

“A Profoundly Hegemonic Moment”: De-Mythologizing the Cold War New York Jewish Intellectuals¹

Nathan Abrams
University of London

Since a mythology has been grown to such an extent around “the New York (Jewish) Intellectuals,” Nathan Abrams examines their history in order to re-evaluate it anew, from a perspective that has not been shaped entirely by them. In doing so, he takes a new angle on the subject by extensively subjecting them to a theoretical analysis, utilizing different models of the intellectual. Abrams looks at the changing function of the New York Intellectuals, as public intellectuals, beginning in the 1930s through the forties and fifties, and paying specific attention to the period known as the Cultural Cold War. Using the work of, in particular, Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault, he concludes that, through their alliance with the anticommunist hegemony, many of them lost their original functions as “organic” and “universal” intellectuals and instead became “traditional” and “specific.”

Introduction

Historians of intellectual life in twentieth-century America have largely been content to write within the constraints imposed by the New York Jewish Intellectuals’ memories of their own lives. In recent decades, most notably the 1980s, autobiographies and memoirs proliferated, forming what Richard King called a “flood,” as those Jewish intellectuals who came to prominence during the forties and fifties began to recollect their lives.² These texts constructed and reconstructed their histories in a form of

¹The author would like to thank Hugh Wilford and Ethan Goffman for their useful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

²Examples of these are Norman Podhoretz, *Making It* (New York: Random House, 1967); *Breaking Ranks: A Political Memoir* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979); *Ex-Friends: Falling Out with Allen Ginsberg, Lionel and Diana Trilling, Lillian Hellman, Hannah Arendt, and Norman Mailer* (New York: The Free Press, 1999); *My Love Affair with America: The Cautionary Tale of a Cheerful Conservative* (New York: The Free Press, 2000); Diana Trilling, *The Beginning of the Journey: The Marriage of Diana and Lionel Trilling* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1993); William Phillips, *A Partisan View: Five Decades of the Literary Life* (New York: Stein and Day, 1983); Irving Howe, *A Margin of Hope: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1982); Irving Kristol, *Reflections of a Neoconservative: Looking Back, Looking Ahead* (New York: Basic Books,

"discursive self-fashioning."³ As Morris Dickstein pointed out, "the early New York intellectuals have written so much about themselves"⁴ that these memories have deeply inscribed the writing of twentieth-century U.S. intellectual history. This inscription has been so profound that historians of this era are often prisoners of their very subjects' constructed histories. Richard King observed how "most people who write about them are still working with the terms of political, literary and cultural discourse that the New Yorkers themselves have laid down."⁵ Indeed, as Norman F. Cantor has written, "The *Partisan Review* group and their affiliates—the New York Intellectuals' as they are now called—have developed their own mythology."⁶ This mythology has been grown to such an extent that it must be reevaluated.

Although there has been much recent discussion of Richard Posner's book *Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline*, surprisingly, the historiography of the New York Intellectuals has never been extensively subjected to a theoretical analysis, utilizing different models of the intellectual.⁷ I will attempt here to reevaluate the changing function of the New York Intellectuals, as public intellectuals, beginning in the 1930s, using the work of, in particular, Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault, and paying specific attention to the 1950s and the Cultural Cold War.

The New York Jewish community of intellectuals was broad, embracing writers, academics, professionals, journalists, poets, artists, critics, politicians, and so on. They were intellectuals in that expansive sense which Antonio Gramsci suggests goes beyond the "traditional and vulgarised type of intellectual" such as "the man of letters, the philosopher, the artist" to include every individual engaged in "some form of intellectual activity," or, as Edward Said has put it, "everyone who works in any field

1983); William Barrett, *The Truants: Adventures Among the Intellectuals* (New York: Doubleday, 1982); Ted Solotaroff, *Truth Comes in Blows: A Memoir* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998); Midge Decter, *An Old Wife's Tale: My Seven Decades in Love and War* (New York: Regan Books, 2001).

³I have taken this phrase from David Savran, *Communists, Cowboys, and Queers: The Politics of Masculinity in the Work of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), p. 9.

⁴Morris Dickstein, "The New York Intellectuals: Some Personal History," *Dissent* (1997), p. 83.

⁵Richard H. King, "Up from Radicalism," *American Jewish History* 75 (1985), p. 77.

⁶Norman F. Cantor, *The American Century: Varieties of Culture in Modern Times* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), p. 268.

⁷Richard A. Posner, *Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

connected either with the production or distribution of knowledge.”⁸ They are “public intellectuals” in the sense that Russell Jacoby described: “writers and thinkers who address a general and educated audience. Obviously, this excludes intellectuals whose works are too technical or difficult to engage a public.”⁹

Organic Intellectuals

The Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci observed how every community produces its own intellectuals, characterizing them as “organic intellectuals.”¹⁰ According to Gramsci, in a process, which, unfortunately, he did not fully describe, each community spontaneously produced a layer of individuals who perform the function of intellectuals in that society. It was the task of these organic intellectuals to raise the self-awareness of their own social group. Furthermore, as Said has put it, they “are actively involved in society, that is, they constantly struggle to change minds.”¹¹ During the 1920s and 1930s in America, precisely this type of organic intellectual began to emerge out of the Jewish community. Rejecting the orthodoxy and observance of their parents and exploiting the new spaces opened up to them, these intellectuals sought to accommodate themselves within the mainstream of American culture. Many of them had attended American public schools as youngsters, confronted with what John Murray Cuddihy called a “civilizing” process aimed at transforming them into Americans.¹² This process of Americanization began to overcome their organic Jewishness and communal attachments. Allied to this Americanizing impulse was the powerful appeal of secular American culture. Russell Jacoby observed how poverty and distance from the ascendant culture produced, in many cases, “an identification, and overidentification” with its values. Jewish intellectuals, many of whom spoke Yiddish as their first language, “fell in love” with English and American literature.¹³ Arthur Miller spoke for many when he wrote: “in my most private reveries I was no sallow Talmud reader

⁸Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), p. 9; Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 7.

