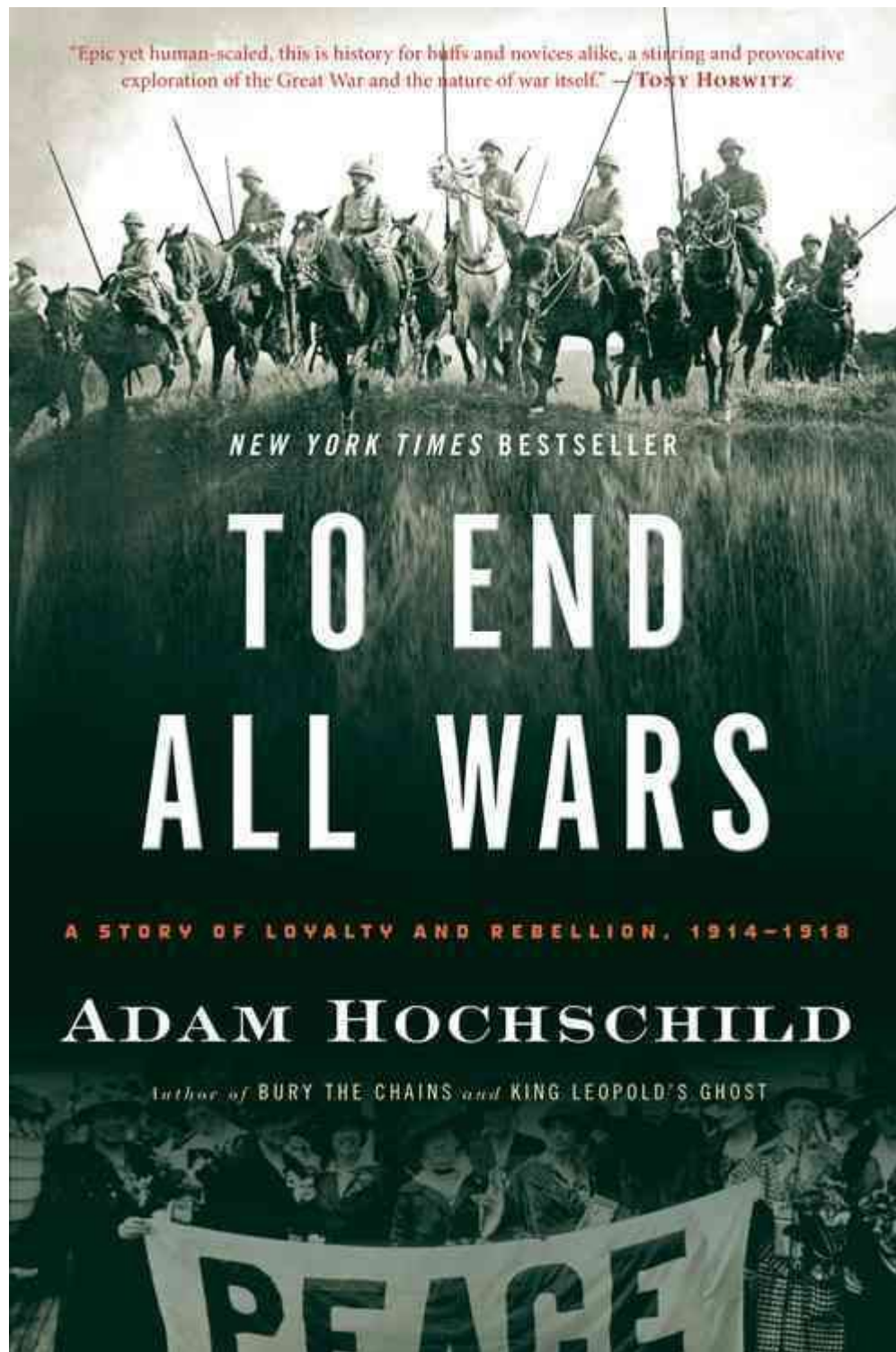


# {essays in history}

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## To End All Wars: A Story of Loyalty and Rebellion, 1914 – 1918



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### Reviewed Work(s)

*To End All Wars: A Story of Loyalty and Rebellion, 1914 – 1918.* By Adam Hochschild (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011). Pg. 448. Paperback, \$28.00.

Adam Hochschild's 2011 work, *To End All Wars: A Story of Loyalty and Rebellion, 1914–1918*, is set on the backdrop of World War I, one of the world's most brutal conflicts. As its subtitle suggests, the book is more than just a military history. Hochschild's work utilizes historical research and in-depth storytelling to provide a glimpse into the human conflict between the forces of national loyalty and dissent within wartime Britain. Indeed, this work is a story about differing loyalties among Britons, whether these loyalties were to country, military duty, or the ideal of international brotherhood (xviii).

