

# Prodigal Sons

THE NEW YORK  
INTELLECTUALS  
& THEIR WORLD

ALEXANDER  
BLOOM

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*The New York  
Intellectuals  
& Their World*

ALEXANDER BLOOM

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*For Stefan & Zachary,  
who give me pleasure beyond words*

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# Preface

That which is read first is written last. The author knows—or thinks he knows—what awaits the reader. The reader may have expectations but ventures into unknown territory. For an author, the book is done. For the reader, it is just beginning. The book is in the reader's hands.

I have been at this project for a number of years. Jokingly, I have said that I feel as though I had been assigned this topic when I started grade school. Seriously, I have told my older son that I have been working on it longer than he has been alive. He may be impressed; I am incredulous. This book is longer and took more time than I ever imagined necessary when I began. And yet, other individuals and events could have been included but were left out for reasons of space; other themes might have been developed; and further analysis of what is already here was possible. In this sense, this book—any book—is not done, only the writing has stopped.

Before the reading is to begin, a few comments. This book falls into a number of cracks between the divisions which usually mark the historical profession. It is intellectual history, but is more than a discussion of ideas. It is ethnic history, but the story of just one, unique group which emerged from an ethnic community. It is social history, but neither of the old nor the new variety. I do not claim however, that this is a new kind of history. In fact, it is probably the oldest kind. I have let my subject determine the approach. The New York Intellectuals have wandered through radicalism and literary criticism, cosmopolitanism and ethnicity, cultural discussions and political debates. And I have followed. A recounting of both their lives and their ideas is essential for a full understanding of their history.

I have not proceeded totally alone. I have received guidance and assistance in a number of forms over the years. The staffs and resources of several libraries



have provided me access to the tremendous amount of material the New York Intellectuals have produced. I am grateful to the Boston College Library, the Wheaton College Library, the Boston Public Library, and the Harvard University Library—whether they were aware of my presence or not. The F. W. Dupee Papers at Columbia University were an important source, and I am grateful to Mrs. F. W. Dupee for giving me permission to use and to quote from the papers, including letters of her late husband. In addition, for permission to quote from letters written to F. W. Dupee, I would like to thank Clement Greenberg; Mary McCarthy; William Phillips; Norman Podhoretz; Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, for the estate of Edmund Wilson; Edward Mendelson, for the estate of W. H. Auden; and Mrs. Gloria Macdonald, for the estate of Dwight Macdonald.

I have made extensive use of *Partisan Review* and *Commentary* and am most grateful for the permission of these magazines to quote from them, as well as that of Irving Howe to quote from his 1946 *Commentary* article, “The Lost Young Intellectuals,” his 1954 *Partisan Review* article, “This Age of Conformity,” and his 1968 *Commentary* article, “The New York Intellectuals: A Chronicle and a Critique”; that of Irving Kristol to quote from his 1952 *Commentary* article “Civil Liberties: 1952—A Study in Confusion”; and that of William Phillips, to quote from his 1976 *Commentary* article, “How *Partisan Review* Began.”

A number of the individuals about whom I wrote spoke openly with me and have allowed, in some cases with revision, their words to reappear here. This provided me with the opportunity to ask questions not answered in the literature, and their insights have added a texture and dimension unavailable from printed sources alone. I am certain that these individuals will not agree with all of my interpretations, but each encouraged me—during the interview—to pursue my own analysis and write my own book. This has been their style throughout their careers. The present book would be something much more limited without the benefit of these interviews. I am very grateful for the time taken—in the initial interviews and in the subsequent revisions and the approval of quotations—by Arnold Beichman, Daniel Bell, Midge Decter, Leslie Fiedler, Morris Fine, Clement Greenberg, Sidney Hook, Irving Howe, Alfred Kazin, Irving Kristol, the late Dwight Macdonald (reviewed by Mrs. Macdonald), William Phillips, Norman Podhoretz, Meyer Schapiro, and Diana Trilling.

Julian Bach agreed to serve as my literary agent and Sheldon Meyer agreed that Oxford University Press would publish this book long before I had any right to expect either representation or publication. Their faith saw me through the common condition of a graduate student—the feeling that no one really cares about a dissertation except the candidate and his or her advisers—and helped bridge the gap between a thesis and a book. Wendy Weil, Julian Bach’s associate, helped finalize the initial publishing agreement. Their agency is a model of civility coupled with enthusiasm; their willingness to put an unknown

graduate student on their list of best-selling authors bespeaks a commitment beyond financial reward. Everyone at Oxford University Press has been nothing short of splendid—supportive, patient, and excited, when appropriate. Sheldon Meyer remains the perfect editor—available, insightful, and encouraging. Otto Sonntag, the copy editor, dissected the manuscript with his red pencil, to my temporary exasperation and the book's substantial improvement. All of these people have my sincere appreciation.

In the years I have been working on this project, I have had the assistance of a number of extremely helpful individuals. My research assistants have done everything I have asked, from minute tasks to large-scale endeavors, and I am extremely grateful to them: Diane Beswick, Diedre Fogg, Laura Harding, Allison Perry, Deborah Sedares, Christine Swenson, and, especially, Kim Kennedy and Kristin Robinson. The preparation of the manuscript for publication was facilitated by the work of the secretarial staff at Wheaton College, in particular Nancy Shepardson, Kathie Francis, and Emily Pearce, and by the Wheaton Academic Computer Center, including Gail Richardson and Linda Fitzpatrick.

A number of friends have floated in and out of this project over the years—reading sections, sending me clippings, alerting me to articles, listening to my ideas, or merely talking with me. They are a disparate group, spread over geography and time. As a whole they serve as a kind of personalized history of the years I have been working on this. They are true friends: Ann Banks, Paul Breines, Nancy Condee, Todd Endelmen, Paul Helmreich, Frances Maher, John Miller, Alan Rogers, Ellen Schrecker, Peter Warner, and Kersti Yllo.

Several friends read major portions of the manuscript and took the time to make careful and thoughtful comments. David Ennis and Marc Ferrara read the part which began as my dissertation—essentially the first nine chapters—and their comments helped in the revision of those sections. Peter Weiler read my dissertation as it was being written, and his intelligent criticisms improved the thesis and this book. David Vogler read the entire book and brought a critical and insightful eye to the whole work. All these friends have my heartfelt thanks.

My debts to Andrew Buni and Alan Lawson are great. Both read and commented on my dissertation, but their contributions only begin there. Andrew Buni provided consistent encouragement from the very beginning of my graduate school career, first as a teacher and later as a colleague and a friend. He made it clear that the profession of history was both exciting and accessible, even to graduate students. Alan Lawson encouraged this project from its start—in his seminar—and continued as a model thesis adviser. His detailed, challenging, and supportive comments improved every section of the book, as he provided the same careful reading of all that I wrote. I hope these two understand my indebtedness and my appreciation for all they have done for me.

Jill Betz Bloom took time from her own busy professional and academic

career to discuss with me various crucial issues at important junctures in the thinking and writing of this book. Her psychological insights helped clarify particular discussions. In addition, she read the final work, helping to catch everything from errors in typesetting to muddled syntax and unclear concepts. Beyond all these, however, are contributions more intangible but even more important. Over the years, a great many of the things we have learned, beyond our specific disciplines, have been learned together. These are impossible to enumerate, but essential to recognize. The process of learning together has been as important and as satisfying for me as the knowledge gained. For all this—and for more—I am extremely grateful.

My sons, Stefan and Zachary, have grown with this book. The first was born when I was writing my thesis, the second when I was writing the book. They have provided a constant reminder of what is most important to me. Holding a book can be very satisfying, especially if one wrote it. Holding one's child is even better. What I owe my sons is inexplicable, but their contributions to my life continue to be wonderful.

Brookline  
May 1985

Alexander Bloom

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# PRODIGAL SONS

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# Introduction

## “The Herd of Independent Minds”

*The New York Intellectuals dislike being labeled, they can speak bitterly about each other's work and opinions, they may not see one another from year's start to year's end, but they are nervously alert to one another's judgment. Attention is paid—whether from warranted response or collective vanity or provincial narrowness, it hardly matters.*

—Irving Howe

*They were themselves, if not the only, the main people who knew what they were talking about. All of us, in fact, write to each other as an audience.*

—Norman Podhoretz

*A lot of people in the group hate one another like poison, and you have to be about eighty years old before you can look at your worst enemy and say he and I belong in the same place.*

—Midge Decter<sup>1</sup>

Although they first came together in the 1930s the New York Intellectuals\* began only recently to admit that they belonged “in the same place.” They do not agree on much else these days, or at least large segments of the intellectual community have gone their separate ways so dramatically that it would be hard for anyone without a knowledge of their backgrounds to believe that they ever occupied the “same place.” Perhaps the political distances which have grown, as well as advancing age and new intellectual groupings, have made it easier for

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\*Throughout this work, the New York Intellectuals have been designated with a capital I to distinguish them as a particular group, as opposed to the great number of other intellectuals who lived in New York during the period this study covers. The notion of the “intellectual world,” for example, is very different from that of the “New York Intellectual community.”



them to understand their common connections. But it is only lately—and with the community truly dispersed—that they started to talk about their common story.<sup>2</sup>

Outside observers have for years, however, seen them as a group and as identifiable players on the stage of American intellectual life. New York Intellectual became a label which could be affixed to a certain intellectual style by the 1950s.<sup>3</sup> But members of the group did not suddenly come together in the postwar years. They shared a common history which stretched back to the Depression and beyond. Public acknowledgement of their particular intellectual position marked the culmination of an effort which had been under way for two decades.

