

An Uneasy Idealism: The Reconstruction of American Adolescence from  
World War II to the War on Poverty

*by Lucas S. Waltzer*

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy, The City University of New York

2009

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This manuscript has been read and accepted by the  
Graduate Faculty in History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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**Abstract**

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This dissertation argues that American adolescence was reconstructed in the two decades after the end of World War II. At the beginning of the period, adolescent behavior was widely seen as a function of biological and psychological factors inside the individual. By the end, more adults understood the behavior of the young as reflective of the broader social, cultural, and political currents in American life. This transition was primarily visible in the reformulation of juvenile delinquency policy during these years. It was also present in the other realms where adolescence was constructed: in the mass media's investigation and entrepreneurial exploitation of youth, in the discourses that surrounded youth culture and consumption, in battles over school curricula, and in the way adolescence was invoked by politicians and other authority figures. This project looks at the reconstruction of adolescence both nationally and in New York City, and ultimately demonstrates that the concept is often about much more than the collective experiences of an age group made up of individuals who are transitioning to adulthood.

## Acknowledgements

I would not have been able to complete this dissertation without support from a number of sources.

First and foremost, I benefited from the sage guidance of my advisor, David Nasaw, who always believed in this project. Ever available with an encouraging word, David forced me to think boldly about the importance of this work and always pushed me towards my own voice. I'm grateful to have had his advice and stewardship throughout my graduate career.

Josh Freeman read multiple drafts and offered thorough criticisms that sharpened the armature of the study. Gerald Markowitz was incredibly supportive and enthusiastic. He asked incisive questions as I framed the project, made sharp suggestions about the future direction of my work, and also generously shared research he did with David Rosner for their excellent study of Kenneth and Mamie Clark and the Northside Center. Steven Mintz and Michelle Fine graciously agreed to serve on my committee, and offered challenging feedback that helped me refine the narrative arc of the study and also to address its weaknesses.

I was fortunate to begin my graduate career as the Durst Research Scholar at the Graduate Center's New Media Lab, working with Josh Brown and Steve Brier and the staff of the American Social History Project. They helped me learn about creative and rigorous ways to approach the past, and have always had time, advice, and warmth for me in matters both professional and personal.

The Macaulay Honors College and the CUNY Writing Fellows Program provided fellowship support at different stages in this project, and introduced me to a number of

committed scholars and teachers from a variety of disciplines that have made me a better historian. I'm also grateful to the anonymous donor who endowed the E.P. Thompson Dissertation Fellowship at the History Department of the Graduate Center, and to the Graduate Center's Doctoral Research Grant program.

I'm especially indebted to the Bernard L. Schwartz Communication Institute at Baruch College, and my good friend Mikhail Gershovich, who supported me in the final stages of this project.

No student can earn a degree from the Graduate Center's History Department without being indebted to Assistant Program Officer Betty Einerman, whose good cheer and knowledge of the ins and outs of the college's processes were among the most reliable elements of my graduate career. The students in Josh Freeman's dissertation seminar in the spring of 2008 offered criticism and enthusiasm about my work, and also shared with me their excellent and inspiring work.

Thomas Harbison gave helpful feedback on this manuscript, always offered a willing ear, and has become a good friend through talk of history, technology, work, and life. It's been a pleasure to accompany my close friends Ryan Swihart and Leyla Mei step-by-step through graduate school. They've made the journey easier, exponentially more enjoyable, and ultimately more fulfilling.

My father and brother, Kenneth and Benjamin, read every draft of this dissertation, and helped me address matters big and small. I've always admired and pursued the intellectual model they've set, and their encouragement, feedback, and support have been absolutely crucial to the completion of this project. My mother, Sandy, was always ready with poignant stories from her own adolescence and a

sympathetic ear when I needed it. Riya S. Shah helped me master the legal language with which to discuss juvenile delinquency, and has inspired me with her grace and warmth. Yasmin Spiro, Veeral Shah, Manju and Samir Saha, Kuhu Saha, Thomas and Michelle Nikundiwe, Jeff Whelan, and Kate Coscarelli each made an imprint on this project and my life during the past few years; they all have my love and gratitude. And since I began this dissertation, Kavi, Bella, Izaac, Akenna, Maybeline, and Talulah have come into my world, and injected boatloads of sheer joy.

Kaya Saha Waltzer was born just before this project began. She has inspired me with her dogged desire to learn and to know, and has grudgingly absorbed her daddy's late nights at the computer and recurrent distractedness. I cherish her growth, and look forward to her adolescence with my own uneasy combination of hope and fear. I expect she'll teach me much more about growing up than I learned in the course of producing this dissertation. She's simply everything to me.

Finally, Paula Saha has been more patient than I ever had any reasonable right to expect. Not a single time in the course of my graduate career did she urge me to work more quickly, or did she express anything short of complete faith in me. She read, edited, and improved my work, patiently listened to my frustrated rants, and always, always cheered me on. I'm humbled by how much she has given me, and I'm eternally grateful.

*For Paula, Kaya, & ?*

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## Introduction

### **The Evolving Architecture of Adolescence**

*Our children now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers.*

- Socrates

Adults have been and always will be concerned about the behavior of the young. For much of American history, well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this concern resembled the fretting of an investor over an unreliable holding. Even before puberty and the physical transition to adulthood, most American children played a crucial role in the economic life of their family. Playfulness or neglect at a productive age had direct consequences on a family's wealth, and could not be tolerated.

From the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century into the 20<sup>th</sup>, the role of the young in American life changed. Families came to depend less on children for their labor, and more on children for the emotional relationships and rewards they could provide. It became less likely that a child would go to work as soon as possible, and the maturation period for many youths gradually became longer. At the dawn of the twentieth century, the last phase of youth -- the extended transition to adulthood -- came to be popularly known as "adolescence."

Throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, American adolescents have repeatedly been scolded for their behavior, lectured from one quarter or another for

their assumed lack of readiness to inherit the world. They've been the primary subjects in a recurring narrative of declension.

That narrative, as banal as it may appear to be, has great utility as a path into the past. Adult expressions of concern about the behavior of the young have regularly said as much or more about the experiences of adults than they have about what it means to grow up in America. Every tract or screed against "kids these days" contains a window into the moment in which it was produced.

This was particularly true in the two decades after World War II, when concern about adolescent behavior became especially intense. Socrates' statement about the tyranny of children was a common reference point in discussions of American adolescents during these years. It was cited in a letter to the *New York Times* urging restraint in public debates about teenage behavior in 1948, in a major psychology textbook published in 1953, in a dialogue on youth and the mass media organized by the New York City Youth Board in 1962, and by the mayor of Amsterdam in a statement to the American press following a youth protest in the spring of 1966.<sup>1</sup> The quote reassured readers in each instance that no matter how poorly the young were behaving, the phenomenon was really nothing new. Invoking one of the world's monumental thinkers placed adult concerns about adolescents in historical perspective: even the great philosophers were befuddled and frustrated by the behavior of the young.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to the *New York Times*, January 20, 1948:14; William L. Patty and Louise S. Johnson, *Personality and Adjustment* (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 1953), 277; "Proceedings of the Dialogue: The Mass Media and the Moral Climate," New York City, May 22, 1962, Co-Sponsored by the Youth Board and the Committee of Religious Leaders of the City of New York, 33; Edward Cowan, "Young Dutch Rebels Seek Civil Action," *New York Times*, April 3, 1966: 16.

Socrates, however, appears not to have uttered those words. The origins of the quote -- which never appeared with a reference -- are unclear.<sup>2</sup> It is clear though that during this era Socrates' timeless reassurance was especially necessary, even if it had to be fabricated. In the years after World War II, many Americans were certain that adolescents were different than they previously had been, that they had somehow gone bad. Some even looked upon the next generation and worried about the survival of the nation. American adolescents were damaged, and action was required.

Numerous scholars have documented how the behavior of American adolescents changed during this period.<sup>3</sup> What has been less fully explored, however, is how

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<sup>2</sup> When Malcolm Forbes authored an editorial about youth following the Amsterdam protests, his research staff at *Forbes* attempted to confirm that Socrates had uttered the words Mayor Gijsbert Van Hall attributed to him. They consulted the top research librarian at the New York Public Library, who was unable to locate the quote, and consulted scholars at several universities before the famous classicist Moses Hadas, at Columbia University, told them that no text knew had encountered attributed those words to Socrates. See "Sidebar," *Forbes*, April 16, 1966: 8, 85.

<sup>3</sup> The changing behavior of American adolescents in the 1950s is a familiar element of the nation's popular memory, and since the period has been regular grist for television episodes, movies, and novels. It has also drawn the attention of more than a few historians. James Gilbert examined the role of mass culture in the debate about juvenile delinquency after the end of World War II, and argued that outrage directed at the movie and comic book producers was a byproduct of a larger reaction against social changes in American life. He showed how the discourse on delinquency was subject to distortion and confusion amidst rapid national transformations. See James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986). William Graebner focused more explicitly on youth culture during this period, arguing that there was no single definition for that term but rather many youth cultures at both the local and the national levels that were in conversation and conflict with one another. See William Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo: Youth and Authority in the Postwar Era* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1990). Eric Schneider explored how gangs in postwar New York provided a meaningful social logic for young men in an urban space undergoing disruptive transformation. See Eric C. Schneider, *Vampires, Dragons and Egyptian Kings: Youth Gangs in Postwar New York* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999). For earlier periods of a longer view, see the following: Kelly Schrum situated girls within the expanding mass culture leading up to the end of World War II. See Kelly Schrum, *Some*

American "adolescence" changed from 1945-1965. "Adolescence" is something more than the collective experiences of the members of an age group. It's also an intellectual construct produced by a cacophony of voices weighing in on how to best comprehend and shape the lives of the young. "Adolescence" is defined mostly, but not entirely, by institutions, ideas, and policies designed and controlled by adults. "Adolescence" deeply influences the lives of "adolescents," individuals who are not children but who are also not yet adult. The experiences of "adolescents" exist in dialogue with the broader idea of "adolescence," but the relationship between the two is not direct. Rather, it is rearticulated and renegotiated as social circumstances evolve.

The words that were put into Socrates' mouth were attempts to infuse the idea of "adolescence" with stability, which was necessary precisely because of how the idea was changing in the years after World War II. Throughout this period the willingness of various, authoritative voices to find comfort in a manufactured statement shows just how elusive a firm grasp of adolescence was for many adults.

In the period examined here, in fact, both "adolescence" and "adolescents" changed. American youths became more assertive as producers and consumers of culture, more likely to attend high school, and also more regularly present in the popular imagination. This is a familiar story in American memory, personified by James Dean and raucous rock 'n' rollers, illustrated by comic books and the proliferation of movies

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*Wore Bobby Sox* (New York, NY: Pallgrave MacMillan, 2004). Grace Palladino placed the adolescent at the center of twentieth century American culture. See Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1996). Steven Mintz showed the timelessness of American concern about the young. See Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2004). Jon Savage proved the historical depth and density of teenage culture. Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture* (New York, NY: Viking, 2007).

catering to teenage tastes, and freighted by the seemingly boundless expansion of juvenile delinquency that was so much discussed throughout the 1950s.

That young Americans themselves became more forceful actors in the nation's life was but one element in the reconstruction of adolescence in the years following World War II. Joseph Kett, in *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America 1790 to the Present*, wrote of “the architects of adolescence,” the educators, reformers, psychologists, social workers, and counselors who structured the institutions that would be responsible for the maturation of American children into adults throughout the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> While those professions and the institutions they built remained central to the construction of adolescence after the war, the ideas at their cores evolved. Other voices — of entrepreneurs, of politicians, of muckraking journalists and intellectuals — also contributed to the reformulation of the idea. By the early 1960s, American adolescence, the idea a composite of parts, was something different than it had been two decades earlier.

The transition can be described in the following way. In the mid-1940s, American adults were most likely to examine adolescent behavior on its own, to see it as the product of biological and psychological processes that were less subject to the influence of external forces than to the internal trajectory of the individual. This belief was present when adolescence was invented at the dawn of twentieth century, and was predominant in programs and policies towards the young that lasted well into the 1950s. During that decade, new ways to understand adolescent behavior became more prominent, and they paid closer attention to both the social influences on the maturation

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1977), 6.

process and the social meanings of youth experiences. This approach -- most explicitly voiced in the social sciences, but also present in one way or another in every area of American life that somehow implicated the young -- saw adolescence as more intimately bound to and reflective of the broader national experience. The idea filtered into both the policies designed for American youths and into the discourses that surrounded adolescence.

The transition is visible in the core question posed at two major conferences held during this period, which provide something of a chronological frame for this dissertation. The 1950 Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth, which is examined in the second chapter, asked “how do we foster the creation of healthy personalities in today’s youths?” The question focused on the individual, reflecting the preeminence of developmental psychology in the discussion and design of youth policy, school curricula, and the public’s sense of adolescence. Ten years later, the Golden Anniversary Conference, which is discussed in the final chapter, asked “how do we create opportunities for children and youth to realize their full potential?”

The shift in emphasis over these ten years from “personality” to “opportunity” exemplified a new contextualization of and new perspective on the experience of American adolescents. No longer was it sufficient to construct an adolescence that was the sum of the lives of individual youths; social contexts, structures, and forces were as determinative of the experience of adolescents as were their personalities. Policy and discourses about youths should address those contexts as much as the experiences of the individual. Inversely, much could be learned about the nation from the stories of American adolescents. The problems of young America were not endemic to

adolescents. Instead, they became seen as emblematic of the larger problems of the nation. In the 1960s, the nation's youth provided the starkest representations of and paths into the roiled national condition.

This dissertation traces the shift described above by looking mostly at the changing character of concern about adolescence among its architects, and the policies and ideas that those architects put forward. An extended focus on juvenile delinquency in the 15 years after the end of World War II was at the center of this change in perspective, and national and local discourses and policies on delinquency provide the central thread of the analytical narrative that follows. "Juvenile delinquency" was so broadly defined and so loosely used during these decades that it was clearly about more than just the behavior of "problem children." "Delinquency" itself was a social and intellectual construct, and became a way for adults to organize their thoughts and design interventions into the lives of young Americans whose behavior was taking on new forms.

Much of this dissertation focuses on rhetorical and programmatic responses to delinquency both nationally and in New York City, and I pay comparatively less attention to the mundane elements of growing up in the 1950s. I maintain that responses to delinquency emerged from within the construct of adolescence, and were thus shaped by more than just thinking about individual adolescents who failed to conform to society's expectations. Responses to the "juvenile crime wave" that swept America during and after the war had as much if not more to do with the process by which adolescence was constructed as they did the actual behavior of adolescents. These responses, which

themselves regularly conflated the criminal and the mundane, tell us about how the architects of adolescence perceived *all* youths, not just the delinquent ones.

What, then -- beyond the new opportunities to consume and exist in the public sphere embraced by the young — lay behind the changing construction of adolescence? The years after 1945 witnessed intertwined challenges to existing social relationships along racial, gender, and class lines that filtered into and influenced the discourses on adolescence. The specter of African-American freedom was played out repeatedly between 1945-1965 through a public focus on black youth. *Brown v. Board of Education* foregrounded the insufficient infrastructure to educate black children in a way that demonstrated to America the moral costs of segregation. Black students initiated a new wave of protest at the outset of the 1960s, first in the upper South, then spreading both southwards and northwards. All the while, black youths were present at the center of the nation's controversial youth culture, first as zoot-suiters targeted in the mid-1940s by racists who rejected the flamboyant self-expression of second class citizens, then as the creators of the soundtrack for young America during and after the rock 'n' roll revolution of the mid-1950s. These cultural developments spurred no shortage of responses by the architects of adolescence. By the early 1960s, as a result of the discourses on and policies towards adolescence that evolved over the previous decade, the notion of the "juvenile delinquent" was likely to conjure in the American mind a picture of an urban, nonwhite youth.

That youth was also likely to be male. The construction of adolescence was and remains a deeply gendered process. Most of the debates about adolescence during the period focused on males and, in fact, many treated adolescent females as an afterthought.

Mothers, too, were implicated in concern about the young. “Rosie the Riveter” had ushered in a “crisis” of American motherhood that lasted well beyond 1945, and women with aspirations beyond the home bore a significant amount of the blame for increases in juvenile delinquency rates. Concerns about teenage female sexuality mixed in volatile ways with racist reactions to rock ‘n’ roll and the overall uptick in adolescent assertiveness. Still, female delinquency was undertheorized, and barely addressed by policy. Discussions of female delinquency almost always focused on girl auxiliaries to male gangs and rhetoric about teenage pregnancy. Broader anxieties about female adolescents flowed from the concern that assertive teenage behavior would diminish girls’ willingness to conform to social expectations of domesticity in adulthood. What and how female adolescents consumed provided evidence of their conformity, or lack thereof, and provides the best path towards assessing gendered constructions of adolescence.

Shifting class relations also contributed to the reshaping of adolescence, a process particularly visible in changing cities, especially New York, which is the focus of three of the chapters that follow. The expanding white ethnic middle-class began its flight to the suburbs during this period, as southern African-Americans and Puerto Ricans flowed in to the city. These movements accompanied and spurred changing patterns of work, play, and consumption, and had specific consequences for school curricula, urban youth policy, neighborhood relations, interethnic and gender dynamics, city politics, and mass culture. Adolescence itself became both an inroad to and a debating ground for these broader social and structural changes. In 1962’s *The Other America*, Michael Harrington wrote the following about juvenile delinquents: “their sickness is often a means of relating to a

diseased environment.” Harrington described what many social scientists, journalists, and politicians had been realizing over the previous few years: rising juvenile delinquency rates were not merely a byproduct of unhealthy adolescent psyches, but also represented a response to American poverty.<sup>5</sup>

By the early 1960s, the social and racial influences on adolescence had become more explicit in the debates over juvenile delinquency and also in the discourses around the meanings of American youth culture. Gendered analyses remained sublimated. This dissertation explores how. It treats adolescence as a social process, and traces its evolution through a series of markers from the end of World War II through the initiation of the War on Poverty. The Great Society evolved out of and eventually absorbed the federal delinquency program that was launched under John F. Kennedy in the early 1960s. The Great Society was the beginning of many things, but in this periodization it also marks the ending point of a transition in adolescence. Juvenile delinquency no longer was seen by the state or by the other architects of adolescence as a function of the age of the offender, but rather had come to be understood as a reaction to social influences that were mostly external to the individual. This was symbolic of the broader realization reached by many in the early 1960s that the experiences of American adolescents offered a window into the national condition.

In the pages that follow, first comes a prologue, drawn almost exclusively from secondary sources, which offers a brief pre-history that traces American adolescence back to its “invention” in 1904 by the psychologist G. Stanley Hall. This section is meant to historicize adolescence, to show how its construction has always been subject to

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (New York, NY: MacMillan, 1962), 128.

broader trends in national life, even if adults haven't always recognized that dynamic. It quickly covers the period from the turn of the century through the end of World War II, foreshadowing many of the themes at the heart of the remainder of the dissertation: the influence of trends in the social sciences on popular understandings of adolescence and youth policy; the relationship between changes in American social relations and the problems of the young; the susceptibility of adult anxiety about adolescence to exploitation or manipulation by entrepreneurs of one stripe or another; the agency possessed and desired by adolescents themselves; and the centrality of the urban experience to the process by which American adolescence was constructed.

The six chapters that make up the body of the dissertation each explore the approach towards adolescence of a set of actors, or, as Kett might describe them, a group of "architects." Three of the chapters have a national perspective, and three focus on debates about adolescence in New York City. At the national level, the state, various media, and the market disseminated ideas and nurtured collective thinking about adolescence, influencing it in one way or another at different moments. But ideas took shape locally, through the choices made by those working with, talking about, or designing policies for the young. Social scientists bridged the gap between the local and the national, generating ideas through research, sharing them with a broad audience, and influencing policy. A history of adolescence should explore both the national and the local, and ask how they inform one another. New York is particularly important because it occupied the vanguard of thinking and experimentation on youth issues in the 1950s and influenced the work of the federal government after 1960.

The first chapter examines the first step in the reconstruction of adolescence immediately following the war: investigations of youth behavior in the mass media. The quaint historical memory with which Americans have looked back upon the youth behavior of the 1950s is, in part, a product of choices made in the media to explain to parents how adolescents had changed. Much of the reporting about youth behavior in the late 1940s and early 1950s contained an undercurrent of anxiety. The juvenile delinquent, while hardly new to postwar America, emerged as the archetype for the inverse of the “ideal adolescent,” and offered adults a reference point for assessing the behavior of their own offspring. Reporting on adolescents during this period sought to help parents decode and better understand their young. Much of the reporting concluded little more than that the behavior of American adolescents was baffling and that they needed to be more closely watched. Adolescents themselves, through consumption and increased autonomy in the marketplace, were seeking and exerting growing influence over the construct of adolescence.

The second chapter explores the 1950 Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth. This major conference, organized by the Children’s Bureau, drew a wide range of professionals who did work on adolescence, and provides insight into national thinking on youth issues as well as arguments about the direction and purpose of youth policy at every level of governance. The conference shows the extent to which theorizing about adolescence was influenced by the notion of personality formation, and, specifically, how the “mental hygiene movement” shaped youth policy. Ultimately, these theories offered little to help social scientists or policymakers address the questions of

race, ethnicity, and poverty that would become more central to thinking about adolescence over the course of the 1950s.

The third chapter looks at the foundation and first dozen years of the New York City Youth Board, which emerged as New York City's official response to growing concerns about juvenile delinquency after World War II. The Youth Board, restrained by limited resources and city politics, experimented with different methods for engaging the city's young. The organization began with programs influenced by psychological theories of delinquency, and eventually developed a program of detached gang workers that sought to understand and address adolescents on their own terrain. The later approach reflected shifting explanations of delinquency, which focused increasingly on the environments that surrounded youth as they matured, and sought to ameliorate the negative influences present in urban life by providing the city's adolescents with positive outlets for their energies. Acknowledging and harnessing youth excitement about participation in mass culture was one tool. The Youth Board was equal parts social service organization and political operation, and provides insight into the pressures placed on the city government to both project a theory about adolescence to citizens and to legitimately address changing social circumstances.

The fourth chapter looks at the local discourse on adolescence and juvenile delinquency in New York in the second half of the 1950s. A series of dramatic incidents kept delinquency on the front pages, placed pressure on the New York City government to develop a more effective response, and gave participants in the local discourse on adolescence ample opportunity to debate the causes of youth criminality. Amidst their

chaotic, competing, and often self-interested voices, a shift away from psychological explanations and towards social explanations of delinquency is visible.

The fifth chapter investigates the relationship between an evolving national youth mass culture and the discourse on delinquency. Arguments that mass culture caused delinquency bridged the gap between psychological and social explanations of adolescent behavior, with opponents of youth consumption speaking from one or both of these perspectives over the course of the 1950s. Rock 'n' roll, which possessed tremendous social meaning as the first racially integrated youth mass experience, stood at the core of the expanding youth market in the second half of the 1950s. Attacks by those in the music industry and anti-integrationists who claimed that rock music carried the "delinquency virus" made clear the extent to which concern about delinquency was often kindled by individuals or groups with particular social interests. This ramped up the level of unease in the discourse on American adolescence in the middle of the decade, and also made clear that adult expressions of concern about the young were often about factors external to the experiences of adolescents.

The final chapter studies the emergence of "opportunity theory" as an explanation for juvenile delinquency, and traces its implications for policy at the federal and local levels through the early years of an anti-delinquency program on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, Mobilization For Youth. Ultimately, youth policy in the early 1960s operated from the assumption that an increase in delinquency rates wasn't about some fundamental change among American adolescents, but was rather a byproduct of the structural deficiencies in the economy and evolving social relations in America's cities. One solution, adopted from earlier models developed in Chicago, was to organize and

empower communities to take a stronger role in the maturation processes of local young people and to assist adolescents in their transition to adulthood by helping them prepare for and find employment. Mobilization For Youth learned that the problems on the Lower East Side were much larger than adolescence, and ultimately did significant amounts of work with adults as well as older adolescents. The organization met resistance from those concerned about the destabilizing effect of a large influx of federal money into the city and challenges by local people to existing power structures. Even before being reconstituted as an anti-poverty program and model in the War on Poverty, MFY foreshadowed Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, embodying both its hopefulness and its limitations.

The final two chapters of this study show how concerns about youth behavior gradually broadened in the late 1950s to focus on the social contexts that shaped adolescence and asked increasingly what they said about the national condition. Though Socrates never said the words that began this introduction, he might as well have, because concern and anxiety about the way the young behave is one of the more resilient and recurrent notions in human history. Still, the character of that concern and anxiety reflects the times in which it takes form. If adolescence provides a window into the national condition, then adolescents provide a mirror to their elders, reflecting searing truths with which each generation has to struggle.

This study begins with the end of World War II and ends with the launch of the War on Poverty. In both of these moments and the period between, adolescence was infused with an uneasy idealism. Americans emerged triumphant but scarred from a decade and a half of depression and war, sure of the nation's power and resilience but

little else. Adolescents became a repository of national hopes and fears, their behavior both the fruit of American freedom and a cause for concern that as they aged they might not develop the ability to meet the world's gathering challenges. By the end of the period, the nation had reached another crucial juncture, and youth stood firmly at the center of America's process of self-examination, demanding that the nation become a better version of itself. In part because of the ways that both *adolescents* and *adolescence* had changed over the preceding two decades, the nation's internal social problems had become more clearly visible, if no easier to solve.

## Prologue

### **American Adolescence, 1904-1945: From Invention to Crisis**

To understand the reconstruction of adolescence in the two decades after World War II, we must first trace the evolution of the idea since its “invention” at the turn of the century.

Though use the word dates back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, G. Stanley Hall is often credited with “inventing” modern adolescence in 1904 when he published the encyclopedic *Adolescence: Its Psychology, and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*.<sup>1</sup> His work married 19<sup>th</sup> century conceptions of “youth” to the emerging fields of biology and psychology. Before Hall, popular understandings about “youth” were accessible via child-rearing guides and behavior manuals. Many of the ideas developed by Hall were present in these materials, which repeatedly featured the words “pliant,” “plastic,” “formative,” and “danger” in discussions of youth. Urban life, where authority over the behavior of the young was dispersed, if present at all, was particularly corruptive, filled with “temptations” that preyed upon “passions” that the young weren’t yet capable of controlling.<sup>2</sup> But not until Hall, who founded the American “child-study” movement in the 1880s, was the second decade of life deeply investigated in a systematic and scientific way.

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<sup>1</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., “Adolescence”; G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology, and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*, Two vols. (New York, NY: Arno Press Reprint, 1969).

<sup>2</sup> John Demos and Virginia Demos, “Adolescence in Historical Perspective,” in *Childhood in America*, 132-138 (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2000).

Hall argued that “adolescence is a new birth, for the higher and more completely human traits are now born. The qualities of the body and soul that now emerge are far newer. The child comes from and harks back to a remoter past; the adolescent is neo-atavistic, and in him the later acquisitions of the race slowly become prepotent. Development is less gradual and more saltatory, suggestive of some ancient period of storm and stress when old moorings were broken and a higher level attained.” “Storm and stress” was an essential element of the maturation process, and was responsible for the erratic behavior seen regularly in the years following the onset of puberty. Hall conceived of adolescence primarily as a biological stage of psychological development, yet one that inevitably thrust the individual against the “later acquisitions of the race.” This final phrase was a function of the “recapitulation theory” Hall had adopted from German zoologist Ernest Haeckel, which held that there was a direct relationship between the maturation stages of the individual and the evolutionary stages of man. It was also a reference to modern life, which was rife with immoral temptation and the “diseases of maturity,” especially in urban environments. He believed that “the momentum of heredity often seems insufficient to enable the child to achieve this great revolution and come to complete maturity, so that every step of the upward way is strewn with wreckage of body, mind, and morals. There is not only arrest, but perversion, at every stage, and hoodlumism, juvenile crime, and secret vice seem not only increasing, but develop in earlier years in every civilized land. Modern life is hard, and in many respects increasingly so, on youth. Home, school, church, fail to recognize its nature and needs and, perhaps most of all, its perils.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology, and Its Relations to Physiology*,

Hall's writing on adolescence was maddeningly wide-ranging, symptomatic of a field of inquiry — adolescent psychology — being born out of the mixture of existing and developing knowledge at the turn of the century. References to the threats upon adolescence posed by modern life flowed from a genuine effort to reconcile environmental influences with internal processes. Still, in his work the pull of recapitulation theory often got in the way of a full consideration of environment and blocked off a full analysis of the social influences on maturation. Hall placed the directing source of adolescent behavior firmly within the maturation process of the individual, even if his work did begin to acknowledge and explore the influence on that process of the environment in which development took place. His approach embodied the conflict between “nature” and “nurture” arguments pervasive in the Progressive Era. Hall's work, in its belief in the ability of institutions to learn to cope with adolescent upheaval, marked a departure from what Jon Savage has referred to as “the determinism of Cesar (*sic*) Lombroso and Herbert Spencer,” which held that environmental factors were irrelevant to the making of a criminal.<sup>4</sup>

Hall's conception of adolescence, particularly when mixed with the Progressive reform ethos, was actionable from a policy perspective in ways that earlier understandings of youth were not. Hall himself favored youth policy that elongated the phase and protected adolescents from too much responsibility too soon. Adolescents

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*Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* (New York, NY: Arno Press Reprint, 1969), 1: xiii-xiv.

<sup>4</sup> Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture* (New York, NY: Viking, 2007), 66. Cesare Lombroso was an Italian criminologist and eugenicist who argued that criminals were born, not made, and could be identified by physical characteristics. Spencer was an influential philosopher, theorist, and proponent of Social Darwinism who argued that excessive reform would interfere with natural selection and, therefore, evolutionary progress.

would benefit from a moratorium where they could experiment and where their psyches would be allowed to settle. As Joseph F. Kett has shown, Hall's ideas influenced a range of adult areas of engagement with adolescence during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Efforts to "build the boy" expanded the target of the child-saving movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century beyond just poor children and, in organizations ranging from the YMCA to the Boy Scouts to local playground movements, which promoted play or contact with nature to counteract the physical weakening caused by urban environments. Influenced by Hall's recapitulationism, proponents believed that all boys, regardless of social class, would become stronger adults if they participated in rigorous physical activity. A second area influenced by Hall was the "child-study" movement, which sought to popularize theories of adolescent psychology with the purpose of helping parents properly socialize their children for entry into a bourgeois adult world. Hall's work also resonated in debates about the American high school, which was expanding at a rapid rate between 1900 and 1920 and becoming the state's best opportunity to impact the maturation process. Now that more youths were staying in school longer and entering the work force later, these debates explore if curriculum should prioritize socialization or individual realization and development. The comprehensive public high school eventually emerged to answer this question, uniting vocational and academic pursuits under one roof — though "tracking" students differently -- and becoming the model for American secondary education in the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1977), 221-224. See also David Nasaw, *Schooled to Order: A Social History of Public Schooling in the United States* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1979), 87-158. Both works show the extent to which the concerns of labor and capital found their way into the design of the high school. High school

The above areas, each directly or peripherally influenced by Hall's work, stood at the intersection of social science, reform, and popular opinion, where most adult engagements with adolescence originated during the first half of the twentieth century. Adults who worked with the young or talked about adolescence struggled to comprehend the social disruptions wrought by urbanization, immigration, and the triumph of industrial capitalism. Middle-class biases permeated their worldviews. "Build the boy" programs that emphasized bringing order to adolescent play constantly clashed with the seemingly chaotic rituals of working-class and immigrant communities. Popularization of child-study rhetoric offered little to the parents of those children. Battles over high school curricula showed that America was indeed not a classless society, and that the purposes of schooling were tied intimately to the needs of the economy.

It was from this terrain -- where expert, policy maker, and the occasional entrepreneur met — that American adolescence was constructed in the first half of the twentieth century. Adolescents themselves also had much to say about the matter. Working-class youths asserted desire at every opportunity, whether by using the resources of a YMCA to make up their own games, pilfering food or goods they otherwise couldn't afford, or forcing their way towards an academic education when they had been tracked for a vocational one. Cities were a locus for concern and intervention in youth, because their condensed spaces rendered adolescent behavior both more disruptive to everyday life and more visible. Based on work in cities, social scientists grappled

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attendance among 14-17 year olds expanded from 10.6% in 1900 to over 75% in 1950. See Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox* (New York, NY: Pallgrave MacMillan, 2004), 12. Also of note, "a new high school opened every day in the first thirty years of the twentieth century," in Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2004), 175.

towards a universal understanding of adolescence, and youth policy and social reform sought to nurture a singular experience. But each approach downplayed the influence of environment in examinations of the process of personality development, and also offered little consideration of adolescent agency.

In cities, where new methods of play, social interaction, and reform emerged, the behavior of the young showed adults a future they couldn't fully comprehend. In the first two decades of the twentieth century after Hall invented adolescence, policy makers and reformers established the boundaries of "normal" behavior. Normality was defined via the way that adolescents played, explored relationships with the opposite sex, existed within their communities, and behaved in school. Over the next two decades, social scientists, policy makers, and reformers developed understandings of and then treatments for behavior that in one way or another departed from the "norm." Much of this work came out of Chicago.

In 1926, University of Chicago sociologist Frederic Thrasher wrote *The Gang*, the first major study of juvenile delinquency in the twentieth century. Thrasher argued that gangs formed when the natural playgroups of boys were faced with conflict in their environment. His naturalization of the tendencies of boys to congeal into groups echoed the recapitulation theory proposed by Hall: "what boys get out of such association that they do not get otherwise under the conditions that adult society imposes is the thrill and zest of participation in common interests, more especially in corporate action, in hunting, capture, conflict, flight, and escape." Group play fulfilled a fundamental need of the adolescent boy, but when "the normally directing and controlling customs and institutions

[failed] to function efficiently” conflict ensued, and the gang was born.<sup>6</sup> Thrasher’s work with his colleagues at the Chicago School, especially Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay, influenced a generation of sociologists and criminologists who studied the relationship between delinquency and environment. They saw gangs as subcultural responses emerging from the “interstitial spaces” where institutions responsible for socializing adolescents could not effectively reach. Their explanations did not ignore biology, but sought to explain delinquency by looking at the relationship between the process of personality development and social structures.

The theories that came out of the Chicago School resonated through the fields of sociology and psychology for the next three decades, but had little impact on either the shapers of public opinion about adolescence or politicians powerful enough to turn theory into policy. A combination of factors explains this, including the limited access of sociologists to the halls of power and the local focus of programs such as the Chicago Area Project, which worked to organize communities to address their own delinquency problems. Direct state engagement with youth in the years before World War II was limited for the most part to schools and under-funded juvenile courts. Youth criminal offenders were most often given probation, though some were removed to state-run “reformatories” that attempted rehabilitation before being returned to their neighborhoods.

More pressing issues, especially surrounding employment, required the attention of the state between 1930-1945. New Deal youth policy addressed the problems of the oldest adolescents or young adults who were moving into the workforce. The Civilian

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<sup>6</sup> Frederic M. Thrasher, "The Gang: A Study of 131 Gangs in Chicago," in *Childhood in America*, 147 (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2000).

Conservation Corps, which employed males 18-25 to do outdoor construction work and planting, was dedicated to alleviating unemployment among older adolescents, not addressing behavioral issues. The National Youth Administration, launched as part of the Works Progress Administration in 1935, sought to funnel money -- \$50 million between 1935-1943 -- through schools, residence centers, and local training organizations to poor youths. The NYA exposed young males and females to occupations they were most likely to find for work in their adult lives, imparting middle-class values along the way. For instance, at a NYA residence center in Arkansas, girls worked at a nursery school, cooked and served dinners to the other residents, and learned to shampoo their hair and apply makeup. Boys were trained to build homes, work at a power plant, as auto mechanics, or with the forestry service. After work, they were organized into athletic teams.<sup>7</sup>

Youth policy during the New Deal, while helpful to those involved with the CCC and the NYA, embodied the limitations of the liberal state when addressing adolescence. This theme would emerge again during the early years of the Great Society. The impulse behind most youth policy in the first half of the century, from the comprehensive high schools to the youth-focused programs of the New Deal, was to create a universal experience for adolescents, extended into the late teens, aimed at smoothing entry into adulthood and the work force. This approach failed to recognize the wildly varying experiences and cultural milieus from which American youth came.

Leonard Covello, who wrote extensively about the immigrant family as the founding principal of Benjamin Franklin High School in Italian East Harlem from the

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<sup>7</sup> Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 39-46.

early 1930s to the late 1950s, believed that urban adolescence was plagued by the tensions between particular ethnic cultures and American expectations of assimilation. His work illuminated the extent to which adolescence and the institutions created to protect and foster it, such as the high school, were peculiarly American, bourgeois constructions. For Italian-American immigrants, “adolescence” was unheard of; there was a playful youth, and then there was productive adulthood. “Boys and even girls,” Covello wrote, “were compelled to go to school up to a certain age regardless of parental feelings, the child’s aptitudes and desires. Below a certain age, work by children was prohibited. And when the child neither goes to school nor attends to useful work, the enforced leisure and idleness detach the child from the orbit of family life and remove him from the wholesome influence of familial tradition.”<sup>8</sup>

Extended schooling both deprived immigrant Italian families of immediate income and slowed down the youth’s passage into productive, useful adulthood. Covello’s perspective reveals the extent to which a normal adolescence was constructed primarily by the institutions in which it was to take place, regardless of whatever social change was happening in the communities around them. Ethnic and working-class adolescents were often caught between the expectations of the culture in which they were reared, and the demands of the world into which schools, reform organizations, and the state sought to assimilate them.

While immigrant parents might have rejected this extended, separate phase of pre-adulthood, adolescents from all backgrounds embraced it. Freed by societal norms from

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Stephen A. Lassonde, "Should I Stay or Should I Go? Adolescence, School Attainment, and Parent-Child Relations in Italian Immigrant Families of New Haven, 1900-1940," *History of Education Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (Spring 1998), 46.

the expectations of full-time work, they delved into a broad range of pursuits with zeal. Much has been written about how adolescents embraced the expanding offerings of American mass culture in the years before 1945.<sup>9</sup> By the late the 1930s, jazz orchestras led by Benny Goodman, Count Basie, and Fletcher Henderson were playing in front of throngs of teenage and young adult dancers. Comic books became more available during the war. Adolescent girls were more regularly featured in advertisements for clothing and cosmetics. *Seventeen* appeared to great fanfare in 1944. In cities like New York, the young mingled in public on playgrounds, athletic fields, and dance floors, and in private, in the “cellar clubs” that obscured youth behavior from adult oversight. Zoot-suiters, bobby soxers, and jitterbuggers each signified established national youth subcultures in the early 1940s. Locally, other subcultures emerged, and they marked themselves through particular patterns of consumption and style.

Pre-1945 youth culture, then, was well-formed, but not without its controversial elements. Each of the above areas of adolescent revelry foreshadowed controversy in the postwar period, when youth participation in mass culture intensified. During the war the zoot-suits worn by black and brown adolescents came to be seen as markers of criminality, and created targets for angry sailors in Los Angeles in the summer of 1943. Aside from the Los Angeles riot, wartime “zoot-suit riots” were noted in Baltimore, Albuquerque, and Philadelphia, and reporting on the race riots that ravaged Harlem and Detroit in 1943 also mentioned that participants wore zoot-suits. None of these riots

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<sup>9</sup> See Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls' Culture, 1920-1945* (New York: Pallgrave McMillian, 2004); Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), and Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture* (New York, NY: Viking, 2007) for the best work on pre-World War II adolescence and mass culture.

were caused by clothing, but were rather a product of the socioeconomic disruptions of the war and racist reactions to the behavior of adolescents of color.<sup>10</sup>

The behavior of teenage girls also seemed to change. Teen canteens offered young females a place to dance in public, and they showed off their moves at concerts by Frank Sinatra, Harry James, and others. “Victory Girls,” most often under twenty and thus unable work in the war industries, rewarded young soldiers for their service and recaptured some of the “fun” the war robbed them of. During the war the American public more conscious of the sexuality of young women, and the notion would define female delinquency from the postwar era through the sexual revolution of the late-1960s.

Moviegoers awaiting a feature presentation in the autumn of 1943 might have seen one of two jolting newsreels about American youth that announced the arrival of the “delinquency epidemic.” Both were nominated for Academy Awards the following year, and each argued that the insecurity of wartime was causing an alarming rise in juvenile criminality. *Youth in Crisis*, from the famous March of Time Series, showed adolescent males abusing alcohol and marijuana, and reading comic books. Mothers, exhausted from war work, were unable to control their sons’ consumption or their daughters’ sexual experimentation. *Children of Mars*, according to *Time*, was “less terrifying” than *Youth in Crisis*, and “to that extent a less true job.” The RKO Radio production claimed that

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<sup>10</sup> For more on the zoot suit and the riots, see Douglas Henry Daniels, “Los Angeles Zoot: Race ‘Riot,’ the Pachuco, and Black Music Culture,” *The Journal of African American History* 87 (Winter 2002); George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993); Robin D.G. Kelley, “The Riddle of the Zoot: Malcolm Little and Black Cultural Politics During World War II,” in *Race Rebels* (New York: The Free Press, 1994); and Edward Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

delinquency was no longer contained in slums, and was now also infecting the upper classes. Both films proposed programs that would occupy adolescents who were too young to participate fully in the war effort. Keeping them busy would limit the damage they could inflict.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the gravity of the warnings, the public couldn't really be certain about the contours of juvenile delinquency after seeing these short films. *Youth in Crisis*, for instance, was purposefully alarmist. Theater owners had been concerned about reports of vandalized movie houses, and pressured the March of Time to produce a newsreel that might encourage adult viewers to closely monitor the youths sitting among them.<sup>12</sup> *Children of Mars* presented a broad and unsupportable assertion: delinquency was spreading through the air like a virus. No one knew how, but viewers should be warned and ready for the havoc what adolescents might wreak.

In theaters where these newsreels were shown, juvenile delinquency was at once a genuine concern and something intentionally overblown. That both shorts earned Oscar nominations suggests that their grave messages were taken quite seriously. That both shorts also purposefully exaggerated the issue showed just how much misunderstandings about adolescent behavior and delinquency were vulnerable to exploitation and distortion.

When the war ended, and the nation surged into a position of global hegemony, many adults weren't quite sure what to make of the nation's young, and were susceptible to the kinds of warnings they got at the movies. In the previous half-century, adolescence

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<sup>11</sup> *The March of Time: Youth in Crisis*, Vol. 10, Number 3 (New York City: Time, Inc., 1943); *Children of Mars* (Los Angeles: RKO Radio, 1943).

<sup>12</sup> *Time*, "The New Pictures," November 15, 1943: 94.

had been invented and its processes had been outlined and debated by social scientists. The state had erected a public school system that would, theoretically, help young Americans from diverse backgrounds mature into a vibrant and productive work force. And the market had honed in on adolescents as consumers.

In the years after 1945, each of these beams in the architecture of adolescence would undergo disruptive change. Reports of growing delinquency led social scientists to conclude they had much to learn about adolescent behavior. America's communities would change as populations shifted along with the economy, and educators were tasked with reshaping curricula and providing support for students with divergent needs amidst such transformations, challenging the assumption that a solid, unitary adolescent experience could be attained. Youth consumption reflected new social realities, from an increase in disposable income to the dramatic cultural implications of racial integration. Amidst these transformations, American adults regarded the next generation with a mixture of hope and fear, struggling to better understand them, and to better respond to their needs.

## Chapter One

### **Making Sense of “The Age of Turmoil”: The American Media and the Construction of an Ideal Adolescence Following WWII**

From the end of World War II through the early 1950s, efforts were widespread to explain to adults the seemingly bizarre behavior of adolescents. Nationally distributed magazines, newspapers, pamphlets, and instructional films treated the American teenager like the subject of a nature documentary. With knowledge, parents and communities could nonetheless crack the “code” of teenage behavior and language, and thus become better able to manage how youths passed through this “Age of Turmoil.”

That was the name for one film in a series of five released by McGraw Hill in 1953 to support Elizabeth Hurlock’s psychology textbook, *Adolescent Development*. The film depicted a Friday in the lives of six teenagers. Sally, Joan, and Kaye each complained about their teachers, brothers, parents, and hometown, and hoped to move to New York for a more exciting adulthood. “If you don’t make an effort to understand them,” the narrator said, “teenage girls may seem silly and opinionated.” Three boys argued, wrestled, and “seemed to spend hours in completely useless activity.”<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of the film was to help psychology students understand the range of normal adolescent behaviors, knowledge that they could then pass on to parents. Some teenagers were surly, others bold and assertive; some were boisterous and outrageous, others quiet. The “turmoil” in the title referred to the psychological impact of the

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth B. Hurlock, *Age of Turmoil*, produced by Crawley Films, Ltd, distributed by McGraw Hill Text Films, 1953. Available online at <http://www.archive.org/details/AgeofTur1953>.

physical and social maturation processes of adolescence. Inexplicable behavior was the norm, and was best left alone by parents.

“Age of Turmoil” was illustrative of a style of examination that predominated in the national media in the years following World War II. These repeated investigations of how adolescents were changing produced a series of archetypes that ranged from the goody two-shoes parent pleaser to the surly, disturbed juvenile delinquent. Images produced in this process have been bronzed in American memory, living on as visual representations of an era that, when viewed through the tumult of the 1960s, seems quaint and tranquil. They were, however, the byproducts of a national conversation about adolescents, led by the popular press, in which visceral reactions regularly trumped penetrating analysis.

Journalists and other adults used the media to engage, critique, and attempt to understand adolescents almost exclusively through a focus on their behavior. Much postwar journalism sought to resituate American life following the dramas of the previous two decades, highlighting and exploring newfound prosperity and an expanding middle class. But the ways that the young acted, whether in school or at home, in mundane leisure activities or while committing crimes, was regularly detached in these investigations from the social contexts in which they took place. The national press nurtured the notion that adolescent behavior was inexplicable. Simplifying the forces at play in the construction of adolescence of course was much easier than confronting the complexities of American life. Reporting in the mid-to-late 1950s would begin to explore the social factors that influenced both the lives of adolescents and the ways that adults regarded youth. But that type of insight was rarely present in the ten years

following war. Much of the reporting on adolescence took on a tone of discovery and display, as though the behavior of teenagers had no rationale in the world that adults knew and understood. When explanations were offered, they were vague and imprecise, often referencing some decline in values or a moral laxity that gave youths too much space to exercise their natural inclinations towards anarchic, destructive behavior.

Instead, these popular engagements with adolescence intended to help Americans recognize and sort youth behavior into simple, easy to recognize categories. This was a crucial first step in the reconstruction of American adolescence. The behavior of American youths *was* changing. Extended public discussion about those changes was necessary for parents and for adults who designed policies for the young, or for the young psychologists who read Elizabeth Hurlock's textbook. But discovery pieces through the mid-1950s did little to explain or help adults understand what was behind new adolescent behaviors, and tended instead to obfuscate more than they explained. The confusion of American adults about adolescent behavior can, in part, be explained by the ways that behavior was reported upon.

Much reporting defined for the American public a symbolic, ideal adolescence against which the behavior of all youth could be measured. The ideal adolescent was presented as white, middle-class, and non-urban. Both males and females were expected -to behave in a manner that aligned with traditional gender roles in American adulthood. Adolescent boys could goof-off and date, and adolescent girls could giggle and talk to each other in secret languages. But, boys were expected to drive within the speed limit, and girls were expected to be home by curfew and to remain chaste. Even the behavior of "good kids" was regularly portrayed as baffling and curious. Adolescents of color

were rarely, if ever, present in most popular, national investigations through the early 1950s. Echoing the process by which adolescence was constructed a few decades earlier, this reporting was characterized by the impulse to locate and define a common adolescent experience against which outliers could be measured.

The specter of juvenile delinquency hovered over these investigations of youth, referring not just to a set of illegal or socially un-sanctioned acts by people of a certain age, but often to the *inverse* of the idealized adolescent. While the mundane behavior of good kids was often explored with a tone of bemused bafflement, reports on the criminal exploits of delinquents were, without fail, dark and foreboding. Delinquency was becoming more alarming because it was no longer seen as being contained within cities, taking on viral qualities the contours of which were difficult to trace. Much of the reporting on delinquency in the years after the war sought to inform middle-class, suburban parents of what their teenaged children might be up to. Adolescence was presented as a time of gathering threats, and parents needed to gain knowledge so that they could identify and manage the passage of their children through this phase of maturation.

To a generation of Americans who had lived through World War I, the booming Twenties, the Great Depression, and World War II, the increasingly public and ribald behavior of adolescents challenged morals that had been nurtured by a decade and a half of austerity and war. The only thing certain about the postwar world was that the nation was powerful; but even what *that* meant was unclear. Economic prosperity was not a certainty, and a cold war with the Soviet Union loomed. Adults read youth behavior through their own experiences, and at times mixed their concerns about youth with

appreciation for its excesses as a fruit of American freedom. Many stories were lurid, yet exciting. Youth in photographs were dangerous, but cool. Newsreels and short documentaries about teenagers were often produced with Hollywood flair. Adolescents may have been behaving badly, but they looked oddly appealing doing so.

The sense that youth were aging more quickly was prominent in the discourse on youth during the war, when a “wartime acceleration of growing up” was discovered. It had begun with teenagers who were able to participate directly in the war effort and had, according to one study “reached as far down as the six and seventh grade.” While eighteen and nineteen year-olds were fighting in the war, younger adolescents were wearing lipstick, dating, and becoming “intensely social.” Of course, little evidence can be found that adolescents in the decades before the war were *not* wearing lipstick or dating. Nevertheless, the assumption that youth behavior on the home front had changed was well established by the end of the war.<sup>2</sup>

Some pieces, such as a reassuring pictorial on “Teen-Age Boys” that appeared in *Life* in 1945, noted that though the war and potential military service weighed heavily on the minds of adolescents, in reality “they are just the same as they have always been.” They still ate their parents out of the house, procrastinated on their homework, and dressed sloppily. Teen-age boys in Des Moines favored a “comfortable, sloppy look” that ranged from the classroom uniform to the “Saturday variation,” and finally to what a boy might wear on a weeknight date. Photos showed that boys tended to eat and sleep a

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<sup>2</sup> See Catherine McKenzie, “Teen-Age Social Life,” *New York Times Magazine*, September 8, 1946: 34; McKenzie, “Unchanging Teen-agers,” *New York Times Magazine*, December 8, 1946: 42; *Life*, “Teen-Agers,” December 20, 1948: 67-72; Dorothy Barclay, “Code of Teen-Age Behavior,” *New York Times Magazine*, December 30, 1951: 11.

lot, talk in impenetrable vocabularies, and angle to get dad's car as often as possible to impress the girls.<sup>3</sup>

Examination of the mundane behavior of teenagers only made sense when weighed against pervasive claims that youths were *not* the "same as they have always been." Following the war, newspapers and magazines began to explore emergent youth subcultures. Subcultures have their own peculiar forms and methods of communication, which mark them as different from other subcultures and the dominant culture. Following in the steps of the zoot-suiters and the bobby soxers, postwar adolescents developed ways of expressing themselves through language, behavior, and dress, and adults took a special interest. Though language varied from locality to locality, teens everywhere expressed themselves differently from their elders:

*In Atlanta on Thursday the boys have nothing to do with the girls and the girls have nothing to do with the boys. In Des Moines, Tuesday is a special day. On Tuesdays the boys wear GI shoes to school. In Detroit the boys go in for crazy haircuts, and in Seattle some football players wear hair curlers at night. This years fashionable word for a jerk, square, or schmo is 'geek' in Detroit, 'mole' in Philadelphia, 'pine' in Atlanta, 'tweet' in Chicago, 'snook' in Des Moines, 'tube' in Los Angeles, and 'scurb' or 'T.W.O.' (Teensy Weensy Operator) in Washington, D.C.<sup>4</sup>*

In newsreels and instructional movies, an adolescent's use of esoteric language, along with his slicked back hair and dungarees or her blasé attitude towards her parents, served to mark the youngster apart from his or environment. The popular press portrayed entire conversations as impenetrable to parents, such as the exchange between two girlfriends in

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<sup>3</sup> *Life*, "Teen Age Boys," June 11, 1945: 91-97. Also see Catherine McKenzie, "Unchanging Teen-Agers," *New York Times Magazine*, December 8, 1946: 42.

<sup>4</sup> *Life*, "Teen-Agers," December 20, 1948: 67-72.

the March of Time newsreel *Teen-age Girls*. As a father looks on confused, his daughter says into the phone:

*Oh, the suicide blonde? Oh I know she's a rope-jumper. Well he is getting pretty dimple-crazed, he's too sturdy a joe for that vicious TNT. As far as I'm concerned, I think she's a tick. Who? Oh, Tom. He's a doll. Are you coming to the party Saturday night? It's just a makeshift. I've got a tall, dark, and gruesome I'd like you to meet.*

While this statement, upon a second or third read, is perhaps not so difficult to interpret, the father in the movie simply shakes his head and throws up his hands. When he says to the girl, “I simply must use that phone,” she replies “just a min,” and he mutters back her brief retort as he sulks his way out of the room.<sup>5</sup> The message to parents was that they had little hope to understand their children, who spoke another language and lived in another world.

These types of “discovery” pieces predominated through the early 1950s. *Look* reported on the “Teenage Public Relations Council,” which had been set up to “explain teenagers to America.”<sup>6</sup> They discussed the styles that were “in”: duck-tail haircuts, blue jeans, khaki shorts in summer for boys; for girls, pink lipstick, denim skirts with pockets and pleats front and back, and, the newest fad, a bow-tied babushka. *Look* also offered a “reference guide to teen-age conversation,” which featured phrases and definitions such as:

*Real frozen, man: newest version of ‘it’s the most’ or ‘it’s crazy’—or just plain terrific in non-teen language.*  
*Monster, freak, or mental case: all terms of endearment.*

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<sup>5</sup> *Teenage Girls*, directed and produced by Louis de Rochemont, 1945, included in *America’s Youth*, VHS, distributed by Embassy Home Entertainment, 1987.

<sup>6</sup> I could find no additional references in my research to a “Teenage Public Relations Council.”

*She's jacketed: she's going steady and, in place of a fraternity pin, she wears his heavy varsity sweater.*

*Feel around and see if you're still in bed: retort to a dull joke.*

*Mop: a teenager's date.*

*He's a closet case: someone to be hidden or ashamed of.*

*You slurp me: you send me.*

*You've goofed: you made a mistake.*

Oddly enough, the article in *Look* was entitled "For Women Only."<sup>7</sup> Perhaps this was a function of the emphasis on fashion and fads in the piece -- spheres that were generally assumed to concern only women -- or perhaps it was the mundane nature of the behavior that rendered it unnecessary for the serious attention of men. Men were more likely to take note of adolescent fashion when it contained explicitly political overtones, such as articles on adolescents in Moscow wearing dungarees and bobby sox. It was a relief that the Soviets also had a problem with their teenagers.<sup>8</sup>

The emergence and evolution of subculture, a process that was at the heart of the preceding examples, was one of the driving forces in postwar American youth culture. Participating in both national fads and their local distillation increased the avenues available to teenagers for self-expression and connection with one another. The extent to which this represented any kind of real "freedom" for adolescents is highly debatable—but many *parents* certainly interpreted new trends in youth culture that way. The freedom of adolescents to express themselves made it difficult for parents to assert control over their teenagers' lives. Understanding how they spoke and behaved when

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<sup>7</sup> *Look*, "For Women Only [American Teenagers]," August 10, 1954: 88-89. Adolescents also had their own handshakes (such as the "politician's handshake" and the "beer drinker's handshake") and play games (such as "Temptation" and "Trick Talk").

<sup>8</sup> Chroniclers of U.S.-U.S.S.R. relations noted the influence of American youth culture, including music, fashion, and fads, on Soviet youths. See *New York Times Magazine*, "Bobby Soxers—Moscow Style," February 17, 1952: 166; and Harrison E. Salisbury, "Man, Dig That Stilyag!," *New York Times Magazine*, January 11, 1953: 18.

they were spending time together was an important step in the reassertion of parental social control. Media reports that explained the clothes and language of teenagers could be seen as an aid to parents in this regard. Such reports, however, were usually oriented towards basic documentation rather than explanation, and rarely connected youth consumption to broader trends in the American marketplace.

Youth consumption was expanding at a remarkable pace in the years after the war. By the end of the 1940s, corporations, seeking to rationalize their marketing and advertising to maximize profits amidst postwar prosperity, realized that they, like American parents, needed to learn more about adolescents. With the help of a new generation of entrepreneurs, many businesses developed strategies to access the youth market.

*Seventeen* had first appeared in 1944, and sold out 400,000 copies in less than a week. By 1947, its circulation was more than a million; by 1949, 2.5 million.<sup>9</sup> The magazine tapped into reservoirs of teenage desire, and mastered the art of both speaking to and speaking for adolescent girls. Editors at *Seventeen* hired a research firm, Benson and Benson, to identify adolescent tastes and help them communicate with advertisers. *Seventeen* helped manufacturers design clothing for girls, urged department stores to set aside space to sell directly to teenagers, and met with Revlon to urge them to start taking the needs of adolescents more seriously.<sup>10</sup>

Eugene Gilbert, a wunderkind who had dropped out of Northwestern University in 1945 to run his own marketing and consumer research company, made his name

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<sup>9</sup> Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox* (New York, NY: Pallgrave MacMillan, 2004), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History*, (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 102-108.

explaining to companies how to tap into adolescent desire. By 1947, the Gilbert Youth Marketing Company had established contracts with companies from a wide range of industries. Gilbert used high school and college students to measure youth likes and dislikes, while he distributed his clients' products to the same groups to create what would, in later years, become known as "buzz." In an attempt to help the public grasp the scope of adolescent consumption, NBC commissioned Gilbert to conduct a poll of over 1200 teens in Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, and Pittsburgh. He extrapolated from their responses that the "nation's urban teen-agers spend some \$6,000,000,000 a year, part of it on more than 2,500,000,000 glasses of soft drinks, 3,000,000,000 servings of ice cream, and 7,500,000,000 glasses of milk." Gilbert's data broke down teenage listeners' likes and dislikes by age and sex, and led NBC to conclude that should it "strengthen the program appeal" to teenagers and give advertisers more information about the viewers they were reaching, it could increase its advertising revenue. Gilbert's work in helping corporations access the youth market was cited in *Newsweek* as proof that "within the past decade the teen-agers have become a separate and distinct group in our society."<sup>11</sup>

The most important aspect of this equation, however, was adolescent desire. Participation in the market offered adolescents the opportunity to define themselves through consumption, through belonging both to a national youth culture and to local subcultures. New toys and games such as Candyland and Mr. Potato Head appeared for children, and new comic books and magazines appealed to their older brothers and

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<sup>11</sup> *Newsweek*, "Tastes of Teens," May 9, 1949: 57; *Newsweek*, "Teen-Age Tasters," December 3, 1951: 78.

sisters.<sup>12</sup> The youth market exploded in the dozen years after the end of the war. By 1957, teenagers were spending more than \$9 billion per year, 50% more than six years earlier. They bought \$150 million annually worth of records, some 70% of that market, and purchased half the radios that were sold.<sup>13</sup>

As adolescents flocked to the marketplace, the choices available expanded. By the late 1940s radio stations were beginning to orient themselves towards teenage tastes. Television programs like the “Hi-Teen” show, airing in Buffalo on Saturday afternoons, brought famous acts like Benny Goodman, Lionel Hampton, and Vic Damone to perform for local youth. Beginning in 1946, the “Hi-Teen” show drew mostly lower middle-class whites both to its dance floor, to its television show, and to membership in the “Hi-Teen Club.” Bob Wells, the mild-mannered and paternal host of the show, enforced a strict dress and behavioral code, envisioning his dance party as a curative for delinquency. By the mid-1950s, George “Hound Dog” Lorenz had begun spinning rhythm and blues records for Buffalo youth who, for reason of class or race, rejected or were rejected by the “Hi-Teen Show.” Kids of all backgrounds listened to “Hound Dog” and attended the integrated concerts he produced that brought new rock ‘n’ roll stars to town.<sup>14</sup>

The multiple paths available for Buffalo youth to tap into national musical trends by the early 1950s offers just one small illustration of the dynamic development of

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<sup>12</sup> See Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2004), 277 and Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, (New York: Vintage Press, 2003), 319.

