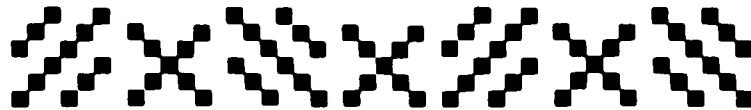


Viewpoints and Morale of Urban High School Students during World War II—Indianapolis as a Case Study

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Even the young, who did not experience the perils of battle, design the grand strategy, or speed the production of factories, had to face the challenge of war. The date was December 8, 1941. More quietly than usual, students in Indianapolis shuffled into their high school auditoriums to hear President Franklin D. Roosevelt's radio speech. They listened attentively as he asked Congress to recognize what by then to most Americans seemed plain—war with Japan! At the time when these adolescents were preparing to greet maturity, at the moment when "we . . . should be about to live," world war inescapably had become "the outstanding fact" of their lives.¹

Not all adolescents responded to the disorder of war in socially acceptable ways. Eventually, revelations of juvenile delinquency awakened many adults to tensions young people faced.² In early 1944 social workers, youth leaders, correctional authorities, and other interested persons from Indiana assem-

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¹ Emmerich Manual Technical High School, Indianapolis, *The Booster Magazine*, January, 1941; Shortridge High School, Indianapolis, *Shortridge Daily Echo*, April 13, 1942.

² For instances of the awakening among adults, see Josephine D. Abbott, "What of Youth in Wartime," *Survey Midmonthly*, LXXIX (October, 1943), 265; Roy Sorenson, "Wartime Recreation for Adolescents," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, CCXXXVI (November, 1944), 148; Caroline E. Zachry, "Customary Stresses and Strains of Adolescence," *ibid.*, 136; Ernest R. Groves and Gladys H. Groves, "The Social Background of Wartime Adolescents," *ibid.*, 27; Charlotte Towle, "The Effect of the War Upon Children," *Social Service Review*, XVII (June, 1943), 149-50; Arnold A. Fenton, "American Children: Problem in Rehabilitation," *Better Homes and Gardens*, XXIV (January, 1946), 44; Minutes of Staff Meeting, February 5, 1944, p. 1, Youth File, Records Relating to Youth Problems 1941-45, Records of the Recreation Division, Records of the Office of Community War Services, RG 215 (National Archives, Washington, D.C.).

bled at Purdue University. After wide-ranging deliberations, they concluded that the children most affected by the war were those of high school age. Just when allied military success had greatly reduced the threat of Axis victory, and shortly before the Normandy invasion and Soviet advances in the east would almost assure the final conquest of Germany, the conferees worried that adolescents were suffering major setbacks on the home front.³

The sensationalism surrounding juvenile delinquency concealed a more common yet significant malaise, one that, like delinquency, surmounted class and ethnic barriers. For while only a small proportion of adolescents lapsed into delinquency, some authorities argued that the problem was only symptomatic of more widespread dissatisfaction—of low morale—among large numbers of teen-age youth.⁴

Although the question of morale was important during the war, it did not become generally a serious problem.⁵ Most people benefitted psychologically from the feeling of national unity, from the enjoyment and anticipation of the fruits of wartime prosperity, and probably even more from the satisfac-

³ *A Report of a Conference on Juvenile Delinquency*, n.p., n.d., 29 (Indiana Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis).

⁴ Although only a scant 1 to 2 percent of adolescents participated in delinquent acts, juvenile delinquency received enormous attention. According to one count, in the first six months of 1943 magazines saturated the country with 1,200 articles on the problem. Summary of Minutes of Conference on Juvenile Delinquency, August 3, 1943, p. 2, Juvenile Delinquency File, General Records 1941-45, Records of the Office of the Director, RG 215. People agreed it was a major social problem of the time. There was little agreement on causes of errant behavior, and the extent of the problem could easily be exaggerated; what is conclusive is that arrests of juveniles increased dramatically during the war. In Indianapolis they jumped from 807 in 1941 to 2,019 in 1943. United States Children's Bureau, "Preliminary Statement: Juvenile-Court Statistics, 1944," p. 1, chart, Juvenile Delinquency 1944-46 File, Records Relating to Juvenile Delinquency 1942-46, RG 215. While delinquent behavior may have been in part a response to low morale, a cause-and-effect relationship is difficult to confirm. For views that delinquency reflected low morale, see Robert J. Havighurst and Stephen M. Corey, "The Morale of High-School Youth," *School Review*, L (May, 1942), 321-23; Milton Lessner, "Controlling War-Time Juvenile Delinquency," *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, XXXV (November-December, 1944), 245; Groves and Groves, "Social Background," 29-30. The converse hypothesis, that delinquency contributed to low morale, is far more tenuous. Because of this and because of the low percentage of adolescents involved, the relationship of low morale to delinquency receives no further treatment in this essay. For additional analysis of this important problem in a more comprehensive view of youth, see Richard M. Ugland, "The Adolescent Experience during World War II: Indianapolis as a Case Study" (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Indiana University, 1977), 219-86.

⁵ For several views of morale and its importance, see Goodwin Watson, ed., *Civilian Morale; Second Yearbook of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues* (Boston, 1942).

tion and enhanced sense of self-worth that derived from involvement in the war effort.⁶ Not surprisingly, historians have emphasized the impressive unity and patriotism they have noted among Americans on the home front. According to an early study by Isaac Kandel, "there was at no time any fear about the morale or the patriotism of the American people" Popular accounts of the home front by Richard Lingeman and Geoffrey Perrett announced that "the whole country [was] . . . bursting out in a springtime of patriotism" and that "the country had plunged into a spontaneous outpouring of patriotic emotion." Academic writers, while more reserved, have proclaimed "the spirit of unity," "determination and unity," and "a high degree of unity and wartime enthusiasm" on the home front.⁷

Yet these findings can lead to exaggeration or oversimplification of cohesion and enthusiasm during World War II—particularly among high school students. The variegated responses of students to "the outstanding fact" in their lives counsels circumspection. Left at best with a reservist role in mobilization, many adolescents did not receive the satisfactions or exhibit the enthusiasm adults drew from the war effort. Although students faced and reacted to many wartime experiences in ways similar to adults, they were kept at the edge of this great historical event by their ill-defined status between child and adult; adolescence was akin to minority group status, with incomplete civil rights and lack of access to the full range of American life.

In spite of well-defined enemies and ample appeals to patriotism, accustomed features of adolescence such as uneasiness,

⁶ See John Morton Blum, *V Was for Victory: Politics and American Culture During World War II* (New York, 1976), 9, 90, 92; Richard Polenberg, *War and Society: The United States, 1941-1945* (Philadelphia, 1972), 132. For a soldier's view of home front conditions, see James Jones, *WWII* (New York, 1975), 150-52.

⁷ I.L. Kandel, *The Impact of the War Upon American Education* (Chapel Hill, 1948), 5; Richard R. Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On? The American Home Front, 1941-1945* (New York, 1970), 73; Geoffrey Perrett, *Days of Sadness, Years of Triumph: The American People, 1939-1945* (New York, 1973), 33. The professional scholars quoted are James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom* (New York, 1970), 176; Arthur S. Link, *American Epoch: A History of the United States Since the 1890's* (New York, 1955), 525; and Richard S. Kirkendall, *The United States, 1929-1945: Years of Crisis and Change* (New York, 1974), 220. See also Allan Nevins, "How We Felt About the War," in Jack Goodman, ed., *While You Were Gone: A Report on Wartime Life in the United States* (New York, 1946), 8, 11; Alonzo L. Hamby, *The Imperial Years: The United States Since 1939* (New York, 1976), 56, 85-86; Polenberg, *War and Society*, 131-32; Blum, *V Was for Victory*, 7-8.

uncertainty, and uninvolvedness flourished among students throughout the war. As early as March, 1942, a representative of the national YWCA voiced a concern that others would come to share. "The boys and girls whose wartime nervous excitement can find no useful outlet," she warned, "will become a dispossessed generation that may once more lose the peace." Four years later the federal Office of Community War Services concluded that "while the rest of the world mobilized its resources and swung into the grim business of war, youth too often was the 'forgotten man'."⁸ If not neglected, students were largely restricted to a narrow range of activities. Fewer opportunities were available for them to contribute to the common cause, to be an integral part of the response to national emergency; hence, compared to others in society their opportunities for self-enhancement were fewer. This had long been true in American life. In a war that demanded so much from other elements in society, the discrepancy was magnified. During mobilization, one of society's recent creations—the adolescent itself—proved its resilience.

