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Toward a Theoretical Perspective on the Legislation of Adolescence

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Abstract

A theoretical perspective on the historical origins of adolescence in the United States is outlined. Based on a materialist theory of social change, it is argued that adolescence is best understood as the state-appropriation of youth leisure, that the imposition of this status was effected through the enactment of compulsory education legislation, and that the reason for enacting this legislation was to increase the average propensity to consume within the population. We appeal to Dahrendorf's theory of class and Poulantzas' theory of the state to aid in our reconstruction of the history of compulsory education in terms of the creation and maintenance of adolescence. We conclude that adolescence was not a by-product of a socio-cultural need to institute a compulsory system of public education, but the reverse, that child-saving movements reflected the need to institute adolescence. The primary purpose of secondary education is to manipulate the deployment of youth within the economic sphere, and to serve as the locus of confinement within the structure of authority relations in the culture.

INTRODUCTION

In this essay we will attempt to develop an outline of a theoretical approach for understanding the history of adolescence. We will argue that the invention of adolescence can be best understood within the broad context of a materialist theory of social change. Adolescence, understood as the sociological condition resulting

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from state-enforced status deprivation and the prolongation of childhood, is regulated by the societal machinery of compulsion located chiefly within the mass institutions of public education. Hence we may view the development of compulsory education as the principal (but by no means the only) vehicle for the creation and maintenance of adolescence. We will attempt to understand this development by appealing to Dahrendorf's (1958) theory of class and class conflict in industrial society, and Poulantzas' (1973; also, Clarke, 1977; Shapiro, 1980) theory of the state.

In our view theoretical perspectives on the history of adolescence are badly needed. While ours is not the only statement of an inventionist view of adolescence, what characterizes most other accounts of the origins of adolescence is the eclectic ordering of factors said to contribute to the "discovery" of adolescence. Hence the origins of modern adolescence has been linked in the literature to the decline of apprenticeship, to mechanization, to the upgraded skill requirements of industrial labor, to specialized divisions of labor, to the separation of work from the home, to the writings of G. Stanley Hall and the proliferation of child-guidance tracks, to changes in fertility patterns and in the structure of the family, to urbanization, to the emergence of youth groups like the YMCA and Boy Scouts, to age-segregated schools. Many of these factors figure into a single account of the discovery of adolescence (e.g., Kett, 1977; Sebald, 1968). In a recent review Finley (1985, p. 26), complained about "...historians... who hold to the doctrine that full and accurate reporting is their only legitimate function, that interpretations, the search for causes, the connection between the history of ideas and underlying institutions are the business of the social scientist, not the historian." According to Finley (1985; also Field, 1981, p. 92) historical accounts that are bare of interpretation, of the search for causes, can yield only a "two-dimensional portrait" of the subject matter. It is hoped that our present theoretical effort will contribute to a three-dimensional understanding of the origins of modern adolescence.

A FIRST APPROXIMATION

It was argued earlier in this issue that the survival of Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay colonies depended largely on the participation of its young adolescents in the general labor of their respective communities (Enright, Lapsley, & Olson, this issue). Young adolescents were expected to render military service, to man the nascent spinning industry, to participate in the planting and harvesting of agriculture products. It is perhaps no accident that the colonial ideology of "all hands employed" (Rodgers, 1974), and the religious justification of adolescent labor, coincided with the cultural requirement that young people labor. Indeed, as Abbott (1908) has pointed out, colonial child labor was viewed as a "rightious institution" (p. 19), one that was also "...a national asset which may be used to further the material greatness of America" (p. 21).

The status of adolescents is markedly different in the modern era. "Society no longer depends on young people for anything in particular (unless it be as soldiers) and has been forced to create for them a succession of contrived roles and institu-

tions not tightly woven into the community structure'' (Kett, 1972, p. 28 – 29). Extreme age segregation has encouraged the emergence of youth culture (Keniston, 1970) and has virtually precluded a smooth transition to adulthood (Colemen, et al., 1972). Hence, while adolescent fulfillment may have once been expressed in servitude and labor, it is now expressed in leisure activities (Grinder, 1980).

But it would not be entirely correct (in our view) to say that modern society depends very little on adolescents. In the colonial period of our national history the *labor* of youth was required for economic survival, and the appropriation of youth *labor* was defended on religious grounds. If we could press the colonial example further, and argue that societies regulate the status of youth in culturally-adaptive ways, we could conjecture that in the modern era the *leisure* of youth is required for economic survival. However, the appropriation of youth leisure in the modern era is defended not so much on religious but on psychological grounds. Because adolescence is a normative period of psychological instability and incapacitation, a psychosocial moratorium is required to permit the resolution of developmental tasks. However, we might view the psychological definition of adolescent leisure as a culture-perservering ideology of modern culture. The adolescent moratorium has been effected in history through the coercive (or perhaps benevolent) power of the state which has, through child-saving legislation, systematically excluded adolescents from adults roles and compelled their dependency (prolonging childhood) well into the teen years. Viewed in this way adolescence is the result of state-imposed status deprivation, and is hence not necessarily a natural category of human development (e.g., Katz, 1976, but see Hiner, 1975; Fox, 1977).

The rise of an adolescent ideology can be readily seen in the changing status of children that occurred between 1890 and 1920. During this period there emerged not only a distinct psychology of adolescence (Hall, 1904), but also a child-saving metastructure that enforced age-segregation, prolonged adolescent dependency, and promulgated rules governing the social lives of youth. As part of this ideology, young people ''...came to be seen as individuals with critical needs: as patients requiring specialized medical care; as ''delinquents'' needing particular treatment in the courts; and as students deserving elaborately differentiated schooling'' (Tyack, 1976, p. 363). To understand why adolescents were commanding so much societal attention near the turn of the twentieth century, two related historical literatures can be examined. One literature (e.g., Bakan, 1971; Demos & Demos, 1969; Gillis, 1974; Kett, 1977; Musgrave, 1964) explicitly treats adolescence as an historical discovery or as a newly invented phase of the lifespan that emerged as a consequence of demographic and economic changes in American culture. A more formidable literature (e.g., Bailyn, 1960; Cremin, 1961; Ensign, 1921; Everhart, 1977; Katz, 1976; Katz & Davey, 1978; Tyack, 1976) is concerned primarily with the history of public education proper and, in particular, with the legitimating function of public compulsory education in a rapidly changing industrial culture (e.g., Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Braverman, 1974; Tyack, 1974; Walters & Rubinson, 1983). Both literatures make reference to common historical transformations in the structure of American society (e.g., urbanization, industrialization, capitalism). Both literatures acknowledge that a change in the status of young people was one

outcome of these transformations. But there is a subtle and important difference in focus between these literatures, that can be illustrated by how the following questions are answered: Was there societal recognition that education should be universal, compulsory, prolonged, funded at public expense, bureacratically administered, and regulated by the coercive power of the state, such that "adolescence" was simply a by-product of this concern for education? Or was it the case that the economic integrity of the culture required that the transition to adulthood be delayed, that adolescent dependency be prolonged, that adult status be deprived, i.e., that the culture required a period of "adolescence" for its youth, and that the compulsory education system was instituted to effect this end? In other words, was adolescence a by-product of a socio-cultural need to institute a compulsory system of public education, or was the system of compulsory education (and the entire child-saving machinery) a by-product of the need to institute adolescence?

