

THIRTY-FIVE CENTS

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Today's Teen-Agers

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Students: On the Fringe of a Golden Era

(See Cover)

"If Booth Tarkington were to write *Seventeen* today," says a Connecticut high school English teacher, "he'd have to call it *Twelve*." Sociologist Reuel Denney notes with fascination the shopping list of a twelve-year-old suburban girl: "Water pistol, brassiere, permanent." When a 16-year-old Louisville boy, as a practical joke, gravely announced at dinner that his girl friend was pregnant, the first reaction of the stunned family came from the boy's younger brother, 13. "My God," he said. "You'll lose your allowance."

Worldly, interesting, informed and even intellectual when barely out of childhood, young kids all over the U.S. are pulling down the entry age to teendom. Even as they do, the affluent society is pushing up the average age of school leaving. The lengthened span of teen-agerhood—what Johns Hopkins Sociologist James Coleman calls "the coming earlier to social maturity while having to spend a considerably longer period in a dependent role"—is further fattened by a growth rate of teen-age population that is four times as high as the U.S. average. The country now has 24 million people aged 13 to 19.

This one-eighth of the nation is chiefly formed and fashioned by the schools, where teen-agers spend half of their waking hours. If Lyndon Johnson succeeds in getting "every child the best education the nation can provide," the schools' responsibility will grow ever greater. And by and large the pattern works: in the mid-1960s, smarter, subtler and more sophisticated kids are pouring into and out of more expert, exacting and experimental schools.

They Know More. Caltech President Lee DuBridge believes that "there is no question that today's teen-ager coming to one of the major colleges is better educated and more seriously motivated than ever before." Profiting by a vast improvement in teaching methods, curriculums and equipment, "our children know more about things than we did," says New World Foundation Consultant Frank G. Jennings. Ellsworth Tompkins, executive secretary of the National Education Association's 30,000 secondary school principals, holds that "over the past seven or eight years we have experienced in the schools the most important developments since the establishment of public education."

In no society of all history have more teen-agers gone to school and stayed there through such advanced ages. In 1900 only 13% of U.S. children of the ages 14 through 17 were students. By 1940 the ratio had risen to 73%. Now enrollment is close to 95% of the high-school-age population, and more than half the graduates will enter college. With 700 two-year colleges already enrolling nearly a million students, experienced trend watchers forecast that in 1980 the ordinary U.S. student will not leave the classroom until he is 20 or 21.

The burden of added numbers, rather than forcing down academic standards, has raised them. "The big drop in quality that many educators were predicting ten years ago just never took place," says Curriculum Planner A. Harry Passow of Columbia's Teachers College. Instead, the average performance of junior and senior high school teen-agers on many tests has been gradually rising, reports E. F. Lindquist, president of the Measurement Research Center at the University of Iowa. Even though the exams are tougher than a decade ago, and even though seven times as many students (1,500,000 this year) are taking them, scores on the formidable College Entrance Boards have stayed up—thus revealing how quickly excellence has attained depth. James B. Conant, whose *The American High School Today*, published in 1959, became the bible of reform, is dumfounded. Last week, addressing an N.E.A. convention of secondary school principals in Miami, he happily confessed that "writing about American education is almost as breathtaking as writing about international politics."

Before a book is in print, parts of it are already out of date."

Tough Culture. Just as obsolete are most conventional notions about teen agers, a word invented in the U.S. and popularized scarcely 25 years ago to supplant such earlier images as the carefree Huck Finn type, the early-to-work Horatio Alger model and the heavily psychological "adolescent" of three decades back. It was the culmination of the process by which, as Sociologist Denney points out, the U.S. became the first nation to transform children from "a family asset as labor to a family liability as student-consumer." That liability is one that the U.S. seems willing to afford; it has created a flourishing subculture whose goals, heroes, styles and customs are, in the teen-age word of admiration, "tough."

