In light of our changing ideal of Americanism, we must perpetuate the paradox that our American cultural tradition lies in the future.
—Randolph S. Bourne, “Trans-National America”

I believe that we shall find in the current Jewish ideal of Zionism the purest pattern and the most inspiring conceptions of trans-nationalism.
—Randolph S. Bourne, “The Jew and Trans-National America”

When the Seven Arts closed in October 1917 after only twelve months of publication, it seemed to many in New York’s intellectual community that political dissent had died along with it. Privately Robert Frost complained that Bourne’s uncompromising essays of dissent had precipitated the journal’s demise:

The Seven Arts

In the Dawn of Creation that morning
I remember I gave you fair warning
The Arts are but Six!
You add Politics
And the Seven will all die a-Bourneing.¹
The *Seven Arts* was only one of the many casualties of the war. In the political climate of preparedness and war, American culture as a whole was affected. Funding for journals was canceled; editors were cautious. Innocuous or rebellious publications, such as the *Masses*, were taken from circulation by Postmaster General Albert Sidney Burleson, its editors tried for sedition. Radio programs were banned, German music was removed from the airwaves, meetings were broken up by police or vigilantes. The preparedness campaign aimed especially to rout political radicals, pacifists, and the foreign-born. Although President Wilson and George Creel, former muckraker and then-director of the Committee on Public Information, repeatedly condemned vigilantism, the creation of Loyalty Leagues was organized under their direction. In the schools and universities, patriotic curricula were introduced, in one form as the War Issues Course taught by regular professors in the social sciences and history. By 1918 preinduction centers were established for male students in the universities, who took several hours a week of military instruction in addition to their regular classes, wore uniforms, and lived under military discipline. Programs for elementary schoolchildren included the reading of “war biographies” of heroic figures from the Allied countries, and course materials were developed to stress the ideals of “patriotism, heroism, and sacrifice.”

The cultural effect of the war at home was a politicization of private and public life:

We find a liberal war undertaken which could not fail to do far more damage to American democracy at home than it could ever do to the enemy abroad. . . . The war has brought an immense and terrifying inflation to the political sphere, so that for most people non-governmentalized activity has ceased almost to have significance.³

Moreover, as the war politicized private activities, it aestheticized politics. The commonly accepted boundaries of modernity between the political, the economic, and the cultural-aesthetic were blurred. The state became a heroic actor whose mission was to create an illusory harmony, a place of escape for the middle class and
for the people dislocated by the contradictions of modern society.

Bourne’s own experience of U.S. government surveillance in Connecticut redoubled his anxiety:

I feel very much secluded from the world, very much out of touch with my times, except perhaps with the Bolsheviki. The magazines I write for die violent deaths, and all my thoughts are unprintable. If I start out to write on public matters I discover that my ideas are seditious, and if I start to write a novel I discover that my outlook is immoral if not obscene. What then is a literary man to do if he has to make his living by a pen?

The “terrifying” logic of military preparedness affected the politics of immigration with particular repressiveness. Within a discourse of Americanization, immigration policies were linked to a militant nationalism, aiming to eliminate “enemies within,” through deportations, the criminalization of dissent, and vigilantism, and enemies without through international war. In the white imaginary, the demonization of the foreign Other—in the form of ethnicity and national origin—was a means of strengthening solidarity among themselves at a time when their cohesiveness was being challenged internally. As such, this moment of America’s internal control over its immigrant self belongs to a longer tradition of American anxiety over primitivism and disorder.

Against the discourse of Americanization, Bourne put forward a counternarrative of transnationalism to challenge both the ideas of “100% Americanism” and cultural pluralism and to propose a new conception of American national identity that was both ethnic and modern, American and cosmopolitan. His theory of transnationalism challenged both theories of American national identity by amplifying the “small narratives” of oppositional, subaltern, and countercultural groups in America’s cities. Further, he proposed a practical, collective, pacifist enterprise for intercultural cooperation and social reorganization that was meant to be a counterweight to the military machine and a strategy for survival for America’s newest immigrants.

His idea of transnationalism also confronted what was at stake in the debates over immigration and assimilation, that is, the cen-
transience of ethnicity to American identity." For Bourne, the idea of an American national identity that did not take into account its diverse origins and multiple experiences failed to fulfill the "American promise." An American nationalism that ignored the experiences of immigration, common to Anglo-Americans as well as to the newest immigrants, conflated what it meant to be an American, a product of not one, but of several cultures. An American identity that was based only in a neutral, that is, deracinated, cosmopolitanism failed to address the democratic side of civic membership or the possibilities of a common culture. Consequently, the challenge he raised to early twentieth-century cultural-pluralist theories and Americanization programs was also a challenge to the limits of American liberalism, asking how it was possible to create a public interest or a shared moral consensus from a cluster of private interests and cultural differences, and whether, in the absence of such shared commitments, a genuinely pluralistic democratic culture was possible?