They had assembled on the edge of American society. Coming from the immigrant ghettos in which their parents had settled upon arrival in America, they moved toward the center of American intellectual life by a circuitous route through left politics and the avant-garde cultural life of the 1930s. They exchanged the peripheral world of the immigrants for the marginal world of radical intellectuals. But even here, among those who all considered themselves cosmopolitan and universalist, they felt different. They were young, Jewish, urban intellectuals whose radical politics became bound up with an assimilationist momentum begun when their parents left Europe. Whether as precocious youths in the city school system, as young radicals interacting with American leftists who came from generations of American native stock, or as intellectuals feeling that political constraints inhibited their cultural development—they did not integrate fully with the others. They frequently spoke of themselves as alienated. As Norman Podhoretz later put it, “They did not feel that they belonged to America or that America belonged to them.” But neither did they feel that they belonged to the world of their parents, a world fated to fade before their eyes. Nor did they feel, Podhoretz noted, that they belonged “to the Jewish people” as a whole. What they did belong to was each other. They were, in Podhoretz’s telling phrase, “the Family”—each other’s intellectual relatives.<sup>4</sup>

“Almost all these individuals come out of themselves,” Daniel Bell observed in the 1970s. “They had no *yichus*,” which Bell translated from the Yiddish as “eminent pedigree.”<sup>5</sup> They all made themselves who they were. They knew one another—in college cafeterias, on magazine editorial boards, from radical organizations—but they all achieved on their own. They became experts in different areas of American intellectual life. Some earned doctoral degrees, but in a variety of fields. Others functioned in a more traditional intellectual role, as free-lance critics or reviewers, often holding down regular jobs as well. Some found themselves drawn into the community because of literary issues, others because of political concerns. They published widely, often in the same magazines, but also in the more specific journals of their fields. They labored extremely hard to create their own individual places in the American intellectual world. But these efforts should not deflect us from understanding the common themes and threads which bind them together.

They remained, through it all, a feisty, battling community. "There's a lot of talk about back-scratching," Irving Howe remarked in the 1960s, "but I don't see much. Change the word 'back' to 'eye' and maybe you've got something." Only in those years did William Phillips, a founding editor of the essential New York Intellectual journal *Partisan Review*, come to see the impact of the tumultuous interactive style the New Yorkers adopted. "I realized," he said, "why New Critics such as [Allen] Tate and [R. P.] Blackmur and [John Crowe] Ransom enjoyed such fine reputations and nobody ever heard of us. They were always praising each other and we were always at each other's throats." But they also understood the benefits of their particular kind of personal interactions; moreover, they were not as unknown as Phillips suggested. When asked why he remained in New York, Irving Howe responded,

It's because in New York I can talk with people like Meyer Schapiro, Daniel Bell, Harold Rosenberg, and Lionel Abel. They usually disagree with me, but they put me on my mettle. Outside of New York, I might be a big cheese in a small town. But the trouble with big cheeses is that they're probably full of holes and I want to be near people who can point them out.<sup>6</sup>

Since Howe made this assessment, Rosenberg has died, and Bell moved to Cambridge and Abel to Buffalo. Certainly, Howe has other friends who will evaluate his work. Meyer Schapiro is still one, but the rest may not be New York Intellectuals any longer. Death and geographical dispersion, as well as political and cultural schisms, have ended the cohesion of the New York Intellectual community. Its existence is now the province of history.

*Lionel Trilling is in many respects my idea of the perfect New York intellectual . . . intelligent, curious, humane, well read, interested in ideas, fascinated by other times and places, immensely knowledgeable about European culture.*  
—David Daiches

*[Harold] Rosenberg was . . . formidable and combative—in many respects, the quintessential New York intellectual, resourceful in polemic and sometimes dazzling in style. . . . His style, both in conversation and in writing, was nurtured on that special mixture of Marxism and modernism that came to constitute the distinct Weltanschauung of the New York intellectuals.*  
—Hilton Kramer

*Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus, Yes, there is such a figure as the New York Intellectual, and he is, or was, Philip Rahv.*

—William Barrett<sup>7</sup>

Despite the community's dissolution and despite the fact that the three "quintessential" New York Intellectuals noted above have all died, New York

Intellectuals still exist. The living remain some of the most important figures in American intellectual and academic life. And they retain many of the attributes developed when they shared the margin with other members of their intellectual community. The entire group is most easily identified by the generational stages in which they emerged and by the institutional connections, especially to magazines, which developed. The first generation coalesced in the late 1930s around the “new” *Partisan Review*—“new” because it had broken its direct ties with the Communist left. Drawn by political and literary issues, as well as by a desire to define the place of intellectuals in society, the “new” magazine and the emerging community attracted a wide range of literary and political figures, including Philip Rahv, William Phillips, Lionel Trilling, Diana Trilling, Meyer Schapiro, Clement Greenberg, Harold Rosenberg, Dwight Macdonald, Elliot Cohen, and Sidney Hook. Among the readers of the “new” *PR* were young radicals still in college, a number of whom would become the second generation of the intellectual community. These included Irving Howe, Irving Kristol, Daniel Bell, Delmore Schwartz, Leslie Fiedler, Seymour Martin Lipset, Nathan Glazer, Alfred Kazin, Robert Warshow, Melvin Lasky, Isaac Rosenfeld, and Saul Bellow. As they came of age, these younger writers joined with the older ones, but just at the point when politics began to change for them all. They made the transition from thirties radicalism to postwar liberalism together. They also succeeded in establishing names for themselves after 1945, as well as several new journals, including *Commentary* and *Dissent*. A small, third generation attached itself after the war. Students rather than colleagues, they joined not when the community was on the periphery of American intellectual life but as it moved to the center. While a few of this third generation—Norman Podhoretz, Midge Decter, and Steven Marcus—grew to importance in the community, most of the others, including Norman Mailer, Philip Roth, and Susan Sontag, headed off in varying directions. The times and the changed status of the older members made the connections different and, often, much looser.\*

The New York Intellectuals began as radicals, moved to liberalism, and sometimes ended up as conservatives. But they were always intellectuals. *Partisan Review* started as a magazine dedicated to radical literature and then rededicated itself to radical culture, only outside the world of proletarian literature and Communist party politics. The New Yorkers held out for the preeminence of art, not devoid of social context but reflective of it. They resisted both the perceived limited scope of the New Critics and their notion of the programmatic nature of proletarian literature. They brought the modernist

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\*As is evident from the listing of the individuals who comprise the community, this is essentially a male group. As such, when discussing the intellectual community itself, male pronouns are frequently used, as are the designations “bright boys” or “young men” to describe them in their early years. General societal descriptions are gender-free. The use of male identified terms is intentional and meant to be specific of the group.

heroes of the 1920s into the world of radical politics, without sacrificing cultural standards or radicalism, they believed. Furthermore, they held strongly to ideas about the special and crucial role for critics and for intellectuals in general. In the end their politics, rather than their cultural ideas or intellectual position, underwent the most dramatic changes. And with those changes they moved to the center.

Having been “stuck with one another” in the 1930s, as Podhoretz was to put it, they stayed with one another through the 1960s when political pressures and the passage of time finally began to undo the community. No sudden disruption occurred, just the moving away of various individuals at various points. Until this happened, however, the New York Intellectuals found themselves and kept themselves together. They held out for their personal independence but maintained their connections. All were strong, driven individuals, eager to create their own personal place, and they often saw their own achievements in personal terms. Yet they moved across the political landscape together, not in a single line advancing along a common front, but occupying the same large areas at the same time.

Harold Rosenberg once labeled his fellow intellectuals as a “herd of independent minds.” He went on to describe his personal distinctions from the “herd.” The others could have equally well set themselves apart from the rest. All of them, however, including Rosenberg, belonged for a long time. They resisted inclusion because they worked so hard to make themselves something and, in so doing, often lost sight of the common ties. And they were not always friendly in person or courteous in print with one another. Still, they all ran with the herd.

After reviewing the course of the first years of *Partisan Review*, Leslie Fiedler concluded that despite intellectual and, in his case, geographical distinctions, *PR* (at that time synonymous with the New York Intellectual community) was a part of him: “I have accepted my fate with all its contradictions: I stand somehow for *PR* and *PR* for me.”<sup>8</sup> These individuals usually came to *PR* and, ultimately, to the New York Intellectual community from a common background, seeking certain intellectual and political goals, and eager to fulfill the ambitions of their youth. They shared much, differed on many particulars, and steadily advanced together. They were a varied and often extremely individualistic lot. There was no single, typical New York Intellectual, because no one of them fit all the characteristics the group possessed or shared all the community’s wide-ranging intellectual interests. There is no question that some differed on certain points and that they have gone their separate ways in the last decade or so. Yet there is also no question that these individuals embodied many of the most important political and intellectual forces of recent years, that they helped shape what America thought—in its universities, its leading journals, and its political debates. And there is no question that despite personal animosities and differing attitudes on particular questions, they could for a long time be considered together. The discussion which follows does not

aim to write the complete biography of any single member of the community, nor does it maintain that every member shared every position. Rather, it seeks to describe the intellectual herd as a mass and to follow it as it moved across the political and intellectual landscape. How the community came to be formed, what it thought important, how and why it moved and changed, and why it ultimately came undone are what we are after. Watching the community come together, develop, and adjust, we can learn about the motives which helped drive these children of immigrants to positions of intellectual eminence, about some of the ways in which intellectuals function and justify their own places, and something about the political and cultural terrain itself over which the New York Intellectuals passed.