The most startling part of the change may be that the classic conflict between parents and children is letting up. The archetype of the James Dean-style cool youth is giving way to the likes of the teen-age hero of James Leigh's new novel *What Can You Do?* "I've never been able to see the big rebellion scene in order to prove you're an individual," drawls Hero Phil Fuller. "Much less friction if you just go with it. That's elementary physics: the heat of friction is waste energy."

Parental Abdication. At the same time, adults who lived through a great depression, a shattering war, an anxious peace, and the whole onslaught of existentialism are less inclined than ever to proclaim what Margaret Mead calls "parental imperatives." Some of the slackening has been as silly as the diffident dad in Max Schulman's *I Was a Teen-Age Dwarf*, who takes his son on "palship walks." But much of the diminishing tension results from parental intent as well as parental abdication. Harvard Sociologist Talcott Parsons finds many young parents "committed to a policy of training serious independence in youth," to which children respond with seriousness—and an occasional wistful regret. "I don't get authority at home," sighs Dana Nye, 17, a student at Pacific Palisades High School in Los Angeles. "We're just a bunch of people who go about our business and live under one roof. One of these days I'd like to sit down and find out from my parents what they really believe in."

What a lot of parents believe, as one mother expresses it, is that "a parent who says to a child 'I don't know' is somehow better than one who says 'I know for sure.'" Inevitably many adolescents are left with few guidelines. "Their difficulty," says Harvard Historian Laurence Wylie, "lies not in living up to expectations, but in discovering what they really are." The result, according to University of California Sociologist Edgar Z. Friedenberg, is "the vanishing adolescent"—made to mature earlier, yet in many ways still engagingly immature. And since "part of the American dream is to live long and die young," many adults ambivalently relish and resent the teen-ager's freedom and spontaneity. "Our whole culture believes less in authority," snaps a Detroit priest. "Yet the teen-ager is the only one criticized for not recognizing it."

"The very changes that society is undergoing have spawned something more than was bargained for," writes James Coleman in *The Adolescent Society*. "Adolescents today are cut off, probably more than ever before, from the adult society. They are dumped into a society of their peers, whose habitats are the halls and classrooms of their schools, the teen-age canteens, the corner drugstore, the automobile." That is where teen-agers get their tastes and values. "They're in cahoots now," says Columbia Psychologist Arthur Jersild.

Noonday at "Pali." One anthropologically absorbing place to watch these characteristics in interplay is the wall-less, roofed area for cafeteria tables at Pacific Palisades High School, bordering on Sunset Boulevard. "Pali," as the kids call it, is a new, \$7,000,000, red brick campus for 2,100 upper-middle-class students. "These are the students' cars," says English Teacher Jeanne Hernandez, pointing to a fast collection of "wheels" ranging up to Jags, "and there are the teachers' cars," pointing to a sedate group of compacts and the like. "It's so lush here that it's unreal," she says. "After a while you feel like a missionary in the tropics. If you don't get out, you go native."

The natives observe a rigid noonday ritual. The social elite—a breezy clique called the Palisades-Brentwood Singing and Drinking Association—hold court at cafeteria tables reserved by custom for them. Near by, like ladies in waiting, two plain girls snatch at conversational crumbs tossed by a pair of homecoming queens. At another table are the "social rejects"—girls on the fringes of the elite whose boy friends are now tired of them. "They are still allowed to go to parties," explains a guide, "but they aren't in on the really big decisions, like who the elite will back in student elections."

Toward the rear of the hall sit the service club members and the rah-rah crowd, "the squares who really believe in student government." Other tribes are the Saracens, who include a small motorcycling hood element; the clowns, a group of practical jokers who wear Mickey Mouse shirts to signify that all human existence is fraudulent; the intellectuals, who lounge on the steps of the administration building as the rest of the student body speculates over whether the long-haired girls among them are professional virgins or real swingers; and an amorphous crowd that defies classification by declaring unanimously: "I'm myself."

