

Panel 3

Bourne Today

George Packer: I'm the moderator, so I'd better take control of this panel. But I hope it'll become self-moderating. I want to thank Allan for just doing this. I mean, what a great idea. And when you called me months ago, I thought, "Nice thought, Randolph Bourne." I had no idea that it would be so full-blown and moving and well-thought through.

I started reading Randolph Bourne when I was writing a book about American liberalism called *Blood of the Liberals*, and I felt like I had discovered him myself. And now I find out there are all sorts of other people who discovered him themselves, and there's a kind of a community of Bournians, and it's just wonderful to have so many of them in a room together.

But Bourne didn't really . . . our topic is, I think, Bourne and today. And for me, Bourne did not come up to today until after I wrote the book. And then war reentered American life in a big way the following year. And I began to remember some things that Bourne had written and I went back to them. And throughout the buildup to the Iraq war I was conflicted, and in one ear I had the voice of Randolph Bourne, quite insistent and rather mocking, saying certain things. And I just wanted to read two of them and then begin, just to get these words out into the air.

It was his essays from the war period that most struck me and stayed with me, especially "War and the Intellectuals" and "Twilight of the Idols," and his "War Diary." And they were not published by his former employer, the *New Republic*. They were published in a journal called *Seven Arts*, a short-lived journal, because the *New Republic* wouldn't allow him to publish in its pages anymore because he had broken from the line of the editors of the *New Republic*, who were extremely strong advocates for U.S. intervention in Europe.

So here's one thing that Bourne wrote about, essentially, his former comrades at the *New Republic*, I think especially John Dewey, but also some of the others, too: "The realist thinks he at least can control events by linking himself to the forces that are moving. Perhaps he can. But if it is a question of controlling war it is difficult to see how the child on the back of a mad elephant is to be any more effective in stopping the beast than is the child who tries to stop him from the ground."

And in another essay:

War determines its own end. Victory and government crushes out automatically all forces that deflect or threaten to deflect energy from the path of organization to that end. All governments will act in this way, the most democratic as well as the most autocratic. It is only liberal naïveté that is shocked at arbitrary coercion and suppression. Willing war means willing all the evils that are organically bound up with it. A good many people still seem to believe in a peculiar kind of democratic and antiseptic war. The pacifists oppose the war because they knew this was an illusion and because of the myriad hurts they knew war would do to the promise of democracy at home. For once the babes and sucklings seem to have been wiser than the children of light.

For me these words were just inevitable and inescapable during the buildup to the Iraq war, because so much of the talk about the war coming from the pro-war side sounded like the illusions that Bourne was pointing to in World War I, and they came from similar kinds of people, intellectuals, many of whom had ardent beliefs in progress and in the good and in the common good and in internationalism and in all sorts of things that progressives believe in. And they had been Bourne's comrades, and suddenly they were taking those ideals off to war in Europe, and they left Bourne behind. And I think in the case of World War I, Bourne really did have the last word.

But I guess I just wanted to throw open to the others, whom I should introduce. Benj DeMott, at the far right, is a writer and editor for the radical newspaper *First of the Month*, and three-time recipient of, I guess it's a grant for the Fund for Creative Communities. Do you want to add anything to your bio?

Benj DeMott: Well, I would say that *First of the Month* is a newspaper that has published arguments on both sides of the war, and I think it was just sort of striking, because obviously on the left it's either one line or the other, especially since Hitchens left the *Nation*. And I think the most striking thing I would say probably about the pro-war argufiers on our side is that they are specialists in abuse of a very high caliber. I'm not one of them, as a matter of fact, although I'm pro-war. So I would just say that our newspaper has had, as I say, positions on both sides.

George Packer: And Todd Gitlin is a professor right here of journalism and sociology at Columbia, a board member of *Dissent* and the *American Scholar*, author of many books, most recently *Letters to a Young Activist*.

I'm George Packer, I'm a staff writer at the *New Yorker*. Michael True is the author of *An Energy Field More Intense Than War: The Nonviolent Tradition in American Literature*. Do you want to add anything to that?

And Fred Dewey is director of Beyond Baroque, the leading literary-arts center in Los Angeles, writer and community activist. He's also the great-grandson of John Dewey, and a longtime student of his relative's work and his times.

I'm wondering if any of the others have felt this return of Bourne in the last year or two. It seems to me that the Iraq war and its aftermath resemble the First World War perhaps more than the other two conflicts that the Iraq war has been most often compared to, which was Vietnam and World War II in some ways. And I just wonder if others have been feeling drawn back to him and whether there are lessons to be learned and what your thoughts are.

Michael True: I don't know about the other panelists, but that's what I'm going to talk about in my presentation, so yes, I think he's incredibly timely. And in fact, reading his essays, as many people have commented, you'd think they were written ten minutes ago. Unfortunately, I think that what happened is that all the things that Bourne feared, we're living in the middle of, but I'll say more about that later.

Fred Dewey: Well, I think you're exactly right. I'll . . . are we going to give a presentation? What's the format here?

George Packer: The format is up to you. If you have a presentation to give, you should.

Fred Dewey: No, I mean I don't want to be formal. I think the country is facing a complete moral, political, and spiritual collapse. And I think the country . . . not actually. I would say perhaps not even *country* in the sense that Bourne uses the word in "The Fragment of the State," where he refers to the country as really the people . . . but I think the political order has suffered a complete moral, political, and spiritual collapse. I just got back from Europe, a month in Berlin, which is not a place one would think of going to have perspective on this, and it seems quite apparent to me, and the thing that is most frightening to me is that on returning to the country I can feel the sense of this slowly draining away from me, I can feel that, well, actually things are really quite all right here. And I think that of course that's not the case, and I think that Bourne's arguments are crucial because what he described has become completely institutionalized.

George Packer: Do you want to add anything to that?

Todd Gitlin: I'd rather wait until I present my presentation.

George Packer: Well, then why don't we begin with the presentations then? Who wants to begin?

Benj DeMott: I'm going to read fast, OK? So I apologize for that, but I've got a fair amount to say, so I'll zip. OK. I'm going to read a streamlined, not to say amputated, version of a piece I wrote last summer on Iraq for *First of the Month*, the occasional tabloid I've coedited for the last five years.