*Section I*

PATHS TO  
PARTISAN

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# Chapter 1

## Young Men from the Provinces

New York had long been the center of American radicalism and artistic movements, the ideal place where young intellectuals could learn and develop, and come into contact with numerous styles and trends. The New York Intellectuals did not grow up, however, in that part of New York which mattered to radicals and artists. The New York where they did grow up proved just as essential to their maturation as the one to which they would eventually migrate. They lived on the periphery—in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, in the Bronx, in Newark, or even in the neighborhoods on the edges of other large American cities. These places made up “for most American Jews the image of their group,” Robert Warshow observed in 1946. “The New York pattern is the master pattern, repeated in its main outlines wherever there is a large Jewish population.” In the immigrant ghettos in which their parents had settled, the young students were raised and schooled. Maturing in a half-English, half-Yiddish environment, they always carried with them some of that divided world. This world was more than their environment, however; it settled into the consciousness and the memories of young Jews. “It is what a Jew remembers, it is what he has in mind when he experiences his more private emotions about being a Jew—affection, pity, delight, shame,” Warshow believed. It was their home, more than merely their address. The Jewish ghetto offered many of the New York Intellectuals what small towns had offered bright young Americans for decades, a place in which to grow and learn. And while “the life of the small town can be said in some sense to embody the common experience of the older Americans,” Warshow concluded, “so the life of New York can be said at this particular stage in the process of acculturation to embody the common experience of American Jews.”<sup>1</sup> The young New Yorkers came, in time, to reject and abandon this world, just as past generations



had fled the small towns. But this abandonment meant more than merely the departure from one's place of birth. The young intellectuals, like the future accountants, schoolteachers, salesmen, and social workers in their neighborhoods, carried with them the dreams of their parents, even as they rejected their world. The archetypal contest between the small-town life and the bright lights of the city describes the division which grows between parents and children, between basic beliefs and values. The immigrants in the ghettos wished strongly for the success and assimilation of their children. What developed was not a battle of systems but a joint venture in launching the younger group. This experience is by no means unique to the New York Intellectuals. Immigrant parents' ambition for the success of their children is a classic tale of American history. With this success, though, came a burden to be carried through adult life. The large number of New York Intellectuals who grew up in this environment carried these burdens. Their early, personal history was reflected in their later lives. Their ghetto youth influenced their adult concerns, reemerging as they sought to find their way in political and intellectual worlds. They shared childhood experiences with numerous young Jews. Their adult resolutions, however, were all their own.

#### ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND JEWISH PARENTS

*We were the end of the line. We were the children of the immigrants who had camped at the city's back door, in New York's rawest, remotest, cheapest ghetto.*

*How that was an extraordinary world to grow up in!*

—Alfred Kazin<sup>2</sup>

To understand fully both how "extraordinary" and how "raw" this world really was required the perspective of both having been raised there and having left. "In New York the Jews still formed a genuine community," Irving Howe recalls, "reaching half-unseen into a dozen neighborhoods and a multitude of institutions, within the shadows of which we have found protection of a kind."<sup>3</sup> This community nurtured its sons, protected them, and dreamed for them.

The immigrants had come to make a place for themselves in America. Encountering poverty and prejudice, they spent their days trying to make a living. Life proved extremely hard. "When I was young, there were three words we dreaded," Sidney Hook recalled, "'diphtheria,' because that meant a child would die; 'pneumonia,' because that meant an adult would die; and 'slack,' because that meant six months without work."<sup>4</sup> Grand aspirations had to give way to the process of survival, the immigrants transferring their yearnings to their children. The young would take the final step, would enter and prosper in the larger American society. The security of the immigrant Jewish community provided the protective environment and the early preparation for this venture into the world. From an early age the expectation of a successful life beyond the bounds of the immigrant ghetto became one of

the clear goals set for the young boys by their parents. The pressures of achievement for oneself and for one's parents became part of the psychological baggage they took with them.

Most American immigrant neighborhoods offered a communal sense to counter the feeling of isolation from the outside world. For the adults, community organizations, social interactions, cultural groups, and religious affiliations provided solace. The young found a tight-knit community, where some of the stigma of poverty and prejudice might be avoided. Although Irving Howe's father went bankrupt in 1930 and became a door-to-door peddler to support his family, Howe's recollections of those years offer an example of the insulating aspects of the ghetto environment.

We were often very poor, living together with uncles, aunts, and grandmothers to save rent. Yet I had no very acute sense of being deprived, or any notions that I was the victim of social injustice . . . . The realization of what is meant to be poor I had first to discover through writings about poverty; the sense of my own handicap became vivid to me only after I had learned about the troubles of people I did not know. And surely this experience was typical.<sup>5</sup>

While the young intellectuals and their contemporaries matured, the ghetto cushioned their growth. As Alfred Kazin remembered, "In one sense I had a hundred thousand Jewish parents when I grew up in Brownsville." And Howe summarized the general nature of the ghetto as follows: "The Jewish community enclosed one . . . . We did not realize then how sheltering it was to grow up in this world. . . ."<sup>6</sup>

The cushioning, however, was mixed with expectations. Parents measured success by educational achievement, and as the young boys proved precocious, they were singled out in the public schools and shone in adults' eyes. While this marked a boy for educational heights at an early age it also brought with it personal pressure to succeed.

Other difficulties added to the contradictory sense of support and pressure. The young boys shone at school, yet the classrooms seemed overcrowded, constrictive. At home, where parents transferred their own aspirations to their children, families lived in a few rooms. Even beds were crowded. At school and at home the expectations pressed in. The only place of personal freedom was in the street. "The streets were ours . . . the streets belonged to us. We would roam through the city tasting the delights of freedom, discovering the possibilities far beyond the reach of our parents," Howe later recalled. Being streetwise grew to be a mark of these young students, sharp and mentally tough. It was mirrored in their intellectual styles. "Even those of us who later became intellectuals or professionals kept something of our bruising gutter-worldliness, our hard and abrasive skepticism."<sup>7</sup>

Within the Jewish community existed a wide variety of cultural and political offerings. The immigrants had transported a number of radical and socialist

movements with them to America. Others had sprung to life in their new country. For the young students, the diversity of street-corner speakers, political meetings, and discussions of Yiddish literature or of the day's *Forward* filtered into emerging intellectual consciousness. They might wander through the numerous associations of impromptu discussions, picking up bits and pieces. Always quick to learn, praised in school for their verbal agility, considered bright young boys—many of the young intellectuals tested their political wings in their own environment long before they could have ventured out in the larger radical world. Having become an early convert to socialism, Daniel Bell recalls standing on street corners at the age of fourteen, championing the socialist position.<sup>8</sup>

The assimilation of this variety of cultural and political material had a second effect. The give-and-take of the street corner or the cultural association kept learning and education from compartmentalization. Ideas on political events flowed into those on philosophy or culture, issues of the street mixing with lessons of the classroom. "It was inconceivable to me that I could be simply an academic specialist," recalled Alfred Kazin. "I was swept up in all sorts of socialist and radical ideas, and I believed that modern art and modern history had come to be very much related."<sup>9</sup>

The passion of the intellectual interests of the Jewish neighborhoods added to their breadth. The electricity of the intellectual debates became a chief source of vitality among the immigrants. For others, set adrift in an alien world, the maintenance of a European tradition—religious, cultural, or political—helped compensate for the general isolation. Many Jewish immigrants came to America because of political beliefs, converts to socialism seeking a home where their ideas might take root. All these reasons contributed to immigrants' intellectual interests. Their passion, though, also increased through a convergence of theory and reality. "Always a voracious reader," Sidney Hook recalled of his youth, "I devoured the literature of the socialist movement at an age when righteous passion at the indignities of existence which surrounded me in the proletarian slums where my family lived, helped me to understand . . . the fundamental truths of the class-struggle."<sup>10</sup>

The European talmudic tradition and lives sharpened by poverty combined to create this intense, passionate environment in the Jewish ghettos. The streetwise young students learned much of their style from their elders. In a difficult life, intellectual pleasures offered a temporary escape. The street corner debates, the pointing of fingers, and the pounding on chests provided the stimulation as much as did the particular issues under discussion. Stifled at nearly every turn, the Jewish immigrants found some release in this combative atmosphere, aware that it was something of a game in which to spend pent-up energy. The young men as well as their elders, venturing into this world of verbal battles, found the give-and-take of the argument coupled with a sense of tolerance. "Attitudes of tolerance and permissiveness, feelings that one had to put up with and indulge one's cranks, eccentrics, idealists, and extremists,

affected the Jewish community," Irving Howe later wrote. And for those like himself, "You might be shouting at the top of your lungs against reformism or Stalin's betrayals, but for the middle-aged garment worker strolling along Southern Boulevard you were just a bright and cocky Jewish boy, a talkative little *pisher*."<sup>11</sup>

They might be *pishers* and cocky, but being bright raised them above the level of potential "cranks" or "eccentrics." Youthful swagger would be tolerated. With the support and tolerance of the community, it could be turned into attributes which would lead them out of the ghetto. And nowhere were these expectations higher than at home.

#### WE WERE THEIR AMERICA

*O Nicolas! Alas! Alas!  
My grandfather coughed in your army,  
Hid in a wine-stinking barrel  
For three days in Bucharest,  
Then left for America  
To become a king himself.*

—Delmore Schwartz

*My parents were Jewish immigrants and now, in retrospect, I can see how important this was to my life. It meant, on the one hand, a home atmosphere of warm and binding love, and it meant, on the other hand, an atmosphere of striving, of struggle to appropriate those goods of American life which to others come almost automatically.*

—Irving Howe<sup>12</sup>

More than a cultural boundary surrounded Brownsville. Jewish immigrants stayed not only because of familiarity but also because a move would merely have been to someplace else, not to someplace better. Language, education, and poverty, as well as prejudice, kept the immigrants out of the mainstream of American life. "They were trapped in the limitations of their skills," wrote Irving Howe, "in the skimpiness of their education, in the awkwardness of their speech, in the alienness of their manners."<sup>13</sup> Singly and collectively, however, they saw their personal emancipation and full participation in American society through the success and assimilation of their children. Homes also provided support and a launching ground. To be schooled, to succeed, to go to the university, and to be a success—all this would complete the journey Jews had begun in the pale, as well as lead them out of Brownsville.

