

# European Civilization, 1648-1945: Lecture 18 Transcript

## Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning

November 5, 2008

**Professor Jay Winter:** What I'd like to do today is to talk to you about what it is that distinguishes European ideas about the shared history of the last century and the United States. What makes Europe European and what makes its sense of history different from ours. I think the primary difference between Europe and the United States will be seen in about six days, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November, when Armistice Day is commemorated all over Europe. In fact, it's now commemorated in Eastern Europe as well as in Western Europe, since it took the fall of the Soviet Union to remind people that two million Russian soldiers died in the First World War, and that the Eastern Front was the place where the German army won the war and where the Russian Revolution came directly out of it.

So, the First World War is what made Europe in the twentieth century European. And the war created a series of wounds that, to a degree, have never healed, to a degree. The primary reason for that is the bloodshed, is the staggering casualties of a degree and magnitude that no one had ever seen before. When we talk about losses on the scale of the First World War, we enter a surreal terrain. I have great difficulty getting my mind around figures of one million casualties for the Battle of Verdun, in 1916, or just about the same number for the Battle of the Somme. The Battle of Verdun between February 1916 and November was the longest battle in history. It was ten months without a break. There was nothing like it in the Second World War. It pushed soldiers, human beings, beyond the limits of human endurance.

The primary way in which this wound has been remembered is in terms of an array of commemorative practices which describe what European identity is, not only was, but is. I want to suggest that there are many reasons why the remembrance of the First World War is carried on throughout the twentieth century in a defining way. The first is technology. It's an accident that the First World War happened at the very moment that the film industry became the centerpiece of mass entertainment. Hence, this was the very first filmic war. It was filmic in a fictional way. That is to say, the technology of the day provided motion picture cameras for all major armies, and indeed they were used in all kinds of ways. The problem was they never filmed battle, or almost never filmed battle. There are one or two exceptions. But the important point is that generals and their staffs didn't want cameras on the battlefield, partly because it might produce evidence that would be useful to the other side. The other part of it is that the film might get back home. If families got to see it, then what would happen?

There's a famous story of the fictional film representation of war which is one reason why I think it is so iconic as a descriptive element in European consciousness about the past. In 1916, in the middle of the Battle of the Somme--which was a six-month quagmire started by the British army on the 1st of July 1916 and ended roughly November 1916, for no gain whatsoever and a million casualties--in the middle of it, a part of the British propaganda office, it wasn't a ministry until 1918--it was all done more or less informally until then--they decided to make a film to buck up public morale. What they did was they filmed the Battle of the Somme while it was being fought.

But they didn't film the fighting. They filmed mock episodes where soldiers in training would go over the top in a totally fictional representation of war.

The problem was that the people who saw this didn't know that it was phony. When the film was shown in the middle of 1916, in August-September 1916--the battle started on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July--it was shown all over Britain. Twenty million people saw it. That is half of the population of the country. There has never been a film that was seen by half of the population of any country in the world before that date or since. It broke all box office records. What it showed in silence was the preparation for the battle, the huge artillery barrage, and then men going over the top. Because of this phony--there were men who went over the top, stopped for a moment and then slid right down again, which caused women in the theaters that saw that to faint. They didn't know that this was simply nonsense, that it was fiction.

I think the critical point to bear in mind, therefore, is that as a filmic war, the war turned into myth at the very moment that it was being fought. Nobody had ever seen the landscape of the dark side of the moon that was created by industrialized war between 1914 and 1918. The way it was represented by film was completely fictional. Film comes straight out of theater. It has a proscenium arch and it has a vanishing point. Anyone who's ever been anywhere near a battle will realize that battles don't have vanishing points. People vanish in them, but they go in every conceivable direction. The representation of war became a matter of myth right in the middle of the war itself. It became a battle of myth to be remembered.

I'll give you another example which makes the point really powerful, very, very powerful. In February 1916 the German army decided to push through French lines at Verdun. This big ten-month battle, which is the biggest of all time, took place. In the course of it a series of completely made-up stories turned into legend. One is called the Trench of the Bayonets. What it shows is there were no trenches in the Battle of Verdun. There were isolated pockets of men in big underground forts. There was simply artillery barrage going on day and night for ten months. Little pockets of men would be caught in one part of the battle, and they stayed put to make sure that the Germans would not get through. The French line was in *ils ne passeront pas*. They won't get through and they didn't.

