

# CULTURE VS. *KULTUR*, OR A CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS: PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS IN THE UNITED STATES AND THE GREAT WAR, 1917–1918\*

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ABSTRACT. *This article analyses the historical conditions for, and implications of, the attitudes and conduct of a number of prominent or influential public intellectuals in the United States during the Great War. It argues that many intellectuals, particularly those who supported American entry to the war, shared a general lack of concern with the realities of full-scale warfare. Their response to the war had little to do with the war itself—its political and economic causes, brutal and industrial character, and human and material costs. Rather, their positions were often based on their views of culture and philosophy, or on their visions of the post-war world. As a result, relatively few of these intellectuals fully considered the political, social, and economic context in which the catastrophe occurred. The war, to many of them, was primarily a clash of civilizations, a battle of good versus evil, civilized democracy versus barbaric savagery, progress versus backwardness, culture versus kultur. The article describes several manifestations of American intellectual approaches to the war, discusses the correlation between intellectual and general public attitudes, and concludes with some implications for thinking about the relationship between intellectuals and war in more recent American history.*

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## I

Their dislike of scholarly consensus aside, most historians of early twentieth-century American political life would likely agree that many prominent American intellectuals greeted the 1917 intervention of the United States in the Great War with great enthusiasm, and that those intellectuals who openly criticized American foreign policy in April 1917 were relatively few and far

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between. This pro-war ardour was not just a matter of rampant patriotism, though that was decidedly part of the story; plain fear was another important factor. The mobilization of American writers and scholars to the war camp was accompanied by the repression and persecution, often institutional and sometimes informal, of those who refused to get on the national bandwagon.

The repressors and persecutors, it should be noted, were not only political authorities but intellectuals themselves. Once the United States went to war in Europe, it became difficult, if not impossible, for anti-war intellectuals to express their opinions freely, as they had more or less done until then. University professors who dared to do so were often dismissed from their posts, or harassed by administrators and colleagues; journalists were censored; activists were attacked or jailed.<sup>1</sup> The ire, of course, was turned primarily toward Germany, the enemy du jour, even retroactively: intellectuals who had referred to Germany in a favourable light, even long before the war, were punished, sometimes by their own friends and colleagues. Americans of German origin became a favourite target for opprobrium or worse – often regardless of their opinions on the war. Pacifists and conscientious objectors suffered treatment reserved for criminals. Decades before the rise of McCarthyism, political non-conformism in America became a serious offence.

To be sure, the heightened pro-war fervor was not confined to the realm of intellectuals. The nation, to generalize in the somewhat discredited tradition of the consensus historians, was swept in the wake of war by a wave of political paranoia and xenophobia that would be recognizable, even from a considerable distance, to any observer of American public and political reactions to the more recent aftermath of 11 September 2001 and the beginning of the war in Iraq. In 1917–18, any outspoken opponent of American intervention in the Great War, whether an academic or a factory worker, could be considered a traitor, especially if she was not ‘100 per cent’ American. We do not know how many scholars, teachers, and writers who did not believe that the United States should be at war with Germany simply kept silent. What we do know is the extent to which innumerable American intellectuals, in 1917 and 1918, found satisfaction and hope in the face of war.

The purpose of this article is not to describe the entire spectrum of the American intellectual response to the war – an impossible task to accomplish in a single article.<sup>2</sup> Nor does it survey the possible connections between Wilsonianism and American foreign policy in the first decade of the twenty-first

<sup>1</sup> See David M. Kennedy, *Over here: the First World War and American society* (New York, NY, 1980), pp. 45–92.

<sup>2</sup> For a useful survey, see Jacquelin Reimen, ‘1917–1918: America’s warring intellectuals’, *Revue française d’études américaines*, 29 (1989), pp. 309–24; see also Jacquelin Reimen, ‘Les universitaires américains: clerics ou prolétaires?’, *ibid.*, 16 (1983), pp. 139–52; L. Moody Simms, Jr, ‘World War I and the American intellectual’, *Social Science*, 45 (1970), pp. 157–62; Kennedy, *Over here*, ch. 2. For a study of the universities during the war, see Carol S. Gruber, *Mars and Minerva: World War I and the uses of higher learning in America* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1975).

century, a topic that has already stirred an interesting debate and merits a separate scholarly discussion.<sup>3</sup> (Nor, on a more general level, do I intend to join the trench warfare that has characterized the debates over who, or what, qualifies as an intellectual.<sup>4</sup>) Rather, I intend to assess the historical conditions for, and the implications of, the attitudes and conduct of a number of publicly prominent or politically influential American intellectuals during the war – a topic worth revisiting as the centenary of the American entry into the Great War approaches.

Whether or not one holds these intellectuals in equal regard, this article argues that many of them shared a startling lack of concern with the realities of full-scale warfare. Indeed, their response to the war had little to do with the war itself – its political and economic causes, its brutal and industrial character, its staggering cost, both human and material. Rather, their positions were often based on their views of culture and philosophy (particularly, in many cases, their belief that German culture had been permeated with a particularly pernicious and violent mode of thought), and their visions (often optimistic) of the world after the war. As a result, relatively few American intellectuals fully considered the political, social, and economic context in which the war was taking place. To many (though not all) of them, the war was primarily a clash of civilizations, a battle of good versus evil, civilized democracy versus barbaric savagery, progress versus backwardness, culture versus *kultur*.

## II

Between the start of war in Europe in 1914 and the US entry into the war in 1917, public and intellectual attitudes towards the conflict were more diverse than they would be once the ‘doughboys’ were shipped to battlefields across the ocean. There was also less at stake, in a sense, as the United States was not yet directly and militarily involved. The road that took the United States from isolation to participation in the war was long and complex, and the

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Robert Westbrook, ‘Bourne over Baghdad’, *Raritan*, 27 (2007), pp. 104–17, which makes explicit use of Bourne’s critique of John Dewey to criticize some of the prominent public intellectuals (such as Michael Ignatieff, Paul Berman, and Christopher Hitchens) who – in different ways – originally supported the war in Iraq for liberal, democratic, and humanitarian reasons.

<sup>4</sup> For some examples of this vast literature, see Michael Walzer, ‘The practice of social criticism’, in his *Interpretation and social criticism* (New York, NY, 1987), pp. 35–66; Lewis S. Feuer, ‘What is an intellectual’, in his *The intelligentsia and the intellectuals* (New York, NY, 1981), pp. 51–72; Leszek Kolakowski, ‘The intellectuals’, in his *Modernity on endless trial* (Chicago, IL, 1990), pp. 27–37; J. P. Nettl, ‘Ideas, intellectuals, and structures of dissent’, in Philip Rieff, ed., *On intellectuals: theoretical studies, case studies* (Garden City, NJ, 1969), pp. 53–122; Edward Said, *Representations of the intellectual* (New York, NY, 1994). I use the term ‘intellectual’ in a societal rather than a qualitative sense; I refer to members of an intellectual elite – university professors, journalists, writers, et al. – not necessarily to those whose intellectual product had a lasting significance or whose discussions of the war went deeper than rally fodder. Thayer, for example, was probably an intellectual only in the societal sense, while Dewey was one in both senses.

intellectuals are a part of that story. As Justus Doenecke and others have shown, the American public was quite divided when it came to assessing responsibility and blame for the war, and even more so in regard to what the United States should or should not do. But even at the outset of war in Europe, many Americans were outraged by the German attack on neutral Belgium and the reports of atrocities against innocent civilians, and public opinion gradually but steadily turned against Germany.<sup>5</sup>

In 1914, many American scholars were disturbed by what they saw as the blind support of their German counterparts for their government's aggression, as seen in a manifesto entitled 'An appeal to the civilized world', signed by ninety-three German writers and scholars, that ardently defended Germany's military establishment and actions. Indeed, many German intellectuals outdid themselves in 1914 in expressing emotional, even primal, support for their country's actions.<sup>6</sup> As long as the United States remained neutral, many American scholars repeatedly expressed their dismay at the repression of political dissent in Germany. (About similar goings-on in Britain they had less to say.<sup>7</sup>) This suppression was supposedly part of what America was destined to fight in its struggle to make the world safe for democracy. But although after 1914 there were some American voices hostile to Britain,<sup>8</sup> the developing consensus in the United States was that Germany alone was responsible for the war.<sup>9</sup> Germany had, after all, been the first of the warring nations actually to attack another country. The German intellectuals were therefore supporting a reprehensible cause. Arthur O. Lovejoy, professor of philosophy at Johns Hopkins University (born in Berlin, to American parents), had been among those outraged by the German manifesto. In a letter to *The Nation*, he concluded that

the professional class, in the country where it has played the greatest part, has signally failed, at the most critical moment in German history, to perform its proper

<sup>5</sup> For valuable background, see Justus Doenecke, *Nothing less than war: a new history of America's entry into World War I* (Lexington, KY, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> For the German scholars and the war, see Fritz K. Ringer, *The decline of the German mandarins: the German academic community, 1890–1933* (Cambridge, MA, 1969), pp. 180–99. For background on the intellectual atmosphere in Germany at the start of the war, see Jeffrey Verhey, *The spirit of 1914: militarism, myth, and mobilization in Germany* (New York, NY, 2000). This patriotism was by no means strictly a German phenomenon. For a broader European view, see Roland Stromberg, *Redemption by war: the intellectuals and 1914* (Lawrence, KA, 1981). For the cultural background to the European intellectuals' support for the war in its early stages, see Robert Wohl, *The generation of 1914* (New York, NY, 1979).

