

The AMERICAN SCHOLAR

Walter Lippmann

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Source: *The American Scholar*, Autumn 1975, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Autumn 1975), pp. 585-603

Published by: The Phi Beta Kappa Society

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41207341>

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Walter Lippmann

RICHARD H. ROVERE

SOMETIME EARLY IN 1950, I was telephoned by a young man who identified himself as a staff member of *Flair*—a soon-to-be defunct magazine designed to appeal to what used to be known as the carriage trade—and asked if I would be interested in writing an article on Walter Lippmann. I was anything but enchanted by the prospect of appearing in that publication, whose principal contribution to world journalism was a hole in the front cover, but I said without hesitation that I would be very much interested. I had long admired Lippmann, but, although I had had some correspondence with him, I had never met him and looked forward to the opportunity of doing so. In time, I met with the editor of *Flair*, Fleur Cowles, in her Manhattan office. Mrs. Cowles was then the wife of Gardner Cowles, president of Cowles Communications, a corporation that owned several newspapers, magazines, and radio and television stations in the Midwest. After settling some details about length, deadline, and money, she asked me how I proposed to handle Lippmann's divorce from his first wife and his second marriage. I knew a bit about this—it had been a mild tabloid scandal in 1938—but I told Mrs. Cowles that I had no intention of writing anything about it. I did not propose, I explained, to do Lippmann's biography, only an appraisal of his career and its impact on American politics and journalism. If gossip was what she wanted, she had better get in touch with Walter Winchell or Hedda Hopper, two eminent practitioners of the trade. She took this with reasonably good grace, and by the end of the summer I had completed the article. It appeared in the last issue of *Flair*, and among my souvenirs is a copy of the magazine with her signature framed in the aperture.

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Soon after reaching agreement with the editor, I had written Lippmann, notifying him of my assignment. He replied that, while he did not care much for publicity, he would be pleased to see me at his summer home on Mount Desert Island, Maine. I found him gracious, less formal than I had expected, and one of the most stimulating conversationalists I have ever known. We remained good friends for almost the last quarter-century of his life. (I did not see him in the months before his death on December 20, 1974.) I cannot, however, say that ours, at least on my part, was an altogether easy relationship. At our first meeting, I was thirty-five, and he was sixty-one, just my father's age. Perhaps because he had no children (only a stepdaughter, child of the former Helen Byrne Armstrong), it seemed to me that he often treated me rather like a son in need of instruction and guidance. This may have been partly my imagining, but others of my approximate age have told me they had the same feeling. As a consequence, I was somewhat more deferential than is normally my custom, and I tended not to challenge any of his views with the vigor I might have employed with a contemporary. But this was hardly a matter of importance, certainly not when measured against the fact that I had the opportunity to learn from a great teacher.

The side of Lippmann that I, like most people, was mainly aware of was the lucid analyst of men and events. But I soon became fascinated by other aspects as well. His interests were much broader than many people, even friends, realized. Before Lincoln Steffens snatched him away from Harvard and tried to make him a junior muckraker, he had planned to become an art historian. When he was a student at Dr. Julius Sachs Collegiate Academy in Manhattan, his parents took him to Europe, where, still in knee pants, he became a habitu  of museums and cathedrals. Strolling through the Louvre one day, he came upon Mrs. Jack Gardner, the quintessential American art collector. This meeting led in turn to a lifelong friendship with Bernard Berenson, who became one of Lippmann's few real confidants. His passion for art—particularly classical art—never left him. He was also much interested in literature, philosophy, psychology, and theology. In the early twenties, he contributed some quite dazzling

literary criticism to *Vanity Fair* and other magazines. (Some of this work, along with several political essays, is to be found in *Men of Destiny*, a book long out of print but one of his finest and by far the most entertaining. His appraisals of Sinclair Lewis and H. L. Mencken, written when both men were at the height of their vogue, are as perceptive as any done since and are, in places, extremely funny.)

Lippmann had been a protégé of George Santayana, and his undergraduate writing had attracted the attention of William James. His first book, *A Preface to Politics*, was published when he was twenty-five. It was proclaimed by Ernest Jones, Sigmund Freud's leading disciple and first biographer, as the first Freudian treatment of politics. Hearing this, Freud said he wanted to meet Lippmann; they met once, in Vienna, but had no opportunity for conversation. Theodore Roosevelt read the book while hunting in the jungles of Brazil and expressed the same wish. He and Lippmann did meet, and for many years Roosevelt was Lippmann's ideal of a public man.

