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BIBLIOGRAPHY


From: Ronald Strickland, ed. Growing up Postmodern: Neoliberalism and the War on the Young. Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield, 2002

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“A Caste, a Culture, a Market”: Youth, Marketing, and Lifestyle in Postwar America

Bill Osgerby

The high school set makes its own decisions about what to buy and where to buy it, often dragging their parents along in their wake. Thus teen-age boys have created the vogue for button-down collars, Bermuda shorts, cadet-style sweaters, sport shirts, “Ivy League” jackets and loafers. And the junior miss ... leads the way in ordering “separates,” “man-tailored” shirts, ballet slippers, and ski-trip “smoo” ski or balloon-skin layers of petticoats.

Eugene Gilbert, in Harper’s Magazine, November 1959

Writing in New Yorker in November 1958 cultural critic Dwight Macdonald drew readers’ attention to what he depicted as a startlingly new social phenomenon— the American teenager: “Teenagers,” the author affirmed, were now “not just children growing into adults but a sharply differentiated part of the population.” As a generational cohort of unprecedented numbers, with unique levels of disposable income and an apparent thirst for the exciting opportunities opened up by postwar affluence, it did not seem unreasonable for Macdonald to conclude that young people represented an exceptional social formation. Proclaiming the advent of a “teenage revolution,” he argued that American youth had “a style of life that was fast becoming sui generis.” In these terms the 1950s had seen youth emerge as both a potent economic force and a compelling cultural influence, Macdonald opining that the American teenager had now taken discrete and distinctive shape as “a caste, a culture, a market.”

For Macdonald it was their unparalleled spending power that, above all else, marked out 1950s teenagers as “a new American caste.” “Economically,” Macdonald

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advised his readers, teenagers constituted “the latest—perhaps the last—merchandising frontier.” Before 1958 was out, Macdonald estimated, America’s seventeen million teenagers would have spent at least nine-and-a-half billion dollars—an annual spending that was set to rise by a further five billion dollars by 1965. And this financial power seemed all the more impressive for the way it was unchallenged by domestic responsibilities or restraints—teenage consumption being concentrated in the realms of leisure, style, and hedonistic pleasure. As Macdonald put it, the distinctive feature of the teenage market was that it was “free money”.

Free from all claims except the promoter’s whim. . . . Some teenagers actually have more free money to spend than their parents, who must meet all kinds of fixed obligations, among them the support (and the allowances) of the teenagers in question.4

Nor was Macdonald a voice in the wilderness. Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s the scale and character of youth consumption was a regular topic for financial comment. In 1959, for example, a breathless edition of Life announced “A New $10-Billion Power: The US Teenage Consumer”—the magazine recounting how American youth had “emerged as a big-time consumer to the US economy. . . . Counting only what is spent to satisfy their special teenage demands, the young and their parents will shell out $10 billion this year, a billion more than the total sales of GM [General Motors].”5 In 1964, meanwhile, Newsweek averred that “the country’s 26 million youngsters between the ages of 13 and 22 control a collective purchasing power that has long since ceased to be child’s play, with US youngsters expected to spend more than $24.5 billion in 1964. . . . And two years later the teenage market was still a hot topic—Newsweek devoting a special edition to a survey of the young generation’s tastes and lifestyles, the magazine concluding that “the high school set has graduated from the ice-cream, soda-fountain and bicycle circuit into the big leagues of US consumption.”6

During the late 1950s and early 1960s commercial interests scrambled to cash in on the gold mine represented by young people’s spending. The range of products geared to the young was literally boundless, consumer industries interacting with and reinforcing one another in their efforts to woo the youth market. Rather than neutrally “reflecting” consumer demand, however, manufacturers and marketers played an active role in shaping and disseminating the tastes, styles, and attitudes of “teenage” America. Moreover, the process of interpellating youth as a discrete consumer group was integral to the transformation of the American marketing industry. In recognizing “teenagers” as a distinct market segment, with specific tastes and interests, the strategies of youth marketing developed by postwar advertising giants pioneered the concepts of “consumer lifestyle” and “nichemarketing” that became central to the regeneration and revitalization of Madison Avenue.

