

## Henry R. Luce, *Time*, and the American Crusade in Asia

Henry Robinson Luce (1898–1967) founded *Time*, *Life*, *Fortune*, and *Sports Illustrated*. Born in China to missionary parents, Luce was a kind of lay preacher, eager to mold the American mind and advance his ideological program of intervention, capitalism, democracy (when appropriate), and Christian activism. The most celebrated and influential editor of his day, Luce was also obsessed with the American mission in the world, and with China and East Asia. Luce tried to “sell” this mission to a sometimes reluctant public. A passionate anti-Communist interventionist, he also convinced Americans that the United States had perversely “lost” China to the Communists. A fervent advocate of the Vietnam intervention, Luce, the author of the “American Century,” edited incoming correspondents’ cables so that the magazines might conform to his ideas. For the first time, we see how Luce accomplished this. Using hitherto inaccessible or neglected sources, Robert E. Herzstein produces a gripping portrait of a great but tragic figure in American history.

Robert E. Herzstein is a Carolina Distinguished Professor of History at the University of South Carolina, where he teaches. He is the author of numerous books, including *Henry R. Luce: A Political Portrait of the Man Who Created the American Century*, *Waldheim: The Missing Years*, *Roosevelt and Hitler: Prelude to War*, *Adolf Hitler and the German Trauma*, and *The Nazis*. Professor Herzstein is also the author of numerous scholarly articles and the recipient of various awards and grants.

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Robert E. Herzstein

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ROBERT E. HERZSTEIN



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*To Edward T. Chase, for three decades of wisdom,  
criticism, inspiration, and friendship*

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## Preface

To me, and to many other readers who grew into adulthood in the 1950s and the early 1960s, *Time* was much more than a magazine. It was required reading for middle-class Americans eager to learn about the world in which we lived. *Time*'s writing was often superb, and for many of us, the magazine presented a kind of unofficial but definitive version of America's righteous cause during the Cold War. *Time* also told fascinating stories; our high school history teachers boasted of reading it cover to cover, and in civics, we had to take weekly "*Time* quizzes," which filtered the news through Henry R. Luce's prism.

Most of us had never heard of Luce, but we realized that his newsmagazine was biased against the Democrats and in favor of Eisenhower. We detested the magazine's unrelenting attacks on liberal heroes like Adlai E. Stevenson, but we were all budding Cold Warriors, and if *Time* said that Ngo Dinh Diem of South Vietnam was a great man, most of us believed it. We read on, engrossed by the stories *Time* told, and above all, we accepted its version of world events. Luce's Red China was my Red China, and I took for granted the virtues of his global interventionism. It was only in the mid-1960s that the discrepancy between what *Time* said and what was actually happening in Vietnam badly eroded my faith – and that of many other Americans of my era – in Henry Luce's chosen instrument.

Memories of Luce's powerful journalism linger among people who were adult readers during the era of World War II and the early Cold War. The conservative William F. Buckley, Jr., who was a close friend of Clare Boothe Luce in her later years, recalls that "if it was in *Time*, it was important." In agreement, the liberal Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., who wrote for *Life* and *Fortune*, remembers the "Time Inc. ethos" as "powerful stuff in those days." Now, fifty years later, I return to those early decades of the Cold War. I will examine the ideology and impact of a man whose journalism helped to mold our history, although not so much as Luce would have liked or his enemies feared.

My aim is to probe the ways in which Luce tried to influence American foreign policy in regard to China and the Far East. I want to learn what Luce

knew and then find out what he told his readers and friends among the political elites of the day. Then, when possible, I will comment upon his influence or lack of it. I will take three cases: China, Korea, and Vietnam.

In exploring these aspects of Henry Luce's journalism, I have made extensive use of a precious resource. This virtually unknown but massive collection was brought to my attention by Harvard librarians laboring in the stately Houghton Library. There, one finds large, dusty cartons containing a huge number of dispatches from *Time's* correspondents. They seem to have been deposited there by Roy Larsen, Luce's longtime associate and the president of Time Inc. The documents are vaguely organized by date but are otherwise stored without reference to subject matter or authorship. So far as I can tell, none were destroyed, something that is not true of the copies perused by Time Inc.'s editors in New York. By examining those cables and then analyzing what Luce and the other editors then published, we can see through Time Inc.'s news filter. The results are sometimes disturbing, for what I found was a flawed journalism for which editor-in-chief Luce was primarily responsible.

One finds that Luce not only edited but also censored. His advocacy journalism, driven by hopes and prejudices and ideology, affected Time Inc.'s coverage. Objectivity, Luce believed, was often used as a cloak to hide indifference. As a result, there was an inverse ratio between Luce's passion about a subject and its objective treatment in *Time*.

I say this sadly, because Henry Luce was a man of powerful intellect and phenomenal energy, a patriot and a generous benefactor and patron of worthy causes. He was courageous, too, but often his journalism was misguided more than informative.

In this post-Cold War world we can move beyond the Communist-centered political debates that roiled this country fifty or thirty years ago. Perhaps we can now determine how Henry Robinson Luce affected our history during a long and bitter international conflict. Yet despite the demise of the Soviet Union and the abandonment of Marxism-Leninism by China, Luce's influence and mindset have hardly been laid to rest. As I write, the United States is involved in a massive project that seeks to convert Muslim Iraq into a democracy. Once again, the American nation-building mission is at work, in a different time but in ways defined by men like Woodrow Wilson and Henry R. Luce.

I want to thank many people for their kind assistance. Sadly, some who were so helpful in interviews have passed away, among them John Hersey, Allen Grover, Bob Sherrod, and Eliot Janeway. I learned much from them, and I treasure the memory of friendly but frank interviews.

Mr. Henry Luce III was kind enough to grant access to his father's papers at the Library of Congress before they were available to the public. I would also like to thank Mr. William F. Buckley, Jr., for allowing me to use his collected papers, which are accessible at Yale University; and Mr. David Halberstam, for permitting me to consult his papers, which are stored at Boston University.

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To the historian researching the work and impact of Henry Luce, four collections stand out in importance: the papers of the Luces at the Library of Congress; the John Shaw Billings collection at the University of South Carolina; and the *Time* dispatches at Harvard University. In all cases, archivists and staff were courteous and helpful. In addition, the list of archival sources identified at the end of this book cites other collections essential to my work on Henry R. Luce.

I express my appreciation to the University of South Carolina for support from the office of Research and Productive Scholarship.

I would also like to thank individuals whose assistance went well beyond the call of duty. Among them are Elena Danielson and Carol Leadenham of the Hoover Institution, David J. Haight of the Eisenhower Library, Fred Bauman of the Library of Congress, and Dennis Bilger of the Truman Library.

I owe special debts of gratitude to Professor Ralph Levering of Davidson College; to Dr. Elizabeth Stewart; and to Professor Patrick J. Maney of the University of South Carolina for their suggestions, criticisms, and corrections.

A note on Chinese names and places: In most cases, I have used pinyin – for example, Zhou Enlai rather than Chou En-lai. In certain cases, I have put the older usage in parentheses (formerly Chou En-lai) after the first reference to an important figure. In other instances, however, the older form is so standard that I have retained it (Chiang Kai-shek, or KMT for Guomindang). Where I cite a document or comment where the older form occurs, I have of course retained the original usage – for example, “I arrived in Nanking today, November 25 . . .”