

Michigan Law Review

Volume 117 | Issue 6

2019

Which Radicals?

Cass R. Sunstein
Harvard Law School

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.law.umich.edu/mlr>

Part of the [Law and Society Commons](#), [Legal Biography Commons](#), and the [Legal History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cass R. Sunstein, *Which Radicals?*, 117 MICH. L. REV. 1215 (2019).
Available at: <https://repository.law.umich.edu/mlr/vol117/iss6/15>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Michigan Law Review at University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Michigan Law Review by an authorized editor of University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact mlaw.repository@umich.edu.

WHICH RADICALS?

Cass R. Sunstein*

YOUNG RADICALS: IN THE WAR FOR AMERICAN IDEALS. By *Jeremy McCarter*. New York: Random House. 2017. Pp. xvii, 324. \$30.

INTRODUCTION

Should radicalism speak to us? Which kind?

There are many possible answers, and in the future, there will be many more. Right now, the United States contains passionate young thinkers who favor radical reform. They are in their twenties. Some of them sound crazy. They have bold ideas about liberty, equality, and democracy, and about what is wrong with our nation. You haven't heard their names, but you will. In a hundred years, people will write whole books about them.

Some of them believe that we have ignored a form of systematic injustice and that the Constitution should be amended to stamp it out. They are marching in the footsteps of Alice Paul, a tireless advocate of sex equality and a critical force behind the women's suffrage movement (p. xvi). Others insist that in the modern world, our conception of democratic self-rule is hopelessly naive and that we need to find a way to empower experts—scientists and statisticians—who see the world as it is. They are following the lead of Walter Lippmann, social theorist and journalist (pp. xvi, 3), who was an early diagnostician of fake news and echo chambers. Some of them have no interest in democracy or expertise; they want to promote liberty, as they understand it, or they are inspired by religious convictions, and they reject the idea of separation of church and state. Some of them embrace liberalism in one or another form. Some of them repudiate it.

Jeremy McCarter¹ has written a dazzling book, *Young Radicals: In the War for American Ideals*, about five young radicals, including Paul and Lippmann, who did some of their most important work exactly a century ago, when the United States experienced an outpouring of left-wing thought (pp. xiv–xvi). McCarter's radicals were idealists, revolutionaries; they thought that American society had to be remade in fundamental ways (p. xvi). They were exploding with energy, humor, and wit. They loved satire, drama, and sex. They wanted to be where the action was. In offering a collection of nonpolitical poems to the public, one of them, Max Eastman,

* Robert Walmsley University Professor, Harvard Law School.

1. Executive Producer at Make-Believe Association.

thought it necessary to provide an explanation, even an apology, which could have been the young radical's secret *cri de coeur*:

Life is older than liberty. It is greater than revolution. It burns in both camps. And life is what I love. And though I love life for all men and women, and so inevitably stand in the ranks of revolution against the cruel system of these times, I loved it first for myself.²

In addition to Eastman, Paul, and Lippmann, McCarter focuses on John Reed and Randolph Bourne (p. xvi). Let's explore them.

I. THE SWASHBUCKLER

Without question, the most magnetic of McCarter's radicals is Reed—reporter, poet, and playwright, drawn to war. Was there ever a writer, or anyone, like Reed? Swashbuckling, mischievous, exuberant, and vain, he runs away with the narrative. Here's how McCarter introduces him: "John Reed prowls the docks, laughing with the sailors, chatting up the whores" (p. 9).

Walter Lippmann knew Reed well, and in an affectionate, merciless profile, called "Legendary John Reed," he ridicules Reed's initial attempts to embrace socialism: "He made an effort to believe that the working class is not composed of miners, plumbers, and working men generally, but is a fine, statuesque giant who stands on a high hill facing the sun" (pp. 72–73). Disdaining one of the most celebrated young journalists of the time, Lippmann proclaims, "By temperament he is not a professional writer or reporter. He is a person who enjoys himself. Revolution, literature, poetry, they are only things which hold him at times, incidents merely of his living . . . I can't think of a form of disaster which John Reed hasn't tried and enjoyed" (p. 73). But he also offered a tribute: "Wherever his sympathies marched with the facts, Reed was superb" (p. 73).