<sup>13</sup> *Business Week*, "Who Are Tomorrow's Customers?," December 8, 1951: 146-152; *Newsweek*, "The Dreamy Teen-Age Market: 'It's Neat to Spend'," September 16, 1957: 94-96.

<sup>14</sup> William Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo: Youth and Authority in the Postwar Era* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1990), 6-7, 26-31. Rock ‘n’ roll as the first integrated mass teen experience will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

American youth culture during the postwar period. National trends were mediated through local concerns and interests, and teens participated in both a mass youth culture and local subcultures. The “Hi-Teen Show” catered to a particular audience, but those not included eventually found their own ways to participate in the marketplace. Parental concern about adolescent behavior wasn’t simply a baseless hysteria, or the product only of an echo chamber of repeated pronouncements about youth behavior in the mass media. The lived experience of youth had changed and was changing, driven by the combination of adolescent desire and the sharpened ability of entrepreneurs to tap into that want. The process gave parents new and curious behavior to examine, learn, and worry about.

With the booming postwar birth rate, the youth presence in the market would only continue to grow. Expanding adolescent consumption, though, was a subset of the national evolution of the marketplace. Across the political spectrum and throughout American society, various groups agreed on the centrality of mass consumption to economic reconversion in the years immediately following the war. Labor sought full-employment and high wages; the federal government passed the G.I. Bill and the Employment Act of 1946, which promoted “maximum employment, production, and purchasing power”; big business was happy to be free of wartime price controls and recognized that increased mass consumption would drive profits; and big labor entered into a social contract with business matching high productivity and benefits with order in the workplace. Home, car, and appliance ownership each grew by an order of magnitude through the early 1950s.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Press, 2003), 112-165.

Yet all Americans were not included in the economic boom of the early 1950s. Suburbanization began in this period, and white ethnic working class families began leaving leave cities for recently built housing a short commute away. Though sharp differences emerged in cultural and economic patterns between city and suburb, youth in all locations could share a common experience through the consumption of music, comic books, teen magazines, and television, all of which became more directly oriented towards the youth market. By the early 1950s, an implicit recognition of the potential for common experience contributed to parental anxiety about youth behavior. Though concern about the implications of youth connectedness across racial and class lines would become more prominent later in the 1950s with the emergence of rock ‘n’ roll as an integrated national youth experience, the process had already begun by 1950. Eugene Gilbert had focused much of his research on adolescent consumption in urban areas, with the understanding that trends emerged in cities before radiating outwards. In part because of this expansion of a youth culture that stretched across the nation and connected adolescents everywhere, parents and communities became more concerned about what the young were consuming, and what their new consumption patterns signified.

The solidification of a national youth market contributed to the intensity of the reaction against delinquency in the postwar years. Several articles argued that if youth weren’t controlled, their behavior would inevitably turn destructive. The popularized Freudian principles that pervaded much of the social scientific writing on adolescence in the period influenced some reporting. Contemporary theories of psychological development, which will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter, maintained that adolescence was a period of identity diffusion and emotional and psychological

upheaval not only for the individuals experiencing it, but also for those around that person. Articles in national magazines urged parents to empathize with their adolescent's changes, and to understand that central to the process of maturation were the movement towards independence, the development of first adult relationships with members of the opposite sex, and the pressures of having to confront the next stages in life. Parents -- especially women with daughters -- needed to resist their own susceptibility to being jealous of their offspring as they came of age. Parents were advised of the importance of giving children sufficient space to develop their own personalities.<sup>16</sup>

Teenagers, regardless of the best intentions of parents, were regularly presented as innately, unavoidably, and inexplicably wild. As a piece in the *Saturday Evening Post* about a community in Connecticut argued, they needed to be watched and "tamed." In West Hartford, uninvited guests crashed a few parties, and parents organized a committee to monitor teenage misbehavior. When the punch was spiked at a party and, in an unrelated incident, a boy crashed his car, the organization concluded that the "general social habits of the adolescent community had admittedly deteriorated." Parents set "Guiding Principles" for their own behavior, which advised against allowing adolescents to attend parties to which they weren't invited, recommended that parents always be home if their children hosted a party, and encouraged conversations with sons and daughters about responsible driving and proper social behavior. Over time, some parents in West Hartford felt that many of the communal goals were met through the efforts of

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<sup>16</sup> *Parents Magazine*, "Living and Letting Live With Adolescents," October 1946: 34-35+; *Parents Magazine*, "Good Teen Fun Your Sociable Teen-agers Will Appreciate," July 1949: 22-23+; *Newsweek*, "100 Proof Teen-Agers," December 29, 1952: 60-61.

their organization, though the president of a local parent-teacher organization noted: “who can tell?”<sup>17</sup>

This last comment articulated a notion that many parents were struggling to come to grips with: there were limits on parental ability to fully control adolescent offspring. The volume and tone of reporting directed at teenage behavior encouraged in parents a feeling that no level of oversight could eliminate the potential for adolescent malfeasance. The best that the most committed parents could do was to track their children’s behavior, to be present at all times, and to intervene before tragedy struck. That two isolated incidents spurred the concerted, organized attention of parents in West Hartford suggests that information beyond just what was happening locally had influenced adult perceptions and reactions to adolescent behavior. Parents in this community read the national reporting on adolescence in *Life*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*, just as parents elsewhere read the piece on West Hartford in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Reporting on adolescence in these serials encouraged frustration among parents who felt that, despite their efforts to promote responsible behavior, only so much could really be done. Adolescents were beyond adult ability to comprehend, or – worse – to control effectively.

Some reports on delinquency encouraged parents to see delinquency as a viral problem, emanating from cities and invading the suburbs. As the headline of an article about delinquency in West Orange, New Jersey read, “Spotlight on Bad Boys: Not All

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<sup>17</sup> Hartzell Spence, "Connecticut Tames its Teen-Agers," *Saturday Evening Post*, October 4, 1952: 24-5.

Are From Slums.”<sup>18</sup> While the media had discovered and described the mundane behavior of “normal” adolescents in the years following the war, numerous investigative reports now also “discovered” delinquency, often in places where it shouldn’t really have been. These pieces suggested that there might be little difference between dangerous juvenile criminals and the kids of the nice family next door. “Gentlemen Hoodlums” from “well to-do families” in New Orleans belonged to a “Nazi Storm Troopers Club.” They took names like Spider, Crusher, Saint, and Ripper, and specialized in vandalism and the occasional assault. “Three Smart Girls,” ages fifteen, sixteen, and seventeen, felt life was dull in a suburb of Boston. They stole \$18,000 from a family who had hired one of them to baby sit, and traveled to New York City to buy designer clothes and to party. When they were finally apprehended, they were unfazed, saying “it sure was fun while it lasted.” When *Newsweek* wondered about “Our Vicious Young Hoodlums: Is There Any Hope?” it claimed that “this is not a story dealing with a handful of boys who live somewhere else. This is a story of a national teen-age problem.” In Ohio, an eighteen-year-old would-be rapist slashed a woman and her daughter. In Kansas City, nine “youngsters” beat a man who had no cigarettes for them. In Memphis, two boys shot a girl for resisting their advances. Near Atlanta, “a gang of teen-agers tortured four smaller children for three hours in the woods, then forced them to commit perversions.” Even novelist John Steinbeck joined the hand-wringing, shocked that “a gang of boys murder a

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<sup>18</sup> John O. Davies, "Spotlight on Bad Boys: Not All Are From Slums," *Newark Evening News*, February 29, 1948: 1.

nurse and can't even say why they did it—not poor kids—kids from apparently normal families.”<sup>19</sup>

Growing concern about the spread of juvenile delinquency didn't just appear out of the ether. During the war, experts on juvenile delinquency, including the sociologists Walter Reckless and Ernest Burgess, actively argued that the social disruption caused by mobilization—specifically, fathers in the armed forces and mothers in the workplace--weakened the binds of family that kept adolescent behavior in-check. They pointed to an increase in crime following World War I as precedent for their concern. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover amplified the issue via a series of well-publicized articles and statements that warned that American children had been broken by the “wartime spirit of abandon” and a decline of the “fundamentals of decency.”<sup>20</sup>

Hoover published one of these pieces in April 1946, in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*. “The Crime Wave We Now Face” harkened back to the violence that followed World War I — with no mention of the race riots or the labor radicalism at the center of these conflicts — and noted that “in one month in 1945 there were 32 per cent more murders and 38 per cent more robberies than in the same month in 1944. There was an over-all increase in serious crimes of 19 per cent over the same month in 1944.” He

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<sup>19</sup> *Newsweek*, "Teen-Agers: 'Gentleman Hoodlums'," November 24, 1952: 27; *Newsweek*, "Three Smart Girls," October 29, 1951: 25; *Newsweek*, "Our Vicious Young Hoodlums: Is There Any Hope?," September 6, 1953: 43; John Steinbeck, "Some Thoughts on Juvenile Delinquency," *Saturday Review*, May 28, 1955: 22.

<sup>20</sup> Hoover quote from James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), 27-29.

then asserted: “present-day crime involves youthful participants. Youngsters who fell into evil ways early in the war are contributing heavily to today’s wave of violence.”<sup>21</sup>

Hoover cited two immediate causes for this increase in criminality: the ready availability of guns brought back from battle zones, and the lax punishment of the “criminal who has established that he is completely untrustworthy.” Parents, churches, schools, youth-serving groups, and local law-enforcement would be crucial elements in addressing the situation, and more work needed to be done in the juvenile delinquency field. Hoover’s piece appeared with a pair of cartoons reprinted from other publications. The first had originally appeared in the *New York World* following World War I, and depicted threatening laborers, armed with guns and bats, descending on New York City from the sky. Next to it was a contemporary cartoon, from the *Dallas Morning News*, which showed a boy labeled “juvenile delinquent” being led into a jail following a man labeled “chronic lawbreaker.”<sup>22</sup> The implication was clear: juvenile delinquents were significant threats to the postwar social fabric, and Americans should be concerned.

The meaning of the statistics on juvenile delinquency in this era is actually anything but clear. Historian James Gilbert cites two primary statistical measures for delinquency in the 1940s and 1950s: the Children’s Bureau’s record of Juvenile Court cases and the FBI’s annual reports on police arrests. Both of these “demonstrated the same trend: a steep rise in delinquency during World War II, a sharp decline and then a rise during the 1950s.” Yet inside the Children’s Bureau there was concern that the statistics were misleading, and the Bureau itself publicly sought to improve the ways in

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<sup>21</sup> J. Edgar Hoover, "The Crime Wave We Now Face," *New York Times Magazine*, April 21, 1946: 104.

<sup>22</sup> Reprinted in *Ibid.*

which statistics were compiled and interpreted over the course of the 1950s. Growth in the youth population, changes in police surveillance of youth and reporting, and the reclassification of crimes each offered alternative explanations for the reported increase in the number of juvenile offenses.

Hoover intended to draw attention to juvenile delinquency so that he could prescribe the same remedies that he prescribed for adult criminals and communists: “refurbished and strengthened family, home, church, and local institutions.” He was not the only member of the federal government talking about delinquency, and he wouldn’t be the last person to use delinquency as an argument for family values. Florida Senator Claude Pepper made repeated statements about delinquency and held hearings on youth in 1943, much of which were devoted to juvenile crime. Attorney General Tom Clark organized a National Conference on the Prevention and Control of Juvenile Delinquency in 1946, and led a Continuing Committee through the late 1940s that eventually coordinated work with the Children’s Bureau. The Children’s Bureau welcomed increased attention to youth issues, whether it came via sensational or more reasoned routes. It wasn’t in the Bureau’s interest to resist claims that there was a juvenile delinquency epidemic. Besides, they just weren’t sure about the truth, so claims of a spreading adolescent crime wave went mostly unchallenged.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 32-39, 63-78. Citing a 1956 report by the American Municipal Association, Gilbert argues that “during the 1950s status crimes had a particularly important impact on general delinquency statistics.” “Status crimes” are acts deemed criminal only due to the age of the actor, such as underage drinking, certain sex crimes, operating a vehicle without a license, truancy, or breaking curfew. As authorities and journalists paid more attention to these offenses, they appeared as “new” and could support notions of an increase in juvenile crime.

What purpose, then, did the increased attention to juvenile delinquency serve? It has been well documented that J. Edgar Hoover repeatedly used the bully pulpit of his position as the head of federal law enforcement to pursue a particular political agenda.<sup>24</sup> The concern about juvenile delinquency he fostered can be seen as a tool in his crusade, and as part of a broader backlash against changes in postwar American society. Adolescent behavior was clearly changing, and the nation's adults did not know what those changes meant. One could easily point to new youth behaviors and to delinquency rates as symptomatic of a broader national decline. Juvenile delinquency lent itself to exploitation by the mass media: it was dangerous and hidden, yet seemingly everywhere, and it intersected with adult concerns about what the future held.

The imprecision of the term “juvenile delinquency” also contributed to its vulnerability to manipulation. Everyone seemed to agree that an individual tried and convicted in a state juvenile court was indeed a “juvenile delinquent.” Whether or not a case was referred to juvenile court was determined however by state law, and sometimes by the whim of the judge in front of whom a young defendant appeared. Some states allowed trial by a juvenile court for defendants up to age twenty-one; others regularly sent sixteen year-olds to adult criminal court. Status crimes — acts that were illegal due only to the age of the actor — further complicated the definition. Confusion about juvenile delinquency was evident in the ways that the press reported incidents; often

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<sup>24</sup> See Richard G. Powers, *Secrecy and Power: The Life of J. Edgar Hoover* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1987) and Athan G. and John Stuart Cox Theoharris, *The Boss: J. Edgar Hoover and the Great American Inquisition* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1988).

times, a youth was noted as having been “charged with juvenile delinquency” absent detail about specific behavior.<sup>25</sup>

Hoover’s pronouncements that there was a coming juvenile crime wave in the postwar years, the media echo of his proclamations, and the other investigations led by the federal government did much to convince the public that the threats were real. But other factors also contributed to the construction of a general, if vague, consensus that juvenile crime was a serious issue in need of a concerted public response.

Beginning in the late 1940s, the psychiatrist Frederic Wertham became well known for his arguments against comic books. Wertham had come to the United States in 1922 from Germany to work at the Mental Hygiene Clinic at Johns Hopkins University, and had moved to New York City in 1934. The mental hygiene movement, which also will be discussed in the next chapter, favored psychiatric evaluation and solutions for social problems, and strongly influenced youth policies immediately following the war.

After moving to New York City, Wertham held several positions in psychiatry and mental hygiene: professor of clinical psychiatry at New York University; director the psychiatric clinic at the Court of Special Sessions; director of Bellevue Hospital’s mental hygiene clinic; and director of psychiatric services at Queens Hospital Center. Wertham also founded the LaFargue Clinic, a free psychiatric clinic in Harlem, in 1946. Unlike Hoover, Wertham was liberal. He had written about the psychological impact of racism and testified in civil rights courts cases (he would be an expert witness for the defense of

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<sup>25</sup> In 1944 in Coney Island, for example, a youth was arrested and “charged with juvenile delinquency” for participating in a disturbance outside a synagogue during Yom Kippur services. See *New York Times*, “Hoodlums Stop Worship,” September 27, 1944: 22; and Howard Whitman, “Anti-Riot Squad,” *Colliers*, November 17, 1945: 58-59.

Ethel Rosenberg 1953, and he conducted a study on the effects of segregation for the Delaware NAACP as they prepared a case that was eventually combined with *Brown v. Board of Education*).<sup>26</sup> He believed that the tenets of mental hygiene could be a progressive force for social good, and would help offset the problems faced by minority children in adolescence.

While working at LaFargue, several young patients who had committed violent crimes referenced their fascination with comic books. Wertham began looking more deeply into the effect of comics on juvenile behavior. “Comic books are the greatest book publishing success in history and the greatest mass influence on children,” he wrote in the *Saturday Review of Literature* in 1948. Borrowing from Hoover’s habit of conjuring up outrageous numbers to drive home the gravity of the situation, Wertham wrote “if I make the most conservative estimate from my own research, one billion times a year a child sits down and reads a comic book. Crime does not pay, but crime comics do.” He listed more than a dozen violent crimes committed by youth in New York City, then claimed “the common denominator is comic books.” Comic books were the “marijuana of the nursery,” and among adolescents there existed a “conflict between super-ego and sub-machine gun.” Wertham largely portrayed the crime comic industry as filled with delinquency-peddlers, and urged parents and lawmakers to find ways to bring them under control.<sup>27</sup>

Wertham’s research culminated in the 1954 publication of *The Seduction of the Innocent*, which crystallized criticisms of crime comics and also stoked a broader debate

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<sup>26</sup> Bart Beaty, *Frederic Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 12, 94.

<sup>27</sup> Frederic Wertham, “The Comics.... Very Funny!,” *Saturday Review of Literature*, May 29, 1948: 6-7+.

about the influence of mass culture on behavior. Wertham analyzed comics, the children who read them, and the industry that produced and profited from them. James Gilbert has written that “in effect, Wertham walked both sides of the ideological street, trading with local vigilante groups who favored cultural censorship as well as with those who criticized modern capitalism for substituting market relations for moral relations.”

Wertham echoed the concerns of intellectuals, from the Frankfurt School and beyond, who questioned the impact of mass culture on the social fabric.<sup>28</sup> He found (and displayed prominently in illustrations in his book) all sorts of prurient messages in comics, hidden from parents by deceptive titles or subtle integration into background art.

Wertham’s logic was questionable. He repeatedly and dramatically indicted comic books for mere proximity to a youthful crime. There was the five year-old burglar, “rewarded by his companions with a steady supply of candy and crime comic books,” or the gang whose “secret meeting-house, incidentally, was stacked full of textbooks for violent fighting—crime comics.”<sup>29</sup> Wertham surveyed comics, such as *The Perfect Crime*, which presented strategies for malfeasance, and condemned comic-makers for publishing advertisements for BB guns, knives, and fat-burning potions in their pages.

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<sup>28</sup> Quote from James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 93; also see pp. 89-110. Gilbert deals expansively with Wertham’s psychological analysis of comic books and youth culture, situating him within the intersection of social science research and government inquiries. He details popular responses to Wertham, which were critical from scientists and accepting from politicians and the popular media. Gilbert is also drawn to Wertham’s expansive knowledge of the form and sophisticated questions about culture, while acknowledging that *The Seduction of the Innocent* was sensationalistic and its author a savvy salesman of his own ideas (Gilbert’s discussion of Wertham is in his chapter on the “crusade against” mass culture, rather than about intellectuals and mass culture). There’s no need here to restate what James Gilbert, who had access to Wertham’s personal papers, has already stated. Thus, my discussion of Wertham is abbreviated.

<sup>29</sup> Frederic Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent* (New York, NY: Rhinehart and Company, Inc., 1954), 149-150.

He also challenged more mainstream comic books, in addition to the niche crime comics that drew most of his ire, writing about the homoeroticism of Batman's relationship with Robin, and Superman's echoing of fascist fantasies: "with the big S on his uniform—we should, I suppose, be thankful that it is not an S.S."<sup>30</sup>

Wertham wanted access to most comic books for those under age 16 to be prohibited. While he accepted multi-causal explanations of juvenile delinquency, he focused his attention on one element of youth culture that he felt was particularly pernicious, understudied and susceptible to public control. He was reluctant to support or even to be aligned with conservative censorship groups founded by churches, Cub Scouts, and PTAs, who held public burning of comic books.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, their causes aligned. Together, their crusade against comic books yielded eighteen different state ordinances governing the sale of comic books, and influenced the creation of the Comics Magazine Association of America (the "Comic Book Code") of 1954, as well as the famous Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency's investigation of mass culture.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> On comics and the psycho-sexual development of children, see Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*, 173-193; on Superman, see p. 34. Wertham was a staunch proponent of racial integration, and also challenged racist stereotyping in comics. According to James Gilbert, this political progressivism was representative of his hostility to the "conservative agenda of many of his most ardent admirers." See Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 106.

<sup>31</sup> David Hadju, *The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic Book Scare in America* (New York, NY: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2008), 116-119, 148-150.

<sup>32</sup> Gilbert found that Wertham wanted "central legal action, a simple sanitary law—a federal law—preventing the sale and display of all crime comic books to children under fifteen." Frederic Wertham to Rev. Raymond Stephenson, undated letter, Frederic Wertham Papers, Kempton, Pennsylvania in Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 106. Also see Hajdu, *The Ten-Cent Plague*, 262-268.

Wertham's agitation against comic books also helped focus parental attention on the types of materials to which youth had access in the marketplace.<sup>33</sup> Some parents and community groups used the information in efforts to restrict youth culture during the 1950s, while others used the information simply to know how adolescents spent their spare time. Wertham's work succeeded in bringing an element of youth culture that had previously been distant from the public's concern out into the open, but was also emblematic of responses to youth culture that were overwrought with concern. When "experts" like Wertham and Hoover made dramatic and grave warnings, offering scientific evidence to back up their claims, they carried significant cultural authority that for many Americans more than made up for the deficiencies of their claims. Other adults in the media adopted their grave tone, and few, if any, challenged it.

Wertham didn't significantly reduce the presence of prurient content in the youth market, though he did much to inject youth culture into the popular discourse about what caused juvenile delinquency. That discourse, overall, was not particularly probing. In the absence of analysis and understanding, reporters reveled in dramatic detail that supported claims from alarmist authorities like Hoover and Wertham. *Newsweek* called the period "The Second Jazz Age," and worried that the emerging generation of delinquents would

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<sup>33</sup> A series of pulpy dime novels, many published by Avon Books, started to appear after 1950 that sensationalized violence while riffing off of the growing concern about juvenile delinquency. These featured illustrations on the front cover that, while perhaps more realistic-looking than the graphic crime comics, portrayed teens in violent or hyper-sexualized conditions. For examples, see Harry Whittington, *Teenage Jungle* (New York, NY: Avon Publications, 1953); Lenard Kaufman, *Juvenile Delinquents* (New York, NY: Avon Publications, 1952); Wenzell Brown, *Jailbait Jungle* (New York, NY: Belmont Books, 1952); Harlan Ellison, *The Deadly Streets* (New York, NY: Ace, 1958); Meyer Dolinsky, *Hot Rod Gang Rumble* (New York, NY: Avon, 1957). Over time, the illustrations on the covers of these books have become highly-sought after collectors items. See <http://www.goodgirlart.com/> for samples.

follow in the footsteps of “the Al Capones, Dutch Schultzes, John Dillingers, Alvin Karpises, Lepke Buchalters, and their followers.” *Reader’s Digest* published a piece about “Tomorrow’s Gangsters” whose crimes were growing progressively more dramatic, citing an arrest of three criminals (offenses not noted), ages eleven, twelve, and thirteen, and noting an unrelated incident in which a group of adolescents, under fifteen, tortured dogs. Youth in five cities reportedly, after school, went downtown and dropped lit matches into baby carriages, and a teenage girl in a Connecticut city, while her mother was at work, used the house as a brothel for her high school classmates. Authors repeatedly noted that such examples seemed exceptional, but then trotted out statistics from the Justice Department suggesting that things were getting worse, and recommending merely that parents and communities needed to do a “better job” of corralling adolescents.<sup>34</sup>

The tone of much of this reportage both sensationalized and normalized juvenile criminality. Longer features accentuated the threat by painting pictures of seemingly normal adolescents for whom some undetermined element of maturation went dramatically awry. There was Eugene McManus, “a handsome 17-year-old with brown wavy hair, in the upper half of his class at Valley Stream, N.Y.” His parents didn’t trust him, and urged him into the Army and off “the family dole.” While on furlough from the Army, he left North Carolina for home, then hitchhiked to Rochester to pick up his girlfriend Diane. They decided they wanted to get married, but thought they would need to travel to Minnesota because of her age. They needed a car for the trip. McManus stole one, and when the owner resisted, the then eighteen-year-old Private First Class shot and

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<sup>34</sup> *Newsweek*, “The Second Jazz Age,” October 29, 1945: 34-35; Charles J. Dutton, “Tomorrow’s Gangsters,” *Readers Digest*, July 1946, 1946: 74-76.

killed him. En route to Minnesota, McManus robbed and killed four more people, before discovering that they indeed could *not* marry without the girl's parents' permission. They were traveling in Iowa when apprehended by a state policeman. McManus was eventually returned to New York and, despite a plea of insanity, was sentenced to life in prison. *Newsweek* entitled a story about his killing spree "Five-Murder Drive," depicting him as a normal adolescent who had inexplicably turned to crime.<sup>35</sup>

Gripping narratives about specific crimes suggested that delinquency was also a spreading phenomenon. A story "That Rocked New Jersey" in 1948 garnered national attention in the *Saturday Evening Post*, and made "many a parent ask: 'Could this happen to my boy?'" After supper one night, a twelve year-old named Frankie Marvin from West Orange "hurried out of the house to commit the crime he had been planning all month. He was prepared and eager to rob and to kill, and he had chosen the moment shrewdly." Marvin lived in "one of West Orange's choice residential neighborhoods, an area of fifty-foot frontages, 1948 cars, electrified kitchens and five-figure mortgages." The piece guessed at Frankie's father's significant salary, and conjectured that Mrs. Marvin, "a devout Catholic, is an intellectually conscientious woman who devotes enormous energy to the welfare of her children" who all have "exemplary reputations." Despite this apparent normality, Frankie convinced two friends to raid their fathers' gun collections, and join in a search for a victim. They wandered the area by foot until they encountered Bertram Betsch, a middle-aged father of two, who was on his way to a

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<sup>35</sup> *Newsweek*, "Five-Murder Drive," April 13, 1953: 39-40; *New York Times*, "McManus Receives Life Term in Killing," September 27, 1953: 27.

basketball game. Marvin shot Mr. Betsch in the back, severely wounding him. The boys fled before there was a robbery.<sup>36</sup>

The author of the *Saturday Evening Post* piece, John Kobler, was given access to the written confessions of the three boys, and also interviewed the psychiatrists who evaluated them. He spun his research into a narrative that presaged Truman Capote's excursion into "true crime" over a decade later, *In Cold Blood*. Only after dramatically retelling the story of the evening of the crime did Kobler attempt to broaden his focus to its impact on the community. Newark and West Orange residents wanted to know what compelled Frankie, the acknowledged leader of the "gang," to conceive and execute the crime. The boys spent many hours with psychiatrists who hoped to find causes for their behavior. Frankie had been "emotionally neglected by his father in favor of an older brother," and pre-adolescent illness had left him psychologically frail. He had, more than once, been caught shoplifting. His parents had moved around because of Mr. Marvin's work, and had only arrived in West Orange a year earlier. He was a slow reader, whose female teachers had chided him, nurturing "a bitter aversion to women in general and women teachers in particular."<sup>37</sup>

Frankie's teachers complained that had they known of prior truancies and hostilities to teachers, they would have paid closer attention to him. Instead, they read his participation in the glee club and radio club as signs of adjustment. The other two boys involved in the crime—Ned Armory and Billy Carter—had problems of their own. Ned's mother smothered him and insisted to his teachers that he was a prodigy, though they

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<sup>36</sup> John Kobler, "The Case that Rocked New Jersey," *Saturday Evening Post*, August 7, 1948: 15+; *New York Times*, "Jersey Boys Sentenced," April 15, 1948: 52.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*; *Newark Evening News*, "Schools, Police Seek Cause of Boy Crimes," March 1, 1948: 1; *Newark Evening News*, "Shooting Inquiry is Widened," March 2, 1948: 1.

maintained that he was average. And Billy's father rarely played with him. *The Newark Evening News* actively sought answers, sponsoring a drive to establish a child-guidance clinic for Essex County where a full-time psychiatrist would help parents and teachers to recognize warning signs in youngsters before they turned violent.<sup>38</sup>

These cases were generalized as they were reported. One reading the press would encounter notices, both short and long, of another middle-class boy — the vast majority of the time, they were boys -- gone wrong. An unremarkable lad, who showed no earlier signs of delinquency, commits a crime with a cool calm. Parents wonder where they went wrong, and the community worries about the larger meaning. As more information about the individual comes out, certain key elements emerge—tensions with parents, or an unstable home life caused often by a mother who worked. A reference to an expert, or a revelation that the “boy had read comics.” The communities vow to investigate the causes of such behavior and bolster mental health services to support adolescent adjustment. Often, an individual is quoted expressing surprise that such a crime could happen “here.”

Such vivid, narrative descriptions of criminals with the statistics and warnings put forth from the Justice Department combined to make a convincing case to the public that in the years around 1950 America indeed faced a growing juvenile crime crisis, and that the only way to understand youth crime was to focus on the personality of the individual offender. If delinquency had been traditionally restricted to slums, but now was filtering into suburbs like Valley Stream, West Hartford, and West Orange, then the psychological health of adolescents *must* be in question. Something about these boys was making them

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

susceptible to bad influences, whether those influences originated from the processes of adolescent development or had some explanation outside the individual.

Much of the reporting on youth intended to help parents recognize the warning signs of an adolescent going wrong. To make the case more forcefully, the mass media used images as well as words to describe juvenile crime. The construction of adolescent types in the early 1950s actually was about style and exteriors as much as the meanings of youth behavior. Stories about juvenile delinquency and wayward youth prominently featured images that held a funhouse mirror up to the more mundane depictions of adolescence. Reassuring photos of teenagers eating and goofing off were countered by darker images, often staged in urban areas, of adolescents preparing to commit random crime. Readers in the suburbs could see what delinquency looked like, and apply the knowledge they gleaned from *Life*, *Look*, *Colliers*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and other publications to the adolescents in their midst.

*Life* had told Americans that teenage boys hadn't changed during the war, but in 1946 offered another photo essay about juvenile delinquency. "Juvenile Delinquency: War's Insecurity Lifts Youthful Crime 100%" began with Hoover's statistics, and argued that juvenile delinquency "is a product of sickness in society. It is largely an urban phenomenon and its most fertile breeding place is in the slums of the great cities," and is most commonly the byproduct of dense living conditions cities foisted upon diverse ethnic groups whose characteristics clashed and brought trouble. A narrative details the formation of a delinquent, drawing upon the language of developmental psychology. An adventurous youth, steeped in poverty and raised by parents whose "dishonesty and brutality" make it difficult for him to know right from wrong, is propelled by anomie into

a permanent state of irrationality. Three delinquents--Joe, Alvin, and "Dandy Jim"--are presented as classic examples, each maladjusted in his own way.<sup>39</sup>

The photos for the piece were gathered by a *Life* photographer who latched onto a group of boys who told him "where to go in order to see fights and tire-stealing." This piece was within the tradition begun over a half-century earlier by Jacob Riis, where muckraking journalists toured slums to uncover and document social problems and depict unknown denizens of the city's shadows. Most of the photos were from New York City, though there were also some from Los Angeles, Chicago, and Pittsburgh. Some were journalistic: pictures of boys standing on a corner, of an abandoned lot on the Lower East Side, of youths riding the tail bumper of a bus, or play-fighting in front of school. One showed youths running holding chickens, captioned as stolen. Some were more didactic or dramatic: a close-up of a hand loading a gun, of weapons arrayed on a tabletop, of kids being scolded by a judge, and of a reformed gang leader lifting weights with an air of triumph. The photo essay also contained a number of re-enacted scenes, a peculiar genre of photography that would, over the subsequent decade, be a primary tool in the efforts of the mass media to represent juvenile delinquency.<sup>40</sup> In this case, the re-enactments were

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<sup>39</sup> *Life*, "Juvenile Delinquency: War's Insecurity Lifts Youthful Crime 100%," April 8, 1946: 83-93.

<sup>40</sup> Another re-enactment was a sub-photo essay of the larger whole. "The Early Life of Donald Cook" explores the maturation of a real live 16 year-old juvenile delinquent whose "father was a drunk. His mother worked and bought his dinner on her way home." One night in 1945, Cook, the "latchkey kid" knifed and killed his friend Morton Stein in a hotel room. Pictured are re-enactments of a young Donald at a liquor store with his father, of the boy unhappy and alone with his sister and divorced mother, of him truant in front of school, and of Donald loafing while hanging with friends (including Stein). An advertisement for a movie about John Dillinger, noted as the boys' hero, was found in the hotel where the killing occurred and displayed, despite the fact that it was a re-enactment, as though it were evidence photographed at the scene. These photos stood next to ones of the real Donald Cook, leaving for the prison to which he was sentenced to 7 to 14 years,

of “mugging,” “stomping,” and “card-playing,” a favorite hobby of urban delinquents, the spoils of which were always, the reader learned in accompanying captions, “spent on liquor.” In each photograph, the faces of the boys were blocked out to conceal their identity. They looked, for the most part, white and Latino.

Why would a set of re-enacted photos necessitate hiding the identity of the subjects? What was the purpose of the re-enactment at all? Why were most of the photos captioned in ways that assumed that the subjects in them were delinquents, when no information in the frame supported such a conclusion? Was the reporter told that the money kids won playing cards was always spent on liquor? One of the photos of teens on a street corner describes “a meeting place of city boys with nothing to do. There they smoke cigarets (sic), plot trouble. This is a white-Negro borderline area in New York the scene of many racial fights.” The behavior of the boys in the photograph may have been completely innocuous. They aren’t pictured doing anything illegal or even mischievous. Perhaps the youth guiding the photographer led him to believe that the ones on the corner were troublemakers. Perhaps the photographer assumed this himself, given his knowledge of the location and the purpose of his assignment. Maybe an editor made assumptions and wrote the captions.

Such choices, made again and again in the *Life* piece, suggest that the purpose of the photo essay wasn’t to explain or even to document juvenile delinquency, but rather to *display* it. As a curator would hang a series of paintings to emphasize some aspect of the

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of him being processed at the penitentiary (with a caption nothing that because he was “a careful, good dresser, he hated the prison garb), and, finally, looking “insolent and proud... and no feeling of guilt” in a portrait taken at the jail. *Life*, “The Early Life of Donald Cook,” April 8, 1946: 90.

artistic style or the subject explored, *Life* framed and presented the photographs to make certain points about adolescence. Ambiguous photographs were captioned so as to urge the reader towards the conclusions about delinquency offered by text of the photo essay. Readers of *Life*—estimated at upwards of 40 million Americans in the years following the war—were presented a picture of juvenile delinquency as an urban, working-class dilemma, the product of bad parenting and tense interethnic relationships.<sup>41</sup>

The photo essay in *Life* pre-dates by a few years the most intense media engagement with juvenile delinquency, but the starkness of its presentation explains in part the intensity of the reactions to the notion that the phenomenon was spreading in the later part of the decade. By 1950, episodes such as the West Orange shooting, the repeated mentions of expanding national delinquency rates which unmoored juvenile criminality from specific locations, and the increasing participation of American youth everywhere in a national market challenged the notion that delinquency was solely an urban phenomenon. By the early fifties, juvenile delinquency was understood as something that didn't only happen "there," but also was "here," too, perhaps right around the corner.

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<sup>41</sup> Erika Doss, "Looking at Life: Rethinking America's Favorite Magazine, 1936-1972," in *Looking at Life Magazine*, 1-24 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001). Doss also writes at some length about "editorial intent" in the placement of advertisements and the choices of photographs through the life of *Life*. Though nothing about juvenile delinquency or adolescence appears in the volume she edited, it seems a reasonable assumption that certain editorial choices were made in the presentation of the piece discussed here. It should also be noted that "dramatization" was a fairly common method in the delivery of news in the years around World War II. Nevertheless, the choices made in the process as it engaged juvenile delinquency—there's no space here for a comparative analysis with other examples—were influenced by an editorial approach to news delivery as much, if not more so, than a documentary one.

Elements of the *Life* pictorial were echoed and amplified in subsequent years, and contributed to the formulation of an accompanying “aesthetic” of juvenile delinquency and a general strategy for its coverage. This strategy included re-enactments that featured adolescents play-performing crime. It also represented the range of locations where the juvenile delinquent might spend some time: the streets, jail, the courts, school, the reform school, or in a cellar club. Other standard photos included close-up images of the types of weapons teenagers might use: guns, knives, blackjacks, and chains. Like the *Life* piece, some magazines depended upon supposedly reformed delinquents to be guides who either led reporters and photographers to other teens in public space, or willingly performed “delinquent” acts for public documentation. A 1950 photo essay in *Colliers* on San Francisco’s “Teen-Age Punks” used each of these forms as it explored how San Francisco dealt with its “punkism” problem. It began with a dramatic opening:

*When sixteen-year-olds carry guns, when youngsters of thirteen to seventeen pummel innocent pedestrians with blackjacks or lay open their cheeks with rings filed sharp as scalpels; when young wolf packs roam the streets for prey, when they flail their victims with chains and belts, smash at them with brass knuckles or fists weighted with lead—when kids who are still wet behind the ears begin to worship a new god named Violence, then a city must sit up and take notice. That’s what San Francisco did. It sat up with a jolt. It watched with horror an epidemic of teen-aged violence that all but unhinged the Golden Gate.*

The front page of the story prominently displayed three photographs. In the first, members of the “suburban Precita Valley Boys Club, who are themselves helping in the fight against ‘punkism,’ demonstrate in a posed photo how a teen-age gang operates.” Three boys with slicked hair, leather jackets, dungarees and white socks, armed with a chain, a club, and brass knuckles stoop behind a wall as three other boys—their targets—stand around the corner, oblivious. The scene is carefully lit, and looks like it could be a

movie poster. The other two photographs show a local judge along with the principal of a model school and his students at a ball game, and a “close-up of typical weapons confiscated from teen-agers.”<sup>42</sup> The photographer for the piece was John Florea, who had worked regularly for *Life*, and who went on to a career as a popular television director.<sup>43</sup>

The article is about San Francisco’s efforts to address “punkism” through both community and political intervention in adolescence. The piece claims the San Francisco Youth Council, formed in response to an “outbreak” of the “punks’ reign of terror” in January of that year, had developed a new philosophy for dealing with delinquents. “It is a philosophy which *loves them without coddling them*. It is *firm without being cruel*. For what it hands kids on a silver platter, it asks *responsibility in return*.” The piece recounted a few stereotypical crimes in a sensational tone: a high school football star, talking to his girlfriend on the sidewalk, was put in the hospital by a roving gang of toughs; a stare-down at a pool hall turned into a hot-rod chase on a California highway that led to a shooting; a street-car was robbed by five teens, “Jesse James-style.” The piece explored how “punkism” was different than previous forms of juvenile criminality: “‘Never hit a guy when he’s down’ was another rule kids lived by in the old days. Not so in punkism.” It then traced--in less space than is devoted to recounting crimes--avenues where the “new philosophy” had been applied: cops cracked down on curfew violators; principals brought a “theory of responsibility” to bear on problem-kids in their schools;

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<sup>42</sup> Howard Whitman, "Teen-Age Punks," *Colliers*, April 29, 1950: 18-20. “Punkism” is the phrase that the *San Francisco News* used as a replacement for “juvenile delinquent,” and entered the local lexicon forthwith.

<sup>43</sup> According to his entry in the online Internet Movie Database, Florea directed several episodes of two shows that would be popular with a later generation of adolescents: “CHiPs” and “Dukes of Hazard.” See <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0282644/>.

and Youth Council workers talked endlessly to adolescents about the need to make better choices.<sup>44</sup>

Juvenile delinquency “discovery” pieces such as those in *Life* and *Colliers* were much more about style than about substance. Using dramatic, filmic imagery, they argued not only that adolescents were different than they previously had been, but also that delinquency had become more severe and vicious. But they did so without looking for local factors – in the economy, in the social structure, in demographics -- that may have been influencing youth behavior. Many of the films that would deal with juvenile delinquency over the subsequent decade mimicked this form in narrative structure, arguing that delinquency was a byproduct of adolescent maturation rather than a response by youths to external influences.<sup>45</sup> An event would lead communities to recognize that they had a problem, and citizens would vow to respond in some vaguely stated “new” way that let kids know they couldn’t get away with certain behavior. In terms of visual style, the pieces usually began starkly and scarily, and intended initially to inform readers of the worst that could be expected.

Almost always, photo essays like these also exhibited balance in some way. After beginning with images of delinquency, they would move to images of redemption, featuring engagement with youth by adults, or teenagers themselves pursuing more productive ends such as exercise or perhaps playing the piano. Yet nothing really changed in the environment captured by the story beyond the immediate experience of the adolescent. Depictions of adolescents in the mass media encouraged parents and

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<sup>44</sup> Howard Whitman, "Teen-Age Punks," *Colliers*, April 29, 1950: 18-20.

<sup>45</sup> See *The Wild One* (1953), *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), and *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) as prime examples.

communities to be on the lookout for the warning signs of delinquency and to be ready to intervene with services that could re-establish or extend social control. Increasing adolescent autonomy provided parents with plenty of behavior to analyze; many did so thoughtfully. But the dramatic nature of much reporting on youth, the repeated claims of a juvenile crime wave, and the statements by authorities such as Hoover and Wertham created unease amongst adults that at times led to excessive and panicked oversight instead of understanding. Adolescence, these voices warned, needed a new architecture.

The reactions against hot-rods in the years after World War II embodies this point. Hot-rods had been a presence California since the 1920s, and following the war and the elimination of gas rationing, teenagers on the West Coast began to drive “jalopies” that, with great ingenuity and mechanical know-how, they had modified for increased power. A formal racing scene emerged in the desert east of Los Angeles, though over the next few years the hobby of customizing cars spread throughout the country. Teenage boys everywhere were told that cars were the “greatest asset in [the] tentative, awkward approaches to grown-up love-making.”<sup>46</sup>

Customizing cars helped satisfy adolescent lust and a sense of adventure, but the hobby also concerned local communities and garnered national attention from the press. Practically every mention of hot-rods in local and national presses noted that they traveled “100 miles per hour,” a magical number that, like Wertham’s one billion comic book readers, implied “danger.” Articles in newspapers and magazines emphasized the reckless racing of these vehicles over the creative act of customizing them. In June 1949, the Automobile Club of New York and Thomas W. Ryan, the Director of New York

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<sup>46</sup> *Life*, “Teen Age Boys,” June 11, 1945: 91-97.

State Division of Safety, warned “against the use of these dangerous vehicles,” and “parents were urged to increase their vigilance to curb an outbreak of speed epidemic among youngsters during the vacation period.”<sup>47</sup>

Youth hot-rodding was a part of a larger, adult hot-rod subculture. Some — including a student of Reuel Denney and David Riesman named Gene Balsley who published an essay on hot-rodding in *American Quarterly* -- saw this as a culture opposed to commercialism and the mass production processes of Detroit. Car customization allowed consumers to break out of the aesthetic restrictions of mass production and to imprint their own personalities -- and desires for increased power -- onto their vehicles. Hot-rods became a canvass on which young engineers could paint their freedom.

The growth of youth involvement in the hobby attracted negative attention. “Hot-rod Happy” was a comic-strip about a “lawless, spoiled, delinquent, disrespectful cad, who is the antithesis of good, clean-living American youth.” In the strip, Happy crashes his car, but lives on as a cautionary tale to other teenagers. *Hot Rod Magazine*, which first appeared in 1948 and by 1950 claimed a circulation of over 200,000, published a letter from a Hot-Rod association taking exception to such portrayals. The magazine sought to separate the hobby of customizing vehicles from the occasions of youthful recklessness that were garnering the hot-rod world negative attention. The hobby was a serious one, and enthusiasts were unlikely to “risk their specialized equipment for use as battering rams.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*; *Life*, "Hot-rods," November 5, 1945: 86-88; Bert Pierce, “Teen-Agers’ Ego Held Road Peril,” *New York Times*, June 19, 1949: 39.

<sup>48</sup> Gene Balsley, "The Hot-Rod Culture," *American Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (Winter 1950): 353-358.

After 1950, the phrase “hot-rod” in popular parlance shed its meaning as a creative pastime for garage tinkerers, and took on the negative connotation of a tool used by juvenile delinquents. Hot-rod enthusiasm among adolescents was seen as another threat to adult control over youth behavior. Driving at high speeds was, of course, dangerous, and some hot-rods, it was often noted, could outrun police vehicles. New Rochelle, New York opened a “war on ‘hot-rod’ automobiles” in 1950 following the driving death of a local 18-year old named William White. White had been driving a standard automobile allegedly at high speeds, and had swerved off the road. A local judge claimed that White had been on his way home from a meeting with other hot-rod enthusiasts, and that his investigations of the accident had detected “gangs of ‘hot-rod’ operators” that “have been going crazy in their driving.” Eight hot-rods were located in a garage at the Shady Lake Riding Academy, and its operator was charged with violating zoning ordinances. In 1951, following the death of a 16-year old from Peekskill who was traveling home from stock car races with friends—also, in a standard vehicle—Westchester began a “War on Hot-Rods.” Teenagers with driving offenses were required to attend a meeting at the County Center where two films were shown, along with “other entertainment.” The sponsors included the Magistrates Council of New York, the New York State Youth Council, the Westchester Recreation Commission, and the New York Automobile Club. They all felt that “entertainment” rather than “speeches” would get through more clearly to the youngsters.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *New York Times*, “New Rochelle Opens a Campaign Against Teenage ‘Hot-Rod’ Cars,” July 22, 1950: 1; *New York Times*, “Westchester War on Hot-Rods Begins,” May 23, 1951: 37.

Jimmy Stewart narrated one of the films shown at the Westchester County Center: *And Then There Were Four*. This movie featured five drivers in Los Angeles — one was a teenager — who each had some personality problem that affected their driving. Stewart indicated midway through the film, after the five drivers left their homes for the day, that one of them would not return. The suspense was drawn out until the end of the movie, when it was revealed that the only woman driver—a widowed mother of two, overburdened and often forgetful at the wheel—had died in a fiery crash. The film is ripe with the common tropes of the day, from the strained single mother to the leather-jacket wearing adolescent who sees no problem with driving 70 m.p.h., burdens his parents with worry, and eats like a bottomless pit. In the end the hot-rodder only survives, Stewart notes, because he has “gotten lucky.”<sup>50</sup>

Reporting on youth hot-rodding assumed that those adolescents who customized their own vehicles did not practice a level of care with their creations similar to that of their adult co-hobbyists. Rather, it assumed that teenage boys were turning cars into speeding death machines. Yet there was very little evidence that this was actually the case. The two stories of teenage driving deaths that prompted “wars” on hot-rods north of New York City in 1950-1951 involved hot-rods only on the periphery; neither accident involved actually customized vehicles. *Look* published an article in 1953 on “How to Tame Teenagers” which featured as its lead photograph a crumpled vehicle, with the caption: “This speeding car skidded across the road and wrapped itself around a pole.

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<sup>50</sup> The two movies shown at the Westchester County Center were “The Last Date” and “And Then There Were Four,” a 1950 public service film that was narrated by Jimmy Stewart. *And Then There Were Four*, narrated by James Stewart, written and directed by Charles Palmer, produced by Roland Reed Productions, Hollywood, CA. 1950. Available in public domain for download from [http://www.archive.org/details/and\\_then\\_there\\_were\\_four](http://www.archive.org/details/and_then_there_were_four)

Two passengers were killed and four hurt; none were more than 15 or 16 years old.” Beneath that photo were two pictures: one featured three hot-rods side by side on a road with the caption “Phoenix hot-rodders were a public menace when they raced on open highways”; the second, a young man (not necessarily an adolescent) in a hot-rod, pulled over by the police, captioned “Their souped-up cars could outdistance the traffic cops, but they didn’t always win.” The article accompanying these photos credits a Phoenix juvenile court judge named Charley Bernstein, who started a County Teen-Age Drivers’ Attitude School, with reducing teen-age driving offenses and deaths. Eight deaths in one year in the late 1940s had been “traced to reckless juvenile drivers.” But between 1950 and 1953, only three deaths involving teen-age drivers occurred in the area.<sup>51</sup>

Media coverage of the hot-rod subculture was emblematic of the elaboration of the juvenile threat through the early 1950s. Hot-rods, which had barely existed a decade earlier, became popular because of the increased ability of adolescents to pursue them — there was no longer gas rationing or material shortages -- and the development of a national subculture through which knowledge and experience were shared. The national media served as both the conduit for the distribution of information about hot-rodding through publications such as *Hot Rod Magazine*, and a path for the airing of adult concerns. The case that teenagers—or, for that matter, *anyone*--shouldn’t be driving souped-up cars at high speeds on public roads seemed to be able to make itself, even if the vast majority of automobile accidents didn’t involve hot-rods, or even adolescent drivers. But in the hands of a media susceptible to the articulation of grave concerns

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<sup>51</sup> Bert Pierce, “Accidents Traced to Driver Schools,” *New York Times*, September 6, 1950: 42; Dan Fowler, “How to Tame Teenagers,” *Look*, August 25, 1953: 78+. Also see *Newsweek*, “Teen-Age Hazards,” October 5, 1953: 74-75.

about adolescence, the case against hot-rods dramatically evolved into an indictment of an element of youth culture that challenged the boundaries of “acceptable” behavior.

Teenage car culture was added to the list of things for parents to be concerned about.

This approach held little regard for why some adolescents might be drawn to hot-rods, and entirely dismissed the analysis of those like Gene Balsey who saw in the subculture the rejection of conformity. Those questions didn’t register in mass media reporting on hot-rods, though they were in fact much more deeply probing than what appeared in the vast majority of reportage on adolescent behavior through the early 1950s.

Youth participation in mass culture had become more energetic, and the public nature of youth consumption convinced many adults that this was the primary engine of behavioral change among adolescents. When rock ‘n’ roll exploded in the middle of the decade around the same time as *Brown v. Board of Education*, concerns about race and integration would add a layer of unease to the politics of youth consumption.<sup>52</sup> Until that time, however, African-Americans and other minorities were rarely present in popular depictions of the ideal adolescence, and even only slightly more present in discussions of juvenile delinquency that explored it as an urban phenomenon. The politics of race, culture, consumption, and adolescence became much more intertwined in the coming years, but through the early 1950s, they made barely a blip in most reporting on American youth.

The ideal adolescence and its delinquent opposite were byproducts of an effort within the national media to explain to parents and communities what of this new teenage

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<sup>52</sup> This will be discussed in Chapter Five

behavior was normal, and what was not. Efforts to define a normative adolescence predated this period, but changing opportunities and experiences available to youth in the postwar world revitalized the process and made it a central component in daily reporting on American life. Reporting that intended to make better sense of the transitional period from childhood to adulthood created a language, both textual and visual, with which the adolescent experience would be discussed for the following decade. This was a first step in the reconstruction of postwar adolescence, and it had mixed consequences. Reporting on youth focused the attention of adults on the changing behavior of their children. But it also encouraged the feeling among many Americans that something incomprehensible was happening to the next generation.

Parents and the American media that spoke to them were not the only ones seeking to understand how the experience of growing up in America was changing in the years immediately following World War II. Federal, state, and local governments were interested as well, and they increasingly turned to social scientists for help in understanding such changes.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Personality Development and the “Ideal Childhood” at the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth**

Approximately every ten years between 1909 and 1971, the President of the United States hosted a major White House conference on children and youth. The conference, highlighted by the grandeur of presidential participation and the media attention it generated, pulled together leading experts around a theme or a set of questions concerning youth. The first four White House Conferences grew progressively in size, and articulated broad areas of concern relating to American childhood. Each took for granted that the state should play primary coordinating, advisory, and directing roles in efforts to deal with troubled children, though what this meant changed over time. No real national policy came out of the events, only recommendations for more work in the social sciences, increased governmental coordination of services for youth, and more community attention to youth issues. Inevitably, they painted childhood in dramatic strokes, and outside events always colored the themes that were chosen.

In these conferences participants took seriously the notion that the future was at stake in national efforts to create for children healthy living situations, solid educational systems, outlets for recreation, and opportunities to join the workforce once childhood ended. The conferences also resonated with national fears, such as “child saving” in 1909 and threats to democracy in 1940. Each event captured a cross-section of thinking by experts on youth issues. They also always produced a flurry of published material that

became a resource for state and local governments and non-governmental social service agencies as they addressed youth issues at the local level.<sup>1</sup>

1950's Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth was organized around the idea of the "ideal childhood." The idealism that pervaded the conference was influenced by recent events. Memories of the Great Depression and World War II were still fresh in people's minds, and the nascent Cold War and the existential threat that accompanied it hovered over the proceedings. President Harry Truman, in his opening address, framed the challenges to American childhood almost entirely in the context of American foreign policy, arguing that in the brewing conflict with the Soviet Union, the United States faced "the greatest challenge in our history."

We cannot insulate our children from the uncertainties of the world in which we live or from the impact of the problems which confront us all. What we can do—and must do—is to equip them to meet these problems, to do their part in the total effort, and to build up those inner resources of character which are the main strength of the American people.<sup>2</sup>

Truman's words, which identified American children as the future front line in the Cold War, contributed to the conference a kind of uneasy idealism, a sense that the future was under siege and that purposeful and thoughtful interventions were crucial in order to better prepare a generation of young Americans for the challenges they would face.

The Children's Bureau, which organized the conference, was a Progressive Era invention, and embodied a faith in government as the source of answers to profound questions, if not the solutions to intractable problems. The organization had been housed

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<sup>1</sup> *New York Times*, "Roosevelt Speaks on Care of Children," January 26, 1909: 10; Katharine Lenroot, "Needs of Nation's Children Are Weighed in Washington," *New York Times*, January 14, 1940: D9; Donald Dukelow, "The Midcentury White House Conference Comes Home," *Today's Health*, March 1951: 23.

<sup>2</sup> United States Children's Bureau, *The Story of the White House Conferences on Children and Youth*. (Washington, D.C.: United States Children's Bureau, 1967), 6.

in the Department of Labor from its founding in 1912 through 1946, when it became part of the Social Security Administration. The Bureau's leadership, especially Chief Katherine Lenroot and Associate Chief Martha Eliot, had been involved in shaping child welfare policies in the Social Security Act of 1935, and carried into the postwar era the reform impulse of the New Deal.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the intellectual fervor and agitation for increased action around the conference can be seen as a way station for liberals who sought to examine and expand the role of the federal government in the lives of citizens between the New Deal and the Great Society.<sup>4</sup> The conference provided an opportunity for those in government who sought to intervene in American childhood to gather advice and knowledge from experts.

Behind the programmatic recommendations of the conference lay a debate over the maturation processes of American children. The conference brought together participants from a variety of disciplines and professions, including sociology, anthropology, psychology, theology, government, the labor movement, and journalism. Each had their own take on the challenges facing youth. The conference was too large to

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<sup>3</sup> Dorothy E. Bradbury and Martha Eliot, *Four Decades of Action for Children* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Social Security Administration, U.S. Children's Bureau, 1956).

<sup>4</sup> The conference ultimately recommended an expanded liberal state via funding for education and social services, new public housing initiatives, FCC regulation of media to reserve broadcast channels for educational purposes, economic support for the families of members of the armed forces, and adaptation of the recommendations of the President's Commission on Civil Rights and desegregating the schools. State and local governments would be responsible for implementing many of these initiatives by ensuring that schools and social services were responsive to specific needs of the population. Relevant state agencies would increase coordination with non-governmental social service organizations, general educational standards for those working in child-related fields would be developed and enforced. These recommendations called for an expansion of government bureaucracy, but they also called for a strengthened apparatus to inform and educate that bureaucracy.

resolve these sometimes-conflicting ideas; rather, it collected, digested, and ultimately disseminated them to the nation. If a consensus was reached, it was that the ultimate focus of governmental youth policy should be the experience of the individual child. Families, communities, schools, and employment were, of course, important in their own ways. But the ultimate arbiter of the outcome was the individual, and through treatment of the child's psyche along with the bolstering of the apparatuses that nurtured him or her, positive outcomes -- "healthy personalities" -- would become more likely. Psychology and psychiatry were the most influential fields in materials that were produced around the conference.

In order to articulate the "ideal childhood," the conference organizers employed an interdisciplinary approach that focused on the "whole child." The core question of the conference was: "how we can develop in children the mental, emotional, and spiritual qualities essential to individual happiness and to responsible citizenship, and what physical, economic, and social conditions are deemed necessary to this development." The shorter version was, "how can we develop healthy personalities in children?"

Ultimately, in a kind of circular logic, the conference argued that the "healthy personality" it sought to nurture in the nation's young was a peculiarly American idea "in which individual happiness and responsible citizenship are combined."<sup>5</sup> A sense of national character and exceptionalism infused the proceedings, seeping into various discussions through references to the American dream and a resilient "American

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<sup>5</sup> Ruth Kotinsky and Helen Witmer, *Personality in the Making: The Fact Finding Report of the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1952), xviii.

personality” type upon which the nation’s strength was built. The “healthy personality” was well adjusted, civically engaged, and productive.

Consideration of “personality” was hardly new. Exploration of personality development had been at the core of the expanding field of psychology during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the word’s meaning has always been related to broader social changes. Historian Warren Susman has explored how “personality” supplanted “character” in the early years of the century as an encapsulating description of the predominant “vision of the self” in American culture and society. The increasing importance of “personality” flowed from the gradual emergence of the mass society and the crowds that came to participate in it. No longer was a vision of the self as relating to society in a morally upright and honorable way a sufficient measure of the individual. In a crowd, one needed to differentiate oneself in order to be noticed. According to Susman, a culture that valued personality held that “to be somebody one must be oneself (whatever that means).”<sup>6</sup>

How, then, did one become “oneself”? Psychologists understood personality as formed through both internal and external forces, and participants in the conference explored these processes as they existed in American society in order to interrogate which were working and which needed improvement. Still, in much of the material circulated, internal processes of personality and identity formation were much more deeply investigated than were external, social influences, such as ethnic and racial prejudice or integration. Developmental psychology carried significantly more weight than social psychology. Further, though Susman and others have convincingly

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<sup>6</sup> Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 271-285.

demarcated a lasting differentiation between “personality” and “character,” participants in the conference felt that bringing both “visions of the self” into alignment was the key to the development of a “healthy personality.”<sup>7</sup>

Sigmund Freud’s theory of psychosexual development shaped understandings of personality development during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the years following World War II, psychologists, led by Erik Erikson, sought to build on Freud’s work and move the focus beyond a narrow sense of the individual towards at least the immediate social influences on psychological development. Erikson’s work on personality development provided the intellectual scaffolding for the conference, and helped participants break down and examine the processes by which personality was developed.

Erikson’s seminal work *Childhood and Society* was published in 1950. Trained as a psychoanalyst, he conducted anthropological studies of children from a variety of backgrounds—Afro-American, Native American, German, Euro-American, Jewish—and arrived at universal conclusions about the process of identity formation.<sup>8</sup> A healthy personality depended upon the solution of a central problem or conflict in each stage of development. Newborns needed to trust their parents, toddlers needed to develop a sense of autonomy, followed by a sense of initiative. The next stage, stretching into the onset of adolescence, involved the development of a sense of duty and accomplishment, also described as a “sense of industry.” In adolescence, the prevailing conflict came out of the development of a sense of identity, as “the adolescent seeks to clarify who he is and what his role in society is to be.” In language that drew from G. Stanley Hall’s

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<sup>7</sup> See also Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 232-235.

<sup>8</sup> Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1950), 12.

recapitulationism, the failure to achieve this sense of identity was dangerous because it “is the individual’s only safeguard against the lawlessness of his biological drives and the autocracy of his overweening conscience.”<sup>9</sup> The initial stages--in which trust, autonomy, and initiative were formed—were the most central to the development of a healthy personality. The success or failure of the process, however, was ultimately revealed in adolescence. Adolescence itself was understood as a period of self-diffusion, a liminal state when a person was neither child nor adult. A child with the proper foundations for a “healthy personality” would be better able than one whose personality was malformed to navigate the dangers of adolescence and fully realize an adult identity without falling prey to the “lawlessness” organic to the moment.

