

# The Rise and Fall of Baby Boomers



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*The Long, Strange Trip  
of a Generation*

By

Lawrence R. Samuel

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## INTRODUCTION

*“In a very real sense, the history of the United States in the second half of the twentieth century is the history of a single generation, the baby boomers.”*

—Marvin Cetron, 1991

Once upon a time, not that long ago, in fact, baby boomers were considered by many to be the kings and queens of the cultural hill. The impact of the generation (the 76 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964) over the course of the past three-quarters of a century could not be underestimated. Indeed, their record spoke for itself. After an adventurous youth, American boomers had settled down nicely, leading the nation to become possibly the richest and most powerful civilization in history. By the turn of the century and millennium, the generation appeared to be at the top of its game, deservedly recognized as the principal players in economic, social, and political circles. Boomers had never been liked by non-boomers—that’s one of the big stories in this book—but they commanded respect if only for the power they collectively wielded and how they had shaped the contours of the country and the world.

But then something happened. In America, youth always wins the day, and the offspring of baby boomers—Gen Y or millennials—began to steal much of their parents’ thunder. Millennials usurped boomers as the largest generation in history, and the former’s sheer numbers carried much social currency. Running parallel with this demographic changing of the guard was the meteoric ascent of digital technology. Just as boomers were in the right place at the right time when the economic boom of the 1980s kicked in, so were millennials ideally positioned when the online universe changed life as we know it.

Now, with baby boomers in their third act of life (they currently range in age from 58 to 76), the generation’s perceived worth has taken a major tumble. Alongside their rise to power, the reputation of the generation has fallen precipitously, so much so that their place in history is in considerable danger. The “Fall” in the title of this book thus refers to the decline in boomers’ public image over the last decade or two. Many members of younger generations, i.e., Gen X, millennials, and Gen Z, hold strong negative feelings toward boomers, convinced that the latter

compromised the future of the former. The generation's narcissism and consumptive ways have caused major, perhaps irreparable damage to the nation and planet, this thinking goes, both economically and environmentally.

Currently blamed for having caused most of the world's problems and considered generally clueless regarding contemporary thought and goings-on, baby boomers can be said to now be the laughingstock of the United States and much else of the world. Even the term "boomer," which was once admired (much like "American"), is deemed toxic, making it somewhat embarrassing to be a member of the generation. The irony in boomers' recent devaluation is that we are better people than we were when we were younger. Research shows that age and experience bring humanistic values such as patience, empathy, and wisdom, and our march up Maslow's hierarchy towards self-actualization makes us more valuable members of society than when we were in our physical prime. This makes the downgrading and demotion of boomers all the more unfortunate, and this book is an attempt to set the record straight by letting the facts speak for themselves.

To that point, most baby boomers have defended the generation's history, considering our recent devaluation unwarranted and, essentially, sour grapes. Our large numbers and collective wealth have made us a convenient target for the sorry state of the world, making the widespread condemnation of boomers unfair and unjustified. I have been a loud supporter of boomers' reputation, pointing out that despite critics' hateful claims, there is no evidence that we sabotaged the future for younger generations. Everything from the skyrocketing cost of healthcare to global warming is our fault, younger people have told me, and now we are being held responsible for the inability of a 30-something to buy a house. (Turns out most of us want to stay in our homes rather than move to a condo in Del Boca Vista.)

I have also pointed out the many achievements of baby boomers over the past three-quarters of a century. Growing up in the forward-looking postwar years, boomers were cast as a kind of chosen people, expected to accomplish great things in life. I think we did just that. The Greatest Generation may have survived the Great Depression and won World War II, but we led a countercultural revolution grounded in the noble ideals of peace and justice, made the country a much more equal society in terms of race and gender, and are now giving away trillions of dollars to causes in which we believe (including our children and grandchildren).

As well, I am quick to concede that, like any generation, baby boomers have much not to be proud of. After our rather brief movement to change the world for the better, many of us jumped on the career merry-go-

round with haste, prioritizing the acquisition of money and the (mostly needless) things it can buy. We not just created but perfected the concept of conspicuous consumption, not realizing or caring that it is an unsustainable proposition and ultimately an unsatisfying pursuit. Today I'm deeply disappointed that my fellow boomers have not taken on the challenge of ageism in any real way. It's a golden age of activism, and most 50-, 60-, and 70somethings are sitting on the sidelines rather than trying to defeat what has been called "the last openly tolerated form of discrimination."

Still, I'm proud of being an American baby boomer, and I'll continue to be a voice of the generation. There are still around 70 million of us out there (the ten or so million who have died have been mostly replaced by immigrants who fall into the cohort), and the actuaries say that the majority of us are going to be around for the next two or three decades. My hope is that over time younger adults begin to view the generation born in the post-World War II years in a broad historical context and, by doing so, not hate us so much for doing the things we did. Boomers had their own "generation gap," some might recall, and I think it's fair to say that we eventually came to understand and even appreciate the choices our parents made in their own time.

Regardless of how one feels about them, the history of American baby boomers is an undeniably fascinating one that, despite all the attention given to the generation over the years (way too much, some say), has yet to be fully told. In his 1980 *Great Expectations: America and the Baby Boom Generation*, Landon Y. Jones did yeoman's work by showing for the first time the impact of the generation on American society, past, present, and future. That book also helped to bring the term "baby boomer" into common language as, before that, there was not a consensus as to what the generation should be called.<sup>1</sup> Generations as a whole are a "fuzzy concept," as Jeffrey J. Williams put it in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* in 2014, although many sociologists agree that historical events and cultural shifts do help to shape the identity of age cohorts. Just as the Great Depression encouraged a good number of young people in the 1930s to be thrifty for the remainder of their lives, for example, so did post-World War II prosperity contribute to the spend-thrifty ways of boomers.<sup>2</sup>

The modern concept of generations goes back at least a century. In his 1923 essay "The Problem of Generations," Karl Mannheim defined a generation as individuals who share not just a certain age but "a common location in the social and historical process ... predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action." While every member of a generation



did not necessarily share the same characteristics, Mannheim believed that generations functioned much like class, i.e., as a kind of social construct that influenced individuals' attitudes and behavior.<sup>3</sup> In their handful of popular books, William Strauss and Neil Howe argued that generational dynamics are nothing less than the key to understanding the cycles of American history, with a cycle occurring roughly every 20 years.<sup>4</sup>