The first two decades of the twentieth century, according to historian Joseph Kett, witnessed "the invention of the adolescent, the youth whose social definition—and indeed, whose whole being—was determined by a biological process of maturation." Moreover "adolescence was essentially a conception of behavior imposed on youth, rather than an empirical assessment of the way in which young people actually behaved. The architects of adolescence used biology and psychology . . . to justify the promotion among young people of norms of behavior that were freighted with middle-class values."⁹ Accompanying these intellectual developments and fortifying their middle-class values were social movements that accelerated the segregation of youth within the new urban-industrial culture: compulsory education, prohibitions on child labor, and special legal procedures embodied in the juvenile court. Legislation associated with these movements conferred a more precise chronolog-

⁸ Anne L. New, "Senior Service Scouts," *Recreation*, XXXV (March, 1942), 737; Office of Community War Services, *Teamwork in Community Services 1941-46: A Demonstration in Federal, State, and Local Cooperation* (Washington, D.C., 1946), 33.

⁹ Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York, 1977), 243. See also John and Virginia Demos, "Adolescence in Historical Perspective," in Michael Gordon, ed., *The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective* (New York, 1971), 210.

ical definition on adolescence.¹⁰ Age grouping had become a powerful factor in the social lives of teen-age youth.

By 1940, particularly in urban areas, the cultural determinants of adolescence, and along with them the institutional sway of the high school, set students apart.¹¹ Within the group itself the influence of such factors as race, class, religion, and ethnicity served to differentiate youth, as they did the members of other social groups such as women and the elderly. Student viewpoints and morale were not homogeneous, and how much the differences among them derived from the above variables remains beyond the scope of the present analysis. But youth can be defined as a social group largely because of affiliation with the high school and age itself. Both of these factors identified adolescents as deserving of special treatment, helped shape adult expectations of them, and contributed to their sometimes special perspective on issues.¹² Age designations conditioned their lives and brought diverse individuals together to share common experiences.

¹⁰ David Bakan, "Adolescence in America: From Idea to Social Fact," *Daedalus*, C (Fall, 1971), 980-81. On the middle-class origins of one of these movements, definition and control of delinquency, see Anthony M. Platt, *The Child Savers: The Invention of Delinquency* (Chicago, 1969).

¹¹ Students were conspicuous largely because of the great expansion of high school enrollment in the 1920s and 1930s that by 1940 placed 79.3 percent of the nation's fourteen- to seventeen-year-olds in public and private high schools. In Indianapolis the figure was 84 percent. United States Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940 Population*, Vol. II *Characteristics of the Population* (Washington, D.C., 1943), Part I, p. 11; *ibid.*, Part II, pp. 813, 815. See Kett, *Rites of Passage*, 238, 243, 254, 269; Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture* (New York, 1929), especially 211-222; Talcott Parsons, "Age and Sex in the Social Structure of the United States," *American Sociological Review*, VII (October, 1942), 605-616; Caroline M. Tryon, "The Adolescent Peer Culture," in *The Forty-Third Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education Part I: Adolescence* (Chicago, 1944), 217-39. For a sociological definition of adolescence, see August B. Hollingshead, *Elmtown's Youth: The Impact of Social Classes on Adolescents* (New York, 1949), 6-7. Rural youth were more apt to have responsible work roles and less contact with peers than urban adolescents. See Demos and Demos, "Adolescence in Historical Perspective," 216-18; Glen H. Elder, Jr., *Children of the Great Depression: Social Change in Life Experience* (Chicago, 1974), 71; Robert C. Bealer and Fern K. Willits, "Rural Youth: A Case Study in the Rebelliousness of Adolescents," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, CCCXXXVIII (November, 1961), 65.

¹² Hollingshead observed that youth who withdrew from high school were viewed by the adult community as young adults, with responsibility for their actions, while those of the same age in high school, the adolescents, were regarded as dependent children. Hollingshead, *Elmtown's Youth*, 389. Characteristics of the age group often flowed easily through class barriers. "Even though variations do exist in the behavior of youth," David Gottlieb and Charles Ramsey wrote, "it is possible to identify a number of areas where the actions of adolescents are distinct in style from those of other age groups. In these situations the norm of acceptance or preference is set for the most part by

Almost as a reflection of their lesser social status, adolescents have remained largely hidden from historical inquiry. Bereft of positions of command, they leave little conventional historical debris. As with other social groups that tend to be historically mute, historians must recognize that not all questions regarding adolescents can be addressed. Some remain beyond reach.

To approach the group's interests and unsettled thought requires the historian to examine novel sources. Student publications permit some inner views of the world of high school students. Although possessed of weaknesses, they reveal much about the wartime pressures and confusions among young people. Especially in student newspapers, though edited with the counsel of faculty advisers, youth expressed opinions, voiced the concerns of peers, and directed attention to matters, petty and grand, relevant to their lives.¹³ They also provided an information link between adults and students who spent so much of the day in different milieus. One adviser of student journalists proclaimed that it "is substantially the fact, that only the student publications remain as lines of mass communication with the adults of your city."¹⁴

The latter comment signals the pitfalls inherent in the student newspaper as a historical source. Aware that newspa-

members of the adolescent group and deviation from those standards is likely to bring about peer-imposed sanctions." David Gottlieb and Charles Ramsey, *The American Adolescent* (Homewood, Ill., 1964), 33. In the matter of clothing, for example, a student of the subject concluded that the problem of cost paled before the desire to emulate mainstream tastes. Similar styles constituted "virtually a uniform" among all classes of high school girls. See Sylvia S. Silverman, *Clothing and Appearance* (*Columbia University Contributions to Education*, No. 912, New York, 1945), 49. Other notable examples of the vast literature on teen-age youth as a social group include the issue entitled "Teen-Age Culture," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, CCCXXXVIII (November, 1961); James S. Coleman, *The Adolescent Society: The Social Life of the Teenager and Its Impact on Education* (New York, 1961); F. Musgrove, *Youth and the Social Order* (Bloomington, Ind., 1965); Hans Sebald, *Adolescence: A Sociological Analysis* (New York, 1968); Cyril S. Smith, *Adolescence: An Introduction to the Problems of Order and the Opportunities for Continuity Presented by Adolescence in Britain* (London, 1968), especially 17-35. An excellent discussion of bibliography is provided by David Gottlieb and Jon Reeves, *Adolescent Behavior in Urban Areas* (New York, 1963).

¹³ Publications of the seven Indianapolis public high schools in the period 1939 to 1945 were analyzed. The schools were Arsenal, Attucks (the black high school, where nearly all issues of the student newspaper are missing), Broad Ripple, Howe, Manual, Shortridge, and Washington. Shortridge had a daily paper, one of the very few in the nation, Arsenal's was weekly, and others were biweekly.

¹⁴ R.R. Maplesden, "Why Student Publications Have Public Influence," *Scholastic Editor*, XXII (October, 1942), 9.

pers mirrored the group's behavior and attitudes, student journalists might have been inclined, even if unconsciously, to try to present themselves in a favorable light. Moreover, the adult influence presents problems. Administrative censorship certainly precluded, for example, adverse comment on school and staff and direct criticism of government and community. These publications, then, do not lend themselves to all questions and must be used with care. Still, their important limitations seem to make all the more noteworthy the not infrequent expressions of dissatisfaction that appear in student papers.

Such expressions creep in because the student press remained largely a creation of students, even if only select ones. Competition for staff positions could be fierce. The winners probably were among the most able and acute observers and expositors of student behavior and attitudes. They no doubt knew their peers at least as well as the average student did and better than nearly all adult observers. Nevertheless, it must be recognized that distortion of the entire group's views might result because the papers were written by a small and generally "elite" group of students. Because public high schools were inclined to reflect middle-class values and standards and because students over sixteen—those not required to attend—were disproportionately middle class, one would expect a middle-class outlook, difficult to define and variable as it might be, to prevail in these newspapers.¹⁵ But if student journalists embodied middle-class characteristics and if they now and then catered to social elites, the desire to obtain a large circulation kept them from editing and speaking for the sole interest of any one segment of student society. At any rate, many other students besides staff journalists contributed commentary and a range of reports to each school paper. War-related issues that affected students in similar ways regardless of class or clique affiliation were of course unavoidable and irresistible to the high school reporters.

