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A Case Study of an Atypical Perspective on the First World War

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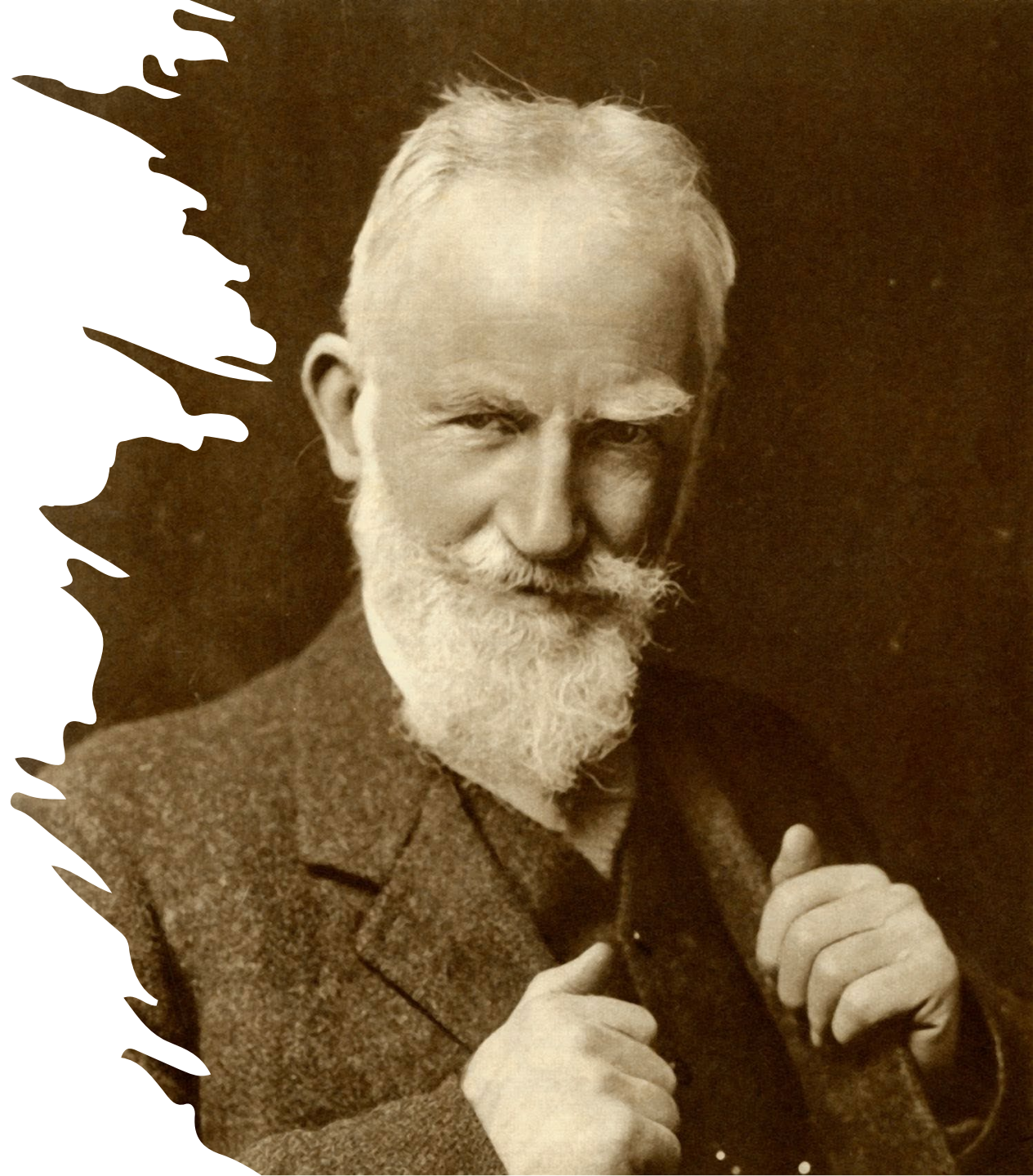
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A case study of an atypical perspective on the first world war

By Patrick Riley

Our author: George Bernard Shaw

- The most influential playwright of his time
- Nobel prize winner in literature
- Irish
- His plays mostly covered politics
- Famous for many eccentric political beliefs late in his life being a friendly to the ideas of Mussolini and Stalin



The political climate during the first world war

- Ultra-nationalism
- Partisanship
- Intense ethnic divisions
- Militarism and Brinkmanship



German cartoon World war one collection box one

The document: "world should check hatred"

Why is Shaw's view on the conflict so special ?