To understand the idea of transnationalism and its implications, it is necessary to historicize it within the converging contexts of its development: Bourne’s personal autobiography as a young intellectual and an outspoken critic of the war; a social history of immigration amid a rising tide of nativism; a political history of military preparedness, in concert with the shift from a liberal to a bureaucratic, corporatized state; and a cultural history of modern cosmopolitanism, emerging in New York, Milwaukee, Madison, and Boston but coming to include the whole of America. In what follows, these four interrelated histories are untangled and briefly examined, followed by an examination of the idea of transnationalism as a counternarrative to the dominant narrative of Americanization. In a concluding section, I will consider transnationalism today as a challenge for America to recover its ethnic identities through aesthetic-expressive forms of cultural production, organization, and discourse.

Bourne’s counternarrative grew out of his personal experience of profound and radical marginalization. The self-described Ishmael found that identification with the immigrant, the New Woman, the
urban poor, and other outsiders came easily, as they were seen, as he was, as unchosen by Puritan elites and as “alien” by Protestant Yankees. He chose to be a “spiritual vagabond” and “malcontent,” “irreconciled” to both official policy and to social-reform programs. Instead of service to the state, his generation of pragmatic-progressives should expend their considerable energies not in war but in building America into the “first international nation.” “The war—or American promise. One must choose. One cannot be interested in both.”

The roots of his transnationalism began before the war, when he was a student at Columbia University and first began to reject what Henry May has called the “certainties of the Victorian world” and the Arnoldian conception of culture on which they were based. The genteel critics of the school of belles lettres, influenced by Matthew Arnold, regarded culture as the property of the chosen people, set against the shallowness of the philistines. Culture was something to be acquired and consumed passively by people who had no taste or who presumably did not know better. The average person’s tastes could be “cultivated” by exposure to the classics, according to Arnold, and through an immersion in culture in this sense, civilization could be saved from the “anarchy” that threatened to dissolve it. In America, Bourne argued, just the opposite had occurred. Instead of culture saving Americans from anarchy, Arnold’s “cult of the best” had produced a nation of cultural parasites, convinced of their own cultural inferiority, directing their attention outward toward European standards rather than inward to the cultivation of “inner taste.” In “Our Cultural Humility,” written in 1914, he suggested in a telling illustration that the Armory Show of 1913, organized in New York City, had the “frankly avowed purpose of showing American artists how bad they were in comparison with the modern French.” He rejected the conception of culture as high art, challenging it as Anglophilic and class-bound, and called for a resurgent “cultural chauvinism” that championed contemporary American writers and artists who helped to instill an “intense self-consciousness” of the “soul of this hot chaos of America.”

While traveling in Europe in 1913–1914, he began to assemble the ingredients of a dynamic definition of culture that was more
anthropological, emphasizing that culture was the interaction among peoples, places, and artifacts rather than merely the cultivation of taste. Culture, in this sense, was a “living effort” of a people’s self-expression and solidarity. It referred to the whole range of personal, aesthetic, moral, and religious habits and values that structured a people’s unofficial and personal lives, uniting them in a “common consciousness” and collective sense of identity. At its best, culture sustained a sense of belonging and personal identification with a group, or what Bourne called “the good life of personality lived in the environment of Beloved Community.” At its worst, it could breed a narrow like-mindedness, provincialism, and a rigid intolerance of the Other.

Indeed, when the eastern Brahmin elite in the United States witnessed the massive influx of immigrants between 1880 and 1920, they became preoccupied with what they perceived to be the forces of “anarchy,” of which Arnold had warned, invading their “civilization.” As Michael Rogin argues, urban immigrants, the poor, public women, and political dissidents symbolized civilized breakdown, alien control, and the return of the repressed. “Aliens” were feared for the threats they posed to the “American way of life,” or the breakdown of boundaries between “us” and “them.” At the same time, according to Jacques Lacan, fears of the Other are actually displacements of one’s own desire, particularly to enjoy the enjoyment of the Other—that is, to enjoy his festivals and celebrations, his cuisine and language. Desire becomes destructive through fantasies and fascinations about the Other and his “organized enjoyments,” in particular, that they are inaccessible to us, that they will threaten “ours,” or even that the Other will steal our enjoyments. This explanation suggests that the feared threat to the “American way of life” at the height of immigration was based on “destructive desire,” not merely aversion to foreigners.