Erikson’s work influenced all areas of the conference, including the publications that followed it. *A Healthy Personality For Your Child* arrived in 1952 and, according to the Children’s Bureau, nearly one million copies were distributed over the subsequent decade.<sup>10</sup> Written by educator James Hymes, it integrated recent work by Erikson and Dr. Benjamin Spock, whose parental guidebook *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* had been published in 1946. Spock was a vice chairman of the conference and an influential participant. The popularity of his book, which sold 750,000 copies in the first six months after it was released, was evidence of the anxiety that mothers felt about raising their children in the postwar world. Spock advised parents to trust their

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<sup>9</sup> The impact on the conference of Erikson’s thinking is distilled through Ruth Kotinsky and Helen L. Witmer, *Personality in the Making*, 19-22. Also Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, (New York: Norton, 1950) and “Growth and Crises of the ‘Healthy Personality’,” in *Problems of Infancy and Childhood*, (New York: Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation, 1949).

<sup>10</sup> United States Children's Bureau, *The Story of the White House Conferences on Children and Youth*. (Washington, D.C.: United States Children's Bureau, 1967), 22.

instincts, and he suggested that raising a child should be relatively easy and relaxed. While responding mostly to the problems caused by excessive anxiety, Spock's advice also frustrated those parents who in fact didn't find childrearing easy, and in many cases undermined the very confidence of mothers which he argued was so central to their ability to effectively nurture their offspring.<sup>11</sup> *A Healthy Personality for Your Child* combined Spock's emphasis on nurturing with Erikson's focus on the stages of identity development, and sought to "spread far and wide the basic tenets of mental hygiene and good child care without burdening parents with a sense of anxiety and guilt."<sup>12</sup>

*A Healthy Personality for Your Child* provided an informational cheerleading that pitched the notion of a "healthy personality" as the most attainable element of the "American dream." The pamphlet walked parents through each stage of identity development, focusing on a series of "growth essentials" that corresponded to the conflicts Erikson had identified in each stage of maturation. Adolescence was described as an especially delicate time, when a child seeks to reconcile physical changes with an impending increase in responsibility. "You will need good footwork and kid gloves here," the pamphlet advised. "You will need patience and confidence." An individual "whose very early life did not let him develop a strong sense of being an independent person" will have a difficult time forming an identity in adolescence. "Such a youngster may rebel more strongly" than the average adolescent, who all rebel at least a little bit. With sufficient parental responsiveness and touch, the pamphlet says, the youth could

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<sup>11</sup> Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2004), 280-281. See also Julia Grant, *Raising Baby By The Book: The Education of American Mothers* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Kathryn Close, "Youth in Today's World: Conference Report," *The Survey*, January 1951: 19.

move gradually to the second phase of adolescence, where he shared his strongly formed identity with others, engaged the realm of ideas, and became part of a broader community.<sup>13</sup>

Personality development, in this presentation, occurred primarily within the home and in relationships with parents through adolescence, when a broader socialization became more important. The pamphlet was only one element of the conference's efforts to strengthen American parenting, to increase in parents "feelings of satisfaction and self-confidence in their ability for child-rearing." Other ideas included increased attention to training future parents through general public education at the high school level. By exposing adolescents to "broad preparation in the knowledge of human growth, behavior, and motivation," the conference hoped it would create a better next generation of parents.<sup>14</sup>

*A Healthy Personality for Your Child* also embodied an instinct prevalent at the conference to construct and normalize a unified understanding of personality development. Both Erikson and Spock sought, through popularizing their research, to explain youth to parents. Yet each also focused primarily on individuals-- either the youngster who needed to solve a conflict to move to the next stage of identity formation, or the mother who was responsible for creating the conditions under which her offspring could mature. These were important elements in understanding personality formation, to be sure, but they were packaged and promoted in *A Healthy Personality for Your Child* in

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<sup>13</sup> James Hymes, *A Healthy Personality for Your Child*, (Washington, D.C.; Federal Security Agency, Social Security Administration, U.S. Children's Bureau, Publication No. 337, 1952).

<sup>14</sup> Edward A. Richards, *Proceedings of the Midcentury White House Conference* (Raleigh, N.C.: Health Publications Institute, Inc., 1951), 30-31.

a way that ultimately neglected other important influences on the processes of maturation and child rearing.

Influences outside of the home *were* given significant attention at the conference, but always in the context of their respective impact on personality development. While parents were certainly understood as central to the development of each child's personality, schools were the only location where the state could directly access youth, and thus were extensively considered. Conference organizers argued that schools "must assume the primary responsibility for the healthy development of the whole personality of each child for personal fulfillment and for effective participation in democratic life. They must also carry much of the responsibility for training youth and adults to appreciate and preserve those freedoms and opportunities inherent in a democratic society."<sup>15</sup> This description married the goals of progressive education, which explored the evolving relationship between democracy and education, with the mental hygiene movement, which sought to increase the role of psychiatry and social work in educational processes, and emphasized individual adjustment over other elements of the maturation process.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 175

<sup>16</sup> Progressive education valued pluralism and "child-centered" learning. John Dewey was at the center of the movement. His work emphasized the experiential value of learning, the immediacy of the environment in which learning is done, a sensitivity to natural impulses, and the persistent moral value of knowledge. He believed these elements should be integrated into instruction through experimentation in the classroom, and that experiments that worked then should inform curriculum development. Progressive education, taken broadly, was more a field of inquiry than a specific approach to restructuring the classroom. The field encompassed debates over methods to best integrate knowledge and strategies for moral growth into instruction, and proposed myriad responses to the challenges of education in a rapidly changing and increasingly diverse and complex society. Its impact flowed mostly through the thousands of educators influenced by or taught directly by Dewey and others, although its curricular

The mental hygiene movement originated in 1909 out of a collaboration between a group of social workers, physicians, and psychiatrists who formed the National Committee for Mental Hygiene. Initially the group focused on mental illness, which it viewed as a personality disorder, but by the late 1920s they were seeking to address maladjustment of any sort. Members of the organization published pieces in *The Survey*, the national journal of social work, and established ties with the National Education Association. After 1930, the mental hygiene movement absorbed the moralist/democratic analysis of Progressive education and combined it with the growing influence of psychiatry and an expanding emphasis on mental health in the schools. “Personality development” was itself one of the buzzwords of the movement, and that the term was pronounced as the Midcentury White House Conference’s theme was a victory for mental hygienists.<sup>17</sup>

According to historian of education Sol Cohen, “personality development” clustered together the following assumptions: “personality maladjustments are the cause of individual mental disorder and social problems of all sorts; childhood is the critical period in the development of personality; children are extremely vulnerable to personality disorders; the school is the strategic agency to prevent, or detect and ‘adjust’ problems in

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implications have always been difficult to trace. Implementation of Progressive ideals tended to happen on a small, local scale, as state curricula were incredibly slow to change. The slow responsiveness of schools to the concerns of increasingly invested communities would be a significant conflict in the relationship between the state and citizens over the next two decades, particularly after *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and the expansion of community action programs after 1960. See John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: McMillan, 1916) and Roger Soder, ed., *Democracy, Education, and the Schools* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996).

<sup>17</sup> See Sol Cohen, “The Mental Hygiene Movement, the Development of Personality and the School: The Medicalization of American Education,” *History of Education Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (Summer 1983): 123-149.

children's personality development; and, finally, the personality development of children must take priority over any other educational objective."<sup>18</sup>

The mental hygiene movement thus envisioned the school as a potential corrective to the causes of unhealthy personalities, and its adherents influenced the conference by theorizing extensively on the relationship between healthy personalities and a functioning and improving democracy. In *Personality in the Making*, the fact finding report produced for the conference, the discussion of mental hygiene argued that, "in this culture, democracy and healthy personality development go hand in hand, democracy providing by definition the most favorable conditions for wholesome living, and in turn requiring well-developed personalities for its proper functioning. In as far as the school can select and choose among the cultural influences it brings to bear upon the child, it therefore filters out, as far as possible, those contradictory to the democratic tradition, just as it attempts to filter out all other influences deleterious to health and wholesomeness."<sup>19</sup> School, then, was a location where the state could defend the child from the messy elements of democracy while also creating the conditions for a common maturation process. The end result was the key element of an ideal American: a healthy personality.

The influence of mental hygiene was reflected in the conference's conclusions that "curriculum" should mean more than just "course of study," and should focus on the "sum total of the pupil's experience in the school." Recommendations made by the

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<sup>18</sup> Cohen, "The Mental Hygiene Movement, the Development of Personality and the School: The Medicalization of American Education," *History of Education Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (Summer 1983): 124.

<sup>19</sup> Kotinsky and Witmer, *Personality in the Making* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1952), 230-231.

conference on improvements to schools had less to do with academic pursuits and more to do with creating a more robust institution devoted as much, if not more, to molding the child's psyche as to developing his intellect. Beyond imparting rudimentary academic skills, schools should become sites for building good behavior, and modifying bad. Since unhealthy personalities could be the product of a number of factors, schools needed a variety of flexible tools for engaging and molding children. These included increased qualitative analysis of students' work, the greater involvement of doctors and nurses in the everyday functioning of schools, a larger role for guidance counselors, and an improvement in home-school communication that encouraged school workers to perform home visits.<sup>20</sup>

Embedding social and health services in schools was an effort to engage and treat the "whole child," but it also was a step in "rationalizing" the maturation process of America's children. The goal was to gather all services children could potentially need in the place where they most regularly were present: the school. A child's social worker could work with his teacher and psychologist to develop a learning program catered to his specific needs, taking into account his situation at home. This was not necessarily a bad thing: there were children who needed mental health services, and a public education system that allowed support for those students was undoubtedly helpful. But the broad strokes of the mental hygiene movement's arguments about education, which assumed that the vast majority of young American pupils *needed* mental health services, implied that the state could achieve social control of its young through psychological treatment.

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 258-272.

A previous generation of reformers had been drawn to eugenics as a solution to democracy's messiness: ethnic and racial diversity caused social problems, and one answer was to use science to minimize such chaos. Mental hygienists favored a different medical approach—psychotherapy--in an attempt to treat youth problems before they became destructive. Frederic Wertham was also a mental hygienist, and his crusade against comic books, which peaked in the years around the conference, jibed with the goals of the proponents of psychological and psychiatric counseling in the schools. Wertham favored consciousness-raising that “protected” youth psyches from nefarious influence. The educational analysis of the mental hygiene movement favored medical solutions to problems that could be psychological, social, or both in origin. The mental hygienists focused ultimately on personality development, and gave little attention to the broader, structural forces that played such a large role in determining the forces on individual lives.<sup>21</sup> A school-based treatment system implied that the challenges to personality development could effectively be adjusted through therapy.

At least one participant at the conference offered an analysis that looked more critically at the relationship between personality development and American society. By far the most important publication to come out of the conference was Kenneth Clark's “The Effects of Prejudice and Discrimination,” which formed the sixth chapter in

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<sup>21</sup> Sol Cohen argues that the conference was the triumphant moment in the process to “medicalize” American education. At the same time, historians of progressive education hold that its influence was in sharp decline by the 1950s. These are not necessarily contradictory positions. Cohen describes the mental hygiene movement of the postwar period as an updated version of the eugenics movement of the 1920s, itself an attempt at social engineering. Sol Cohen, “The Mental Hygiene Movement, the Development of Personality and the School: The Medicalization of American Education,” 123-149.

*Personality in the Making*.<sup>22</sup> Both the chapter and the volume in which it appeared would be famously cited in footnote eleven of the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Clark's contributions suggested that any approach to defining and designing treatment for the problems of America's young must look broadly at the contexts in which they matured.

Clark was a social psychology Ph.D. from Columbia University teaching at City College who, with his wife Mamie Phipps Clark (after her husband, Columbia's second black psychology Ph.D.), had founded the Northside Center for Child Development in Harlem in 1946. Northside was a social service center for the children of Harlem and upper-Manhattan, serving mostly, but not entirely, African-American families. In Clark's words, there was nowhere that "the average family could inexpensively and comfortably seek the guidance of a qualified staff. The opening of this center was the answer to a community need in the solution of mental hygiene problems." Clark was influenced by the mental hygiene movement, as is evident by the language with which he talked about his work, as well as his attention to treating the "whole child." At the same time, his particular interest and expertise were in the area of prejudice and discrimination, influences external to the individual. At Howard University, he had been a student of Ralph Bunche and a research assistant on Gunnar Myrdal's famous study of American race relations, *An American Dilemma*.<sup>23</sup> His research explored the psychological impact

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<sup>22</sup> Noted in John P. Jackson, *Social Scientists for Social Justice: Making the Case Against Segregation* (New York: NYU Press, 2001), 254.

<sup>23</sup> "To Meet a Community Need: Northside Testing and Consultation Center," brochure, quoted in Gerald Markowitz and David Rosner, *Children, Race, and Power: Kenneth and Mamie Clark's Northside Center* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 21. Also see pp. 26-32.

of racism on both victims and perpetrators, and provided a powerful argument against segregation.

Clark became well known after *Brown v. Board of Education*, a result of the citation of his work in the decision and his testimony for the NAACP's Legal Defense and Education Fund in *Briggs v. Elliot*, a South Carolina anti-segregation case that eventually was combined with *Brown v. Board of Education* on its way to the Supreme Court.<sup>24</sup> Clark's work with his wife throughout the 1940s led to his involvement in the White House Conference and subsequent drafting as a material witness by the NAACP. The Clarks famously studied the effect of racial prejudice in a series of experiments where young children were given dolls of varying colors, and asked questions aimed at uncovering racial awareness and its impact on self-esteem.

The experiments formed the basis of the brief that first appeared as the chapter on "The Effect of Prejudice and Discrimination" in *Personality in the Making*. Clark acknowledged the range of factors that influenced the making of a damaged personality, and argued that rarely, if ever, were prejudice and discrimination the sole cause: "such matters as the emotional balance and good sense of the individual's parents, the character of his physical and intellectual make-up, the part of the country he lives in, the opportunities of his neighborhood and community will determine to some extent whether, in what way, and to what degree he is affected by prejudicial and discriminatory practices." He noted the impact prejudice and discrimination had on the early stages of development. Development of trust was impaired both by parents' own "fragile" sense of trust, and if it was developed, its maintenance was challenged time and again by a hostile

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<sup>24</sup> John P. Jackson, *Social Scientists for Social Justice: Making the Case Against Segregation* (New York: NYU Press, 2001), 109-112.

environment. Initiative was curbed by external circumstances, and even when present, “it is not long before they learn that they belong to a looked-down-upon or despised group and that they should be wary in what they attempt.” Many minority children came from homes that didn’t value intellectual achievement, and were thus unprepared for the challenges of education. Even those that did were at risk of stunted development, because they “may find success at this level so satisfying that they do not push on sufficiently to deal with the problems of later developmental periods.”<sup>25</sup>

Clark, like others at the conference, pointed to adolescence as a stage in personality development where issues from earlier stages came to a head: they were either resolved in the attainment of identity (and a healthy personality) or dissolved into crisis. Challenges for the discriminated-against child in this stage included the “dominant group’s own insecurities, which so often take the form of a cliquish antagonism,” the likely lack of a solid “tradition” and security in family life amongst minority groups, and the absence of “portrayals in magazines, movies, radio, and other sources of information to suggest to these youths that they and their group are persons of worth.” Clark noted that internal conflict among minority group children was inevitable, though the “particular way in which any one child deals with this problem depends, in a rather complex and intricate fashion, upon many unrelated factors,” including quality of family, social and economic class, intelligence, and personality structure. The likely impact on personality of such situations is a defensiveness and hypersensitivity that can underlie a range of behaviors: “they exhibit a generalized pattern of personality difficulties that

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<sup>25</sup> While Clark was acknowledged as a contributor, his (and that of others) specific contribution was unspecified in the original collection that came out of the conference. Kotinsky and Witmer, *Personality in the Making*, 136-138.

seems to be associated with the humiliations to which they are subjected. Not that all of them are obviously emotionally maladjusted. The majority pulls through somehow or other, but with what burden of resentment and bitterness few know.”<sup>26</sup>

The tone of Clark’s writing stood in contrast to the abstract idealism that characterized much of the rhetoric that came out of the conference. He acknowledged his conclusions were “gloomy,” and over the rest of his career developed a reputation for being averse to optimism in matters pertaining to racism.<sup>27</sup> He was a realist, combining scientific detachment with a passionate belief that much more work needed to be done to challenge racial prejudice and discrimination in American society.

In his paper for the conference, he reviewed the existing research on the effect of prejudice and discrimination on personality development, and found it extremely thin, though what did exist supported his conclusions. He compared research on anti-Semitism and anti-black racism in an attempt to find how skin-color impacted the style of discrimination and its psychological impact on the victim. In an argument that would be significant in his testimony in the *Brown* case, Clark also explored the negative impact of prejudice and discrimination on those who practiced it. Citing studies of the Holocaust, including *The Authoritarian Personality*, recently published by Theodore Adorno and his colleagues at the University of California, as well as the political psychology of Erik Fromm, Clark argued that acts of discrimination were expressions of personality disturbances by the perpetrators that tended only to reinforce that individual’s emotional maladjustment. As such, “the attitudes of these individuals toward members of minority

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137. Also see Markowitz and Rosner, *Children, Race, and Power: Kenneth and Mamie Clark’s Northside Center*, ix-x.

groups are only an exaggerated reflection of attitudes that are prevalent in the society. If we are to combat prejudice, then, we must take our stand on moral and realistic grounds. These prejudices inhibit social progress, defined in humanistic terms; they are a manifestation of men's more primitive propensities to debase and harm his fellow human beings; they seem in a complex way to be related to the maintenance of destructive social tensions and conflicts and drain energy away from the task of constructive solution to many and vast social problems; and they distort, constrict, humiliate, and, in extreme cases, destroy the personalities of the victims.'<sup>28</sup>

Clark's humanism strained against the dominant focus at the conference upon the individual personality. For him, it was not nearly enough to help the individual child find psychological treatment. American society needed to be made more aware of the moral, psychological, and social costs of racial and ethnic discrimination, not just for the victims, but also for the perpetrators and for the overall well being of the nation. In order to combat discrimination and prejudice, Clark felt work was needed on both the personal and the social level by treating both individual psychological development and challenging discriminatory social mores.

Clark's arguments about the causes and impacts of prejudice and discrimination contrasted his work from many of the other ideas at the conference. Much of the other writing and thinking on personality development focused on the individual and his or her capability to cope with challenges, resolve conflicts, and progress through the stages of identity formation. The exact nature of relevant external challenges was rarely identified;

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<sup>28</sup> Kotinsky and Witmer, *Personality in the Making*, 147-153.

rather, the focus was put on the individual as the ultimate arbiter of outcomes. It was more important to defend the child than to attack the pressures of social circumstance.

More than any other individual's contribution to the conference, Clark's work separated and explored in-depth a particular challenge beyond the individual psyche. This perspective was a function of his training as a social rather than as a developmental psychologist, and also his experience as an African-American. "In a basic and inescapable sense, the problem of prejudices is not only a problem of individuals but also of society," he wrote. "The problem of reducing prejudice and eliminating discrimination must be approached on a societal basis if it is to be dealt with successfully." Clark's recommendations supported the broader mission of the conference to bolster national services to youth. Yet, Clark found "a startling lack of an over-all coordinating program or systematic integrating policy governing the activities of the nearly four hundred agencies working on essentially the same problem." There was no relationship between the development of knowledge on the prejudice and discrimination and the development of programs to address the problem. Clark also felt that most programs operated with a simplistic conception of an overwhelmingly complicated issue and that, due to the desire to procure funding assistance, they tended to "veer toward the dramatic or more popular areas of activity."<sup>29</sup> Such approaches distracted policymakers from grasping the solution to prejudice and discrimination needed to focus on more than just the individual's psyche.

Clark's emphasis on the diverse range of experiences in American youth was ahead of its time. Most contributors were more focused on finding the common bonds of American childhood for the purpose of creating a unified system to ensure healthy

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 157-158.

maturation. Participants repeatedly referenced the idea of an “American personality,” which was visible through socio-cultural traits: through the types of relationships that developed within families, through the assumptions that informed child-rearing practices, and through the ways youth presented themselves to the outside world when they left home. Like the popular reporting on adolescence in circulation at the same time, the discourse around the “American personality” and the “ideal childhood” produced a typology that sought to simplify the experiences of childhood by sorting them.

Problems among minority children in adolescence were ascribed through a psychological lens to the tension that existed between their particular upbringings and the broader American culture. This tension accentuated feelings of insecurity and doubt already present in adolescence, and only added to brewing personality crises. While much was understood about helping children whose early personality development had been impaired in one way or another, “helping adolescents who grew up in cultures that are not as common” was less well understood, and often simply misunderstood. The language used to discuss this difference in *Personality in the Making* harkened back to Progressive-era tones of benevolent criticism that located the explanation of the problems faced by minority children in their upbringing, not in the deficiencies in American society. Non-white children were actually described as being “privileged in having had a childhood in which there was little inhibition of sensual and active pleasures and in which development proceeded by easy, unself-conscious stages” but ultimately, upon entering school and commencing socialization into the American community, their development left them fragile, susceptible to damage “if their parents lose trust in themselves or their teachers apply sudden correctives or if they themselves reject their past and try to act like

the others. The new role of middle-class adolescent is often too hard to play. Delinquency or bizarre behavior marks the failure.”<sup>30</sup>

The argument here shows both the influence of Kenneth Clark’s contribution to the conference (at least other participants were trying to talk about ethnicity), and the power of assumptions about “type.” Children from minority groups did have additional pressures and conflicts in their personality development, and the participants in the conference readily acknowledged this. At the same time, most analyses (other than Clark’s) implied that those tensions evolved from *within* the minority culture as much if not more than out of the relationship between minorities and the broader society. References to “inhibition of sensual and active pleasures” and “unself-conscious” development echoed historical dismissals of African-American culture as primitive and underdeveloped. Coupling “delinquency” with “bizarre behavior” suggested that there were only exotic explanations for the misbehavior of minority youth.

With the exception of Clark’s contribution, and despite the forceful recommendations of integration and the stated support for the recommendations of the President’s Commission on Civil Rights, little of the work around the conference integrated a sophisticated understanding of prejudice and discrimination with theories of psychological development. The disjunction was emblematic of a postwar liberalism struggling for firm footing from which to address the broad, systemic implications of American racism. Discussions of minorities, however sympathetic, were the flipside of the construction of a normative “American personality.” In popular reporting, the juvenile delinquent became the inverse of the “ideal adolescent.” In the discourse of

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22.

social scientists at the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth, minority children were mostly marked by their difficulty in developing the “American personality.”

The notion of an “American personality” was approached uncritically at the conference. Contributors to *Personality in the Making* and *The Proceedings of the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth* make references to the “promise of American life,” or to how Americans have come “to consider certain personality traits admirable,” or to the American “cultural stress on self-sufficiency and on individualism.”<sup>31</sup>

The “American personality” was especially visible in *Personality in the Making* in discussions on “The Prevailing Type of Family.” When the optic panned beyond individual behavior, the prejudices prevalent in the conference’s approach to the intersection of ethnicity, class, and childhood became more overt. The “peculiarly American” two-generation family had a husband, wife, and minor children. Extended family was kept at bay when major decisions were made, nurturing a certain feeling of freedom and independence among children. This family structure, a byproduct of the American occupational system, was tied to other “values that are culturally prized,” and prioritized the development of the individual. “Freedom of choice, freedom from emotional ties, limited responsibility for family members but much self-responsibility, pride in initiative and achievement, ability to cooperate with one’s peers.... Children are

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 165-173.

expected to take joy in their own accomplishments and to become self-reliant as soon as possible.”<sup>32</sup>

Two “divergent” types of families were noted: the northern and southern “aristocracies” for whom historical family ties were of paramount importance to personality development, and the “family that is culturally outside the mainstream—the family of Mexicans, the Spanish Americans, the Indians, the rural Southern Negro and the mountain white, of the Chinese and other Orientals who maintain their old values and customs, of certain Southern and East European nationalities. This type—in spite of great differences within it—has in common the fact that the whole orientation of the culture of which it is a part is different from the predominant American.”<sup>33</sup> Non-white, non-middle class residents of the nation were thus defined and understood primarily through their distance from the “peculiarly” American norms outlined above, and through the insufficiently individualistic offspring they produced.

In *Personality in the Making*, the only “divergent” type of family to receive extended attention was, curiously, the Greek-American family, presented via stereotyping that emphasized its departure from the norm. Greek families “value honor and love above all else.” Work was “life for the Greek,” and “diligence is a personal quality, warmly admired.” The Greek, “on principle, should want little,” lives well within his income, and “does not regard the present as a means to future enjoyment.” Greek-Americans are family centered, and family was broadened by marriage; “thus extended, the family becomes the center of a Greek’s loyalty,” with its particular relationships, gender roles, emphases on work, and style of engagement with the world. Like other

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 183-184.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

immigrant groups, “the fact that the character traits thus encouraged are considerably different from those that are ‘American’ may create few difficulties for the children and youth so long as they live largely within that community, in worship, work, and play.... What happens to children from Greek-American families—or from other families that diverge greatly from the ‘American’ model—who move out of their cultural orbit and try to follow ‘American’ patterns is not clear. Presumably, they do so with considerable emotional struggle.” The extent to which the “American pattern” was flexible and willing to absorb difference was also unclear, and detailed study on the point was called for. Tensions within Greek-American families almost always derived from the disconnections between the cultures inside and outside the home.<sup>34</sup>

The example of the Greek-American family was meant to extend to other “divergent” types, and also to serve as a counterpoint to the problems of the “prevailing” type of American family.<sup>35</sup> Families of the prevailing type were not without problems of their own, which often revolved around women who felt their work and contributions were underappreciated, anxiety among family members about prestige, and an overemphasis on independence and self-sufficiency that stymied emotional development among the very young. Solutions recommended at the conference included improving emotional communication between generations, especially fostering openness between parents and children, as well as more education for parents as to what their role should be, and how they could best nurture their children. Ultimately, given gender roles in this

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 185-209.

<sup>35</sup> The text does not offer a justification for why Greek-American families are given such significant attention; but it is safe to assume that the un-cited researcher who had contributed the chapter on families had studied Greek-Americans. Clark’s work wasn’t attributed directly to him in the text either, though credit for his contributions appeared elsewhere.

family, mothers were seen as responsible for finding the balance between tender nurturing and more demanding rearing.<sup>36</sup> A more robust social-service apparatus could aid the child in specific aspects of his or her life, but the family, and particularly the mother (since the father was presumably at work), was the only institution that could reasonably be required to accept full responsibility for the child.

Such a binary construction of the types of families in which American youth were raised reflected a mere scratching at the surface of American diversity, and reinforce the conclusion that few adults were able to truly understand the multifarious influences on the lives of the nation's young. The simplistic and narrow construction of difference concluded that families of the "non-prevailing type" were much less likely to produce children possessing the character traits of individualism and self-reliance Americans valued, and therefore less likely to develop the healthy personalities that were so dependent upon those traits.

The conference struggled for a tone with which to address "divergent" types. At times, minority groups were conflated into one "type" whose members' problems resulted from its cultural distance from the assumed middle-class norm. Cultural differences within this type were acknowledged, but those differences were secondary to the insider-outsider conflicts that so impacted personality development. Solutions for these families required them to first become more "American" by adapting the behavior of the prevailing family type. Only when their problems aligned with those of the "prevailing group" could institutions effectively address them. Given these frustrations, its no wonder why the curricular solutions favored by the mental hygiene movement were

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<sup>36</sup> Much of this analysis comes from a psychoanalytic subgenre on "Momism" popular in this moment. Erik Erikson engages it lengthily in *Childhood and Society*, 247-283.

embraced at the conference: they offered a plan to turn schools into normalizing treatment centers.

Ultimately, the conference publications reflected the discomfort or uncertainty many participants possessed when dealing with ethnic and racial difference. A functional nationalism filtered through the work of the conference that was a byproduct of a vague goal to create a unified structure that could build American strength by efficiently turning children into healthy adults. Attempts to construct a “prevailing” type fit within this goal by providing a baseline of problems any child living in the United States could reasonably be assumed to have. The white, middle-class nuclear family was the most accessible model. Only Clark’s contributions to the conference broached the difficult question of how outsiders might be brought “inside,” or how their presence might complicate processes of institutional engagement with youth. Other contributions tended only to note “more work needed to be done” on the variety of approaches necessary to deal effectively with the problems of youths across the range of American “types.”

It is telling that the most expansive discussion of ethnicity actually fell into the section of *Personality in the Making* on “Services of Law-Enforcement Agencies.” Even then, ethnicity was folded into a discussion that identified social class as the most significant predictor of future delinquency. The distance of the home life of adolescents from American norms was central to the effort to predict and address delinquency. Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck had spent two decades studying juvenile criminality and published *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency* in 1950. Though they were not directly involved with the conference, their work was prominent among sociologists and criminologists, and was cited and debated in *Personality in the Making*.

The Gluecks felt that delinquency could be explained by the psychological implications of familial relationships. Their model fit well within the focus of the conference on the processes of personality development and the importance placed upon family. They believed that “tendencies toward uninhibited energy-expression are deeply anchored in soma and psyche and in the malformations of character during the first few years of life,” and that the delinquency this could lead to was much more likely to develop “in the exciting, stimulating, but little-controlled and culturally inconsistent environment of the underprivileged area” than in a middle-class zone. The instinct prevalent in the Glueck’s articulation of the causes of delinquency was to group youth who ran foul of society’s expectations, and to characterize them by their individual traits.<sup>37</sup>

The Gluecks ultimately intended their work to be used as a predictor of future delinquency, as a tool for targeting social services, and the New York City Youth Board eventually developed a project based upon their model.<sup>38</sup> But many participants in the conference felt that the Gluecks did not effectively explain why certain children became delinquents, and what exactly could be done to keep that from happening. The very process of grouping delinquent youth to identify how they were different from non-delinquents assumed from the start that they *were* fundamentally and functionally different. This approach supported the notion that delinquent behavior evolved primarily from within the individual, from how he – the Gluecks focused exclusively on boys --

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<sup>37</sup> Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency* (New York: Commonwealth Fund, 1950), 282.

<sup>38</sup> The New York City Youth Board used it particularly to help determine which geographic areas upon which to focus their attention; see Chapter 3 for more discussion on this topic.

internalized and processed the social factors around him. To deter the potential delinquent, work must be done on his mind.

The contributions of the University of Chicago anthropologist Allison Davis on the class basis of culture, the Harvard sociologist Talcott Parsons on “peer culture,” and Erik Erikson on the psychological impact of ethnic minority status problematized the Gluecks’ explanation of delinquency, and also foreshadowed some of the primary concerns of postwar youth policy. These contributors believed that the value systems of different social classes were fundamentally different from each other in terms of standards, goals, ideals, and behavior, and that this caused emotional deprivations in childhood to manifest as delinquency during adolescence. As peer-group influence became more important in adolescence, middle-class parents were better able than their lower-class counterparts to counteract the negative influences of a “youth culture” that varied in its content by class. Delinquency was a likely outcome for those lower-class children who were “culturally deprived” of “full participation in American life” and unable to fend off bad influences. Though they “have the capacity for sensual enjoyment that is greater than that of most Americans, and they are probably less anxious about the expression of aggressive impulses.... Some of them, culturally, have a love of beauty and find pleasure in nature and in music and ritual to a degree that is lacking among middle-class Americans. Their delinquencies arise largely out of their defiant refusal to accept second place in American life.” Options, particularly for lower-class minority adolescents, are to “band together in a zoot-suit manner and aggressively protect their

rights or withdraw into such strange and inaccessible moods that they appear to be schizophrenic.”<sup>39</sup>

This analysis of juvenile delinquency also sought answers from the psychoanalytical framework in which many contributors to the conference operated. At the same time, it hinted at why that particular approach to studying the challenges of personality development, especially during adolescence, was insufficient. These examinations of delinquents searched for some essence shared by every youth gone awry, and the “refusal to accept second place in American life” seemed like a good explanation. Prejudice was something for the discriminated against to overcome, and class and ethnicity were reduced to their proximity from the prevailing white American middle-class values necessary to counteract the negative influences bound to be visited upon the individual adolescent. The very reference to “zoot-suits” and dismissal of the moods of some minority adolescents as “strange and inaccessible” revealed both the frustrations and biases of the contributors to *Personality in the Making*.<sup>40</sup>

Davis, Parsons, and Erikson, like Clark, strained against the focus on the individual at the conference, invoking large, structural ideas like ethnicity, class, and race that weren’t easily addressed through therapy or counseling. More often than not, these influences were simply seen as one of many elusive challenges policy makers had to overcome in order to create a common set of conditions for youth personality

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<sup>39</sup> Kotinsky and Witmer, *Personality in the Making*, 410-414; Allison Davis, "Socio-Economic Influences upon Children's Learning," in Edward A. Richards, "Proceedings of the Midcentury White House Conference" (Raleigh: Health Publications Institute, Inc., 1951); on Allison Davis, see Michael R. Hillis, "Allison Davis and the Study of Race, Social Class, and Schooling," *The Journal of Negro Education* 64, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 33-41.

<sup>40</sup> Zoot-suits by 1950 were well-established in middle-class minds as the uniform for youth criminality.

development. Much youth policy in the coming decade would focus on shifting the target of analysis from the individual child to the context in which he or she was raised. At the 1950 White House Conference, only Kenneth Clark was able to clearly articulate how intimately tied to predominating social relations the problems of America's youth really were.

Though the 1950 event was much larger than the previous four White House Conferences on Children and Youth, it did not receive significant attention from the popular press. The *New York Times* published several articles covering both the national buildup and planning phase, and sent two reporters to return daily dispatches. The *New York Herald-Tribune* sent a reporter who filed summaries of the keynote addresses and detailed some working-groups. Several other newspapers failed to mention the conference in any significant detail.<sup>41</sup> Given the postwar interest in delinquency, it is odd that the largest national conference on youth was given scant attention by the daily press. Perhaps this was a function of the policy orientation of the conference, and the fact that it took as its focus not dramatic instances of youth misbehavior, but rather the less sensational process of maturation.

Major magazines also gave the event little attention. *Newsweek* offered a brief synopsis of Truman's keynote, a Kansas psychiatrist's critique of selective service, as well as the educator and actor Lymon Bryson's complaint against comic books, radio, and television: "The only noise that one does not hear in the living room today is the sound of the parental foot going down." The inclusion of Bryson's colorful quote about

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<sup>41</sup> These newspapers include the *Chicago Tribune*, the *New York Post*, and the *New York Daily News*, which mentioned the conference only in an editorial that took a shot at President Truman's "moral fiber." See *New York Daily News*, "Harry and that Moral Fiber," December 6, 1950: 37.

newly popular media rather than one of the more substantive discussions that had propelled the conference forward foreshadowed the attention youth-directed mass culture would receive in the coming years. The article was entitled “Breech-Loaders, 1950,” suggesting that the youth situation was like a gun, ready to burst.<sup>42</sup>

The policy-orientation of the conference did attract the attention of several trade and scholarly publications. These engaged a readership that was already familiar with the work of the conference, given the lengthy buildup and massive research mobilization over the previous year. As such, they tended to give highlights, focusing on youth involvement in the gathering (which was significantly greater than at previous conferences), on the range of issues discussed and conclusions reached in the working groups, and on progress made since the 1940 conference. The most significant advance, it was agreed both by conference participants and by those who covered the event, was an increased interest and attention paid to the mental and physical health of the child. Examples cited included mass “X-rays, mobile mental hygiene clinics, the introduction of sodium fluoride into drinking water to stave off tooth decay, the fortification of food with nutritional elements, and the provision of well-baby and nutrition clinics.”<sup>43</sup> Women

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<sup>42</sup> *Newsweek*, “Breech-Loaders, 1950,” December 18, 1950: 56-57.

<sup>43</sup> *The Survey*, “A Turning Point for Children,” February 1950: 86; Kathryn Close, “Everybody’s Business: The Young of the Nation,” *The Survey*, December 1950: 534-540; Kathryn Close, “Youth in Today’s World,” *Survey*, January 1951: 19; Marion Robinson, “What Bends the Twig?,” *The Survey*, January 1951: 27-33. Also see: Dorothy Barclay, “The Youth at Midcentury,” *The New York Times Magazine*, December 31, 1950: 9; Augusta Baker, “Mid-century White House Conference on Children and Youth,” *Library Journal*, January 1, 1951: 57; Clara Savage Littledale, “The White House Conference on Children and Youth,” *Parents Magazine*, January 1951: 24; “The White House Conference on Children and Youth,” *American Journal of Public Health*, January 1951: 1437; Dean W. Roberts, “Highlights of the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth,” *American Journal of Public Health*, January 1951: 96-99; M.D. Donald Dukelow, “The Midcentury White House Conference Comes

performed the majority of reporting on the conference. Though men dominated journalism, child services were generally felt to be the realm of women, and that extended to reporting on the matter.

The reach of the conference is perhaps best measured not by how it was covered, but by taking a brief look at the process by which the work around it was disseminated afterwards. *A Healthy Personality for Your Child* sold over one million copies, and dozens of chart books, digest materials, reports on state and local action, and progress reports were produced for the conference, copies of which soon ended up in libraries and state archives. A continuing committee, called the National Midcentury Committee for Children and Youth, Inc., was created by the Children's Bureau in May 1951. Leonard Mayo, a former president of the Child Welfare League and the director of the Association for the Aid of Crippled Children, who had been Vice-Chairman of the White House Conference, was elected chairman of the group. The committee made a consultant service available to state, local, and federal agencies carrying out the recommendations of the conference.<sup>44</sup>

Over the two years that the committee was active, it advised more than 450 organizations at the federal, state, and local level. In a report the committee published in 1952, it noted successful efforts to amplify the work of the conference by disseminating

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Home," *Today's Health*, March 1951: 23; Gertrude E. Chittenden, "The White House Conference, 1950," *Journal of Home Economics* 43, no. 2 (February 1951): 83-84; Helen B. Hatch, Winona Morgan, and Faith Fenton, "Research Implications of the White House Conference," *Journal of Home Economics* 43, no. 3 (March 1951): 208; Muriel W. Brown, "Laboratory for Social Action," *Journal of Home Economics* 43, no. 5 (May 1951): 345-347; and Ella Merrit, "White House Conference on Children and Youth, 1950," *Monthly Labor Review*, February 1951: 188-190.

<sup>44</sup> *New York Times*, "New Group Formed on Youth Welfare," May 30, 1951: 15; Dorothy Barclay, "Midcentury Group Maps Child Plans," *New York Times*, January 3, 1953: 12.

the formal “Conference Pledge” through newspapers, periodicals, in the programs for various conferences, in kits for workshops and study courses, in church and school bulletins, in framed displays in the offices of child advocacy agencies, and even, with the help of the National Dairy Council, accompanying morning milk deliveries on “Child Health Day.” Herbert Hoover had proclaimed the first national day focused on children’s health in 1929, and for the twenty-third consecutive year observance fell on May 1<sup>st</sup>. Though perhaps a coincidence, the contrast of such a celebration with the observance of May Day in the Soviet sphere of influence proclaimed that national concern about the health of the child was a fundamentally American pursuit.<sup>45</sup>

In 1952, the committee administered a survey of adolescents, asking what they felt were the most important issues facing youth. “Contrary to what the newspaper headlines suggest,” the survey found, “young people today are not preoccupied with narcotics and sex orgies. What are the real problems? The boys are worried because they don’t want to drift until drafted (many employers won’t hire potential draftees). The girls are worried because eligible boys are being drafted. Both sexes want congenial places where their crowd can meet.”<sup>46</sup> Also of concern was “finding a job.”<sup>47</sup>

The adolescents had internalized some, but not all, of the discourse present at the 1950 conference. The transition from World War II to the Cold War informed their perspectives, and both boys and girls were well aware of the profound sacrifices made by

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<sup>45</sup> National Midcentury Committee for Children and Youth, *Report on Children and Youth, 1950-1952* (Raleigh, NC: Health Publications, Inc., 1952).

<sup>46</sup> National Midcentury Committee on Children and Youth, Inc., "As Children Go, So Goes the Nation" (Washington, D.C.: National Midcentury Committee on Children and Youth, Inc., 1951).

<sup>47</sup> Dorothy Barclay, “Youth in Search of Right Job,” *New York Times Magazine*, December 14, 1952: 53.

those who had been just a few years older than them. The youths surveyed were anxious about their abilities to make lives for themselves in a world where the future seemed so uncertain. They felt their biggest challenge wasn't to develop healthy personalities, but rather to adjust to the priorities that the adult world offered as inheritance. Implicit in the responses of the youths surveyed was an argument that would become more prominent as the decade unfolded: the problems faced by American youths had been created by adults, not by youths themselves.

The Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth synthesized the thinking about adolescence that preceded it, and foreshadowed much of what would come. It was also emblematic of postwar liberalism in a number of ways. Building on the traditions of Progressivism, participants in the conference valued scientific inquiry and saw in government the power to influence positive change. President Truman used the conference to rearticulate the urgency of the fight against communism, and used American concern over childhood as ammunition in a larger battle. Children didn't just need to develop healthy personalities for their own good, he argued, but also so that they could contribute to a strong democracy that would, for the foreseeable future, face a determined enemy.

Truman's words reflected the broader sense at the conference that American democracy needed to be strengthened via investigations and interventions in the national apparatus for maturing children into adults. The theories in circulation at the conference implied, and at some moments explicitly stated, that this apparatus was not sufficient for addressing the problems of America's children. If there was a call for action that came out of the conference, it was for Americans to reexamine and bolster the architecture of

adolescence in a way that would be more likely to produce the kind of adults the nation needed going forward. The argument that that architecture was currently insufficient was implied.

Kenneth Clark's contributions made clear that the problems that accompanied racial, ethnic, and class diversity were in need of attention. Yet the overarching focus on psychological development limited deep discussion of the larger social issues facing the nation. Most of the recommendations offered at the conference to help children develop "healthy personalities" argued for treating the individual rather than promoting policy to address the broad contexts in which children were nurtured. Mental hygiene clinics in schools did not foreground the needs of the community, but rather were devoted the development of the individual. Of course, these are not mutually exclusive targets and both have their place. But the choice at the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth to prioritize the problems of the individual reflected a pervasive sense at the outset of the 1950s that American adolescents needed to be strengthened from within.

The wave of youth policy that emerged at the local level in the late 1940s sought to do just that.

### Chapter Three

#### **The New York City Youth Board and the Shaping of Local Youth Policy, 1947-1960**

New York was one of thirty-five states to establish a commission on youth after World War II in response to expanding public concerns about delinquency. The New York State Youth Commission's primary role was to provide financial and coordinating assistance to municipalities developing programs to prevent juvenile crime. This promised support — which came in the form of reimbursement for fifty percent of expenditures -- led Mayor William O'Dwyer, in 1947, to create the New York City Youth Board.

Local bureaus like the Youth Board were new developments in state efforts to address delinquency, and their role was to coordinate between public, private, and religious agencies to study existing and model new local programs for youths, and to supplement the actions of private agencies and the schools wherever needed. They were also important tools for state and local governments to show the public that they were actively addressing the juvenile delinquency problem so much reported about in the press. In order to be effective, the Youth Board needed to develop methods to assess the particular problems facing the city's youth, to apply resources in areas most in need of assistance, and to give the public evidence of its good works. The Youth Board also looked for ways to assess broader changes in adolescence to better situate and understand the causes and meanings of delinquency in New York City.<sup>1</sup> The activities of the Youth

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<sup>1</sup> Robert P. Capes, "Partnership in Youth," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 24, no. 1 (September 1950): 13-17; *Youth Board News*, "Youth Board Created," December 31, 1949: 1.

Board between its founding in 1947 and the early 1960s -- when it was supplanted at the vanguard of the local anti-delinquency movement in New York City by the federal government's investment in other organizations — give insight into the hopes, methods, achievements, and limitations of urban youth policy during this era.

Three related themes in the history of postwar New York thread through the first dozen years of the Youth Board's work: the social implications of demographic change in the city, the impact of rapid changes in both youth culture and mass culture, and the changing programmatic orientation of youth social services. For the Youth Board to be effective, it needed a strong sense both of the changing populations it served and the publics to whom it spoke. The shifting ethnic boundaries and dramatic demographic changes in the city during the 1950s created a moving target, and required the Youth Board to administer nimble, experimental programs that constantly reassessed the problems and needs of the city's young. Mastering mass "culture," both as a tool for the dissemination and debate of ideas and as a growing influence on youth identities, became an increasingly important element of the Board's work.

The history of the New York City Youth Board shows how the effort to reconstruct adolescence impacted youth policy. The two preceding chapters have explored how the popular press, social scientists, and federal bureaucrats struggled to articulate and comprehend changes in the experiences of adolescents, and focused on how sensationalist concerns mixed with earnest attempts to dissect and engage the maturation processes of young Americans. In New York City, the Youth Board – which employed or partnered with social workers, politicians, judges, business leaders, and

other individuals interested in the city's response to its youth — stood on the front lines, transforming understanding into action.

The Youth Board's changing program reveals much about the reconstruction of urban adolescence. Early Youth Board programs were influenced by the mental hygiene movement, and focused on individual adjustment and personality development. By the late 1950s, the Youth Board prioritized work in communities and with gangs and, in certain ways, laid the groundwork for the more radical social work that Mobilization For Youth would attempt. Ultimately, however, the Youth Board was a social service organization subject to pressures of city politics. To ensure its own survival and continued control over its programs, it learned to speak to multiple populations, including youth on street corners and their parents at home, educators, law enforcement, business and civic leaders, politicians, and social workers. By mastering this complex art, the Youth Board managed to project success and deflect criticism through the late 1950s, even as fears of juvenile delinquency persisted and, at certain moments, sharply deepened. While doing so, the organization established a set of basic services for youth in the city that other organizations would subsequently build upon, yet never went so far as to articulate or attempt to treat the deeper, structural causes of problematic youth behavior that would eventually be targeted by Mobilization For Youth after 1960.

The Youth Board was deeply influenced by the Chicago Area Project (CAP), the anti-juvenile delinquency program founded in 1934 and directed by sociologist Clifford Shaw. Shaw believed that the best way to challenge delinquency was to employ the community against it. The CAP “engaged local residents in reforming their own children

according to their own means.”<sup>2</sup> This approach appealed to the founders of the NYCYB who, while focused primarily on the lives of New York City’s young, also hoped to inspire a sense of neighborhood self-investment.

The Youth Board was different from Shaw’s CAP in several ways. The organization attempted intervention on a much broader scale than did the Chicago project, which was limited to a specific neighborhood in Chicago’s Southside. The Youth Board was funded with public money, which often impacted the choices that it could make. As a city agency, the organization reflected the modest liberalism that reigned in postwar New York City politics. The Board was made up of the heads of several city agencies, including the Commissioner of Health, the Chair of the New York Housing Authority, the Chief Justice of the Court of Special Sessions, the Schools Superintendent, the Police Commissioner, and the Commissioner of the Parks Department, Robert Moses. Private citizens from across New York society were also on the Board, including at times Kenneth Johnson, the Dean of the New York School of Social Work; James Quinn, the Secretary of the CIO; and Ruth Harris Bunche, the wife of Ralph Bunche. The big names on the Board lent prestige to the organization and eased avenues of coordination across public and private agencies, but also restrained the Board from developing programs that might become controversial.

Mayor O’Dwyer appointed Judge Nathaniel Kaplan of the State Family Court Chairman of the Youth Board--a position he held until 1966—and his primary responsibility was to translate the concerns of city government to the organization’s staff,

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<sup>2</sup> Eric Schneider, *Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings: Youth Gangs in Postwar New York* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 189-190.

and to speak to the public about the Board's work.<sup>3</sup> Operationally, however, the Board relied upon career social workers led by Ralph Whelan, who was Executive Director from 1947-1962. Whelan oversaw the Board's various projects, which through the late 1950s included referral units, clinics in the family court, group services (including psychotherapy and gang mediation), a special Three Schools Project, play streets, and various research projects. The extent of the Board's investments in each of these areas evolved as its priorities changed—by the late 1950s, for instance, the Council of Social and Athletic Clubs, which focused on gangs, drew significantly more funds than the other projects. As with most social service organizations, the staff was more progressive and experimental than was the leadership.

The leaders of the Youth Board sought to define and address the problems of city youth while not upsetting existing social structures. The organization acknowledged and condemned prejudice and discrimination, yet did little to systematically confront or challenge it. Much of the Youth Board's work straddled the psychological explanations of delinquency that were in vogue in the years immediately following the war, and the sociological explanations of delinquency that were ascendant later in the 1950s. Ultimately, the organization's most innovative policy drew upon both of these approaches, mixing mental hygiene principles with job training, while organizing communities to self-invest and promoting counseling services. Though the Youth Board's mandate was delinquency, it cast its net and defined "youth issues" broadly. In this sense, its target population was the 500,000 or so young people living in New York City.

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<sup>3</sup> *New York Times*, "Judge Nathaniel Kaplan Dead: Header Youth Board 1947-1966," September 14, 1968: 28.

The Youth Board invested its initial budget of two million dollars mostly in experimental projects during the late 1940s.<sup>4</sup> Drawing from statistics compiled by the Juvenile Aid Bureau of the New York City Police Department, the Board identified eleven “high-delinquency” areas of the city where it would focus the first phase of its work. These areas were East Harlem, Central Harlem, Manhattanville-Washington Heights, and Park West in Manhattan; Bedford-Stuyvesant, South Brooklyn, Brownsville, and Williamsburg in Brooklyn; Mott Haven-Longwood and Morrisania-Belmont in the Bronx; and South Jamaica in Queens.

Each of the target areas had changed dramatically in demography between 1940-1960. Central Harlem had been predominantly African-American for two decades by the time the Youth Board was founded, and the population was pressing both to the west and to Manhattanville and Washington Heights as new migrants arrived.<sup>5</sup> Puerto Rican migrants had settled heavily in an existing, formerly African-American enclave in East Harlem, and had also joined African-American migrants to the Bronx—in 1950, the Bronx had 1,451,277 residents, of which 159,676 were black and Puerto Rican (91% of those lived in the South Bronx); by 1960, the Bronx had about 25,000 fewer overall residents, but the black and Puerto Rican population had more than doubled.<sup>6</sup> The black population in Brooklyn and Queens had also grown, particularly in Brownsville,

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<sup>4</sup> Using the Consumer Price Index as a guide, \$2 million in 1947 is comparable to about \$18,500,000 in 2007. By 1958, the budget had grown to \$4.5 million, or more than \$32 million in 2007 dollars.

<sup>5</sup> Eric Schneider explored the tension between the expanding African American community in Harlem and Euro-Americans who hadn't yet left. Adolescents regularly stood at the front lines of these conflicts, “participating in general troublemaking, harassment, and muggings of white residents and store owners.” Schneider, *Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings*, 35-38.

<sup>6</sup> Evelyn Diaz Gonzalez, *The Bronx* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2004), 110.

Bedford-Stuyvesant, and South Jamaica.<sup>7</sup> Puerto Ricans had begun to settle in Williamsburg and South Brooklyn, which still remained predominantly Italian and Jewish areas.<sup>8</sup>

Changes in the Youth Board areas were part of the overall demographic transformation of New York City in this period. The total African-American population grew by nearly 300,000, from 458,444 in 1940 to 749,080 in 1950; by 1960, there were 1,087,931 blacks in New York City, even though the overall population of the city had dropped by over 100,000 during the 1950s. Between 1940-1950, the African-American population doubled in Brooklyn, and grew by over 300% in the Bronx. Puerto Rican migration to New York also exploded. In 1940, there were just more than 60,000 Puerto Rican-born individuals living in New York City; by 1950, there were almost 190,000; by 1960, there more were almost 430,000. In 1960, the total Puerto Rican population of New York, including those born in the city and in Puerto Rico, was 612,574.<sup>9</sup>

The areas where the Youth Board focused its work, where it would maintain its presence over the following decade even as it expanded its operations to new locales,

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<sup>7</sup> Brownsville's black population in 1950 was 14,177, 22% of the total population; by 1957, the overall number of residents of Brownsville decreased by 12,000 (to 87,936), but the black population increased to 21,584. Wendell Pritchett, *Brownville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews, and the Changing Face of the Ghetto* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 108.

<sup>8</sup> Reed Ueda, *Postwar Immigrant America: A Social History* (New York, NY: Bedford St. Martins, 1994), 78; Thomas D. Boswell and Angel David Cruz-Baez, "Puerto Ricans Living in the United States," in *Ethnicity in Contemporary America: A Geographical Appraisal* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 199.

<sup>9</sup> Thanks to Carla DuBose for sharing her census work on black migration to New York through 1950. For 1960, I used data and reports from Andrew Beveridge's *Social Explorer*, (<http://www.socialexplorer.com>), 2006, especially "Segregation and Isolation, NYC 1910-2000." On Puerto Rican migration, see Ira Rosenweike, *Population History of New York City* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1972), 139. Also see Virginia Sanchez-Korrol, *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 1994), 11-50.

were the centers of the postwar demographic flux. Black and Puerto Rican migrants were mixing into the edges of established white ethnic communities as newly middle-class residents began to move to the suburbs in Long Island and New Jersey. Neighborhood change is always socially disruptive, and adolescents were the residents most likely to stake their claim to turf, new and old. New youth gangs, as Eric Schneider has shown, coalesced during this period to organize these changing urban spaces. Though the postwar rise in delinquency rates and gang membership that spurred the state to create the Youth Board may have been distorted in reporting by a more active policing strategy, it is safe to conclude that social relations in changing neighborhoods were conflict-filled and roiled, at the very least.

The Youth Board believed that its target neighborhoods were poorly organized, which made interacting with residents more difficult. One of the Board's first moves was to establish a referral structure in each area by developing relationships with schools, churches, parents, social agencies, and the Juvenile Aid Bureau of the New York City Police Department. The goal of this effort was to create a "central register of children in trouble," while also beginning to assess how the city's wide variety of institutions addressed children's issues. According to Alfred J. Kahn, who produced a report on the Juvenile Aid Bureau while a student at Columbia University, the main innovation of the NYCYB in its earliest years was successfully coordinating existing organizations around the city.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Alfred J. Kahn, *Police and Children: A Study of the Juvenile Aid Bureau of the New York City Police Department* (New York, NY: Citizens Committee on Children and New York City, Inc. 1951), 58-60. See also *New York Times*, "City Youth Board Begins Big Project," July 29, 1948: 23.

The Youth Board led a pilot project in late 1948 in three South Bronx neighborhoods that collected community feedback on how to better find and engage troubled children. Over 150 citizens produced a “Citizens’ Report of the Bronx Pilot Project” in April 1949. Seven panels consisting of housewives, clergy, businessmen, police, and social workers met regularly over three months and researched and composed reports on “School and Teacher Responsibility,” “Church and Home Responsibility,” “Courts Dealing with Children and Youth,” “The Role of the Police,” “Recreation and Group Work,” “Treatment Resources,” and “Housing, Employment and Living Standards.” Each report surveyed existing services and made recommendations for improvements. Almost every recommendation called for the allocation of additional state resources to expand the ability of institutions to offer youth ways to occupy their leisure time. Churches with potential play areas were recommended for financial assistance to extend the availability of those spaces. Schools needed financial support to expand their recreational offerings, improve their audio/visual programs, bolster their support for Spanish-speaking children, expand services for the physically and mentally handicapped, create more opportunities for apprenticeships, offer semi-skilled training to students who couldn’t gain admission to vocational high schools, and hire more counselors.<sup>11</sup>

The “Citizens’ Report of the Bronx Pilot Project” was aimed at multiple audiences, and showed that from early in its existence the Youth Board understood the political nature of its work. A polished presentation and high level of detail showed the Mayor’s office and the New York State Youth Commission how committed to the project community participants were. Addressing the public-at-large, the report prominently

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<sup>11</sup> New York City Youth Board, "Citizens' Report of the Bronx Pilot Project," Office of the Mayor, New York City Youth Board (New York, NY, 1949).

featured a didactic, glossy series of photographs that adapted the style of the photo essays seen in national reporting on juvenile delinquency in the years after World War II. The images included a white police officer shaking hands with young black children, and meeting with a church organization and then a group of youths. In an acknowledgement of the slum clearance that was propelled by the 1949 Housing Act (and controlled locally by Robert Moses, a member of the Youth Board), a young boy was photographed crouching beside an abandoned lot in which several adults were talking, with the caption “Hangout makes way for housing project.” A basketball coach lectured children, wearing jackets that read “Jr. Hawks,” over the caption “Playground rivalry replaces gang warfare.” The same coach stood with the same group of children, all smiling, in front of a sign announcing the future location of P.S. 22. Additional photos showed meetings of the working groups that produced the pamphlet.<sup>12</sup> The images offer a hopeful narrative of an area in need of steady investment, yet being led by an imaginative and energetic group of individuals who lacked the support to truly solve problems. The photographs drove home the narrative the Youth Board intended to present in a visual language that would be familiar to any adult who had read a newspaper or magazine report on delinquency, and which showed the city’s leadership the impact of its work.

A third audience targeted by the Citizens’ Report was social psychologists and social workers in New York City. The report became the basis for a Youth Board and Division of Child Welfare of the Board of Education-sponsored “Three School Study,” which hoped to implement many of the school-based recommendations offered by the citizens’ group. The project was launched in September 1949 in three schools in the

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

Bronx, augmenting the existing child guidance clinics at P.S. 42 (an elementary school), P.S. 37 (a junior high), and Morris High (a senior high school). It put into practice many of the ideas about the role of the school system in treating the “whole child” that would be presented by mental hygienists at the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth the following year, and reflected a growing postwar interest in psychiatry. The project’s motivating principle was that “education is becoming increasingly comprehensive and is giving more consideration to the social, emotional, spiritual, and recreational needs of the pupils.”<sup>13</sup>

The bureaucratic relationship of the project’s staff-members to the group’s leadership was self-consciously “democratic.” New programs and initiatives proceeded only staff members debated openly and reached consensus. The team based in each school consisted of one psychiatrist, two psychologists, three psychiatric social workers, and a supervisor of social work. Rigidity in the execution of roles was frowned upon in the interest of interdisciplinary coordination, and the clinicians also aggressively pursued working relationships with the schools’ teachers.<sup>14</sup>

A year into the project, participants in the “Three School Study” published both their work plan and preliminary conclusions in an issue of the *Journal of Educational Sociology*.<sup>15</sup> They described the schools in the Bronx as being in a crisis caused by the rapid transition of the community’s population, and the inadequacy of the system to

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<sup>13</sup> New York City Youth Board, “Tri-School Study of the Three Child Guidance Clinics,” Office of the Mayor, New York City Youth Board (New York, NY, 1956): 9. The study was referred to as both the “Tri-School Study” and the “Three School Study.”

<sup>14</sup> Mira Talbot, “Design for the Three Schools Project,” *Journal of Educational Sociology* 25, no. 3 (November 1951): 134-139.

<sup>15</sup> The writing in the journal can reasonably be assumed to represent the attitudes and beliefs of those employed at the time by the New York City Youth Board; this was the most visible project supported by the organization.

respond to these changes. Germans, Irish, Italians, and Jews were moving out, and “South Americans” (Southern African-Americans), West Indians, and Puerto Ricans were moving in. The area had previously been working-class and densely populated, but the migration complicated relationships in the community in ways that were particularly visible inside the schools. Morris High School, for example, had been “a place where students came to prepare for college entrance or for commercial work. The choice as to course was usually made at home by parents and students. Now, many came because of the rise in the compulsory school age, and were not necessarily interested in preparation for college or commercial work. Most of these came from homes where the parent could not help the student make a choice of course. These students needed more intensive counseling to help them understand the relation of school to themselves and to make choices among the variety of subjects offered.”<sup>16</sup>

As this passage suggests, one of the most fundamental challenges facing the Youth Board in the “Three Schools Study” was overcoming cultural differences between neighborhood residents and the schools or institutions that existed to serve them. Youth Board workers throughout the late 1940s and 1950s struggled to formulate programs that effectively addressed what they believed the needs of new local residents were.

