**Look Back at Youths in America**

Imagine leaving your home, family and friends to come to a strange new country. That is just what many young people (sometimes with their families, but often alone) have done for more than 350 years in coming to the New World. For many immigrants (people who arrive in a new country), the New World offered hope of a better life; for all new arrivals, the change was traumatic.

In the 1600s, many children of poor European immigrants were apprenticed (contracted) to work without wages as servants for wealthier people until they were between 18 and 21 years of age.

Beginning in 1619, blacks were brought to North America as slaves to work for the few early European settlers. Young people as well as adults served as slaves until 1865, following the Civil War, when the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution was passed, which abolished slavery.

Later, the United States experienced major periods of immigration. The first occurred from about 1840 to 1880. During that time, most of the immigrants were from northern and western Europe. Most were fleeing poverty, or political or religious persecution. The second major period began in the 1880s. While immigrants still came from northern and western Europe, the majority now came from southern and eastern Europe, largely for the same reasons as the first group. Many found work in large cities such as New York, Chicago and Pittsburgh.

At the time of these major periods of immigration, children of all ethnic groups often worked long hours in factories, coal mines, mills or on farms. There were no laws regulating child labor until the 1900s.

However, many new Americans saw that education was their best chance for prosperity. In the 1900s, boys and girls began to attend schools in increasing numbers. Many stayed in school until they were about 15 years old. Work became less of an influence on young people. They were now being influenced more by their schools, churches and families.

At the beginning of the 1900s, new factories had been built, the western frontier was being conquered and the economy was growing rapidly. Though society still fell short of their ideals, youths—and their elders— believed that improvement and progress toward a better world was inevitable and unstoppable. The staggering shock and losses brought by World War I (1914-1918), however, caused disillusion. During the 1920s, youths in America determined to live life to its fullest in anticipation of an uncertain future, went "on the greatest, gaudiest spree in history" wrote novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald. Some young people tended to reject their parents' values and turned to the new jazz music, to dancing and to having a good time.

The Great Depression, beginning in 1929, put an end to this era. About 12 million people lost their jobs. Many people had a hard time providing enough food for themselves. As a result, many children had to quit school to find work. Under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's direction, programs under the National Youth Service created jobs for many young people. Some three million young men took part in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), working to maintain forests and parks throughout the United States.

World War II (1939-1945) restored a feeling of national purpose and hope, and after the war the United States experienced the biggest baby boom in history. Extending into the 1950s, this increase in the birth rate produced the generation of young people known as the "baby boom" that reached adulthood in the 1960s and early 1970s.

During the 1960s, many youths met President John F. Kennedy's challenge: "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." They volunteered to help the handicapped, the poor and the needy at home and also in foreign countries through the Peace Corps. The decade of the 1960s was also a time of growing political awareness, turbulence and rebellion. On many college campuses, young people protested the country's involvement in the Vietnam War. They demonstrated and worked against racial segregation and against poverty. Some young people developed their own subculture, which included styles of dress, music and ideas about independence which were different from those of their parents.

Some women began calling for equality with men and developed the beginnings of what is now known as the women's liberation movement. Increasing discord in family life was openly discussed as divorce rates climbed and young people who couldn't agree with their parents' attitudes and values talked about the "generation gap."

Television programs and films introduced an unaccustomed openness about sexuality in the United States during this period, Many young people became involved in activities that once only some adults participated in, such as the use of drugs and alcohol.

By the 1970s, the times were different and the focus of youths' attention had been drawn elsewhere. Gone were the violent protests of the previous decade. The American involvement in the war ended and after military conscription was stopped in 1973, many protests died away.

In the 1980s, young people generally became more conservative and interested primarily in working toward success in their careers. One writer called the 1980s "the new age of realism." Others dubbed the young people of the 1980s "the me generation."