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**Theodore Patrick Abraham Sweeting**

**Columbia 1968: The New York Intellectuals' Faculty Response to the  
Student Sit-ins**

**Dissertation submitted in partial requirement for the Degree of MA. in  
American Studies, University of Nottingham, 2009.**

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation seeks to extrapolate the broader political and intellectual implications of the New York Intellectuals' responses to the incidents of student protest that occurred on the Columbia University campus in 1968. Firstly three groups who were involved in the incidents are set up; the students, the faculty and the administration. By exploring how their actions influenced the student strikes and resulting media frenzy, the dissertation seeks to demonstrate three distinct political positions which current academia places these factions in. By analysing the New York Intellectuals' direct responses to the incidents, focusing primarily on the members of the intellectual cadre who were themselves faculty members at Columbia, it then seeks to analyse their political and intellectual inclinations on a subject that was very close to home, both literally and figuratively. The broader personal, political and intellectual opinions of the figures are then drawn out in order to illuminate any shared ground or ruptures in the New York Intellectual group, at a time traditionally seen as heralding the end of their cohesive unit, the end of the liberal consensus and sometimes a beginning of neo-conservative political thought.

**19684 Words**

## Section One: Introduction

The events that occurred at Columbia in April and May of 1968, incidents of student protest and dissent surrounding the seizure of academic buildings between April 23<sup>rd</sup> and April 30<sup>th</sup>, the students' subsequent forceful removal by police, and the resulting student strike in May, have been described as "among the most significant in the history of higher education in the United States."<sup>1</sup> Multiple volumes of scholarship have been written on the episode alone, and it is mentioned in almost any history of the New Left, not to mention countless volumes on the sixties.<sup>2</sup> It was directly referenced by Nixon in a campaign appearance on May 15<sup>th</sup> 1968 in a speech that encapsulates some of the fears regarding Columbia at the time:

"Columbia is "the first major skirmish in a revolutionary struggle to seize the universities of this country and transform them into sanctuaries for radicals and vehicles for revolutionary political and social goals"... "if student violence is either rewarded or goes unpunished, then the administration of Columbia University will have guaranteed a new crisis on its own campus and invited student coups on other campuses all over this country"... "A university is a community of scholars seeking truth, it is a place where reason reigns and the right of dissent is safeguarded and cherished. Force and coercion are wholly alien to the community and those who employ it have no place there"... "Academic freedom dictates that those engaged in the pursuit of knowledge and truth, resist the encroachments of hotheads who assume they know all."<sup>3</sup>

Like many observers Nixon granted the protestors symbolic resonance across the whole of American higher education, and in mentioning it in one of his presidential campaign speeches he demonstrated the importance with which the events were

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<sup>1</sup> Jerry L. Avorn. *University in Revolt*. London (Macdonald, 1968). IX.

<sup>2</sup> Books specifically on the events include Jerry L. Avorn *The University in Revolt*; Roger Kahn *The Battle For Morningside Heights*. New York (William Morrow and Company, 1970); James Simon Kunen. *The Strawberry Statement*. London (Wiley-Blackwell, 1995); Joanne Grant. *Confrontation on Campus – the Columbia Pattern for the New Protest*. New York (Signet Books, 1969). On top of these is the plethora of articles that circulated amongst all levels of the national press following the events.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Nixon. May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1968. Quoted in Donald Janson, 'Nixon Bids Columbia Oust 'Anarchic Students''. *The New York Times*, May 16<sup>th</sup> 1968. 22.

viewed at the time. The quotation is also a concise summary of the relevant issues; revolutionary politics on campus, the need for punishment and the possibility of a broader crisis developing from a lack thereof, and a development of theories about how universities should work as a result of the strikes, that were viewed in terms of an intergenerational conflict, or a fear of radicalised youth. Whilst a plethora of work exists on the New Left and on the Columbia incident, one relatively overlooked element is how members of the New York Intellectuals, previously a vanguard of the Old Left, viewed and reacted to the unfolding events. Many among their ranks, such as Lionel and Diana Trilling, F.W Dupee, Daniel Bell and Richard Hofstadter, taught at Columbia or lived on campus, at the time of the protests. The majority of the responses from the New York Intellectuals come from these implicated respondents, who, because of their university roles had to carefully consider what they wrote, and a university line to some extent. As intellectuals with a vested interest in the situation this put them in a fairly unique position to comment on the incidents, an exploration of which holds potential for uncovering the relationships between the Old and New Left, and what effect, if any, the events had on the political leanings of the older generation. What comes out of their debate on the Columbia incidents forms an informative case study on the issues surrounding one aspect of intellectual history at the close of the sixties, a time when the New York Intellectuals were undergoing group fractures and for some, a transition into neoconservative thought.

By exploring the nuanced opinions regarding the incidents throughout key journals for which the New York Intellectuals wrote, including *Commentary*, *The Public Interest*, *Partisan Review*, *The New York Review of Books* and *Dissent* it is possible to draw out significant similarities, and differences in the reaction to the New Left and the political debates that emerged from this issue. These range from outraged highly oppositional stances through to apathy, and even varied support from some circles. As with Nixon, the responses generally give the uprisings greater

cultural resonance than a superficial glance would suggest, and they form the basis for debates and arguments on the fracturing of the liberal consensus towards the end of the 60s. The responses from the New York Intellectuals often deals with balancing the different factions (a conservative administration, a radical student body and a liberal faculty) with the differing degrees of sympathy and disdain for these groups, often betraying their own political opinion. Whilst historians such as John P. Diggins have to some extent explored the interaction between the New and Old left, it remains difficult to find an unbiased or in-depth case study of this important interchange. In regards to their relationship Diggins suggests that

When the Old Left lost its belief that existing historical reality could be radically transformed, it lost its capacity for negation. To call this behaviour of the Old Left “cop-out” is uncharitable and misleading as to describe the activities of the New Left as a “nihilistic ego-trip” – epithets often hurled across the generational barricades... What divided these two radical generations was an implicit debate involving two ponderous questions: What is possible? And what is real? ... Thus the institutions that the ex-radicals embraced as real represented to the younger radicals the very system that was rejected as unreal because of its alleged irrationality and immorality.<sup>4</sup>

Diggins’ argument affirms many of the set notions regarding their supposed relationship, the main issues being generational discord and the interaction between radicals and ex-radicals. Using Columbia as a specific example rather than making broader generalisations, allows for a demonstration of divergent opinions that elements of the Old Left held on the new standard bearers of radicalism of the time, illuminating the transitional processes of political realignment and demonstrating nuanced political opinions that perhaps cannot be subsumed under group titles.

Mark Gerson’s *The Neoconservative Vision* uses interactions between the New York Intellectuals and the New Left in order to highlight the former’s supposed

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<sup>4</sup> John P. Diggins. *The American Left in the Twentieth Century*. New York, Chicago et al (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich inc., 1973). 18.

transition into neo-conservatism. One standard definition of neo-conservatism states that

This highly charged label indicates the worldview or ideological stance of conservatives who were once liberals, but who turned to the right during the late 1960s and early 1970s. From the start, neo-conservatism has been largely a reactive phenomenon, defining its own positions in relation to the leftward drift of American Liberalism – within the Democratic Party, the news media, the universities, and the cultural and literary worlds.<sup>5</sup>

Clashes with the New Left in instances such as Columbia match this definition perfectly; a reaction against a radical student body with a liberal faculty faction in a late 60s setting, involving an intellectual community widely seen as broadly liberal prior to these engagements.

Whilst Gerson's book overall has a clearly pro-neoconservative agenda, it is useful in highlighting the importance of the interplay between the New York Intellectuals and the New Left with neo-conservatism as one possible outcome of this. Gerson suggests that opposition to 60s radicals was "self explanatory; the neoconservative defence of American society was launched in response to the student radicalism and tepid reaction from the liberal faculty."<sup>6</sup> The neoconservative response was as "liberal critics of liberalism" as much as liberalism interacting with radicalism.<sup>7</sup> Therefore despite its many shortcomings Gerson's text serves to highlight one of the key contexts; that it was as much the liberal response to the counterculture, or "liberal intellectuals...entranced by the causes of radical students," as the counterculture itself that inspired many among the New York Intellectuals to

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<sup>5</sup> Mathew Berke. 'Neoconservatism.' *A Companion to American Thought*. Richard Wightman Fox and James T. Kloppenberg Eds. Oxford and Cambridge (Mass.) (Blackwell, 1995). 486.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Gerson. *The Neoconservative Vision From Cold War to the Culture Wars*. Lanham, New York and Oxford (Madison Books, 1997). 23.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 20.a



shift in various political directions.<sup>8</sup> For Gerson the most important of these directions was certainly neo-conservatism. He suggests that debates on the New Left, amongst other things, betokened the end of the old liberal anti-communist consensus and New York Intellectual circle, rupturing along lines such as *Commentary* vs. *The New York Review of Books*.<sup>9</sup> He is not the only one to note this rift resulting from the debates on the New Left. Alexander Bloom also discusses splits along the lines of *Commentary* and the *New York Review of Books*, with Trilling's article in *Commentary* "expressing the view of the majority of the New Yorkers" and Dupee's more radical piece in the *New York Review of Books* a minority position (both of which will be explored in depth later).<sup>10</sup> Dupee, along with a few others, saw the positive aspects and thus "earned the enmity of their former intellectual comrades," with the debates resulting in the end of "working relationships and friendships."<sup>11</sup> Bloom's summary of the debate provides an insightful take on the interactions; "The problems centred on an unresolved conflict. The older ex-radicals wanted the younger radicals to avoid the mistakes of their radical past which meant to come see the world as ex-radicals did, which meant to be no longer radical."<sup>12</sup> Yet in so framing the debates, Bloom also privileges the anti-New Left side of the New York Intellectuals' reactions. Despite some flaws, Bloom and Gerson clearly identify some of what was at stake in the debates on the New Left that centred on incidents such as Columbia.

Whilst viewing a neoconservative shift can be a reductive analysis of the New York Intellectual's political evolution, it does serve to highlight well the other

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 22, 103.

<sup>9</sup> The subchapter 'The Response to Radical Chic' explores the line of *Commentary* vs. *New York Review of Books*. Ibid. 118-122.

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Bloom. *Prodigal Sons – The New York Intellectuals and their World*. New York and Oxford (Oxford University Press, 1986). 344-345.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 347-350.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 353.

important political context at this time; the increasing political divide in the group that was one symptom of the breakdown in the liberal consensus, to which many the New York Intellectuals had acquiesced. There is no doubt that in the early stages of their intellectual careers the majority of the New York Intellectuals were radical in their thinking. Douglass Tallack suggests that in the 1930s they “articulated a very precise and important position. To be opposed to the totalitarianism of Stalinist bureaucracy... and to be a supporter of Trotsky... was to be a radical and not a reactionary.”<sup>13</sup> Theirs was a new breed of radicalism, “Rahv and Phillips were among the first of their generation to argue radicalism could not originate with ‘the people’” but was instead led from an avant-garde intelligencia.<sup>14</sup> This avant-garde anti reactionary radicalism was a reasoned intellectual and political world, instead of working class grass root politics. Nevertheless this position changed as the decades drew on. Tallack identifies the shift as early as 1939, which he sees as “a watershed between radicalism and the move towards a consensus and even neo-conservative politics of culture,” but also suggests that “the second world war was another turning point in the de-radicalisation of the intellectuals,” with a *Partisan Review* becoming the “middle-ground among intellectuals in the post-war years.”<sup>15</sup> This de-radicalisation process is a key turning point in many histories of the New York Intellectuals. Alexander Bloom borrows Norman Podhoretz’s phrase ‘Making It’ for his chapter on this change, which would suggest a positive outlook on the events, a desire to ‘make it’ into the mainstream, not remain opposed to it. Nonetheless phrases such as ‘embourgeoisement,’ which Neil Jumonville discusses as the “move into the middle class,” due to the availability of academic positions, and more readily available paid magazine work, raised questions regarding the credibility of

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<sup>13</sup> Douglass Tallack. *Twentieth Century America- The Intellectual and Cultural Context*. London and New York (Longman, 1991). 188.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 189-190.

the intellectuals and their ability to critique culture if they no longer remained in an “adversarial relationship to mainstream society.”<sup>16</sup> The *Partisan Review* 1952 symposia edition entitled ‘Our Country, Our Culture’ is widely cited as evidencing this acceptance of mainstream liberal, values which Tallack suggests posed questions as to “whether there was any longer a good reason for taking intellectual cues from Europe, when it was American Culture that had avoided the terrors of fascism and Stalinism.”<sup>17</sup> This is certainly evidenced by the symposium. The ‘editorial statement’ suggests that its aims are “to examine the apparent fact that American intellectuals now regard America and its institutions in a new way,” no longer “hostile to art and culture.”<sup>18</sup> This did not entail complete solidarity from the group; in his section in the symposium Norman Mailer takes pains to “declare straightaway” his “total disagreement with the assumptions” of the issue, suggesting that the current integration into “American reality” is in fact a negative force, as the artist and writer “often works best in opposition” to mainstream culture.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, Lionel Trilling’s statements, which end the symposium, sum up some the main themes well, suggesting that “American intellectuals have radically revised their attitude... an avowed aloofness from national feeling is no longer the first ceremonial step into the life of thought.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Neil Jumonville, Ed. *The New York Intellectuals Reader*. New York (Routledge, 2007). 6. Other descriptions of the transition include Terry Cooney’s, who describes it as a “gradual migration” from “self conscious radicalism to Cold War Liberalism.” The chapter title, “A Tolerable Place to Live” is suggestive of a middle ground, not a negative typecast of embourgeoisement, nor a celebration of American culture, but an acceptance of the political climate, suggesting that their arc was a familiar “American theme – that success in the wider world may extract its price a transformation of character.”

