



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America by Neil Jumonville
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value of individual creativity and freedom. Of course, they failed. Twentieth-century America did not become a "beloved community." Still, according to Blake, they contributed importantly to the continuing efforts to create a personally meaningful and socially responsible modern culture.

If anything, Blake makes too much of too little. Although interesting and important, the legacy of the Young Americans, finally, is confusing and, at times, disturbing. Even Blake's hero, Mumford, occasionally flirted with technocratic authoritarianism and, after World War II, succumbed to isolated despair. Blake is correct, however, in insisting that the Young Americans provide important insights into the critical generational/cultural shift that occurred among educated Americans in the first half of the twentieth century and, especially, for understanding the pivotal decade of the 1920s, often inaccurately labeled as a "lost generation." Far from it. In the 1920s, a rich and creative time, as Blake makes clear, American writers, artists, and intellectuals laid the foundation of modern American culture. Well written and reasoned, Blake's book is an important chapter of that story and a key book for an understanding of twentieth-century American culture.

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NEIL JUMONVILLE. *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. 1991. Pp. xix, 291. \$24.95.

Neil Jumonville has written a strong and enjoyable book. Rather than re-create debates over abstract ideas such as socialism, anticommunism, or American culture in general, he organizes his chapters around the responses of the New York intellectuals in their forums (the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, for example), and magazines (prominently *Partisan Review*, *Politics*, *Dissent*, *Commentary*, and *Encounter*) to a series of specific events during the years 1945–70: the Waldorf Conference of 1949; the confessional literature produced by repentant ex-Communists (such as Whittaker Chambers' *Witness*); mass culture as represented by radio, television, Hollywood movies, mass-market books and magazines, advertising, mass-produced goods and art; the Beats; and the New Left and the counterculture of the 1960s.

All New York intellectuals did not think alike about these events, people, and topics. Although many in the group had in common growing up in poorer Jewish neighborhoods and attending the City College of New York, there were generational differences. Jumonville's basic distinction involves those whom he labels "affirmers" and "dissenters." Enacting the "critical crossing" from an "earlier ideological faith and prophetic partisanship" and adopting a "more mod-

est and precise outlook based on reason, analysis, and pragmatism" (p. xii), the group's leader, Sidney Hook, and other "affirmers" such as Lionel Trilling, Clement Greenberg, Norman Podhoretz, and Nathan Glazer, usually had moved from the left before the war to the liberal center in the late 1940s and 1950s and then to the right of center in the late 1960s. They urged that, in time of cold war, the task of intellectuals was to be positive about American culture and politics. "Dissenters" such as Dwight Macdonald, Irving Howe, Lewis Coser, and Alfred Kazin, having battled Stalinists in the 1930s, shared the firm anti-communist outlook of the affirmers but moved only from the radical Left to the liberal Left after the war. Affirmers and dissenters agreed on what it meant to be an intellectual: "a nonconformist who maintained some tension with society." They did not agree on "what constituted nonconformism and about the proper level of tension with one's culture" (p. 99).

Many New York intellectuals did not, as one familiar version of their story goes, abandon a commitment to socialism in the fires of the 1960s and, in fear and loathing of the New Left, become the *Commentary* crew of the 1970s and 1980s. Emerging during the 1930s were the characteristics of what became "neo-conservatism": strong anticommunism, a reluctance to tolerate criticism of America, a fear of direct democracy, a Madisonian ideal of representative democracy rather than popular rule, a hostile and elitist attitude toward mass culture, and a "tragic view of life" (pp. 237–38, n. 4). Scorning what they perceived to be the "irrationalism . . . nihilism . . . romanticism . . . moralism, absolutism, and inflexibility" of student radicals in the 1960s, they echoed a quarter-century's commitment to "rationalism, pluralism, system, temperance, moderation, informed debate, analysis, civility, pragmatism, and reason" (p. 221).

Jumonville has not imposed on his intellectuals an agenda derived from concerns of other critics in the 1960s. Instead, he gives us the New York intellectuals in their own terms and asks us to consider questions raised by these activists, questions that resonate in today's debates over "cultural literacy," "diversity," and "closed minds" in American education. He criticizes his subjects gently and offers them as worthy "generalists" who accepted a public responsibility to promote their vision of the good society. Readers of this fine book may not sympathize with his subjects to the extent that Jumonville often does, but they will probably agree that he makes a convincing case for rejecting the commonplace of the past two decades, "that intellectual history is elitist and social history is radical" (p. xv).

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FRANK DONNER. *Protectors of Privilege: Red Squads and Police Repression in Urban America*. Berkeley and Los