

get along easily with others, drink, etc." Students regarded grades in the B and C range as acceptable. Nothing in the college culture encouraged students to work more than the minimum. A student who ignored these standards risked being called a "grind" or an "individualist."⁷⁰

Thus despite immense changes in the nature of knowledge and its relation to society, the life that college men created in the early nineteenth century remained intact in the mid-twentieth century. America stood on the verge of entering the space age, but college men were still caught in the conflicts of the years of the early Republic. Science and technology were splitting the atom, with its immense dangers and promises, but college men knew better than to take study too seriously. To them the real triumphs of college continued to be style, fun, prestige, and winning the races of the extracurriculum. In their eyes students remained at war with their faculty, and only traitors went over to the other side.



Jacobins and Other Rebels

Unlike college men of the nineteenth century, who had the stage all to themselves, those in the twentieth century had to jockey for the limelight with their rebellious classmates. Outsiders had always existed aplenty, but they generally did not take on the opposition, or at least not on its own ground. What was new in the twentieth century was that college rebels confronted college life openly and collectively and fought for dominance in the hallowed realms of the college man—the college newspaper and student government.

The rebels of the 1910s flouted two critical canons of college life. They demanded that college not be a place of withdrawal from politics, but a platform from which to confront the hard issues of the day. They brought onto campus questions of war and peace, capitalism and socialism, and insisted that undergraduates debate them. Perceiving the faculty neither as enemies in battle nor as steppingstones to a career, they dropped the characteristic stances of college students toward their teachers. They regarded professors, like books, as there to be used—when they were helpful. When not, they should be treated with contempt and flung aside.

During the 1920s, one of the heydays of college life, the rebels persisted in their fight for the hearts and minds of college students. Yet in the aftermath of World War I, the search for alternative possibilities became dual. In the 1910s social critics—inside and outside college gates—had blended political and cultural radicalism. The sense of the new that pervaded artistic innovation often took the political form of a cheerful, conflict-free socialism. While some 1920s undergraduates were able to sustain the integration of politics and culture that had enlivened the prewar years, others found

themselves caught in the countercurrents of the broader society. The war and the Russian Revolution challenged both the optimistic and the peaceful assumptions that had underlain the earlier radicalism. In addition, the conservative resurgence of the 1920s, following wartime repression of civil liberties and the Red Scare, came on campus. While college men often joined to their free and easy approach to morals a political conservatism in keeping with national politics, campus rebels followed a less predictable path. Some sustained political commitments on the Left; others moved away from politics to search for aesthetic or personal solutions.

Supporting undergraduate rebellion in the 1920s—both political and aesthetic—were social critics hostile to the connection between college and big business and to the social conformity this interrelation fostered. Though important to intellectual history, Thorstein Veblen's indictment of American colleges and universities, *The Higher Learning*, published in 1918, went virtually unread by collegians. Though a far weaker book, Upton Sinclair's *The Goose-step*, published five years later, had an undergraduate audience. His sprawling catalogue of educational sins—especially those of alliance with American corporate life—served as a reference point for the disaffected. J. E. Kirkpatrick's *The American College and Its Rulers*, published by New Republic, Inc., in 1926, offered a more judicious critique coupled with a call to return college authority to its appropriate masters, the resident members of the community—its faculty and students. As a hopeful sign, he saw "students in revolt."

Kirkpatrick chronicled the rise of dissent among undergraduates. On many campuses, college rebels had created new publications, such as the *Saturday Evening Post* at Yale and the *Tempest* at the University of Michigan, to bypass the censorship imposed on established campus papers. At a number of colleges, undergraduates were staging protests against required military training. At more conservative colleges, especially black institutions, collegians actively revolted against the discipline of an earlier century. Students at Oberlin set themselves in opposition to compulsory chapel. At Harvard and Dartmouth, they demonstrated a growing interest in the nature and form of their courses, and Dartmouth undergraduates participated in a report to reshape the college curriculum. Although the majorities on American campuses still remained "complacent," Kirkpatrick concluded that one could look "with more of hope than of fear to the rising of militant minorities on the campus."²

Rebellious students graduated. Before taking up their adult careers, several of them gave a few years to fostering dissent on campus. A few, such as Henry Hurwitz (Harvard '08), the founder of the undergraduate Memorial

Society, gave their entire professional lives. Others, such as Horace Kallen (Harvard '03) in his *College Prolongs Infancy*, wrote stinging critiques of the canons of college life.³ *The New Republic*, founded by Walter Lippmann, among others, used its pages and its book-publishing subsidiary to provoke collegiate rebellion. Its 1929 collection *The Students Speak Out!* sampled rebellious student opinion from campuses across the nation.⁴

Rebellious alumni were crucial in sustaining key organizations and publications. In 1921 two liberal student organizations merged to form the National Student Forum. Graduates served on its executive committee, along with faculty and undergraduates. The National Student Forum sponsored several conferences in its early years. Between 1922 and 1929 it published the first national college newspaper, *The New Student*, edited until 1927 by Douglas Haskell.⁵

Although its political emphasis fluctuated during its seven-year life, *The New Student* consistently fought to liberalize rules on campus, to offer an alternative to fraternities, and to oppose militarism. It stimulated rebellion: its monthly "magazine" supplement published sections of *The Goose-step*. Most importantly, *The New Student* gave college rebels a critical forum in which they could air their dissent. It printed their iconoclastic poems and quips. As it published news from many institutions, it gave rebels the sense that their local battles formed part of a nationwide struggle. It reported student efforts, such as that at Miami University in 1924, to take power from the fraternities.⁶ It publicized individual fights, such as Beatrice Anthony's battle in the courts for reinstatement after she was expelled from Syracuse because she was not the "Syracuse type."⁷