Parental pressure for grades at Pali is intense; students often retaliate at home by demanding cars, clothes, expensive vacations. "If you aren't aware of the underlying fraud," explains Senior Al Hunsaker, an A student, "then you become a grind. In a way, it's a massive put-on, faking out the community and the family without going through the suffering of a full-fledged revolt." "As long as we don't make waves," a classmate adds, "the administration is happy."

Dancing the Jerk. Drinking is common enough among Pali students, and the important thing is style. "It's all right to get blasted, if you can be witty or brave," says Larry Futterman, 17, "but if you get sloppy, you're way out." Glue-sniffing and marijuana are also out, because they bring on major trouble from the cops. Illicit sex is discussed more intensely than it is practiced, but even the talk is becoming boring since it involves a responsibility wary Pali teen-agers are not willing to accept.

"We're not going to talk about sex, are we?" says a blond kid in horn-rims, yawning. The latest dance is the jerk: partners face each other three feet apart, then languorously sway their upper spine and arms while rhythmically punctuating the undulations with a savage pelvic thrust.

"You can't marry anyone important without going to college," says Candace McCoy, a Pali senior whose looks suggest the Mona Lisa melded with Gidget. "But there is more to it than that. I don't want to go through life uneducated." Her father, an aerospace engineer, "is always on my back about grades," but "mother just gave up on me about six years ago and decided I was destined to enjoy life, nothing more." Twice a week Candy dates basketball players, her way of steering between tribal obligations to the social elite and a "guilty" attraction for intellectuals ("They are so worthwhile"). The specific attraction is Jamie Kelso, 16, a skinny near genius who studies only those subjects that interest him, mostly political science and history.

"I enjoy three things," says Jamie. "Being in a bookstore with \$10 in my pocket, a rainy day at the beach, and insight in terms of finding insight in myself." Like many Pali students, he does not especially enjoy his home life. "I'm kinda hoping to make a more meaningful person out of my mother, but it's hard work." Meaning is Jamie's favorite word. "What do good grades mean?" he asks. "And what if I go along, get married, have a good job and raise kids? Do we know what it is all about? Are the people around us really alive?" As for getting into college, he proposes a new kind of entrance exam: "The old eyeball test—the candidate and the admissions officer should look at each other until someone blinks." If the officer blinks first, he has to admit the kid.

Fashions in Fashions. Other schools, other mores—in fashions, music, buying, sex, goals and heroes.

Almost everywhere boys dress in madras shirts and chinos, or perhaps green Levi's—all tame and neat. The standard for girls is sweaters and skirts dyed to match, or shirtwaists and jumpers, plus blazers,

Weejun loafers, and knee socks or stockings (required at Pali in even the hottest weather). There is a small vogue for black and white saddle shoes—cruelly called "polio boots" for their bulky appearance.

Sprayed, teased hair has mostly given way to the long, loose style. "You see some girls with big bouffis still, scratching their heads with pencils," sniffs Debbie Scott, a loose-haired Atlanta 15-year-old. Some girls even press their hair on ironing boards. If they carry lankness of hair to the Morticia stage, girls are also likely to put on textured or patterned stockings, pierce their ear lobes (with an ice cube to deaden the pain), and call themselves beat.

Behind every reasonably well-heeled teen-ager lurks a stereo set endlessly playing the Beatles, the tearful ballads of Joan Baez or the homogenized harmonies of Peter, Paul and Mary. Big in the older set: the twanging social protests of Folk Singer Bob Dylan. Thelonious Monk is generally classified with Guy Lombardo as "from another era."

Growing Down. In most such matters of fad, teen-agers are unwilling to give a moment's heed to adult criticism—for they know that grownups eventually get wise. Growing down to teen tastes, adults took over the twist, the Beatles, straight hair and tight pants, among dozens of other crazes. "Is nothing sacred any more?" moans one teenager.