The problem, thus posed, has a chicken-or-egg quality about it. The expansion of secondary education, the erection of the machinery of compulsion, and the discovery of adolescence covary over historical time. While the two positions are not necessarily antithetical, we do not believe that the institutionalization of adolescence, which has the effect of radically re-ordering the human lifespan, could be a tertiary outcome of some more fundamental transformations. Hence, we find it useful, for heuristic purposes, to choose sides, and we find that a materialist theory of social change takes us some distance in shedding new light on the historical problem of adolescence.

A materialist theory of socioculture change (e.g., Harris, 1979; Laslett, 1980; also Cohen, 1978; Wilkinson, 1973), argues that domestic and political economy, and ideology (including adolescence ideology), are responsive to the productive and reproductive forces in a culture. To complete our analogy to the colonial period we must show not only that adolescence is a sociohistorical creation effected through state intervention, but that, in addition, this creation contributes to the economic viability of modern industrial culture. If one believes that the creation of adolescence relieves an economic system under stress, say, by preventing a bloated labor market, or by insuring, through prolonged dependence on parental incomes (Fox, 1977; see Katz & Davey, 1978, p. 117), higher and more dependable rates of consumer expenditures (Enright & Lapsley, 1982), then it is conceivable that under other circumstances some semblance of adult status might be restored to "young adults" Hence, this also suggests that the "adolescence" status that is presently conferred on youth is not historically fixed, but may be moderated during periods of cultural need (e.g., wartime labor shortage, see McGee, 1944). One might even conjecture that adolescence, defined in terms of status deprivation and enforced dependency, may not always be a status reserved for young people. In the next section we will review what needs to be explained—the development of adolescence-creating legislation.

THE LEGISLATION OF ADOLESCENCE

The period of most active legislative interest on the issues of compulsory education and child labor is between 1880 and 1920 (Burgess, 1976), though one can

readily detect child-saving themes prior to 1880, particularly in the annual reports of the various state superintendents of public instruction (e.g., Bernard, 1840; Jillson, 1870; Stockwell, 1873; White, 1870; see Bailyn, 1960; Ensign, 1921; Everhart, 1977; Jernegan, 1918). By 1918, 31 states had established laws compelling school attendance until age 16; seven states compelled attendance until age 15, eight states until age 14, and one state (Virginia) compelled attendance only until age 12 (Umbeck, 1960). By 1939, 20 states had extended their upper compulsory age limit, so that 90% of all states now had an upper age boundary of 16 or older (Umbeck, 1960).

However, progress in the enactment of compulsory legislation was far from uniform (Everhart, 1977; Katz, 1976; Richardson, 1980; Tyack, 1976). As Table 2 indicates there were wide variations in the dates of enactments. None of the southern states, for example, had enacted a compulsory education law before 1905, with South Carolina enacting its *(first)* law as late as 1915. In contrast, virtually all of the Northern industrial states had enacted compulsory education prior to 1890 (excepting Pennsylvania, 1895).

The mere fact that a law had been enacted, however, was not a guarantee that it could be enforced and attendance compelled. The initial laws in the several states were, in fact, greatly flawed (Ensign, 1921; Tyack, 1976). In most states the laws were "dead letters," unheard of by parents, ignored by responsible officials and riddled with exclusions and loopholes. Enforcement provisions were either inadequate or nonexistent (see, e.g., U.S. Commissioner of Education, 1889). Indeed, the observation of Massachusetts State Constable George Oliver (1871, p. 85) was not atypical:

> Nobody looks after it (enforcement) . . . and the larger cities and many of the towns of the state are full of unschooled children, vagabonding about the streets. The mills all over the state, the shops in cities and towns, are full of children deprived of their right to education . . . and nobody thinks of obeying the school law.

Abner Phipps (1871, p. 85), agent of the Massachusetts Board of Education complained similarly. "It is true," he wrote, "we have a compulsory law with sufficient penalties if it were enforced, but in many towns, it is not only never enforced, but no disposition to enforce it is shown." The compulsory act of New York was said to be "so defective" that it could not enforce attendance (Draper, 1882, p. xiii). Indeed, the efficacy of compulsory education legislation was held in such low regard, that A. N. Raub, (1888, p. 8) Commissioner of the Free Schools of Delaware could remark that "The laws enacted for compulsory education in several of the states are practically so inoperative, the results so unsatisfactory, and the theory so undemocratic in principle, that I cannot recommend such a law for Delaware."

Tyack (1976) has called the period up to 1890 the "symbolic" phase in the enactment of compulsory education. During this phase there was an expansion of elementary school enrollments, (e.g., Meyer, Tyack, Nagel, & Gordon, 1979) and a proliferation of compulsory attendance laws, though, again, the laws were rarely enforced. Indeed, there is mounting evidence that compulsory legislation followed, rather than preceded, rises in school enrollment, and that the laws merely formalized the existing trend toward greater school participation (Everhart, 1977; Fuller, 1983;

TABLE 1

Compulsory School Attendance Limits, at 5 Period, Selected States[1]

State	1887	1902	1918	1939	1954
New York	8-14	8-6	8-16	7-16	7-16
New Jersey	7-12 7-16	7-12	7-16	7-18	-16
Pennsylvania	-	8-16	8-16	8-18	8-17
Massachusetts	8-14	7-14	7-16	7-16	7-16
Connecticut	8-16	7-16	7-16	7-16	7-16
Delaware	-	-	7-14	7-16	7-16
Maryland	6-16	8-16	7-15	7-16	7-16
Rhode Island	7-15	7-15	8-16	7-16	7-16
New Hampshire	8-14	8-14	8-16	8-16	6-16
Vermont	8-14	8-15	8-16	8-16	7-16
North Carolina	-	-	8-14	7-14	7-16
South Carolina	-	-	8-16	7-16	7-16
Virginia	-	-	8-12	7-15	7-16

[1]Source: Umbeck (1960)

TABLE 2

Dates of Enactment of Compulsory School Attendance Laws[1], Selected States

State	Date of Enactment
New York	1874 (1853)[2]
New Jersey	1875
Pennsylvania	1895
Massachusetts	1852
Connecticut	1872
Delaware	1907
Maryland	1902
Rhode Island	1883
New Hampshire	1871
Vermont	1867
North Carolina	1907
South Carolina	1915
Virginia	1908

[1]Source,Umbeck (1960).

[2]Source, Biennial Survey of Education (1916 – 1918). The 1853 law was a truancy act that empowered the court to restrain "idle and truant" children between the age of 5 and 14 from "wandering about". The court could either compel parents to cause their children's engagement in some lawful occupation or, failing that, "the child might be put under the charge of the overseers of the poor, set at work by them and given instructions in the elementary branches, or he might be bound out by them as an apprentice" *(Laws of 1853, chapter 185)*. The law of 1874 was more explicitly a compulsory education act.

