

A Face in the Crowd (1957) Elia Kazan

P Michell, 2017

“HAS NEVER CEASED TO BE RELEVANT. Remains the founding movie of postmodern times. Election years make it only too evident that our popular culture and electoral politics are symbiotic; *A Face In The Crowd* was the first to dramatize it...The fact is that *A Face In The Crowd* is not about any one person so much as a particular system that brings everything together—politics, news, and entertainment—in the democracy of the market. The movie is still ‘pretty on target,’ Schulberg says. ‘With the right charisma and the right message, it could still happen here.’ It could and it does.”

Source: J. Hoberman, *Village Voice*

A Face in the Crowd is a 1957 film starring [Andy Griffith](#), [Patricia Neal](#) and [Walter Matthau](#), directed by [Elia Kazan](#).^[1] The screenplay was written by [Budd Schulberg](#), based on his short story "Your Arkansas Traveler", from the collection, *Some Faces in the Crowd* (1953).

The story centers on a drifter named Larry "Lonesome" Rhodes who is discovered by the producer (Neal) of a small-market radio program in rural northeast [Arkansas](#). Rhodes ultimately rises to great fame and influence on national television.

The film launched Griffith into stardom, but earned mixed reviews upon its original release. Later decades have seen reappraisals of the movie, and in 2008 it was selected for preservation in the United States [National Film Registry](#) by the [Library of Congress](#) as being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant".

Elia Kazan (1909-2003) Director

Wikipedia link:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elia_Kazan

Controversial theatre and film director. Co-founded Actor's Studio in 1947 which introduced 'Method Acting' under Lee Strasberg.

Twenty years of films between 1947 and his last serious film – *The Arrangement* (1969) mad significant works including *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947), *Panic in the Streets* (1950), the justly famous *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) with Marlon Brando, *On the Waterfront* (1954) with music by Leonard Bernstein, *East of Eden* (1955), *Baby Doll* (1956).

Works profoundly affected by his tersimony in 1952:

His testimony helped end the careers of former acting colleagues [Morris Carnovsky](#) and [Art Smith](#), along with ending the work of playwright [Clifford Odets](#).^[8] Kazan later justified his act by saying he took "only the more tolerable of two alternatives that were either way painful and wrong."^[9] Nearly a half-century later, his anti-Communist testimony continued to cause

controversy. When Kazan was awarded an honorary Oscar in 1999, dozens of actors chose not to applaud as 250 demonstrators picketed the event.^[10]

Bud Schulberg (1914-2009) book and scriptwriter

American [screenwriter](#), [television producer](#), [novelist](#) and [sports writer](#). He was known for his 1941 novel, *What Makes Sammy Run?*, his 1947 novel *The Harder They Fall*, his 1954 Academy Award-winning screenplay for *On the Waterfront*, and his 1957 screenplay for *A Face in the Crowd*. Co-wrote *Wind Across the Everglades* (1958) directed by Nicholas Ray and Schulberg.

Mother was his talent agent!

Born into a significant Jewish Hollywood family:

Son of B P Schulberg, producer who later ran Paramount pictures. His Mother – Adeline Schulberg (nee Jaffe) - after her divorce with B P after 20 years, formed a significant talent agency with clients including – Marelene Dietrich and Frederick March. She was the sister of Sam Jaffe. Famous Hollywood producer.

Links:

<https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/schulberg-adeline-jaffe>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sam_Jaffe_\(producer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sam_Jaffe_(producer))

While serving in the Navy during [World War II](#), Schulberg was assigned to the [Office of Strategic Services](#) (OSS), working with [John Ford](#)'s documentary unit.

Following [VE Day](#), he was reportedly among the first American servicemen to liberate the [Nazi concentration camps](#).^[6] He was involved in gathering evidence against [war criminals](#) for the [Nuremberg Trials](#), an assignment that included arresting documentary film maker [Leni Riefenstahl](#) at her [chalet](#) in [Kitzbühel](#), Austria, ostensibly to have her identify the faces of Nazi war criminals in German film footage captured by the Allied troops.^[7]

Real Life Trivia

On Friday (Jan 2017), viewers across USA will have the opportunity to flip on their televisions to watch a power-hungry, media-savvy celebrity rise to megalomaniacal heights. We're referring of course to Elia Kazan's 1957 film *A Face in the Crowd*, which TCM will air in the hours after President-elect Donald Trump's inauguration.

A darkly comic cautionary tale about the dangers of fame and politics intertwining, the film stars Andy Griffith as a plainspoken drifter who becomes a populist hero via radio and TV appearances. As his ambition, ego, and disdain for his audience grow, he begins to spin out of control and is ultimately brought down by a vitriolic rant caught on a hot microphone.

