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Introduction

“UNLESS A MAN, in the intellectual community, was bent on sexual conquest he was never interested in women,” Diana Trilling recalled of the New York intellectuals, a renowned group of writers and critics at mid-century. “He wanted to be with the men. They always wanted to huddle in a corner to talk. Their shop talk did not include women, even the women whom they had regard for professionally.” Trilling was one of the few women in this group. She entered their ranks when she married literary critic Lionel Trilling. Others echoed her comments. Jason Epstein, for example, who cofounded the *New York Review of Books* (NYRB) in 1963, said: “With women in that crowd, the first thing you thought about was whether they were good-looking and if you could sleep with them. But if a woman could write like a man, that was enough. You wanted a piece, a piece of writing—you’d forget everything else for a good piece.” Epstein, of course, left a certain ambiguity as to whether he meant a piece of writing or a piece of ass. But his remarks, along with Trilling’s, underscore the importance of virility in this testosterone-driven literary circle. What did masculinity mean to these intellectuals? Epstein’s directive to “write like a man” indicated that the act of writing itself constituted a form of masculine performance. But what did “writing like a man” entail?¹

Literary critic Irving Howe, another member of the group, hinted at an answer in 1968 when he chronicled its shared history. Writing in *Commentary*, Howe used pugilistic terms to describe the group. Its members saw “intellectual life as a form of combat,” he said. They developed that attitude when they were anti-Stalinist radicals in the 1930s. Debates within the group constituted a “*tournament*, the writer as gymnast with one eye on other rings, or as a skilled infighter juggling knives of dialectic.” These intellectuals embodied a “style of brilliance,” Howe said, that at its best

“reflected a certain view of the intellectual life: free-lance dash, peacock strut, daring hypothesis, knockabout synthesis.” In summarizing what bound the group together, Howe wrote:

They appear to have a common history, prolonged now for more than thirty years; a common political outlook, even if marked by ceaseless internecine quarrels; a common style of thought and perhaps composition; a common focus on intellectual interests; and once you get past politeness—which becomes, these days, easier and easier—a common ethnic origin. They are, or until recently have been, anti-Communists; they are, or until some time ago were, radicals; they have a fondness for ideological speculation; they write literary criticism with a strong social emphasis; they revel in polemic; they strive self-consciously to be “brilliant”; and by birth or osmosis they are Jews.²

Howe was not alone in juxtaposing Jewishness and masculinity when describing these writers and critics. A year earlier, in his 1967 memoir *Making It*, Norman Podhoretz characterized them as a “Jewish family.”³ He, too, emphasized their pugilism. “The family’s prose had verve, vitality, wit, texture, and above all brilliance,” he wrote. “Here the physical analogy would be with an all-round athlete.” There was also a Jewish analogy, to “Talmudic scholars,” which is to say to men who “not only regard books as holy objects but, haunted by what was perhaps the most ferociously tyrannical tradition of scholarship the world has ever seen, they seem to believe that one must have mastered everything before one is entitled to the temerity of saying anything on paper.”⁴ Women were not traditionally allowed to study Talmud.⁵ Podhoretz suggested that the New York intellectuals were the modern descendants of this masculine tradition. But they were also virile in the way that athletes were in American culture.

Daniel Bell, another prominent New York intellectual, described them as one of the few intelligentsias ever in the United States. A term of Russian origin, intelligentsia initially “was meant to apply to a generation,” Bell said, “who were becoming critical of society—and it received its definitive stamp in the novel of [Ivan] Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons*” (1862). Thereafter, intelligentsia came to mean a “collectivity” of intellectuals, a “curia” of thinkers who “come from some common milieu and seek common meanings.” Though Bell did not say so explicitly, he imagined these collectivities as a male space. Curia comes from the Latin word *coviria*, meaning “a gathering of men.” And when he spoke in specifics he referred to the New York Jewish intellectuals as men: “the background of all these men was largely immigrant, their parents themselves working-class or

petty bourgeoisie,” he wrote. Like Howe and Podhoretz, Bell highlighted how they combined “political radicalism and cultural modernism,” and the ways in which “ideas were passionately and fiercely debated.”⁶

Speaking at Hebrew Union College in 1976, Bell lamented that little had been written on the New York intellectuals. “There are almost no memoirs, no biographical accounts, no reflections which try to explain their lives.”⁷ Bell’s observation now seems quaint. In the 1980s and ’90s a slew of memoirs by members of the group appeared in print.⁸ Countless scholarly monographs followed.⁹ Yet despite the many books published on the New York intellectuals, few scholars have focused on either gender or Jewishness and the ways in which they intersected in the lives and careers of these figures.¹⁰

Write Like a Man argues that masculinity and Jewishness were linked in the minds of the New York intellectuals. Men and women, Jews and non-Jews in the group all came to espouse a secular Jewish machismo. This evolved into an ideology of secular Jewish masculinity. Those who developed and embraced this ideology prized verbal combativeness, polemical aggression, and an unflinching style of argumentation. Hard-hitting and impassioned arguments, especially in print, undergirded their understanding of a new kind of masculinity.

The ideology of secular Jewish masculinity that they developed was not all-encompassing. I use the term “ideology,” in part, to distinguish from other constructions of Jewish masculinity in twentieth-century America.¹¹ By ideology, I mean the often unstated, even unconscious assumptions, habits, and maxims that inform how people understand and experience the world.¹² Yet ideologies by nature mean different things to differently situated people. The New York intellectuals wrestled over the meaning and consequences of their newly created secular Jewish masculinity, which contributed to political divisions among them. The term “ideology” is also apt because their new construction of secular Jewish masculinity was deeply informed by other prominent ideologies in the twentieth century, especially Marxism and Freudianism, and it in turn helped shape political ideologies like Cold War liberalism and neoconservatism.