Kaestle & Vinovskis, 1978; Landes & Solomon, 1972; Meyer, et al., 1979; Richardson, 1980, p. 154). What is not in dispute is the fact that the notion of compulsory education had engendered ideological and political resistance during the symbolic phase (Tyack, 1976; also, Reagan, 1973; Katz, 1977). This resistance can be expressed in a variety of ways. Agrarian communities, and the South generally, were hostile to compulsory legislation. According to R. C. Stearnes (1917, p. 35)

> The Southern mind . . . has associated the idea of parental responsibility for a child's education with the sacred principle of State's rights in the larger political relations. Jealously does it guard the home from government interference *just* as it was want to guard the state from Federal interference.

Hence compulsion was seen as being "undemocratic in principle," as an usurpation by the State of traditional parental perogatives concerning the education of their children.

Rural resistence to compulsion has also been linked to the higher enforcement costs in agricultural states and communities, relative to industrialized states and more urban communities (Richardson, 1980). "A law of this kind" wrote A. N. Raub of Delaware (1889, p. 9), "may be desirable in large cities when backed by a constabulary force to gather the absentees into the schools, but it has never been either effective or popular in communities chiefly agricultural." One reason that compulsory laws may have been unpopular in agricultural communities is that it deprives families access to the labor of their children. While this may be phrased politically as another example of the state's encroachment on parental perogatives, what seems clear is that child labor is often indispensable in agrarian economies. Child labor intensifies the productivity of agriculture and stock raising ". . . in such operations as weeding, harvesting, herding, and retrieving animal droppings" (Harris, 1979, p. 88). In response to the fact that over a quarter-million children were outside of the Virginia schools in 1914, Superintendent R. C. Stearnes (1915, p. 36 – 37) held that nonenrollment was not chargeable to the distance from the schoolhouse, but rather, "(N)ot infrequently, it is a question of a thoughtless or heartless parent who is willing to profit from the labors of tender childhood."

While the participation of children and youth in agrarian economies is essential for its viability, there is also evidence that child labor was useful in industrial settings as well, useful to manufacturers who needed a cheap supply of labor, and useful to families, who required the earnings of their children to make ends meet. The wage-labor system, the most distinguishing aspect of capitalism (Dobb, 1947), having eroded apprenticeship, created as a consequence an unbound, mobile, and inexpensive pool of young laborers, "who left school in order to take up jobs in newly expanded or developed industries" (Katz & Davey, 1978, p. 93). According to Kett (1977, p. 146) "During these initial phases industries had a consuming appetite for teenage laborers. Data compiled . . . indicates that the same patterns often prevailed after the introduction of high speed machinery in the more advanced stages of industrialization" (also, Wright, 1878).

While manufacturers seemed to have employed children and youth in great numbers (Trattner, 1970), it is also the case that many working-class families

required the labor of their children for family survival. Modell, Furstenberg, and Hershberg (1976), for example, have shown that most urban families in the nineteenth century could live well only when the laboring children (of both sexes) contributed to the family income, and that most young men and women made such contributions for about seven years after first entering the work force. Carroll Wright (1882) concluded that, in Massachusetts, children under fifteen contribute between ⅛ and ⅙ of the total family earnings (fathers contributing from ¼ to ⅓ of the earnings), and that without children's assistance, the majority of workingmen's families would be in poverty or debt (also, Goldin, 1980). See Zimmerman (1936) for a review of nineteenth-century family budget studies, which attests to the often critical contribution that children and youth made to family income.

Hence the need for cheap labor, and the importance of children's contribution to family income, produced two additional sources of resistance to the enactment of compulsory education laws. The interests of manufacturers, and working-class families would not be served by the denial of labor and income, respectively. Indeed, in some cases, proponents of school reform had to phrase their arguments in such a way so as to not imply a complete elimination of child labor. Thus, writes Commissioner Thomas Stockwell (1886, p. 121, our emphasis), of Rhode Island:

> It is sometimes charged even now that to enforce the law in manufacturing localities will necessitate a practical giving up of the employment of children. If the objectors will, however, consider that but twelve weeks, or less than one-fourth of the child's time, is required by the school each year and that there is always the desire on the part of the school authorities to adapt their actions to the convenience of the employers . . . and that therefore they do not ask all the children to be discharged at once, but only such portions at a time as shall permit the whole number to service their twelve weeks, during the year, *they will see that no real basis for the objection exists*.

It should be noted that the labor force participation of blue-collar youth did not necessarily decline even in the period 1890 – 1920. According to Fuller (1983), most youth from blue-collar families remained in the labor force, at least until 1920, which suggests protracted working-class resistance to the imposition of compulsory school attendance laws.

Thus far, we have suggested that the relative ineffectiveness of compulsory legislation during the symbolic phase can be partly attributed to the resistance of agrarian communities, manufacturing interests, and working class families. Additional sources of political and ideological dispute concerning compulsion have been identified. A consensus developing in the revisionist literature is that in the face of labor strife (e.g., Brecher, 1972), increased ethnic diversity and cultural heterogeniety (Everhart, 1977; Katz, 1968), and the rapidity of social change generally, a "majoritarian mood" (Burgess, 1976, p. 202) emerged in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Centered in middle class and urban elites, the majoritarian response to the rapid transformation of the structure of society was to seek the reassertion of traditional (read evangelical Protestant) American values. Reformers looked to the schools, and to compulsory education, to create and legitimate citizens

(Meyer, & Robinson, 1975), to promote ideological unity and cultural standardization (Burgess, 1976), to promote loyalty, and domestic tranquility (Pawa, 1971), to disabuse immigrants of their inferior ideologies, and to constrain the youth of the "clamoring working class" (Katz, 1968, 1976). "Laws to control the behavior of the unorthodox in religion and the unwashed in ethnic and rural background poured from the majoritarian pen between the Civil War and World War I" (Burgess, 1976, p. 207). Marlin Bowser (1888, p. 6) school agent for Armstrong County (PA), went so far as to suggest that the school diploma be made the basis of citizenship. He lamented the indifference shown by parents and pupils for regular attendance. "They think that loafing around the country store and smoking, or running through the woods with a dog and gun, are more manly traits *than to submit to proper restraint* and become intelligent" (our emphasis). The idea, according to Tyack (1976, p. 365), was for families in divisive subgroups to "turn over their children to state schools to learn a common language, a national history, and an ideology." This was obviously not accomplished without political conflict (Tyack, 1974, Part III) and one may view the uneven progress in the enactment of compulsory legislation during the symbolic phase as a symptom of ethnic and religious resistance to the majoritarian demand for conformity and standardization (for evidence against the standardization hypothesis, see Fuller, 1983).