The manner in which consumer industries represented and responded to the youth market during this period was also a sixteenth-century allegory for the broader patterns of cultural change. Mobilized as a signifier for dynamic modernity and stylish individualism, the iconography of “youth as fun” was central to a new consumer value system that prioritized commodity consumption and immediate gratification. This cultural inflation with “youthful hip” was especially pronounced within an emergent faction of the American middle class—a group that sought to distinguish itself as a distinct class formation through the pursuit of expressive, “liberated” lifestyles that laid emphasis on the achievement of self-expression and individuality via the consumption of distinctive cultural goods and signifiers.

**YOUTH IN THE JAZZ AGE**

The existence of a commercially based youth culture was not a feature unique to America during in the 1950s. An embryonic youth market was already discernable in the universe of commercial entertainment that took shape in the burgeoning cities of the late nineteenth century. And during the consumer boom of the 1920s a more fully formed, youth-oriented leisure culture became recognizable—a phenomenon heavily indebted to the concomitant expansion of higher education. Once the preserve of a relatively small elite, colleges and universities saw a threefold increase in enrollments between 1900 and 1930, nearly 20 percent of the college-age population attending some kind of educational institution by the end of the 1920s. In her meticulous survey of this growing student body, Paula Fass shows how “the first modern American youth culture” coalesced during the Jazz Age amid the budding network of student fraternities and a world of proliferating dance halls, cinemas, cafeterias, and other campus hangouts.8

The student culture chronicled by Fass weathered the lean years of the 1930s, but overall American youth was hard hit by the Depression. Young people represented 27.5 percent of those unemployed in 1930, and by 1937, 16 percent of the total youth population was still out of work. Even those from relatively well-do backgrounds were hard hit—this reflected in the 10 percent decline that took place in college enrollments between 1932 and 1934.9 During the 1940s, however, youth culture was reenergized by the labor demands of the wartime economy. The economic pressures of the war drew increasing numbers of young men into the workforce, partially reversing trends towards extended schooling and dependency on parents. In 1944, Census Bureau statistics showed that over two in five young men aged between sixteen and seventeen were gainfully employed—35 percent of these having left school altogether to enter full-time work.10 As a consequence, greater disposable income was delivered into young hands. By 1944 American youth was believed to account for a spending power of around $750 million, much of it discretionary.11 This economic muscle not only helped crystallize notions of
young people as possessing unprecedented cultural autonomy, but also provided the basis for a significant expansion of the commercial youth market—and thereby laid the foundation for the rise of the "teenager" as a cultural phenomenon.

THE TEENAGE MARKET

Clearly, a distinct youth culture associated with particular tastes and patterns of consumption existed before the Second World War. But the specific concept of the "teenager" only gained momentum during the 1940s. Since the 1960s it had become common to refer to an adolescent as the "teen"—yet it was only in 1941 that an article in Popular Science magazine featured the first published use of the word "teenager." During the 1940s the term was increasingly utilized in the world of advertising and marketing, steadily leaking into popular discourse where it was used to denote a new breed of affluent, young consumers who prioritized fun, leisure, and the fulfillment of personal desires.

The runaway success of Seventeen magazine was one of the first pointers to the rise of distinctly "teenage" consumption. Helen Valentine, Seventeen's first editor, had originally developed the idea of a publication geared to college girls while working as publications editor of Mademoiselle magazine. In 1944 she repackaged the concept with the launch of Seventeen—in its premiere edition of 400,000 copies selling out within two days and its circulation topping the million mark within sixteen months. Keen to maximize her venture's commercial potential, Valentine hired a professional research team—Rowan and Benson from Princeton—to survey her readership's buying habits. With this information at their disposal, Seventeen's editorial team could tempt merchandisers with valuable information on the tastes and desires of a demographic market that was shaping up as one of the most lucrative in modern America.