<sup>7</sup> See G. H. Hardy, *Bertrand Russell and Trinity* (Cambridge, 1942), for perhaps the best-known case. See also Stuart Wallace, *War and the image of Germany: British academics, 1914–1918* (Edinburgh, 1988); Adam Hochschild, *To end all wars: a story of loyalty and rebellion, 1914–1918* (Boston, MA, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Willard Huntington Wright, 'England's intellectual colonization of America', *Seven Arts*, 1 (1917), pp. 395–401.

<sup>9</sup> There is an abundance of examples; see the correspondence between Albion W. Small, professor of sociology at the University of Chicago, and Georg Simmel, professor of sociology at Strassburg, 'Germany and American opinion', *Sociological Review*, 8 (1915), pp. 106–11.

function – the function of detached criticism, of cool consideration, of insisting that facts, and all the relevant facts, be known and faced. [The manifesto] appears to be shouting with the rest for a wholly avoidable war of which, in nearly all non-German eyes, the moral indefensibility seems exceeded only by its fatal unwisdom [sic] from a purely national point of view.<sup>10</sup>

Some of the American academics and intellectuals most hostile to Germany during the war years had themselves lived or studied in Germany in their past. Indeed, one of the most intriguing aspects of the trajectory of many intellectuals in the United States – from their rejection in 1914 of the German scholars' enthusiasm for their nation's war to their own enthusiasm in 1917 for the American entry into the same war – was the fact that Germany itself had played a significant role in the backgrounds and development of many academics and thinkers in the United States. But, as we will see, the growing revulsion at what they perceived to be German aggression and ruthlessness, and the increasing support for American entry on the British and French side of the battle, steadily trumped any identification and loyalty these intellectuals may have had for the country that had provided many if not most of their intellectual foundations.

To be sure, many of the same intellectuals who deeply disliked the German scholars', manifesto began calling for intervention while the United States was still neutral, often using very similar language as had the German academics.<sup>11</sup> William Roscoe Thayer, professor of history at Harvard University and the president of the American Historical Association, published a series of works in the first years of the war, in which he chronicled the history of German warmongering and brutality. In *Germany vs. civilization* (1916), Thayer explained that 'these Teutonic masses, which resemble in so many points the Chinese rather than any European race, were slowly organized into a machine as vast as Germany itself'.<sup>12</sup> Thayer also pointed out those who presented a clear and present danger to democracy and freedom at home:

will American universities tolerate professors who have been slyly preaching sedition? It is far more likely that for a generation to come, the very word German will be detested in the United States, and that every German will have to show cause why he should not be regarded as a secret enemy of this country.<sup>13</sup>

Thayer's opinion was echoed by his Harvard colleague Josiah Royce, a professor of philosophy who had once studied at Göttingen and Leipzig universities. In a January 1916 speech in Boston, Royce, who owed much of his training to German teachers, nonetheless proclaimed that 'Germany is the willful and

<sup>10</sup> Arthur O. Lovejoy, 'German scholars and "truth about Germany"', *Nation*, 24 Sept. 1914), p. 376.

<sup>11</sup> H. C. Peterson, *Propaganda for war: the campaign against American neutrality, 1914–1917* (Norman, OK, 1939).

<sup>12</sup> William Roscoe Thayer, *Germany vs. civilization: notes on the atrocious war* (Boston, MA, 1916), p. 37.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

deliberate enemy of the human race. It is open to any man to be a pro-German who shares this enmity.<sup>14</sup>

These were still relatively calm statements, made before American troops actually entered the fray. The US declaration of war in April 1917 opened the floodgates of full-fledged intellectual jingoism. Academics and journalists across the country wrote vitriolic diatribes against Germany and German-Americans, often describing the war in Europe as the ultimate battle between civilized democracy on one side and barbaric savagery on the other. Craving participation—as opposed to mere observation—in the great world event, many scholars (especially historians, it should be said) left their leafy college campuses and went to work for the federal government as propagandists with the Committee on Public Information (CPI).<sup>15</sup> To ensure purity on the home front, many distinguished scholars devoted their energies to purging from the ranks of academia colleagues who dissented from the uniform view of the war. As David Kennedy once put it, ‘this was not their finest hour’.<sup>16</sup>

Yet not all intellectual responses to the American intervention were so simplistic. In fact, the relation between American intellectuals and the war was extremely complex. Even the pro-war camp itself was quite diverse, and the different intellectuals in it had differing reasons for supporting the cause. For some—Thayer and Royce are obvious examples—Germany posed a threat to Western civilization in general and American society in particular. For others, the United States had a duty to go to war because of its strong cultural bond with England. To John Dewey, Herbert Croly, and the pragmatist intellectuals who clustered around the engaged journal the *New Republic*, the war provided America, and the rest of the world, with an unprecedented opportunity for progress and social reform.

Not all American intellectuals supported the intervention, and there were also various reasons for opposing (or at least not wholeheartedly supporting) it.<sup>17</sup> Some German-born or German-American intellectuals, such as the Columbia University anthropologist Franz Boas, retained a degree of loyalty to their home country (others, on the other hand, such as the former Harvard instructor

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Charles Angoff, ‘The higher learning goes to war’, *American Mercury*, 11 (1927), p. 178. The *American Mercury*, H. L. Mencken’s journal, published this essay in the period of revisionism regarding the American intervention in the war. For background, see Warren I. Cohen, *The American revisionists: the lessons on intervention in World War I* (Chicago, IL, 1967).

<sup>15</sup> Kennedy, *Over here*, pp. 59–63. See also George Creel, *How we advertised America* (New York, NY, 1920); James R. Mock and Cedric Larson, *Words that won the war* (Princeton, NJ, 1939); John A. Thompson, *Reformers and war: American progressive publicists and the First World War* (New York, NY, 1987); Peter Buitenhuis, *The great war of words: British, American, and Canadian propaganda and fiction, 1914–1933* (Vancouver, 1987).

<sup>16</sup> Kennedy, *Over here*, 59.

<sup>17</sup> For a survey of anti-war literature, see H. C. Peterson, *Opponents of war, 1917–1918* (New York, NY, 1968). See also Paul L. Murphy, *World War I and the origins of civil liberties in the United States* (New York, NY, 1979).

Hermann Hagedorn, became so-called superpatriots on the allied side).<sup>18</sup> Some well-known pacifists and peace activists, such as Scott Nearing and Emily Balch, opposed any American military action on principle (Nearing, tried and convicted for his anti-war activities under the Espionage Act of 1917, and Balch, fired from her position at Wellesley College, both suffered the consequences of their stance) while others, such as Stanford President David Starr Jordan and University of Chicago Literature Professor Robert Herrick, eventually came to support the American war policy.<sup>19</sup> Many young intellectuals on the left, Randolph Bourne for instance, refused to condemn Germany, while others, such as Upton Sinclair, became fervent supporters of the United States war effort.<sup>20</sup>

Some historians have argued that many intellectuals saw the war as an opportunity to internationalize America's reform impulse and achieve the goals of peace and justice on a world-wide scale, along the lines of Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points.<sup>21</sup> Yet even the most significant progressive or Wilsonian intellectuals, like Dewey, Croly, and Walter Lippmann, who all avoided jingoism and made sure to justify their support of the war in rational terms, made almost no reference during the war years to the war itself.<sup>22</sup> Their internationalism had little to do with the rest of the world and their realism had, at times, little to do with reality.<sup>23</sup> For a cohort brought up in an intellectual world shaped

<sup>18</sup> Franz Boas, 'Why German-Americans blame America', *New York Times*, 8 Jan. 1916, p. 23. For a psycho-historical analysis of Hagedorn's position, see Phyllis Keller, *States of belonging: German-American intellectuals and the First World War* (Cambridge, MA, 1979), pp. 189–260.

<sup>19</sup> Scott Nearing, *The great madness: a victory for the American plutocracy* (New York, NY, 1917); Scott Nearing, *The making of a radical: a political autobiography* (New York, NY, 1972); David Starr Jordan, *The days of a man* (Yonkers-on-Hudson, NY, 1922); Robert Herrick, 'Recantation of a pacifist', *New Republic*, 30 Oct. 1915, pp. 329–30. For a moving account of British pacifist resistance to the war, see Hochschild, *To end all wars*. For American pacifists, see the forthcoming study by Michael Kazin, *War against war: the rise, defeat, and legacy of the American peace movement, 1914–1918*. See also F. L. Carsten, *War against war: British and German radical movements in the First World War* (Berkeley, CA, 1982); Will Ellsworth-Jones, *We will not fight: the untold story of World War One's conscientious objectors* (London, 2007). For these debates in broader chronological and political context, with reference to Dewey, Balch, and other thinkers, see Christopher McKnight Nichols, *Promise and peril: America at the dawn of a global age* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), passim.