Its pages gave language to student conflict, both lofty and low. In 1923 the dramatic refusal of twelve Amherst undergraduates, including the senior class president, to take their degrees from a college that had fired President Alexander Meiklejohn became a symbol of courage "to stand up and talk, work, and fight for . . . living knowledge."⁸ On a different plane were quotes from undergraduate publications, such as the one from the University of Indiana's *Vagabond* that criticized conformity and intellectual sterility. The *Vagabond* writer found to be a "pitiful spectacle" the "wretched degradation of human nature . . . the putrescent mess of flesh and bone, be he Babbitt or be he Dean, who, never having experienced the right-about-face in his opinions, goes through life accepting his beliefs on authority and mouthing them with an air of sageness."⁹ An eclectic collection of undergraduate and alumni writing, *The New Student* persistently encouraged college rebels of the 1920s.

Although the initial rebels of the 1910s generally had shared a middle-

or upper-class background with their club or Greek opponents, they were distinctive in that they came from nurturant backgrounds that nonetheless barred them from college life. Their adolescent rebellion took the form of opposition to the conformity that excluded them. After World War I, well-educated, child-conscious families continued to breed rebels, and in some cases the forces of exclusion continued their catalytic effect. When Earl Miers went to Rutgers in the fall of 1929, he entered with a special handicap—cerebral palsy. It marked him as clearly as if he were Jewish or black. During freshman "Pledge Week" no fraternity knocked on his door: "In that age, no fraternity would have considered pledging an athetoid . . . any more than a fraternity would have selected a Negro." Miers determined to fight back. "Rebellion—that streak of impudence without which, no handicapped person can rise above the ignorance and superstition surrounding him—stirred deeply. A variety of four-letter words expressed nearly what I thought of the entire fraternity system. Nor would I accept the belief that fraternities had to run the whole campus. There were on the campus more neutrals than fraternity men, who needed only organization to become the dominant political force in the college. . . . I intended, by God, to break the system."¹⁰

Although he ran for freshman president, he knew he had no chance. His eye was on the long haul, ultimately the editorship of the *Targum*, Rutgers' campus newspaper. As he gradually built support, he came to rely on Earl Reed Silvers, professor, mentor, and confidant. But others on the faculty and administration opposed him, those "old fraternity boys" who "now revered the system as though it were as sacred and as indispensable to a stable society as membership in a church and a good country club (to say nothing of a discreet association with a reliable bootlegger)."¹¹ Miers won his war and emerged as a crusading *Targum* editor-in-chief.

Miers' iconoclasm was not reserved for deans. While he learned a great deal from Reed Silvers, it was the rebel's way to be selective. Once when a young psychology lecturer tried to elicit from the class responses to inkblots, Miers spoke up: "There, sir, I said, 'are two girls chasing a frightened senior across the campus and his pants are falling down. On the steps of Kirkpatrick Chapel a drunken night watchman is laying the housemother of one of the dorms. The dean, hiding in the bushes, is splitting his sides with laughter.'"¹² Fortunately for Miers, the onset of the Depression meant that his tuition was valued above the dignity of the academy, and he was not kicked out.

Handicapped though he was, Miers enjoyed his Rutgers years. "College was not a place where we went to learn how to live; here we lived." Each

night ended in a bull session. On the other side of the great sexual divide, "a dozen of us, crowded in someone's room, talked and talked: about books, music, girls, masturbation, bootleg whiskey, parents, the future, what was wrong with the college, profs, and sex, sex, sex." In his senior year he met Starling Wyckoff, a student at Rutgers College for Women (later renamed Douglas). They became "inseparable." Yet although Miers and his buddies could talk about sex, without a fraternity house or a car, finding places for lovemaking was not easy for young couples. Miers' former housemother understood his need for privacy with Starling. She invited both over and then announced that she would have to be away for an hour and a half. But at Rutgers in the 1930s, not all were so accommodating, and, in Miers' case, one even indicted the innocent. Starling's vindictive housemother learned that the two had been in an unsupervised building (while Miers wrote an editorial for the *Targum*) and tried to make an issue of their breaking of the rules. Miers wisely turned to his faculty mentor, who moved to his defense and prevented any proceedings against the two.¹³ In the years after World War I, college authority spoke about sexuality and rules in many different tongues.

In some cases no apparent disability set off the college rebel. He was simply an outsider who wanted to be inside. To become a rebel required ambition, in some cases blind ambition. It meant both bucking the dominant college clique and fighting to win. In 1927 Lyndon Johnson at San Marcos College had just such ambition. He found it relatively easy to ingratiate himself with the college administration, but power over other students was more difficult to achieve. In that Texas setting athletics provided the single route to collegiate prestige. The athletes confirmed their power in a local social fraternity, the Black Stars. Because he was not an athlete, Johnson did not make the fraternity and found himself cut out of the ruling elite. To a young man of his energy and drive for power, this was clearly unacceptable.

Johnson quickly figured out a strategy. He joined the White Stars, a secret club, and helped turn it into an instrument for gaining power at San Marcos. Convinced that secrecy was essential, club members never congregated in public. In an interview with Doris Kearns, Johnson recalled the rule "that no more than two of us could be seen together on the campus. If a third member came along, we had special code signals as to which one was expected to leave."¹⁴ Each club member took responsibility for learning about a different group on campus and pooled his information with that of the others at club meetings. San Marcos' non-athletes, who formed 90 percent of the student body, were its outsiders. They clearly felt aggrieved over the athletes' privileges and their inequitable share of the student activi-

ties fund. Initial success came when a number of White Stars, who had grown to twenty, beat Black Star candidates in elections to the student council and the student newspaper.

