt that this proactive support is a good first step.

“The Western States Center’s program showed us that we needed to be intentional about being inclusive so we started taking action on making sure that we are there for all members of our community,” said Carmen. “We shouldn’t just start a ‘gay rights program,’ because this work needs to be intrinsic in our mission and the values. Uniting Communities showed us how much we did not know, and it felt good to be thoughtful about our next steps to learn the needs of our community.”

One of Latino Network’s board members is an openly gay Latino. “It had a huge impact on me when I learned that he shared his story in our Latino leadership academy. These folks are essentially strangers to him, and I really respected his bravery and willingness to share his personal story to help build awareness within our community about the experiences of LGTBQ Latinos,” said Carmen. “For him, as the son of Latino immigrants, and a gay man, I’ve started to realize what a fine balance he is trying to find to retain both parts of his identity. There was this whole other dimension in his life that I don’t think we fully appreciate at Latino Network all the time.”

The letter of support, at right, on National Coming Out Day is much more than words on a page - it’s about creating spaces so that everyone in our communities will feel comfortable come out and be their whole selves.

Come Out for Our Families!

We believe all our families have so much in common: we struggle to access healthy food, quality education, affordable healthcare, and housing. Our families also face discrimination that prevents us from thriving in our workplaces and our neighborhoods. As families of color, we experience unique challenges as we work to keep our homes, our jobs, and our health.

These struggles affect Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) families of color in very unique ways. LGBT families of color are part of the fabric of our community and members of our own families. Unfortunately, some of our LGBT family members do not feel our community’s full support. So, in honor of National Coming Out Day on October 11, 2011 we are coming out as friends, family and public allies of LGBT families of color.

We believe our communities are strongest when all families - extended families, multi-generational families, single-parent families and LGBT families - have the resources, respect and love they need to thrive.

We believe it’s time to come out in support of all our families. Join us!

Read the list of signees at
www.basicrights.org/ourfamilies.



Amy Lam is the Development & Communications Associate at the Western States Center, which aims to build a progressive movement by supporting grassroots organizations. The Center’s Uniting Communities project works with organizations based in communities of color to advance LGBTQ equality.