One group of such men were almost certainly buried by a landslide. The weight of artillery barrage in the mud would mean the earth would move when, indeed, the artillery barrage hit a particularly wet part of the front. So, a group of men were buried alive, which is a very normal practice in the course of the First World War. The German group of soldiers, the platoon that took it, put bayonets basically sticking up out of the ground to indicate to the Frenchmen where to find the dead, so that they could be buried during a lull in the fighting. The French didn't interpret it that way. What they said was, "Here are fifteen French men who stood with their bayonets there until they were buried alive and they didn't move an inch in the *passeront pas*."

This is a completely made up story. But it became a sacred site commemorated every 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 1917, 1918, 1919. In other words, the war itself created a mythic set of representations of war that have come up to the present. The Great War created myth in other ways. Another one came from the landing in Gallipoli. Gallipoli was a Turkish peninsula south of Istanbul, Constantinople then. It's about a four-hour taxi drive in lousy traffic. It probably took longer

then. The idea of the Allies was to knock Turkey out of the war, help Russia and possibly encircle Germany by not attacking directly through the western front, but coming around through Asia Minor.

This landing was a catastrophic failure. It was the brainchild of Winston Churchill who, until 1940 when Hitler made him the great man that we all remember, was a complete failure. politically and in military affairs. Gallipoli was his idea, and he shared in the form of what is now called Orientalism, a complete underestimation of the capacity of Muslim populations, Asian populations, brown people, to fight against Europeans. So, nobody had a look at the ground where the Allies were supposed to land at Gallipoli. They didn't actually take account of the fact that there were very big cliffs to climb. When they got there, they just reproduced trench warfare that had already existed. It was a complete failure.

The landing, though, took place on the night of the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1915, and the people used for it were Australian and New Zealand troops, alongside British and French ones. That landing was the birth of the Australian nation. To this day, Anzac Day--Australia, New Zealand Expeditionary Corps--Anzac Day is sacred. It's the 4<sup>th</sup> of July in Australia. It's the moment of celebration, through the shedding of blood, the winning of national pride. The point I'm trying to make initially is that remembering the First World War is remembering sacred themes that define nations. The oddity of the First World War is that these nations were defined first of all because they're a part of imperial powers, but this war was at the one and the same time the apogee and the beginning and the end of empire. Hence, nations that affirm their loyalty to Britain by dying on the beaches of Gallipoli, or in the hills of Gallipoli, earned the right to break away from Britain. This sacred moment is how the Great War turned into myth.

If you think this is light, you're mistaken. This is big-time politics to this day. Yesterday, in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, two Australian politicians virtually came to blows about how to remember Gallipoli, because it is at the core of the notion or of the idea of what the nation has to be. The first point I want to make is remembering the First World War is remembering a series of myths. They're iconic in the sense that they describe not just what happened at a particular moment, but they describe what the rest of the twentieth century might become and did become. And that is the second point I think I'd like to draw to your attention.

What makes remembering the First World War so important is that it became the way in which war was configured throughout the twentieth century in Europe. In many respects, this is a defining difference between the United States and Europe. The Second World War in this country is quite different from the First. The United States didn't really suffer the injuries of any major European country in the First World War. One hundred thousand American soldiers died in the First World War. Perhaps 40,000 of them, and there's a dispute on this, but perhaps 40,000 of them died from the Spanish Flu, the worst influenza epidemic in history. It hit everybody. It hit civilians. It hit soldiers. But it particularly preyed, as many mutant viruses do, on young adults. So, it got soldiers. Well, 100,000 dead was roughly, just roughly, what the British army suffered in three weeks on the Battle of the Somme, in one battle.

The scale of casualties in the First World War is what makes it everybody's business. The second reason why remembering the First World War is iconic is that it is universal in Europe. It's

family history. Let me give you an example of what that means. If you ever visit the extraordinary power of individual graveyards at the scene of the landings at Normandy, you will find that there are graves of 3,000 American soldiers who died in the course of the first day of the landing on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1944. That landing on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1944 was terrible. It was an extraordinary day. It was a day that should be remembered and is remembered. If any of you see the Steven Spielberg film *Saving Private Ryan*, you'll see it. It is iconic. It should be.