I jump off from a passage of Bourne's and then come back to him in the course of the essay, relying on him to help frame my thinking about Iraq headlines, to use a phrase from the summary of this panel's mandate. I should say straight up, however, that this piece wasn't conceived as a testimony to the relevance of Bourne's anti-war essays; it was written in response to a letter by Howard Zinn which we published in *First* under the title "An Avuncular No." Zinn criticized *First* writers who had made a radical case for the invasion of Iraq. While *First* doesn't have a correct line on this, or any issue, unlike most newspapers and journals of the Left we have published sharp argufiers on both sides of the ongoing argument about Iraq.

Howard Zinn's invocation of leftists who supported American intervention in World War I sent me back to Randolph Bourne's critique of that war and those Progressives. "The penalty a realist pays," said Bourne, "for accepting war is to see disappear one by one the justifications for accepting it. He must either become a genuine Realpolitiker and brazen it through, or else he must feel sorry for his intuition and be regretful that he willed the war. But so easy is forgetting and so slow the change of events that he is more likely to ignore the collapse of his case. . . . He soon becomes satisfied with tacitly ratifying whatever happens, or at least straining to find the grain of implausible hope that may be latent in the situation."

I'd like to claim that Bourne's prophecy relates only to regretful realists on the Right who are reeling most recently from the Senate report confirming failures of American intelligence. After all, pro-war leftists register skepticism of the adminis-

tration's winnowed-down rationale, i.e., WMD, for the invasion of Iraq, and Kanan Makiyain [in] particular pressed for a reaffirmation of the American commitment to democracy until Bush himself used the *d* word in the run-up to Operation Iraqi Freedom. Still, during the past year I found myself straining, and sometimes failing, to find reasons to believe my own idealistic justifications for the war. Last fall, for example, I was shaken by a story about a U.S. soldier who'd been blinded in combat after the invasion. The now-disabled and often-despairing young man was asked to talk at a local public school, where a student asked him if he enjoyed meeting any Iraqis. The blind soldier iced that schoolboy's kinder, gentler fantasy: "I don't have Iraqi friends." The soldier's talk back was enough to chill anyone like me who had warmed up to the idea that Bush's war might be taken as an antifascist act of solidarity with suffering Iraqis. "So far everyone has been wrong about something," wrote pro-war Brit journalist David Aaronovitch soon after the fall of Baghdad. Aaronovitch—whose columns on Iraq in the *Observer* (that's the U.K.) had been informed by an Orwellian commitment to keep his opinions on the square—criticized his own "stupid" failure to imagine Iraqis' "unbearable ambivalence" toward the idea of being freed by an outsider. "It is one thing, after all, to be liberated from someone else; it's quite another thing to be liberated from yourself."

When Aaronovitch visited Iraq soon after Fallujah erupted and Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi militia went to extremes among the Shia, he allowed the silent majority's ambivalence about "armed resistance" might render the situation in country "intractable." Yet even though he bought out of beamishness early, Aaronovitch has never failed to understand what's at stake in Iraq. His reading of a *Washington Post* piece about University of Baghdad students underscores why it seems disingenuous to downgrade, as Mr. Zinn did, "the value of Saddam's fall." The students in question were

. . . genuinely bad-mouthing the Americans.

Then one of them, a chemistry student, told his questioner: "The difference is that now, none of us will be killed for expressing our opinion." It was, he said, "a huge difference, like between the earth and the sky."

Making a huge difference was what progressive politics was supposed to be all about.

Aaronovitch may be the one pro-war arguier who doesn't have to apologize to the Iraqi people for Abu Ghraib. Aaronovitch wrote a blistering piece about Guantánamo last fall, accusing the Bush administration of becoming the "state version of hostage-takers in Beirut." He predicted American policy toward prisoners of the "War on Terror" was a human-rights disaster waiting to happen. When the Abu Ghraib story broke, Aaronovitch laid into the lowdown torturers and high officials for their acts and inaction, but their acts and inaction didn't move him to equate the American occupiers with Saddam's regime or with the regimes of other Arab rulers and wannabes who have no qualms about their own reliance on torture. Aaronovitch's column ended with a postscript directed at Brits who claimed that everything wrong in Iraq could be traced back to the original decision to invade the country: "Whatever the rights and wrongs of the invasion of Iraq, this much is certain: had it not been for this 'basic mistake,' far worse things would be happening to Iraqis in Abu Ghraib every single day. Unphotographed."

While Aaronovitch's earned moral clarity provided some comfort last spring, I knew I didn't deserve to have my mind eased. What I deserved were Randolph Bourne's stony words in my passway, especially his reminder about "the luxuriant releases of explosive hatred for which peace apparently gives too little scope," and his insistence, "Keep your country out of situations where such expressive releases take place." Once the invasion of Iraq was on, I claimed in *First* the choice came down to "war or torture," and my now-false antithesis indicates I wasn't mindful enough about how difficult it would be to keep "luxuriant releases of explosive hatred" in check.

While Bourne's warnings to would-be pragmatists remain irrelevant, not all aspects of his or Howard Zinn's analysis seem right on time. American intellectuals helped will American intervention into World War I—"herd-intellect became herd-instinct," in Bourne's phrase. But in our time the Progressive professoriat has been overwhelmingly opposed to the war in Iraq. It may be the opinions of the "Iraqodox" have more in common with Bourne's "herd-intellect" than the deeply unfashionable positions taken by pro-war leftists. I apologize to Howard Zinn if he feels I'm traducing his "Left" again, but there's something to be said for the following summary of anti-war stances which I found on the Web, where it was offered in response to a critique of Rumsfeld that jumped off from his famous eighties handshake with Saddam:

Rather than going to war, the U.S. should have tried peaceful diplomatic engagement with the ruler of sovereign Iraq, but without shaking hands. Remember, Saddam was brutal dictator who we were wrong for supporting, and it was wrong of us to overthrow him. If this diplomacy failed, we should have continued our policy of economic sanctions against Iraq, rather than the brutal policy of economic sanctions against Iraq. And remember, Saudis were the majority of terrorists on 9/11, so rather than attacking an oil-rich terrorist-supporting Arab nation, it would have made more logical sense to attack an oil-rich terrorist-supporting Arab nation, which of course would be wrong. Also, the war on Iraq diverted us from the war in Afghanistan. And the war in Afghanistan is wrong. And we're being distracted from the War on Terror. And the War on Terror is a straw man.

