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Teenagers: An American History

Grace Palladino

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Nobody worried about teenagers prior to the 1940s. In fact, as a culturally or economically defined entity they did not exist. But in the 50 years since the last world war, when the term was first coined, teenagers have had an enormous impact on American culture. They have reshaped our language, our music, our clothes. They have changed forever the way we respond to authority. They have become a 200 billion consumer group avidly courted by marketers. And they have changed our culture, which will never again treat their demographic group merely as young adults. Teenagers ranges widely across American culture of the middle twentieth century to depict the shifting characterizations of teens from invisible young adults to young soldiers in training, to bobby soxers and zoot suiters, to rock 'n' rollers and juvenile delinquents, from hippies to savvy consumers. Grace Palladino examines everything from Andy Hardy and Elvis Presley to Seventeen magazine and MTV. She challenges those who decry teenage hedonism and immorality today, showing that modern disaffected teenagers, as in the past, are responding just as much to hypocritical adult behavior as to a commercial cult of sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll.

About the Author Grace Palladino is coeditor of the Samuel Gompers Papers at the University of Maryland and is the author of the prizewinning book *Another Civil War*.