

Charles Kadushin

American
The
American
Intellectual
Intellectual
Elite
Elite

With a new introduction
by the author

Charles Kadushin

American
Intellectual
Elite

With a new introduction
by the author



Transaction Publishers
New Brunswick (U.S.A.) and London (U.K.)

New material this edition copyright © 2006 by Transaction Publishers,
New Brunswick, New Jersey. www.transactionpub.com

Originally published in 1974 by Little, Brown and Company.

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher. All inquiries should be addressed to Transaction Publishers, Rutgers—The State University, 35 Berrue Circle, Piscataway, New Jersey 08854-8042.

This book is printed on acid-free paper that meets the American National Standard for Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials.

Library of Congress Catalog Number: 2005055998

ISBN: 1-4128-0513-9

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kadushin, Charles.

The American intellectual elite : with a new introduction by the author / Charles Kadushin.

p. cm.

Originally published in 1974 by Little, Brown and Company.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-4128-0513-9 (alk. paper)

1. United States—Social conditions—1960-1980. 2. Intellectuals—United States. 3. United States—Intellectual life. 4. Elite (Social sciences) I. Title.

HN65. K32 2005

305.5'52097309045—dc22

2005055998

American
Intellectual
Elite

For My Children

*Introduction to the Transaction Edition*¹

The data reported upon in *The American Intellectual Elite*² (henceforth AIE) were collected in 1970 and represented intellectuals who in the late 1960's wrote in leading intellectual journals or whose books were reviewed in them, and who were talked about by other intellectuals. Much has happened in the last thirty-five years to the world, to the United States and to American intellectuals. But one thing seems not to have changed. Intellectuals still like to write about themselves. Stefan Collini, professor of intellectual history and English literature at Cambridge University, offers a wry but accurate model about the current state of thought about intellectuals:³

[T]he sheer predictability of so much of the writing on intellectuals is truly awful to behold. I have sometimes thought that I could earn a steady income by marketing a software package which, used correctly, would guarantee the production of a whole series of publishable 1, 200-word articles on the subject so limited does the collection of journalistic tropes appear to be—real intellectuals are only found elsewhere, in other countries, in the past, or in the mind; intellectuals aren't speaking out when they should be; intellectuals should keep quiet for once; once upon a time intellectuals were important; only intellectuals have ever thought intellectuals; were important; happy is the land which has no intellectuals why does Britain, uniquely, have no intellectuals and, most commonly, some variant on what one might call "the 3-D version"—the decline, disappearances or death of the intellectual. And there is a similarly limited repertoire of concluding flourishes: "pygmies in the shadow of giants" "being

awkward is what they're for," "Socrates as role model, hemlock and all," "speak out or sell out," and so on. If the term "ivory tower" does not appear somewhere, then it is just possible that a little genuine thinking may be going on.

This vein is true of journalists for whom "turning out a piece on the theme of 'intellectuals' might almost seem the would-be columnist's equivalent of passing the driving test," but British academic writing on intellectuals is equally the target for Collini's scorn:

Although academic writing on the topic usually manages, as it should, to be less merely topical and (somewhat) less parochial, it is, in its own way, almost equally repetitive—the rise of a new class, the comparison with France, the decline of an old class, the comparison with France, the level of social integration of elites, the comparison with France, the impact of European émigrés, the comparison with France, the failure to be a true intelligentsia. In Britain, the Victorian sages (Carlyle, Mill, Arnold, and Ruskin), will receive honorable mention, and then attention will be focused on the failings of the usual suspects—the Utilitarians, the Fabians, Bloomsbury, the Auden generation, the Angry Young Men... And, with a show of rigor, the same narrow band of idealizing definitions will be trotted out by way of contrast: intellectuals are/ought to be critical, dissident, oppositional independent outspoken tellers of unpopular truths...⁴

Americans could easily substitute for the British references, for example, Greenwich Village for Bloomsbury.

