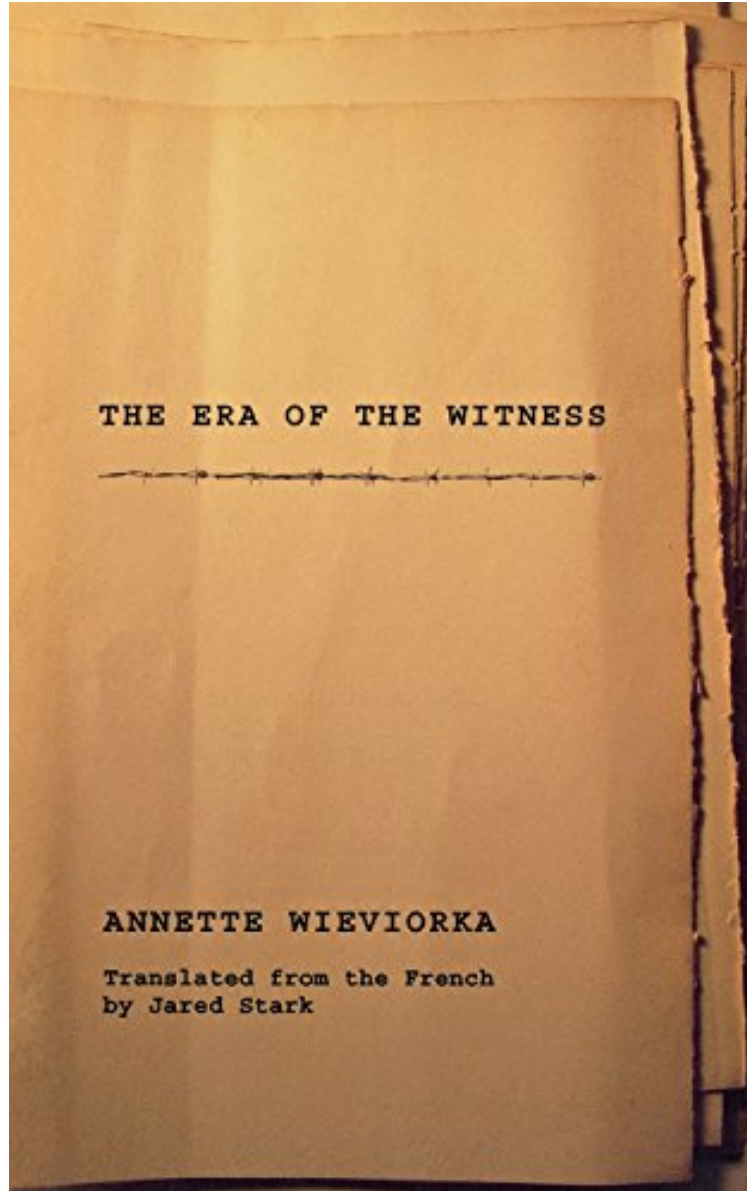


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The Era of the Witness

Annette Wieviorka

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#905720 in Books Cornell University Press 2006-04-27Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 7.50 x .20 x 4.501, .37 #File Name: 0801473160192 pages | File size: 23.Mb

Annette Wieviorka : The Era of the Witness before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Era of the Witness:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Useful overview of a key area of historical analysisBy MurrayhillA fine account of a crucial development in historical thinking after WWII. Important reading for anyone interested in changing attitudes about testimony in law and the humanities.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Holocaust Historiography. Why Jewish Children Exterminated. Holocaust-Survival Accounts are Not Automatically Credible By Jan Peczkis This French author, a Holocaust historian, surveys the history of Shoah-related memorial writing, beginning during WWII. This includes Jewish diarists and chroniclers. She then surveys the early postwar attempts of Jews to write down the events of the Shoah. From then, she moves on to the Eichmann trial, and numerous other events related to the publicizing of the Holocaust. Author Wieviorka includes fascinating statistics in her book. For instance, in 1949, one third of Israel's population consisted of Holocaust survivors--350,000 of them. (pp. 72-73). The HOLOCAUST series, televised in 1978, reached an audience of 120 million television viewers. (p. 98). WHY JEWISH CHILDREN WERE ALSO SYSTEMATICALLY MURDERED The Holocaust came about when Hitler took collective revenge on Europe's Jews for "international Jewry starting another war". Wieviorka cites a German-language source that quotes Heinrich Himmler (spoken October 6, 1943) for an additional reason that Jewish women and children were targeted for destruction, (quote) "I did not feel I had the right to exterminate the men--that is, to kill them or have them killed--while allowing their children to grow up and take revenge upon our children and grandchildren. The difficult decision had to be taken of making this nation vanish from the face of the earth..." (unquote). (p. 2). SHOULD HOLOCAUST-SURVIVOR TESTIMONIES BE PRIVILEGED? Annette Wieviorka, the author, treats Holocaust-survivor accounts with some skepticism, (quote) Lucy Dawidowicz expressed an opinion shared by most of her colleagues: "The transcribed testimonies I have examined have been full of errors in dates, names of participants, and places, and there are evident misunderstandings of the events themselves." Thus, for Dawidowicz, nothing can be salvaged from testimony, which is seen as incapable of reporting facts in a pure positivist mode and, above all, incapable of generating a historically accurate narrative. (unquote). (pp. xiii-xiv). [To see the original quote from Dawidowicz, and in more detail, please click on The Holocaust and the Historians, and read the detailed Peczkis review.] Evidently, the assessment of survivor testimonies by Dawidowicz, and even more that of Wieviorka, is diametrically opposite of that of neo-Stalinist authors such as Jan T. Gross and Jan Grabowski. The latter two seriously state that Jewish Holocaust survivor testimonies should automatically be accepted as factual, as they are the voice of victims. [As if this fact automatically conferred reliability, or as if Poles under the Nazi occupation were not also victims.] Clearly, historic objectivity requires that no one group's testimonies should be privileged, or otherwise exempt from the normal processes of historical scrutiny.