The symbolic phase, ending around 1890, was supplanted by what Tyack (1976) has called the "bureaucratic phase" in the enactment of compulsory legislation. During the bureaucratic phase a workable machinery of compulsion was set in place in virtually every state. Laws were amended or enacted that (1) closed loopholes, (2) extended the compulsory age limits, (3) closely monitored attendance, (4) stringently regulated the issuance of working permits, and that, perhaps most importantly, (5) coordinated the exclusion of youth from most employments with their compelled attendance upon the schools (Ensign, 1921). Stiff and extensive enforcement provisions, administered by state, rather than local agents, was a notable feature of most of this legislation.

Calling the period after 1890 the bureaucratic phase describes two related processes. The first concerns the transformation of public education into an institutional system of education that was age-graded, bureaucratically administered, hierarchically structured, and staffed by professionals (Callahan, 1962; Katz, 1976). Secondly, one also sees during this period the emergence of professional and reform organizations that were committed to the diffusion of middle-class values and who also possessed sophistication in bureaucratic technologies and faith in the corporate model of organization. According to this organizational hypothesis "one might interpret the passage of child-labor legislation and effective compulsory-attendance laws as the work of functional groups and national reform associations that combined ideological committment with bureaucratic sophistication" (Tyack, 1976, p. 375). Examples of influential organizations include the National Child Labor Committee, the National Education Association, and the greatly expanded state departments of education. In support of the organizational view, Richardson (1980) has shown that a strong predictor of the date of enactment is the date of formation of State Teachers' Associations.

TABLE 3

Proportion of Males and Females, 10 – 15, Gainfully Occupied, Selected States 1910 – 1930

	1910		*1920*		*1930*		% Decline, *1910 – 1930*[2]	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
States								
New Hampshire	10.2	7.1	4.4	2.3	1.4	1.2	−86	−83
Vermont	10.3	3.2	4.8	1.8	2.6	1.0	−75	−69
Massachusetts	11.3	8.6	10.0	7.1	2.3	2.0	−82	−77
Rhode Island	15.5	13.2	14.3	12.6	3.1	3.0	−81	−77
Connecticut	11.7	8.3	9.0	7.1	3.2	2.8	−76	−66
New York	8.4	5.5	5.5	3.9	1.9	1.3	−77	−76
New Jersey	11.0	8.0	8.3	6.9	2.2	2.4	−80	−70
Pennsylvania	15.1	7.8	6.7	4.5	2.0	2.1	−86	−74
Delaware	23.3	8.6	7.9	3.8	2.6	1.4	−88	−70
Maryland	21.1	10.2	10.0	5.0	4.7	2.5	−77	−75
Virginia	33.2	10.6	12.7	3.6	7.3	2.0	−78	−81
North Carolina	57.5	34.1	21.7	11.5	15.1	7.2	−74	79
South Carolina	58.2	45.4	28.7	20.1	23.0	13.6	−60	−70

[1]Source: Abstract of the 15th Census of the United States, 1930.
[2]Our calculations.

TABLE 4

High School Graduation, and Rate of Growth, 1870 – 1940[1]

Year	No. of Graduates	% change
1870	16	
1880	24	50
1890	44	83
1900	95	116
1910	156	64
1920	331	112
1930	667	101
1940	1221	83

[1]Source: Series H598-681, *Historical Statistics of the United States*.

Accompanying the transformation of the structure of public education was an expansion of school participation, particularly at the secondary level, and a decline in child and adolescent labor (see Tables 3 and 4). For example, between 1900 and 1930, there was a 600% increase in the number of high school graduates, a 467% increase in the percentage of total enrollment in high schools. Gainful employment for 10 – 15 year olds declined by about 75% between 1910 and 1930. Many state officials either attributed these advances to the effective operation of child-saving

legislation, or else, in the case of irregular attendance, expressed their faith that only such legislation could bring about the desired results (e.g., Campbell, 1895; Gary, 1904; Hart, 1926; Joyner, 1910; Swearingen, 1921; Watchorn, 1893).

While educational gains were extensive in the early decades of the twentieth-century, two sources of fluctuation in school participation rates are worth noting. One is that enrollments greatly swelled during periods of economic depression. This, too, was widely noted by state education officials, particularly for the depression of the early 1890s, and the Great Depression (e.g., Maryland State Board of Education, 1931; Watchurn, 1893; also Tyack, 1976). Sidney B. Hall (1833, p. 23), for example, the Superintendent of Public Instruction for Virginia, noted that the "extraordinary" increase in school enrollment for the 1932–33 session over the previous session (1931–32) was the largest increase in high school enrollment for any single session in the history of the Virginia public schools. "This increase," he writes, "was no doubt due to the general effect which the present economic disorder has had upon the enrollment in the public schools throughout the country."

Second, adolescent labor generally increased during periods of war. During World War I the scarcity of help in the munitions factories, but particularly on the farm, was a source of backsliding. In a letter to Governor Walter Edge, Pennsylvania Commissioner of Labor Lewis T. Bryant (1917) wrote that:

> Scarcity of help is unquestionably causing employers who in some instances never employed children to make use of their services. . . . The number of young men called to the colors during the past year, leaving vacant places in the industrial world . . . appear to be a determining factor in the present situation.

According to a report to the Delaware State Board of Education (Spaid, 1919, p. 51), it was noted that "Day by day the labor situation has become more acute. High school boys from many cities have spent their vacations working on the farms. The scarcity of labor has endangered school attendance . . . parents have not hesitated to take their sons from the high school, attracted by the alluring wages of the munitions factories and other war industries." Declines in Pennsylvania high school attendance was attributed to "war activities as well as to the increased demand for workers" (Wolford, 1919, p. 193), while in New Jersey, high school youth were organized into a Junior Industrial Army and, according to the Commissioner of Education (1917, p. 18), who could "doubt that if the boys and girls are doing productive work for our country and for our soldiers and sailors their human work will be as great a value to their spirits and their lives as the ordinary classroom exercises."

A more extensive assault on adolescents, and adolescence-creating legislation, was evident during World War II. According to Magee (1944, p. 100):

> The child labor standards of the various states have been under more open attack during the war than the Federal laws. . . . In 1942, in the first legislative sessions after Pearl Harbor, efforts were made to break down existing child labor laws in a number of states, but only a few enactments relaxed the standards for those under 16. . . . The legislative session of

> 1943, when forty-four legislatures were in session, told a different story. Sixty-two acts affecting the employment of minors were passed in twenty-seven states, fifty-four included some backward steps.

Backward steps included lowering standards for maximum hours, night work and a reduction of the age for working hazardous occupations. From 1940 to 1944 there was a 383% increase in the number of children found illegally employed under the Fair Labor Standards Act. From 1940 to 1943 there was a 657.7% increase in the issuance of work permits for 14 – 17-year-olds, a 762.3% increase for 14 – 15-year-olds, and a 630% increase for 16 – 17-year-olds (Magee, 1944, Table 1). High school enrollments for 15 – 17-year-olds declined 24% from 1940 – 1944 (Magee, 1944), reversing a trend of phenomenal increases in high school enrollment rates since 1900.