By the 1950s the developing scope and scale of the youth market seemed spectacular. The growth was partly indebted to demographic trends, wartime increases in the birthrate, and a postwar "baby boom" ensuring that the teen population spiraled from 10 to 15 million during the 1950s, eventually hitting a peak of 20 million by 1972. The postwar expansion of education, moreover, further accentuated the profile of young people as a distinct social group. During the 1950s the high school system was expanded considerably, but it was in colleges and universities that the most dramatic growth took place. In 1950 about 41 percent of high school graduates went on to college, but by 1963 this had risen to 53 percent, the trend giving a new lease of life to the campus culture that had first surfaced between the wars. The vital stimulus behind the growth of the commercial youth market, however, was economic. Wartime increases in young people's spending power were sustained throughout the fifties. Though the rate of decline in full-time youth employment, young people's consumption was sustained by a combination of parental allowances and part-time work. Hyperbolic undoubtedly crept into some of the more extreme claims made for the magnitude of youth's spending, but the general trend was undoubtedly upwards—some estimates suggesting that young people's average weekly income had risen from just over two dollars in 1944 to around ten dollars by 1958.

Commerce quickly grasped the potential of this market. Following in the footsteps of Helen Valentine and Seventeen magazine, a legion of marketers developed strategies to zero in on the wants and wallets of young consumers. A young entrepreneur from Chicago led the field. An enterprising nineteen-year-old in 1945, Eugene Gilbert was working as a shoe store clerk when he heard that few young people shopped in the store, even though it was stocking the latest styles. After persuading the owner to advertise more directly to young buyers, Gilbert was struck by the sudden rise in sales and began to console market research among his peers as a viable business proposition. By 1947 his research organization, Youth Marketing Co., was prospering. With offices in New York, the company employed a battalion of market researchers and boosted accounts with such prestigious clients as Quaker Oats, Maybelline, State-Baker, and United Airlines. Gilbert himself became a figure of some celebrity. Professed by national magazines like Newsweek and Harper's, he was hailed as a leading spokesman for, and interpreter of, modern youth culture. Presentments in his syndicated newspaper columns—"What Young People Think"—charted the whims and caprices of the young, while his book Advertising and Marketing to Young People (1947) became a manual for those hoping to court adolescent spending. With missionary zeal Gilbert evangelized youth as a commercial market of unprecedented importance. As he explained in Advertising Age in a 1951 interview:

Our recent discovery is that within the past decade teenagers have become a separate and distinct group within our society, enjoying a degree of autonomy and independence unmatched by previous generations.

Not everyone, however, shared the young adult's enthusiasm. In its 1957 special issue on youth, for example, Cosmopolitan magazine editorially asked "Are Teenagers Taking Over?"—the inside copy only half jokingly conjoining with images of "a vast, determined band of blue-jewed storm-troopers forcing us to do exactly as they dictate." These anxieties were constituted in a broader climate of uncertainty. Although postwar economic growth had brought prosperity for many, the 1950s saw a wide body of academic and popular opinion revile what was regarded as the maladjusted cultural fallout of the consumer culture. Social commentators, concerned that the rise of a debased "mass culture" they perceived as the corollary of modern consumption—"processes of cynical marketing and mass consumption delivering a cultural life bereft of meaning and individuality. For the mainstream of mass culture theory the flourishing youth market offered the starkest evidence of the consumer society's blanket of oppressive uniformity. For example, in 1950 (the
same year that he lamented the "other-directed" conformism of *The Lonely Crowd*. David Keisman condemned a pop music industry that had the power "to mold popular taste and to eliminate free choice by consumers."46 Dwight MacDonald, too, saw the young generation as falling easy prey to the wiles of commerce. "These days," he dejectedly explained in his commentary for *New Yorker*, "merchants eye teenagers the way stockmen eye cattle."47 And, even though fascinated awe was the underlying tone of Esquire's 1965 special edition on "The Affluent Teen" ("in the time it takes you to read these lines the American Teen-Ager will have spent $2,378.22"), a distinct sense of unease also crept in.48 Profligating the new wave of youth marketers, Esquire was ambivalent. The magazine was spellbound by their business acumen but, gathered together in a group portrait, the high priests of the youth market seemed to be presented in a more ominous light. Shot against a shadowy background, Helen Valentine, Eugene Gilbert, and their henchmen cast a somber gaze at the camera—configured, perhaps, as the manipulative Pied Pipers of teenage consumption.