In this country, Lippmann was thought of primarily as a force in journalism and politics. Few regarded him as much of an influence in American intellectual life, but in Europe, at least in the early days, he was seen as a substantial figure in the intellectual community. Soon after leaving college he went to England and got to know many of the country's intellectual elite, among them H. G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw, Lytton Strachey, John Maynard Keynes, Harold Nicolson, and Rebecca West. He became a card-carrying member of the Fabian Society, and, as an editor of the *New Republic* and a talent scout for Harcourt Brace, he recruited many of its members for the magazine and the publishing house. His interest in religion was a continuing one. He discussed it with me only in the most academic terms, telling me of a plan to write a book about it. I have often been told, however, that at one point he seriously considered becoming a communicant of the Roman Catholic church. Whether or not this is true, one finds many touches of neo-Thomist thought in his writings.

A facet of his character that was even more deeply concealed from the public was his political activism. Indeed, whenever he ad-

vised other journalists on the duties and obligations of their profession, he would stress the necessity for keeping their distance from persons in public life. Fraternizing with politicians, he insisted, was destructive of circumspection. Addressing the International Press Institute in London in May 1965, he said:

The powerful are perhaps the chief sources of the news, but they are also the dispensers of many kinds of favors, privilege, honor, and self-esteem. . . . The most important form of corruption in the modern journalist's world are the many guises and disguises of social climbing on the pyramids of power.

And two years later he wrote:

Cronyism is the curse of journalism. After many years, I have reached the firm conclusion that it is impossible for an objective newspaperman to be a friend of a President. Cronyism is a sure sign that something is wrong and that the public is not getting the whole journalistic truth.

His practice, however, was far from his preaching. Throughout his half-century as a publicist, he intervened in government affairs far more frequently than did most of his colleagues. In the early years, he did so openly; in the later years, surreptitiously. In 1915 and 1916, he lobbied furiously for Senate confirmation of Louis D. Brandeis as associate justice of the Supreme Court. Although Brandeis, a labor lawyer from Massachusetts and one of the great American jurists, was Woodrow Wilson's choice, he had precious little support from other quarters—in fact a great deal of opposition. The common view, shared by many Democrats, by most Republicans, and by such generally enlightened organs as the *Nation* and the *New York Times*, was that his years as a labor advocate had made him a partisan and hence disqualified him for the high Court. But Lippmann and Felix Frankfurter (who himself became an associate justice three decades later) were for Brandeis, as was the *New Republic*, of which Lippmann was a founder and editor. About the only other journalistic support came from some small Populist papers in the Midwest and West, and a few trade-union journals. The struggle was hard and bitter. The fuss about

Brandeis's past—in large part a cover for anti-Semitism—was led by former President William Howard Taft, then at the Yale Law School and bitter because he had not been appointed to the Court by the man he succeeded as president. (He was later, of course, to become chief justice.) In letters, articles, and conversations, Lippmann and Frankfurter worked tirelessly for Brandeis, who was confirmed only after prolonged and rancorous hearings. It was, perhaps, Lippmann's greatest triumph.

During the First World War, Lippmann was commissioned as a captain in the army and served at General John J. Pershing's field headquarters. He contributed much to the modernization of psychological warfare—not the most attractive military field but certainly the least lethal one. As that war drew to an end, Colonel Edward M. House, President Wilson's principal political strategist, asked him to join the staff of the Inquiry, a non-governmental and largely clandestine outfit that had been established—largely as a response to the British and French secret treaties with other powers—to draw up American peace terms. This was the group that compiled Wilson's noble but doomed Fourteen Points. Its putative head was Isaiah Bowman, a noted geographer and president of the American Geographical Society, not to be confused with the National Geographic Society. Most of the work, though, was done by Lippmann as executive secretary, and eight of the Fourteen Points were his. Wilson's six points dealt with such abstractions as the freedom of the seas, the self-determination of peoples, and so on; Lippmann's were the hard, substantive ones, dealing with frontiers, demographics, and sovereignties. While working on boundaries, he went to the State Department's Balkan desk and found that the people in green eyeshades and shirtsleeves there were using maps published in 1870. Back in the American Geographical Society's headquarters, he, under Bowman's occasional tutelage, gave himself a cram course in geography; in time he knew as much about it as did Sir Halford John Mackinder, the British student of geopolitics whose ideas were perverted by Hitler for his *Lebensraum* policies. The experience became central to Lippmann's political thinking; it was an enduring concept of his that on the baize-covered negotiating