From his position on the college paper, Johnson covered news of non-athletes. His closeness to the college administration helped him get student jobs for his supporters. The White Stars' ascendancy in the student council led to a reallocation of student funds to the cultural and intellectual activities



Even the most ambitious rebel could take time off: Lyndon Baines Johnson, right, with his college roommate, Alfred "Boody" Johnson. *Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.*

of the non-athletes. Johnson's final goal was symbolic, to win for his group the presidency of the senior class. Unwilling to accept the judgment of informal White Star poll-taking that the Black Star candidate had the lead, Johnson spent a long night traveling through the student boardinghouses to argue for his man. The next day his best friend won by eight votes.¹⁵ Although Johnson's later career suggested an extraordinary lust for power, his college days read like those of other successful rebels. It took Johnsonian drive to win against the odds.

Jacobs and Other Rebels

Although Earl Miers became a campus rebel because his disability excluded him from college life, and Lyndon Johnson because he could not play football, by the 1920s other undergraduates required no such catalyst. Collegiate rebellion was an available alternative to students, in some cases a compelling one. It was supported by alumni and by *The New Student*. The groove had been made. Some of those who later became rebels had joined fraternities or sororities, but became converted later in college. A fair number were Jewish, but by the 1920s many Jews had the option of becoming college men and women in their own branch of the Greek system. The distinction that emerged in the 1920s between rebels and college men and women was of temperament and style. Collegiate rebellion attracted those who were nonconforming, ambitious, and restless. In the world of Main Street, such undergraduates thought of themselves as Sinclair Lewis.¹⁶

In 1923 at Harvard, for example, two wealthy clubmen turned against their own kind. Corliss Lamont began his long career as a maverick by publishing in the *Harvard Advocate* an article exposing and attacking the divisions that sustained the "Two Harvards." *The New York Times* reported that he demonstrated that the "sons of well-to-do families" who came to Harvard from preparatory schools dominated "sport, club and editorial activities, while the students recruited from public schools almost monopolized scholastic honors." His classmate Charlton MacVeagh, son of a United States Steel executive, publicly attacked the low academic standards that allowed the well-prepared clubmen to loaf their way through college. Both joined together to create the Harvard Debating Union, modeled after that of Oxford, to interest their more privileged classmates in public questions.¹⁷

Columbia's Reed Harris, later to be a government official and deputy head of the Voice of America, was a rebel in this mold. The son of wealthy New Yorkers, he had prepped at Staunton Military Academy. Historically Columbia College had offered students a talented faculty and significant diversity.¹⁸ But Reed Harris initially made the conventional choice. On entering Columbia, he joined a prestigious fraternity, went out for freshman football, and began writing for the student daily, the *Spectator*. Once he became editor-in-chief, however, Harris turned to attack. He wrote exposés of Columbia football practices, its honor society, and the administration of its dining halls. On April 1, 1932, Dean Herbert Hawkes expelled him. Although Reed Harris' family represented the establishment, his father supported him against the Columbia administration. Tudor Harris announced that he "would regard a diploma received at the hands of a college president who could sanction, let alone direct, such an action for such a cause as a stigma." The elder Harris' permissive understanding of youth is clear

from his statement that he respected his son for having "brought new vigor and life" to the student paper. In contrast, President Nicholas Murray Butler and Dean Hawkes "seek to hold growing and active minds within the limits of prescriptive thinking."

Outraged undergraduates, organized by radical groups, staged a one-day strike protesting Harris' expulsion. As they demonstrated in front of Low Library, they were pelted with eggs by fraternity members and athletes. To many in his class, however, Reed Harris was a campus hero: in May he garnered enough votes to be elected the senior "most likely to succeed."¹⁹

While rebels such as Lyndon Johnson and Reed Harris operated in a political fashion, the 1920s saw the birth of a more elusive form of collegiate rebellion, one that vied less for the votes than for the inner assent of classmates. This aesthetic or intellectual iconoclasm questioned values, institutions, and mores, but stayed aloof from political engagement. As college students with an independent cast of mind confronted a changed world, some of them chose to remain outside the political fray and turn inward to struggle for psychic freedom. As a result, the cultural and political strands of rebellion split apart.

By the 1920s at Harvard some experimental-minded undergraduates, uncomfortable with both the conformity of college life and the assumptions of the more politicized forms of college rebellion, found their voice as independents. David Riesman and his roommate entered Dunster House as seniors. As editor of the *Crimson*, Riesman had taken a position—opposed by the clubmen—to support the new House system. As he later recalled, "the new Houses made a difference for those of us who needed adults who would support our intellectual and academic concerns, since we could not always find enough support for these among our peers."²⁰ In the company of young faculty—Carl J. Friedrich, Crane Brinton, and Seymour Harris—Riesman and his friends created a world in which they could discuss music, art, and literature. Although of Jewish descent, Riesman was no outsider. The son of a distinguished professor of medicine at the University of Pennsylvania and an alumna of Bryn Mawr, he became a managing editor of the *Crimson*. Nor was he a political rebel: "I was one of those who mocked Roger Baldwin and Corliss Lamont, civil libertarians and Harvard alumni, when they protested the wages of Harvard scrubwomen." Feeling "little class guilt," Riesman stood aloof from political protest, but kept his inquiring mind.²¹

Riesman's independence of established modes suggests a shift that began as early as the late 1920s at Harvard. Already by Riesman's undergraduate years the sharp boundaries between college men, outsiders, and rebels at

Harvard were beginning to dissolve. What in the nineteenth century had been clear social divisions maintained by the Greek and club system gradually began to fade to become more elusive mental constructions against which individuals struggled for self-definition.