Terry A. Cooney. *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals – Partisan Review and Its Circle*. Madison and London (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1986). 251- 272.

<sup>17</sup> Tallack. *Twentieth Century*. 205.

<sup>18</sup> “Editorial Statement.” ‘Our Country and Our Culture.’ *Partisan Review*, Vol. 14, No.3 (May-June 1952). 282.

<sup>19</sup> Norman Mailer. ‘Our Country and Our Culture.’ 299.

<sup>20</sup> Lionel Trilling. ‘Our Country and Our Culture.’ 318. There are various different arguments for the main motors of this change. Howe’s ‘This age of Conformity’ is perhaps useful due to its

As another self styled contemporaneous take on the New York Intellectual's political transitions, evidencing similar trends to 'Our Country and Our Culture,' Irving Howe's 1968 *Commentary* article 'The New York Intellectuals' reveals the shifting political positions of the New York Intellectuals. His opening section attempts to define the New York Intellectuals as group;

They appear to have a common history, prolonged not for more than thirty years... a common focus of 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-Communist; they are, or until some time ago were, radicals; they have a fondness of ideological speculation they write literary criticisms with a strong social emphasis they revel in polemic; they strive self-consciously to be "brilliant."<sup>21</sup>

Howe's piece draws out their shared identity whilst also maintaining a degree of nuance towards their divergent paths by evidencing the different rates of transition from radicalism and anti-Communism. The piece has even been credited with creating the name the New York Intellectuals, such was the value of the article for affirming certain elements of the group.<sup>22</sup> What Howe suggests is that the "literary avant-garde and the political Left were not really comfortable partners," a demonstration of what he sees as the unsound relationship of elements that underpinned the early work of the New York Intellectuals. He continues to list the reasons for the shift towards the centre including the acceptance of capitalism, or the

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contemporaneous nature. He postulates that "In 1932 not many American intellectuals saw any hope for the revival of capitalism," instead they were "committed to a vision of the crisis of capitalism" as a "vulgarised model of the class struggle in Europe." Then "suddenly with the New Deal, the intellectuals saw fresh hope" with the two main policies of "social legislation and state intervention in economic life." Thus radicalism and the later integration were largely the results of the success of American government policy and the triumph of modern liberalism in the pre-war era. Other sources cite the tyranny of Stalinism and America's success against Nazi Germany as another reason for the death of radicalism and a reinvigorated support of American values.

Irving Howe. 'This Age of Conformity.' *Partisan Review*, Vol. 21, No.1 (January-February 1954). 8.

<sup>21</sup> Irving Howe. 'The New York Intellectuals A Chronicle and a Critique.' *Commentary*, Vol. 46, No.4 (October 1968). 29.

<sup>22</sup> Terry A. Cooney. 'Howe, Irving.' *A Companion to American Thought*. Richard Wightman Fox and James T. Kloppenberg Eds. Oxford and Cambridge (Mass.) (Blackwell, 1995). 316.

“sly workings of prosperity,” but also the “remarkable absorptiveness of modern society,” for its centre ground allowed access to such a diverse crowd.<sup>23</sup> In defence of this process, which had been labelled by some parties as “selling out,” Howe feels inclined to point out the actually “very modest” middle class lifestyle of the group. This defence, because of the context and even shame that dictates its necessity, serves perfectly to highlight their acquiescence to the liberal consensus in the 50s and 60s.

Not only a useful document of the de-radicalisation of the New York Intellectuals, Howe’s article also chronicles the climate of the late 1960s that followed on from this liberal consensus and one that makes the Columbia incidents a highly revealing case study. Towards the end of the piece Howe discusses, with the utmost disdain, the “new sensibility” (the new sensibility being the culture of the students and the New Left), his final question being whether there is “no longer available among the New York writers enough energy and coherence to make possible a sustained confrontation with the new sensibility,” a prophetic statement that aggrandises the interactions this dissertation is based upon.<sup>24</sup> What Howe is discussing is one element of the crisis in the liberal consensus that the New York Intellectual’s confrontation with the New Left demonstrates. His long and aggressive descriptions of the New Left are revealing, its level of vehemence serving to highlight the importance with which he viewed these debates. He describes the new sensibility as “impatient... breath[ing] contempt for rationality, impatience with mind, and hostility to the artifices and decorum of high culture. It despises liberal values, liberal cautions, and liberal virtues. It is bored with the past: for the past is a fink.”<sup>25</sup> His piece directly references Columbia as part of this, noting that the “new

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 31 and 41.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 51.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 47.

sensibility” screams on campuses “Up against the Wall, Motherfuckers, This is a stick up,” a direct reference to the then SDS leader Mark Rudd’s letter to the then Columbia president Greyson Kirk.<sup>26</sup> What Howe encapsulates is the transition the New York Intellectuals were undertaking through this process. The liberal consensus had been at threat throughout the 60s and the relationship with the New Left was a part of this. Their radical leftist politics opened up questions as to the ability of liberalism to defend the American culture that many of the New York Intellectuals had become increasingly comfortable with. As representatives of the intellectual mainstream of American culture the New York Intellectuals engaged in critiques of the New Left, questioning what their positions meant to the changing nature of liberalism, and the breakdown of the liberal consensus. Gerson notes a break in the New York Intellectual crowd around this period, between supporters of the radical students and nascent neoconservatives. Howe’s article is also useful for demonstrating the presence, and nature of this rift. In the subsequent issue of *Commentary* Irving Kristol takes issue with many of Howe’s statements. Kristol is more accepting of the de-radicalisation process, accepting it as a result of “greater experience of the world” and a conclusion that in retrospect he was “pleased” to reach. The discussion continues with Kristol personally attacking Howe, for his “continued attempts” to “expel” Kristol from the political left, with Howe responding in a similarly aggressive manner.<sup>27</sup> This exchange perfectly in highlights the fissure that Gerson and Bloom both see as a result of debates on the New Left, but is also useful for demonstrating that the conclusions reached are far more diverse than neoconservative or not; at the end of the altercation Howe affirms his socialism whilst Kristol is perfectly at ease in his de-radicalised home, yet both denounce the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 48.

<sup>27</sup> Irving Howe and Irving Kristol. ‘The New York Intellectuals.’ *Commentary*, Vol.47, No.1 (January 1969) 12-14.

New Left. What a case study like Columbia allows is a nuanced look at how the New York Intellectuals reacted to a perceived threat to the liberal hegemony, and what political changes they underwent due to the interaction of these ex-radicals with the new youthful radical cadre.

An interesting element to the context of the liberal consensus is the blame often placed on “liberal professors” for fawning over their students, or the “tepid reaction of the liberal faculty” that resulted from the assaults of the New left, for part of the conservative shift in American society.<sup>28</sup> Alan Bloom’s chapter ‘The Sixties’ in *The Closing of the American Mind* is another attack on the position of the faculty to the New Left. Using the example of Cornell University student protests in 1969 he suggests that

“the professors, the repositories of our best traditions and highest intellectual aspirations, were fawning over what was nothing better than a rabble; publically confessing their guilt and apologising for not having understood the most important moral issues, the proper response to which they were learning from the mob; expressing their willingness to change the university’s goals and content of what they taught.”<sup>29</sup>

Bloom’s indictment is provocatively aggressive; he further suggests that “turning the decision about values to the folk, the Zeitgeist” is the same “whether it be Nuremberg or Woodstock” and that “as Hegel was said to have died in Germany in 1933, Enlightenment in America came close to breathing its last during the sixties.”<sup>30</sup> The professors are firmly indicted in a process that Bloom and others saw as a threat to the core of American values. Their liberal cowardice is plainly blamed, so much so as to evoke continued comparison to Nazi Germany and the failure of its

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<sup>28</sup> Gerson. *The Neoconservative Vision*. 23.

<sup>29</sup> Alan Bloom. *The Closing of the American Mind*. New York, London et al. (Simon and Schuster, 1987). 313.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 314.

professors to help stop the tide of Hitler's ascension, even negatively comparing American professors in this rather extreme analogy by suggesting that the German professors in the thirties faced death whilst "at Cornell there was no such danger."<sup>31</sup> Bloom suggests that the "fashionable" conclusion about the sixties is that "there was indeed excess" yet "many good things resulted, however as "far as the universities [were] concerned" he claims "nothing positive [came] from that period; it was an unmitigated disaster for them."<sup>32</sup> This context is important one the nature of Columbia; the New York Intellectuals, at least the respondents in question, were part of this liberal faculty, and therefore scrutiny of their role is useful for partially deconstruct the myth of the compliant professor who helped seal the demise of their institutions.

The convergence of these contexts and ideas is what makes the Columbia incidents an enlightening case study. Analysing multiple responses from the New York Intellectuals allows for a demonstration of the myriad political tangents, or lack thereof, that took hold as a result of the perceived threats to liberalism from the student radicals. Neo-conservatism is a starting point for analysing these political opinions, and one possible route for the later political stances of the New York Intellectuals, and also perhaps the one that would become the most influential due to the conservative shift in American politics after the 1960s, and presidential figures such as Ronald Regan and George W. Bush being associated with the title. Yet Bloom and Gerson's shattering of the New York Intellectuals' harmony is indicative of the broader trend as the sixties brought the post war consensus to a close. The responses by the New York Intellectuals to the Columbia riots therefore not only provide a uniquely interesting example of the diverging political opinions of this

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 318.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 320.



influential group, but are perhaps also useful for analysing the possible political divergences available in a broader social context. The self referential and politically self aware nature of the New York Intellectuals, exemplified in round tables such as 'Our Country and Our Culture,' make their writings especially useful for exploring political stand points; their styles may be complex, but constant self and group appraisal makes what would otherwise be extremely complex political positions easier to access.

## Section Two: Three Factions at Columbia

Describing some of the main events that occurred at the Columbia uprising is of central importance for understanding how and why various people reacted to the students' actions.<sup>1</sup> Despite various accounts stressing different elements what is clear from piecing together these narratives is that the students, the faculty and the administration were the three main factions in the incident and that each of them had different agendas, but all of them saw the uprising as a historic moment. Student fliers made grandiose announcements such as "At 2.30 this morning, Columbia University died" whilst academic staff formed the Ad Hoc Faculty Group in an attempt to mediate between the administration and the students, a process that acknowledged the hard line positions of the two other factions, as the group's creation was based upon the need for a centre ground negotiator.<sup>2</sup> One of the long term complaints leading up to protests that sparked the incidents on April 23<sup>rd</sup> 1968 was the administration's planned building of a gym in Morningside Heights, which from the students' perspective was seen as "quasi-colonial disdain for the black community" due to the "building of a gymnasium (with a separate entrance for the ghetto) in a public park."<sup>3</sup> The administration's viewed the gymnasium as necessary to compete with Ivy League universities that were not constrained by city campuses.<sup>4</sup> This was one of the key issues that united both the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) and the African-American student group SAS (Student Afro

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<sup>1</sup> More detailed accounts of the uprising and surrounding events include chapter 15 'Riding the Whirlwind: Columbia 68' in Robert A. McCaughey. *Stand, Columbia – A History of Columbia University in the City of New York, 1754 – 2004*. New York (Columbia University Press, 2003) 423 – 461, and Ellen Kay Trimberger. 'Why a Rebellion at Columbia Was Inevitable.' *Trans-Action*, Vol.5, no.9 (September 1968) 28-39. Also see footnote 2 in the introduction

<sup>2</sup> SDS flyer, April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1968. Quoted in Robert A. McCaughey. *Stand, Columbia*. 425.

<sup>3</sup> Todd Gitlin. *The Sixties – Years of Hope Days of Rage*. New York, Toronto et al (Bantam Books, 1987) 306.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed exploration of the intricacies of the Columbia gym see Roger Starr. 'The Case of Columbia Gym.' *The Public Interest*, No.13 (Fall 1968). 102-121.