Reed began his career as a poet as well as a journalist, making his reputation with jubilant, silly, memorable verses about Greenwich Village and its various bohemians: "O Life is a joy to a broth of a boy / At Forty-Two Washington Square!" (p. 15). He offered his own merciless portrait of Lippmann:

Our all-unchallenged Chief! But were there one
Who builds a world, and leaves out all the fun,—
Who dreams a pageant, gorgeous, infinite,
And then leaves all the color out of it,—
Who wants to make the human race, and me,
March to a geometric Q. E. D.—
Who but must laugh, if such a man there be?
Who would not weep, if WALTER L. were he? (p. 16)

2. P. 262 (quoting MAX EASTMAN, *COLORS OF LIFE*, at Preface (1918)).

As McCarter puts it, Reed became, for various radicals and dissidents, “part crown prince, part jester” (p. 17), and much of McCarter’s book can be read as a tale of the pitched battle between Legendary John Reed, perpetually young, and that all-unchallenged Chief, middle-aged before his time. But Reed also had a serious streak. Eastman, editor of the socialist magazine *The Masses*, read his stories and ran them, and made him part of the journal’s small, informal editorial board (p. 25). Together, they wrote the magazine’s manifesto, which sounds like Reed’s self-understanding:

A revolutionary and not a reform magazine; a magazine with a sense of humor and no respect for the respectable; frank, arrogant, impertinent, searching for the true causes; a magazine directed against rigidity and dogma wherever it is found; printing what is too naked or true for a money-making press; a magazine whose final policy is to do as it pleases and conciliate nobody, not even its readers—there is a field for this publication in America.³

While writing for *The Masses*, Reed creates scenes, literally and figuratively. With radical friends and workers, he masterminds the performance of a play, a “proof of concept of a kind of people’s art,” on Fifth Avenue, displaying a picket line, the shooting of a striker, and the funeral procession; the play receives national publicity.⁴ He has an affair with his patron, the wealthy heiress Mabel Dodge, who falls desperately in love with him (pp. 42, 70). He becomes a war correspondent, pushing his way right to the middle of the Mexican Revolution, where he dances, drinks, and sings with the rebels who followed Pancho Villa (pp. 69–70). When war breaks out in Europe, he heads straight to Paris, “frantic to reach the front lines” (p. 69). Returning to Greenwich Village, he becomes more sincerely radical, seeing war as a “capitalist swindle” (p. 101). After Lippmann endorses Theodore Roosevelt, Reed breaks savagely with his old friend for having betrayed his radical principles and for having supported a monster (pp. 101–03). He breaks up with Dodge and falls in love with Louise Bryant, a married writer (pp. 71, 132).

In the summer of 1916, Reed is ill with a kidney ailment, and on doctor’s orders, he stops his ceaseless travelling to recover in Provincetown, Massachusetts (with Bryant) (pp. 127–28). He decides both to write and perform in plays (pp. 128–31). In fact, he “and his merrymaking comrades go a long way toward inventing serious theater in America” (p. 128). He helps to found the Provincetown Players (p. 133). He meets a young playwright with a trunk full of plays; it’s Eugene O’Neill, and Reed has a part in one of the first performances of his work (p. 131). O’Neill and Reed become close friends; O’Neill has a torrid affair with Bryant (p. 132). A few months later, Reed and Bryant are married (pp. 147–48). Her affair with O’Neill continues (p. 148).