The first day of the Battle of the Somme, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1916, was 20,000 British men killed. The first day of the landing at Normandy, 3,000 Americans killed. The landing at Normandy, compared to the Battle of the Somme, shows us that the iconic battle for Britain of the First World War was six times as murderous in one day as the landings at Normandy. That sheer scale of casualties means that remembering the Great War means remembering loss of life that became universal throughout families, throughout Europe. This is extraordinary in many respects.

Until 1914, war was not democratic. Military service was not democratic. Either it was aristocratic and rural, in terms of the officer corps, that's why the cavalry mattered so much. They came from the land. Or it was more or less the men whom the general who defeated Napoleon, Wellington, put it, who were "the scum of the earth." Either the unemployable overpopulation of major cities, or indeed the unemployable populations of rural life in Europe, as well. Now, what happens in 1914 is conscription, universal conscription antedating the war presented armies of a size that had never before been pulled together. These armies suffered casualties of roughly one out of eight killed and one out of three wounded. We're talking about seventy million men in uniform in the First World War, nine million men killed, roughly twenty-five million men wounded.

One out of every two men who served in the First World War was a casualty. There were eight million prisoners of war. In those camps illness was likely to kill you more than anything else. The critical thing to bear in mind, therefore, is that the First World War created an astonishing and unprecedented challenge of commemoration. The first challenge was the missing. I want to take you through the commemorative forms that the First World War created, which created cultural practices that are still very important today. Anybody going to England today--and I mean today, I was there last weekend in Oxford--will see everybody wearing a little red poppy in your lapel. This is what you buy for a couple of pennies, whatever you want to give as a contribution to a charity called The Royal British Legion, the biggest charity in Britain. It is still to this day the biggest charity for those families, and indeed survivors, and successive generations of those who served their country and who were wounded or died in it.

The critical thing to bear in mind about this is that the mythic representation of war, which came out of film, has been matched by what I would call a family representation of war that comes through cultural practices of remembrance. We should never ever get away from the fact that remembering is a business. People make money out of it. That's why films sell so well. The History Channel is dominated by stories about war. It's an important thing to bear in mind that people make money out of representing war. It's an important thing to keep in mind. But that's too cynical to suffice for a discussion of how the First World War was remembered. It was remembered and still is remembered within families. The answer to "Why is that?" It's because of the universalization of bereavement.

What's the problem? The problems are threefold. The first is the missing. The second is, in some sense, the irrelevance of conventional religious practices. The third is the search for some kind of collective statement of why these men died. For what? What price, victory? The missing. Half of those men who died in the First World War, and we're talking about nine million men, have no known graves. Not a trace of them exists. This, by the way, is exactly the same proportion of those who were killed at Ground Zero on 9-11. Half of them have vanished completely. There are traces that matter a great deal to the families of the survivors, the survivors who need something to remember, to mourn.

The fact that roughly four million men died without a trace made commemorating war very, very difficult. Conventional religious practices require a site, a grave, a place to go to where individuals can honor those who die and take their lives up once again, let the loss go. What possible ways do they have to handle this? During the war, nothing. Because the confusion over casualties of war, which always happens in wartime, was overwhelming. If a family got a message saying, "Your husband," "Your brother," "Your son," "Your fiancé is missing in action," it could mean anything. It could mean that the individual was in a prison camp on the other side of the line. It could mean that the individual was in a hospital. It could mean that there was a confusion of identity and that the person was still alive, but somebody else found his dog tag. It could mean that the person had been blown to pieces and there was nothing that remained of him. None of that could be sorted until the end of the war, and even then it couldn't be sorted out.

The loss of knowledge, the lack of knowledge about the most fundamental question of war is the most poignant origin of a series of commemorative practices that followed it. Given the scale of the losses, the conventional churches were not able to handle the problem of helping the bereaved or those who were, as it were, in no man's land, in Purgatory. In fact, Purgatory is an interesting idea. If you think about it, it's centered to a certain kind of popular Catholicism in the nineteenth century. Purgatory means that people who are on the way to heaven have to wait a while, and maybe, maybe just the good works that you and I might do will help them get there sooner, rather than later. It's a medieval idea. The Catholic Church had to jettison the idea of Purgatory, which died in the First World War, because no one wanted to put up with the idea that an individual who died for his country had to wait for 100 years in Purgatory in order to be able to get to heaven.