Teen magazines thus urge their advertisers to pursue the consumer "not in the sweet by-and-by, but in the much sweeter now-and-now." Now-and-now statistics show that teen-agers spend \$570 million on toiletries, \$1.5 billion a year on entertainment. \$3.6 billion on women's clothes—\$12 billion all told. They account for 25% of the record industry, 35% of the movie audience. "Action comedies with music," like Beach Party, Bikini Beach, Beach Blanket Bingo and the forthcoming How to Stuff a Wild Bikini, get made for only one sweet reason, explains Samuel Z. Arkoff of American International Pictures. "They're a kind of never-never land in modern undress." Teen-agers are not necessarily flattered by so much commercial attention. This month the student assembly at Lincoln High School in Portland, Ore., rebelled and condemned manufacturers who prey on "gullible teen-agers."

Sex at 16. "I didn't know what puberty was until 1 was almost past it," sings the fuddy-duddy father in Bye Bye Birdie, asking

Why can't they be like we were.

Perfect in every way?

What's the matter with kids today?

Kids today candidly talk about everything from puberty to homosexuality, but the actuality of free sex based on widespread use of contraceptives is nowhere near at hand. Some girls sleep with steady boy friends, circumspectly and not promiscuously. There are also the perennial pathetic girls who, as one boy explains it, "put out regularly, but they're either ugly or fat or, you know, kinda gross." Mostly, sex among teenagers is a joking game.

The crowd at San Francisco's Lowell

High School, where students say there were three pregnancies last year, embarrasses a couple leaving a party to be alone by crying "Baaa" and jerking their elbows in a sideward motion, indicating that the couple intends to do more than make sheep's eyes. Interracial necking is acceptable, reports Junior Clyde Leland, 15, "but usually they're the phonies trying so hard to be liberal." Denver's suburban Cherry Creek High is known for academic excellence and high-strung students, but it also has "woodsies"—dancing on the sand of a dry creek bed while beer cans pop and music from car radios blasts the night air. A current joke at Houston's Bellaire High asks: "What's white and scares teen-agers?" Answer: the stork. Sherry Watson, 17, a popular member of the baton-twirling Bellaire Belles, is casual about boys. "Why, you've either dated them all once, or else they're like a brother to

you and you wouldn't have them."

"Some couples who go steady are extremely idealistic," says Mrs. Sherrill Godwin, a counselor at Griffith High School just outside Winston-Salem. "That is why early marriages occur if she should get pregnant—from the idealism." Yet rural life is changing rapidly. Down on the farm, one time-honored way of learning about sex, watching the animals, is disappearing. "Today the animals are artificially inseminated," observes Mrs. Joseph Rademacher of Peotone, 111. (pop. 3,300). mother of four sons, including teenagers Bob, 16, and Bill, 14. "So I felt I should answer their questions rather than have some outsider tell them."

Goals & Heroes. Finding models and purpose is a major teen-age occupation.

The traditional high school hero has been the star athlete; the serious young scholar who did not go out for a team was usually scorned as a "curve raiser" who made it tough on his classmates. The tradition may be changing. "I think the athletes are losing out," observes Daniel G. McMurtrie, 17, from Detroit's Denby High School. "It's In to be an individual and not be afraid to bring up serious questions." Jimmy Fitzpatrick, a senior at Santa Monica High School, is In with the local surfing crowd. His hero is James Bond: "He's got everything. Everyone I know wants to be like him."

"The thing I like most is experience," says U.S. Teen Queen Luci Baines Johnson, 17. "I don't like to read about things. I want to do them." "Getting somewhere and proving yourself are the most important things," says Florence Jeffers, 16, a pert sophomore from Bridgeton, N.J., who is a class vice president ("Round up a posse and vote for Flossie"), a member of seven school clubs, and a prizewinning baker of chocolate-chip cookies and chocolate cake. "I'd like to be a Jack-of-all-trades and a master of one." Carolyn Smith, 17, is taking seven periods of art at New Canaan (Conn.) High School, aims to be a professional painter, and is glad that, unlike most of her classmates, "I know what I'm going to do in life."

