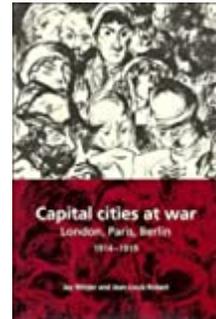




**Jay Winter, Robert, Jean-Louis.** *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1919. Volume 2: A Cultural History.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 545 S. \$90.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-57171-5.



**Reviewed by** Gerald Herman (Northeastern University)

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## Comparative Urban History: London, Paris, and Berlin in the Great War

Jay Winter, perhaps the most prolific scholarly writer in English working today in the First World War, has, with Jean-Louis Robert and others, produced a dense, complex, and fascinating comparative portrait of three of Europe's capital cities as they each coped with the crisis of war. The book is the third in the Studies in the Social and Cultural History of the Modern Wars series that Winter edits for Cambridge (the others are Winter's own *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* published in 1995, and *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War* edited by John Horne and published in 1997). In addition, Winter has written, co-written, or edited five other books on this subject, co-written the eight part television series "The Great War and the Shaping of the Twentieth Century" produced by KCET and the Imperial War Museum in 1996 and its accompanying text, and is a founder of the Historical de la Grande Guerre.

In this volume, the international and interdisciplinary team of authors explores "the juncture of a chronological history, that of the Great War, and a thematic history, that of urban history," in order, they say,

to produce "a comparative examination of a common history within the space of three metropolitan centers... Paris, London, and Berlin within international, national, urban, and local frameworks, and in the exploration of the fundamental material questions of urban life and survival in wartime" (pp. 527, 530). "At the same time," they conclude, "our study has identified the dangers of the reification of urban history. In wartime, these cities were never for one moment disengaged from the rest of the national war" (p. 549). To do this, the book concentrates (except for a first section, called "Premises" that provides definitions and background and a "Conclusion" that presents the difficulties of parsing out postwar impacts of wartime experience) on reminding the reader of the limitations and incommensurability of some of the data comparing cities in different countries. It provides some tentative conclusions about the urban wartime experience.

The book is divided into sections analyzing the available data: "The social relations of sacrifice" (Part Two), "of Labour" (Part Three), "of Incomes" (Part Four), and "of Consumption" (Part Five). Part Six deals in the same manner with "Urban demography (including pub-

lic health, illness, and mortality) in wartime.” Each part is subdivided into chapters on specific subjects, and each chapter provides a discrete data-based section on its subject for each of the three cities, paying due attention to limitations that differences in sources, populations covered, collection agencies, and purposes in each country and metropolitan area create. Most of these chapters also divide the war into at least two phases, one from 1914-1916 and another from 1917 onward. Each section concludes with statements in similarities and differences among the capital cities as does each chapter.

The data gathered for each of the chapters—displayed in graphs, charts, and an occasional map within the chapters and in fifteen appended statistical tables estimating female population demographics with a narrative description of the data collection difficulties at the end—represent the best single source of information about the life of wartime cities available in one place and the most complete exposition of the issues the limitations of the (largely snapshot) data leaves for the researcher interested in the changing dynamics of wartime life in urban centers filled with military and civilian transients.

Having said this—though the chapter authors try valiantly to give the reader some sense of the dynamics of change operating within each of the capital cities as the war goes on and of the lives, struggles, and even representations of the groups of human beings hidden behind

the statistics—*Capital Cities at War* suffers from the fact that it is only the first half of the project the authors envisioned. It is difficult to assay the success of the project in the basis of this first half. As the authors themselves admit, “In effect, we have studied in volume I the two ends of the urban spectrum: the individual and the collective. In volume II we privilege the intermediary levels of experience, the actions and reactions of groups of urban populations to the daily circumstances of the waging war” (p. 553). Thus, at many junctures in the chapters, as process questions arise their authors end abruptly by referring the reader to the not yet published volume II. And though the authors claim to have covered “the individual” in this volume, individual exemplars if general trends are largely missing. There are “individuals” only in the statistical aggregate. Judged alone, Winter and Robert have indeed produced ground breaking “outlines of a full urban history of Paris, Berlin, and London in wartime” in a comparative framework (p. 553). But until volume II appears, it will remain difficult to judge whether or not, as the book’s frontispiece maintains, it “will transform studies of the conflict, and...become a paradigm for research on other wars.”

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