tables nations never yield so much as a kilometer that has not been won on the Champs de Mars. The idea was to serve him well in later years and later wars.

In 1919, Lippmann went to the Paris Peace Conference, ostensibly as a public relations man for the Fourteen Points and for the president who was backing them. To him, as to many others, the Treaty of Versailles was a disillusioning experience. But he was not quite ready to give up his overt interventions.

In 1927, when the Mexican government nationalized the oil industry, Lippmann, like many others, foresaw the possibility of another war between Mexico and this country. As a way to head off any such development, he persuaded President Calvin Coolidge to appoint their common friend, Dwight Morrow, as ambassador to Mexico, knowing full well that Morrow would make Lippmann his deputy. As he told it, it all came about as he had expected. The sovereignties involved were Mexico, the United States, and the Vatican, which was at the time distressed over the anticlericalism of the Mexican government and inclined to be partial to its opponents. Lippmann played by far the largest part in the crisis. He wrote letters to be sent from President Coolidge to the Mexican president, General Plutarco Elias Calles, and vice versa. He wrote letters for both to send off to the pope and for the pope to dispatch to the two presidents. The whole performance was widely admired, and it did avert the possibility of war. When the crisis was past, Lippmann thought of a way to create a festive atmosphere: to have Charles A. Lindbergh, who had just made the first nonstop flight across the Atlantic, come to Mexico on a goodwill flight to visit several of its cities. Lindbergh accepted the proposal and in the American Embassy he met the ambassador's family—including his daughter, Anne, who later became Mrs. Lindbergh.

After that episode, Lippmann seldom showed his hand in public affairs, but he never ceased to be active. He constantly—often without solicitation—offered his advice on appointments and policies. He helped write speeches and put ideas into heads that were largely barren of them. Reading his correspondence now preserved at Yale, I learned that he was in large part the creator of Senator Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan. Vandenberg was a

midwestern Republican isolationist who, at a critical moment in World War II, became an internationalist and politically a bipartisan. His conversion brought him a reputation as a statesman and celebrity that he much enjoyed, both here and abroad. Two Democratic presidents sent him to international conferences all over Europe and to the 1945 San Francisco Conference that established the United Nations. In reality, Vandenberg was a run-of-the-mill politician and a rather clownish one at that. But Lippmann, in collaboration with James Reston of the *New York Times*, talked him into his new position and provided him with some rather elegant language in which to express it. Lippmann was helpful in similar ways to many others—among them Alf Landon, Dwight Eisenhower, John Foster and Allen Dulles, Adlai Stevenson, and Lyndon Johnson—although none of these needed to be invented, as Vandenberg did. All of them profited by their association (“cronyism” is doubtless too strong a word, though in some cases it amounted to that) with Lippmann.

His last interventions were with John F. Kennedy. Lippmann had held off backing Kennedy until late in the 1960 campaign. He had nothing personal against the Democratic candidate, but he was distrustful of anyone connected with Joseph P. Kennedy, the candidate’s father, who had been his close friend until late in Kennedy’s tenure as American ambassador in London. At that point, Lippmann came to think of Kennedy as pro-Nazi, and they were friends no longer. But he did in time come to support the Democratic candidate, and he watched with interest as John F. Kennedy, after his election, formed a cabinet. When he learned that the president-elect was considering the appointment of Dean Rusk as secretary of state, he did all he could to prevent it. I do not know whether he had any personal animosity toward Rusk, but he certainly had political animosity—based in large part on Rusk’s bellicose behavior at the time of the war in Korea, a conflict that Lippmann opposed from the start. His choice for secretary of state was McGeorge Bundy, who, as it turned out, would hardly have pleased him either, since Bundy was for many years an ardent backer of Rusk’s policies.

