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American Thinking About Peace and War

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Booth, Ken and Wright, Moorhead. *American Thinking About Peace and War*. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1978. 240pp.

In celebration of the American Bicentennial in 1976 the University College of Wales held a conference on "American Thinking About Peace and War: Reflections Two Hundred Years On." This thought-provoking volume is one result of that conference. Each of the 10 contributors was asked to write an essay on American attitudes towards peace and war from the perspective of 200 years of American experience. Wisely avoiding generalizations, they have limited themselves to how some Americans have thought about peace and war.

These essays summarize and illuminate many broad and diverse currents of thought about peace and war in the context of specific times and circumstances over the past two centuries. If there is any one theme it is that Americans have thought long and hard on the difficult, but transcendently important, subject. They have made a notable contribution to intellectual history and in so doing they have provided concepts and ideas that have met with varying degrees of acceptance in the cold, cruel world of international relations.

The contributors are admirably qualified to discourse on their respective topics. They range from such prominent and well-known men as Inis Claude and Anatole Rapoport to such equally qualified but lesser known young scholars as James Piscatori and Catherine Kelleher, who show great promise of significant contributions yet to come. The topics covered range from international law (Piscatori) to American political institutions (Kelleher) to peace movements (Charles Chatfield) and ethical considerations (Kenneth Thompson). Moorhead Wright, one of the editors of this volume, discusses three American war novels. This essay on how individual men have responded to war is a needed foil to the

other nine. It reminds us that regardless of what scholars may write or what statesmen may do, wars are fought by individuals on a very personal level. One wishes Wright had expanded this all too short essay.

By far the most stimulating and challenging contribution is Ken Booth's discussion of American strategy. He enumerates and then disposes of a number of myths about American strategic thinking. It is by no means a debunking *tour de force* to show British and European scholars that since 1776 Americans have thought long and hard about peace and war. Rather, he carefully examines and evaluates such myths as "Americans did not think seriously about strategy before World War II" and "American strategy in the last twenty years has been characterized by overthink." Booth points out that explaining American strategy requires an appreciation of the characteristics of American society and an understanding of the American historical experience. His conclusion is fair and well-balanced: "... to the extent an American approach to strategy exists, it has been both very different and very much more complex than it has usually been portrayed."

The contributions are generally readable and well-written. With one exception, they represent a triumph of good editing and literary skill over ponderous academic prose.

The most noticeable lack is an essay on American military institutions and American attitudes towards a military establishment. The inclusion of such an essay would have given this slim volume a better overall balance. Nevertheless, it is a worthwhile collection and it provides necessary and useful background for professional military officers, civilian officials and, particularly, international officers interested in the enormous subject of American views of peace and war.

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