I know this all sounds very contradictory, inconsistent, and incoherent, so I'll simplify it: Whatever the administration or the U.S. does is wrong and, if they do the opposite, that will be wrong, too.

Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* suffers from this sort of incoherence anatomized above, though his class angle seems sharp when he captures the rumble of self-satisfied laughter that rolls through a GOP crowd when Bush jokingly defines his political base: "the haves and the have-mores." Moore's anti-Americanism, however, trumps his populism. This is Moore's letter; it's on his Web site actually. It wasn't in the movie, of course. "I oppose the U.N. or anyone else risking the lives of their citizens to extract us from our debacle. I'm sorry, but the majority of Americans supported this war once it began and, sadly, that majority must now sacrifice their children until enough blood has been let that maybe—just maybe—God and the Iraqi people will forgive us in the end."

Randolph Bourne was a socialist who counseled his readers to hold out for a cause worth fighting for, the international class struggle. But Moore and many others on

the Left aren't content to remain above the battle. They urge their audience to identify with the "armed resistance" in Iraq. Here's Moore: "The Iraqis who have risen up against the occupation are not 'insurgents' or 'terrorists' or 'The Enemy.' They are the REVOLUTION, the Minutemen, and their numbers will grow—and they will win." Others on the left have managed to project their own politics on the Iraqi "resistance." A member of the influential Midnight Notes Collective, which is largely responsible for talk of the "new Enclosures" and "the Commons" that has become so common in the discourse of antiglobalists and Greens, offered an analysis that treats the various Iraqi insurgencies as a "many-headed Hydra"—a characterization that's taken on a ghoulish edge since Berg's decapitation—engaged in a class struggle against America's latest efforts to enforce a privatizing new world order.

The *Nation's* Naomi Klein imagined that she was all up in that struggle a couple of months back, when she had the Sunnis and Shiites "on the verge of building a common front" and imaged Moqtada al-Sadr as a cross between "Ayatollah Khomeini and Che Guevara." According to Klein, Sadr's army claimed "hundreds of thousands of members," and she dutifully engaged in further transparent rumor mongering, passing on complaints from "Sadr's office"—"U.S. soldiers . . . crudely shredded photographs of the Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the top Shiite cleric"—and speculating on the motives behind the campaign against the Mehdi militia: "Here's one possible answer," said Klein. "Washington has given up on plans to hand over power to an interim Iraqi government on June 30, and is now creating the chaos it needs to declare the handover impossible."

That answer has expired. But the Iraqodox are never at a loss for explanation, so here's a couple of questions for them. When David Aaronovitch talked to one of Sadr's representatives in Baghdad there were two things that concerned this cleric about the new Iraq. "The first was the rights of minorities to exercise a constitutional veto, which he opposed, and the second—more substantial—concerned his rejection of a code enshrining equality for women. He wanted it to be illegal to dress 'immodestly,' for example. This was his red line." Are Progressives like Naomi Klein who sympathize with Iraq's armed resistance aware they are following his line? Klein went to Iraq, but maybe she'd have been better off staying home here and checking out the Web, where an Iraqi blogger recently described an inspiring moment in a district-council session broadcast on local TV in the city of Samawa. This is the quote. "A woman stood up wearing the traditional costume and behind her was a group of women, she started to yell in the face of the chairman of the council saying: 'Listen to me! You can't ignore our voice anymore. These women elected me and put their trust in me and I demand authorities like those of men. My voice will not stay low from now and I have to give those who elected me what they need.'" My wonder at this woman's courage was amplified by a story I came across last year about initial efforts to hold local elections in Iraq. The civil-affairs officers in charge of one town had to explain to husbands who had left their wives at home and showed up ready to vote twice that their wives had a right to choose for themselves. I'm burning to find out how that woman in Samawa came to break the barrier of fear and stand up for herself and her sisters. The Iraqi blogger who observed her on Samawa TV offered his own analysis of her behavior. "It simply means that we have moved tens of years forward in a matter of months and we have broken the chains of a long dark past. The cry of this woman was enough to awaken me to the great progress that happened." He may be dreaming, but "whatever the rights and wrongs of the Iraq invasion," why is the "we were right" Left sleeping on the

possibility of a humanist politics in Iraq?

Here's one possible answer that might have some truth in it. There's not a lot Americans can do to help. What goes down from now on in Iraq is pretty much up to Iraqis, yet the Left should hold onto the principle of solidarity. Deep structures of feeling link that Iraqi woman with grassroots struggles in America, as the opening and best scene of *Fahrenheit 9/11* reminded me. As I watched the Senate with Al Gore presiding quash efforts by black members of the people's House of Representatives to challenge the legitimacy of Bush's election, I flashed on the image of Fannie Lou Hamer giving hell to LBJ and mainline Democrats at the 1964 convention. Those black House members were her heirs, and that Iraqi woman is Fannie Lou's sister, too.

Todd Gitlin: I want to talk a bit about Bourne's great unfinished essay on the state. In this essay, which part of whose poignancy is its unfinished quality, Bourne would appear to be the great anti-Whitman, the deplorer of America's failed vitality. In this argument, war is the illness that wrecks the great democratic design. "The moment war is declared," he wrote, "the mass of the people through some spiritual alchemy become convinced that they have willed and executed the deed themselves." This was, I think, a profound insight into the nature of societies, not only American society. War, in other words, as Bourne saw it, inverted the will. Those who made war convinced the mass to be, in his words, "regimented, coerced, deranged." Deranged. "The form this derangement takes," Bourne said in 1918, "is that the people believe that they are exercising their will, when in fact they are reduced to nothing but implements of the will of those who command the state."

Bourne was unable to envision patriotism as the lyric of the republic which was, I think, Whitman's achievement. To Bourne in 1918 . . . crucially, fifty years after Whitman's most important writing . . . to Bourne, patriotism was nothing but the glory of the state. And the most damning thing he wrote about patriotism was that "The patriot loses all sense of the distinction between state, nation, and government." What did he mean by these terms? *Nation* for him was synonymous with country. *Nation* was where you lived, *nation* was the sum of the way of life, the customs, the literature and art that made up a collective life. It was not a political concept. *Government* was the machinery by which the state carried out its functions. And the state—well, the state was something mystical for Bourne. "It signifies," he said, "a group in its aggressive aspects." The state was truculent; the state was always looking for war with other states. *Government* was the word made flesh, but the *state* was the word, and therefore dangerous. The state was a mystical force. And it was in this connection that he wrote these famous, deservedly famous, words, "War is the health of the State." What he meant was that war is good for coercion, orchestration, and the rest of the devices which we've come to associate with authoritarian and even totalitarian governments.

