The Emergence of the Teenager

Life after World War II brought changes in the family. For the first time, the teenage years were recognized as an important and unique developmental stage between childhood and adulthood. The booming postwar economy made it possible for teenagers to stay in school instead of working to help support their families, and allowed their parents to give them generous allowances. American business, particularly the music and movie industries, rushed to court this new consumer group.

TEENS AS CONSUMERS

Comic books, pimple creams, and soft drinks were just a few of the products aimed at teenagers with money to spend.
ROCKING TO A NEW BEAT
Teenagers seeking a collective identity found it in rock ‘n’ roll, a fresh form of music that delighted teenagers and enraged their parents. Dick Clark’s *American Bandstand* (shown at left) showcased young performers playing music ranging from doo-wop (shown above) to hard-driving rhythm and blues. The songs they sang underscored themes of alienation and heartbreak.

THE TEEN MOVIE SCENE ▲

TEENAGE TIDBITS
- A *Life* magazine survey showed that, during the 1950s, teens spent $20 million on lipstick alone.
- In 1956, a total of 42,000 drive-in movie theaters—heavily frequented by teenagers—took in one-quarter of the year’s total box-office receipts.
- College enrollments more than doubled between 1946 and 1960.
- A weekly credit payment for a record player was $1.

**U.S. School Enrollments, 1950–1990**

**Teenagers and Employment, 1950–1990**

**THINKING CRITICALLY**

1. **CONNECT TO HISTORY**
   - Interpreting Data: What were some causes of the booming teenage market in the 1950s? To answer the question, review the entire feature, including the Data File.

2. **CONNECT TO TODAY**
   - Analyzing Movies Today: What types of movies do American studios make for the teenage market today? How do these movies differ from those of the 1950s?

**RESEARCH LINKS**

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