

This Week's Citation Classic

Riesman D, Denney R & Glazer N. *The lonely crowd: a study of the changing American character*. New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1950. 386 p.

This book was one of the first to reflect a self-conscious society. Using materials from philosophy, history, popular culture, psychoanalysis, as well as sociology, gave it an audience among educated people generally. [The *Social Sciences Citation Index*[®] (SSCI[™]) indicates that this book has been cited over 635 times since 1966.]

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"*The Lonely Crowd* was the outcome of an invitation from Yale University's Committee on National Policy to spend two six-month leaves of absence from the University of Chicago in 1948 and 1949 to do research at Yale. I recruited Nathan Glazer to work with me there; his collaboration and that of Reuel Denney at the University of Chicago were essential in the creation of the book. Glazer brought to bear his wide knowledge of the social sciences; Denney, a former professor of the humanities with a keen interest in popular culture, was a late convert to the social sciences.

"The book reflects the interest, after the Second World War, in linking sociology, on the one hand, with psychoanalytic psychology and characterology and, on the other, with social history. Our study was an ambitious effort at synthesis (including demography) which would be far more difficult to undertake within the more specialized subdisciplines of today.

"Glazer and I read interviews in public opinion surveys, seeking to understand how so many respondents had opinions on so many subject show very few (ten percent or

less) answered, 'Don't know,' when asked about something outside their own knowledge or experience. We then began to do our own interviewing to gain a better sense of individual character from the nuances of interviews—a diagnostic approach illustrated in the companion volume Glazer and I published in 1952, *Faces in the Crowd*.¹

"'Research' is almost too formal a term for the speculative essay *The Lonely Crowd* turned out to be, covering many facets of American experience from children's fairy stories to mass media and to the 'veto groups' which we saw as dominating our political life.

"The book made its way slowly; the late Lionel Trilling, discovering it and writing an essay about it in a book club journal, *The Griffin*, he was editing at that time, helped launch the book and give it visibility. Trilling saw in this book that social science might take the place of novels as a vehicle for understanding society. He also saw the value of our creation of new terminology which quite rapidly entered the common language. However, the terms 'inner direction' and 'other direction' as applied to *individuals* have been misused by people, who like to 'type' them-selves and others in a dichotomous way, whereas the book sought to make clear that the labels were rather broad descriptions of 'ideal types' in Max Weber's sense of that term.

"The book first took off in an Anchor paperback edition,² then returned to Yale,³ and eventually sold over a million copies in the United States and in many foreign countries. I wrote two prefaces to Yale paperback editions—one in 1960, another in 1969—in which I cautioned readers against over-interpretation of the book, and against certain erroneous assumptions (for example, that we were entering an era of unparalleled affluence)."

1. Riesman D & Glazer N. *Faces in the crowd*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1952. 751 p.
2. Riesman D. *The lonely crowd: a study of the changing American character*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1953. 359 p.
3., *The lonely crowd: a study of the changing American character*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1961. 315 p.