

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: THE EFFECT OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITY FORMATION AND FRACTURE IN BRITAIN DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND THE INTERWAR PERIOD.

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This work explores the development, maintenance, and fracture or transformation of the collective identity that defined the British upper class in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the historical/cultural narratives that developed around the fracture of that collective identity, and on the affect that both identity fracture and narratives exercised on British society, culture, and politics during and after the First World War. We examine the process by which that collective identity was transmitted from generation to generation, examine the damage done to upper class collective identity during and in the wake of WW I, and explore the expression of that damaged identity in the development and influence of historical/cultural narratives generally identified as Lost Generation narratives.

The theoretical framework used in this dissertation is based on the work of a group of sociologists that includes Alberto Melucci, Manuel Castells, Harold Kerbo, John Ogbu, Jeffrey Alexander, Ron Eyerman, and Kai Erikson. Their analyses are grounded in Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory – a body of theory that seeks to describe the formation, maintenance, and transformation of both individual and collective identities. The historical analysis used in this effort involves the work of a range of historians and theoreticians. These

include historians who focus on British social/cultural history and/or on the history of Britain during the First World War (e.g. J.M. Winter, David Cannadine, Samuel Hynes, Lawrence James, Paul Fussell, and Angela Lambert) as well as historians and theoreticians who focus on literary interpretation and on the use of narrative in history (e.g. Keith Jenkins, Hayden White, Roland Barthes, and Michel Foucault). The historical analysis includes research in primary sources from historical actors discussed in the dissertation. These include diaries, letters, and memoirs by Robert Graves, Vera Brittain, Siegfried Sassoon, and JRR Tolkien; letters and expedition journals of George Mallory; and JRR Tolkien's working notebooks regarding the development of his fictional works.