On another important occasion in this pre-inauguration period,

Lippmann did prevail over Kennedy. Having almost completed the final draft of the speech he was to deliver after taking the oath of office, the president-elect took it to Lippmann's house to get his advice and consent. Lippmann advised but did not consent. He objected to Kennedy's use of the word "enemy" to characterize the Soviet Union, and suggested that it be changed to "adversary." Kennedy accepted this; it was a small change but an important one, and the fact that it was cheerfully made showed something about Kennedy's approach to U.S.-USSR relations.

I had known Lippmann for about fifteen years before I was aware that he was much more than the standoffish political journalist known to the public. His services to President Wilson were, to be sure, a matter of public record (though his work on the Fourteen Points is still, as far as I am aware, known only to a few historians)—as was his brief service to the Socialist mayor of Schenectady, New York, shortly after leaving college. But I did not know the extent of his involvement in other matters until I gained access to his papers at Yale. (They were deposited there rather than at Harvard because a young businessman, Robert Anthony, had started a Lippmann collection of his own in his undergraduate days. When Lippmann learned of this, he added everything he could to it, and made Anthony the curator.)

This research at Yale came about while I was gathering material for a biography of Lippmann. For many years, publishers had urged him to write his autobiography, but he insisted that he would never do it. In 1950, he was persuaded by Allan Nevins, a colleague of his on the *New York World* in the twenties and head of the Oral History Project at Columbia University, to record a series of interviews about his life, but the transcript, though valuable, is an incomplete and in some ways unsatisfactory document. When some friends—particularly his publisher, Edward Weeks, of Atlantic-Little Brown, and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.—realized that further efforts at getting him to do an autobiography were futile, they cast about for a biographer. I do not know what other writers they approached, but in time I was asked to do the job, and accepted. At the start, he was agreeable but rather diffident. When I

asked him about letters, he said that he had never been much of a correspondent and that, besides, someone had stolen many letters from his files. (This was true, but the letters ended up in the hands of a book dealer; they were bought by a friend of Lippmann's and returned to his files.) Did he have diaries? Only appointment books, he said—not very interesting. But after I got into the archives at Yale, I quickly found that he was wrong on both counts. There were a great many letters, some of them fascinating. As for the appointment books, they were more than just that. Whenever any meeting seemed worth more than a note about the place and time, he would summarize the discussion in his tiny, cramped hand. And when he went abroad, he would dictate an account of each day's events to Mrs. Lippmann. A two-week trip would sometimes yield as much as two hundred typed pages. My awareness of this material, and of the light it cast on little-known aspects of Lippmann and of American life early in the century, led me to a procedural decision: to focus on him as an active participant in the political and social life of the time rather than as a political writer and thinker. His books and columns were interesting, but they could be dealt with by scholars whose main interest was in the content of his thought.

I do not know if I ever successfully communicated my idea to Lippmann, but I did discuss it with Weeks and Schlesinger, and they agreed with me. In my talks with Lippmann, therefore, I tried to concentrate on events rather than on political judgments. I also tried to bring the Nevins oral history up to date in taped interviews of my own.

I think that what I was trying to do was sound in principle, yet in practice it did not work. Although I have never been particularly adept as an interviewer, in this case I do not think the fault was altogether my own. At least in his later years, Lippmann was a man with what I can only describe as a profound distaste for the past—not the historical past, which delighted him, but his own past. This did not, I am sure, rest on any dissatisfaction with his professional career and his private life; both, to the best of my knowledge, had been satisfying to him. It was more a matter of a single-minded focus on the present and future, which a man could

attempt to mold, as he could not do with the past. This might have been a healthy attitude in a person as vigorous and busy as Lippmann was, but it was frustrating to a biographer, since a biographer deals only with the past. Most of the time, when I asked him to reminisce, he had difficulty summoning up details. Moreover, I learned that he had a very unreliable memory. His recollection of events was frequently contradicted by the evidence in contemporary letters and diaries, and before long I realized I could not use anything that was not confirmed in documents or by other people.