Society) in protest on the day that sparked the uprising. The presence of the African-American students and the university's relation to Harlem was later seen as key in the escalation of events, as the group "provided a tactical coup in [the protestors'] dealings with the administration; it exaggerated the potential operational unity with Harlem based radicals."<sup>5</sup> Another long term complaint was the university's involvement in the IDA (Institute for Defence Analysis). In September 1967 the then president of Columbia, Grayson Kirk, had banned indoor protest. On March 27<sup>th</sup> of the following year six students had been suspended following an indoor demonstration against membership of the IDA, despite previous leniency towards indoor protests earlier in the year, a fact that led the students to suspect the administration of entrapment. The disciplined students became known as the IDA six. The protest was therefore not only about the administration's level of culpability in the Vietnam war but also an issue of student punishment and the right to protest, which would, over the course of the subsequent events, become the key element of the debate. The issue of the IDA was a complex one; despite "readily acknowledging membership" the administration was "not forthcoming about the extent of defence-related secret research" which led the students to suspect the worst, when in reality the university held a relatively minor role and was willing to quickly cede to the students demand for IDA withdrawal.<sup>6</sup>

On April 23<sup>rd</sup> 1968 the students gathered in the grounds of Columbia University to protest the long term issues outlined. Three days prior to this Mark Rudd, the then leader of the Columbia SDS, sent a public letter to "uncle Grayson" (Columbia President Grayson Kirk) outlining three "nonnegotiable demands... [the] cessation of gym construction, Columbia's withdrawal from the IDA, and no

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<sup>5</sup> Rick Perlstein. *Nixonland*. New York, London et al (Scribner, 2008). 264.

<sup>6</sup> Robert A. McCaughey. *Stand, Columbia*. 438.

disciplinary action against the Low [IDA] six.”<sup>7</sup> It ended “I’ll use the words of LeRoi Jones, who I’m sure you don’t like a whole lot: “Up against the wall, motherfucker, this is a stick up.” Yours from freedom, Mark (Rudd).”<sup>8</sup> Supposedly emboldened with this kind of revolutionary rhetoric the first day’s strike began. By the day’s end Hamilton Hall had been occupied by both Black and White students, with segregation later enforced by the Black students which forced the whites to take hold of Low Library and the president’s office. Whilst various different accounts attempt to analyse the white’s reaction to this enforced segregation differently, Rick Perlstein suggesting that “the whites were glad to give Hamilton Hall up to brave black militants” whilst Ellen Trimberger, perhaps more believably, proposing that “humiliated, the white radicals decided spontaneously to break in and occupy the president’s office,” most agree that the presence of black radicals furthered the white students’ commitment and fuelled their radicalism.<sup>9</sup> As the strike continued five university buildings were occupied, the initial two, Hamilton Hall by the African American students, and Low Library which included the president’s office, were then joined by occupations of Fayerweather Hall. Architecture students also took up residence in Avery Hall, and Mathematics Hall was also occupied and led by SDS founder Tom Hayden who was seen as a “hardliner” because of calls for “sexual abstinence and ban[ing] the use of drugs,” this, along with a complete non-negotiation stance, saw Mathematics cast as the most radical group.<sup>10</sup> The actual number of student occupiers gradually increased as time went on but even generous estimates never put them above 800, however the strikes and protests that followed

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<sup>7</sup> Robert McCaughey. *Stand Columbia*. 441.

<sup>8</sup> Mark Rudd. ‘An open letter for president Kirk.’ From *Columbia* 68.

<http://beatl.barnard.columbia.edu/columbia68/> 27/07/09. Rudd’s election to the president of SDS was key in stepping up the protests as he was more radical than his predecessors.

<sup>9</sup> Rick Perlstein. *Nixonland*. 264 and Ellen Kay Trimberger. ‘Why a Rebellion at Columbia...’ 32.

<sup>10</sup> Robert McCaughey. *Stand Columbia*. 451.

the police action were far more popular.<sup>11</sup> As the protest continued a fresh demand for complete amnesty from punishment for all protestors sprang up, one which would come to dominate the proceedings and cause the most friction between students and the administration, with both parties ardently refusing to budge on either side of this demand. Counter protest groups were also set up by students and became a worry to the administration, who at the time believed “fears of student on student violence and ensuing campus-community-racial confrontation” to be “real possibilities;” at various points throughout previous protests and during the incidents in April and May, groups such as the Majority Coalition had caused minor incidents when attempting to intervene with SDS activity, yet their activity was “less assiduously covered by the press,” perhaps because it countered the position that all students were radicals.<sup>12</sup>

During this time the Ad Hoc Faculty Group was also founded in an attempt to mediate between the students and administration, by day six of the sit-ins they had drafted a list of five resolutions:

1 – Cancellation of the gym construction. 2- Columbia’s withdrawal from the IDA. 3 – Establishment of tripartite disciplinary procedures. 4- Acceptance of the principle of collective punishment for the building occupiers. 5- The disavowal by the faculty of any party, students or administration, that refuses to accept these resolutions.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of the reaction of the New York Intellectuals the Ad Hoc and other faculty groups are perhaps the most important faction in the debate. These liberal mediation attempts represented a middle ground between a conservative administration and a radical student body, and are some of the most commented on parts of the incident by the New York Intellectual respondents. The main aims of the group appeared to

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<sup>11</sup> Ellen Kay Trimberger. ‘Why a Rebellion at Columbia...’ 31.

<sup>12</sup> Robert McCaughey. *Stand Columbia*. 442, 445.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 452. Full details of the group’s resolutions can be found here:  
<http://beatl.barnard.columbia.edu/columbia68/documents/doc9.htm>

be to keep police off campus and resolve the situation peacefully, even going as far as to make the tenacious resolution that “until the crisis is settled” to “stand before the occupied buildings to prevent forcible entry by police or others.”<sup>14</sup> Whilst their efforts for negotiation were to end in vain, the liberal faculty group no doubt prolonged the calling of the police and there is evidence to suggest that “some of the more moderate students occupying Avery and Fayerweather” were “ready to talk about alterations to complete amnesty” as a result of the Ad Hoc Faculty Group’s negotiations.<sup>15</sup> Despite this Police were called in on April 30<sup>th</sup>, the eighth day of the occupation, which resulted in “the arrests of about 700 students and the injuring of 150 students and faculty.”<sup>16</sup> It was this police action that was to prove the most publicised juncture in the events so far, not only bringing the attention of the global media due to the bloody scenes on campus, but also causing a huge upsurge in support for the student radicals. This is evidenced by the fact that around 800 students partook in the sit-ins, but the subsequent student strike that lasted the remainder of the academic term, involved around 5000 active students, the main demands of which included the amnesty for punishment for the participants of the sit-ins. The huge upsurge in support was blamed on the bloody and violent actions that ensued from calling the police. The strike was divided however, between the “SDS-dominated Strike Coordinating Committee, intent on spreading the protest beyond the university, and Students for a Reconstructed University, focused on campus issues.”<sup>17</sup> Further police action was also used for a second sit-in at Hamilton Hall, protesting the suspension of the IDA six. As a result of the events the administration cancelled classes for most of the final term and continued along its

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<sup>14</sup> Ellen Kay Trimberger. ‘Why a Rebellion at Columbia...’ 36.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 37.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 31.

<sup>17</sup> ‘The Road Back’ Columbia 68 Timeline. <http://beatl.barnard.columbia.edu/columbia68/time3.htm> 11/08/09.

hard line disciplinary road, suspending around 30 students. However, affiliation with the IDA ended, as did plans for the gym at Morningside Heights. The administration also created the Executive Committee of the Faculty to replace the Ad Hoc Faculty Group, although unlike its predecessor it had “ready access to the trustees and enjoyed the confidence to the administration,” whom they “publically supported” whilst privately pressuring to “adopt a more conciliatory stand” towards discipline.<sup>18</sup> This group was seen as conservative and “did not gain the confidence and support of the students” which led to the creation of the group called the “Independent Faculty” that more closely related to the original Ad Hoc Faculty Group.<sup>19</sup> Whilst this is by no means a complete account of the events that occurred at Columbia, what it does attempt to do is draw together the necessary strands and factions required to understand the various issues at play in order to contextualise the New York Intellectuals’ responses.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ellen Kay Trimbeger. ‘Why a Rebellion at Columbia.’ 38.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> For a very comprehensive resource, complete with photos, detailed timelines of events and a plethora of relevant documents see the website *Columbia 68*.  
<http://beatl.barnard.columbia.edu/columbia68>

## Section Three: The New York Intellectuals React

Within the contexts of a breakdown of the New York Intellectual's group dynamic, demise of the post war liberal consensus and a possible route into neo-conservatism in mind, an exploration of the New York Intellectuals' responses to the incidents at Columbia outlined previously, can reveal much about their political leanings. Daniel Bell is a central figure for the New York Intellectuals in relation to the Columbia uprisings. Described as part of the "Second Generation" of the New York Intellectuals by Neil Jumonville,<sup>1</sup> he is also somewhat associated with the early neoconservative movement despite being, according to Mark Gerson, one of the few "lifelong deniers" of the label.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless Gerson postulates that "if an intellectual writes regularly for *Commentary* or *The Public Interest*, he is a neoconservative."<sup>3</sup> Therefore being a founding editor of *The Public Interest*, along with Irving Kristol with whom he set up the journal in 1965, would be enough for Gerson to place Bell in the emerging neoconservative tradition, which was beginning its break from the liberal consensus at this time. Gerson suggests that the neoconservatives supposedly held "contempt for the New Left [that] cannot be overstated."<sup>4</sup> Bell's position as a faculty member at Columbia at the time of the incidents places his reaction to the incidents in a prominent light to explore this neoconservative thesis. Bell's written position is complicated by his personal involvement with the Ad Hoc Faculty Group and his later disavowals of this role. In reaction to Columbia and other student protests Bell's journal, *The Public Interest*, printed a special edition entitled 'The Universities' for its

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<sup>1</sup> Neil Jumonville, Ed. *The New York Intellectuals Reader*. New York (Routledge, 2007). 2.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Gerson. *The Neoconservative Vision- From Cold War to Culture Wars*. Lanham, New York and Oxford (Madison Books, 1997). 8.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 111.



Autumn 1968 edition, covering a scale of reaction to events, which, if Gerson is to be believed, would come entirely from a nascent neoconservative position.<sup>5</sup>

Bells' article in 'The Universities' issue of *The Public Interest*, 'Columbia and the New Left,' is an effort to "reconstruct the salient events" of the Columbia uprising. From the start he attempts to discredit the protesting students.<sup>6</sup> By placing the terms "siege," "insurrection" and "rebellion" in inverted commas he distances himself from them, disregarding them as hyperbole, an idea more directly indicated when he describes their lexicon as "extravagant."<sup>7</sup> He affords similar treatment to the SDS's complaints against Columbia's "complicity" in the Vietnam War and their claims as to its "institutional racism," inverted commas once again distancing him from, and therefore undermining, these claims.<sup>8</sup> These elements combined, open his appraisal of the situation with immediate, but somewhat veiled condescension for the students, particularly the language they use to justify their actions and political positions. However, Bell's position throughout the article is more subtle than outright contempt, a stance that would have been unwise to take given his faculty role, and any written disdain is complicated, and even compromised by his role in the Ad Hoc Faculty Group that negotiated between students and administration. Robert A. McCaughey suggests that "Professor of sociology Daniel Bell seized what passed for the centre ground with motions that called on the students of Hamilton and Low to vacate those buildings immediately and for the creation of a faculty-student-administration committee to deal with all disciplinary matters... He also attached to his resolution

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<sup>5</sup> Gerson states that "while the term "neoconservative" was not used actively until the early 1970s, it is an accurate description of the *Commentary* intellectuals from the mid 1960s." (Gerson, 85). Given his previous yoking of *Commentary* and *The Public Interest* and the intellectual cadre that the two journals shared at this time, it is safe to suggest that he also infers *The Public Interest* in this assumption.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Bell. 'Columbia and the New left'. *The Public Interest*, No.13 (Fall 1968).61.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

the following statement; “we believe that any differences have to be settled peacefully and we trust that police action will not be used.”<sup>9</sup> Bell’s role in the group is also discussed by Alexander Bloom who suggests that Bell “figured prominently” in the Ad Hoc Faculty Group whose main goals were to “mediate between students and administration and to keep police off campus.”<sup>10</sup> Bloom highlights the group’s resolution to place themselves between police and students, if the administration were to call them in. This would imply a slightly left of centre middle ground that offered marginally more support to the students in its negotiations than the administration, of which Bloom sees Bell as a central part. An interview with Eric Bentley published in *Partisan Review*’s response to the incidents, ‘Columbia: Seven Interviews,’ also explores Bell’s position on the Ad Hoc Faculty Group. Bentley is clearly an overt supporter of the students who openly, and somewhat arrogantly, compares himself with Noam Chomsky and Herbert Marcuse in order to position himself on the radical, or in his words “revolutionary,” side of the intellectual spectrum.<sup>11</sup> Bentley suggests that he “found himself approving” of many of Bell’s propositions during the Ad Hoc faculty meetings, despite later disagreeing with “his belief in pure procedure, in pure *non*-ideology,” or entirely “value free” negotiations, a position that was intended “cool the boiling antagonists Kirk and Rudd” despite ambiguities over “exactly what positions either would take.”<sup>12</sup> Bentley is accusing Bell of complete value free management, of creating a centre even when the two extremes are unknown, or a style of politics based on technicalities rather than any

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<sup>9</sup> Robert A. McCaughey. *Stand, Columbia: A History of Columbia University in the City of New York, 1754-2004*. New York (Columbia University Press, 2003). 447.