⁹Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), p. 5.

¹⁰Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, pp. 5–6.

¹¹Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p. 4.

¹²John Murray Cuddihy, *The Ordeal of Civility: Freud, Marx, Lévi-Strauss, and the Jewish Struggle with Modernity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974).

¹³Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals*, p. 90.

but Frank Merriwell or Tom Swift."¹⁴ This, in turn, was undoubtedly strengthened by its promise of the full active participation of Jews as *citizens* in society, rather than as the "mere parasites" they had been considered in the Old World.¹⁵ One Jewish intellectual, Alfred Kazin, expressed this feeling of opportunity: "Never before had so numerous a mass of Jews been free citizens of the country in which they lived, and so close to the national life."¹⁶ Young Jewish intellectuals, therefore, sought to take advantage of this new and unprecedented freedom that America seemed to promise.

As they sought to move into the American mainstream, however, many young Jewish intellectuals found that antisemitism blocked their path. Antisemitism had long existed in the United States, but it greatly increased during the 1920s and 1930s, continuing into World War II.¹⁷ Due to an increasing perception of a "Jewish problem" the major Ivy League schools introduced quota systems designed to bar Jews. This had a direct effect on the second generation of organic intellectuals, most of whom, as a consequence, went to City College, New York. The answer to antisemitism for many Jews who wanted to move into the American mainstream during the 1930s lay outside of their communities of origin. They had learned that their Jewishness restricted their opportunities and that their communities could not provide outlets for their creative impulses. Instead, they began to look outside the Jewish communities and found solutions within those communities that stressed universalism rather than ethnic particularism. In their search for "place," young Jewish intellectuals overtly rejected particularistic ethnic characteristics and embraced the new communities of cosmopolitanism and the universalism promised by Marxism and its variant forms. Marxism, wrote Paul R. Gorman, "offered a needed middle ground between the influences of the immigrant neighborhood and the national mainstream."¹⁸ Not only did it explain the roots of the economic system that had destroyed their aspirations, but it was also perceived to be the solution to the problem of "homelessness" or "alienation" for which Jews were considered to be the central symbol. This led to a marked shift away from the Jewish community on the part of many intellectuals, even if milder forms of radicalism had been a typical social strain among East European Jews. Where many had

¹⁴Arthur Miller, *Timebends: A Life* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 62.

¹⁵Peter I. Rose, "The Ghetto and Beyond," in *The Ghetto and Beyond: Essays on Jewish Life in America*, ed. Peter I. Rose (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 5.

¹⁶Alfred Kazin, "The Jew as Modern Writer," in *The Ghetto and Beyond*, ed. Rose, p. 423.

¹⁷Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 79, 105, 127, 107, 108–109.

¹⁸Paul R. Gorman, *Left Intellectuals and Popular Culture in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), p. 141.

contributed to the overtly Jewish *Menorah Journal*, they now wrote for Marxist organs. Irving Howe recalled how many young Jews arrived at articulateness “at a moment when there was a strong drive to both break out of the ghetto and leave the bonds of Jewishness entirely.” These young Jews wanted to “declare themselves citizens of the world and, if that succeeded, might then become writers of this country.”¹⁹ At this point, then, these young intellectuals’ self-fashioning corresponded to that type of intellectual which Michel Foucault called “universal.” As cosmopolitan individuals they positioned themselves as the spokespersons of the “universal,” they sought to bear universal values, and they “aspired to be the bearer of this universality in its conscious elaborated form.”²⁰

The problem of Jewish identity, it was felt, could be solved not through particularistic communal identification as Jews, but as universal citizens. Membership in the Communist Party and fellow-traveling organizations offered those concrete advantages which were denied to them, as well as access to the wider world. The embrace of Marxism was a search for community to replace the Jewish one they denied and the American one denied to them. Rejecting their organic origins and rejected by America, young Jewish intellectuals discovered a new community in which they were accepted it seems without prejudice. Marxism offered a “sense of belonging.” They were welcomed as equals and comforted by the promise of egalitarianism. This was nourished by the Soviet experiment, which, during the 1930s, appeared to be the very model of an egalitarian society which spurned antisemitism and discrimination. More importantly, according to Terry Cooney, Marxism promised “acceptance, belonging, opportunity—a home and a career.”²¹ Thus, these young organic Jewish intellectuals had fashioned themselves into Foucault’s “universal” intellectuals, and the universal intellectual “*par excellence*,” according to Foucault, was the writer who valued his/her autonomy.²²

Many Jewish intellectuals, however, began to find Marxism unacceptable just as the Jewish community had been before it. Although distaste for the Communist Party was felt throughout the thirties, for many it provided the only significant force for organization; hence their continued allegiance. This distaste, however, soon began to develop into desertion. As Stalin’s denunciations of the Bolshevik old guard

¹⁹Irving Howe, *A Margin of Hope: An Intellectual Autobiography* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1982), p. 137.

²⁰Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*. ed. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, Kate Soper (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), p. 126.

²¹Terry Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals: Partisan Review and its Circle* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), pp. 43, 50.

