

## MEMORIES OF WWII IN BRITAIN : WHAT NEEDS TO BE REMEMBERED

### **Memory:**

Collective way at looking at the past: subjective representations of the past: role of witnesses and historians  
When a group creates its own consensus on the past and its meaning  
Sometimes the state might wish to influence or control the way citizens look at some events

### **1- Early stages of the war:**

It's remembered Britain was surprised by the declaration of war in September 39 and was unprepared. The government tried to reassure people ( poster Keep calm and carry on ) and praise the British phlegm.

There was evacuation to protect children from bombings: it's remembered only children were evacuated and all was well organized. In real, only 800 00 kids were evacuated and they were dirty and badly behaved and sometimes host families got rid of them!

### **2- British events which were most remembered: a triptych**

**DUNKIRK:** the British troops left France after it was invaded; Remember as a "strategic withdrawal": debated ( a debacle ?)

**THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN JUNE SEPTEMBER 40:** German aircrafts attacked Britain' RAF. Pilots are remembered as heroes, solidarity helped to withstand the attack ( a "people's army"). In real there were racial discrimination within the army and Commonwealth troop were not mentioned for their participation until quite recently.

**THE BLITZ:** Bombing 24/24 by German Luftwaffe. It's remembered the " Blitz 's spirit" pulled people together. But in real, sometimes after bombed were dropped some peoples stole things on corpses or plundered ( piller) some shops.

### **3-The homefront**

It's remembered rationing was harsh but in real cafés continued to operate and there was a lot of black market !  
The BBC has programs to help recycling the food ( The KITCHEN FRONT)

It's remembered there as a real social unity during the war: in REAL, class antagonism was strong as well as anti-semitism.

Women had to register and participate to homefront activities: they are remembered as war heroes ( Dame Laura Knight). In real, some women were war heroes but many did not play a part and stayed home because of their family occupation. There were also illegitimate birth and spread of venereal diseases ( posters by the government not often mentioned in history books)

Relation with the US: remembered as a co-operation but IN REAL there was a dependence

D-Day: remembered as the final act of WWII drama: still very studied. In 2013 some veteran stared to record their memories for posterity

### **MONUMENTS AND CELEBRATIONS:**

- Cenotaph in London for deaths of both WW and commonwealth troops as well
- POPPY DAY NOVEMBER 11<sup>TH</sup>

## MEMORIES OF WWII IN THE USA : WHAT NEEDS TO BE REMEMBERED

### **1-Wartime memories:**

-Meaning of the war: Remembered as THE GOOD WAR: Roosevelt used the Office Of War and Information ( OWI) to spread the idea of a “GOOD PEOPLE’s War), remembered by others as a need to take revenge on Pearl Harbor. In **REAL**: some now underline some cooperation between US and Nazi companies, others underline the motive of a anti-communism more than anti-Nazism, others underline the bad behavior of some GI’s during liberation ( rapes, robberies).

- Soldier’s memories: some like Eisenhower want to put the stress on the “good war” in his book “crusade to Europe”, whereas for many soldiers it was really like Hell.

-Pearl Harbor: did Roosevelt know and just wanted a pretext to enter the war?

-D-Day: is only remember as an American intervention: no mention of British or French resistance’s help

-Jews and Auschwitz: Roosevelt did not meet rabbis who were willing to tell him what was happening to the Jews in the camps (Was he anti-Semitic?) Why did not the American bomb Auschwitz or at least the rail links to the camp?

-Hiroshima: it’s still presented by the US as a way to avoid a costly and cruel invasion of Japan (remember the veteran in the video): but was it really necessary? And same for Nagasaki after! Wasn’t it a means to impress the Soviets instead? Feeling of shame today : Hiroshima Maidens in the 1950’s.

-Victory: Veterans were torn between: a sense of relief and pride to have protected human rights and others used victory as a way to make the fight of evil as a US priority. US film industry put the stress of the “Good war “ (Spielberg’s private Ryan) but today some films show the “dark side” (Clint Eastwood’s Iwo Jima)

### **2-The homefront:**

-Harsh reality far from the “good war”: rationing, conscience objectors, displaced people, race clashes in the army, sexually transmitted diseases linked with war “affairs”.

-Women: Myth of “Rosie the riveter” ( Rosie the riveter memorial in California). But women were discriminated against and sometimes disloyal to their husband (illegitimate births)

-Racism and discrimination: black soldiers were discriminated against and denied war decorations sometimes! ( Posthumous wards today ! ) ; Japanese were put in camps and their properties taken away ( LA Japanese museum only in 92).

### **3- Memorials:**

-Traditional war memorials : 3 very important: Arlington Cemetery in Washington for all war heroes since the civil war ( 290 000 graves), 2004 Washington WWII memorial, Colleville-sur-mer in Normandy since 1956.

-Civic centres

-Memorial day: the final Monday of May