Indeed, the face of American culture had changed. Between 1870 and 1920, 20 million immigrants came to America. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, one in every three Americans was an immigrant or had at least one foreign-born parent. In New York, by 1910, 40 percent were foreign-born. Moreover, the new immigrants, principally from eastern and southern Europe and from Russia, not only outnumbered their English, German,
and Irish cohorts by as many as six times, but they also spoke little or no English, brought few or no personal possessions with them, and were often religiously orthodox (primarily Catholic or Jewish). Establishing their own political clubs and civic associations, founding over 3,400 newspapers that served over thirty different nationalities, the newest Americans created a vital, cosmopolitan network of national cultures and neighborhood communities.

Yet increasingly Anglo-Americans saw the new arrivals as dirty, unkempt, abject, unskilled, and decidedly “foreign.” Nativist sentiments were voiced by settlement workers, school administrators and teachers, university presidents and professors, town mayors, and journalists of the yellow and liberal presses, and the objections intensified during the 1910s. Anarchists, socialists, and the foreign-born in general were the principal targets of suppression and intimidation, but even within immigrant communities, religious and class factionalism gave way to divisions over American identity and Americanization programs. Prosperous German Reform Jews supported assimilation and Americanization programs, for instance, but poor and working-class, Orthodox eastern European Jews and Zionists opposed them.

By 1915 debates over nationalism and American identity became linked inextricably to the military preparedness campaign and to questions of loyalty and subversion. Under circumstances that Bourne termed “the thinly disguised panic which calls itself ‘patriotism,’” German Americans were added to the list of reviled foreigners. “One hundred percent Americanism” became militant and militarist. In 1915 Theodore Roosevelt, a leader of the “citizenship training” movement, told the Knights of Columbus that the duties of patriotism required giving up all other loyalties—those of class, ethnic group, or national origin—for loyalty to America itself. “The only man who is a good American is the man who is an American and nothing else.” In a similar vein, Woodrow Wilson, in his first preparedness speech before the Congress, announced: “There are citizens of the United States, . . . born under other flags but welcomed under our generous naturalization laws . . . who have poured the poison of disloyalty into the very arteries of our national life.” They must be “crushed out.” Two months later, he went further: “Any man who carries a hyphen about him
carries a dagger that he is ready to plunge into the vitals of this Republic.”

As Wilson acceded to demands for the deportation of immigrants who had failed to learn English after living in the United States for five years, twenty states imposed Americanization programs on the public schools to promote “the language of America” and the inculcation of “American values.” Groups per se became suspect, seen as threats to American liberalism and the idea of the solitary, unattached contractarian and bearer of natural rights. In 1915 Wilson made plain his antipathy to (unofficial) groups: “America does not consist of groups. A man who thinks of himself as belonging to a particular national group in America has not yet become an American.” In contradiction to the group theory underlying twentieth-century corporate liberalism, first outlined and legitimated in Arthur Bentley’s *Process of Government* (1905), anxiety over the spread of groups and the democratization of civil society became pathological.

Within the rising tide of a militant nationalism, three competing theories of American national identity and its ethnic origins appeared: the theory of Anglo-conformity, the melting pot (or assimilation) thesis, and cultural pluralism. Each theory constructed American identity, to use Werner Sollors’s terms characterizing the ways in which ethnicity has been symbolized in America, either as “descent” relations, that is, as based in ancestral tradition, family, blood ties, or sacred election; or in “consent” determinations, that is, those grounded in contract, reason, law, or marriage; or in a combination of the two. Although these terms of consent and descent were not meant to be natural, according to Sollors, they do suggest the preoccupation of American writers with foreignness and ethnicity (*ethnikos*: heathen; *ethnos*: other) as an aspect of American identity and a concern with the Other in delimiting American membership.

In its simplest form, the theory of Anglo-conformity posited the notion that America was originally and remained irreducibly one, single, pure strain of Anglo-Saxon stock, originating with the Puritan commonwealth and extending into the nineteenth-century genteel tradition. It insisted on the homogeneity or like-mindedness of the American people (by which its proponents meant themselves),
imagining an unbroken line of continuity between the culture of the first English settlers and that of the nineteenth-century “guardians of culture.” Accordingly, Anglo-conformists considered cultural identity to be based in descent rather than consent; for them, national identity was something essentially given and fixed, and it admitted of only a limited flexibility for certain classes.27

With the preparedness debates, Anglo-conformity turned into a preoccupation with the idea of racial purity and a general fear of “enemies within.” The case was made most forcefully by Edward A. Ross in 1900 in praising the Teutonic America, a favored concept within Brahmin circles, and warning that “unchecked Asiatic immigration might lead to the extinction of the American people.” These notions were subsequently picked up by Theodore Roosevelt in his invoking the threat of “race suicide” and by Madison Grant in his notorious The Passing of the Great Race (1916).28