If the extent of the outpouring of verbiage on the topic of intellectuals is any indication, then we have truly not seen *The Last Intellectuals*, the title of Russell Jacoby's widely noted book⁵ first published in 1987. In an otherwise churlish book – Jacoby hardly can find an intellectual he likes or admires, either past or present⁶ which just about sums it up because they have no future – he has done us at least one service: he coined the term "Public Intellectual," now a widely used appellation for the kind of intellectuals I had been talking about. Which brings us to the sore topic of definitions. Are journalists and academics "intellectuals" – public or private? Again I cite Collini as a start:

[T]here are at least three senses of the noun "intellectuals" used and confused in current usage. First, there is what might be called the sociological sense, referring to a whole range of socio-occupational categories, extending, in large advanced societies, into millions. Secondly, there is what may be called the subjective sense, where the focus is upon an individual's level of interest in or attitude toward ideas, regardless of their occupation or social role. And third,

there is what has now become the dominant sense, which we may call the cultural, where the term designates those figures who, on the basis of some recognized standing in a creative, scholarly, or other non-instrumental activity, are also accorded the opportunity to address a wider audience on matters of general concern.⁷

"Public intellectual" tends to be used in the United States of someone who, from an academic or creative base, addresses a non-specialist public on matters of general concern, often (though by no means always) policy matters.⁸

Despite other more exotic claims, intellectuals are likely to be the oldest profession. Shamans, medicine men, priests and prophets are found in just about every society catalogued in the Human Relations Area Files. Modern-day public intellectuals are their inheritors. The earliest seers, healers and pronouncers of policies driven by values and significance were part-time and not an "occupation" in the division of labor, although in later societies priests, having become part of the "establishment" found a means of steady employment and remuneration. The prophets of ancient Israel certainly played the role of "public intellectuals" and though they could not earn a living from being such gadflies, some such as Jeremiah were fortunate to attract scribes who could take down and publicize their words.

There was always the problem of institutional legitimation. When Moses gathered seventy elders to the Tabernacle to be his council of advisors, Joshua (Moses' military chief of staff) petulantly reported that two people who had not been so designated were "prophesying in the camp." Moses the coalition builder decided to include them (Num. xi. 26-29). Elijah challenged some 450 prophets of Baal to a duel of competing miracles on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18). Today there is still no category of intellectual (or for that matter prophet) in the current Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT) or in the Standard Industrial Classifications Index (SIC) and in this secular world we do not rely on miracles or the Word of God to anoint or to define public intellectuals.

There are clearly two parts to the idea of public intellectual: public and intellectual. Assuming one can have either public or private intellectuals, who or what determines access to the "public" and which "publics?" While there are all kinds of publics, the one generally in the mind of those interested in public intellectuals is that elusive target, intellectually curious publics. This is not the place to review the market research that attempts to locate such publics, but suffice it to say that if there is a "crisis" of public intellectuals much of it relates to the diffi-

culty of finding the right (and profitable) audience for them.⁹ If locating the audience for their works is difficult today, of even greater difficulty is determining who is a public intellectual in the first place. This lies at the heart of the AIE. In this democratic era, it may be offensive to observe that peers of professionals, not the public at large, are the ones who decide who is a professional, though the state may literally license such practices. Priests decide who may be priests. Popes cannot decide who is to be the next pontiff since by definition this can only occur after a pope's death. But the College of Cardinals, the peers from whom the pope must be chosen, are the ones to decide. Similarly, in principle, saints should be the ones to decide who is a saint, but again, they are all dead so an institutional alternative is chosen. Physicians, of course, are the ones to decide who can be a physician. For that matter, occupational guilds were the ones to decide who could be a tradesperson. University professors, much to the lament of Jacoby and others who bemoan the stultifying effects of university promotion and tenure procedures are the ones who decide about academics. For all these occupations, there is a career pattern and procedure, though there are almost always some exceptions (but try to short-circuit the requirements for becoming a physician and you could land in jail). Some notable professors, for example Arthur Schlesinger, do not have a Ph.D. (having bypassed this by becoming a Harvard Fellow), but this is very rare. Schlesinger is also, by anyone's account, a public intellectual. But take intellectuals: what is the college of intellectuals that elects the intellectual, and what is the orderly career path to such an election?

