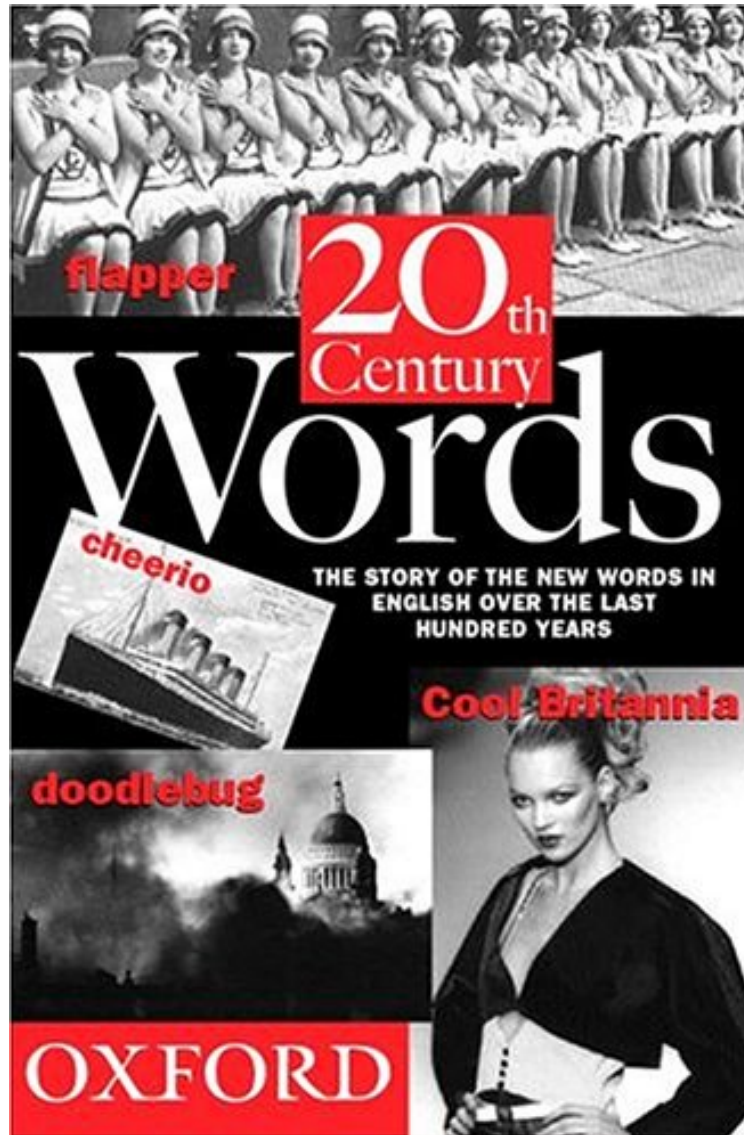


Twentieth Century Words

John Ayto

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John Ayto : Twentieth Century Words before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Twentieth Century Words:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. History as told through word coinagesBy Dennis LittrellLexicographer John Ayto of the Oxford English Dictionary, that august authority on the English language, wrote this interesting book on neologisms for the Oxford University Press. As such there is a notable Brit bias to the text featuring many words and phrases never current in the States or anywhere outside of England. One of my