3. P. 28 (quoting *A Free Magazine*, *MASSSES*, Feb. 1913, at 2).

4. Pp. 40–42. A stylistic note: For Reed, I am mostly using the present tense. It suits him.

After the United States enters World War I, Reed is devastated, and he writes numerous essays for *The Masses*, attacking both the logic and the justice of U.S. engagement (p. 178). He has an affair.⁵ In 1917, he finds his way to Russia, having been told that “the new world was being born there” (p. 190, 205). There he meets Leon Trotsky, who dazzles him, explaining that the soviets (councils of workers, peasants, and soldiers) are “the most perfect representatives of the people—perfect in their revolutionary experience, in their ideas and objects” (p. 207). Reed is entranced. He covers the Russian Revolution, eventually producing his classic, *Ten Days That Shook the World* (p. 260). He hopes for a revolution in the United States, in which “the proletariat will finally lose its temper and rise,” and “blood will flow—in rivers” (p. 208). No longer “a baffled, wayward reporter,” he is now a genuine revolutionary, probably the most important Communist in the United States (p. 215). He becomes editor of *The New York Communist* (p. 261). He gets to know Lenin (Chapter Thirty-Five). He is prepared to take orders directly from Moscow, where the Bolsheviks have created the Third Communist International, an organization that steers the global revolution (p. 266). He dies of typhus in 1920, with Bryant holding his hand (p. 295). He is in Moscow, where he receives a hero’s funeral (pp. 295–96, 316–17). He is buried at the Kremlin (pp. 316–317).

II. THE DEMOCRAT

If Reed is McCarter’s most mercurial figure, Alice Paul is his steadiest, and while the four others knew each other and often crossed paths, Paul appears not to have encountered any of them. She grew up in a traditional Quaker family, whose members sometimes addressed each other as “thou,” but who had highly advanced ideas about sex equality and with a commitment to making the world a better place (p. 31). Small and soft-spoken, she was also athletic, decisive, and intensely focused (p. 32). One of her contemporaries described her as “swift, alert, almost panther-like in her movements.”⁶

Early on, she joined the National American Woman Suffrage Association, and all by herself, she became its congressional committee (p. 33). On the eve of the inauguration of President Woodrow Wilson, she organized a monumental parade for suffrage in the very center of the nation’s capital (pp. 29–31). Two weeks later, she found herself face-to-face with the new president in the White House, who emphasized that his priorities were currency reform and tariff reform (pp. 34–36). “But, Mr. President,” Paul asked, “do you not understand that the Administration has no right to legislate for currency, tariff, and any other reform without first getting the consent of

5. P. 207 (quoting JOHN REED, *TEN DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD* 69 (Penguin Classics, rev. ed. 2007) (1919)).

6. P. 32 (quoting DORIS STEVENS, *JAILED FOR FREEDOM* 10 (1920)).

women to these reforms?"⁷ Wilson's baffled response: "Get the consent of women?"⁸

Paul became a thorn in Wilson's side and a constant problem. Relentless, optimistic, inventive, and focused like a laser, she started a magazine, *The Suffragist*, and founded a new organization, the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage, whose purpose was to raise funds to fight to amend the Constitution (p. 36). Later she created the National Woman's Party, which brought political pressure to bear on those who did not support the suffrage amendment (p. 114). As the war began, she redoubled her efforts, invoking the war itself and proclaiming:

We have no true democracy in this country, though we are fighting for democracy abroad Twenty million American citizens are denied a voice in their own government. We must let the public know that this intolerable situation exists because, toward women, President Wilson has adopted the attitude of an autocratic ruler.⁹

Her message got through to her fellow citizens. With a huge crowd watching, two women unfurled a banner as Russian diplomats entered the White House gates: "We, the Women of America, tell you that America is not a democracy."¹⁰ (Eastman, Bourne, and Reed endorsed their efforts (p. 194).) Paul was arrested for unlawful picketing and ended up in jail, where she faced unspeakably horrendous conditions (p. 199). "The food is vile beyond belief, consisting of worm-ridden pork, bug-ridden soup, and stale bread" (p. 199). She refused to eat and was moved to the prison's psychiatric ward (p. 201). Through what seems to be a form of torture, she was forcibly fed raw eggs through a tube (p. 201). Her life was in danger, but she was suddenly released—possibly as a result of personal intervention from the president (p. 203).

Wilson eventually came around and publicly supported the suffrage amendment. To the nation and Congress, he spoke very much as Paul had a few years before, arguing that the suffrage movement is a test of whether "we be indeed democrats, and wish to lead the world to democracy."¹¹ The House of Representatives voted for the amendment, but the Senate was unmoved (pp. 217, 221).

