



Herds and Hermits: America's Lone Wolves and Submissive Sheep

Terry Reed

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America is a country of characters, many of them larger than life, many of them shrinking from life, and many tenaciously asserting their individuality even as they succumb to the weight of life. This is a broad-spectrum, academically oriented book, an historical, sociological and ideological examination of the continuing acrimonious mutual conflict waged between America's loners and joiners. Divided into five chapters, it is generously researched, provocatively iconoclastic, contrarian and comical. The initial chapter defines and copiously illustrates the plight of individuality and its collision with collaboration in American life. It then moves from classical and renaissance culture and philosophy into the subject as it is tellingly, abundantly and amusingly illustrated in American literature from Franklin through Emerson, Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, Whitman and Twain. The second chapter advances into the 20th and 21st centuries, exploring the essence of the conflict as illustrated biologically, socially and anecdotally—the object being to elucidate the causes of division between the minority who function well as hermits and the majority that inexorably forms itself into insidious herds. Chapter 3, “What Price Affiliation?” examines such nefarious matters as Group Think, the rise of corporate culture and trade unionism. The fourth chapter examines even more intensively the intellectual and emotional costs of fraternal life. The fifth, final chapter looks closely at the American intellectual as loner and outcast.

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