Just as time itself appears to be speeding up, however, one gets the sense that new generations are popping up with greater frequency. "Now it seems that a new generation is named every decade or less, driven by sweeping generalizations from the mass media and supported by little more than alleged changes in character traits as described by pop sociologists," wrote Mano Singham in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* in 2009. It was true that Generation Y was considered to have arisen in the early 1980s or even late 1970s, either way certainly less than twenty years after the first members of Generation X were said to have been born in 1965. The names of generations are also fluid, Singham noted, with Generation Y eventually rebranded as the more media-friendly "millennials." (Gen Xers had previously been known as the not very melodious "baby busters.")<sup>5</sup>

Of course, it took some time for baby boomers to earn their label after the first one was born one minute after midnight on January 1, 1946, in Philadelphia. It is not precisely clear when the term was first used and who should be credited (or blamed) for it. The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites a mention of the term in a 1970 article in the *Washington Post* as the first usage, but "baby boomers" (or the singular) undoubtedly appeared in a publication before that. One early documented usage of "baby boomer" was in a January 1963 *Daily Press* (Newport News, Virginia) article by Leslie J. Nason (reporting a coming surge of college students).<sup>6</sup> The term "boom" was used well before that in reference to the spike in births after the war. As early as 1951, in fact, the postwar population increase was described as a "boom" by various newspaper reporters, including Sylvia F. Porter in a column on May 4 of that year in the *New York Post* that was reprinted in the *Reader's Digest*.<sup>7</sup>

Whatever the original source, "baby boomers" stuck if only because of the linguistic harmony. "The words have a playful, alliterative rhythm to them," the very same Landon Y. Jones noted in 2017, thinking of them as "bouncy iambic duometers." Although the term has spread to other countries, "baby boomers" is most associated with Americans and, as Marvin Cetron noted, the group is recognized by many as a defining if not the primary theme of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup>

Although the demographic stretch of the generation fits nicely with Strauss's and Howe's theory of 20-year cycles, many agree that there were

two, quite distinct waves of baby boomers born between 1946 and 1964. Members of the first wave may recall and have been influenced by the events of the counterculture while those of the second could very well list Watergate, stagflation, and the energy crisis as memorable things that happened in their youth. Musical tastes too could be bifurcated, with the first wave raised on psychedelic rock and folk and the latter on heavy metal and New Wave. Second waver Barack Obama's brand of politics was certainly different than that of first wavers Bill Clinton or George W. Bush, another significant cleavage within the boomer generation. Because there were so many of us and so much happened between the late 1940s and the mid-1960s, one could even argue there were three six-year chunks within the generation, each with its own defining characteristics. It's worth keeping these divisions in mind when reading these pages, as the story of boomers has more often than not been overgeneralized and oversimplified, something I've tried to avoid but perhaps am guilty of myself.<sup>9</sup>

*The Rise and Fall of Baby Boomers* is told chronologically, tracing the story from the birth of the first member of the generation right up to today. Sources are both popular and scholarly, but definitely lean towards the former. Period magazine and newspaper articles have served as a valuable paper trail of how boomers have been perceived and are thus used liberally. Such journalistic sources really do represent the first draft of history, I believe; the media's presentation of boomers reveals key insights into the image of the generation among the general public. Books relating to the boomer experience over the past three-quarters of a century help to provide context and locate this one within the historical literature dedicated to the field.

Needless to say, telling the story of 76 million people over the course of three-quarters of a century is an ambitious enterprise. For that reason, this work is limited to American baby boomers, and I welcome other historians to document the lives of the generation from other countries. As well, parsing the generation into men and women and/or white and black people (or straight and gay people or any other socially constructed division, including geography or religion, for that matter) would greatly exceed the scope of this book and I think any other with a subject of such magnitude. Social and economic class, on the other hand, is discussed, as disparities in wealth, unlike gender and race, play an important role in the dynamics of the generation. As perhaps the first attempt to tell the full baby boomer story, my primary goal is to lay the foundation for what is already a compelling narrative, something I hope readers will appreciate.

# CHAPTER 1

## FIRST RESPONSE TO PEACE

*“In our efforts to provide ‘all the advantages,’ we have produced the busiest, most competitive, highly pressured and over-organized generation of youngsters in history—and probably the unhappiest.”*

—Betsy Fancher, 1962

In October 1946 at, of all places, Carnegie Hall in Manhattan, Dr. Benjamin Spock spoke to a group of new parents who confessed to knowing little or nothing about how to care for a baby. Both mothers and fathers were nervous about even handling their newborns, thinking they might drop them. Bath time too was an opportunity for disaster to strike; accidentally drowning the little things was considered a distinct possibility. Dr. Spock, then an assistant attending pediatrician at the New York Hospital and a member of the teaching staff of Cornell University Medical College (and the author of an increasingly popular new book on the care of babies and children), tried to ease some of these parents’ many concerns. “Leap in, distract,” he urged his audience in what would be the first of hundreds of such talks, surprised at how little these adults knew regarding what and what not to do in attending to the needs of a tiny human being.<sup>1</sup>

Such were the beginnings of baby boomers’ long, strange trip that continues to this day. A switch seemed to go off and then back on with the end of World War II in September 1945, something quite apparent even at the time. Getting married and starting families were understandably difficult things to do in the early 1940s, when the war served as a major disruption to domestic life. Now, for many, the primary order of business was to quickly find a relatively suitable mate and soon have children, a pursuit *New York Times Magazine* called “the first response to peace.” The Great Depression had also functioned as a deterrent to starting new families, perhaps further increasing the desire for men and women of the “Greatest Generation” to do so at war’s end. That couples were marrying at a young age made it possible to have a big family, precisely what happened in these pre-birth control pill days.<sup>2</sup>

High expectations were immediately assigned to the rapidly growing number of children born after the war, as it would be they who would enable America to realize its full potential in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Cold War emerged as the geo-political backdrop to what was commonly called the “American way of life,” i.e., a consumerist lifestyle supported by a system based in free enterprise and pitted against foreign, i.e., communist and socialist, ideologies.<sup>3</sup> Within this context, growing the population could be seen as a weapon between the superpowers, a contributing factor in the creation of what would become the largest generation in history up to that point in time. Advice for new parents on a wide range of child-oriented topics—nutrition, health, education, and many more—flowed freely, with Dr. Spock considered the expert of experts. With psychological thinking heavily informing everyday life, there was considerable pressure to raise a “well-adjusted” child, as it was this generation that would prove to the rest of the world that our system was the best.

Things did not go exactly to plan, however. The Greatest Generation may have survived hard times and conquered the Axis powers, but many new parents were wholly unprepared to take on the mighty challenges of raising children. Despite (or perhaps because of) the constant stream of advice being offered by professionals, confusion and frustration reigned as the generation to be known as baby boomers gradually declared their independence in order to break free from the restrictions and restraints of postwar America. By the early 1960s, it had become clear that these tens of millions of young Americans had minds of their own and intended to follow a much different kind of path than the one that had been envisioned and carefully orchestrated for them.