Paul did not think that Wilson's commitment was firm enough. In 1919, she arranged to have Wilson burned in effigy, right outside the White

7. P. 35 (quoting DORIS STEVENS, *JAILED FOR FREEDOM* 23 (1920)).

8. P. 35 (quoting DORIS STEVENS, *JAILED FOR FREEDOM* 23 (1920)).

9. P. 198 (quoting *President Onlooker at Mob Attack on Suffragists*, *SUFFRAGIST*, Aug. 18, 1917, at 7).

10. P. 192 (quoting *The Woman's Party Appeals to the Russian Mission*, *SUFFRAGIST*, June 23, 1917, at 7).

11. P. 221 (quoting *Wilson Asks Senate to Pass Suffrage Bill*, *N.Y. TRIB.*, Oct. 1, 1918, at 1, 11).

House.¹² (It is worth pausing over that particular form of protest. Can we imagine it today?) In June, Congress voted in favor of the amendment, and in 1920, the states ratified the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution (pp. 271–72). For the next fifty years, Paul served as a leader of the National Woman’s Party, which worked to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, of which she was the original author, back in 1923.¹³ She did not succeed (p. 312). But at the age of 78, she played a key role in getting the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to forbid discrimination on the basis of sex (pp. 312–13). That ban continues to have a major impact in American life, and it is now essentially uncontested.

III. THE IDENTITARIAN

Of McCarter’s five radicals, Randolph Bourne is the most complicated and elusive, and his story is the most heartbreaking. He also speaks to current concerns, perhaps especially on university campuses, but also on the political left. Born with a facial deformity, a hunchback, and just five feet tall (pp. 48, 50), Bourne was, in McCarter’s account, the most farsighted thinker in the group (pp. 322–23). He also fell in love with beautiful women, and at least one of them loved him back (pp. 121, 150–51). In 1911, he wrote an unusual essay called *The Handicapped*, part of which was deeply personal:

When one, however, is in full possession of his faculties, and can move about freely, bearing simply a crooked back and an unsightly face, he is perforce drawn into all the currents of life. Particularly if he has his own way in the world to make, his road is apt to be hard and rugged, and he will penetrate to an unusual depth in his interpretation both of the world’s attitude toward such misfortunes, and of the attitude toward the world which such misfortunes tend to cultivate in men like him. For he has all the battles of a stronger man to fight, and he is at a double disadvantage in fighting them He is never confident of himself, because he has grown up in an atmosphere where nobody has been very confident of him; and yet his environment and circumstances call out all sorts of ambitions and energies in him which, from the nature of his case, are bound to be immediately thwarted.¹⁴

His most influential essay, published in 1916, *Trans-national America*, is a celebration of the dismal failure of the idea of an American “melting-pot” (pp. 123–24). In his view, that failure, “far from closing the great American democratic experiment, means that it has only just begun.”¹⁵ What America is becoming is “not a nationality but a trans-nationality, a weaving back and

12. P. 271; *Suffragists Burn Wilson in Effigy; Many Locked Up*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 10, 1919, at 1, 1.

13. See p. 312.

14. One of Them [Randolph S. Bourne], *The Handicapped*, 108 ATLANTIC MONTHLY 320, 320 (1911); p. 48.

15. P. 123 (quoting Randolph S. Bourne, *Trans-national America*, 118 ATLANTIC MONTHLY 86, 93 (1916)).

forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors.”¹⁶ With these ideas, Bourne was, in McCarter’s account, able to give new meaning to Josiah Royce’s idea of the Beloved Community (pp. 62, 125). For Bourne, that ideal did not involve “mere doubtful triumphs of the past, which rebound to the glory of only one of our transnationalities.”¹⁷ It would require a “future America, on which all can unite,” as those who are different come to “understand each other more warmly.”¹⁸

Bourne was also a vigorous opponent of American participation in World War I. A prominent writer for *The New Republic*, he lost his position with the magazine because of that opposition (pp. 168, 174, 223). He continued to find outlets for his essays but in journals with much smaller readership, where he deplored what he saw as a betrayal by his friends and colleagues of their shared ideals (pp. 174–76). “To those of us who still retain an irreconcilable animus against war, it has been a bitter experience to see the unanimity with which the American intellectuals have thrown their support to the use of war-technique in the crisis in which America found herself.”¹⁹ Some characteristic words:

The intellectual who retains his animus against war will push out more boldly than ever to make his case solid against it. The old ideals crumble; new ideals must be forged. His mind will continue to roam widely and ceaselessly. The thing he will fear most is premature crystallization. If the American intellectual class rivets itself to a “liberal” philosophy that perpetuates the old errors, there will then be need for “democrats” whose task will be to divide, confuse, disturb, keep the intellectual waters constantly in motion to prevent any such ice from ever forming.²⁰

Bourne was always skeptical about “premature crystallization.” He died during the pandemic of 1918 (pp. 246–47).