The immigrants transferred a second goal to their sons, their intellectual tradition. The high hopes placed on the bright boys came not only from

successes in the first encounter with an American institution, the public school, but also from the potential fulfillment of the stifled intellectualism of their fathers. Many an immigrant father worked in a skilled or semiskilled job by day and became the household or neighborhood intellectual in the evening. Years later Irving Howe looked back on the attitude of fathers such as his own:

The Jewish immigrant is the most intellectualized of the workers for a variety of reasons: the traditional forms of his religion are highly literary; the compensation of an urban, restless, and rootless people who can find sustenance only in the internalized, that is intellectualized, experiences, lead him to an overvaluation of the significance—as well as the cash value—of verbal and written activities.

The limits of language and an education inappropriate to the American intellectual marketplace kept the fathers in their working-class professions. Those few schooled in Europe had received a talmudic training, useful perhaps for mental agility but otherwise useless in America. The right kind of training was, however, being given their sons. In place of his own success, then, Howe saw how the frustrated intellectualism of the father worked itself out in his children. "Since he himself has not the opportunity to so develop but must, as he puts it, 'spend the rest of his days in the shop,' he centers his hopes on his favorite son."<sup>14</sup>

The young students felt the responsibility placed on them from the outset. While never articulated, their role in this process remained unconsciously perceived. It influenced the way they behaved in classes, determined the level of their academic motivation, and colored their relations with their parents. "My father and mother worked in a rage to put us above their level," Alfred Kazin has written; "they had married to make *us* possible. We were the only conceivable end to all their striving; we were their America."<sup>15</sup>

Living with these expectations did not always make for the easiest of childhoods. Along with the warmth and love of home and community came an increasing sense of the pressures as well. Alfred Kazin remembered,

I worked on a hairline between triumph and catastrophe. Why the odds should always have felt so narrow I understood only when I realized how little my parents thought of their own lives. It was not for myself alone that I was expected to shine, but for them—to redeem the constant anxiety of their existence. I was the first American child, their offering to the strange new God; I was to be the monument of their liberation from the shame of being—what they were.<sup>16</sup>

Most of the contemporaries of these young students never perceived the choices so starkly, learning that more than a hairline existed between triumph and catastrophe. First-generation assimilation does not usually lead to immediate public prominence, but a smaller step into the larger middle classes—a move from Brownsville to Long Island, Westchester, or the New Jersey suburbs. The case of the New York Intellectuals is atypical. The

intellectual heights they achieved met the dreams of their parents but proved exceptional for most other first-generation Americans.

There is a period in life when all children incorporate the values of their parents. By the time children begin to break away from their parents, they already carry many of these values with them. Many are able to adjust them, some deny them, and others consciously oppose them. Yet, they function in terms of them. For these young Jewish students, Alfred Kazin among them, the incorporation went even deeper than for others in their neighborhood. The high hopes placed on the brightest students matched the increased incorporation of the parents' outlook into their own.

I was awed by this system, I believed in it, I respected its force. The alternative was "going bad." The school was notoriously the toughest in our tough neighborhood, and the dangers of "going bad" were constantly impressed upon me at home and in school in dark whispers of the "reform school." . . . Behind any failure in school yawned the great abyss of a criminal career. Every refractory attitude doomed you with the sound "Sing Sing." Anything less than absolute perfection in school always suggested to my mind that I might fall out of the daily race, be kept back in the working class forever, or—dared I think of it?—fall into the criminal class itself.<sup>17</sup>

The drive for absolute perfection, Irving Howe believed, led to "precocity, internality, moral quest and self judgment, a neurotic need for perfection." Against what seem overwhelming odds, the young students ultimately triumphed. The "neurotic need for perfection" and the high "hopes [placed] on the 'favorite son' " finally led to success and eminence.<sup>18</sup>

All the evaluations and assessments of these dynamics would come later. The immigrants, as Howe noted, "were seldom in a position to grasp the complex process by which ideas of collective fulfillment were transformed into goals of personal achievement." They reacted as individuals, responded personally—sometimes with expectations different from those of their children.<sup>19</sup> While academic achievement became the standard which established the beginnings of this process, the question of where to apply academic success proved a point of generational debate. Material worth became the tangible sign of American success, especially among impoverished immigrants. Intellectuality had its place, but the idealized model of European Jews was the man rich enough to have time to spend in the synagogue, not the impoverished, perpetual student. This model found its American counterpart. Mrs. Bauman, a character in a story by Delmore Schwartz, "dreamed that her sons would be millionaires and her grandsons rabbis and philosophers."<sup>20</sup> The future intellectuals, whether at the point of making career choices or, as we shall see, at the point of thinking no careers were really available to them, chose the path of Mrs. Bauman's grandchildren. They became philosophers, scholars, critics—intellectuals. Yet, they internalized the strivings of their parents and in the postwar years emerged neither as millionaires nor as impoverished intellectuals.

The compromise they achieved allowed for the best of both generations, the scholar and the success. They worked out a system of priorities which would guide them in career choices as well as in intellectual decisions. As Robert Warshaw summarized for his contemporaries, "They evolved the three imperatives that govern them: be secure, be respected, be intelligent." He then elaborated the kind of career choices these imperatives would direct: "In their world a dentist is better than a machinist, a doctor better than a businessman, a college professor is best of all. But an unsuccessful intellectual is worse than an unsuccessful businessman: he should have known better than to try."<sup>21</sup> The option to be a machinist or a businessman might have existed for some of their generation. For the young intellectuals the high hopes held for them pointed to the highest places on this list of potential careers. In the resolution of career choices and directions, they carved a middle ground between personal goals and parental expectations. Before they settled in this position, however, the New York Intellectuals cast about in areas and activities far from the places their parents envisioned and far from the comfortable positions they ultimately achieved.

The overall relations between these young men and their parents provided an exaggerated example of the basic pattern of maternal closeness and paternal aloofness typical of the time. This form was not the sole province of the ghetto families. The atmosphere of the ghetto, however, added special elements to the role perceptions. While the father often was the symbolic figure of a household intellectual, this activity confined itself to his personal love of books or his interaction with the other men. His example more than his instruction accounted for the intellectual inheritance the young received. In addition, the father's self-perception of failure, his belief that his life lacked fulfillment, increased the disparity between the attention of the parents. Mothers are remembered for nurture and support as well as for overattentiveness and a smothering of their children with concern. Fathers are faulted for excesses in the other direction, for being too standoffish. They specifically desired that their sons *not* grow up like them. Sons might expand on the father's limited intellectualism, but otherwise the fathers hoped their children would turn out differently from themselves. The ultimate success of the fathers' ambition rested on the sons' achievement.

The relation of the mother to her child grew especially close in this atmosphere. "From infancy on," Irving Howe later observed, "the child is petted by his mother. She keeps him in the feminine pattern as long as possible." She doesn't want to cut his curls, Howe noted, or to have him enter athletic activities, for fear he might be hurt. He is "burdened" with so many activities, such as music lessons, Hebrew school, family obligations, and schoolwork, that he has little time for the normal pursuits of childhood. "She constantly hovers over him, developing in him—as if with unconscious skill—the sense of dependence on her which he is later to find so difficult to

overcome." Only in later life were individuals like Alfred Kazin able to sort out the roots of certain motivations. "I felt all my life," Kazin said in 1976, "that I was having to report back to my mother. I didn't feel I was a victim; I felt I was responsible for her."<sup>22</sup>

Relations between mothers and sons proved intense and deeply rooted, but relatively straightforward. The relations between fathers and sons never grew as close, and they evidence more complexity. During adolescent rebellion the sons found clearer targets in the overattentive and restrictive pattern established by their mothers. Never fully free of the ties to their mothers, the young could at least temporarily feel the bonds breaking. To resolve the internalized connections and hostilities they felt toward their fathers remained a more difficult task. Fathers provided multifaceted objects for the young men to confront—symbols of intelligence, aloofness, and failure. Mothers might dominate through cajoling, spoiling, and loving; fathers were figures of much less personal involvement. Fathers' sacrifices and hopes for their sons' success were not always translated into closeness. In response, the young men vacillated between reverence, resentment, disappointment, and conflict.