At times, the programs devised and language used by the Youth Board echoed the middle-class paternalism of settlement house work, exemplifying continuity between Progressive Era and postwar social services. With the best of intentions, workers in the “Three School Study” set out to identify and correct the problems of newcomers in the community. Morris High reacted to neighborhood changes by “modifying curricula and

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<sup>16</sup> George Weinberg, "School in Transition," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 25, no. 3 (November 1951): 143.

services to assist students with job training. Recognizing that the inability to secure suitable employment may be due to inadequate planning and preparation, need for improved personal habits, strengthened motivation and interest, and realistic occupational orientation; these schools are augmenting their programs to enable youth to secure a more basic preparation prior to leaving school. Such focus will alleviate the frustrations which many youth encounter when they take the step from formal education to work.”<sup>17</sup> The primary focus of the school was not to be academic or intellectual or even social development; rather, student behavior was to be assessed and modified to better integrate with the demands of the workforce after adolescence.

This program believed that it would be easier to offer Morris High students a direct path to conform with what society expected of poor, non-white workers if the school curriculum was transformed from an academic one to a less rigorous and more “realistic” approach. Vocational guidance offered to students was supposed to operate as an “adjunct to the psychiatric treatment program” at Morris High School, though in reality the two programs were more closely linked. The school’s curriculum prioritized behavior and skills most likely to land adolescents in jobs immediately following high school. The process required skill enhancement and psychological counseling. Nowhere in the documentation of the program at Morris High are discriminatory hiring practices criticized. The focus on the preparation of individual students was a capitulation to the realities of the New York City labor market and an adaptation to the severely limited paths of opportunity for young residents of the Bronx.

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<sup>17</sup> Paul A. Haywood and Alvin Tracthman, "Senior High School Guidance Project," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 25, no. 3 (November 1951): 177-178.

Though the Youth Board workers in the Bronx had little to say about the impact of the city's labor market on youth behavior, they did critically engage the community around the schools where they worked. The social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists working with the project believed that juvenile delinquency was a manifestation of a community that didn't function in a healthy way. The language used in much of the Youth Board material was similar to the language present in discussions of mental hygiene at the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth, and yet the Board's methods of engagement suggested a desired scale of social intervention that went beyond just the emotional integration of the single child into the school. The school, in this approach, was the primary point of contact, but the subject was broader than just the individual child: it was the community as a whole.

Mira Talbot, a psychiatric social worker who directed the project, wrote that "a child guidance clinic, primarily responsible for the planned treatment of maladjusted children, repays the community by increasing the quota of healthy and useful citizens."<sup>18</sup> Assumptions about the deficiencies in the community were elaborated by Dr. Charles A.P. Brown, who helped design the psychotherapeutic activities of the clinics, and who gives more insight into the middle-class perspectives functional at the administrative levels of the project: "In the lower class community, the neighborhood heroes are, all too frequently, the gamblers, pimps, touts, and prostitutes who attract attention with their

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<sup>18</sup> Mira Talbot, "Design for the Three Schools Project," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 25, no. 3 (November 1951): 139.

flashy clothes, and cars, and their appearance of having endless leisure time.... An easy code of morals and a flexible sense of honesty might be culturally quite acceptable.”<sup>19</sup>

It is instructive that comments so patently dismissive of the intricacies of local cultures in the neighborhoods came from a voice influential in the formulation of psychotherapeutic treatment in the project. If youth came to school with deficient values, Brown argued, then the best way to treat and adjust them was through their psyches. Even more, treating student psyches was the best way to access and address community-wide cultural problems. Though juvenile delinquency was the motivating force behind the project, it did give clinicians the latitude to explore and begin to articulate other interactions with local communities. For instance, the local branch of the New York Public Library offered a series of films and public meetings that sought to draw the community into an extended version of the process that was happening in the schools, though focused on communal self-reflection and analysis. Through continued interaction with clinicians, the Youth Board hoped that adolescents could be purged of the culturally-determined characteristics—such as hero worship of pimps--that made their assimilation into the existing social structure more difficult.

Once adjusted, adolescents were more likely to take advantage of the curriculum at Morris High, which would help them find their place at the bottom of the employment structure of the city. The Youth Board recognized, implicitly, that problems in the communities in which it worked were visible through the behavior of adolescents. Yet only in these experimental moments of its early work, when the Youth Board’s focus moved beyond the individual’s psyche to consider and engage the social contexts of the

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<sup>19</sup> Charles A.P. Brown, "Social Status as it Affects Psychotherapy," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 25, no. 3 (November 1951): 167-168.

community, did the organization act in a way, feeble though it may have been, which acknowledged that real explanations for the delinquency lay beyond the individual.

In 1954, the New York State Youth Commission organized a study of the first five years of the project, published by the Youth Board in 1956 as the *Tri-School Study of Three Child Guidance Clinics*. Statistics emphasized a drastic demographic shift within the community. The elementary school transformed from 62.5% white, 27.3% black, and 10.2% Puerto Rican in 1950 to 45.3% Puerto Rican, 40% black, and 14.7% white in 1955. The researchers found this last number so remarkable that they capped it with an exclamation point. The junior high, a boys-only school, was an anomaly within the demographics of the South Bronx. Even though it was in an area whose non-white population had increased ten-fold between 1940-1950, the school maintained a 53% white (mostly Irish) student body, with 38% Puerto Rican, and 9% black. Morris High School drew from an area that was 84% black, 7% Puerto Rican, and 9% white. Overall numbers from the junior high school and Morris High School suggested the total population of youth in the area was declining, even as the juvenile delinquency rate, which was distilled from the number of referrals to the Juvenile Aid Bureau, increased dramatically. At the junior high, the rate grew from 30 per thousand in 1951 to 117 per thousand in 1955, which made it the highest rate in the city; at Morris High, the delinquency rate increased by 90% between 1951 and 1954.<sup>20</sup>

A more active effort by the police and the Juvenile Aid Bureau to locate delinquents likely skewed the numbers upwards. While it would have been reasonable to conclude from the delinquency rates that the clinics weren't performing their assigned

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<sup>20</sup> New York City Youth Board, "Tri-School Study of the Three Child Guidance Clinics," Office of the Mayor, New York City Youth Board (New York, NY, 1956).

task, the authors of the study and those working in the clinics seemed unconcerned with the statistics. From the Youth Board's perspective, the numbers only justified their continuing presence in the schools. Their clinicians tended to value qualitative over quantitative analyses of their work, anyway. Their reports gave much more attention to details of the day-to-day functioning of the clinics, such as the referral process, and analyzed the responsiveness of teachers and administrators to the needs of the students.<sup>21</sup>

Case studies presented in an appendix shed some light on the clinics' activities, and particularly the issues brought on by demographic shifts and cultural differences between clinicians and clients. An early intervention was made with a first grader named Arsenio who "had been indulged and infantilized by his mother and grandmother," and "who only agreed to come to class if his mother sat with him." His mother spoke no English, and after the child was brought to the attendance department, the clinic helped arrange a referral (to what, exactly, wasn't mentioned). Douglas was a 14 year-old eighth-grader who had immigrated a few years earlier from Scotland into a Puerto Rican neighborhood and had trouble communicating and integrating. The clinic referred him to the St. Andrews Society, a welfare organization for Scots immigrants, and the boy eventually gained admission to Brooklyn Tech. Peter was a 15 year-old Puerto Rican living with his father and a step-mother with whom he didn't get along. His father "rigidly applied concepts from Puerto Rican culture that were not appropriate in New York. He had strong feeling about 'respect' and 'obedience,' rigid moralistic ideas, and tried to force Peter into a straight-laced pattern of behavior." The tensions at home extended to Peter's schooling, and Peter eventually moved to Manhattan to live with his

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

mother, where he “blossomed.” The role of the clinic in this case, it seems, was to observe and advise.<sup>22</sup>

The case studies suggest that the clinics were well situated within the schools and well connected to other organizations in New York City, though some teachers expressed confusion about the role of the clinics and concern about their own loss of autonomy. The clinics provided psychological support to students in need (and some not), and made connections between subjects and the broader network of social work institutions in the city whenever necessary. They had a fundamental understanding that the communities in which they existed were undergoing significant transformations, and worked to attenuate the disruption this caused in the maturation processes of the children. Though the clinics were aware of the cultural gap between many of their subjects and the world they encountered in school, they didn't know much about how to address these problems. They were limited to a certain extent by both their own lack of knowledge and the school bureaucracy, and preferred to refer students having trouble assimilating to outside agencies such as Casita Maria, an East Harlem settlement house and unit of the Catholic Charities, for more immediate assistance. This initial phase of the Youth Board's work, then, was concerned with learning as much as possible about the problems facing New York City youths. Reflective of that approach, Ralph Whelan, the Executive Director of

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, Two other cases: Helen was an aggressive 16 year-old who misbehaved and landed at the clinic. Two years of therapy revealed traumatic sexual experiences, and helped explain that Helen was seeking attention from boys but didn't know how to get it. So, she resorted to risqué dress and aggressive behavior. David was a schizophrenic with paranoid elements, preoccupied with violence. The clinician sought to arrange a home visit, but David's grandmother, who ran the household, resisted. David's primary symptom was anxiety, but therapy assisted him. The clinic also directed the boy to the Department of Welfare, which arranged dental work and eyeglasses for him.

the Youth Board, traveled in 1953 to Puerto Rico to “explore ways of aiding the adjustment of Puerto Rican migrants on the mainland.”<sup>23</sup>

The “Three Schools Study” was by far the Youth Board’s most intensive engagement with the schools, and was touted by Whelan in 1954 as providing more guidance services than “almost any school in the nation possesses.”<sup>24</sup> The project continued as an “experiment” through the late 1950s, though funding responsibility was transferred in fall 1955 from the New York City Youth Board to the New York City Community Mental Health Board.<sup>25</sup> In 1958, the Board of Education felt that the experimental phase of the project was over, and sought to discontinue the clinics in favor of a broader expenditure of resources, arguing that “the existence of an enclave is bad administrative practice.” The staff of the clinics and community leaders in the areas where they were stationed organized a Committee to Save the Three Schools Project, and temporarily staved off elimination of the clinics, but no mention of them in their original formation can be found in the historical record after 1958.<sup>26</sup> By that point, the Youth Board was committing more of its resources to group work, work with gangs, and larger projects that were less explicitly focused on the psyches of individual youth.

As the Youth Board expanded through the middle of the 1950s, it remained at heart a coordinating agency, and it sought to use its developing expertise to smooth the

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<sup>23</sup> Peter Kihss, “Puerto Rican Will to Work Stressed,” *New York Times*, February 25, 1953: 18; Peter Kihss, “Home-Made Bridge Aids Island Spirit,” *New York Times*, March 5, 1953: 29.

<sup>24</sup> Ralph Whelan, “To Prevent Delinquency: Work of the Youth Board With Maladjusted Children Described,” Letter to the *New York Times*, September 6, 1954: 14.

<sup>25</sup> The New York City Community Mental Health Board had been established in 1954.

<sup>26</sup> *New York Times*, “Three School Clinics to Get Reprieve,” February 9, 1958: 58. Also see Mary Ellen and Daniel H. Casriel Costello, “A Mental-Hygiene Clinic in a High School,” *School Review* 65, no. 2 (Summer 1957): 193-203.

citywide process of finding and getting services to troubled youth. The Board set up nine referral units in conjunction with the Division of Child Welfare of the Board of Education; two operated independently of the schools. The purpose of the eleven referral units was “to aid in early identification of children who exhibit behavior and personality problems; to study and diagnose these situations; to locate appropriate community resources to treat individual problems; and to refer people to these services.” The Board contracted with agencies to provide vocational guidance and job placement, child guidance services, and group work services to youth. Social workers involved with the units aggressively reached out into the surrounding communities, and believed that coordinating across agencies to “reach the unreached” was the best way to improve the penetration of social work in areas of need in the city.<sup>27</sup>

In 1949 the Youth Board also opened a psychiatric clinic in the Magistrate’s Court devoted exclusively to persons between the ages of 16-21. Nathaniel Kaplan, the Chairman of the Youth Board, said that the clinics would “provide a means for getting at basic causes of anti-social behavior in a good number of young persons who come to the attention of the court.” Judges could refer to the clinic youths who displayed anti-social behavior, or showed signs of emotional maladjustment. A group therapy clinic also opened in the Children’s Court aimed at both children and parents, augmenting the other psychiatric services already existent in the courts.<sup>28</sup> Therapists working there believed

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<sup>27</sup> Mary S. Diamon, “Re-Orienting Social Work Concepts in Referral Units,” and Alice Overton, “Aggressive Casework,” in New York City Youth Board, *Reaching the Unreached: Fundamental Aspects of the Program of the New York City Youth Board* (New York: New York City Youth Board, Office of the Mayor, 1952): 36-61.

<sup>28</sup> For a detailed look at the role of a psychiatrist in Manhattan’s Children’s Court, which ultimately blames increases in delinquency on parental neglect, see Marjorie Rittwagen, *Sins of Their Fathers* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Press, 1958).

that “reformatories are not the answer to delinquency,” and that more psychotherapy should be used to intervene in emotional disturbances that stunted maturation and led to anti-social behavior. Within three months, the clinic at the Children’s Court reported that more than 80 percent of the children and parents who received group therapy showed “substantial improvement.”<sup>29</sup> At the same time, the vast majority of children who came into court did so for minor offenses, and one of the primary responsibilities of the psychiatrists who worked in the Children’s Court was to sort through the youth who were brought in to determine who needed more intensive services.

The largest Youth Board projects occurred in the summer, when school was out of session, and adolescents in the city were unwatched. In 1948, the Board spent \$300,000 to create recreational opportunities for 50,000 children. Explicitly marketed as an effort “to reduce juvenile delinquency,” the Youth Board coordinated the project with the Parks Department, City Housing Authority, the Police Department, and the Board of Education. Recreational programs included thirty-five new play centers, located in schools, and operated by the Board of Education. City parks hosted “teen-age social dancing” events. The Police Department helped manage sixty new play streets near precinct houses, blocking car access and organizing street games such as stickball and hopscotch for neighborhood youth. Five housing developments offered athletic and arts and crafts spaces, and the Youth Board placed 5000 teenagers with private agencies where they received assistance with remedial reading, guided tours of local arts institutions, day-camp excursions, and other “constructive measures.” Also, one hundred teens, “who

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<sup>29</sup> *New York Times*, “Psychiatric Clinic Will Assist Courts,” May 2, 1949: 27; Lucy Freeman, “Young Offenders Will Get Therapy,” *New York Times*, October 20, 1949: 30; Lucy Freeman, “Psychiatry Clinic Held Successful,” *New York Times*, January 15, 1950: 84.

offer(ed) more serious behavior problems,” were given eight weeks at a camp outside of the city where they received “therapeutic treatment.”<sup>30</sup>

The Youth Board’s summer program implicitly recognized the importance of leisure time for youth, and sought to use organized play to bring adolescents under control. In so doing, the organization expanded the target of its operations beyond just those in need of immediate intervention or in high delinquency areas to include all unsupervised young people in the city. Play centers were open twelve hours daily, six days a week, and could each accommodate around 300 children. In the evenings they hosted dances and outdoor movies with refreshments for teen-agers. Each of the play streets run by the Police Department accommodated up to several hundred youth. The Police Athletic League also organized “novelty races” that pitted winners of meets at multiple precincts against one another, and the summer project ended in August with the first Youth Board Junior Olympics. A moment of silence for the just-deceased Babe Ruth kicked off the event, which culminated with the crowning of the team representing Kingsborough, followed by a dance and jitterbug contest.<sup>31</sup>

The recreational opportunities organized by the Youth Board in 1948 continued and expanded through the fifties, and eventually included a transportation program to help youth traverse the city to participate in various events. The program continued with slight augmentation for the next decade, before being expanded in 1958. Amidst rising

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<sup>30</sup> William R. Conklin, “‘Face-Lifting’ Plan Ordered for City,” *New York Times*, May 14, 1948: 25; *New York Times*, “Recreation Study Planned in Bronx,” May 24, 1948: 21. The New York State Youth Commission reimbursed the city for one-half of Youth Board expenditures.

<sup>31</sup> *New York Times*, “New Play Centers Ready,” July 8, 1948: 20; *New York Times*, “Play Street Meet Held on East Side,” July 16, 1948: 16; *New York Times*, “200 Boys, Girls Vie in Junior Olympics,” August 18, 1948: 27.

public concern and increased reporting about gang violence, as well as a lengthy grand jury investigation into delinquency in the city schools, Mayor Wagner began a yearly program of “summer vigilance” to ensure that staffing levels remained as high as they possibly could during the summer. As Police Commissioner Stephen P. Kennedy announced in April, 1958, “it is anticipated that the spring and summer months will bring with them more frequent, greater, and bloodier gang wars, and the people of the city must be protected from them.”<sup>32</sup> When the school year ended, adolescents spilled into the streets from their hot, crammed apartments, looking for fun, and Wagner and Kennedy both ensured that the city would use as wide an array of resources as possible to keep them under control.

In the late 1950s new Youth Board-directed programs included a charm school for young girls, extended tutoring programs and Police Athletic League competitions, as well as a sightseeing program to expose kids to different parts of the city, and even a “ragamuffin parade” for elementary school students in costumes. By 1963, nearly four hundred public and private agencies were involved in coordinating summer services.<sup>33</sup> These visible and popular programs allowed the Mayor and the Youth Board to demonstrate each summer their commitment to keeping youth behavior in check.

In addition to its concerted efforts to step-up general programming during the summer months, in the early 1950s, the NYCYPB devoted significant resources to

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<sup>32</sup> *New York Times*, “Text of Kennedy Talk in Increase in Youth Crime,” April 23, 1958: 28. The grand jury referenced here, which put additional pressure on the city government to intensify its youth programs, will be discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>33</sup> *Youth Board News*, May, 1958: 1; Clayton Knowles, “City Acts to Help Youth in Summer,” *New York Times*, July 11, 1963: 30. After 1960, an increasing amount of attention was paid to the “unemployed young” with job training and placement assistance, reflecting the influence of the “opportunity theory” analysis of delinquency that gained traction in the late 1950s, and which will be discussed in Chapter Six.

research for exploring new methods of identifying delinquents in need of more immediate, focused intervention. The organization spent one-fifth of its budget on demonstration projects and experimental processes that could help it most efficiently target its resources. These programs can be seen as the Youth Board's effort to refine its own operational understanding of delinquency within a social, political, and cultural climate where the term was often defined broadly. The national media, through its construction of the "ideal adolescent," used discovery and display to help the public understand delinquency. Much of the language produced by national magazines and newspapers—both written and visual--bled into the work of the Youth Board, particularly when it presented itself to the public-at-large through its newsletter or other publications. The language was used both to buoy the public's sense that the organization was effective, and to describe broad programs, such as its summer projects.

When it came time to design purposeful programs intended to find and treat more lasting and damaging delinquency, and to contribute to research and scholarship about youth, the Youth Board drew upon the theories and language of influential social scientists. One of the more significant investments by the Youth Board was a project to verify the delinquency prediction method developed by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck of the Harvard Law School. Ralph Whelan had worked as a research assistant for the Gluecks while a graduate student at Harvard, and was interested in applying their method in New York.<sup>34</sup> The Gluecks, who focused exclusively on male delinquency, had refined their method during the 1940s through research on two groups of 500 boys aged 11-17; one a group of institutionalized delinquents, and the other a group of boys in the public

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<sup>34</sup> *Youth Board News*, December, 1958: 3.

schools of Boston. They subsequently published *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency* in 1950 and *Delinquents in the Making* in 1952, which solidified their standing as the leading juvenile criminologists in the country. The Gluecks built three predictive tables from their work: one based on responses to a Rorschach test, a second derived from a psychological interview, and a third based on examination of “significant social factors.” An interviewer would score the subject on a variety of factors weighted to yield a number that, when plugged into a table, returned a “probability of delinquency.”<sup>35</sup>

The Youth Board implemented an adapted Glueck model in 1952, with grant support from the Ford Foundation. The Board had two goals: the first was to test the validity of the method, and the second was to begin to use the method to make the organization’s work in the city more efficient. As Executive Director Ralph Whelan put it, “a philosophy of cure rather than a philosophy of prevention underlies most programs dealing with delinquency.”<sup>36</sup> The Board wanted to explore a preventative approach, and designing a predictive model specific to New York City was the first step. Youth Board reviews of the Gluecks’ work suggested that applying the Social Factors Prediction Table alone would be just as efficient a measuring stick as the three tables combined, and, because it didn’t require as much detailed communication with the boys, it also allowed the Board to more easily work with a sample group of younger children.

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<sup>35</sup> Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency* (New York: Commonwealth Fund, 1950); Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, *Delinquents in the Making* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952); New York City Youth Board Research Department, *An Experiment in the Validation of the Glueck Prediction Scale: Progress Report from November, 1952 to December, 1956*, (New York City: New York City Youth Board, Office of the Mayor, 1957).

<sup>36</sup> Ralph W. Whelan, "An Experiment in Predicting Delinquency," *The Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology, and Police Science* 45, no. 4 (November-December 1954): 432.

The Youth Board identified two schools in the South Bronx in the fall of 1952, and enrolled all incoming first-graders in their study. Half of the 224 pupils were African-American, and 40 were Puerto Rican. This concerned researchers, because the Gluecks' sample in Boston consisted almost entirely of boys of Italian and Irish descent. In the interest of balancing the sample against the Gluecks' results, the Board recruited more non-Jewish whites over the following two years, though it did not alter much of the process of gathering information and scoring. Ultimately, 301 boys were followed in the study for ten years. Girls, whose behavior in the early 1950s was rarely examined in any depth, were not included in the study.<sup>37</sup>

The Youth Board used five social predictive factors: discipline of boy by father, supervision of boy by mother, affection of father for boy, affection of mother for boy, and cohesiveness of family. Interviewers gathered "social histories" in unannounced home visits, from conversations with administrators and teachers at the schools, and from discussions with individuals in the community familiar with the boy. The home, however, was the primary locale of analysis. Interviewers had been trained extensively in the process of approaching subjects, explaining the project, and recording data. Once the detailed case histories were complete, two analysts translated them into numbers and plugged them into the table (if they disagreed, a third and sometimes a fourth analyst became involved).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ford Foundation, "Ford Foundation Annual Reports," *Ford Foundation*, 1956, <http://www.fordfound.org/about/annualreports> (accessed 2007): 56. Julius Horowitz, "The Arithmetic of Delinquency," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, January 31, 1965: 12+.

<sup>38</sup> New York City Youth Board Research Department, *A Manual of Procedures for Application of the Glueck Prediction Table*, (New York City: New York City Youth Board, Office of the Mayor, 1964).

Halfway into the project the Board, with the cooperation of the Gluecks, scrapped the five-factor table for a three-factor table that was deemed even more efficient, and rescored the original evaluations. The factors in this table were: supervision of boy by mother, discipline of boy by mother, and cohesiveness of family. The new table was in part a response to Youth Board's discovery that a father wasn't present in many of the homes. As a result, the father's relationship was rolled into the analysis of the family's cohesiveness, and more weight was given to discipline by mother.<sup>39</sup>

The study found 243 subjects unlikely to become delinquents, 25 subjects having an equal chance of becoming delinquent or not, and 33 likely to become delinquent. When the study was concluded in 1964, 97.1% of the non-delinquent predictions were verified, 84.8% of the delinquent predictions were correct, and 64% of the group that could go either way remained non-delinquent. The results were predicted with 100% accuracy for the 130 white subjects, with 97% accuracy for the Puerto Rican subjects, and with 93% accuracy for the black subjects. Of the 130 white subjects, 8 ultimately became delinquent, compared to 29 for the 130 black subjects (20 had been predicted, with 13 who could go either way), and seven of the 41 Puerto Rican subjects (against five predicted). "Delinquency" was defined as knowledge of behavior by age 16 that if

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<sup>39</sup> Maude M. and Selma J. Glick Craig, "Glueck Prediction Table," *Crime and Delinquency* 9, no. 3 (July 1963): 258-261. See also Eleanor Glueck, "Efforts to Identify Delinquents," *Federal Probation* 24, no. 2 (June 1960): 49-56.; Eleanor Glueck, "Toward Improving the Identification of Delinquents," *The Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology, and Police Science* 53, no. 2 (June 1962): 169.; Maude M. and Selma J. Glick Craig, "Ten Years' Experience with the Glueck Social Prediction Table," *Journal of Crime and Delinquency* 9, no. 3 (July 1963): 249-261.

committed by an adult would be deemed a felony or a misdemeanor crime. For the purposes of the study, adjudication was not a necessary element of the definition.<sup>40</sup>

The Youth Board was concerned with the implications of using a procedure that had been honed by study of a population that was ethnically dissimilar to that of the neighborhoods it focused on in New York. Much of the Youth Board's literature was sensitive to the changing environment of the city, and the organization seemed to be able to integrate at least a basic understanding of those changes into the qualitative elements of its work. Quantifying that sensitivity was trickier. Interviewers were encouraged to develop an understanding of the culture into which they were stepping, and were urged to "appreciate and accept" difference. They were told that "what may be considered unacceptable behavior in one culture may be perfectly acceptable in another." All of the interviewers were white, which was acknowledged as a limitation, but the Board felt it could do little more than urge its workers to be aware of their cultural biases. Information on illegitimacy, broken homes, rearing by a non-natural parent, welfare enrollment, and the location of the mother's birth were taken into account to help round out the picture of family cohesiveness. Though black and Puerto Rican subjects were less accurately predicted than were the whites, the Youth Board felt it had successfully validated the use of the Glueck table as a predictive measure.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Maude M. and Selma J. Glick Craig, "Application of the Glueck Social Prediction Table on an Ethnic Basis," *Crime and Delinquency* 11, no. 2 (April 1965): 165-175.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* An interesting note which suggests some rules that were generally assumed to operate in the South were actually at work in the North as well: One boy who was originally classified as white was later reclassified as Negro when it was discovered that he had a Negro grandparent. See New York City Youth Board Research Department, *An Experiment in the Validation of the Glueck Prediction Scale: Progress Report from November, 1952 to December, 1956*, (New York City: New York City Youth Board,

When the study was completed in the mid-1960s, it came under considerable criticism for not developing a strong enough plan for integrating existing knowledge of different family structures and relationships existent among black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers into its methods of interviewing and predicting outcomes.<sup>42</sup> The Board acknowledged this deficiency, and re-examined in detail the 20 black children it had overpredicted for delinquency. The Board concluded “sociological and environmental factors intervened during the school years to bring about the variance between prediction and outcome.” A lack of a full understanding of “The Negro Cultural Matrix,” especially the “matriarchal” structure of many families, and the under-appreciated influence of “consanguine family,” led to an underestimation of the ability of these 20 families to supervise and direct their children in positive ways.<sup>43</sup>

In the mid-1960s the Youth Board sought funding to implement the prediction project on a larger scale, but encountered significant opposition from the Citizen’s Committee for Children (CCC), a leading private social work organization. Alfred Kahn, who had written a sympathetic review of the Youth Board’s work in the Bronx in the

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Office of the Mayor, 1957): 10; Julius Horowitz, “The Arithmetic of Delinquency,” *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, January 31, 1965: 12+.

<sup>42</sup> This increase in criticism was likely related to two conflicting factors. First were the evolving understandings of ethnicity within the New York City social work scene after 1960, which I will discuss in my final chapter. African-American and Latino voices were much more prominent in the public discourse about children’s issues during the 1960s than they were during the 1950s. Also growing in prominence were “culture of poverty” analyses, influenced by Oscar Lewis and popularized by Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s report on the black family in 1965. For more on deficiencies in the Glueck’s work, see Harwin L. Voss, “The Predictive Efficiency of the Glueck Social Prediction Table,” *The Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology, and Police Science* 54, no. 4 (December 1963): 423-430; and Kurt Weis, “The Glueck Social Prediction Table, An Unfulfilled Promise,” *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 65, no. 3 (September 1974): 397-404.

<sup>43</sup> New York City Youth Board Research Department, “Study in Variance from Predicted Delinquency” (New York, NY: New York City Youth Board, Office of the Mayor, January 1962): 4, S3, S14.

early 1950s and was then a Professor of Social Work at Columbia, wrote for the CCC that predictive measures could unfairly label and stigmatize vulnerable youth. Prediction was dangerous and could lead to a “self-fulfilling prophecy.”<sup>44</sup> The Youth Board merely had hoped to use the method in the way that the Gluecks had originally intended: as one in a battery of processes to refine its engagement with urban youth, and make its work more efficient. Adaptation of the Glueck scale was one among many areas of experimentation by the Board, which never implemented predictive measures on a larger scale.<sup>45</sup>

By the mid-1960s, as we shall see in the coming chapters, emerging explanations for addressing delinquency made investment in a predictive model targeted at a psycho-social family-based analysis of individual pre-adolescents less attractive, less likely to generate support, and also less necessary. In the early 1950s, when the Glueck’s work was most popular and when it attracted the attention of the Youth Board, a predictive model that could help clinicians sort through multitudes of potential delinquents offered significant value. But by the early 1960s, the sense that every adolescent was a potential delinquent and should be so treated was much less prevalent than a few years earlier. By that point, youth policy in New York increasingly focused on structuring programs for the group and for the community. Individualized treatment was still integrated into broader programs in a reactive method of engagement rather than as part of a proactive

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<sup>44</sup> John Sibley, “Youth Board Acts to Predict Crime,” *New York Times*, November 30, 1964: 35; Sidney Schanberg, “Crime Predicting Scored as Social Peril,” *New York Times*, January 8, 1965: 31

<sup>45</sup> *New York Times*, “Sheldon Glueck of Harvard Dies: Studied the Roots of Delinquency,” March 13, 1980: D16. Review of an index of the Glueck Papers at Harvard Law School show communication with the Youth Board ended in the mid-sixties, and after the Citizen’s Committee for Children attack while the Board was seeking funding for the project.

plan to identify and segregate potential wrongdoers. Ralph Whelan's hope to promote a "philosophy of prevention" over a "philosophy of cure" was not to be realized, at least not if it was to focus only on the experience of the individual.

Over the course of the 1950s the Youth Board gradually directed more of its resources to older youths, who would soon be moving into the workforce. After 1950, the primary method the Board used to engage adolescents was group work. Young group workers, more likely to connect with and understand youths a few years younger than them, were employed to work with adolescents in selected neighborhoods. They operated out of recreation centers or neighborhood offices, and used a mixture of methods to first gauge the behavior of adolescents, and then to inject themselves into various groups in these areas.

In October 1950, Martin Hellman was hired by the Youth Board to set up a club operating out of the Temple Anshe Chesed on West 100<sup>th</sup> Street, which provided access to a lounge space and a gymnasium.<sup>46</sup> Hellman kept detailed records of his work, noting contacts with particular groups, each of which came to the center with a name, or chose one upon arrival: the Young Villains, the Paragons, the Ragers, the Cameos, the Dukes, and the Duke Debs. Hellman recorded the age and the ethnicity of each member of each group taken into the center. These youths were primarily Puerto Rican and Irish, though there were at least a few Jews in each group. The groups came into the center intact, and Hellman organized a basketball league, helped the groups set up dances, raise money to

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<sup>46</sup> The NYCIB would not work directly with religious institutions, so the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y and the Jewish Welfare Board directed the project. The Youth Board hired the worker, however, and his methods for engaging neighborhood youth were shaped by the organization.

buy equipment, jackets, and sweaters, and also encouraged groups to take on a volunteer project within the community. Older youths spent time mentoring younger groups.<sup>47</sup>

Though some of the groups had earned less-than-stellar reputations in the neighborhood, and though they adopted the tough monikers and mimicked the dress of street gangs, none of those involved in the center were “fighting gangs” of the type that would receive increased public attention as the 1950s evolved. Hellman still gave extra time to those groups or specific youths whose behavior he found more erratic, and sought to get each group to invest in the center and become responsible participants in the club. His reports were thorough, optimistic, and almost always noted some sort of progress, whether it be working through intergroup conflict, reaching some understanding with a group about its behavior and responsibility to the center, or directing one of the more troubled youths to a referral unit. Hellman devised strategies to draw more Jewish youth into the Council Teen-age Club to satisfy the temple that housed it, but the ethnic makeup of the groups remained the same through 1954.<sup>48</sup>

The Temple Anshe Chesed project was one of nearly two hundred group projects funded by the Youth Board in 1950. Space in the city for adolescents was at a premium, and youth gathered wherever they could. “Cellar clubs” had provided adolescents with space away from adult supervision in the 1930s and 1940s, and had developed a reputation, according to the *New York Times*, for allowing “rape, theft, beatings, and

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<sup>47</sup> Temple Anche Chesed/Council Teen-Age Club Papers, 1950-1954 (New York, NY: 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y): Youth Board Committee—Correspondence and Reports 1950-1952; Youth Board/ Council Teen-age Club Committee Minutes Folder; Leader’s Report to Committee, 1950-1953; individual group folders.

<sup>48</sup> Minutes of Meeting, June 30, 1954, Youth Board/ Council Teen-age Club Committee Minutes Folder, Temple Anche Chesed/Council Teen-Age Club Papers, 1950-1954 (New York, NY: 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y).

extortion” to flourish.<sup>49</sup> Groups of adolescents moved increasingly above ground in the early 1950s, congregating in soda shops, pool halls, cafeterias, on street corners, and in parks. The more public nature of adolescent leisure time in the city gave Youth Board workers the opportunity to study, understand, and then to intervene into the life of young New York.

First, group workers -- often recent graduates of the New York School of Social Work at Columbia University -- explored the neighborhood in which they were stationed, taking note of “unserved natural groups,” and talking with local shopkeepers, playground directors, school principals, police, and religious leaders to determine the community’s needs for its youth. The worker then selected and approached a group, devising a strategy informed by the information he had gathered. In one instance, a worker attached to a community center identified the leader of a group of teenagers as they were nailing a peach basket to a wall to play ball. He approached the leader and asked if the boys had ever played ball at a local gym. The boy responded that it was a crazy idea, that they wouldn’t be allowed in to the center, and that they couldn’t afford it anyway if they were. The worker told the leader to bring a dozen of his friends by the gym, and he’d work something out.<sup>50</sup>

Group workers were necessarily cognizant of the environments in which they worked. They were very aware, for instance, that many neighborhoods were undergoing dramatic demographic shifts. Integration and diversity in its programs was explicitly

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<sup>49</sup> Charles Grutzner, “Youth Gangs Found Decreasing in the City,” *New York Times*, May 12, 1950: 34.

<sup>50</sup> New York City Youth Board Research Department, *Reaching the Group* (New York, NY: New York City Youth Board, Office of the Mayor, 1956): 15-24. The Youth Board Monograph Series consisted of analyses of reports submitted to the research department from field workers.

valued by the Youth Board, and workers received in-training to help them address ethnic tensions. Such tensions, of course, existed not just among youth, but also across generations, and many group workers were forced to confront prejudice within the adult community.<sup>51</sup> Youth Board workers sought to address racial tensions by improving communication between neighborhood factions, and also by cultivating a loyalty to the agency that spread across the community. One Youth Board office was in an area of Brooklyn where a new project had recently been built that housed many African-American families. The nursery, after-school, and adult programs organized by the Board all integrated fairly easily, but the teenage program remained 100% populated by the “old-time” residents who had been in the area. Under the leadership of the group worker, the staff of the agency recruited groups of African-American adolescents to the club. They encountered resistance from the established group, and were forced to set up a quota system to maintain a sound balance (even though the Board was generally against such arrangements). Once the groups were integrated into the agency, workers focused on improving relationships by planning recreational activities across the ethnic divide.<sup>52</sup>

Programs with adolescent groups in Youth Board areas often revolved around organized play, ranging from athletic competition to arts, crafts, and different methods of performance. This approach could draw adolescents into involvement in Youth Board endeavors, giving workers the opportunity to learn more about the neighborhood and its

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-75; New York City Youth Board, "Reaching teen-agers through group work and recreation programs: observations on work with teen-agers in agencies cooperating with the Youth Board," *Pamphlet* (New York, NY: New York City Youth Board, Office of the Mayor, 1954).

<sup>52</sup> New York City Youth Board, In-service Training Department, "Training in parent and neighborhood leadership toward the prevention and control of juvenile delinquency" (Glen Rock, NJ: Microfilming Corp. of America, 1976). The ethnicity of the “old timers” was not mentioned in this source.

youth. A strong element of social control pervaded these projects, reflecting the notion that if youth were going to be gathering and playing, they should be doing so in locales where the Youth Board could observe them and intervene. Sanctioned play also provided opportunities for mingling across groups, which was less likely to happen if youth were left to explore the city on their own.

Play, interethnic relationships, and political calculation were each central to the programming developed by the Youth Board in the second half of the 1950s. The organization became more astute at employing the tools of mass culture to promote its activities, though its position as a publicly funded agency influenced the type of choices it could make. In 1955, the Youth Board began planning a feature film for national distribution. Arthur Miller agreed to script the movie, and the Board approved his initial story outline. In December, after the Board had already given him the go ahead to begin writing, it abruptly dropped plans for the movie. Miller had been accused by the American Legion, the Catholic War Veterans, and the anti-communist organization AWARE, Inc. of being connected to “subversive groups.” He had hoped to write “the unvarnished truth about juvenile delinquency in New York,” but lost this particular job even before he was blacklisted for refusing to name names in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee in June 1956. The Board, concerned about its public image, “did not want to become involved in a controversy over Miller’s loyalty.” It had initially appointed a subcommittee to investigate Miller’s ties to Left-leaning organizations, which had concluded that those ties were insignificant. The subcommittee

was overruled by a vote of the Board's senior members, many of whom were the heads of major city agencies, and thus the movie project was dropped.<sup>53</sup>

The Youth Board calculated that the risk of a partnership with someone tainted by Communist ties, even as towering a figure as Arthur Miller, was too great. The Board faced a difficult task in balancing progressive work that inevitably drew the interest of liberal-Left organizations with its goal to grow and solidify itself as the front line in the city's effort to deal with delinquency. Public youth work in New York City required significant political and media savvy: this is something that the Youth Board understood, but with which Mobilization For Youth, as will be discussed in chapter six, struggled. Nationally, HUAC was continuing its hunt for subversives in the world of entertainment despite Joseph McCarthy's demise a couple of years earlier, and the Youth Board did not want its work, which required the cooperation of a wide range of city agencies, to be impeded. It erred on the side of caution and timidity.<sup>54</sup>

The Miller episode showed that the Youth Board was as much a political organization as it was a cog in the city's social service apparatus. A significant amount

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<sup>53</sup> *New York Times*, "Youth Board Set to Approve Film," December 5, 1955: 33; *New York Times*, "City Drops Plans for a Youth Film," December 8, 1955: 47; *New York Times*, "Miller Hits Back at Agency," December 9, 1955: 29. Miller would go in front of HUAC and refuse to name names in June 1956, leading to a contempt charge, the seizure of his passport, and his blacklisting. He maintained an interest in youth, delinquency, and gangs, arguing in an article for *Harper's* in 1962 (inspired by Vincent Riccio's and Bill Slocum's *All the Way Down*, a 1961 memoir of Riccio's work with the Youth Board) that more than anything else, "boredom" was driving youth towards violence not just in New York City, but also in the suburbs and around the world. See Arthur Miller, "The Bored and the Violent," *Harper's*, November 1962: 50-56.

<sup>54</sup> This stands in counterpoint to the political turmoil that enveloped Mobilization For Youth for its more radical organizing in 1963 and 1964, which will be discussed in the final chapter. As an organization answerable to local politicians rather than those removed in Washington, the Youth Board was much less likely to adopt any truly radical policies.

of the Board's energy was devoted to developing programs to reach and speak to different populations. To keep the public informed about its work, the Board published the *Youth Board News*, which was distributed to social service agencies, businesses, and charities throughout the city. The *Youth Board News* made monthly recommendations of television and radio shows, films and filmstrips, as well as books that related to contemporary youth issues, and quickly became the city's mouthpiece on youth issues. The *Youth Board News* was self-consciously optimistic, relentlessly upbeat.

In the mid-fifties, the Youth Board expanded its use of mass media to engage the public. WRCA radio and WRCA-TV produced documentaries about group work with the Youth Board's cooperation, and also gave funds to support a youth worker in a neighborhood on the West Side.<sup>55</sup> In the summer of 1956, Mayor Wagner funded a juvenile delinquency prevention advertising campaign developed by the advertising firm Warwick and Legler. The city was saturated with two messages, one aimed at parents of younger children, and one aimed at teenagers. Parents on subways, buses, and reading the newspaper saw a series of ads that argued "when family life stops, delinquency starts." Teenagers were reached through television and radio ads, particularly on "disc jockey programs." The youth campaign employed the "teen-age idiom," reminding kids

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<sup>55</sup> Val Adams, "Series Planned on Delinquency," *New York Times*, July 27, 1955: 47; *Youth Board News*, February, 1956: 3; Also, Edward R. Murrow produced a one-hour radio documentary about the 1957 killing of Michael Farmer in Washington Heights. Murrow praised the work of the Youth Board for great progress in battling street gangs, though did not go into much detail about the nature of its work. See Jack Gould, "Radio-TV: Street Gangs," *New York Times*, April 22, 1958: 67. For more on the Farmer murder and its roots in the shifting ethnic landscape of New York, see Schneider, *Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings*, 79-91.

that “j.d. is the hard way to get nowhere.” Participating in the youth campaign were such local luminaries as Roy Campanella, Alvin Dark, Yogi Berra, and Bing Crosby.<sup>56</sup>

Though Bing Crosby was possibly not the hippest choice for a spokesman at the dawn of the rock ‘n’ roll age, the Youth Board was committed to engaging New York City’s many publics on their own terrains. In the second half of the 1950s, seeking as many ways as possible to bring youth play under its auspices, the Board organized programs built around the new popular youth culture. The group workers of the earlier half of the decade had already begun to appeal to adolescent subcultures when they helped groups organize dances, raise money for club sweaters and jackets, and find spaces in which to sing doo-wop. At a one-day group worker conference in 1956, the Board made a concerted effort to get workers to use “current teen-age fads” for programming, including rock and roll, cha-cha, and clothing. The Board’s in-service trainers made a sophisticated psychological argument for the utility of culture that tied it to the overall mission of the organization:

In their outward manifestation fads are transient, subcultural fashions. In a more basic sense they are eloquent expression of the need and search for security. In the process of breaking away from early, established patterns, fads provide both an ‘apartness’ and a ‘commonness’ in the search for new identifications. At the same time the uniformity of fad behavior provides a protective submersion for the teenager’s own tenuous identity. Fads may take on healthy or unhealthy forms depending on the needs, interests and abilities within the teens who reach out mutually for support and self assertion. They can provide for the worker important and revealing clues as to the nature of immediate, obvious interests, needs and goals: Rock and Roll, Cha Cha, dance groups, and those of more basic quality: A sense of group belonging through carnivals, inter-ethnic plays, musicals, shows, exhibits. In this way fads can be used as helpful and constructive devices in a worker’s reaching and programming efforts.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Youth Board News*, April-May, 1956: 3.

<sup>57</sup> New York City Youth Board Research Department, *Reaching Teenagers Through Effective Programming*, Report from Conference for Group Workers and Supervisors,

Here the Youth Board was tying cultural performance and subcultural immersion to identity formation, showing how the individual participated in group activities to soothe the “storm and stress” of adolescent development. This was particularly useful for the worker who sought to intervene in adolescent behavior: nurturing the development and performance of fads provided the Youth Board access to the individual adolescent’s process of identity development. Seeing how the individual youth responded could give the youth worker a sense of the services that youth needed.

At the same time, the Youth Board encouraged young New Yorkers to participate in mass culture for more social purposes. From 1956 forward, the Board often integrated youth mass culture into its local activities for a more social purpose. Like the “Hi-Teen Show” in Buffalo and “American Bandstand,” which would appear out of Philadelphia the following year, Youth Board cultural programming brought adolescent play into the open, which made less likely the “unhealthy” participation in disapproved fads. The Board made sure the city’s ethnic subcultures were represented in its programming, and began a partnership with Local 802 of the Musicians Union, whose members—including the Latin jazz great Machito—regularly played Youth Board dances. In 1960, the Board organized an “Entertainment Program for Youth,” which put on shows at five youth centers in high delinquency areas. Louis Armstrong, Brooks Benton, Eddie Fisher, Lionel Hampton, Mahalia Jackson, Sammy Davis, Jr., and Tony Bennett all took part, performing free of charge, and then sometimes teaching youth about their crafts in workshops. Local athletes were also mobilized: Jackie Robinson was a regular presence

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Wagner College, Staten Island, NY. (New York: New York City Youth Board, Office of the Mayor, 1956): 46-47.

at Youth Board events, Willie Mays lent his name to the trophy that was awarded to the winners of the Council of Social and Athletic Clubs basketball tournament, Barney Ross spoke to kids about his boxing career, and the young sportscaster Howard Cosell brought professional athletes to visit to local clubhouses.<sup>58</sup>

Many of the athletes and entertainers represented in the Youth Board's cultural programming were ethnic heroes, and their involvement with the organization was part of its effort to target and appeal to particular groups in the city. Latino, African-American, and white celebrities were chosen especially for their ability to attract youth from the populations targeted by the Youth Board. Bringing youths from different backgrounds together for dances or athletic competition was one method in the Youth Board's efforts to address the interracial gang violence that became a dramatic problem in the second half of the 1950s.

"Fighting gangs" were nothing new in New York City, stretching back into the early-nineteenth century. Eric Schneider has written that a new wave of gang conflict emerged in the aftermath of the Puerto Rican and African American in-migrations of the 1940s and 1950s. Population shifts landed many adolescent newcomers in crowded neighborhoods and schools where they formed peer groups "that competed for recreational space." "Conflict," Schneider notes, "occurred primarily in New York's borderlands, where neighborhoods touched and Euro-American gangs defended their turf while African-American and Puerto Rican gangs formed to contest their control."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Youth Board News*, March-April, 1955: 1; and January 13, 1960: 4-6; Sam Zolotow, "Variety Artists Will Help Youth," *New York Times*, December 29, 1960: 17.

<sup>59</sup> Eric Schneider, *Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings*, 27-50. Along with the in-migration, Schneider argues that a shift in the economy of New York City away from manufacturing and towards service which caused a loss of blue collar jobs and the

Continuous reporting on the violence of youth gangs grafted terrifying detail onto the general sense of juvenile malfeasance that pervaded the nation and the city in the years following the war, and lent support to those who claimed that adolescent behavior was spinning out of control.

The Youth Board moved to the forefront of the city's efforts to deal with gangs in the late 1940s, and was the most prominent organization working on the problem throughout the 1950s. In 1948, the organization had given money to the Boy Scouts as part of an initiative to break up street gangs in Tremont, Morrisania, Mott Haven, Red Hook, and Harlem. Ten men with experience as Scout leaders gathered groups of boys for trips within the city, and only after establishing rapport with the group did the leaders reveal that they were from the Boy Scouts. The boys were then taken to a Boy Scout camp in New Jersey for more traditional scouting activity. At the end of the summer, one counselor noted the behavioral improvement of a group of Brooklyn boys who gave their seats on the subway to older women.<sup>60</sup>

Also in the late 1940s, the Welfare Council of New York City had organized an anti-gang project in central Harlem, and the Brooklyn Council for Social Planning had set one up as well. These projects were inspired by the model of the Chicago Area Project,

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reorganization of city space under the guise of "urban renewal" after the war were the structural underpinnings of the increase in gang violence. In addition, he builds on the arguments of sociologists Diane Archur and Rosemary Gardner regarding the up-tick in civilian violence following wartime by exploring the impact of the "thousands of young men... suddenly released back into civilian society" with "sophisticated weapons" and "elaborate tactics." Of course, this wouldn't necessarily apply to adolescent gangs, but rather gangs of young men, some of whom had served in the war. Adolescents and teenagers were often in gangs whose members were as old as their mid-twenties. See pp. 71-77.

<sup>60</sup> "New technique of Fun, Friendship Turns Boy Gangs into Boy Scouts," *New York Times*, August 10, 1948: 1.

and “involved the introduction of a neighborhood program of community organization and participation and of training of local adult leadership.” Workers directly engaged the gangs to control their behavior and called on the community for assistance. When the Youth Board was founded, it immediately made funds available to the Central Harlem Street Project to expand its work, and in 1949 the Board funded seven other agencies developing “detached worker” programs. At the same time, the Board worked directly with teenage gangs in community center projects. This latter experiment produced evidence that gang work was most effective when carried out within the Youth Board’s existing organizational framework, which provided “active, coordinated technical supervision.”<sup>61</sup>

In 1950, an outbreak of gang violence in South Brooklyn and Bedford Stuyvesant led the Board to create the Brooklyn Detached Worker Project. Two supervisors who had previously worked in the Central Harlem Street Club Project were hired, and eleven detached workers were selected from five hundred applicants. The Board’s goal was to “saturate” the area with gang workers, and reach each of the two areas’ eleven major gangs. In 1951, a unit in East Harlem was established, and the Youth Board’s detached worker program was renamed the Council of Social and Athletic Clubs, or “Street Club Project.” By the end of the decade the Council operated ten units: two in the Bronx, three in Brooklyn, one in Queens, and four in Manhattan.<sup>62</sup>

In the early 1950s, Vincent Riccio became a gang worker in the Gowanus section of Brooklyn. Riccio was a Brooklyn-bred boxer who had been in the Navy during the

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<sup>61</sup> New York City Youth Board, *Reaching the Fighting Gang* (New York, NY: New York City Youth Board, Office of the Mayor, 1960), xiii-5.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

war and had worked as a coach while attending school first at Long Island University and then while earning a M.A. in health education from Columbia. He got the position by impressing Jim Delaney, the Brooklyn Supervisor of the Youth Board, with his knowledge of the area and his ability to both handle himself physically and verbally in interactions with local youth.<sup>63</sup>

Riccio's was one path to becoming a gang worker. Hugh Johnson followed another. An African-American trained as an anthropologist and social worker, Johnson moved to Harlem after college from his native Iowa in 1947 and became a street gang worker. By the late 1950s, he headed up the Youth Board's Council of Social and Athletic Clubs operations in the South Bronx.<sup>64</sup> Kenneth Marshall was raised in Bedford-Stuyvesant, and after college became a gang worker while pursuing a doctoral degree at NYU.<sup>65</sup> Gang workers were encouraged to use their street smarts, though they were also given on-the-job training by the Youth Board and generally employed similar methods. The process of the detached worker was presented in great detail in *Reaching the Fighting Gang*, perhaps the most polished of the New York City Youth Board's publications from the era. In over three hundred pages compiled from nearly a full-

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<sup>63</sup> Vincent Riccio and Bill Slocum, *All the Way Down* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1962), 12-19.

<sup>64</sup> Robert Rice, "Who You Are and What You Think You're Doing?," *The New Yorker*, December 23, 1961: 33.

<sup>65</sup> Clayton Knowles, "Gang Wars Curbed by City Mediators," *New York Times*, November 21, 1953: 20; Eva Rosenfeld, "A Research-Based Proposal for a Community Program of Delinquency Prevention," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 332 (March 1959): 138. Marshall also became a project manager for the 1960s anti-poverty program HARYOU-ACT, and had a brief relationship with Mobilization For Youth. See Noel Cazanave, *Impossible Democracy: The Unlikely Success of the War on Poverty Community Action Programs* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007), 94.

decade's worth of detailed reports from gang workers and their supervisors, Arthur J. Rogers, the Director of the Social and Athletic Clubs, Aaron Schmais, a Youth Board Supervisor, and Hugh Johnson laid out every conceivable reason why a boy could join a gang, every type of male gang that existed, every method of interaction employed by Youth Board workers, and every potential outcome for adolescents who became involved with gangs.

The most clear representation of the Youth Board's process when working with gangs was a photo essay in the middle of the book that played, again, with the established tropes of adolescence that by the late 1950s had been branded onto the public consciousness. The photo essay, composed of nearly two-dozen black and white photos by the famed World War II photographer Emil Reynolds, traced the evolution of a fighting gang called "The Knifers." They were introduced as an "anti-social teenage gang," strutting menacingly towards the camera, weapons in tow. While their ethnicity was unspecified, they appeared to be Hispanic, presumably Puerto Rican. They were presented performing various staged criminal acts: burglary, gambling, pilfering, stealing tires, and assaulting a boy. Known to the police, and with most having criminal records, they "spent the greater part of their time in aimless horseplay and hanging around." Jerry, a Youth Board worker, zeroed in on the group after conversations in the neighborhood, and began to spend time at the soda shop where they hung out. The boys gradually became less suspicious of him, and he befriended them with trips to Madison

Square Garden for a basketball game, access to the gym of a settlement house from which they had previously been barred, and by assisting two boys who got arrested.<sup>66</sup>

Jerry mediated conflicts with another gang, helped tutor boys who were having trouble in school, and gradually became so close to members of the group that he was invited into one of their homes for a family celebration. With the continued guidance of his Youth Board supervisor, Jerry gradually led the boys towards a more sanguine existence. Eventually, they changed the name of their group from “The Knifers” to the “Social Lions,” and Jerry organized camping and horseback riding trips in the county. The boys came to his apartment to listen to music. When the group had become a “constructive social club holding orderly meetings,” Jerry finally gathered them to announce that he was moving on to another gang.<sup>67</sup>

The photo essay portrayed Youth Board interventions in gangs as a linear process that proceeded step-by-step towards a successful conclusion. The visual presentation captured the hopefulness of the work and the idealism with which Board workers attacked it, while also projecting an aura of inevitable success. The text of *Reaching the Fighting Gang*, however, was more realistic and nuanced than the images, and acknowledged the challenges of gang work. Youth were naturally drawn to group membership, and in a city as dense as New York, these groups inevitably sought space to gather. Several factors could tip one of these groups over into violent behavior, including economic hardship, territorial relationships and interethnic tension, boredom, and social

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<sup>66</sup> New York City Youth Board, *Reaching the Fighting Gang* (New York, NY: New York City Youth Board, Office of the Mayor, 1960).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

maladjustment. The text argued that getting a worker inside the gang who could intervene and redirect its energies was society's best shot at dealing with violent youth.<sup>68</sup>

*Reaching the Fighting Gang* presented only the Board's work with gangs made up of boys, but in the autumn of 1959, a social worker named Martha Lewis was hired to devise strategies for working with the female auxiliaries of male gangs. The Council of Social and Athletic Clubs publicized this work in a documentary aired on WOR-TV on January 14, 1961. The show featured reenactments of gang behavior by local teenagers as well as a statement from Mayor Wagner noting that over the previous ten years "we have become increasingly aware that something must also be done for the many teenage girls who are involved in the unwholesome behavior of the gangs. Now, with the expansion of its work, made possible by growing community support, the Youth Board has been enabled to develop a promising new program of help for the girls as well."<sup>69</sup>

The primary problem of female involvement in gang activity, as the Youth Board saw it, was "sex delinquency." Girl delinquents often became pregnant, and girls caught between teenage gangs accentuated already existing tensions. One official, quoted in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, worried that the problem was larger than the individual girl or the immediate environment, expressing concern that female delinquents "are not only infecting one another with the virus of anti-social behavior, but as mothers of the next generation they are perpetuating these patterns."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> For more on the Youth Boards work with gangs, and the perspective of a gang worker, see Vincent Riccio and Bill Slocum, *All the Way Down* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1962).

<sup>69</sup> *Youth Board News*, September 1959: 7; *Youth Board News*, November-December, 1960: 4-5.

<sup>70</sup> Gertrude Samuels, "Tangled Problem of the Gang Girl," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, July 10, 1960: 13-16.

In New York City, as nationally, consideration of female delinquency was an afterthought. Explanations of why a girl would join a female auxiliary of a male gang tended to filter into easily accessed, gendered expectations. Lewis's goal was to separate the girls from the boy gangs with which they were affiliated, and to put them on a "refinement program" that included trips to the ballet, charm clinics, and the organization of a fashion show. Though criticized for "imposing her values" on the girls, Lewis strongly believed that these experiences would instill in the girls a level of self-respect that would lead them to make more positive choices in their neighborhoods.<sup>71</sup> Boy delinquency could be explained by developmental malformation or the pressures of environment, and could be treated by counseling, group work, and other intensive methods of intervention. But female delinquency was seen as little more than an adjunct of male delinquency, and the Youth Board's only programmatic solution was to provide models of alternative behavior.

The Youth Board's deployment of ballet and fashion to distract female delinquents from the activities of boys in their neighborhoods was symbolic of the hopefulness, the resourcefulness, and, ultimately, the limitations of the organization's work. The project was innovative in that it was the first to focus on female delinquency, but limited because it offered little more than temporary social control as a solution to deeper problems. The girls who returned to their homes after participating in a fashion show may have possessed bolstered self-esteems, or even developed a new set of interests. But, ultimately, the conditions that gave rise to their delinquency in the first place were left unaddressed.

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

The Youth Board simply wasn't capable of finding and really tackling the causes of juvenile delinquency in a broad, sustained way. Its programs -- from implementing mental hygiene clinics in schools, to experimenting with delinquency prediction, to reaching youth groups and gangs, to using youth enthusiasm about music and sport to bring their activities under watchful eyes — presented a wide range of models for a city to interact with its young. The organization's work with gangs, which acknowledged the social purpose they served and began to treat delinquency as a product not of the individual's maturation but of social circumstances, was an important step in the progression of youth policy in the 1950s, and reflected a deeper understanding of the forces that shaped youth behavior than existed in the late 1940s.

After 1960 the Youth Board no longer developed or sought to implement experimental programs. New organizations, such as Mobilization For Youth, built upon and augmented the foundations created by the Youth Board by intensely focusing on a specific location and offering a more robust set of services for youths and the communities in which they were reared. By the early 1960s, the Youth Board was seen by most New Yorkers as a solid, municipal social service organization that didn't rock any boats. For those concerned that all adolescents in the city were potentially delinquent, the Youth Board could point to its summer vigilance and to its club work. To those worried about the gang problem, the Youth Board could show *Reaching the Fighting Gang*. It had become extremely astute in responding to criticism and situating itself politically in the city.

Yet, during the first dozen years of the organization's existence, the delinquency problem in New York seemed to deepen, even as the Youth Board expanded and refined

its programs and sharpened its ability to project success. Part of this was due to the growth of the gang problem. Part of it also was the bright light shone by repeated investigations into the causes of delinquency that broadened the public's awareness, its anxiety, and its understanding of the issue over the last half of the 1950s. Other city institutions also involved in the construction of adolescence were more vulnerable to attack than was the Youth Board.

## **Chapter Four**

### **“Thrill Killers” and a “Shook-Up Generation”: Local Investigations into Juvenile Delinquency in New York City, 1954-1960**

Explanations of delinquency that focused increasingly on social relations in New York City were visible not only in the programmatic adjustments of agencies like the Youth Board, but also in the local discourses produced by journalists and politicians in the second half of the 1950s. These discourses were important components in the reconstruction of American adolescence, mediating between the lived experiences of young people and the realm of ideas that influenced perceptions and policies.

