

Notes on the Book

The Behavior of Crowds

by Everett Dean Martin¹

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This book was written by a one-time Unitarian parson. The fact that I am trying to review it is due to the subtle influence of one Archie of Philadelphia. He threatened to do it, but I was afraid that his review would develop into an historical account of the theatre meetings of the Layman's League in Philadelphia, so I jumped into the breach, and decided to review the book myself.

At first I was a little bothered by the limitations of my own experience. By what right of experience, hearsay, or gossip should a Unitarian parson attempt to deal with such a subject as crowd psychology, to say nothing of the subject of behavior of crowds. Of course I had heard about crowds at Unity House, and even the mention of Sunday evening socials at Detroit had not escaped my notice. I even recalled that Archie of Philadelphia had refused to attend the retreat last year because of the numbers that were attending his Bible class. More recently I have learned that Palfrey and William of New York had been dealing with crowds at St. Louis. For myself, I could find no experience that would entitle me to deal with the subject except the disinterested desire to save you from the aforementioned League meetings in Philadelphia.

¹ This manuscript reviews the book, *The Behavior of Crowds: A Psychological Study* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920, by Everett Dean Martin. Martin was a Unitarian minister from 1906 until 1915 when he shifted career paths towards journalism and academic lecturing. He was a lecturer at The New School for Social Research from 1921 until 1929 and he Directed the People's Institute at Cooper Union from 1922 until 1934.

The first light and relief came to me when I learned from this book that a crowd is not merely a large aggregation of people, but that its real significance and distinguishing characteristic is that of being "a state of mind." Here I found something that sounded familiar, and it occurred to me that the tried sojourn of the author in the Unitarian fellowship had not been without its influence. In coming upon this phrase, "a state of mind," I recalled with a fellow feeling, a certain Western Farmer with a broad-brimmed hat and high boots who I followed with great interest as he surveyed the exhibit silver art craft display in the German section at the St. Louis Fair. He wandered around with a queer mystified air until he suddenly came upon an object whose use he understood, then he turned to his companion and blurted out, "A Tobacco box, by god."

I suppose that it is fair to call this book a war-product, in so far as the immediate occasion for its production is the conviction that "As a practical problem, the habit of crowd-making is daily becoming a more serious menace to civilization. Events are making it more and more clear that, pressing as are certain economic questions, the forces that threaten society are really psychological."²

As I continued with his presentation of the situation and the development of his thesis two considerations arose in my mind that seem to me to be important.

The first one is that in his development as a whole he himself may be to some extent a victim of a state of mind that seems to me at times to be running beyond the speed limit. I may be wrong in my feeling about this matter, but I have thought frequently that we have been developing a crowd attitude towards the word, "Psychology," and that we tend to use it much more freely and loosely and with much more finality than the present status of that science warrants. The book is based upon the application of the Freudian thesis to the phenomena of crowd behavior. Whatever may be the truth of the Freudian contribution to the science of Psychology, it has seemed to me that in the

² Everett Dean Martin, *The Behavior of Crowds: A Psychological Study*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920, p. 1.

hands of some of the disciples of Freud at least the tendency to speculation has been permitted a great deal of free range. In this book I am inclined to believe that at times conclusions are reached that are hardly warranted. Yet on the whole the general development of the thesis and the relation of the same to practical present day problems appeals to me very strongly.

The second consideration that occurred to me, and to which I shall refer in conclusion, is the question that this book raises for us, our work, and methods. Perhaps I am the more prejudiced in favor of many things said in this book because they tend to support and confirm what has been the fundamental guiding principle of my ministry. Says Martin,

There must be an increase in the number of unambitious men, men who can rise above vulgar dilemmas and are deaf to crowd propaganda, men capable of philosophical tolerance, critical doubt and inquiry, genuine companionship, and voluntary cooperation in the achievement of common ends, free spirits who can smile in the face of the mob, who know the mob and are not to be taken in by it.

... Somewhere there must be people with sharp edges that cut when they are pressed too hard, people who are still solid, who have impenetrable depths in them and hard facets which reflect the sunlight. They are the hope of democracy, these infusible ones.

To change the figure, may their tribe increase. And this is the business of every educator who is not content to be a faker. What we need is not only more education, but a different kind of education. There is more hope in an illiterate community where people hate lying than in a high-school educated nation which reads nothing but trash and is fed up on advertising, newspapers, popular fiction, and propaganda.³

³ Everett Dean Martin, *The Behavior of Crowds: A Psychological Study*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920, pp. 286-7.

This is one of the professional questions that I hope you will carry in mind for discussion. I have always considered it a prime duty to try to keep myself free from these mobs, and crowd movements; to make what contribution I might towards developing in people in whom I have come in contact that same ideal to be a cloud by day when passions are running high, and a light by night when the wave of ungodly enthusiastic light has given away to the dark night of reaction. I conceive it to be the duty of a minister to maintain an attitude of mind which as it would not be a slave either to a momentary crowd or an individual, so it would not be a master either of a crowd or an individual, but would be as one working in an honest give-and-take fashion for the development of strong personalities fitted for individual standards and for social reactions and relations.