The mass society pessimism of figures such as Reichman and Macdonald starkly contrasts to the more positive accounts of commodity consumption offered by many cultural theorists thirty years later. During the 1980s a number of authors sought to emphasize dimensions of *agency* (even transgression) in the domain of consumer practice. Here, *social actors* were interpreted as activating their own values and meanings through their patterns of consumption, creatively using the market machine to engineer their own cultural space and identities.21 Elements of this approach were especially evident in analyses of youth culture, with theorists such as Paul Willis seeing young people as actively generating their own cultures and forms of self-representation by "creatively selecting and appropriating the raw texts and artefacts made available by the commercial market."49 For critics such as Jim McGuigan, however, this approach drifted dangerously close to a celebration of the unqualified pleasures of consumer sovereignty in the marketplace and subsequently other theorists have called for renewed attention to the political economy of the culture industries and to the "interplay between the symbolic and the economic."46

This, however, does not entail sliding back into notions of marketing Svengalis leading passive and undiscriminating consumers by the nose. In the analysis of youth culture, for example, it is important to retain recognition of young people's capacity as active agents in the authorship of their culture. At the same time, this is a process underpinned by an engagement with the machinery of the commercial market—youth culture being formed through an intersection with the media, corporate entrepreneurs, and market institutions. As Gaynor Miles argues, therefore, while a reciprocal and "mutually exploitative" relationship exists between youth and the commercial market, the boundaries of this relationship are largely set by commercial interests. As Miles elaborates:

"A Taste, a Culture, a Market"

The proposition that young people actively engage with the mass media and to a degree forge it in their own image is a sound one, but it is one only partially realized. Ultimately, the parameters within which young people are able to do so, are set down for them by a mass media that is inevitably constructed first and foremost on the needs of itself. For more and more, the media at one and the same time—it provides them with the canvass, but the only oils they can use to paint that canvass are consumerist ones.46

In these terms, then, there was at least a grain of truth to Dwight Macdonald's 1958 contention that "the teenage market—and, in fact, the very category of teenagers—has been created by the businessmen who exploit it."50 Indeed, the 1950s saw American industry devote increasingly assiduous attention to this process of *creation*. In 1955, for example, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Hires Root Beer was using part of its 5 million dollar promotions budget to pay popular high school girls to ask for Hires soft drinks on their dates. The tobacco firm R.J. Reynolds, meanwhile, were ensuring that their brand of Camel cigarettes were heavily promoted on Alan Freed's CBS radio show, "The (Camel) Rock 'n' Roll Dance Party."51

This was a field in which Eugene Gilbert developed particular expertise. Drawing on Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld's classic study of "opinion leaders," Gilbert argued that the surest way of finding a market among teenagers was "to sell a product to the leaders in school, what they approve of counts far more than what Mom and Dad approve at home."52 Rather than simply manipulating the market, however, strategies of investigation and research were also central to Gilbert's approach. Early in his career Gilbert recognized that young people themselves were best placed to gauge the tastes and interests of the teenage market and, in a pioneering move, he recruited an army of students to canvass the opinions and consumer preferences of their peers.52 As such, Gilbert's techniques of marketing and promotion can be seen as anticipating later trends towards qualitative consumer research and "post-Fordist" niche-marketing. Gilbert's attention to the attitudes and feelings of young consumers was a foretaste of moves away from "number-crunching" empiricism towards the kind of attitudinal and motivational research that would become widespread in American marketing during the 1960s.53 Moreover, in developing the model of a specifically "teenage" market, Gilbert's work can be seen as part of a broader structural shift that took place in the fashion of consumer marketing. By the late 1950s notions of monolithic and homogenous "mass" consumption were increasingly abandoned as advertisers began coining the term "lifestyle" to denote the distinctive consumption practices and consumption spectrum of nuanced consumer groupings.54 In these terms the rise of "teenage" marketing was one (very visible and influential) aspect of a wider move by American business to address an increasingly diverse range of "lifestyle" markets.