There were further difficulties. We had trouble agreeing on the terms of our collaboration. I was uneasy in the role of authorized biographer. I felt that I needed complete independence, and he always said that he, in a similar position, would settle for nothing less. I think, though, that he was troubled by the thought that I would find in the letters something either discreditable or of so private a nature that he would not want it revealed. I told him I thought his concern was groundless. For one thing, I had no intention of going into matters that were not part of the public's concern. For another, I had read enough of the letters and diaries to learn that he had a highly developed sense of privacy and never wrote of his private life to others. (He came close to doing this with Berenson, but the details he confided were mainly financial.) I also assured him that I would show the completed manuscript to him and to anyone else he would like to have read it. I said that I would, of course, take most seriously and sympathetically any objections raised, and if his definition of privacy differed from mine, I would almost certainly accept his. I twice put a statement of all this into writing and submitted it to Louis Auchincloss, Lippmann's lawyer and a distinguished novelist. Both times, Lippmann said that he agreed and that all final decisions about content should be up to me. But then he would again be assailed by doubts. Once he proposed that we jointly appoint a board of arbitrators consisting of three men who were friends of his and of mine. Knowing whom he had in mind, I might have been able to accept the proposal, aware that the only trouble I would have would be the loss of time. But I didn't like the principle, and

neither did at least two of the three proposed judges when I told them of it. In fact, they said they would have nothing to do with it. I did not speak to the third.

I foresaw another problem. Lippmann's health grew poorer, and I thought it likely that he would die before I finished my work. Mrs. Lippmann, who was eight years younger than he, could have been expected to outlive him, and not consider herself bound by the agreements (oral on his part) we had reached. But actually she died several months before he did. At any rate, I decided to turn the project over to a younger writer, a man who could make a fresh start. I found an ideal successor in Ronald Steel, who had been a foreign service officer and was starting a career as a journalist. He consented, and he is, he tells me, approaching the end of what I am sure will be a book worthy of the subject.

For several years after I turned the job over to Steel, Lippmann and I continued to be friends. He was a delightful companion, always entertaining and often, in conversation, as amusing as were those early literary criticisms I have mentioned. He had powerful likes and dislikes—a fact that I myself might have appeared to contradict in writing of him elsewhere. I quoted a famous exchange between him and Mabel Dodge Luhan, the mistress of a sumptuous salon in Greenwich Village, circa 1912. “What do you love?” Mrs. Luhan once asked him, to which he instantly replied, “The living world.” I rather rashly added the comment, “He liked everything.” That was hyperbole; if it were not, he would not have been the man he was. What he meant, of course, was that he liked the experience of living and working and being part of his time. Life had been good to him in almost every way, and he had served his country—and, by extension, other peoples—as perhaps no other journalist of the century has done. But he did not like everything, and he obviously did not like everybody. Although his mind was firmly fixed in the liberal tradition, he was essentially conservative—not in the sense of resisting change but in the sense of approaching it prudently and circumspectly. He liked order in life and society. He was skeptical of many democratic values and would, I think, have felt at home in a society in which hierarchies

were more clearly defined than they are in this country. In 1956 he published a book, *The Public Philosophy*, in which he argued that too much authority was vested in representative bodies such as Congress, and too little in offices of consolidated leadership such as the presidency. It seemed to me, and to many others who reviewed the book, that the trend was the opposite of what he held it to be. In this country, the executive branch was steadily gaining power at the expense of the legislative branch. I did not think that this was altogether bad, nor did most other critics; we simply felt that he had misjudged developments. The book got few favorable reviews, and he was so hurt by this that he gave up work for a few months.

I had a rather odd experience as a consequence of my own review of the book in *The New Yorker*. While I was critical of it, I paid tribute to Lippmann as a thinker and to the high quality of his other work. One day, soon after the review was published, I met the late Edmund Wilson in the corridor outside my office. He stopped me and said he had been terribly disappointed by my review. Assuming he had read the book and liked it better than I had, I asked him what he himself had liked in it. He said he hadn't read it, but had been put off by my general praise of Lippmann. I said that I admired the man very much, particularly in his latest phase, when he was bedeviling Eisenhower and Dulles for their foreign policy. "Have you been reading him lately, Mr. Wilson?" I asked. "Of course not," he said. "I haven't read him since 1926, when I discovered that he was an agent of the House of Morgan."

