

At a meeting of the FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES on May 4, 2021, the following tribute to the life and service of the late Nathan Glazer was spread upon the permanent records of the Faculty.

NATHAN GLAZER

BORN: February 25, 1923

DIED: January 19, 2019

Nathan Glazer was Professor of Education and Social Structure, *Emeritus*. His Harvard service, from 1969 until his retirement in 1993, spanned the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and the Graduate Schools of Education and of Design, reflecting the broad range of his scholarship and interests. He was an academic and public intellectual who greatly influenced not only scholarship on American culture and ethnicity but also post-war American intellectual discourse on public life and policy. He was that most unusual of intellectuals, one not afraid to change his mind.

As a sociologist he is best known for two works. *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (1950), which he co-authored with David Riesman and Reuel Denney, greatly influenced mid-century thought on the roots, nature, and consequences of American individualism and was for decades the bestselling work in sociology. *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City*, which he co-authored (though mainly wrote) with Daniel P. Moynihan, strongly shifted the dominant image of America from a melting pot, in which all immigrant groups eventually assimilated, to a mosaic of ethnic groups that maintained much of their identity though destined to be incorporated in the economic and institutional life of the nation. His work influenced not only scholarship but also the revival of ethnicity as a socio-political force during the 1970s. However, when this movement evolved to push for affirmative action toward equal representation in the workplace and academia, Glazer became a leading critic, arguing against group over individual rights in his influential work *Affirmative Discrimination: Ethnic Inequality and Public Policy* (1975). Nonetheless, two decades later, in light of the evidence of persisting Black disadvantage and segregation, Glazer reconsidered both his earlier view on the inevitability of assimilation in America and his criticism of affirmative action. His book *We Are All Multiculturalists Now* (1997) recognized the persisting injustices and structural inequalities Blacks experienced in the U.S. and acknowledged, somewhat cautiously, the need for special action on their behalf. This shift elicited dismay and outrage from conservatives of the time, who had viewed him as an important intellectual leader.

By then, Glazer was long used to these changing public expressions of approval and disagreements. An important assessment of his life and work in the *New York Times Magazine* opened with the ironic bon mot that “Nathan Glazer has had more second thoughts in his lifetime than most people have had thoughts.” Born in 1923 to working class, Jewish immigrant parents from Poland, he grew up in hardscrabble East Harlem and East Bronx and enrolled in City College, where he joined a brilliant group of anti-communist Marxists, including Daniel Bell, Irving Howe, Irving Kristol, Seymour Martin Lipset, and Lionel Trilling, who were later to become famous as “the New York Intellectuals,” the most influential public thinkers on mid-century American culture and politics. Of his radical student days, Glazer once remarked that he and his friends’ intellectual confidence came from “the arrogance that if you’re a Marxist, you can understand anything, and it was a model that even as we gave up Marxism we nevertheless stuck with.” On graduation, Glazer did editorial work at Anchor Books, Random House, and several small magazines, including *Commentary*, the influential magazine of American Jewish life. After receiving his doctorate in sociology from Columbia University in 1962, he worked in both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, on housing policy and the Model Cities Program, respectively. This experience led him to believe that public policy for the disadvantaged did more harm than good because it neglected or even reinforced, in his view, the cultural factors and lifestyles that largely explained their plight. In *The Limits of Social Policy* (1988), he wrote that, “I came to believe that although social policy had ameliorated some of the problems we had inherited, it had also given rise to other problems no less grave in their effect on human happiness.” After his government work, he took academic positions at UC Berkeley, Bennington College, and Smith College before accepting one of five new professorships on urban studies at Harvard funded by the Ford Foundation. At Berkeley, Glazer soured on radical activism as a result of his disagreement with the student movement and radical demonstrations of the sixties, which he thought went too far. In the mid-sixties he became an important contributor to *The Public Interest*, a newly founded journal of public policy and opinion of former left radicals, and in 1975, he took over the position of co-editor of the journal from Daniel Bell. Critics dubbed this group the neo-conservatives, a term embraced by Glazer’s co-editor, Irving Kristol, and other members of the group, although not by Glazer. He continued to co-edit the journal through 2002, and it ceased publication two and a half years later. In later life, especially after the publication of his modified defense of affirmative action and multiculturalism, Glazer’s views mellowed to what he considered a centrist Democrat position. After retirement he pursued a long secondary interest in architecture, writing a book on modernist architecture and editing a volume on the National Mall. In all, Glazer authored more than a dozen books and edited nearly as many volumes.

Although at the center of so many controversies, Glazer spoke truly when he said, “I consider myself pragmatic, rather than a man of the left or a man of the right.” He was an engaging, kind, gracious man, who could write a glowing blurb for an author who opposed his views on ethnicity. A sympathetic, interested listener, he never stopped questioning and welcomed the opportunity to converse with those who differed from him. He cherished the diversity of

ideas, peoples, places, and their buildings. In his beloved New York he preferred the subway to the taxi.

Glazer was survived by his wife, Sulochana Glazer; three daughters from a previous marriage—Sarah Glazer, Elizabeth Glazer, and Sophie Glazer; seven grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

Respectfully submitted,

Michèle Lamont

Mario Small

Orlando Patterson, Chair