¹⁵ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 186; Robert J. Havighurst and Dorothy Neubauer, "Community Factors in Relation to Character Formation," in Robert J. Havighurst and Hilda Taba, eds., *Adolescent Character and Personality* (New York, 1949), 46; Jessie Bernard, "Teen-Age Culture: An Overview," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, CCCXXXVIII (November, 1961), 2. The middle-class characteristic probably intensified in Indianapolis during the war. It is likely that most of the thousands of students who dropped out of school to take jobs were from lower income families; vocational schools suffered severe drops in enrollment in the city from 1940 to 1944, with Manual High School having the sharpest decline, 37 percent. High School Enrollment Data Forms (Indianapolis Public Schools Administration, Indianapolis Education Center).

Weaknesses intrinsic to student sources are alleviated when the historian understands they do not stand alone as evidence. Polls of student opinion and studies by wartime journalists, educators, and social scientists complement or corroborate material in the student press, and they are essential to the task at hand. Together, the documentation reveals the viewpoints and morale of an important segment of American society.

Judging from the flurry of comments in the high school press, most adolescents in Indianapolis, like their elders, yearned for neutrality when war erupted in Europe in 1939. They rejoiced that the United States remained aloof from the fighting. In a virtual shout from the printed page, a boy at Washington High School thundered: "War!!—Three little letters, the symbol of what may be the destruction of civilization. . . . We do not want war! Who does?" Such outbursts were not unusual. A "spirit of peace" permeated school halls. "It is up to us, the youths of America, students that we are," this same boy continued, "to foster and perpetuate this spirit." The student made this plea: "Nothing has ever come out of war but misery, weariness, hate, and oppression, the seeds for other wars. . . . Let us believe in peace—let us live!!!!"¹⁶

If writing punctuated by exclamation points accompanied notice of the war in Europe, in calmer moments, apparently unaware of the effects of increased defense expenditures, adolescents argued that war endangered the economic health of the nation. Some young people had an almost apocalyptic vision of how the war would affect their country. According to the essayist who received honorable mention in a 1940 contest, "Youth treads the daily paths of existence, unconscious of the treacherous pitfalls of betrayed trust that will fling it to the depths of war and its hideous sequels, economic disaster, corruption, spiritual collapse, ruin." Others shared the same grim vision. "Should it come," wrote a boy from Manual High School, "another war will make some drastic and terrible changes in our nation. It is probable that after the war we will revert to some form of totalitarian government. It is certain that this will be true during the war. There will be a total depression, striking even the government with poverty."¹⁷

Gradually, as events in Europe and the Pacific pulled the nation nearer to war, students in Indianapolis became less sure

¹⁶ George Washington High School, *The Surveyor*, October 5, 1939; Emerich Manual Technical High School, *The Booster*, November 10, 1939.

¹⁷ *The Booster Magazine*, January, 1941; *ibid.*, January, 1940.

of the staying power of neutrality. Their uncertainty paralleled that of Indiana adults, who were divided over the question of intervention. A seemingly widespread feeling developed among students that "democracy is on the wane" and that America remained the "last fort" protecting the privileges of democracy. During the fall term of 1941, high schools assumed a stance close to the war footing they would soon experience. Posters imploring students to "Buy a Share in America" sprouted in school halls in support of the sale of defense bonds and stamps.¹⁸ Yet the belief remained common that America deserved to remain above the fray. Even three months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, a Shortridge High School student considered war a violation of American innocence and found it difficult to accept. "War has come to America," he said, "the America that was impregnable, the America who [sic] looked upon war as a foreign thing that could never reach her distant shore."¹⁹

The strength found in unity might have assuaged such dejection. It is well known that the Japanese treachery at Pearl Harbor fashioned an unusually united nation, one whose people were eager to aid the war effort. A *Fortune* poll in the fall of 1942 appeared to demonstrate convincingly that solidarity also prevailed among high school students: 91 percent of a nationwide sample thought the fighting worth continuing.²⁰ Yet this survey masks the wide variety of attitudes toward the war and justifications for fighting it.

An indication that adolescent attitudes were complicated came in a study conducted in the summer of 1942 by Mandel Sherman, a University of Chicago social scientist. Sherman compiled seven classifications of responses to the war, basing them on examination of 6,500 essays entitled "How the War Affects Me," written by high school students in Chicago, and 500 interviews with Chicago youth, most of whom were not attending school.²¹ No strong consensus favoring the war

¹⁸ See Crispus Attucks High School, *The Attucks* [Yearbook], 1942, p. 3; Arsenal Technical High School, *Arsenal Cannon*, September 28, 1940; *The Surveyor*, November 20, 1940; *The Booster*, May 29, 1941; Broad Ripple High School, *The Riparian*, November 27, 1941.

¹⁹ *Shortridge Daily Echo*, March 18, 1942.

²⁰ An interesting account of an "instinctive" response to the attack on Pearl Harbor is in Robert Ardrey, *The Territorial Imperative* (New York, 1966), 229-36; see also Watson, *Civilian Morale*, v; Donald Rugg, "American Morale When the War Began," *ibid.*, 189; "The Fortune Survey," *Fortune*, XXVI (November, 1942), 14, 16.

²¹ Mandel Sherman, "The Attitudes of Youths of High School Age Toward the War," *Psychological Bulletin*, XL (1943), 294-99.

emerged. Five percent of the sample expressed direct antagonism, including criticism of the government, the war effort, and reasons for the war. Some of these students believed Roosevelt's policies had goaded Japan into attacking the United States; some were sympathetic to Germany and Italy; others were pacifists. It is responses such as these that one does not expect to find in the high school press. Another group of 6 percent shared a critical attitude toward the war, believing it would not solve anything. Instead they feared that a war-induced depression would leave the country in worse condition than before. More significant than the first two categories was a third group of 21 percent who expressed indifference. Because they believed the war was unavoidable, they simply resigned themselves to it. They too worried about depression and deprivation. A typical response from a student in this category was, "This war doesn't mean much to me except that we have to get along with less sugar and maybe other things." A fourth group, comprising 12 percent of the students, responded that they were confused; the war and its issues were a mystery to them. A fifth group of 9 percent showed a mildly favorable attitude toward the war but complained about certain aspects of it, such as younger people having to join the armed forces, the impact on their families, and the rationing of certain items. Twenty-six percent of the sample expressed a favorable attitude, absent of criticism and morale problems, and 21 percent were strongly favorable, with many of them expressing vindictiveness toward the enemy and believing that the nation should have entered the war sooner. Residents of Indianapolis would have had reason to be startled when they read a summary of these results in the *Indianapolis Star*: in a time of apparent national unity, 44 percent of these youth expressed either criticism, confusion, or indifference toward the war.²²

These findings need to be interpreted cautiously. The title of the essay may have led some respondents to think in terms of adverse effects, and Sherman's judgment of the essays' contents is subject to error. Furthermore, he did not distinguish between race; perhaps black youth were more critical because of the Double-V civil rights campaign, and if they formed a large percentage of the sample the results may be distorted. Thus, although the student press in Indianapolis did reflect similar concerns, precisely how representative the Chicago findings were of Indianapolis youth or the country's adolescents is

²² *Indianapolis Star*, December 8, 1942.

uncertain. Nevertheless, they strongly suggest that wartime attitudes were more varied and complicated than such sources as the *Fortune* poll would lead one to believe.

Like their counterparts in Chicago, high school students in Indianapolis assessed the impact of the war on their lives in different ways. An analysis of the student press reveals fluid thought; individuals cannot be fitted into specific attitudinal categories. They flowed from one to another, perhaps often holding, as no doubt did many adults, contradictory views. Still, a pattern of the group's concerns throughout the war years does emerge.