<sup>20</sup> Albert Fried, *Socialism in America: from the shakers to the Third International* (Garden City, NJ, 1970), pp. 568–70. In Apr. 1918, Upton Sinclair began to publish a pro-war serial of his own, *Upton Sinclair's*.

<sup>21</sup> For Wilson, Wilsonianism, and the world, see David Steigerwald, *Wilsonian idealism in America* (Ithaca, NY, 1994); Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian moment: self-determination and the international origins of anticolonial nationalism* (New York, NY, 2007); and Trygve Throntveit, 'The fable of the fourteen points: Woodrow Wilson and national self-determination', *Diplomatic History*, 35 (2011), pp. 445–81.

<sup>22</sup> Simms, 'World War I'. See also Sidney Kaplan, 'Social engineers as saviors: effects of World War I on some American liberals', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 17 (1956), pp. 347–69.

<sup>23</sup> Internationalism can and has meant many things, from the nineteenth-century left-wing idea of the *International* to global or supra-national governance to state-to-state and international relations and diplomacy. In this context, for these specific American thinkers

primarily by the experience of the Civil War, their support of this new war was striking – though, I suggest, entirely in step with general public sentiment. These remarks could aptly be used to describe the behaviour and attitudes of parts of the American ‘professional class’ after April 1917. Lovejoy himself, who as the head of the American Association of University Professors was officially a protector of academic freedom, actually helped to spread what Carol Gruber has called ‘the fear of sedition’ that gripped academic campuses across the country during 1917–18.<sup>24</sup> There was nothing ‘coolly considered’ about the way he and several other scholars proscribed colleagues who did not share their view that America should be at war with Germany, nothing ‘critically detached’ about the way many academics wrote about Germany and German-Americans.<sup>25</sup> What was wrong for the German goose in 1914 was good for the American gander in 1917. There are several examples of this double standard. In late 1917, J. Franklin Jameson, managing editor of the *American Historical Review* and the head of the Department of Historical Research at the Carnegie Institute, argued that

It is notorious how large a part, in giving to German public opinion its marvelous unity and cohesion, has been played by the chauvinistic history lessons of the German schoolmaster. Heaven forbid that we should imitate the chauvinism; the American enters the war distinctly as a citizen of the world.<sup>26</sup>

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internationalism meant primarily linking the American public and institutions to the wider world and the global community, in some cases (that of Dewey, for example) with the broader aim of creating a world government. For a good introduction to definitions, see Giuliana Chamedes, ‘Internationalism’, in Vincent Pecora, ed., *The Routledge encyclopedia of modernism* (New York, NY, 2014). See also Martin H. Geyer and Johannes Paulmann, eds., *The mechanics of internationalism: culture, society and politics from the 1840s to the First World War* (Oxford, 2001); and Akira Iriye, *Cultural internationalism and world order* (Baltimore, MD, 1997). For internationalism as the aspiration to global governance, see Mark Mazower, *Governing the world: the history of an idea* (New York, NY, 2012). For internationalism as a vision of ‘global community’, see Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the age of nationalism* (Philadelphia, PA, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> Gruber, *Mars and Minerva*, pp. 170–1. The image of Lovejoy, a pioneer in the field of the history of ideas, as a protector of academic freedom, was not tarnished by the revelations about his behaviour during the war. For a typically laudatory example, see Lewis S. Feuer, ‘Arthur O. Lovejoy’, *American Scholar*, 46 (1977), pp. 358–66.

<sup>25</sup> For a typical example, see Vernon Kellogg, ‘Unclean, unclean’, *North American Review*, 208 (Sept. 1918), pp. 536–9: ‘Most Germans in Germany, and some out of it, seem unashamed to reveal the symptoms of their fatal inoculation with the loathsome disease of “nothing-counts-but-winning” ... approving deceit, robbery and cruelty, choosing international outlawry, sacrificing all personal feelings and morals, gloating over horrors, whining over reprisals, they advertise themselves by these as unmistakably as did the silvery lepers of old, when they called out “Unclean, unclean” ... will it be any wonder if after the war the people of the world when they recognize any human being as a German from Germany will shrink aside so that they may not touch him as he passes, or stoop for stones to drive him from their path?’ Kellogg, it should be noted, was a professor of entomology at Stanford.

<sup>26</sup> J. Franklin Jameson, ‘Notes and suggestions: historical scholars in war-time’, *American Historical Review*, 22 (1917), p. 831.

For Jameson, one of the New Historians who had begun to dominate the American historical community in the years leading up to the war, the role of the historian during wartime was to educate the public. Americans needed to know not only that they must go to war, but also *why*; this should now be the purpose of scholarship. The German equivalent of this idea had been, in his view, ‘chauvinistic’; the American scholars, on the other hand, were performing a similar task as ‘citizens of the world’.

But what is most striking about this paragraph is its duality. On the one hand, German schoolteachers had betrayed their calling and, quite simply, lied to their pupils; on the other hand, these detestable methods had achieved ‘marvellous unity and cohesion’, a result which Jameson, as a patriotic historian, envied. In his ‘drive for uniformity’ (to use Kennedy’s expression, paraphrasing Tocqueville), Jameson’s essay contained no discussion of the validity of the war. Like the writings of many other pro-war American intellectuals, it contained neither any evaluation of the character of the war or the costs of intervention, nor any honest assessment of the behaviour of the Allied countries in the contest. Rather, it was written on the a priori assumption that America’s intervention in the war against Germany was justified. The only question Jameson posed was what could the historian do to help defeat Germany. His essay provides a blueprint for academic action during wartime: ‘What is more essential to the successful prosecution of a great national war’, he wrote, ‘than an enlightened, unified, and powerfully-acting public opinion? ... the American gun may be the best that science can make it, the man behind unsurpassed in quality, but how long will he persist in his fearful struggle if the people at home do not see why he should?’<sup>27</sup>

Accordingly, in the spring of 1917, Jameson, Thayer, and fifteen other prominent American historians founded the National Board for Historical Services (NBHS), whose purpose was ‘to bring into useful operation, in the present emergency, the intelligence and skill of the historical workers of the country’.<sup>28</sup> In the spirit of local voluntarism that swept much of American society, Jameson and his colleagues believed that historians could contribute to the war effort by aiming their scholarship at adult audiences and teaching the kind of history that they considered relevant to the war.<sup>29</sup> To that purpose, they should give public talks, write in local newspapers, reach out beyond their colleges to as many people as possible.<sup>30</sup> Many of them, as I

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 831. For other examples of the genre, see George Burton Adams, ‘America’s obligation and opportunity’, *Yale Review*, 5 (1917), pp. 474–83; Charles Beard, ‘A call upon every citizen’, *Harper’s*, 137 (1918), pp. 655–6.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew C. McLaughlin, ‘Historians and the war’, *Dial*, 17 May 1917, p. 427. Quoted in Gruber, *Mars and Minerva*, p. 120.

<sup>29</sup> For background on voluntarism, the war, and the federal government, see Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam wants you: World War I and the making of the modern American citizen* (New York, NY, 2008).

<sup>30</sup> Jameson, ‘Notes and suggestions’, pp. 832–3.

have mentioned, worked as propagandists; Guy Stanton Ford, professor of history at the University of Minnesota, was drafted by Creel to head the CPI's Production Department. And there were other, more direct, ways to rally around the cause. George Lincoln Burr, a professor of history at Cornell University, donned a military uniform and participated in drills with the college students.<sup>31</sup> Earl Evelyn Sperry, a professor of history at Syracuse University, wrote pamphlets for the National Security League, some of which openly justified the persecution of German-Americans. In an essay entitled *The tentacles of the German octopus in America*, Sperry explained: 'the Pan-Germans ... have a plan for our future. It is that there shall be on the soil of the United States a branch of the German nation consisting of the people of German descent who dwell here.'<sup>32</sup>

In his own essay, Jameson argued that a historically knowledgeable American is a better citizen. But this vision demanded uniformity. *All* historians were expected to teach a certain kind of history. Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that the New Historians were among the most impassioned pro-war intellectuals. Indeed, in their quest to be socially and nationally relevant, they were responsible for much of the blatant bias that characterized so much historical scholarship during the war.<sup>33</sup>

The atmosphere on some campuses was such that Edward Potts Cheyney, a historian of high standing and a member of the NHBS, expressed his reservations about the war in private correspondence, but never made them public.<sup>34</sup> History faculties at elite American universities collaborated in putting out 'University War Books', designed to explain the historical necessity of the war to the public.<sup>35</sup> They understood 'war' in a broad sense: it was to be waged not only against Germany, but also against everyone and anyone suspected of supporting that country. That included anyone who did not support the American intervention. Once the United States declared war, many of these scholars believed that their primary loyalty was not to the profession, but to their nation's government. Indeed, they generally saw no difference between the two. The idea that a professor could oppose his nation's

<sup>31</sup> C. Hartley Grattan, 'The historians cut loose', *American Mercury*, 11 (1927), p. 421.

<sup>32</sup> Earl Evelyn Sperry, *The tentacles of the German octopus in America* (New York, NY, 1917), p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> This is true also of the 'respectable' publications. See, for example, Wallace Notestein, *Conquest and Kultur: aims of the Germans in their own the words* (New York, NY, 1917).