Religious practices had to change to handle the unprecedented losses of war. Those who went to the churches for solace found very little, because there was very little the churchmen could do, could say. Why did I lose three sons? What did they die for? The phrases, the noble phrases of patriotism last only so long, and most of the time don't get you through the night. Well, what did individuals do? The first thing they did was to move to the pagan perimeters of Christianity. John Merriman referred you to a wonderful film by Abel Gance about the return of the dead called *J'Accuse, I Accuse*, which is accusing war, accusing the sun of not stopping war. It's accusing everybody of this insanity that had no end to it. Well, the pagan perimeters of Christianity are the areas where the occult lives. It's the areas where people believe, *faute de mieux*, because they have no choice in extra sensory perception.

This is a period not just of the film industry, but the emergence of radio. It's a world where telegraphy was a quite normal means of communication, with underground cables, Reuters dispatched stories all over the world. For millions of families the idea of getting in touch with the missing or the dead seemed quite appealing. These are not fools. These are not people who are, as it were, bought by the Elmer Gantrys of this world. These are ordinary people or very intelligent people who are prepared to suspend disbelief about extrasensory perception in order to be able to find some solace, some way of understanding the world in which they live.

There was an extraordinary efflorescence, development of spiritualism, of séances. One of the great carriers of this message was Arthur Conan Doyle, who was the author of the great, the ultimate rationalist, Sherlock Holmes. When his son died and was missing, completely missing, he became one of the great figures in the development of the spiritualist movement. Churches have no part in that because speaking to the dead has no mediation. Christianity couldn't be interested in this. Jewish religion has no time for it. Islam has no time for it whatsoever. But it just shows you that the scale of the catastrophe of the human loss of the First World War challenged conventional institutions and frameworks for understanding what was happening.

If séances are a kind of collective remembrance, they created, as it were, the precedent for the ones that have left their most powerful marks, not only on Europe but beyond it, as well. These are war memorials. The need to create a substitute tomb, a substitute place in front of which to mourn, is what creates the extraordinary vogue of war memorials. You don't have to go very far to see them. All you have to do is go through Commons, and you'll see two war memorials that were created at the same moment, right after the First World War. When you see the names of Civil War vets who were Yale men, when you go through Commons on the walls, you should recognize that was completed in the 1920s, at the same time as there is a façade, a war memorial in front of Commons with the names of the battles that American soldiers fought in. In front of that is a cenotaph.

The cenotaph, an empty tomb, says that these men died for liberty, and so on. It is an empty tomb. This is the critical point to bear in mind. The enormous development of commemorative forms, in particular sculptured, architectural war memorials in the twentieth century, comes from the First World War. Anyone who goes--and I think it's marvelous that we can talk about this in this particular room. Anyone who goes to see Maya Linn's Vietnam Veterans Memorial will see an outcome of a lecture on First World War commemoration that took place in this room, where Maya Linn was a student. She studied First World War memorials in order to create the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Why?

If you go to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial you'll understand the genius of First World War commemoration. The only thing that matters are the names. The names are what matters. The highly-polished granite surface of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial has your own reflection forced back upon you, to touch the names is the way to find a means, inadequate perhaps, symbolic perhaps, to bring the dead back home, to bring them to the center of American history in the middle of the Mall at the intersection between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington memorial. It is an extraordinary gathering together of the bones, of the remains of the dead who were buried in Europe or never found.

Why does this matter? It matters because the universalization of mourning, of bereavement in the First World War meant that these war memorials are all over Europe. They're everywhere. There are 38,000 of them in England. Every village has one. Every commune, I think, bar twelve in all of France. There are 30,000 of them in France alone. These war memorials are extraordinary in many respects. I want to tell you about them today. They are places where, next Tuesday, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November, there will be ceremonies. It's a public holiday in France. The mayor of the town will be at the head of a procession--this is choreographed all over the country--in which there will be 100 school children who will march in the rain and the sleet, it doesn't matter, to the local war memorial. What happens then is that the mayor reads out the names of those from a small village or from a town who died in the First World War. The children in the school after the name of Cohen Albert will say "*présent*," will answer for the men who aren't there.

This bonding between the living and the dead, the bringing back of the dead to their own villages, to their homes, was a substitute burial ceremony for the ones that could never take place. How did it all happen? The first point that has to be made is that the commemorative wave took place through political leadership. Politics means many things. The first thing it has to mean is that there is a fundamental difference between the way in which men are remembered in the winners and in the losers. In the case of Germany, where there were two million soldiers who died in the First World War, this is an enormously difficult problem. The reason is that you not only need to remember the dead, but you have to find a way and a form to answer an eternal question. The question is: how is it possible to glorify those who die in war without glorifying war itself? The extraordinary wave of commemorative activity, the cultural practices of commemoration that were universal in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s have many different answers to it.