A series of dramatic incidents kept both adolescents and delinquency forefront in the public’s consciousness, and heavy reporting on these events pressured the city to intensify its programmatic approach to youth issues. Much of the local discourse around delinquency was blatantly exploitative: journalists overdramatizing stories about youth to sell papers, or politicians and other public figures drawing attention to themselves by painting the starkest of pictures about New York City’s adolescents. At the same time, this intense attention to juvenile delinquency helped reveal the inadequacy of the approaches of the earlier part of the decade. Ongoing investigations into delinquency in New York City showed that crime couldn’t be understood simply as an inevitable byproduct of adolescence, some inexplicable phenomenon to be contained. A deeper understanding of the pressures on the city’s adolescents was necessary. Outraged reactions to juvenile delinquency in New York City led, mostly, to more outraged

reactions. But they also shone a bright light on the lives of young New Yorkers, and pressured the state to invest more energy in finding effective youth policy.

On August 17, 1954, four Brooklyn teenagers were arrested and charged with multiple violent crimes, including torturing and beating a vagrant to death, as well as “horse-whipping” two young women in a Brooklyn park. Melvin Mittman and Jerome Lieberman, 17, confessed to the murder of Rheinhold Ulrickson, whom they had beaten unconscious on August 6, and who died a day later. 15 year-old Robert Trachtenberg also confessed to the crime, though he was charged only with “juvenile delinquency” because of his age. Jack Koslow, 18, was charged initially with felonious assault because, unlike the others, he didn’t confess to murder.<sup>1</sup>

The foursome had been picked up after a Brooklyn resident reported to police that he had seen them assaulting a man, in Lou Sobel Park. Mittman and Lieberman confessed that earlier that evening they had found a second man asleep on a park bench. They burnt the soles of his bare feet with a cigarette, and then beat him unconscious and tossed his body into the East River. Once Willard Menter’s body was recovered, two days later, all four boys were charged with additional counts of murder. Edward S. Silver, the Kings County District Attorney, said that he couldn’t “understand what would make boys do such terrible things,” and remarked that they must have done it for the “thrills.” That fall and winter, the case of the “Brooklyn Thrill Killers” captivated New York City in a story

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<sup>1</sup> *New York Times*, “4 Teen-Agers Seized In Death by Kicking,” August 18, 1954: 1.

that was also picked up by the national press. The city and the nation joined the Brooklyn District Attorney in wondering what had made the boys do it.<sup>2</sup>

In the days immediately following the arrests, various theories emerged about how these teenagers, who at first look seemed harmless, could commit such heinous acts. Lieberman's defense attorney sought to arraign all of society, who he argued was "reaping the results of our neglect of the problems of youth for the last twenty years." Kings County Judge Samuel Leibowitz, who would be at the center of a major grand jury investigation into delinquency beginning in 1957, blamed the Children's Courts. In their sentencing leniency, he claimed, the courts were "not curing, but encouraging young hoodlums." A spokesman for the Board of Education said school officials were bewildered by the crimes, and stated that the board would "inquire both into the causes of this violence and possible remedies." Silver used to opportunity to explain in a thirty-minute meeting with Mayor Wagner that he was "jammed up" on juvenile matters, and needed to expand his prosecutorial staff. The Youth Board, committed to making only the most optimistic public statements, said nothing about the crimes.<sup>3</sup>

As some city leaders looked to blame failing institutions for the crimes, the police released to the public what they learned about the boys. Detectives found "respectable, clean homes; decent parents rearing their boys with kindness." The boys, Jewish all, were "not neighborhood bullies or pool hall loiters." Two of them were shy and bookish. Lieberman was a talented and sensitive musician, who had earlier that summer worked as a counselor at a camp in upstate New York, and who was very close with his father.

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<sup>2</sup> *New York Times*, "Teen-Age Killers Identify Body of 2d Victim, Taken From River," August 20, 1954: 1; *New York Times*, "Murder Charges Face Teen Killers," August 22, 1954: 62.

<sup>3</sup> Emanuel Perlmutter, "Court Debate," *New York Times*, August 19, 1954: 1.

Trachtenberg was the “baby” of the group, who was particularly close with Lieberman, and spent most of his spare time at the library or synagogue.<sup>4</sup>

The other two boys seemed more threatening, with episodes of violence or instability in their backgrounds. Mittman was the “muscle man” of the group, weighing well over two hundred pounds, and upon confession, he told the police that he liked to use the victims to “see how hard I could hit.” He had run into trouble in school for destroying property and attacking another student. Koslow-- who on the night of his arrest had confessed that he had “an abstract hatred of bums” and that beating them had been a “supreme adventure”--emerged in the eyes of the police and the press as the “arrogant brain” of the group. Police concluded that the force of his personality had pushed the other boys to help him commit the crimes.<sup>5</sup>

Private information about Koslow quickly found its way into the city’s major newspapers. Koslow’s attorney, Murray Cutler, attempted to lay the groundwork for an insanity defense, claiming that the boy “was in the process of homicidal mania for some time.” He had been a brilliant but pampered adolescent whose parents refused to treat early signs of mental illness. Dr. Harry Gilbert, a psychiatrist with the Bureau of Child Guidance of the Board of Education, told the papers that Koslow had been referred to his unit when he was in the second grade. As a seven year old, he was “found to be aggressive and subject to fantasies about killings.” School psychiatrists and psychologists had found him “disturbed, but not psychotic,” and in need of treatment that

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<sup>4</sup> Murray Schumach, “Case Studies,” *New York Times*, August 19, 1954: 1; Joseph Klerman and James Davis, “Sight of Body Wipes Smirk Off Thrill Kids,” *Daily News*, August 20, 1954: 3.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Gruenberg, “2d Thrill-Killer Youth Had Record of Erratic, Sadistic School Behavior,” *New York Post*, August 24, 1954: 5.

was never offered in a sustained way. According to Dr. Thomas Clark Pollack, the Dean of NYU's Washington Square Campus, Koslow had an excellent academic record at Boys' High before coming to the campus, but after one semester in the fall of 1952, NYU determined that "he was not well adjusted for college work." Koslow dropped out in 1953. His mental state quickly moved to the center of the discourse around the case. Koslow's mother wondered in the press "what did I do wrong?" as his father bragged about his son's intellect, and how everyone knew he was going to be something big.<sup>6</sup>

Coverage of the aftermath of the murders was extensive, and the press exposed intimate details of the teenagers' lives. Koslow, the leader, was examined especially closely. As his physician, Dr. Joseph Smul, told the papers, he had learned expertly to conceal his schizophrenia. He was a latent homosexual, but was secretly engaged to be married. Neighbors noted his interest in authoritarianism, and his fascination with Hitler. But he was also physically weak. When Koslow and his friends were taken to a Brooklyn pier underneath the Williamsburg Bridge from which they dumped Willard Menter into the East River to identify the corpse as it was pulled out, he almost fainted (he did pass out at his arraignment). A photographer from the *New York Herald Tribune*, present when Menter's body was removed from the river, gave the public a seemingly-staged image: as Police Lieutenant Vance Barkinson pulled back a blanket to reveal the

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<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Toomey, "'What have I Done Wrong' Mother Sobs," *New York Post*, August 20, 1954: 5; Loren Craft and Irving Lieberman, "Thrill-Murder Gang 'Brain' Insane, Has Been for Years, His Counselor Says," *New York Post*, August 20, 1954: 5; Milton Bracker, "Sanity Plea Made for Youth Slayer," *New York Times*, August 21, 1954: 18; *New York Times*, "Koslow, at 7, Was Psychiatric Case," August 23, 1954": 18.

corpse's face, the four boys looked on glumly, pointing at their victim, surrounded by police.<sup>7</sup>

The national media integrated the story of the “Brooklyn Thrill Killers” and Koslow’s psychosis into the narrative of an expanding, inexplicable wave of delinquency. *Life* wrote about “Quiet boys... and horror,” mentioning only Koslow by name as it recounted the crimes. *Newsweek* wrote about “These Terrible Young,” and how their sadism had shocked New York out of its “blasé” reaction to juvenile crime. The “experts,” as usual, “attributed the orgy of crime not only to the failure of parents and family life, but also to neighbors and the community at large. They recognized that teenage crime was growing more and more common with each passing year, suggesting a general loosening of social pressure, linked somehow with the uncertainties of this atomic age.” Correspondents tied the Brooklyn crimes loosely to crime in other big cities including Detroit, Denver, Atlanta, Chicago, and Toledo, though they failed to mention specific similar incidents in the other locations. *Time* wrote about the senselessness of the crimes, invoking the novelist Betty Smith, asking “what grew in Brooklyn?” *Look* cut right to the heart of the national interest in the murders with a piece entitled “The Case of Brooklyn’s Thrill Killers: Could This Happen to Your Boy?”<sup>8</sup> Collectively, the national reporting on the case struggled to understand whether the behavior of the boys was exceptional or normal—and wasn’t sure which answer would ultimately prove more disturbing.

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<sup>7</sup> Jack Tait, “Thrill-Kill Leader Confessed Quickly to Shield His Girl,” *New York Herald Tribune*, August 22, 1954: 1; *New York Times*, “Why?” August 22, 1954: E2.

<sup>8</sup> *Life*, “Quiest Boys... and Horror,” August 30, 1954: 16-17; *Newsweek*, “These Terrible Young,” August 30, 1954: 23; *Time*, “Senseless,” August 30, 1954: 15; *Look*, “The Case of the Brooklyn Thrill Killers: Could This Happen to Your Boy?” November 2, 1954: 126-129.

While the national reporting tied the crimes into an expanding trend of inexplicable juvenile lawlessness, reporting in New York City treated the “Thrill Killers” as exceptional and out of the norm. The boys weren’t part of a larger gang. They came from middle-class Jewish families and were educated. That same week a gang conflict brewed in the Bronx between the Imperial Hoods and the Young Sinners. The tensions led to the shooting of a bystander and a botched shooting of a gang member, and landed a dozen teenagers in jail. In a separate incident, teenager Willie Colon, a member of the Dragons, was shot and killed by three Viceroyes in Spanish Harlem. These crimes involving ethnic gangs received significantly less attention than did the Brooklyn case, and though they were reported in the papers on page one, they were presented as common events. The Brooklyn case was exceptional because of the identities of the perpetrators, the randomness of their crimes, and the intersection of the event with the national feeling that adolescence had somehow changed. When a group of Brooklyn thugs beat up an innocent teenager, led by a boy shouting “I’m Koslow, the thrill killer,” it was clear that the “Brooklyn Thrill Killers” had captured the city’s attention.<sup>9</sup>

The reaction to the crime provides a window into the parallel, evolving engagements with juvenile delinquency at the national and the local level. James Gilbert has shown that national concern about juvenile delinquency grew in the early years of the decade, peaking between 1954 and 1956. Gilbert explores how a variety of factors accounted for this trajectory, including the repeated pronouncements of concern by

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<sup>9</sup> *New York Herald Tribune*, “Boy Leads Police to Hidden Gun Used in Bronx Doorway Shooting,” August 21, 1954: 1; George F. O’Brien, “Boys in Shooting Didn’t Mean It,” *New York Post*, August 22, 1954: 1; Philip Kanter, “Gun Misfires, Saves Teener in Gang War,” *New York Post*, August 23, 1954: 2; *New York Herald Tribune*, “New Gang is Broken Up As Arrests Soar to 600,” August 23, 1954: 1.

officials such as J. Edgar Hoover and the senators who established a subcommittee to investigate juvenile delinquency; a change in behavior of police who more actively looked for delinquents; and a change in the behavior of youths, which rendered their behavior more susceptible to interpretation as delinquent.<sup>10</sup>

Yet, other factors were important as well, and they're particularly visible through the ways in which official addressed and the press reported upon delinquency in New York City, where concern about delinquency continued to intensify after 1956. J. Edgar Hoover had fomented broad national interest in delinquency as part of his moralistic crusade. At the local level, individuals or groups with motives beyond concern about youth or the nation's morals exploited delinquency for their own purposes. Local politicians and journalists seized upon issues like delinquency in the schools, or failure to provide counseling services to troubled youngsters, or the city government's slow and measured responses to youth crime. Even so, public investigations of delinquency in New York City at times mixed sincerity with opportunism.

In the local discourse on adolescence in New York City, more sophisticated structural and social explanations for juvenile crime gradually emerged alongside the psychological explanations that were more prevalent earlier in the decade. The programmatic trajectory of the Youth Board, from its earlier focus on mental hygiene initiatives to its developing emphasis on group work, gang outreach, and organizing adolescent leisure time, embodied this broadening analysis of the causes of delinquency. Mobilization For Youth, to be discussed in the final chapter, was founded on the Lower East Side in 1957, to act upon these newer understandings. The local discourse about

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<sup>10</sup> James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), 63-78.

juvenile crime in New York City was in some ways more intense than the national discourse. As a result, it was able to compel responses from the city government that helped propel the transition in youth policy towards the end of the decade.

Throughout the 1950s, the Youth Board was an occasional target for investigation. Through its public pronouncements of innovative programs, “summer vigilance,” and advertising campaigns featuring celebrities, the Youth Board actually helped construct an environment for the anxiety-inducing statements about delinquency by others. Here was an agency committed to addressing the problem of delinquency, and yet the problem seemed to be deepening as the Youth Board was expanding. In 1955, there had been only a handful of adolescents arrested for murder or manslaughter in the city. In 1956, there were more than sixty. That number that increased every year but one from 1958 until it reached nearly 200 in 1965. During this same period, the overall homicide rate of the city rose at a similar pace, suggesting that the increase in violent crime was less about adolescent behavior than broader social trends. Yet, the public focused intensely on juvenile delinquency, in part because of how the local press reported on crimes such as the Capeman and Michael Farmer killings, and the Brooklyn Thrill Killers.<sup>11</sup>

Sorting out the progression of understandings about delinquency and adolescence in 1950s New York is made difficult by the cacophonous and often-time platitudinous warnings that generally accompanied discussions of delinquency. In 1954, the case of

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<sup>11</sup> Eric C. Schneider, *Vampires, Dragons and Egyptian Kings: Youth Gangs in Postwar New York* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 73-77. The Michael Farmer murder in July 1957, and the Capeman murders in 1959 have received extensive treatment elsewhere. Eric Schneider has discussed these incidents in the context of shifting ethnic boundaries and the meaning of gang membership.

the “Brooklyn Thrill Killers” represented a delinquency that could best be explained through analysis of what had gone wrong with the individuals involved. This approach enabled dramatic statements about whether or not “this could happen to your boy” to resonate with the public, and also justified investigating of the linkages between delinquency and youth mass culture as a potential vehicle for the spread of criminal youth behavior. If delinquency was worsening, and the causes were uncertain, it seemed perfectly reasonable to examine comic books and music consumed by adolescents.

Some public investigations of delinquency in New York City beginning in the mid-1950s sought more penetrating and more actionable explanations for delinquency. Many reactions to the Brooklyn murders focused both on the boys’ psyches and the institutions that had nurtured them. Adolescent mental health was the first area of focus in the city’s war on delinquency; it had been the target of much of the early work of the Youth Board, and it was also a significant element in the reportage and commentary around the Brooklyn murders. As the decade evolved and the dramatic incidents piled up, some investigators began to ask more probing questions about the relationship between the changing population of the city and adolescent behavior, and exploring how the city’s institutions were failing to respond to the public’s needs. Other drew upon established patterns and easy, self-serving explanations.

In September 1954, Dr. Frederic Wertham, five months after the publication of *The Seduction of the Innocent*, was invited by the Kings County Court to interview Jack Koslow in the days before his murder trial. Wertham’s task was to determine if Koslow could legitimately plead insanity. After quickly determining that Koslow was aware of the difference between right and wrong—the key criteria of an insanity plea—Wertham

sought and was granted permission from Judge Hyman Barshay to spend more time with him over the coming days.<sup>12</sup> Wertham discovered first-hand what the press had already uncovered with the help of talkative policemen, physicians, and attorneys: Koslow was an extremely intelligent but maladjusted and emotionally unstable young man who harbored fascist fantasies and flirted with violence.

Wertham also uncovered and explored Koslow's fascination with comic books. According to Wertham, Koslow, not knowing the identity of his interviewer, spoke to him about "some guy, a psychiatrist, who keeps saying they have a bad effect on kids. I read about it in *Readers Digest*. Listen--I could tell that guy something." Wertham revealed himself to be "that guy," and proceeded to discuss comic books with Koslow. Wertham brought Koslow a copy of "Night of Horror," a comic book series that represented the genre the boy was interested in, and which the doctor had campaigned against. The comic featured voluptuous women being tortured—beaten with bullwhips and burned by cigarettes. As Koslow described his crimes, they read to Wertham as if they had been ripped directly from the comic books: "It is hardly something that a boy would do spontaneously—that is," Wertham said, "without getting the idea from somewhere." A search of Koslow's home uncovered a bullwhip and a switchblade that he had borrowed from a schoolmate—one of the bullwhips and the knife had apparently been bought through advertisements found in a comic book. Koslow also had a black wardrobe that he claimed he had donned when he went out to play his role as "the Vampire." He reportedly told detectives that he liked watching bodies float in the water,

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<sup>12</sup> Marya Mannes, "The 'Night of Horror' in Brooklyn," *The Reporter*, January 27, 1955: 21-26.

an image found in many comics, and shared that Mittman liked comic books too, especially about Superman.<sup>13</sup>

After his interviews, the details of which he relayed to the journalist Marya Mannes, Wertham diagnosed Koslow as a “sexually underdeveloped masochist,” and concluded that he had wielded great psychological power over Mittman’s muscle. Mittman’s mental state was left comparatively unexamined. Ultimately, Koslow and Mittman were tried and convicted of murdering Menter, and sentenced to life in prison. Trachtenberg had hired a top attorney, and testified against Koslow and Mittman. Because of his participation in the beating of Ulrickson, Trachtenberg was sent first to Youth House, the city’s detention center for delinquents, and then to Cedar Knolls, an institution run by the Jewish Board of Guardians. Charges against Lieberman in the Menter case were dismissed when the statements of the other boys placed him a block away at the time of the beating. Due to a lack of evidence, he was finally acquitted in the Ulrickson case in 1959, after graduating from the University of Arizona.<sup>14</sup>

Frederick Wertham clearly looked for and saw comic books as a culprit, and he folded the case of the “Brooklyn Thrill Killers” into the repertoire he used to publicly assail the comic book industry. By early September of 1954, just weeks after the Brooklyn murders, his crusade against comics had begun to yield results. The

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>14</sup> Morris Kaplan, “Top Counsel Hired for Teen Killers,” *New York Times*, August 26, 1954: 29; Murray Schumach, “Path to Murder Traces by Youth,” *New York Times*, December, 1954: 34; *New York Times*, “Boys’ Stories Told in Murder Trial,” December 8, 1954: 39; *New York Times*, “One Youth Clear in Dock Murder,” December 10, 1954: 21; *New York Times*, “Murder Indictment of Youth Dismissed,” December 23, 1954: 33; *New York Times*, “Sent to Youth House,” December 25, 1954: 21; *New York Times*, “Boy, 16, Committed in Thrill Killing,” January 19, 1955: 14; *New York Times*, “Two Brooklyn Killers Get Life, No Parole,” January 25, 1955: 53; *New York Times*, “Youth is Acquitted,” July 1, 1959: 8.

Corporation Counsel of New York City, Adrian Burke, moved Supreme Court Justice Edgar Nathan, Jr. to ban the sale of the *Nights of Horror* series at five bookshops in Times Square, employing affidavits from members of the New York City Police Department's Juvenile Aid Bureau. The Court of Appeals upheld the city's ban on this particular comic book a year and a half later, allowing censorship under a 1941 state law that prohibited the sale of "obscene publications."<sup>15</sup> In October 1954 the Comics Magazine Association of America, in response to pressure from the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency, adopted a "code" that would govern future publications. Obscene material, stories that glibly treated crime, and advertisements for knives or fake guns would be prohibited, and only approved comics would be stamped with the CMAA seal.<sup>16</sup>

Wertham was displeased with the comic book industry's enforcement of the code when he appeared before a joint New York State Legislative Committee in 1955. Brandishing a bullwhip that he had ordered from an advertisement in a comic book stamped with the seal of the Code Authority, Wertham reminded the committee of his conclusion that Jack Koslow was spurred to crime by comic books. The Police Commissioner of New York City, Francis W.H. Adams, also testified at this hearing that

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<sup>15</sup> *Daily News*, "Sex Book Raids Hit 5 Times Sq. Shops," September 11, 1954: 21; *New York Times*, "Sale of a Crime Book is Blocked as City Takes 5 Sellers to Court," September 11, 1954: 19; Judith Crist, "City Enjoins Horror Book Sellers," *New York Herald Tribune*, September 11, 1954: 1; *Daily News*, "Crime-Comics Firm to Drop Horror Books," September 15, 1954: 15; *New York Times*, "2 Bookshops Accept Ban," September 18, 1954: 36; *New York Times*, "Court Upholds Ban on 'Obscene' Books," April 28, 1956: 13.

<sup>16</sup> See Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency, Interim Report* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1955). On comics, see Bradford Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Baltimore, MD.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

his department saw a “direct relationship between obscenity and lewdness and juvenile crime.”<sup>17</sup> The following year, Senator Robert C. Hendrickson, who had chaired the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency until he left the Senate in 1954, published the alarmist *Youth in Danger*, which detailed his conclusions from the committee’s investigations, as well as his prescriptions for dealing with “teenage lawlessness.” A chapter on “Exposing Horror Comics” began with the story of the “Brooklyn Thrill Killers,” and argued that their crimes were directly caused by Koslow’s ownership of and obsession with *Nights of Horror*: “This is probably as striking a single instance as can be found of the close connection between abnormal stimulus and abnormal youth action.”<sup>18</sup>

In reporting on the Brooklyn killings, however, the New York press never mentioned comic books. That Wertham had evaluated Koslow was also not reported until after the case was closed in January 1955, and that appeared in a national magazine, *The Reporter*, rather than the local press. Though *Nights of Horror* was banned in New York City only two weeks after the Brooklyn murders, there was no reported link between the killings and the efforts of the city to censor the publication. Wertham’s work had already motivated Hendrickson’s subcommittee to investigate comics, and the raids on the Times Square bookstores were independent of the Brooklyn murder case.

Local reactions to the murders focused more on what the crimes said about social and educational services in the city than about the influence of the products of youth mass culture. Challenging lascivious literature and bolstering the social service apparatus of the city were of course not mutually exclusive goals. But these efforts rarely, if ever,

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<sup>17</sup> Emma Harrison, “Whip, Knife Shown as ‘Comics’ Lures,” *New York Times*, February 5, 1955: 17.

<sup>18</sup> Robert C. Hendrickson, *Youth in Danger* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1956), 193-194.

flowed from the same offices or from the same people. Activists such as Wertham, local police departments, and the federal government--through the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency--were more attracted to a law and order approach that led to dramatic searches and seizures, public testimonies, or censorship of one kind or another. Wertham would in subsequent years dismiss the programs of the Youth Board as “confused and confusing,” and argue that the “hang around” policy they employed to interact with gangs was ultimately useless.<sup>19</sup> This was an odd dismissal, since Wertham was a mental hygienist and the Youth Board was sympathetic to the approaches of that field. By that point, though, Wertham’s critique against comic books had become a crusade, and though his statements repeatedly rejected monocausal interpretations of delinquency, he was not particularly interested or involved in more penetrating investigations of city institutions.

Local reportage on the “Thrill Killers” understood that Koslow’s psychological problems had little to do with comic books, and left that angle to national reporting and narratives that tended to elevate the most dramatic elements of local crimes that would connect with a national audience. Problems with New York City’s institutions wouldn’t resonate much beyond the city line in the mid-1950s, and were limited to the local discourse, in which some journalists and politicians urgently depicted New York as under siege by the young. Concern about juvenile delinquency was a constant presence in the New York City press during the latter half of the decade, and it was tied to adolescence more generally because the viability of city’s youth institutions came increasingly under examination, especially the schools. Beyond the “Three Schools Study,” a few referral

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<sup>19</sup> *New York Times*, “Wertham Scores City Youth Board,” February 1, 1956: 23.

centers, and the implementation of the Glueck Prediction Scale, none of the Youth Board's work was based in the schools.

A Kings Country grand jury held an extended investigation of delinquency in the New York City public schools that garnered both local and national attention from 1957 to early 1960. In the 1950s, grand juries were regularly impaneled by judges and directed by district attorneys to investigate citizens or corporations who may or may not have been involved in illegal activity. Through presentments to the judge, which often were shared with the press, a grand jury could make elements of its investigation available to the public while stopping short of an indictment. Grand juries were thus powerful tools for judges to exert pressure on individuals or organizations they suspected of misconduct or either illegal or simply undesirable activity.<sup>20</sup> Judge Samuel Leibowitz had been threatening to impanel a grand jury to investigate the Children's Courts when the "Brooklyn Thrill Killers" had been arrested, but held off until 1957.<sup>21</sup>

Coverage of the grand jury focused the public's attention on what some commentators believed was the most significant element of the juvenile delinquency crisis. The argument that juvenile delinquency was rampant in the schools created

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<sup>20</sup> In part as a result of Leibowitz use of grand juries, the New York State Legislature outlawed the use of public presentments in 1961; a jury was allowed to indict, or was required to remain silent. The Legislature restored public presentments in 1964, though those cited were allowed to read the document and append a response before they were made public. Douglas Dales, "Grand Jury Curb Asked to Safeguard Individuals," *New York Times*, November 29, 1959: 1; Jack Roth, "Judge Bans Use of Presentment When Grand Jury Cannot Indict," *New York Times*, April 4, 1961: 29; John Sibley, "Presentment Act Voted in Albany," *New York Times*, March 36, 1964: 1.; Robert M. Morgenthau, "Our Invaluable Grand Juries," *New York Times*, June 23, 1987: A31. Since the mid-1960s, criminal procedure law has tightened on matters of grand jury secrecy. See New York State Criminal Procedure Law, Article 190.25 and USCS Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure, Rule 6.

<sup>21</sup> Emmanuel Perlmutter, "Court Debate," *New York Times*, August 19, 1954: 1.

shockwaves that filtered into local and state government. At the same time, the process by which the threat was articulated serves as a prime example of the utility of juvenile delinquency for those with political ambitions.

Leibowitz was the central figure in the grand jury investigation. Leibowitz was a famous lawyer in the 1930s, known for his mastery of the courtroom and successful defense of accused rapists, murderers, gangsters, and corrupt cops. He defended Al Capone on four occasions, and some called him the “next Clarence Darrow.” He had a background in dramatics from his time at Cornell and he carried that skill with him into the courtroom, where he was considered a “triple-threat,” a “master of cackles, thrills, and tears.” In 1933, the new national secretary of the International Labor Defense (ILD), William Patterson, brought Leibowitz onto the Scottsboro Boys case. Leibowitz was a mainstream Democrat, hardly a radical or fellow traveler of the Communist Party. He accepted the case in the name of justice, and proclaimed that he could scratch through the wall of southern racism and push reasonable Alabamians to recognize that the boys weren’t guilty, and should be set free. He was warned by the ILD that it wouldn’t be easy. He served as co-counsel with Joseph Brodsky of the ILD, and worked pro-bono, but also with a firm sense of the renown that would accompany acquittals. He vowed, repeatedly, to appeal the boys’ convictions “to hell and back.”<sup>22</sup>

The ILD, of course, was correct about the difficulty of Leibowitz’s mission, and the Jew from New York was not well liked in northern Alabama. He didn’t help himself by referring to the jury as “bigots whose mouths are slits in their faces, whose eyes pop

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<sup>22</sup> *New York Times*, “Leibowitz Expert in Criminal Law,” November 6, 1940: 3; James Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1994), 101-103.

out at you like frogs, whose chins drip tobacco juice, bewhiskered and filthy."<sup>23</sup> Death threats flowed in, and five National Guardsmen were assigned to guard him. Leibowitz remained a courtroom lawyer in the case until 1937, when the state dropped charges against four of the nine defendants, who were aged 18-23 at the time. He traveled with the men to Cincinnati, where he described them as "problem children" while demanding restitution for the six and a half years they had been in the custody of the state of Alabama. The defense team and the four freed men then came to New York, where they were greeted with cheers at the railroad station and appeared together at a Scottsboro Defense Committee rally, attended by 4500. Leibowitz's address to the gathering was broadcast over the radio and, concerned about the ILD's motives, he stated "there will be no exploitation, no barnstorming, no theatricals of any kind. In a day or two we're going to put them in charge of some responsible and respected agency with a view of giving them a chance to resurrect lives almost crushed out of them by the relentless persecution of Alabama." Leibowitz returned to his New York practice, and continued to advise the Scottsboro team from afar during the numerous appeals and retrials of the five boys still in jail.<sup>24</sup>

The Scottsboro case was Leibowitz's first encounter, however indirect, with the question of the role of the state in dealing with adolescents. He rode his renown and tough reputation to a victory as a Kings County Court Judge in Brooklyn in 1940, and presided over some of the most high profile criminal cases in New York City during the next twenty-three years. He repeatedly used the bench as both a strong arm of the state and a strong arm *on* the state by directing grand juries to investigate and pressure New

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<sup>23</sup> *Time*, "Jurist Before the Bar," November 15, 1963: 70.

<sup>24</sup> Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro*, 302-310.

York institutions that he felt needed fixing. Between 1949-1954, he impaneled a jury that targeted police corruption in Brooklyn, leading to the dismantling of a \$20 million a year bookmaking ring, and the disclosure of police-protected rackets along the waterfront. The headlines generated by that case propelled the judge to a stint as the City Fusion Party candidate for Mayor in 1953. The candidacy fizzled after two months when Leibowitz found he couldn't raise sufficient funds to purchase radio and television advertisements. The judge would flirt with the idea of another run at the mayoralty in the coming years.<sup>25</sup>

Leibowitz dealt often with youthful offenders in his court, and regularly used their sentencing hearings to call attention to the failure of the city to effectively address juvenile delinquency. He advocated harsh punishments for young criminals, and accused juvenile courts of coddling them with their inclination to recommend psychological counseling and group work rather than incarceration. When he sentenced a 16-year old armed robber with a history of delinquency to 20-40 years at Sing Sing, the young convict hurled an obscenity at the judge, who yelled back that the boy was a "rat." In 1955 Leibowitz sentenced a 16 year-old to death, the youngest person so sentenced in twenty years (though the sentence was subsequently changed to 30 years after the boy was granted a new trial, which also happened in front of Leibowitz). He sent youth to rural camps, lectured others about the dangers of cellar clubs, and pressured the New York State Liquor Authority to clamp down on juvenile drinking after a group of young

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<sup>25</sup> *New York Times*, "Samuel S. Leibowitz, 84, Jurist and Scottsboro Case Lawyer, Dies," January 12, 1978: B2; *New York Times*, "Sentence Suspended, But..." June 11, 1941: 23; *New York Times*, "Police Cite Work on 'Worst Block,'" February 22, 1947: 28; *New York Times*, "Leibowitz Fights Liquor for Minors," May 29, 1948: 1; *New York Times*, "3 Youth Gangs in Brooklyn Agree to Turn Their Weapons into Police," November 27, 1950: 1; *New York Times*, "Leibowitz to Head City Fusion Ticket," June 17, 1953: 1; *New York Times*, "Leibowitz Drops Mayoralty Race," August 2, 1953: 1.

convicts relayed to him just how easy it was to get some “Sneaky Pete.” Leibowitz was attuned to the rhetoric of juvenile delinquency in other quarters of society, referring to it as a “disease” and urging the expansion of mental health services in high delinquency areas, though he thought criminals should face more punitive consequences.<sup>26</sup>

Leibowitz decided to impanel the grand jury after Maurice Kessler, aged 17, appeared in his courtroom. Kessler was accused of throwing liquid lye into the face of a high school classmate and, before going to trial, was found to be insane. Leibowitz was “particularly curious to learn why young Kessler, known to school officials for more than eight years as several kinds of psychopath, was allowed to go on attending schools for normal children.”<sup>27</sup> While tasking the 23-member jury, Leibowitz swiped at the “so-called experts and do-gooders” who couldn’t stem the “tide of terror and lawlessness” in Brooklyn’s public schools. Though Leibowitz didn’t call the Youth Board out by name when impaneling the grand jury, he made later statements excoriating the organization for calling “a murderous gang of thugs” a “street club,” and his public statements from the bench suggested he had little regard for the organization’s work.<sup>28</sup> The judge acknowledged that Kessler was psychotic, but he made no distinction between a lack of services for the mentally unstable and the lack of responsiveness by the school system to the needs of its students, even though he had also known enough to call for better mental health services. The delinquency rate was simply unacceptable, and Leibowitz intended to use the jury to pressure the city to take a more active approach in rooting out the

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<sup>26</sup> *New York Times*, “Jail Young Thugs, Leibowitz Urges,” August 13, 1954: 17; *New York Times*, “Brooklyn Boy, 16, Sentenced to die,” June 7, 1955: 37.

<sup>27</sup> *New York Daily News*, Editorial, November 8, 1957: 39.

<sup>28</sup> *New York Times*, “Leibowitz Attacks Youth Board View,” September 11, 1959: 16.

causes and limiting the effect of delinquency in the schools. The judge reminded the jury of children's constitutional rights to an education, and that the State Education Law covered the "dismissal from school of pupils who had been found insubordinate, disorderly, or delinquent." The jury was directed to issue subpoenas to school officials, and Leibowitz declared that "when children were permitted to remain in a 'hotbed of crime, violence, and depravity,' officials were guilty of a misdemeanor under the Penal Code."<sup>29</sup>

Through the late 1950s, Leibowitz still had an eye on the mayoralty. By impaneling the grand jury and pressuring it to be as aggressive as possible, he was able to stimulate local discussion about delinquency and move the Board of Education to action, while also keeping his name in the headlines. Beyond his work in the court system, Leibowitz was a sought-after speaker on the local political circuit, where he developed and publicized his own theory of contemporary delinquency, and sounded a lot like J. Edgar Hoover.

Delinquency, Leibowitz argued, was a byproduct of other abstract changes affecting American adolescence. Too many parents absolved themselves of responsibility for their children, either through neglect or through breaking up the home. Religion was increasingly forsaken, and a rampant, lewd materialism predominated a culture and encouraged moral degeneration. Psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, swimming pools, and summer camps were all relatively new developments in the state's engagement with youth, and they reflected the approach of a coddling society of

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<sup>29</sup> *New York Daily News*, "Probe Crime in B'klyn Schools; Leibowitz Blasts Do-Gooders," November 7, 1957: 2+; *New York Times*, "Leibowitz Orders School Crime Study," November 7, 1957: 37; *New York Times*, "Leibowitz Reminds Jury of School Law," November 15, 1957: 24.

“bleeding hearts” rather than a demanding and disciplined one. Illegitimacy, moral complacency, and ethnic antipathies were the foundations for delinquency, and parents and youths should be clear that the state would not tolerate such behavior. The tough talking helped convince the New York Young Republicans to urge the former Democrat to run for Mayor. It also filtered into the behavior of the grand jury, leading to both dramatic headlines and tangible action from the Board of Education.<sup>30</sup>

The grand jury called on school officials to testify, beginning with the Superintendent, Dr. William Jansen, and leading to an exchange that summed up the clashing perspectives of the Board of Education and the judge. Leibowitz was interested in social control of adolescents, and stated that he’d like to see policemen in every school. Both Jansen and the Teacher’s Union responded negatively, emphasizing the schools’ lack of resources and limited ability to meet curricular needs. The resources necessary to place 900 officers in the schools, they argued, would be better used appointing remedial reading teachers and psychologists, as well as augmenting other existing services.<sup>31</sup>

Leibowitz ignored their responses, viewing the jury primarily as an opportunity to speak to the public rather than to gather evidence. Leibowitz wanted the jury to make school officials answer why “a poor innocent kid is compelled to go into a hell hole with a psychopath,” and why “maybe hundreds or even thousands of similar wild animals are

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<sup>30</sup> Speech Notes, Samuel Simon Leibowitz Papers, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Box 1, Folders 19-20; Letter, Edmund R. Schroeder (Co-Chairman, Downtown Luncheon Committee, New York Young Republican Club) to Samuel S. Leibowitz, October 22, 1959, Leibowitz Papers, Box 1, Folder 21.

<sup>31</sup> Superintendent Jansen’s Statement to the Press, November 27, 1957 and Press Release by the Teachers Union of the City of New York, November 27, 1957, Leibowitz Papers, Box 1, Folder 23.

occupying rooms where decent kids go for an education. What has been done to get these misfits out?”<sup>32</sup> The jury possessed the power to subpoena and to indict, and in an exchange with the foreman of the jury, George Golden, Leibowitz urged them to use those powers to compel school officials to give answers. Witnesses who agreed to testify before the jury were asked to sign a waiver of immunity.<sup>33</sup>

The grand jury investigation turned ugly in a very public way in late January 1958. George Goldfarb was a 55-year old principal at John Marshall Junior High, a racially mixed school in the heart of Brooklyn. On January 21<sup>st</sup>, he appeared before the grand jury to testify about his school. The following day, a 13 year-old girl was raped at John Marshall, and an administrator and policeman on campus were assaulted the following day. Goldfarb was called to testify before the grand jury a second time on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, a meeting at which the jury badgered him and threatened to indict him. Goldfarb was distraught, and reported his experience to the Board of Education, even while asking permission for a policeman to be posted at his school. The principal was to appear before the grand jury again on January 28<sup>th</sup>, but leapt to his death from the roof of

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<sup>32</sup> *New York Times*, “School Jury Told to Call Officials,” December 5, 1957: 46.

<sup>33</sup> *New York Times*, “Leibowitz Scores School Officials,” December 7, 1957: 29. The drama surrounding the jury took an odd turn in mid-December when Golden, the foreman, was one of four drivers whose cars were reportedly hit by bullets from a .22 caliber rifle while moving along the Gowanus Parkway in Brooklyn. The police said the sniper was “probably a thrill seeking juvenile.” Lo and behold, they were right—somewhat. The following day the police arrested three teenagers for sling-shooting stones at drivers from the roof of a building. The episode was an example that combined police overstatement and fear-mongering, on the one hand, and actual juvenile lawlessness on the other. See *New York Times*, “Sniper Hits Four Autos,” December 18, 1957: 44; and *New York Times*, “3 Teen-Agers Seized for Stoning Autos,” December 19, 1957: 23.

his apartment building a few hours before. The letter he had written to commander of the 77<sup>th</sup> Precinct formally requesting a dedicated patrol arrived the following morning.<sup>34</sup>

Goldfarb's friends and supervisors claimed that the "suicide was caused by harassment by the grand jury." The foreman in turn retorted "that the jury would try to find out if Goldfarb was being harassed by the Board of Education," and that while the jury sympathized with the family of the principal, it would not be deterred in its efforts to make the schools safe for all children. If anything, the death should highlight the problem and "accelerate" efforts to deal with it. Charles Silver, the President of the Board of Education, and William Jansen, the Superintendent, returned the posturing at Goldfarb's funeral, which was attended by 500.<sup>35</sup>

No one knew for certain the causes behind Goldfarb's suicide, but that didn't stop Golden and the Board of Education from shamelessly battering each other with blame. Newspaper reporting about the suicide muted details of the stress Goldfarb was under: he oversaw a school in a changing neighborhood where crime was on the rise, and possessed neither the power nor the resources to deal effectively with the situation.

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<sup>34</sup> Joseph Kiernan, "Principal Dies in Leap; Faced School Crime Quiz," *New York Daily News*, January 29, 1958: 2; Charles Gruenberg, "Principal's Suicide Turns Spotlight on Schools; Was He Harrassed?," *New York Post*, January 29, 1958: 3.

<sup>35</sup> William Haddad, "Adams, Jansen Back Goldfarb Death Story," *New York Post*, January 30, 1958: 3+; Emanuel Perlmutter, "Principal's Death is Laid to Threat by a Grand Juror," *New York Times*, January 30, 1958: 1+. On the day of the funeral, students at Marshall were let out early so that they could attend. Edward Hausner, a New York Times photographer waiting at the school, was threatened by a group of students. He snapped a photo from inside the crowd, which ran on the front page with the caption "'You're Making Us Look Bad,' pupils of John Marshall Junior High School told photographer yesterday in Brooklyn. One boy raised his hand menacingly before the camera." Another boy handed the photographer a note in which the Corsair Lords, a local gang, threatened to run off any "flatfoots" assigned to the schools. The boy who wrote the note was arrested two days later and charged with juvenile delinquency. See Edith Evans Asbury, "Mayor Sets Study on School Crime," *New York Times*, February 1, 1958: 1.

Leibowitz declined to comment on Goldfarb's death, allowing George Golden to speak on behalf of the jury. Though Leibowitz clearly encouraged Golden to be aggressive, the real estate broker welcomed the stage. Golden had his own political aspirations that were bolstered by his presence at the head of the grand jury. While serving, he was nominated for the presidency of the Property Association of Greater New York. The association was aligned with the United Taxpayers Party, a political group organized against public housing, rent control, and anti-discrimination in private housing legislation. The Taxpayers Party would nominate Golden as its candidate in the 1958 gubernatorial contest, before ultimately throwing its support to Nelson Rockefeller.<sup>36</sup>

Golden and Leibowitz approached delinquency from similar political perspectives. They both felt that the state wasn't doing enough to address the issue, and must be compelled by rule of law to be more aggressive. While the dramatic headlines were good for newspaper sales, a number of editorials urged Leibowitz and Golden to tamp down their rhetoric and also to acknowledge that juvenile delinquency was an issue larger than just the schools. The Board of Education questioned the legality of the grand jury.<sup>37</sup>

Mayor Wagner, who skillfully evaded controversy while in office, got involved on the periphery of the issue by inviting members of the board to a meeting at Gracie Mansion. He organized a five-man committee to plan the "first phase" of a program to

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<sup>36</sup> Oliver Pilat, "The Jury Foreman: A 'Victory' Dinner," *New York Post*, February 6, 1958: 5; *New York Times*, "A. George Golden, Realty Man, Dies," May 13, 1959: 37.

<sup>37</sup> *New York Times*, "Crime in the Schools," January 30, 1958: 20; *New York Daily News*, "Board Raps 'Intemperate Inquiry,'" January 31, 1958: 2; Edwin Ross and Neal Patterson, "School Board Opens Up on Jury Quiz," *New York Daily News*, January 31, 1958: 2; Charles Gruenberg, "Board Challenges Legal Standing of Grand Jury Inquiry on Schools," *New York Post*, January 31, 1958: 5; Ross and Patterson, "Mayor Calls School Board, HS Officials to Talk," *New York Daily News*, February 1, 1958: 7.

combat delinquency in the city's schools. Without much mention of the grand jury, the committee took on the question of why there was no place to keep delinquents who appeared in front of the Juvenile Court. Usually, these students were just returned to their schools. The committee recommended opening six new schools devoted to "problem children," and expanding guidance, counseling, and other services. They urged the mayor to secure additional retention facilities from the state for "hard core repeaters," and reassured teachers that the Board would support them in their efforts to enforce "reasonable disciplinary measures."<sup>38</sup>

A week later, the Board of Education announced that all pupils "charged with a violation of law involving violence or insubordination" would be suspended until their cases were decided. The Board felt that it was "the duty of other public agencies"—including the Youth Board—"to provide for custody of pupils having violent tendencies." Given the lack of facilities to hold boys (girl delinquents were not mentioned in any of the reportage around the policy) who had been arrested, the city was faced with the prospect of unsupervised adolescents roaming the streets while they awaited adjudication. 644 boys were suspended from their schools immediately upon enactment of the policy. Governor Averell Harriman met with Mayor Wagner immediately to discuss a "crash program" to deal with the problem. Within days, Harriman arranged beds at existing facilities for over 200 delinquents, and Wagner announced that four special "700" schools would be opened in vacant buildings within a month that could accommodate up

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<sup>38</sup> Charles Gruenberg, "Mayor, Board Conferring on School Crisis," *New York Post*, February 3, 1958: 2; William Haddad, "Committee Giving Mayor Its 1st Plan To Cope With Violence In Schools," *New York Post*, February 4, 1958: 3; Leonard Buder, "Schools Propose Plan to Cut Crime; Mayor Approves," *New York Times*, February 5, 1958: 1.

to 800 suspended students on a temporary basis.<sup>39</sup> The State Labor Commissioner announced his intention to consider a work-study program, and the schools announced plans to hire more guidance counselors.<sup>40</sup> The Youth Board would “concentrate its attention on the suspended students,” and integrate them into its outreach programs.<sup>41</sup> Leibowitz’s pressure, as artless and nasty as it had been, moved that state to specific action, even if it was a mere bandage on a system in need of much deeper reform.

Thirteen ministers from Bedford-Stuyvesant sent Wagner a letter pledging their cooperation with the Board of Education to do whatever they could to make the schools safer, but criticizing “headline-seeking adventurers who would disrupt our schools—and who by innuendo are attempting to place a racial connotation on recent unfortunate events in our borough.” Race had not been explicitly discussed in the furor around the

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<sup>39</sup> The schools were informally referred to as “700” schools as a byproduct of the public school naming system. “600” schools had been in existence for a decade. In 1927, P.S. 37, later to become 612 in Manhattan, was re-organized as a probationary school for seventh and eighth graders. In the early 1930s, Lillian L. Rashkis took over control of the school and instituted a program of social and behavioral adjustment. Rashkis expanded the grades served, offered special remedial and therapeutic services, required higher qualifications for teachers, and de-emphasized coercive discipline. Dr. Frank O’Brien, the Associate Superintendent and head of the Board of Education’s Division of Child Welfare, noticed Rashkis’s efforts, and worked to expand the idea over the next two decades. The ‘600 Schools’ were founded under Rashkis’s direction in 1948, and by 1956 there were five operating in the city: 612 and 614 in Manhattan, 611 in the Bronx, 613 in Brooklyn, and 615 in Queens. Rashkis served as director of the schools until her death in 1959. In addition to these schools, schools located in detention and treatment facilities in the city were also called “600” schools. See The Juvenile Delinquency Evaluation Project of New York City, *The ‘600’ Day Schools* (New York, NY: The Project, 1957); *New York Times*, “Official Honored for ‘600 Schools,’” May 3, 1959: 48; *New York Times*, “Mrs. Rashkis Dead: Led ‘600 Schools,’” November 27, 1959: 29.

<sup>40</sup> Edith Evans Asbury, “Harriman Offers to Aid on Schools; Wagner Accepts,” *New York Times*, February 10, 1958: 1; Betsey Luce, “City, State Chart Delinquency Worry, Seek Space at Once for 200 Youths,” *New York Post*, February 13, 1958: 1.

<sup>41</sup> Wayne Phillips, “Schools to Start Hearings For Suspended Students,” *New York Times*, February 11, 1959: 1.

grand jury, though many reports did note that juvenile crime had been most severe in areas undergoing “ethnic changes.” What the city’s demographic transition meant for social relations was not yet deeply investigated in the local press, though as a plain fact city life it was readily acknowledged. The Brooklyn ministers warned that certain parties might look to invoke a racial analysis of the schools jury for their own purposes. In the process, they implied that race was less at the center of the schools issue than an element of the controversy available for exploitation by those with ulterior motives.<sup>42</sup>

The ministers were justified in their concern. When the local controversy reverberated nationally, race was at the center of the narrative. The Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency set up a five-person research team at the Federal Courthouse in Brooklyn to monitor the schools investigation and determine if federal intervention or aid could help. This alarmed many New Yorkers; Congressman Emmanuel Celler of Brooklyn warned that segregationists might use a federal investigation of juvenile delinquency in New York as a “defense mechanism” for their opposition to the enforcement of school integration in the South. Stanley Lowell, an assistant to the Mayor, said that if the Subcommittee “is coming here to try to prove that we have a Spanish problem or a Negro problem in our schools, then we are going to invite them out.” Jacob Javits clashed with Georgia segregationist Eugene Talmage about the matter on the floor of the Senate. Talmage offered sympathy to the citizens of Brooklyn for their trouble dealing with the schools, and suggested that the President send “Federal troops to Brooklyn to preserve order in the public schools there in the same

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<sup>42</sup> Leonard Buder, “Schools Propose Plan to Cut Crime; Mayor Approves,” *New York Times*, February 5, 1958: 1; Betsy Luce, “CCNY President Blasts Jury Tactics; Joins Fight on School Crime,” *New York Post*, February 5, 1958: 5;

manner that he did to force a new social order upon the public schools of Little Rock, Arkansas.” Javits snapped back that the Senator was crying “crocodile tears.”<sup>43</sup>

National reportage on the grand jury also played up the race angle. *U.S. News and World Report* published a feature article on the “crime-ridden schools” of New York, invoking the film *Blackboard Jungle* and concluding that the truth was “grimmer than film fiction.” “The great majority of the crimes occurred in schools that are heavily populated by Negro and Puerto Rican pupils—mostly in Brooklyn and Harlem.” The magazine followed, a month into the crisis, with an article that more pointedly asked, “Is race tension behind the surge of crime in New York City’s integrated schools?” The piece acknowledged that New York is known as the “melting pot,” and that its schools are the nation’s most integrated. Yet, Americans around the country “see frequent news stories about New York Negroes attacking white pupils and white teachers. They read that schools in the Negro and Puerto Rican areas of New York City head the list of crime centers.” Though the Board of Education refused to disclose to *U.S. News and World Report* data on the race of disciplined students, information leaked about the location of the most troubled schools and the ethnic makeup of delinquents that supported the notion that the city’s African American and Puerto Rican students were disproportionately represented among the disciplined. *Newsweek* also emphasized racial animosity when it noted that the problem in the Brooklyn was a function of “sharp changes in neighborhood

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<sup>43</sup> *New York Times*, “2 Senators Clash on City’s Schools,” February 5, 1958: 16; *New York Times*, “Misuse of Inquiry on Schools Feared,” February 17, 1958: 15.

ethnic make-up” that brought different groups together, rather than simply the enrollment of more African Americans or Puerto Ricans in the schools.<sup>44</sup>

The Associated Press studied how local papers reported on the relevance of race to the furor around the jury, and concluded that most had downplayed race as an angle. With a few notable exceptions, reports of the violent acts that happened while the jury was in session didn’t specify the race of either the perpetrators or the victims, and mention of racial tensions were limited to discussion of violence in “transitional areas.” These subtle references were enough to signify to outside observers that New York City’s delinquency problem was perhaps something more significant. Southern newspapers mimicked the analysis of Senator Talmage: race tensions must be the primary cause of the violence in New York schools. The North, it seemed, also had itself a Negro problem.<sup>45</sup>

Were the New York newspapers missing something in what they chose to emphasize, or were the southern and national media using the story of the schools jury for their own purposes? No racially motivated incidents were reported in the local press, and the claims of black on white crime put forth by *U.S. News and World Report* were dubious. Juvenile delinquency was in part a social construction, and this was far from the first time that an event centering on delinquency was seen through the prism of particular political interests. In this case, the southern media and the segregationist bloc of the Democratic Party saw an event that they could use to their rhetorical benefit in their

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<sup>44</sup> *U.S. News and World Report*, “Biggest City’s Nightmare—Its Crime-Ridden Schools,” February 7, 1958: 46+; *Newsweek*, “Death of a Teacher,” February 10, 1958: 72; *U.S. News and World Report*, “Latest on Crisis in New York Schools,” February 21, 1958: 40+.

<sup>45</sup> *U.S. News and World Report*, “As New York Newspapers Tell Story of Crime in Schools,” February 21, 1958: 45+.

efforts to resist federal enforcement of *Brown v. Board of Education*. While Southern segregationists exploited violence in the schools as a tool in their program of massive resistance, the New York press — not yet as interested in school desegregation as it would become in the late 1960s -- was more focused on what the city and the state were going to do to respond to the immediate problem of delinquency in the schools.

For city and state politicians and the Board of Education, engaging with the grand jury was politically dangerous, but unavoidable. The Board of Education was forced by the controversy to develop a “delinquency plan” which called for smaller classes, more intensive remedial education, increased guidance and vocational support, and a targeted advertising campaign to attract new teachers. All of these initiatives required resources the schools did not have. More immediate action was focused on social control of the unruly, and on clearing out spaces for non-delinquent students to learn. The number of “600” schools was to be doubled, and New York state vowed to increase its facilities for expelled boys.<sup>46</sup> Mayor Wagner occasionally sparred with the grand jury over whether or not he would testify. Wagner echoed the sentiment of many editorials when he told Edward Silver, the District Attorney, that the jury “had helped focus public attention on a most important problem, but that it had also led to misunderstandings and false evaluations in some corners.”<sup>47</sup> Wagner would not be pulled into a debate with the grand jury over the matters at hand, and certainly not into sworn testimony without being

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<sup>46</sup> The number of ‘600’ schools expanded over the next few years, reaching twenty-five when the Livingston School for Girls (PS 621) was opened in 1961. Of these twenty-five schools, ten were public schools for boys, and fourteen were attached to a youth institution of some sort. They collectively served over 4200 students. See McCandlish Phillips, “Delinquent Girls at City School Given a New Approach to Life,” *New York Times*, May 22, 1961: 33.

<sup>47</sup> Letter, Mayor Robert Wagner to Edward S. Silver, March 19, 1958, Box 156, Folder 2164, Wagner Archives, Laguardia Community College, Long Island City, NY.

subpoenaed. He did, however, begin the Youth Board's emphasis on high staffing levels—its “summer vigilance”—and expand police foot patrols in locations where youth gathered in 1958.<sup>48</sup> This use of the Youth Board can be seen as a political response from the city to the concerns about delinquency voiced by the Brooklyn grand jury.

The bluster of the grand jury and Leibowitz's overbearing personality obscured just how effective the tandem was as a motivating force. Politicians could question the jury's tactics, but they couldn't deny that crime in the schools was unacceptable. There may not have been more crime in the winter of 1957-1958 than in previous years, but there were enough successive incidents to intensify the jury's rhetoric and bring much public scrutiny on the Board of Education. While the school system was justified in rejecting the jury's threats of criminal prosecution, the jury was right to urge an adjustment in the way schools dealt with delinquents. The jury controversy kept public interest in the question of juvenile delinquency energized, and inspired a number of prominent newspaper series on delinquency in 1958.

Harrison Salisbury, a Pulitzer Prize-winning *New York Times* reporter who had recently been in Moscow and who would provide influential coverage sympathetic to the civil rights movement and skeptical about the war in Vietnam, wrote a seven-part, front page series on delinquency in 1958. The series identified its subject as “New York City's school students and their backgrounds and problems.” Salisbury focused broadly on adolescence in the city, exploring what he called the “shook-up generation.” This was a reference to a hit 1957 Elvis Presley song, and a nod to explanations of delinquency that implicated youth culture. It was also the name of the book Salisbury published later that

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<sup>48</sup> *New York Times*, “City to Shephard Youth in Summer,” May 6, 1958: 30.

fall, and the generation consisted of not just the estimated 8-9000 “dangerous youths” in the city, but also every young New Yorker who was potentially “upset or disturbed.” Salisbury examined various youth terrains in the city, with particular attention to schools, gangs, and the shifting meaning of community in New York. Salisbury, influenced by Chicago sociologist Frederic Thrasher’s work, acknowledged that gangs gave youth meaning and a sense of belonging beyond the cramped confines of converted tenements or newly built but poorly maintained housing projects.<sup>49</sup>

Salisbury gave much attention to migration to the city and the socio-cultural disruption generated by swift demographic change. He found disruption in the influx of migrants from Puerto Rico and the American South. The economic pressures of life in New York City scattered many families, as did the large-scale re-imagining of many neighborhoods. “Slum clearance,” Salisbury argued, “uproots the people. It tears out the churches. It destroys the local businessman... it mangles the tight skein of community friendships and group relationships beyond repair... And it pours into a neighborhood hundreds and thousands of new faces—often of a race or nationality different from that which lived there before.” Projects, such as the \$20 million complex that housed 3400 families in Fort Greene, became, in Thrasher’s words, “interstitial areas” where different ethnic groups mingled uneasily. Youth Board Director Ralph Whelan had found that delinquency rates invariably rose in the first six to eighteen months after a housing project opened. Absent the social controls of an established community or close family, youths found their way into gangs, which in turn provided an organizing principle for social relations in the area. Yet those adolescents did not absent themselves from the

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<sup>49</sup> Harrison Salisbury, “Youth: On the Streets, in the Schools,” *New York Times*, March 24, 1958: 1.

larger community. They still attended school. Many held jobs, or spent their afternoons at community centers run by the Youth Board, or at local candy stores where lawful behavior was required and enforced by adult oversight. In contrast to Wertham and Leibowitz, Salisbury praised the efforts of the Youth Board to engage these adolescents on their own terrain. He also praised city schools, arguing that they were often the most stable social institution in the lives of their students, and were proactively addressing questions of delinquency despite minimal resources.<sup>50</sup>

While Salisbury's reporting was mostly descriptive, his invocation of Thrasher and discussion of the Youth Board showed a sophisticated conversance with contemporary psychological and sociological literature on delinquency, as well as youth policy in the late 1950s. Much of his reporting explored structural deficiencies in the city — slum clearance created more problems than it solved, employment futures for youth were uncertain — and he also had integrated psychological explanations for delinquency that were difficult to articulate with much precision. “The prime source” for delinquency, he found, “lies in the youngsters themselves. It reflects their ‘shook-up’ condition. The condition, in turn, mirrors the brutal, non-family, morally deficient, transient environment in which they live.” The causes of delinquent behavior were both psychological and social: the adult world was violent and fast and erratic, and uncontrolled adolescents were prone to be “unpredictable and frequently dangerous to themselves and others.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Salisbury, “‘Shook’ Youngsters Spring from the Housing Jungle,” *New York Times*, March 26, 1958: 1.

<sup>51</sup> Salisbury, “Lethargy of Public Found at Root of Youth Problem,” *New York Times*, March 30, 1958: 1.

Despite the focus on the individual, and the sensational series title drawn from the rhetoric of rock ‘n’ roll, Salisbury’s reporting was the closest to a structural explanation of delinquency focusing on poverty as can be found in a mainstream newspaper in the late 1950s. His reporting tied delinquency to a broader issue as he cast the inability of the city’s institutions to effectively meet the challenges posed by its adolescents as a byproduct of a larger societal drift away from responsibility and civic investment. Kids were “shook-up” on their own, but their violent behavior was more reflective of “instability in the adult world.”<sup>52</sup> Delinquency, to Salisbury, was about more than the individuals who performed it and the institutions that failed to stop it; it was about a nation unmoored from its values, and a city unwilling or unable to really address deep-seated problems. The power of Salisbury’s reporting, and the fact that the venerable *New York Times* was giving delinquency such a significant, extended look, made at least one central agency in the city’s efforts to address delinquency take immediate action: Chief Inspector Thomas Nielson directed all police commanders from the precinct level upwards to read the series and submit a report within a week on “any police action taken in connection with the subject matter.”<sup>53</sup>

The discourse on youth in late 1950s New York City was filled with both the sensationalist rhetoric and opportunism evident in many local and national investigations into delinquency. Some voices added anxiety to the discourse on adolescence, and little else. The *New York World-Telegram & Sun* published two extended pieces that sought to expose elements of the delinquency problem, yet which proved more exploitative instead.

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<sup>52</sup> Salisbury, “School Violence Reflects Instability in Adult World,” *New York Times*, March 28, 1958: 1.

<sup>53</sup> *New York Times*, “Police Ordered to Read Stories on Youth Gangs,” March 26, 1958: 32.