War entailed the enforcement of war orthodoxy. In one of his arresting phrases, "War entailed a rage for loyal conformity." And the government was then assigned the task of enforcing domestic penalties against those so audacious as to dissent. War was therefore the fuel or the forage of a collective identity. It delivered a transcendence of self. It conveyed the possibility . . . or, more than conveyed, it created the possibility of the individual melting down from the burdens of his or her separate existence, melting down into the herd. The triumph of something that in other

connections Bourne might have thought was a virtue, namely gregariousness.

Bourne would have recognized George Bush's form of thought. I think George Bush's form of thought is war incarnate. And Bourne, who flirted with psychoanalytic thinking at this early stage, was acutely aware of the way in which war and war-mindedness responded to and cultivated what he considered an infantile regression. Here's some of the language in which he spoke about the fusion of human powers in war-mindedness. This is from the essay on "The State":

Psychologists recognize the gregarious impulse as one of the strongest primitive pulls which keeps together the herds of the different species of higher animals. Mankind is no exception. Our pugnacious evolutionary history has prevented the impulse from ever dying out. This gregarious impulse is the tendency to imitate, to conform, to coalesce together, and is most powerful when the herd believes itself threatened with attack. Animals crowd together for protection, and men become most conscious of their collectivity at the threat of war. Consciousness of collectivity brings confidence and a feeling of mass strength, which in turn arouses pugnacity, and the battle is on. In civilized man, the gregarious impulse acts not only to produce concerted action for defense, but also to produce identity of opinion. Since thought is a form of behavior, the gregarious impulse floods up into its realms and demands that sense of uniform thought which wartime produces so successfully. And it is in this flooding of the conscious life of society that gregariousness works its havoc.

When I read this passage, I thought of George Bush's comment as cited in Ron Suskind's very important, very revealing book *The Price of Loyalty*, which is based largely on the memories of Paul O'Neill as secretary of Treasury in the first couple years of the Bush administration. Bush says at one point, when asked whether it wouldn't rather be preferable to hear conflicting opinions on important policy questions . . . Bush says at one point, "Why would I negotiate with myself?" Why would I negotiate with myself? The mass that Bourne feared is the mind of George Bush. But it is not . . . and it is our tragedy, though possibly a reversible tragedy . . . it is not George Bush's self-meltdown alone that is problematic. What George Bush represents is a fusion of images and themes which never rise to the level of thought. They are ideation before thought, or without thought. George Bush's supporters, in the main, are people who believe that it has been demonstrated that there was an operating connection between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda. They overlap substantially with the population that believes that at least one—and more likely some or most—of the hijackers of September 11 were Iraqi. And a considerable number of those people to this day, despite all evidence, believe that weapons of mass destruction have been found in Iraq. This is the Groucho theory of international relations: Who are you going to believe, me or your own eyes?

Now, Bourne belongs to a time before fascism and before Stalinism. He belongs to the time, what we might call the sunrise of reason. He is still a child of the Enlightenment. And therefore he believed that there was a substantial population that, relatively speaking, was immune to the seductions and self-sacrifices . . . I mean *intellectual* self-sacrifices . . . of war-mindedness. He believed, in particular, that the working class was less vulnerable to the herd instinct which he found so ferocious and destructive. If it was true then . . . and that's questionable . . . it is certainly no longer true. Bourne considered war, and I quote, "Almost an upper-class

sport." Well, those times are gone. He recognized, however, that part of the power of war as a source of coherence and social connection was in its encouragement of the punishment of opinion. He recognized the ruthlessness of war as an implement for the suppression of individuality.

Bourne noted, by the way—and this is foresightful—that even at a time when the suppression of antiwar sentiment far outdistances anything that we've known since, certainly in the most recent war; but Bourne noted that the search for heresy during World War I outdid the actual finding of enemies. And we are familiar with that again today in John Ashcroft's America, when not a single terrorist has actually been convicted of a crime, despite all the beating of the drums.

In Bourne's time, the state demanded its loyalty in absolutes. "Watch what you say" was more than a casual remark by an Ari Fleischer mouthpiece, more than a small contribution to the vocabulary of state mindlessness. It was, during World War I in America, a holy and wholly enforced principle. Today we still have debates, and this is an achievement. I wonder how Bourne would have understood it.

Bourne thought the war would drown the American hope once and for all. He was probably right. It did drown a hope, and what followed it in the rest of the dreadful twentieth century certainly contributes to that drowning. The current talk . . . or, I should say now, policy . . . of endless war, war on terror, promises another great flood. However, there is one element of the current situation that I think Bourne would have marveled at, and it is in my view the fact that we are at a cusp moment. I mean right now, October 11, 2004, with three weeks to run before the presidential election. We are at a cusp moment because we are at a moment of politics. And it's striking to me in Bourne's account of the relations among the state, the government, and the nation, that he did not find, or could not find, a moment in his analysis for politics. We have that moment; we are in that potentially redemptive moment. A victory for Bush would be more than a victory for Bush, it would be a victory for the truculent unreason, the antireason that Bush incarnates, that inspires his followers, and therefore unreason would prevail on the part of a herd that wishes to be a herd. A victory for George Bush in this election would not be a victory of naïveté or unknowingness; it would be a victory for a way of state action, of which we have seen plenty and of which we would, I think, almost surely see plenty more in the sequel. A victory for Bush, I think, would spell the conquest of America by the sort of soft machine that terrified Randolph Bourne. And a victory for John Kerry, not the millennium, but a victory for the possibility of one of the great offerings of democracy, namely the possibility of self-correction, which is the reward and prerequisite of reason, and the promise of self-government.