²²Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, pp. 126–127.

progressed, he manifested increasingly anti-Jewish impulses, compounded by his persecution of Leon Trotsky. Thus, communism seemed to exacerbate antisemitism rather than offer solutions to it, and, following news of the Moscow Trials in 1933–34, intellectuals began to convert to anti-Stalinism and away from the Party. Others followed with the second round of the Moscow Trials reported in America during 1936–37, and the experience of the Spanish Civil War and finally the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939 convinced many others who had not yet left the Party to do so. Not only had communism not destroyed antisemitism, it allied itself to those who most actively and openly advocated it. Having abandoned the Communist Party, many young Jewish intellectuals regrouped around the newly reformulated *Partisan Review* journal, begun in 1937. The magazine became an independent publication of Trotskyist, anti-Stalinist, and Modernist opinion. It contrived to construct its own peculiar discourse based around notions of marginalization, detachment, separation, and independence, as well as cosmopolitanism. The abandonment of Marxism had led to a subsequent investment in Modernism since it privileged the outsider, autonomy, and critique of bourgeois society.²³ So, although Marxism had been forsaken, the intellectuals still retained their organic and universal functions, not least because, in the words of Said, "organic intellectuals are always on the move."²⁴

Specific Intellectuals

With the onset of World War II, the function of these organic-universal intellectuals began to change. The impact of the war and the extermination of European Jewry persuaded many Jewish intellectuals to reconsider their Jewishness and Americanness. The attempted solutions of Marxism, cosmopolitanism, and Modernism had all failed and misled them since none of them had prevented Hitler. In their place, the war had increased identification with both the American and the Jewish communities. Through service in the United States Army or in federal wartime agencies, universal-organic Jewish intellectuals felt a greater identification with the national community than ever before. The Holocaust also prompted Jewish intellectuals to re-embrace their Jewishness. Midge Decter summed up the change for many young Jewish intellectuals when

²³See Stephen A. Longstaff, "The New York Intellectuals: A Study of Particularism and Universalism in American High Culture" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, 1978), pp. 4, 117–122, 124–132; Hugh Wilford, *The New York Intellectuals: From Vanguard to Institution* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 32–36, 60; Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals*, pp. 232–234, 227.

²⁴Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p. 4.

she said: "To put it much too crudely, Hitler taught them that they were Jews."²⁵ To which Irving Howe added: "We knew but for an accident of geography we might also now be bars of soap."²⁶ It came to be realized, therefore, that Jewishness was ineluctable, what Norman Podhoretz referred to as "Hitler's altogether irrefutable demonstration of the inescapability of Jewishness."²⁷ Jewish intellectuals, convinced of their inescapable Jewishness, began to use it as the materials for a renewed self-fashioning.

When the then cultural center of the world—Paris—fell to the Nazis in June 1940, many intellectuals began to contribute directly to the war effort. They enlisted in intelligence and propaganda agencies like the Office of Strategic Services, the Office of War Information, and other branches of military intelligence. Others joined the armed forces either as soldiers or journalists.²⁸ Following the end of the war, this development continued when these skills were transferred to other precise institutions, in particular, the university campuses. Hugh Wilford accurately described a process of insitutionalization,²⁹ whereby the shift to a post-industrial economy, an increased demand for trained technicians, suburban migration, the decay of public utilities, and the rising costs of living in New York City all combined to make the intellectuals' position of the 1930s untenable by the 1940s and 1950s. Requiring some form of institutional attachment to subsist, those Jewish intellectuals, who had memories of being denied access to the American mainstream in the past, exploited the unparalleled opportunities offered in both academia and publishing during the postwar period as a result of the decline of academic antisemitism and of the expansion in higher education. Exclusion and antisemitism help to explain the great willingness of Jews to move into the mainstream in the 1940s and 1950s, when given the opportunity to do so, without having to hide or reject their Jewish heritage, as they had felt compelled to do during the 1930s.

²⁵Midge Decter, "An Activist Critic on the Upper West Side," in *Creators and Disturbers: Reminiscences by Jewish Intellectuals of New York*, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and Ernest Goldstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 358.

²⁶Irving Howe, "The New York Intellectuals: A Chronicle & A Critique," *Commentary* 46 (1968), p. 43.

²⁷Norman Podhoretz, *Making It* (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 92.

²⁸See Richard Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), pp. 8–9; Wilford, *The New York Intellectuals*, p. 13; Henry Pachter, "The Radical Émigré in the Metropolis," in *Creators and Disturbers*, ed. Rosenberg and Goldstein, p. 122.

²⁹Hugh Wilford, "The Agony of the Avant-Garde: Philip Rahv and the New York Intellectuals," in *American Cultural Critics*, ed. David Murray (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1995), p. 8. For a longer description of this process see Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals*, in particular the chapter "New York, Jewish, and Other Intellectuals," pp. 72–111.

In becoming institutionalized, however, the function of these Jewish intellectuals was redefined. During the postwar period, Foucault noted that the universal intellectual had become obsolete, as s/he was no longer required to function as a marginalized, autonomous, and alienated spokesperson. He had observed the growth of a new type of intellectual—the "specific" one—that had supplanted the universal intellectual. According to Foucault, the specific intellectual was precisely situated "within specific sectors," the function of whom was to deploy a particular knowledge within a precise field.³⁰ Looking at his contemporary U.S. intellectual counterparts, H. Stuart Hughes asked: "Is the Intellectual Obsolete?" He warned his peers:

American intellectuals would do well to recall that in their government service they did not function as intellectuals but as 'mental technicians.' They had assigned jobs to do: they were not free to speculate as their fancy directed. Or, if they did choose to speculate in academic fashion, they ran the danger of going astray and of saying or doing something that in retrospect would look rather foolish. In short, by serving their country they lost some of their independence. Again, as intellectuals, their position was diminished rather than enhanced. And the same is true of those who in the postwar period have accepted the favors of government or of business.