The difference in tone and quality between these pieces and Salisbury's was a function of the journalists and their newspapers. The first *World-Telegram and Sun* series was a repetitive space-filler inspired by the tone of the Leibowitz grand jury. Ten short articles entitled "Paroled to the Jungle" hurled accusations at the state without much reporting or specificity. Appearing in July, amidst of the Youth Board's "summer vigilance," the series took as its primary point of focus deficiency in city and state facilities for dealing with youthful offenders. Most of the sources were Domestic Relations judges, who were flustered because youth houses were overcrowded and "young punks thumbed their noses at cops and truant officers." The "soaring juvenile delinquency rate" was the "shame of the city," a sickness, "like cancer," that the state allowed to fester by failing to provide adequate support and education at youth correction facilities. The result was a high rate of recidivism. Explicit blame for the slow response to the increased number of delinquents was placed on the State Department of Social Welfare and the New York City Commissioner of Welfare and adviser to Mayor Wagner, Henry McCarthy. The rhetorical ploy of using "jungle" in the title gave readers the impression that youth, many of whom were not white, were running wild across the city.<sup>54</sup>

The second *World-Telegram & Sun* series, a remarkable prank that appeared in November 1958, recentered focus on the schools, and also intersected directly with Leibowitz's grand jury. George Allen, a reporter at the paper, resigned his position in late January, and announced to colleagues and friends that he was going to prepare for the teachers examination and seek placement at one of the city's troubled schools. He crammed for the exams, passed them in April, and received his teacher's license,

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<sup>54</sup> Murray Davis and Robert Prall, "Paroled to the Jungle," *New York World-Telegram & Sun*, July 8-18, 1958.

contingent upon his taking courses in the history of education. He enrolled at Teachers College in July, and in August applied for a substitute English teacher's position at John Marshall Junior High-- the school in Brooklyn where George Goldfarb had been principal when he committed suicide. Allen began work as a substitute at Marshall JHS on September 4, and kept a nightly journal. He resigned November 5, and a week later, under his byline, the "Undercover Teacher" series appeared in the *World-Telegram & Sun*.<sup>55</sup>

Allen's fifteen-piece series detailed how in his two months as a teacher, he became "overworked, threatened and frightened." His narrative reads like a serialization of the movie version of *Blackboard Jungle*, though without the flare of the original text or the good intentions of the protagonist. Cynical teachers refer to their classrooms as "dungeons" and warn the new guy not to "let 'em see you afraid." Allen was given an "adjustment" class, made up of the "worst" kids in the school. He concluded early on that they were, for the most part, unreachable; the low intelligence quotient scores on their record cards suggested that they couldn't learn. Their ethnicity and language problems were an obstacle for Allen as well: "I wanted to taste the rewards of being able to impart learning to students who sought knowledge. But I couldn't. The make-up of the class was against it. The register contained 24 Negroes, one student of foreign descent and five of Puerto Rican parentage."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Robert Prall, "A Telegram Reporter's Secret Role: Undercover Teacher in Tough School," *New York World-Telegram & Sun*, November 12, 1958: 1.

<sup>56</sup> George Allen, "'Don't Let 'Em See You're Afraid,' Writer told by School Official," *New York World-Telegram & Sun*, November 13, 1958: 1; Allen, "'Hey, Teach' Is Signal for Classroom Bedlam," *New York World-Telegram & Sun*, November 19, 1958: 1, 3.

Allen recounted in detail a confrontation with a student, the “prize psychotic of the school,” who challenged his authority in the classroom. He wrote vividly about breaking up a fight, and repeatedly noted the implicit threats that came along with the “uniform” worn by a presumed gang member. Allen bemoaned feeling unprepared by his speedy education course, and resented the amount of bureaucratic paperwork required by school administration. He learned from other teachers that he could keep his students occupied by having them copy lessons off of the board. Bad teaching predominated in the school. The author felt badly for students who earnestly wanted to learn, but for whom even remedial classrooms were no help.<sup>57</sup>

Allen found problems with every element of the public school system. Rowdies kept the students who genuinely wanted to learn from doing so. Teachers were resigned to doing little, and developed curricula that were not adapted to the needs of the students. School administrators covered up trouble rather than working to expose and fix it. Classes were over crowded, teachers were underpaid and poorly trained. Ethnic and lingual diversity hindered learning.

It could be argued that Allen was reporting in the muckraking tradition, or as a social anthropologist practicing participant observation, and that his series did a great service to the city by shining light on the failures of the public school system. But “Undercover Teacher” offered nothing that was new, or that hadn’t been explored by the press in the years dating back to the “Brooklyn Thrill Killers.” The primary motivating force behind the series, it seems, was to sell papers: Allen’s editors targeted John

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<sup>57</sup> George Allen, “Reporter Passes First Test: Challenge by Class Tough,” *New York World-Telegram & Sun*, November 14, 1958: 1; Allen, “Slow Pupils Cheated by Our Schools,” *New York World-Telegram & Sun*, November 21, 1958: 1.

Marshall Junior High School precisely because it had been at the center of the controversy the previous winter. Allen admitted as much. His recommendations were steps the Board of Education was already eager to take — smaller classes, special schools for troubled kids, higher pay for teachers in tougher situations — but which were made difficult by an overextended school budget and hard-to-move bureaucracy. Despite Allen’s acknowledgement that the majority of the students at the school wanted to learn, each of the fifteen pieces is dominated by a sense of grave crisis. Moreover, Allen was unequipped to be in the classroom, and while his experience revealed the extent to which demand for willing teachers had a negative impact on the hiring practices of the Board of Education, the author and his editors were untroubled by the ethical implications of sending a teacher into the school with ulterior motives. The two months of reporting done by Allen seemed intended only to confirm an argument he entered the project ready to make. He ultimately compiled the pieces into a book, *Undercover Teacher*, which was published by Doubleday in January 1960.<sup>58</sup>

The obvious entrepreneurial imperative that lay behind the “Undercover Teacher” series was lost on neither the Board of Education or Judge Leibowitz. The Board circulated a document arguing that the series did not offer a “true picture of conditions in the public schools,” and Leibowitz directed the grand jury to investigate both the reporting *and* the school officials who objected to its verity. In response, the *World-Telegram & Sun* quoted new Schools Superintendent John Theobald as agreeing with most of the conclusions in the series, even though he had earlier that fall proclaimed a significant drop in violence in the New York City public schools due to increased

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<sup>58</sup> George Allen, *Undercover Teacher* (New York, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1960).

coordination between the Board of Education and the Police Department. The jury ultimately determined that there was nothing wrong with the “Undercover Teacher” series and even praised Allen for performing “a fine public service.”<sup>59</sup>

The strategy and goals of the *World-Telegram & Sun* and Leibowitz’s grand jury overlapped around the need for dramatic headlines to pressure the state to action. But the “Undercover Teacher” story also illustrates how the entrepreneurial motive impacted the local discourse on delinquency by ramping up levels of anxiety. By Autumn 1958, the contours of the juvenile delinquency issue in the city had been fairly well established, traced by the work of the New York City Youth Board, hammered out by local reporting that included Salisbury’s eloquent and erudite exposition, and focused upon by the grand jury. “Undercover Teacher” grafted detail onto a well-known story but, unlike the Salisbury series, offered little that was new. Rather, the dramatic headlines increased the volume of rhetoric, and nurtured the public’s anxiety by suggesting that little could be done other than to report, again and again, on the hopelessness of the issue.

In the fall of 1958 Leibowitz’s grand jury continued to pummel the Board of Education. One presentment called upon Governor Rockefeller to pass a law allowing corporal punishment in the schools, dismissing the Board of Education’s prohibition of teacher physicality as “namby-pamby.”<sup>60</sup> Assemblyman Joseph Corso, a Brooklyn Democrat up for re-election and seeking to tap into law and order sentiment, had introduced a corporal punishment bill the previous year. Governor Harriman had vetoed.

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<sup>59</sup> *Time*, “Undercover Uproar,” December 8, 1958: 71; Leonard Buder, “Drop in Violence Noted by Schools,” *New York Times*, September 26, 1958: 29; *New York Times*, “Inquiry Ordered on School Articles,” November 21, 1958: 20; *New York Times*, “Leibowitz Bids Jury Look Into Charges That Reporter Distorted School Expose,” January 8, 1959: 21.

<sup>60</sup> *New York Times*, “Grand Jury Asks School Discipline,” January 22, 1959: 63.

Corso requested that Leiberman direct the grand jury to support his resubmitting the bill to the new governor, which they did. Governor Rockefeller vetoed the bill the following spring.<sup>61</sup>

After spring 1959, Superintendent John Theobald proved more adept than William Jansen at parrying the jury's blows, cooperating and welcoming its critiques as constructive. Leibowitz renewed the jury through March 1960, when it made its final presentment recommending that the work age be lowered to fifteen as an option for dealing with "backward" pupils.<sup>62</sup> Through the issuance of public presentments, the grand jury had been able to censure individuals who it felt bore some responsibility for problems in the schools. In this sense, Leibowitz used the grand jury to exert pressure on the state without ever charging an individual with a crime. He also solidified himself as a leading public "expert" on juvenile delinquency in the city and in doing so was able to move to other venues to state his views and expand his visibility.<sup>63</sup>

The Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency held hearings in New York City twice in 1959, and Leibowitz testified each time. At a hearing in February, he had assailed the city government for "tossing in the ash can" his plan for creating a force to deal with the "hard core" families that produced the majority of delinquents, as well as a youth correction authority to take over sentencing of convicted

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<sup>61</sup> Letter, Joseph R. Corso to A. George Golden, May 27, 1958, Leibowitz Papers, Box 1, Folder 20; *New York Times*, "Rockefeller Vetoes Proposal to Permit Spanking in School," April 23, 1959: 33.

<sup>62</sup> *New York Times*, "Jobs at 15 Urged for Some Pupils," March 22, 1960: 34.

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, Samuel Leibowitz, "Nine Words That Can Stop Juvenile Delinquency," *Readers' Digest*, March, 1958: 105-107.

juveniles (his plan had gotten no attention in the local press).<sup>64</sup> The subcommittee returned in the fall. Tensions around the hearing were high, as a 16-year-old named John Guzman had been murdered on the steps of Morris High School in the Bronx the previous week, and the city was still reeling from six other juvenile murder cases over the summer (including the infamous “Capeman” killings). These hearings garnered much wider attention than did the February event, and featured testimony by Governor Rockefeller, Mayor Wagner, Police Commissioner Stephen Kennedy, Ralph Whelan (then City Commissioner of Youth Services as well as Executive Director of the Youth Board), John Theobald, Brooklyn Borough President Abe Stark, and even Jackie Robinson. Rockefeller, Wagner, and Kennedy used the opportunity to request increased federal government control over weapons and narcotics. Whelan proclaimed that the Youth Board was making it possible for the vast majority of youth in gangs to “make out all right,” and Theobald highlighted the inadequacy of city facilities. Stark urged the creation of a \$100,000,000-a-year program of federal subsidies to settlement houses and other agencies, to be administered by a National Youth Coordinator.<sup>65</sup>

Leibowitz, though, stole the headlines when he testified that the way to cut juvenile crime was to cut migration to the city “from all parts of the country and the Caribbean.” Leibowitz offered statistics that showed that Puerto Ricans, though they constituted only 7 percent of the city’s population, made up 22.3 percent of its delinquents. African Americans were 11 percent of the population and made up 46.3

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<sup>64</sup> Ira Henry Freeman, “U.S. Delinquency Study Opens Here,” *New York Times*, February 13, 1959: 1.

<sup>65</sup> *New York Times*, “Boy, 16, is Killed in Gang Ambush at Bronx School,” September 22, 1959: 1; Peter Kihss, “Leibowitz Urges Cut in Migration to Combat Crime,” *New York Times*, September 25, 1959: 1.

percent of the cases awaiting trial in the Brooklyn juvenile courts. Joseph Montserrat, the chairman of the Puerto Rican Community Self Help Program, countered the claim that Puerto Ricans made up a larger percentage of the juvenile population than of the general population, noting a study by the Board of Education that had concluded that Puerto Rican children were less likely to become delinquent than other children in the same neighborhood. Leibowitz countered that his attack on migration was intended to pressure Mayor Wagner “to open his mouth, to do a little talking not only to Puerto Ricans but others who are going to be jammed into these terrible slums which cause juvenile delinquency.” Leibowitz assailed the city for “pampering and protecting slumlords,” while also urging the creation of a state law requiring one-year’s residency before eligibility for relief.<sup>66</sup>

Leibowitz’s flailing attacks provoked harsh rebukes. Police Commissioner Kennedy warned against the stereotyping in Leibowitz’s statements, arguing “we must not transfer individual guilt to the group.” Local ministers criticized Leibowitz, and the Puerto Rican Bar Association censored him. He also received multiple death threats, and was granted police protection. Wagner rejected Leibowitz’s plan wholesale, noting that the city government had been working with the Puerto Rican government to aid settlement, and reiterating that it was important to allow migration to the city and to find ways to help new residents adjust.<sup>67</sup> Senator Thomas Hennings of Missouri, who chaired the subcommittee and conducted the hearings, disagreed forcefully with the notion of restrictive legislation that applied only to minorities. He also testified before the

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<sup>66</sup> Peter Kihss, “Leibowitz Urges Cut in Migration to Combat Crime,” *New York Times*, September 25, 1959: 1.

<sup>67</sup> Peter Kihss, “Mayor Bars Plan to Cut Migration,” *New York Times*, October 2, 1959: 1.

Brooklyn schools grand jury the day after concluding his own hearings, focusing on the deep social, psychological, and historical causes of the “appalling increase” in youth crime. As an outsider who had been studying delinquency in New York, Henning saw much to be concerned about; yet he also concluded “New York is doing a good job, making a real effort, to stem the rising tide of lawlessness. New York is our show window and we’re proud of it.”<sup>68</sup> Hennings’s words foreshadowed how central New York City would be in the federal response to juvenile delinquency after 1960. As far as he was concerned, the city’s work was to be celebrated and emulated, not ridiculed.

But Leibowitz dug in his heels, rearticulating his belief that a large part of the problem of juvenile crime was attributable to the disruption caused by the in-migration of blacks and Puerto Ricans. He tried to qualify his stance in a television appearance alongside Frederic Wertham on Theodore Granik’s issues show, “American Forum of the Air.” Both men tied youth crime to racial animosity, and assailed the city’s overall response. The Youth Board, they agreed, was “a most inadequate institution” that did “tremendous harm. They spend a great deal of money. They have wonderful publicity. They say that gangs, for instance, are something natural and reasonable, even a gang of fifty. One boy commits murder. Then they take the rest out to Coney Island.”<sup>69</sup>

Leibowitz’s appearance in 1959 alongside Wertham on television decrying the city’s response and highlighting the role of racial animosities as a causative factor in youth crime provided a fitting coda to a decade’s worth of discourse on delinquency in New York City. Wertham’s theories on the impact of mass culture on adolescent

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<sup>68</sup> Newton H. Fulbright, “A Veteran Reporter Looks at Teen-Age Crime in New York,” *U.S. News and World Report*, October 5, 1959: 61-63; Robert Alden, “Hennings Scores Leibowitz Plan to Cut Migration,” *New York Times*, September 26, 1959: 1.

<sup>69</sup> *New York Times*, “Youth Crime Tied to Racial Hatred,” October 12, 1959: 39.

psychology were prevalent at the beginning and middle of the decade, and remained in circulation as Leibowitz, with much bluster and public attention, argued that the city's response must address a problem that was broader than the individual. Though Leibowitz's recommendations were rash and racist, they did moor the concept of delinquency to circumstance. His perspective represented both the emergence of more specific interpretations of the causes of delinquency and a creeping racialization of delinquency in the late 1950s. Though the reporting by the national press highlighted the role of racial animosity in the incidents investigated by Leibowitz's grand jury, the judge himself didn't speak in these terms until the fall of 1959. That he began to signify both that existing explanations of delinquency were insufficient, and that the architects of adolescence would increasingly examine social relations in the city, particularly along racial and class lines, more closely than they had before.

Wertham and Leibowitz agreed that the tactics of the New York City Youth Board -- an organization that actually sought to implement policy that incorporated each of their critiques — were insufficient responses to juvenile delinquency. What was a sufficient response to delinquency, then? By the late 1950s, the problems of adolescence seemed so vast that no solution could possibly be adequate. The rhetoric around juvenile delinquency became most roiled when it was augmented by other motivations, prohibiting reasoned discourse about causes and solutions. Anxiety-producing pieces like those offered by the *New York World Telegram & Sun* offered no new information and produced no new ideas about how to deal with delinquency, doing little to help the public grasp the issue, and contributing to the general sense that the problem was intractable. Wertham's crusade against comic books and Leibowitz's fire breathing from

the bench, along with J. Edgar Hoover's pronouncements at the national level, also took on qualities that distracted from whatever validity their arguments held about mass culture, institutional responsibility, or moral drift.

At the same time, there were real social, economic, and structural developments in the life of the city — examined by Salisbury, implied via rhetorical scattershot by Leibowitz — for which delinquency was a symptom. By the late 1950s, some space *was* opening up in the discourse on adolescence for investigations into the impact of the contemporary urban condition. While Salisbury used language and drew upon theories that at times overlapped those offered by both Wertham and Leibowitz, his analysis was not intended to compel change by stoking the public's anxiety, but rather by fostering an awareness of the depth and complexity of the contexts out of which youth behavior came. Salisbury, more than any of the other figures examined above, sought deeper understanding as the foundation for knowing action. Even as he was writing, Mobilization For Youth, an organization that sought a new way to address the conditions Salisbury explored, was planning its program on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Their 660-page proposal, completed in 1961, would draw extensively on his reporting in framing the lives of New York City's adolescents.

Salisbury's level-headedness was difficult to find within the popular rhetoric about youth in the 1950s at both the local and the national level. The path towards a deeper popular understanding of adolescence was often obstructed by the ulterior motives of those, like Leibowitz or the more shameless journalists, whose loud voices dominated the construction of adolescence. Even so, the incidents examined in this chapter show how, despite the obstructions, the discourse on delinquency in New York during the last

half of the 1950s haltingly moved towards an examination of the particular environments in which youth matured. A similar trajectory, also impeded and clouded by ulterior motives, is visible in the broader popular discourse on American youth culture in the last half of the 1950s.

## Chapter Five

### **From Jim Stark and Rick Dadier to Dick Clark and Officer Krupke: Juvenile Delinquency and American Youth Culture, 1955-1961**

By the early 1950s, youth culture was central to adult understandings of both adolescent behavior and delinquency. In the years following World War II, the mass media had presented the juvenile delinquent as a guidepost for understanding the behavior of the young, as the inverse of the ideal adolescent who had been imagined at the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth. In the mid-1950s, with the discourse on youth culture in the mass media as their guide, many adults were jittery about strange and assertive teenagers, and remained convinced that delinquency was an unbound viral epidemic, practically impossible to trace or comprehend.

Youth consumption accelerated through the middle of the decade, and as it did, adult efforts to understand the relationship between youth culture and delinquency absorbed some of the broader issues of the era. This led to a flurry of unease in the mainstream media in the last half of the decade.

Especially prevalent in the evolving discourse was a growing focus on race. African-American youths had, for the most part, been absent from most mainstream media engagements with adolescence through the early 1950s. Not so after 1954. *Brown v. Board of Education* foregrounded the black freedom struggle in the minds of most Americans, and the explosion of rock 'n' roll racialized the popular discourse on adolescence in a way it hadn't been before. Both of these developments had the experiences of American youths at their center. Other contemporary social questions

were also increasingly present in the discourse on youth in the late 1950s. These included changing American gender norms, evolving urban landscapes, and two questions that evolved from an expanding consumerism: who would reap the benefits? And, what did mass consumption mean for the soul of the nation?

The overwrought reaction to youth culture in the second half of the 1950s can be understood as a product of the combination of these broad, anxiety-inducing social transformations with the long-simmering belief that adolescence was a volatile period of identity formation. This discourse -- which was propelled mostly by the observations, arguments, and exploitative behavior of politicians, educators, social critics, and entrepreneurs -- evolved on a track that paralleled the social science at the heart of youth policy in the 1950s. In fact, these discourses regularly intersected. After all, social scientists also participated in the broader cultural life of the nation, and their theories were not limited in influence to parochial circles. Social scientists and policymakers often drew evidence for their arguments from popular culture, and their ideas in turn helped shape the American public's broader understandings of adolescence.

A subtle shift in the national discourse about youth culture is discernible in the middle of the 1950s, and it corresponded with a theoretical shift towards social and contextual analyses of delinquency within American youth policy. In short, a focus on the social implications of consumption became more central in popular critiques of youth culture. The belief that adolescents possessed vulnerable psyches, which was primary in many of the critiques of youth consumption in the first half of the decade, was augmented by concerns about the influences of a youth culture that was becoming more varied in its content and whose messages had become impossible for parents to control. In the first

half of the 1950s, adolescent behavior was alarming because it seemed bizarre and inexplicable, characterized by moodiness and assertions of autonomy. In the second half of the decade, youth behavior retained those traits, but also seemed to be acquiring some social *meaning*. As in the earlier period, delinquency became a reference point in the discourse on youth culture for developments that the architects of adolescence either didn't understand or didn't accept. A spike in adult unease about adolescent behavior in the mid-to-late 1950s was caused by the integration of broader social concerns into the already considerable disquiet about American youth.

Frederic Wertham's research on comic books in the late 1940s and early 1950s promoted the belief that frail adolescents were urged towards criminality by the consumption of lascivious products. Other documents, such as the 1955 movie *Rebel Without A Cause*, also found causation for delinquency in vulnerable adolescent psyches. *Rebel Without A Cause* borrowed the title of Robert Lindner's 1944 book about the hypno-analysis of a criminal psychopath, and presented to the viewing public an adolescent destructiveness that evolved from deep within the dissatisfied personas of the teenagers portrayed by Sal Mineo, Natalie Wood, and James Dean.<sup>1</sup>

*Rebel* focused on the alienation of three middle class adolescents in Los Angeles whose parents were either unable or unwilling to effectively address their problems and needs. Sal Mineo's Plato is practically abandoned by his jet-setting mother, and seeks a

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<sup>1</sup> In a telling confluence, criminologists Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, whose work influenced the discourse at the 1950 White House Conference on Children and Youth and provided the foundations of the New York City Youth Board's delinquency prediction efforts, wrote the introduction to Lindner's text. Robert M. Lindner, *Rebel Without A Cause* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1944). The Gluecks were the most well-known proponents of the idea that a delinquent could be identified through assessment of his psyche.

sense of belonging with Natalie Wood's Judy, and James Dean's Jim Stark, towards whom Plato has barely-concealed romantic feelings. Judy covets love and affection from her father, and when she's rebuffed, turns to Jim's dark, withdrawn personality. Jim himself is new to town, his family having moved from previous homes after he's found trouble, and he is disturbed by his mother's pushiness and his father's lack of backbone. Jim awkwardly seeks acceptance in his new high school, and finds a new family amidst the affections of Judy and Plato.

In *Rebel Without a Cause*, delinquency evolves out of the angst that consumes each of the three main characters. The audience first meets Jim in a police precinct, after he's been arrested for public drunkenness. His efforts to fit in at his new high school are rebuffed by a school gang, who force him into a confrontation outside a planetarium. When he stands up for himself, he's challenged to a game of chicken, which ends with the death of his adversary. Unable to explain to his parents what's happened, and unable to go to the police because he's being pursued by the gang, Jim and Judy run to an abandoned mansion and, joined by Plato, they together imagine a more fulfilling life. The gang finds their hideout, and Plato protects his new family by shooting one of their pursuers. The police also find them, and Jim and Plato end up back at the planetarium, where Jim removes the bullets from Plato's gun while calming him. But when the boys emerge from the planetarium, Plato loses control and charges at the police before being shot down.

The scenes at the planetarium imbued *Rebel Without A Cause* with an existential longing, as each of the protagonists search for identity and a sense of belonging their families fail to provide. Beyond laying significant blame on the main characters' parents,

the movie also presented adolescents whose conflicts — so central to personality development, as Erik Erikson had explained -- were so deeply felt that they ultimately turned destructive. Plato is the least stable of the characters, abandoned by his mother, fraught with the weight of his homosexual worship of Jim. He falls over the edge into tragedy. But both Judy and Jim were also deeply wounded by their disappointment with their parents, so much so that they were driven to dangerous and destructive behavior at the cost of adjustment. The middle-class environments that surround these adolescents are not nurturing, but the characters themselves are also incapable of navigating their own maturation; they're depicted as exceedingly sensitive, vulnerable, and weak. It's not difficult to see Jim Stark as a reflection of Jack Koslow, the Brooklyn Thrill Killer. They share detachment, charisma, the gift of leadership, and tenuous self-control. Their only real difference lay in the contrast between Koslow's sneering authoritarianism and Stark's evident sweetness, which was made so powerful by Dean.

*Rebel Without a Cause* was released within the shadow of Dean's death at the wheel of a sports car less than a month earlier. The tragedy helped bronze his characterization of Jim Stark as the stylish symbol of mid-1950s adolescent angst (while also strengthened the arguments of the anti hot-rod brigade). Popular reaction to the movie was mostly positive, despite some criticisms. The Motion Picture Association of America, which through its enforcement of the United States Motion Picture Code of 1930 played a large role in controlling which films got made and how, came under fire for allowing *Rebel Without a Cause* to present scenes of brutal violence. According to James Gilbert, out of concern that copycat crimes would emerge, "Chicago police had ordered cuts in the film, and the city of Milwaukee had banned it outright." But *Variety*

reported receiving letters from teenagers who identified with the characters, parents who found poignant meaning in the film, and even some sociologists and psychologists who appreciated the depiction of the vulnerable relationships between adolescents and their parents.<sup>2</sup>

The reaction to *Rebel Without a Cause* was considerably less intense than the backlash that had met *Blackboard Jungle* a few months earlier. *Blackboard Jungle* was adapted from Evan Hunter's novel of the same name, and had been inspired by the author's experience as a substitute teacher at a vocational high school in New York City. The first in a long line of Hollywood films centered on a morally upstanding teacher reclaiming lost students in a rundown urban school, the movie was also the first to use rock 'n' roll on its soundtrack, and to capitalize on the music's growing popularity. *Blackboard Jungle* helped turn "Rock Around the Clock" by Bill Haley and the Comets into an iconic hit. Even though the book didn't mention rock music, the trailer for the film featured the song played over a truck highjacking and an attempted rape. "Blackboard Jungle" became shorthand for the urban school system, particularly in New York City, and rock music became wedded to popular notions of juvenile delinquency.<sup>3</sup>

The enthusiastic adolescent reception of the movie puzzled and worried adults, cultivating the already pervasive sense that juvenile delinquency was akin to a virus spread through mass culture. When "one o'clock, two o'clock, three o'clock rock"

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<sup>2</sup> James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 188-189.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate, Subcommittee to Study Juvenile Delinquency in the United States, *Motion Pictures and Juvenile Delinquency*, Report to Committee on the Judiciary, 84<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2nd sess., 1956: 21; Thomas Pryor, "Metro Pursuing Juvenile Theme," *New York Times*, July 12, 1955: 21; see Evan Hunter, *The Blackboard Jungle*, Third Edition (New York, NY: Dell Printing, 1966). Hunter later published, to great renown, a series of detective books under the name Ed McBain.

blasted from theater speakers, some teenagers danced into the aisles of movie theaters. Some of this enthusiasm was read as celebration of the lawlessness depicted in the film. According to reports out of Rochester, New York, “young hoodlums cheered the beatings and methods of terror inflicted upon a teacher by a gang of boys” in the picture.<sup>4</sup> A school administrator in Chicago wrung his hands out of concern that the movie “encourages delinquency among the more susceptible teenagers by exposing them to situations which wouldn’t be tolerated anywhere,” and a citizen in New York condemned the movie as a crime, “doubtless applauded by all the teenagers whose behavior we deplore.”<sup>5</sup>

Critical reaction to the film was mixed. Some reviewers were distracted by the movie’s sensationalistic depiction of the impact of juvenile delinquency in the schools, while some others felt the movie’s analysis of the causes of delinquency was too simplistic.<sup>6</sup> Bosley Crowther wrote in the *New York Times* that “some boys may be emboldened to imitate the hoodlums in this film, no doubt to their eventual misfortune, and to the passing distress of all concerned.” Crowther, joined by several New York City educators, also argued that the film sensationalized and distorted the situation in the city’s schools and thus poorly served the viewing public by misinforming them.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Democrat and Chronicle* of Rochester, New York, April 26, 1955, in Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 185.

<sup>5</sup> “Pedagogs Pummel ‘Blackboard’; Hits Teacher Prestige,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 13, 1955: 7; “Burn It!” Letter from Mrs. Robert E. Goodwin to the *New York Times*, April 3, 1955: X5.

<sup>6</sup> Bosley Crowther, “The Exception or the Rule?” *New York Times*, March 21, 1955: 21. “A Movie Tackles Teen-age School Terror,” *Look*, May 3, 1955: 31; “The Current Cinema,” *The New Yorker*, March 26, 1955: 120; “Tigers in the Classroom,” *Saturday Review*, April 2, 1955: 31; “Blackboard Jungle,” *New Republic*, April 11, 1955: 30.

<sup>7</sup> Letters from C. Frederick Pertsch and Edward N Wallen, “Jungle Tempest: Schoolroom Drama Fires Hot Controversy Among Readers,” *New York Times*, April 3, 1955: x5.

The movie helped codify the relationship between juvenile delinquency and rock 'n' roll at the national level. On May 20, 1955, four Princeton University students were suspended following “an uprising by 1000 students” earlier in the week in which students blocked campus traffic and turned on a fire hydrant. As the *New York Times* reported, the “riot” began when “‘Rock Around the Clock,’ from the movie ‘The Blackboard Jungle,’ blared from phonographs on the campus.”<sup>8</sup> The incident at Princeton reinforced the assumption that rock music accompanied and even might cause juvenile delinquency. Rock music could even carry the delinquency virus into the Ivy League.

The accusations against *Blackboard Jungle* drew the attention of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, which was established in 1953 and held hearings in both Washington D.C. and in localities where particular problems were highlighted and explored. In 1954-1955 the committee focused on the relationship between mass culture and juvenile delinquency, examining comic books, radio and television, and the motion picture industry. Senator Estes Kefauver, a Democrat from Tennessee, chaired the subcommittee during the 83<sup>rd</sup> and 84<sup>th</sup> Congresses. Kefauver had gained national exposure as the leader of televised hearings on organized crime in 1950, and had been a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1952 (and would be again in 1956). The hearings provided a grandstanding opportunity; who could argue against an effort to protect the nation’s young?<sup>9</sup>

After the release of *Blackboard Jungle*, Kefauver traveled alone to Los Angeles to explore the relationship between motion pictures and juvenile delinquency. Though two

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<sup>8</sup> *New York Times*, “Rioters at Princeton,” May 19, 1955: 31; *New York Times*, “Princeton Suspends Four; Action is Aftermath to Rioting Earlier in Week,” May 21, 1955: 37.

<sup>9</sup> On Kefauver, see Charles Fontenay, *Estes Kefauver: A Biography* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1980).

psychiatrists agreed that “the influence of movies could not be minimized,” the doctors “doubted their power as activating agents.” At most “impressions gained by viewing pictures would be more likely to serve as ‘trigger mechanisms’ to set off latent tendencies of abnormal behavior.” Kefauver reiterated that unspecified evidence showed that “indiscriminate” depictions of violence or brutality “constitutes at least a calculated risk to our young people.”<sup>10</sup> Kefauver’s stewardship of the hearings supported the belief that adolescents were exceedingly vulnerable, psychologically frail, and that delinquent tendencies lay dormant within them.

Dore Schary, vice-president in charge of production for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, the studio that produced *Blackboard Jungle*, was called to testify before Kefauver. Schary defended the film, arguing that it was intended to be controversial, that violence in the schools was a timely topic, and that the studio was in fact doing the public a service by shining light upon it. Kefauver acknowledged the artistry of the movie, but noted that he and other members of the subcommittee felt that “there are valid reasons for concluding that the film will have effects on youth other than the beneficial ones described by its producers. It is felt that many of the type of delinquents portrayed in this picture will derive satisfaction, support, and sanction from having made society sit up and take notice of them.” The film’s brutality and violence overwhelmed its message, and the subcommittee concluded, ultimately,

...it is likely that there will be people who will go to see the *Blackboard Jungle* and any other picture, then come away with the point of view which they had brought to the picture themselves. This, of course, is the exact point of view that the subcommittee has been taking since the beginning of its investigation i.e., that movies will not change attitudes of a particular subject, but that they can form

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas M. Pryor, “Impact of Movies on Youth Argued,” *New York Times*, June 17, 1955: 24.

new attitudes or can reinforce and give support and direction to already existing attitudes. In the case of *The Blackboard Jungle* attitudes of brutality and violence may be given a push further in that direction.<sup>11</sup>

Another witness to appear before Kefauver, Ronald Reagan, took the opposite view. He saw the movie as a “great tribute” to schoolteachers, and believed that audiences enjoyed “a feeling of triumph when the one boy was won over and became a leader for the right.”<sup>12</sup> The subcommittee’s intention was not to promote a state-driven censorship, but rather to urge communities and industries to police themselves and challenge “questionable” materials.

Though *Blackboard Jungle* was widely criticized, only two localities — Memphis and Atlanta — saw fit to attempt (unsuccessfully) to keep the movie from being played locally.<sup>13</sup> A United States diplomat had the picture removed from the Venice Film Festival.<sup>14</sup> That public action against “questionable” material stopped short of censorship

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<sup>11</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate, Subcommittee to Study Juvenile Delinquency in the United States, *Motion Pictures and Juvenile Delinquency*, Report to Committee on the Judiciary, 84<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2nd sess., 1956: 54.

<sup>12</sup> Ronald Reagan quoted in Glenn Altschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock ‘N’ Roll Changed America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 196 (n. 58).

<sup>13</sup> Christine Smith Gilliam, the movie censor in the Atlanta Board of Review, banned the film locally and argued that the movie was “immoral, obscene, licentious, and will adversely affect the peace, health, morals and good order of the city.” Loew’s Inc., the movie theater chain distributing the film, successfully opposed the Atlanta ban, winning an injunction against enforcement from U.S. District Court Judge Boyd Sloan, who expressed “grave doubt as to the constitutionality of the local ordinance under which the ban was promulgated.” See Bert Spencer, “Suit Here Seeks to Lift ‘Blackboard Jungle’ Ban,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, June 3, 1955: 12 and *Variety*, “‘Blackboard’ Court-Ok’d for Atlanta; City Ducks Basic Censorship Issue,” July 13, 1955: 7.

<sup>14</sup> In Fall 1955, *Blackboard Jungle* it was released for international distribution. The first dustup came when Ambassador Clare Booth Luce was accused of forcing the withdrawal of the movie from the Venice International Film Festival, which led Metro Goldwyn Meyer to file a complaint with the State Department. While Luce didn’t force the movie out, she did say she wouldn’t attend the festival if it was shown because it showed America in an “unfavorable light.” It’s not clear whose final decision it was to remove the film and show *Interrupted Melody* instead in its place, but Luce’s comments

suggests a consensus, non-unanimous though it may have been: the methods used to limit the impact of mass culture on the behavior of youth should be constitutional and local, and also respectful of commerce.

This consensus also helps explain the sensationalistic reporting on juvenile delinquency that reigned over much of the decade. Political figures like Kefauver and Samuel Leibowitz believed that they were providing public service by cultivating awareness and concern about juvenile delinquency and by offering parents dramatic warnings about the questionable content that their children encountered in the marketplace. Most activists, including Wertham, frowned on censorship, favoring instead regulation, oversight, and parental awareness of the materials targeted to youth. Newspapers and magazines, motivated by a sense of public duty combined with the pressures of commerce, welcomed dramatic warnings and missed no opportunity to present the public with something about which it should be concerned. Entrepreneurs who sought to reach both the vibrant teen market as well as the adults concerned about the relationship between youth culture and delinquency operated under the adage that “no publicity is bad publicity.” The same journalistic rules that led to the “Undercover Teacher” series in the *World Telegram & Sun* led papers to present controversies about youth culture in the most sensationalistic terms possible.

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generated significant commentary, most of which was in agreement that the United State’s government should not engage in censorship or anything close. The movie got an “X” rating, for adults only, in Britain, was shown for free “because of it’s educational value” in Finland, was given an “especially valuable” rating in West Germany, and, interestingly, was banned in India. See articles in *New York Times* August 27, 1955; August 28, 1955; September 1, 1955; September 3, 1955; September 4, 1955; September 8, 1955; September 9, 1955; September 11, 1955; September 18, 1955; October 26, 1955; November 10, 1955; and December 4, 1955.

This arrangement was rife for exploitation by politicians, the press, and entrepreneurs alike. Expressing concern about delinquency was an unassailable position, and sincerity and exploitation often mixed in ways difficult to separate in reactions to cultural events, like the release of a movie, and to political ones, like the grand jury to investigate delinquency in the New York City schools later in the decade. *Blackboard Jungle* and its appropriation of rock 'n' roll had revealed to entrepreneurs the various populations whose interest in or concern about juvenile delinquency could be exploited for profit. Adults went to see the movie out of concern, and young people went because its soundtrack signaled that the movie was ostensibly about their world. The commercial success of *Blackboard Jungle* showed that juvenile delinquency was a device that could draw paying customers.

As the nation stumbled in its implementation of *Brown v. Board of Education*, and as African-American performers were increasingly represented on the soundtrack of young America, race became a central element in the discourse around juvenile delinquency. Discussions about rock 'n' roll and its relationship to delinquency often became a stand-in for direct commentary about racial integration. The reaction to *Blackboard Jungle* marked the beginning of this process, even though the movie drew very little direct commentary about race. A mere year after *Brown v. Board of Education*, it's difficult to believe that the racial liberalism in what was to date the most integrated filmic presentation of a classroom—not to mention perhaps the most sympathetic depiction to date of a young black male—elicited no commentary. Granted, the film's producers intended to draw attention to the broad problem of juvenile

delinquency, not to the challenges of integration. Still, the film dealt with race in a fairly sophisticated manner.

Early in the film the teacher, Rick Dadier (Glen Ford) identifies Sydney Poitier's Gregory Miller as a "natural born leader," and, with only the slightest provocation (catching Miller smoking in the bathroom) wrongly assumes that Miller is the leader of the gang of delinquents. Dadier must come to grips with his own assumptions about race, as well as his confusion about adolescent behavior, as he struggles to adapt to his diverse classroom. After leading the class in a discussion about the negative impact of racial slurs, Dadier is called into the principal's office and reprimanded for his use of slurs by the school's leader. Dadier wrongly assumes Miller spun the story of what happened in-class to the principal, and confronts him in the hallway, revealing his own racism when he states, angrily, "*Why you're just a black...!*" before catching himself and stopping.

This confrontation begins the thaw in relations between Dadier and Miller, and Dadier continues to attempt to win his student's trust. If Miller trusts him, he thinks the class will cease misbehaving. Dadier's misassumption about Miller's leadership role in the gang is revealed over the course of the film, as the psychopathic, slightly effeminate Artie West (played by Vic Morrow) is revealed as the true leader of the delinquents. Early in the film, Dadier reads Miller's aloofness as antagonistic intention rather than the learned and wise detachment of an individual who understood his place—or, lack of place--within the system. Over time, Dadier learns that Miller works after school as a mechanic because "mechanics are always needed," and that he leads a vocal quintet of young African-American students who perform in the school's Christmas Show, even responsibly telling his fellow performers to "stop jazzing up" their performance of "Go

Down Moses.” Miller gradually comes to accept and appreciate Dadier’s earnest interest in teaching, and enters into a bargain with the teacher that neither of them will quit before they accomplish their goals: Miller to graduate, and Dadier to connect with the students. Artie West is an underdeveloped character, intent only on wrecking havoc. Miller eventually teams with Dadier to take him down. Miller, as much if not more than his teacher, is the hero of the movie; he goes from aloof to involved, takes the positive leadership position in the class that Dadier had hoped for him, and offers a snapshot of potential redemption in the midst of inner-city morass.

Reviews – positive and negative, newspaper and magazine -- gave the racial elements of *Blackboard Jungle* little or, more often, no attention. Poitier wasn’t even mentioned in most advertisements as one of the lead actors in the movie. Though *Ebony* celebrated Poitier’s performance, the African-American monthly actually implied that Miller was one of the delinquents and credited the teacher with winning him over, with no attention to the diversity in the classroom or the racist assumptions that had led Dadier to focus on Miller in the first place.<sup>15</sup>

The pluralistic, redemptive, and timely liberalism of the movie’s conclusion -- that despite the very real and dramatic problems of delinquency, students and teachers from different backgrounds could come together to learn -- was lost in the alarmist reaction to the film’s dramatization of delinquency, in the fear about the potential for many Artie Wests. It would be inaccurate to claim that all who opposed the film, or criticized its sensational treatment of juvenile delinquency, were anti-integrationists. But it is not too farfetched to suggest that the fact that Poitier’s character was the strongest

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<sup>15</sup> *Ebony*, “Blackboard Jungle,” May 1955: 87.

and most sympathetic in the film likely ruffled feathers already crimped by the brutality of the movie. Banning the film was, for instance, attempted only in Memphis and Atlanta, two urban locales with long histories of segregation and roiled race relations.

This lack of recognition and selective criticism can be explained in part by the fact that *Blackboard Jungle*, because it so strikingly tied rock music to juvenile delinquency, made it easier for anti-integrationists to indirectly oppose black culture by instead opposing Bill Haley and other rockers. The popular reactions to the movie were rife with anxiety about the both the impressionability of young viewers and the presence and meaning on the soundtrack of rock ‘n’ roll, and reflected the public’s inability to really understand or examine deeply the relationship between adolescence, delinquency, and racial integration during the middle of the decade.<sup>16</sup>

*Blackboard Jungle*, both in its subject matter and the reactions it provoked, can be seen as a pivot point in the history of understandings of both adolescence and delinquency. Its one-dimensional depiction of the psychotic Artie West as the lead

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<sup>16</sup> This has been repeated in much of the critical writing on *Blackboard Jungle* since the 1950s; *Blackboard Jungle* has been remembered first for containing the initial screen appearance of rock music, second for its subject matter, third for Luce’s attempts to ban it in Venice, and only rarely for its commentary on race. The film historian Thomas Cripps suggests that racial anxiety influenced the negative reaction to the movie, and although he mentions the redemptive liberalism that ends the film, he shortchanges the discussion to focus on the development of Poitier’s career as “a moviestar of a seamless, waxy-smooth liberal politics.” See Thomas Cripps, *Making Movies Black* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 286-287. Uta Poiger argues that moviegoers and reviewers in East and West Germany immediately understood the racial liberalism in *Blackboard Jungle*, and that was the primary reason why the movie was accepted or rejected, depending upon the perspective of the critic. See Uta Poiger, *Jazz Rock and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in Divided Germany* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 87-89. Other film histories of the period, including Thomas Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s*, Revised and Expanded Edition (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2002) and Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America* (New York, NY: Random House, 1975) severely short shrift discussion of race in the film.

criminal at the school jibed with over-simplified understandings of delinquency that had been in circulation for some time. Rock 'n' roll and black and white youths in school together were new factors, each social in nature, for the public to assimilate into its sense of what adolescence and delinquency were. That the movie was set in a gritty, urban school implied that the delinquency Americans should be most worried about came from cities, even though West's delinquency was grounded more in his psychology than in a particular location. The film employed existing explanations of delinquency while also foreshadowing many of the social concerns about adolescence of the late 1950s.

In the years following the film's release, juvenile delinquency became a regular theme not just in newspapers and at political press conferences and hearings, but also in movie houses, record stores, and the broader popular sense of the content of youth culture. Though by all accounts actual juvenile delinquents were a small subset of the overall numbers of American adolescents, it is difficult in the historical record of the mid-to-late 1950s to find discussions of adolescence that do not reference the specter of delinquency in some way. This was especially true of the discourse around rock 'n' roll.

Rock became a target in the anti-delinquency crusade because it absorbed and subsumed in the public imagination broader concerns about the messages in the marketplace, vulnerable psyches, new modes of adolescent social relations, and, especially, racial integration. Rock was, of course, not new music at all, but was rather the creation of entrepreneurs who saw potential profit in making African-American rhythm and blues readily available to white youth. As an element of a national youth mass culture, however, rock was entirely new. Many Americans believed the music, because of its roots in working-class culture and its overt sexuality, was a corruptive

force that needed to be contained. Yet rock had no purposeful “politics” in its early years, and no serious criticism of the music emerged until the 1960s. Therefore, the politics of early rock can best be understood by reading its opposition.

Race was at the center of much of the reaction against rock ‘n’ roll, and yet it was rarely explicitly or directly acknowledged as the reason for protest outside of the South. Juvenile delinquency, and its assumed potential to be spread via the choices adolescents made in the marketplace, served as an analogue for race in the reactions to rock, just as it did in reactions against *Blackboard Jungle*. By opposing rock, and by opposing delinquency, some Americans could express their unease about integration without talking directly about it.

Rock’s entrepreneurs learned from the commercial success of *Blackboard Jungle*, and quickly moved to profit from the public’s concern about juvenile delinquency. The more that parents, politicians, and community groups attacked the music, the more it became something youths could embrace in a claim to their own culture. Rock did not succeed in spite of its roots in black culture and dangerous connotations, but rather because those who produced and disseminated it balanced the projection of danger while avoiding peddling anything that was *actually* dangerous.

Beginning in 1956, cheaply produced movies featuring budding rock stars and catering solely to teenagers flooded America’s cinema houses. *Rock Around the Clock*, *Don’t Knock the Rock*, *Rock, Rock Rock!*, *Mr. Rock and Roll* were profitable pictures that revolved around rock ‘n’ roll, white teenagers, and little else. They made rock accessible not only through the radio but also at movie theaters across the country, where performers put their bodies on display along with their talent. During 1956 these

movies—along with Elvis’s controversial appearances on television and in his first film, *Loving You*—helped sustain the debate over rock, juvenile delinquency, and youth mass consumption, while also further disseminating rock style and culture.

*Rock Around the Clock*, the first teen rock picture released, was remarkable as much for the opposition it provoked as for the new teen world it exemplified. The film struggled with none of the headiness that weighed down *Blackboard Jungle*. Rock historian Nik Cohn was not far off the mark when he described the extent of the plot as: “Bill Haley grinned.”<sup>17</sup>

Not long after *Rock Around the Clock* was released and following a profitable 10-day Alan Freed stand at Brooklyn’s Paramount Theater, *Variety* devoted several columns to rock’s potential for causing mayhem. In reportage that’s representative of the overwrought reaction to rock that had by this point become commonplace, a column entitled “Rock and Roll B.O. Dynamite” read: “Rock ‘n’ roll—the most explosive show biz phenomenon of the decade—may be getting too hot to handle. While its money-making potential has made it all but irresistible, its Svengali grip on the teenagers has produced a staggering wave of juvenile violence and mayhem. Rock ‘n’ roll is now literal b.o. dynamite—not only a matter of profit, but a matter for the police.” The article claimed rock had been “writing an unprecedented record” on the police blotters, noting that “en route from the Brooklyn Paramount the juvies wrecked a Manhattan-bound subway train.” In addition to trashing the train, concert attendees were accused of ruining some seats by excessive jumping, pockmarcking the carpets with the occasional cigarette,

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<sup>17</sup> Nik Cohn, *Rock from the Beginning* (New York: Pocket Books, 1970), 17; *Rock Around the Clock*. Directed by Fred Sears, Produced by Sam Katzman. Columbia Pictures: Culver City, CA, 1956. *Don’t Knock the Rock* and *Rock Around the Clock* issued on DVD issued by Sony Pictures, 2007.

and resting their feet on the walls. Pinkerton detectives and city police observed and managed teenage behavior throughout the Paramount shows, and, because of them, the “rowdiness was held down.” Further evidence of rock-inspired mayhem filtered in from San Diego, where one hundred shrieking teenage girls thrown into frenzy by Elvis Presley’s “sensuous gyrations and savage beat,” pounded on the singer’s dressing room door in what was termed a “riot.”<sup>18</sup>

These articles gave the sense that madness was in the air and urged theater owners to think long and hard before deciding if and how they would display *Rock Around the Clock*. Two theaters in Bridgeport, Connecticut decided not to show the film, its opening was delayed a week in Hartford, while theaters in Baltimore and Washington, D.C. only went as far as resisting Columbia’s attempts to sell rock ‘n’ roll merchandise on the premises and to bring bus loads of students from area high schools as an advertising gimmick. Despite the concerns fanned by alarmist voices like those in *Variety*, the financial promise of the film was too great to limit its exhibition. The trouble might soon wane, though--according to *Variety*, the rock “vogue [was] fading,” and a radio station in Boston had even “KO’d” rock ‘n’ roll for classical music.<sup>19</sup>

Theater owners who chose to show *Rock Around the Clock* were correct that it was financially worth the risk, even if a few pieces of furniture might need replacement. The worst behavior among those viewing the movie was similar to what *Variety* had reported about the Alan Freed shows in New York City—kids dancing in the aisles, or on

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<sup>18</sup> *Variety*, “Rock and Roll B.O. Dynamite,” April 11, 1956: 1. Admittedly, *Variety* possessed less-than-pure journalistic motives at it banged the drum against rock ‘n’ roll. The trade journal was closely aligned with the American Society for Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP), which built its own attack on rock ‘n’ roll in the late 1950s; this is discussed below.

<sup>19</sup> *Variety*, “Rock and Roll B.O. Dynamite,” April 11, 1956: 60.

seat cushions—although in Minneapolis a group of teenagers reportedly snake-danced down a major street after seeing the movie and broke some store windows. Other than that, disturbances were few.<sup>20</sup>

The overanxious reactions in the press to the expansion of rock ‘n’ roll only added to its cachet among adolescents, and also helped reveal its nascent politics. Rock music and the culture that gradually congealed around it generated what Lawrence Grossberg has called one “line of flight,” one “vector of effectivity which disrupts and escapes any particular structure of power.”<sup>21</sup> Such promise was at the core of rock’s appeal to youths in the late 1950s, and the racially integrative and transgressive elements of rock were central to this line. It is vital to understand how many black rhythm and blues artists were rendered relatively powerless and penniless by the creation of rock, and this process has been explored elsewhere in great detail.<sup>22</sup>

Rock reproduced the traditionally exploitative relationship between white capital and black labor—that part of the “structure of power” was not escaped or disrupted, and for that fact the progress marked by rock can only be understood as severely limited. But *socially* rock provided as many if not more examples of the promise of integration as did any other cultural form of the day. This can only be seen as a small step in the processes of strengthening integration in the North—but it was a step. Rock presented one positive

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas Ronan, “British Rattled by Rock and Roll,” *New York Times*, September 12, 1956: 40. The article details the uneasy British reaction to rock and roll; two cities banned *Rock Around the Clock*, despite multiple reports from the U.S. that adolescents behaved when they went to see the film.

<sup>21</sup> Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Outta This Place* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992), 398.

<sup>22</sup> See, especially, Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998).

potential outcome of cultural miscegenation. The music came out of black and white working-class culture, and integrated acts played together and toured together, in many cases in front of mixed crowds, in the process creating a vibrant, resonant, and lasting musical medium. As historian Steven F. Lawson has written, “In the North and the West, where de facto segregation and more subtly constructed patterns of racism kept black and whites apart, rock and roll likewise exerted the centripetal force that pulled teenagers of both races together.”<sup>23</sup> In the South, white teenagers listened to black radio stations behind closed bedroom doors, and the boldest among them—Elvis Presley the most famous of the bold—ventured into black neighborhoods to seek out the roots of the music.

Warnings about the ways that adolescents reacted to depended upon the belief that teenagers, like Jim Stark and Jack Koslow, were psychologically vulnerable and susceptible to nefarious influences, and implied that the racial integration represented by rock made the music even more dangerous. Still, opposition to rock only rarely focused explicitly on race. Asa Carter, the leader of the North Alabama Citizen’s Council, accused the NAACP of using bebop and rock and roll to “force Negro Culture on the South” and to “mongrelize America,” ignoring the extent to which bourgeois African Americans disdained rock.<sup>24</sup> Such statements were irregular and extreme. Racism was

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<sup>23</sup> See Steven F. Lawson, “Race, Rock and Roll, and the Rigged Society: The Payola Scandal and the Political Culture of the 1950s,” in William H. Chafe, *The Achievement of American Liberalism: the New Deal and Its Legacies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 211; For visual evidence of interracial audiences at rock shows in New York City, see Glenn C. Altschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock ‘n’ Roll Changed America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 20.

<sup>24</sup> *Newsweek*, “White Council vs. Rock and Roll,” April 23, 1956: 32. On middle-class African Americans and rock, Martin Luther King, Jr., was asked by a seventeen year old if playing rock and roll was sinful or not, replying that he wasn’t sure, but that the music

usually a more subtle presence in the rhetoric of opposition to rock, especially in the North, and often times it was enveloped in statements about a contagious delinquency.

Double-entendres about sex in rock songs, common in rhythm and blues, were the primary area of early criticism, and rock's opponents sought to utilize parental anxiety about adolescent sexuality and feminine virtue in their crusade. *Variety* published a three-part series of editorials in February and March 1955 on rock "Leer-ics." Abel Green condemned the very phrase "rock and roll," along with "'hug,' 'squeeze,' and kindred euphemisms which are attempting a total breakdown of all reticences about sex. In the past such material was common enough but restricted to special places and out-and-out barrelhouses. Today 'leer-ics' are offered as standard popular music for general consumption, including consumption by teenagers. Our teenagers are already setting something of a record in delinquency without this raw musical idiom to smell up the environment still more.... The most casual look at the current crop of 'lyrics' must tell even the most naïve that dirty postcards have been translated into songs." In what can be read as an effort at consciousness-raising, Green argued that the same type of voluntary censorship measures be taken against this "smut" as the Kefauver committee recommended to the film industry later that summer. "Here is where the responsible chief officers of the major diskeries should come in," wrote Green. "They can continue to blind themselves, as apparently seems to be the case, or they can compel their moral obligations to stand in the way of a little quick profit."<sup>25</sup>

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"often plunges men's minds into degrading and immoral depths." From *Ebony*, April 1958, p. 104, quoted in Lawson, "Race, Rock and Roll, and the Rugged Society: The Payola Scandal and the Political Culture of the 1950s," 206.

<sup>25</sup> Abel Green, "A Warning to the Music Business," *Variety*, February 23, 1955: 2.

*Variety*'s complaints, echoed by other trade publications such as *Billboard*, were picked up by wire services and reported in papers and magazines throughout the country. In the process, the battle over the "question of questionable meanings" transcended the narrow interests of those in the music industry about losing profits to rhythm and blues records, and became an issue for public debate.<sup>26</sup> The tone of this debate over "leer-ics" suggested a fear of invasion or contamination of American youth, an anxiety that the lyrics previously contained in "some special place" or "barrelhouses" would penetrate the already suspect juvenile morals and cause a dramatic increase in illegal behavior.

Such language at times took on thinly coded racial connotations, focusing on how "tribal," "primitive," and "savage" rock music was. When a small fight broke out inside a Washington, D.C. armory during a performance by Bill Haley and the Comets, the manager of the building told *Newsweek* "It's that jungle strain that gets 'em all worked up." In the same article, an unnamed sociologist called the music a "virus." After a dustup during a rock show at a Hartford theater, Dr. Francis J. Braceland, a noted psychologist, told a reporter that rock and roll was a "communicable disease," a "cannibalistic and tribalistic form of music." It was insecurity and rebellion that impelled "teenagers to affect 'ducktail' haircuts, wear zoot-suits and carry on boisterously." Such sentiment did not emerge solely in America. As part of the British reaction to around *Rock Around the Clock*, the *Manchester Guardian* wrote "perhaps it is a case for the anthropologists to study, an echo in staid surroundings of tribal dances to the drum, or

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<sup>26</sup> "Leer-ics, Part III," *Variety*, March 9, 1955: 49; *Life*, "A Question of Questionable Meanings," April 18, 1955: 168. Many black deejays were also angered by the trend towards double-entendre in popular music, and, rightfully fearful that the movement of white capital into the race records market would render their role less necessary. Deejays such as Jack Walker and Hal Jackson were no great fans of Alan Freed, to say the least. See *Variety*, "Negro D.J. Raps Spread of 'Filth' Via R&B Disks," March 23, 1955: 1.

the slogans to which dervishes revolve. One cannot help suspecting a certain amount of auto-intoxication.” Accusations of a frenzied, unconscious loss of control were common: Abel Green had noted in *Variety* that rock possessed a “Svengali grip on the teenagers.” Rock’s potential as a contagion, though, occasionally could be put to work positively: a southern Illinois high school music teacher, whose band played “Rock Around the Clock” at basketball games, dubbed rock “good for school spirit.”<sup>27</sup>

These are a few telling examples of the language present in opposition to rock during the mid-fifties, which mixed psychological and sociological explanations to be aghast at the music’s content. To a certain extent, the insinuations about “invasion” were correct. Integration was happening—that meant working-class African-American “leerics,” rhythms, fashion, sexuality, and expressive styles were becoming part of mainstream American cultural expression, and they were entering the mainstream through American youth. It was perfectly acceptable for young black audiences to participate in musical performance, whether through call and response, snapping fingers, or wearing the low-collared Mr. B shirts designed by Billy Eckstine and appropriated by Elvis.<sup>28</sup> When white youth did these things, especially white girls, it was more concerning. Part of the “frenzied” teenage reaction was native to the music, which was participatory in nature and built upon the call-and-response tradition in black culture. But these types of reactions were foreign enough to many Americans to elicit concerns about more than the price of replacement furniture. They became symbolic of some larger

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<sup>27</sup> *Newsweek*, “Rocking and Rolling,” June 18, 1956: 42; *New York Times*, “Rock-and-Roll Called ‘Communicable Disease’,” March 28, 1956: 33; *New York Times*, “British Rattled by Rock and Roll,” September 12, 1956: 40; *New York Times*, “Rock ‘n’ Roll Dubbed Good for School Spirit,” *New York Times*, February 2, 1956: 33.

<sup>28</sup> Nelson George, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 62.

youth disorder rather than the occasional behavior native to an emerging subculture.

While adults were being barraged by reports of increased delinquency, they found in this new cultural form explanation for what was different.

Though commentators were genuinely concerned about the meanings of rock culture, for racist and non-racist reasons, much of the popular concern about rock 'n' roll in the middle of the decade was actively fomented by groups in the music industry whose bottom lines were impacted by the rise of rock. As Linda Martin and Kerry Segrave have written in their chronicle of rock opposition *Anti-Rock: The Opposition to Rock 'n' Roll*, record companies and trade organizations worried about the incursion of "race music" on their target marketing demographic: "The major labels, the Tin Pan Alley songwriters of ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers), major radio stations, and trade publications such as *Variety* and *Billboard* all made their money from white music. They feared that the growth of R&B would be at their expense. They had a vested interest in keeping R&B down."<sup>29</sup>

The emergence of rock fueled a battle between the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP) and the upstart Broadcast Music Incorporated (BMI) over control of the airwaves that found its way into the halls of Congress and provided a battling ground for the issues surrounding the music in the final third of the 1950s. ASCAP had been founded in 1914, and represented interests from Broadway, Hollywood, and Tin Pan Alley, collecting royalties and enforcing copyright laws for its members. In 1940, in reaction to ASCAP doubling their rates for radio, a group of broadcasters formed their own licensing firm, BMI. Established New York

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<sup>29</sup> Linda Martin and Kerry Segrave, *Anti-Rock: The Opposition to Rock 'n' Roll* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), 15.

artists ran ASCAP, while BMI branched out to represent artists from all genres, including rhythm and blues and country and western. BMI also established a scale that rewarded all artists equally, while ASCAP used a sliding scale that paid higher fees to veteran artists.