Most of the time what happens is that politics became local, that small groups of people in small towns and villages took it upon themselves to answer the question: What will we do? How will we remember the men of our village? Given the numbers, we're talking about three, four brothers in agrarian towns. We're talking about fathers and sons who never came back. We're talking about the absolutely personal, face-to-face culture of village life. Everyone knew the names. Everybody knew the families. What this means is that it may be the case that high politics set out certain lines--the cabinets, the politicians, the generals. But what's extraordinary about Europe between the wars is how democratic commemoration was, and how much life there was in civil society in order to create forms that were separate. That's why I mentioned the poppy fund. This is a private organization. It's not a public charity. It's not the state. It's civil society speaking its compassionate language of remembering not only the fallen, but those left behind, the widows, the orphans, and so on.

I'll give you an example of how civil society and state power differ and vary. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of July 1919, just two weeks after the signing of the peace treaty on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 1919, when the Germans were forced to accept the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, there was a victory parade in Paris. That victory parade had a march past the Champs-Élysées, through the Arc de Triomphe. It's only happened twice in history and this was one of them, to celebrate the victory. The French were there. The Americans were there. The Brits were there. The Italians were there. All the Allies were there. There are two things that happened. One was that Georges Clemenceau, the French prime minister, decided in this spectacle, "We need a symbol of the lost

generation." So, he had a papier-mâché catafalque built, a very big ornate plinth. On top of it was a cenotaph, an empty tomb, to symbolize the tombs of all those soldiers who died in the war, half of whom have no known graves.

To start the victory parade, Clemenceau insisted that the people who lead the way are the most badly mutilated men of the war, the *gueules-cassés*, men with broken faces, the men without arms, the men without legs. The use of this vanguard of the suffering transformed a victory parade into a day of mourning. This was extraordinary. It was absolutely extraordinary. The Brits decided if there's going to be something on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July, we'd better do something, too. It'll take five days for us to get everybody back over. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of July we need a victory parade, too. Three-quarters of a million British men died in the war, another 250,000 from the empire and so on, dominions. A million men from the British forces died in the First World War. We need a victory parade.

So, they asked the architect, Edwin Lutyens, to put together another papier-mâché memorial called The Cenotaph, an empty tomb. They put it right in the middle of Whitehall, official London, right next to 10 Downing Street, next to Buckingham Palace, basically a small stroll down to the houses of parliament, right in the middle of official London. They had their parade. But that wasn't the end of it. Two million people came to it, and they all deposited whatever they had to offer to the dead of the Great War, because this was an empty tomb. It wasn't the empty tomb of Christ. It was a Greek form. This drove the churchmen leading the Church of England apoplectic. It meant that the language of commemoration was ecumenical and not Christian. Why should that be?

Lutyens was the man who designed New Delhi. He was the architect of empire. He wanted a memorial that would suffice for Hindu soldiers who had died, Muslim soldiers, Jewish soldiers, Anglican, Catholic, Irish, whatever, people of no belief at all, and he found it. He found the simplest possible way. As a result of this extraordinary outpouring of feeling, literally flowers they kept on having to shovel away because there were so many things left. Understandably. These are families who finally found a way to express perhaps a form of symbolic exchange. It happens in the Vietnam Wall, too. People leave things. Why? These people whose names are on the wall, those people who died, represented by the cenotaph have given everything. I need to give something. Pilgrimage is hard. It's not tourism. It should be difficult. You should give, not just get.

The critical thing there is that clearly the British people voted with their feet for the national war memorial. So, the cabinet said, "Lutyens, could you do it again, this time in stone?" He did. He did it again in stone. A year later when the Unknown Soldier was buried in Westminster Abbey, where did people go? They went and paid their respects. You can still do it today. The Abbey is the home of kings and poets. No, the people's monument is The Cenotaph in Whitehall, not the church of the kings, but it's the sacred space of the people. It remains so to this day.

