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**RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY**


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*Influential  
Intellectuals*

"New York Intellectuals—Up From Revolution" by Nathan Glazer, in *The New York Times Book Review* (Feb. 26, 1984), P.O. Box 508, Hackensack, N.J. 07602.

From the 1930s to the 1950s, a small band of intellectuals in New York City hotly debated questions that nobody else cared about in obscure magazines that nobody else read. Today, some of those writers, while not household names, informally advise presidents and enjoy the status of minor media celebrities.

Glazer, a Harvard sociologist, is an alumnus of the New York world populated by the likes of philosopher William Barrett, novelist Mary McCarthy, and literary critic Irving Howe. He explains what happened.

Revolutionary eras often spawn intellectuals (not academics but literary folk with a political bent), and the Great Depression appeared to be such a time. The New Yorkers avidly pursued not the politics of who gets what, Glazer notes, but the politics of theory (e.g., was Marxism or Leninism to blame for the end of democracy in the Soviet Union?).

Brilliant though they were, these intellectuals would have soon faded into obscurity, says Glazer, except for two accidents of history.

First, the Cold War began after World War II. "Their experiences, right there in New York . . . struggling [with American Communists] over control of magazines or unions or conferences . . . had taught them how different Communists, and Communism, were," says Glazer. As liberals in good standing, they also represented a "respectable" anti-communist alternative to McCarthyism. (In 1952, Henry Kissinger, then a Harvard graduate student, invited William Barrett to visit the school to serve as living proof of this possibility.)

The second accident was the postwar growth of higher education and the acceptance of modernist writers whom the New Yorkers had long championed—Joyce, Kafka, Proust. Suddenly, old literary essays from the *Partisan Review* were campus classics. By the late 1960s, most of the New Yorkers had won professorships around the country.

That ended New York's virtual monopoly on intellectuals. In any event, says Glazer, the old New York intellectual style of making bold judgments "without knowing quite enough" was doomed. Across the land, activist intellectuals are more specialized and less preoccupied with theory, but no less passionate about their politics.

*Longevity, Yes*

"When We Are Old" by Sir Peter Medawar, in *The Atlantic* (Mar. 1984), Box 2547, Boulder, Colo. 80322.

As modern medicine makes ever-longer human lives possible, doubts about longevity's allure have grown. Medawar, the 1960 recipient of the Nobel Prize in medicine, says the skeptics have it all wrong.

The possibility of a dramatic breakthrough makes research seem, to