Several forces intersected to corrode the old categories. Reform effectively altered the atmosphere to break the power of college life and allow worldly students entry into the life of the mind. Anti-Semitism, which had maintained a *cordón sanitaire* between Gentiles and Jews, began to lose its potency among sophisticated college students, opening the way to friendships and spirited interchange. And finally modern consciousness penetrated to question established traditions, even the tradition of questioning. As a result, beginning in the late 1920s a small number of undergraduates were able to distance themselves from existing modalities.

Published in 1933, George Weller's novel of Harvard, *Not to Eat, Not for Love*, captures this new possibility. The multiple voices of the work sound unlike any previous traditions of college fiction. Modeled after Dos Passos' *U.S.A.*, the novel suggests a musical composition, whose melodies, taken by different students, play against a counterpoint of deans, professors, and alumni. Authority as represented by these elders is complex and contradictory. It speaks the many languages of official administration, college men, rebels, and outsiders.²²

As an upholder of the old moral order, Dean Carron demands that a student who has spent the night with his girlfriend resign from the college. The Dean's justice is abstract: "If I make an exception in your case I have to make it in all cases." The iconoclastic composition professor pushes the freshmen to consider a Harvard of individuals, where "no one cares what you do," where each graduate is not "much like any other young man that ever went there," and where only the uninteresting strive for college life. The collegiate alumnus returning to his annual club banquet can think of nothing about which to converse with an undergraduate other than alcohol and football. The outsider alumnus bitterly condemns the Harvard that valued the "mummery" of clubs and cliques.²³

What is intriguing is that these are the background figures, not the foreground. By the Harvard of the early 1930s a mentality existed that perceived these stock types as the props of the drama, not its substance. The book centers on the inner consciousness of Epes Todd, a Harvard junior. Todd plays football because he loves it, but he is Second Varsity. He eats at the Varsity Club during the season but is outside final club life. At the opening of the novel, Todd's grades have slipped. He does not care, for his passion of the moment is football. Through the course of the narrative Todd

comes to shift his intensity from football to art history. As he strives to gain insight and mastery, he concentrates on the subject itself, not the grade. At the center of Todd's Harvard life are emerging commitments to work and to love.

In his struggle for a creative adulthood, Todd makes a critical alliance with his tutor in art history, Warren Brant. Brant is not a professorial type but an individual of quiet kindness and clear intellect. Brant opens his apartment, library, mind, and personal life to Todd. The two engage in true intellectual discourse that redirects Todd and helps him find his calling. As Todd reads in Brant's study in the afternoon the "crevices in his knowledge began to fill in. It became probable that the neoclassic French had not blindly scourged themselves into order, but that they had honestly raised up a code of laws and voluntarily made it governor of their creativeness."²⁴

Once Todd meets Ellen Thwyte, his growing intellectual power becomes entwined with the opening of his emotional and erotic life. He leaves his first examination with the satisfaction that "he had written freely and fluently. . . . Ellen's coming had taken away a filter through which all his thoughts had once been forced to pass."²⁵ With full knowledge of Todd's need of Ellen, Brant offers Todd use of his apartment when he and his wife take a vacation, and thereby gives Todd a place to gain sexual fulfillment.

Nothing about Todd's growing love for Ellen Thwyte echoes college fiction. It is passionate and serious, not comic or melodramatic. The two speak the language of sensitive youth emerging into adulthood. As they leave the chapel after hearing Christmas carols, Ellen Thwyte reflects, "My trouble, after evenings like this, is to find out which music I heard and which was my own." The consummation of their love in the Brants' apartment, suggested in an intense and dramatic dream sequence, does not end the narrative, but merely moves Todd to another plane of development. Todd remains at Harvard. Despite their deep feeling, he and Ellen are forced by their ignorance of birth control to withdraw temporarily from sex. More importantly, Todd must work through a second relationship, that with his mentor, Warren Brant, and with Brant's wife, Ina, a couple to whom he felt he owed everything. His knowledge that, after years of infertility, Ina is bearing Warren's child frees Todd from the sense of indebtedness that had clouded their relationship and opens the way to his imagining a full life with Ellen. He leaves the Brants to telephone Ellen: "As he drew near the lightbathed Square he understood that he was now educated. It could not be given back, no, nor taken. He tightened himself, not to tremble."²⁶

Except for a minor character desperate to get a job after graduation, the novel gives scant attention to the Depression. The personal and developmen-

tal issues that Weller addresses through Epes Todd suggest their roots in the consciousness of certain undergraduates of the 1920s. However, in the decade in which it was published—the 1930s—the independent mentality that Weller evoked was overwhelmed by undergraduates' response to the Great Depression.

The 1930s saw a marked change in the fortunes of the political college rebels. During the hard times, many students who might have joined a Greek-letter society had to economize, shrinking the ranks of the organized. Rebels were able to mobilize the independents to win power on some campuses, gaining control over some undergraduate government associations and campus newspapers. In numbers the political rebels were few. They led with little following among their own kind. Some gained power by playing it safe within the Greek orbit until elected. Others openly mobilized outsiders from the beginning. Rebels gave to outsiders candidates and a battle plan. What the rebels received in return was votes. Through this route the rebels broke through the oligopolistic control of the Greek system, which, where it was a minority on campus, required the apathy and the disorganization of the outsiders to win college-wide elections.