Jon Holdaway has been "bouncing around like a rubber ball. I'm immature, plenty," he admits cheerfully, "but I don't feel I'm mixed up." Holdaway, 18, is a track star at Seattle's Ingraham High School, a National Merit Scholarship semifinalist, and last summer was a tenor soloist in the first U.S. high school choir to tour Japan. He is torn between a career in political science or music, but in either case his goal is personal happiness. "That is the issue when you evaluate your life."

Sarah Greensfelder is firm on the subject of heroes: "It's not a very good concept, because you're always thinking of what you ought to be and not what you are." Sarah is 13 and an agnostic who nevertheless keeps a reproduction of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel on the ceiling above her bed. She lives in a modest frame house in Mill Valley, near San Francisco, and licks stamps for Snick when she is not demonstrating for one cause or another. Zealously committed, she wanted to join the sit-ins at Berkeley, but her mother would not let her.

The Dung Heap. Negro teen-agers live in a world apart. "Culturally deprived, culturally deprived! That's all I hear," says Willie Armstead, 16, an A student at David Starr Jordan High School in the black ghetto of Los Angeles. "It's not so much that I mind being in an all-Negro school. What I care about is not being able to get together with white kids, or just kids with other backgrounds, and discussing ideas." Leslie Harris, 16, a talented musician and a student at Chicago's Wendell Phillips High School, has picketed the Chicago board of education to protest the skimpy treatment of Negro history in the standard public school curriculum.

Armstead and Harris are college-bound, but they are the exceptions. For most slum kids, says Hunter College Sociologist Ernest Smith, "the American dream is not the American fact. These children cannot respond to what is being taught, and most educators resist changing the curriculums to aid these children." Kenneth B. Clark, New York psychologist and civil rights leader, holds that "the Negro kid

who drops out of school is probably doing so to protect himself from a system designed to throw him on the dung heap of our society."

Already beyond the schools' help, for example, is Harlem Dropout Harrison Campbell, 16, who quit Manhattan Vocational High School in the tenth grade last November. Campbell wanted to be a carpenter, "but I wasn't learning nothing, no how," and no one urged him to stay on. Nowadays, he sleeps until noon, plays cards and records with his buddies until 3 p.m., then ambles over to a neighborhood school playground for a game of basketball or football. Campbell hopes to get a job soon, delivering telephone books at \$11.80 a day. "That's good bread," he says.

The Transformation. "The youngster who has only muscle to sell is an obsolete man," observes William Levenson, education professor at Western Reserve. Whereas earlier generations believed that there were many ways to get ahead, today's teen-agers think that schooling is perhaps the only way to success. "The educational period which was once tentative and experimental," notes Anthropologist Mead, "is now quite as directly functional as the life of a weaver's apprentice during the Middle Ages." The resulting "college education syndrome" puts immense pressures on teenagers. Some kids occasionally rise at 3 a.m. to study—one Washington mother has to forbid her girls to get up before 6. And so eager are kids to find colleges that when a wag at New Canaan High posted an invitation for interviews with the admissions officer of "Whasamatta College," five students signed up.

All pressure would go for nothing if the schools were failing. But they are not. The emerging truth is that the tentative innovations of the recent past—honors courses, team teaching, language labs, curriculum reform, "enrichment," comprehensive schools, independent study, advanced placement, non-graded classes, "new" this or that—have in the main worked toward a successful transformation of U.S. secondary education. Although the U.S. educational system is too varied, too unwieldy, too much subject to local control for the tide to be national, the direction is clear. Says J. Lloyd Trump, who pioneered the team-teaching method: "We're on the fringe of a golden era in education. It's going to come slowly, but we're heading there."