## **The Bumper Crop**

Although some date the beginnings of the American baby boom to the end of the war in September 1945 (and some to the war years themselves), it was January 1, 1946, when most agree that the first member of the generation was born. One second after midnight on that day in Philadelphia, newborn Kathleen Casey became the original baby boomer, with some 76 million more to come through New Year’s Eve of 1965.<sup>4</sup> Both the intensity and longevity of the boom took demographers by surprise. Rather than being a temporary blip as expected, the births kept coming, good news for those worried that the population of the Soviet Union would in a few decades far exceed that of the United States. The baby boom also reversed

the century-long trend towards smaller families in Western countries, adding to the sense that this was history in the making.

The massive urge to reproduce could perhaps be best described as improvisational. As Dr. Spock had noted, many first-time parents, having rushed to get married and start families at war's end, were wholly ill-equipped for raising a child. Some admitted feeling "panicked" about their new responsibilities, having no idea how much food babies should eat or sleep they should get. Courses in baby care to both young men and women were recommended by physicians, one of them being Dr. Spock, who was becoming famous by means of his bestselling book *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*. The book sold 500,000 copies in the six months following its initial publication in 1946, a clear indication of the demand for such guidance.<sup>5</sup>

While Dr. Spock's name became synonymous with baby and childcare in the postwar years, he was hardly alone in doling out the dos and don'ts of parenting. From the late 1940s to the mid 1960s, a steady stream of experts from a wide variety of fields offered their own take on how to raise a physically and mentally healthy child. Medical doctors, home economists, educators, psychologists, psychiatrists, sociologists, religious leaders, health officials at government agencies, and other professionals and organizations came forth with an abundance of theories and research designed to produce a group of adults ideally equipped to lead the nation into the future. Publications of all sorts were made available, most of them free, and lectures were delivered and films shown to overflow crowds of curious and often confused parents. Importantly, the information was almost always grounded in "modern" principles that replaced the outdated beliefs and practices of the prewar years. It was, in short, a golden age of childcare as the generation that would be called baby boomers grew up in an era dominated by scientific thought, a trust in figures of authority, and a deep fear of communist ideology.

With a fast-growing number of young children to be looked after, the postwar years were also a golden age of babysitting. Nicknamed "bratting" by the millions of teenagers and adults charged with taking care of a little one, babysitting was reported to be a \$750 million a year business in 1948. High school girls and college women did most of the sitting, with 75 cents per hour considered the top rate. No boyfriends, alcohol, or use of the telephone was typically allowed. Still, the supply fell short of the demand, reason why some hospital nurses were taking babysitting jobs in their off-hours to make extra cash. Some sitters, knowing they were in the cat bird's seat, were organizing and setting rules of their own, e.g., extra pay for housework and service after midnight, provided snacks, and rides home.

Relative newlyweds eager for a rare night out, meanwhile, were luring better sitters with well-stocked refrigerators, a pack of cigarettes (!), and big tips.<sup>6</sup> Courses were being offered by health departments to train future babysitters, with certificates of completion awarded to show parents who were understandably nervous about leaving their child with a stranger.<sup>7</sup>

By 1949, with the baby boom still exploding, it was becoming increasingly clear that the United States didn't have enough schools and educators to meet the needs of all the students-to-be. In fact, even if no more babies were born, there wouldn't be sufficient educational facilities to handle the number of young children heading to school over the next five years. Officials in many states were tumbling the numbers and realizing they were well short of what was required, especially when this group began high school around 1960. Other aspects of a community's economic and social life were going to be affected by this large and ever-growing wave, making city and town planners no doubt wonder where all the money was going to come from.<sup>8</sup>

Not only was this demographically defined collection of children greater than any that had come before, it had been mostly intentionally created. "The bumper crop of post-war babies appears to have been deliberately planned and invited to a greater degree than any previous generation," the *New York Times* reported in 1950 after reviewing a study completed by the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. About 80% of pregnancies were planned, the study of Baltimore obstetrical patients showed, a significantly higher percentage than for pre-war pregnancies. In these pre-pill days, couples had used the birth control methods available to them, waiting for the right time because of housing, work, or educational issues. This was a new thing, as historically it was only when families grew to an unmanageable size that a couple would explore ways to avoid another pregnancy.<sup>9</sup>

It was also apparent that this era's version of child raising was different from that of earlier times. Around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the relationship between parent and child can be best described as "sentimental," i.e., infused with strong feelings of tenderness and an inclination towards indulgence. Between the 1910s and 1930s, however, methods became rigid and disciplinary, seemingly inspired by the systematic and emotionless character of the Machine Age. (Henry Ford's assembly line provided a good model for parents and schools to follow.) Now, at midcentury, a revolution in child raising was taking place, many experts believed, with science-based research determining common practices. In addition to an emphasis on self-regulation and "understanding" the child, a link between physical and emotional health had been established, bringing a heavy dose of psychology

into the equation. It's safe to say that the postwar interest in if not obsession with psychoanalysis was clearly evident in the thinking and techniques of the day, putting more pressure on parents lest they cause permanent trauma to their child's psyche.<sup>10</sup>

Not helping matters was the typical image of the American family as presented in popular and consumer culture at midcentury. Writing in the journal *Child Study* in 1950, Helen W. Puner took note of the wide gap between the idealized family seen in the media and real life and cautioned parents assuming the former was normal. One could get the impression from reading a magazine or watching television that most families were continually "abeam with fatuous good cheer," as Puner described it, when the truth was that parenting was more likely a tense, anxiety-filled affair, especially if there were siblings. Don't get caught in the trap of comparing one's family to others, she warned, especially those depicted in the mythical world of TV shows and commercials.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, the potential impact of television on children was getting a lot of attention as the new medium became increasingly popular. Children of the postwar years were growing up alongside the development of the television industry, after all, making it understandable why some were questioning whether the medium was functioning as a positive or negative force in the lives of young people. Because it combined visuals with sound, television was considered a far more "powerful" device than radio, the latter of course having been the dominant medium of the parents of this generation. Even in 1950, critics believed that kids were watching too much TV and what they were watching was either inane or detrimental to their minds. Teachers were reporting lower grades and attributing the drop to television overconsumption, citing violent crime shows and the sexual innuendo found on *The Milton Berle Show* as the biggest contributors to the problem. "No Pied Piper ever proved so irresistible," James N. Miller wrote for *Nation*, thinking that the draw of television to children was uncontrollable.<sup>12</sup>