<sup>34</sup> Gruber, *Mars and Minerva*, p. 173, quotes Cheyney's letter of 30 Aug. 1917 to J. Franklin Jameson: 'we ought not to have entered the European war ... the compulsory draft is a blot on our national escutcheon ... the war between German autocracy and Allied democracy is largely a mythical conception'.

<sup>35</sup> See for example Albert Bushnell Hart, *America at war: a handbook of patriotic education references* (New York, NY, 1918). British historians also engaged in this sort of writing. See Wallace, *War and the image*. For American historians during the war, see George T. Blakey, *Historians on the homefront: American propagandists for the Great War* (Lexington, KY, 1970); Harold Josephson, 'History for victory: the National Board for Historical Services', *Mid-America*, 52 (1970), pp. 205–24; Gruber, *Mars and Minerva*, pp. 37–8, 68–9.

decision to go to war was therefore unacceptable. The ignominious dismissals of J. M. Cattell, a professor of psychology at Columbia University, and of William Schaper, a German-American professor of economics at the University of Wisconsin, were just two examples (of many) of this state of affairs.<sup>36</sup> Both men lost their positions, and their reputations, partly because of a lack of support from their colleagues, who believed, as Lovejoy put it, that because of their opinions they ‘might bring about the defeat and dishonor of the republic and do immeasurable injury to the cause of freedom throughout the world’.<sup>37</sup>

### III

It is always tricky to provide *geistesgeschichte* explanations for social and political processes, but the behaviour of many intellectuals in the United States in 1917–18 does much to support Kennedy’s critical speculation that

As Alexis de Tocqueville observed in 1830, few countries displayed less genuine independence of mind and real freedom of discussion than America. Those deep-running historical currents, darkly moving always beneath the surface of a society more created than given, more bonded by principle than by traditions, boiled once more to the surface of American life in the crisis of 1917–1918.<sup>38</sup>

The ‘concern for the sameness of opinion’, as Kennedy put it, can help explain the conformity and fear that pervaded much of American intellectual life during the war years. But along with fear, there was also an understandable emotional release. Bourne, the young intellectual who dissented from the wartime consensus, wrote in his essay ‘The war and the intellectuals’ that ‘the American university is a brisk and happy place these days’. In his opinion, one of the main reasons for the American intellectuals’ support of

<sup>36</sup> Gruber, *Mars and Minerva*, pp. 174–5, provides a list of professors who were dismissed from university positions in 1917 and 1918 mainly for political reasons.

<sup>37</sup> Arthur O. Lovejoy, ‘Letter to the editor’, *Nation*, 4 Apr. 1918, p. 402. Each of these two cases merits a separate study. For a survey of the Schaper case, see John T. Hubbell, ‘A question of academic freedom: the William A. Schaper case’, *Midwest Quarterly*, 17 (1976), pp. 111–21. For the Cattell case, see Walter Metzger, *Academic freedom in the age of the university* (New York, NY, 1955), which contains information about another fired Columbia professor, Henry Longfellow Dana; Fon W. Boardman, *Columbia: an American university in peace and war* (New York, NY, 1944); Charles F. Howlett, ‘Academic freedom versus loyalty at Columbia University during World War I: a case study’, *War and Society*, 2 (1984), pp. 43–53. See also Gruber, *Mars and Minerva*, pp. 177–84, 198–206. The Cattell affair eventually sparked the protest of a number of Columbia scholars, notably John Dewey and Charles Beard, both of whom supported the war effort but opposed the dismissal of faculty by administration on political grounds. Beard eventually left Columbia to become one of the founding members of the New School for Social Research. For two other studies of First World War academic repression, see Clifford Wilcox, ‘World War I and the attack on professors of German at the University of Michigan’, *History of Education Quarterly*, 33 (1993), pp. 59–84, and Bruce Tap, ‘Suppression of dissent: academic freedom at the University of Illinois during the World War I era’, *Illinois Historical Journal*, 85 (1992), pp. 2–22.

<sup>38</sup> Kennedy, *Over here*, pp. 46–7.

the war was their unbearable feeling of helplessness, even impotence, in the face of a rapidly changing mass industrial society; scholars cloistered in the ivory tower felt increasingly out of touch with the real world, and real Americans, and bemoaned their lack of influence and inaction. But once the war was on, and once scholars assumed a role in it, their joy was immense. They were relevant; the war gave them fulfilment.<sup>39</sup>

But the term ‘sameness of opinion’ can be misleading. One of the more interesting aspects of the American responses to the intervention is the variety of justifications that pro-war intellectuals found for it. Some provided reasons that were so convoluted or unconventional that they met with repression and censorship simply because they confused their readers. The economic theorist Thorstein Veblen is a case in point: his 1915 work *Imperial Germany and the industrial revolution* depicted contemporary Germany as a warlike and semi-feudal aggressor that demanded complete subservience from its subjects.<sup>40</sup> But because the book was a complex analysis of Germany’s lightning-quick rise to industrial greatness, it was read in some quarters as praise for America’s enemy. And Veblen’s opinion of Britain’s and France’s war aims was far from positive, as well. And so the US postmaster general Albert Sidney Bursleson banned the book, along with many others, under the Espionage Act of 1917 – at the same time that the book was being recommended as good propaganda by the CPI. No matter that Veblen had also published a rallying pro-war cry of his own for scholars during wartime<sup>41</sup> and another scholarly work that more straightforwardly put forth his case against Germany,<sup>42</sup> or that he even went to work for the Food Administration as a statistical expert. When he published a report contending that stopping the persecution of members of the anti-war union Industrial Workers of the World could perhaps solve the shortage of farm labour in the Midwestern states, he was promptly fired from his position. Veblen wound up teaching at the New School for Social Research in New York, and would not return to establishment academia.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Randolph Bourne, ‘The war and the intellectuals’, *Seven Arts*, 2 (1917), pp. 133–46; reprinted in Carl Resek, ed., *The war and the intellectuals: essays by Randolph S. Bourne, 1915–1919* (New York, NY, 1964), pp. 3–14. John M. Jordan, *Machine-age ideology: social engineering and American liberalism, 1911–1939* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1994), argues that American intellectuals in this period learned to think and speak through the language of technological progress – the ‘machine’. For different viewpoints on the war as ‘fulfillment’, one socialist and one libertarian, see James Weinstein, *The corporate ideal in the United States, 1900–1918* (Boston, MA, 1968), ch. 5 (‘War as fulfillment’), and Murray N. Rothbard, ‘World War I as fulfillment: power and the intellectuals’, *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, 9 (1989), pp. 81–125. For official foreign policy intellectuals in a later period, see Bruce Kuklick, *Blind oracles: intellectuals and war from Kennan to Kissinger* (Princeton, NJ, 2006).

<sup>40</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *Imperial Germany and the industrial revolution* (New York, NY, 1915).

<sup>41</sup> Thorstein Veblen, ‘The war and the schools’, *North American Review*, 108 (1917), pp. 497–502.

<sup>42</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *An inquiry into the nature of peace and the terms of its perpetuation* (New York, NY, 1917).

<sup>43</sup> See Christopher Capozzola, ‘Thorstein Veblen and the politics of war, 1914–1920’, *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 13 (1999), pp. 255–71; see also Gruber,

Yet whether the writing of the major American intellectuals about the war was as simplistic as Jameson's or as sophisticated as Veblen's, much of it could be strikingly idealistic. One can sometimes hardly tell from reading some of these writings that the war actually took a toll – that it was a physical and not just symbolic clash. To a number of these intellectuals, as we can see, the war was principally between cultures, not people. Thus, they often preferred to wage their rhetoric battles in the realm of the abstract. This war of culture versus *kultur* pitted democratic, progressive, liberal Britain (and America) on one side, against autocratic, barbaric, militaristic Germany on the other.<sup>44</sup> Some intellectuals even chose sides according to their individual tastes in philosophy or art. George Santayana (who had left Harvard before the war to travel in Europe), explained his opposition to Germany in *Egotism in German philosophy*;<sup>45</sup> Frank Harris, the Irish-born editor of *Pearson's*, supported Germany (as long as he could) because he considered England a sexually repressed country that had persecuted Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw (Harris had also spent some time in a British prison).<sup>46</sup> Some younger American intellectuals supported the allied powers because of their love for France, whose artists and poets, they felt, had provided the world with everything culturally worthy since the start of the nineteenth century.<sup>47</sup>

Many of the pro-war intellectuals ignored or glossed over those aspects of the war that did not suit their hostile view of Germany or their identification with Britain. Similarities between Germany and the United States became invisible. Nor did they acknowledge the similarities between the aims and pre-war conduct of all three major European powers. As I have mentioned, they were shocked by the manifesto of the German intellectuals in 1914, but similar responses by French and British intellectuals did not appear to trouble them or even draw their attention.<sup>48</sup> They found fault, even before the declaration of war, with non-democratic Germany, but could never satisfactorily explain why the United States should side with Tsarist Russia and Imperial Japan, two polities at least as autocratic as Germany (part of that dilemma was solved when Russia dropped out of the war after the Bolshevik Revolution in

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*Mars and Minerva*, pp. 59–60, 116–17; Reimen, '1917–1918', p. 316; and David Riesman, *Thorstein Veblen: a critical interpretation* (New York, NY, 1960), pp. 30–1.