In the future, he warned ominously, intellectuals will have to make "a sharp choice between intellectual independence and government service."³¹ Some of the Jewish intellectuals did not heed his warning, and this process of becoming "specific" was completed during the Cold War, as intellectuals began to move away from their organic-universal role to function as mediators for the emergent anticommunist hegemony.

Hegemony

Andrew Ross remarked that the Cold War was a "profoundly hegemonic moment" in American history.³² The onset of the struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union from March 1947 onwards produced an "anticommunist hegemony." According to Antonio Gramsci, the key feature of hegemony was the process whereby a group or a "historical bloc" forms alliances with other interested groups to construct a dominant ruling group. Hegemony is not the exclusive domain of any single group, but a number of groups which act as mediators for the dominant group within a particular alliance. Thus, specific auxiliaries and allies assist the dominant group. Consequently, in order

³⁰Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, pp. 126–127.

³¹H. Stuart Hughes, "Is the Intellectual Obsolete? The Freely Speculating Mind in America," *Commentary* 22 (1956), pp. 313, 316, 318.

³²Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 56.

to maintain itself, *mediation* is vitally important for hegemony.³³ A successful hegemony is composed of a network of alliances and relies upon a multiplicity of intricate institutional interdependencies, which must be constantly sustained in order to survive. In order to achieve this, hegemony either co-opts individuals or blocs through a potent combination of ideology and financial rewards, or enlists the cooperation of those who already share its world-view and discourses. Ideology consists of convincing the other groups of the rightness of the dominant group's world-view, that is, the naturalizing and privileging of its particular discourses. This almost all-encompassing, pervasive form of political power may be described in the words of Foucault as "employed and exercised through a net-like organization."³⁴

The anticommunist hegemony in America was constructed around discourses of anticommunism and freedom. The Truman Administration initiated a campaign to inform the American public of the external and internal threats posed by the Soviet Union and the communist movement. The concept of "freedom" was then inserted as a key pillar of anticommunist discourse in what became known as the "Cultural Cold War."³⁵ Ideas became weapons which, it was believed, needed to be put to organized use. As an expression of the anticommunist hegemony's discourses, the Truman Doctrine of 1947 insisted that the United States had a positive role to defend actively

³³Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, pp. 56–57, 12, 53. The following have also been very useful in developing my understanding of Gramsci's formulation: T. J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *American Historical Review* 90 (1985), pp. 567–593; Raymond Williams, "Hegemony," in his *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 108–114; Michael Denning, "The End of Mass Culture," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 37 (1990), pp. 4–18; Jerome Karel, "Revolutionary Contradictions: Antonio Gramsci and the Problem of Intellectuals," *Politics and Society* 6 (1976), pp. 123–172; George Lipsitz, "The Struggle for Hegemony," *Journal of American History* 75 (1988), pp. 146–150.

³⁴Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 98.

³⁵The term "Cultural Cold War" has been relatively under-theorized and thus no systematic definition of the term has been produced. Possibly the first usage of the term was in Christopher Lasch's essay, "The Cultural Cold War: A Short History of the Congress for Cultural Freedom," in his *The Agony of the American Left: One Hundred Years of Radicalism* (London: Pelican, 1973), pp. 64–111. Lasch, however, did not provide a definition of the term. Hugh Wilford, on the other hand, suggested that it was "an ideological conflict" instigated by the United States that began in the late 1940s in response to the Soviet "peace" campaign launched in 1947. It aimed to win "the hearts and minds of the citizens of non-aligned countries around the world," with a special focus on foreign intellectuals and "extended as well into the realm of culture." See his "'Winning Hearts and Minds': American Cultural Strategies in the Cold War," *Borderlines* 1 (1994), pp. 315–326, esp. pp. 315–316. I will use the term here to refer to the ideological, cultural, and intellectual offensive launched by the United States around the term "freedom" in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

and spread freedom throughout the world. This was crystallized in the National Security Council directive number 68, which emphasized an activist and interventionist role for the U.S. government. It repeatedly called for a projection of U.S. moral and material strength into the wider world, proclaiming the necessity of the practical affirmation and demonstration abroad of its values. As a part of this campaign, the concept of freedom itself was used as ideological ammunition against the Soviet Union in a discursive war of position. Freedom was promoted as propaganda, producing a discursive conflict whereby the rhetoric of freedom was pitched against the rhetoric of peace. The Administration did not so much want to foster greater freedom in the United States, as promote its already existing freedom. It was desired that America would become automatically synonymous with freedom in the public mind. Freedom, according to Thomas Bender, became the "masterword in the critical discourse of the era."³⁶

Specific intellectuals were vital to this process. According to Paul Bové, intellectuals possessed a "unique" role in the extension, development, and maintenance of the hegemony.³⁷ Their privileged position was due to their precise situation within modes of cultural production. They had access to the vehicles of mass dissemination of information (television, cinema, magazines, books, newspapers, and radio) and thus were able to function as opinion-shapers. To this end, the Administration sought the cooperation of contemporary and prominent opinion-makers and intellectuals in the fight for freedom and anticommunism. As producers and disseminators of information, intellectuals, it was felt, could radiate and incite such speech among the wider public. Intellectuals were favored because, as *private* agencies/individuals, they would mask official Administration efforts. Their operation, both self-consciously and in the public eye, under the category of autonomy made them appear to be "free"; their previously and apparently organic and universal nature would endow them with an authenticity which overt governmental patronage denied. As we have seen, some Jewish intellectuals had already begun the process of shifting from "universal" to "specific" intellectuals through their enlistment in the wartime Administration, where they were required to utilize their specific skills. With the inception of the Cold War and the establishment of an anticommunist hegemony, many other Jewish intellectuals began to be co-opted by it. Their support for the anticommunist hegemony, however, altered their function as intellectuals.