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Bloom. *Prodigal Sons – The New York Intellectuals and Their World*. New York and Oxford (Oxford University Press, 1986). 344.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Eric Bentley. Stephen Donadio. ‘Columbia: Seven Interviews.’ *Partisan Review*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (Summer 1968). 369. It is interesting to note that Chomsky tried to “correct the view” that the university should be dealt with “as if it were perfectly continuous with society” and therefore did not share the same optimism for the students methods or demands as Bentley. Interview with Lionel Trilling, ‘Columbia: Seven Interviews.’ 392.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 368.

morality. If we read Bentley as a radical who firmly viewed Bell as a more conservative, or at least less morally guided thinker, then what his interview shows us is that Bell was engaged in a negotiation effort that drew support from a politically diverse faculty and firmly located itself in a centrist position, between a conservative administration and radical students. Even if his purpose for the group was entirely a practical one, his procedural politics entailed a leftward lean in order to achieve its goals.

Many sources indicate that Bell had a central role in this negotiation effort, yet in 'Columbia and the New Left' Bell plays down his role as a mediator, claiming that he "took the initiative" in the matter of the creation of a "central place for faculty information and discussion" but that he "was out of town when the Ad Hoc Committee was formally created" and later "co-opted to membership."<sup>13</sup> These later disavowals suggest that Bell's actions at Columbia in the heat of the moment were at odds with his reasoned political opinion as expressed in the article, namely a more negative position towards the students, albeit a veiled one. His article is somewhat compromised due to the sympathetic nature of the Ad hoc Faculty Group, whom afforded greater respect for the students than the administration, most of the public press and perhaps most of the faculty (membership of the Ad Hoc group was limited and tended to be younger members of staff who were "more sympathetic to the students than other faculty.)"<sup>14</sup> His denial runs counter to a host of other historical evidence, by downplaying his role Bell is perhaps flagging up a level of shame for his previous support for the students. Bell certainly admits at least some part in the mediation, but insists that certain elements of the Ad Hoc group's methods "probably

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<sup>13</sup> Bell. 'Columbia and the New left.' 77.

<sup>14</sup> Ellen Kay Trimberger. 'Why a Rebellion at Columbia was Inevitable.' *Trans-Action*, Vol. 5 No.9. (September 1968). 36.

served to sharpen the confrontation” and that he “shared in this mistake,” an admission that clearly defines at least some role in the Committee, but also demonstrates later critique of its methods.<sup>15</sup> What is clear is that Bell’s role on the committee placed him in a far more centrist position than Gerson’s monolithic neoconservative contempt, that in fact, during the incidents themselves at least, Bell afforded a surprising amount of sympathy for radical activist politics. Bell’s analysis of the Ad Hoc negotiations also highlights this position. He claims the negotiations were a “bitter pill” for both administration and student. Yet some of the committees’ demands (and by extension Bell’s if McCaughey, Bloom and Bentley are to be believed), clearly favoured the students’ own, calling for, in Bell’s words “the suspension of work on the gymnasium” and group punishments to ensure “strike leaders would not be singled out,”<sup>16</sup> as well as demands such as Columbia’s withdrawal from the IDA which was also shared by the students.<sup>17</sup> The students had to accept the failure of the demand for amnesty, but in the very least the Ad Hoc Faculty Group wanted to reduce the administration’s prospective punishments. As part of this faculty group Bell’s role creates more nuances than Gerson’s assumption that “the students were lauded” by their professors and that the neoconservatives believed that “liberal intellectuals had become... entranced by the causes of radical students.”<sup>18</sup> In fact Bell’s role, though not his later comments on the incidents, could be read as a position of a liberal professor if not encouraging, then certainly not condemning the student uprisings. What is clear is that between the actual events and his subsequent writings, Bell had at least a minor political realignment.

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<sup>15</sup> Bell. ‘Columbia and the New Left.’ 79.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 78.

<sup>17</sup> See footnote 16 in the introduction for a full list of the Ad Hoc committee’s final demands. They also had a resolution to “take all measures within our several consciences to prevent the use of force to vacate these buildings,” suggesting a stance that was heavily opposed to the use of police force. *Resolution of the Ad Hoc Faculty Group*, April 28 1968.

<http://beatl.barnard.columbia.edu/columbia68/documents/doc9.htm> accessed on 04/09/09.

<sup>18</sup> Gerson. *The Neoconservative Vision*. 105, 103.

Throughout the rest of 'Columbia and the New Left' Bell attempts to place together all the relevant strands in order to explain the events that he sees as "incomprehensible" given the fact that "Columbia had not been going from bad to worse;" to him the events seem to be an aberration.<sup>19</sup> Whilst the article is clearly derogatory towards the SDS organisers, particularly Mark Rudd whom he describes as "a hulking, slack faced young man with a prognathic jaw," he also attacks the actions of the administration, describing them as "slow and lumbering," and especially the police whom he blames for the radicalisation of the students whilst also criticising them for "simply running wild" against people not even involved in the actual occupations.<sup>20</sup> It is clear however, despite his mediation, that Bell did view the students with some disdain, mocking their "assertive leap" in making the university a "microcosm of society" in order to do "what SDS could not do to the larger society... to wreck it."<sup>21</sup> The attitudes expressed in this article clearly show a man in transition. It is viable to suggest that Bell's later attacks on the students in 'Columbia and the New Left' are a kind of defensive screen to hide his earlier more moderate role on the Ad Hoc Faculty Group, and even if this were not the case he still critiques the administration and the police, although admittedly in a far more limited sense than the students, therefore his position is somewhat floating and perhaps representative of the anti-ideology of which his fellow Columbia professor Eric Bentley charges him.<sup>22</sup> After all Bell published *The End of Ideology* in 1960 and his role as editor of *The Public Interest* supposedly entailed providing a value free sociological journal. His breakdown of the Columbia incidents, whilst clearly offering certain objective viewpoints, is reflective of the difficulty of this anti-ideological position; he never clearly falls down on either side, the radical activist position of the students or the

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<sup>19</sup> Bell, 'Columbia and the New left'. 62.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 69, 81.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 90.

<sup>22</sup> See footnote 8.

more traditional conservatism of the administration, but both his actions and elements of his lexicon do suggest failed attempts to remain impartial. In offering glimpses of disdain for the student radicals, the conservative administration's blundering and, supposedly, the Ad Hoc Faculty Group's failings (despite his own role in them) he is defining himself in opposition to these elements. Whilst opposition to the radical students is often cited as a key early neoconservative trope, Bell attempts to maintain neutrality despite his role as an implicated observer, something that sets him aside from more overtly ideological figures such as Norman Podhoretz and Irving Kristol, both doyens of the intellectual neoconservative tradition, whose outspoken nature on many subjects places Bell's more neutral register outside the realm of neoconservative vision. Saving extra scorn for the students over the administration is indicative of the 'level' of ideology of the parties. The students were certainly the most ardent users of rhetoric and ideologically charged politics and therefore posed the greatest threat to Bell's neutral nucleus.

The piece suggests that Bell sees a crisis in liberalism, but this does not necessarily mean he is disregarding it as a political mode. He identifies the "single source for the crisis in liberalism – apart from the Vietnam War – [as] the complexity of our social problems... the old simplicities about "more" schools... or even "better" schools ... have not proved very useful in breaking the cycle of poverty," suggesting a questioning of the current political climate, as would be expected given the realignment in his level of support for the students after being given time to dwell on the significance of the situation.<sup>23</sup> This process leads him to question liberalism along almost entirely pragmatic, non ideological grounds; in his analysis the old questions are those of quantity, of concrete managerial type politics, presumably which need replacing with more complicated and situation specific agendas that

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<sup>23</sup> Bell. 'Columbia and the New Left'. 88.

would imply a degree of specialisation not suited to an ideologically charged political mode. Alongside this he places the SDS tactics as “the last gasps of a romanticism soured by rancour and impotence,” which despite its doomed nature does raise “real questions” as to the nature of “hierarchical decision making” and desire for broadened participation in the institutions that affected their lives.”<sup>24</sup> These questions turn the abstract student radicalism into concrete problems for political representation and participation, and are perhaps some of the most revealing in the piece as to Bell’s position. Irving Kristol has described Bell as a “rarity... [an] honest-to goodness social-democratic intellectual,” playfully accusing him of “belief in a mixed economy, a two-party system... and other liberal heresies.”<sup>25</sup> Read in this sense he sees the students as a radical threat to the largely liberal political climate of the time that he would presumably support, but a threat that nonetheless raised acute questions that were useful for liberal reform of institutions such as the university, if taken out of the students radical activist mode. His final statements reveal this. With a degree of cynicism towards the effectiveness of Columbia to engage in worthwhile reform, he asserts that the university should make

the fullest commitment to being a participatory institution to an extent consonant with its full responsibilities. This means, of course, neither student power not faculty power not any such shibboleths, but the definition of areas of rights and powers and responsibilities appropriate to the division of function and place in the university itself. Unless it takes those steps convincingly, to enlarge that participation, the university - and Columbia - may be forced to the wall by those who, in the words of Fidel Castro that the New Left has adopted, are “guerrillas in the field of culture.”<sup>26</sup>

His thought therefore cannot be conclusively categorised as an emerging neoconservative position, nor can it be suggested that he is a liberal in defence of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 100.

<sup>25</sup> Irving Kristol, ‘Memoirs of a Trotskyist.’ *Neoconservatism – The Autobiography of an Idea*. Chicago (Elephant Paperbacks, 1995). 476.

<sup>26</sup> Bell. ‘Columbia and the New Left.’ 101.

student disdain for American society, representative of a “leftward drift.” He attacks the students for their ideologically charged radicalism but instead of acting in a reactionary, traditionally conservative manner, he resorts to complete non-ideology with a largely neutral tone. He also attacks the administration and is cynical in their ability to effect worthwhile change. His attacks are on the overtly ideological parties on either side of his debate and his response to the incidents remains almost entirely specific to the university. He may briefly discuss a crisis in liberalism but his main conclusions relate to the university. This suggests that his position is a utilitarian liberal centrist position; he is unwilling to draw on the readily available broader social implications of the New Left that the other respondents to the incidents do, such as the draft and the Vietnam War, therefore hiding any ideologically charged opinions from view and remaining neutral. His position on the Ad Hoc Faculty Group might suggest a broadly left liberal outlook, but his written response implies, as Bentley does, that he is someone transfixed on pure procedure, on “pure *non-ideology*.”<sup>27</sup> The veiled disdain for students almost becomes surplus, merely evidence of his transition deeper into a mode that reacts against their ideology, not with an ideology of its own, but with technocratic management.

‘The Universities’ edition of *The Public Interest* also includes an article entitled ‘That Generation Gap,’ by Samuel Lubell, which provides an interesting look at the issues facing students, and whilst not a direct look at Columbia, its editorial placement next to Bell’s article means it influences the subject. Lubell’s evidence is made up from a series of interviews on various campuses that compare the socio-economic backgrounds of a spectrum of students to their political attitudes on various subjects. He suggests that “the really important challenge to universities is coming not from agitation for “student power” but from pressures originating outside

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Eric Bentley. ‘Columbia: Seven Interviews.’ 369.



of campus” and that “only one in every ten students interviewed showed drastic changes from their parents.”<sup>28</sup> In effect he undermines the scaremongering surrounding student uprisings by somewhat negating generational discord and pointing out other issues of causality. His findings do concur with some of the criticisms of the New Left, that their parent’s wealth allows them the comfort to do other things compared to “if the whip of poverty had still to be obeyed.”<sup>29</sup> Yet far from implying that students were “monumentally spoiled,” as Gerson would suggest of the neoconservatives, his attitude towards the end of the piece actually creates sympathy for the students.<sup>30</sup> He laments the draft as a “truly tragic action of the government – one which, as long as it is persisted, will remain a major disturber of the social peace” and an action that kept the students in “needless uncertainty as to their career paths from eighteen to twenty six.”<sup>31</sup> Placed just before Bell’s more critical piece towards the students in the journal, the article’s sympathy for the students facing the draft and its attempts to explore the generation gap demonstrate a nuanced exploration of student movements by *The Public Interest* at this time. What Lubell ‘s article shows is our inability to make monolithic the opinions about any of the journals in question, as *The Public Interest* clearly had a varied editorial line at the time. Lubell’s sympathetic position in fact represents a reasoned liberal centre ground that attempts to mediate between press reactions to the student protest and counter cultures and the actual pressures facing the students, presenting a reasoned academic approach to the situation. By concluding on a sympathetic note he is not endorsing student culture, but is merely presenting a logical take on the situation if ideologically charged generational conflict is removed. The idea that the draft is in fact a massive negative force on the students’ lives and

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<sup>28</sup> Samuel Lubell. ‘That Generation Gap.’ *The Public Interest*, No.13 (Fall 1968). 53.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 60.