Against the backdrop of Trump's unprecedented political ascent, *A Face in the Crowd* has frequently been compared to the trajectory of the former *Apprentice* star, in outlets including [CNN](#), the [Washington Post](#), [the Ringer](#), [Deadline Hollywood](#), and the [AV Club](#).

According to a TCM spokesperson, however, the film was programmed as part of a tribute to the actress Patricia Neal, whose birthday coincides with Inauguration Day.

Source: Entertainment Weekly – 18 Jan 2017

Special Presentation in 2016 with speaker -

Andy Griffith sizzles in his first onscreen role as drunken drifter Lonesome Rhodes who becomes an overnight media sensation, rising from itinerant Ozark guitar picker to local media rabble-rouser to TV superstar and political king-maker. From director Elia Kazan and *On the Waterfront* writer Budd Schulberg, *A Face in the Crowd* was hailed by Francois Truffaut as "passionate, exalted, fierce...a pleasure for the mind."

Before the film, join Dr. Steven Schlozman, associate director of The Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH), and an assistant professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School (HMS), as he discusses our attraction to politically charismatic speakers, our tendency to create "us" versus "them" dichotomies, and how our brains work (and don't work) during an election year.

Dr. Steven Schlozman is associate director of The Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH), and an assistant professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School (HMS). He also serves as course director of the psychopathology class for the MIT-HMS Program in Health, Sciences and Technology. Dr. Schlozman practices child and adult psychiatry at MGH, where he also serves as the primary consultant to the pediatric transplant service. He received BA's in English and biology from Stanford University, and his MD from the Dartmouth-Brown Program in Medicine.

Source: Coolidge Corner Theater – Massachusetts, USA

Trivia

[Elia Kazan](#) and [Budd Schulberg](#) spent months researching the advertising world, even gaining access to ad agency meetings, in order to understand the way Madison Avenue approaches and shapes the thinking of the American public.

The ad agency that [Elia Kazan](#) and [Budd Schulberg](#) studied as their research for the film represented the Lipton's Tea account, which was the official sponsor of Arthur

Godfrey's radio/TV appearances. The duo may have been trying to uncover the true nature of Godfrey's role as a media pitchman.

Elia Kazan and Budd Schulberg observed the political arena by going to Washington, D.C., where they interviewed future president Lyndon Johnson, studying the way he walked, talked, and presented himself in private and in public.

François Truffaut was a champion of the film, writing, "What is important is not its structure but its unassailable spirit, its power, and what I dare call its necessity. The usual fault with 'honest' films is their softness, timidity and anesthetic neutrality. This film is passionate, exalted, fierce, as inexorable as a 'Mythology' of Roland Barthes - and, like it, a pleasure for the mind."

Reviews

Senses of Cinema by Thomas Beltzer, 2004

Note – interesting how time may have affected this review ...

http://sensesofcinema.com/2004/cteq/face_in_the_crowd/

The Rise and Fall of a TV 'Personality'; 'A Face in the Crowd' Opens at the Globe

By BOSLEY CROWTHER

May 29, 1957

BUDD SCHULBERG and Elia Kazan, the writer-director team whose "On the Waterfront" manifested the rare congeniality of their skills, are doing a brisk encore in tracing the phenomenal rise (and fall) of a top television "personality" in their new film, "A Face in the Crowd." This sizzling and cynical exposure, which came to the Globe last night, also presents Andy Griffith as the key figure in his first screen role.

Like other debunking films before it that have gleefully discovered feet of clay on seemingly solid public idols, this one is more concerned with the nature and flamboyance of the idol than with the milieu and machine by which he is made. Lonesome Rhodes, the two-faced hero, is pretty much the whole show, and what he symbolizes in society is barely hinted—or discreetly overlooked.

From the outset, when he is picked up as a drunken guitar-playing tramp by a female television reporter in an Arkansas town, he progressively dominates the TV audience to which he is expandingly exposed, the advertising agency

representatives and the big industrialist by whom he is employed. He even is coming close to dominating a political faction and a Presidential aspirant when the rug is suddenly pulled out from under him by his girl friend, who throws a studio switch.

Meanwhile, he is demonstrating his eccentric personality—his gusto, his candor, his shrewdness, his moral laxity and his treachery. And, from the way his eyes narrow and his lips tighten, we gather he is demonstrating a thirst for power, when his loving and loyal discoverer decides that we've all had enough.

In a way, it is not surprising that this flamboyant Lonesome Rhodes dominates the other characters in the story and consequently the show. For Mr. Schulberg has penned a powerful person of the raw, vulgar, roughneck, cornball breed, and Mr. Griffith plays him with thunderous vigor, under the guidance of Mr. Kazan.

You know you are in the vicinity of someone who has white-lightning for blood when Mr. Griffith first hits old "Mama Git-tar" and howls his "Free Man in the Morning" song. And you know you are up against a trickster when he starts spouting amiable lies. Mr. Schulberg and Mr. Kazan spawn a monster not unlike the one of Dr. Frankenstein.

