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Grace Palladino. *Teenagers: An American History.* New York: Basic Books, 1996. xxii + 313 pp. $14.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-465-00766-0.

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Grace Palladino's *Teenagers* admirably contributes to the recent spate of scholarship regarding youth, child development, and the state. Palladino's work is valuable for its contribution to historiography on children, mass culture, and parenting in the twentieth century. Other historians, notably Joseph Kett, have examined a broader sweep of time, and in the process have not presented the extensive detail offered in this book.

Palladino focuses on several streams of modern American culture and ideology from the 1930s to the 1990s. She examines changing ideas regarding child rearing; shifts in the consumption patterns of young people; the development of advertising directed at teenagers; and variations in youth tastes, especially in areas of music, fashion, and behavior (including issues like dancing, dating, and sexuality). Palladino combines a small sample of primary resource data with sources of mass culture, historical scholarship, and biography. The result is an entertaining and illustrative approach that shows how youth and perceptions about teens have changed over time.

Palladino begins her study in the 1930s, when boys struggled to find work that could contribute to the family income, and girls worked toward the goal of marriage, where they would "spend … money wisely on their family's behalf" (p. 18). Palladino also found that parents in this period tended to oversee most aspects of adolescents' lives, from overseeing their contact with other young people to directing career choices. Palladino points out that the 1930s was also an important decade in that young people began to attend high school in larger numbers. This signaled an ideological shift, in which the notion of teenage rights and the acceptability of experimentation came into vogue. Thus, while parents, advice columnists, and authority figures tried to suggest how young people should behave, Palladino offers examples of youth misbehavior, alcohol consumption, and cigarette smoking to show that young people in the 1930s experimented with these previously exclusive adult entertainments.

The word "teenager" was first employed in 1941. Palladino shows that the use of a single word to describe a specific class of people had several results. First, teenagers were people who could be categorized not only by age, but also by specific behavior patterns (Palladino focuses especially on the rising popularity of swing music). "Bobby soxers" were viewed as a social problem, not only because they enjoyed "addictive time wasters," but also because teens who listened to this new music sometimes stopped attending school and had little respect for parents or authority figures. Palladino is especially sensitive to differences in experience among teens, especially according to race (she offers separate chapters to focus on black teens, and lengthy segments about Hispanic youth) as well as gender.

Teens, however, did share certain experiences and appetites, and Palladino shows how, under the direction of Eugene Gilbert, "still a youth himself," advertisers began to produce and market products directly to young people (pp. 109-10). Palladino's focus on various marketing campaigns that were directed toward young people is one of the most useful aspects of *Teenagers*. In the 1940s and 1950s, teens were bombarded with advertising, most of which suggested that they could be more popular, attractive, and likeable if they purchased the variety of new products on the market. What had been youth experimentation was now a viable consumer market; young people were encouraged to explore their independence by purchasing items which would help them establish a separate identity..

By the 1950s and 1960s, instead of suggesting what young people should purchase, advertisers began to respond to youth tastes. While she does not discuss as much how advertisers worked in the 1940s, Palladino devotes considerable attention to advertising and sales in the 1950s and 1960s, especially by surveying the activities of rock 'n' roll producers and the countless teen stars they tried to market to the general public. This segment of her book is useful, for it makes the important point that advertisers were able to exploit teens for personal

profit (both as potential "stars" who sought to rise out of strained economic circumstances and as consumers).

Palladino also shows that once teenagers were designated a separate group, there was an accompanying shift in how youth were viewed and treated, both within families and in society at large. In the 1940s, especially after World War II, teenagers were perceived as potential agents of democratic change. Palladino offers marvelous anecdotal evidence to show how popular magazines like *Seventeen* suggested that young people could inspire their parents and friends to "build a better world" (p. 92). Palladino's collection of these examples is noteworthy; one pervasive attitude at the end of the war was certainly that young people could help engineer social equality. However, it would also have been interesting to see a survey of the extent to which such rhetoric was actually absorbed by teenagers. Palladino hints at youth disaffection and social inequality when she discusses the zoot suit riots, but those conflicts mostly involved adults harassing teens. School strikes and riots involving young people were relatively frequent in the late 1940s and early 1950s, especially as neighborhoods and schools began to desegregate. Those events would likely have been a way to investigate the sentiments and the behavior of young people, within communities in which youth figured more prominently than in the zoot suit riots.

Palladino's work, engaging as it is, also occasionally begs for deeper analysis, or at least for broader coverage of available data. For instance, the author sometimes relies on a few significant models of teen behavior to describe a trend that she argues took place in U.S. society as a whole. For instance, Palladino focuses in some detail on Diana Ross and Ronnie Bennett, both of whom were teen stars, members of racial minority groups, and who grew up in relatively poor economic circumstances in the late 1950s. Palladino seems to suggest that the "cocky attitudes" of teen stars were characteristic of all teens, who were apparently "determined to strike out on their own" (p. 153). In another chapter, a few members of the "Little Rock Nine" are prominently featured. The bravery of black students who helped to desegregate Little Rock's public schools signified to Palladino a desire "to change the world" as a measure of teens' "… own self-confidence–a characteristic of the baby-boom generation" (p. 188). They are apt examples, but Palladino makes her point largely based on the citation of a series of secondary sources.

In both of these cases, it seems Palladino's point would have even greater weight if she offered a more thorough survey of youth culture at large, instead of focusing only on individuals who figured prominently in the news or at the box office. Palladino suggests the possibilities for investigating this trend in her coverage of teens' responses to the Beatles tour, and again in her consideration of the Rolling Stones' popularity. But while popular rock 'n' roll tours offered solid evidence of changing youth values, Palladino could have intensified her points about marketing and about the vibrancy and rebelliousness of youth culture by focusing on two key themes that she develops so well elsewhere. First, she could highlight a bit more the wide variety of musical tastes present among teen audiences, especially those that developed in the 1970s and after (punk, heavy metal, disco, rap, and "cult" stars who initiated new teen fashion trends, like Madonna or Kurt Cobain). Secondly, she could examine more than the most "mainstream" of rebellious youth musical tastes. Not only was the market more varied than she seems to suggest, but its potential for profit increased to similarly large dimensions. Palladino only begins to hint at this in her final chapter, but by then "punks" and people who listen to "gangsta rap" are a sign of youth disaffection in the 1990s. Neither seem to fit into Palladino's otherwise excellent coverage of how teens were an integral part of mass marketing and advertising developments.

Overall, Palladino's analysis does not effectively carry through to the 1990s. She surveys several changes in how young people seem to view themselves, especially in regard to teen crime and sexuality. However, she does not address advertising and the marketing campaigns of the 1990s as much as in earlier decades. For example, examining the marketing of Ninetendo, computers, and video entertainment would be one way to continue her earlier theme.

These criticisms, however, should not dissuade readers from considering *Teenagers* for research on youth in the twentieth century United States. Palladino shows how young people have transformed the market, and focuses on how parents and "experts" have changed their views on child raising and youth. Palladino's narrative is entertaining, and her ability to mine sources of mass culture and historical research is a wonderful starting point for those interested in issues regarding youth in U.S. history.

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