Young people commonly recognized that compared to other groups in society the war left them relatively untouched. They often behaved accordingly. In spite of gas rationing, for example, enough "joy-riding" by adolescents took place to incur the wrath of workers hard pressed to reach their jobs. Transportation problems prompted the student press to comment frequently on the "current date problem," but dating continued and even flourished. In response to the solicitations and gregarious inclinations of teen-agers, communities established youth centers for them.²³ One young writer stated near the end of the war that "the younger set, high school age, seems to be the least hard hit by present conditions. . . . [because] boys and girls look to themselves for entertainment." She failed to elaborate, but the war did release youth from the constraints of the depression years and turn their attention even more toward their group life. From their peer-centered social life evolved fashions, styles, and patterns of acquisitive behavior that transformed adolescents into the "teen-agers" who composed what Daniel Boorstin has called in another context a "consumption community."²⁴ The phenomenon lent credence to the view of many youth counselors that depression-induced frugality had given way to an exaggerated emphasis on materialism.²⁵ In this sense adolescents' lives fit John Kenneth Galbraith's description of the home front as being "an almost casual and

²³ *Arsenal Cannon*, September 21, 1944; *ibid.*, January 18, 1943; Thomas Carr Howe High School, *Howe Tower*, April 17, 1942. On youth centers see Ethelwyne Arnholter, "An Analysis of Thirty Teen-Age Canteens in Indianapolis" (M.A. thesis, Indiana University, 1951), and Ugland, "The Adolescent Experience," 313-37.

²⁴ *Arsenal Cannon*, April 26, 1945. On the social life of teen-agers, see Ugland, "The Adolescent Experience," 346-400; Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* (New York, 1973), 147-48.

²⁵ Marechal-Neil E. Young, "Understanding the Adolescent," National Conference on Social Work *Proceedings* (1946), 411.

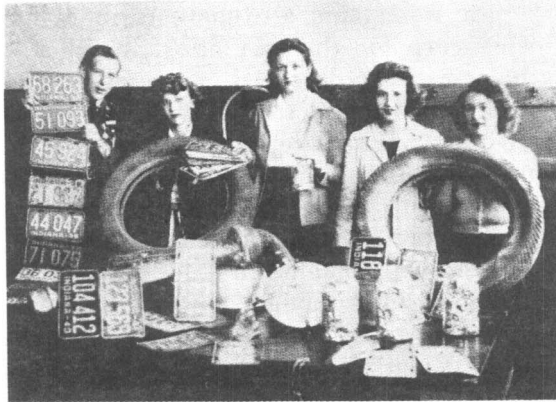
pleasant experience."²⁶ At worst this attitude contributed to complacency, lack of concern for the war effort; at best it guarded against psychological disorders and low morale.

An opposing viewpoint encouraged youth to be more sensitive to the exigencies of war, to sacrifice, and to assume more responsibility. For some students influenced by such considerations, shortages, rationing, and disrupted habits and pastimes portended a bleak future for their adolescent years. Frequently tinged with self-pity, numerous comments in the student press showed that adolescents sometimes thought the war was particularly unfair to them, whether in trivial matters such as not being able to have formal gowns cleaned, or in more profound concerns, such as friends and relatives departing for war. In some households youth might undertake greater responsibilities and even move rapidly into young adulthood. "Just a few months ago we were a perfectly normal American family," wrote one girl a year after Pearl Harbor. "But now that has changed." Her father worked overtime in a war plant; her mother left home for much of the day at her own war job; her brother had quit school to enlist. "The job of running the house is now left to me," she said. While some of her peers shared similar responsibilities, this experience was less evident than in the depression years.²⁷ Some students, realizing they were the generation embodying the nation's future, expressed an attitude that respected the serious implications of the war. This view compelled them to assume such obligations as the study of the intricacies of government and international relations in the hope that they might help make the next peace last. One boy at Arsenal High School, who had witnessed several of his peers change educational plans or sacrifice preferred vocations and leisure time for work in war industry, argued "that this war is affecting the lives of the youth even more than those of older people." If this perspective was not widespread, it had rewards, particularly the opportunity to show that youth can perform important functions in society.²⁸

²⁶ John Kenneth Galbraith, *American Capitalism: The Concept of Countervailing Power* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), 69.

²⁷ See, for example, *Shortridge Daily Echo*, May 22, 1942; *ibid.*, December 1, 1942; on the assumption of adult responsibilities by children in the Great Depression, see Elder, *Children of the Great Depression*, 62, 64-71.

²⁸ *Shortridge Daily Echo*, September 27, 1944; quotation is from *Arsenal Cannon*, May 13, 1943. Francis E. Merrill, *Social Problems on the Home Front: A Study of War-Time Influences* (New York, 1949), 78-79, emphasizes the significant role of adolescents in the war effort; Merrill badly overstates his case.



STUDENTS AT ARSENAL TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL COLLECTED
EVERYTHING FROM SCRAP TO KEYS TO SILK HOSE

Courtesy Indiana State Library.

The confusion between feeling free to pursue one's personal interests and feeling burdened with unusual responsibility was further compounded by the uncertainty about what people still in school could actually do to help the war effort. A panel of youth convened by the United States Children's Bureau agreed that most young people wanted to contribute in a significant way and have a larger stake in the community.²⁹ Indianapolis student spokesmen were eager to pledge the services of youth. The pressure could be intense. "Headlines scream at you . . . radios blare. . . . Friends . . . [are] helping the country in many ways," a student at Shortridge observed. "You become caught up in the excitement and want to do your part too. And that is right." Expressing a popular sentiment, another writer insisted that "today we all want a share in some type of work which will help towards the victory of our nation." At Broad Ripple High School in 1942 a student responded to those who questioned young people's commitment to the war. "We . . . already have begun making plans to aid our nation," he claimed. "Many will say this is the foolish notion of youth; but, to us, this is the only attitude which we could take at such a time of stress." It would be a kind of banishment to feel useless and idle.³⁰

Even in a city where total employment increased by more than 29 percent during the war, however, the nagging question was what meaningful role adolescents could play. Their gradual removal from the adult world of work was largely complete by 1940.³¹ But as the defense emergency unfolded, it seemed more important than ever to participate in the affairs of society. Neglected social groups suddenly seized the attention of manpower recruiters as employers found that the supply of out-of-work males quickly ran dry. In autumn, 1942, the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce surveyed unemployed women to locate those willing to work. The following year the city's newly or-

²⁹ Participation of the Youth Panel in the Meeting of the Children's Bureau Commission on Children in Wartime, March 17-18, 1944, p. 9, Youth File, Records Relating to Youth Problems 1941-45, RG 215.

³⁰ *Shortridge Daily Echo*, February 16, 1942; *ibid.*, November 20, 1942; *The Riparian*, December 11, 1941. Similar comments were numerous and widespread in the student press.

³¹ United States Bureau of the Census, "A Few Selected Facts about an American City Available from the Census Bureau—Indianapolis," (Washington, D.C., n.d.), 2. Concerning the decline in young workers, see Ella A. Merritt and Floy Hendricks, "Trends of Child Labor, 1940-1944," *Monthly Labor Review*, LX (April, 1945), 756; Dorothy Canfield Fisher, *Our Young Folks* (New York, 1943), 85; Bruce L. Melvin, *Youth—Millions Too Many? A Search for Youth's Place in America* (New York, 1940), 18-19.

ganized Citizens Manpower Committee launched a related manpower roundup that also included the elderly and out-of-school youth. Such appeals, together with an influx of migrant workers, enabled the industrial labor force of Indianapolis to more than double during the war, with the number of women in industrial work expanding nearly threefold and the number in clerical and service jobs growing by more than 50 percent. Even the city's rigid pattern of racial discrimination yielded somewhat to the requirements of the wartime economy.³²

High school students had less chance for suitable participation. A disturbing number recognized this and chose to drop out of school, although the jobs they secured customarily lacked opportunity for advancement.³³ Most young people responded to the widespread entreaties to stay in school. Yet in the classroom concentration proved difficult. In the words of one student, filled with visions of glory, "merely to dream of shooting a gun or diving in a plane at unsuspecting Japs while learning of past . . . things, will be harder to do than face . . . death itself." Many teachers testified to a feeling of restlessness in the classroom.³⁴ Enthusiasm for school wartime activities quickly

³² Indianapolis Council for Economic Development, *Past, Present, Future of Indianapolis Industrial Employment* (Indianapolis, 1944), 3-4; Works Projects Administration Memorandum, December 4, 1941, pp. 1-2, Social Forces—Population Movements File, Box 84, Indiana War History Commission Files and Civilian Defense Files (Archives Division, Indiana Commission on Public Records, Indianapolis); United States Employment Service for Indiana, "Recommendation for Establishing Day Care for the Children of War-Worker Mothers," October 20, 1942, p. 1, Child Care Committee File, Box 142, Indiana War History Commission Files and Civilian Defense Files; Indianapolis Council of Social Agencies, "General Statement of War Connected Need," n.d., 1, Social Forces—Reports of Indianapolis Council of Social Agencies File, Box 85, Indiana War History Commission Files and Civilian Defense Files; Max Parvin Cavnes, *The Hoosier Community at War* (Bloomington, Ind., 1961), 120.