Religious leaders were especially concerned about the possibly deleterious effects of this powerful new medium upon the moral compass of children. Cardinal Spellman of the Roman Catholic Diocese of New York was an outspoken critic of this demonic box brought into Americans' living rooms, thinking that television could turn the generation into a massive horde of criminals. "Now, any broadcasting radical may enter the home and, under cunning disguises, sow the seeds of juvenile bewilderment and delinquency," he declared at a conference of the city's judges, seeing no good to come from this invasive machine.<sup>13</sup>

## Duck and Cover

Because it was in many ways the perfect device to persuade Americans to buy things, however, it was highly unlikely that the encroachment of television would slow down.<sup>14</sup> Marketers of products used by children were some of the heaviest advertisers, as a veritable windfall was to be had because of the large and growing market. Gerber Products, a top seller of baby food, found itself in the enviable position of having to double its output in order to meet the demand. The baby food industry had increased 1,800% between 1940 and 1950, and Gerber's sales had doubled since the end of the war. The Rochester, New York-based company was building a new plant to produce large volumes of strained vegetables, fruits, and desserts and was branching out into cereals.<sup>15</sup>

As the babies of the baby boom gobbled up mushed up carrots and bananas from glass jars, the White House was having its once-a-decade Conference on Children and Youth. The mission of the 1950 meeting was "to consider how we can develop in children the mental, emotional and spiritual qualities essential to individual happiness and to responsible citizenship," a reflection of the nation's focus on the freedoms to be enjoyed in a democracy during the Cold War. Interestingly, a fair number of the 6,000 or so attendees viewed this mission from a psychological and specifically psychoanalytic perspective. "We can only hope to achieve our ideal of a free society through healthy personalities who are capable of bearing the burdens of freedom," stated Lawrence K. Frank, a social scientist and member of the steering committee of the conference. "The aim is not just to save individuals from neuroses and emotional disorders but to fit them for an increasingly healthy society," he added, the future of America essentially dependent on raising a generation of mentally stable children.<sup>16</sup>

Framed as a matter of national security and defense of our system of free-market capitalism, child psychology blossomed in the postwar years. Rather than leave the development of a child and adolescent to chance—a risky thing, given the stakes involved—experts of all stripes made their presence known to help manage the process of growing up. It was parents and teachers who carried most of the burden, however, as it were they who were in the best position to shape the delicate and pliable minds of children. Understanding the thoughts, motives, habits, and emotions of children was key, argued Arthur T. Jersild, a professor of education at Columbia University, urging that parents and teachers have a plan in place lest young people develop feelings of anxiety, guilt, and self-reproachment.<sup>17</sup> It could be seen how, during this "Age of Anxiety," adults were projecting their own



fears upon children, a theme addressed in Erik Erikson's 1950 book *Childhood and Society*.<sup>18</sup>

With the threat of a nuclear war between the superpowers a genuine concern in the early 1950s, the task of raising a "normal" child was considered not an easy one. Providing children with love and assurance was paramount, experts believed, as the reality of atomic energy led to the inescapable truth that the world could blow up at any moment. "You and I cannot tell the children that there will be no bombs, but we can, through the society, help strengthen and prepare them for whatever may lie ahead," wrote Morgan Dix Wheelock, president of the Children's Aid Society, in the organization's 1951 annual report.<sup>19</sup> "Duck and cover" drills at schools were routine, a practice designed to reassure students that an atomic blast could be survived. The effects of such drills on children were unclear, some thinking that students shrugged them off (or even welcomed them as a break from class routine) and others believing they triggered significant tension.<sup>20</sup>

While many believed that television was rotting children's brains, others felt that the medium was helping relieve some of the Cold War anxieties by boosting their overall psychological wellbeing. Phillip Polatin, a professor of psychiatry at Columbia, held that Western shows in particular were excellent outlets for children's hostility and aggression, and thus not at all the passive entertainment some claimed television to be. While or after watching cowboy and Indian shoot-'em-ups, boys, some armed with cap pistols, often engaged in hero versus villain battles, a healthy release of latent apprehensions and inner angst. Other experts cited additional benefits of children gazing at "video receivers," including the exposure to a wide variety of people and topics, the learning of new words, and a greater familiarity with current events. Some felt that TV was helping bring parents and children closer together as they watched the same shows, this alone a good reason not to dismiss the medium as a waste of time or cause of cognitive corrosion.<sup>21</sup>

More broadly, many experts viewed entertainment media in general as a good way for children (as well as adults) to engage in the entirely normal realm of the make-believe. Mental and emotional maladjustments "are often due to the suppression of childish daydreams and fantasies," stated Herbert Kupper, a Los Angeles psychiatrist, at a 1951 convention in that city, thinking that mass entertainment (including movies, radio, and comic strips) provided a healthy release of internal fears and aggression. Television wasn't as good as live theater or reading a book in this regard, Kupper noted, but even the "boob tube" was harmless as long as there was some connection with reality.<sup>22</sup> Don't take your child's rather extreme attraction to television and other forms of entertainment too

seriously, agreed Portia Hamilton, a clinical psychologist, thinking their influence was for the most overstated if said child also actively played with friends or classmates.<sup>23</sup>

With so many experts giving so much advice on every aspect of child raising imaginable as the baby boom produced ever more children, it was becoming apparent that not everything that was being said should be believed. Professionals not only often disagreed with each other but also admitted they simply didn't know the answers to parents' many questions. Approach any and all recommendations made by recognized figures of authority with a healthy dose of skepticism, some experts (ironically) advised. Common sense trumped scientific research when it came to parenting, in other words, suggesting a backlash of sorts was brewing relative to the intense pressure to raise a generation of emotionally healthy children. The social, economic, and political stress and strain of the times only exacerbated parents' lack of confidence, and the Babel of opinions being expressed magnified the confusion many felt. In short, the fear of being judged a "bad" parent was rampant, and the plethora of information being offered was perhaps doing more harm than good.<sup>24</sup>

Also being questioned was the emphasis being given to civil defense activities and the atmosphere they created. World War II was well over, but a palpable sense of international conflict could be felt, particularly at school. This was not a good thing, many agreed, as it instilled in children at the very least a confrontational ideology and, at worst, the belief that an attack by the enemy was imminent. As well, educators tended to cast the Soviet Union as villains and the United States as heroes in order to instill the value of democracy (and evils of communism) among students, a morally questionable lesson regardless of one's political affiliation. The idea of "brotherhood" was at the same time being inculcated in both schools and at church or synagogues, contradicting the wholesale demonization of a particular country and its people.<sup>25</sup>