Surveying structural changes in western economies since the 1970s, many
commentators have identified the emergence of a new, "post-Fordist" era. 22 Here, the systems of mass production, standardized products, uniform markets, and concentrations of capital typical of the modern, Fordist economy are seen as giving way to a new, consumption-oriented era of flexible production processes and fragmented markets. In this narrative of economic change, consumption occupies a pivotal role—authors such as Frank Mort arguing that manufacturers, marketeers, and retailers have resorted to "[g]reater market segmentation [which] demands different methods of communication. . . with an upbeat stress on design and visual awareness."23 The rise of the teenage market in postwar America, however, suggests that such developments did not suddenly materialize during the 1980s and 1990s, but were already pronounced traits of the consumer economy that emerged in the United States after the Second World War. The rise of "teenage" consumption also impacted upon Madison Avenue's creative practice. During the late 1950s American advertising had been beset by a sense of malaise, the industry perceiving itself as woefully lacking in innovative flair. The early 1960s, however, saw a "creative revolution" in advertising strategy as a new generation of admen began to identify with the contemporary youth scene. Their aim was partly to appeal to the growing youth market but, as Thomas Frank cogently argues, the "creative revolution" was also distinguished by the way it traded on youth as an icon of rebellious autonomy.24 In employing the concept of "youthfulness" as a shorthand signifier for self-affirmation and "hipster" nonconformity, advertisers appealed to new consumer value systems that aspired to break away from stoic conformity and explore new horizons of individuality and excitement—an ethos of hedonism and personal gratification that was especially significant within ascendant factions of the American middle class.

