PRODIGAL SONS: The New York Intellectuals and Their World
by Alexander Bloom
Oxford, 1986
461 pp. $24.95

THE LYRICAL LEFT: Randolph Bourne, Alfred Stieglitz, and the Origins of Cultural Radicalism in America
by Edward Abrahams
Univ. of Va., 1986
265 pp. $20

In Europe the separation of literary intellectuals from national politics seems not nearly so evident as it does in the United States. Some of the biggest monuments and broadest boulevards in European cities honor writers, poets, and artists. Only a winding river or a few stops on the busline separate a capital's literary quarters from its parliament buildings. The critic and the politician exchange greetings at the café or at the opera. A conflict between them can become a national dialogue. No one would dream of calling Raymond Aron or Jean-Paul Sartre a "Paris intellectual." Intellectual life is a national resource.

By contrast, the distance between the cultures of literary New York and political Washington can seem as great as the New Jersey Turnpike is long. In his splendidly detailed narrative, Alexander Bloom, a professor of history at Wheaton College, adds testimony to the immense gap between the avant-garde elitism of one city and the pragmatic populism of the other. The comparison is not a part of his purpose. Anti-Communism is the axis of Bloom's history; it is also the base of the only apparent axis that his "New York intellectuals" and political Washingtonians ever managed to form.

But what does the phrase mean—"New York intellectuals?" At best, it is a slightly ironic self-description, as suggested in Irving Howe's famous essay by the same name. At worst, as everyone who does not live in New York knows, "New York intellectual" serves as a code phrase for New York *Jewish* intellectual.

The sociology of this stereotype and the origins of this peculiar usage have never been as fully illuminated as in Dr. Bloom's study. He has written the best available history of a preeminent group of Jewish writers making their way out of the constraints of the immigrant community, through the social radicalism of the Great Depression. By the sheer brilliance of their writing they not only broke through walls of prejudice but, by the late 1930s, began to reshape the literary and artistic canons of New York and, to some degree, of the whole nation.

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Within a decade and a half after World War II, it would hardly be possible to imagine American literary culture in the exclusion of Lionel Trilling, Alfred Kazin, Phillip Rahv, or Saul Bellow; art criticism without Meyer Schapiro, Harold Rosenberg, or Clement Greenberg; social criticism without Daniel Bell or Nathan Glazer; historical studies in the United States without Richard Hofstadter.

Yet it is not the substance of their professional careers that primarily interests Bloom; nor does he uncover striking similarities in their intellec-

tual contributions. (Had he ventured further into these areas, this might have been the definitive study of this generation of Jewish thinkers.) What interests the author most is the ideological core of this group, the anti-Communism that formed the magnetic field of their relationships and that brought most of them together on the pages of ***Partisan Review***, ***Commentary***, and ***Encounter***, and in the Congress for Cultural Freedom.

Of course, most of these men had been radicals in their youth. Whether Socialists or Communists, whether pro-Trotsky or pro-Stalin, they had all tended, at least up until the late 1930s, to interpret the world in Marxist terms. As Jews (for the most part), they had special reasons for being drawn to radical politics. On one hand, Bloom notes, the "cosmopolitan philosophy of radical causes offered the hope of a world where being Jewish would not make any difference." On the other, radicalism was an assertion of their connection with the marginal ghetto world of their parents. Even after they abandoned Marxism, the "intensity and fervor" (as Irving Howe described it) of their radicalism has continued to characterize their intellectual style.

Though he avoids zooming in on all the factional and frequently petty disputes that divided them, Bloom moves cautiously and critically along the complex history of their hatred of Stalinism and of its American followers. Not always united about how to combat the threat, none doubted its gravity. In this they of course differed from a significant group of other New York intellectuals, many of them of similar ethnic origins. Precisely why that was so, how anti-Communism became a virtual obsession among one group of Jewish intellectuals while Stalinism commanded the prolonged loyalty of others remains something of a puzzle. But one virtue of this book is that it does not offer facile solutions.

If Bloom's chronicle is another version of the American success story, Edward Abrahams's double biography of writer Randolph Bourne and photographer Alfred Stieglitz is about ideals not lost but still unfulfilled.

The short and poignant life of Randolph Bourne (1886–1918), our best-known critic of war and the warfare state, is here finally told with the appropriate mixture of passion and critical scholarship. One of the leaders of the cultural rebellion in Greenwich Village before World War I, Bourne was not, in the current usage of such terms, a liberal, a conservative, an anarchist, or a Marxist. He counted himself an ***intellectual***, a status he prized for its connotation of independence from all forms of political or social control; a term that therefore required no qualifying adjectives.

As contributing editor of the infant ***New Republic*** and of the short-lived ***Seven Arts***, Bourne managed to demonstrate his political immiscibility in a variety of ways, most famously by his scourging criticism of Woodrow Wilson's war policies. About this elusive and, as some thought, slightly sinister figure (he was hunchbacked and his face had been disfigured at birth), Abrahams has uncovered new sources of information. These make it possible for him to describe and to analyze Bourne's complex political views and his tortured personal relationships, above all with women.

An equally persuasive and textured portait of Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946) is drawn in the second half of this volume. The author has sure command of the world of modernist art over which Stieglitz ruled in America during the decade before and the decade after World War I. In addition, Abrahams, a historian of wide-ranging talents, manages to read Stieglitz's own photographs as texts illuminating the mind of this great artist and social critic. In his own work, as in that of the artists he exhibited, Stieglitz sought to establish photography as a new medium of self-expression. As the owner of the famous Manhattan gallery, "291," and as editor of *Camera Work*, perhaps the finest photography journal ever published, Stieglitz introduced Americans to the most advanced art of the day.

As representative figures of the "lyrical left," Bourne and Stieglitz emerge as spokesmen of the "inviolable autonomy of the self" in an age of ever-increasing political and social conformity. Through them, the author reminds his readers that, among other things, there were intellectuals in New York before there were "New York intellectuals." And also that there has existed in New York a tradition of intellectual radicalism that has never been trimmed to suit the requirements of mere ideology.

—Carl Resek '86

NEW TITLES

History

THE FOREIGN POLICY OF SAUDI ARABIA: The Formative Years, 1902–1918
by Jacob Goldberg
Harvard, 1986
231 pp. $22.50

Saudi Arabia moves in ways strange to most Middle Eastern nations. Wary of "fraternal" Arab alliances, comfortable in their dealings with Western states, the Saudis appear remarkably free of ideological fervor. Goldberg, a professor at Tel Aviv University, traces the nation's pragmatic foreign policy to the rise of the third Saudi dynasty during the first two decades of the 20th century.

In 1902, when Ibn Saud (1880?–1953), heir to the Saudi throne, returned from exile and drove the rival Rashidi dynasty from Riyadh, observers (particularly the Ottoman overlords) expected a revival of Wahhabism. A fundamentalist brand of