Melting pot-assimilationist images, on the other hand, can be traced back as far as Hector St. John de Crevecoeur’s conjectures regarding the new American. “What then is the American, this new man? . . . Here individuals of all nations are melted into a race of men.”29 The melting pot conception of American identity was based on descent relations as well. Its proponents argued that America was a hybrid nation and that Americans were a heterogeneous mixture of many national traditions, mingling and ultimately merging into a unified and harmonious whole. The determinant of cultural identity, it seemed, was less racial than geographic in this conception, as if the special nature of America as a place was the source of the common customs and values that made one an American. American identity was rooted in descent determinations because it involved something outside the individual’s agency or will, an identity that was organic or natural rather than self-made.30

Under the logic of a militant nationalism, proponents of the assimilationist ideal became paranoid. Voiced by a wide range of spokespersons, from Mary Antin to Frances Kellor to Woodrow Wilson, many assimilationists sought to quell extremist preparedness sentiments and ethnocentrism by appealing to common values among Anglo-Americans and the new Americans, often in terms reminiscent of the nativists’ approach. Antin, for example, defended the new immigrants by arguing, “We’re hard working,
clean, upstanding, but humble recruits for democracy.” Other proponents insisted on forced assimilation and Americanization. One preparedness expert, for instance, argued that military service was the only way to “yank the hyphen out of the Italian Americans” and other “imperfectly assimilated immigrants.”

The modern variant of cultural pluralism, the third theory of American identity, was formulated by Horace Kallen, a philosopher and Jamesian specialist who taught at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in a 1915 article, “Democracy versus the Melting Pot,” an explicit attack on Ross’s nativist tract, The Old World in the New (1914). As Kallen’s title suggests, his antiassimilationist program proposed the thesis that America was composed of many pure strains and ethnic stocks that interacted with and related to one another, forming into a heterogeneous and fundamentally unmeltable whole. Kallen and early twentieth-century cultural pluralists (among them, Robert Park and Robert Mclver) valued the variety of groups for the intrinsic worth of difference and diversity. In contrast, James Madison, the early founder of pluralist theory, understood the political value of groups (“factions”) for representing diverse interests but was wary of them as impediments to individual liberty and orderly government. In contrast to Madison, as well, modern pluralists saw differences as based in race, class, ethnicity, religion, or national origin (natio: origin, birth), whereas for Madison, the “most common and durable” source of factional difference was in property or the private interest in economic security.

Kallen’s theory of cultural pluralism therefore was formulated in terms of descent identity. He argued that the inner cultural identity of the immigrant, carried with him into his new land, remained an “inward” experience, regardless of how his external relations changed: “Men change their clothes, their politics, their wives, their religions, their philosophies, to a greater or lesser extent; they cannot change their grandfathers.” As if to underscore the distinction between a given, descent identity and a flexible, consent identity, he continued: “An Irishman is always an Irishman, a Jew always a Jew. Irishman or Jew is born, citizen or lawyer, or church-member is made. Irishman and Jew are facts of nature; citizen and church-member are artifacts of civilization.” Because the
melting pot idea threatened an individual’s internal, ethnic particularity, Kallen argued that democracy must be made to apply to groups as well as to individuals, guaranteeing groups the right to exist, so that the immigrant could retain and enjoy his essential, irreducible cultural identity even while participating fully in the civic affairs of the new land. 33

Kallen used the metaphor of society as an orchestra to illustrate the sort of democracy he advocated that preserved various traditional cultures. “Culture thus constitutes a harmony, which people and nations are the producing instruments, to which each contributes its unique tone, in which the whole human past is present as . . . a background from which the present comes to light.” The problem with the metaphor of the orchestra of course, is that each instrument has a particular function, as violins cannot become flutes, and each instrument follows only one part of the orchestral score. A democratic harmony at best can achieve the protection and perfection of given, distinctive cultural differences, but no one can expect to transcend those roles. 34 Kallen’s pluralism did not alter or subvert Anglo-Saxon hegemony or question the rules of democratic participation. It sought to preserve ethnic and cultural differences, nothing more. As Irving Howe has pointed out, the argument allowed American Jews a position in American society, but “they would be in it, at least as much as they were allowed to, but not entirely of it.” 35

As an alternative to Kallen’s pluralism and as a direct challenge to the theses of assimilation and Anglo-conformity, Bourne fashioned a notion of cultural identity, based partly on descent and partly on consent, and a theory of American nationalism that was explicitly pacifist and internationalist. Like his friend Kallen, he believed that identity was a product of the given “place,” that is, the regional, traditional, and familial determinants of a people (descent); but he also recognized that identity was manifested in willed attachments to others (consent) or through affiliations in “communities of sentiment.” This socially embedded, constructed self of multiple affiliations was the result of the mix of one’s private and public associations, a self that, as Nietzsche determined, was constantly in the process of formation. In Hegel’s terms, the process of individuation involved separation from one’s primary
associations (family, ethnic group) and affiliation with secondary (national and civic) memberships. In this sense, one always existed within a group; the self was irreducibly a social self.36