The immigrant father spent his life largely outside the home. At work, in the synagogue, or in a political meeting, he was a figure removed from a child's perception of the day-to-day events of the household. However, the father's public "pretensions," as Robert Warshow would call them, ultimately came to be seen as "nothing but nonsense," and the boy ultimately held him "responsible" for the family's hardships. Isaac Rosenfeld's novel *Passage from Home* is the fullest articulation of this generational conflict between Jewish fathers and sons. Bernard, the main character, speaks about this dilemma: "[I felt] forever disappointed in my father, just as I know he was disappointed in me. As far as I can remember, I was always denying him." Disappointment, Warshow later observed, "was often the only thing [fathers] could clearly communicate."<sup>23</sup>

As the young boys grew, resentments and disappointments moved toward the surface. Adolescent rebellion was fully manifest in the immigrant ghettos. The centrality of this conflict in the life of so many of his contemporaries led Daniel Bell to see it in vivid terms. For the "bulk of Jewish immigrants," he stated, "the anxiety was translated into the struggle between fathers and sons. Few generational conflicts have had such exposed nakedness, such depths of strain as this." The children of other immigrant groups, perhaps even those from long-established American families, might also believe their generational conflict highly intense. Bell's observation is less telling about the relative degree of "struggle" than about the impression it made upon his generation of Jewish youths. "In my time," Lionel Trilling wrote, "we all were trying to find a release from our fathers."<sup>24</sup> The same impression emerged in the responses to Isaac Rosenfeld's novel, published in 1946. Many New York Intellectuals were deeply touched by Rosenfeld's descriptions. Irving Howe's review in *Commentary* noted that "the helpless, tragic conflict [was] . . . a true and acute



perception, the very stuff of which literature is made.”<sup>25</sup> The perceptions of Bell, Howe, and others emerged in adult years. Time and space had offered the chance to gain perspective on the interactions. Yet, during the childhood years, signs of the differentiation, the first hints of the distance that grew between parents and children, began to appear. This divergence stemmed from the same source as the other difficulties—the problems brought on by immigration and the alien place of the parents in American society.

While the ghetto environment provided the parents a degree of familiarity in a strange land, it also allowed them to maintain old-world habits and customs. Language was one significant remnant. Many of these immigrants not only continued to read the foreign-language press but also spoke Yiddish at home. Many young children went to school either speaking only Yiddish or knowing Yiddish better than English. “Yiddish was my first language,” Bell noted; “English was my second.” Irving Howe recalled an awkward moment deriving from this home-school distinction.

I attended my first day of kindergarten as if it were a visit to a new country. The teacher asked the children to identify various common objects. When my turn came she held up a fork and without hesitation I called it by its Yiddish name: “*a goepel*.” The whole class burst out laughing at me with that special cruelty of children. That afternoon I told my parents that I had made up my mind never to speak Yiddish to them again, though I would not give any reasons. It was a shock for them, the first in a series of conflicts between immigrant and America.<sup>26</sup>

Immigrants believed school to be the arena where potential successes began, and thus the disparity of school-English and home-Yiddish grew more obvious. Delmore Schwartz saw this bilingualism as “produc[ing] in some a fear of mispronunciation; a hesitation in speech; and a sharpened focus upon the characters of the parents.” Parents’ stature clearly began to diminish. Norman Podhoretz contrasted his patrician high school teacher with his mother. “The idea of Mrs. K. meeting my mother was more than I could bear: my mother, who spoke with a Yiddish accent and of whom, until that sickening moment, I had never known I was ashamed and so ready to betray.” Daniel Bell recalls similar feelings of “awkward shame.”<sup>27</sup>

As the students increasingly interacted with the world outside the home and, especially, outside the ghetto community, their sense of separateness and shame grew. Howe’s aversion to the Yiddish speech of his parents fed his sense of distance. He remembered playing in an abandoned lot and having his father call for him: “He would shout my name from afar, giving it a Yiddish twist: ‘Oivee!’ I would always feel a sense of shame at hearing my name so mutilated in the presence of amused onlookers. . . . I would always run ahead of my father as if to emphasize the existence of a certain distance between us.”<sup>28</sup>

This physical separation, placing actual space between the generations, became a child’s simple way of expressing something much more intricate. It was most pronounced when the interaction occurred outside the insular Jewish

community. Bernard, in *Passage from Home*, feels no real shame interacting with his very traditional and Orthodox grandfather in Jewish neighborhoods.

Once when he had come to our house—we lived farther North and West, among Gentiles—I had been ashamed to meet him at the elevated station and walk down the street with him, and had kept a few paces ahead, not letting him take my arm.<sup>29</sup>

As the young grew older, their sense of distance took on more mature and more cultural forms. The distinctions they saw between themselves and their parents continued to grow. They came to realize, Daniel Bell concluded “the fact that most of this generation, including myself, were ashamed of our parents.”<sup>30</sup> They felt themselves pulled toward the center of American society, away from the edge where their parents lived. They grew ever more alienated from the world of the ghetto and from their own parents as well. No longer at home in this environment, they could not immediately find a home at the center either.

#### STANDING OUTSIDE AMERICA

The distance which developed between parents and children did not provide the younger generation with a sense of being at home in America. A sense of belonging, feeling part of the mainstream, remained as absent from their own consciousness as from their parents'. They felt somewhat removed from the old-worldliness of the ghetto and of their parents, but they neither felt totally accepted nor were totally accepted in the New World. They stood between, aware of what they were not—distancing themselves from one group, kept at a distance by the other.

They, too, were immigrants or branded by their immigrant connections. Philip Rahv emigrated from Russia as a small boy, first to Palestine and then to live with an older brother in Providence, Rhode Island. Mary McCarthy told how Rahv, older than the grade school students in whose class he was placed, “went to grade school still dressed in the old-fashioned European schoolboy style, in long black trousers and black stockings, looking like a somber little man among the American kids.” Even for those born in America, the immigrant experience played heavily on the notions of who they were. “The basic element of Jewish life in America,” Daniel Bell has commented, “has been the immigrant experience . . . . At times it led . . . to a sense of being a ‘guest in the house.’”<sup>31</sup>

The feeling of being apart was reinforced by a second factor which proved crucial for defining the ghetto as different from mainstream America. In addition to being immigrants or immigrants' children, they were Jewish. These characteristics, given the motives for emigration and the places of residence in the New World, were interwoven but not identical. Immigration carried with it

the hope or potential for assimilation. One desired to be an immigrant or an alien only a short time. Jewishness, however, was an ethnic tradition which it was wrong to abandon or to deny. These distinctions, to be sure, seemed less apparent to the young residents of the Jewish neighborhoods, where Jewish culture and immigrant life styles combined. Alfred Kazin found it necessary to write in a 1944 symposium on Jewish writers, "It is about time we stopped confusing the experience of being an immigrant, or an immigrant's son, with the experience of being Jewish."<sup>32</sup> The close coupling of Jewish and immigrant identities made it extremely difficult for the maturing young students to decide which portions of their inheritance to abandon and which to maintain. It became easiest to move away from it all.

This dilemma was further complicated by the fact that for their parents many of the immigrant institutions also served to maintain Jewish identity. Yiddish newspapers, cultural associations, neighborhood synagogues—all these provided social as well as ethnic identifications. For the young the move toward assimilation meant the rejection of many of these institutions; they consciously tried to shake off immigrant ways but in the process abandoned Jewish elements. It became difficult, though, to reject the institutions which provided Jewish as well as immigrant identity and then to maintain a clear sense of Jewishness. In their early careers, many New York Intellectuals found themselves grappling with this problem and with definitions. In the symposium on young Jewish writers in 1944, Lionel Trilling and Alfred Kazin provided two examples of attempts to redefine their Jewishness, definitions which lacked the specific attributes their parents might have included. "For me," Trilling noted,

the point of honor consists in feeling that I would not, even if I could, deny or escape being Jewish. Surely it is at once clear how minimal such a position is . . . [It] is perhaps the position of most American writers of Jewish birth.

Kazin put it this way:

My parents are Jews—not particularly devout, not particularly conscious of being insincere in their occasional devotion; but Jews for whom the symbols have had a direct and tender meaning, and for whom the code had a plain integrity. I had no such luck. I learned that Jews were "different"—but different as I had to suppose, only because the ones I knew were always poor and usually scared. . . . I learned long ago to accept the fact that I was Jewish without being a part of any meaningful Jewish life or culture.<sup>33</sup>

Aware that they were Jews but unable to define clearly their Jewishness, the young intellectuals fell back on a "minimal" position, such as Trilling's. This stance kept pace with the cosmopolitan and radical style of the times. As they matured, they returned to these dilemmas and ultimately arrived at a personal identity which defined their Jewishness, as well as their general place in

American society. During their youth, however, the enigma remained, unspoken and unresolved. Clearly perceived as Jews in the Gentile world, they felt less clear as to what that meant personally. In a series of short stories about a year spent teaching at a midwestern college (actually at Wisconsin), Trilling often returned to the theme of being a Jew in an essentially non-Jewish environment. This led his autobiographical character in one story to daydream of a rabbi whirling his arms excitedly. " 'What does it mean to be a Jew?' He repeated it over and over again." Being a Jew, Trilling's imaginary rabbi finally announces, has two aspects: "the Subjective and the Objective—What does it mean to be a Jew to Yourself and What Does it mean to be a Jew to Others?"<sup>34</sup> It was much easier for these young intellectuals to answer the second question, to give the objective definition, than the first. That others perceived them as Jews was undeniable. "A Jewish writer," Isaac Rosenfeld believed, "feels that he may at any time be called to account not for his art, nor even his life, but for his Jewishness."<sup>35</sup> If called to account, these Jews could not comfortably provide answers. Just as they were caught between the immigrant world and the center of American society, they found themselves similarly caught between a notion of Jewishness which their parents held and which they could not accept and a designation as Jews which the outside world imposed.

