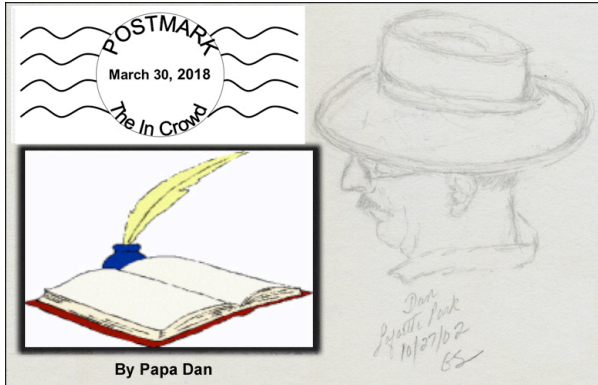# An Outsider's Lament
By Dan Sapone

By Papa Dan

"You ain't been nowhere 'til you've been 'in' with the 'In Crowd.' "
— Dobie Gray (lyrics Billy Page)

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Last week, a friend of mine lamented the fact that some important content she was interested in was available only on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media. The bad news was that this content happened to be the marketing material from the publisher of her soon-to-be-released book. The problem, in her words, was this: "**I don't do social media and don't intend to start!**" After some thought, I replied, "It seems to me that everyone assumes these days that we are all hooked up to these social-media websites; and, if you aren't, you don't have a clue what's going on. It's like the new 'In Crowd.' "

And then a memory popped into my head — "Remember the song from back in the day …"

An Old Song Pops into My Head

Let's drift back a moment to 1964. Every Saturday morning on radio station KYA, my favorite disc jockey, Emperor Gene Nelson, would count down the "Top 30 Hits" for that week. A lot of new songs were introduced on those Saturdays; and it was absolutely essential for us 14-year-olds to keep up with the latest music. High school was a big change for me. After eight years in the same school, in the same class with pretty much the same faces, the transition from being an 8th grader to being a High School freshman was intimidating.

My freshman class had ten times as many kids as my 8th-grade class had. I knew thirty-some kids and the rest of the 300-some kids in the Freshman class were strangers. But, even as a *stranger*, like other 9th-graders, I quickly realized that listening to the right music would be required to fit in to my new world. So, I listened carefully — to the Beatles, The Stones, The Supremes, Leslie Gore, The Dixie Cups, The Dave Clark Five, Dusty Springfield — to all the music Emperor Nelson played on KYA.

With all that in mind, one Saturday morning, The Emperor introduced a new song that got my attention. The song was "The In Crowd." Coming from a school where I had always known everyone, the idea of an "In Crowd" was new to me. The big, bold voice of Doby Gray sounded like a voice of authority.

Here is what the song said:

The In Crowd
By Dobie Gray (recording released December, 1964); lyrics by Billy Page

I'm in with the in crowd
I go where the in crowd goes
I'm in with the in crowd
And I know what the in crowd knows

Any time of the year, don't you hear?
Dressin' fine, makin' time
We breeze up and down the street
We get respect from the people we meet
They make way day or night
They know the in crowd is 'out of sight'

~~I'm in with the in crowd~~
~~I know every latest dance~~
~~When you're in with the in crowd~~
~~It's easy to find romance~~

At a spot where the beat's really hot
If it's square, we ain't there
We make every minute count
Our share is always the biggest amount
Other guys imitate us
But the original's still the greatest

Anytime of the year, don't you hear?
Spendin' cash, talkin' trash
Girl, I'll show you a real good time
Come on with me and leave your troubles behind
I don't care where you've been
You ain't been nowhere till you've been in
With the in crowd, yeah
~~Oh, with the in crowd (yeah, yeah, yeah)~~
We got our own way of walkin', yeah,
We got our own way of talkin'
In the in crowd

Not all of the ideas in the song were new. I already knew that some 8th graders were considered more "cool" than others (certainly more "cool" than I was); and "cool" usually meant exhibiting behaviors that other kids admired. I remember a friend of mine, Michael Savage, (who had an older brother who could teach him "cool") showed up one day in the 8th grade with "a new way of walkin'," like the song said. When he walked across the courtyard at school, with his slow, purposeful gait and aloof expression, he caught the admiring eye of those of us who were "less cool."