Although Bourne did not adopt Kallen’s notion of society as an orchestra or the idea that each group retained an irreducible, static ethnic identity, he took Kallen himself—a German-born immigrant, organic intellectual, a scholar of James, and an active and ardent Zionist—as an exemplar of the “Zionist idea” and an individual with a “spiritual world citizenship,” whose multiple levels of identity and consciousness formed a whole American self and a distinctive personality. The Zionist represented the ideal of modern cosmopolitanism to Bourne, “the purest pattern and the most inspiring conception of transnationalism.” Bourne spelled out the idea of dual citizenship that underlay his conception of a modern transnationalism: “The Zionist does not believe that there is a necessary conflict between the cultural allegiance to the Jewish centre and political allegiance to a State.” Rather, he enjoyed a “dual citizenship,” at once a “complete Jew and at the same time . . . a complete citizen of any modern political State where he happened to live and where his work and interests lay.”

The idea of dual citizenship lent equal standing to immigrants and natives in any country. Echoing Kallen, Bourne denaturalized (and subverted) his thesis: “Once a citizen, always a citizen, no matter how many citizenships he may embrace.”37 By way of illustration, Bourne singled out Associate Justice Louis Brandeis of the Supreme Court, “at once an ardent Zionist and at the same time an incomparable American leader in economic and social reconstruction.” Brandeis, an example of the sort of modern cosmopolitan Bourne had in mind, used as his Zionist credo: “To be good Americans, we must be better Jews, and to be better Jews, we must become Zionists.”38 The idea that Jews in America could be Jewish and American, and more fully so than if their cultural and political terrains were identical, suggested the pattern for the kind of dual citizenship that was possible for every “hyphenated” American. “This dilemma of dual allegiance must be solved in America, it must be solved in the world, and it is in the fertile implications of Zionism that I veritably believe the solution will be found.”39
Moreover, early Zionism also pointed the way to the sort of nationalism Bourne endorsed, one that was pacifistic and internationalist. The Zionist state was nonmilitary and delimited the role political loyalty should play in the modern world:

As I understand it, the Jewish State which Zionists are building is a non-military, a non-chauvinistic State. Palestine is to be built as a Jewish centre on purely religious and cultural foundations. It is not to be the home of all the Jewish people. Zionism does not propose to prevent Jews from living in full citizenship in other countries.

Whether Jews living outside Palestine were perceived to be “aliens,” “marginal men,” or, as Chaim Potok put it, “an inbetween person, at home and not at home at the same time,” Judaism had always been perceived as an obstacle to full membership in the lands of exile.40

Yet Bourne, reversing the conventional conclusion of exclusion and enclosure, insisted, “the Jew in America is proving every day the possibilities of this dual life.”41 Zionism represented more than marginality or otherness to Bourne. For him and for second-generation American Jews, Zionism represented freedom from both ethnocentrism and 100 percent Americanism. Moreover, there was something distinctively modern, even avant-garde in the Zionist idea that had implications for modern intellectuals in general. Indeed in 1919 Veblen would suggest that the “pre-eminence” of modern Jewish intellectuals was due to their detachment from traditional nationalisms, which freed them from orthodoxy and class bias.42 But Veblen saw the Jew as shedding alliances, and Bourne saw him as acquiring new ones.

Both men agreed, however, that the mark of an exceptional intellectual was to have overcome the confines of orthodoxy and provincialism, enabling him or her to be truly critical. The cosmopolitan individual, who enjoyed a dual citizenship with divided loyalties and multiple perspectives, represented not so much alienation as a healthy self of fluid identity, “at home” in several worlds. It was as if the split between bourgeois and citizen in the secular state, of which Marx had written in “On the Jewish Question,”
entailed no necessary contradiction in Bourne’s modernist conception but led to a more resilient self. Alienation of this sort, or what Bourne referred to as the unintegrated self, was the most advantageous position for the marginalized, the outsider, or the hyphenate-American. It kept the new immigrant either from drifting along or succumbing to the influences of Anglo-conformity or commercialism.45

Modifying Kallen in reference to the mediation of national identity, Bourne wrote:

Although the Frenchman may accept the formal institutional framework of his new country and indeed become intensely loyal to it, yet his Frenchness he will never lose. What makes up the fabric of his soul will always be of this Frenchness.