Michael True: Thank you very much. This has been an extraordinary day and I'm so grateful to everyone involved and all the contributors. I'm going to try not to repeat things that have been said before, and what I want really to concentrate on is to set a context. My talk is called "Randolph Bourne in Context," and we've had some very good work in that regard earlier in the day. I thought Robert Westbrook's setting Bourne within the context of what he called "the Wilsonian Right and the Wilsonian Left," he really set Bourne in the present context in an extremely useful way. Also, I thought professors Miller and Longmore set Bourne within the context of his handicap, something that, although I've known Bourne a long time, I had not paid enough attention to, and I think, really, is a tremendous contribution of this

particular forum.

But there are two other contexts that I think are really essential, and that is the context of his aesthetics, of the lively arts of early modernism, which he contributed a great deal to by his literary criticism, his essays on Theodore Dreiser, his essays on the new poetry, Amy Lowell, his sensitivity to so many things that were happening in the precursors, you might say, or the persons who, like Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy and others, who sort of prepared the way for early modernism in a very important way. So that context, the fact that Scofield Thayer, the editor of the most important literary magazine in the history of American literature, chose Bourne as his political writer . . . Bourne died and could not fulfill that appointment, and Scofield Thayer said, "No, I'm not going to choose anybody else." It was in the *Dial* in 1920 that the autobiographical "Fragment" of Bourne first appeared. So the aesthetics and the lively arts of Bourne are absolutely crucial. One might say that the political vigor of, and the force in which he was immersed, disappeared, was destroyed by the war, by the Red scare, by the incredibly repressive laws, not unlike the PATRIOT Act that would follow very soon. But the aesthetics and the lively arts began to flourish; that is, in early modernism so much of what he looked for, as I will try to illustrate, did come into being. It's just sad that he didn't see and hear the poems of Eliot and Pound, even though they appeared in the very magazine in which his last essay appeared.

Having lived with Bourne's writings for over forty years . . . since completing a dissertation on his development as a writer as both a social and literary critic . . . I continue to be amazed at the way in which we return to him again and again, especially in times of social destabilization, that is, in the thirties . . . has been pointed out . . . and in the sixties. I've always remembered that in Noam Chomsky's first book on foreign policy, *American Power and the New Mandarins*, there's an extended discussion, not unlike what we heard earlier, an extended discussion of Randolph Bourne and, my God, if anybody has been faithful in that vocation of being an intellectual who's taken on almost everything in the war-making state, it's been Noam Chomsky.

One characteristic . . . Bourne was so very good at identifying the characteristics that were unleashed by the war. "The use of the war technique" and "the riveting of the war on the public"; those are direct quotes, and obviously one characteristic of the war fever that absolutely infuriated him—as it did Dwight Macdonald—was the complicity of the intellectuals, often at the expense of the university, the media, and cultural institutions.

So the other context I want to look at which has not been mentioned is that to understand the time in which Bourne was living and writing in 1917, 1918 . . . have we forgotten how incredibly repressive that was? What it unleashed? How the forces . . . the political forces that were unleashed . . . absolutely destroyed the socialist movement, destroyed the labor movement? It didn't recover for another ten years. This was the atmosphere in which he was trying to write, and so when we quote individual essays like "On the Idols," I think it's really important that we understand the time in Bourne's life in which they were written. In other words, there's great value to look at "Trans-National America" or "The Twilight of Idols" or any of the singular essays, and critique them and also evaluate them in terms of their usefulness at the present, but I think it's really important also . . . if we're going to decide why

is Randolph Bourne useful . . . [to] look at the total picture of who he was and what he was. I'm not pretending to do that, but I'm trying to offer a couple of things that I think need to be considered.

Several commentators have suggested, in other words, that Bourne is useful (it's one of his favorite words, by the way) and that he offers us, in one sense—as Van Wyck Brooks liked to say—he offers us a usable past as an alternative to the war-making present. Impelled by the values he embraced, he fulfilled again and again the responsibility of the man of letters, or the intellectual. Allen Tate, however, called the man of letters the one who publishes “his discriminations of the staggering abuses of language and thus of choices and ends that vitiate.” That is, invalidate a democratic culture. And that's where I think Bourne is really a man of letters, in the sense that [it is] his responsibility to the language, to speak up against the lying. Because of his interests and insights, each of us, of course, sees Bourne and values Bourne for particular reasons. I would say that his value rests upon two major accomplishments as a social critic and a literary journalist, his grounding in aesthetics and politics, not to mention educational philosophy, that he had a sensibility and an intelligence that enabled him, as a critic, “to keep things whole,” and not to see politics over here and art as here. He lived in a time, as I mentioned earlier, when the artists and political figures were very much bound together. Emma Goldman used to go to the Stieglitz 291 gallery all the time. She wrote about literary people, she was entranced by the plays of Ibsen and Strindberg, and wrote for the *Atlantic Monthly* when Bourne was writing. And the same is true of other of the great radicals of that time who were very friendly and, my gosh, so many of the young people who came out of the empire universities, even Harvard and Princeton, for God's sake, were socialists. Can you imagine the young John Dos Passos, a socialist? Good heavens. And then he got all that property inherited, and he kind of changed his politics. But anyway, he did great stuff.

But anyway, Bourne I think does see things whole, aesthetics and politics all together. The other is his exposing, in no uncertain terms, the dangers of the war-making state, that steamroller that was really gathering speed by 1917 and that has now really leveled almost everything in its path. Suffering the consequences of his commitment, Bourne is also a telling example of what happens—watch out, guys—what happens to writers, artists, and activists who remain faithful to the values he espoused. Observing the political scene, the academic scene, of the present, each one of us can point to literary and social critics and academics who pursued that path for a while, then saw their access to major periodicals or academic posts disappear when they no longer trimmed their sails to the mighty winds of the status quo. And that wind has been blowing awfully strongly for fifty years.

Remembering the lack of public debate prior to our two wars on Iraq, one might think that Bourne's critique of intellectuals was written yesterday, as when he called them “[a]n intellectual class gently guiding a nation through sheer force of ideas into what the other nations entered only through predatory craft or popular hysteria or militarist madness!” I'm talking about our whole culture. I'm not talking just about the war in Iraq. You know, military budget at 500 billion dollars, money spent on [the] military that would feed, clothe, educate, and provide health care for every person in the world for several years; got the figures on that. That's what you call a war culture. He wrote this while trying “to understand,” as he said, the “willingness of the American intellect to open the sluices and flood us with the sewage of the

war spirit.”