favorites is "train-spotter" (1989) which incidentally explains the meaning of the title of the British cult movie, *Trainspotting* (1996). However the vast majority of the entries-there are about four thousand of them-will be recognized by most native speakers (and especially readers) of English. There is an excellent introduction to begin the book explaining how words come into the language, how meanings change, and how one can read history through etymology. This is followed by the entries themselves arranged according to the decade of the twentieth century in which they entered the language. Ayto has written a short introduction to each decade, emphasizing the scientific, political, artistic, etc. developments that led to the new coinages. Each entry is tagged with the date it first appeared in print as recorded in the files of the OED. As with a usage dictionary, the entry includes examples of the use of the word or phrase, especially early usages. There are many surprises, at least for me. For example, "enthuse" as a verb is not listed because it actually came into use in the 19th Century. "Ska," referring to a kind of popular music of Jamaican origin, first made its appearance in 1964. I would have guessed the eighties as the earliest. "Atomic bomb" amazingly enough first appeared in 1914 (anticipating the Manhattan Project by about thirty years!) in something from H.G. Wells, and in 1917 there was this bit of irony from S. Strunsky, "When you can drop just one atomic bomb and wipe out Paris or Berlin, war will have become monstrous and impossible." In some of the entries we can see the early development of a word. "Feminazi," for example entered the world of print in 1990 (I would have thought earlier). Ayto quotes the Atlanta Journal and Constitution first using it like this, "Let commie-liberal, femi-nazis and other bleeding hearts quibble over that." Then Rush Limbaugh is quoted in 1992 as saying that the real agenda of the feminazis "is to see that there are as many abortions as possible." By 1994, however the word had become almost benign as in this quote from Ms Magazine: "I fight my way to my destination, finally arriving in bad mood, militant black woman, cranky feminazi." There's a certain artificiality to dividing the growth of the language by decade, but of course it is a handy organizing device as long as one remembers that, for example, the so called "sixties" really didn't begin until about 1964 when the U.S. got involved in Vietnam, and didn't end until sometime in the early seventies. The etymological history here supports that notion by revealing that "miniskirt" first appeared in 1964, and that "freak" and "freak out," meaning to undergo an intense emotional experience, became words in print in 1965. If you're like me and like to curl up in bed with a good usage dictionary (Bergan and Cornelia Evans's *A Dictionary of Contemporary American Usage* (1957) for example), *Twentieth Century Words* will not only be a special treat, but a little overwhelming as you realize just how much lexical information you have in your hands. Proscriptive grammarians and those who think we ought to guard the English language the way the French Academy protects French from the horrors of "franglais" should beware since Ayto's user-based collection can offend sensibilities with its democratic bias. The "f-word," for example, appears in various guises, and a lot of not really established slang ("diss," "tubular," etc.) appearing alongside established usages. There is an index listing the words alphabetically, which is very handy, and a table in the introduction giving examples of some surprising pre-twentieth century coinages, e.g., "contact lens," "milk shake," "acid rain," etc. Some really recent words that didn't make the book include "bobos" (from the popular book *Bobos in Paradise* by David Brooks) and "hottie" (for an attractive member of the opposite sex). Ayto writes that there are an average of 900 words per year that come into the language, about 90,000 for the twentieth century, so we have in this book perhaps the most important five or six percent.

I found the following review helpful. Incomparable!

By Sanjay Agarwal

I have always been fascinated with words, and the coded information of our civilization that they contain. Tracing the history of a word, or breaking it up into its components can help deepen our understanding of a topic. For instance, 'inflation', to my mind, does not occur because someone is charging more - it occurs because someone has 'inflated' the money supply. The 'Bible' is so called, because it is a set of books (biblios). And the Gita is a poem, hence the name gita (which means a song in Sanskrit). This book, which I picked up 4-5 years ago, is another outstanding book by John Ayto, whose 'Word Origins' I have used for many years. But *Word Origins* is highly condensed, with limited information - this one is much better, going into an explanation of the word, and also the context in which the word was coined. Mr. Ayto also provides an extract of the passage where the word is first known to have been used. In some cases, he also adds some unique information about the word or his own insight. You can dip into this book at random (entries are arranged alphabetically within the ten separate chapters for ten decades), or locate something more specific, using the common index at the end. I personally would have preferred the book to give all the word alphabetically, and provided a decade-wise index at the end. This would have made browsing easier, especially as there is a limited connection between the decade and the coining of a particular word. The book also includes words that have fallen out of use. Sometimes this fading away is mentioned - at other times it is not. Overall, there are about 5,000 entries over 626 pages. So you get about a tenth of a page, on an average, for each entry. The book is bound very nicely (signature binding), on good paper, and the typeface is a pleasure to read. The entries are fascinating. For instance, I had been trying to figure out when the Nazis adapted the Sanskrit word Swastika for their symbol. This book tells us that actually they never did - it was an English translation (1932) of the German word 'Hakenkreuze', which means 'hook-cross'. And it also provides an invaluable quote from 'Nordicus' where it was first used: "Thousands flocked to his standard - the 'Hakenkreuze' - (swastika), the ancient anti-semitic cross in a color scheme of red-white-black in memory of the colors of the old army". Amazing work, with painstaking scholarship. With works like this, no wonder that English today dominates