This was a frequent charge, by liberals and radicals, against Lippmann in the decades before World War II, and Wilson's remark led me to think about it and look into it. There was a sense, a rather innocent one, in which the charge was true. In the twenties and thirties he, like many other columnists, was writing about economics and finance. Of economics he had a fine grasp, but he was an amateur in finance and needed expert help. In those days it was just about useless to consult anyone in Washington about such matters. The Treasury Department people were mostly businessmen who knew less about economics than he and not much about finance. At least until the New Deal, all the financial

experts were in Wall Street. Lippmann readily consulted the bankers there, particularly Russell Leffingwell, a Morgan partner. As it happened, Leffingwell was a liberal Democrat and, like most New York bankers, an internationalist. In the correspondence, I found instance after instance in which Lippmann had written Leffingwell asking him to explain and give his opinion on some current dispute. Leffingwell would oblige, giving a lengthy analysis—and not, so far as I could tell, a partisan one—and in a few days, that response, shortened and paraphrased, would turn up in Lippmann's column, "Today and Tomorrow," in the *New York Herald Tribune*. By inadvertence, perhaps, some of Lippmann's writings may have served the interest of the Morgan people, but "agent" was far too strong a word for the relationship.

Lippmann's association with the Morgan partners was often faulted on another ground altogether, particularly by fellow Jews who objected to his close association with what was, in the current parlance, a notoriously WASP firm. Lippmann had, after all, grown up in a Jewish community that had produced any number of distinguished bankers, some of whom he had attended school and college with—Kuhns, Loeb, Lehman, and many others. He was frequently accused of anti-Semitism. In this, I am afraid, there was a modicum of truth. He was a German Jew whose family, a rather wealthy and cultivated one, had immigrated fifty years earlier than most of the East European (mainly Russian and Polish) Jews, and he shared some of the disdain of the one tribe for the other. He was never, to be sure, overtly hostile in what he wrote, but it was notable that he seldom wrote about Jewish questions and had rather little sympathy for Israel. He never visited that country, but he did visit Egypt under the Nasser regime, and the fact that he was allowed to do so says something about that government's attitude toward him. I know of only one instance in which he addressed himself to the condition of American Jews—an article entitled "Public Opinion and the American Jew," published in the *American Hebrew* in April 1922:

The fundamental fact in the situation [the rise in anti-Semitism in the early twenties] is that the Jews are fairly distinct in their physical ap-

pearance and in the spelling of their names. They are, therefore, inevitably conspicuous. . . . Thus, while the Jews are not sharper traders than the Greeks or the Scotch, and while they are not more blatantly vulgar-rich than among other stocks, sharp trading and blatant vulgarity are more conspicuous in the Jew because he himself is more conspicuous. . . . [T]he rich and vulgar and pretentious Jews of our big American cities are perhaps the greatest misfortune that has ever befallen the Jewish people. . . . I worry about the Jewish smart set in New York. . . . They can in one minute unmake more respect and decent human kindness than Einstein or Brandeis could make. . . . That is the real problem of the Jew in America, the problem of his use of his opportunities. . . . What the American Jew needs is to develop the habit of self-criticism.

This begs several questions. Other ethnic groups are distinguished by physical features and the spelling of names. In the latter case, the Jews can hardly be said to be more “conspicuous” than, say, the Greeks. Why should the “vulgarity” of Jews stand out in contrast to that of anyone else? I think he was trying to get at what I consider a valid point, which is that what I call “otherness”—in appearance, culture, religion, language, behavior—is often the true explanation of racism. But the Jews are hardly unique. When I was a child in Brooklyn—living in a mixed WASP-Jewish neighborhood—both groups feared and loathed the Italians in an adjoining neighborhood and assumed that no Italians were worthy of respect. Lippmann’s fallacy, it seems to me, was his failure to recognize that anti-Semitism had deeper roots than mere “conspicuous” differences.

But the failing was a common one of the time, and Lippmann was not, of course, anti-Semitic in any of his personal relationships. As I have noted, he made a valiant fight against the anti-Semites who tried to bar Brandeis’s appointment to the Supreme Court.