The New York intellectuals’ conception and performance of secular Jewish masculinity was thus hardly binary. It was a deeply anxious project of both self-definition and political significance. Could Jews “make it,” as Norman Podhoretz put it, if they didn’t prove that they were “real” men? But what did being a “real” man entail? For Podhoretz, and a few others, that question led to neoconservatism, a political persuasion or ideology that came to signify a muscular and preemptive approach to foreign

affairs.¹³ In domestic life, it often involved an embrace of “family values,” a catchall phrase for sexual morality in the culture wars of the late twentieth century.¹⁴ Most New York intellectuals rejected the politics of neoconservatism, remaining tied to liberalism, like most American Jews.¹⁵ Yet they were still just as engaged in a project of defining and proving Jewish masculinity.

Write Like a Man shows how the tether of masculinity, so crucial to the lives and works of the New York intellectuals, shaped broader political, intellectual, and cultural debates in American life in the last quarter of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.¹⁶ In the postwar years, these intellectuals became well-known. They were read by readers and writers from coast to coast.¹⁷ Their combative, masculinized style and politicized work became fashionable. Hollywood even took note, referring to them or creating characters based on them on screen.¹⁸ Accordingly, their intellectual culture, with its redefinitions of what it meant to be a man, demands special attention. As intellectuals, they wrestled with modern alienation. As Americans, they came of age with the triumphalism of “the American Century.” As Ashkenazi Jews, they had fresh, intimate experience with the specter of their own annihilation. Their struggles in fact illuminate modern American intellectual life more broadly.



To the nineteenth century, writing was feminine—though never simplistically so. Ladies were the main audience of literature, as Jane Austen, the Brontës, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Emily Dickinson, George Eliot, and Edith Wharton were recognized as masters of the verse and prose—though George Eliot was well advised to change her name from Mary Anne Evans, and to have an affair with an influential man. Moreover, male writers obviously had great authority and made unimpeachable contributions to what women read. That said, women also took over the teaching profession and shaped everybody’s sense of literature and, to an extent, controlled their very access to it. Half a century ago, Ann Douglas argued that writers, like ministers, painters, and professional actors, were considered “sissies” in the golden age of the novel. If not always implicitly homosexual, they were sexual outlaws, like the pioneering New Yorker Walt Whitman.¹⁹ The Manhattanite Teddy Roosevelt was not the first to try to reclaim writing—and high culture in general—as masculine.²⁰ But, according to Douglas, nobody succeeded in remasculinizing literary culture until Hemingway’s generation. That

“lost” generation’s urban culture was shaped not only by Black migrants moving north from the rural South but also post-Civil War immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe.²¹ That a distinctly “Jewish intelligentsia” contributed to this process of masculinization is significant, especially given stereotypes that had long cast Jews as unmanly.²²

The Jewish New York intellectuals were one of only a handful of “intelligentsias” in the United States. According to Bell, the first distinct intelligentsia to emerge on this side of the Atlantic were the Greenwich Village intellectuals of the 1910s.²³ Figures like Walter Lippmann, Van Wyck Brooks, John Reed, Waldo Frank, Sinclair Lewis, and Edmund Wilson were united by “the protest against the genteel tradition, the domination of America by the small town, and the crabbed respectability which the small town enforced.” The second intelligentsia was the “lost generation” of the Jazz Age. Disenchanted with American life in the wake of World War I, these “literary expatriates” looked abroad to Paris, and included “the Hemingways and Fitzgeralds.” Third were the Southern Agrarians that gathered at Vanderbilt University in the 1920s and ’30s. They included Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and John Crowe Ransom. “What they were defending,” Bell wrote, “was an agrarian way of life, the rhythms of a gentler time and quieter place—and with it a model of aristocratic learning which would take the word as the text and ignore the mundane biographical [and] sociological.”²⁴

The New York intellectuals differed from these other American intelligentsias in several ways, most significantly, because of their Jewishness. “They had no *yichus*,” a Yiddish word meaning “eminent pedigree,” Bell said. They did not “flee” the United States but rather “inherited the cultural establishment of America in ways that they, and certainly their fathers,” poor Jews who had fled the shtetls of the Pale of Settlement for the ghettos of the Lower East Side, Brooklyn, and the Bronx, “could never have dreamed of.”²⁵

In the years after World War I, New York started becoming the Western world’s cultural capital, rivaled only by Paris. Before the passage of immigration restriction, the city’s population grew on average over a million a decade from the 1890s through the 1920s. New York Jews were heirs to the unique new polyglot melting pot that had been celebrated in the prewar years, along with Vaudeville and early motion pictures. In the Roaring Twenties—the Jazz Age—New York had the unprecedented reach of radio and the uncontrollable festivity of the speakeasy belt, along with the “uptown” clubs and theaters where the Harlem Renaissance was flourishing.²⁶ In the 1930s came a numerically small wave of refugees that

included many famous writers, scientists, and orchestra conductors. They filled the city with highbrow culture, even though the anti-immigration laws of 1921 and 1924 allowed only the tiniest trickle from those parts of Europe (the Pale of Settlement) to enter. The New York intellectuals had grown up in that city in those years.²⁷ It was their turf.