But so hypnotized are they by his presence that he runs away not only with the show but with intellectual reason and with the potentiality of their theme. Lonesome Rhodes builds up so swiftly that it is never made properly clear that he is a creature of the television mechanism and the public's own gullibility. He swings in an ever-widening orbit, as it were by his own energy and not by the recognized attraction and governance of a new magnetic field.

Everyone condescends to him—in the script of Mr. Schulberg, that is—instead of taking positive positions that would better represent reality. Patricia Neal as his doting discoverer, Paul McGrath as an advertising man, Percy Waram as a big manufacturer, Marshall Neilan as a scheming Senator and Anthony Franciosa as a wise guy—all play their roles capably, but they're forced to behave as awed observers, not as flexible factors in the scheme of things.

As a consequence, the dominance of the hero and his monstrous momentum, driven home by a vast accumulation of TV detail and Mr. Kazan's staccato style, eventually become a bit monotonous when they are not truly opposed. Reality is proved by inadvertence. We finally get bored with Lonesome Rhodes. Thus the dubious device of having his girl friend switch him on the air when he thinks he is finished with his program (and is scorning his public) is inane. This type would either have become a harmless habit or the public would have been finished with him!

Withal, he is highly entertaining and well worth pondering when he is on the rise.

The movie that foretold the rise of Donald Trump

By [Marc Fisher](#) February 8, 2016

For half a year already, the Donald Trump collapse market has featured active trading and steady, mounting losses. Every overreaching burst of wild rhetoric, every unpresidential put-down, every violation of conservative principles, every pronouncement of his superiority over one stupid person or another leads to a fresh round of predictions that Trump's fiery march through the thickets of American politics has finally slammed into a dead end. And then it doesn't happen.

Trump's rule-smashing romp may have no precedent in the annals of presidential campaigns, but the template for his remarkable rise — and the potential for a hard fall — was laid out in a little-known film masterwork half a century ago. "[A Face in the Crowd](#)," a 1957 movie written by Budd Schulberg and directed by Elia Kazan — the same team that had already made the classic "[On the Waterfront](#)" — stars Andy Griffith as Larry "Lonesome" Rhodes, a folksy, charming Arkansas traveler who soars from a filthy jail cell to the pinnacle of American celebrity and political power.

Unlike Trump, Rhodes has zero money before he captivates the public. But the rest of the story is a revealing and cautionary portrait of what happens when a non-politician captures the American imagination, expresses the frustrations and aspirations of the people, wins hearts and trust, and litters the landscape with choice reminders that beneath his truth-telling lies a surly streak of contempt. Like Trump, Rhodes offers a reminder that one person's demagoguery is another's populism. Add a dose of arrogance, and the result looks to some like a dramatic fall waiting to happen.

"I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose any voters, okay?" Trump told an audience in Iowa about a week before the state's caucuses. "It's, like, incredible."

“This whole country, just like my flock of sheep,” Rhodes exclaims at the height of his power. “They’re mine, I own them, they think like I do. Only they’re more stupid than I am, so I got to think for them.”

“A Face in the Crowd,” made in the shadow of the anticommunist witch hunts led by Sen. Joseph McCarthy, was one of the first movies to take on the startling power of television, which had entered a majority of American homes just five years earlier.

Schulberg, son of a Hollywood producer, grew up on studio lots and had a brief and disillusioning flirt with the Communist Party. He was fascinated by larger-than-life characters who experience sudden upswings and devastating downfalls. He was also deeply allergic to demagogues.

In “A Face in the Crowd” and the short story it was based on, “[Your Arkansas Traveler](#),” Schulberg created a character who dares to say what regular folks privately think; who has few, if any, filters; and who gets away with rogue behavior because he’s charming and, eventually, successful.

Rhodes is neither the first nor last movie character to rise and fall by appealing to the base anxieties of the American people. He is a model for Howard Beale, the TV news anchorman who rallies the nation to shout “[I’m as mad as hell, and I’m not going to take this anymore!](#)” in “Network” (1976). His lineage flows through Chauncey Gardiner, the dim gardener whose [unwitting folk wisdom](#) turns him into a possible presidential contender in “Being There” (1979), and on to the [brutal truth-teller Sen. Jay Bulworth](#) in the eponymous 1998 movie.

Lonesome Rhodes is coarser and blunter than the others. He goes through women like they’re cheap snacks. He calls minorities names. He makes big promises and then denies ever having made them. He tells it like it is — or at least like the people thought it had once been, back in the gauzy time when things were good. [Like Trump](#), he calls people in power dumb and phony.