IV. THE PROPAGANDIST

Sometimes described as “the founding father of the twentieth-century American left,” Eastman made his reputation as editor of *The Masses*, a position that he accepted reluctantly in 1912, when he was just twenty-nine years old.²¹ The magazine was effectively dead at the time; it was tedious and had no money (pp. 18–22). Eastman transformed it, making it funnier and bolder (p. 22). He put color on the cover (p. 22). He added fiction, satire, and po-

16. P. 123 (quoting Randolph S. Bourne, *Trans-national America*, 118 ATLANTIC MONTHLY 86, 93 (1916)).

17. P. 126 (quoting Randolph S. Bourne, *Trans-national America*, 118 ATLANTIC MONTHLY 86, 93 (1916)).

18. P. 126 (quoting Randolph S. Bourne, *Trans-national America*, 118 ATLANTIC MONTHLY 86, 93 (1916)).

19. Randolph Bourne, *The War and the Intellectuals*, 2 SEVEN ARTS 133, 133 (1917).

20. *Id.* at 146.

21. Pp. 18–21 (quoting JOHN P. DIGGINS, UP FROM COMMUNISM 4 (Columbia Univ. Press 1994) (1975)).

etry (p. 23). He devoted the middle two pages of one issue to an illustration portraying the New York press as a whorehouse, in which a rich man, labeled “Big Advertisers,” has access to the prostitutes, “who are really the men working at a newspaper in incongruously slinky dresses” (p. 23). In terms of substance, Eastman’s most important decision was to refuse to choose between the pragmatic socialists like Lippmann, who wanted to win elections, and the radicals, who accepted the use of violence to combat capitalism (pp. 26–27). He made space for both positions (p. 27). (Even for current readers who deplore its politics, *The Masses* is teeming with life.) Eastman’s changes rescued the magazine (pp. 23–25). A glimpse of his own writing:

Another thing about the Income Tax is that it really offers a method by which a great big redistribution of wealth could be effected, if the right people got the power. By the right people I mean the revolutionary workers and their allies who have the courage to fight for a Great Big Redistribution.²²

Like Bourne, Eastman vigorously opposed the war, and along with Reed, he repeatedly railed against it in *The Masses*.²³ As described in some of the most chilling, even terrifying sections in McCarter’s book, Eastman faced serious criminal charges as a result of wartime legislation that made it a crime to obstruct recruitment for military service (pp. 229–37). Prosecutors argued that Eastman’s writing violated the law and brought him to trial (pp. 230–31); thanks to a hung jury, he narrowly avoided jail (p. 237). But free speech did not prevail. As a result of the Espionage Act of 1917,²⁴ *The Masses* had to close down.²⁵ (Without getting didactic, McCarter shows how quickly and easily a free nation, headed by a democracy-loving president, can turn to censorship, accusations of disloyalty, and prison sentences in the midst of war.²⁶)

To continue his work, Eastman helped to found another radical magazine, called *The Liberator* (p. 231). Like Reed, he became enraptured by what he saw as the success of the Russian Revolution—and lost his moorings (pp. 302–03). Having been victimized by censorship, he wrote, astonishingly, “The most rigid political tyranny conceivable, if it accomplished the elimination of wage-slavery and continued to produce wealth, would increase the amount of actual liberty so much that the very sides of the earth would heave with relief.”²⁷ In a truly nonsensical sentence, he explained that he did not

22. Max Eastman, *Knowledge and Revolution*, *MASSES*, June 1913, at 5, 6.

23. P. 178; e.g., Max Eastman, *Knowledge and Revolution: War for War’s Sake*, *MASSES*, Sept. 1914, at 5; John Reed, *The Worst Thing in Europe*, *MASSES*, Mar. 1915, at 17.