I have said that the book is based on the application of the Freudian idea to the Behavior of Crowds. The first premise of the book is,

that there are certain types of social behavior which are characterized by unconscious motivation to such a degree that they may be placed in a definite class of psychological phenomena. (Page 5).⁴

Such phenomena of crowd behavior are comparable to certain types of mental pathology in the individual which psychologists of a generation ago explained as motivated by unconscious mechanisms, a phenomenon, psychology, though unconsciously determined. Under such conditions the crowd acts in a manner wholly different from the usual and conscious conduct of its individual constituents, and different indeed from the same aggregation of people when motivated by conscious critical purposes.

The second premise is that our present day life is menaced by the crowd making methods of propagandists of all sorts and varieties. We are developing men inclined to become crowd men, easily absorbed by crowd movements, swung into line by the pathological behavior of any crowd that happens to have the right of way for a moment.

⁴ Everett Dean Martin, *The Behavior of Crowds: A Psychological Study*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920, p. 5.

Whether it is temperance, or justice, or greater freedom, moral excellence, or national glory that we desire—whether we happen to be conservatives or radicals, reformers or liberals, we must become a cult, write our philosophy of life in flaming headlines, and sell our cause in the market. No matter if we meanwhile surrender every value for which we stand, we must strive to cajole the majority into imagining itself on our side. For only with the majority with us, whoever we are, can we live. It is numbers, not values that count—quantity not quality. Everybody must “moral crusade,” “agitate,” “press-agent,” play politics.⁵

Such is his statement of the situation, and into the situation of brain-storm crowds, selling everything from peanuts to religion, and never caring whether the contents of the packages measure up, either in quantity or quality to the 57 varieties of labels, the author has a very simple remedy. It is that of education, not only more education but different in character from commonly accepted methods.

The chapter headings suggest the general scope of the book, and drift of his development of the theme:

Chapter I	The Crowd and Social Problems of Today
Chapter II	How Crowds are Formed
Chapter III	The Crowd and the Unconscious
Chapter IV	The Egoism of the Crowd Mind
Chapter V	The Crowd a Creature of Hate
Chapter VI	The Absolutism of the Crowd Mind
Chapter VII	The Psychology of the Revolutionary Crowd
Chapter VIII	The Fruits of Revolution: New Crowds Tyrannies for Old
Chapter IX	Freedom and Government by Crowds
Chapter X	Education as a Possible Cure for Crowd Thinking

In the chapter on how crowds are formed he sets forth his definition of the crowd and the process by which it is developed.

⁵ Everett Dean Martin, *The Behavior of Crowds: A Psychological Study*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920, pp. 7-8.

In comparing his own interpretation of the crowd mind with Le Bon's and others, he makes the point, emphasizing it very strongly, that the word crowd is not to be confused with masses: Crowds develop quite readily among the upper classes and even among the educated in precisely the same way that they develop among the less educated and the so-called masses and proletariat. The emotionalism theory of explanation does not satisfy him. Emotions may be strongly in evidence in crowd phenomena, but also it is to be noted that powerful emotions of a certain type are conspicuous by their suppression in crowd phenomena.

But it is not only in crowds that people show emotion. Feeling, instinct, impulse are the dynamic of all mental life. The crowd doubtless inhibits as many emotions as it releases. Fear is conspicuously absent in battle, pity in a lynching mob. ...

... Le Bon is correct in maintaining that the crowd is not a mere aggregation of people. *It is a state of mind.* A peculiar psychic change must happen to a group of people before they become a crowd. And this change is not merely a release of emotion, neither is it the creation of a collective mind by means of imitation and suggestion. My thesis is that *the crowd-mind is a phenomenon which should best be classed with dreams, delusions, and the various forms of automatic behavior.* The controlling ideas of the crowd are the result neither of reflection nor of "suggestion," but are akin to what, as we shall see later, the psychoanalysts term "complexes." ... Crowd ideas are "fixations;" they are always symbolic; they are always related to something repressed in the unconscious. ...

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... The phenomena which we call crowd-mind are ... the result of forces hidden in the personal and unconscious psyche of the members of the crowd, forces which are merely released by social gatherings of a certain sort (Page 19-20).⁶

⁶ Everett Dean Martin, *The Behavior of Crowds: A Psychological Study*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920, pp. 19-23. Emphasis in the original book.

The process of development, whether it be a crowd-mind developed in a particular aggregation of people gathered together in one place, or a crowd developed in other ways, is as follows.

First. An issue, a controversial issue, somebody to be denounced. Some person, some class, or institution that can serve as the foe or enemy.

Second. The speaker, or writer, the hero of a hundred battles, who deals with glittering generalities, who waves abstract phrases, flags of justice, or freedom, or some other generality whose meaning is so broad and symbolic that it tends to become the common center of attention.