Particularly worrisome was the screening of "Duck and Cover" in schools across the country. The film intended to help children prepare for an atomic attack made its debut in the spring of 1952 and, by the end of that year, millions of students had seen it. At least one organization, the Committee for the Study of War Tensions in Children, considered such showings "inadvisable"; its members contended that the movie was doing an "actual disservice" to young viewers. Rather than help them escape physical or emotional harm, "Duck and Cover" (produced by the Federal Civil Defense Administration in conjunction with the National Education Association) "promoted anxiety and tension in children," according to the committee (made up mostly by psychiatrists). Civil defense should be a

matter for adults, not children, for one thing, and it was in the best interests of all Americans for schools to counter popular anti-communism fever rather than help spread it.<sup>26</sup>

## A Nation of Weaklings

In fact, some argued, there was a larger threat to American children than communism, and it was being posed not by some foreign enemy but rather by ourselves. Conformity, i.e., the pressure to adjust to group norms, was a powerful force in the postwar years for both adults and children, a reflection of the conservative values in play. Many educators urged that students join the crowd both literally and figuratively and discouraged individualistic thought and action. Some of those in the field of child development thought this was a big mistake, however, and urged teachers and administrators to allow students to think for themselves, even if that meant occasionally challenging adult authority. Democracy itself depended on citizens being true to themselves and doing what they thought was right even if it was unpopular, as history clearly showed what could happen when people acted like sheep and were afraid to challenge those in power.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to conformity, the prospect of being “overprivileged” was viewed as a major hazard to American children. Broad prosperity combined with parents’ instructions to bestow large quantities of love upon their children for the latter’s emotional wellbeing was creating a generation of Americans believed to not possess the traditional character of rugged individualism. While such children were perhaps happy today, this thinking went, it was their future that was worrisome. “The overprivileged, overprotected, overindulged child of the oversolicitous parent may well grow up with problems as difficult to himself as those of the youngster who has had too few of the good things of life,” wrote Dorothy Barclay for the *New York Times* in 1954, citing hypochondria as one condition that could develop from receiving too much attention in one’s youth.<sup>28</sup>

Much like how “helicopter” parents of today are criticized for not allowing their children to develop “grit,” postwar mothers and fathers were thus accused of raising a generation that was, in a word, soft. Children and teens of the 1950s, especially those growing up in the crabgrass frontier of the suburbs, were “coddled,” “pampered,” and “spoiled,” many were claiming, with even Dr. Spock declaring that they were not resilient enough for the realities they would eventually face. Wanting to shield their children from the challenges that were a normal part of childhood, parents were actually doing a disservice to their kids, experts pointed out, leading to the dreaded prospect of prolonged dependence. In order to win the Cold War, it

was essential that the nation produce citizens who could be independent enough to not be swayed by foreign ideologies.<sup>29</sup>

Equally bad, perhaps, this large generation appeared to be less than physically fit, another byproduct of excessive privilege. American children of the 1950s were “living in a highly mechanized society, depending on cars, school buses, elevators, and perhaps television sets,” Barclay wrote after seeing the results of a cross-cultural study examining the relative fitness of students. Young Europeans were in better shape than young Americans, the study showed, this too a function of the latter’s cosseting in our abundant society.<sup>30</sup> Such a thing was unacceptable, especially when viewed against the lean times of the Great Depression and the muscle required to win the Second World War. With both the minds and bodies of American children deemed not strong enough, the United States was on the brink of creating what *American Magazine* called in 1956 “a nation of weaklings.”<sup>31</sup> This could be said to have been the beginnings of the negative sentiment that would be directed baby boomers’ way throughout their lives.

Weaklings or not, American children continued to arrive in startling numbers in the mid-1950s. A baby was born every eight seconds or 10,000 a day in 1954, close to the record of 4 million that had been born the previous year. Demographers had predicted there would be a slowdown in births based on the fact that it was children of the 1930s who were now reaching marriageable age. There were far fewer children that decade than in the 1920s (a function of the economy), but obstetricians were in the mid-1950s as busy as ever. The number of marriages had indeed fallen but high employment and high incomes encouraged them to get married at an earlier age and to have more children.<sup>32</sup> It was the heyday of the American middle class, and, with jobs and houses readily available (for white men), having large families was for many the natural thing do.<sup>33</sup>

If there was any doubt that hordes of new babies continued to be born, all one had to do was walk down the street of a big city. Baby carriages was a booming business, having grown 400% over the past decade, and packs of the things could be seen almost everywhere, sometimes bumper-to-bumper. Newly built apartment houses were making space for baby carriage “garages,” and department stores were setting aside room near the entrance for buggy “parking lots.” In Manhattan, police departments were getting complaints from pedestrians that the carriages were crowding the sidewalks, and, in some places, there wasn’t enough space for two to pass at the same time. Deluxe models were selling for as much as \$175 (\$1,800 in today’s dollars), some of them having shock absorbers, chrome mudguards, and white sidewall tires. Among the wealthier set, however, it

was an imported British pram that announced a baby of considerable means was present.<sup>34</sup>

Baby carriages were hardly the only thing in which new parents were investing. “Watching the baby grow—perhaps the greatest indoor sport the world over—is proving to be a gold mine for manufacturers,” the *New York Times* noted in 1955, with clothes, food, and furniture just some of the ways in which “mother and money were soon parted.” Age-appropriate wallpaper for a child’s room was a popular choice, as were portable gates and in these pre-car seat days, contraptions that kept kids from rolling off the backseats of automobiles.<sup>35</sup> Soon, however, it would be children themselves who often had money to spend, with allowances provided to train them as junior consumers. Children were “youthful buyers on their own,” thought *Life* in 1954, an observation that would escalate in the years ahead as baby boomers became teenagers.<sup>36</sup>

American children were considered different from their European counterparts not only due to their penchant to spend money or have it spent on them. More Americans were traveling to Europe in the fifties and noticing that children in other countries did not much resemble the jeans-clad, toy gun-toting, and rambunctious young person they were raising. The stereotypes attached to certain nationalities—the calm Swiss, the formal British, the rules-oriented Dutch, the reserved French, and the gentle Italian—seemed to apply to the children of those countries. American parents were raising their children to be, more than anything else, sociable, something quite apparent after observing how little ones across the pond behaved. Americans wanted their children to be friendly, popular, and able to “fit in,” something that could not be said of most Europeans. Parisian mothers were generally abhorred by American-style sociability, for example, instead instilling the values of self-discipline and intellectual rigor among their *enfants*.<sup>37</sup>