24. Espionage Act of 1917, ch. 30, 40 Stat. 217 (codified as amended at 18 U.S.C. §§ 792–799 (2012)).

25. See pp. 179–82.

26. Pp. 191–94. For relevant discussion, see *CAN IT HAPPEN HERE? AUTHORITARIANISM IN AMERICA* (Cass R. Sunstein ed., 2018).

27. P. 303 (quoting Max Eastman, Editorial, *Dogmatism Again*, *LIBERATOR*, May 1921, at 5, 8).

believe in free speech: “So long as our civilization consists in its economic essence of a war between two classes, Free Speech will exist only at such times, or to such extent as may be harmless to the interests of the class in power.”²⁸ A lifelong poet, he still wanted “to cultivate the poetry, but keep the poetry true to the science of the revolution.”²⁹ (Good luck with that.)

Eastman decided to leave the United States and to spend two years in Russia, to see (by his own account) whether what he had been writing was actually true (p. 314). He didn’t like Stalin, and over the coming decades, he came to repudiate his previous thinking, describing socialism as “a dangerous fairy tale.”³⁰ In the 1940s, he became a friend and an admirer of Friedrich Hayek, socialism’s greatest critic.³¹ In the early 1950s, he supported Joseph McCarthy (pp. 314–15). “The man hounded and harassed during the first Red Scare became an advocate of the second” (p. 315). (He was also famously handsome, even as an old man, and enjoyed a colorful personal life; happily married for many years, he had countless lovers, extending well into his seventies (p. 315).)

V. THE TECHNOCRAT

Lippmann started as a radical, but alone in McCarter’s group, he became an establishment figure. He was perhaps the most respected journalist in the United States, wined and dined by the nation’s leaders, including several presidents. McCarter captures his astonishingly rapid rise to moderation and influence. In his early twenties, he embraced socialism. Later he was a co-founder of *The New Republic*,³² which rapidly became highly influential. Before the 1916 election, Woodrow Wilson himself courted Lippmann—and charmed him. “I have come around completely to Wilson,” he told a friend,³³ and in October, he endorsed him publicly as “a constructive nationalist” whose purpose was “liberal in purpose.”³⁴ He was invited to the White House. As McCarter puts it: “The most powerful men in the country like him. And he likes them. Wilson’s reelection means they will spend the next four years together” (p. 149).

28. P. 303–04 (quoting Max Eastman, Editorial, *The Free Press*, LIBERATOR, May 1921, at 5, 5).

29. P. 304 (quoting Max Eastman, *Clarifying the Light*, LIBERATOR, June 1921, at 5, 7).

30. P. 314 (quoting MAX EASTMAN, REFLECTIONS ON THE FAILURE OF SOCIALISM 24 (1955)).

31. See Sidney Hook, *Remembering Max Eastman*, 48 AM. SCHOLAR 404, 405, 412 (1979) (book review).

32. Walter Lippmann, *Notes for a Biography*, 63 NEW REPUBLIC 260 (1930), <https://newrepublic.com/article/101570/notes-biography> [<https://perma.cc/CB6E-LXJA>].

33. P. 140 (quoting PUBLIC PHILOSOPHER: SELECTED LETTERS OF WALTER LIPPMANN 58 (John Morton Blum ed., 1985)).

34. P. 140 (quoting Walter Lippmann, *The Case for Wilson*, 8 NEW REPUBLIC 263 (1916)).

When Wilson decided to join the war effort—a decision that Lippmann supported—Lippmann reached out to his friend, Newton Baker, the secretary of war, to seek employment with the War Department (in part, it appears, to avoid the draft) (pp. 170–71). Baker obliged him (p. 171). Lippmann did terrific work and impressed everyone, including the great figures in Washington; the famously skeptical Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. proclaimed, “Monstrous clever lad.”³⁵ To his delight, Wilson chose Lippmann to work in diplomacy for the peace conference that would follow the war (p. 172). As his old colleagues Bourne and Eastman rose in status in the antiwar camp—and hence in national marginalization—Lippmann became an increasingly important figure in the Wilson administration. (After leaving the government, he returned to journalism, won two Pulitzer prizes, and served as an occasional adviser to several presidents.³⁶ In 1964, he was awarded the presidential medal of freedom (p. 320).)