A SECOND APPROXIMATION

As we noted at the outset the erection of the machinery of compulsion, the expansion of secondary education, and the discovery of adolescence covary across historical time. However, under the aegis of a materialist theory of social change, we proposed that the development of the system of compulsory education (and other child-saving movements) can be seen as a by-product of the need to institute adolescence, and not the other way around. We suggested that the creation of adolescence may have served the function of relieving an economic system under stress, perhaps by insuring, through prolonged dependence on parental incomes, higher and more dependable rates of consumer expenditure. Hence, one basic assumption is that adolescence is an economic readjustment instituted to induce a higher "average propensity to consume" within the consumer class.

Average propensity to consume (APC) is a Keynesian concept that describes the ratio between income and expenditure (consumption). If the average propensity to consume were 100%, then it would mean that all income would return to the system in the form of consumption. A ratio less than 100% would indicate the amount of discretionary income that is available, while a ratio greater than 100% would indicate the extent of debt. Keynes (1935) believed that a high average propensity to consume (over 80%) was desirable to maintain high productivity and employment rates because it allows only a relatively small gap between income and consumption. A second assumption, then, is that high rates of consumption primes the productive capacity of the economy, and that the role of the "average man" in the economy is, in fact, to consume. Hence, according to Galbraith (1979, p. 39):

> The small volume of savings by the average man, and its absence among the lower-income masses, reflect faithfully the role of the individual in the planning system and the accepted view of his function. The individual serves the planning system not by supplying it with savings and the resulting capital; he serves it far more by consuming its products. On no other activity, religious, political, or moral, is he so elaborately, skillfully, and expensively instructed.

TABLE 5

Percent Change in Earnings, Prices and Commodity Output, 1970 – 1910

	Real[1] Earnings	Eastern 1 Income	Eastern 1 Percapita Income	Eastern 1 Industrial Wage	Annual 2 Earnings	Real 2 Earnings
1870 – 1874	– 7.20%	9.50%	– 3.69%	– 16.70%	– 0.75%	– 10.32%
1875 – 1879	16.78	11.36	– 0.30	6.80	10.44	0.37
1880 – 1884	14.76	35.71	18.80	9.30	15.47	24.46
1885 – 1889	2.00	9.70	3.90	0.70	1.78	10.43
1890 – 1894	2.79	17.50	10.10	– 3.70	3.90	16.28
1900 – 1904		13.60	7.49			10.50
1905 – 1910		5.90	– 5.93			– 5.60

	C.P.I.2	Eastern Commodity Prices 1	Commodity Output 1
1875 – 1879	– 14.36%	– 16.00%	21.22%
1880 – 1884	– 3.03	4.65	17.51
1885 – 1889	– 5.56	– 6.80	29.80
1890 – 1894	– 0.10	– 12.86	15.00
1895 – 1899	– 7.25	9.00	17.00
1900 – 1904		– 8.10	13.00
1905 – 1910		5.46	6.60

[1]Source: Williamson (1974)
[2]Source: Series D *Historical Statistics of the United States*

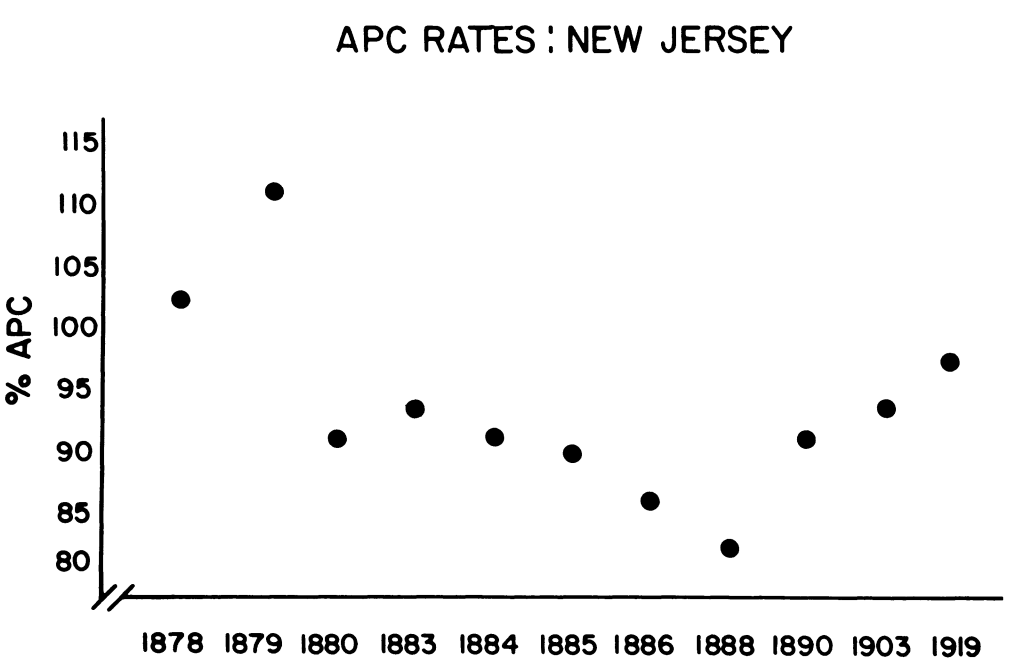
If high APC is needed to support production and employment (Keynes, 1935), then one indication of an economic system under stress would be declining APC rates, particularly when accompanied by declining rates of employment and commodity output. Two types of evidence can speak to this question. The first is to compare various indices of wage and income rates to price indices and commodity output rates. If wage rates, for example, rise faster than price indices, then we can presume that it is possible for consumers to acquire some amount of discretionary income. We can also examine the numerous family budget studies that were compiled in the several states during the nineteenth century, and calculate the ratio of income to expenditure, to arrive at an estimate of discretionary income. We have provided both types evidence here. In Table 5, for example, it can be seen that wage and income rates were indeed rising much faster than consumer and commodity indices in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, and that these trends were accompanied by declining rates of commodity output. There were also declining rates of GNP, a 66% increase in unemployment from 1880 – 1885, and a 140% rise in unemployment from 1880 – 1894 (see Williamson, 1974, Tables 4.2B, C.5).

These data suggest that participation in the economic system by producers was returning ever decreasing profits and increasing risks. This situation was noted even by contemporary observers, such as Albert Bolles (1893, p. 1G – 3G), Chief of the Pennsylvania Bureau of Industrial Statistics. He writes:

> In the general downward course of prices which has been going on for many years, the price of labor has not fallen in proportion. It has, therefore, taken a constantly increasing share of the sum obtained for the product, leaving a smaller proportion for the manufacturer. . . . The low prices, coupled with diminished output, which has the effect of increasing the cost of production so that almost everywhere it is carried on at a loss, causes the producers . . . to consider himself exceptionally fortunate if he sells his products for their cost of production. . . . Suppose production has fallen off 10%, what does it mean? . . . (T)his means that 10% of the laborers . . . are at present not required, or not employed; but if they are not, then their power to purchase and consume is gone.