Until 1938 Lippmann lived in New York. It was his native city. His principal journalistic associations had always been with New York publications—the *World*, the *New Republic*, the *Herald Tribune*. New Yorkers, as I have pointed out, were better informed on many of the matters that concerned him than persons he might have consulted in Washington. New York was, as in most respects

it still is, the intellectual capital of the country. But Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal brought to Washington many people of a caliber rarely seen in preceding administrations—economists, historians, scientists, scholars of many kinds, not least among them his friend Felix Frankfurter. The foreign service was recruiting brilliant young men, as were most agencies of the executive branch, including the Treasury, which took on a number of Lippmann's Wall Street friends. Although Lippmann was by no means an enthusiastic New Dealer, he began to find the Washington climate intellectually more stimulating than he had ever known it to be. He lived there until 1968, when he and his wife returned to New York.

At the time, he explained the move as “coming home.” It was more than that. He moved because he could not stand the proximity to Lyndon Johnson. His dislike for the president was uncharacteristically passionate, amounting indeed to hatred. The two had once been friends, and the Lippmanns had visited the Johnsons at the LBJ Ranch. But the war in Vietnam outraged Lippmann as nothing ever had before, and in time every facet of Johnson's personality became offensive to him. He made much of Johnson's Texas background (which always struck me as being largely an affectation, since Johnson, except in accent, was far more a product of Washington than of Texas and clung to the ways of his youth largely to give himself identity). He would often say something like, “What can you expect of a Texas jingo?”—a purely rhetorical question.

But withdrawal of support for a president he had earlier backed was a habit with Lippmann. Some incumbents, of course, he had never backed in the first place; but, except for Wilson, who could not be faulted for his terminal illness, he ended up hostile to every president from the first Roosevelt to Richard Nixon. He was a bit of an idealist: he expected more from those he chose to favor than they could possibly deliver, and disappointment was thus inevitable. In commitment and subsequent alienation, he was perhaps little different from other journalists, except that he was one of the few who made public endorsements. With other journalists, it is generally possible to tell from the tone of their work whom they

favor, but few feel impelled to announce their support publicly, thus averting any need to announce their withdrawal of it. But I suppose Lippmann's practice of declaring himself was a function of his activist side.

One of the warmest and most sensitive of the tributes paid him after his death was by James M. Cain in the *Washington Post*. Cain, author of the classic *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and other novels, had worked under Lippmann on the *World* in the early twenties and had observed sides of him that I had not, although I assumed they existed. One was his perfectionism, sometimes carried a bit far, in the matter of writing. Once, for example, something of his that appeared in the *Washington Post* contained a sentence urging the country to revert to the "*status quo*." Seeing this in print, he shot off a letter to the editor of the paper asserting that his copy had been manhandled, and that the phrase should have read "*statu quo*." Cain thought this nitpicking. "True, the dative use of *status*, in Latin, is *statu*, but who cuts it so thin?" At the same time, Cain was pleased to be "working for one man in the newspaper business to whom such things mattered." And he goes on to explain that it was his, Cain's, own passion for rhetoric that led Lippmann to hire him for the *World's* editorial page in the first place. "As he told me later, when we compared notes, 'When my ear caught the participles that didn't dangle, the infinitives well buttoned in, the pronouns all with antecedents, it occurred to me that you could take [Maxwell] Anderson's place.' " In similar circumstances, I should have felt the same way. Purism was characteristic of Lippmann, in substance as well as in form. There were times when he may have had a poor case or none at all, but he rarely overstated or understated.

Another aspect of Lippmann that did not strike me until I read Cain's article was his physical strength and grace, even though I had been impressed by his vigor. Into the last decade of his life, he was a tennis enthusiast, regularly playing with competence a game that I had given up in my thirties. When I first met him in Maine, he was a tireless walker, and despite being twenty-six years younger, I had a hard time keeping up with him. Cain cites an instance in which Lippmann's strength saved his subordinate's life.

The two were on the sidewalk in front of the Pulitzer Building, where they both worked, and Lippmann said, “Jim, I think it’s up to the few to keep civilization from being torn down by the many. Don’t you?” Cain was startled by this remark, as well he might have been. “I was so astonished my head snapped around, and at that moment this iron hand caught my arm, to pull me, almost lift me, back from the curb, as a taxi shot by within inches. If it hadn’t been for that hand, I would have been killed. It was that kind of hand, and he was that kind of man.”