In the intensely political atmosphere of the 1930s organizational victories became substantive ones. For example, at the University of Oregon, Richard L. Neuberger spearheaded a campaign in the *Oregon Emerald* against the university's compulsory athletic fee. Many college papers and student councils came out for the Oxford pledge, originating in England, that committed its takers to oppose their government in any future war. At some institutions campus organizations supported the April student strikes against war, initiated by radical groups. These became annual events in the late 1930s.²⁷

Eric Severeid attended the University of Minnesota during years of political ferment. The grandson of Norwegian immigrants, he came from the small town of Velva, North Dakota, where his father was the local banker. At Minnesota in the early 1930s he encountered struggle, not of the gridiron, but "the battle, in deadly earnest, with other students of different persuasion or of no persuasion, with the university authorities, with the American society of that time." His college days had their intense moments of exhilaration and bitterness, but of a different sort from media portrayals. Emotional exhaustion for him came "not from singing about the 'dear old college' but from public debate." Whenever he read a college novel or saw a Hollywood depiction of college life, he was "astonished and unbelieving" or had "a faint twinge of nostalgia for a beautiful something I never knew."²⁸ For in college Severeid became a rebel.

With like-minded friends, a small intense group of ten or twelve high

academic achievers with radical convictions, he formed a tight circle. The group took the name Jacobin Club. It first gained university attention when it appeared on a fraternity ranking list where it received the highest academic average of any organization on campus in thirty years.

The Jacobins turned to campus politics. They took on the Greek system, which at Minnesota was led by a few seniors in the law school. Heretofore, this clique had controlled nominations, parceling out the elective offices among the fraternity brothers and the social honors, such as positions in the line of march at the class dances, among the sorority sisters. "The Greek houses suddenly discovered that while they had been immersed in such matters as the class proms, other students by some diabolical and mysterious means had overreached them and were controlling the really vital instruments—the daily newspaper, the literary review, the law review, the board of publications, the student council, and so on."²⁹

As they gained control of campus organizations, the Jacobins turned them to new purposes. They tried to make student government into a real policy-making body, rather than the puppet of the university administration. They turned the newspaper into a radical forum. And they used their support of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party and Governor Frank B. Olson to change the composition of the board of regents in order to abolish military training, which had been compulsory for all University of Minnesota students for the preceding sixty years.

Although successful, this band of rebels had one notable failure. For several years the Jacobins controlled the campus newspaper. By "right of seniority," Severeid assumed that he would serve as editor his senior year. Because of Severeid's open leadership in the fight against military training, the ROTC and the administration opposed him. The incumbent editor, one of the rebel group, went over to the enemy. He allowed himself to be persuaded by the university administration to stand for re-election. In the bitter fight that followed, the ROTC, the administration, and the Greek system mobilized against Severeid. In the publication board election, he lost by one vote.³⁰

Severeid and his cronies took politics seriously, but they had a playful side. As part of its campaign to end compulsory military training the newspaper joined in support of "Jingo Day," a counter-celebration to the annual ROTC reviews. At a mock political convention in 1936, to ridicule the preparedness movement, Severeid nominated Bernarr Macfadden, the elderly health proponent, as a "Strong Man in the White House" and to parade the convention floor hired a bugler, a well-endowed female acrobatic dancer, and a muscular football player. To mock the American Legion and

the Gold Star Mothers, he and his friends joined the "Veterans of Future Wars."³¹

Like Walter Lippmann in 1910, the Jacobins connected campus politics to the larger world. Philosophically they were socialists, but on the state level they fervently backed Governor Olson. In 1934 they sympathized with striking truckers, led by Trotskyists. Severeid covered the strike for the *Minneapolis Star* and was shocked to see fraternity men with baseball bats supporting the police and the Citizen's Alliance against the strikers. When the strikers, running away from a police ambush, were shot with buckshot, Severeid felt he had seen fascism in the American Midwest.

But not all the lessons were out of school. Severeid entered intensely into some of his courses. He felt that before college he had learned nothing. He "strayed one day into a class on political first principles" taught by a radical exponent of the Socratic method. Bombarded by questions he could not answer, Severeid became, like many others, "not only confused, but angry and resentful. Some did not come back to his classes. For those of us who stayed it was not an easy time, but it was wonderful. We were just discovering the exciting world of Ideas, the world of Theory and of Principle." Severeid began a serious study of philosophy, working his way from the Greeks to Trotsky. "It was a long trip." But through it he learned how to find his way in the political universe. The experience of his first encounter with the life of the mind "was like learning a foreign language after one is grown. For a long time the words and phrases beat without effect upon the brain—then suddenly one day they all drop into place; one can understand, and he can speak."³²

For Severeid collegiate rebellion merged into political radicalism. This link went back to early-twentieth-century beginnings. Some initial college rebels had joined the Intercollegiate Socialist Society, created in 1905 by adult socialists to educate students to the cause. In the period from the early 1930s until the entry of the United States into World War II, radicalism appealed strongly to rebellious college youth. Thus a study of the 134 known members of student socialist and communist groups between 1932 and 1942 at the conservative University of Illinois is instructive. Their numbers were extremely small: on a burgeoning state university campus, the average annual membership in all radical organizations was 34. (The activities that they sponsored attracted between 100 and 450.) Compared to their classmates, a far higher proportion of the known radicals were urban, children of professional parents, Jewish, and enrolled in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Not only was their participation in all campus activities lower; only 15 percent of the radicals belonged to fraternities and