## A Breed Apart

While many experts advised parents that their child had better be sociable lest they be cast as a loner, others in the field continued to warn that too much guidance in general was being put forth. Although his book had by 1954 sold six million copies, Dr. Spock was not a fan of much parental education. Numerous programs “have missed the target and some of them have, in a subtle way, done more harm than good,” he said to a group of child psychiatrists at a conference in Toronto, thinking less was more when it came to teaching parents how to raise their children. The biggest factor in raising a happy child was having had a happy childhood, obviously something

that could not be learned from a book, lecture, or class. Good child raising came naturally, the pediatrician believed, with problems more likely to arise when trying to follow the recommendations made by someone with a particular point of view on the subject.<sup>38</sup>

Hilde Bruch, a child psychiatrist at Columbia University, agreed that too much information was there for the taking. “The time has come to leave mother and child alone,” she told the same group, citing research that showed there had been no decline in emotional problems among youth despite the avalanche of material made available. Too many parents were acting like puppets after hearing the stern warnings of a certain expert, a dangerous thing given that much of the advice being disseminated was for the most part theoretical and speculative.<sup>39</sup>

About six months after Dr. Spock’s talk in Toronto, the man spoke to another group in Chicago with much the same message. Parenting was not like the step-by-step approach found in an instruction manual and should not be viewed as hard work, he told the Child Welfare League of America. Rather, it was enjoying the process that was best for both parents and children, a much simpler recipe than the complex, psychology-filled formulae that typified childcare guidance these days. As well, just wanting one’s child to thrive was a lot better than trying to manage every step of the way, something many parents were determined to do.<sup>40</sup> As well, a fair share of mothers and fathers were striving for perfection, not just an impossible pursuit but an ill-advised one that would likely backfire, according to Grace McLean Abbate, a Yale psychiatrist.<sup>41</sup>

With sales of Benjamin Spock’s *Book of Baby and Child Care* up to 7 million copies in 1955 and a local Pittsburgh television program that he hosted proving popular, NBC decided to give the man his own network television show. (Yale-based pediatrician and psychologist Arnold Gesell remained popular but his view of child development seemed dated by midcentury.) Simply called *Doctor Spock*, the weekly half-hour show broadcast on Sunday afternoons had the pediatrician meet with a group of mothers (and occasionally fathers) to discuss child raising problems. As in his lectures to professionals in the field, here too Spock emphasized that parents should trust themselves rather than follow experts’ advice. Young parents not only lacked experience but self-confidence, he had learned, but the answers to their questions could not be found in a typical “how-to” book. His own book was successful because it provided common sense advice and was designed to get parents to think for themselves. “You know more than you think you do,” was the opening sentence in his bestselling book, and he was determined to continue to hammer away at this theme until American parents displayed self-assurance.<sup>42</sup>

While such a message was indeed common sense, the reality was that parents likely had less influence on their children than they believed. By the mid-1950s, mass media had entered the average middle-class home with a vengeance, with children exposed to the steady stream of popular and consumer culture delivered via radio, magazines, newspapers, and television. Abram Kardiner, dean of the Psychoanalytic Clinic at Columbia University, made the case that the American home, a private institution, had been “culturally invaded,” allowing the media to usurp much of the power that parents once held. The home was considered a safe haven in the anxiety-ridden postwar years, making any intrusion from outside forces cause for concern.<sup>43</sup> Barraged by entertainment and advertising targeted to the middle class, this generation of children was said to be developing “cookie-cutter” personalities, i.e., were more alike than those of the past. The flood of mass media was curtailing the emotional development of children, Kardiner maintained, something that did not bode well for the nation’s future.<sup>44</sup>

Kardiner’s conclusions were debatable given the fact that children were spending a considerable amount of time not in their homes. In addition to their hours at school and the increasingly popularity of summer camp, children were being taken along on trips and to places that had traditionally been adults-only. With the baby boom showing no signs of stopping or even slowing down, the hospitality industry was reconfiguring to become more, as it would become known, family friendly. Airlines had already made airplane travel more accommodating for young passengers in various ways to attract the family market, and hotels were doing the same as it became clear that more parents wanted to take their kids along on vacations. Now it was country clubs that were adding amenities to attract families. “Clubs and resorts across the nation are going into the baby-sitting business so that young moms and pops can have a chance to play in peace,” observed Craig Thompson in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1956, finding even the snootiest places happy to provide childcare and kid-like activities for their members.<sup>45</sup>

Despite getting out of the house, however, there was a sense that the lives of children were being overmanaged by adults in different capacities. “What happened to the magic of childhood?” asked Robert Paul Smith in that same publication the following year, thinking there was too much effort to plan every minute of a young person’s day. “There are play groups and athletic supervisors and Little Leagues and classes in finger painting and family counselors and child psychologists,” he wrote, the “aimless days we used to know” now gone. Childhood was being professionalized, in other words, a shame for Smith who grew up in a time in which kids could just be kids. Little League, for example, was taking all the fun out of baseball, Smith insisted, as there used to be no grown-ups

hanging around at games telling kids what to do. In short, it was considered best for children to be part of organized group activities led by a responsible adult in order to encourage socialization. There was safety in numbers, it could be said, as too much alone time was commonly viewed as a breeding ground for “maladjustment.”<sup>46</sup>

In addition to advising parents that their children should, perhaps more than anything else, learn how to get along with others (a mini-version of the Cold War-era aspiration for international harmony), many psychologists were making the case that adults should be friends with these little people. Children were essentially smaller versions of adults or at least they should be, this theory went, a reflection of the prevailing values of citizenship, duty, loyalty, and neighborliness. In her now classic book *Please Don't Eat the Daisies* (which was adapted for a movie in 1960 and a television series in 1965), Jean Kerr humorously mocked the notion that children were pint-sized grownups. “Children are different mentally, physically, spiritually, quantitatively, qualitatively, and furthermore they're all a little bit nuts,” she wrote in the bestseller, going on to list a litany of reasons why they were “a breed apart.”<sup>47</sup>

It was quickly becoming apparent, however, that this enormous group of children and soon-to-be teenagers was not just a breed apart from adults but like no previous generation of young people. American youth was “not young in the old way,” *Vogue* noted in 1958, while the previous year *Commonweal* had gone so far as to call them “young rebels.”<sup>48</sup> Children of the 1950s appeared to be “older” in part because they did not automatically follow the dictates of authority figures, often asking why they should or should not do a particular thing. Young people were also apt to mimic their keep-up-with-the-Joneses lifestyles of their parents, very much interested in money and the things it could buy.<sup>49</sup>