The short answer is that there is no such formal institution and there never has been, which accounts in part for the plethora of definitions. But an informal network or social circle of intellectuals serves this function and this explains why I said in AIE that "an elite intellectual is simply a person whom other elite intellectuals believe to be an elite intellectual."¹⁰ This definition was ridiculed by some as "circular," which suggests to me that they failed to grasp the ideas about social networks and circles as well as those about collegial certification that accompanied this statement. Indeed the definition was intentionally "circular": intellectuals were defined by their circles and networks.

When I introduced ideas about networks, circles and the "small world" in 1974, these concepts did not have the "buzz" that they currently have.¹¹ I wrote the book so that the people I was writing about, intellec-

tuals, could read it and as is their wont, complain about it (anthropologists used to have the advantage that the "natives" could not read) and so omitted most of the technical social science apparatus that would have made their eyes glaze over. Oddly, demonstrating the recurring and pervasive divide between the world of public intellectuals and academics, my fellow social network scholars largely were unaware of this book, that contained one of the first published computer generated diagram of a social network, because it was published as a trade book rather than a scholarly monograph.¹² And since the intellectuals who read the book apparently did not grasp the network idea, I offer another try at explaining the nature of intellectual circles.

To begin with, social networks are never entirely free floating. They are always pegged to and draped upon formal institutions and organizations. For example while one might talk about the "power structure" of the United States as an informal network,¹³ one might begin to look for members of the network through examining who are the major corporate leaders of the United States, who are the major committee chairpersons in Congress, who occupy key positions in the executive branch of the government, who are the leaders of major Washington lobbying organizations and so on. One can then look for relationships between the occupants of these key positions. Surprisingly enough to those wedded to conspiracy theories, at the heart of the network are those very institutions and organizations such as the Senate, the Presidency that are supposed to be running things, admittedly, with important links to corporate, voluntary, and lobbying organizations.¹⁴ These kinds of networks take the form of "social circles" an idea first promulgated in the 1920's by Berlin-based philosopher-sociologist Georg Simmel.¹⁵ There is no formal leadership, though there are central figures, the rules for how one is supposed to relate to other members of the circle are not formalized and are somewhat elastic, and not everyone knows everyone else directly, but if they don't know another first hand, they tend to know someone who does and can easily reach him or her. Upon meeting someone at a gathering, say a cocktail party, they assume that if the other person is there, he or she must be a "member" of the same circle, even though they have never met before. This is verified by asking do you know "X"? If the answer is yes, then they tend to know many people in common, and may exclaim, "Isn't this a small world!"¹⁶ If the answer is no, then one is obviously at the wrong party.

The way to find public intellectuals is obviously then to begin with the question what are the formal institutional and organizational devices upon which these circles rest and are adumbrated. This is the point that is missed by most writers on what are now called public intellectuals, though it is central to Jacoby's analysis when he bemoans the decline of Bohemia, the exodus to the suburbs, and the virtual stranglehold of academia on young would be public intellectuals. There are at least two levels of formal procedures that define, as Collini puts it, "the basis of some recognized standing in a creative, scholarly, or other non-instrumental activity" that grants the "opportunity to address a wider audience on matters of general concern." Minimal criteria for scholarly standing in the West had been set since the middle ages by some sort of priestly, monastic, or university standing. The criteria for creative standing have been less clear and have included Church and patron sponsorship and membership in an artistic academy. The Enlightenment loosened the criteria since the Church and the universities did not endorse the newly developing science and philosophy. "Scientist" was another title that was not an "occupation" since all sorts of remunerative positions including clergyman and landowner engaged in science. Albert Einstein's key discoveries were promulgated in 1905 as "papers" while he was a patent clerk. The social invention of a "paper" reminds us that in the seventeenth century scientific societies and journals were added to the informal networks of persons interested in science who met and corresponded with one another. Societies and journals were subject to some form of peer review.¹⁷ A leading scientist is someone whose papers are often cited by other scientists. So again, a scientist is a person whom other scientists think is a scientist. Informal circles of scientists, called "invisible colleges" are to this day pegged to journals and to co-citation networks.¹⁸

For social scientists, political and policy theorists, and psychologists – generally embraced until almost the twentieth century under the title Philosophers, as well as literary figures, the situation was less formal and is explained in detail in AIE in the section "*The Function of Circles and Journals*," pp. 8 – 15. Small size was important until late in the nineteenth century – "everybody" who counted knew almost everybody or knew someone who did, and location such as a café, coffee house, or a salon run by well-known hostesses¹⁹ were the pegs upon which the network was draped. And, as I explained, although the French

seem to have invented the salon, the British, or more exactly the Scots, invented the literary-political journal that vastly extended the geographic reach of the salon or coffee house. Those who wrote for the journals and those who read them were the core of the social circles of intellectuals who constantly criticized and rated one another. The editors of the journals served as salon hostesses, that is as the gatekeepers.