So in these brief remarks, I want to attend to the distinctive achievement. And I say some of the things, in a way, because I think often commentators, including Henry Fairlie, who did those two magnificent articles that we were suggested that we read from the *New Republic* . . . even there, I think, there was a lack of attentiveness to the context that I'm going to describe.

Several people have quoted the Dos Passos quote from *USA*, and I think that's also had an unfortunate influence in its kind of romantic view of him as “tiny, twisted bit of flesh in a black cape.” He was not at all the impossibilist that is suggested by this. At the very end of his life he was still writing essays that were certainly very strong and very critical of the state, but even in his autobiographical essay he has that sense of that other America, the possible one, that he saw disappearing. One must insist, in other words, that Bourne was by no means bitter or an impossibilist. In his critiques of the war-making state and intellectual cheerleaders who embraced the war spirit, he inevitably offered an alternative vision, and it was a vision that the editors of the *New Republic* . . . he was their first education editor that they had embraced in 1914, and then just sent down the river by 1917.

By his distinctive character as a critic, I mean the kind of synthesis and temperament that you see in “The History of a Literary Radical,” his posthumously published essay, his move toward that aesthetic is evident in commentaries for many years on the works of Dreiser, as I said; and Amy Lowell; his marvelous reviews of Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky; his reading of Bernard Shaw; the skepticism of Shaw; his interest also in Bertrand Russell, who was sort of his counterpart in England; and in many other ways, as was suggested earlier, his indebtedness to William James, that's especially obvious in Bourne's essay “A Moral Equivalent to Universal Military Service” in 1916. Bourne's reading and experience eventually led him to associate himself, in other words, with a literary tradition that included Thoreau, Whitman, and also Mark Twain, the fierce critic of American foreign policy during the Spanish-American War and the vice president, during Twain's last ten years, of the Anti-Imperialist League. He shared that, of course, with William James. And again, Bourne was very familiar with the late Twain. He was very familiar with those scathing verses and so on that Twain wrote in the tremendous disillusionment over America's behavior of killing tens of thousands of Filipinos when we seized and took over Teddy Roosevelt's little pond, that is, the Pacific.

At the same time, Bourne was challenging many of the academic critics who dominated literary criticism at the time, Paul Elmer More and Irving Babbitt, people we really no longer read. And what he looked for he was very clear about. “When Miro”—he calls himself Miro—“sees behind the minds of The Masses group a desire for form and for expressive beauty, and sees the radicals following Jacques Copeau and reading Chekhov, he smiles at the thought of the American critics, young and old, who do not know yet that they are dead.” He saw that literary criticism had exhausted itself and, in other words, we were waiting. And in the wings, of course, were the critics who would very much resemble Bourne in what they had to say. Edmund Wilson was one, and even Ezra Pound in his *ABC of Reading* and other things. And even Eliot, who uses a phrase that's very close to what Bourne talked about in “The Importance of Art,” “bringing together of thought and feeling.” So what Bourne called it was a “new classicism,” combining “power with restraint, vital-

ity with harmony, a fusion of intellect and feeling." He wanted, he said, "a keen sense of the artistic conscience, where the revolutionary world is coming out into the classic." He could not have known [about] that "the new classicism" that we now call early modernism, and its startling achievements within the next ten years or so. One almost wishes that he had lived long enough to read the poems of Wilfred Owen, the essays and novels of Virginia Woolf. And, of course, T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound's poems would actually appear in the *Dial*, alongside his last essay, and in future issues.

Another unfortunate lapse, I think, in contextualizing Bourne is the failure to mention, or forgetting, Woodrow Wilson's success in whipping up the war fever and the forces that were unleashed by his campaign, with the enthusiastic endorsement of the *New Republic* editors and others who should have known better, John Dewey. Having endorsed a peace platform in 1916, Wilson sent tens of thousands of public-relations people to promote the war one year later. What followed, as Lillian Schliessel said, was an "appalling excesses of the nation at war." After the passage of the Espionage Act in 1917, the Sedition Act of 1918, 1,500 people were arrested for disloyalty, harassment of German Americans, the breaking of windows of shops in Chicago, even the harassment of Theodore Dreiser, and especially of conscientious objectors. Four thousand COs were arrested—400 of whom went to prison and a number of whom died in Leavenworth and all the other prisons—because there was no conscientious-objection classification in the draft in the First World War. We've already heard how these harsh laws led to the firing of two professors here at Columbia: the resignation of the great economic historian Charles Beard, the imprisonment of Eugene Victor Debs in 1918, who would remain in prison until 1921. It was under the same laws that were unleashed in this period—and the work of an ambitious young lawyer by the name of J. Edgar Hoover—that Emma Goldman and her lover, Alexander Berkman, and 145 other radicals were put on a boat in 1919 and shipped out of the country. This is the legacy of the laws passed. This is the legacy of the war fever that Bourne was the first to acknowledge and recognize.

Just prior to his death, harassed by the fledgling FBI, Bourne had seen his access to journals of opinion such as the *Atlantic* and the *New Republic* disappear. Fortunately, he was able to write for the "little magazines," and for the *Seven Arts*. Not accidentally, the *Seven Arts* was edited by James Oppenheim, who'd written a wonderful, rousing poem in support of the Lawrence strike of 1912; we know it as the song "Bread and Roses." In a stroke of genius, also, Scofield Thayer—as I said, who was a friend of T. S. Eliot's and later would publish "The Wasteland" in the *Dial*—chose Bourne as his political writer. When Bourne died, Thayer published his autobiographical essay which appeared in the *Dial*, but subsequently refused to appoint anyone else to write on politics for his very influential literary journal, publishing Yeats and all the great names in early modernism.

My point is that in attending to these two aspects of Bourne's aesthetic, as well as his political concerns, not to mention just his outright courage, we rediscover, as Dwight Macdonald and Chomsky pointed out over the years, just how useful Bourne remains at the present time. This is particularly true at this moment in history, as we struggle with the scandalous consequences and cruelties of a war-making state that Bourne delineated in his literary and social criticism ninety years ago.