<sup>30</sup> Gerson. *The Neoconservative Vision*. 106.

<sup>31</sup> Lubell. ‘That Generation Gap,’ 59-60.

that, scaremongering aside, the problem runs deeper than blaming it entirely on campus activism.

Like Bell's article, Diana Trilling's 'On the Steps of the Low Library' published in *Commentary* in response to the Columbia incidents, provides another unique lens on the situation. As the wife of the famous faculty member and New York Intellectual, Lionel Trilling (although it must be noted Diana herself is also included within the New York Intellectual group entirely on her own merit by many historians), Diana's article also comes from the position of an implicated participant of the situation, but unlike the other respondents in this survey, she has no institutional ties that would serve to temper her position. When reflecting on Trilling's piece Alexander Bloom suggests that despite "having harsh words for the students" she had "two conflicting instincts of the moment, political and maternal."<sup>32</sup> Bloom suggests that the language Trilling uses, quoting "the wail of a child coming out of a tantrum," implies that she "remained the university mother," implying that somehow her attacks are tempered by 'maternal' feelings for both the students and the university.<sup>33</sup> Bloom seems to reach this conclusion by wrongly applying this metaphoric language, something Trilling uses to demean to students' activities as childish, to the whole of the piece, creating a confused reading of an almost entirely critical essay and undermining her as an intellectual. She is certainly protective of the university, but to suggest that this comes from a maternal point of view is a somewhat sexist reading of her essay. What emerges from exploration of her article in regards to the students is a scathing attack and a detailed exploration of the failings of liberalism, none of which appear to be tempered by any 'maternal' feelings.

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<sup>32</sup> Alexander Bloom. *Prodigal Sons*. 344-345

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 346.

Using Mailer's *Armies of the Night* and its subject, the march on The Pentagon, as a comparison to the Columbia uprising, Trilling's opening section makes clear distinctions between the two protests: "touch with hostile hands the building which houses your Department of Defence and you perhaps flick the soul of your nation...You have made a statement but you have not delivered death... Touch a university with hostile hands and the blood you draw is immediate and copious and real."<sup>34</sup> In such metaphorical language Trilling creates a distinction between the two events based upon the personal stakes for the participants. Whilst there may have been the danger that the "marchers might be clubbed, or that tear gas or mace might be used against them" at the Pentagon incident they faced a choice of "how much discomfort [they were] prepared to take" and "no career or old commitment or old loyalty or even old friendship was at stake, as in the university event which continued for long weeks and involved daily, hourly decisions of men whose professional lives are inextricably interwoven with each other and with the life of Columbia."<sup>35</sup> Trilling clearly feels a personal affiliation with the university; her hyperbolic metaphoric language reveals the extent of her emotions regarding the event. It is not necessarily protesting per se that is wrong, but the chosen site and the myriad of possible personal challenges facing unwitting participants, the professors and staff who have been forced into the situation by the protestors. Trilling's argument implies that the academic staff at the university had no choice but to get involved, to put their careers and loyalties on the line, yet it must be noted that the formation of the Ad Hoc Faculty Group was entirely voluntary; whether or not individual professors felt ideologically forced into negotiation is another question. She takes issue with the framing of the revolt as a revolution as "in any revolution, no matter how circumscribed, we can assume that the rationale of one's own direct action is that

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<sup>34</sup> Diana Trilling. 'On the Steps of the Low Library.' *Commentary*, Vol.46, No.5 (November 1968). 30.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 30-31.

one is acting against an aggressive force.” She suggests that the SDS’s premise that “The university alone bore responsibility for the uprising” that was innate in their demands for amnesty “makes thought unnecessary.”<sup>36</sup> Paradoxically, whilst categorising the students as unthinking, she also examines the very logic they use to create their goals. Whilst doing so, however, she demonstrates contempt for these goals and blanket support for the university as an idea, if not Columbia’s particular administration. Her tone of condemnation continues throughout the piece, describing the students as children (suggesting their protests were “the wail of a child coming out of a tantrum”<sup>37</sup>), portraying their claims that the university was racist were a “total error” and going to great lengths to describe their destructive actions such as shouting at a couple crossing the campus “go home and die, you old people” and urinating in offices, the effect of which is to play down the goals of the protest and instead draws attention to the activists’ tactics, which in this light, appear questionable at best.<sup>38</sup>

Despite opening with an attack on the students’ actions Trilling does offer some limited support for their goals at points. While she rubbishes claims such as the Morningside Heights gym being racist, pointing out that the “back entrance” the students had cause to complain about on the grounds of segregation was actually practical, she also offers support for some, albeit more abstract, student grievances.<sup>39</sup> She suggests that “especially in the graduate schools which are the more crowded and anonymous sections of the university,” students have reason for complaint, and even protest, but she is “unable to locate sufficient reason for a

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 31-32.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 46.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 47, 43.

<sup>39</sup> “The land in the park slopes sharply, so that were the people from Harlem to have been made to enter on Morningside Drive they might well have had cause to complain about the distance they had to walk and the hill they had to climb.” Ibid. 33.

revolution.”<sup>40</sup> Yet even in her limited support for the need to restructure the university Trilling still offers no support for the methods employed. Whilst she also objects to the “brutality of the police” on the morning that the protests were broken up, here she is not supporting the protestors but lamenting the administration’s ineptitude, as police action created the situation where “everyone, students and faculty, not to mention the public, blamed the university for the ugliness of the police. The SDS could not have hoped for a greater victory.”<sup>41</sup> She suggests that the administration is “simple-mindedly jealous for its own safety and yet so inadequate in crisis,” a conclusion reached on the basis of the New Left’s attempts to “politicise” the unpolitical;” by forcing the administration to “reveal itself in the worst possible aspect” they confirm “the radical assumption of its basic and entire unsoundness or corruption.”<sup>42</sup> Thus, what may appear as limited support for the students is in fact support for one of their minor goals, the restructuring of the university. The attack on the administration once again, like Bell’s, does not mean support for the students, but instead represents a middle ground. However, the position between administration and student does not mean a political middle ground and Trilling certainly appears more dogmatic, conservative and certainly more ideologically and morally charged than Bell, which is particularly evident in her metaphoric language.

Towards the end of the article, Trilling uses the Columbia events as a springboard to explore wider ranging political and social issues, thus demonstrating the symbolic importance that she sees in the ‘attack’ on the university. She first attempts to explain support for the students from liberals as being borne out of a “fear under which people of conscience now live of being looked upon as conservative,” comparing liberal support of the students to liberalism having “the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 38.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 39.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 40.

long habit of excusing” Communism “on historic grounds” with the mantra “what right have we to accuse others when our own house is in such poor order?”<sup>43</sup> The student protests here become a conduit through which to explore what she sees as the problematic nature of liberalism as a political mode, particularly in its inability to make strong judgements against oppositional politics. She does not immediately lambast this thought, but instead suggests that it is perfectly reasonable to “welcome a movement of the young directed to the reconstitution of the democratic ideal,” however it is clear from her previous attacks on the students that she feels this point of view is in part due to a misinterpretation of their demands and activist methods in the press, whom “reported none of the obscenities” and who could not have been “less capable of getting to the heart of the situation.”<sup>44</sup> Here the press, for their misrepresentations, and the administration, for calling the police (both actions that garnered support for the students) are blamed for diverting attention away from the realities of the events. They are accused of allowing a moderate liberal stance to the students to dominate. This is a fresh manifestation of the McCarthy era issues that the New York Intellectuals were embroiled in as liberal anti-Communists in the 1950s; the New Left becomes the new enemy within, which causes factionalism within the liberal hegemony thus threatening its existence.

In typecasting supporters of the students as ‘liberal’ Trilling then goes on to discuss liberalism in a broader sense, suggesting that:

If liberalism lacks the fortitude and intelligence to stand up to the New Left, if it deceives itself that the principles of liberalism betrayed by our present democratic establishment now depend for their preservation on support of the contemporary revolution, it will have a major responsibility for the triumph of reaction in this country.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 36.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 37, 43.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 50.

What Trilling is opposing is the weakness of liberalism to stand up to the New Left, suggesting that in acquiescing to any of their demands they are only exacerbating the issue. Trilling does not support what the students oppose, but she certainly does not support the students themselves. Their tactics and lack of political intelligence are clearly defined as negative throughout the piece and she defines them as “anti-liberal” in their opposition to the Ad Hoc Faculty Group and the administration (regularly citing Mark Rudd’s dismissal of the Ad Hoc’s negotiations with a simple “bullshit” as testament to this).<sup>46</sup> The intention of the article seems to be a rallying call to liberalism, to end support for the New Left. She aims to “caution against capitulation to the revolution designed by the New Left” whilst also “caution no less against the comfortable assumption that liberalism has only to shine up its old medals and resurrect its old rhetoric of responsibility to be equal to the actual responsibility that now devolves upon it.”<sup>47</sup> From the article, it appears Trilling is suggesting that the emergence of the student protest movement has thrown another factor into the equation, which old liberals, who opposed the Vietnam war and supported other aspects of the students demands, must now respond to in a strong fashion, especially given the students’ extreme tactics. Thus the activism of the students becomes a larger political rallying cry and instils events like Columbia with far greater symbolic significance. Her political stand point here appears to be a hardened form of liberalism, one that does not tolerate excessive threats to its own hegemony, either in the form of the New Left or Communism, a form of liberalism that is imbued with a certain conservative anti-radicalism. Whilst she has not yet abandoned liberalism as a political form, her tone suggests her tolerance for the open-minded weakness is wearing thin, and that she is in fact nearing a more neo-

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.49.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.56.

conservative mode of thought (although she is clearly not fully part of this political spectrum, as figures like Gerson might suggest). The penultimate paragraph of her article ends on one of the strongest affirmations of this idea; “[Robert] Kennedy believes in the possibility of our society and Hayden believes that our society must be destroyed,” a statement that sums up her arguments of liberalism as diametrically opposed to the radicalism of the students, therefore tolerance of a threat to the hegemony cannot be an accepted position and anti-radicalism must prevail, an idea that encapsulates the whole tone of her piece.<sup>48</sup>

In the next issue of *Commentary* the poet Robert Lowell, whom Trilling briefly mentions in her piece due to his association with Mailer at the march on the Pentagon, offers some criticisms of Trilling’s piece to which she responds. Lowell questions what Trilling has “done for liberalism” then ironically lists a “record clear of agitation about the Vietnam War, clear of a feverish concern for the drafting of reluctant young men... free of a nervous fear about the militarization of our country,” claiming she is “more preoccupied with the little violence of the unarmed” students than these other ills.<sup>49</sup> He then goes on to dispel ideas that sharing the students’ anti-militarization political goals necessarily means full support for the New Left, and pronounces that he “might wish to be a hundred percent pro-student” but takes issue with their idealisation of figures such as Mao and Stalin, declaring that “no cause is pure enough to support these faces,” and then likening the students to the older generation; “they are only us, younger, and the violence that has betrayed our desires will also betray theirs if they trust it.”<sup>50</sup> Despite disapproving of the idealisation of these Communist figures Lowell seems to forgive it as the same

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 55.

<sup>49</sup> Robert Lowell. ‘Liberalism and Activism.’ Round table on Dianna Trilling’s ‘On the Steps of Low Library’ (*Commentary*, Vol. 46) *Commentary*, Vol.47, No.4 (April 1969). 19.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.



youthful experimentation that many of the New York Intellectuals dabbled in, and as something they will later regret. Lowell's statement of political belief, his clear disdain for American militarisation, support for the New Left and critique of American foreign policy seems akin to what standard definitions of neo-conservatism suggest it reacted against in its nascent stages; a Liberal critique of American society, especially foreign policy, through a New Left lens, or a "leftward drift" in American Liberalism.<sup>51</sup> Trilling's retort accuses Lowell of moral relativism in his pacifism, being able to make distinctions between violence, or, as she puts it, "let's wash the piss under Kirk's carpet and keep our minds on napalm."<sup>52</sup> She feels herself "unable to make a united front with the anti-Americanism which provides the overarching principle of all "active" protest of our Vietnam engagement."<sup>53</sup> In a very revealing quotation Trilling says

I can talk about American stupidity or complacency or about the contradictions between American capitalism and American idealism, but I cannot talk about American genocide in Vietnam or about American imperialist greed and rapaciousness in Vietnam – which means that I am without a passport to Mr. Lowell's world of political activism.<sup>54</sup>

Despite accusing Lowell of a kind of moral relativism, of being able to overlook student aggression in light of American aggression, Trilling's position on Vietnam seems to come from a similar, if somewhat inverse, kind of logic. She is able to critique the Vietnam War but not to an extent so as to ally herself with what she sees as an opposing political faction, therefore in effect she is compromising her own feeling of discontent towards certain elements of American foreign policy because she is unable to allow herself to become part of the "anti-American" opposition. Clearly Trilling's position at this time is one that is firmly comfortable with American

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<sup>51</sup> Mathew Berke. 'Neoconservatism.' *A Companion to American Thought*. Richard Wightman Fox and James T. Kloppenberg Eds. Oxford and Cambridge (Mass) (Blackwell, 1995). 485.