Wechsler later recalled his undergraduate sense that the event was "a shattering episode in what we came to describe rather grandly as our 'disillusionment with the professed liberalism of Columbia.'"36

The third lesson came during the protests that followed, as Wechsler observed the communists mounting effective demonstrations. In college Wechsler became convinced that the world was on the verge of "break-down," that he was living "on the edge of catastrophe." To him the efficient, self-assured Marxists offered both a convincing explanation and a means of action—"certitude and salvation." By his sophomore year he had left his fraternity and had become a socialist. In the spring of 1933 when Columbia failed to renew the appointment of Donald Henderson, an economics instructor and open radical, the protests of 1932 resumed. Wechsler covered the torchlight parade for the *Spectator*. On impulse he rose to speak in Henderson's behalf. The paper reprimanded him for his breach of reportorial neutrality, but his stock rose among radicals.³⁷

By Wechsler's junior year, he had repaired the damage to his newspaper reputation and felt confident of becoming the *Spectator* editor. He came increasingly to feel that his "failure to join in the communists was simply proof of my own timidity and prejudices rather than the product of any reasonable objection," that he was bound by his middle-class prejudices. A few days before his election as editor, a young instructor in zoology approached him: "Wasn't it time, he asked, for me to become a communist in fact as well as in spirit?" Wechsler's fears about losing his editorial freedom to write his own opinions were quieted by the verbal reassurance, of dubious logic, that because he would have participated in any decision of the Columbia chapter of the Young Communist League, he would agree with that decision. And thus, he signed the card.³⁸ In the three years that followed, he edited the *Spectator*, participated in the American Youth Congress, rallied in the spring strike for peace, spent several months on the executive committee of the Young Communist League, worked for the National Student League, and wrote the persuasive and still useful *Revolt on the Campus*. Disillusioned with communist intellectual rigidity and sobered by a trip to Russia, in 1937 he resigned formally from the party.

While Wechsler moved from rebel to radical at Columbia, some freshmen at the City College of New York moved from radicals to rebels. This free, non-resident college attracted the ambitious children of immigrants, and by the 1920s over 80 percent of the student body was Jewish. Some, such as Irving Howe, a student between 1936 and 1940, entered with an advanced political education that had begun in high school.

At City College the "real center" of Howe's life was the lunchroom. His

turf was Alcover 1, the hangout of the anti-Stalinist Left, a loose coalition of perhaps fifty Trotskyists, Socialists, and Lovestonites. Next to them was Alcover 2, the territory of the Stalinists, the four hundred members of the Young Communist League. Throughout the day and evening they argued in Alcover 1 about the various issues that divided the Left: the New Deal, the war in Spain, the theory of permanent revolution. "I can remember getting into an argument at ten in the morning, going off to some classes, and then returning at two in the afternoon to find the argument still going on, but with an entirely fresh cast of characters."³⁹

Only the peculiar conditions at City College allow us to consider Howe a college rebel as well as a radical. Undergraduate rebellion at CCNY did not mean a confrontation with its tiny, ineffectual fraternity system, but rather the struggle for power with the stronger and better-organized communists of Alcover 2. Just like those other rebels who were creating alternative campus publications, Alcover 1 waged its warfare in leaflets. Howe got journeyman experience as a writer as he waged college political warfare, writing and printing socialist leaflets to be distributed every two weeks or so.

Unlike that of other campus rebels, Howe's education at CCNY had little to do with the classroom. Faculty provided a formal education that was "all right," but "not enough for the time or for us." With a few exceptions, such as the brilliant sessions with Morris Raphael Cohen, Howe learned outside of class. He had a mediocre record because he spent "little time in class and less doing homework." "I'd go to class, sit impatiently for a few minutes until the roll was called, slip out, head for the lunchroom where a political argument was waiting, and at the hour's end race back to get the books I had left in the classroom." Howe did admire Cohen, who retired in the late 1930s, but he failed to make contact with most of his professors. The gap between professors and students seemed "beyond bridging." The students demanded an intellectual intensity that their professors could not meet. "Intellectual to a fault, entranced by abstraction and deficient in the graces of life," undergraduates "educated and miseducated" themselves.⁴⁰

City College was a unique case, an intense concentration of Jewish immigrants' sons learning to speak the language of socialism, taught by a decent but conventional faculty from an earlier era. Columbia, too, in the heart of New York, was a special world. And the 1930s was an unusual decade. In the most unexpected places, political college rebels flourished and created a style that mixed seriousness and gaiety. The Vassar College that writer Richard Rovere remembered from his college days at Bard was the Vassar of 1934 whose students and faculty staged a peace parade. A traveling circus in Poughkeepsie for a day joined the parade: "debutantes and profes-

sors mingled with bearded ladies, weight lifters, and peep-show performers." Rovere had come to Bard an unquestioning conservative. He "became a radical almost overnight . . . I am sure that the fact that the Vassar girls I knew . . . were members of the Young Communist League had a lot to do with my speedy conversion."⁴¹

World War II ended an era. Undergraduates who had opposed all wars their government might undertake rallied to the flag to defend the United States against fascism and Japanese aggression. Many postponed or interrupted college to join the troops, enter intelligence, or perform war service. To go to college during the conflict meant preparing oneself to be a better worker in the national cause. In the war's immediate aftermath, the campus became the place of opportunity for returning veterans, whose no-nonsense approach to higher education gave little room for nonconformity.