By the time rock 'n' roll began to dominate the airwaves in the mid-1950s, BMI was licensing 80 percent of the music on the radio. ASCAP accused BMI of “forcing” rock 'n' roll upon listeners through its control of radio stations, and the two organizations entered a protracted legal battle. ASCAP sued BMI for \$150 million, and lobbied Congress to level antitrust violations against the organization. In 1957, the Senate Subcommittee on Communications debated a bill — co-sponsored by John F. Kennedy and Barry Goldwater -- that would keep people or corporations from owning a radio or a television station if they were engaged in publishing, manufacturing, or selling musical recordings. ASCAP’s star witnesses, which included the composer Oscar Hammerstein and the critic Vance Packard, argued that BMI was manipulating the public’s interest to create hit records and, given the obviously poor quality of rock music, the only way to sell records was to beat the public over the head incessantly until its collective taste deteriorated. The subcommittee was not convinced by ASCAP’s argument, in part because they believed that the desire of young Americans to listen to rock and roll was genuine. Several senators had teenage daughters who loved the music.<sup>30</sup>

The ASCAP-BMI battle, which evolved into the “payola” scandal of 1959-1960, would have been unnecessary if not for the exploding purchasing power of adolescents. By 1957, teenagers were buying over \$150 million worth of records annually, and by

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<sup>30</sup> Altschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock 'N' Roll Changed America*, 133-142.

1959 were spending \$10 billion a year overall.<sup>31</sup> ASCAP had cynically adopted the argument that Vance Packard had outlined in his 1957 bestseller *The Hidden Persuaders* that rock ‘n’ roll was part of a larger effort by advertisers and marketers to manipulate the public’s taste for profit. Both Packard and ASCAP argued that teenage choices in the marketplace were not genuine, but rather rigged by external forces.<sup>32</sup> ASCAP’s nurturing of the animus against rock was akin to the entrepreneurial exploitation of local newspapers that ran sensationalist headlines about youth behavior and the political exploitation of individuals like J. Edgar Hoover and Senator Kefauver. Sincere adult concern and confusion about adolescent delinquency was an easy mark for manipulation in support of crusades with financial, political, or moral motives.

Vance Packard was not the only cultural critic to raise his voice in concern about the implications of mass consumption. Dwight MacDonald, who had written extensively on mass culture and “midcult” since the 1930s, wrote a profile of the marketing impresario Eugene Gilbert for the *New Yorker* in the Fall of 1958 that echoed some of the Packard-ASCAP perspective. MacDonald found through his study of Gilbert that youth culture had become a primary force behind the expansion of American mass culture, and with it an unthinking consumerism. Gilbert’s nurturing of a youth market that allowed companies to access family consumption through its children revealed a process whose end result, MacDonald feared, was the elevation of the banal.<sup>33</sup> American youth may

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<sup>31</sup> *Newsweek*, “The Dreamy Teen-Age Market: ‘It’s Neat to Spend,’” September 16, 1957: 94-96; *Life*, “A New, \$10-billion power: the U.S. teen-age consumer,” August 31, 1959: 78-85. On payola, see Lawson, “Race, Rock and Roll, and the Rigged Society.”

<sup>32</sup> Altschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock ‘N’ Roll Changed America*, 136.

<sup>33</sup> Dwight MacDonald, “Profiles: A Caste, A Culture, A Market, Pt. 2” *New Yorker*, November 29, 1958: 57+; for more on the size of the youth market, see *Newsweek*, “The Dreamy Teen-Age Market: ‘It’s Neat to Spend,’” September 16, 1957: 94-96.

have *felt* that consuming gave them freedom, but MacDonald and some other critics on the Left rejected that notion wholeheartedly.

MacDonald pointed to increasing delinquency rates as proof of moral drift, without deeply inquiring as to the root causes of youth criminality. Eugene Gilbert's own writing acknowledged and then brushed aside delinquency: "the weaknesses of a few become pre-eminent, while the good of the majority is totally ignored. Youth itself objects violently both to the vast amount of material pointing a finger at juvenile delinquency and to the attitude of adults, when one person or a small group is delinquent, that all youth is delinquent and impossible. One article in the newspaper or magazine is often enough to convince adults... that over half the teen-agers are indulging in delinquent activities. The truth is that less than 5% of teen-agers are delinquent." He offered a bevy of statistics about teenage employment, as well as general recommendations for how communities might deal with that unruly 5%.<sup>34</sup> MacDonald, on the other hand, felt that juvenile delinquency was a byproduct of the expansion of American consumption. MacDonald referenced — though misread -- the recent work of Harrison Salisbury to show that there was "some justification for the present tendency to equate 'teenager' with 'juvenile delinquent.'" While acknowledging that juvenile violence was a real and expanding problem, he was also careful to note that though "teenagers have created a world of their own, it is not primarily a criminal world, absurd or repugnant though it sometimes appears."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Eugene Gilbert, *Advertising and Marketing to Young People* (Printer's Ink Company: New York, NY, 1957), 329-331.

<sup>35</sup> Dwight MacDonald, "Profiles: A Caste, A Culture, A Market, Pt. 2" *New Yorker*, November 29, 1958: 57+.

To MacDonald, the products of youth culture encouraged delinquency by normalizing empty rebellion, and delivering, at best, a degraded freedom. MacDonald analyzed a pictorial on hot-rodding, which he believed “suggested that chicken contests meant thrills and that to get into trouble with the cops meant prestige, and the result was an increase in hot-rodding accidents.” The same effect amplified rock ‘n’ roll’s presence, as “the more it seems that ‘everybody’ is doing a thing, the more ‘everybody’ feels he must do it.” Movies “present the teenager as sinister but exciting—and an image is built up that in most cases merely impels him to behave rudely at breakfast but in others tempts him to go in for more sensational misdeeds.” While he warned against over generalizing “The Teenager,” and noted that in fact there was no such singular thing, he did think that it was safe to conclude “teenagers are disobedient, group-minded, and unrealistic.” They were also accessible through analysis of what they consumed, and Gilbert’s research helped MacDonald better understand how teenagers spent \$10 billion yearly. The popularity of *Mad* magazine reflected a pervasive cynicism, and teenagers were “addicted” to a variety of “communications machines” such as telephones, televisions, and radios. They were drinking and dating more, while exhibiting less knowledge of the Bible and a discernible political apathy. Hollywood was quick to recognize teen purchasing power, and produced movies with “moral peculiarity” in which the good guys and the bad guys behaved the same way: “tough, sexy, jive-talking, and generally hopped up.” This perspective flowed to the movies from its source in rock ‘n’ roll, where “teenism reaches its climax, or its nadir—at any rate, its least inhibited expression.” MacDonald dismissed the music as tribal, as consisting of “nothing but a simple beat and lots of noise,” and echoed the words of a critic who called it “a reversion

to savagery.” Rock ‘n’ roll was “teenagers’ link to the nihilism of our time,” and was an analogue to the Kerouac-reading Beat Generation hipsters who were a bit older, but with whom adolescents shared a vocabulary.<sup>36</sup>

MacDonald’s criticism of the pre-eminence of youth culture wasn’t as breathless or moralizing as those who denounced rock ‘n’ roll or comics in the press, and was certainly more learned and eloquent.<sup>37</sup> Yet he still held the behavior of youth and the products and ways that they consumed in low regard, and the manner in which he dismissed rock music echoed some of the rhetoric of contagion that other critics had employed. Such dismissal came not through a racist prism (though rejecting the language of rock ‘n’ roll and the Beats was in part a reaction against the presence of black vernacular in both worlds). MacDonald’s concern was primarily with the implications of mass consumption, and he didn’t acknowledge that there could be something redeeming about white youth celebrating black music.

David Riesman, whose famous 1950 book *The Lonely Crowd* had articulated a loss of individuality in a society dominated by “outer-directed” personalities, was more sensitive than MacDonald at the end of the decade to the potentially empowering elements of youth consumption. In an essay he wrote on “Listening to Popular Music,” he challenged those who might “forget that things that strike the sophisticated person as trash may open new vistas for the unsophisticated,” and discussed the “complex interplay of forces between the adults who are the producers and the young who are the

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> MacDonald was much more in dialogue with those, such as Theodore Adorno, who saw no enlightenment in the direction of mass culture, than the Samuel Leibowitz’s of the world. See, especially, Adorno and Max Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

consumers” in which “one role of popular music in socializing the young may be to create, in combination with other mass media, a picture of childhood and adolescence in America as a happy-go-lucky time of haphazard clothes and haphazard behavior.” Most teenagers, Riesman granted, did not deeply consider the processes involved in their consumption, but some did—he used hot-rodders who challenged Detroit’s authority by altering car engines as an example—and resisted stereotypes while “seeking a differential selection from what the media already provide.”<sup>38</sup>

In Riesman’s formulation, which elevated the importance of the choices consumers made in the marketplace and also acknowledged emerging subcultures, white teenagers celebrating black music *could* be read as an element of social progress—although, to be fair, he didn’t make this exact point. Yet for Riesman, adolescent consumption was an important operating ground for socialization, and it had potential for “opening new vistas.” Though choices for youth were often conscripted by what adults offered them, adolescents could and did exercise autonomy in the ways that they approached or challenged those choices. By embracing music with black, working-class roots, white teenagers could choose to live in a more integrated world than their immediate environment might provide them.

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<sup>38</sup> David Riesman, “Listening to Popular Music,” in Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1957), 408-417. MacDonald would have likely have rejected Riesman’s claims in this essay, not least of all because they appeared buried in a vast work on mass culture and were the products of the author’s interview of only 15 teenagers. MacDonald, of course, had approached his profile of Gilbert with his own prejudices about mass culture, which had been nurtured through exchanges with Clement Greenberg and on the pages of *Partisan Review* since the late 1930s. James Gilbert details “The Intellectuals and Mass Culture,” arguing that their engagement evolved from the late 1930s to the early 1960s from one fearful for the future of American civilization to an approach that saw the artifacts of mass culture as coded inroads into understanding American society. See Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 109-126.

Riesman offered his critique to question wholesale dismissals of mass culture from the Left, but an implicit understanding of his analysis was present in the objections of those who rejected rock on a more visceral level. The process of existing as autonomous consumers in the marketplace, which for many adolescents included celebrating rock music, gave the young more influence over their own socialization than many adults were comfortable with. Adolescents consumed with great enthusiasm, embracing participation in the market as a path towards freedom from adult oversight.

Most youths couldn't have cared less that critics on the Left dismissed the "freedom" they found through consumption as compromised or degraded. And adults weren't just reacting against the materials that youth consumed, but also against the enthusiasm with *which* they consumed. Rock 'n' roll represented the pinnacle of the process, merging in a very public way youth autonomy in the marketplace with the nation's most immediate social challenges. The struggle for control over rock culture and its content ranged from the halls of Congress to the editorial boards of newspapers and magazines to city governments in locales such as Boston that sought to restrict where, when, and how rock was performed. Finally, the debate over rock reached the recording booth and stage, where around 1960 subgenres, the soundtracks for subcultures, were born.

Alan Freed, who had been instrumental in bringing rhythm and blues to a wider audience first in Cleveland and then after 1954 from New York, was battered in each of the above locales over the last half of the 1950s. His story illustrates how youth consumption was the battleground on which the rock 'n' roll wars were fought, and

shows how race, juvenile delinquency, and a general concern about changing social relations were munitions in that battle.

Freed repeatedly ran up against the forces aligned against rock 'n' roll. In July 1957, ABC cancelled his short-lived national television show, "The Big Beat," after the thirteen-year old African American lead singer of the "Teenagers," Frankie Lymon, was shown dancing with a young white girl.<sup>39</sup> In Boston, Freed ran into trouble in 1956 when police officers had gotten into a shoving match with concert-goers at his traveling "Big Beat" show, in 1957 when Mayor John Hynes blamed the concert for a fight between black and white youths that broke out in a subway station near the concert hall, and especially in 1958 when a "riot" at his show drew international attention and led to two indictments for the promoter.

Freed's show that year featured Jerry Lee Lewis, Buddy Holly and the Crickets, and Chuck Berry as the headliners. Policemen lined the aisles and the side of the stage at the Boston Arena, repeatedly interrupting the show to demand that the audience cease dancing and remain seated. Finally, after telling Freed and his co-promoter Jack Hooke, that the "kids are out of line," the sergeant-in-charge made Chuck Berry finish the show with house lights on. Freed quipped to the audience "I guess the police here don't want you kids to have a good time." The crowd was riled up.

In the audience that night was an African-American gang called the "Band of Angels," and many of its members had been drinking. They tied on bandanas, and faced off with another gang in the crowd. The fight spilled out of the arena, which was located

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<sup>39</sup> Thomas Hine, *The Rise and the Fall of the American Teenager* (Harper Collins: New York, N.Y., 1999), 246-248.

in the run-down “Back Bay” section of Boston. Fifteen people reported that they were stabbed, beaten, or robbed after the concert, though no one was admitted to a hospital.<sup>40</sup>

The following day newspapers across the country and in Europe reported that there had been a major riot in Boston, and blamed it on the concert, rock music, and Freed’s statement to the crowd. Mayor Hynes vowed to “restrict future licenses for rock ‘n’ roll sessions in Boston to those run by responsible church, social, and other groups.” Though he was “not against rock ‘n’ roll as such,” there would be no licenses for use of city auditoriums for shows like the one at the arena.<sup>41</sup> Freed was indicted on May 8 by a Suffolk County (Ma.) grand jury on charges of “inciting the unlawful destruction of property,” and all but one of the remaining shows on the “Big Beat” tour were cancelled “in the interest of public safety.”<sup>42</sup> Freed resigned his position at New York City’s WINS because of the station’s refusal to support him or allow him to defend himself on air after the Boston incident.<sup>43</sup> While Freed was dealing with his deepening troubles -- a second indictment in Boston for “incitement to riot” followed a week later -- editorials appeared in *Variety* wondering “What Hath Rock ‘n’ Roll Wrought?” and noting in an oddly Yiddish-inflected English, “Boston Common to Hoot Mon Belt, They Rock ‘n’ Riot Out

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<sup>40</sup> John Jackson, *Big Beat Heat: Alan Freed and the Early Years of Rock and Roll* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1991), 190-193; *New York Times*, “Rock ‘n’ Roll Fight Hospitalizes Youth,” April 15, 1957: 23.

<sup>41</sup> George Moonoogian, “Wax Fax,” *Record Collector’s Monthly*, February-March 1985: 10; *New York Times*, “Rock ‘N’ Roll Stabbing,” May 5, 1958: 48; *Boston Herald*, “Rock ‘n’ Roll With A Back Bay Beat,” May 5, 1958: 4; *Boston Herald*, “More Cities Ban Rock, Roll Show,” May 6, 1958: 1.

<sup>42</sup> *Boston Herald*, “Grand Jury Probes Fracas,” May 8, 1958: 13.

<sup>43</sup> *New York Times*, “Freed is Indicted Over Rock ‘N’ Roll,” May 9, 1958: 3; *New York Times*, “Quits Station at WINS,” May 9, 1958: 3. John Jackson writes the Freed was forced out under a “morals clause,” and this was not reported in the newspapers. Jackson, *Big Beat Heat*, 204.

of this Veldt.” The *New York Post* wondered about “The Three New R’s-- Rock, Roll, Rebellion.”<sup>44</sup>

The “riot” in Boston in May 1958 was more remarkable for the reaction that it provoked than the level of destruction it wrought. Calling what happened in Boston, or what had happened at the earlier Paramount Theater shows in New York or outside Elvis’s dressing room in San Diego, a “riot” attached the negative connotations of “mob behavior” and “infectious frenzy” to rock culture. This wasn’t a riot; it was a fight. The interference by Boston authorities and their harassment of Freed were attempts at social control of both the entrepreneurs who promoted rock and the youth who consumed it. Boston was one of the most racially segregated cities in the North, and its Irish Catholic political leadership and white working-class residents were notoriously resistant to integration.<sup>45</sup> The charges against Freed were eventually dropped because they would be difficult to prove in court, and the Boston “riots” ended up being one step in Freed’s precipitous fall from the pinnacle of the rock world.<sup>46</sup> The “payola” scandal of 1959-1960 did much more damage.

“Payola” referred to the gifts record companies gave to disc jockeys to get their songs played on the radio. As historian Glenn Altschuler has written, “payola was an open secret. Industry insiders disagreed only about its scope and significance.” Some radio stations attempted to limit payola, but the practice continued through 1958-1959,

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<sup>44</sup> *Variety*, “What Hath Rock ‘n’ Roll Wrought?,” May 7, 1958: 1; *Variety*, “Boston Common to Hoot Mon Belt, They Rock ‘n’ Riot Out of this Veldt,” May 14, 1958, p. 1; *New York Post*, “The Three New R’s-- Rock, Roll, Rebellion,” May 11, 1958: 10.

<sup>45</sup> This resistance famously came to a head in 1974 when efforts to use busing to integrate public schools met violent resistance from working-class whites. See Ronald Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

<sup>46</sup> Jackson, *Big Beat Heat*, 232-247. See also *Time*, “Rock ‘n’ Riot,” May 19, 1958: 50.

when the quiz show scandal reenergized American examinations of the ethics of broadcasting. Jack Berry and Dan Enright, the producers who had rigged *The \$64,000 Question* and *Twenty-One*, also owned radio stations, which helped ASCAP make the case to politicians that payola was BMI's method of controlling the airwaves. With ASCAP's prodding, the Federal Trade Commission assigned an army of investigators to the payola question, and ultimately charged over one hundred record company executives with deceptive business practices aimed at suppressing competition. Record companies signed "consent decrees" promising to end the practice, and avoided criminal prosecution. The files from the investigation were turned over to the Federal Communications Commission, the Internal Revenue Service, and the House Special Subcommittee on Legislative Oversight. Broadcasters were forced to clean up their own shops. Alan Freed had been employed by WABC since resigning his post at WINS after the Boston incident and his employers, to protect themselves, tried to force him to reveal if and what he had been paid for playing records. Freed refused. He was fired by WABC and also by WNEW-TV, where he had briefly revived his television show for a New York audience. Freed, who by that point had begun drinking heavily, made repeated self-incriminating statements, and was soon being pursued by the FBI and the IRS for tax evasion on the payments he received from record companies.<sup>47</sup>

The disc jockey Dick Clark rose to national prominence when "American Bandstand," the local dance show he hosted in Philadelphia, was picked up by ABC to replace Freed's "The Big Beat" in the summer of 1957. For ninety nationally-televised minutes each weekday, dozens of teenage Philadelphians wore their best suits and dresses

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<sup>47</sup> Jackson, *Big Beat Heat*, 145-151. Freed died of liver disease in 1965 at the age of 43.

and danced in front of lip synching rock ‘n’ rollers. As Thomas Hine noted in *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, many of the dancers were Italian-American, and some were African-American. They gave the show an “urban and ethnic, and thus faintly exotic” aesthetic, noticed by “those watching from the suburbs.” “American Bandstand” didn’t shy away completely from presenting the music in all of its rawness. Chuck Berry, with his phallic treatment of his guitar, and Little Richard, with his “Tutti-Frutti” challenge to gender norms, were guests on the show. But Clark mostly presented rock in a way that appealed to teenagers while tamping down the controversial elements of the music and the culture. A strictly-enforced dress code for his dancers was one of his methods; another was a rule that coupled boys and girls by their ethnicity.<sup>48</sup>

Clark’s “American Bandstand” was as much a response to the interests and concerns of the day as it was a brilliant melding of rock music to television. Like the most successful entrepreneurs of youth culture, Clark listened intently to the public and distilled a way to position himself in the market by presenting rock in as “non-threatening” a way as possible, by acknowledging and adjusting to the concerns of the public. Pat Boone did the same thing and became nearly as popular in the late 1950s as Elvis Presley.

Clark’s career serves as a counterpoint to Freed’s, as illustrated by their distinct paths through the “payola” scandal. By all accounts, Clark was just as guilty as Freed of taking payola. But, he was much more able to navigate and mitigate the concerns of network executives and the politicians and advertisers who could influence them. Clark, through *American Bandstand*, was the public face of ABC’s youth programming, and his

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<sup>48</sup> Thomas Hine, *The Rise and the Fall of the American Teenager* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1999), 246-248.

show, with its clean-cut style, mediated the “dangerous” elements of rock and roll more so than did any other forum. ABC was fully behind him, even taking out ads for his special revues, including “Because They’re Young,” in high school newspapers.<sup>49</sup>

When the payola scandal broke, ABC asked Clark to divest his interests in the music industry and in return shielded him from the authorities who had pursued Freed. They offered up Tony Mammarella, the producer of *American Bandstand*, as a party guilty of pay-for-play, and supported Clark’s statements that he knew nothing of the money his associate had taken from record executives. The press, for the most part, bought Clark’s proclamations of his cleanliness. Reactions to his testimony before the House Special Subcommittee on Legislative Oversight in 1960, however, suggested that many congressmen did not believe Clark. The hearings revealed that Clark held 162 song copyrights, 145 of which he was given for free, including the hit song “Sixteen Candles,” which he played on his television show 27 times in three months. Still, Clark maintained that he was guilty only of making a great deal of money on his investments.<sup>50</sup>

Clark was never charged with a crime for his involvement in payola, mostly because of his skill in responding to the charges and ameliorating the concerns of his superiors. Alan Freed had refused to sign an affidavit requested by his employers that detailed his dealings with payola, and aggressively attacked anyone who questioned his ethics. Clark wrote his own affidavit, in which he was able to deny ever having taken money directly in return for playing or promoting a record. Payola was an underhanded, backroom cash-business in which the parties established “understandings” rather than agreements. It was impossible to prove that Clark had taken pay directly for play, and he

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<sup>49</sup> *Clinton News*, Bronx, NY., April 1, 1960: 4.

<sup>50</sup> Jackson, *Big Beat Heat*, 151-160.

was disciplined in sticking to his story. But his image, which had been created more by the ways in which he presented the music than by his association with rock, and his value to ABC, made it easier for him to navigate the landmines of the payola scandal.

Freed was not as astute, and was tainted by the incidents in Boston and with Frankie Lymon. His unwillingness to present rock 'n' roll in a clean or restrained way was more honest and straightforward about the music than Clark's, but it ultimately made him vulnerable. Freed's demise and the payola scandal each reveal the extent to which the battles over rock 'n' roll, which so regularly in the 1950s invoked the specter of juvenile delinquency, were really pushed along by a mixture of forces that included concern about racial integration, control over profits in the music industry, and a debate about the moral implications of adolescent consumption. Rock music and youth consumption had implications in each of these areas, and the method most readily available to those adults who rejected the developing meaning of youth consumption was the rhetorical, and often kneejerk, invocation of juvenile delinquency.

Yet, that method was not eternally effective. By 1960, opposition to rock was decidedly less energetic than it had been just a couple of years earlier. Some radio stations, in part as a reaction to the bad publicity of the payola probes, shied away from playing the music. The anti-rock movement had peaked nationally with the ASCAP-BMI battles and the payola scandal, although it continued to percolate in local resistance aimed at restraining certain elements of rock. For example, "The Twist," a dance inspired by Chubby Checker's 1960 hit cover of a Hank Ballard song, was banned from two of New York City's famous cabaret halls, Roseland Dance City and the Barberry Room. In the words of Lou Brecker, the founder of Roseland, "it is not a ballroom dance, and since we

have previously outlawed rock ‘n’ roll as a feature at Roseland, we likewise will not permit the Twist to be danced.”<sup>51</sup> Checker twisted away, however, on “American Bandstand” and elsewhere, and made a career out of the song. Yet by 1960 few of the original stars of rock were still active. Elvis was in the army, Jerry Lee Lewis couldn’t get a gig because he had married a thirteen-year old cousin, Little Richard had quit singing to become a minister, Chuck Berry was in prison under violation of the Mann Act, and Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, Eddy Cochran, and the famous deejay Big Bopper had all died in accidents.<sup>52</sup>

The ASCAP/BMI battles, Alan Freed’s demise, and the decline of radio play were elements of a transitional moment in the rock industry and also in youth consumption. Fostered in part by the emergence of a new group of entrepreneurs who were able to wed their sharp ears for what the public wanted to their ability to cultivate and publicize talent, subgenres emerged from the late 1950s-early 1960s that both responded directly to *and* rejected the concerns of those who opposed rock music in the 1950s. These subgenres, far from signaling the fracturing of youth culture, represented the triumphant spreading of its roots.

“Soul” music was born during this period, and took on a variety of forms. In Memphis, Jim Stewart and Estelle Axton’s founded Stax Records, which brought white and black musicians together to launch a new phase in rhythm and blues. In Detroit, Berry Gordy’s Motown Records became a shining light of black capitalism by offering an urbane, pop-influenced soul with a reach that stretched from coast-to-coast. In New

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<sup>51</sup> *New York Times*, “Roseland Dance City Rules Out the Twist,” October 21, 1961: 12.

<sup>52</sup> See Altschuler, *All Shook Up*, 161-184, and Linda Martin and Kerry Segrave, *Anti-Rock: The Opposition to Rock ‘n’ Roll*, 103-108.

York, Ahmet Ertegun and Jerry Wexler's Atlantic Records turned from recording jazz acts to popularizing rhythm and blues artists, like Ray Charles, and also helped distribute Stax's music.<sup>53</sup> Other subgenres emerged or matured. The Beach Boys were founded in 1960, and their Southern California surfer music illustrated how rock as a medium could translate local culture for a national audience; "Surfin' USA" showed how it could be done in patriotic ways. Rockabilly music, which Sam Phillips had dominated in the mid-1950s producing Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, and Carl Perkins, was reenergized by Roy Orbison's emergence as a major star in 1960 with "Only the Lonely." Joan Baez released her first record in 1960, and both Bob Dylan and Peter, Paul, and Mary released theirs in 1962; together, they brought folk music to a broader audience and showed youth how mass culture could have direct political content. This period also witnessed the rise of the girl groups, including the Ronettes, the Shirelles, the Shangri-Las, Ruby and the Romantics, and Motown's Supremes and Martha and the Vandellas. These groups prominently featured vocal harmonies, and explored themes central to female adolescence and young womanhood. In England, both The Beatles and the Rolling Stones were formed during the early 1960s, and invaded American shores in 1964.

This emergence of subgenres represented a new phase in the history of youth mass culture, when music was just one cultural form that responded to the desire of

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<sup>53</sup> See Nelson George, *Where Did Our Love Go: The Rise and Fall of the Motown Sound* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1985); Gerald Early, *One Nation Under a Groove: Motown and American Culture* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004); Peter Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music: Rhythm and Blues and the Southern Dream of Freedom* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1986). James Brown also emerged during this period, releasing his first single on King Records in 1956. King was a label started by a musician in Cincinnati named Syd Nathan, and recorded Brown through 1959 before he moved onto Federal Records. Brown, unlike artists on Motown, Stax, and Atlantic, did not produce much crossover music until the late 1960s.

adolescent consumers for more varied and fulfilling choices in the market place. New comic books, stand-up comedy, movie genres, television shows, and hobbies gave young Americans myriad avenues of self-expression to pursue in their free time. The explosion of choice in the early 1960s also showed the world that the culture consumed by American youth, especially the music, was more sophisticated and resilient than its detractors had claimed in the 1950s. Though criticism of rock ‘n’ roll persisted, the notion that the music was some sort of conspiracy to exploit or corrupt youth, void of redeeming content, was done great damage by the new wave of performers in the early 1960s. Frank Sinatra, who had gone from teenybopper heartthrob in the early 1940s to establishment veteran by the mid-1950s, had dismissed rock and roll in 1957 as “phony and false. It is sung, played and written for the most part by cretinous goons and by means of its almost imbecilic reiteration, and sly, lewd, in plain fact, dirty lyrics... it manages to be the martial music of every sideburned delinquent on the face of the earth.” By 1960, though, Sinatra was hosting a “Welcome Back” television party for Elvis after he got out of the army.<sup>54</sup>

Sinatra’s softening was symbolic of a larger shift in the ways that Americans addressed the issue of juvenile delinquency. Delinquency was less likely to be seen as an unknowable, boundless scourge. As James Gilbert has noted, “the question of delinquency by the early 1960s seemed far less important than it once had been,” moved off of the front pages by excitement about the ascendancy John F. Kennedy and the

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<sup>54</sup> Martin and Segrave, *Anti-Rock*, 46, 68. For the purposes of full disclosure, this moment could also be read as Elvis’s first step towards his career as a crooner, since he agreed to wear a tuxedo for the event. I believe it’s fair to say that both instincts were present.

dramatic acceleration of the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>55</sup> Juvenile delinquency became a less explicit presence in and around rock ‘n’ roll after 1960 as the battle between ASCAP and BMI faded into the background, as the explosion of subculture signaled the evolving vibrancy of youth culture, and as the nation grew more accustomed to the sounds of wailing guitars and unrestrained yelping. Delinquency certainly remained in the public’s consciousness after 1960; the next chapter will explore a new phase in youth policy that addressed delinquency as a knowable and treatable phenomenon. But delinquency’s usefulness as a rhetorical battering ram in the battles over the meanings of youth culture declined as the discourse around youth criminality increasingly acknowledged and moved to address the social and structural factors that impacted adolescence.

The film version of *West Side Story*, released in 1961, illustrates this shift in rhetorical linkages between youth culture and juvenile delinquency. The show had opened on Broadway in 1957, amidst the public uproar over urban gangs. By the time the film opened four years later, much of the concern had faded, and the movie was notable much more for its style and content than its subject matter. Most reviewers explored the disconnection between the ugliness of the setting and language used by the characters and the stunning achievements of Jerome Robbins’ beautiful choreography and Leonard Bernstein’s dazzling score.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps as a signal that the show was meant to

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<sup>55</sup> Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 195.

<sup>56</sup> None of the actors were seen as believable as delinquents in the way that Vic Morrow’s sullen Artie West had been in *Blackboard Jungle*. See Wolcott Gibbs, “Hoodlums and Heiresses,” *New Yorker*, October 5, 1957: 64; Brendan Gill, “The Current Cinema,” *New Yorker*, October 24, 1961: 196; Harold Clurman, “Theater,” *The Nation*, October 12, 1957: 250-251; Robert Evett, “Bernstein’s ‘Romeo and Juliet,’” *The New Republic*, September 9, 1957: 21; Stanley Kaufman, “The Asphalt Romeo and Juliet,” *The New Republic*, October 23, 1961: 28-29; Arthur Knight, “Romeo Revisited,” *Saturday Review*, October 14, 1961: 40; “The Show’s the Thing,” *Newsweek*, October 7, 1957: 102; *Life*,

appeal primarily to adults and *not* to young people, Bernstein featured Latin-influenced jazz rather than rock ‘n’ roll. The stage show was primarily a vehicle for Bernstein’s music, Stephen Sondheim’s lyrics, Arthur Laurents’ dialogue, and Robbins’ choreography.

Laurents and Jerome Robbins came up with the idea for a musical based upon *Romeo and Juliet* in 1949, originally setting it on the East Side of Manhattan, with the clashing groups depicted as Catholics and Jews. In response to the massive Puerto Rican migration and the gang problems of the mid-fifties, Laurents changed the ethnic composition of the groups to Polish-American and Puerto Rican. The shift was an effort to give the show a patina of verisimilitude that would make it more present and vibrant. The creators of both the show and the movie (which was directed by Robbins and Robert Wise) have maintained that *West Side Story* was not about culture, migration, Puerto Ricans, social relations-- or even gangs and juvenile delinquency.<sup>57</sup> As Bernstein noted during the lengthy and difficult casting calls, “this show is a dancer’s show.” The ability of the players to inhabit Robbins’ demanding choreography was far more important than their ability to present authentically as Polish-American or Puerto Rican.<sup>58</sup>

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“Explosion on the West Side,” October 20, 1961: 80-87. Henry Hewes was the only reviewer to conclude that the show penetrated the issue of juvenile delinquency in any meaningful way. See Hewes, “Broadway Postscript: The Cool Generation,” *Saturday Review*, October 5, 1957: 22.

<sup>57</sup> See Frances Negrón-Muntaner, “Feeling Pretty: ‘West Side Story’ and Puerto Rican Identity Discourses,” *Social Text*, Volume 18, Number 2, 2000: 84.

<sup>58</sup> Murray Schumach, “Talent Dragnet,” *New York Times*, September 22, 1957: 135.

*West Side Story* immediately moved to the center of American historical memory about the juvenile delinquency in the 1950s, and has remained there ever since.<sup>59</sup> In fact, the hit musical and Academy Award-winning film represented a shift in how Americans addressed delinquency through popular mediums. In the last half of the 1950s, theories of delinquency had been so thoroughly integrated into the American consciousness that *West Side Story* could playfully mock them. The song “Gee, Officer Krupke,” sung by the Jets outside of a soda shop, takes on socio-behavioral explanations for delinquency. The Jets explain to Office Krupke that their upbringings -- by drunken, drug-using, abusive parents -- have led to their affiliation with a gang and lives of petty crime. They tease the officer by impersonating social workers, psychiatrists, and judges who argue over whether to treat the delinquent, jail him, or help him get a job. The song, set in the context of a movie that was not meant to appeal to youths themselves, seemed to suggest that the competing theories about delinquency had little meaning, and did so in a way that sought knowing agreement from the audience. *West Side Story* used juvenile delinquency in much the same way as it used Puerto Rican migration to New York and the city’s slums: as plot devices that were easy to stylize and which audience members were sure to have heard a lot about (even if they understood little).

That *West Side Story* immediately became the primary cultural text about juvenile delinquency is symbolic. The mission of *West Side Story* was not to delve deeply into the matter, but rather to use delinquency to signify a setting and to dramatize the tension between two ethnic groups. Jim Gilbert has written that its commercially successful

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<sup>59</sup> *West Side Story* came up more than any other cultural artifact when I discussed this dissertation topic with people, no matter their age or level of knowledge about the subject.

mixture of forms including ballet, jazz, and street language represented a broadening acceptance of an integrated American mass culture that no longer saw meaningful difference between high culture, “midcult,” and popular culture.<sup>60</sup> But *West Side Story* created so lasting an artistic depiction of juvenile delinquency because the topic itself was integrated with other storylines. Delinquency wasn’t presented as something new or as a subject that only drew overwrought reactions, head shaking, and sober responses from adults. Delinquency was presented as a byproduct of urban social relations, an important element in the characters’ lives and the daily life of New York City, but not as the primary subject of the story. In *West Side Story*, delinquency was presented as understandable within its context, as one factor in the complicated lives of urban adolescents.

By the time the movie version of *West Side Story* came out in 1961, much of the furor around the relationship between popular culture and juvenile delinquency had subsided. Hand-wringing newspaper articles likening delinquency to a virus appeared less frequently, and, after a decade of anxiety-producing reporting, the idea that a delinquent might be next door was widespread enough not to be so alarming. There are many explanations for this, ranging from the expansion and maturation of the youth market, to the deepening of tensions with the Soviet Union (a conflict in which existential threats to humanity carried more immediacy for many Americans than misbehaving adolescents), to the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement as a national story in which adolescents played a primary role. Those who opposed social equality for African-Americans realized that the vote was a much more powerful tool than a guitar, and the

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<sup>60</sup> Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 214.

Freedom Rides of 1961 refocused the racial politics of youth at the national level in a way that made conflicts around popular culture seem comparatively trivial.

By the early 1960s, more Americans were coming to understand something that was not reflected in the discourse on youth culture through much of the 1950s: there was a significant difference between adolescents acting out in school or committing petty crime, and more lasting, invasive, and destructive forms of delinquency. The former was perhaps explainable through a focus on the psychological disruption caused by adolescent maturation or the occasional, instinctive misbehavior of a hormonal teenager who otherwise conformed. This was the type of behavior that occasionally accompanied the public youth culture of the 1950s, that was present in adolescent consumption, and which sparked the ire of adult observers and the critique against rock 'n' roll.

But this behavior and these adolescents were different in kind from the more violent and destructive behavior that youth policy would seek to ameliorate. As the discourse on juvenile delinquency and youth culture evolved in the late 1950s, social scientists and social workers were concurrently developing new understandings of adolescent development. When these ideas were granted legitimacy by significant investment from the federal government, they helped redefine operative definitions of delinquency. By 1960, adult efforts to understand adolescence increasingly acknowledged the difference between the juvenile delinquent who performed status crimes and the young criminal whose behavior was a genuine threat to society. It was the latter who needed the attention of adults, the focus of intellectuals and social scientists, and intervention from the state.

## Chapter Six

### **Opportunity, Community, and The Politicization of Reform: Mobilization For Youth and the Transition from Anti-Delinquency Policy to a War on Poverty**

At the 1950 Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth the primary focus had been helping the young create “healthy personalities” as they matured into adults. Ten years later, the 1960 Golden Anniversary White House Conference on Children and Youth considered how to create “opportunities for children and youth to realize their full potential for a creative life in freedom and dignity.” The same year, Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin published *Delinquency and Opportunity: A Theory of Delinquent Gangs*, a landmark book in the history of social work that argued that the most significant cause of delinquency was the tension between the high aspirations American society encouraged among lower class urban youth and limited or unavailable paths to achievement. The book would form the theoretical foundation of Mobilization For Youth (MFY), an organization on the Lower East Side of Manhattan that became a model in Lyndon Johnson’s “War on Poverty.”<sup>1</sup>

These references to “opportunity” marked a shift in national thinking that placed more of a burden upon American society to actively create the conditions under which adolescents could become contributing adult citizens. At the Midcentury White House Conference, delinquency had been explained primarily as a psychosocial malfunction in personality development. Ten years later social scientists had evolved an explanation

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<sup>1</sup> Golden Anniversary White House Conference on Children and Youth, *Conference Proceedings* (Washington, D.C.: Golden Anniversary White House Conference on Children and Youth, Inc., 1960); Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin, *Delinquency and Opportunity: A Theory of Delinquent Gangs* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1960).

that located the primary cause of delinquency in American economic and social structures. Delinquency was not simply at the far end of a sliding scale by which to measure adolescent behavior, from good to bad; it was a response by the individual to a complex of specific external factors.

Bits and pieces of “opportunity theory” could be found in the reporting of Harrison Salisbury, or even amidst the rants of Samuel Leibowitz. In *West Side Story*, A-Rab took on the persona of a shrink, singing to Officer Krupke, “this boy don’t need a doctor, just a good honest job!” This developing understanding of delinquency, which integrated youth criminality with analysis of the rest of American social life, had been synthesized by the social scientists and social workers who had been studying adolescence since World War II. When John F. Kennedy took office in January 1961, a focus on “opportunity” moved into the Executive branch of the federal government, and influenced the programs that would evolve over the next three years into the War on Poverty. Juvenile delinquency policy in New York City was the fertile testing ground for theories of opportunity through Mobilization For Youth, and ultimately was the path through which social science filtered into the federal liberalism of the first half of the 1960s.

The emergence of opportunity theory as a model for addressing delinquency effectively trumped in policy discussions the principle that there was some fundamental problem concerning adolescence. The New York City Youth Board had explored, through projects like the Glueck Prediction Table and through its support of mental hygiene clinics in the schools, a wholesale approach to challenging delinquency through sorting the child according to his psychological adjustment. Yet, in the middle of the

1950s the delinquency problem seemed to deepen, and programs that focused primarily on the individual were no longer sufficient. As the decade evolved, and as voices in local and national politics demanded that the state do a better job of addressing delinquency, a new theoretical approach with viable practical programmatic applications became necessary.

By 1955, social scientists were already beginning to explore approaches to delinquency research and policy that focused on the contexts from which delinquency arose. In May of that year, Helen Witmer and Ruth Kotinsky of the U.S. Children's Bureau, who had been instrumental in the work around the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth, organized a small meeting of sociologists and psychiatrists. The two-day conference, titled "New Perspectives for Research on Juvenile Delinquency," highlighted the work of participants Erik Erikson and the sociologist Robert Merton, and sought to diminish "the separateness of psychological and sociological theories about delinquency" and to "build bridges" between these two distinct areas of research. Erikson's work on ego structure had been the most influential theory at the 1950 White House Conference on Children and Youth, and located explanations for delinquency within the individual's failure to develop an "inner identity." Merton believed that the forces towards deviation were external, and located the source of anomie, or normlessness, in the pressures and failures of the social structure.<sup>2</sup> While Erikson's ideas were foundational in postwar research on processes of

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<sup>2</sup> Ruth Kotinsky and Helen Witmer, *New Perspectives for Research on Juvenile Delinquency* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Children's Bureau, 1956). Richard Cloward, who would be instrumental in the early years of MFY and who was a graduate student of Merton's, presented his early research on the social organization of prisons at this conference.

maturation, Merton's would become increasingly influential in the latter half of the 1950s, and encouraged policy that focused on "opportunity" rather than "personality."

By 1960, "opportunity" had become a regular theme in national politics, even before John F. Kennedy was elected President. "Opportunity" and "delinquency" were two prominent areas of discussion at 1960's Golden Anniversary White House Conference on Children and Youth. Amidst an opening address that offered more aphorisms than concrete ideas, President Dwight D. Eisenhower identified only juvenile delinquency as a specific area in need of attention during the week.<sup>3</sup> The conference was structured to respond to reports submitted by states that highlighted local issues and concerns. Forty-two states noted that juvenile delinquency was in need of "urgent attention." Services, where they existed, suffered from poor coordination between state and local agencies, anti-delinquency personnel were limited and under trained, and physical facilities for play, treatment, and rehabilitation were lacking. The states were acutely aware of and concerned with juvenile delinquency as an issue, and almost unanimously requested the assistance of the federal government to help them structure a more effective response.<sup>4</sup>

The engagement with delinquency at the 1960 conference was more thorough and sophisticated than at the meeting ten years earlier. Numerous local agencies and social scientists had examined the issue over the course of the decade, and by 1960 public

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<sup>3</sup> Bess Furman, "President Voices His Faith in Youth," *New York Times*, March 28, 1960: 1.

<sup>4</sup> National Institute of Mental Health and the Children's Bureau, "State Reports Submitted to the 1960 White House Conference on Children and Youth as They Relate to Juvenile Delinquency: A Summary Analysis," *Report to the Congress on Juvenile Delinquency*, February 1, 1960: CB 49-50 (in author's possession courtesy of David Rosner and Gerald Markowitz).

understanding had benefited from the extended popular focus on youth behavior. The sheer size of the gathering and number of agreed upon recommendations — 640, ten times what was offered a decade earlier -- was a product of the attention paid to youth in the 1950s. While many states argued that they were ill equipped to address delinquency, thirty-five had commissions on youth, and several cities had agencies similar to the New York City Youth Board. Social service organizations outside the government focused significant energy in combating delinquency as well.<sup>5</sup>

Discussions of delinquency at the conference were more restrained than what could be found at the local level or in popular reporting on adolescence at the end of the 1950s. In anticipation of the conference, two social scientists from Temple University argued that, given the increased attention to delinquency and the fluid categorizations of youth crime, it was impossible to know whether juvenile delinquency was more prevalent than it had been in earlier eras. This skepticism was indicative of the more precise understanding of delinquency at the 1960 conference when compared with the earlier event. The goal of the conference was to move beyond roiled rhetoric to help construct a federal bureaucracy more supportive of work on youth issues, and the conference recommendations criticized the hysterics present in the public discourse about delinquency. Two of the more than twenty-five conference recommendations directly pertaining to delinquency urged parents not to blame comic books for youth misbehavior, and reminded lawmakers not to pass any laws that might restrict the “rights and freedom of that great majority of young people who never come in contact with law enforcement.” Most of the recommendations concerned federal support for coordination of youth

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<sup>5</sup> Ephraim R. Gomberg, "The Golden Anniversary White House Conference on Children and Youth... A Process of Citizen Action," *School Life* 42, no. 2 (October 1959): 3-4.

services at the state level, increased attention to early detection and prevention, and stronger services for correction and treatment.<sup>6</sup>

The stream of thinking that would dominate youth policy at the national level under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations was present amidst the cacophonous discussions of delinquency. The 1950 conference had focused on personality development, but in 1960, participants spent more time examining social dynamics, structures, and institutions. The conference treated adolescence as intimately tied to the rest of American life, not as a process propelled by its internal trajectory. This approach nurtured the sense that purposeful policy could effectively intervene in the lives of America's young.

Even within a broader contextualization of adolescence, adult concerns were still palpable. Participants examined the American family, whose assumed breakdown removed the most fundamental method of social control over the young. They explored how internal migration had separated families from extended kinship networks, and discussed how activities once centered inside the home, like recreation and religious instruction, were now more likely to happen outside. Schools were failing to prepare the young for productive work. American mothers suffered a particularly scathing critique for selfishly abdicating their domestic responsibilities to go to work. One judge who commented on the challenges to families even noted, "every working mother who leaves

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<sup>6</sup> Negley K. and David Matza Teeters, "The Extent of Delinquency in the United States," *The Journal of Negro Education* 28, no. 3 (Summer 1959): 200-213; Golden Anniversary White House Conference on Children and Youth, "Composite Forum Recommendations," *Conference Proceedings* (Washington, D.C.: Golden Anniversary White House Conference on Children and Youth, Inc., 1960); 315-399.

children below high school age continually unsupervised is practicing brinkmanship with delinquency.”<sup>7</sup>

Several groups and individuals based in New York presented at the conference. Ralph Whelan, then the New York City Youth Commissioner, noted that in his city “some 20,000 multiproblem families, less than 1 percent of the city’s family population, are responsible for 75 percent of the delinquency, and there is reason to believe this ratio applies throughout the nation. Yet the needs of these families are not being met.” Judge Samuel Leibowitz had ushered out this same statistic repeatedly in his efforts in New York to raise the public’s consciousness about delinquency. Whelan also argued that parents had abdicated their control, that the mass media was intrusive, that child labor laws had made it difficult for teenagers to find work, and that the young hadn’t been included as “responsible participants in community affairs.”<sup>8</sup> The first two arguments above also echoed Judge Leibowitz. But the second two, likely culled through Whelan’s involvement with the Youth Board and its limited interest in community involvement, were examples of the developing analysis of structural issues increasingly present in policy circles.

Whelan made his comments in a forum on “Opportunity,” where a group of speakers, each of whom worked and lived in New York, illuminated the various obstacles to full community participation for the young. John Slawson, the Executive Vice President of the American Jewish Committee, spoke of how anxiety engendered aggression, and how discrimination in the “affluent society” limited the mobility of

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<sup>7</sup> *Newsweek*, “Crisis in the Family,” April 4, 1960: 103-4; *US News and World Report*, “Now the Experts Say This About Us,” April 11, 1960: 88.

<sup>8</sup> Golden Anniversary White House Conference on Children and Youth, *Conference Proceedings*: 152.

minority groups and narrowed overall social responsibility. George Meany, the President of the AFL-CIO, also railed against discrimination while preaching the need for additional federal investment in vocational education. Reginald Johnson, the Director of Housing for the National Urban League, described the organization's efforts to challenge discrimination in housing, education, and access to employment. And on a related panel, discussing "The Young in Conflict," Alfred J. Kahn, of Columbia University's New York School of Social Work, criticized existing policy for failing to address the complex causes of delinquency, for implementing programs without proper planning, and underutilizing social science. Robert MacIver, who headed New York City's Juvenile Delinquency Evaluation Project, commented about the effects of population mobility on the development of youth, and concluded "when young people move from one social environment with its inherited standards and mores to another with different standards, there is a tendency to lose the clear conviction of principles by which to live."<sup>9</sup>

The ideas in the above speeches represented two broader points of consensus reached at the conference, at not just among New Yorkers. The first was that the state was insufficiently meeting the needs of young adults. The second was that delinquency couldn't be explained or ameliorated by a focus on the individual since it was a byproduct of larger social dynamics. Delinquency wasn't simply about adolescence, but about discrimination, demography, education, and employment. Those were the areas where work should be done to increase the chances of adolescents to mature into successful adults. Speakers layered a broader structural analysis on top of the psycho-

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*: 130, 150-152, 265-276.

social arguments for delinquency, and pointed out that this was where federal policy could be most helpful.

Like many other participants in the conference, the speakers on “opportunity” also addressed continued discrimination against African-Americans and the government’s failure to enforce *Brown v. Board of Education*. Race and ethnicity were much more of a presence than they had been at the earlier conference, where Kenneth Clark’s sophisticated work stood out so boldly. The focus on race was a function of a growing interest in the relationship between race and delinquency, and a product of the presence at the conference of more than fourteen hundred youth who aggressively voiced their support for the sit-in movement that had begun in Greensboro, North Carolina a month earlier. The youth delegates collectively vowed to write the managers of segregated Southern stores in protest, condemned “ambivalent” stances among politicians on the issue of desegregation, and also circulated a petition throughout the conference to insure that their concerns were heard amidst the chaos of the gathering. Clark, who attended the conference as a member of the New York Youth Commission, applauded the activities of the students, noting “The sit-in is one of the best things since the Boston Tea Party. It is so wonderfully American and has jolted American students out of their complacency. It can only be successful.”<sup>10</sup> The youth presence at the conference showed that action at the local level—the grass roots—was picking up steam. It also showed that youth, at least those who attended the conference, saw their lives not as distinct or local, but as part of

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<sup>10</sup> Emma Harrison, “Youths at Capital Conclave Move to Support Negroes on Sit-Ins,” *New York Times*, March 30, 1960: 24; Emma Harrison, “Youths’ Petition Backs Sitdowns,” *New York Times*, March 31, 1960: 27.

the broader national experience, and foreshadowed the youth organizing for civil rights and against the war in Vietnam of the coming years.

The Golden Anniversary White House Conference on Children and Youth raised many more questions than it answered, yet it clearly articulated the necessity for bold new programs that would more comprehensively address the problems of youth. Community action programs, which ultimately became the controversial form of federal anti-delinquency and then anti-poverty programs in the early-to-mid 1960s, sprouted from the convergence of three factors.

First was the model of the Civil Rights Movement, which fomented an activist base that fanned out after 1960. The Movement was energized in Montgomery in 1955 and accelerated after Greensboro, putting participatory democracy in the air. Local people in cities like New York, Cleveland, San Francisco, and Philadelphia were inspired by the actions of southern African-Americans fighting for their rights, and sought more ways to engage power where they lived. The second factor was that community organizing was by then an established method of combating juvenile delinquency. The Chicago Area Project, founded by pioneering sociologists Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay in 1932, had for three decades organized communities into support of youth recreation, job training, and community improvement measures. The Chicago Area Project had been one model used by the New York City Youth Board, and by the late 1950s employing local adults in programs to empower the powerless was a top priority of those working on anti-delinquency measures. The final factor was a shift in priorities at the federal level with the election of John F. Kennedy, and then the ascendancy of Lyndon B. Johnson.

These factors created the conditions for Mobilization For Youth (MFY) to become the national model for community action in the early 1960s. MFY was formed in the summer of 1957 after a meeting of the Board of Henry Street Settlement at which members discussed the necessity of an “overall attack” on Lower East Side delinquency that would better coordinate services. The Lower East Side Neighborhood Association (LENA), a cooperative of social service agencies formed in 1954 to address tensions between the neighborhood’s ethnic groups, was the conduit for the initial organizational work. Hall and the LENA board, with the help of a grant from the Taconic Foundation, produced a proposal for a research program that would lead to an action program. When presented to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), the group was told that in order to secure funding, it would need to find a unifying principle for its research. Leonard Cottrell, a Chicago-trained sociologist who was executive director of the Russell Sage Foundation and an advisor to the NIMH, recommended the work of two faculty members at the New York School of Social Work at Columbia.<sup>11</sup>

Lloyd Ohlin and Richard Cloward were completing *Delinquency and Opportunity* in the late 1950s, and came to see the Lower East Side as a locale in which to test their theory. The Lower East Side was home to a mixture of Italian, Jewish, Irish, Puerto Rican, and African-American residents, and gang violence that broke down along ethnic

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<sup>11</sup> Joseph Helfgot argues that the NIMH arranged the relationship between Cloward and Ohlin and MFY, which then gave final shape to the organization. Joseph Helfgot, *Professional Reforming* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1981), 23-28. Noel Cazenave argues that the NIMH gained control over MFY’s programmatic orientation by setting the conditions for its funding. See Noel Cazenave, *Impossible Democracy: The Unlikely Success of the War on Poverty Community Action Programs* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007), 24-25.

lines had been an issue in the area since the mid-1950s.<sup>12</sup> LENA, working with the Youth Board, had managed to negotiate gang truces at times over the previous five years, and had some success in organizing community residents against the gangs.

There were problems with its approach, however. For instance, LENA's program had responded primarily to the outbreak of violence rather than proactively creating a new social service structure that would bolster the community's ability to support—and control—its own youth. Helen Hall, in the words of Richard Cloward, “did not want to offend liberal political figures because she and other settlement figures thought that much of the progress in New York City came about because of their close relationship with this political stratum.”<sup>13</sup> Also, most of LENA's workers were white in a neighborhood becoming increasingly black and Puerto Rican. Bringing in more black and Puerto Rican social workers would make community development and organization easier.<sup>14</sup> The Youth Board had hoped to organize neighborhoods early in its existence, but a number of factors made that difficult, including cultural differences between its workers and target communities, strained resources, and an unwillingness to fully engage in activities that could be deemed “radical.” The NIMH pushed LENA to create a native and more active local organization than what existed in New York City at the time.

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<sup>12</sup> Italians, Jews, and Irish youngsters—all “white” by this point in American history—joined forces in the Mayrose gang; Puerto Rican youth organized as the Dragons, a brother gang to the East Harlem incarnation; and African-Americans youth were in the Sportsmen. These were the three main gangs among 45 active in the area in the middle of the decade. See Eric Schneider, *Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings: Youth Gangs in Postwar New York* (Princeton, N.J.; Princeton University Press, 1999), 201-203.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Cazenave, *Impossible Democracy*, 25.

<sup>14</sup> Schneider, *Vampire, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings*, 209-211.

The NIMH gave the project more than \$400,000 for an eighteen month planning phase. The research program was handled by the Columbia sociologists, and development of an action program was led by James McCarthy, who had organized a gang-prevention program in Harlem in the late 1940s and worked as a staff member and Deputy Executive Director of the New York City Youth Board for its first decade of existence. As the 1960s dawned, MFY represented a collaborative effort between various organizations on the Lower East Side and researchers from Columbia to design an integrated, multi-level attack on delinquency.<sup>15</sup>

MFY's plan and the fact that it was nurtured by a federal organization represented the triumph in policy circles of the idea that delinquency was the product of a mixture of psychological, sociological, demographic, economic, and educational factors. Any sufficient response from the state must be broad-based, intensive, and flexible. This idea was not necessarily new; even those, like Erik Erikson, who looked especially at personality development, didn't discount the importance of environment on the process of youth maturation. Only in the late 1950s did the notion that mental health services should exist within a program of aggressive state engagement with broader social structures gain traction at the highest levels of the federal government. This shift in programmatic priorities at the federal level was a function of the persistent efforts of certain individuals in positions of power to find a new set of solutions for a delinquency problem that seemed to be deepening. It was also made possible by Cloward and Ohlin's reorientation of delinquency theory towards a more narrow understanding of the problem.

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<sup>15</sup> Mobilization for Youth, *Proposal for the Prevention and Control of Delinquency* (New York, NY: Mobilization For Youth, Inc., 1962), iv-vii, 605-616.

Status crimes and rock 'n' roll belligerence, the behavior of rowdy adolescents, were not seen as necessary targets of state policy.

At the time of the Golden Anniversary White House Conference on Children and Youth, Congressman John E. Fogarty (D-RI), the chairman of the House Subcommittee on Appropriations for Health, Education, and Welfare, was strongly pushing for an increase in federal support to demonstration and action programs such as MFY. Fogarty was a close family friend of James McCarthy, and gave MFY a path to exercise influence in Congress. Though a bill was in Congress that would authorize \$5 million per year over the next half-decade to finance model anti-delinquency projects, Fogarty thought \$1 million should be spent immediately to design a "major national blueprint" on how to attack the problem.<sup>16</sup>

The NIMH and the Children's Bureau had supplied a report on juvenile delinquency to Congress that attempted to define and delineate the extent of the problem, as well as to make known the local organizations that were emerging to deal with it, like MFY. The report acknowledged that some delinquency numbers were a byproduct of the way crime was reported, but also argued that "there is evidence that the magnitude of the problem has increased."<sup>17</sup> Fogarty called McCarthy and Winslow Carlton, the President of Henry Street Settlement and the Chairman of the MFY Board, to a closed session of his subcommittee, and presented their testimony along with the report in support of his proposal. All of this was done "in defiance of the budget policies of the Eisenhower

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<sup>16</sup> Cazenave, *Impossible Democracy*, 28; Helfgot, *Professional Reforming*, 27-28.

<sup>17</sup> National Institute of Mental Health and U.S. Children's Bureau, *Report to the Congress on Juvenile Delinquency*, 4-5.

Administration.”<sup>18</sup> The federal government’s budget priorities changed, of course, when John F. Kennedy was elected president.

Before John F. Kennedy took office, then, there was already significant energy at the federal level, and access to power for those who were working on juvenile delinquency in New York City. Under Kennedy, though, this engagement and access spread to the Executive Branch. Up to that point, Congress had never passed an act devoted to the prevention of juvenile delinquency.<sup>19</sup>

Within months of his inauguration, Kennedy promised a “total attack” on delinquency, and urged Congress to develop a law that would devote \$10 million for each of the next three years to fund demonstration projects, train workers, and improve the technical assistance that the federal government could give to public and private agencies. Though not a particularly large investment, Kennedy’s program gave more than Fogarty’s committee had requested and signaled interest in innovative policy. Kennedy created the Committee on Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime and signed the Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Offenses Control Act of 1961 as part of the “New Frontier,” his moderate reinvigoration of the New Deal welfare state.<sup>20</sup>

Kennedy had expressed little interest in juvenile delinquency as a senator and a candidate, and remained aloof from the issue during his presidency. Actually, his public statements on youth harkened back to G. Stanley Hall’s recommendations of physical

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<sup>18</sup> Bess Furman, “U.S. Urged to Map Child Crime Fight,” *New York Times*, March 26, 1960: 23.

<sup>19</sup> Gayle Olson-Raymer, “The Role of the Federal Government in Juvenile Delinquency Prevention: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives,” *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 74, no. 2 (1983): 578.

<sup>20</sup> Alvin Shuster, “Kennedy Offers Plan to Combat Juvenile Crimes,” *New York Times*, May 12, 1961: 1.

rigor for young Americans by urging children to participate in 50-mile hikes during television appearances and through essays in *Sports Illustrated*.<sup>21</sup> Robert F. Kennedy, the Attorney General, had pushed his brother to seriously address delinquency, and he chaired the cabinet-level Committee on Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime. The Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, who controlled grants under the Delinquency Act, Abraham Ribicoff, and the Secretary of Labor, Arthur Goldberg, were also on the committee. The most important member, however, was David Hackett, a special assistant to the Attorney General who served as the committee's executive director.<sup>22</sup>

Hackett had attended Milton Academy Preparatory School with Robert Kennedy, and had been a member of the U.S. Olympic hockey team and a successful publisher in Montreal before joining the Kennedy campaign in 1960. The author John Knowles modeled the central character of *A Separate Peace*, a magnetic adolescent named Phineas, on Hackett. He was exceptionally talented and well connected, and the Kennedy brothers gave him carte blanche to develop a juvenile delinquency program, even though he knew nothing about the matter. At the recommendation of Leonard Cottrell, he recruited Lloyd Ohlin to be the committee's special consultant on delinquency.<sup>23</sup>

Ohlin had, around the publication of *Delinquency and Opportunity*, been designing the research program of Mobilization For Youth in an attempt to make actionable the theory he had developed with Richard Cloward. *Delinquency and*

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<sup>21</sup> Judith Sealander, *The Failed Century of the Child: Governing America's Young in the Twentieth Century* (New York City: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 319-320.

<sup>22</sup> On the founding of committee, see Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960's* (New York City: Harper & Row, 1984), 107-109.

<sup>23</sup> Matusow, *The Unraveling of America*, 112-13.

