



Science, Jews, and Secular Culture

David A. Hollinger

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This remarkable group of essays describes the "culture wars" that consolidated a new, secular ethos in mid-twentieth-century American academia and generated the fresh energies needed for a wide range of scientific and cultural enterprises. Focusing on the decades from the 1930s through the 1960s, David Hollinger discusses the scientists, social scientists, philosophers, and historians who fought the Christian biases that had kept Jews from fully participating in American intellectual life. Today social critics take for granted the comparatively open outlook developed by these men (and men they were, mostly), and charge that their cosmopolitanism was not sufficiently multicultural. Yet Hollinger shows that the liberal cosmopolitans of the mid-century generation defined themselves against the realities of their own time: McCarthyism, Nazi and Communist doctrines, a legacy of anti-Semitic quotas, and both Protestant and Catholic versions of the notion of a "Christian America." The victory of liberal cosmopolitans was so sweeping by the 1960s that it has become easy to forget the strength of the enemies they fought.

Most books addressing the emergence of Jewish intellectuals celebrate an illustrious cohort of literary figures based in New York City. But the pieces collected here explore the long-postponed acceptance of Jewish immigrants in a variety of settings, especially the social science and humanities faculties of major universities scattered across the country. Hollinger acknowledges the limited, rather parochial sense of "mankind" that informed some mid-century thinking, but he also inspires in the reader an appreciation for the integrationist aspirations of a society truly striving toward equality. His cast of characters includes Vannevar Bush, James B. Conant, Richard Hofstadter, Robert K. Merton, Lionel Trilling, and J. Robert Oppenheimer.

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