So, back then, I suppose we 8th-graders had a sense that some of us were especially "in"; but the following year when the song came out, to my 9th-grade ears, some of these "In Crowd" song lyrics revealed ideas that separated those who were "in" from the rest of us. Two examples:
• it hadn't occurred to me that some people "know what the in crowd knows" and presumably, those were things that I didn't know. And
• apparently, the chosen few "go where the in crowd goes" and "if it's square, we ain't there."
I wasn't completely sure what "square" meant — except that I suspected that "square" included attributes that I probably had and included places that I went. (Uh, maybe places like the library or the store where I supplied my stamp collection? I suppose they were "square.")

As I became more accustomed to high school, some of the lyrics were actually troubling: the assertion that "our share is always the biggest amount" didn't sit well with my teenage sense of fairness and I wondered, as an outsider, 'what earned you that biggest share' — other than trivial stuff like "our own way of walkin' " and "our own way of talking'." The song assigned behaviors to those of us who were not in "The In Crowd" that I didn't like:

They make way day or night
They know the in crowd is 'out of sight.'

Who said I was going to "make way" for anyone?" On reflection (or what passed for 'reflection' in a 14-year-old), "Spendin' cash, talkin' trash" did not sound like something worthy of respect.

Evolution

As time went on, and this Freshman became a Sophomore, and so on, other bits of evidence confirmed my suspicion (and hope) that there were other ways to earn respect — things like getting good grades, succeeding at athletics, reading books, joining clubs, being a good friend, etc. The music continued to be important to me (and I learned to keep quiet about my Frank Sinatra and Tony Bennett records), but I came to realize that a narrowly defined "in crowd," that merely imitated approved "cool" behaviors, was not particularly appealing. I considered that a person, even in high school, could be part of more than one "crowd." One of my teachers had a sign on the classroom wall that I copied into my notebook. It said:

> "They laugh at me because I'm different.
> I laugh at them because they are all the same."

Fast Forward to Today

So, as I mentioned, these "In Crowd" lyrics from 54 years ago did not spring into my memory out of nowhere. The pervasive nature of Facebook, Twitter, and other social media seems to have created a new "in crowd." While digital media was originally promoted as being _inclusive_; in fact, the "In" and "Out" feature of digital social media seems to have grown more _exclusive_. Has Facebook become a new "In Crowd?" We have learned lately that there are things we have to give up to be a member of that crowd.

Looking at this topic through the lens of today, I think we can hear these lyrics in *The News* that we hear every day. We seem to be surrounded by people who want us to believe that we must be members of a particular _exclusive_ "in crowd" or we are not properly American. Some promote the idea that the survival of that American "in crowd" requires its members to exclude people who are different. Are we being fed an _exclusive_ "In-Crowd-First" philosophy?

The optimist in me wants believe that the kind of _exclusive_ "In Crowd" behavior we saw as teenagers of 1964 eventually disappears with age and is replaced with something more sensible and grown up. There is evidence, however, that my optimism may be naïve. Is today's "in crowd" mentality growing rather than receding? Is it dangerous? How divisive can it get?

But, I do notice that some crowds are emerging with more _inclusive_ intentions — crowds like "Enough is Enough" and "Never Again." Some of the most articulate and welcoming spokespersons of those crowds are not much older than I was in 1964 and they are starting to emerge as the "grown-up" voices of our time. And the crowds, just last weekend, have been quite large. Do these "in crowds" offer just another short-lived "new way of walkin' " and " new way of talkin' " as they did in my youth?

Or is something more enduring, more inclusive, perhaps more promising, on the horizon?