As the name implies, a gatekeeper stands at the door between intellectuals and their publics. It is an interstitial role. Sometimes, the gatekeeper is mostly inside the circle of intellectuals. Many, but not all the editors of intellectual journals themselves qualify as public intellectuals because they write for their own and other journals and are highly regarded by other intellectuals. Of the generation I was writing about, Irving Howe (on the left), the editor of *Dissent*, or Irving Kristol (on the right), the editor of the *Public Interest*, for example, held central positions in the circles of elite intellectuals. Publishing houses are gatekeeping institutions, and editors for publishing houses are certainly gatekeepers. Some, such as Robert Gottlieb, then an editor at Knopf, are part of the circle. Many are on the periphery with good relations, that they intentionally cultivate, with intellectual circles, but are not necessarily core members. Below I will have more to say about the current and sometimes confusing role of gatekeepers, as well as about publishing houses.

Intellectual journals and reviews of published books, were the media that made intellectuals "public." I now turn to a brief account of the way the "opportunity to address a wider audience on matters of general concern" operates and how it seems to have changed in recent years. Opportunities do not present themselves. Intellectuals who want to become public intellectuals have always had to work at it and bring their work to the various gatekeepers. We might go back to the era of the American Founding Fathers for examples. Publishing books or journals was not the style. Rather, pamphlets or newspapers were the mode and those who had access to means of printing them and the desire to promulgate their views were among the public intellectuals of their day. Tom Paine²⁰ in Philadelphia or printer Benjamin Franklin (who was instrumental in bringing Paine to America and a key gatekeeper as well as public intellectual) are examples, as were the authors of *The Federalist Papers*,²¹ that were published serially in newspapers.

While there may be "accidental" public intellectuals, for the most part this is a role though not an occupation that requires desire and

effort to fill it, as Paine, Franklin and Hamilton illustrated. Norman Podhoretz in *Making It* irritated fellow public intellectuals by revealing his campaign to join the intellectual elite and describing the intellectual bourse.²² As will be noted, the way one makes the intellectual scene has probably changed since the sixties or seventies. For example, the Op Ed pages of national newspapers such as the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* were not as prominent as they are today as podiums for public intellectuals. One can “make it” now by regularly appearing on those pages. David Brooks, currently an Op Ed page columnist for the *New York Times* (not much of a podium for public intellectuals in 1970) earned a BA in history from the University of Chicago in 1983. Both the university and his major were incubators of generalists. He came to the public intellectual role from journalism, beginning with police reporting for City News Bureau of Chicago, moving on to the *Wall Street Journal* as a foreign correspondent, but then holding two gate keeping roles for the *Journal*—first book review editor and then Op Ed editor. He moved on to the newly founded journal of opinion, the *Weekly Standard*. He has written for many journals on our original list including the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times Magazine*, *Newsweek*, *Commentary*, the *Public Interest*, and the *Atlantic Monthly*. Had he been active in 1970, he surely would have been among the American Intellectual elite, at least by my criteria. Clearly, this is something he has worked hard at.