Fred Dewey: I thought that I would start what I have to say by perhaps politely

renouncing my great-grandfather. No, I mean I'm kind of kidding, but I think he was a great intellectual, but I also think that a lot of his great work came after World War I and was really a consequence of Randolph Bourne, to whom he really did not acknowledge a debt. And I think this is a most unfortunate thing. He was a man of great vanity and a man of great talent and a truly committed citizen. This is a lapse which unfortunately I think we're now, eighty years, ninety years later, having to dredge all this stuff up precisely because one of the most, if not the most, influential philosophers of the twentieth century had very little to say about this man.

He was my great-grandfather, and I feel to some extent that I am a creature of all of the things that Randolph attacked in my great-grandfather. My grandfather worked on Wall Street, my father worked in the defense business, and my sister was disabled, so I'm both a child, a brother, and a beneficiary of all of this stuff. I run a cultural center out in Los Angeles. I fled New York in 1984. Our family goes back three generations here, really thanks to John when he moved here from the Midwest, and I guess I have to say that I'd kind of had it with New York society and what Bourne, I think, refers to as "the significant classes." I think this is a very interesting concept because what he does . . . and I would like to just say sort of parenthetically here that I think what Bourne has done for us is to try to craft a critical philosophy that is not Marxist, that is neither left nor right. It's some sort of struggle, and I'm not saying it's successful, but I think it's some kind of struggle to come up with a political awareness that uses the concepts of class, the concepts of state, the concepts . . . he actually very rarely uses the word *polis*, which is kind of interesting, but country, state, nation, all this kind of stuff.

That Bourne forced my great-grandfather, I think, to really grapple with the limitations of both academia and the limitations of the significant classes, because in his concept of class this notion of significant classes, what I think he's talking about . . . and of course he falls back into the concept of classes being propertied and moneyed and all this sort of stuff . . . I mean, you could say certainly it was central to his thought. I would like to say that maybe he was wrestling with something. And what he's talking about are the classes of people who consider themselves significant. And I think this is really how the state gets people to go along with stuff that is just absolutely insane because the state really grants power to people. That's what its function is. It coordinates, centralizes, distributes, whatever, *lo stato* in Machiavelli. So the state effectively uses these classes who consider themselves significant, and I suppose in some sense they are, but they use this kind of sense of importance to herd the society, *herd* being Bourne's word, into delusion, madness, all the things that Todd quoted from in that one paragraph that is so extraordinary.

Earlier, when I said this business of what I believe to be a moral, political, and spiritual collapse . . . I think many of the things that Bourne talked about, when I said I believe that they'd been institutionalized, I'm referring specifically of course to the war foundation of the state. And many of the great innovations that our beloved liberal Woodrow Wilson put into place were reversed when he was booted out, or rather when he tottered out, but they were certainly revived by Harry Truman in 1947 and installed in secret form as really the primary political principle of society and politics in the United States, being the national-security state which we all know about. But what nobody has really talked about today I think is the historical significance of the possibility, and I'm just saying it's a possibility, that these very things that Bourne talked about have now become the general organizing principle of a

kind of deeper political power in the United States which we're contending with.

I have been reading a piece recently which is really quite frightening, and it's probably one of my favorite pieces of political writing. It's from I believe 1973. It's called "Lying in Politics," by a controversial thinker by the name of Hannah Arendt, and it's a discussion of the Pentagon Papers. And the central argument of her analysis is that lying had penetrated the highest levels of government and had saturated all—all of the bureaucracies of the government. Lying is a hard word because I'm definitely not a Rousseauian. I don't believe that hypocrisy can be legislated out of existence. Once you start going after people for lies you start going after everybody because none of us are able to be completely truthful. But when you bring lying and political power together on a global scale you create a thing that she calls, and I think quite brilliantly, "defactualization."

What she doesn't go into so much because she talks about it in so many other places at a philosophical level is the history of the installation of a machinery in the government which could allow this to happen. And when I said the moral, political, and spiritual collapse of America, I know that sounds hyperbolic, but I think it's real because we're all floating around in a state of unreality now, at least I feel it, and it's based in this machinery that goes back to Woodrow Wilson. There is a historical genealogy of this machinery. He mentioned J. Edgar Hoover. There's a long list, but the structure that Wilson developed, going out into even things like farm bureaus, things of this nature, is a structure for a total police state. And I might even disagree with Randolph Bourne on the question of whether we should have gone to war or not. I mean, I think that's a subject of debate. But what he's absolutely correct on is the consequences of this and the fact that the structure that Wilson, a Southerner, put in place effectively annulled the civic life, if you will, the public life of the country. It was very deliberate. It started with anti-Germans, it then became a red scare, etcetera, etcetera. All of this became very unpopular, of course, after the war, and Wilson became very unpopular. But what you have is a progressive accumulation of these measures, and this is why I was just noting down . . . I appreciated your comment about the election. I'm extremely concerned, as I think probably everyone in this room is. But I also think, and this comes back to the importance, I think, of Bourne's piece "The State," which is that amidst all of our panic and amidst our concern and our fear and our concern for the democratic republic and what's going to happen to the Constitution . . . I mean the list is long and I'm sure we all lose plenty of sleep over this . . . the election becomes a kind of ritual in which we can pin our hopes or our fears. And the result of this is that there's no enduring political analysis of the structure of the country that has led us to this point.

So, OK, Bush is installed. I doubt he's going to win the election fairly, or Kerry wins or whatever. Now, I mean I'm certainly hoping that Bush will not become president, but when that happens it's like out of our minds drains this question of a deeper crisis in America that goes back again to Woodrow Wilson. It goes back to all the things that Randolph Bourne was talking about.

I think I'm very appreciative of some of the people here who have written on pragmatism, including my great-grandfather, so please, especially Rob, I hope you won't take this personally, but there are two components to this crisis. One, I believe, is the permanent war state in which again all the things that Todd mentioned have

now become institutionalized . . . regimentation, in fact even the Anglo-Saxon model, which is the economic model that the United States is spreading around the world. So the permanent war state is the first component of the crisis. I really think—and I hate to say this, but this is why I started out by renouncing my great-grandfather—I really think pragmatism is the other component of the collapse of moral, political, and spiritual life in America.