The sense that they were Jews and therefore different never became a matter of controversy. Personal experiences with anti-Semitism supplemented those of their parents, both in Europe and in America. Stories of Cossacks and pogroms formed a part of their heritage; encounters with anti-Semitism from non-Jewish teachers and interactions outside their neighborhoods were a part of their childhood experience. When they embarked upon careers, especially in the academic world, they faced open prejudice. It confronted them as they progressed into the non-Jewish worlds of academe, publishing, and criticism. After working as an instructor at Columbia for four years, Lionel Trilling was dropped, in 1936. "The departmental spokesman said he would not be reappointed for a next year because 'as a Freudian, a Marxist, and a Jew,' he was not happy in the department," Diana Trilling recalled. "Lionel said he *was* happy in the department. They said he would be 'more comfortable' elsewhere." Only in 1939, after his book on Matthew Arnold had been published, and only through the personal intervention of Nicholas Murray Butler, Columbia's president, was Trilling appointed the first Jewish assistant professor in the Columbia English department.<sup>36</sup>

This attitude was not, however, what Trilling had hoped would exist in academic life. In another of the stories of his year at Wisconsin, he described his desire to find a "cultivated" society in academe, "men living pleasantly, well-mannered, civilized, among whom he could be one . . . there would be no confinement . . . here there was no crying of 'Jew!'"<sup>37</sup> As Trilling's experience at Columbia proved, the academic world was no more tolerant than the rest of society. Trilling could only hope that it might be possible to live an existence free of the tensions of ghetto life, of the drive to raise oneself out of

poverty, to be released from the daily struggle. This would be a life far different from the one being abandoned—and better as well. “Our families and teachers seemed tacitly agreed that we were somehow to be a little ashamed of what we were,” Alfred Kazin recalled.<sup>38</sup> The achievement of a better life involved a denial or minimization of what they were—not a conscious rejection, but slow adjustments in perspective, until the parents’ world seemed foreign, even inferior.

Schools, where the process of assimilation began, provided the initial comparisons. Delmore Schwartz recalled that, “contrast between the authority of the public school teachers and the weakness of the Hebrew school teacher [was] one which makes the child wonder what reason can justify the emphasis on Jewishness.”<sup>39</sup> What they were to become was clearly defined. Where they came from remained unconsidered until, in later life, they discovered just how far they had moved away.

Anxious to abandon the world of which they felt a little ashamed, they began to include the characteristics of their parents and of Jewishness among the items to be rejected. Irving Howe found that statements beginning “I am a Jew and . . .” were very difficult for his fellow New York Intellectuals to utter. Lionel Trilling, one of the first successful Jewish professors of English, clearly discovered the division between his professional and personal background. While establishing his personal position as a “minimal” Jew, as he called it, he claimed,

I cannot discover anything in my professional intellectual life which I can significantly trace back to my Jewish birth and rearing. I do not think of myself as a “Jewish writer.” I do not have it in mind to serve by my writing any Jewish purpose.<sup>40</sup>

Apart from the world of their fathers as well as the society around them, the young intellectuals found themselves standing between the two. They maintained this position for a number of years, comfortable in neither place. Their sense of alienation, in fact, helped form their new grouping. “This is a generation,” Daniel Bell noted, “which more than any other made itself.”<sup>41</sup> Increasingly alienated individuals found that others shared the same position, that the dynamic which propelled them out of the ghetto propelled others. As young Jews, they might even focus on their alienation as a source of intellectual insight. Clement Greenberg believed that his appreciation of the abstract stemmed, in part, from

a certain *Schwärmerei*, a state of perpetual and exalted surprise—sometimes disgust—at the sensuous and exalted data of existence which others take for granted. This is probably connected with the Jew’s chronic conception of himself as a wanderer.<sup>42</sup>

The young Jews might look for sources of intellectual solace, might take joy, as did Alfred Kazin, in the other “aliens” from American culture, such as Emily

Dickinson or Walt Whitman. "Nevertheless," Kazin wrote, "I still thought of myself then as standing outside America."<sup>43</sup>

Even Lionel Trilling sensed that he did not belong in his arcadian dream of the cultivated midwestern college town, fearing it was "going to make him do things he must not do . . . . To prevent this he had use of a hitherto useless fact. He had said, 'I am a Jew,' and was immediately set free. He had felt himself the embodiment of an antique and separate race." Unable to define his own Jewishness in more than a "minimal" way, Trilling nonetheless had felt that connection strongly enough to realize that his place was not in the non-Jewish world of a midwestern college. He fell back not on the cultural or religious institutions of his parents' generation but on the place being carved out by young men like himself—a space created by their sense of apartness. "Lonely you were born and lonely you would die," Kazin remembered; "you were lonely as a Jew and lonely in a strange land, lonely, always lonely even in the midst of people . . . ."<sup>44</sup> Feeling apart from the community in which they had grown up, they pushed ahead toward the next stage of development. They emerged from the shadows of the protective Jewish neighborhoods and into the often frightening light of New York City. They did not find a home waiting; instead, they created one among those waiting to find a home.

#### YOUNG MEN FROM THE PROVINCES

*Thus equipped with poverty, pride, and intelligence, the Young Man from the Provinces stands outside life and seeks to enter. This modern hero is connected with the tales of the folk. Usually his motive is the legendary one of setting out to seek his fortune, which is what the folktale says when it means that the hero is seeking himself. He is really the third and youngest son of the woodcutter, the one to whom all our sympathies go, the gentle and misunderstood one, the bravest of all. He is likely to be in some doubt about his parentage; his father the woodcutter is not really his father. Our hero has, whether he says so or not, the common belief of children that there is some mystery about his birth; his real parents, if the truth were known, are of great and even royal estate.*

—Lionel Trilling<sup>45</sup>

Standing at the edge of manhood as well as the periphery of Manhattan, the young Jewish students probably sensed the possibilities for the future more clearly than their growing disconnections from the past. With the support and dreams of their communities behind them, they ventured into the new arena of their development. Looking ahead, they were not always aware of what was being left behind. "One of the longest journeys in the world," Norman Podhoretz wrote, "is the journey from Brooklyn to Manhattan." Although Podhoretz's journey came a few years after the others, in the motives for his progression and in the growing distance from his parents he was typical of those who had followed this path in the 1920s and 1930s. That all of them were moving beyond the confines and traditions of their parents and their childhood

communities was obvious. That this movement embodied a growing sense of estrangement from their parents and neighborhoods was undoubtedly less clear. "It appalls me to think what an immense transformation I had to work on myself in order to become what I have become," Podhoretz continued: "if I had known what I was doing I would surely not have been able to do it, I would surely not have wanted to."<sup>46</sup>

These breaks were softened in part by their slow evolution and in part by the exhilaration of adolescent emancipation. The young men did not immediately conquer New York. Their continuing to live at home during college blurred the growing distinctions. Their successes came slowly; they eased their way in—through school, primarily, or small jobs and even smaller opportunities to write or review. Yet, they had been conditioned to move beyond their parents' world. The dynamic of immigrant assimilation propelled them as it has pushed scores of others. The spirit of the 1930s, the dreams engendered in the radical movements which sprang up in the aftermath of the crash, fueled their development. The American past, of which they were never a part, seemed as irrelevant as the Jewish past of their parents. Firstborn Americans always have a sense of themselves as new men and women. This sense of newness could now be shared by countless other Americans. The young New York Intellectuals found excitement in the cultural upheaval. They did not have to follow the standard path into traditional American society and culture. "They meant to declare themselves citizens of the world," Irving Howe remembered, "and that succeeding, perhaps consider becoming writers of this country."<sup>47</sup>

Part of this break was highly personal. In a number of cases, names were changed. William Phillips's father changed the family name from Litvinsky; Daniel Bolotsky's uncle chose "Bell"; and Ivan Greenbaum, using a variant of his mother's longer Russian name, took "Philip Rahv." Some rationalized changes because of their connections to radical movements and the search for a protective pseudonym. For others it was an attempt to escape Jewish identification in the "international" days of the 1930s. Irving Howe believed that it was quite likely a mixture of the two. Name changing had long been a part of the assimilative process and some of these young Jews followed a path taken by many others of their generation.<sup>48</sup>

In this entire estrangement, Norman Podhoretz came to feel that a "kind of treason" existed. That parents concurred in the decisions which led to it, he wrote in 1967, made it "sadder but no less cruel."<sup>49</sup> At the time, however, the movement into this new environment was filled with excitement, and the young Jewish writers saw in it great promise. This new life, free of old traditions and burdensome connections, not only provided an inspirational source for their writing but gave a new direction for Jewish literature as well.

Previous trends in Jewish writing had been confined to smaller Jewish circles. Lionel Trilling noted the differences between his own predilections and those expressed in a notable journal of Jewish culture to which he once had been attached, the *Menorah Journal*. Choosing the Jewish author Ludwig

Lewisohn as his case in point, Trilling believed that this "literature of self-realization" attacked the "sin of 'escaping' the Jewish heritage." The result of this was an easier acceptance of the "sin of 'adjustment' on a wholly neurotic basis. It fostered a willingness to accept exclusion and even intensify it, a willingness to be provincial and parochial." Even his own series of short stories about his year at Wisconsin, which appeared in the *Menorah Journal*, were, Trilling admitted, a part of this trend. The material of Jewish literature should come not from the acceptance of exclusion and heritage but from the flight and the discovery of the larger world. As Clement Greenberg put it, "Again and again they describe escapes or, better, flights from the restriction or squalor of the Brooklyns and Bronxes to the wide open world." This was in keeping with a great American theme, Greenberg maintained, but the concerns of the young Jewish writers added an extra dose of intensity and personal involvement. "His writing becomes essentially a career which provided him with the means of flight." This close interrelation between life and work propelled the young writer even more rapidly toward the outside world.<sup>50</sup>

A strong notion of class was also buried in this entire dynamic. Only subsequently did some of the young men come to see how clearly their own progress was tied to a desire to rise. Sociologists like Bell and Seymour Martin Lipset would view class and status anxiety as strong motivating factors in postwar American society. Norman Podhoretz recognized its application to his own life: "I was never aware [when young] . . . how inextricably my 'noblest' ambitions were tied to the vulgar desire to rise above the class into which I was born; nor did I understand to what an astonishing extent these ambitions were shaped and defined by the standards and values and tastes of the class into which I did not know I wanted to move."<sup>51</sup>

The process of maturation begun in the Jewish neighborhoods of the Bronx, Brooklyn, or Newark had taken these young students to the foot of the bridges to Manhattan. Entering Manhattan did not mean immediate prominence or a sense of full participation in the political or cultural life of the country. Rather, it introduced them to the next arena of their development. There—in the classrooms of the city's universities, in radical political meetings, or in the editorial offices of a few important journals—they would continue their education. But their life on the periphery had been their beginning, and they would carry with them, on the one hand, the benefits of those years and the burdens of their time spent there and, on the other, the burdens which accompanied their abandonment of that world. As Trilling wrote,

The story of the Young Man from the Provinces is thus a strange one, for it has its roots both in legend and in the very heart of the modern actuality. From it we have learned most of what we know about modern society, about class and its strange rituals, about power and influence and about money, the hard fluent fact which modern society has as its being. Yet through the massed social fact there runs the thread of legendary romance, even of downright magic.<sup>52</sup>



# Chapter 2

## A New York Education

Crossing the bridges to Manhattan brought the young intellectuals to a world in which they felt more isolated. Manhattan was the real New York, Irving Howe recalled thinking, “the embodiment of that alien world which every boy raised in a Jewish immigrant home has been taught, whether he realized it or not, to look upon with suspicion.”<sup>1</sup> The young Alfred Kazin saw it as the province of others.