International intercourse. The book is not likely to be issued in paperback, as it is not really a general-interest book. A must-buy if you love words. 17 of 19 people found the following review helpful. Good (with some scholarly notes added here) By Barry A. Popik This is a good book. Author John Ayto knows words. I'll add some reservations/corrections that must be mentioned.... I'm a member of the scholarly, nonprofit, 100+-year-old American Dialect Society. The ADS publishes *American Speech*, and each issue features *Among The New Words*. ATNW has been around for most of the 20th century. Ayto never mentions ATNW!... Ayto has *_supermodel_* on the back cover--a word I've antedated on the ADS online list.... The 1909 *_jazz_* citation was taken from the OED, but they've admitted a mistake and it should not be cited.... But that's nitpicking! The book has LOTS of words! Novelists, playwrights, and screenwriters who are writing about a particular time period will find the list of words very useful.... TWENTIETH CENTURY WORDS should be read with Ayto's most recent slang book, which covers slang by topic (and not by year).... Some of my colleagues (Word Detective Evan Morris) have already endorsed TWENTIETH CENTURY WORDS. I'll add my endorsement (despite reservations/corrections, which surely must apply to all books) and give it four stars.

In *Twentieth Century Words*, lexicographer John Ayto takes us on an exhilarating tour of our century, charting it decade by decade by way of the words we've coined to mark our passage through time. Ayto looks at some 5,000 words and meanings, from "flapper" to "flower power" to "road rage." We learn the birth dates of words such as "movie" (1910s), "barbecue" (1930s), Beatlemania (1960s), and "foodie" (1980s). Ayto also treats us to many surprises as well. Did you know, for instance, that "atomic energy" was coined in the 1900s, "rocket ship" in the 1920s, "hologram" in the '40s, and "modem" in the '50s? And in addition to the main alphabetic sequence of entries, the book also offers boxed features on topics of special interest, such as words arising from World War II ("bazooka," "jeep," "bikini"). With a thoughtful essay to introduce each decade, and thousands of evocative words and phrases, *Twentieth Century Words* will enthrall all word lovers as it opens a unique window on the last one hundred years.

From *Library Journal* Ayto, the author of *The Longman Register of New Words* and *The Oxford Dictionary of Slang*, presents "the most salient" new English (British and U.S.) words and word meanings from the 20th century. Based on *The Oxford English Dictionary* and its supplements, entries include the date of the word's earliest appearance in the OED, a definition, and examples of usage. Words are arranged by decade, which is fine in theory but problematic in practice: had Ayto traced linguistic developments thematically, this volume would have been much easier to navigate. As it is, readers will have to rely heavily on the index. More importantly, a thematic structure would have given readers a sense of the issues that have dominated linguistic developments throughout the century. The brief essays that introduce each decade, situating new words in their historical context, aren't enough. Indeed, it would appear that Ayto has a poor grip on the issues and themes that shaped 20th-century English. For example, in his introduction to the 1990s (a decade marked, among other things, by high visibility of gay and lesbian culture), he makes the following, puzzling statement: "The gay community, meanwhile, had to face the new threat of outing." Despite its flaws, this book encapsulates 20th-century developments and will appeal to scholars and readers. For larger public and academic libraries. A Anna Youssefi, Univ. of Houston Lib. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. 'The virtues of the diachronic approach to linguistics are splendidly exemplified by John Ayto's unpretentious gold mine of a book.' Paul Dean, TLS, 1.10.99 'Fascinating.' - Dot Wordsworth, Daily Telegraph, 18.9.99 'Endlessly fascinating book' - Craig Brown, Mail on Sunday, 26.12.99