Lippmann covered many topics in his long career, and it is not simple to discern a unifying theme. I will suggest that some of his most distinctive work embraced a form of technocratic democracy. That is what distinguished him most sharply from McCarter’s other figures, and it is what makes him, in a way, unusually helpful for contemporary issues.

VI. WHO’S INSPIRING, REALLY?

McCarter wants to tell his tale, not to editorialize about it. But he is inspired by his subjects. In his words, “we ought to be braced by the example of the young radicals: how they discovered their ideals, made a decision to fight for them, and went on fighting even when the battle turned against them” (p. 324). He adds that when marchers are on the streets today, it sometimes feels like 1912, making it “possible to daydream, even if only for a moment, that the forces of idealism are discovering their strength, and that one day they’ll help this country make another leap into the future” (p. 324).

We should emphasize here that “the forces of idealism” can take many different forms, including, of course, the political right. Radicalism comes in many shapes and sizes. Adolf Hitler was a radical, and so are other fascists of various kinds.³⁷ But McCarter is focused on left-wing figures, and they will be my focus here.

McCarter does a stunning job of bringing the five figures to life, of capturing the idealism of their young years, and of showing the massive, and wildly different, impacts of the war on their idealism. His book also has art-

35. P. 171 (quoting Jeffrey O’Connell & Nancy Dart, *The House of Truth: Home of the Young Frankfurter and Lippmann*, 35 CATH. U. L. REV. 79, 83 (1985)).

36. Harry C. McPherson, Jr., *Walter Lippmann’s American Century*, 59 FOREIGN AFF. 163 (1980) (book review); *International Reporting*, PULITZER PRIZES, <https://www.pulitzer.org/prize-winners-by-category/210> [<https://perma.cc/RWB7-LXAM>]; *Special Awards and Citations*, PULITZER PRIZES, <https://www.pulitzer.org/prize-winners-by-category/260> [<https://perma.cc/4UE4-EL3P>].

37. See LAWRENCE DENNIS, *THE COMING AMERICAN FASCISM* (1936).

istry. By focusing tightly on the period from 1912 to 1922 and by proceeding chronologically, he manages to provide far more illumination, and a lot more fun, than could have been generated by sequential biographies. The contrasts among the various figures, and their intersecting lives, present countless mysteries, only some of which are solved; McCarter's account will lead many readers back to the original writings of his subjects.

But should they really inspire us? To answer that question, we need to ask questions about what their goals were and what they did to achieve them. Reed is an unforgettable character, and he produced some superb work, but his radicalism took the form of an ardent embrace of Soviet-style Communism. That's not exactly admirable. Would he have embraced Hitler too? Probably not, but you cannot entirely rule that out. There is no question that the Nazis would have excited him. Above all, he was drawn to drama as such. Many contemporary radicals, on the left and right, seem to be similarly drawn. But that is hardly inspiring if the point of radicalism is to produce desirable change.

Eastman and Bourne certainly had strong moral commitments. Eastman's work for *The Masses* displays wit and verve, and he produced a massive amount. But for all his passion and productivity, it's not unfair (I think) to wonder how much he contributed to either theory or practice. Bourne was a man of deep feeling, and his life had great poignancy, but his arguments about transnational America are soupy and half-baked. True, the metaphor of a melting pot is far too simple, but it captures an idea: a shared *national* identity, in which people with disparate racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds come to identify as distinctively American. It's not clear to what extent Bourne wants to repudiate that idea, or even what the idea of a transnational America really means. It is not clear, by the way, that modern defenders of identity politics, or identitarianism, have gone beyond Bourne, or done better than he did—which is to say that they have not gone very far, or done very well.³⁸

In my view, Paul and Lippmann are the most inspiring figures, and they are inspiring for altogether different reasons. Paul was a great democrat. She devoted much of her life, and all of the period of McCarter's narrative, to making American democracy live up to its own ideals. By contrast, Lippmann's most important work is a plea for a kind of technocracy. He was a disaffected democrat in the sense that the whole idea of self-government seemed to him misleading and simplistic. In his view, we need a stronger role for scientists and experts, who can overcome the inevitable ignorance of the public.