Why did they live *there* and we always in “Brunzvil”? Why were they *there*, and we always *here*. Why was it always *them* and *us*, Gentiles and *us*, *alrightniks* and *us*? Beyond Brownsville was all “the city,” that other land I could see for a day. . . . Beyond was the strange world of Gentiles. . . .<sup>2</sup>

Like the emigrants of other generations or other parts of the country, they, too, made their trek—but often to return home each night. They came for school and for work. And they came to find a place for themselves. Their initial preparation in the ethnic ghettos of their youth gave way to the next phase of their education—be it the actual classroom learning of one of the city’s universities or the lessons gained from their attempts to mark out a place for themselves in an alien environment. Their assimilation proved slow and erratic. But once they had begun the process, they found it impossible to turn back.

Those who ventured forth in the 1930s found the entire experience intensified by the disruption which affected all Americans during this period, the Great Depression. Making their way in the larger American society was never easy for immigrant youths, and it proved especially difficult after 1929. Whatever their political or social outlook—whether hopeful writers, struggling intellectuals, young radicals, or new undergraduates—they found that the

depression unalterably adjusted their perspective. And it struck "them" as it struck "us"; it affected life in "the city" as well as "Brunzvil."

Thus, the next step in the progression of the New York Intellectuals proved to be an often uneasy intermixing of a college education and the beginning of a career with the tumult created by the Depression. The economic chaos and political instability complicated the already knotty dilemma of a personal sense of apartness coupled with a powerful ambition and drive. Questions about one's future were complicated by questions about the condition of society itself. Those who crossed the bridge to Manhattan after 1929 found a world shaken, as alien to its longtime residents as to its newest arrivals.

#### THE NEW RELIGION

*It was a symbol of spiritual promotion. . . . University-bred people were the real nobility of the world. A college diploma was a certificate of moral as well as intellectual aristocracy.*

*My old religion had gradually fallen to pieces, and if its place was taken by something else, if there was something that appealed to the better man in me, to what was purest in my thoughts and most sacred in my emotions, that something was the red, church-like structure on the southeast corner of Lexington and Twenty-third Street.*

*It was the synagogue of my new life. Nor is this merely a figure of speech: the building really appealed to me as a temple, as a House of Sanctity, as we call the ancient Temple of Jerusalem. At least that was the term I would fondly apply to it, years later, in my retrospective broodings upon—upon my first few years of my life in America.*

—Abraham Cahan<sup>3</sup>

In *The Rise of David Levinsky*, Abraham Cahan's novel of Jewish immigrants, the main character laments that despite personal wealth he was never able to attend that citadel of learning he described so grandly—the City College of New York. Among the immigrants the notion of attaining a college education appeared the surest way to move into American society. If, like Levinsky, they could not attend themselves, they passed the hopes on to their children. The bright, precocious youths in the immigrant ghettos seemed fated to go on to college after high school, and, thereby, out of the ghetto. Teachers as well as parents spotted the potential and nurtured the development. In the early years of the twentieth century, immigrants' children followed this course with increasing frequency. By 1920 the number of Jewish students in New York's major universities had grown large. The proportion of Jewish students at Columbia reached 40 percent; the percentage at New York University was even higher. At tuition-free City College and Hunter, the figure grew to between 80 and 90 percent.<sup>4</sup> Some of the older New York Intellectuals were

among these Jewish students, including those at the private colleges. Meyer Schapiro took his bachelor's degree from Columbia in 1924, Lionel Trilling in 1925. Diana Trilling, then Diana Rubin, graduated from Radcliffe in 1925. Elliot Cohen, a child prodigy, graduated at eighteen from Yale. Sidney Hook had been an undergraduate at City College and took his Ph.D. from Columbia; William Phillips, another CCNY graduate, went to NYU for his master's.<sup>5</sup>

The pattern of Jews at major universities abruptly changed, however. In the years following the First World War, many private schools began to perceive what became known euphemistically as the Jewish problem. During the first years of the 1920s Jews began to face, at many American universities, a system of quotas, restrictions, and outright rejections. The techniques ran from the sophisticated (Harvard's intricate geographical quota system) to the more blatant (denial based solely and admittedly on Jewishness).<sup>6</sup> The oldest of the New York Intellectuals had entered college before these restrictive barriers had been fully established. By contrast, no members of the "second generation" went to Columbia as undergraduates.<sup>7</sup> Between the college careers of these two generations, during the middle 1920s, the lines of ethnic discrimination were drawn firmly across American higher education, altering the direction which the younger ghetto students would take. City College remained the one major New York school that freely admitted Jews.

When Jewish students had gone to Ivy League schools or other private colleges, they still confronted the problems of anti-Semitism, as prevalent on college campuses as in American society. Clubs, fraternities, college dramatic societies, and various other campus organizations remained closed or restricted to Jews. Once graduated, young Jews found academe no more open than Princeton's eating clubs or Yale's Skull and Bones. Lionel Trilling recalled the difficulty Jews encountered when considering careers in the university.

[Elliot] Cohen, after a brilliant undergraduate career at Yale, had given up the graduate study of English because he believed that as a Jew he had no hope of a university appointment. When I decided to go into academic life, my friends thought me naive to the point of absurdity, nor were they wholly wrong—my appointment to an instructorship at Columbia was pretty openly regarded as an experiment, and for some time my career in the College was complicated by my being Jewish.

Trilling was, in fact, fortunate—his experimental instructorship was an exception. Clifton Fadiman, a member of Trilling's class, was told upon graduation, "We have room for only one Jew and we have chosen Mr. Trilling."<sup>8</sup> There were a few traditional scholars among the New York Intellectuals. Several emerged from this first generation, those who entered college before the Depression and before the spread of overt discrimination. Hook, Schapiro, and Trilling pursued doctorates and academic appointments in the well-established manner in which scholars are trained and employed. Their publications reflect, in large measure, their schooling and employment.

Trilling, as was mentioned, had a more difficult time finding a tenured place, but that may have been because English departments were traditionally more anti-Semitic than others. Schapiro first applied to Princeton for graduate work but was rejected, he later learned, because he was Jewish. Even at Columbia, which accepted him, he remained aware of his ethnic distinction. There were then, he recalled, only four or five Jewish full professors on the entire university faculty.<sup>9</sup>

The flow of intelligent Jews into many American universities, either as students or as professors, declined markedly in the 1920s. Prejudice forced many young Jews to rethink and redirect their career goals. Daniel Bell recounts the story of his cousin Teddy Cohen, one of the most brilliant in his college class. Seeing the potential for an academic career severely limited, he chose instead to go into business, ultimately growing rich as an importer.<sup>10</sup> A few did become academics. Meyer Schapiro began as a lecturer at Columbia in 1928, Sidney Hook as an instructor at NYU in 1927. Both retired in the 1970s as professors emeriti from the same institutions. They remained the exceptions, however, during their early years. At the Washington Square campus of NYU, the *Menorah Journal* complained in the late 1920s, "over ninety percent of the students are Jews, but less than one percent of the instructors are Jewish." Although specific numbers may have been exaggerated, the journal's perception of the general pattern was accurate.<sup>11</sup>

In the 1920s it grew increasingly difficult for Jews to enter the more prestigious private colleges. Prejudice against hiring Jews to teach at these institutions remained strong. Thus, even in the period of economic prosperity, when most Americans believed in the limitless possibilities of social growth, restrictions and constraints lay across the paths of ambitious Jewish students. Some, such as Bell's cousin Teddy or Elliot Cohen, turned away from academic careers. Others, such as Hook, Trilling, and Schapiro, persisted—but not without confronting more difficulties than non-Jewish students encountered. For the younger students contemplating a college education and a career, the world made a sudden and dramatic shift after 1929. College degrees, along with almost everything else, came to be reevaluated amid the social chaos of the Great Depression. New barriers fell across the path toward success and prominence. And now other Americans, some not accustomed to such inhibitions, joined the young Jews in confronting the possibilities and the limits of future advancement.