In exploring this complex conflict, *To End All Wars* devotes great attention to the subject of British war resisters and opposition towards national participation in a conflict on European shores through detailed personal stories. One such story concerns the life of aristocratic Charlotte Despard, who worked as a tireless supporter of Britain's poor, women's rights, and was resolutely opposed to all of Britain's colonial wars abroad, including the country's participation in World War I (14). Another example was James Keir Hardie, a coal miner turned member of the British Parliament, who strived for a worldwide socialist revolution benefiting all humanity and campaigned ceaselessly against the conflict raging in Europe (55–59, 99–100). Other figures include the Pankhurst Family, once united in the struggle for women's rights but soon divided over support of the war and the Wheeldon family, longtime British leftists who participated in aiding the escape and freedom of British deserters (98–99, 252).

On the other side of the conflict between loyalties in WWI-era Britain, Hochschild pays attention to the stories of people who were in favor of or were connected with the British military effort in Europe. A prominent example was Charlotte Despard's brother John French, who strove to glorify the British Empire as an army officer and fought as a general in World War I (6–10, 109–110). Another important figure was Alfred Milner, an influential official enmeshed in the administration of British imperial holdings and a strident proponent and administrator of the nation's war effort against the Central Powers (37–39, 245).

Hochschild also elaborates on known British historical figures of the period such as Cambridge professor Bertrand Russell and British general Douglas Haig, tying their respective histories into the greater national

debate between loyalty to one's country and one's conscience during a time of war (111–113, 222–223, 299).

Competing loyalties to country, to the army, and to ideology continued to play out on various fronts in WWI-era Britain. Hochschild notes that on the home front, the British government undertook an extensive propaganda campaign to garner public support for the war and encourage enlistment for the hard-pressed British army in Europe. A prominent example of this public relations effort was the film *Battle of the Somme*, which the government utilized to drum up support for the war effort (227–228). The British government supplemented this wide-ranging propaganda effort by more aggressive measures such as rigorous press censorship and government espionage to root out “agitators” and thus suppress dissent against the war effort (249).

However, anti-war sentiments still remained strong in the face of both government and social opposition. By 1916, some 200,000 Britons signed a petition calling for a negotiated peace in response to the rise of conscription by the British government, with more than 20,000 military age men refusing to enter the British armed forces before the war ended (188). This sentiment was supported by the No-Conscription Fellowship, or NCF, which worked to support and aid British conscientious objectors against official persecution (188–189). Hochschild puts particular emphasis on the fact that those who resisted the call to war as COs faced both persecution via government propaganda and imprisonment. He cites the case of almost 50 COs who, in the spring of 1916, were forcibly inducted into the military and sent to France, with the full knowledge that adherence to their beliefs would lead to their deaths by firing squad (191-192).

*To End All Wars* fits with Hochschild's focus as a historian on the human drama and micro-history behind major historical events or phenomena, reflected in his other works such as *King Leopold's Ghost*.<sup>[1]</sup> In terms of the existing historiography of World War I, the book does not offer any new information regarding the conduct of the conflict. Hochschild's work is also not the first time that the cultural context of the war has been taken into account. For instance, Michael C. C. Adams' 1990 book *The Great Adventure* focuses on the cultural atmosphere in which World War I took place, an environment that emphasized Victorian values of masculinity, such as knighthood, courage, and male bonding.

[2] Nor is Hochschild's study unique in its focus on antiwar sentiments in the midst of World War I, a subject that has also been covered by previous scholarship such as David Zonderman's study of antiwar sentiments in Wisconsin during the conflict.[3]

Nevertheless, the book stands out among existing scholarship for its ability to successfully use both personal stories and historical research to understand the human reality behind the history of World War I era Britain. The accounts of both war supporters and the generals in charge and their opposites in the anti-war activists and conscientious objectors particularly stand out for their excellent combination of extensive research and storytelling. The result is a glimpse into an inner "war" over the hearts and minds of the British peoples taking into account the viewpoints of both sides without reducing either side to broad stereotypes. While Hochschild specifically focuses on Britain for his research, his work does present a jumping off point for further research in the struggle between pro-war and anti-war forces within other nations participating in World War I, such as France and even Imperial Germany. Overall, while not blazing any new trails in historical knowledge, *To End All Wars* is a worthy treatise that shines a humanizing light into a part of one of the world's darkest periods.

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[1] Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998).

[2] Michael C.C.Adams. *The Great Adventure: Male Desire and the Coming of World War I*(Bloomington, ID: Indiana University Press, 1990).

[3] David Zonderman, "Over Here: The Wisconsin Homefront during World War I," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 77 (Summer, 1994).



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