³³ From 1940 to fall, 1944, enrollment in Indianapolis public high schools declined by 3,150 or 17 percent, about the same percentage as the nation, which lost 1,200,000 from school rolls. As noted earlier, vocational schools suffered particularly severe drops, and it is likely that students from lower-income households composed a disproportionate number of the dropouts. The importance of education for future advancement in society was not lost on middle-class students, frustrating though it was for many of them to remain in school. See Richard M. Ugland, "'Education for Victory': The High School Victory Corps and Curricular Adaptation during World War II," *History of Education Quarterly*, XIX (Winter, 1979), 435-51. Other scholars have agreed with Hollingshead that youth who left school also were leaving their adolescence behind. Elder, *Children of the Great Depression*, 72, 79, 81; Kett, *Rites of Passage*, 254.

³⁴ *Arsenal Cannon*, April 23, 1942. On restlessness see, *Shortridge Daily Echo*, October 1, 1940; *Scholastic*, XLI (September 14, 1942), 38; United States Congress, Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, *Hearings on H.R. 1975 First Deficiency Appropriations Bill for 1943* (Washington, D.C., 1943), 41; George Johnson, "War and the High Schools," *Commonweal*,

waned, and youth organizations that established wartime services, like the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, did not attract many teen-age youth. While part-time jobs proved popular with youth and important to the community, they often did not satisfy the longing for war service. One study of boys in war service activities reported that well over half of them wanted "adult" jobs, not believing their position was "big enough." To improve the morale of youth, Professor Sherman prescribed factory or other "real" work for part of the day, not the well-publicized play-acting chores like scrap collecting. Participants at a conference on youth centers concluded that adolescents needed recognition, for "the boy under 18 is apt to feel useless and unimportant because he is not old enough to serve in the armed forces."³⁵

In some ways girls faced greater barriers to assuming adult roles. Although they matured earlier than boys, they did not have the same opportunities for employment in industry. Nor did the armed forces offer an equivalent route to adulthood. Their male contemporaries could anticipate adult status almost overnight upon reaching age eighteen, but females could not enlist until age twenty. The "manpower" shortage delayed marriage and motherhood for many. "It is the young teeners who are feeling part of the burden of this war," said one girl. "Our elders do not seem to realize it." Another girl lamented, "Being sixteen and seventeen, we're considered too young for the armed forces and too young for work in war factories. . . . If we go to college, the boys have only a short while, and after they leave, the girls will feel very unimportant and unpatriotic spending money on schooling while their comrades go to fight the war. . . ." The result of such thinking, according to an observer of youth in 1944, was that "numbers of our young girls

XXXVIII (April 30, 1943), 33; Isabelle Post, "Not Postwar Bewilderment, But Postwar Enlightenment," *American Home*, XXXIV (June, 1945), 20-21.

³⁵ See Ugland, "The Adolescent Experience," 168-69, 299; Ronald Lippett and Alvin Zander, "A Study of Boy Attitudes Toward Participation in the War Effort," *Journal of Social Psychology*, XVII (May, 1943), 314-17; Sherman is cited in the *Indianapolis Star*, December 8, 1942; "Teen-Age Centers: Report of a Conference" January, 1945, p. 2, Indiana State Library; see also George V. Sheviakov, "War and Adolescents," *Journal of Psychology*, XIV (July, 1942), 165. Gordon Allport noted that an essential ingredient of healthy morale is "a task to be performed." See Allport, "The Nature of Democratic Morale," in Watson, *Civilian Morale*, 4. The Progressive Education Association noted in 1942 that "children and youth have suffered more from the frustration of not being invited to share in solving real problems than from being overtaxed in working at them." High School Victory Corps and Community War Services, HSVC—Examples File, Box 13, entry 34, Records of the Office of Civilian Defense, RG 171 (Washington National Records Center, Suitland, Maryland).

today are suffering from a continual sense of frustration in relation to the war."³⁶

At the root of the morale problem was the peculiar position adolescents held in American society. Neither children nor adults, students who considered themselves mature and capable were frustrated in being unable to make the contribution they wanted to make. For them it was not total war; society frankly did not require their services until they reached an older age. As home front reservists their addition to the war effort too often seemed to entail little more than mouthing patriotic slogans. Until the day when they could join the armed forces or find a spot on an assembly line, they were trapped in an age group that society had come to expect little of.³⁷ The upshot was, in the words of the National Recreation Association, as if "history is being made—and they are being left out."³⁸

A girl at Shortridge summarized the issue in a statement that attracted the interest of the local press and that her school newspaper said voiced the "sentiment of high school girls everywhere with respect to youth's philosophies." The Indianapolis *Star* said that she spoke for "thousands of teen-age American girls in . . . appeal for understanding of their war viewpoint." In the opening line of her statement she exclaimed, "you may think that a girl of 16 thinks about nothing but clothes, dates and looks, and that what she has to say isn't of much importance anyway but you're wrong. I have plenty to say, and I'm asking you to listen." An emotional defense of young people ensued. She attempted to show that youth were as concerned with and involved in the war as anyone, but through no fault of their own they could not contribute in conventional ways. Not being able to fight, she said, was the most difficult actuality to face. "We know we can never fight; we know we must go to school to help rebuild the world for

³⁶ Newspaper clipping, n.d., Teen-Age—Miscellaneous Data File, Box 30, Indiana War History Commission Files and Civilian Defense Files; letter to editor, Indianapolis *News*, July 6, 1943; Caroline B. Zachry, "Preparing Youth to be Adults," *The Forty-Third Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part I: Adolescence* (Chicago, 1944), 338-39.

³⁷ Testimony from many adult observers speaks to this point; for example, Office of Community War Services, *Citizens of Tomorrow: A Wartime Challenge to Community Action* (Washington, D.C., 1943), 5; Frederick H. Lewis, "Blueprint for Junior Citizenship," *Recreation*, XXXVII (November, 1943), 456; James H. S. Bossard, "Family Backgrounds of Wartime Adolescents," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, CCXXXVI (November, 1944), 38; The High School Victory Corps and Community War Services, HSVC—Examples File, Box 13, Entry 34, Records of the Office of Civilian Defense, RG 171.

³⁸ National Recreation Association, *Teen Trouble* (n.d.), 5.

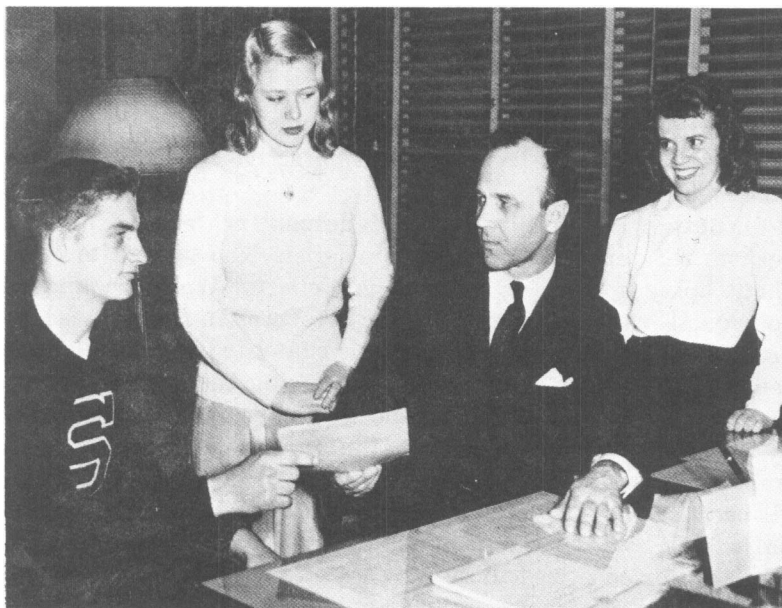
tomorrow." But still they craved to be involved in some more immediate way. "We know we've got to do something; we know we've got to go out there and help . . . or we'll go crazy but what can we do?"³⁹ It seemed silly to ask what one could do when surrounded by feverish wartime activity. Still, the question had no answer.