#### AN EDUCATION BY SHOCK

The immigrant neighborhoods from which these young students came had little share in the general prosperity of the 1920s. Life was hard and money often scarce. Work came in the form of low-paying jobs as garment workers, housepainters, and unskilled laborers. These might not pay much, but at least they paid something. The young children of the immigrants replaced

immediate gratification with the notion that a better world existed for those able to raise themselves out of the ghetto. The promise of a professional career based on a college education seemed one likely path to this end. For many families the minimal level of security and the hopes for the future ended with the stock market crash. Jobs, businesses, and small savings were lost. Compared with those of the large investors, the financial losses might have been minimal. For people living at the most marginal level, though, any loss had disastrous consequences. The resulting adjustment in personal lives often had a great impact on the young. "The great event of my childhood," Irving Howe recounted,

came when, during the Depression, my father lost his little grocery business, and we were plunged into severe poverty. It was this which turned me to the world of books and ideas, which pulled me out of the unreflectable routine of ordinary childhood. From the cast of seriousness that was then thrown over me I have been unable to escape nor do I wish to.<sup>12</sup>

The Depression did not affect all the children of the immigrants equally. Delmore Schwartz's father lost a considerable fortune and soon died of a heart attack. Robert Warshow's family hotel business suffered some economic setbacks but avoided deep poverty.

More important, however, than the fact that a few immigrant families were unaffected by the Depression is the extent to which other American families began to experience many of the same hardships as the immigrants. In the 1920s many young intellectuals tended to turn toward traditional models, established styles. Alfred Kazin recalls that Lionel Trilling seemed to resemble the non-Jewish critics, such as Van Wyck Brooks, Carl Van Doren, and Lewis Mumford, all of whom had a "conscious air" of being "the voice of tradition." Kazin later distinguished between Trilling's "casual, gentlemanly style of the twenties" and that of his own contemporaries, a style which "had absorbed the social angers of the abrasive lower-class thirties."<sup>13</sup> Many non-Jews and nonimmigrants who might in earlier days have naturally fused with the "voices of tradition" now chose the style of the outsiders. This had always been the province of immigrants. Dwight Macdonald, after a career in prep school and at Yale, was forced to support his mother after the death of his father and the loss of family income in the crash. He first went to work at Macy's, later joined *Fortune*, and ultimately found himself more and more involved in radical politics, joining the Trotskyists. Mary McCarthy shuttled between relatives and foster homes as a child, after her parents' modest life-style crumbled.

Kazin's comparison of Trilling and himself demonstrates that more than economic changes differentiated the 1920s from the 1930s. Unavoidable hardship and suffering confronted many Americans. Caught up in the "lost generation" spirit of the twenties, Malcolm Cowley, for example, wrote poignantly of the slowly developing awareness which emerged by 1931. A

small-town refugee, Cowley abandoned his detached literary stance of the pre-crash period and became deeply involved in radical politics and literary radicalism. Young men attaining maturity in the 1930s found these precrash days very distant indeed. At the end of the decade, Kazin remembered the twenties as "no more than a boisterous version of the Continental *fin de siècle*."<sup>14</sup> By contrast, the world of the 1930s seemed to be neither boisterous nor stable, but to be undergoing internal eruption. "Something happened in the thirties," Kazin concluded in 1941,

that was more than the sum of the sufferings inflicted, the billions lost, the institutions and people uprooted: it was an education by shock. Panic, a panic often significantly disproportionate to the losses of those who were most afraid, became the tone of the period. . . . In the world after 1932, where everything seemed to be breaking up at once, the American had at first neither a sense of history nor the consolation of traditional values. He was oppressed by forces that were meaningless to him in operation and hence all the more humiliating in effect.<sup>15</sup>

Non-Jewish intellectuals, young men and women with long ties to American society, found the disruption shocking. It often threw them into radical political and cultural movements and thus into close proximity with the young Jewish intellectuals. The same is true of the young Jews, though with slight modification. They did not have deep roots in American society but had just made their first connections to it. Their parents, abandoning European values and traditions, fastened onto American ones, less out of a sense of patriotism than from the need for touchstones in an alien culture. Their children, on the verge of entering that society, saw it crumbling about them. The prize, seemingly within their grasp, had vanished. The Depression made political questions nearly unavoidable. The elder New York Intellectuals either found their pre-crash radicalism heightened or turned to politics instead of to more literary or scholarly interests. Lionel Trilling gave up his interest in Jewish cultural concerns, left the circle around the *Menorah Journal*, and began an uneasy period of involvement with radical movements. William Phillips graduated from City College in the late 1920s and in his first postgraduate years devoted himself to purely literary questions. During the first years of the Depression, however, Phillips grew increasingly interested in political matters. Philip Rahv, on the other hand, always possessed strong political interests, as did Sidney Hook. Many pre-crash radicals, such as Rahv and Hook, discovered that the intensity of their commitment and their radical activity increased during the 1930s. Parlor socialism gave way to more active pursuits. As Dwight Macdonald put it, whereas once "people would have voted for the [Socialist] Norman Thomas, by '32 Norman Thomas seemed much too mild."<sup>16</sup>

The younger students, just beginning to form their political and cultural attitudes and to map out career plans, found both areas clouded. "Most of us did not think seriously about careers," recalled Alfred Kazin. "Not only was

there a depression, but we were all quite certain that a war was coming. I did not go on in graduate school and was too much an independent writer and freelancer, living very hazardously indeed, until my first book came out in 1942, even to think of having a 'career.'"<sup>17</sup> During the latter part of the thirties, when he was writing *On Native Grounds*, Kazin supported himself by teaching night classes at the New School and at City College. Irving Kristol, who graduated from City College a few years after Kazin, found employment in a shipyard.

To some extent there just weren't any other jobs. To another extent, it may have been colored by my radical inclination, the notion that proletarian work was good, healthy, redeeming work, which was easy to think since no one was offering me nonproletarian work.

Irving Howe later recounted that his first job after graduating from CCNY was in a factory, where he was fired within six weeks for attempting to organize the workers.<sup>18</sup>

Recent graduates were not the only individuals forced to take nonacademic positions. Many of the older intellectuals found it equally difficult to find "nonproletarian" employment. Clement Greenberg worked for the Civil Service Commission, the Veterans' Administration, and as a clerk in the New York customshouse. Remembering those days, Greenberg wrote,

Worldly success seemed so remote as to be beside the point, and you did not even secretly envy those who had it . . . when I thought of taking up painting as seriously as I had once half-hoped to do before I went to college, the highest reward I imagined was a private reputation of the kind [Arshile] Gorky and [Willem] de Kooning then had, a reputation which did not seem to alleviate their poverty in the least.<sup>19</sup>

Others found the situation nearly as bleak as Greenberg did. A few like Kazin found occasional employment as part-time college instructors. William Phillips taught briefly at NYU; Lionel Trilling spent nearly a decade as a night school instructor at Columbia. Those who hoped to be writers and critics had to hustle. A few bits and pieces could be had at the popular journals, reviews for the *Nation* or the *New Republic*, occasional articles elsewhere, but little else.

The radical dislocations, economic disruptions, and personal disorientation visited upon many Americans by the Great Depression certainly took their toll on the young New York Intellectuals. Yet, for them the impact had its own, special twist. Rarely did the Depression end a prosperous existence, with breadlines replacing the country club. They had mostly been poor, their cultural orientation was of the outsider looking in, and they had been schooled to feel they were in the process of moving into the larger American society. The failure to feel fully a part of either their parents' society, which they had abandoned, or the Gentile society of mainstream America left them feeling disoriented. The Depression blocked their hopes for a resolution of this

alienation. The sacrifices their parents had made and the ambitions which had been instilled were supposed to direct these young men toward a successful future. The achievement of that goal came into serious doubt. Their hopes for personal advancement did not decline, but their notions of how that advancement might be achieved changed. The sobering realities of the thirties forced the young New York Intellectuals to alter some of their attitudes, to redirect their ambitions and energies. William Phillips noted this change in 1934, in terms of all his radical contemporaries. Implicit in Phillip's assessment, however, is strong evidence of the changed attitude of his young Jewish contemporaries in particular.

Most of us come from petty-bourgeois homes; some, of course, from proletarian ones. But the gravity of the economic crisis has leveled most of us (and our families) to meager, near-starvation existence. Opportunities for cashing-in are gone, and we have no illusions about their return. The kind of reputation which used to bring jobs as editors, lecturers, and readers in publishing houses holds no lure for us, because those jobs have been whittled down to a few sinecures for standpatters and tightrope walkers. The bourgeoisie does not want us, and we could not accept the double-dealing which these jobs require. All of us have worked, for some time at least, in factories, in stores, and at odd jobs. Some have had better paying jobs as teachers. But we are all in the same leaky boat now.

Our economic experiences have stripped us of waverings, of side-glances toward prosperous avenues. Our aims have been linked to the proletariat.<sup>20</sup>

#### LUFTMENSCH

The Depression added a new barrier beyond that of discrimination to the educational difficulties and obstacles of Jewish students. Economic chaos put intellectual endeavors into new perspective. Lionel Trilling recalled the futility he felt while at work on his dissertation:

I was trying to write a book about Matthew Arnold and having a bitter time of it because it seemed to me that I was working in a lost world, that nobody wanted, or could possibly want, a book about Matthew Arnold. . . . They wanted it even less because it was to be a doctoral dissertation . . . the university, it is true, was just then beginning to figure in people's minds more than ever before in America, but it did not enjoy the prestige, though ambiguous, which it now has, and I was much ashamed of what I had undertaken.<sup>21</sup>

The lack of a sense of usefulness which Trilling reported also affected the younger, second generation of New York Intellectuals. The economic difficulties caused by the Depression reinforced other factors which directed young Jewish students toward some colleges and away from others. Tuition-free and a subway commute from home, City College in the 1930s attracted Alfred Kazin, Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer, Irving Howe, Irving Kristol, and Seymour Martin Lipset. In addition, young Jewish students found the