What Bourne seemed to be saying in Kallenesque language is that one would never conceive of saying, “I used to be French,” or “I used to be Jewish.” That is, one cannot unlearn what one knows about one’s self. In some sense, one always retains an element of one’s parentage or, quoting Bourne, “dwells still in his native environment.” Thus a “Frenchman” is always a French man, but in a particular context he is also more than French, and not French—that is, not the French man he once was. We carry “nations within us,” Bourne suggested, those of origin and of choice. Like the Zionist, the transnational lived in both worlds at once. As such, one learns to reinvent oneself as the Other, the first step toward bridging the gap between parochial identities.44 In this modern conception of the cosmopolitan individual, consent- and descent-identities were thoroughly mediated through active participation in the building of a democratic culture.45

In reversing the conventional depiction of Jews and other immigrants as marginalized, Bourne transvalued the meaning of marginality itself. Marginality, in another light, was a form of embeddedness, an anchor that kept one either from being sucked into the “centripetal” forces of the city or scattered into atomized isolation by the centrifugal forces of liberal society. Without this “spiritual internationalism,” Bourne maintained, “America ran the real danger of becoming a queer conglomeration of the prejudices
of past generations, miraculously preserved here, after they have mercifully perished at home.”

Consequently, he could not condone the maintenance of political loyalty to a homeland or of unchanging cultural practices. [Those who] fondly imagine that they are keeping the faith . . . have not really kept the faith. The faith is a certain way of facing the world, of accepting experience. It is a spirit and not any particular form.46

The point is significant. An unmediated descent identity was pre-modern; it did not affect a negotiation between old and new cultures or between former and present selves. A successful cosmopolitanism involved a mediation of consent- and descent-identities in one’s experiences in the new land. More important, Bourne was suggesting that a modern cosmopolitan identity was not reducible to a particular pedigree or set of experiences. Rather, it entailed a certain “spirit” or stance—toward oneself and the world—that de/formed and re/formed the individual. As a certain practice and discourse, one’s ethnic and cultural identity was continually made and remade, in contact with other individuals and groups.

Traditional nationalism, therefore, was at best a temporary source of identification for the hyphenate-American. It would not do because it was mired in the past, in a “weary old nationalism—belligerent, exclusive, inbreeding,” and was rapidly becoming obsolete by the breakup of geopolitical units, the international “mobility of labor,” and the rise of the multinational corporations. The idea of transnationalism did not do away with nationalism or national identity; it treated it as a point of departure for a new conception of American national identity.47

On a practical and theoretical level, Bourne wanted to expose the melting pot ideal as a failure and a hoax.48 It was a failure because, though cultural communities were broken up and dispersed, individuals retained strong memories of their former lands. “Assimilation, in other words, instead of washing out the memories of Europe, made them more and more intensely real.”49 But it was also a hoax because it formulated a corrupt ideal that was foisted upon the new immigrants. Assimilation was designed to
take place in terms of the dominant culture and produce results “congenial to the ruling class.” Americanization meant “Anglo-Saxonizing,” when it succeeded. When assimilation failed, on the other hand, it sentenced immigrants to “the most rudimentary planes of America life, the American culture of the cheap newspaper, the ‘movies,’ the popular song, the ubiquitous automobile.” They become “the flotsam and jetsam of American life.” Dispersion became the lot of every immigrant; “America has become a vast reservoir of dispersions.” Yet he was careful to note that the “cultural wreckage of our time” comes “from the fringes of the Anglo-Saxon as well as the other stocks.”

Linking the Anglo-Saxon with the European immigrants as “detached fragments of peoples” clearly suggested that Anglo-Americans were also immigrants. “We are all foreign-born or the descendants of foreign-born, and if distinctions are to be made between us they should rightly be on some other ground than indigenousness.” Only American natives were able to claim an organic link to a national identity; every group arriving since had been a “hyphenate.” “The Anglo-Saxon was merely the first immigrant, the first to found a colony. He has never really ceased to be the descendant of immigrants.”

The idea that “all Americans are immigrants” ignored the very real historical differences between immigrants and “colonized minorities,” to borrow from Alan Wald, in terms of their absorption into the American economy, the forms of discrimination they experienced, and their cultural acceptance (language, religion) in the larger society. Moreover, it is a claim that comes close to the “we are all ethnics” position that gained some degree of popularity in the 1950s and that has reemerged in the debates over cultural diversity and multiculturalism since the 1980s. Cultural and ethnic studies scholars are rightly concerned with the false universalism implicit in this position and the tendency to “reduce” race, as Sollors does, to “one aspect of ethnicity.” In my view, the emphasis on ethnicity also has the effect of reinforcing the hegemony of liberalism (“individualism, mobility, self-reliance, free enterprise”), because liberal values are conceptualized as neutral, and in some sense “natural,” rather than as a “particular set of interests” conceived within a middle-class society, which have emerged from contestation and challenge during the last three
centuries. As Slavoj Zizek cautioned, the “massive presence” of the “world system” of global capitalism is rendered “invisible” by debates over cultural differences and ethnic particularity, which do not challenge it but take it for granted.