<sup>52</sup> Dianna Trilling. 'Liberalism and Activism.' 20

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

political hegemony, with definite conservative leanings towards protection of the state and liberal institutions from radical opposition even if it means some moral compromises. Yet it is also important to note that at this point atrocities such as the My Lai massacre were not public knowledge, therefore critiques of the Vietnam War as genocide were still firmly entrenched in a radical position. What places Trilling slightly right of centre are remarks such as her final retorts to Lowell, in which she suggests that “he apparently doesn’t regard thought as a form of action... in his view reason exists in opposition to activism.”<sup>55</sup> She is in effect labelling him as part of the New Left activist politics and sarcastically attacking this mode of political expression as anti-intellectual, and opposed to reason. Her tone in this response is also far more virulent and abrasive than that of the already quite inflammatory original article, suggesting she is partial to reactionary politics, and that she is willing to go heavily on the offensive if pushed. She might still define herself as liberal but it is clearly a more hard line manifestation than mainstream liberalism and the weakness she associates with it, a prognosis that by its very existence must place her outside of it.

Diana Trilling’s is perhaps the most overtly right of centre piece out of the respondents, and given Gerson’s framing of *Commentary* and *The Public Interest* on the conservative fringes of the New York Intellectual’s journals, one would expect the other publications to offer different political stand points on Columbia. This is certainly suggested, at least superficially, by the *Partisan Review* article published in response to the events, entitled ‘Columbia: Seven Interviews.’ In the piece Stephen Donadio interviews a spectrum of participants, ranging from Lionel Trilling, through other staff members and even members of the protesters themselves, including the then leader of the Columbia SDS Mark Rudd along with Lewis Cole, “an active

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 21.

member of Columbia SDS.”<sup>56</sup> Giving voice to this spectrum of participants suggests a more rounded take on the scenario than *Commentary* and *The Public Interest*, which despite nuances to their arguments, seemed largely opposed in the two pieces, at the very least to the students’ methods, if not many of their demands (even if Bell’s supposed role in the Ad Hoc faculty and both his and Trilling’s objections to the actions of the administration somewhat complicate this view).

For the purposes of this dissertation the most revealing of the interviews is that with Lionel Trilling because of his prominent position among the New York Intellectuals. Something to note on Trilling’s role is that although he was not heavily involved with the Ad Hoc Faculty Group, he was later on the Executive Committee of the Faculty, which was set up after the initial incidents during the following student strike in place of the Ad Hoc group, but was on the whole more conservative than its predecessor, “publically supporting the administration” during the second police action.<sup>57</sup> Trilling’s short but intellectually heavy response sets the students’ actions up as a “cultural issue;” he dismisses their concrete political goals, the IDA issue as “more symbolic than substantive,” the gymnasium issue as having lost force, and instead suggests that

The actual issue, I believe... was a very large and general one. The most radical students were expressing their doctrinaire alienation from and disgust with the whole of American culture. The less radical but still militant students were attempting to reach a new definition of what a young person is in relation to the institutions he is involved with.<sup>58</sup>

This is then defined as the students “pressing for the recognition of their maturity” and he suggests that their type of political activity is “gratuitous.... For young people now, being political serves much the same purpose as being literary has long done –

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<sup>56</sup> Stephen Donadio. ‘Columbia: Seven Interviews.’ *Partisan Review*, Vol.35, No.3 (Summer 1968). 370.

<sup>57</sup> Ellen Kay Trimberger. ‘Why a Rebellion...’ 38.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Lionel Trilling. Stephen Donadio. ‘Columbia: Seven Interviews.’ *Partisan Review* Vol.35, No.3 (Summer 1968). 387.

it expresses and validates the personality.”<sup>59</sup> Whilst he takes some precautions to maintain neutrality by suggesting that he does not “mean to question the authenticity of their emotions and motives” he still clearly undermines the political currency of these factors.<sup>60</sup> He reduces the political importance of the student movement, encapsulating it in a kind of individualistic grab at identity and personality rather than a reasoned political action. This is placed distinctly in relation to his own youthful radicalism which he invokes in comparison, suggesting that in the thirties the political activity in which “specific aims and fully formulated views of society were of the essence. No doubt there was a certain element of gratuitousness even in Marxist politics... we wanted the gratifications of *being political*.”<sup>61</sup> Despite repudiating his own youthful radicalism it is still privileged over the new campus politics, this suggests a kind of generational schism; despite being criticised in relation to his own radicalism the present situation is still much more reprehensible, and much more motivated by self interested superficial concerns, such as politics being used as a fashionable signifier of ‘cool.’ The whole concept of generational discontent is somewhat called into question with the positions of figures such as Eric Bentley, F.W. Dupee and Robert Lowell; Columbia itself, due to the very nature of a student strike, may be ruptured along broadly generational lines, but as these older supporters show wider political dissent and so discontent cannot be solely associated with the young.

Trilling is not entirely critical in his analysis of the students’ actions; he does take some pains to understand the motivations and antecedent conditions that led up to the Columbia incidents and the attitudes of the students. One major influence he identifies is the changing role of the university in regards to culture. He suggests that

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

previously the universities' role in terms of its students was to introduce the "undergraduate to the best ideals and also the highest pleasures of culture, giving him what is called, or used to be called, a liberal education."<sup>62</sup> He suggests that this is no longer the case, one reason for this mass culture that has resulted in "the questions about society that the college teacher used to hope his young student would learn to ask are now being asked, and answered for him by popular art."<sup>63</sup> This claim seems to give the students credit for a kind of cultural maturity that would previously not be present in undergraduates, but it also underscores the changing nature of the role of the university. Trilling is not clear on what he believes this role to be, but it is implied that it is steering away from the old "liberal education." He relates this to a change in the status of the university, suggesting that the university has gained more power socially but that they are "being thought of as privileged vested interests" viewed with "suspicion and hostility," a condition that is "more intense in urban environments."<sup>64</sup> The combination of these two elements sets up the conditions Trilling sees as antecedent to the incidents, a more culturally savvy undergraduate body, inclined to view an urban university with hostility due to its vested interests and its complicity in the military industrial complex.

Despite lining up the cultural preconditions for critique of the university, Trilling's political leanings tend towards the university's interests over the demands of the students. He claims sympathy for students when he views them individually; "when I confront them personally I see them in their cultural and social situation, and since I understand why this should arouse their antagonism and rebelliousness, I am the better able to see why they should direct their protest at the university" but he takes pains to note that "my seeing this does not prevent me from thinking that they

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 388.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 389

are wrong.”<sup>65</sup> Trilling’s position appears to be coming from one attempting an academic understanding of the psychology of the situation, but also one that cannot hide its own political leanings. His statements of understanding almost seem redundant when he uses such conclusive language to suggest that the students are “wrong,” and it is clear where his position comes from when he suggests the result of continued student actions will be to render academic life “impossible.”<sup>66</sup> Trilling is one of the few people who also comes out in direct support of some of the administration’s actions, suggesting that “they have been eminently decent and humane” and that “representations to the contrary seem to me factitious or perfectionistic.”<sup>67</sup> In light of the political stance of the whole interview, his comparisons to his own radical youth and his claims of understanding towards the students almost seem like patronising disdain, or in the very least open disapproval. His support of the administration and place on the Executive Faculty Group place him at the most conservative fringes of the respondents. His criticism may lack the metaphoric vehemence of his wife, but hidden behind the academic register of the text is an even more damning indictment of the students’ actions, and a position borne out of a greater deal of respect for the university establishment than those who oppose it.

The other interviews in ‘Columbia: Seven Interviews’ suggest a more neutral editorial line in *Partisan Review* towards the Columbia incidents than Lionel Trilling’s would alone. Certainly other interviewees are critical of the students, Peter Gay decries the illegality of the student’s actions and suggests that their calls for amnesty are “infantile... attempts to offend authority, and perhaps even overthrow it... without ever being punished for it,” and yet interviews with Mark Rudd, Lewis Cole, members

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 391-392

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 389.

of the Student Afro Society Ray Brown and Bill Sales, and even highly supportive faculty member such as Eric Bentley, suggest a far more rounded take on the incidents than *Commentary*, and *The Public Interest*.<sup>68</sup> The interviewer, Stephen Donadio, questions the role of the Ad Hoc Faculty Group's attempt at mediation in all of the interviews, suggesting Donadio is most interested in how the liberal faculty dealt with the students, and what the respondents' interpretations are on the liberal consensus. He also affords the same treatment towards the students that he does the professors. Both are asked about the Ad Hoc group and the students are quizzed on their own precondition of amnesty, a question that is also brought before most of the other participants in the interviews. This egalitarian treatment implies a greater deal of respect for the students as rational adults, than an article such as Diana Trilling's does. Overall the editorial line of *Partisan Review* appears to support the middle ground compromise liberalism such as that which the Ad Hoc Faculty Group took towards the negotiations, a position left of the Trillings, and one heavily critiqued by Diana.

As *Dissent* was set up by Howe and others in 1954 as an attempt to "draw together intellectuals critical of the post-war liberal line," or in Howe's words in "reaction to the gradual but steady disintegration of the socialist movement" perhaps a more sympathetic stance towards the students could be expected to be found amongst its pages as their actions at Columbia were read, in the very least, as questionings of liberalism and, from a point of view such as Diana Trilling's, outright attacks on the post war consensus.<sup>69</sup> However, as Howe's attitudes in the article 'The New York Intellectuals' makes clear, his own political position, however more radical it was than many of the rest of the New York Intellectuals' by this time, did not

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Peter Gay. Stephen Donadio. 'Columbia: Seven Interviews.'

<sup>69</sup> Alexander Bloom. *Prodigal Sons*. 285. And Irving Howe, Interview, June 16, 1978, In *Prodigal Sons*. 285.

mean he in anyway endorsed the counterculture and New Left movements. Howe's reactions would suggest that reading Murray Hausknecht's article, 'Sources of Student Rebellion' which appeared in response to the Columbia events in the September- October 1968 edition of *Dissent*, may provide a critique of the incidents from a more leftist position than the other journals.<sup>70</sup>

'Sources of Student Rebellion,' despite its subtitle 'How shall we understand the Columbia Uprising?' is more an attempt to understand the process by which students could be radicalised on any university campus rather than a specific position on the Columbia incidents. This approach follows a similar line to Samuel Lubell's 'That Generation Gap' in so far as it is an attempt to understand student psychology rather than pass overt judgement on their actions. Hausknecht's approach for understanding is to position the students as a separate "stratum" to the rest of society and then examine why their stratum is predisposed to radicalism. Firstly he places university as a site of "prolonged adolescence," one in which the students are "barred from adult roles" and a position that makes students self consciously aware that they "belong to a distinctive social group" as even the "very language of society calls attention to this apartness... their parents speak of them as being "away at college."<sup>71</sup> He suggests that this alienation is exacerbated by the collapse of the organised left that previous student radicals were a part of, which is also to blame for prolonging youthful "moral purity" because the lack of political organisation defers the "loss of purity" that the older generation of radicals faces because "it was difficult to maintain it as a member of the organized left."<sup>72</sup> Whilst the new student radicals are positioned as the children of previous radicals Hausknecht

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<sup>70</sup> Murray Hausknecht. 'Sources of Student Rebellion: How Shall we Understand the Columbia Uprising?' *Dissent*, Vol. 15. No.5 (September-October 1968). 389-395.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* 389.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* 390-391.



postulates that the parents' "commitment to ideologies.... Was itself severely shaken, either as a result of self-questioning or the political climate of the fifties," so that the parents pass down "basic values" rather than "specific political beliefs and norms."<sup>73</sup> In this part of his model for understanding, Hausknecht blames the radicalism of the students on the de-radicalisation of their parents, the same process which many of the New York Intellectuals went through, and so presumably not a position they themselves would take. In his final analysis Hausknecht suggests that the change from the inclusive model of student activism that was present in the early sixties civil rights movement to the racially divided anti-war movement, furthered student alienation and provided white students with models such as the black panthers on which to base their activism.<sup>74</sup> Throughout the piece Hausknecht is keen to draw comparisons between the students' position in the university and the position of African Americans in wider society, suggesting that "as one says of Negroes in the social structure they are *in* the university but not *of* the university. Or, to put it another way, students are promised opportunities which cannot be realised within the university as now structured."<sup>75</sup> Using this racially charged metaphor would suggest that Hausknecht affords a degree of sympathy for the students' position that he believed led up to the Columbia incidents, yet despite the neutral tone of much of the piece, and the attempts to understand the antecedent conditions that led to the incidents, Hausknecht offers some positions towards the end of the piece. He suggests that the students' logic of seeing "the nature of college as a community" is wrong, as formal education is never an experience between equals. He suggests that the activists make the university "one dimensional" in transforming it into a "base for revolution," a process that he believes will mean "the end of the university, for its

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 390.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 392.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 393.

principles are the necessity for the free play of the mind and the acceptance of uncertainty,” suggesting that the only thing that was “put up against the wall at Columbia was their inherited values.”<sup>76</sup>

For Hausknecht Columbia almost becomes an academic exercise in analysing causation. He does not overly criticise the students as many of the other respondents do, nor does his response agree with them in anyway. The mild disagreements with the students at the end of the piece seem to come from a position of sympathetic disdain. It is a piece that is devoid of any noticeable political belief and represents the most neutral take on an otherwise highly ideologically charged debate by never really discussing the broader social implications of the Columbia incidents. Unlike most of the other responses the article does not bemoan any crisis in liberalism caused or signalled by the students, instead opting to understand them through the lens of the Old Left and of the plight of African-Americans. As *Dissent* was one of the more radical of the New York Intellectuals’ journals it is revealing that Hausknecht’s article was published in it. As Howe’s opinions in the article ‘The New York Intellectuals’ make clear, presupposing a sympathetic line, due to Howe and *Dissents’* socialist and radical leanings, is a dangerous prejudice. However Hausknecht’s article is certainly one of the least critical specifically on Columbia. Its stance could almost be read as politically apathetic, preferring to analyse the specific causation rather than the broader implications of the incidents.

