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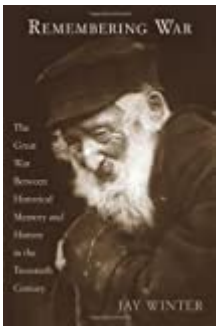


**Jay Winter.** *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006. viii + 240 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-11068-5.

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## Origins of Remembrance

Jay Winter is known to many readers as the author of *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (1995), in which he argued that World War I did not produce a rupture that led to the triumph of modernist sensibilities Ã la Paul Fussell. Winter attempted to show how the hideous carnage wrought on human bodies cast an ominous shadow over postwar Europe. Military and civilian survivors tried to make sense of what happened via a culture of mourning and remembrance that relied on traditional social and literary practices. I have always felt that his argument complimented rather than undid the insights of scholars such as Fussell, who interpreted the war in terms of irony and discontinuity. Winter's real contribution, in my opinion, was to suggest that the mourning engendered by the war's technologically caused mass deaths shaped the thinking of decision-makers within Europe for the next twenty years. In his ambitious new book, he pursues this latter theme. Winter argues that World War I inaugurated the Western infatuation with remembrance and the contemporary conflation of history and memory in a way that has profoundly shaped our ability to make sense of the world.

The author's thesis is that the memory boom of the twentieth century does not date to World War II and the Holocaust, but draws its inspiration instead from the trauma of the Great War. The Great War is key to understanding the current fascination with memory among politicians, reporters and ordinary citizens. All these tasks are accomplished within a learned historiographical framework and via sources comparative and original.

For example, he deftly weaves together a series of diverse examples in the first part of the book to show that practices of remembrance animated Europeans during and after the conflict in a way that bridged the disruption caused by total war. Shell-shocked soldiers challenged traditional notions of heroic combat because some men seemed to have been blasted altogether out of identity; they could not even remember who they were. Doctors tried to "reinsert" them into history by helping them regain prewar memories. Photographs, such as those taken by Bernhard Bardach–a Jewish physician in the Austrian Army serving on the Eastern Front–captured the horrors of modern warfare in the East and ominously presaged the destruction of the ancient shtetl after 1941. On

the other hand, such photography seemed to suggest the ability of traditional faith to enable people to overcome the worst violence. In Germany, writers and academics painstakingly compiled editions of soldiers' letters (especially those written by dead students) to create an image of youthful idealism for war drawn from literary conventions of the 1890s that transcended defeat.

Winter presents evidence to show that practices of remembrance differed across national boundaries and triggered significant political repercussions. Winter confidently takes the reader through cultures of remembering in France and England among soldiers after the war. In England, many survivors who wrote interpreted the war in terms of irony. In France, on the other hand, a well-organized veterans' movement heaped scorn upon the politicians its members deemed responsible for an unnecessary conflict that ruined a generation; their trope was not irony but anger. Particularly interesting is a chapter on the ways that migration and memory impacted the social networks that sustained the commonwealth. Winter provocatively argues that the heavy migration of "whites" from England to the Empire prior to 1914 cemented the relationship of the dominions to the metropole by creating networks of memory. Many men who served in the Australian army had been born in England. Nonetheless, the bonds tying Australia, Canada and New Zealand fractured as residents of these regions saw their sacrifice and British incompetence as the moment of national birth. It is not surprising that the imaginary links uniting the empire frayed; Winter sees the Great War as the key to making sense of this process.

The second part of the book explores how these practices of remembrance have been represented in various genres in the intervening decades. In particular, the author relates fascinating insights about the intersection of history, memory and the public sphere. Starting in 1994, Winter worked with PBS and the BBC to create an eight-hour documentary of World War I that took a cultural approach. Inevitably, he and his colleagues' desire to represent the horror and suffering of soldiers and civilians ran afoul of other collective remembrances of the war as noble and necessary (such as those of Republican members of Congress or of historians at the Imperial War Museum in London). Winter had a similar experience as one of the three founders of the Historial near the Somme battlefield. He, Annette Becker and StÃ©phane Audoin-Rouzeau somehow navigated diverse strands of collective memory represented by French bureaucrats and traditional military historians who thought the project terminally compromised by fluffy cultural theories and veterans' organizations that believed the museum glorified warfare. These later chapters are intended to convince academics that it is important to engage with the broader public about the meaning of history and memory before we are entirely pushed to the margins.

Like any ambitious book, this one is imperfect. Winter makes a great deal about the need to abandon the term collective memory for remembrance, because the latter suggests an active process of negotiation between individuals. Most of the scholars I know in the field already understand this semantic point. Also, it is debatable that World War I (and not the Civil War or the French Revolution and the fall of *ancien rÃ©gime* [as Peter Fritzsche has argued]) is the key to understanding the modern fascination with remembrance. Finally, while I agree with Winter that academics need to engage a broader readership for many reasons, numerous barriers to this trajectory are in place. We do have important insights to offer that people are not only willing but eager to receive if historians would simply take the time to make them accessible. The great success of the Historial bears this out. Nonetheless, junior faculty members in the process of publishing dissertations must limit their audience to fellow academics whether they like it or not; any attempt to write for a general audience will result in the denial of tenure. For the time being this struggle will have to remain the preserve of senior colleagues with more flexibility in their research agendas.

Nonetheless, I think Winter is correct when he concludes by saying that a time as disastrous for many Europeans as the twentieth century calls out for balanced remembrance and for careful attention to the difference between history and memory. One key component of this endeavor has been the testimony of moral witnesses such as Primo Levi, ImrÃ© Kertesz and Leon Wells. In the future, this burden will have to be carried primarily by academics. Winter seems to have been influenced by Walter Benjamin's belief that historians have a moral duty to recover the experience of those people destroyed in the name of progress so that we can remember them as well. I must confess that I agree. I am not sure if Winter considers himself a military historian, but if more of them could move as effortlessly between James Joyce, Walter Benjamin and Maurice Halbwachs as he, they might be able to retake their central position within the discipline. This book is a worthwhile read for graduate students and academics working on modern Europe, military history, memory and cultural studies.

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