*Opportunity* brought together two theoretical traditions. The first began with the nineteenth century sociologist Emile Durkheim, who argued that “anomie,” or “normlessness,” “results from a breakdown in the regulation of goals such that men’s aspirations become unlimited. Unlimited aspirations create a constant pressure for deviant behavior—that is, for behavior that departs from social norms.” Delinquent behavior arose, then, as a response to a society’s failure to properly regulate men’s goals. Robert Merton built on Durkheim’s work by delving deeper into the relationship between culture and social structure. “Anomie,” he argued, “develops not because of a breakdown in the regulation of goals alone but, rather, because of a breakdown in the relationship between goals and legitimate avenues to achieve them.” Unlike Durkheim, Merton saw pressure as a constant element in social relations, not the product of exceptional economic conditions, and also noted that the tension between aspiration and opportunity became more intense lower in the social structure. Cloward and Ohlin extended Durkheim and Merton’s takes on strain theory to argue that delinquent gangs emerged out of the inability of adolescent males to achieve the conventional goals of society, out of their inability to “conform.”<sup>24</sup>

The second sociological tradition Cloward and Ohlin engaged came out of Chicago. Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay’s work with the Chicago Area Project helped them identify “criminal traditions” that were native to an area and were minimally affected by demographic change, and that were transmitted through culture from generation to generation. Edwin Sutherland, also working in Chicago, was interested in the ways that illegitimate opportunity became integrated within the social structure, and

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin, *Delinquency and Opportunity*, x, 78-86.

became learned by individuals within a community. William Whyte had built on Sutherland's theories by exploring the extent to which illegitimate and legitimate structures were integrated in "slum" societies.<sup>25</sup>

Cloward and Ohlin, in their "theory of differential opportunity systems," merged the notions that criminality was anchored by place and that illegitimate opportunity structures existed alongside legitimate ones with the theory that adolescent anomie emerged in response to blocked opportunity. They were primarily interested in what they called "lower class areas of large urban centers," where juvenile gang violence appeared to be systemic and most destructive to the local community. They also worked only with a narrow definition of delinquency, rejecting en masse public concerns about general youth malfeasance and hand wringing about isolated incidents of violence while searching specifically for a theoretical understanding that could be a guide for policy. They identified three delinquent subcultures: a "criminal subculture," devoted to earning income through illegal acts; a "conflict subculture," which sought status through violence; and a "retreatist subculture," which valued the consumption of drugs. These subcultures, they argued, were the foundation of recurrent criminal acts, fostered access to an adult criminal career, and injected a persistent criminal culture into a community. The goal of their study was to illuminate the conditions that gave rise to delinquent behavior as well as the processes by which such behavior congealed as a subculture. Cloward and Ohlin believed the delinquency they described was becoming more severe because social organization within urban slums was disintegrating under the pressures of

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 146-156. Also see, Richard Cloward, "Illegitimate Means, Anomie, and Deviant Behavior," *American Sociological Review* 24, no. 2 (April 1959): 164-176.

migration and “slum clearance.” In that context, then, illegitimate opportunity structures grew both in availability and appeal to local residents.

The theory rejected understandings of juvenile delinquency that had been behind much of the anxious public moralizing about adolescence since World War II. The impact of mass culture on adolescent development, and random acts of juvenile violence in middle-class areas were left out of their explanations for delinquency, implicitly rejected as unworthy of significant policy attention. *Delinquency and Opportunity* set forth a narrower definition of delinquency that argued that the most significant youth malfeasance occurred in specific places, for knowable and treatable reasons. Policy, its authors argued, should address the social structures behind those reasons.

In December 1961, Mobilization For Youth published *A Proposal for the Prevention and Control of Delinquency by Expanding Opportunities*. In 620 pages, the organization offered “a broad program of action based on a coherent operating hypothesis and integrated with a carefully designed program of research and evaluation.” George Brager was the Director of Action Programs, James McCarthy was the Administrative Director, and Richard Cloward was the Director of Research. The production of the proposal was a massive undertaking, involving various methods of research that sought to grasp the complexity of social relations on the Lower East Side. Newspaper articles, reports produced by the various social agencies that made up LENA, thousands of interviews, and official data provided by New York City and the Youth Board formed the bulk of materials analyzed. MFY surveyed labor patterns, housing conditions, income information, ethnicity, family structure, public resources deployed, education, and community attitudes about all of the above, as well as about teenagers. The proposal

summarized the history of understandings of what caused juvenile delinquency, leading up to Cloward and Ohlin's integration of strain and differential opportunity structure theories.

MFY located the sources of juvenile delinquency not in the failure of the schools or parents to adequately socialize neighborhood children, but rather in tensions that evolved from American society's expectations of conformity. All industrial societies emphasized upward mobility:

*Something in the organization of life in such societies must therefore require that the members make a virtue of dissatisfaction, of discontent with their present positions.... We believe that delinquency and conformity generally result from the same social conditions. Efforts to conform, to live up to social expectations, often result in profound strain and frustration because the opportunities for conformity are not always available. In this way delinquency and conformity can arise from the same features of social life; unsuccessful attempts to be what one is supposed to be may lead to aberrant behavior, since the very fact of reaching out for socially approved goals under conditions that preclude their legitimate achievement engenders strain.<sup>26</sup>*

The socialization available to adolescents on the Lower East Side had yielded young adults who both conformed and failed to conform, and problems arose not from within the individual but primarily from a lack of opportunity in the social structure.

“Delinquency there represents not a lack of motivation to conform but quite the opposite: the desire to meet social expectations itself becomes the source of delinquent behavior if the possibility of doing so is limited or nonexistent.”<sup>27</sup>

The crisis ultimately climaxed at the point at which boys became men and girls became women, and it was deeply gendered. Though the proposal acknowledged that female delinquency was “often overlooked,” girls suffered from inadequate opportunity

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<sup>26</sup> Mobilization For Youth, *Proposal for the Prevention and Control of Delinquency*, 44-45. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

as well. “The problem of many girls in the lower class is not that they are likely to become unwed mothers but, rather, that the possibilities to become *wed* mothers – that is, becoming part of a stable, monogamous family system – are extremely limited.” The difficulty local men had finding work that would allow them to support a family negatively affected the ability of the local women to conform to the expectations American society placed upon them.<sup>28</sup> Women on the Lower East Side were expected to preside over a stable home and create an environment in which children could conform as they matured. Without that opportunity, daughters were more likely to engage in the sexual behavior that defined female delinquency, and sons wouldn’t have the domestic stability necessary to “conform.”

MFY saw limited legitimate opportunity structures as the most significant cause of delinquency, but was aware of and integrated many other theoretical factors into its analysis. “Lower-class” social relations and immigrant values made alignment with the limited routes towards social mobility difficult, and “the functional autonomy of self-defeating attitudes” complicated social relations on the Lower East Side. Without directly referencing Oscar Lewis’s “culture of poverty” theory, MFY argued that after the inability to conform was established in individuals and families, many residents of the Lower East Side internalized their failures. “The adaptation becomes elaborated and refined as a way of life into which people are directly socialized from birth. Hence, the young become carriers of the cultural system even before they have themselves experienced failure.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-54.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-69. Also see Joseph H. Helfgot, *Professional Reforming*, 43-68. Helfgot argues that MFY represented the ascension of a new theory of social work, one with the

Cultural impediments to conformity originated not only in self-defeating adaptations to poverty, but also in the traditions many immigrants and migrants to the Lower East Side carried with them. The Lower East Side was populated by new African-American and Puerto Rican migrants, as well as old Jewish, Italian, and Chinese immigrant families. While MFY saw diversity on the Lower East Side as a “source of cultural riches and community strength,” language problems and differential value systems interfered with the ability of the young to conform and tensions between ethnic groups gave concrete form to delinquent behavior. Ultimately, irregular patterns of immigrant settlement stood as an impediment to the community cohesion that MFY felt was “a central requirement of the Mobilization program: increasing the motivation and the ability of local residents to participate in the social and political life of their community.”<sup>30</sup>

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central thesis “that ideology had ended, that amelioration of social ills was basically a problem of administration, best left to experts who could make use of social science to solve social problems” (see page 59). He also argues that MFY’s program from the beginning was plagued and eventually undone by the mixing of conflicting theories such as the “culture of poverty” and Cloward and Ohlin’s opportunity theory. I think there is some truth in each of these arguments, but that together they are not completely accurate. MFY ultimately located causative factors of delinquency in the restrictive social structure that limited opportunities for the poor, and sought to address those tensions, at least in its early phase, more than the behavior that in coming years would be labeled as “pathological.” The phrase “culture of poverty” historically evolved after the early 1960s from a tool in the efforts of social reformers to understand the destruction caused by poverty to a politically charged term that blames, still, the poor for their ongoing predicaments. MFY’s initial program did not place blame on the individuals it sought to reach and help, and saw the “functional autonomy of self-defeating attitudes” not as a product primarily of the failure of the individual, but rather of failure of the social structure. Conflict between opportunity theory and notions of a “culture of poverty” were not so great as to undo the organization; in fact, as theories, they were reconcilable. Political attacks and external factors in the 1960s were more responsible for MFY’s failure than theoretical incongruity.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 327-328.

In response, like its predecessors in the settlement house movement and the New York City Youth Board, MFY prioritized assimilation. Their literature promoted an “Operation Assimilation” theme that cut across the organization’s various projects during its early years. Mobilization Neighborhood Service Centers were to “facilitate absorption of newcomers into the community.” A project to “Organize the Unaffiliated” sent workers into the community to assess the needs of newly arrived immigrants and to refer them to local services and communal organizations. Like some of the Youth Board’s more ambitious programming, MFY sought to help local social service organizations penetrate more deeply into the community. But the Youth Board had focused, in programs like its “reach the unreached” initiative, on youth, while MFY targeted all residents. The Youth Board was less interested in assimilation than in sorting through the young to find those with the most significant behavioral problems. MFY saw assimilation as a necessary step to open up opportunity for the residents on the Lower East Side. Programs to foster assimilation couldn’t focus solely on the young and expect to be effective.<sup>31</sup>

MFY was aware of the tension that existed between some of its middle class employees and the “lower class” individuals with which they worked. MFY did occasionally employ arguments that echoed the paternalism of both earlier settlement workers and the culture of poverty analysis offered by Oscar Lewis; but MFY possessed none of the politically inspired nastiness that would be attached to the latter term with the ascendancy of the conservative movement in the middle of the decade. MFY believed that self-defeating attitudes could and did develop “functional autonomy,” but

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

approached the issue empathically rather than as pathology, and with the overwhelming feeling that the problem could be fixed through a focus on opening up avenues of opportunity. MFY planned to hire nonprofessionals from the Lower East Side, who hadn't been trained as social workers — they were called “indigenous personnel” — to ease relations between the organization and the neighborhood.<sup>32</sup>

MFY had developed its proposal with funding from the National Institute of Mental Health, and in June 1962 the federal government, Ford Foundation, and New York City gave the organization \$12.6 million to put its plan into action. MFY was the first organization to receive money from the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency.<sup>33</sup> At a ceremony in the Rose Garden at the White House, Attorney General Robert Kennedy lauded MFY's attempt to integrate action and research to give youth “a stake in conformity if they are to accept the normal values in society,” and Mayor Robert Wagner celebrated the organization of new forces in the battle against delinquency. Reports of the announcement noted that MFY was “designed to strike eventually at the roots of the national juvenile delinquency problem,” and that it was a three-year project that used the Lower East Side as a “giant laboratory.”<sup>34</sup> Ideas developed over the subsequent three years could then be scaled and adapted to other environments.

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<sup>32</sup> Frank Riessman, “Role of the Profession: Mobilizing the Poor,” *Commonweal*, May 21, 1965: 285. Noel Cazenave notes that the inclusion of “indigenous personnel” in the MFY plan was oxymoronic; if they were truly “indigenous,” they wouldn't require top-down training and mobilization by the organization. He points at this a fundamental tension in the MFY program between elite direction and citizen empowerment. See Cazenave, *Impossible Democracy*, 72-74.

<sup>33</sup> In 1963, the Presidential Committee on Juvenile Delinquency also funded programs in Cleveland, Philadelphia, Minneapolis, New Haven, and Boston. But MFY was the first, the biggest, and the best known. See Matusow, *The Unraveling of America*, 116.

<sup>34</sup> Marjorie Hunter, “U.S. and City Open \$12.6-million War on Delinquency,” *New York Times*, June 1, 1962: 1.

MFY hit the ground running in September 1962. An orientation conference for more than three hundred new employees at the end of that month illuminated the detailed action program that had been laid out in the proposal. This program was broken down into five areas whose names echoed the settlement house tradition of the early twentieth century. “The World of Work” focused on lowering the unemployment rate for those in the neighborhood 16 to 20 years old, which stood at 16.8% (against an overall rate in the city of 7.7%). It created a Youth Job Center, where residents could come for counseling, testing, and referral. MFY subsidized on-the-job training with local business owners, and established its own Urban Youth Services Corps, which mirrored President Kennedy’s Peace Corps by paying youth to perform neighborhood conservation projects, office work, assistance in public and non-profit private organizations. A “Teen-Age Industries Project,” refurbished furniture and manufactured toys to distribute on the Lower East Side.<sup>35</sup>

“The World of Education” brought MFY into the each of the Lower East Side’s schools, as well as one “600” school just beyond the border in Greenwich Village. Like the work of the “Three Schools Study” sponsored by the Youth Board a decade earlier, the goal of this program was to locate the delinquent and “guide him back into the mainstream.” MFY’s schools program mixed the mental hygiene principles prevalent in the Youth Board’s work with an orientation towards community development. Teachers were to participate in trainings that explored community-school relations, lower-middle class tensions, and ethnic characteristics of the neighborhood’s population, with the goal

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<sup>35</sup> Mobilization For Youth, “Presentations at Mobilization for Youth Orientation Conference, September, 1962” (New York, NY: Mobilization for Youth, 1962); Mobilization For Youth, *Proposal for the Prevention & Control of Delinquency*, 89-126.

of “modifying attitudes and behavior and developing needed skills and insights.” Teachers were encouraged to make in-home visits to pupils to “enlist the aid of parents in creating a more effective learning environment for their children.” MFY established “laboratory schools” for teacher training, and worked with the Board of Education to study and make recommendations about changing the curricula citywide. They looked especially at middle-class bias in school materials, and sought to fulfill “a need for instructional materials of all kinds which are more realistic, more interesting, and more meaningful to the culturally deprived youngsters than what is available” in a “Curriculum Materials Production Center.” Reading Centers were to be established in each of the elementary schools in the area, with clinics to diagnose and provide remedial services to those children who had trouble. Area high-school students were hired to tutor elementary school students. Truant officers were renamed “Attendance Teachers” and were tasked with informing the school about the truant child’s activities in addition to returning him to the building.<sup>36</sup>

The third and fourth programs provided specialized services to individuals and families, and specialized services to groups. The former organized neighborhood service centers where families could receive social guidance from caseworkers, individuals could enroll in experimental drug treatment, and juvenile delinquents who had been in reformatories, such as the Wiltwyck School in Westchester where the writer Claude Brown spent time as a child, could find help reintegrating into the neighborhood. Services to groups gave youth opportunities for recreation and self-expression. MFY worked with the Youth Board to expand the team of detached gang workers on the Lower

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<sup>36</sup> Mobilization For Youth, *Proposal for the Prevention & Control of Delinquency*, 107-125.

East Side (where they had operated since the late 1950s) and to coordinate services with other agencies. It also sought to bring recreational opportunities more in-line with the interests of youth in the area, organizing an “Adventure Corps” that provided opportunities for camping, sports, music, and introductory vocational training to boys aged 9-13. The most locally well-known MFY project was the creation of two coffee shops for 16-22 year olds with motifs “symbolic of the style and mood of the youth themselves... each shop will be ‘jazzy’ and ‘cool.’” Refreshments were to be subsidized, and the coffee houses were to promote the arts as “alternatives to illegitimate patterns.” To bypass the “squareness” of supervising adults from MFY, local adolescents would run the coffee houses and plan the programming.<sup>37</sup>

The fifth area of action — Community Development -- captured the goals of MFY most completely, and foreshadowed the political opposition the organization would meet soon after it began its work. “Organizing the Unaffiliated” sought to establish new group structures that drew those who, if they belonged to any organization at all, were involved only in the “home-town clubs” immigrants organized, or in storefront churches. New associations would bring together groups to amplify local concerns, and to work with LENA to plan “collaborative programs of a cultural, recreational, social, or social-action nature.” This group also planned to explore new housing programs, arguing, much as Harrison Salisbury had in his 1958 series about youth in the *New York Times* and Frederic Thrasher had much earlier, that slum clearance had succeeded primarily in removing long-standing systems of social control that were being “replaced by

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 145-171.

collectives of disoriented and alienated individuals.”<sup>38</sup> The Community Development program of MFY sought very much to organize the disparate voices of the powerless on the Lower East Side into a political force.

MFY’s action program was intended to saturate the Lower East Side with services, and to shock the community into more self-engagement. A robust research program was to accompany the action program that would examine its overall impact on the neighborhood, as well as the effectiveness of specific programs in meeting their goals. Research also was to explore “substantive issues pertinent to the definition, distribution, origins, and content of juvenile delinquency.”<sup>39</sup>

Though juvenile delinquency was a guiding presence in the formation and early development of Mobilization For Youth, the scope of the action program, and the focus of the organization’s 350 employees, was in actuality much broader. Juvenile delinquency, so extensively discussed in the late 1950s, had provided the path towards the federal, city, and private money given to MFY. But the ultimate target of MFY’s work was the conditions that made juvenile delinquency a systemic problem on the Lower East Side. MFY believed that a certain amount of delinquency was unavoidable in any industrial society, and particularly in one with social barriers to conformity. The problem was compounded by recidivism that evolved into adult criminality, and MFY believed that the solution was to create stable conditions that expanded opportunities for conformity through both jobs programs and social work. Earlier programs organized around psychological counseling and diversion were oriented towards younger

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 126-144.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

adolescents. MFY's work focused more on the final stage of adolescence, and on creating the conditions for a successful transition to adulthood.

MFY's emergence as the nation's pre-eminent anti-juvenile delinquency program, as the shining symbol of the Kennedy Administration's stance on youth issues, challenged a construction of adolescence that had been functional for much of the 1950s. MFY argued that the reasons for delinquency were precise, knowable, and treatable, implicitly rejecting discourse at both the local and national level that had concluded that the behavior of adolescents was inexplicable. Other factors had helped make this possible, including a public less distracted by the dramatic warnings of the previous 15 years, a maturing youth mass culture more integrated into the broader trends of American consumption, and the urgency of a Civil Rights Movement that rendered by comparison concerns about the mundane behavior of adolescents less significant. By promoting a specific approach to delinquency, and by drawing the endorsement and support of the federal government, MFY argued for an understanding of the maturation process that focused upon the institutions and social structures that defined adolescence.

Soon after beginning its program, MFY ran into resistance. Its first year consisted mostly of opening training and counseling centers for older adolescents and their families, setting up a coffee shop and leasing a gas station to employ youth, and working with local teachers to educate them about the community's disadvantaged groups.<sup>40</sup> Yet,

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<sup>40</sup> James McCarthy, "Testimony Before the Subcommittee on Appropriations of the US House of Representatives For the Departments of Health, Education and Welfare, and Labor," March 26, 1963, in Mobilization For Youth Papers, Box 3, Folder 2. Teachers participated in lecture-discussions on the theory and research behind MFY's work, performed "guided home visits to effect a closer link between the teachers and their pupils' families," went on field trips, and contributed to a curriculum re-organization. Small group work programs were also established in a quarter of the area schools.

the only protests the organization had managed to foment in its first year had been *against* itself: in May 1963, Lower East Side youths picketed MFY's Youth Job Center, which they said didn't lead to high enough paying jobs, and which they claimed favored troublemakers.<sup>41</sup>

MFY became more overtly political in its second year by stepping up its community organizing. That fall, MFY led over one hundred adolescents through the Lower East Side on a march to draw residents to a voter registration rally. In January 1964, MFY contributed manpower and meeting space to the Lower East Side Rent Strike Committee, which also consisted of members of the East Side Tenants Council, the Negro Action Group, the University Settlement Housing Clinic, the Council of Puerto Rican Organizations, and the Congress of Racial Equality.<sup>42</sup>

As MFY began to organize community residents on the Lower East Side, it became increasingly clear that most local citizens weren't particularly concerned about adolescent behavior or juvenile delinquency. The voter registration drive was about adult participation in the democratic process, and the rent strike was about tenant rights, a class-based issue that revolved around adults. MFY had been celebrated in the press and supported with statements from local officials when it won recognition and funding from the federal government as a model anti-delinquency program. But when it began to directly attack the underlying causes of most of the problems on the Lower East Side —

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<sup>41</sup> *New York Times*, "Youths Protest Job Center Hiring," May 9, 1963: 20. The protesters were backed by Lower East Side Action Project, a group that was "independent and critical of Mobilization's approach" and which would continue youth organizing on the Lower East Side for the rest of the Sixties.

<sup>42</sup> *New York Times*, "Voter Registration Drive Slated on Lower East Side," September 11, 1963: 22; *New York Times*, "Lower East Side Plans Rent Rally," January 12, 1964: 80.

the poverty and powerlessness of residents — MFY soon was embroiled in dramatic controversy.

The first shot, in January 1964, came from a group of 26 Lower East Side school principals who urged MFY's sponsors and the New York City Board of Education to investigate the organization for hiring "full-time paid agitators and organizers for extremist groups." The principals asserted that MFY workers were "troublemakers" who spread "dissension" among parents and teachers, and who had organized new neighborhood residents to demand that the schools provide better textbooks and investigate acts of discrimination. The principals were reacting to the emergence in October 1963 of Mobilization of Mothers (MOM), a group of Puerto Rican women who MFY had helped organize, and who were embroiled in an ongoing confrontation with the principal of P.S. 140, Irving Rosenblum. The MOM-schools battle preceded a citywide, one-day school boycott by African-American and Puerto Rican children (and many whites as well) on February 4, 1964. MFY had given material support during the planning for this direct action protest against continued segregation in the schools, which had been organized by Bayard Rustin and Milton Galamison. MFY did not officially sanction the boycott, however, because of the public origin of much of its funding.<sup>43</sup>

These protests revealed to anyone who was paying attention that MFY was a part of the expanding ethos of direct action organizing fomented by the Civil Rights

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<sup>43</sup> Gene Currivan, "Principals Assail Juvenile Agency," *New York Times*, January 31, 1964: 29; Alfred Fried, "The Attack on Mobilization For Youth," in Harold Weissman, *Community Development in The Mobilization For Youth Experience*, (New York, NY: Association Press, 1969), 137-141; Cazenave, *Impossible Democracy*, 74-83. On the boycott, also see Clarence Taylor, *Knocking at Our Own Door: Milton A. Galamison and the Struggle to Integrate New York City* (New York, NY: Lexington Books, 1997), 116-146.

Movement in the early 1960s, and that it would be targeting existing power structures in New York City. In fact, the MFY proposal had made no effort to hide the organization's plans to directly confront public and private institutions in an effort to amplify the voices and coalesce the power of community residents. The FBI was certainly aware of this in 1962 and infiltrated the organization, without the knowledge of either Kennedy brother. So was the New York Police Department's Bureau of Special Services (BOSS), the city's elite "Red Squad," which reported to Mayor Wagner in February 1964 that 150 MFY employees were "undesirables." Wagner, continuing the city government's susceptibility to Red-baiting that had led to the cancellation of the Arthur Miller-scripted Youth Board movie, unsuccessfully pressured MFY to remove the employees. Most had been identified as possible members of the Communist Party because of their involvement in local strike and petition activities led by other organizations.<sup>44</sup>

What made MFY vulnerable to attack, then, was the combination of its dependence on public money, its visibility as a nationally lauded anti-delinquency program, and an anti-radical political environment. Still, certain offices in the federal government, before and after the president's assassination, did not waver in their support of the organization. In July 1964, the Department of Labor gave MFY \$1.5 million for job training for 2000 Lower East Side youths, and President Johnson said that "the Mobilization For Youth program has my deep interest and support." The grant

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<sup>44</sup> Fried, "The Attack on Mobilization For Youth," 142-143. Two informants told the FBI that MFY had used federal money to support the March on Washington and to help CORE picket a public housing site. When questioned by Bobby Kennedy about this, James McCarthy showed that MFY had in fact not used federal funds in support of the march, and that MFY employees who had participated in the housing protests had done so on their own time.

exemplified Johnson's feeling that MFY was a prototype for the kind of organization he'd want to see in his coming anti-poverty program.<sup>45</sup>

Opposition to MFY's activities intensified as it more directly attacked the root causes of delinquency. On July 18, 1964, the first northern riot of the 1960s erupted in Harlem after a CORE protest following off-duty police lieutenant Thomas Gilligan's fatal shooting of fifteen-year-old African-American James Powell. The rioting soon spread to Bedford-Stuyvesant, and City Council President Paul Screvane, acting as mayor while Wagner was vacationing abroad, claimed that the disturbances were fomented by "fringe groups, including the Communist Party." Screvane asked Lyndon Johnson to direct the FBI to investigate the source of money for rallies that featured "anti-American and seditious" rhetoric. Screvane charged MFY specifically with printing an inflammatory poster distributed throughout the city that read "Wanted for Murder—Gilligan the Cop!" Police officials, however, said MFY was not involved.<sup>46</sup> Still, Screvane pressed the issue. As coordinator of the city's Anti-Poverty Operations Board, Screvane controlled local contributions to MFY's budget, which were 28.5 percent of its total. The *Daily News* reported that MFY was under intense scrutiny by federal and local investigation for harboring "scores" of subversives.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *New York Times*, "U.S. Fund to Help Slum Youth Here," July 9, 1964: 1.

<sup>46</sup> *The Nation*, "The Man Who 'Saved' MFY," August 2, 1965: 58. According to MFY, the poster had been created by the Integrated Workers, a branch of the Progressive Labor Movement operating on the Lower East Side. MFY claimed that it did not approve the use of its machines to mimeograph protest materials. See Homer Bigart, "City Hunts Reds in Youth Project on the East Side," *New York Times*, August 17, 1964: 1.

<sup>47</sup> *Daily News*, "Youth Agency Eyed for Reds. City Cuts Off Project's Funds," August 16, 1964: 1. Both local and national politics played a role in the attack on MFY. Screvane was planning a run in the Democratic mayoral primary in 1965, and was also interested in expanding city control over the federal money going to MFY. Screvane persuaded Wagner to undertake a comprehensive review of the charges against MFY that

As with many anti-communist witch-hunts, the accusations against MFY were a canard. The real problem was MFY's political organizing on the Lower East Side, its organization of black and Puerto Rican citizens, and the city's inability to control the group. Screvane submitted three reports between September 1, 1964 and the following January 15 that gradually shifted the accusation against MFY from subversion to financial impropriety to, finally, shoddy management.<sup>48</sup> Much of the investigation focused ultimately on James McCarthy, the Executive Director, and his eating and drinking habits.<sup>49</sup>

By the time Screvane's final report was issued in January 1965, the original charges of communist subversion and financial malfeasance within MFY had faded away. What was left, in the words of Alfred Fried, "was the naked drive itself for a city takeover."<sup>50</sup> Screvane argued that the city should be able to oversee MFY's programmatic and personnel procedures, and that participation in rent strikes (which were

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fall, and the organization prepared a vigorous defense. The *Daily News* and the *New York Times* offered conflicting tallies of the number of MFY employees who had ties in their past to the Communist Party or front organizations. The FBI, who had been watching MFY for some time, stated in late August that only five employees were members of the Communist Party or "other leftist organizations," and that 32 employees had at some point been linked to Communist organizations. See Fried, "The Attack on Mobilization For Youth," 145-148.

<sup>48</sup> New York City Anti-Poverty Operations Board Report, November, 1964, MFY Papers, Box 21, Folders 16.

<sup>49</sup> McCarthy resigned on September 11, 1964 citing health issues. He was dragged through the mud in the press after Screvane accused him of lavish spending in November, but by the final report, that accusation was gone. As Richard Cloward said, "Screvane had made wild public charges that MFY started the Harlem riots, was engaged in illegal social action, and had been infiltrated by subversives. When these charges proved to be unfounded, he needed a way out. So he released a bunch of lies about McCarthy's expenses." See Fried, "The Attack on Mobilization For Youth," 161. Also see Joseph Lelyveld, "McCarthy Resigns as Youth Officer," *New York Times*, September 12, 1964: 1.

<sup>50</sup> Fried, "The Attack on Mobilization For Youth," 158.

legal) and other types of protest activity be subject to the approval of the Board of Directors, not solely to the desires of individual social workers.<sup>51</sup>

The investigations in the autumn of 1964 brought into the open the deeply politicized environment within which youth policy was being designed and implemented. The experiences of both the Youth Board and MFY showed that anti-delinquency work in New York was clearly about more than adolescence. The New York City government, which contributed just under a third of MFY's overall operating expenses, couldn't control the organization as tightly as it had the Youth Board. But it could hold more sway over MFY than over groups like CORE, which continued to organize protests against slum landlords, police brutality, school segregation, and employment discrimination in the city.<sup>52</sup>

The attack on MFY bridged the gap between the McCarthyism of the 1950s and law and order racial politics of the late 1960s. Initiated as an anti-communist investigation, by early 1965 it had become clear that the city's investigation of MFY was a product of the combination of concern over the political impact of its organizing and individual political posturing. Screvane was something of an enforcer for Wagner in the early 1960s, and was preparing to run to replace him as mayor. MFY made an easy target for a tough law and order candidate. Screvane wasn't the only one who piled on the organization, however. State Senator John Marchi, a Republican from Staten Island and the chairman of the Senate Committee on Affairs of New York City, was up for re-election in 1965, and also had plans for a mayoral run. Marchi claimed that sources

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<sup>51</sup> New York City Anti-Poverty Operations Board Report, January, 1965, MFY Papers, Box 21, Folder 17.

<sup>52</sup> Cazenave, *Impossible Democracy*, 141.

inside MFY had alerted him to the presence of subversives and that his committee would conduct yet another investigation. When the Marchi report was issued in December, it did nothing by duplicate the accusations made by Screvane, and Mayor Wagner dismissed it as “chop suey.”<sup>53</sup> That Wagner was not nearly as scornful of Screvane’s weak report supports the conclusion that the investigation of MFY was both a power grab by the New York City government and a gritty piece of politics from Screvane.

The attacks on MFY showed that the organization’s work was not only about delinquency, but about helping the powerless. MFY coordinated with the local representatives of national civil rights organizations such as CORE, and became involved in local direct action through its support for rent strikes and groups like MOM. Here was an organization that set out initially to address the needs of adolescents in a specific community, and quickly found its energies caught up in broader battles of which juvenile delinquency was only a part. As MFY got closer to what were becoming its real targets — poverty and racism— the opposition that it faced intensified.

MFY was sustained through this period by commitments at the federal level. By 1964, the Johnson administration was deep into a broad effort to locate, articulate, and find solutions for poverty. Kennedy had wanted, after campaigning in 1960 through depressed areas of Appalachia and the publication of Michael Harrington’s *The Other America* and John Kenneth Galbraith’s *The Affluent Society*, to use the federal

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<sup>53</sup> Homer Bigart, “Mayor is Scornful of Marchi’s Report,” *New York Times*, December 31, 1964: 1. The *Times* called Marchi’s investigation “McCarthyism Revived,” in an editorial, and argued that MFY was paying a price for its “vigor and imagination with which it is seeking new ways to combat poverty at its roots.” *New York Times*, “McCarthyism Revived,” December 31, 1964: 17. Marchi would eventually defeat John Lindsay in the Republican primary for Mayor in 1969, running as a law and order candidate, only to have Lindsay win the general election as a candidate of the Liberal Party.

government to address poverty with New Deal-type legislation.<sup>54</sup> Only after Kennedy's assassination did Johnson muster the collective will to push through anti-poverty programming on a large scale. He based much of that programming on the work being done by MFY, without fully understanding the resistance the organization's radicalism produced.

David Hackett played a significant role in advising the task force on poverty during its planning stages. He argued for demonstration projects akin to what MFY had just gotten off the ground in New York; they would be small and would study the needs of communities, and could then be scaled into larger policy. Johnson, priming himself for an election year and aiming to offset defections from the southern wing of the Democratic Party following the Civil Rights Act of 1964, wanted something that was "big and bold and [that would] hit the whole nation with real impact." Johnson wanted to immediately fund every local group that wanted money for a community action program. Both Robert Kennedy and David Hackett warned Johnson that proceeding on a large scale could backfire, but Johnson forged ahead.<sup>55</sup>

"Community action" was one program in the broader War on Poverty, but it was also a core idea that ran across the programs created by the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. The head of each federal agency administering poverty programs was "directed to give preference to any application for assistance or benefits which is made pursuant to or in connection with a community action program." In his budget message to the Congress

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<sup>54</sup> Jerome M. Mileur, "The Great Society and the Demise of New Deal Liberalism," in Sidney M. Milkis and Jerome M. Mileur, *The Great Society and the High Tide of Liberalism* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), 434.

<sup>55</sup> Matusow, *The Unraveling of America*, 120-125. Also see Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, "The Politics of the Great Society," in Milkis and Mileur, *The Great Society and the High Tide of Liberalism*, 253-269.

in January, Johnson decreased overall spending for fiscal year 1965, but devoted \$500 million to community action and over \$1 billion total to new anti-poverty programs. Kennedy had only promised \$10 million for each of three years devoted to delinquency demonstration programs.<sup>56</sup> Section 202 of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, signed into law on August 20, famously and controversially defined community action as a program “which is developed, conducted, and administered with the maximum feasible participation of the residents of the areas and members of the groups served.”<sup>57</sup>

Community action was very much intended, in its application within the context of an anti-juvenile delinquency program, to unsettle bureaucracies and redistribute power. This, in part, explains why the New York City government made a play for control over MFY: the federal government was effectively giving citizens material support to help them protest conditions in their neighborhoods, protests which would inevitably require the response of the city. With the coming of the War on Poverty, and the haphazard flooding-in of federal moneys, race tensions in urban areas across the country deepened. By June 1965, 415 Community Action Agencies had been founded, a remarkable number. Many of them were quickly assembled and poorly organized in order to compete for funds. These programs inevitably pitted residents against local power structures, much to the chagrin of urban mayors who now had to manage the increasingly

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<sup>56</sup> The Department of Defense had cut its budget by \$2 billion, so Johnson could afford to make the large gesture to the inner cities through the community action program and still maintain a balanced budget. “Annual Budget Message to the Congress, Fiscal Year 1965,” Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, January 21, 1964, John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA: University of California (hosted), Gerhard Peters (database). Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26013>. Government spending would increase again for budget year 1967.

<sup>57</sup> United States Congress, Public Law 88-452, August 20, 1964, Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, Section 202, Part A-3.

frustrated demands of citizens who had been given a promise of real power by their federal government.<sup>58</sup>

In New York, three independent anti-poverty programs were active by the middle of 1964, and each had originally been articulated as an anti-delinquency program based around the concept of community action.<sup>59</sup> Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited (HARYOU) was developed by Kenneth Clark with the Harlem Neighborhood Association (HANA) and had been given \$230,000 by the Presidents Committee on Juvenile Delinquency in 1962. Its planning document, *Youth in the Ghetto: A Study of the Consequences of Powerlessness*, argued that the path to a better life for Harlem residents lay through the organization of resources native to the community and not through dependence on the benevolence of others. Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., who

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<sup>58</sup> See Matusow, *The Unraveling of America*, 243-271. Matusow details the tensions between urban mayors and the Johnson administration around this issue. The Office of Economic Opportunity, under Sargent Shriver's leadership, repeatedly issued guidelines that emphasized the necessity for the poor themselves to be the dominant figures in CAP. A group of social workers, including Lloyd Ohlin, Leonard Cottrell, Kenneth Clark, and Antonia Pantoja had anticipated the politicization that would ensure as federal money flowed into the city and had urged Mayor Wagner to designate the City Administrator's office as a planning and coordinating unit for the anti-poverty programs active in New York. Instead, Wagner established the Poverty Operations Board, with Screvane as the chairman who controlled the city's anti-poverty expenditures. The move reflected the extent to which those in New York City government felt threatened by large sums of federal money going to organizations who might potentially challenge the power of local government. See Peter Kihss, "Poverty Agency Urged on City," *New York Times*, May 25, 1964: 1; Clayton Knowles, "Mayor Broadens Drive on Poverty," *New York Times*, July 1, 1964: 18.

<sup>59</sup> A fourth, the Puerto Rican Community Development Project, was a group created in 1963 by the Puerto Rican Forum, a citywide umbrella organization devoted to the development of economic self-sufficiency among new migrants that had been founded in 1957 by Dr. Antonia Pantoja. Though it developed a proposal in 1964, it was not funded until 1966. See Puerto Rican Forum, Inc., *The Puerto Rican Community Development Project* (New York: Puerto Rican Forum, 1964); Antonia Pantoja, *Memoir of a Visionary* (Houston, Tx: Arte Publico Press, 2002); Paul Hoffman, "New Agency to Help Puerto Ricans Opened," *New York Times*, June 7, 1966: 22.

was chair of the House Education and Welfare Committee, in 1962 had also set up his own youth outreach program in Harlem, called ACT, with money from Hackett's committee. When Johnson vowed to send money to the cities, Powell felt he had the right to control the fruits of federal largesse in Harlem. Hackett had wanted HARYOU and ACT to merge since 1963, in the spirit of community cooperation, and didn't stand in Powell's way as he muscled control of federal money away from Clark while forming HARYOU-ACT.<sup>60</sup>

Youth In Action, Inc. (YIA), an organization formed by the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Agency in Bedford-Stuyvesant, was given \$223,000 by Mayor Wagner immediately following the July 1964 riots to develop an antipoverty program to compete for the federal money the Office of Economic Opportunity was going to dole out. YIA was closely modeled on MFY. Its autonomy was short-lived. The city government's Poverty Operations Board brought YIA under its control by including it as part of a 30-program proposal submitted to the Office of Economic Opportunity in May 1965. This infuriated local residents and established Bedford-Stuyvesant as a center of agitation by poor blacks for more control over local community action efforts during 1965 and 1966.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Powell, Jr. and Hackett used the rhetoric of community empowerment to realize the merger with HARYOU. By the end of July, Clark had resigned after refusing the Congressman's offer to "share the spoils of federal largesse." See Gerald Markowitz and David Rosner, *Children, Race, and Power: Kenneth and Mamie Clark's Northside Center* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 198; Also see Cazenave, *Impossible Democracy*, 85-135.

<sup>61</sup> Youth In Action, Inc., *Proposal* (New York: Youth In Action, Inc., 1964), original in possession of David Rosner and Gerald Markowitz. Also see New York Charles G. Bennett, "Brooklyn Anti-Poverty Program Is Set," *New York Times*, July 26, 1964: 42; Homer Bigart, "Negroes Condemn City Poverty Plan," *New York Times*, April 20, 1965: 1; Fred Powledge, "City's Antipoverty Drive Approaches Action Stage," *New York Times*, May 11, 1965: 1. The city's proposal was for \$18,172,829, and included everything from visiting nurse programs, community-organized "substitute families" to

MFY, because it predated the Great Society, retained a measure of autonomy, and reacted differently to the politicization of 1964. The goals of MFY's programs were redirected by both the immediate demands of neighborhood residents and the restrictions of the local and national political contexts.<sup>62</sup> The emphasis on "opportunity" had already implied that the problem of juvenile delinquency straddled the transitional moment from late adolescence to early adulthood. By 1964, after significant resistance to the organization's efforts to reform education on the Lower East Side, MFY increasingly focused on the problems of young adults. This was reflected in the evolution of MFY's funding sources during the middle of the decade, which prioritized job training programs. By 1965, the Presidential Committee on Juvenile Delinquency was providing only five percent of MFY's budget, down from fifteen percent the year before, while the Office of Economic Opportunity, the Department of Labor, and eventually New York City's own Economic Opportunity Committee gradually took on larger percentages of the funding.<sup>63</sup>

MFY had originally been intended as a three-year demonstration project, but politics and the demands from the people of the Lower East Side altered its mission. An extended action phase lasted for the remainder of the decade, accompanied by limited research and theorizing. The "opportunity theory" that had been so central to MFY during its planning phase became a less central component of the organization's work,

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assist recent migrants from Puerto Rico whose families remained behind, to work programs organized by the New York City Youth Board.

<sup>62</sup> My argument here is influenced by the sociologist Joseph Helfgot, who demonstrates that the shift in emphasis was a response to the changing sources of funding and to the broader cultural and political milieu in which MFY operated. See Helfgot, *Professional Reforming*, 131-147.

<sup>63</sup> See Table 6-2 in Helfgot, *Professional Reforming*, 141. The Economic Opportunity Committee replaced the Anti-Poverty Operations Board after Wagner left office at the end of 1965. It existed under the aegis of the city's Human Resources Administration, and administered Federal money given to the city.

and the amelioration of juvenile delinquency no longer remained the fundamental operating principle. According to Richard Cloward and Frances Fox Piven, who had been employed by the National Institute of Mental Health to research administrative collaboration between the organization and the other federal and local agencies with which it worked, MFY had always *really* been an anti-poverty agency:

Although Mobilization for Youth was initiated as a program to prevent and control juvenile delinquency, it was based on the premise that delinquency among low-income adolescents was significantly related to poverty. Even at its inception, therefore, MFY was an anti-poverty project. As the years passed, MFY came to be regarded less and less as an anti-delinquency project and more and more as an anti-poverty project. For this reason, it is not surprising that a number of its activities — both in action and in research — have been devoted directly to the study or alleviation of poverty.<sup>64</sup>

MFY was founded in reaction to an increase in gang activity on the Lower East Side, and its early support evolved out of the efforts of social scientists and policymakers to better understand how adolescence was changing. The organization's existence was made possible by postwar concerns about adolescence. MFY, however, ultimately discovered that poverty and powerlessness were much bigger problems.

After 1964, MFY was devoted to ensuring its own survival by satisfying the priorities of funding sources on the one hand, and the immediate needs of residents of the Lower East Side on the other. Neighborhood Service Centers were deluged by “people who needed cash to avoid an eviction, to buy school clothing for their children, or to pay the grocer.” Many of the residents making these demands were eligible for welfare, and MFY helped them navigate and challenge the discriminatory practices of the local welfare administration. The welfare rights movement of the late 1960s, inspired by Piven

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<sup>64</sup> Richard Cloward and Frances Fox Piven, “A Review of Research, in Conjunction with Mobilization for Youth,” Report to the Columbia University School of Social Work, January, 1967: J-1, in Mobilization For Youth Papers, Box 26.

and Cloward, worked from the notion that poverty is at root defined by a lack of money.<sup>65</sup> MFY did not abandon programs for Lower East Side adolescents, which included service centers for youths in crisis, a Cultural Arts Program that nurtured artistic expression, and referrals to drug treatment centers to address expanding heroin use. These services, while needed, were a retreat from the bolder efforts to transform school curricula, to offer intensive tutoring and remedial services to neighborhood youths, and to organize residents to challenge power where they resided. MFY, from 1965 through its end in 1970, pretty much left alone the deficient social structure that had been identified by Cloward and Ohlin, and transformed into a traditional social service organization.

MFY's evolution from 1957-1964 ultimately embodied the reconceptualization of delinquency not as an isolated problem in need of its own solution, but rather as one of many larger problems that required bold action from the state. Though gang violence became less severe in the 1960, the urban crisis deepened. Narcotics addiction, joblessness, and angry citizens of all ages obliterated the notion that delinquency was simply a natural byproduct of American adolescence. The "delinquency crisis" of the 1950s was small compared to the social disruptions of mid-to-late 1960s. In part, due to the good work of MFY and other social scientists, juvenile delinquency was now

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<sup>65</sup> Cloward and Piven, "The Politics of the Great Society," in Milkis and Mileur, *The Great Society and the High Tide of Liberalism*, 260-262; also see Richard Cloward and Frances Fox Piven, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971), 291. Cloward and Piven note that "two thirds of the people who found their way to the storefront during the first six months listed "insufficient income" as their principal problem. MFY's foray into the welfare rights movement was short lived—it ended under the pressure of local officials in 1966—but it did help kick start the National Welfare Rights Organization and contribute to a nearly doubling of the welfare rolls from 1960-1968.

absorbed into the discourses and thinking about American poverty, and was less regularly explained as a natural byproduct of adolescence.

That also meant that delinquency shared the fate of poverty in the American consciousness. In 1965, the Moynihan Report helped move explanations for poverty among African-Americans onto their psychology and their culture. Compared to the ideas forwarded by MFY earlier in the decade, and that continued to be pushed by poverty advocates on the left, Moynihan's arguments diminished the influence of an analysis of broader economic and social structures on the formulation of federal policy.<sup>66</sup> In 1959, Samuel Leibowitz had argued that, since blacks and Puerto Rican youth were disproportionately delinquent, migration to New York City should be restricted. His racist suggestion amidst the furor over delinquency's causes and solutions foreshadowed

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<sup>66</sup> See Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, DC: Office of Planning and Research, United States Department of Labor, 1965). The inclusion of the phrase "maximum feasible participation of the poor" in the Economic Opportunity Act ultimately came to bear part of the blame for the failures of the War on Poverty, as distinct from the very real accomplishments of the Great Society (Medicare/Medicaid, Head Start, Food Stamps, and the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts chief among them). Margaret Weir has argued that community action empowered groups and individuals who had little or no ability to deliver the fundamental solution for poverty: employment. See Margaret Weir, *Politics and Jobs: The Boundaries of Employment Policy in the United States* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 77-78. Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward think that Weir's explanation fails to acknowledge that Johnson couldn't possibly have created the demand for labor that Weir thought was missing from the War on Poverty. Their analysis of the Great Society foregrounds political concerns, and argues Johnson wouldn't have risked a backlash from the business community by tightening labor markets. See Cloward and Piven, "The Politics of the Great Society," in Milkis and Mileur, *The Great Society and the High Tide of Liberalism*, 267. I think these critiques are both fair, and not mutually exclusive: both offer viable explanations for why the Great Society unfolded as it did. The "empty" empowerment of local people contributed to the frustrations at the heart of the urban violence of the late 1960s, and Johnson's political concerns informed the way policy was formulated and implemented, leading to the haphazard enactment of programs with community action and little else at their center. This discussion is purposely located in this footnote rather than the body of the text because this dissertation is ultimately about adolescence, not an entry into historiographical debate on the Great Society.

the ascendancy of similar arguments about poverty in the late 1960s. By 1968, a long backlash against the experimental liberalism of the early part of the decade had come to power, and over the last third of the twentieth century the conservative political movement deepened the racialization of both poverty and delinquency in the American mind.

In the late 1960s, adolescents, delinquent and not, poor and middle class, urban, suburban and rural, carried pressing concerns of their own. The Civil Right Movement had yielded great progress, yet unfulfilled promises. Young women, inspired by the reflections of women a generation older, sought to exert more control over their lives and expand the opportunities for fulfillment available to them adulthood. Anxiety and alienation among the young, while accentuated during these years, was not new. The teenagers who had been interviewed following the Midcentury White Conference on Children and Youth had expressed unease about being drafted and sent to fight in Korea. By the late 1960s that feeling had come came full circle. The escalation of an unjust war in Vietnam and the institution of the draft combined with the other concerns and weighed heavily on the minds of young Americans. Many of them took to the streets to drive home a point that had already been recognized by the most astute of the architects of adolescence over the preceding years: their experiences could not, should not, and would not be interpreted apart from the American whole.

## Conclusion

### **An Adolescence Reconstructed**

It's easy to lose sight of the urgency with which many Americans worried about adolescent behavior in years after the end of World War II. As that era recedes deeper into our past, popular memory foregrounds its quaintness above all. The most lasting images of the period's delinquents -- James Dean pouting in jacket and dungarees, the Jets and Sharks squaring off on a sound stage, even the Brooklyn Thrill Killers or the Capeman -- pale in comparison to the gang violence that sprung up around the crack trade in the 1980s, or the shooting sprees at Columbine in 1999 or Virginia Tech in 2007. Adolescents were at the center of each. Since around 1960 disturbing episodes of youth criminality have been more likely to compel examinations of all of American life than new investigations of adolescence. Columbine raised questions about guns and a culture of violence. Virginia Tech spurred discussions of emergency preparedness and warning systems. Reactions to gang violence in the 1980s brought a War on Drugs that further racialized criminality, but which also often simply ignored the age of the adolescent criminal and treated him as an adult. None of these events -- and each was deeply disturbing in its own way -- were transformed into an argument that there was some "crisis of adolescence."

More Americans have come to accept that the transition from childhood to adulthood is reflective of the broader national experience. This hasn't made the implementation of juvenile delinquency policy any easier, and certainly doesn't mean that irrational or overheated reactions to youth behavior have disappeared. Every group

of American adults reliably develops a take on the inferiority of subsequent generations.<sup>1</sup> But the notion that adolescents will inevitably behave wildly has become so commonplace since the 1950s that whole subgenres of American culture have emerged to riff off of the idea. These cultural products range from televised Spring Breaks that border on the orgiastic and movies that frankly address teenage sexuality to the inverse: chastity pledges and purity rings. Until the sexual revolution of the late 1960s, popular acceptance of such behavior was utterly unthinkable; today, revelry in it pervades American culture. Most Americans – if they’re being honest -- recognize that adolescent hedonism and sexuality are directly related to the culture and, especially, the commerce that’s almost entirely controlled by adults. The architects of adolescence are willing to accept certain behavior on Friday and Saturday nights, as long as schoolwork, extracurricular activities, and civic engagement offer some reassuring balance.

A full consideration of the construction of adolescence since the mid-1960s is beyond the scope of what can be offered here. The goal of this project was to outline how the architecture of adolescence was reconstructed during these years, and show that it ultimately came to better reflect the fact that young Americans are inseparable from the national trajectory. The change in delinquency theory towards a focus on the social contexts of youth behavior was the clearest manifestation of this realization. But delinquency theory was not the only place it could be found. Paul Goodman’s *Growing Up Absurd* argued that in both youthful rebellion and adult concern about adolescence lay

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<sup>1</sup> Current examples tend to argue that technology, and especially Web 2.0 social media, as distort the adolescent mind. See Mark Bauerlein, *The Dumbest Generation: How The Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future (Or, Don't Trust Anyone Under 30)* (New York, NY: Tarcher/Penguin, 2008) and Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled—and More Miserable Than Ever Before* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2006).

implicit discomfort with an “organized system” that had expanded over the previous decade and that offered America’s young few opportunities for a meaningful future. Jules Henry’s *Culture Against Man* explored the mundane pursuits of teenagers, arguing that they were being socialized by American institutions such as the marketplace and the high school into a culture that was replacing impulse control with impulse release. Edgar Friedenberg’s *Coming of Age in America* argued that adolescent angst and adult unease were the byproducts of the tensions between freedom and a mass society that robbed the individual of his integrity.<sup>2</sup>

In each of these works lay the recognition that the primary problem with adolescents in the early 1960s was the flawed world they were set to inherit. Adolescents knew this, too. These works were part of a complex of social, cultural, political, and intellectual developments that inspired the generation who came of age in the mid-to-late 1960s to take to the streets in protest and pronouncement about the failure of their society to live up to its promises.

This dissertation has been about the construction of the adolescence that they experienced. In the years after the end of World War II, their elders, Americans who had been nurtured through depression and war, began to think deeply about what the future held. According to the authoritative voices in the Justice Department and law enforcement, delinquency had skyrocketed. J. Edgar Hoover warned Americans to remember the chaos that erupted after World War I, and argued that the violence of

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd* (New York, NY: Random House, 1956). See Jules Henry, *Culture Against Man* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1963). Friedenberg argued that both adolescent angst and adult concern about youth behavior were the byproducts of the tensions between freedom and a mass society that robbed the individual of his integrity. See Edgar Z. Friedenberg, *Coming of Age in America* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1963).

earlier race riots and labor radicalism would now be propelled by youthful rebellion. Newspapers and magazines swarmed to the idea, and reported repeatedly and vaguely about youth misbehavior. Their reports clouded the differentiation between status crimes and acts of real violence by lumping them together under the banner of “juvenile delinquency.”

Actual changes in adolescent behavior complicated the ability of adults to comprehend the young. Adolescents flocked to opportunities in a market that, during the war and after, showed there was profit to be pulled from their pockets. Adults reacted, poking and prodding even the most mundane activities of the young for meaning. This behavior was regarded as a harbinger of things to come, and as it became more playful or disobedient, adults grew uneasy about the future. At the dawn of the Cold War some, including President Truman, worried that this new generation of Americans would be too busy dancing, goofing off, or committing crimes to counter the existential threats of the age.

Social scientists, educators, some journalists, and many government officials believed purposeful youth policy was necessary to ensure that adolescents effectively completed the transition to a responsible, American adulthood, that they moved into the gender and social roles expected of them. Youth policy was, and is, constructed out of the confluence of politics, the social sciences, and popular understandings of the needs of both the young and the nation. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, adolescent psychology was the lens through which policymakers designed programs for youth. Most focused on bolstering the development of “healthy personalities,” to create well-adjusted adults that could meet the challenges of the postwar world. Concerns about delinquency and

uncertainty about just how vast the problem might be necessitated programs that could reach as many young people as possible and which would direct to more intensive services, generally psychotherapeutic in nature, those adolescents who were deemed to pose a threat. In this construction of adolescence, class and ethnic diversity made locating and treating troubled youth more difficult and challenging. Most youth policy in the years around 1950 did little more than acknowledge and bemoan prejudice, choosing instead to rely on strengthening the psyches of the oppressed.

New York City was one of many locales that formed organizations to address youth issues in the postwar era. The New York City Youth Board began its work in 1947 and, drawing upon the social sciences and the popular discourse on adolescence, designed programs to both challenge juvenile delinquency and to communicate with the public about its work. The Youth Board created new services, focused on counseling and curricular innovation in schools, as well as programs oriented towards simple social control when school was out. The Youth Board was also a political construction, and it was restricted and influenced by the concerns of the city government. It necessarily stopped short of implementing programs that might unsettle existing bureaucracies or power structures, or that might directly address the social realities that lay behind the problems of the city's young people. Much of the Youth Board's early work assumed that delinquency was rooted in a personality disorder, and recoiled from more penetrating questions.

As the 1950s unfolded, a pervasive feeling that delinquency was a serious problem hung in the air over New York and other locations, nurtured by the muckraking of journalists, the public programs of organizations like the Youth Board, the

opportunism of those who saw currency in exploiting the issue, the general sense of a decline in adolescent morals, and, also, the expansion of gangs who organized New York City streets and gave dramatic and often stylish form to delinquent behavior. The Youth Board created street workers to intervene in these gangs, and they helped adolescents find jobs or drug treatment, and negotiate truces between rivals. Gang work, though effective, was a limited response to a problem whose origins lay within the changing social fabric of the city.

In the second half of the 1950s, some voices in the press and within local and state government questioned New York City's response to adolescent behavior. Some argued that the Youth Board was a most inadequate institution, others criticized how the schools addressed delinquency, and a few suggested that the city should restrict migration, blaming new arrivals -- African-Americans from the South, and Puerto Ricans -- for an increase in youth crime. At the same time, the Lower East Side Neighborhood Association founded a new organization, Mobilization For Youth, which argued that delinquency was not rooted in the mind of the individual, but rather sprouted from specific conditions in particular locations. The sociologists who shaped MFY saw delinquency as the product of closed or deformed opportunity structures. They argued that once youth policy focused on opening up opportunities for the young, delinquency would cease to be as significant a problem. This new program, which hoped to saturate a specific location with services, argued that social relations were more important than personality in the process of adolescent development.

In many ways, the evolving discourse around youth culture mirrored the changes in youth policy in the 15 years after the end of World War II. Concerns about the

psychology of adolescents gradually gave way to unease about the social meanings of consumption. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, parents struggled to understand youth behavior, dismissing their rituals, language, and dress as bizarre or inexplicable. But the choices that adolescents made in the marketplace were products of participation in both a national youth culture that disseminated fads and local subcultures that filtered and reshaped them. Youth consumption, and the “bizarre” behavior that went along with it, were primarily social in content, even when it took place under a blanket, with a flashlight illuminating a comic book. That youth wasn’t being malformed, but was rather seeking control of his own formation by engaging with a world created by individuals who existed outside the architecture that had been set up to manage his maturation. Comics spurred his imagination, and he shared them with his friends. Though the violent fantasies in some raised legitimate concerns and deserved the awareness of parents, by embracing comics – or movies, or music -- postwar youths were exercising more freedom and agency than they could in school, in church, or in conversations with the adults in their lives.

In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled that the nation could no longer pretend that segregated learning was equal, and a year later for the first time a rock ‘n’ roll song, “Rock Around the Clock,” topped the *Billboard* sales and airplay charts. These twin events signaled the convergence of race and notions of American adolescence. In the second half of the 1950s, Americans looked upon youth behavior that was already flummoxing, and found it blaring a soundtrack that thumbed its nose and whatever traditional notions of public decorum still remained. The growing centrality of black cultural expression to the experience of young Americans, even when filtered through

performance by white bodies, gave racists or others who were concerned about youth culture a powerful rhetorical tool. Rock 'n' roll was assailed for the infectious frenzy it caused, for its primitivism and lack of sophistication, and because, like comic books, it "caused" juvenile delinquency. It was particularly damaging to notions of feminine decorum, and it was used by conservative voices to marry notions of race and rebellion. The arguments against it were all vaguely psychological in nature, as though the music and the experience of hearing it triggered some latent part of the brain, spinning the vulnerable adolescent off into destructive madness.

In reality, the opposition to rock 'n' roll, just like the resistance against the enforcement of *Brown v. Board of Education*, was predominantly about the social concerns of the resisters and about the racialization of juvenile misbehavior. Those who opposed rock did so because they feared integration or teenage sexuality (often in combination), or the loss of power over profits in the music industry, or because they equated the music with the creeping degradation of American society. None of these reactions were really about the music or the minds of the adolescents who listened to it, but were rather external concerns heaped upon the choices made by the young. Adolescents revealed to their elders a future that was decidedly different from the present, one that would empower the young to choose at least what they would consume, and that prefigured a more integrated society. Concern about rock 'n' roll was about the prejudices and fears of adults projected onto the lives of the young. So was much of the most intense concern about juvenile delinquency.

The theorists and social workers that brought Mobilization For Youth to life placed both juvenile delinquency and adolescence into a new perspective. They treated

youth criminality not as a symptom of a warped maturation process, but rather as a manifestation of larger problems in American society, especially poverty and powerlessness. They treated delinquency more seriously, drawing a clear line between recurrent and destructive adolescent criminality and the more mundane disruptions of life caused by teenagers. Their work on adolescence implied that the overwrought reactions that adults had heaped upon the architecture of adolescence in the previous decade should be stripped away, and they argued for a new construct that would more honestly address the needs of the young. The federal government soon saw, for a moment, what the reformers at MFY saw. The War on Poverty was founded in the wake of the delinquency “crisis,” amidst the broader realization that America’s most pressing problems were social in nature and were not limited to any particular age group. The only sufficient response from the state was democratization and opportunity.

Looking back at the early 1960s through the tumult that immediately followed, it’s just as easy to forget the idealism and hope that accompanied a liberal state willing to experiment with new ideas, programs, and social analysis as it is to fail to see the intense anxiety in American society during the earlier years. Exploring the ways that Americans reconstructed adolescence in the two decades after World War II makes the feelings that pervaded those moments a touch more visible. Throughout much of the period, the architects of adolescence regarded the young as though they were the cause of their own problems. By the early 1960s, the American social fabric was bursting at the seams. More penetrating theories and explanations for the national condition were necessary, and they helped forge a new construction of adolescence that viewed its processes as less segregated from the other experiences in American life. The persistent problems facing

American youth – poverty, equality of opportunity, expectations of conformity -- became a bit easier to see during this period. That doesn't mean that they've become any easier to fix.

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