The New York intellectuals' understanding of masculinity emerged among this nascent group of thinkers in the 1920s and 1930s in immigrant enclaves in New York City. These sons of immigrants sought to forge their own vision of masculinity that contrasted with their working-class, immigrant-born fathers, some of whom were unlearned, who struggled to earn a living—and were, in their own sons' eyes, emasculated. Their sons yearned to be American men. But these were also years when American nativist tendencies climaxed. After immigration halted with the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914, nativists succeeded in urging Congress to prevent the resumption of immigration (especially from Asia, Southern Europe, and heavily Jewish parts of Eastern Europe), in two radical National Origins Acts (1921 and 1924).²⁸ In reaction to mass immigration, Anglo-American ideals of masculinity had grown more extreme and discriminatory around the turn of the twentieth century, emphasizing physical strength, honor, individualism, and athleticism (which professionalized and became part of college culture in those years) that nonwhite non-Protestants allegedly lacked. Excluded from this construction, Jewish masculinity evolved alongside mainstream American gender ideals.²⁹

The New York intellectuals' ideology of secular Jewish masculinity was not assimilationist, however—at least not wholly. In the wider culture in those years, intellectual prowess was often seen as a sign of effeminacy—the scholar was the opposite of the virile male athlete. But it also was not merely bound by traditional Jewish gender ideals as embodied in the Talmudic scholar.³⁰ Rather, secular American Jewish masculinity, as the New York intellectuals came to define it, was an amalgam of Jewish and Anglo-American ideals that formed something new: the combative secular intellectual.

After World War II, the New York intellectuals became some of the most renowned critics and writers in the country—bringing their fractious masculinity with them. “The real contribution of the New York writers,” Howe said, “was toward creating a new, and for this country almost exotic, style of work.”³¹ In the postwar years, they found “respected places in universities, publishing houses, and magazines” and became “some of the brightest stars in American culture itself,” Bell wrote.³² *Write Like a Man*, then, is in part a story of how this important construction of Jewish

masculinity helped propel American Jews from outsiders to insiders in postwar America.³³

Some scholars of American Jewish history have described the fifteen years following World War II as a golden era for American Jews, a period marked by prosperity, consensus, and affluence. In these years Jews became “insiders” in American society in religious, ethnic, political, and socioeconomic terms.³⁴ The defeat of Nazism discredited scientific racism and its corollary, prevalent on both sides of the Atlantic, that Jews constituted an inferior and unassimilable “race.”³⁵ In the postwar years, discriminatory barriers against Jews crumbled significantly, and many Jews moved from the working to the middling classes, joining other white ethnic groups in the suburbs.³⁶ Meanwhile, during World War II a tri-faith America replaced an older view that America was an Anglo-Saxon Protestant nation. Thereafter a Judeo-Christian tradition was held up as a bulwark against godless Communism.³⁷ Second-generation American Jews by and large abandoned the leftist-radicalism of the immigrant generation and embraced the Cold War liberal consensus, a liberalism that the New York intellectuals worked hard to define.³⁸ Thus the New York intellectuals in many ways exemplified this golden age. By the 1960s they were some of the best-known and most respected critics and writers in the country.³⁹

But on the terrain of gender, the process of acculturation was arduous and complex, belying notions of easy accommodation.⁴⁰ The New York intellectuals clashed over the meaning of Jewish masculinity in the postwar years. Should intellectuals remain critics of society—outsiders when it came to both the intellectual vocation and masculinity? If not, what did assimilation into norms of American masculinity entail? How did the early years of the Cold War, which saw heightened fears over political and sexual subversion, shape how the New York intellectuals understood Jewish masculinity?⁴¹ In the 1960s and '70s, when a younger generation of radicals rejected the New York intellectuals' model of intellectual masculinity, how did figures in the group respond? Second-wave feminists, whose leaders and theorists were also disproportionately secular Jews, challenged the ways in which the New York intellectuals had engendered the intellectual vocation masculine.⁴² What did Jewish masculinity look like in the wake of feminist critiques? How did Jewish masculinity shape their political trajectories? *Write Like a Man* seeks to answer these questions, tracing how the New York intellectuals' ideology of secular Jewish masculinity evolved from the 1920s and '30s through the 1970s, how it interacted with and responded to other constructions of masculinity—Jewish

and normative—in the second half of the twentieth century, and how it affected American politics more broadly.

In 1977 Woody Allen satirized the fame of the New York intellectuals in his Academy Award-winning film *Annie Hall*. The film's protagonist, Alvy Singer, played by Allen, joked that he heard the magazines "*Commentary* and *Dissent* had merged to form '*Dysentery*.'" Allen's quip spoke to the prominence of the New York intellectuals and to the many magazines they founded in the postwar years, as well as to "their ceaseless internecine quarrels," as Howe put it.⁴³ But Allen's focus on *Commentary* and *Dissent* was acute. The two journals staked out two ends of a spectrum of secular Jewish masculinity in postwar America. Norman Podhoretz, the editor of *Commentary* between 1960 and 1995, forged what came to be known as neoconservatism—a rightward politics centered on a greater assertiveness in anti-Soviet and pro-Israel policies and an embrace of "family values." Howe, the longtime editor of *Dissent*, a magazine he founded with Lewis Coser in 1954, remained tied to a scholarly ideal of Jewish masculinity that emphasized independence and the intellectual as vigilant outsider and critic of society.