Now, that man, Edwin Lutyens, designed another set of war memorials that lead us directly to Maya Linn. Thiepval, T-H-I-E-P-V-A-L is a small village that no longer exists in the Somme, in northern France. There he was asked, eighteen years later, to do a memorial for the 73,000 British soldiers who died in that one battle, and have no known graves. What he created was an



extraordinary arc, an Arc of Triumph that basically has small arches on top of it and then nothing. He reduced the Arc of Triumph to nothingness. The only thing you do is when you walk up to it, my eyesight is dreadful, but younger people do it too. It just depends. When you get close--for me it's very close, for other people it's further away--you all of a sudden see that the walls of this arch that he built in Thiepval are completely covered with names. There's a vanishing point where you suddenly see them. From a distance you can't see it. It just looks like a façade. There are the names. It's that which Maya Linn heard about in this lecture hall, when Vincent Scully talked about Lutyens and commemoration, that inspired her to create the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

She's told me what it felt like to sit in this room and do it. She actually submitted her design for that memorial as the design that was ultimately the winning design in the competition. It was anonymous. By the way, she got a B+ for it in her class. I'll leave that aside. "'Judgment is mine,' sayeth the Lord." All I can do is to tell you that the forms that were created in the cenotaph were ones that have endured throughout the twentieth century to describe how war is remembered. Now, The Cenotaph, as I say, is pre-Christian. It's one more move away from the institutionalization of religion. It's not that the sacred died in twentieth-century Europe; it moved out of the churches. It can be found elsewhere. One of the places where it will be found next Tuesday is in front of war memorials that were placed all over villages, towns, marketplaces, all over Europe.

Let me return to that process. The first I said is political. Small groups of people, the busybodies, the committeemen that always exist in small towns with nothing better to do, retired men or men of leisure, sometimes women. What they did was, "We want to design this ourselves." The first thing you have to figure out is: How much does it cost? Hence, we should always recognize that commemoration is a business. The cost factor actually matters substantially. The reason why it matters substantially is that if you want something sculptural, if you want something like a piece of architecture, the cheapest possible form of stone is an obelisk. You don't have to do much. You just hack it here or there and that's it. It has a great advantage, which is that it's Egyptian; it's pre-Christian again. It doesn't require you to distinguish between Protestant, Catholic, Jews, or anybody else. It's an ecumenical form and it's the most popular one.

The second problem is that in France, in particular--Germany has its own headaches--but in France, in particular, church and state had been separated in 1905, and rather violently separated. No crosses, except in some Catholic areas where they said, "I don't really care. We're going to have a cross no matter what," which is true in Catholic Brittany, in the northwest of the country. Most of the time there are not crosses. What they show primarily are two kinds of representations. The first is of a Gallic rooster, which again could be bought through a mail order catalog, or a soldier, the *poilu*. The British liked to see their soldiers shaved. For the French, the idea of a soldier should be somebody who's a hairy one, a *poilu*, somebody who never shaved. Having a beard is being masculine, being a tough guy, being a soldier who won the war. A *poilu* could be bought, again, on a mail order catalog.

Overwhelmingly, and this is a very important point, overwhelmingly, the images are not triumphal. They are mournful. Again, these were decided by small groups of people who put together money in order to describe the ways in which war memorials should be organized,

should be designed, and, indeed, should be paid for. They were paid for by popular subscription overwhelmingly, pennies, sous, francs, deutschmarks, whatever, whatever you had. That's the way it was done. What about the inscriptions? Once more I want to reinforce the point that I made earlier about the democratic nature of loss.

Ninety-five percent of war memorials list people either alphabetically or by the year or the time in which they died, the sequence of their death. Only five percent of all war memorials in Europe that I've ever seen, and I've tried to collect material all over the place on this, have men listed by rank. There is a democracy of death and of commemoration in highly inegalitarian societies. It is something extraordinary that goes on when loss is so general it becomes apparent that it isn't possible to separate those who died in uniform, in high rank, from those who died as private soldiers.

One important point to bear in mind is that once the choice of place was made, and the choice of form was made, and the money was gathered together and paid to the artist or the sculptor who would do this, then we come to the third part of the commemorative process. The first is political. By that I mean small politics more than big politics. The second is business, the money, the commissioning, the putting together of the project. The third is the ritual. What do people do when they stand in front of a war memorial? The answer is very different things. The first thing that happens in the front of war memorials, and it still happens, is that women enter the narrative of war.