Youth who did little out of despair or lack of interest became the targets of student journalists who harped to them about doing something for the war effort. "Wake up and do your part!" rang the theme of many features in the high school press. But the articles and editorials that tried to minimize the sense of uselessness often ended up having the opposite effect. As one editor declared, "even the seemingly small part played by us students is important in the winning of the struggle." Another taunted young people who tended not to contribute at all because they thought their "small contribution" could be of no help. While not questioning his peers' patriotism, still another writer chastised those who too often neglected the "small duties," thinking them unimportant or expecting other people to act. Students must have become weary of hearing that a war was on, and they must have become bored and irritated with continual comments earnestly exhorting them to new standards of dedication, when to many there seemed little worthwhile or noteworthy for them to do.⁴⁰

To counter perceptions among youth of the war as something of adult concern only, of themselves as adrift in a society whose goals they did not share, it was important that they become aware of what the conflict was about and what its implications might be for America. Although they wanted to participate in a time of public excitement, this was not the same as understanding how great events impinged on their lives. By and large the work of educating them in the origins and purposes of the war, as opposed to encouraging an outpouring of patriotic fervor, appears to have been poorly carried out. According to a report of the National Recreation Association, "We have taken it for granted that the teenage understands as much about the war as we do—or that they needn't be touched by it at all. There hasn't been much explaining, or tying it up with what they have read about in their histories, or analyzing just what it means—why we are fighting or what we are fight-

³⁹ *Shortridge Daily Echo*, January 19, 1943; *Indianapolis Star*, January 17, 1943.

⁴⁰ *Howe Tower*, October 6, 1944; *The Riparian*, October 19, 1944; *ibid.*, March 19, 1942.



MEMBERS OF THE JUNIOR CLASS ('44) OF SHORTRIDGE HIGH SCHOOL
PRESENT A THOUSAND DOLLAR WAR BOND TO
PRINCIPAL J. DAN HULL

Courtesy Indiana State Library.

ing for." Adults generally took the war's purpose for granted, and with longer working hours, rationing, and various problems hounding them, they had little time or desire to explain or discuss the conflict with youth.⁴¹

Adolescents displayed little knowledge of world affairs. The *Fortune* poll disclosed a dismal level of knowledge among them. It rated less than one in five well informed, with the rest nearly divided between being poorly informed and simply uninformed. The amount of space high school newspapers devoted to encouraging young people to learn about the war and current events reveals how uninformed student journalists thought their peers were. Editors challenged students familiar with Buck Rogers, Popeye, Li'l Abner, and Blondie to identify the

⁴¹ National Recreation Association, *Teen Trouble*, 11. Professor Sherman considered the confusion among youth over the causes and issues of the war and the conflicting statements about it as another principal reason for the low morale he discovered. *Indianapolis Star*, December 8, 1942. See also Havighurst and Corey, "Morale of High-School Youth," 321-23.

significance of such places as the Dardanelles, Singapore, Yugoslavia, and Suez. Few could do so.⁴²

The relatively poor state of information raises the question of how much, and what, adolescents read. The evidence suggests that they read little and that it was generally only material of a light sort. Their chief stimulation seems to have come from movies, radio, and comic books. Not even books on World War II appear to have had wide appeal. Although in 1943 the librarian at Arsenal claimed there was demand for books with war themes, a student journalist making an informal survey of the student body reported that few people were reading or had ever read a book on World War II. Magazines held more attraction. *Life* was popular, as were the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Look*, and *Reader's Digest*. Monthlies such as *Woman's Home Companion* and *Good Housekeeping* attracted girls, while *Popular Mechanics* and *Popular Science* found favor with boys. The problem was that periodicals like these provided at most only peripheral insights into current events.⁴³

Students apparently learned little more from newspapers. From research conducted in "Elmtown" in 1941, August B. Hollingshead reported that most adolescents avidly read the comics, boys the sports page, and girls the women's page and society column. They only scanned the front page, however. Another study did show increased attention to war news and headlines after Pearl Harbor, which is hardly surprising and not too significant when one considers that few read war news before. The study concluded that in the war years adolescents' favorite features of the newspapers remained, in order, photographs, comics, cartoons, illustrations, sports, and movies. A poll at Arsenal in December, 1943, showed little interest in newspapers beyond the comics and sports pages. Indeed, the students who did not read a newspaper at all outnumbered those who claimed to take serious interest in the hard news it contained. Mulling over the results of the survey a reporter could only feebly reply, "we should keep up with the news of the day."⁴⁴

⁴² "The Fortune Survey," 18, 20; *Howe Tower*, April 24, 1941; *Shortridge Daily Echo*, June 4, 1945; *Arsenal Cannon*, February 25, 1943; *The Riparian*, March 16, 1944.

⁴³ Young, "Understanding the Adolescent," 418; *Arsenal Cannon*, September 23, 1943; *ibid.*, December 16, 1943; *The Riparian*, October 9, 1941; *The Surveyor*, December 3, 1941; Paul Weaver, "Youth and Religion," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, CCXXXVI (November, 1944), 153; Hollingshead, *Elmtown's Youth*, 307.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*; Homer F. Tangney, "A Study Relating to the Change in the Newspaper Reading Interests of Secondary School Students Since the Entrance

Most adolescents, it appears, simply had little interest in major questions of current affairs, other than specific events associated with relatives or friends in the service. They ordinarily pulled out maps to locate where battles had been fought or where relatives and friends were stationed.⁴⁵ But, without belittling such interest, it is not the same as serious attention to the reasons for the war, its impact on the country, and the nature of the postwar world. Even as late as the week after the sinking of the *Reuben James* on October 30, 1941, Lee J. Cronbach, a psychologist who examined student morale and attitudes toward the war, found many high school students in the state of Washington unmindful of current affairs and the threat of imminent war. He asked them: "If the United States enters the war, how will your life be affected, both during the war and permanently?" A typical response came from a girl who answered candidly, "Before this question was asked of me I can honestly say that I had never thought about it, and I doubt whether many other students had."⁴⁶ Although data gathered from students in Washington does not necessarily apply to students in Indianapolis or elsewhere, Cronbach's survey is all the more convincing because students in a coastal state presumably would have been more aware of the possibility of war than, for example, those in the Midwest. In spring, 1942, the editor at Shortridge expressed an all-too-common attitude when he dismissed the need for understanding the background of the war, considering it "a trivial matter," to be "treated insignificantly."⁴⁷

Seventeen magazine, a periodical aimed at teen-age girls, elicited at best a mixed reaction when it began a monthly feature on world affairs. A characteristic response came from the girl who wrote: "Why must you print articles on world affairs in a magazine that a girl looks to for advice on clothes, charm and personality? I'm sure (and I'm speaking for our gang) that when a girl feels like boning up on the brain food that she would turn to a magazine devoted to politics and world affairs." Perhaps she had a point. But it is difficult to imagine this girl taking the time to pore over news magazines and

of the United States into World War II," *Journal of Experimental Education*, X (June, 1942), 195-99; *Arsenal Cannon*, December 16, 1943.

⁴⁵ Author's interview with Waneda Cline, Indianapolis Department of Parks and Recreation, February 2, 1976.

⁴⁶ Lee J. Cronbach, "The Wartime Morale of Youth—An Analysis of the School's Problem," *School and Society*, LV (March 14, 1942), 304.