The remark that threw Cain off balance seems perfectly in character. Lippmann was an elitist. When he was misled, it was almost always because of an undue respect for established authority. The most famous case was in 1927, when he accepted uncritically a report by the Lowell Commission (chaired by A. Lawrence Lowell, president of Harvard) on the verdict that led to the execution of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two Massachusetts radicals charged with payroll robbery and murder. The commission had been appointed by the governor of Massachusetts and was staffed by the kind of persons—New Englanders, Harvard men, estimable public servants—in whom Lippmann had an instinctive trust. It led to an ugly rupture of relations between him and Heywood Broun, another ornament of the profession, who refused to accept the report and was forced to leave the *World*. In time, it was revealed that the report was riddled with simple factual errors—some of the commissioners had not even read the transcript of the testimony—and Lippmann quickly and apologetically reversed himself, but by then the damage was done. One more example: In 1949, when Alger Hiss, a former State Department official, was accused by many of treason and was tried in federal court for perjury, I spent an afternoon walking with Lippmann in Washington. We were discussing the case, and he said, “I know Alger Hiss. He couldn’t be guilty of treason.” I said that I didn’t understand his use of the word “couldn’t.” I said that, without judging the merits of the case, it seemed to me that anyone was capable of treason, depending on how the term was used. I pointed out that if I told him someone had betrayed a friend, or a wife, or a husband, he would probably accept the state-

ment as true and, since that sort of thing happens every day, think nothing more of it. In my view, I went on, betraying a fellow human being is never justifiable, whereas betraying a government may be an act of virtue, as I thought he must assume it was in this country in the colonial period or in the case of those Germans who plotted Hitler's destruction. I added that in the not impossible event that I became convinced that my countrymen would be served by an act of treason, I would, if I could summon up the courage to face the consequences, commit one. I am sure I made no impression on him.

If any man was a member in good standing of the Establishment, Lippmann was. But he served it well and, with few exceptions, critically. When he discovered that he had made an error of judgment, he was quick to acknowledge it. And he made far fewer mistakes, even of prophecy, than his detractors have claimed. Back in the sixties, the Pentagon, whose operations he was criticizing in almost every column, put some researchers to work on his writings over the years and circulated a document detailing what the military men regarded as faulty appraisals and forecasts. In some cases, the Pentagon was itself misinformed as to his opinions; in others, the errors were trivial. One mistake that was far from trivial was his 1968 estimate of Nixon. In early October of that year, following his customary procedure in presidential elections, Lippmann endorsed the Republican candidate and announced his acceptance of the view that a "new Nixon" had emerged. (By my count, this would be at least the eighth announced incarnation.) "I believe," he wrote, "that there really is a 'new Nixon,' a maturer and mellower man who is no longer clawing his way to the top, and it is, I think, fair to hope that his dominating ambition will be to become a two-term president. He is bright enough to know that this will be impossible if he remains sunk in the Vietnam quagmire. . . . And at home, he must, as he knows well, move out to find common ground with the active minorities who are dividing and might paralyze the nation." It did not take him long to recognize and regret this spectacular misjudgment.

Reviewing his work as a whole, I found most of it stood up far better than I had expected it to. I recall rereading, about ten years

ago, two of his books—*U.S. War Aims* and *U.S. Foreign Policy*—published in the war years of 1944 and 1943. I approached them with the expectation that they would be full of false assumptions about the future. They were, for one thing, prenuclear. They were written before the communist domination of China and the Soviet domination of Eastern Europe and before the formation of the United Nations. Yet Lippmann, drawing on his geographical theories, foresaw that the Soviets would establish a military and political presence from the Baltic states to the Balkans. He recognized the instability of the Chinese Nationalist government. And when the Truman Doctrine—a kind of global application of George Kennan’s “containment” thesis—was promulgated, he saw its dreadful consequences immediately.

But I think something valuable would be lost if we thought of him simply as a pillar of social and political wisdom. He was far more than that. He embodied most of what was best in the liberal and humanist traditions. He brought a new dignity to American journalism and practiced it as if it were one of the learned professions. As a stylist, he should be studied not only by other journalists but by anyone interested in English prose, for he was surely as much a master of it as any modern American writer. As a human being, he had human failings, but they were fewer by far than those of most of his contemporaries.