Given that both Bloom and Gerson suggest that the rift between the New York Intellectuals at this time centred around their opinions regarding the New Left, with *Commentary* and *The Public Interest* on the more sceptical side and *The New*

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 395.

*York Review of Books* as the more radical, pro-student magazine, and also that Bloom uses both Trilling's 'On the Steps of the Low Library' and Dupee's 'The Uprising at Columbia' as two touchstones that signify the "two camps which had emerged among the New York Intellectuals" one would imagine that the latter, being so used as a binary opposite to Trilling's piece which offers "harsh words for the students" to be an entirely sympathetic piece.<sup>77</sup> In discussing Dupee's piece Bloom suggests that "Dupee discussed the role and ultimately the impotence of the Columbia faculty" and that he "saw the students as serious, radical adults," presumably in opposition to Trilling's aforementioned role as the "university mother."<sup>78</sup> It is certainly clear that Dupee sympathised with the students, one major element of this came from the Vietnam War which he suggested was "doing more violence to the university than they were" whilst also controlling the fate of the young; "the war's large evil was written small in the misery with which they pondered hour by hour the pitiful little list of their options; Vietnam or Canada or graduate school or jail!"<sup>79</sup> He also affirms some of the students' demands, suggesting that the "relatively superficial" demand of the disciplinary hearing of the IDA six related to an "absolutely fundamental one: the theory and practice of the university vis-à-vis its student body."<sup>80</sup> His major political concern therefore may lie with the Vietnam War, but not necessarily the university's supposed culpability in it and not specific disciplinary procedures either, but instead more abstract notions of how the administration and university should operate, in general, towards the student body. He takes issue with the fact that university officials announced that "the university is not a democracy," therefore despite his enthusiasm for the student methods (he describes them as

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<sup>77</sup> Alexander Bloom. *Prodigal Sons*. 344-345.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* 346.

<sup>79</sup> F.W. Dupee. 'The Uprising at Columbia.' *New York Review of Books*. Vol.11, No.5 (September 26, 1968). 20.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* 23.

uniting “the politics of a guerrilla chieftain with the aesthetic flair of a costume designer” in opposition to the “stodgy and uninventive” radicals of the thirties), and an agreement over the evils of the Vietnam War, he does not share the same belief in the students’ concrete goals.<sup>81</sup> Much of his support is for the artistic merit of the form of their dissent, rather than the political goal itself, a celebration of new activist methods that appeared with the New Left and how their politics can beneficially influence existing liberalism. Yet even as a supporter of their political mode, and as a personal signifier of the ability for the political discontent to cross generations, Dupee agrees with the rest of the respondents in classifying political discontent as a youthful undertaking, especially by comparing it to his own radical 1930s past.

Dupee’s enthusiasm for the students’ methods is matched only by his appreciation of the Ad Hoc Faculty Group’s actions. He describes the barricading of Hamilton by the group in order to prevent a police raid as ‘heroic’ and celebrates the “instinct” to keep the police off campus.<sup>82</sup> Yet for neither the students nor the Ad Hoc Faculty Group does he maintain constant praise. In a mood similar to Bell’s he describes the “tri-partite committee issue as developed by the Ad Hoc Faculty Group a mistake;” hindsight allowed him and Bell to rethink certain issues forced by the Ad Hoc Faculty Group, and admit that they were mistaken.<sup>83</sup> This kind of re-thinking tells of a certain kind of presentism both Dupee and Bell felt as implicated parties, an idea that positions were taken in the heat of the moment that in retrospect did not appear so appealing. Dupee’s article also mentions that “physical nearness to the rebels brought us closer to them in sympathy, hardship for hardship, danger for danger... because their illegal acts were forcing us to engage in acts which if not illegal, were

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 23.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 34.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 36.

certainly unconventional.”<sup>84</sup> Like Bell, Dupee appears caught up in the events and perhaps influenced by the student’s rhetoric, but unlike Bell this pushes him further left in his response. His language of description in regards to the reading of President Kirk’s personal correspondence by the students can support this claim; despite suggesting this action was “self defeating” he does commend the “euphoric” impulse that led the students.<sup>85</sup> Certainly Alexander Bloom would suggest that Dupee and other members of the Old Left were entranced by the radicalism of the students; he suggests that “Dupee and Macdonald’s descriptions of the Columbia strike reveal an excitement about the spiritual elements which the students possessed, the vigour and enthusiasm they brought to the political conflict. For these old leftists... this exuberance seemed refreshing, perhaps reminiscent of the spirit which had enthused young radicals in the 1930s.”<sup>86</sup> Whilst this does seem somewhat reductive a view it is clear that Dupee allowed himself to get personally involved with the radicalism of the students.<sup>87</sup> Unlike Bell, whose hindsight critiqued all parties, including the liberal Ad Hoc group, Dupee seems somewhat celebratory of both the students and the faculty, reserving complete disdain only for the police, and therefore presumably by extension, the administration. Unlike Bell he takes a clear ideological grounding. Dupee’s main element of support for the students comes from his celebration of their exuberant radical activism, his political standpoint is different from their concrete goals, and therefore this would suggest Dupee is entranced with the methods of activism rather than the student’s politics itself. Whilst Diana Trilling calls for a hardening of liberalism in order to deal with the New Left, Dupee’s support of both the moderate liberal Ad Hoc and the students activism suggests a more

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 36.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 24.

<sup>86</sup> Alexander Bloom. *Prodigal Sons*. 347.

<sup>87</sup> Bloom’s reading also shows similarities between critics and supporters; although Lionel Trilling takes almost the opposite line to Dupee, he critiques them via the same nostalgia for his own thirties radicalism, to which the students compare unfavourably, the reversal of Dupee’s claims.

radical form of liberalism, imbuing liberal tolerance with the radical enthusiasm of the students; a more lenient and more leftwing reform liberalism than Diana Trilling's position, and one that embraced new, and apparently more artistic, forms of political dissent.

Whilst Richard Hofstadter's response to the Columbia incidents was not published in any of the New York Intellectuals' journals, his *1968 Columbia Commencement Address* is nonetheless a revealing document, despite, or even because of, its intrinsic administrative ties to the university due to the very nature of the speech and its role in the machinations of the university due to the importance of graduation. Daniel Geary suggests of Hofstadter that

[He] was extremely critical of student tactics, believing that they were based on irrational romantic ideas rather than sensible plans for achievable change, that they undermined the unique status of the university as an institutional bastion of free thought, and that they were bound to provoke a political reaction from the right.<sup>88</sup>

Certainly his Columbia address would seem to support this view. It is almost hyperbolic in its support for the ideal or abstract of the university, a "special kind" of community, a "citadel of intellectual individualism" that acts as the "most accessible centre of thought and study and criticism" that the current social order has to offer.<sup>89</sup> His praise also extends to Columbia as a concrete institution, suggesting that he and many colleagues "differing as they do on many matters, are alike in their sense of the greatness of this institution and in their affection for it."<sup>90</sup> David S. Brown, whose work Geary was reviewing, suggests that Hofstadter was "in complete agreement with the students. He opposed the building of the gymnasium, denounced the

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<sup>88</sup> Daniel Geary. Review of David S. Brown. *Richard Hofstadter: An Intellectual Biography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. *Reviews in American History*, Vol.35, No.3 (2007). 426.

<sup>89</sup> Richard Hofstadter. *The 214<sup>th</sup> Columbia University Commencement Address*. June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1968. <http://beatl.barnard.columbia.edu/columbia68/documents/doc22.htm> accessed on 03/09/09.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

presence of the IDA on campus, and believed that the university's disciplinary structure had to be taken out of the hands of the president's office," but that he denounced the militancy of the students and believed the young radicals "took advantage of a university and society that granted their generation unprecedented privileges and opportunities."<sup>91</sup> He places Hofstadter as a "liberal who critiques liberalism from within" opposed to the students "simplistic moralistic approach."<sup>92</sup> Therefore any criticism of the students has to be taken in context of Hofstadter's highly liberal position and support for their issues, which would mean that any criticism is all the more emphatic as an extreme distaste for their methods undermined any agreement on goals.

Given his "affection" for Columbia one would expect a tirade against the students for, as he describes it, the "terrible trial" that they put the university through, but rather than make any direct attacks Hofstadter decries the students' actions via a discussion of the nature of a university community.<sup>93</sup> He takes great pains to demonstrate the fragile nature of the university "community," suggesting that the "ideal of academic freedom...put[s] extraordinary demands upon human restraint" in order to maintain it, that the restraint needed is "normally self imposed, and not enforced from the outside."<sup>94</sup> This is his first subtle attack on the student protestors, implying that they lack the self restraint and moderate temperament needed to work within the framework of an academic community. He suggests that whilst the university does "constitute a kind of free forum" that it is not "a political society, not a meeting place for political societies" as it is an institution that "has to be dependent on something less precarious than the momentary balance of forces in society" and

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<sup>91</sup> David S. Brown. *Richard Hofstadter – An Intellectual Biography*. Chicago and London (University of Chicago Press, 2006). 179-180.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 180.

<sup>93</sup> Richard Hofstadter. *The 214<sup>th</sup> Columbia University Commencement Address*.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

not something “hard boiled or self regarding.”<sup>95</sup> He is suggesting that for the principles of academic freedom to rein, political individuality has to be subdued, and that “no group... should consider itself exempt from exercising the self restraint.”<sup>96</sup> What this criticism amounts to is a complete disavowal of the students’ tactics, he suggests that

To imagine that the best way to change a social order is to start by assaulting its most accessible centres of thought and study and criticism is not only to show a complete disregard for the intrinsic character of the university but also to develop a curiously self-destructive strategy for social change.<sup>97</sup>

Hofstadter calls for self restraint and offers almost unequivocal praise for the university as an abstract institution, disregarding the student methods as unthinking, misdirected anger. Whilst he does offer support for some of the sources of this anger, suggesting that he “shares their horror” for the Vietnam War, on which he blames the student unrest, casting it as a “cruel and misconceived venture” that undermines student belief in “the legitimacy of our normal political process,” but that the outcome of this disillusionment is itself an illegitimate political process, with the sit-ins framed as “a powerful device for control by a determined minority” continued use of which “would be fatal to any university in the next few years.”<sup>98</sup>

Like David Brown suggests, Hofstadter might disagree heavily with the students’ methods, but he was willing to side with them on some political issues, as his attitude towards the Vietnam War suggests. His open attitude is also demonstrated towards the end of his speech. Even though he conceives of the events as “a disaster whose precise dimensions it is impossible to state” and thoroughly decries the methods used by the students, he optimistically looks towards

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.



the future, celebrating the fact that “reform commands an extraordinarily wide positive response in all bodies from trustees to students,” even if “when we come to discussing particulars, we will surely differ on them.”<sup>99</sup> In his own vision for reform he suggested that plans be based on “evolution from existing structures and arrangements, not upon a utopian scheme for a perfect university,” this once again discredits the students’ radicalism, preferring a liberal reformist model over calls for a complete institutional overhaul. What Hofstadter demonstrates in his response is the ability to remain highly critical of the students’ politics whilst holding on to shared values. He does not come out and express the level of shared goals that Brown implies in his biography, instead opting for easier moral targets such as the Vietnam War, but he does see the positive side of the events with the possibility of reform, something that implies more sympathy than he is willing to announce in a university sponsored speech. Distance is created through distaste for their methods, their unthinking activist approach. Yet his is a liberal stance comfortable in its own political leanings, able to understand the motives of and even share limited ideological ground with an enemy to the university and pragmatic political system he clearly holds dear, tempering attacks on them into reasoned defences of the existing hegemony, a less reactionary position than Bell or Diana Trilling, and a position that suggest no neoconservative disenchantment with liberalism. His vision of the possibilities that lie ahead for a new Columbia suggest a greater deal of positivity than other responses such as Diana Trilling’s. Brown even suggests that “the echoes of the Columbia crisis can be heard in Hofstadter’s final books. They extol a consensual vision of political and intellectual life while touching upon the sense of generational purpose that Hofstadter presumed essential to the preservation of a

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

pluralistic nation.”<sup>100</sup> This positive note implies that despite his disagreements with the methodology of the students, shared ideological grounds and a sense of paternalistic responsibility for their actions left a lasting mark on Hofstadter, who saw the students as a crisis in the liberal institution, but one for which the older generation shared some blame and one from which lessons could be drawn, no matter how distasteful the radicalism appeared to the ex-radicals. This is not to suggest his response was entirely positive, as Brown points out, Hofstadter saw the university problems as “particularly inexplicable” due to the privilege of the students, which comes across most in the commencement address in his incredulity at their misdirected anger. Nonetheless it is possible to suggest that his is the most sympathetic response from a central liberal position. <sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> David S. Brown. *Richard Hofstadter*. 187.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.* 215.