³⁶Thomas Bender, *New York Intellectual: A History of the Intellectual Life in New York from 1750 to the Beginnings of Our Own Time* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 339.

³⁷Paul A. Bové, *Intellectuals in Power: A Genealogy of Critical Humanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 24.

Traditional Intellectuals

In either supporting the hegemony or being co-opted by it, Jewish intellectuals became what Gramsci defined as “traditional” intellectuals. They were the “dominant group’s ‘deputies,’” who “put themselves forward as autonomous and independent of the dominant social group,” but nonetheless seemed to “represent a historical continuity uninterrupted by even the most complicated and radical changes.”³⁸ In becoming “traditional,” the organic intellectual disappeared. As the Cold War shifted the focus from fascism to communism, intellectual efforts switched with them. By 1947 Jewish intellectuals were arguing that they should perform the same tasks against the Soviet Union as they had against Nazi Germany. Sidney Hook called for precisely this mobilization of the intellectual in the service of “truth” since the intellectual was beyond any “national or party interest.” He stated:

This cannot be accomplished by governmental agencies because they are naturally suspect. . . . This campaign should be undertaken abroad primarily by American and English private organizations and professional associations. . . . And, most important of all, a personnel can be recruited from among those educators and publicists who consider themselves not only as Englishmen and Americans but as members of an international community.³⁹

Clement Greenberg, Managing Editor of the highly influential New York Intellectual publication *Commentary*, added in 1948 that, “the writer ought indeed to involve himself in the struggle against Stalinism to the point of commitment.”⁴⁰ Following the lead of Hook and Greenberg, many of those grouped around the anti-Stalinist journals *Partisan Review*, *New Leader*, and *Commentary* formed the core of a new “international community” dedicated to fighting against communism. This community cooperated in the mobilization and promotion of freedom.

Maurice Goldbloom, the executive secretary of the American Association for a Democratic Germany, argued that the United States

must take a firm position against further encroachment by the Soviet Union on the freedom of those territories which it has not yet absorbed. Such resistance must be carried through on the economic and *ideological* fronts. . . . Today, such a victory can be won without war—but only if the United States adopts a policy far more adequate to the needs of the world.

³⁸Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, pp. 6, 7, 12.

³⁹Sidney Hook, “Why Democracy is Better,” *Commentary* 5 (1947), pp. 195, 204.

⁴⁰Clement Greenberg, “The State of American Writing, 1948: A Symposium,” *Partisan Review* 15 (1948), p. 878.

This was predicated upon the "removal of the abuses of our society," which could then be mobilized as "a weapon in the struggle for the world" because "it is the one indispensable weapon."⁴¹ Underlying this assertion was the premise that Americanism was both ideal and exportable since it was inherently attractive to others. Sidney Hook also favored such an initiative: "though an indigenous part of our tradition, they [the values of democracy] can under certain favorable conditions be broadened so as to become an integral part of world culture." These values can be extended by "an educational, not ideological campaign [which] should be organized throughout the world on the relative merits and achievements of democracy and totalitarianism."⁴²

On the Soviet side, in an attempt to spearhead a worldwide campaign against American nuclear capability, a "peace offensive" was launched in 1948. The first move towards the promotion of "peace" as propaganda by the Soviets occurred in August of that year when the World Congress of Intellectuals for Peace was convened at Wroclaw, Poland. Although organized by Polish communists, the conference was not a purely communist affair since it attracted diverse individuals such as the former U.S. Assistant Attorney General O. John Rogge. The Congress elected an international committee empowered with the task of attracting European intellectuals to back the "peace offensive."⁴³ This was followed by similar congresses in Prague and Paris, and the awarding of "Stalin Prizes" to those individuals who had publicly condemned the Marshall Plan, the creation of NATO, or the establishment of the republic in West Germany. In response the U.S. Administration acknowledged that abstract notions about the organized use of ideas in the Cold War had to be translated into effective weapons. The result was the promotion of "freedom" to counter the Soviet emphasis on "peace." In the following years, the ideological conflict became a confrontation of discourses couched in terms of "peace" versus "freedom." The Soviet Union's discourse of "peace" was denigrated as empty rhetoric, but more sinisterly, all subsequent calls for peace in America became associated with communism, which was most clearly demonstrated in the reaction to the Waldorf Conference of March 1949 proposed by the fellow-traveling National Council for the Arts, Sciences and Professions.

⁴¹Maurice Goldbloom, "Letter to the Editors," *Commentary* 4 (1947), p. 97.

⁴²Sidney Hook, "Why Democracy is Better," pp. 196, 204.

⁴³See Robbie Lieberman, "'Does That Make Peace a Bad Word?': American Responses to the Communist Peace Offensive, 1949-1950," *Peace & Change* 17 (1992), pp. 198-228. See also William Barrett, "Culture Conference at the Waldorf: The Artful Dove," *Commentary* 7 (1949), pp. 487-494; Robbie Lieberman, "Communism, Peace Activism, and Civil Liberties: From the Waldorf Conference to the Peekskill Riot," *Journal of American Culture* 18 (1995), pp. 59-65; and John P. Rossi, "Farewell to Fellow Traveling: The Waldorf Peace Conference of March 1949," *Continuity* 10 (1985), pp. 1-31.