Among McCarter's subjects, Paul was unique, in the sense that she had a clear political vision, and for all her life she stayed true to it. She was a radical

38. I realize that this is a harsh conclusion, and there are important exceptions. Superb treatments include AXEL HONNETH, *THE STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION* (Joel Anderson trans., Polity Press 1995) (1992), and IRIS MARION YOUNG, *JUSTICE AND THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE* (rev. ed. 2011).

about sex equality. She was relentlessly single-minded. She was right. Her views are now mainstream. Astonishingly, she changed the Constitution in a fundamental way, in the process making a massive mark on American law and life. There is a good argument that she belongs in an extended family with James Madison and Alexander Hamilton as one of the nation's founders.

Of the young radicals, Lippmann was the best and deepest thinker. We have largely forgotten him, and that's a loss. It's time for a Lippmann revival. Above all, his 1922 book, *Public Opinion*,³⁹ repays careful reading.

Lippmann's thesis is that our conception of democracy is fundamentally flawed. In his view, we are asking voters and the press to do something that is essentially impossible, which is to have a fully accurate understanding of the world.⁴⁰ The environment in which we live "is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance," and so "we have to reconstruct it on a simpler model before we can manage with it."⁴¹ That simpler reconstruction is a "pseudo-environment," constructed in diverse ways by and for different groups, with the result that people end up living "in different worlds. More accurately, they live in the same world, but they think and feel in different ones."⁴² Pseudo-environments are full of falsehoods and fake news. Opinions are manipulated, and consent is manufactured.

Nor is the press a solution. "It is like the beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about, bringing one episode and then another out of darkness into vision."⁴³ In the end, people "are compelled to act without a reliable picture of the world."⁴⁴ And that "is the primary defect of popular government, a defect inherent in its traditions."⁴⁵

In Lippmann's view, the last thing we need are earnest platitudes about governance by We the People. Of course the public is ultimately sovereign. But it needs to have, and to empower, "a system of analysis and record"—that is, a government structure that makes a large space for statisticians, scientists, and other experts, who will acquire reliable information and make it available both to public officials and to the public.⁴⁶ Lippmann insists on a large role for technocrats, who are subject to representative government but who can disregard people's beliefs in various "pseudo-environments" and help public officials to deal with the world as it actually is. "The real sequence should be one where the disinterested expert first finds and formulates the facts for the man of action," with pride of place for "experimental

39. WALTER LIPPMANN, *PUBLIC OPINION* (1922).

40. *Id.* at 29–31.

41. *Id.* at 16.

42. *Id.* at 20. For relevant discussion, see CASS R. SUNSTEIN, *#REPUBLIC: DIVIDED DEMOCRACY IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA* (2017).

43. LIPPMANN, *supra* note 39, at 364.

44. *Id.* at 365.

45. *Id.*

46. *Id.* at 364.

method in social science.”⁴⁷ (Think, if you would, about climate change, food safety, the opioid epidemic, and highway deaths.)

Expertise is “the way to overcome the central difficulty of self-government, the difficulty of dealing with an unseen reality.”⁴⁸ For those who worry about democratic ideals, Lippmann candidly insisted that his purpose “is not to burden every citizen with expert opinions on all questions, but to push that burden away from him towards the responsible administrator.”⁴⁹ (So Reed had Lippmann right: “Who wants to make the human race, and me, / March to a geometric Q. E. D.” (p. 16).)

No revolution was ever fought for “a system of analysis and record.”⁵⁰ No one ever marched under a banner bearing the words “responsible administration.” But to skeptics and colleagues—and to Eastman, Bourne, and above all Reed—Lippmann had something simple to say about his proposal: “That is the radical way.”⁵¹

47. *Id.* at 375–77.

48. *Id.* at 396.

49. *Id.* at 399.

50. *Id.* at 364. For modern defenses of technocratic conceptions of democracy, see PARAG KHANNA, *TECHNOCRACY IN AMERICA* (2017), and CASS R. SUNSTEIN, *THE COST-BENEFIT REVOLUTION* (2018).

51. LIPPMANN, *supra* note 39, at 364.