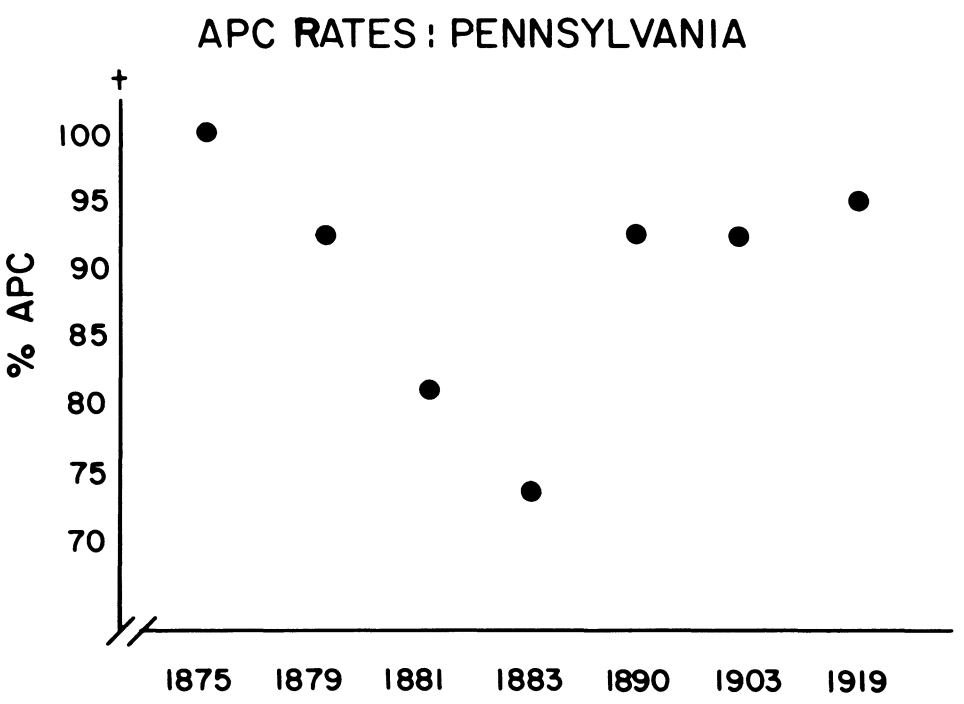
Figures 1 – 3 report trends in APC rates that were calculated from the available family budget studies in three states. What is interesting to note in these trends is that for the northern industrial states (New Jersey and Pennsylvania) there were progressive declines in APC rates in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, with increases evident well before the turn of the century. In North Carolina, however, the available evidence suggests that APC rates were increasing during the periods when the rates were decreasing in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. In addition, declines in APC rates were not evident in North Carolina until the turn of the century, with an increase not evident until 1919.

We hypothesize that this regional variation in the historical timing of the decline and rebound of APC rates is related to the regional variation in the enactment and enforcement of compulsory education, and other child-saving measures. When APC rates are seen to decline there is pressure to increase the propensity to consume within the consumer class. The state-appropriation of youth leisure, through child-saving legislation, is an economic nostrum (we argue) that brings this about. Youth are excluded from the labor force (which increases both the number of positions available to adult workers and the wage rate) and their dependency upon parental incomes is mandated. This, we conjecture, requires higher rates of dependable consumer expenditure, which is subsequently reflected in higher APC rates. The fact that North Carolina did not begin the process of enacting adolescence-creating legislation until the first two decades of the twentieth century reflects the fact that not only was the pace of industrial development much slower in the South than in the North, but also that North Carolina did not show the requisite declining APC rates (which serves as the motivation for instituting adolescence) until that time. Thus, Northern states, because they entered advanced stages of industrial capitalism much sooner than did Southern states, had a greater need to insure a high propensity to consume. They thus tended to enact adolescence-creating legislation much sooner than did states like North Carolina. However, when North Carolina showed declining rates of APC, adolescence-creating legislation soon followed.



1878: First Annual Report of the N.J. Statistics of Labor and Industries
1878: Second Annual Report
1878: Third Annual Report
1878: Fourth Annual Report
1878: Sixth Annual Report
1878: Eighth Annual Report
1878: Ninth Annual Report
1888: Eleventh Annual Report
1890: Calculated from Tables II and III, in Berridge, Winslow and Flinn (1925)
1903: Eighteenth Annual Report of the U.S. Commissioner of Labor
1919: Cost of living in the United States, Bulletin 357, Bureau of Labor Statistics

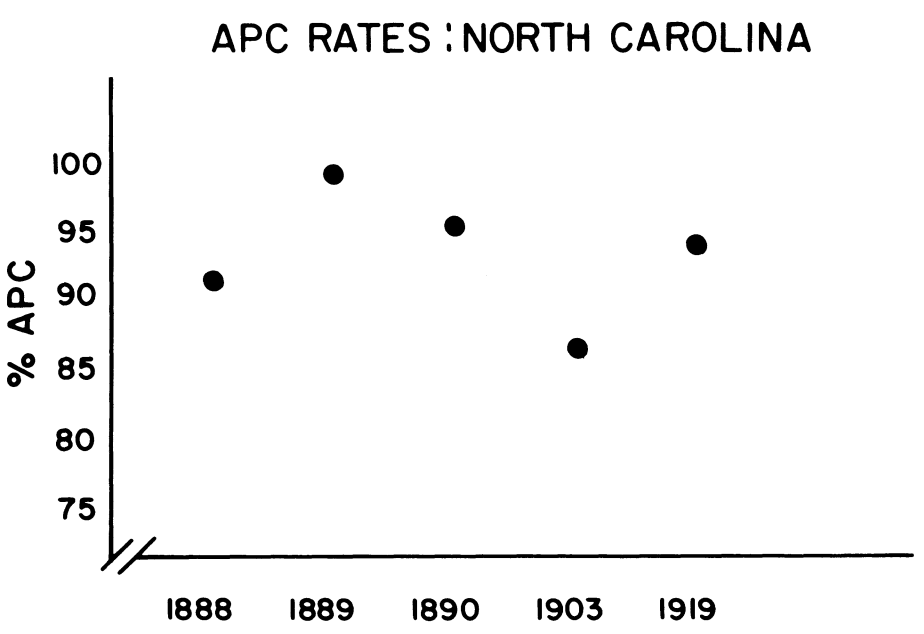
Three questions for the theory comes immediately to mind, however. (1) When consumption decreases, wouldn't it be more in the interests of the economic order to keep young people employed at lower wage scales, thereby maximizing profit margins? (2) Why would employers want to increase the number of positions extended to adult-wage earners (with the concomitant increase in wage rates) during periods of declining APC? (3) Why would states take young people out of the labor pool to increase APC given the sizeable proportion of family income that adolescents contribute? These are surely complex questions that will defy adequate treatment here. The following points, however, can be made. Declining APC rates indicates the build-up of (aggregate) discretionary income in the consumer class. And the effect of pervasive adolescent labor is twofold: it permits a family to have multiple sources of income (and thereby contribute to the increase of discretionary