Although the State Department opposed the peace conference, it recognized that to ban it outright would be a massive propaganda coup for the Soviet Union, proving that America was opposed to intellectual freedom. Nonetheless, a procommunist conference to be held in the heart of America had to be counteracted. The conference was allowed to proceed, but the State Department sought to undermine it by subtler means and, at the same time, to reverse its effects in order to benefit the United States. To this end, it recommended that it “discreetly get in touch with reliable noncommunist participants in New York to urge them to do what they can to . . . expose Communist efforts at controlling the conference.”⁴⁴ It contacted Sidney Hook, setting the trend for other Jewish intellectuals to become involved in the Cultural Cold War struggle.

The State Department’s failure to counteract the conference successfully led Jewish intellectuals to call for more effective action on their own part. William Phillips argued that American intellectuals could no longer afford the “luxury” of “exemption from the practical struggle against Stalinism.” The position of intellectuals was dependent upon American military and material strength and consequently the desperation of the situation destroyed the “old liberal and socialist panaceas.”⁴⁵ Phillips thus suggested nothing less than the mobilization of American intellectuals in support of freedom. Reporting on the conference for *Commentary* magazine, William Barrett asserted that the Administration required its intellectuals to assist in its Cultural Cold War effort: “The United States is not going to get anywhere in this war of ideas unless it succeeds in obtaining some better intellectual grasp of the basis of its propaganda.” He observed: “Even in its mortal struggle with Stalinism, America does not have much use for its intellectuals. This may prove its great mistake.”⁴⁶ Hook hammered the point home: “More literary men and scientists must be drawn into the struggle for freedom.”⁴⁷ Elsewhere, he wrote: “We face grim years ahead. The democratic West will require the critical support, the dedicated energy and above all, the intelligence, of its intellectuals if it is to survive as a free culture.”⁴⁸ Bogdan Raditsa called for the deployment of those “American writers, thinkers, historians, and journalists who have the most thorough knowledge and understanding of Communism and its methods, and the deepest

⁴⁴Quoted in Frank A. Ninkovich, *The Diplomacy of Ideas: U.S. Foreign Policy and Cultural Relations, 1938–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 163.

⁴⁵William Phillips, “The Politics of Desperation,” *Partisan Review* 15 (1948), pp. 451, 452.

⁴⁶William Barrett, “World War III: Ideological Conflict,” *Partisan Review* 17 (1950), p. 653.

⁴⁷Sidney Hook, “The Berlin Congress for Cultural Freedom,” *Partisan Review* 17 (1950), p. 722.

⁴⁸Sidney Hook, in the symposium: “Our Country, Our Culture,” *Partisan Review* 19 (1952), p. 574.

commitment to the struggle against totalitarianism."⁴⁹ Francois Bondy wrote: "In the face of propaganda, which is the weapon of the totalitarians, our side can afford the truth, and has it as an ally." He added that "truth needs active propaganda just as much as falsehood does."⁵⁰

Led by Hook, and mustered by the dismal efforts and short-sightedness of the State Department, many Jewish anticommunist intellectuals created their own counterforce to the Waldorf conference: the Americans for Intellectual Freedom (AIF), an independent organization of intellectuals devoted to defending and extending cultural freedom. They primarily represented the three key anticommunist journals: *The New Leader*, *Commentary*, and *Partisan Review*. These intellectuals met at the behest of Hook without any governmental prompting, representing a voluntary effort on their part. Indeed, the intellectual-sponsored initiative of the AIF occurred prior to the formulation of any coherent response by the CIA. Intellectual cooperation with the hegemony in the propagation of the Cultural Cold War began to occur more frequently. Realizing that intellectuals could and should be mobilized in the counterattack, the Administration explicitly sought their services by organizing a U.S.-sponsored counter-conference known as the International Day of Resistance to Dictatorship and War (April 30, 1949) in Paris. The assistance of intellectuals meant that propaganda attacks against the Soviet Union could be achieved under the guise of freedom, voluntarism, and autonomy. Out of this initiative, the AIF developed into the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), which was actively promoted and secretly funded by the CIA. Hook himself was an unwitting beneficiary of this covert support. The CIA devised the CCF as an intellectual gathering of an international group of writers, artists, and thinkers to defend intellectual and cultural freedom against the forces of totalitarianism both at home and abroad. From its very conception, therefore, the Congress represented that type of measure of "practical application" for which NSC 68 repeatedly called. Even its location in West Berlin was an ideological demonstration of the concept of freedom. The Congress developed the "core" of a community of "traditional" intellectuals committed to struggling for cultural freedom and against communism.⁵¹

⁴⁹Bogdan Raditsa, "Beyond Containment to Liberation: A Political Émigré Challenges Our 'Machiavellian Liberalism,'" *Commentary* 12 (1951), pp. 226–231.

⁵⁰Francois Bondy, "Berlin Congress for Freedom: A New Resistance in the Making," *Commentary* 10 (1950), pp. 250, 246.

⁵¹For a detailed account of the whole Congress see Hook, *Out of Step*, pp. 432–456; Irving Howe, "The Culture Conference," *Partisan Review* 16 (1949), 509; Michael Warner, "Origins of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, 1949–50," *Studies in Intelligence*, <<http://www.odci.gov/csi/studies/95unclas/war.html>> (Accessed March 2, 1997).