THE ETHIC OF FUN

For much of the 1950s notions of "youth" were surrounded by largely negative social meanings and connotations. Wartime perceptions of a frightening rise in levels of juvenile crime continued apace and prompted, in 1953, the launch of a Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency. The Subcommittee hearings continued until the end of the decade, its concerns mirrored by a plethora of exposés in magazines, newspapers, and newsmagazines— all purporting to show a new form of delinquency that was chilling in its extent and severity. Yet, as James Gilbert demonstrates, rather than being rooted in a genuine explosion of adolescent vice, the 1950s alarm around juvenile delinquency (or the "J.D." phenomenon, as it was dubbed) was a product of broader anxieties about the nature of social and cultural change. According to Gilbert, the J.D. "paroxysm" of the 1950s had a powerful "metaphorical" dimension, serving as a symbolic focus to "a vaguely formulated but growing sense of social disintegration," fears of juvenile depravity serving as a vehicle for wider concerns in the face of rapid and disorienting change.25 Developments in the world of youth seemed to exemplify those forces deemed most threatening to social stability. Perceptions of a more pervasive sexual code among young people stoked fears of moral disarray, while the expansion of a commercially based and peer-oriented youth culture challenged dominant ideologies of family-centered "togetherness." Young people's affluence and the growth of a commercial youth market were perceived as weakening the family's cohesive power—adolescent taste seeming to be increasingly independent of parental influence. Moreover, the popularity of cultural forms such as rock 'n' roll prompted particular fear as white, middle-class youngsters appeared to fall under the spell of lower-class and black cultural values. Nevertheless, rather than being entirely negative, social and political responses to youth are characterized by a recurring duality. Almost simultaneously youth is both wild and as the most dependable evidence of cultural bankruptcy and celebrated as the exciting precursor to a prosperous future—contrasting images that Dick Hebdige terms "youth-as-trouble" and "youth-as-fun."26 Both are distorted and exaggerated stereotypes with tenuous relation to social reality. But, since the 1940s, they have welded tremendous consumptive power, serving as key motifs around which dominant interpretations of social change have been constructed. Amid the "J.D. panic" of the 1950s it was notions of "youth-as-trouble" that tended to hold sway, but by the end of the decade anxieties were dissipating and a more positive set of youth stereotypes came to the fore. By the beginning of the 1960s young people were portrayed, celebrated even, as an exciting new and uplifting social force. This was an iconography powerfully marshaled by John F. Kennedy in both his public persona and political rhetoric, where the rising generation was deployed as an avatar of progress in a new era of bold confidence.27 At the same time commercial interests also helped foster an upbeat iconography of youth—James Gilbert arguing that the rise of more positive social responses to young people during the late 1950s and early 1960s was to a large part "derived from a further extension of the market economy in American cultural life."28 Central to this process was the galloping success of commercial leisure industries specifically geared to young consumers, together with the efforts of the new army of advertisers and marketeers who worked both to gauge and to exploit the desires of this "teenage" market. The early hypothesization of the word "teenager" is suggestive of its initial novelty, but by the late 1950s the "teenager" had become a familiar archetype as adwriters and social scientists (along with an avalanche of books and magazine and news features) revealed to the American public what appeared to be a new generational strata with its own language, culture, and values. The concept of the "teenager," however, amounted to more than simply a descriptive term for a generational group. Written into notions of "teenage" tastes and lifestyles was a specific ideological construction of social change. Configured as the embodiment of modern
prosperity, the teenager became symbolic of wider shifts in American life. While some commentators, as we have seen, derided "teenage" culture as the worst example of commercial massification, more widely the late 1950s and early 1960s saw the teenager cast in radiant terms. "Come Alive! You're in the Pepsi Generation" enticed a Pepsi ad campaign in 1963, advertisers and manufacturers habitually identifying their products with the vitality and independence of youth. Here, young people were taken as the epitome of an America in which the sheer pace of economic growth seemed set to engender a newly prosperous age of fun, freedom, and social harmony. In these terms "teenagers" were presented as living at the sharp end of the new consumer culture, distinguished not simply by their youth but by a particular style of conspicuous, leisure-oriented consumption.

And it was among the American middle class that this upbeat "re-branding" of youth registered greatest impact. In the rhetoric of marketers and social scientists alike, the "teenager" was presented as essentially classless—an image redolent of the wider Cold War mythologies of universal abundance. In reality, however, the modes of consumption that defined the "teenage" lifestyle were relatively specific to the white middle class. As sociologist Jessica Bernard observed in his 1963 survey of the American youth scene, "teen-age culture" was "essentially the culture of a leisure class":

"A Teen, a Culture, a Market"

Youngsters of lower socioeconomic classes are in the teen-age culture only in their early teens. They are more likely than children of higher socioeconomic class to enter the labor force or the armed forces or to get married soon after high school and, thus, to disappear into the adult world. This exit from the teen-age world by youngsters of lower class backgrounds means that those who remain are disproportionately from the higher socioeconomic class background.

The burgeoning commercial youth market of the late 1950s and early 1960s, therefore, was largely a middle-class province. The array of "teen-age" products and advertisements geared to Eugene Gilbert's "teenager" consumer were pitched to a relatively well-behaved and respectable market of middle-class, white youngsters. But perhaps even more significant was the way in which the ethos of hedonism and hectic consumerism central to the "teenage" experience also set the pace for the new values and lifestyles evident among an ascending section of the American middle class.

