In January of 1939, David Riesman, then a young law professor at the University of Buffalo, published a short piece in *The Atlantic Monthly*. It was written in response to the editor's request to selected men and women under 30 who were asked to comment on the aims, experiences, and perplexities of their "Post-War Generation." Riesman's message, read more than four decades later, provides some fascinating insights into the man who was to become one of America's foremost commentators, critics, and interpretive sociologists. I quote at length for it is important to get the full flavor of his message and his style.

I spent the summer of 1931 in Russia with a small group of American students. We saw many Russian youths, and in a sense were envious. For they seemed to have no troubles such as confronted us: what to do for a living, what to do for a career. They taunted me, as capitalist apologist, asking how anyone could be happy in a competitive society, serving himself at the presumed expense of others, serving no greater cause. It was hard to answer them. It was tempting instead to throw oneself, as one of my companions did, into the external, picturesque activity of building the Soviet—building tractors, bridges, railroads. It was easy. After all, we Americans had done just that in the previous one hundred years.

Our problems were tougher, for the building that remained for us to do was subtle and complex—the building of good society with all its fine adjustments. But our generation was raised in the Victorian (now Russian) mechanical notion of progress, and, when the building of bridges and making of fortunes were over, so was our drive. We are a democratic and literate society. Hence our opinions about it and ourselves are as important as any statistical data. The penetration of Marx and Veblen gave us crushing insight into that society; the penetration of Freud gave us crushing insight into ourselves. The insights were partial, but we assumed them to be complete. Sensitive and idealistic lads dreaded emergence from college into the stridency of pecuniary competition: we knew about it, since we could read and had no censors. We became cynics. Our Russian contemporaries, if not illiterate, read *Pravda* and not Dostoevsky; unsophisticated, they did not know themselves or their society with its malevolence of bureaucratic competition.

In his statement, Riesman went on to talk of the Blacks (meaning the fascists) as well as the Reds and of "the stale, mad battle... opposing caricatures of industrial and pre-industrial nostalgias," and concluded that:

The Blacks, in their clear cloaks and disguises, brush out the flame [of the candle of reason] like bats afraid of the light. They scrap constitutions, pervert democracy, and root out from the blood-and-soil the small ethics we have, as well as the big we profess. The Reds, hurrying from rational premises towards valid humanitarian goals, shove the bellows of force at the candle, to blow it their way, and have ended by blowing it out, like the candles on feast cakes. We must fight without charity both unreason and reason's inhuman abuse even while they are fighting each other, even while we are shaping our treaty between them. We must fight with the candle of reason and faith, and not with our foes' weapons of evil, for our only irreparable defeat would be to suffer their thoughts to enslav[e] us. Even so, we may lose; but what of it? Who ever said life was like a snap course in college?

This is vintage Riesman. Earnest and brash. Some of it tinged with romantic chauvinism; some of it sharply polemical; some of it incredibly prescient; but all of it stimulating, challenging, refreshing, and timely. It is still timely, for the issues written about in Riesman's "Under Thirty" circumscribe the concerns of many twenty-nine-year-olds setting down (or merely debating)
their own thoughts in our own "post-war period." There have been several such periods since Riesman was under 30. However, unlike the many commentators who wrote on the Jazz Age and the Depression, or World War Two and its Cold War aftermath, or Korea and the fifties, or Vietnam and the seventies, and stopped in their time of disillusionment and reawakening, David Riesman stayed the course. He is still writing about aims, experiences, and perplexities of post-war generations.

Riesman's life and work is a testament to the American intellectual spirit and the unshaken faith one of its most ardent critics has in the American system—a paradox perhaps. But not a paradox to those who know this pro-Enlightenment, anti-Progressive, German-Jewish Philadelphia gentleman, Harvard don, and self-proclaimed autonomous man. The way his twig was bent—by a physician father and feminist mother, by favorite teachers at Harvard, by legal and on-the-job training, by early acquaintances and professional colleagues, and by a myriad of life-experiences (including trips to Russia and Japan—and to the coast of Maine)—is expressed time and again. It is evident not only in his studies of American character and American institutions, particularly education, but also in his general writings as represented in law-review articles on the Constitution, democracy and defamation, law and social science, and in his journal pieces, essays, and book reviews, many of them found in such published collections as Individualism Reconsidered (1954) and Abundance for What? (1964), in the pages of The Correspondent, and in the private files of his hundreds of pen pals.

Groups and Individuals

Riesman's early essays—and what are best labeled "exchanges"—include commentaries on individualism, marginality, popular culture, business, psychoanalysis, Veblen, Freud, totalitarianism, the Cold War (and "The Nylon War"—Riesman's sardonic suggestion to bomb Moscow with nylons instead of nukes), work, leisure, disarmament, and social science. If there is a theme that runs throughout, it is the search for a meaningful and productive place in an increasingly amorphous society. Not surprisingly, Riesman's questions (and the title of his best-known book, The Lonely Crowd) pick up where Tocqueville left off. Like the French observer, Riesman has always been enchanted by the promise of the American experiment and has sought to reconcile its vaunted penchant for personal freedom (and faith in God or self) with the lure of organizations that seem to offer solace and security in order to stave off the threat of anomie.

In the title essay of Individualism Reconsidered, he suggested that,

We live in a social climate in which, in many parts of the world and of the United States, the older brands of ruthless individualism are still a social danger, while in other parts of the world and of the United States, the newer varieties of what we may term "groupism" become increasingly menacing. Actually, we can distinguish conceptually between the needs of society (as a system of social organization) and those of environging groups (as a system of psychological ties and expectations). As so defined, society, the larger territorial organization, often provides the mechanisms by which the individual can be protected against the group, both by such formal legal procedures as the bill of rights, and by the fact that large-scale organization may permit the social mobility by which individuals can escape from any particular group. Prior to the rise of passports and totalitarianism, the modern Western city provided such an asylum and opportunity for many, while the existence of this safety-valve helped alleviate the presence of "groupism" everywhere.

Riesman was and remains committed to seeing people free themselves from the fetters of ascribed group membership. In an early essay, "A Philosophy for 'Minority' Living," he discusses his idea of the "nerve of failure," defined as "the courage to face aloneness and the possibility of defeat in one's personal life or one's work without being morally destroyed. It is, in a larger sense, simply the nerve to be oneself when that self is not approved by the dominant ethic of the society." Time and again Riesman suggests that breaking away and going it alone may be a better course than continued attachment to what Harold Isaacs once called "The Idols of the Tribe." For example, his famous essay, "Marginality, Conformity, and Insight," ends with some observations on the ambiguity of being a hyphenated American and the problems faced by those made near-schizophrenic by what W.E.B. DuBois called their "two-ness"—

We are afraid of a chaotic situation in which people do not know their own "names," their own brand names, that is. In fact, under the mantle of cultural pluralism we often intensify these tendencies.

As recently as 1980, Riesman felt similarly, making a nearly identical point to me in a conversation about minority students at Harvard.

Despite a keen interest in the problems of pluralism, it is noteworthy that this most prolific writer on the American scene has published relatively little about "ethnicity" itself, a term many claim he was the first to coin. Still, he has remained interested in the subject, and through conversation and correspondence has sparked the thinking of many others. An excellent recent example is to be found in Herbert Gans's article on "Symbolic Ethnicity" in On the Making of Americans (1979), a Festschrift for Riesman which Gans co-edited. Yet, it remains the case that David Riesman's major published works often seem somewhat limited in perspective, for America is seen mainly in terms of its dominant culture and those who subscribe to its norms and values—or would aspire to. Ethnic minorities are clearly in the