The international Congress spawned a domestic American version. On January 5, 1951, the American Committee for Cultural Freedom (ACCF) was set up as an affiliate of the European Congress. The Committee called itself a non-partisan community of “writers, teachers, scientists, and artists of various political preferences” whose purpose was to “take appropriate steps against whatever forces in the present-day world threaten our free culture.” The ACCF constituted a new community focused around discourses of freedom and anticommunism: “We expose the Communist conspiracy and its totalitarian threat to America and other free countries,” by giving “practical and intellectual support” to other anticommunists, and by advising and assisting those involved in loyalty and security difficulties.⁵² Many Jewish intellectuals were active in these initiatives, thus agreeing that the “defense of intellectual liberty today imposes a positive obligation” to assist in the propagation of the Cultural Cold War “with the weapons of the intellect.”⁵³

The ACCF and the CCF became two of the Administration’s major hegemonic allies. Through them many Jewish intellectuals participated in the Administration’s prosecution of the Cultural Cold War. These agencies were key allies in providing both personnel and material in the US counterattack against the “peace” campaign. In order to maintain these alliances, the CIA covertly sponsored both organizations, channeling funds through a series of front foundations and conduits, as well as providing a range of financial inducements and rewards to their co-opted specific-traditional intellectuals, such as conferences, editorships, subsidized publishing, and foreign travel. Arthur Koestler lampooned it as the “international academic call-girl circuit” of intellectual conferences and symposia. Frances Stonor Saunders describes an “umbilical cord of gold”—a seemingly unlimited source of largesse distributed by the CIA that appeared to have had a great effect in mobilizing Jewish intellectuals. Saunders mentions the attractive fees, the lecture tours, the conferences, the foreign trips, even the villas provided by the CIA. The editor of *Partisan Review*, William Phillips, observed “the nouveau riche look of the whole operation . . . the posh apartments of the Congress officials, the seemingly inexhaustible funds for travel, the big-time expenses accounts, and all the other perks usually associated with the executives of large corporations.” To reinforce the point Saunders quotes V. S. Pritchett’s observation, “Expenses, the most beautiful word in modern English. If we sell our souls, we ought to sell them dear.” One CIA operative understood this whole process all too well when he stated: “The main concern for most scholars and writers really is how you get paid for doing what you

⁵²ACCF advertisement in *Commentary* 19 (1955).

⁵³“Manifesto of the Congress for Cultural Freedom” (1950), reprinted in Peter Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Postwar Europe* (New York: Free Press, 1989), p. 251; Hook, *Out of Step*, p. 453.

want to do. I think that, by and large, they would take money from whatever source they get it."⁵⁴ In 1952, Louis Kronenberger observed how "our intellectuals are not just more respected, they are better fed." He continued to state that: "Talent is well paid for nowadays, though oftener at the back door than the front."⁵⁵ This backdoor was not revealed to be the CIA until the 1960s, and many of those in receipt of its monies denied any knowledge of its source.

Were these intellectuals simply motivated by money? Many of those intellectuals who composed the membership of both organizations *already* believed in the rightness of the Administration's discourses, since their sentiments were shared. They had preemptively offered their services as intellectuals *prior to* any official approach by the Administration. As Sidney Hook recalled: "Their activities on behalf of the Congress were a burden and a sacrifice, *cheerfully assumed* because of the gravity of the issues at stake."⁵⁶ As mentioned earlier, many Jewish intellectuals were fierce anti-Stalinists, who had been warning of the danger posed by the Soviet Union since the early 1930s, although, surely, some were swayed by the large financial and other inducements offered to them once the CIA became involved.

As is to be expected, those intellectuals involved explicitly deny this. Saunders outlines and documents the rejections of these claims by those who she has shown were recipients of CIA patronage. Most claimed little knowledge of who was paying their expenses, or perhaps they chose not to question. Thus the problems of truth and memory rise once again. Saunders ends with a quote from Primo Levi: "There are . . . those who lie consciously, coldly falsifying reality itself but more numerous are those who weigh anchor, move off, momentarily or forever, from genuine memories, and fabricate for themselves a convenient reality. . . . The silent transition from falsehood to sly deception is useful: anyone who lies in good faith is better off, he recites his part better, he is more easily believed."⁵⁷ In denying any links to the anticommunist hegemony, Jewish intellectuals exactly fulfilled the role of traditional intellectuals, as outlined by Gramsci. They had clearly "put themselves forward as autonomous and independent of the dominant social group." Edward Shils, for example, insisted that the CCF and the ACCF retained their autonomy and "took no instructions from anyone outside their respective organisations,"⁵⁸ while Hook asserted that the "intellectual

⁵⁴Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta Books, 1999), pp. 5, 345, 339, 332, 345.

⁵⁵Louis Kronenberger, "Our Country, Our Culture," p. 440.

⁵⁶Hook, *Out of Step*, p. 451, emphasis added.

⁵⁷Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?*, p. 415.

⁵⁸Edward Shils, "Remembering the Congress for Cultural Freedom," *Encounter* 75 (1990), p. 57.

independence of the Congress [and the Committee were] not affected in the slightest."⁵⁹ They still claimed a critical distance and autonomy, and did not feel that their critical function had been in any way diminished by their deployment by the anticommunist hegemony within the Cultural Cold War. Terms such as "intellectual freedom," "autonomy," and "dissent" were still used with a distinct lack of irony. Consequently, these intellectuals disputed their labeling as "traditional." Unlike the state-sponsored intellectuals of the Soviet Union, they would argue, they remained free to operate as autonomous and independent thinkers.