Historians, literary critics, and journalists alike have long been drawn to these figures because they left such a vivid mark on American intellectual life. Yet aside from discussing their immigrant roots, they have largely ignored the Jewishness of these intellectuals. This is in part because Howe himself de-emphasized it in his 1968 article: "It was precisely the idea of discarding the past, breaking away from families, traditions, and memories which excited intellectuals," he wrote.⁴⁴ Even scholars of American Jewish history, as historian Tony Michels has observed, "have paid minimal attention to these celebrated figures, despite the fact that most were Jews either by birth, or as Howe once wrote, by 'osmosis.'"⁴⁵ In reality, the New York intellectuals did not evade their Jewish identities, even when they were young. Rather, they refashioned the meaning of American Jewishness through their definition and embodiment of a secular masculine ideal.

Gender has also been conspicuously absent from most studies of the New York intellectuals despite the almost axiomatic recognition that this was a decidedly male and sexist milieu. Alexander Bloom's comprehensive history of the group, revealingly titled *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and Their World*, is indicative. Bloom's title acknowledges the

overwhelming maleness of this group while the book itself ignores gender almost completely.⁴⁶ Bloom's book was published in 1986, but most books on the New York intellectuals have followed suit. Those scholars who do examine the ways gender operated among the New York intellectuals tend to focus on the group's female members.⁴⁷ *Write Like a Man* looks at masculinity as a lens to understand both its male and female members, as well as mid-century American intellectual life more broadly. The New York intellectuals assessed each other, and indeed everyone, through their standard of secular Jewish masculine toughness.⁴⁸

"New York intellectual" was an imagined community, not an affixed category. One scholar titled a book, *The Other Jewish New York Intellectuals*, to make the fair point that there were numerous important Jewish thinkers not considered part of this group.⁴⁹ Lucy S. Dawidowicz is a case in point. "Like the immigrant Jewish men of her generation who came of age in the politically intense 1930s, Dawidowicz relished a political argument, was verbally adroit, and did not shy away from a strongly worded rebuff," historian Nancy Sinkoff writes. She identified as a neoconservative and was closely tied to *Commentary* in the 1970s and '80s. But she was not considered a New York intellectual. Dawidowicz differed from them, Sinkoff argues, in that she associated with Jewish causes and organizations and wrote explicitly about Jewish issues, most notably the Holocaust. This is also why American Jewish historians have shied away from the New York intellectuals. They have tended to "[neglect] or [ignore] Jews who felt alienated, indifferent, or ambivalent towards Jewishness or were simply uninvolved in Jewish communal life," as Michels has pointed out. *Write Like a Man* employs what the historian David Hollinger has called a "dispersionist" approach to examining American Jewish history, meaning paying attention "to the role in history of persons of Jewish ancestry regardless of their degree of affiliation with communal Jewry." As to why Dawidowicz was not considered a New York intellectual, Sinkoff argues that she differed from them "by her choice to become deeply rooted in the culture and history of Eastern European Jewry and to defend tirelessly its particularism" in contrast to the New York intellectuals' "cosmopolitanism" and "universalism." But the sexist underpinnings of this milieu also had something to do with it.⁵⁰

So how did one become a New York intellectual? What made someone be considered part of this group? Bell tallied "some fifty within the inner group" and perhaps "several hundred others" on the periphery. Not all were Jewish, nor did all reside in New York. Saul Bellow, for example, lived in Chicago. Leslie Fiedler taught at the University of Montana. "These New

York Jewish intellectuals came together as a self-conscious group, knowing each other, writing primarily for each other, discussing ideas they held in common, differing widely and sometimes savagely, and yet having that sense of kinship which made each of them aware that they were part of a distinctive sociohistorical phenomenon,” Bell wrote.⁵¹

Thus, writing for their magazines was an indisputable qualification. Before they were known as the New York intellectuals—a term Howe coined in his essay—they were referred to as the *Partisan Review* group, or sometimes as the “boys” by its scant women members, known as the “PR girls.”⁵² The genesis of the group is often dated to the relaunching of *Partisan Review* in 1937 by William Phillips and Philip Rahv as independent from the Communist Party’s John Reed Club.⁵³ *Partisan Review*’s anti-Stalinism, combined with its embrace of modernism, provided a “political-literary position,” Podhoretz wrote, that “developed an intellectual style which for a long while was almost unique to *Partisan Review*, and which eventually came of its own force to be identified in the eyes of many with the quality of intellectuality itself.”⁵⁴

But the group’s roots ran deeper. In the 1920s, its oldest members wrote for the *Menorah Journal* when Elliot E. Cohen served as its managing editor between 1925 and 1931. Cohen was a demanding and combative editor. “To write a piece for Cohen was an ordeal which not everyone was willing to suffer,” Podhoretz said. “But it was also, and especially for novices, an education in the impossibly difficult art of effective exposition.” Under Cohen’s leadership, the *Menorah Journal* created the first space where this ideology of secular Jewish masculinity flourished.⁵⁵

Cohen would become the inaugural editor of *Commentary*, a magazine funded by the American Jewish Committee in 1945. Born with the dawn of the Cold War, *Commentary* sought to demonstrate the Americanness and anti-communist credentials of American Jewry.⁵⁶ That the New York intellectuals played a central role in delineating Cold War liberalism is well-known.⁵⁷ Less recognized is that by defining anti-communist liberalism in more masculine terms, the New York intellectuals helped render American Jews, a group long associated with left-wing radicalism, as not only properly anti-communist but properly masculine in Cold War America. Other magazines founded by members of the group included Dwight Macdonald’s short-lived journal *politics*, published between 1944 and 1949; *Encounter*, founded by the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) in 1952 and initially edited by Irving Kristol and the British poet Stephen Spender; the *New York Review of Books*, founded by Jason Epstein, Barbara Epstein, and Robert Silvers in 1963; and the *Public Interest*, a journal

that came to be closely associated with neoconservatism after its founding in 1965 by Irving Kristol and Daniel Bell, later also edited by Nathan Glazer.⁵⁸ To be a New York intellectual one had to write for these magazines. But there were numerous intellectuals who wrote for these journals. There was more to it.

