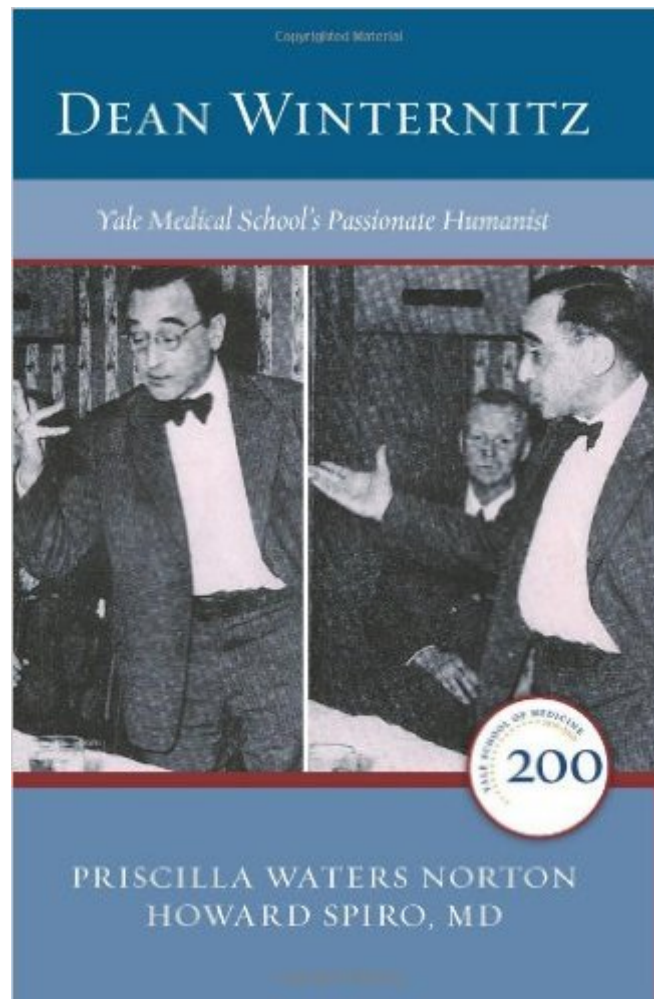


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Dean Winternitz: Yale Medical School's Passionate Humanist



Synopsis

MILTON WINTERNITZ Dr. Milton Winternitz, Dean of Yale Medical School from 1920 -1935, was confident of his own wisdom and right-thinking. He hoped to turn that New Haven school from a local medical training center to the national and international research institution it has become. He simplified the educational program, certain that graduate students, freed from compulsory attendance at lectures, would learn for themselves. "Winter," as he liked to be called, strengthened the requirement that students carry out a research project before graduation. He established the nursing school, the psychiatry department, supported the epidemiology and public health activities. Most important, he brought about a full-time salaried academic faculty. But his real love, his enthusiasm, lay in humanizing the medical curriculum, in the 1920s beginning to verge on the purely scientific. In his short-lived Institute for Human Relations, he hoped to bring Yale Law and Divinity schools down to the medical area, and to encourage a far more humanistic approach to medical training. If he had succeeded, medical students would become science-based but fully aware of the psychological and social origin of much of their complaints. But Winternitz was a Jew in a Christian society. In order to fulfill his ambitions and remain at his post, he yielded to the prejudices of the time in limiting the admission of Jews, Italian Catholics, and African-Americans to the medical school. For that he has been vilified, and only in this 1910 200th Anniversary celebration, are his contributions finally getting the recognition they have long deserved. Here we present a bio-memoir of this remarkable man.

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Customer Reviews

I had bought this out of interest in Winternitz's life and career; in particular as his time as Dean at Yale provides some instructive history of an academically-minded physician from the first generation of Johns Hopkins trainees attempting to spread the new science-based medical curriculum to other institutions (and of attempts to turn around one of the classically moribund medical schools of that era). Unhappily, this book is no help. There is little organization to the writing; figures come and go and reappear, and the authors try to jump ahead without providing context or the back-story behind the institution. Worse, the number of factual errors is disturbing: William Welch did not come to Hopkins to "work under Councilman" [his assistant] - quite the reverse. The famous painting of the Four Doctors is by Sargent (not "Eakins") and it's the "Laura Spelman Rockefeller Foundation" (not "Alora Spelman Rockefeller"). Just a few sampled from the first 50 pages... I'm unsure if you can trust the authors with accuracy in the biography, when they don't seem to have fact-checked very basic material. Readers who want deeper history of the early 20th Century revolution in medicine are better served by Ludmerer's "Time to Heal," Michael Bliss's bios of Wm Osler and Harvey Cushing, or a little-publicized but superb bio of Everts Graham (of Washington U., St Louis) by C Barber Mueller. But don't buy this one...

I always wanted to know more about Winternitz and Yale medical School. The information about Colonel Ullman is especially interesting since he is related to my wife's family.

I was happy to see that a biography of Dean Winternitz was written. I heard so much about him when I was a pathology resident at Yale in the 1960s. I enjoyed the book and the rare opportunity to understand him and his influence on the medical school. The book was exhaustive to the point sometime of unnecessary repetition, but it was a great service to those of us who wanted to know more about the man and his times.

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