Yet not all Jewish intellectuals were co-opted by the anticommunist hegemony, nor were they willing to cooperate with it so enthusiastically. In 1954, a journal designed "to dissent from the bleak atmosphere of conformism that pervades the political and intellectual life of the United States; to dissent from the support of the *status quo* now so noticeable on the part of many former radicals and socialists" was established.⁶⁰ Called *Dissent*, it was explicitly designed to provide an oppositional, if not fully counter-hegemonic, intellectual and political viewpoint. In particular, it was intended to rival *Commentary*, which had become so affirmative that, in the eyes of Irving Howe and Lewis Coser—the new editors of *Dissent*—, it had lost its critical perspective and had become simply an official organ of the anticommunist hegemony. Howe complained of the magazine's "zealousness," of its anticommunism, which was "indiscriminate and unscholarly," with "its air of rude certainty, its readiness to indulge in the most sweeping generalizations."⁶¹ He was annoyed that *Commentary* had simply become an apologist for the American *status quo*.⁶² In contrast, *Dissent* rejected the prevailing mood of American liberalism among Jewish intellectuals, intending to establish a temper of opposition. *Dissent* became the focus for those who rejected "hard" anticommunism, directing considerable flak at those who acquiesced in the anti-communist witch-hunts, and a magnet for those who refused to accept the blandishments and financial rewards offered by the anticommunist hegemony. One of its circle, Meyer Schapiro, a professor of art history at Columbia, snubbed the ACCF because it appeared to be "a 'front organization'" whose purposes were concealed "behind an

⁵⁹Hook, *Out of Step*, p. 453. I have also discussed this in "The CIA 'Call-girl Circuit,'" *The Jewish Quarterly* 46 (1999), pp. 80–82.

⁶⁰"A Word to Our Readers" (Editorial), *Dissent* 1 (1954), 3.

⁶¹Irving Howe, "Letter to the Editor," *Commentary* 12 (October 1951), 388–389.

⁶²Irving Howe, "Does It Hurt When You Laugh?" *Dissent* 1 (1954), pp. 5, 6, 7; Irving Howe "This Age of Conformity," *Partisan Review* 21 (1954), pp. 18–19; Irving Howe, *A World More Attractive* (New York: Horizon, 1963), p. 265.

appeal to other (and less obviously political) ends."⁶³ Indeed, *Dissent* had been a considerable thorn in the side of *Encounter*—the London based and CIA funded journal—and it was *Dissent* that publicly hinted at the problem earlier than most when Paul Goodman wrote in 1962: "Cultural Freedom and the Encounter of ideas are instruments of the CIA."⁶⁴ Thus, those Jewish intellectuals around *Dissent* provide a marked contrast to those other Jewish intellectuals; the attempt of the former to remain organic brought up short those who had become traditional during the Cultural Cold War.

Conclusion

Through their alliance with the anticommunist hegemony many of the New York Jewish Intellectuals became a stratum of "traditional" intellectuals. Through the production of anticommunist discourses they represented an interested mediating agency in a network of alliances that formed the Cold War anticommunist hegemony. They were the "specific" auxiliaries and allies, the aides and deputies, who assisted the dominant group, fashioning themselves as autonomous and independent of that group, but who represented a historical continuity with the past nonetheless. They did not struggle against the forms of power that transformed them into its instruments. Neither did they aim to reveal it, to sap, or to take it. Instead, since "their urge was for place and role" they "associated" with it. These intellectuals did not fight against their hegemonic cooperation nor did they resist becoming the hegemony's deputies. Rather they proactively offered their skills in its service, reflecting their willingness to dismiss their original functions as organic and universal intellectuals in the service of the anti-communist hegemony during the Cultural Cold War. Leslie Fiedler observed that the intellectual now had a "use."⁶⁵ Or, as Lionel Trilling put it: "Our many bureaus and authorities were created not only as a response to the social needs which they serve, *but also as a response to the social desires of their personnel.*" He added: "Intellect has associated itself with power as perhaps never before in history."⁶⁶ Intellectuals, therefore, were not engaged in a local struggle by attacking the hegemony at its weakest points. On the contrary, they were overtly involved in the global battle against communism. Thus, in their failure to struggle against power, these intellectuals extended it.

Such hegemonic cooperation produced major effects within the intellectual community. Discourses were refocused around Cold War concepts of anticommunism

⁶³Meyer Schapiro, cited in Wilford, *The New York Intellectuals*, p. 205.

⁶⁴Paul Goodman, cited in Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?*, p. 356.

⁶⁵Leslie Fiedler, "Our Country: Our Culture," p. 298.

⁶⁶Lionel Trilling, "Our Country: Our Culture," p. 320.

and freedom, and Jewish intellectuals had to position themselves in relation to them during the Cultural Cold War. Many Jewish intellectuals functioned as an important site in the radiation of these discourses, as they cooperated in a war of position against the Soviet Union, communism, and peace. In doing so, they moved farther away from their organic roots, and hegemonic cooperation meant that they had become traditional and specific. They spoke more for the institutions of the anticommunist hegemony than for the community from which they sprang, becoming the spokespersons for a new Jewish and intellectual anticommunist liberalism. Through an alliance with the dominant discourses of the anticommunist hegemony, they asserted a hegemonic position within American intellectual life. It is perhaps for this reason that Norman Podhoretz, newly appointed and recently radicalized editor of *Commentary* magazine, lamented in 1960: "The intellectuals have failed us by abdicating their traditional role as fanatical devotees of the dream of a good society."⁶⁷

Many of those employed and sponsored by the government and the CIA during the Cultural Cold War are reluctant to admit their co-optation. They wallow in disingenuousness, lies, half-truths, and obfuscation. The dilemma becomes: who can we trust? Who carries greater weight, authority and, ultimately, authenticity? Do such questions apply to all forms of outside funding, can they or can they not alter critique and make its effect difficult to pin down? Or is an indeterminable self-censorship the result? As Richard King observed, "it is difficult in reading these volumes to work out just how we are to take them or what purpose, beyond self-justification, they are meant to serve."⁶⁸ If new research shows the New York Jewish Intellectuals' memoirs and biographies to be of doubtful value, then perhaps it is time for their history to be re-written anew from a perspective that has not been shaped by theirs.

⁶⁷Norman Podhoretz, "The Issue," *Commentary* 29 (1960), p. a.

⁶⁸King, "Up from Radicalism," p. 71.