The "traditional" middle class world that had originally emerged during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—with its emphasis on family life, the work ethic, moderation, and probity—had been a powerful force, but by the 1920s was already losing some of its authority as American capitalism steadily prioritized consumption, leisure, and immediate gratification. In the period after the Second World War these changes intensified, middle-class culture becoming more thoroughly permeated by a leisure-oriented consumer ethos. These shifts were especially pronounced within an emerging middle-class faction. The American economy's growing dependence on the servicing of consumer demand brought with it a major expansion in the number of salaried managerial and technical workers and "culture producers" of all kinds—administrators, academics, journalists, advertisers (Eugene Gilbert, for example), and other professionals whose economic role centered on the production and dissemination of symbolic goods and services. Despite its occupational diversity, Barbara and John Ehrenreich argue that this professional-managerial group was bound together by a distinct and recognizable middle-class formation that constituted roughly 20 percent of the American population. Moreover, in contrast to the reserve and diligent work ethic of the traditional middle class, this ascendant faction was distinguished by its embrace of the pleasures of commodity consumption and its hunger for "youthful" fun.

In making sense of these transformations the insights of French cultural theorist Pierre Bourdieu are illuminating. In Distinction, his analysis of changes in the fabric of French bourgeois culture, Bourdieu argues that the 1950s witnessed the rise of a new form of capitalist economy in which power and profits were increasingly dependent not simply on the production of goods, but also on the continual regeneration of consumer desires. To sustain its survival, therefore, this new economic order demanded the emergence of a new social formation which championed the cause of commodity consumption and judged people "by their capacity for consumption, their 'standard of living' and their style of life, as much as by their capacity for production." Lacking the economic, cultural, or social capital that distinguished the traditional petite bourgeoisie, this new class faction established its own distinctive status by colonizing new occupations based on the production and dissemination of symbolic goods and services—Bourdieu coined the term "cultural intermediaries" to denote the new petite bourgeoisie cohort that rose to dominate fields such as the media, advertising, journalism, fashion, and so on. Moreover, in its quest to secure its class position and status, the new petite bourgeoisie broke away from the puritanical and production-oriented "morality of duty" associated with the traditional middle class. In its place was a somewhat more "edie of fun"—a new "morality of pleasure as a duty," in which it became "a failure, a threat to self-esteem, not to have fun." Bourdieu's original study was focused exclusively on developments within the French social structure during the late 1950s, but since the 1980s a growing body of authors have drawn on his work to analyze a broad range of contemporary cultural formations. For example, Paul Baggaley and his associates, Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and John Urry, have all deployed Bourdieu's terms of analysis in their accounts of "postmodern" cultures in the late twentieth century. However, while these authors have focused their attentions on cultural shifts in contemporary Europe, it is also possible to see middle-class culture in America during the 1950s and 1960s as evidencing many of the qualities characteristic of Bourdieu's new petite bourgeoisie.
Like Bourdieu's "cultural intermediaries" of the 1960s France, the ascending middle class of 1950s America established its status as a social formation through their skills in "the art of living." They defined their social status and sense of cultural identity through distinctive, consumption-driven lifestyles—their values and codes of behavior relating an accent on stylistic self-expression, self-conscious display, and (to use Bourdieu's terminology) an "ethic of fun." Indeed, the emphasis on "lifestyle" as a marketing concept was largely predicated upon the developing consumer tastes of this new middle class. As Joseph Benzaquin and Arthur Vidich later explained, by the 1960s marketers and advertisers were not only using the notion of "lifestyle" to denote the mores of "a new middle class of college-held administrators, professionals and managers" who were oriented to a culture of "like, fun, and excitement," and who took "wellness delight in pursuing a light-hearted existence of interpersonal rapport and pleasure based on a moral code that has no relationship to babbity and its protestant morality." In pursuing its "ethic of fun," the new middle class took many of its cultural cues from the developing world of youth consumption. As Eugene Gilbert recognized in 1957, teenagers' "taste not only influenced their parents' household spending but were a source from which almost all mass buying trends originate. The mass adult market may not feel all the youth trends in this stormy teen, but most of those who reach the adult market have their beginnings here." This was particularly true of the cultural forms and texts associated with the new middle class. In the case of advertising, for example, Thomas Frank shows how the "creative revolution" of the 1960s was underpinned by an attempt to mobilize "youth" as a signifier of hip individualism and hedonistic fulfillment that could appeal to newly affluent and upwardly mobile consumers. Frank demonstrates that the trend manifested across a wide range of products and advertising campaigns, but it was probably best encapsulated by the success of the Ford Mustang. The spotty Mustang line rolled off assembly lines in April 1964 and was an instant sensation. Ford's first-year sales estimate of 500,000 units was surpassed in just four months, with some 22,000 orders taken on the first day of availability and more than 417,000 Mustangs sold in twelve months—then a record for first-year car sales. The Mustang phenomenon was indebted to Ford's deft marketing. The Mustang was designed to be a "youth" car—a product that could exploit the increasingly profitable youth market, but which could also appeal to consumers who sought to identify with "youthful" themes of adventure and fun. Both strategies were a big success. As expected, the Mustang sold overwhelmingly well to the young, with more than half of the car's first-year buyers aged under thirty-four. Just the car was also a hit with older age groups, 16 percent of sales going to men in the forty-five to fifty-five age group—the "young at heart" clamoring around the bandwagon of "youthful" and exciting consumerism. The success of the Mustang, then, is testimony to the way in which "youth" had become a motif for the dreams, desires, and ideals of the hedonistic, middle-class consumer. Frank is correct to argue that the marketing move towards "this more hip style" was fully established by 1965. But it was sold as "the counterculture" of the sixties that the "up" consumer really came into his own. While the most politically conscious elements of the counterculture undoubtedly presented a challenge to the domestic order, the libertarian 1960s ethos of "doing your own thing" offered a code of optimism, excitement, and styleliness that was commensurate with the lifestyle sensibilities of the new middle class. Indeed, rather than representing the antithesis of the consumer society, the counterculture can itself be seen as a developmental phase in the evolution of the new, consumption-oriented petite bourgeoisie. As Frank observes, rather than representing the nemesis of advanced capitalism, "the counterculture may be more accurately understood as a stage in the development of the values of the American middle class, a colorful instalment in the twentieth century drama of consumer subjectivity." Pointing the way to a more liberal set of social, sexual, and cultural mores, the counterculture helped give free rein to the new middle class as they strove for "hip" individuality and intimate sensibility through hedonistic and "youthful" patterns of consumption. It was, for example, this "ethic of [youthful] fun" that particularly caught Newsweek's eye when the magazine surveyed the male fashion scene in 1965:

"Sedum has male fashion as 'tight, twisted and disjointed,' with the urgency of today. Money and leisure are part of the reason; the suburban man votes—and can afford—a large set to fit his weekend fun. A more active and pervasive influence is youth. Hipped on color and cachet, whether it's psychedelic art or disco music, young people dance to fit their milieu—and their elders are picking up the beat. "It used to be that the son never looked like his father's tie," says James K. Wilsey Jr., president of Hart Schaffner and Marx Clothes. "Now the father is seeking to borrow his son's taste."

THE LAST MERCHANDISING FRONTIER

At the end of the 1990s a group of young entrepreneurs announced an innovative marketing breakthrough. Under the moniker "Sputnik" they presented themselves as the thriving Young Turks of American market research. Drawing on their "network of young correspondents across the country," Sputnik claimed they were uniquely placed to "get to the streets, the neighborhoods, the clubs, the basements and the playgrounds, and talk to the street cultures." By mining its rich vein of qualitative research data, Sputnik argued, it could "get inside the minds and souls of this largest growing consumer group," offering business unparalleled opportunity to "turn to the progressive trendsetters, to get close, to understand what they are
"A Class, a Culture, a Marker"

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Giddens, Anthony, and Michael Nevin Willard. The Culture of the Fourth and American Upper-Middle Class (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 4-6. Nevertheless, though differences obviously exist between the national cultures of France and America, Bourdieu's account of a shift from a "moral authority" to an " ethic of efficacy" remains broadly useful in a framework for understanding the postwar transformation of American middle-class life during the 1950s and 1960s.

Gill, Gilbertc and marketing, 28.


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