<sup>44</sup> Frank J. Mather in the *New York Times*, 8 Nov. 1914, p. 3; for another example, see Franklin H. Giddins, *The responsible state: a reexamination of fundamental political doctrines in the light of world war and the menace of anarchism* (Boston, MA, 1918), p. 7: 'to exorcise this monstrosity and cast it out forever, the civilized world is arrayed against the Hohenzollern'. Quoted in Gruber, *Mars and Minerva*, p. 61.

<sup>45</sup> George Santayana, *Egotism in German philosophy* (New York, NY, 1916).

<sup>46</sup> Frank Harris, *England or Germany?* (New York, NY, 1915); see also Samuel Hynes, 'Frank Harris: the complete literary rascal', in Samuel Hynes, ed., *Edwardian occasions: essays on English writing in the early twentieth century* (New York, NY, 1972), pp. 47–68.

<sup>47</sup> See Henry F. May, *The end of American innocence: 1912–1917* (New York, NY, 1959), pp. 376–7.

<sup>48</sup> Stromberg, *Redemption by war*.

October 1917). There was, of course, the charge that Germany posed a direct threat to American democracy – something not said of Russia or Japan at the time – but pro-war intellectuals (and politicians, for that matter) never convincingly explained how exactly that might be true.

At the other end of the spectrum, the anti-war American intellectuals, for their part, usually invoked principles – of pacifism, of internationalist socialism – rather than harsh realities in their arguments against the American intervention.<sup>49</sup> In their case, too, the war itself played a relatively small part in their thinking. Although after 1918 many revisionist writers made much of the war's carnage, this was not necessarily true of the relatively few anti-war intellectuals during the war. But certain anti-war intellectuals (Bourne in particular) were able to see then what later became clear to many historians: that the war was not over ideals or philosophies, but primarily over power, national and imperial. Britain and France were not fighting for the vindication of their political systems or cultural legacies; the conduct of French and British politicians at the post-war Paris peace talks, and French and British foreign policies during the early 1920s, all showed this clearly.<sup>50</sup>

#### IV

The more complex intellectual positions towards the war were, in a way, more concerned with troubles at home, with the war's implications for American society and culture, than with what was taking place in Europe or elsewhere in the world. And even these more sophisticated views rarely really engaged the realities of the war itself. The bitter exchange between Dewey and Bourne, formerly mentor and protégé, illustrates this well.

In recent years, a number of scholars have returned to an older debate over pragmatism and the Great War, specifically the linkage between the holding of pragmatist philosophical positions and support for (or opposition to) American entry to the war. The wartime debate between Dewey and Bourne is familiar to American intellectual historians, so my purpose here is not to recount a well-known story but to contextualize it in the broader frame of the intellectual and public American engagement with the war. Indeed, much of the scholarly

<sup>49</sup> Peterson, *Opponents of war*.

<sup>50</sup> The Versailles Treaty itself has been the subject of much recent scholarship questioning the idea that the Germans were handed an unduly raw deal and that the French and British were acting out of exaggerated self-interest. For the critical view of the Versailles arrangements, see Arno J. Mayer, *Politics and diplomacy of peacemaking: containment and counterrevolution at Versailles, 1918–1919* (New York, NY, 1967); for a countering view, see Zara Steiner, *The lights that failed: European international history, 1919–1933* (New York, NY, 2007). For background, see Patrick O. Cohrs, *The unfinished peace after World War I: America, Britain and the stabilisation of Europe, 1919–1932* (Cambridge, 2006), William R. Keylor, ed., *The legacy of the Great War: peacemaking, 1919* (Boston, MA, 1998), John Maynard Keynes, *The economic consequences of the peace* (London, 1919), Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: six months that changed the world* (New York, NY, 2002).

writing on American intellectuals and the war focuses almost exclusively on the issue of pragmatism and whether or not the pro-war positions of pragmatists like Dewey were compatible with pragmatist principles or an aberration.<sup>51</sup> But Dewey's pro-war position – and his was merely one example for intellectual support for the war – is significant to us today not just because he may have correctly or incorrectly represented proper pragmatist thought. More important, his thinking was in many ways in line with the general state of mind of a large part of the public.

When Dewey wrote a series of essays during the war in the *New Republic* (whose editors – Croly, Lippmann, and Walter Weyl – had shifted from a non-intervention position in 1915 to an enthusiastically pro-war one in 1917),<sup>52</sup> he was perhaps at the height of his public influence. Dewey too changed his mind on the issue; in early 1917, he praised Wilson's hesitation to declare war,<sup>53</sup> but by the summer of that year he saw the war as a potentially great social experiment. He was not as fearful of Germany as were other intellectuals (his essays are refreshingly and entirely free of jingoism), but he did have criticism of that nation – not surprisingly, mainly on a philosophical-cultural level. The Germans in Dewey's view had become a belligerent people mainly because of their thinkers: Immanuel Kant had taught them in the eighteenth century to separate the spheres of general ideas and practical affairs, and this original sin explained how Germany could be both beautiful (music, poetry, philosophy) and brutal (militarism, autocracy, war).<sup>54</sup>

Some of Dewey's younger admirers (like Bourne) were pacifists, and he now dismissed them as hopeless innocents. The pacifists, he believed, clung rigidly to

<sup>51</sup> In a signal 2003 essay, James Livingston explained that his purpose, 'apart from convincing you that [Dewey] was quite possibly right about American entry into World War I', was 'to address the repression and mutilation of pragmatism by left-wing intellectuals in the twentieth century. These would seem to be very different purposes, but in fact they are the same.' Locating the origin of this left-wing derision in Bourne's criticism of Dewey over the war, Livingston went to pains to defend pragmatism from subsequent charges of 'intellectual emptiness' and 'acquiescence'. See Livingston, 'War and the intellectuals: Bourne, Dewey, and the fate of pragmatism', *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 2 (2003), pp. 431–50. For the revival of pragmatism, see, e.g., Louis Menand, *The metaphysical club: a story of ideas in America* (New York, NY, 2001); John Pettegrew, *A pragmatist's progress? Richard Rorty and American intellectual history* (New York, NY, 2001); and Richard J. Bernstein, 'Pragmatism, pluralism, and the healings of wounds', in Louis Menand, ed., *Pragmatism: a reader* (New York, NY, 1997), pp. 382–401.

<sup>52</sup> Christopher Lasch, 'The *New Republic* and the war: "an unanalyzable feeling"', in his *The new radicalism in America (1889–1963): the intellectual as a social type* (New York, NY, 1965), pp. 181–224. For a discussion of progressive intellectuals' expectations, especially vis-à-vis their British counterparts, see Marc Stears, *Progressives, pluralists, and the problems of the state: ideologies of reform in the United States and Britain, 1909–1926* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 127–67.

<sup>53</sup> John Dewey, 'In time of national hesitation', *Seven Arts*, 2 (1917), pp. 3–7; embarrassingly enough for Dewey, this essay was written before the declaration of war but published one month after the intervention.

<sup>54</sup> John Dewey, *German philosophy and politics* (New York, NY, 1915); see also May, *The end of American innocence*, p. 378.

fixed ideals; they did not understand that realities changed and that one must adapt to those changes. These ‘young people’, as he termed them, were ‘victims of a moral innocence and an inexperience which have been engendered by the moral training which they have undergone’. This moral training emphasized ‘the emotions rather than the intelligence, ideals rather than specific purposes, the nurture of personal motives rather than the creation of social agencies and environments’. Pacifism, he concluded, was ‘a somewhat mushy belief’. For their naiveté Dewey also blamed the evangelical protestant tradition, which ‘fostered the tendency to locate morals in personal feelings instead of in the control of social situations’, and the American legal tradition, which ‘bred the habit of attaching feelings to fixed rules and injunctions instead of social conditions and consequences of action’.<sup>55</sup> Pacifists did not disturb his pragmatist sensibilities so much as irritate them: ‘I have little patience with those who are so anxious to save their influence for some important crisis that they never risk its use in any present emergency.’<sup>56</sup>

But Dewey’s opinion of pacifism aside, there was still the nagging problem of the sheer violence of war. How could a collectivist progressive, who believed in the common lot of humanity, who disliked nationalism, support joining an insane war that was quite literally destroying European civilization? As he himself put it, ‘how could wrong so suddenly become right?’<sup>57</sup> Dewey had already come up with a suitably pragmatist solution to this dilemma: he reasoned that force in itself was ethically neutral. It could take the form of energy, which was good, and violence, which was bad; America upon entering the war would be using the former.<sup>58</sup>

Unlike pro-allied spokesmen who spoke of liberty, honour, civilization, and the like, Dewey preferred (relatively) concrete terms and tangible reasons: America must go to war because the energy of the war effort could be channelled for the betterment of society. Pacifists believed that *any* use of armed force was immoral, but, in his opinion, they had it wrong:

if at a critical juncture the moving force of events is always too much for conscience, the remedy is not to deplore the wickedness of those who manipulate events. Such a conscience is largely self-conceit. The remedy is to connect conscience with the forces that are moving in another direction. Then will conscience itself have compulsive power instead of being forever the martyred and the coerced.<sup>59</sup>

Dewey thus accepted war and the use of force because, as he saw it, ‘in a world organized for war there are as yet no political mechanisms which enable a

<sup>55</sup> John Dewey, ‘Conscience and compulsion’, *New Republic*, 14 July 1917; reprinted in Joseph Ratner, ed., *Characters and events: popular essays in social and political philosophy*, II (New York, NY, 1929), pp. 578–9.