The second major characteristic was anti-communism. In the 1930s, the anti-Stalinism of the nascent New York intellectuals made them outsiders. As young radicals they dissented from the Popular Front (1935–39), when communists around the world—following the dictates of the Communist International (Comintern) in Moscow—worked with other leftists and liberals to defeat fascism.⁵⁹ This minority position within the decade’s radicalism was central to their ideology of secular Jewish masculinity, as we will see in chapter 1. “The radicalism of the 1930s gave the New York intellectuals their distinctive style: a flair for polemic, a taste for grand generalization, an impatience with what they regarded (often parochially) as parochial scholarship,” Howe wrote. Though many had abandoned radicalism in the postwar years, “brief and superficial as their engagement with Marxism may have been, it gave [these] intellectuals the advantage of dialectic.” According to Podhoretz, the “combination of a commitment to left-wing anti-Stalinism and a commitment to avant-gardism became the distinguishing family trait.”⁶⁰

Finally, Jewishness. There were non-Jews in the group. “Nevertheless, the term ‘Jewish’ can be allowed to stand by clear majority rule and by various peculiarities of temper,” Podhoretz wrote.⁶¹ Bell referred to them as the “New York Jewish Intelligentsia,” while Howe quipped that non-Jewish members became Jews by “osmosis.” Dwight Macdonald seemed to corroborate this view. “I have spent my whole adult life in radical-intellectual circles,” he told an interviewer, and “have long proclaimed myself an ‘Honorary Jew.’”⁶² In 1950 one writer joked in *Commentary* that to be accepted in the world of letters one had to adopt “the wise style of the Jewish intellectual,” which included using “Jewish inflections and expressions” like saying “‘*nu*?’ instead of ‘*so*?’”⁶³

Podhoretz and Bell divided these intellectuals into three generations, more or less. Podhoretz referred to the oldest among them as the “Founding Fathers.” They were born around 1905 and included *Partisan Review* editors Philip Rahv and William Phillips, literary critics Lionel Trilling and Lionel Abel, art critics Meyer Schapiro, Harold Rosenberg, and Clement Greenberg, and critics Sidney Hook, Paul Goodman, Fred Dupee, and Dwight Macdonald. Its second generation was made up of “Mary McCarthy (who possibly even belongs among the first),” Podhoretz wrote,

“Delmore Schwartz, William Barrett, Isaac Rosenfeld, Richard Chase, and Alfred Kazin.” They were joined by “those members of the second generation who came to visibility a little later, toward the end of the war and right after it”: Leslie Fiedler, Elizabeth Hardwick, Daniel Bell, James Baldwin, David Bazelon, Robert Warshow, Nathan Glazer, and Irving Howe. Many of them had been Trotskyists. But they were more “Freudian” than Marxist. “It was truly a second generation in that the Founding Fathers had exerted a formative influence upon its members, helping to shape their ideas, their tastes, their prose, and in general their conception of the nature of true intellectuality and of the intellectual life itself,” Podhoretz wrote. Podhoretz was part of its third and last generation. He also named Susan Sontag as one of its youngest members.⁶⁴

Bell sketched out a genealogy, a family tree of sorts, complete with a cladogram (see box 1). “The Elders” came of age in the 1920s and ’30s. They included Elliot Cohen, Sidney Hook, Philip Rahv, Lionel Trilling, Meyer Schapiro, William Phillips, Hannah Arendt, and Diana Trilling. Their “younger brothers,” came of age a little later “in the mid to late 1930s”: Alfred Kazin, Richard Hofstadter, Saul Bellow, Delmore Schwartz, Bernard Malamud, Harold Rosenberg, Clement Greenberg, Lionel Abel, Paul Goodman, and Isaac Rosenfeld. Its second generation emerged in the late 1930s and early 1940s and included Daniel Bell, Irving Howe, Leslie Fiedler, Robert Warshow, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Irving Kristol, Melvin Lasky, Nathan Glazer, Seymour Martin Lipset, and David Bazelon. Their “younger brothers” joined in the late 1940s and early 1950s and included Norman Podhoretz, Steven Marcus, Robert Brustein, Midge Decter, Jason Epstein, Robert Silvers, Susan Sontag, Theodore Solotaroff, Norman Mailer, and Philip Roth. Bell also listed “gentile cousins,” figures like Fred Dupee, Dwight Macdonald, Mary McCarthy, Elizabeth Hardwick, William Barrett, and C. Wright Mills, and “European relatives,” like Nicola Chiaromonte.⁶⁵

Bell and Podhoretz generally agreed about who were members of the group, despite minor discrepancies. Significantly, both chose male categories to describe them: “founding fathers” and “younger brothers.” Both named only a of handful women. Podhoretz mentioned Mary McCarthy, Elizabeth Hardwick, Hannah Arendt, and Susan Sontag. Bell added Diana Trilling, Gertrude Himmelfarb, and Midge Decter. Diana Trilling was offended that Podhoretz did not mention her as part of the “family” in *Making It*. “For reasons I do not know and can only surmise,” she told Norman Mailer, “he never mentions me as a member. The several times