What is the role of survivor testimony in Holocaust remembrance? Today such recollections are considered among the most compelling and important historical sources we have, but this has not always been true. In *The Era of the Witness*, a concise, rigorously argued, and provocative work of cultural and intellectual history, Annette Wieviorka seeks to answer this surpassingly complex question. She analyzes the conditions under which survivor testimonies have been produced, how they have been received over time, and how the testimonies shaped the construction of history and collective memory. Wieviorka discerns three successive phases in the evolution of the roles and images of the Holocaust witness. The first phase is marked by the testimony left by those who did not survive the Holocaust but managed nevertheless to record their experiences. The second, most important, phase is centered on the Eichmann trial, which for Wieviorka is the moment (1961-1962) when a broad cultural deafness to survivors' stories was replaced by the image of the witness as "bearer of history." The author follows the changing nature of the witness into a third phase, which she calls "the era of the witness." Especially concerned with the pedagogical and political uses to which survivor testimony has been put, Wieviorka examines factors that determine when and how survivor testimonies are incorporated into the larger narrative of the Holocaust, according it a privileged place in our understanding. By exploring the ways in which the Holocaust is remembered, *The Era of the Witness* also deepens our understanding of how testimony can help to define not only twentieth-century history but also more recent episodes of mass killing that are only now "becoming history."

"Wieviorka retraces the evolution of the figure of the Holocaust witness and analyzes the different, and sometimes competing, uses of Holocaust testimonies, with the rigor and clarity that perfectly suits her subject." *Le Monde* "A reflection on the production of Holocaust testimonies, their evolution in time, and their part in the construction of the collective memory." *Libération* "Written by one of France's leading historians of the Holocaust, *The Era of the Witness* is a fascinating and readable exploration of the emergence of survivor testimony into the public sphere. Annette Wieviorka's provocative yet sensitive account will be of interest to all who are concerned with the legacies of the Holocaust and other traumatic histories. Jared Stark's beautiful translation makes this essential work accessible to a new audience." Michael Rothberg, author of *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* and coeditor of *The Holocaust: Theoretical Readings* "This book on witnessing itself bears witness to a close, careful, and often difficult engagement with a vast array of testimonies in different genres and media. It raises the question of how empathy and unsettlement provoked by testimonies may be combined with resistance to a cult of intimacy, a confusion of empathy with identification, and an impairment of the critical perspective necessary for writing history." Dominick LaCapra, Cornell University, author of *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* From the Back Cover "Written by one of France's leading historians of the Holocaust, *The Era of the Witness* is a fascinating and

readable exploration of the emergence of survivor testimony into the public sphere. Annette Wieviorka's provocative yet sensitive account will be of interest to all who are concerned with the legacies of the Holocaust and other traumatic histories. Jared Stark's beautiful translation makes this essential work accessible to a new audience."--Michael Rothberg, author of *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* and coeditor of *The Holocaust: Theoretical Readings* "This book on witnessing itself bears witness to a close, careful, and often difficult engagement with a vast array of testimonies in different genres and media. It raises the question of how empathy and unsettlement provoked by testimonies may be combined with resistance to a cult of intimacy, a confusion of empathy with identification, and an impairment of the critical perspective necessary for writing history."—Dominick LaCapra, Cornell University, author of *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* About the Author Annette Wieviorka, Director of Research at Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, is the author of many books, including *Auschwitz Explained to My Child*. Jared Stark teaches in the Department of Literature at Eckerd College. Jared Stark is Assistant Professor of Literature at Eckerd College.