⁴⁷ *Shortridge Daily Echo*, April 21, 1942.

listen to radio news broadcasts. While other responses endorsed the feature, they often did so on the grounds that the magazine's readership was so uninformed. "I think . . . that seven out of ten teen-age girls don't know half as much as they should about world affairs," one girl remarked. "I very seldom bother to read or even look at a news magazine. . . . Too many teenagers, like myself, are wrapped up completely in their own teen-age world and know little or nothing of what goes on outside of it."⁴⁸

As this statement implies, it is likely that the adolescent's place in the social structure contributed to apathy. On the one hand, consciously or not, students may have excused their ignorance as a result of their having little or no influence on national policy and community life; to be told to wait for the future seemed scant compensation in a world shaken by war. On the other hand, many adolescents of the early 1940s found increasing solace and pleasure in the vibrant social life of their own peer culture.⁴⁹ Moreover, peer pressure was not conducive to reading. Hollingshead noted that "reading . . . is not an important trait in the students' leisure hour activities. A youngster who is known as 'a reader' . . . is left out of the group activities which form such an important part of 'life' in this age group."⁵⁰ Poorly informed before the war, adolescents remained so after the fighting began.

This situation in turn directly affected the outlook or morale of high school students. Cronbach's investigations suggested that in all high schools a morale problem of various degrees existed, which he attributed in part to the woeful lack of knowledge among students. He found that ignorance led some to an unrealistically dire outlook, with attendant anxieties and depression; on others it worked the opposite way, encouraging them to be complacent and overly sanguine about the outcome of the war; still others were simply indifferent.⁵¹ Similar patterns emerged in the student press throughout the war. The three categories of morale were not mutually exclusive; individuals shifted from one to another depending on

⁴⁸ *Seventeen*, June, 1945, p. 159; *ibid.*, August, 1945, p. 4.

⁴⁹ See Uglund, "The Adolescent Experience," 313-17, 346-400.

⁵⁰ Hollingshead, *Elmtown's Youth*, 307.

⁵¹ Lee J. Cronbach, "Pupil-Morale After One Year of War," *School and Society*, LVII (April 10, 1943), 416-20. Two sociologists studying student morale also noted three types other than the cheerful and confident: the depressed, the complacent, and the demoralized, with the last being those who manifested delinquent and abnormal behavior. See Havighurst and Corey, "Morale of High-School Youth," 321-23.

events or mood of the moment. Yet each response, together with the absence of morale problems among some youth, was characteristic of the group during the war.

Fear of economic depression, a fear shared by parents and politicians, accounted for much pessimism. Before Pearl Harbor students worried about the economic consequences of military intervention. Uncommon only because of its certitude was the following statement of a Manual student in spring, 1941: "All the bouyant heights of prosperity will deflate and once again depression will hover over the nation..." When American involvement became a reality and the economy failed to collapse, concern shifted to the state of postwar affairs. Another doomsayer at Manual prophesied: "When the war is over . . . inevitable depression will again cover the United States."⁵² Such dreary thoughts stimulated purchases of defense bonds and stamps, which some students considered a prudent investment in light of the inevitable crash. Their anxiety was not unique to Indianapolis. A Purdue Opinion Panel survey in fall, 1943, showed that 54 percent of high school students in the Midwest believed there would be high unemployment for at least a year or two after the war. Only three in ten had no fears on this score. These misgivings did not diminish over time. In December, 1945, 69 percent of the students polled believed the government would have to mount depression-era programs to put people to work. With hard times still of such recent memory, the thought that wartime prosperity might soon be lost haunted even young people.⁵³

The threat of material deprivation added to the pessimistic outlook. Wartime shortages came as a "shock" to those students who did not understand the gravity of the situation. Others were not surprised. Revealing neglect of the previous decade's economic history as well as anxiety, one boy wrote in spring, 1942, "When we return to Shortridge next September we will be in a far different world. The American standard of living will have been arrested in its hitherto constant rise."⁵⁴ This kind of baleful outlook is easy to understand when one con-

⁵² *The Booster*, May 29, 1941; *ibid.*, May 29, 1942.

⁵³ On saving for a depression, see *Arsenal Cannon*, January 15, 1942, and *The Booster*, May 25, 1945; The Purdue Opinion Poll for Young People, No. 4, October 1, 1943, p. 3 (Measurement and Research Center, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Ind.); *ibid.*, No. 10, December 1, 1945, p. 1. Concern over jobs, no doubt, was the principal reason an overwhelming number of adolescents wished women removed from the workplace after the war. *Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁵⁴ *The Riparian*, January 14, 1943; *Shortridge Daily Echo*, April 10, 1942.



VICTORY GARDENS WERE A FAMILIAR SCENE ON THE HOME FRONT

Courtesy Indiana State Library.

siders that many adults felt the same. In a book on civilian defense published in 1942, for example, the authors predicted that "Inevitably the living standards of the people of the United States will be reduced to levels below those of the worst depression years, in terms of consumer goods." Enough people agreed to encourage hoarding and scare buying, tactics hardly calculated to buoy youthful spirits. In August, 1941, an order from the Office of Production Management affecting silk stimulated a "hosiery-buying hysteria" in Indianapolis. In March, 1943, when meat rationing became imminent, the Indianapolis *Star* reported that consumers were overrunning butcher shops. While no one actually suffered want as a result of rationing, it became a serious matter to students, if for no other reason than that it was a form of deprivation, which easily could have recalled memories of the depression or raised the specter of approaching hard times.⁵⁵

Students understandably worried also about the war's effect on their family life and personal safety. An analysis of

⁵⁵ R. Ernest Dupuy and Hodding Carter, *Civilian Defense of the United States* (New York, 1942), 179; Bernard Friedman, *The Financial Role of Indiana in World War II* (Bloomington, Ind., 1965), 44, 172.

essays titled "What War Means to Me," written by high school students in Columbus, Ohio, uncovered large numbers of anxious responses, especially regarding family disruptions. Following closely were concerns about the sundering of romantic relationships. Cronbach discovered that a high proportion of students expected to be killed in the service or have friends killed or wounded.⁵⁶ Not long after Pearl Harbor, "Gold Star" columns appeared in student papers listing the names of alumni killed in the war. The columns reminded young people of what they feared might happen to them, which in turn may have helped to encourage a carefree, live-for-today attitude. As one adolescent confessed to a psychologist: "Knowing that I am going to war . . . I like to get a little fun that can be still had before I go. . . . Many people think there will be happiness after the war; I hope so, but I don't see how there can be, with all those that will never come back and with all those that come back cripples. . . . So I figure the fun is before you go. . . ." A girl who had a brother in the service and another about to leave said simply, "The war has left a big dent in my life."⁵⁷

Another problem was that the war made the future even more unpredictable for those already at a stage of life normally beset with uncertainty and confusing questions about life goals. "Never in recent years," wrote a Manual student in May, 1941, "has a senior class of any high school had to face a future of greater uncertainty. . . ." The temptation to pursue the immediate rewards of the job market instead of college or preferred occupations proved decisive to many of these last prewar high school graduates, who thought that defense-induced affluence might be ephemeral. But Selective Service, soon to embrace eighteen-year-olds, complicated any planning. Nearly three years later uncertainty remained a major theme, though by then large draft calls usually presaged one's immediate

⁵⁶ Eugene Lerner and Lois B. Murphy, "Further Report of Committee for Information on Children in Wartime," *Journal of Social Psychology*, XIX (November, 1943), 413-18; Cronbach, "Pupil Morale," 418.