In the postwar years, radical ideology found few followers. Knowledge of totalitarianism in Russia and the rise of the Cold War disillusioned many on the Left. The McCarthy hearings reverberated to make many students and professors cautious. Wealth and conservatism returned to campus. Upon the nation settled a sober mood that some students interpreted as a license to return the campus to college life. Most took the routes of the college man and woman or the outsider.

As the campus was swept first by war and then by its wake, the nonconforming undergraduate felt isolated, without mentors or allies on campus. Intense individualists, caught in the drama of their psyches, played out their conflicts in their personal relationships and in poetry. At Columbia and Barnard the beginnings of a literary underground emerged, its ties more with the streets and bars of New York than with the colleges.

One cannot read undergraduate rebellion into the college careers of those who later were called the Beats. Some of them never went to college. The painful metamorphosis of those who did cannot be encompassed by college rebellion because it was too removed from campus and only began in their college years. Two of the Beats went to Columbia. Jack Kerouac entered in 1940 as a football hero with literary ambitions. A leg injury ruined his athletic hopes, but freed him for writing. The war made college seem meaningless. He left to wander and ultimately joined the Navy. Discharged as psychologically unfit after months of observation, he continued to fail. After a stint in the Merchant Marines, Kerouac returned to Columbia in 1944. He took up with Edie Parker, a Barnard student. Through her he met Lucien Carr, a willful but captivating freshman, and, through Carr's homosexual admirer David Kammerer, the writer William Burroughs.

Allen Ginsberg entered Columbia in 1943 to begin years of pain and

search. In crisis over his identity as a homosexual, the effects of his mother's mental illness, and the demands of his poet father, he found allies in Carr, Kerouac, and Burroughs. Encouragement by Lionel Trilling and Mark Van Doren paled beside the pull of his new friends. Despite some praise of his undergraduate poems and recognition of him as a literary figure by college publications, Ginsberg began to live a life more off campus than on. Ultimately it led to his suspension. When Carr killed Kammerer, Kerouac was arrested as a witness and expelled from Columbia. After a brief stint as a married workingman in Michigan, Kerouac returned to Columbia and hung around, living in Ginsberg's room. Ginsberg was suspended for writing obscene slogans on his windows and for harboring Kerouac against college rules. Outside of Columbia, Kerouac and Ginsberg entered into the underground into which Burroughs' drug addiction was leading him. Although Ginsberg eventually returned to Columbia and received his degree in 1948, his college experience had less importance than his life outside, an increasingly disordered life of redium, anxiety, ecstasy, and danger.⁴²

Although the emergence of the Beats into writers and poets had little to do with patterns of undergraduate rebellion, their impact on later generations of college rebels was profound. As the Beats took to the streets and the road, they created a romantic image of the genius, inspired by drugs, sex, and opposition to bourgeois America. By the late 1950s undergraduates uncomfortable with conformist pressures began to gather on campus to listen to Beat poetry and to sing folk music. Struggling to find their authentic selves, they questioned their parents' compromises about sex and drugs and began to experiment. Although the media still focused on either the conformity of American college students or their academic striving, apparent to a few were the increasing numbers of undergraduates who felt alienated from the society and its central values.⁴³

One observer of Princeton undergraduates in the 1950s departed from the usual questions asked about students to study the possibilities of their personal and intellectual growth in college. As an alumnus and adviser, psychologist Roy Heath may have been too sympathetic to his subjects and, therefore, may have exaggerated small signs of change. Yet he set forth a possibility with resonance in the past and implications for the future. As he studied his all-male advisees during their four years, he divided them into psychological types, which he labeled Non-committers, Hustlers, and Plungers. He had no interest in collegiate cultures, ignored class and ethnic variables, and dealt with students' self-presentations during interviews and social hours, not their behavior on campus, but his composite profiles bear significant relation to the three male categories of college men, outsiders,

and rebels. His Non-committers were conformists and joiners who followed safe paths and held themselves back from intense involvement. His Hustlers were competitive high achievers who worked hard, monopolized class discussion, and saw life as a battle. His Plungers, few in number, were impulsive, moody, inconsistent, nonconformist, and concerned with intellectual integrity.

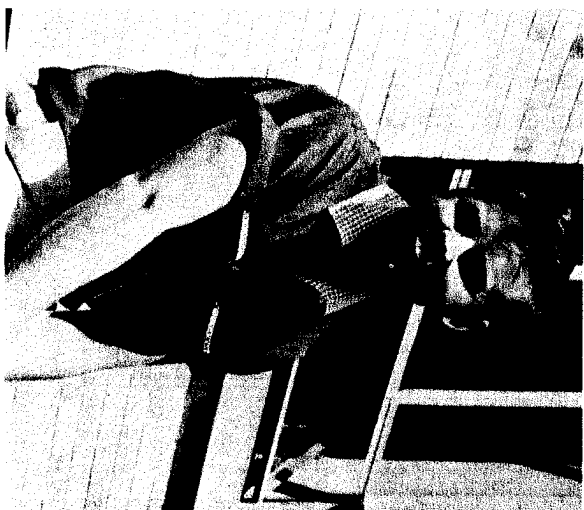
In addition, Heath isolated a fourth type of student, as both a separate category and a goal toward which his other three might strive: the Reasonable Adventurer. These young men stood out because, unlike the others, they were satisfied with both their work and their friendships. They were connected to the world and had the capacity for change. Heath found that they shared "intellectuality, close friendships, independence in value judgments, tolerance of ambiguity, breadth of interests, and sense of humor." Although able to find personal satisfaction, these young men were hardly bucolic. Their knowledge of the world led to "sobriety and, at times, anguish." Out of his group of thirty-six Princeton men, Heath found seven Reasonable Adventurers among his freshmen. Overenthusiastic, he advanced roughly half into that category by graduation.⁴⁴