Rhodes is a drunk and a drifter when the story’s heroine, Marcia Jeffries, daughter of the local radio station owner, launches a radio show, “A Face in the Crowd,” in which ordinary people tell their

stories. She wanders into the county jail to find one such person, and the inmates point her to Rhodes, who is out cold on the floor. Rhodes comes to, sings Jeffries an affecting blues song, strums his beat-up guitar and charms her with his huge laugh and folksy tales. She's so bowled over that she barely hears him when he asks, "What do I get out of this? Mr. Me, Myself and I?"

His ascent is shockingly swift. Jeffries gets him his own show, and his prankish experiments demonstrate the power that a winning, confident personality can wield when he connects with his audience's gripes and hopes.

Rhodes learns that the local sheriff, now running for mayor, is widely loathed, so he asks listeners to show that the sheriff has "gone to the dogs" by bringing their hounds to the sheriff's front yard — which they do, by the dozens.

The result: soaring trust among the little people, and a realization that the man behind the microphone can make things happen.

Jeffries notices that Rhodes now has the power to "say anything that comes into your head and be able to sway people." A talent agent notices, too, and Rhodes is on his way — to his own TV show in Memphis, and then to New York and a coast-to-coast gig and a penthouse apartment, and then an introduction to a senator who's running for president.

In a rare moment of self-doubt, Rhodes sees what's happening: "All them millions of people doing what I tell them to — scares me." But he quickly returns to selling his sponsor's dubious vitamin pills. Like Trump, Rhodes is given to reciting his ratings in response to unrelated questions. "53.7 this morning," he says at one point. "I got another million."

His sudden fame and fortune convince Rhodes that he is more than a millionaire entertainer: "I'm an influencer, a wielder of opinion, a force — a force!"

Last month, when I asked Trump [what effect his TV show, “The Apprentice,” had on his decision to run for president](#), he reeled off his TV ratings, talked about his best-selling books, and then said that his reality show “was a different level of adulation, or respect, or celebrity. That really went to a different level. I’m running to really make America great again, but the celebrity helped — that’s true.”

Like Trump, Rhodes faces criticism that his populist appeals and his simple solutions amount to demagoguery. Rhodes and Trump respond similarly to such accusations: They attack their critics as [bad people who are out to get them](#).

[Donald Trump knew ‘The Apprentice’ would boost his brand, but it did way more than that]

Rhodes, although married, has a public fling with an underage, baton-twirling cheerleader, and then marries her, to popular acclaim. (Trump, pre-campaign, was given to teases about his success with the opposite sex. As he wrote, “If I told the real stories of my experiences with women, often seemingly very happily married and important women, this book would be a guaranteed bestseller.”)

Rhodes connects with people even as he salivates over gaining power through them. He instinctively understands that in the media age, a traditional focus on policy is a loser’s approach: “Instead of long-winded public debates, the people want slogans,” he says. “‘Time for a change!’ ‘The mess in Washington!’ ”

Finally, Jeffries, played by Patricia Neal, can’t take it any longer. At the end of one of Rhodes’s shows, as the credits roll, she turns up the mic so the home audience can hear their hero privately unloading to cast members:

“Shucks, I sell them chicken fertilizer as caviar. I can make them eat dog food and think it’s steak. You know what the public’s like? A cage full of guinea pigs. Goodnight, you stupid idiots. Goodnight, you miserable slobs.”

The analogy to Trump only goes so far, of course. In some ways, Trump has tested the public's fealty even more daringly than Rhodes ever did. After a graceful concession speech following the Iowa caucuses, Trump turned around and declared the process tainted, demanding a do-over. Earlier, Trump had questioned the intelligence of the voters: "How stupid are the people of Iowa? How stupid are the people of the country to believe this crap?" he asked during a verbal takedown of Ben Carson's stories of his youthful violence and redemption.

Rhodes's popularity immediately collapses once his followers hear what he really thinks of them; Trump, however, so far has weathered any backlash provoked by his outbursts.

The two populists' endgames cannot yet be compared, of course. Once Rhodes realizes he has betrayed his base, he suffers a breakdown, begs a group of black waiters to love him, and then slaps them with a racial slur.

Trump, in contrast, continues to ride the magic carpet of confidence that has carried him through myriad crises.

[Donald Trump may not be worried, but his impersonators are]

When I was reporting a piece on "The Apprentice," several network executives who worked closely with Trump told me that even at the height of the show's popularity, the mogul never displayed contempt for his audience.

He genuinely loved the attention, they said, and never said a cynical word about his fans.

And then four of those executives, unprompted, offered the same suggestion: Watch "A Face in the Crowd."

Marc Fisher, a senior editor, writes about most anything. He's been The Washington Post's enterprise editor, local columnist and Berlin bureau chief, and he's covered politics, education, pop culture, and much else in three decades on the Metro, Style, National and Foreign desks.