His fellow Op Ed columnist, Paul Krugman took another path, and moved from a career as a top technical academic economist – a position he still holds – to the parallel, more ephemeral one of public intellectual. It did not happen by accident. As he tells his story on his web site:

In the modern academic world there tends, in any given field—whether it is international finance, Jane Austen studies, or some branch of endocrinology—to be a “circuit,” the people who get invited to speak at academic conferences, who form a sort of de facto *nomenklatura*. I used to refer to the circuit in international economics as the “floating crap game.” It’s hard to get onto the circuit—it takes at least two really good papers, one to get noticed and a second to show that the first wasn’t a fluke—but once you are in, the constant round of conferences and invited papers makes it easy to stay in. By the summer of 1980, with five or so really good papers either published or in the pipeline, I was pretty much guaranteed a lifetime place. ... I hope that I never forget that it is young economists in blue jeans, not famous officials in pinstripes, who really have interesting things to say. And yet I was not satisfied. No doubt this

had a lot to do with personal issues of the kind that I won't discuss here, but after three years of academic conferences I was jaded and a little bored. I was ready to jump at the opportunity to do something different, if not in the end better... I had arranged for a leave from MIT and was on my way to Washington, to be the chief staffer for international economics at the Council of Economic Advisers.²³

But he then discovers that "those who really manage to influence policy are usually the best courtiers, not the best analysts." However, he discovered a talent during that period "of writing serious economics in seemingly plain English." "... [S]ince I wrote *The Age of Diminished Expectations* in 1989, I have increasingly tried to communicate with non-economists through op-eds, magazine articles, and so on."²⁴

The list of journals he has written for include *Fortune*, *Slate* (an online journal), the *New York Times Magazine*, *Mother Jones*, *Foreign Affairs*, and at least seven or eight others. So Krugman clearly made an effort to become a public intellectual. And he enjoys the role of being a gadfly. As he wrote about his work as a public intellectual, "With any luck, you will find many of these pieces extremely annoying."

The case of the late Edward Said is instructive in a different way. Clearly regarded as a public intellectual, Said was ambivalent about the relationship between his technical academic specialization as a literary critic and opining on general matters. "In far too many years of appearing on television or being interviewed in by journalists, I have never *not* been asked the question, 'What do you think the USA should do about such and such an issue?'. And may I add that it has been a point of principle for me *not ever* to reply to the question."²⁵ This may be so, yet Said was noted for his strong publicly expressed opinions on war and peace in the Mideast and on Israel-Palestinian relations. Perhaps he judged that his most noted academic specialty, "Orientalism," a term he reintroduced to intellectual discourse as a derogatory appellation, entitled him to opinions in this area. The relationship between academic expertise and the role of public intellectual is a matter to which we shall return.

Assuming that one does want to play the role of public intellectual, what are the arenas for the pursuit of intellectual influence? At the time *The American Intellectual Elite* appeared, I argued that "Leading intellectuals write for the leading journals and the combination of journals and intellectuals produces the leading circles," (p. 63) but also that "the

journals and times are changing so rapidly that ... it will take a remarkably creative effort to present a coherent, meaningful representation of the intellectual community, if such a community still exists." (p. 62). The demise of the *Partisan Review* on the Left, and the *Public Interest* on the Right, and the financial troubles of the *Atlantic*, key journals of 1970, perhaps signify the end of this phase of certification of intellectuals. The *New York Review of Books* may remain at the core of American public intellectual circles, but it is fast aging. For amusement, I suggest comparing the contents of the personal ads in early years with those of the present, as well as the apparent ages of the supplicants for friendship.

Nonetheless, this may not be an accurate picture. The idea of a two or multiple step flow of communication has always been a key aspect of the concept of Public Intellectual.²⁶ If only public intellectuals read the works of public intellectuals then neither the intellectuals nor their writing would matter. This is of course the complaint that Jacoby lodges against writers for academic journals. Only fellow scholars, and not many of them at that, read technical academic journals such as *American Sociological Review*. In my experience, almost nothing that appeared in that journal ever made it into the public discourse. In contrast, *The Federalist*, a collection of essays published serially in various newspapers in 1788 and written by three prominent intellectuals of the time — Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay—was aimed at a wide public of voters (male property owners) in the State of New York who would be electing delegates to a special State convention which the authors hoped would approve the new constitution of what was to become the United States. The essays were collected in a work of extraordinary intellectual persuasion, and were so recognized at the time. Thanks in part to these essays, the delegates elected ratified the Constitution, and to coin a phrase, the rest is history.