But if Bourne’s transnationalism too readily universalized the experience of immigration and the condition of rootlessness and dispersion, it was too restrictive by its inclusion of (only) European immigrant groups. He wrote to address a specific historical crisis, the politics of immigration and the ideology that justified deportations, vigilantism, and Americanization programs, and to defend, in particular, American Jews from the “terrible like-mindedness” of the Anglo-Saxon culture. The politics of race, he noted in private correspondence, suggested a different problematic. Nevertheless, at the heart of his effort was a concern to define just what it meant to be an American and to decouple that meaning from its Anglophilic associations. In this pursuit of “what an Americanism might rightly mean,” his silence over the racialism of American identity is a striking omission.

The idea of transnationalism rewrote America’s story of origin. Although Bourne did not repudiate the idea of an organic founding, he argued that the founding must be extended into the new century. “In light of our changing ideal of Americanism, we must perpetuate the paradox that our American cultural tradition lies in the future.” Every arriving group of immigrants had an equal claim to reshaping American culture. Each group that arrives in America becomes a co-founder, an equal participant in shaping America’s identity. America was being constantly refounded and regenerated with each arriving group. Thus new immigrants could become part of an organic continuum, an ongoing and continuous founding, and help to define a modern America. “America shall be what the immigrant will have a hand in making it.”

A new way of conceptualizing American national identity was needed, a way through which ethnic minorities and Anglo-Americans might find common cause in democratic opposition to corporate commercialism.

What I mean by co-operative Americanism . . . is, an ideal of a freely mingling society of peoples of very different racial and
cultural antecedents, with a common political allegiance and common social ends but with free and distinctive cultural allegiances which may be placed anywhere in the world that they like.\(^57\)

Stated differently, American transnationalism would begin where classical pluralism had left off: with the idea of democracy as a confederation—decentralized, pluralistic, self-critical, and self-correcting, in a Deweyan formulation of democracy that *creates* a public in the process and practice of democratic participation.

Borrowing from William James, Josiah Royce, and Horace Kallen, Bourne reconstructed the contours of an American pluralism that reflected its oppositional *and* democratic nature. From James, he took the image of a “plura-verse”—the idea that the universe is “more like a federal republic than an empire or a kingdom”\(^58\)—and applied it to American society. America was in miniature what Europe was in general, a “federation of cultures,” a “unique sociological fabric . . . a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors.” The idea of a federated America suggested that it had no cultural core. It was like an onion: all layers, with no center.\(^59\)

From Royce, Bourne derived his communitarianism, the idea that a beloved community could act as a brake against the modern maladies of rootlessness and, alternatively, conformism. In such places—such as Columbia University or the editorial offices of the *Seven Arts*—Bourne discovered the “international intellectual world of the future,” where he “breathe[d] a larger air” and felt himself a “citizen of a larger world.” In particular, Bourne looked to the cities for this democratic and oppositional form of cultural politics. In the cities’ multiethnic, polycentric culture, Bourne found the makings of a viable, countercultural alternative to the ward politics of the urban machine. In its neighborhoods, “communities of sentiment” were supported, where “little pools of workers, appreciators of similar temperaments and tastes” emerged in its working and living communities. In the cities (*metro-poleis*), artisanal or bohemian activities were producing alternatives to the corporate commercialism of the movies, dance halls, and amusement parks. In the cities, the beginnings of a new kind of expressivism could
be found, a dionysian energy and a certain disorder that presumed competition between groups and the absence of certain shared values and norms without a common integrating force.  

His conception of the possibilities of the modern metropolitan experience, therefore, challenged the progressives’ concerns over the dangers of the city. Like the progressives, Bourne saw the city as disruptive. It signified not simply freedom from provincialism but liberation from patriarchy, the bourgeois family, and traditional gender roles. Unlike the progressives, who sought to contain its disruptive potential in organized leisure, planned amusements, settlement work, and reformist politics, he encouraged the expression of that energy in new forms of art. Cities reshaped the possibilities of art, in group pageants, community festivals, and neighborhood theater productions. Group pageants, like the Paterson Pageant, were modern incarnations of dionysian feasts and rites; they exploded the division between artist and audience and brought art to all classes. Their appreciation of the dionysian undercurrent in urban culture had a regenerative appeal:

The outburst of Pagan expressiveness is far more revolutionary than any other social change we have been making. It is a New Freedom that really liberates and relaxes the spirit from the intolerable tensions of an over-repressed and mechanized world.

In contrast to the urban realists, dadaists, and impressionists of the early twentieth century, who represented the city architectonically by identifying New York with its skyscrapers, elevated railways, electric lights, and human congestion, Bourne saw the city as a center of human vitalism, containing a primal, almost sexual, primitive energy of mass man:

Who can walk the lighted streets at night and watch the flowing crowd, the shining youthful faces, the eager exhilaration of the sauntering life, or who can see the surge of humanity on holiday or Sunday, without feeling the strange power of this mass-life? . . . In this garish, vulgar, primitive flow of Broadway, are not new gods being born? This exaltation of the flowing
crowd, is it not one with the mystic thrill of the dancing savage, a new affirmation of life?