Heath told us far too little about his Reasonable Adventurers, giving us no data about them beyond their psychological profiles. Despite this limitation, what makes his study tantalizing is that it raises the possibility that George Weller's Epes Todd may not have been merely fictional and that, largely unnoticed, the independence of mind that began at Harvard in the late 1920s may have been quietly growing and spreading to other places in the years after World War II.

Inner development may be invisible to most campus observers, but political rebellion is, by definition, public and dramatic, and in the 1930s political rebellion returned to campus. By then college life in its prewar forms seemed clearly in the ascendancy, shaping the expectations of entering freshmen. When Willie Morris came to the University of Texas from Yazoo City, Mississippi, he expected it to be like his hometown, "only bigger and better." A joiner, he expanded his field in college to include the fraternity, the student government, the Freshman Council, and the ROTC band. But something began to work inside him and gradually he grew "more lonely, more contemptuous of this organized anarchy, more despairing of the ritualized childishness and grasping narcissism of the fraternity life."⁴⁵

His final moment of truth came when he was a junior. Left naked and tied to a tree out in the country in a campus service club initiation ritual, Morris freed himself and walked back to the university. "It was the last indignity: homesick, cold, alone, naked, and lost, off on some meaningless

adolescent charade." From a hill overlooking Austin, he viewed the campus in all its beauty. "All of a sudden, I got mad, probably the maddest I had ever been in my whole life—at homesickness, at blond majorettes, at gat-rooted Dallas girls, at fraternities, at twangy accents, at my own helpless condition. *I'm better than this sorry place*, I said to myself, several times, and be damned if I didn't believe it." He did not turn openly against fraternity



Rebels in the 1930s might come with quite conventional extensors: Willie Morris, chosen by the *Cactus* 1936 staff as one of its "Outstanding Students." Eugene C. Barker Texas History Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

life. Campaigning for the editorship of the *Daily Texan*, "with cynicism in my heart and the tally of the fraternity and sorority vote in my secret ledger, I sought their support."⁴⁶

Like Reed Harris and other rebel editors, Morris used his position to investigate and question critical areas of university life. At Columbia in 1932, these had been football and the administration of the dining halls. At the University of Texas in the late 1930s, Morris turned to the university's relation to Texas economic interests and racial segregation.

Morris' transformation did not happen by magic. As a freshman on the

Daily Texan his first job was to read the other college newspapers. There he discovered, among the standard articles about football and homecoming, the minds of rebellious college journalists, bringing to the campus the critical issues of the day. He met contemporaries whom he admired. He had dinner at the apartment of two young married graduate students. Their walls were lined with books, and they talked about ideas. Morris left stirred by what he had seen and heard and embarrassed by his ignorance and naïveté. He went to the library determined to read "every important book that had ever been written." He read tall stacks "in a great undigested fury." He had some fine professors. The university was teaching him that "books and literature . . . were not for getting a grade, not for the utilitarian purpose of being considered a nice and versatile boy, not just for casual pleasure, but subversive as Socrates and expressions of man's soul." As he later reflected on the meaning of his education, he knew it had changed his life. His coming into intellectual consciousness had not involved refinement or ideological change, "but something more basic and simple. This was the acceptance of ideas themselves as something worth living by. It was a matter . . . not of discovering *certain* books, but the simple *presence* of books, not the nuances of idea or feeling, but idea and feeling on their own terms."⁴⁷

For political college rebels, such as Morris, the 1950s were not "silent," but as filled with controversy as the 1930s. Morris' story is similar to that of Severeid and Wechsler and countless others. Future iconoclasts entered college with freshman enthusiasm, joined a fraternity or sorority, or found themselves excluded, and then opened their eyes to the foolishness of college life. They were often outgoing and ambitious, and their independence of mind pushed them to nonconformity. Once outside traditional college life, they discovered ideas and books and faculty mentors ready to guide them. They linked up with others who shared their vision and set out to edit the college newspaper or gain control of student government. In power, they pledged themselves to treat the real issues confronting college students. This brought them into conflict with the college administration, which, out of conservatism or fear, tried to censor statements or bring the rebels down.

Cultural rebels, less easy to describe because their struggles were more inward and more diverse, withheld their assent throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Nonconformity began to take a common shape on campus in the late 1950s as alienated youth responded to new artistic currents and to the promise of psychic release from conformist America. Less visibly, independent-minded undergraduates quietly pursued their own ends.

Despite the commonalities, each rebel—in 1935 as in 1910—experienced his or her conversion and struggle as if it were a unique experience. Even

though surrounded by others dealing with the same issues, the rebels felt intensely alone. Perhaps the personal urges that drew them into questioning made them unaware of others like themselves. Perhaps the bohemian tradition of radical individualism lent an aura to the loner. Or perhaps the intense inner changes that intellectual and personal growth demanded made the experience feel isolating even when one was in a crowd. Despite this remembered feeling, in the years after World War II, collegiate rebellion returned as an alternative for students, as clearly delineated as the path of the college man and woman or the route of the outsider.