



On the Battlefield of Memory: The First World War and American Remembrance, 1919–1941

Steven Trout

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This work is a detailed study of how Americans in the 1920s and 1930s interpreted and remembered the First World War. Steven Trout asserts that from the beginning American memory of the war was fractured and unsettled, more a matter of competing sets of collective memories—each set with its own spokespeople—than a unified body of myth. The members of the American Legion remembered the war as a time of assimilation and national harmony. However, African Americans and radicalized whites recalled a very different war. And so did many of the nation’s writers, filmmakers, and painters.

Trout studies a wide range of cultural products for their implications concerning the legacy of the war: John Dos Passos’s novels *Three Soldiers* and *1919*, Willa Cather’s *One of Ours*, William March’s *Company K*, and Laurence Stallings’s *Plumes*; paintings by Harvey Dunn, Horace Pippin, and John Steuart Curry; portrayals of the war in *The American Legion Weekly* and *The American Legion Monthly*; war memorials and public monuments like the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier; and commemorative products such as the twelve-inch tall *Spirit of the American Doughboy* statue.

Trout argues that American memory of World War I was not only confused and contradictory during the ‘20s and ‘30s, but confused and contradictory in ways that accommodated affirmative interpretations of modern warfare and military service. Somewhat in the face of conventional wisdom, Trout shows that World War I did not destroy the glamour of war for all, or even most, Americans and enhanced it for many.

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