1875: Third Report of the PA Bureau of Industrial Statistics
1879: Seventh Report of the Bureau of Industrial Statistics
1881: Ninth Report of the Bureau of Industrial Statistics
1883: Tenth Report of the Bureau of Industrial Statistics
1890: Tables II and III, Berridge, Winslow and Flinn (1925)
1903: Eighth Annual Report of the U.S. Commissioner of Labor
1919: Cost of Living in the United States, Bulletin 357, Bureau of Labor Statistics

income), and it also has the effect of surpressing wage rates generally. Since the production system cannot guarantee that consumers will actually expend their discretionary income in the form of increased consumer expenditure, and thereby increase producer profits, it becomes incumbent upon the production system to compel expenditure. To this end the creation of adolescence offers certain attractions. By excluding youth from the workplace, you assure that every family will have at least one adult-wage earner, who now will be paid at a higher wage rate. It also ensures that, at least for a time, the excluded youth will be dependent on the higher adult wage. The effect of this is to increase the propensity to consume within the family, since more individuals are now dependent upon only a single source of income. And with increased consumption the productive capacity of the economic system is thereby stimulated, increasing producer profits. So, in a sense, all three questions find their answer in this process.

Admittedly, the historical record rarely provides unimpeachable data, and the evidence, at this point, is still largely impressionistic. However, we believe that



1888: Second Annual Report of N.C. Bureau of Labor Statistics
1889: Third Annual Report
1890: Tables II and III, Berridge, Winslow and Flinn (1925)
1903: Eighteenth Annual Report of the U.S. Commissioner of Labor
1919: Cost of Living in the United States, Bulletin 357, Bureau of Labor Statistics

there is at least *prima facie* evidence to support further investigation into our principle hypothesis, that adolescence is best understood as the state-appropriation of youth leisure, that the imposition of this status was effected largely through the enactment of compulsory education, and that the reason for enacting this legislation was to increase the average propensity to consume within the population. We will now more formally specify the role of adolescents in a capitalist economy before attempting to reconstruct the history of compulsory education in terms of the creation of adolescence.

A THIRD APPROXIMATION

In our view, adolescence represents a relation of production that is grounded in the economic structure of society. Production relations, in Marxian theory, are relations of effective power over persons or productive forces (Cohen, 1978). We may think of production relations as involving a type of ownership. "To own an object is to employ a range of rights [privileges, powers, immunities] with respect to the use and situation of that object. . . . Typical ownership rights are: the right to

use an object *o*; the right to income generated by the use of *o*; the right to prevent others from using *o*; the right to destroy *o*; the right to transfer *o*; etc." (Cohen, 1978, p. 63). Relations of production permit the distribution of agents into classes (Poulantzas, 1973). That is, "A person's class is established by nothing but his objective place in the network of ownership relations. . . . His consciousness, culture, and politics do not enter the *definition* of his class position" (Cohen, 1978, p. 73, his emphasis).

This structural view of class determination, which identifies class as a location within a network of production relations, protects the Marxian thesis that class position conditions culture and consciousness, but is not conditioned by it (Cohen, 1978). What is not included in this definition of class is the canonic Marxian view that the determinant of social classes is effective private property in the means of production. Rather, according to Dahrendorf (1959, p. 136), "The authority structure of entire societies as well as particular institutional orders within societies . . . is the structural determinant of class formation and class conflict." Classes are hence defined in terms of relations of authority, by participation in or exclusion from the exercise of authority. While Marx also believed that the relations of production constituted authority relations, this was only so because the exercise of authority was linked to private property. However, Dahrendorf (1959) has shown that property relations are but one type of authority relation, that authority relations are analytically independent of economic conditions, and that authority is the only general social relation. Hence, according to Dahrendorf (1959) "It follows from this that an individual becomes a member of a class by playing a social role relevant from the point of view of authority" (p. 149), and that "class conflict results from the distribution of authority in social organizations" (148).

Two additional points are of moment regarding this notion of class. The first is that class is a category for understanding the dynamics of social conflict. "Inasmuch as any theory of class is a theory of structural change by social conflict, the assumption of a conflict between classes is part of the definition of classes". (Dahrendorf, 1959, p. 134). This is not to imply that classes are always antagonistic or tend toward acute, violent conflict, the Marxian "class struggle". But it *does* allow for the development of mechanisms by which to "institutionalize" conflict. According to Dahrendorf (1959) conflicting classes (1) may coexist, say, as a result of an "armistice", (2) effect structural change through negotiation and compromise, (3) formalize conflict through parliaments or industrial negotiation bodies. Indeed, "conflict may assume the form of civil war, or of parliamentary debate, or a strike, or of a well-regulated negotiation, all of which are ". . . essentially motivated by the same type of social relationship and are but different manifestations of an identical force" (Dahrendorf, 1959, p. 135).

The second point is that class position is not the result, as Marx would have it, of family origin or the class position of one's parents. Rather, role allocation is largely institutionalized through the principal ideological apparatus of the state, the schools (Poulantzas 1973). In Poulantzas' theory class positions are created and reproduced by the system of production, with these class positions existing independently of the personnel who are allocated to occupy them. Hence, "while it is true

that agents themselves must be reproduced—"'trained' and 'subjected'"—in order to occupy certain places, it is equally true that the distribution of agents does not depend on their choices or aspirations but on the very reproduction of their positions" (Poulantzas, 1973, p. 50; also, Dahrendorf, 1959).

With this view of classes and class conflict, and the role allocation function of schooling, we are now in a position to offer a theoretical interpretation of the historical record offered in Part III, and contribute to the new understanding of the emergence of adolescence that was promised in Part I.

TOWARD AN INTERPRETATION

On the basis of the theoretical perspective outlined above we can now view the emergence of adolescence in terms of class formation. Adolescents become members of a class by ". . . playing a social role relevant from the point of view of authority" (Dahrendorf, 1959, p. 149). The evolution of an effective machinery of compulsion has the effect of locating adolescents within a structure of authority relations, in order to make their behavior more manageable, and their deployment within the economic sphere more flexible (see below). To this end the state abrogates parental prerogatives, grants the power of *loco parentis* to its ideological apparatus (the schools), and enforces segregation from adult institutions. While this development is traditionally interpreted as the triumph of child welfare reform, and as the enlightened recognition of the "natural" distinction between stages of childhood and youth, we are inclined to agree with Rothman (1971, p. 377) that this development does not rule out the theme of the "community warring on its young", and that the exploration of this theme may require us to question the notion that innovation equals reform.