<sup>56</sup> Dewey, ‘The future of pacifism’, in Ratner, ed., *Characters and events*, p. 584.

<sup>57</sup> Dewey, ‘Conscience and compulsion’, p. 577.

<sup>58</sup> Dewey, ‘Force, violence, and law’, *New Republic*, 22 Jan. 1916, pp. 295–6.

<sup>59</sup> Dewey, ‘Conscience and compulsion’, p. 580.

nation with warm sympathies to make them effective, save through military participation'.<sup>60</sup> This conviction also led him to accept the repression of dissent in the United States as an ineluctable part of warfare, even if he did not particularly care for the methods of the repressors. While conceding that 'practically all the phenomena of Europe in the first year of the war have been duplicated' and that 'the most striking effect ... has been a morbid sensitiveness at any exhibition of diversity of opinion', he at the same time euphemistically referred to attacks on nonconformists as 'the riotous gambolings [sic] of youth'.<sup>61</sup> He was bothered by the repression not so much because of its victims, but because he felt that the American public was going to war without really understanding *why*. The repression, he explained, stemmed from Americans' inexperience with a war of this magnitude; it marked 'the passage of youth into maturity'.<sup>62</sup>

In his seminal essay 'The social possibilities of war', Dewey described how America could benefit from going to battle.<sup>63</sup> First, there was the alluring possibility of internationalism; as mentioned, Dewey dreamed of a federated world government. The fact that nations were at war was potentially a good thing because, paradoxically, mutual bellicosity created mutual dependence. Peoples at war got to know each other's cultures. Dewey was eager to send American soldiers to the trenches because 'when a million or two young men return from France, the jolt given to our intellectual isolation by the very fact of the war will be accentuated. And Europe ... will have learned as much about us as we about it.' This would help lead to 'the discovery of the interdependence of all peoples, and the development of a more highly organized world ... knit together by more conscious and substantial bonds'. An international state, he happily predicted, 'is on its way'.<sup>64</sup>

There was more. Nationalism would crumble in the face of integration. Isolated sovereign states would be eliminated. Industry would be socialized. The public good would triumph over private interests. Forced conscription was a positive thing because it 'brought home to the countries which have in the past been the home of the individualistic tradition the supremacy of public need over private possession'.<sup>65</sup>

Dewey and the editors of the *New Republic*, self-proclaimed realists, accused the pacifists of naiveté, but in retrospect, Dewey's own view of warfare as a meeting place of cultures seems fantastically detached from reality. Had he no idea what the front was actually like? Many French, British, and German writers certainly knew by 1917–18. True, as it turned out, American soldiers in France were permitted to travel around the country when they were inactive,

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 582.

<sup>61</sup> John Dewey, 'In explanation of our lapse', in Ratner, ed., *Characters and events*, p. 572.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 574–5.

<sup>63</sup> Originally published as 'What are we fighting for?' in the *Independent*, 22 June 1918; reprinted as 'The social possibilities of war', in Ratner, ed., *Characters and events*, pp. 551–60.

<sup>64</sup> Dewey, 'The social possibilities of war', pp. 552–3.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 554–6.

but their mission in Europe was to kill and destroy and then return immediately home, not serve as cultural emissaries.<sup>66</sup> The fact that thousands of American soldiers would be killed, regardless of whether they took the time to learn about French culture, was not a major factor in Dewey's thought. Nor did he realistically gauge the lasting power of nationalism, imperialism, militarism, and xenophobia. Because he did not concern himself – at least in these essays – with how awful the war was in reality, he also did not realize the devastating impact it would have on the psyches of the warring nations. This can perhaps help explain the huge gap between his rosy wartime predictions and the bleak post-war realities. By 1919, many of the former pro-war American intellectuals were completely disillusioned with the idea of internationalism and wanted nothing more to do with Europe, let alone world government.<sup>67</sup>

In the notable case of Lippmann, much of this disillusionment had to do with the experience of serving in Woodrow Wilson's then-secret 'Inquiry' group tasked with studying the causes of the war and Europe's future prospects, in preparation for post-war peace talks.<sup>68</sup> Given that Lippmann and the others concluded that Germany could not realistically be blamed exclusively for the outbreak of the war, and warned – as did their British counterpart, economist John Maynard Keynes – that punishing Germany severely would result in dire consequences for Europe specifically and the new international order as a whole, it should come as no surprise that they were troubled and disappointed with what they considered to be the British and French shortsightedness regarding the treatment of Germany, and Wilson's supposed acquiescence to the British and French demands. This disillusionment would grow through the 1920s, with implications for American domestic and foreign policy. It would not be until the late 1930s, or even after 1941, that the American public – and specifically, many public intellectuals – left this isolationist stance behind.

Dewey ultimately failed to understand why the war in Europe had started in the first place; convinced that education, social planning, and goodwill would solve every problem, big or small, he underestimated the darker sides of modernity. But it would be an error to assume that because in the wake of the disillusionment of 1919–20 Dewey and other pragmatist thinkers retreated from their internationalist pro-war positions to a more cautioned isolationist stance, their wartime positions were merely an aberration in the evolution of pragmatist thought. It seems more plausible that Dewey's justifications of the

<sup>66</sup> For the American military experience in France, see Kennedy, *Over here*, pp. 191–230.

<sup>67</sup> For an example of how diametrically opposed to Dewey's vision the outcome in Europe actually was in terms of the 'public' versus the 'private', see Charles S. Maier, *Recasting bourgeois Europe: stabilization in France, Germany, and Italy in the decade after World War I* (Princeton, NJ, 1975). For the post-war American disillusionment, including Dewey's, see Kennedy, *Over here*, pp. 231–95.

<sup>68</sup> For the 'Inquiry' see, e.g., David M. Ment, 'Education, nation-building and modernization after World War I: American ideas for the Peace Conference', *Paedagogica Historica*, 41 (2005), pp. 159–77.

intervention, as well as his rationalization of domestic repression and violence, were both rooted in the heart of his philosophical convictions. His own wartime writings demonstrate this convincingly.<sup>69</sup>

## V

To Bourne, for whom Dewey had once been a sort of intellectual beacon, his former mentor's pro-war position was a bitter pill to swallow. In a series of essays in *Seven Arts*, a journal persecuted by the wartime censors, he excoriated Dewey along with the other progressives who had cast their lot with the American intervention and from whom Bourne had expected more. Bourne too had had a change of mind: in 1916, when still writing for the *New Republic*, and when the war was still remote, he had expressed his hope that the war in Europe would 'set hosts of Americans to thinking out for the first time what a real national strength and readiness would mean'.<sup>70</sup> But actual American military involvement, and especially the domestic social and political repression and hysteria which followed it, proved to be too much for him. By 1918, he was staunchly against the war. 'Our intellectuals', he charged in his essay 'Twilight of idols', 'have identified themselves with the least democratic forces in American life'.<sup>71</sup> He began that essay with the question, 'where are the seeds of American promise?'. His answer was that they had been sadly wasted. Dewey, of course, was the main idol in Bourne's twilight. His essays on the war, in Bourne's view, reflected a 'slackening in his thought':

A philosopher who senses so little the sinister forces of war, who is so much more concerned over the excesses of the pacifists than over the excesses of military policy, who can feel only amusement at the idea that any one should try to conscript thought, who assumes that the war-technique can be used without trailing along with it the mob-fanaticisms, the injustices and the hatreds, that are organically bound with it, is speaking to another element of the younger intelligentsia than that to which I belong.<sup>72</sup>

Bourne's essays show a sense of intellectual abandonment. They also reflect his growing disillusionment with pragmatism, the intellectual universe in which he had been brought up. As Casey Blake has shown, Bourne was one of a group of

<sup>69</sup> See John Patrick Diggins, 'John Dewey in peace and war', *American Scholar*, 50 (1981), pp. 213–30. Diggins argues that Dewey's pro-war position was antithetical to, rather than rooted in, his pragmatist worldview. See also Alan Cywar, 'John Dewey in World War I: patriotism and international progressivism', *American Quarterly*, 21 (1969), pp. 578–94; James A. Good, 'John Dewey's "permanent Hegelian deposit" and the exigencies of war', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 44 (2006), pp. 293–313, and Livingston, 'War and the intellectuals'.

<sup>70</sup> Randolph Bourne, 'A moral equivalent for universal military service', *New Republic*, 1 July 1916, p. 217.