## Section Four: Conclusions

Perhaps useful for furthering the culmination of these ideas is a return to Howe's work. Although he did not respond directly to Columbia, he did spend a great deal of time arguing and interacting with the New Left on various issues. Looking at retrospective works of autobiography, such as Howe's *A Margin of Hope*, is useful as a comparison to, and contextualization of, the contemporaneous responses, helping to place them in a continuum of political thought. Howe's autobiography seems to be tinged with regret for the relationships he had with the New Left in the sixties. He discusses early meetings between the editorial board of *Dissent* and SDS representatives in which "both sides... favoured social criticism, both had no taste for Marxist-Leninist vanguards, both held to a vision of socialism as a society of freedom. It seemed at first as if there might be a joining of two generations of the left,"<sup>1</sup> and yet at the time the SDS rhetoric, to Howe, "sounded a little too much like the fecklessness of our Youth, when Stalinists and even a few socialists used to put down "mere" bourgeois democracy" and so the elders of the left reacted badly and relations broke down.<sup>2</sup> Howe discusses the problems faced by this broken relationship, such as the inability to protest the Vietnam War due to the New Left's, monopoly on protest, which held a "double standard" of "harsh criticism of Saigon and either silence about or approval of Hanoi" which for Howe as a "socialist, to have yielded to this American nonchalance would have been to break with all [his] training."<sup>3</sup> As a radical, or ex radical, this left Howe and others feeling marginalized, between the "rhetoric of the New Left" and the "provocation from a government that kept lying about the war," the result of which was to feel "politically beleaguered,

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<sup>1</sup> Irving Howe. *A Margin of Hope – An Intellectual Autobiography*. London (Secker and Warburg, 1982). 292.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 298.

intellectually isolated,” with the New Left’s attacks seeming “particularly wounding.”<sup>4</sup> And yet the aforementioned regret for his attacks on the campus radicals, such as those seen in ‘The New York Intellectuals,’ is apparent in *A Margin of Hope* despite this. He also laments how friendships with figures like Phillip Rahv were severed due to the debates, and even the end of the New left, suggesting that “perhaps I should not have gotten so emotionally entangled in disputed with the New Left. But I Did... I overreacted, becoming at times harsh and strident. I told myself I was one of the few people who took the New Left seriously enough to keep arguing with it. Cold comfort.”<sup>5</sup> Howe’s retrospective regret affirms the notion that tough political positions taken by the ex-radicals on the new radical cadre were hardened by the personal agendas formed in the heat of rhetorical battle. He regrets taking up a high minded aloof position of generational superiority, the same tone that pervades many of the New York Intellectuals’ responses, regardless of the political direction from which the attack is coming, and one that undermines any cross-generational channels for protest; even at events as late as Columbia students protested alongside Tom Hayden, who was 29 at the time, and had support from a range of older figures such as F.W. Dupee, Eric Bentley and Robert Lowell.<sup>6</sup> Howe’s analysis of the events reveal the tumultuous political climate the ex-radicals found themselves in, with their normal political positions dominated and diverted leftward by students, of whom they had a unique understanding due to their own radical past. Out of this difficult period of political realignment came varied responses; in their dealings with the New Left

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 299, 314.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 315.

<sup>6</sup> Although it has to be said that the New Left themselves somewhat exacerbated this generational discontent. The phrase ‘don’t trust anyone over thirty’ is the most famous example of this. For a direct reference to Columbia, in his appraisal of the situation, ‘Two, Three, Many Columbias’ Tom Hayden celebrates the fact that “issues being considered by seventeen-year-old freshmen at Columbia University would not have been within the imagination of most “veteran” students activists five years ago.”

Tom Hayden. ‘Two, Three, Many Columbias.’ *The New Left: A Documentary History*. Ed. Massimo Teodori. London (Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1970). 345.

the New York Intellectuals revealed the extent of their new political leanings as they challenged activist rivals for the political left. As Harvey Teres points out, the fact that Howe “a decade and a half later... still felt compelled to rationalize behaviour that he in some part regretted speaks volumes about the profound difficulties of overcoming differences that have become hardened in polemical battle.”<sup>7</sup> The same holds true for the other responses, some of which shared Howe’s contemporaneous vehemence but all of which seemed ‘hardened’ in the heat of the moment and with deep involvement in both the politics, and, at Columbia, the personal details of the events. As Howe was still firmly at ease with his old Old Left roots, transposing his ideas onto the different political positions each of the respondents to Columbia is impossible, nonetheless his regret and insight into interactions with the New Left are revealing.<sup>8</sup>

Given the contexts set up by Alexander Bloom and Mark Gerson, those of group breakdowns, the end of a liberal consensus and a drift towards neo-conservative positions, the responses are most revealing in what they say about the individuals themselves, and whether any level of group cohesion remained in the New York Intellectual crowd that many commentators suggest was fracturing at this time. For example, many of the responses seem to follow a hardening in the heat of the moment, whilst this seems a somewhat superficial characteristic it is somewhat surprising given the nature of intellectual work; it is clear from nearly all the responses that despite being thoroughly thought through, there is a deep level of personal involvement. From Bell’s more liberal reaction on the Ad Hoc that turned

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<sup>7</sup> Harvey M. Teres. *Renewing the left – Politics, Imagination and the New York Intellectuals*. New York and Oxford (Oxford University Press, 1996). 237.

<sup>8</sup> In his response to Irving Kristol’s critique of his article ‘The New York Intellectuals’ Howe writes “I really want to see the major segments of the American economy socially controlled and democratically operated, and I really want a major redistribution of power and wealth in the U.S.” Irving Howe. Discussion on ‘The New York Intellectuals.’ *Commentary*, Vol.47, No.1 (Jan 1969) 16.

more critical towards the students when he came to write, to the extreme vehemence of Diana Trilling, whose language pictures the events as a savage attack on liberalism, one that pushed her own views to the conservative fringes of the liberalism she is trying to defend, through Dupee's support for the radical activism, all of the respondents seem to have developed strong personal opinions in a relatively short time as the events unfolded. The crisis of the liberal consensus is certainly flagged up in all the responses. Howe, in 1969, celebrated the "remarkable absorptiveness of modern society,"<sup>9</sup> for its ability to accept a hugely divergent set of opinions as a centre ground; from the neutral social democratic positions of Bell, to Diana Trilling's seemingly more conservative stance, to Howe's own socialism, and figures like Dupee celebrating activism, all of them were a part of the liberal consensus at least to some degree. However, what is clear from the responses to Columbia is that a threat so close to home, both literally and figuratively, challenged and changed the supple nature of the liberal centre, especially for these ex-radical figures whose institution was under threat. The liberal intellectual centre, for a large part, could not tolerate such an open attack at its core. From the responses to Columbia there is no doubt that figures such as Dupee, who openly celebrated the events, would find close intellectual or political ties to the Trillings, whose responses vilified the students, increasingly difficult. Like Howe, although to a lesser extent, Diana Trilling returns to the events in her memoir *The Beginning of the Journey*. She suggests of Lionel that he was "full of appetite for the emergency... at last sampling the life of action that has always been denied him" despite having "no gift for political leadership or manoeuvre." She also attacks Dwight MacDonald's celebration of the SDS as to him "it mattered not at all if the institution lived or died – he had found

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<sup>9</sup> See footnote 21, section 1.

himself a revolution.”<sup>10</sup> The longevity of personal involvement is once again apparent, Diana still maintaining the hyperbole of the life and death of Columbia, as she did in ‘On the Steps of Low Library,’ evidencing the highly personal element attached to these very public debates, but it also flags up how the crisis was seen as a real emergency that changed lives, at least temporarily, with Lionel Trilling willing to take up a role that, his wife at least, saw as an uncomfortable match for his character.

When looking at Columbia Alexander Bloom and Mark Gerson emphasize a split between the New York Intellectuals, between those supportive of the students, often cast as the ones who are to be left behind, and the ones hyper critical of student activism. Bloom does take pains to note that only “a few – Macdonald, Dupee, Phillip Rahv, William Phillips and some others - found encouragement” in the “emerging spirit” of the student uprisings, whilst “most, for the ever-more conservatives like Irving Kristol to the declared Old Left survivors like Howe, these new trends did not inspire optimism,” and yet he still sets up Columbia as the binary pairing of two opposing and equal camps by placing Diana Trilling’s ‘On the Steps of the Low Library’ at one side, and Dupee’s ‘The Uprising at Columbia at the other,’ thus furthering the argument that the New Left caused a dramatic rift in the New York Intellectual circle.<sup>11</sup> It is commonly noted that the New York Intellectuals fought their battles with those on the left, as the greater threat was always posed by groups that shared ideological ground, rather than completely alien politics, and that trend had developed since their “youth as Trotskyists had taught them combat on the Left against the Left.”<sup>12</sup> Perhaps this is one of the most important contexts in which to

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<sup>10</sup> Diana Trilling. *The Beginning of the Journey – The Marriage of Diana and Lionel Trilling*. New York, San Diego and London (Harcourt Brace and Company, 1993) 204 and 304.

<sup>11</sup> Alexander Bloom. *Prodigal Sons - The New York Intellectuals and their World*. New York and Oxford (Oxford University Press, 1986). 347.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Gerson. *The Neoconservative Vision From the Cold War to the Culture Wars*. Lanham, New York and Oxford (Madison Books, 1997). 21.

view Columbia, as a continuation of internal battles with the Left, from these early beginnings through McCarthy era liberal anti-communist debates, onto these rhetorical battles with the New left. Therefore there is shared ground even in such diametrically opposed views as Diana Trilling's and Dupee's. All the respondents grant the students a symbolic and cultural importance for the future of American Liberalism, and most of them seek to understand this via their own experiences with political activism and radicalism. Therefore by inviting comparison to thirties radicalism, as Dupee and Lionel Trilling do, even if the two men's opinions fall down on opposing extremes, both men seek to understand the students using the same models. Comparison to one's own youth offers a level of empathy that runs throughout all the respondents' takes on Columbia; even if they completely oppose everything the students stand for, in seeking to understand them, and in explaining them in such detailed and personal ways, the responses reveal the huge personal involvement of these intellectuals, and the massive cultural importance they attach to the incidents. It is no coincidence that an ex-radical cadre takes pains to understand the next generation of radical flag bearers; the reason why the students posed such a threat and created the necessity for such damning prose is that, despite the cries of anti-intellectualism, many of the New York Intellectuals, had in their youth at least, shared some ideological ground with the students. Therefore Dupee's support and the Trillings' indictments offer glimpses of cohesion, they both originate from the same shared core, but where Dupee saw an opportunity for solidity, much as Howe did earlier on in the decade, the others saw a threat, one that was all the more virulent because it came from within.<sup>13</sup> The internal nature of the threat is all the

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<sup>13</sup> See footnote one in Conclusions for reference to the meeting between Howe and the SDS in the early 60s. Quotes from both the *Dissent* editorial board and the SDS leaders such as Tom Hayden on the meeting can be found in the chapter 'The Mood of Two Generations' in Joseph Dorman's book *Arguing the World. Joseph Dorman. Arguing the World – The New York Intellectuals in Their Own Words*. New York et al (The Free Press, 2000). 131-157.



more symbolically resonant because of the relatively generational nature conflict. The major criticism, or support, is often of or for the students' activist methodology. Thus what Dupee reads as youthful exuberance and what Trilling sees as wanton destruction are the two interpretations pushing outwards in different directions from the same ideological core, to which the students could only pose a threat because of the elements of shared ideological ground on the political left, elements that had become distorted due to the completely alien political methodologies of the two generations.

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