For millions of Americans, city life was “the real religion, the daily toil the real sacrifice, the evening saunter and amusement the real worship.” Finally, cities generated their own kind of group life, the “merging of one’s petty individuality and cares into this throbbing dynamic life” such that “the individual is transcended.” In the city, one recognized that “the highest reality of the world is not Nature or the Ego, but the Beloved Community.”

The connection between metropolitanism and cosmopolitanism suggests the distinct modern subtext of Bourne’s transnationalism. In the city, one reached another state of consciousness, expressing oneself in ways not directly reducible to the past, in particularistic blends of current and past cultures and traditions. Modern urban transnationalism contained elements of diversity and a little disorder. The frenzied release of crowds on Broadway had their pacific and intimate counterparts in the city’s beloved communities, acting as loci of group life. Both situations were faces of the “hot chaos” of modern urban life: the anonymity of the crowd and the intimacy of strangers commuting on the same bus; the willed mutual commitments of different minds and spirits bound together by friendship, common ideals, or both. Each was an alternative means of offsetting the misguided apollonianism of the rational and the iron cages of the technological.

Bourne’s modern, urban transnationalism ultimately failed to supplant the narratives of Americanization and cultural pluralism and the politics of corporate liberalism. The four intersecting histories—personal, social, political, and cultural—reinforced one another to close off the opportunity for “spiritual internationalism” and a “cooperative Americanism.” Bourne’s death in 1918 was followed by the 1919-1920 alien raids, supervised by J. Edgar Hoover and Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer. The 1920s saw a further increase in anti-immigration fever and the criminalization of dissent, when for the first time surveillance and crime control were combined under one agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The race riots of 1919, which Hoover blamed on subversive forces, also helped bring to a close the
unrestricted immigration of the previous decade. The commercialism and consumerism of the 1920s displaced and dispersed much of the artistic experimentation of the prewar years. For these and other reasons—including an end to the cooperative internationalism among European nations that Bourne noted before the war—the countercultural, pacifistic counternarrative of transnationalism remained what it had been at the outset: a call to create a “progressive democratic reconstruction of America” hospitable to difference.

As with most of Bourne’s political prescriptions, the politics of transnationalism were a form of cultural politics. As Casey Blake has aptly remarked, historians have traced the ways in which cultural activities—the amusement park, baseball, the motion picture—brought together ethnic working classes, “but Bourne understood that power relations did not disappear when Americans went to the same movies or cheered the same baseball teams, and his critique of consumer culture—like his protest against more coercive forms of Americanism—was ultimately made on political grounds. 65

In my view, his transnationalism was also, to borrow a phrase from Winni Breines, a form of “prefigurative politics,” oppositional and alternative forms of politics and education less concerned with challenging directly the policies of the liberal state and more concerned with creating alternative public spaces in which to work out collective solutions to political problems. Prefigurative politics attend to personal and political discontents by redefining problems experienced by the unorganized, marginalized members of society, enabling them to gain a sense of personal authority and collective integrity that is missing in traditional interest-based associations. For instance, the halfway houses of the civil rights movement served as crucial political and social resources for cultivating alternative political strategies. 66 In freeing individuals to develop nonstatist communities as substitutes for the patriarchal family, the provincial town, the public school, and the organized pressure group, prefigurative politics anticipate possibilities for society at large. They are, at the same time, practical experiments in social reorganization, working in concrete ways to restructure relations among work, family, and community.67

Consequently, transnational politics begin where democratic pol-
itics already exist: in the prefigurative politics taking place in America's subcultures, schools, churches, and neighborhoods. In the aesthetic-expressive realm of contemporary culture, one need only think of the origins of rap music or the multicultural music coming out of Los Angeles to appreciate the explosion of traditions being suggested: a mix of Asian, Mexican, Latino, and Anglo music and instrumentation that is wholly new, an exuberant yet respectful merging of the old and new. As the contestation over otherness increasingly takes place in the aesthetic-expressive realm, these local, decentralized centers of identity can be transformed into loci and strategies of power. These alternative forms of group identity and organization are important, even when operating semiautonomously in terms of goals and strategies, because they redefine normal politics, taking it out of the state and returning it to the city (polis), bringing it closer to the lived experiences of the many. The impulse toward nonstatist, oppositional cultural politics is important to nourish, not because minorities are able to join the mainstream but because they help redefine it. The prefigurative politics of a democratic transnationalism suggest a cultural politics that is beyond militarism, and importantly, beyond liberalism. As such, it offers a significant narrative of dissent.