Box 1. *The New York Jewish Intellectuals* c. 1935–c. 1965

The Elders: coming of age in the late 1920s and early 1930s

Elliot Cohen	Lionel Trilling	Hannah Arendt*
Sidney Hook	Meyer Schapiro	Diana Trilling
Philip Rahv	William Phillips	
Gentile Cousins:	Max Eastman	Fred Dupee
	Edmund Wilson	Dwight Macdonald
	Reinhold Niebuhr	James T. Farrell
The “Other Synagogue”:	Michael Gold	Joseph Freeman
Magazines: <i>Menorah Journal</i> , <i>The New Masses</i> , <i>Partisan Review</i>		

The Younger Brothers: coming of age in the mid and late 1930s

Alfred Kazin	Harold Rosenberg	
Richard Hofstadter	Clement Greenberg	
Saul Bellow**	Lionel Abel	
Delmore Schwartz	Paul Goodman	
Bernard Malamud	Isaac Rosenfeld	
European Relatives:	Nicola Chiaromonte	George Lichtheim
Gentile Cousins:	Mary McCarthy	William Barrett
	Elizabeth Hardwick	Richard Chase
	James Baldwin	Ralph Ellison
	Arthur Schlesinger Jr.	
Magazines: <i>The Nation</i> , <i>The New Republic</i> , <i>Partisan Review</i> , <i>Commentary</i> , <i>Politics</i>		

The Second Generation: coming of age in the late 1930s and early 1940s

Daniel Bell	Irving Kristol	
Irving Howe	Melvin Lasky	
Leslie Fiedler**	Nathan Glazer	
Robert Warshow	S. M. Lipset**	
Gertrude Himmelfarb	David Bazelon	
Gentile Cousins:	Murray Kempton	C. Wright Mills
Magazines: <i>Commentary</i> , <i>Partisan Review</i> , <i>Encounter</i> , ** <i>The New Leader</i> , <i>Dissent</i> , <i>The Public Interest</i>		

Continued on next page

Box 1. (*continued*)

The Younger Brothers: coming of age in the late 1940s and early 1950s

Norman Podhoretz	Robert Silvers	
Steven Marcus	Susan Sontag	
Robert Brustein	Theodore Solotaroff	
Midge Decter	Norman Mailer	
Jason Epstein	Philip Roth	
Gentile Cousins:	Michael Harrington	“The Paris Review”†

Magazines: *Commentary*, *Partisan Review*, *New York Review of Books*

The European Intelligentsia

Raymond Aron	David Rousset
Arthur Koestler	Jean-Paul Sartre
Ignazio Silone	Albert Camus
George Orwell	Simone de Beauvoir
Manes Sperber	

The English Intelligentsia

Isaiah Berlin	Noel Annan
Stuart Hampshire	John Gross
Stephen Spender	Jonathan Miller

Institutional Attachments

Columbia University
Congress for Cultural Freedom

Influentials—at a distance

T. S. Eliot	Robert Lowell	Edward Shils
W. H. Auden	James Agee	

The New York Jewish Intellectuals (by field of interest)

Art: Meyer Schapiro, Clement Greenberg, Harold Rosenberg

Philosophy: Sidney Hook, Hannah Arendt (Ernest Nagel)

Literary Criticism: Lionel Trilling, Philip Rahv, Alfred Kazin,
Irving Howe, Leslie Fiedler, Paul Goodman, Lionel Abel, Steven

Marcus, Robert Warshow, Robert Brustein, Susan Sontag,
Diana Trilling

Intellectual Journalism: Elliot Cohen, William Phillips, Irving Kristol,
Melvin Lasky, Robert Silvers, Norman Podhoretz, Jason Epstein,
Theodore Solotaroff, Midge Decter

Poetry: Delmore Schwartz

Fiction: Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, Norman Mailer,
Isaac Rosenfeld, Philip Roth (Harvey Swados)

Theology: (Will Herberg) (Emil Fackenheim) (Jacob Taubes)
(Arthur Cohen)

Sociology: Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer, S. M. Lipset (Philip Selznick)
(Edward Shils) (Lewis Coser)

History: Richard Hofstadter, Gertrude Himmelfarb

Economics: (Robert Heilbroner) (Robert Lekachman)

* Arrived later, yet became one of the elders.

** Outside New York but had status as members.

† The social and intellectual coterie that included George Plimpton and William Styron.

Note: Parentheses indicate individuals who were close enough at times to be regarded as “cousins.”

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I am mentioned in the book I appear as Lionel's on-the-scene wife, not as a writer.”⁶⁶ While Diana Trilling had a reputation for being easily offended—she was a “pot of resentment,” one person who knew her told me—she was nonetheless perceptive about the treatment of women in this milieu.⁶⁷

A total of seven women were considered full-fledged New York intellectuals. Five of the seven were romantically linked to men in the group. McCarthy had been involved with Philip Rahv when he relaunched *Partisan Review* in 1937. Hardwick, too, was rumored to have had an affair with Rahv. She went on to marry the poet Robert Lowell in 1949. Diana Trilling, Gertrude Himmelfarb, and Midge Decter were married to men in the group. Diana married Lionel Trilling in 1929; Himmelfarb married Irving Kristol in 1942; and Podhoretz and Decter wed in 1956. Arendt and Sontag were the exceptions. Neither were romantically linked with any New York intellectual. But both were viewed as attractive and alluring, qualifications Jason Epstein suggested were essential for its women members.