How might we interpret the development of compulsory legislation from the symbolic to the bureaucratic phase? We can view this development as the progressive positioning of young people into a submissive location within the structure of authority relations in the system of production. This development was halting because of the political and ideological resistance that it engendered. Economic power is not identical to political power (Dahrendorf, 1959). The role of the state is to "insure the continuity and cohesion of the entire social formation through its control of the repressive and ideological apparatuses, [and] to ensure the necessary compromise between factions of the dominant class" (Shapiro, 1980, p. 325, 327). While the state can be expected to intervene, ultimately, on behalf of the dominant economic interests (to preserve cohesion of the social formation), the state is not "a simple appendage-reflection of the economy" (Poulantzas, 1974, p. 368). It is not manipulated at will by interests of the dominant groups, but is itself a "relatively autonomous" entity. "The policies of the state at least in the short run, may indeed diverge from the interests of the dominant economic classes. In addition, the conflict among the dominant classes themselves requires a state that operates with some degree of autonomy or independence" (Shapiro, 1950, p. 326). Given the range of political and ideological resistence to the idea of state-enforced compulsion evident until 1890, the state could do little more than to arrange for *symbolic* demonstrations

of its power. Hence laws were promulgated without sufficient enforcement provisions, and often with provisions and exclusions that favored certain economic factions. During the *bureaucratic* phase, however, with the emergence and backing of national reform organizations, more assertive state policy is evident, with the enactment of legislation that effectively and systematically excluded youth from adult roles, deprived them of adult status, and prolonged their dependency well into the teen-age years. We would argue that this state action was required to insure the continuity and cohesion of the "social formation".

We can (partly) address the question of how the continuity of the social formation is favored through the creation of adolescence by addressing this question: in what sense is adolescence a social class? As an authority relation, does it exist in the economic or political sphere? According to Dahrendorf (1959, p. 139), classes are neither primarily nor at all economic groupings. "If we define classes by relations of authority, it is, *ipso facto* evident that "economic classes," i.e., classes within economic organizations, are but a special case of the phenomenon of class. Furthermore, even in the sphere of industrial production, it is not really economic factors that give rise to class formation, but a certain type of social relation which we have tried to comprehend in the notion of authority." Social power, or authority relations within the political system, are analytically independent of authority relations within the economic sphere, and the interrelationship between these two associations must be a matter of empirical research (Dahrendorf, 1959). In our view adolescence, as a social formation, lies at the intersection of state power and industrial production. That is, the state constitutes adolescence as a social class to participate in a unique way in the system of production, i.e., in the economic sphere. Adolescents participate in the economic sphere by their *leisure*. By their prolonged and state enforced dependence on parental incomes we hypothesize that higher rates of consumer expenditures are more dependably assured. This, as a result, serves to prime the productive capacity of the economy. The system of production is also served by state power in the sense that adolescence-creating legislation reflects the manipulation of the availability of labor reserves. Hence, during periods of labor scarcity assaults on adolescence are tolerated (e.g., Magee, 1944). In periods of labor abundance, adolescence can even be extended by manipulating credentialling requirements for occupations which keeps youth in schools and off the labor market (e.g., Braverman, 1974).

But why would the state enact compulsory legislation when there is evidence that school enrollment rates were already quite high prior to their enactment? In our view the problem was not so much with *enrollment* but with *irregular attendance*. Being enrolled in school is not the same thing as actually attending it. Indeed, average daily attendance rates lagged substantially behind enrollment rates during the symbolic phase and is a source of considerable commentary in the primary literature. As indicated above, compulsory laws were effected to constrain the options and behavior of adolescents, to make their deployment within the economic sphere more manageable. Hence, only a bureaucratically-administered system of compulsion could insure that adolescents enroll *and* attend school, and thereby

"submit to the proper restraint" and be located within the matrix of authority relations within the culture. Under this interpretation, schooling does more than allocate personnel to the various class positions. To participate in schooling is to define the location of the class position for adolescents. Schools are the locus of confinement for deployment within the economic sphere (see Foucault, 1973, 1979).

How does this view help us understand regional variations in the date of enactment of compulsory legislation? According to Poulantzas (1973, p. 33) "a concrete society at a given moment of time is composed of several modes and forms of production which coexist in it in combination." In the industrial North, where the pace of development of industrial capitalism was more rapid, the need to institute adolescence and thereby manage consumer expenditure and the availability of labor reserves would be more pressing. In the agrarian South, however, (and in rural northern states, like Delaware), where the pace of industrial development was slower, and where youth still played important farming roles, the need for compulsion was less apparent. Hence we would conjecture that capitalist economies in advanced stages of industrialization have the greatest need for the institution of adolescence, than is the case with primarily agrarian economies.

Finally, how can we understand adolescence as a social conflict group, a meaning we imply by our reference to adolescence as a social class? Let us further speculate that conflict between adolescents, as constituents of a social class, and the associations of authority within the culture, have been "institutionalized," and that evidence of conflict can be found in elements of youth culture: in the adoption of distinct styles of dress, music, and verbal expression; in generational conflict; in rejection of parental values; in drug experimentation and sexual promiscuity; in high school drop-out and youth runaway rates; in adolescent psychopathology, as particularly reflected in teenage suicide rates. These features of adolescence represent a reaction against the culture-wide imposition of childhood. According to Katz and Davey (1978, p. 117) ". . . perhaps the origins of behavior we have come to associate with adolescence lay not in puberty but in the reaction to dependency, in the various new conflicts between biological maturity and cultural childhood that 19th century society inflicted upon its youth."

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

We have attempted to offer a theoretical perspective on why American society has "inflicted" the status of adolescence on its youth. In our view the history of the development of child-saving legislation is the history of the origins of adolescence. By state compulsion adolescents were progressively positioned into a submissive location within the structure of authority relations within the culture, a position that restricted their options, compelled their dependence, and made their deployment within the economic sphere more manageable. Adolescents participate in the system of production through their leisure, which is economically beneficial (we conjecture) to the extent that higher rates of consumer expenditure are assured, and to the

extent that it relieves an over burdened labor market. Future research will need to more fully attend to these latter hypotheses.

In conclusion, we reiterate our view that the institutionalization of adolescence was not a simple by-product of the cultural need to establish a (hierarchial, bureaucratically-administered) system of compulsory public education. Rather, compulsory education was developed to effect adolescence within American culture. In this light, the recent (e.g., Stedman & Smith, 1983) and historical criticism (Callahan, 1962; Cremin, 1961; Ravitch, 1983) of public secondary education, the "cycles of reaction and reform" (Mirel & Angus, this issue) that have characterized educational movements throughout this century, largely miss the point if they continue to mistake the primary purpose of secondary education as the transmission of intellectual skills. Its primary purpose is to manipulate the deployment of youth within the economic sphere, and to serve as the locus of confinement within the structure of authority relations in the culture.

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[1]The data in Figure 1 (1878 – 1888) were calculated from the First, Second, Third, Fourth, Sixth, Eighth, Ninth, and Eleventh Annual Report, respectively, of the New Jersey Bureau of Statistics of Labor and Industries. The data in Figure 2 (1875 – 1883) is from the Third, Seventh, Ninth, and Tenth Report of the Pennsylvania Bureau of Industrial Statistics. The data in Figure 3 (1888 – 89) is from the Second and Third Annual Report of the North Carolina Bureau of Labor Statistics. For all three states the 1890 figures were calculated from Tables II and III, in Berridge, Winslow and Flinn (1925). The 1903 data is from the Eighteenth Annual Report of the U.S. Commissioner of Labor. The 1919 data is from Bulletin 357, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

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