Preface

For the past several decades, fascinating scholarship has been produced on the cultural history of the two world wars. The works of Paul Fussell, George Mosse, John Keegan, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, Annette Becker, Jay Winter, and others pointed the way toward a fuller integration of the ideological, intellectual, cultural, and political elements that were needed for a more comprehensive understanding of this violent period, from 1914 to 1945.

As it recedes in time from us, the era of the world wars can increasingly appear as a modern Thirty Years' War. And this emerging perspective can allow us to perceive in new ways, and with greater accuracy, the commonalities, linkages, evolutions, and passions that drove these conflicts of an unprecedented scale, and how they were remembered and represented afterwards. Yet such recent scholarship in cultural history has focused mostly on Western Europe, without fully including the experience of East-Central and Eastern Europe in this devastating period. Indefensible as they are, the compartmentalizations of the bygone Cold War endure, with postcommunist regions still left out of the enlarged narrative.

The present volume, however, is a distinctive contribution to help remedy this problem. Themes that are universal (exile, loss, trauma, survival, memory) and the undying subjects of art and artistic efforts at representation, here find specific expression. The case of Lithuania and its diverse populations is revealed in its full significance for a modern European history of the impact of the age of the world wars.

This collection presents new research on a rich and varied cast of characters: German soldiers of the Kaiser strolling the streets of Vilnius and becoming military personifications of Walter Benjamin's celebrated *flaneur*; German-Jewish artists fascinated by the depth of Lithuanian

Jewish life revealed before them; a contemporary photographer whose archival digging unearths vast troves of photographs of doomed civilians subjected to Soviet repression; freezing artists struggling to keep the will to create under Nazi occupation, then dealing with loss of homeland in refugee camps; composers seeking to give musical form to their vision of war. The studies also reveal paradoxical and telling dynamics: how (in explicit contrast to the hallowed British memory of the Great War) memory of World War I was sidelined in Lithuania under a series of very different governmental systems; how the sorrowful genre of “memorial books” for Jewish communities destroyed in the Holocaust was anticipated in the interwar genre of German-Jewish artists and writers recalling their wartime encounter with these places; how the virtual archives produced by documentary films of tragedies like the siege of Leningrad open larger questions of representation and historical accuracy. There is special merit in these texts when they explicitly engage comparisons with other national experiences: British, Latvian, and French. Most of all, these studies raise strikingly new questions and themes for further research.

Taken together, this evocative and wide-ranging set of studies is a forceful demonstration of how much the experience of this region, largely neglected until now, needs to be integrated into evolving scholarship on the era of the world wars. The collection diagnoses the challenge of achieving an enlarged historical and artistic perspective, and then goes on to meet it.

Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius

Lindsay Young Professor of History
Director, Center for the Study of War and Society
University of Tennessee, USA