Outsiders certainly took note of the bold if not audacious behavior of young people in this country. Europeans who had taken jobs as camp counselors in the United States in the summer of 1957, for example, were taken back by the brashness of American children. Campers were “pseudo mature,” and “superficially self-assured,” some said after spending a couple of months with them, with respect given to adults only if the latter proved their worth. Having fun was pretty much all that mattered to these campers, with the descriptor “spoiled” coming up more than any other. American children were already highly materialistic, these counselors had concluded, far more interested in things like cars, television, and business than their European counterparts. As well, parental love was expressed mostly by means of the things purchased for the campers, this too quite different from the generational bond in counselors' own countries.<sup>50</sup>



## A Pervasive Fear of Life

Why were American children seeming to deviate from the course so carefully laid out for them? What was causing them to turn out much differently than expected? Most important, perhaps, how had adults failed in their concerted effort to produce a group of young people who would demonstrate the superiority of the American way? The answers to such questions were not at all clear. Some argued that it was the exponential growth of the suburbs that was responsible for the “plight” of the nation’s children, especially those getting into trouble of some sort. Bertram Beck, an associate director of the National Association of Social Workers, held that many children felt “excluded” from society due to the “rootless” suburban communities in which they were growing. Unlike the villages and towns of a half-century ago, the suburbs did and could not offer the kind of parental love and neighborly concern that children needed and deserved.<sup>51</sup>

Others thought that living in the “space age” was having a significant impact on the ways that children were growing up. In October 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik 1, the world’s first artificial satellite, into the Earth’s orbit, putting that country ahead in the “space race.” More generally, the launch gave the impression that the Russians had an edge over the United States in science, technology, and math, something of great concern during the Cold War. (It could be seen as a politically charged STEM of its day.) In response, American educators were focusing more on those subjects to better enable the nation’s youth to keep up with those of the other superpower, a pursuit that critics found less than ideal for raising secure, well-rounded individuals. As well, the notion that children were essentially competing with those of another country to get to the moon first (deemed a strategic advantage in military terms, should relations with the Soviet Union further deteriorate) was adding to the already intense pressure of the times.<sup>52</sup>

Public education as a whole was not serving students nearly as well as it could. With no national governance of the system in place and states mostly leaving it up to local school districts what to teach and how material should be presented, K-12 education in America was scattered and geographically inconsistent. Much faith was being placed in the nation’s educational system, as it was a principal launching pad of our collective future, but the fact was that it was highly disorganized and unfocused. “There is little or no consensus on what children should learn beyond the fundamentals,” William Sanders, State Commissioner of Education of Connecticut, stated, adding that “there are differences of opinions as to what the fundamentals are.” There was even disagreement over what “education”

was and what it was for; beyond teaching the ABCs, was the purpose of schools to serve economic, political, social, spiritual, or moral aims?<sup>53</sup>

There was no shortage of possibilities to explain why children of the late fifties were not the cheery and obedient group of people that adults wanted and had expected them to be. Samuel Witchell, a professor of social studies at Glassboro State College in New Jersey, believed that it was families' habit of relocating that had much to do with children's perceived discontent and questioning of authority. The postwar expansion of the economy, building of interstate highways, and creation of entirely new neighborhoods was encouraging many Americans to move for better job opportunities. Just as the suburbs failed to offer a sense of place, however, mobility was responsible for causing a feeling of rootlessness, Witchell argued, a psychologically unhealthy thing. Witchell compared this spatial disorientation to that an immigrant often felt when moving to a different country, the basis for what he described as "social adjustment problems" among children.<sup>54</sup>

Whatever the reason or reasons for them not turning out to be happy-go-lucky model citizens, it was becoming readily apparent that this generation of children was more "sophisticated" than those of the past. Many fourth, fifth, and sixth graders were "going steady," according to a 1959 report issued by the federal government, with wearing lipstick commonplace among girls aged nine to eleven. Kids talked openly about marrying and having children of their own, a new thing for teachers who had years of experience. The report, which was based on observations made by educators and visitors to classrooms, also found students of these grades to have "inner anxieties" and in need of "security and reassurances from parents and teachers." Boys and girls of this age had a variety of fears, according to the report, including the fear of failing tests in school, the fear of parents getting sick or losing their job, the fear of being hurt (by knives, guns, poison, fire, flood, or holdup), and, last but not least, "a pervasive fear of life."<sup>55</sup>

Were American children as anxiety-ridden and fearful as this report claimed them to be? It appeared that in this respect young people had, as with consumerism, adopted the ways of their parents who admittedly found much of life frightening during these years. The pressures to be accepted by "the group" were being passed on, as was the trepidation of living in what was perceived to be a dangerous world. It was also not surprising that the seeming stability and normalcy of family life was also being bestowed by adults upon children during this era defined heavily by domesticity. The report (authored by Gertrude M. Lewis, a recognized expert on upper elementary school students) was purportedly about children,

but it was really about the values that were in circulation at the time and the ways in which they were being expressed within American society.<sup>56</sup>

The pressures children felt were not only the result of conditions in the present but in those of the projected future. The postwar years were particularly forward-thinking, with a strong belief that the pragmatic seeds of today would bear fruit in the utopian world of tomorrow.<sup>57</sup> What professions children would eventually go into was of great interest to parents and educators who looked to psychological testing for a reliable forecast. (I answered “astronaut” when asked in grade school what I wanted to be when I grew up, a prediction that turned out to be wholly inaccurate given my ineptitude in science not to mention my fear of heights and small spaces.) “Aptitude tests, personality profiles, interest inventories and similar ‘predictive instruments’ are developed for younger and younger children each year,” the *New York Times* noted in 1959, with some schools and nursery programs applying such methods to 3-year-olds. Infants as young as two months were being evaluated in terms of their future prospects, a rather silly thing given all that would take place in the lives of these children over the next couple of decades (and the unforeseeable occupations that would come to be). Still, it was considered important to know whether a child would one day be a scientist, carpenter, or composer, as America’s future depended on the filling of such jobs.<sup>58</sup>

Whatever their future occupations, American babies kept coming. 1959 was the sixth consecutive year that more than 4 million babies were born in the United States, with one coming every seven seconds. Demographers were forecasting that not only would the baby boom continue but accelerate through the 1960s; 6.5 million babies were predicted to be born in 1970. The 4 million mark would actually continue only through 1964, when the number of births fell below that number. It would not be until 1989 when births again climbed above 4 million when baby boomers created the “boomlet,” i.e., millennials. Demographically speaking, 1959 was an important year as it was then that the first wave of boomers turned 13, transferring some of the nation’s attention from children to teenagers.<sup>59</sup>