WORLD SHOULD CHECK HATRED. SAYS SHAW
Continued from First Page.

...mysical law; the civilian's obligation is the same as the warrior's.

War is a very dreadful thing at its best, but if it is suspended every rule and impulse of human kindness, so that men were not only authorized but enjoined to become utter devils "for duration of the war" both at home and in the field, human society would be incompatible with war as an institution, and Dr. Johnson's famous definition of patriotism as "the last refuge of a scoundrel" would become generally valid.

Too many of our civilians need to have this lesson rubbed into them by our soldiers. They know that in the breaches of peace they must not kick a man when he is down or refuse to shake hands with him when they have fought out a quarrel with him. But they seem to have no shame in kicking a German when he is down or declaring they will never shake hands with a German as long as they live.

Difference in Point of View.

Now, a good deal of this is due to the quite amiable failure to realize what war means. In the newspapers the civilian reads an endless and glorious list of heroic exploits by plucky, good-natured, indomitable and cheerful British soldiers, whose worst weaknesses are a little comic coarseness of language and a tendency to go on a spree occasionally and sing parodies on popular hymns.

And side by side with these lists are scores of mean, filthy, cruel, cowardly outrages by men of several different enemy nationalities generalized as "Huns."

It does not occur to some of us that the German papers must have presented the same contrast between the British "Hun" and the German "hero." Both are as false to the facts as the elaborate deception by which Sir Douglas Haig persuaded the German commanders he was planning an attack many miles distant from the spot in which his final blow was actually delivered.

His business of deceiving the enemy was a trifle compared to the business of deceiving our own simpleton civilians who know nothing of war and less of Christian chivalry. Even soldiers have to be deceived, because they are not all heroes. The percentage who win (or deserve) Victoria Crosses is balanced at the other end by the percentage who have to be restrained from surrendering too easily by persuading them that the enemy inflicts unbearable tortures and privations on prisoners of war.

But these deceptions are necessary as "ruses de guerre." There is no sort of sense in keeping them up when the war is over. Sir Douglas Haig is not now ostentatiously equipping a yacht for a Polar expedition to persuade the Germans he will not be available for the defence of Amiens next Summer. No British infantrymen, however "fed up" with fighting, is now under the smallest temptation to surrender in order to escape from shell barrages.

All the deceptions are now doing unmitigated mischief, making for unreason and bad blood where reason and good nature are the most urgent needs of the situation in Europe.

Everyone who is not a born fool must realize soon what all clever people realized long ago: that the moral cleaning-up after the war is far more important than the material reconstruction.

The towns that have been knocked down mostly needed it very badly and will be replaced let us hope, by better planned, healthier and happier habitations. We shall be able to build cathedrals as "handsome" as the best medieval ones, stained glass and all, as soon as we really like them.

This does not include influenza cases. More than 50,000 children under fifteen died in 1917, and 15,000 girls and women under thirty. These are only the deaths. The condition of the survivors may be imagined. And this is still going on more or less, and will go on until the blockade is raised.

Does any Englishman want any more revenge? Can Mr. Havelock Wilson (president of the International Seamen's Union) want any more revenge?

Even we, the winners, are already heavily punished for what we have done, not only by our own losses but by the German losses as well, for every German we killed and every German child we lamed for life by rickets, is a loss to us just as certainly as every allied soldier or civilian the Germans have killed is a loss to Germany.

"There is no wealth but life," said Ruskin, truly, and we shall all, Germans and allies alike, be on short commons for years to come because we have killed and disabled so much of the life of the world.

This is why Germany nursed back to health so many allied soldiers whom they had broken with their shells, and why we did the same with so many German soldiers.

This is why at Ruhleben the Germans gave the English prisoners, with scrupulous honesty, the parcels of food we sent out to them, though they were so hungry themselves that the prisoners at last became masters of the camp because they had a store of fats to give away.

The poor little cramped minds that cannot understand this would have robbed the prisoners and left the fallen soldiers to perish on the field or slaughtered them out of hand.

Mark - 1919
 Printed material
 Clippings - 1919

The World War one collection box one (printed materials clippings 1919)



The Research Process

Missteps

- Selecting a useful collection
- Not taking good enough photos
- Inefficient Research methods

Successes

- **Finding a better collection and moving on**
- **Returning to special collections in order to look at my new collection**
- **Returning to special collections once again to take better photos**

What I learned

- Where you look is equally or more important than how you look/ your analysis
- When it comes to research always paint with a broad brush first and a narrow brush once you have actually found a good source on a topic you set out to research
- Making mistakes is just part of the process and did not lead to any negative besides spending at most one more on the project than I would have