

# **UNTIMELY PAPERS**

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Untimely papers by James Oppenheim

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**JAMES OPPENHEIM**

**UNTIMELY  
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BY RANDOLPH BOURNE

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FOREWORD BY THE EDITOR  
JAMES OPPENHEIM



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## EDITOR'S FOREWORD

Van Wyck Brooks has said of Randolph Bourne that he was the very type of that proletarian-aristocrat which is coming into being. When Brooks and Waldo Frank and Louis Untermeyer and Paul Rosenfeld and I—a nucleus at the heart of a group including so many of the “younger generation”—were joyfully publishing *The Seven Arts* we inevitably found the phrase “the young world,” and by this phrase we characterized nothing local, but a new international life, an interweaving of groups in all countries, the unspoiled forces everywhere who share the same culture and somewhat the same new vision of the world. There was in it the Russian mixture of art and revolution, the one a change in the spirit of man, the other a change in his organized life.

At first Randolph Bourne was separated from us. He had not yet ended his apprenticeship to

that "liberal pragmatism" which he effectually destroys in "Twilight of Idols." He was still relying on the intellect as a programme-maker for society. But when America entered the war, his apprenticeship ended. That shock set him free, and it was inevitable then that he should not only join *The Seven Arts* but actually in himself gather us all together, himself, in America, the very soul of "the young world." No nerve of that world was missing in him: he was as sensitive to art as to philosophy, as politically-minded as he was psychologic, as brave in fighting for the conscientious objector as he was in opposing current American culture. He was a flaming rebel against our crippled life, as if he had taken the cue from the long struggle with his own body. And just as that weak child's body finally slew him before he had fully triumphed, so the great war succeeded in silencing him. When Randolph Bourne died on December 22, 1918, all of us of the "younger generation" felt that a great man had died with a great work unfinished.

He had been quite silent for over a year, for *The Seven Arts* was suspended in September,



1917, its subsidy withdrawn because of our attitude on the war. He was nowhere wanted. It was difficult even for him to get publication for book reviews. Backed only by a few friends, he held a solitary way, with hardly the heart for new enterprise. Nevertheless he began a book, "The State," in which he planned the complete expression of his attitude, both destructive and creative. This was never finished. We have only what amounts to an essay; but undoubtedly this essay is the most effective and terrible indictment of the institution of the State which the war has yet brought forth. It furnishes a natural climax to *The Seven Arts* essays; together they make a book, both historic and prophetic.

We have nothing else like this book in America. It is the only living record of the suppressed minority, and is, as so often the case, the prophecy of that minority's final triumph. Everything that Bourne wrote over two years ago has been vindicated by the event. A great chorus takes up now the song of this solitary, and like so many pioneers he has not lived to see his truth made into fact.

This book is but the first of several. We shall

have, under Van Wyck Brooks's editorship, his volume of cultural essays, his reviews, and a "Life and Letters." When the complete picture of Randolph Bourne emerges he will be seen as the pioneer spirit of his age, a symbol of our future. His place in the American tradition is secure. His life marks the beginning of our "coming-of-age."

This book relates to the war and the present crisis of the world. It does a great service for our country. Without it our showing would be weak and impoverished compared with the Older Nations. We may rejoice that as England had her Bertrand Russell, France her Rolland and Barbusse, Germany her Liebknecht and Nicolai, so America had her Randolph Bourne.

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