While the 1950 White House Conference on Children and Youth focused on the internal, psychological forces that were shaping the attitudes and behavior of young people, the one of 1960 emphasized the impact of external, cultural forces. The tremendous social, economic, and technological changes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century up to that point had had a major effect on the nation’s youth, the thirty or so invited experts agreed, and with mixed results. Family farms, home-based businesses, and methods of transportation dating back hundreds of years had yielded to the ways of modernity driven by urbanization and then suburbanization. Increased productivity, better living

conditions, improved health and longer longevity, and more leisure time were just some of the benefits of the progress made over the first six decades of the century, making it unquestionably a truly remarkable period in the history of humankind.<sup>60</sup>

## The Trojan Horse

Such changes, however, had a profound impact on the stability of the American family and on the nation's education system. Greater migration had separated family members from each other, for example, and increased average lifespans posed a new set of problems. Children especially were vulnerable to the much more complex society that had been created, with the matching of talent to future employment opportunities just one challenge that had not been resolved. The findings of the 1960 White House Conference on Children and Youth were compiled in a three-volume book titled *The Nation's Children* that was designed to serve as a platform to address what Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg called in her review "the troublesome problems regarding children."<sup>61</sup>

Many of these problems were in fact being addressed by recognized experts within the educational arena. "School guidance—like babies—is riding a boom these days," Earl H. Hanson, Superintendent of Schools in Rock Island, Illinois, observed in 1960, having personal experience in the process. At the age of four-and-a-half, children in his town entered a "guidance system" that went all the way into high school. "For the next dozen years, the system gently but firmly manipulates him so that he can take full advantage of our educational facilities," he proudly stated, noting that public schools across the country followed such a model to a greater or lesser degree. Over the past decade, guidance had served as "that important extra gear in the school machinery that attempts to get *and keep* [his emphasis] youngsters on the right track," Hanson continued, the gear a primary component of the country's educational apparatus. Indeed, James B. Conant, who had recently written a bestselling book called *The American High School Today* (earning him a spot on the cover of *Time* magazine), called guidance "the keystone in our educational arch," this despite the fact that relatively few laypeople could explain with any accuracy what it actually was.<sup>62</sup>

While some parents and even some educators felt that school guidance had too much influence over the lives of children, Hanson not surprisingly was an enthusiastic cheerleader for it. Guidance was simply the effort to evaluate a student's potential followed by the steering of him or her in the direction that made best use of the talents that had been identified, he

explained, the thinking being that every child had something to offer society. “Modern science has created a whole bag of dazzling tricks,” Hanson gleefully informed readers of the *Saturday Evening Post*, such tricks including quizzes, intelligence and aptitude tests, conferences with psychological counselors, parent-teacher talks, speech-correction courses, and remedial reading. For Hanson and no doubt other educators in a position of authority, “school guidance can save our children,” he firmly believed, convinced that “the whole country will reap the benefits of the journey.”<sup>63</sup>

Even the dazzling tricks of school guidance could not change the fact that these tens of millions of children would be competing with each other for the kind of jobs they had been “manipulated” in taking. The implications of the huge spike in the nation’s population curve would become a major point of discussion among economists and other social scientists but it was relatively rare in the early 1960s for anyone to take note of the possible ramifications of the proverbial pig in a python. Peter L. Bernstein, an economist and financial historian, was an exception, presenting his thoughts on what he called “the Trojan horse of population growth” in the *Harvard Business Review* in 1961. Americans, particularly businesspeople, were delighted to see the bumper crop of babies being born as it meant more consumption of whatever industry produced. As well, more people implied the creation of more and bigger companies and thus more jobs, another bonus of the postwar baby boom. More was more, in other words, as expansion of the nation’s economy relied on a steady increase in the number of consumers and workers.<sup>64</sup>

Bernstein, however, was less than sanguine about the unprecedented surge of children dating back to the end of the Second World War. “The United States is about to be swarmed over by hordes of youngsters looking for jobs,” he wrote, telling businesspeople to be careful what they wished for. Rather than “a Utopian period of ever-rising numbers of worker-consumers bolstering an ever-rising demand for goods and services,” Bernstein warned, there very well could be big trouble on the horizon. Most economists assumed that postwar prosperity would continue indefinitely but Bernstein knew his history. What went up eventually went down, he reminded men and women of commerce, suggesting they remember what happened after the post-World War I boom. It was unfashionable to be a bear in these bullish times, but Bernstein would be proved correct as the postwar economic train ran out of steam in the late 1960s just as he had predicted.<sup>65</sup>

With the decidedly youthful Kennedys in the White House, the Trojan horse of population growth in the United States grew yet bigger. Over the course of the Kennedy Administration’s first six months, the

country's birth rate had sped up to one baby born every six minutes, a new record. By 1962, Americans appeared to be taking inspiration from the Kennedys' family friendly ways that struck some critics as overly friendly. Caroline Kennedy, the couple's 4-year-old daughter, was permitted to run freely through the White House as were Robert and Ethel Kennedy's many children. (They eventually had eleven.) The gang frequently made their presence known at state dinners and played tag while the President met with foreign ambassadors and union leaders, lending an important humanistic perspective while the fate of the world was being discussed.<sup>66</sup>

Due to their sheer ubiquity in the early 1960s, children were being allowed access to all kind of places in which they had traditionally been banned. Many fancy restaurants had long considered kids *persona non grata* (or kept them along with their parents or nannies far away from respectable diners) but were now not only welcoming them but preparing special meals for them. The more permissive attitude towards children had much to do with money, of course, as parents were more likely to frequent places that were hospitable to mini consumers. Beyond that, however, more progressive psychologists (and Eleanor Roosevelt) urged that children and adults be treated as equals in order to instill confidence in the former. Another piece of advice among the liberally minded was to reason with children rather than punish them, as doing the latter could lead to years of psychotherapy. Some felt that a double standard was in effect, with children getting more favorable treatment than adults rather than the other way around.<sup>67</sup>

The counterargument to such thinking was that treating children like adults was cheating them out of childhood. Much like Robert Paul Smith had argued, Betsy Fancher felt that having constant adult supervision and rigid schedules was not a good way to raise children as it took away the freedom that was an essential part of growing up. Fancher described the life of the typical middle-class American child in the early sixties as the "junior rat race," a miniature version of the accelerated and competitive regimen in which their parents were likely engaged. Children "need to be themselves, to fulfill their creative impulses, and develop their own inner resources," she wrote, not at all in favor of "our arrogant efforts to mastermind whatever they do." Children's after-school hours on most weekdays were often spent playing sports, learning languages, practicing arts, and/or acquiring the tools of good citizenship in the Cub Scouts or Brownies, all of this seen as an excellent training ground for the busy and driven lives that lay ahead for them as adults.<sup>68</sup>