All of these women were brilliant. Yet they were not always treated as intellectual equals. Moreover, to be part of this milieu, they too performed secular Jewish masculinity.⁶⁸ They wrote like men. They would not have put it this way. They thought of themselves as just writers. But they were often scorned and seen as more acerbic than their male counterparts in the public realm *because* they had to perform the combative masculine identity that was “Jewish intellectual.”

Indeed, nothing was more insulting to these women than to be dismissed as mere “lady” writers. That term connoted superficiality and frivolity. Yet that is exactly the term Podhoretz used when he discussed women in the group. Susan Sontag became the group’s “Dark Lady of American Letters” in the 1960s, Podhoretz wrote, “a position that had originally been carved out by Mary McCarthy in the thirties and forties.” McCarthy, Podhoretz said, had “been promoted to the more dignified status of *Grande Dame* as a reward for her long years of brilliant service.”⁶⁹ But the moniker “lady,” as Podhoretz knew, was a backhanded compliment. And “dark” suggested something sinister and dangerous. These women were “dark” because they seemingly embodied an intellectual masculinity. The notion that only one woman could shine at a time also betrayed the group’s sexism. No such standard existed for its men.

Midge Decter took issue with Diana Trilling’s suggestion that the New York intellectuals did not take women seriously. Decter argued that its women were “members in absolutely good, powerful standing . . . What? Hannah Arendt? Are you kidding? She was all but worshipped. And Mary [McCarthy] was held to be infinitely more brilliant than she was, in fact. I mean—the women were part of the crowd.” But she also acknowledged that women needed to behave differently. They needed to “be pleasant. If possible—amusing. If possible—flirtatious. If possible—earnest,” and not be like Diana Trilling by going “in there with fists pumping.”⁷⁰ Decter was a neo-conservative, and her views on gender roles reflected a social conservatism that she had embraced. But Decter’s own career suggests that she was just as combative as any New York intellectual. One’s fists had to pump; one had to “write like a man” to be considered an intellectual among this group.

But there were in fact two types of women in this milieu: those who got credit for being intellectuals and those who did not. Other women married to figures in this group were writers but were not recognized as such. Instead, they were viewed as mere wives. Ann Birstein, Alfred Kazin’s wife from 1952 until their divorce in 1982 (Kazin had four wives in total), is a case in point. A novelist and essayist who published six books while married to Kazin, Birstein was not included in this group.⁷¹ In her 2003 memoir,

What I Saw at the Fair, she chronicled her difficult marriage to Kazin, including charges of emotional and physical abuse. She said that among the Jewish “West Side” intellectuals, “wives didn’t figure at all, neither did any women in terms of thinkers on their own.” Men in the group, she wrote, “feared losing their manhood to literary women.” That is why so many often divorced or ended up with “dim wives” who would support them financially.⁷²

Alfred Kazin’s younger sister, Pearl Kazin Bell, is another example. She was married to Daniel Bell and was thus related to not one but two titans in this group. In the 1940s and ’50s she worked at various magazines—as a researcher at *Time*, as a literary editor at *Harper’s Bazaar*, and as a copy-editor at the *New Yorker*. She was also a gifted writer. She “really plunged into the literary world on her own,” her son, historian David A. Bell, told me. In 1955 she published her first story in the *New Yorker*. After being hired as a copyeditor, she wrote for the magazine’s then unsigned “Talk of the Town” section. Her more established brother, Alfred Kazin, had little to do with her career. “He would introduce her to people, and she appreciated that,” David Bell said, “but he was certainly not interested in promoting her career really in any sense or helping her. She made her own way.”⁷³

Pearl Kazin and Daniel Bell traveled in the same literary circles and likely met in the late 1940s or early 1950s. But both were then involved with other people. Pearl had a passionate affair with the Welsh writer Dylan Thomas in 1950–51. In 1952 she married the photographer Victor Kraft. The marriage lasted only a few months, since he “was also gay so it wasn’t the best match.”⁷⁴ Bell, meanwhile, was married twice before he settled down with Kazin.⁷⁵ He was quite a “womanizer” in the six years between his divorce and his marriage to Pearl. The two casually dated in 1955–56 but broke things off when Bell departed for Europe to work for the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF). They got back together in late 1959 or early 1960 and married in December 1960. Their only son was born the following year, when Pearl was thirty-nine years old. Bell also had a daughter from a previous marriage.⁷⁶

Pearl quit working as a copyeditor at the *New Yorker* after she married Daniel Bell. In 1960 he published *The End of Ideology*, his magisterial work of social theory that predicted the end of political ideologies like Marxist socialism. In 1995 the *Times Literary Supplement* called it one of the “100 most influential non-fiction books published since World War II.”⁷⁷ Over the next fifteen years, Daniel’s public profile exploded. In addition to numerous articles, he published *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* in 1973 and *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* in 1976. In

1965 he cofounded the magazine the *Public Interest*, with Irving Kristol. In these years Pearl focused on raising their son. “I’m sure my father never changed a diaper,” David Bell said. That made him little different from most men of his generation. But “I can’t recall [a lot] of times when she was working that he was taking care of me.”⁷⁸

In 1970 Pearl started writing regular reviews of fiction for the *New Leader*. She was one of two contributors to its monthly “Writers on Writing” column. She left the *New Leader* in 1977 after Podhoretz asked her to review fiction regularly for *Commentary*.⁷⁹ Both were publications, David Bell told me, where “my father and uncle, Alfred Kazin, had long-standing connections.” But even in these later years her husband’s career came first. Daniel Bell struggled with various ailments, including “leg trouble” and “an annual siege of back trouble.” He was in and out of the hospital and in bed for weeks. “It is impossible for me to read without interruption, much less write,” she told *New Leader* editor Myron “Mike” Kolatch, in the summer of 1976.⁸⁰ A few months later she confided to the poet Stanley Burnshaw that, “through all of this, I went on with my reviewing, but Dan was all but helpless so much of the time that I could only work late at night, when he had finally been able to fall asleep.” Pearl wrote that she “was more exhausted than I ever can remember being.”⁸¹