As the audience become crowd, the speaker's cadence becomes more marked, his voice more oracular, his gestures more emphatic. His message becomes the recital of great abstract "principles." The purely obvious is held up as transcendental. Interest is kept upon just those aspects of things which can be grasped with least effort by all. Emphasis is laid upon those thought processes in which there is the greatest natural uniformity.⁷

Justice, right, liberty, peace, glory, destiny, brotherly love, grand and glorious, public weal, common humanity, etc. are some of the catchwords.

Third. The effect of this dealing with abstract things creates a common symbol to which the minds of all present are turned, and the abstractions come to occupy the whole field of consciousness. The result is this abstraction comes to have a reality of its own, comes to be a sort of closed system of {???) reality, quite regardless of whether or not these abstractions fit the commonly accepted reality of the individuals making the crowd.

People are translated into a different world—that is a different sense of the real. The speaker is transfigured to their vision. His words take on a

⁷ Everett Dean Martin, *The Behavior of Crowds: A Psychological Study*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920, p. 28.

mysterious importance; something tremendous, eternal, superhuman is at stake. Commonplace jokes become irresistibly amusing. Ordinary truths are wildly applauded. Dilemmas stand clear with all middle ground brushed away. No statement now needs qualification. All thought of compromise is abhorrent. Nothing now must intervene to rob these moments of their splendid intensity. As James said once of drunkenness, "Everything is just utterly utter." They who are not for us are against us.

... *The crowd is the creature of Belief.*⁸

Forth. In this state of mind many primitive impulses which are held in leash by our critical consciousness, and by the inhibitions of our normal environment, come surging to the front and become factors of conduct in the face of this abnormal situation. We do things that normal conditions would not permit. What is unconscious is the fact that the social is actually being twisted around into giving approval for things which it normally forbids. Our immediate social environment in the crowd has supplanted our normal world of reality. "In other words, a crowd is a device for indulging ourselves in a kind of temporary insanity by all going crazy together."⁹ When the crowd has thus given itself up to an abstraction of this sort, it carries out its impulses until either exhaustion or some contradiction intervenes to question the validity of the abstract absolute that holds it in control.

Such is the process by which, according to Martin, the psychological change which transforms a group into a crowd takes place.

I have not had much experience with this crowd phenomenon. I have watched several. Twice I have spoken to real respectable first citizen crowds where the mob spirit

⁸ Everett Dean Martin, *The Behavior of Crowds: A Psychological Study*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920, p. 30. Emphasis in the original book.

⁹ Everett Dean Martin, *The Behavior of Crowds: A Psychological Study*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920, p. 37. Emphasis in the original book.

was highly developed, but the purpose was nothing more-or-less than the buying of liberty bonds. Twice I have had to face the task of de-mobbing a crowd. On one occasion it consisted of about 2,000 angry strikers, bent on riot. But on the basis of what little I know at first hand, I believe that Martin's description of the process of developing a mob spirit is sound. The de-mobbing process is simple. It is to take the crowd where it is, with all its field of glittering generalities, and by a slow process call it back to its normal reality by introducing some plain facts that break the uniformity of its thought.

Read page 48 and 49.

The next important fact to note is that

Our mob today is no longer merely tramping the streets. We have it at the breakfast table, in the subway, alike in the shop and boudoir, and office—wherever in fact the newspaper goes. And the raggedness is not exterior, nor is the mob confined to the class of the ill-clad and the poor. The raggedness and the tawdriness have now become spiritual, a universal presence entering into the fabric of nearly all our mental processes.¹⁰

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Certain crowd-movements in America today give marked evidence of this unconscious motivation. Notice how the radical and reactionary elements behave when, as is frequently the case with both, the crowd spirit comes over them. Certain radicals who are fascinated with the idea of the Russian Revolution, are still proclaiming sentiments of brotherhood, peace and freedom, while unconsciously they are doing just what their enemies accuse them of doing—playing with the welcome ideas of violence, class war, and proletarian dictatorship. And conservative crowds, while ostensibly defending American traditions and ideals against destructive foreign

¹⁰ Everett Dean Martin, *The Behavior of Crowds: A Psychological Study*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920, p. 47.

influence, are with their own hands daily desecrating many of the finest things which America has given to the world in its struggle of more than a century for freedom and justice. Members of each crowd, while blissfully unaware of the incompatibility of their own motives and professions, have no illusions about those of the counter crowd. Each crowd sees in the professions of its antagonist convincing proof of the insincerity and hypocrisy of the other side. To the student of social philosophy both are right and both wrong. All propaganda is lies, and every crowd is deceiver, but its worst and first deception is itself.¹¹

Of the fact that the attitude of a crowd is an attitude of hate towards something or someone, and that it deals with its victim with all the absolutism that conditions permit, need not be referred to.

¹¹ Everett Dean Martin, *The Behavior of Crowds: A Psychological Study*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920, p. 53.