In the 1960's and 1970's the notion was something like this: Public Intellectuals would publish in a leading intellectual journal, or get their book reviewed positively by a respected intellectual. The idea or proposed policy would then be taken up by a more widely read source such as *Time Magazine* or a national newspaper such as the *New York Times*. Staffers for congressmen or the executive branch would either take up the idea from the more widely circulated media or would directly pick it up from the intellectual journal or book and present it to

their boss.²⁷ A new idea might thus be legitimated and put on the national agenda or perhaps might even create a groundswell that could lead to popular opinion on the matter. If the idea had originally been couched in technical arcane academic or scientific discourse, this chain could not occur. During this time, "think tanks" entered the picture and there were some reciprocal relationships between the intellectual journal and think tanks that affected this process.

This process is somewhat idealized. Chapter 15 of AIE analyzed some of the relationships between the power elite and leading intellectuals. Only seven of the top seventy intellectuals in AIE were named as influential on the issue with which the power person was most concerned at the time. The men of power [in the seventies there were almost no women] tended to name technicians, intellectuals who have held office, some reporters and columnists, mass media "personalities," and others whom Lewis Coser called intellectual "celebrities."²⁸ I suspect the situation is still true today. This is not to say that there was no "trickle down" effect. The public intellectuals did put issues on the table. Ninety five percent of those in the sample wrote either about the War in Vietnam or some other issue they were especially concerned about. Our study of the general elite in the United States in the 1970's showed that a considerable proportion of the most important persons in the mass media read at least some of the intellectual journals and a significant number of leaders in other sectors, notably Congress (or their legislative aids) also read these journals at least occasionally. Whether what they read in these journals had any effect is of course another matter.

Whether liberal or left public intellectuals have a leading role in this flow of ideas depends in part on who is in office, since almost all the public intellectuals in the 1960's and 1970's voted Democrat and Democrats have limited access to government when Republicans are in power. But the political balance among public intellectuals was changing even as my study was in process. Many in the sample eventually became neo-conservatives, and oddly, through a quirk of the computer, many of them were on the right of the computer-generated sociogram of intellectual social circles on page 85 of my book. Peter Steinfels as early as 1979 called attention to the growing ability of neo-conservatives to create a new intellectual atmosphere taken up by corporations, government and policy creators that not only got a politician's or a corporate

leader's ear, but created a long term shift in "sensibility and moral principles."²⁹ Neo-conservatives in his view had three important virtues: serious attention to moral culture, hard headed re-evaluation of "obvious" truths, and an anti-sentimental approach to national policies [the latter, I observe, led to the invasion of Iraq]. He feared that unchecked, neo-conservatism would lead to "... the legitimating... ideology of an oligarchic America where essential decisions are made by corporate elites, where great inequalities are rationalized by straitened circumstances and a system of meritocratic hierarchy."³⁰ In short, public intellectuals indeed mattered through a multiple step flow of ideas. Anyone who has followed the progress of the "neo-cons" in setting both the agenda and the policy for American foreign and military policies as well as domestic ones might agree that public intellectuals mattered.

While I am tempted to suggest that intellectual journals matter a good deal less these days, it may be my liberal left inclinations that are biasing my views. David Brooks, whose career was sketched above, is characteristic of a new generation of conservative public intellectuals (he too started out as a socialist!). In a two-part column in *The New York Times* (December 24 and December 28, 2004) he announced his "Hookie Awards ... Named after the great public intellectual Sidney Hook" a right-wing philosopher out of tune with the majority of intellectual in the sixties and seventies. He began with the very topic that interests us here: "Some people say that the age of the public intellectuals is over, that there are no longer many grand thinkers like Lionel Trilling or Reinhold Niebuhr writing ambitious essays for the educated reader. It's true that there are fewer philosophes writing about the nature and destiny of man, but there are still hundreds of amazing essays written every year."³¹

The awards, for 2004 included essays published in *City Journal*, the *Wilson Quarterly*, *Central Station* [on line], the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *New Yorker* (twice), *Foreign Affairs*, *Policy Review*, the *Weekly Standard*, *Commentary*, the *National Interest*, the *New Republic*, and the *London Review of Books*. Of the twelve journals named, one was British and therefore not included in my book, and one was a new journal that Brooks had helped found. Five were on my original list. Are the new ones there because of their conservative views, or have matters simply shifted since 1970? In a recent column (April 5, 2005) Brooks argued