<sup>71</sup> Randolph Bourne, 'Twilight of idols', in Olaf Hansen, ed., *The radical will: Randolph Bourne selected writings, 1911–1918* (New York, NY, 1977), p. 336.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

young intellectuals and writers who were moving in this period from pragmatist to communitarian thought.<sup>73</sup> The war, and the responses of pragmatic thinkers like Dewey to it, had much to do with this process. ‘What I come to’, Bourne confessed in his essay, ‘is a sense of suddenly being left in the lurch, of suddenly finding that a philosophy upon which I had relied to carry us through no longer works.’ To his mind, Dewey’s brand of instrumental pragmatic philosophy thrived in the relaxed and cool-headed atmosphere of peacetime, but under the pressures of war, its premises crumbled. Bourne rejected the argument that the energy of the war could be channelled for lofty social goals. ‘If the war is too strong for you to prevent’, he pointed out, ‘how is it going to be weak enough for you to control and mould to your liberal purposes?’<sup>74</sup> ‘It is difficult to see’, he added in his essay ‘The war and the intellectuals’, ‘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.’<sup>75</sup>

On this point, the differences between Dewey and Bourne were fundamental—even if their intellectual impulses were similar. Nations, unlike schools, Bourne argued, were not rational entities; therefore Dewey’s optimistic vision did not apply to them. For Dewey, the instrumentalist, there were good and bad wars (energy versus violence).<sup>76</sup> For Bourne, the pacifist, all wars were ultimately the same; they were driven by coercion from above and they were automatic. A society could not control a war; war took over society. Dewey asserted that a society could choose how to conduct itself during a war; Bourne insisted that war, any war, had a dynamic of its own, that all societies at war were essentially alike. For Dewey, the causes for the wartime hysteria in the United States were uniquely American; to Bourne, they were symptomatic of *any* society at war.<sup>77</sup>

Yet perhaps the saddest aspect of the intellectuals’ response to the war, in Bourne’s opinion, was the cultural deterioration that it entailed. To put it plainly, the wartime intellectuals bored him. In ‘The war and the intellectuals’, he complained that ‘the whole era has been spiritually wasted’; ‘during the war’, he contended, ‘the American intellectual class has produced almost nothing in the way of original and illuminating interpretation’. He also mocked the progressive intellectuals for their disingenuousness; the same men who had been so appalled in 1914 by the ‘coalescence of [the European] intellectual classes in support of the military program’ behaved

<sup>73</sup> Casey Blake, *Beloved community: the cultural criticism of Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, and Lewis Mumford* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1990), pp. 157–86. See also Christopher Kamrath, ‘Randolph Bourne’s malcontents: cultural politics, democratic practice, and the domestication of war, 1917–1918’, *Culture, Theory & Critique*, 50 (2009), pp. 59–75.

<sup>74</sup> Bourne, ‘Twilight of idols’, p. 339.

<sup>75</sup> Bourne, ‘The war and the intellectuals’, p. 12.

<sup>76</sup> For a more recent elaboration on this theme, see Michael Walzer, *Just and unjust wars: a moral argument with historical illustrations* (New York, NY, 1977).

<sup>77</sup> See May, *The end of American innocence*.

almost identically in 1917, even though the three years that had passed had given them ample time to reflect on the senseless futility of the war. But, Bourne continued, ‘the war has taught them nothing and will teach them nothing’. American intellectuals had followed their ‘herd intellect’; they had somehow convinced themselves and others that they were different from the Europeans, that they were entering the war not as chauvinists but rather in order to save the free world from subjugation. But, Bourne reminded his readers,

the German intellectuals went to war to save their culture from barbarization! And the French intellectuals went to war to save their beautiful France! And the English to save international honour! And Russia, most altruistic and self-sacrificing of all, to save a small state from destruction! Whence is our miraculous intuition of our moral spotlessness?’

The result in all cases, European and American, was the same: death, destruction, and suffering.<sup>78</sup>

In the interwar years, a number of European thinkers, perhaps most notably the French social philosopher Julien Benda, heavily criticized intellectuals for their involvement in nationalist ‘passions’. Intellectuals in France and Germany, Benda argued, especially during the Great War, had betrayed their calling as dispassionate and conscientious critics of society and upholders of the eternal ideals of truth and justice.<sup>79</sup> Bourne, by contrast, was not bothered by the American intellectuals’ political engagement per se. His criticism was of their form of engagement. ‘They could have used their energy to force a just peace or to devise other means than war for carrying through American policy’, he argued. ‘They could have used their intellectual energy to ensure that our participation in the war meant the international order which they wish. Intellect was not so used. It was used to lead an apathetic nation into an irresponsible war, without guarantees from those belligerents whose cause we were saving.’<sup>80</sup> All in all, ‘the American intellectuals, in their preoccupation with “reality”, seem to have forgotten that the real enemy is War rather than imperial Germany’.<sup>81</sup>

## VI

Even without the benefit of historical perspective, Bourne’s wartime essays offer a perceptive explanation of why so many intellectuals, especially the progressives, so avidly supported American intervention. The outbreak of war in

<sup>78</sup> Bourne, ‘The war and the intellectuals’, p. 7.

<sup>79</sup> Julien Benda, *Le trahison des clercs* (Paris, 1924); for a harsh critique of Benda’s position, see Ernest Gellner, ‘Le trahison de *le trahison des clercs*’, in Alan Montefiore, Ian MacLean, and Peter Winch, eds., *The political responsibility of the intellectual* (Cambridge, MA, 1990), pp. 17–27.

<sup>80</sup> Bourne, ‘The war and the intellectuals’, pp. 8–9.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Europe had shattered the foundation of their ideals—namely, the belief in humanitarian internationalism and democratic nationalism.<sup>82</sup> Their first reaction, according to Bourne, was a ‘lofty and remote and not altogether unsound feeling of spiritual isolation from the conflict’; but in time, that aloofness gave way to an ‘itch to be in on the great experience which the rest of the world was having’. American intellectuals, Bourne believed, were tired—of swimming against the tide, of being ignored, of feeling detached, irrelevant, and obsolete. They had, for too long, been in a state of ‘insufferable tension’; now they found relief in action and participation.<sup>83</sup>

Bourne’s writings from this period earned him a controversial latter-day reputation as a ‘forgotten prophet’. A number of historians have since agreed with his assessments of Dewey and the pro-war intellectuals.<sup>84</sup> This is to be expected, since, as Eric Foner has rightly pointed out, many of Bourne’s bleak predictions came true: ‘For all the [Wilson] administration’s exalted rhetoric, the war inaugurated the most intense repression of civil liberties the nation has ever known. It laid the foundation not for the triumph of progressivism but for one of the most conservative decades in American history.’<sup>85</sup>

But for all his prescience, does Bourne manage to explain the variety of justifications that the pro-war intellectuals found for the intervention, or their intolerance towards those who did not agree with them? His analysis provides part of the answer, but there were other reasons as well. The cultural historian Henry May, for instance, long ago explained the American intellectual response to the war in generational terms. The principal and earliest supporters of the intervention, in his view, were the ‘custodians of nineteenth-century culture’, an older cohort of men and women of letters with a strong affinity to England and the Anglo-American cultural heritage.<sup>86</sup> To these ‘beleaguered defenders’ of an old world that was being destroyed, the war against Germany was a grand lesson in moral idealism. Their attitude was somewhat simplistic; it was the same old vision of the war as a clash of civilizations. May argued that for these intellectuals, the war signalled the death of the idea of a unified European culture. To deal with this trauma, they singled out German culture, *Kultur*, as the lone guilty party in the catastrophe. But this was an obfuscation; as Bourne pointed out in his 1915 essay ‘American use for German ideals’, German culture (if ever there was such a thing) was

<sup>82</sup> For a good contemporary example, see Frank H. Simonds, ‘1914—the end of an era’, *New Republic*, 2 Jan. 1915, pp. 12–13.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9–13.

<sup>84</sup> Bruce Clayton, *Forgotten prophet: the life of Randolph Bourne* (Columbia, MO, 1998).

<sup>85</sup> Eric Foner, *The story of American freedom* (New York, NY, 1999), pp. 176–7.

<sup>86</sup> May, *The end of American innocence*, p. 364, offers as an example the case of Henry James, who became a citizen of Britain, where he had lived for years. See Percy Lubbock, ed., *Letters of Henry James* (New York, NY, 1920), II, p. 479.

everywhere – including England, France, and the United States – and therefore its supposedly nefarious influence could not be confined to just Germany.<sup>87</sup>

For the ‘custodians of culture’, May asserted, blaming the war on Germany was a way to avoid the conclusion that nineteenth-century European civilization as a whole was responsible for the war. By excluding Germany from the camp of enlightened, civilized idealism, they could both salvage the camp and vindicate their own cultural ideals. Many American intellectuals also shared with their European counterparts a profound desire for a ‘regeneration of national spirit’. In 1914, John Grier Hibben, the president of Princeton University, expressed his fear that Europeans would emerge from the war ‘chastened and purified’ while Americans, having missed out on this experience, would wither away into soulless materialism. Hibben extolled the young Americans (some of them future artists and intellectuals) who volunteered, before the American intervention, to serve in the ambulance units of the French army, and called on American youths to follow their fine example.<sup>88</sup>

Christopher Lasch, the late historian and social critic, also accepted Bourne’s argument that the war shattered the illusions of many American intellectuals, and that this explained the realist position adopted by Dewey and other progressives. In a classic essay on the *New Republic*, Lasch argued that ‘[the war] left [American radicalism] with wounds from which it never entirely recovered’. In order to explain the overwhelming pro-war sentiment among American intellectuals on the left, he emphasized their bitter disappointment with the European socialists – particularly the powerful German Social Democratic Party (SPD) – who at the first sound of the war drums put the *international* aside and supported their governments.<sup>89</sup> The dream of internationalism, so dear to the American socialists at the start of the war, seemed dead by 1917.