Now what could I possibly mean by that? Well I think something has happened in how Americans think and feel and do things. It's very deep, and I think when . . . a phrase popped into my head. I was talking to Al, I guess, yesterday while I was trying to figure out what I was going to talk about, and the phrase that I came up with is, you may recognize an echo here, "If there's one thing we are now proving it is that America is incapable of learning by doing." This is a phrase, of course, that became a kind of cliché for my great-grandfather in education and politics and all this sort of stuff. Now the pragmatic concept of doing is not quite the same as the political concept of action, and I think therein lies all the difference. The pragmatists, I think, and I'm sure this will raise the hackles of some, could conceivably include such laudable moral and ethical people as Robert McNamara. These are issues that I think have to be discussed and talked about anyway. The thing that is so striking about the Hannah Arendt piece, "Lying in Politics," is that she's really talking about Vietnam. And if you start to look at the fact, what I would consider to be systematic lying as a form of government. In other words, lying is not an ethical problem. Lying is a structural and political and bureaucratic problem. It becomes the foundation of political rule. All of the things that he was talking of, the gregariousness, all these things are built into it, but really the structure is rule by lying.

This was the problem in Vietnam. Now what happened? Am I having some kind of weird time-travel, déjà-vu psychotic break here? We obviously have not learned by doing. There's no capacity to learn by doing. The model of learning by doing is insufficient for the public and its problems. It's just not enough. And I think figuring out why that's the case requires a political analysis. And this is why Randolph Bourne's last piece—I assume it's the last piece, that is the consensus that it was his last piece—"The State," is so incredibly important, because everything we've been talking about today is embedded in the first three-quarters of the piece, and then something very strange happens. He goes into a passage that I would like to read from. It's rather long. I'm going to try and wade through it.

Just to set up this, it comes as a bit of a surprise, but I think what you have to understand, it is a tragedy that he didn't finish this because he doesn't get a chance to contextualize why he goes into this. And this is where I think Bourne is charting out, beginning finally out of the disillusionment with the significant classes and their intellectual activities or lack thereof, cognitive activities . . . he's trying to come up with a foundation for a new kind of political opposition or political thinking.

"[T]he parties were firmly established to carry on the selective and refining and securing work of the Electoral College. The party leadership then became, and has remained ever since." Now remember this is 1918, he's talking about an earlier period, actually a much earlier period in American history. "The party leadership then became, and has remained ever since, the nucleus of notables who determine the presidency." Remember also, or think also, he makes an extraordinary statement in "The State" where he refers to the power becoming the private possession of the

executive branch. This is 1918. Now this critique of Wilson, where did it go? "The electorate, having won an apparently democratic victory"—this is the last stuff he wrote in his life, OK—"in the destruction of the notables" —I'm sorry—"in the destruction." See, this is what I mean, the contradictions. Anyway . . . "finds itself reduced to the role of mere ratification or selection between two or three candidates, in whose choice they have only a nominal share. The Electoral College which stood between even the propertied electorate and the executive with the prerogatives of a King, gave place to a body which was just as genuinely a bar to democratic expression, and far less responsible for its acts." He's saying we would have been better under a king.

"The nucleus of party councils which became, after the reduction of the Electoral College, the real choosers of the Presidents, were unofficial, quasi-anonymous, utterly unchecked by the populace whose rulers they chose. More or less self-chosen, or chosen by local groups whom they dominated, they provided a far more secure guarantee that the State should remain in the hands of the ruling classes than the old electoral college." This is not a Marxist analysis at all. It's much closer to something like de Tocqueville. "The party councils could be loosely organized entirely outside of the governmental organization, without oversight by the State or check from the electorate. They could be composed of the leaders of the propertied classes themselves or their lieutenants, who could retain their power indefinitely, or at least until they were unseated by rivals within the same charmed domain." That's a lovely phrase. "They were at least entirely safe from attack by the officially constituted electorate, who, as the party system became more and more firmly established, found they could vote only on the slates set up for them by unknown councils behind an imposing and all-powerful 'Party.'"

Anyway, it goes on and on. It's a wonderful last five paragraphs. It's a tombstone to a man whose thinking relentlessly developed and, I think, resulted in a very deep political analysis of the reason why war is the health of the state. Now this is, of course, what he doesn't get to because he dies. I don't really believe in prophecy or prediction, and I don't think we can say for sure what he was going to talk about. Maybe this was the end of the essay. But certainly there is some connection to that phrase which gets repeated over and over . . . which, by the way, this is the part that you never hear about in the essay . . . it's not the conclusion; it's the part you never hear about. "The party system succeeded, of course, beyond the wildest dreams of its creators."

That's kind of what I want to say. I'd like to conclude with a short little reference to something that somebody else here brought up, which I think is true, which is a nugget in this piece that is most interesting where he goes back to Jefferson and describes the Declaration of Independence as the creation of a . . . well he doesn't use the word *body politic*, but the creation of something which is not a state. I would disagree with his theory of what the state means. I think if you go back to Machiavelli you'll come up with a very different description. I think someone earlier today was going into some of the details of what a state is. In the American model it could very well have been the protection of self-government rather than its destruction. I think that's what Jefferson was talking about. But Bourne is onto this, and he gets a sense of this, and he says the U.S.A. is not a state. And to follow Hannah Arendt's term in *On Revolution* where she says that the federal principle, which of course is a word that appears in Bourne in many places . . . not the federal

principle, I'm sorry, but the term *federation*, which I think he got clued into, ironically enough, while he was in Germany. The concept of the Declaration is that it is in a sense against the sovereignty of the state. And of course the sovereignty of the state is really the underlying theme and principle of what he's talking about behind "War is the health of the State," this kind of ferocious state mind that becomes sovereign.

Now finally, what I think is important here is that this is connected to his critique, or what becomes a critique, of the political parties in the United States. It's a depressing subject. It's a banal subject. I think it's got to be taken on by the intellectuals because I think what we have now in the United States is in fact a dictatorship. It's a dictatorship of two parties, not one. This is not going to be discussed. It hasn't been discussed since Woodrow Wilson's loyalty oaths. It's soft. It's not hard. There's nobody knocking on our doors for sure . . . most of us anyway, at least not until I get home . . . but I think this needs to be discussed. I do think this is where Bourne was going, and I think one of the most fascinating things about Bourne is that there is a cultural and artistic politics embedded in his work. The last thing I want to go is to a party-organizing meeting. I think politics can be something other than parties, but I think we need to sit and face the fact that that is what it has become in the United States, and the reason we live in unreality is really because no one really paid attention to the problems that Randolph Bourne was talking about.

Thanks.