⁵⁷ Peter A. Bertocci, "The Moral Outlook of the Adolescent in War Time," *Mental Hygiene*, XXVIII (July, 1944), 356-57. Observers at the Indianapolis YWCA noticed that girls were "jittery and emotionally upset." Indianapolis Young Women's Christian Association, "History—of War Years," April 28, 1945, p. 4, Social Forces—Reports Y.W.C.A. File, Box 86, Indiana War History Commission Files and Civilian Defense Files. See also Martha W. MacDonald, "Impact of War on Children and Youth—Intensification of Emotional Problems," *American Journal of Public Health and the Nation's Health*, XXXIII (April, 1943), 337; Dorothy Hankins, "Mental Hygiene Problems of the Adolescent Period," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, CCXXXVI (November, 1944), 134.

future. A Broad Ripple student reiterated that "war times are definitely not those in which to lay plans for the future."⁵⁸

If one of youth's characteristic responses to uncertainty was pessimism, another was indifference, which led to a lack of concern with the war effort. The number of articles on this subject in the student press suggests that the viewpoint caused considerable self-consciousness. Student writers went to some pains to deny what at times seemed altogether too manifest. "Shortridge students are deeply concerned about the war," one declared. "Adults are sometimes inclined to make superficial judgments about high school girls and boys—that they are not serious but are too frivolous." More often they conceded the merit of the criticisms and chided readers for their lackadaisical attitude and frivolity: "Is the youth of today *too* happy? Is everything a joke? . . . Is the youth of today too lazy? What do we need to awaken us? Do our homes have to be bombed before we'll realize that now is the time to prepare?" Part of the problem was that most students knew the chance of enemy bombs falling on them was remote.⁵⁹ Early in the war a student at Broad Ripple admitted that he and many peers had been "walking through the halls with . . . our heads in the clouds, never giving much thought to the war going on around us." Indifference angered commentators such as the one at Arsenal who wrote: "Your reporter has been listening to some of the 'war' comments from the younger generation . . . until she just cannot stand it any more. Such statements as, 'What has this war got to do with me?' . . . just can't go unchallenged." Even at the end of 1942, the worst year for the American cause, high school papers revealed a surprisingly prevalent casual student attitude toward the conflict. "Are we, as the future America, truly taking this thing seriously?" wrote one student. "Have we actually gotten down to business? Or are we still the same pleasure-loving idlers that we have often seemed to be."⁶⁰

⁵⁸ *The Booster*, May 29, 1941; *The Riparian*, January 21, 1944. On the same theme see Bert I. Beverly, "Effect of War Upon the Minds of Children," *American Journal of Public Health and the Nation's Health*, XXXIII (July, 1943), 795-97; Margaret Mead, "The Cultural Picture," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, XIII (October, 1943), 598.

⁵⁹ *Shortridge Daily Echo*, December 9, 1941; *Arsenal Cannon*, April 9, 1942. See also James S. Plant, "Social Significance of War Impact on Adolescents," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, CCXXXVI (November, 1944), 3.

⁶⁰ *The Riparian*, January 14, 1943; *Arsenal Cannon*, December 3, 1942; *The Riparian*, November 5, 1942. See also *Shortridge Daily Echo*, September 22, 1942; *Arsenal Cannon*, October 21, 1942; *The Booster*, December 4, 1942.

Related to the above attitude was complacency, which held the danger of distracting youth from concentrating on what they could do for the war effort. In this area, as in others, young people often reflected the expectations of their elders. An informal survey in May, 1942, around Monument Circle in downtown Indianapolis revealed that more than half of those interviewed believed the war would end in the coming winter or in the spring of 1943. Not all students, of course, were complacent. The *Fortune* poll of November, 1942, reported that over half believed the Axis had a chance to win the war, although only 8.2 percent believed they had a good chance. The more informed the student the more likely he or she was to believe the Axis had a chance to win. Confidence had increased by 1943, when more than a third of the students questioned by Purdue pollsters believed the war with Germany would be over within the year. Such expectations might indicate healthy optimism to some, but to others it more closely resembled smugness. One exasperated girl lectured her peers: "All right, so you're tired of hearing about it. You're tired of having your school paper all cluttered up with war editorials. . . . Somehow, most young folks have gotten the idea that the war is just about over. . . . Can't you see how wrong this idea is?"⁶¹

Many people no doubt hoped the call to patriotism would blur distinctions among adolescent attitudes and ease inconveniences on the home front. Student newspapers fed readers a steady diet of articles on freedom and democracy and an ideology they fondly referred to as Americanism. Before the United States entered the conflict numerous essays held forth on the special blessing in not having to live in fear of being killed in battle or experiencing the destructiveness of war. This theme would not do after Pearl Harbor. Then patriotism meant loving the flag, willingness to give one's life for the country, doing as one was told at home and at school, and working in assorted ways for the good of the country. A common device used to demonstrate how much Americans had to be thankful for was to contrast the lives of American and German youth. The flag must be revered because it stood for Americanism. Never adequately defined, Americanism apparently encompassed such

⁶¹ George Blackburn, "The Hoosier Arsenal" (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Indiana University, 1956), 420. Opinion surveys showed that Americans, on average, consistently thought the war with Germany would end in a year. Hadley Cantril, "Opinion Trends in World War II: Some Guides to Interpretation," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, XII (Spring, 1948), 39; "The Fortune Survey," 16; Purdue Opinion Poll, No. 4, October 1, 1943, p. 3; *The Surveyor*, November 11, 1942.

high ideals as freedom of speech and religion, as well as more mundane pleasures like baseball, corner drugstores, and even the right to be lazy. For those finding certain pleasures hard to dispense with, patriotism provided both rationale and consolation.⁶²

So insistent was this appeal that even before Pearl Harbor one boy felt compelled to complain that love of country was being reduced to a version of hucksterism. "Our patriotic feelings are in danger of becoming so over-commercialized and insincere," he warned, "that all the good in it originally may disappear. An example of this is a fad to show patriotism by wearing clothes and trinkets designed with the stars and stripes." But he was atypical at a time when Americans, youth not excepted, vied to find words to express the glories of their land and reflect the theme that America was better than other nations. "Thank God there is still an America," one student wrote months before the end of the war, "for our country is the hope of the world." And in the hands of Americans, particularly American youth, "lies the hope of the world," because "European countries are old and tired. . . . They need our help in reestablishing business and freedom. They look to you for that." Perhaps one student reached the limits of patriotic fervor when he said that, "today, there is a new name for America . . . that name is 'America, God's country'." Few of his countrymen would have disagreed with him.⁶³

The dictates of age group behavior helped shape the responses of adolescents to war and their experience on the home front, most notably their relative lack of involvement in the war effort.⁶⁴ While the youth of London and Leningrad would have envied such a plight, the lack of participation enhanced problems of morale and thus the task of adjusting to the war-time environment. Since the invention of adolescence in the early twentieth century, the social role imposed on this phase of life has delayed the acceptance of young people into the main course of American life. In the 1940s it added to youth's burden

⁶² Patriotic expressions abound in the student press. Representative examples include *The Booster Magazine*, January, 1941; *Shortridge Daily Echo*, March 18, 1942; *The Surveyor*, May 9, 1944; *Arsenal Cannon*, January 16, 1941; Crispus Attucks High School, *Attucks News*, June, 1945.

⁶³ *Shortridge Daily Echo*, April 2, 1941; *Arsenal Cannon*, November 22, 1944; *Shortridge Daily Echo*, May 19, 1942; *Arsenal Cannon*, April 9, 1942.

⁶⁴ For discussion of the impact of historical change on age cohorts see Elder, *Children of the Great Depression*, 16, and Norman B. Ryder, "The Cohort as a Concept in the Study of Social Change," *American Sociological Review*, XXX (December, 1965), 843-61.

of finding purpose in a society confronting a national emergency. When the shadow of war fell upon the nation in the closing days of 1941, adolescents found themselves in a safe stage of life, but one that offered relatively few opportunities for contributing to society.

One should not infer from the preceding discussion that age was the only factor influencing individual response to the war, or that other social groups moved through the war years free of cares. Rather, while this study recognizes that nearly all people shared such enthusiasms as that for the material prosperity of the period and such anxieties as concern over relatives in the military, it affirms that social groups also responded in more complicated ways depending on their peculiar circumstances.⁶⁵ The remarkable determination of Americans to bring the Axis to their knees and the splendid patriotism that accompanied that resolve should not obscure the more intricate responses of people to a popular war.

⁶⁵ For the experience of women, see such works as William Henry Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970* (New York, 1972), 135-50, and Chester W. Gregory, *Women in Defense Work during World War II: An Analysis of the Labor Problem and Women's Rights* (New York, 1974), 29-34, 200-201. For the experience of blacks, see Richard M. Dalfiume, "The 'Forgotten Years' of the Negro Revolution," *Journal of American History*, LV (June, 1968), 90-106, and Lee Finkle, "The Conservative Aims of Militant Rhetoric: Black Protest during World War II," *Journal of American History*, LX (December, 1973), 692-713.