Discovery Method. The era was opened by such men as Harvard Psychologist Jerome Bruner, who perceived that "any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development." The theory became practice at M.I.T., where a study group headed by Jerrold Zacharias devised a new high school physics course in 1956 based on the notion that it was more fun, and more instructive, to understand the principles of physics by performing experiments rather than by memorizing a mass of facts and rarely testing them in the lab. The system was called the "discovery method," and it quickly spread to the other sciences as university scholars joined with public school teachers to revise curriculums.

New math now reaches about 70% of the students in Grades 7 through 12. This year nearly half the high school students studying physics are learning by discovery; one-third of the chemistry students and one-fourth of the biology students are taking completely revamped courses. Along with the curriculum changes came a new technology—programmed instruction, audio-visual equipment, classroom television, computers—which freed schools from the idea that one teacher standing before a class of 30 children was the ideal form of instruction.

Combining the latest in technology and content, foreign-language study has grown and improved. Since 1958, when U.S. public schools conducted 46 language labs, the number has soared to 7,000. Instead of memorizing vocabulary lists and grammatical rules, the student teen-ager puts on headphones, listens to tapes, and gets a result almost unheard of in earlier decades of high school instruction: he speaks and understands the language.

Who Teaches Better? The discovery method has also improved courses in the humanities and the social sciences, with students increasingly asked to solve problems, not memorize answers. A "Power

Reading" program in 23 Los Angeles high schools, for example, teaches students to define the author's purpose, analyze the logic, and compare the work to original sources. Having learned anew that writing equals thinking, schools are requiring more composition—and in the process they are finding that a widespread and sensible rebound from distorted permissiveness has permitted the rise of a generation of teen-agers who can spell. And the best of John Dewey's liberating progressive education, with its joy in learning, is a powerful precursor of the discovery method.

"There's no question," says Conant, "that the American public is now more in favor of tough, rough standards for those who can take it." Many high schools now require five courses a semester, not four. Hardly a high school exists without some sort of enriched academic program for gifted students. For super-nourishment, students can take advanced-placement exams, which may land them in the sophomore class at college and will at least eliminate the necessity of taking certain freshman courses. In 1955, when the College Entrance Examination Board introduced advanced-placement exams, 12,000 students from 104 U.S. high schools took them; last May 29,000 students from 2,000 high schools took them.

At Harvard, where early support for advanced placement helped the plan succeed nationally, almost half the freshman class arrived last fall having done some college-level work in high school, and 191 entered as sophomores. Those who enter advanced courses directly from high school do better than those who have taken the preliminary work as college freshmen. "One possible conclusion," jokes a Harvard official, "is that the high schools can teach better than we can."

That may well be the case at nearby Newton High School, guinea pig for most of the new curriculum changes. Four Harvard professors are teaching classes in social studies there, and students take advanced-placement exams in ten of the twelve available subjects. "I don't think we have a program here that was going ten years ago," says Principal Richard Mechem. The latest change: overhauling vocational training, which reflects a new—and overdue—concern of U.S. education.

Knights in Shining Chinos. The Great Society, or any society, needs manpower as well as brainpower. The scholastically brilliant will invent new computers, but the academically average must know how to run them. And although the U.S. has always provided an outstanding education to some, the wave of reform has given a better education to all. Says Carnegie Corporation President John Gardner, chairman of the presidential task force on educational goals: "Gifted and non-gifted students are being challenged to perform closer to the limit of their abilities."

Even an old-math mind can roughly multiply millions of teen-agers by the factor of better-trained intelligence and surmise that the next generations of Americans will look a lot smarter than the past. It will have to; a recent N.E.A. publication notes that "the first doubling of knowledge occurred in 1750, the second in 1900, the third in 1950, and the fourth only ten years later." The fifth and sixth, if the plot line holds its course, are close at hand. Teen-agers today do not think of themselves as "knights in shining chinos" riding forth on rockets to save the universe. But even the coolest of them know that their careers could be almost that fantastic.