Women are at the center of the commemorative practice. They are not at the center of the narratives of war from the battlefield or, indeed, from the military perspective itself. There are those who believe that, indeed, the gendering of the narratives of war separates the stories told by soldiers in novels and memoirs from those of the societies for which they fought and for which they died. I'm not sure if that is true or not. But what we can say, and there are thousands of photographs that show it, is that the ritual that happens in front of memorials are rituals of families. In conventional terms, by that I mean historically overdetermined ways, women have been associated with mourning practices since the Egyptians. There are tombs in the Valley of the Queens in Luxor that show professional mourners, women who have tears painted on their cheeks, from the time of the pharaohs. Whether that is true or not, the notion of Mater Dolorosa, Stabat Mater, "His mother was there," is a Catholic trope of great power and importance in understanding how societies configure loss of life in war.

So, the first point is that women and children, families are there. The second is there is a didactic function. School children come there. This, I think, is a very important point to bear in mind. Overwhelmingly, and this is true in Germany until the 1930s, Italy it's true until the late 1920s, and it's true all over Britain and France, and certainly in the dominions. The rituals have a by-word that dominates the message. It is "never again," the phrase we frequently associate with the Holocaust, with the war against genocide. Yes, that's true, but the phrase "never again" comes out of the First World War. It's what dominates the commemorative practices of the inter-war period. This is the war to end all wars. This is the war that makes war impossible. This is a war so dreadful that it is not at all the purpose of those who go to commemorative forms to prepare the next generation for their turn. On the contrary.

The notion of commemoration in inter-war Europe is "never again." That explains why the commemorative power of the period around the First World War is not repeated after the Second. In France you can see this anywhere. In Britain it's there, too. In Germany there are more difficult reasons, obviously, to handle this. In Eastern Europe, where the massacres were so gigantic, it's almost impossible. What happens in Western Europe is that the names of those who die in the Second World War are tacked on to First World War memorials. Part of the reason is financial. If the First World War impoverished Europe, the Second World War bankrupted it. Without the Marshall Plan, who knows?

The important point is that there's another reason. How many times can you say, "never again"? If the idea was that these men died to make war impossible, in other words, their sacrifices were such as to eliminate the need for their children to go to war again, then what do you do in 1939? This is true in Germany, too, where the 1<sup>st</sup> of September, 1939, the outbreak of the Second World War was not greeted by marching bands, and parades, and so on. It was a day of sadness in Germany as it was elsewhere, because everybody knew, and they knew the costs; the Great War had told them what war is. The conclusion I want to draw on is this. Remembering the First World War has taken many different forms. I've dealt with the filmic mystification of it. There's a big business in novels, in memoirs, in an area of what we might call factoids that are half fictional and half true. Robert Graves' *Goodbye to All That* is still in print eighty years after he wrote it. There are many such novels, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, that are enormous bestsellers. We should accept the fact that the media matters.

I think the critical point to bear in mind is that the casualties of the First World War were so devastating that even the losses of the Second World War didn't change the landscape of remembrance that was constructed between 1918 and 1939. War means something in Europe that it doesn't mean in this country. The reasons can be found in all of these commemorative practices. It is clear to me that political culture follows history, follows the understandings people develop of the world in which they live. Europeans see war differently from Americans. It doesn't stop there from being militaristic groups, and those like the Nazis who wanted to "get it right this time around," and reverse the verdict of 1918 under the Treaty of Versailles. But there's no doubt in my mind that the First World War message of "never again" survived the Nazis, survived Stalin, to create a different kind of Europe in which armies don't matter anymore. They're there. But in the question of a great historian, James Sheehan from Stanford, who just wrote a history of twentieth century, and the question that he put in his title, we have, I think, the final legacy of the commemoration of the First World War. His book is entitled *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone?*

In late-twentieth-century Europe, states are defined in terms of the way in which they defend the wellbeing of their populations. No longer are states defined in terms of the military force that they can deploy in defense of their national interests or their imperial power. The First World War put, as it were, the beginnings--hammered in the nails in the coffin of the old vision that the state is that institution which has the monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force. The story of warfare killed the old idea of state sovereignty. It wasn't dead before the Nazis made it necessary for us to develop something different. But it is the remembrance of the First World War which left traces in families, which are the most powerful reasons why the First World War has become and remains the iconic disaster that has created a Europe that no one had ever seen

before, and that was vastly different, in the minds of ordinary people, than the Europe that existed in 1914. Thank you very much.

[clapping]

[end of transcript]



Jay Winter