In the hope of encouraging readers to dip into the long history of scholarship contained in the pages of the *American Historical Review* (now in the 115th year of its publishing history), and to take advantage of the digital availability of this archive to most readers, the *AHR* editors offer a look back at issues from one hundred, seventy-five, and fifty years ago. What follows is not a comprehensive survey of the contents of those issues, but rather a glance at some of the articles and other features that might be of interest, or even of use, today.

**Volume 15, Number 4 (July 1910)**

The July 1910 issue begins with an article by Frederick J. Teggart, “The Circumstance or the Substance of History,” which reflects his career-long concern with the sciences, especially biology and Darwinism, and the emerging social sciences as both rivals of and potential models for the study of history. Teggart observes that efforts to preserve history as merely the accumulation of facts, detached from any attempt to arrive at generalizations, have “led to desertions, usurpations of its territory, and much unconscious or unacknowledged theorizing.” But he cautions against simply adopting the methods and theories of biology or “social psychology,” insisting on the autonomy of history as a discipline: “Every science makes it own hypotheses, in its own terminology, on the basis of its own material.” Teggart concludes his essay (which is devoid of notes and references) with a critique of historians’ “undue emphasis on events,” reflecting an increasing interest in the patterns and forces of historical development at the time. It is hardly surprising that about ten years after this article appeared, Teggart was instrumental in founding the new Department of Social Institutions (which would become Sociology) at the University of California at Berkeley. Perhaps the most notable article in this issue is “Reconstruction and Its Benefits,” by “W. E. Burghardt Du Bois.” Du Bois had delivered a paper on the subject at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association in New York City in 1909, which was the first time the conference had been addressed by an African American. (The next occasion, apparently, was only in 1940.) Du Bois’s piece anticipates his study of twenty-five years later, *Black Reconstruction* (New York, 1935), and represents one of the very first critiques of the then dominant view that Reconstruction was an unsuccessful, largely disastrous, and even shameful episode in the history of the United States. Du Bois is not sparing in his acknowledgment
of the negative aspects of Reconstruction, especially the corruption and incompetence prevalent among the newly elected officials in the southern states, many of whom were former slaves. But he largely explains these excesses and misdeeds by underscoring the vulnerability and ignorance of “a new race learning the a-b-c of government.” The main point of his article, however, is to argue for the positive results of Reconstruction. And here Du Bois can point to a number of achievements, including the extension of the suffrage, both to African Americans and, notably, to poor whites; the creation of free public school systems (again for both races); the abolition of property qualifications for jury duty; in some states the elimination of routine corruption and peculation; and in general the adoption of state constitutions that conformed to the general principles of democratic government. Du Bois concludes his article by asserting that these considerable gains remained even after Reconstruction was ended and “negro governments” were ushered out of power. As much as white southerners would lament and condemn the experience, Reconstruction left a legacy of achievements that many of them, especially those of the lower classes, continued to enjoy. “Practically the whole new growth of the South has been accomplished under laws which black men helped to frame thirty years ago,” Du Bois wrote. “I know of no greater compliment to negro suffrage.”

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The July 1935 issue contains three articles on very different subjects: one on the practice of statistical information-gathering in early medieval Europe; another on Columbus’s use of an early map of the known world in the course of his voyages; and a third on the depression in the United States in 1837–1843. A curious feature of this last article, “The Social History of an American Depression, 1837–1843,” by Samuel Rezneck, is that it makes absolutely no reference to the contemporary economic situation, although it does emphasize the human dimension of the nineteenth-century collapse, especially the widespread unemployment and sudden impoverishment. “The Statistical Sources of Frankish History,” by James Westfall Thompson—who would serve as president of the AHA in 1941—surveys the existing evidence demonstrating that medieval Europe under both the Merovingians and the Carolingians was just as intent on compiling statistics regarding taxation, population, and landholding as was Imperial Rome. As Thompson regretfully notes, very few of these documents survive, but he nevertheless is able to convey, through other sources, that a concern for counting, recording, enumerating, and the like was central to the Frankish kings throughout the period. On a more general note, he concludes that “there is more statistical information with regard to the history of Germany, Italy, the Byzantine Empire, the khalifate, and the papacy before the thirteenth century than is dreamed of by the average medievalist.”
Perhaps the most interesting article in the July 1960 issue is by James H. Billington, the longtime Librarian of Congress, on “The Intelligentsia and the Religion of Humanity.” His essay aims to explain the emergence of a generation of disaffected and increasingly radical young Russians in the late 1860s. This movement, he writes, was characterized by an “almost physiological spasm of negation that swept through the young student generation.” Ultimately, it adopted the “religion of humanity” espoused by the French thinker Auguste Comte, a belief system that rescued it from the nihilism that was one of its chief characteristics. Indeed, as Billington notes, both “nihilism” and “intelligentsia” were terms that emerged from this movement. Led by “a special priestly caste of ‘littérateurs’ and ‘publicists,’” these young students embraced “a pseudo-scientific theory of history and the ethical fanaticism that it enjoined” but also abandoned their previous commitment to “political liberties, aesthetic values, and even personal amusement.” The intelligentsia, this “new and curiously modern class,” soon developed the characteristics of a party, complete with ritual excommunication, an insularity and suspicion that prompted them to identify opponents with foreigners and non-Russian ways, and an ideological, though highly suspect, identification with “the people,” or narod. This movement, however, proved somewhat ephemeral. “The future,” Billington concludes, “belonged more to mass movements and passions than to an urbane and still predominantly aristocratic intelligentsia.” Still, he notes, the Russian intelligentsia bequeathed its “sectarian spirit, moral fanaticism, and faith in history” to the true revolutionaries who would soon transform Russia into the Soviet Union.