<sup>87</sup> Bourne, ‘American use for German ideals’, *New Republic*, 4 Sept. 1915, pp. 117–19; reprinted in *The war and the intellectuals*, pp. 48–52. On this issue, see the essays in David E. Barclay and Elizabeth Glaser-Smith, eds., *Transatlantic images and perceptions: Germany and America since 1776* (Cambridge, 1997), especially James T. Kloppenberg, ‘The reciprocal vision of German and American intellectuals: beneath the shifting perceptions’, pp. 155–70; Peter Kruger, ‘Germany and the United States, 1914–1933: the mutual perception of their political system’, pp. 171–90; Elizabeth Glaser-Smith, ‘Between hope and skepticism: American views of Germany, 1918–1933’, pp. 191–216.

<sup>88</sup> John Grier Hibben in *Literary Digest*, 17 Oct. 1914, p. 741. See May, *The end of American innocence*, p. 365, for background.

<sup>89</sup> For the German socialists and the war, see Carl Schorske, *German social democracy, 1905–1917: the development of a schism* (Cambridge, MA, 1955); A.J. Berlau, *The German Social Democratic Party, 1914–1921* (New York, NY, 1949); A.J. Ryder, *The German revolution of 1918: a study of German socialism in war and revolt* (New York, NY, 1967); Ian D. Armour and Ian Porter, ‘Men without a Fatherland? The SPD in imperial Germany’, *Modern History Review*, 6 (1994), pp. 8–20; D.K. Buse, ‘Party leadership and mechanisms of unity: the crisis of German Social Democracy reconsidered, 1910–1914’, *Journal of Modern History*, 62 (1990), pp. 477–502; Guenther Roth, *The Social Democrats in imperial Germany* (Totowa, NJ, 1963); Peter Gay, *The dilemma of democratic socialism: Eduard Bernstein’s challenge to Marx* (New York, NY, 1952). For the British socialists, see J.M. Winter, *Socialism and the challenge of war: ideas and politics in Britain, 1912–1918* (London, 1974).

Lasch added another explanation, inspired by Bourne: realists like Dewey, Croly, and Lippmann actually feared neutrality – which they equated with passiveness, even impotence – more than anything else. They would not, could not, let world events shake their belief in inevitable progress; in Lasch's harsh words, they 'took refuge in the rhetoric of hard-boiled realism ... hoping that the outward appearance of tough-mindedness would conceal the flabbiness of their thought'.<sup>90</sup>

Lasch's argument is perhaps most pertinent to the realists or progressives of the Dewey–Lippmann–Croly mould; but what of those intellectuals who went much further, who were swept off their feet by the war, who attacked Germans and German-Americans in newspapers and journals, who helped to purge their colleagues from the universities? To understand that kind of frenzy, we must look beyond the realms of ideas and polemics. May's and Lasch's explanations take us so far but not far enough. Many of these intellectuals, as we have seen, fell into the trap of viewing the war through the prism of 'culture', as if ideas and not people were doing the fighting, as if the war was a clash of civilizations rather than a struggle between rival imperial nations. Historians should not make the same error when analysing their positions. They belonged to more than just the social category of 'intellectuals' that scholars conveniently set up to differentiate between so-called educated opinion and mass mentality, broadly defined. They were also members of their local communities: they read the same newspapers as everyone else, they shopped in the same markets, their children attended the same schools. They breathed, and sometimes influenced, the same social atmosphere. Intellectuals are often exceptionally sophisticated articulators of ideas already present in their society. These wartime American intellectuals were no different.

## VII

In writing about American intellectuals and the First World War, there is always a large and present-minded issue at stake: what war has meant historically for Americans. Implicitly, historians have seen the Great War, and the broader process of empire-building in which the United States was arguably engaged at the time, as American entries into the modern world. Generally, one could make the argument that American involvement in the world is primarily seen through the prism of war – from the Great War through the Second World War through the Cold War through the Korean and Vietnam Wars, and, most recently, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In this context, and with the usual historian's caution, some parallels between American involvement in the First World War and the events that followed 11 September 2001 beg to be made. Clearly the two periods are distinct and distant from each other and the history of the post 9/11 moment deserves a

<sup>90</sup> Lasch, 'The *New Republic* and the war'.

separate treatment; this article cannot do it scholarly justice. Still, as we approach the centenary of the American intervention in the Great War, it seems important not to shy away from pointing out some of the similarities between them, which suggest some continuities across time.

Some are anecdotal yet suggestive. In recalling how the word ‘hamburger’ was retitled ‘liberty sausage’ in the wake of the war with Germany, one cannot help but think of the replacement in some American quarters of ‘french fries’ with ‘freedom fries’ in 2002 – a reaction to France’s formal opposition to America’s so-called preventive war in Iraq. Other correlations are more substantive and raise broader questions about the ways in which intellectual attitudes to war (at their start, and in their aftermath) have tended to recur. As mentioned, in 1917 the *New Republic* was decidedly in favour of American entry into the war, and the most prominent dissenter from this view, Bourne, was excluded from its pages (and suffered all sorts of other ostracism). In the aftermath of the war, and in the context of the intellectual disillusionment that came with the Red Scare, the waves of xenophobia, and the retreat into isolationism, the editors of that magazine came to regret their earlier support for the war. (By then, Bourne was dead, a thirty-one-year-old victim of the Spanish Influenza epidemic.) In 2003, the liberal *New Yorker* was politely but decidedly in favour of war in Iraq, and two of its most prominent contributors, who dissented from the prevailing view on the War on Terror, disappeared from its pages (forever): Susan Sontag and Art Spiegelman. As the ill-conceived war in Iraq turned into a fiasco, the *New Yorker* also came to regret that war and its own support of it.

Perhaps the most striking parallel between 1917–18 and 2002–3 is in the intellectual pro-war mode of thinking. As with the Great War, many intellectuals and journalists who supported the American decision to go to war in Iraq framed their arguments in moral-political-humanitarian terms, stressing the promotion of democracy, human rights, the empowerment of women, and other universal causes, while almost entirely ignoring the war’s potential destruction of lives, both military and civilian, as well as the history of the country in question and the reality of what might actually transpire in it after the battle was won. As was the case in 1917, in 2002 and 2003 the so-called liberal hawks or interventionists called for action almost as a means unto itself, and hailed the tough-mindedness of intervention as superior to the supposed passivity of intellectuals-as-spectators.<sup>91</sup>

In a sense, between 1914 and 1918 many American intellectuals set a precedent for some of these later attitudes. They exhibited two distinct traits, both of which they were supposedly taking a stand against: isolationism and conformity. They wrote extensively about German culture, the significance of the war, and America’s role in the world. But rarely did they concern themselves

<sup>91</sup> For a scathing critique of the so-called liberal interventionists, see Tony Judt, ‘Bush’s useful idiots’, *London Review of Books*, 21 Sept. 2006, pp. 3–5.

with the war itself, with what it actually was like, even though that was no secret by 1917. They may have thought of themselves as internationalists when they called for intervention and then greeted that intervention with satisfaction and excitement, but in my view, they were not. By 1917, many European thinkers were bemoaning the futility of the war; many intellectuals in the United States, at the same time, were describing it as a great adventure, a leap towards the rest of world. By 1918, European newspapers and newsreels were full of descriptions of the horrors of battle, and a number of European nations were on the verge (or in the midst) of violent revolution and brutal civil war. Many American intellectuals seem to have been blissfully ignorant of all this. This was an isolationist stance, and it was entirely in step with the general public sentiment. American society did not readily tolerate political nonconformity after April 1917. Should we expect the intellectuals to have behaved any differently? Did they commit what Benda would term intellectual treason?

It is always problematic for historians to judge their subjects, but this last question demands an answer. True, these intellectuals were part of their society and therefore it should come as no surprise that they shared its dominant sentiments. But the role of the intellectual, especially in times of crisis, goes beyond this. Lovejoy, in 1914, demanded that the German intellectuals, faced with the prospect of war, fulfil 'their function – of detached criticism, of cool consideration, of insisting that facts, and all the relevant facts, be known and faced'. When faced with the same test, many intellectuals in the United States performed just as weakly as had their German counterparts in 1914. The difference is that in 1914 there was no way of knowing about the war what by 1917 or 1918 should have been clear. When they ignored the horrors of the war, when they interpreted it so simplistically and jingoistically, when they tormented dissenters, and when they rationalized, rather than condemned, the wartime hysteria and violence, they failed in all three respects. They did not live up to their own standards, much less Benda's. They may have been dutiful subjects of the American government, but they were not 'citizens of the world'.