Pearl also labored for years over a novel that she never published. In 1982 she told Burnshaw she was “in the final stretch” of her novel and hoped to “have the first few chapters rewritten” to send to an agent. But her husband came first. “Dan’s eye problems are not as severe as they were a year ago,” she told Burnshaw. “But when things go wrong—as did yesterday, when he discovered that both lenses were cracked and unusable—I have to drop everything to help Dan through the day.” Daniel would also get depressed when he could not write.⁸² The physical and mental ailments blurred.⁸³ Daniel was always supportive of Pearl’s writing career, but his needs came first.

Pearl also struggled to find her voice as a writer. Being Daniel Bell’s wife but also Alfred Kazin’s sister likely had something to do with her difficulties writing. She was seven years younger than Alfred. “By the time she went to college, he was already a very well-established figure, so she was always under his shadow,” David Bell told me. “Clearly, she resented that, and she resented, I think, that he got all the attention, and that he was really not very interested in her.”⁸⁴

Daniel Bell did not include his own wife in his genealogy of New York intellectuals. Perhaps she did not consider herself part of the group since she struggled as a writer. Alfred Kazin, meanwhile, scarcely mentioned



FIGURE 1. Pearl and Alfred Kazin. Courtesy of David A. Bell.

his sister in any of his three famous memoirs: *A Walker in the City* (1951); *Starting Out in the Thirties* (1965); and *New York Jew* (1978). It was as if she didn't exist—not as a sister or as a writer who traveled in the same literary circles.⁸⁵

Diana Trilling and Pearl Bell were friends, and Trilling noticed her absence in discussions of the New York intellectuals. In the late 1970s Trilling conducted a series of interviews with figures in the group because she wanted to record their history for posterity and future use by historians. Speaking to Irving Howe, she wondered about “the fate of people like Pearl Bell.” She told Howe she had been talking to Dwight Macdonald, who asked her if she ever read Pearl's essays. “I said yes, with pleasure,

she was a very good reviewer” Macdonald then inquired, “‘Why isn’t she being celebrated the way you were when you started to review?’ This is very important,” Trilling told Howe. But the conversation shifted gears and the subject was dropped.⁸⁶

Scholars have also conjectured that some of these women played crucial but unrecognized roles editing their husbands’ work. Historian Lila Corwin Berman has written about how the historian Oscar Handlin, who circled this milieu, was aided by his wife, Mary Flugin Handlin, a “trained social scientist with a master’s degree from Columbia.” One of Handlin’s early doctoral students recalled “noticing her sitting in the back at Handlin’s lectures feverishly taking notes. He later learned that she used those notes to help write some of her husband’s books, filling in and revising where necessary. Occasionally listed as a coauthor,” writes Berman, “Mary Handlin never received the public recognition or respect her husband did. This was not the least unique to their situation.”⁸⁷ Recently, a debate about mid-century intellectuals’ and the role of their wives in their work took place on the Society for U.S. Intellectual History blog. In a post about Richard Hofstadter and his wife, Beatrice Hofstadter, scholars wondered whether Beatrice edited her husband’s writings. One emeritus historian who knew the couple argued that Beatrice was “a highly skilled editor” who undoubtedly read and commented on her husband’s work. But “so did a lot of other people, including especially his colleagues and grad students.” He argued that “there is a major difference between author and editor.” Others felt her contributions were rendered invisible, aside for a brief mention in the acknowledgments of one of his books.⁸⁸ Perhaps the archives could resolve the issue. But this sort of research might prove inconclusive. Diana Trilling claimed that her contributions to Lionel’s writings were destroyed. After he died, she was furious to see he had thrown away the drafts she wrote on. She was sure he wanted to block future scholars from knowing how much she helped him. It is possible other intellectuals did the same.⁸⁹



This book is about the men and the women New York intellectuals and their interaction with and performance of secular Jewish masculinity. *Write Like a Man* explores this history using two different methodological approaches. Chapters 1, 3, and 5 are chronological and thematic. They focus on particularly important eras in the evolution of the group’s ideology of secular Jewish masculinity. Chapters 2, 4, 6, and 7 focus on individuals—two men and two women—as case studies for how secular

Jewish masculinity molded those on the left and right of the political spectrum. Diana Trilling, the subject of chapter 2, and Irving Howe, the subject of chapter 4, exemplified those who remained on the left-liberal continuum. Chapters 6 and 7 focus on Midge Decter and Norman Podhoretz, examining their shift rightward and the development of neoconservatism.⁹⁰ Other New York intellectuals appear throughout these chapters, as do other writers who engaged with them but fell outside of their purview—Betty Friedan, Kate Millett, and James Baldwin, for example. Chapters also loop back in time and analyze how major events, such as World War II and the Holocaust, shaped the ways in which these intellectuals conceived of Jewish masculinity.

Write Like a Man uncovers the many ways masculinity was a linchpin for mid- to late twentieth-century American Jewish politics. It also reveals the ways in which this ideology of secular Jewish masculinity extended beyond the confines of this milieu to shape American intellectual and political life more broadly.

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