

**the 'containment' of
juvenile delinquency**

**social engineering and
american youth culture
in the postwar era**

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In 1951, Buffalo, New York Children's Court Judge Victor Wylegala, in language evocative of the era's anti-Communist ethos, warned the people of western New York to guard against "complacency." "We are entering a critical period," he wrote, "a period which could bring disaster to the community's young people."¹ The source of Wylegala's concern was not the Red tide, but what the popular magistrate feared would be a new wave of juvenile delinquency. In retrospect, Wylegala's injunction might be read as residue from the immediate postwar years. Statistics gathered by Buffalo's Youth Board in the late 1950s reveal that by any of several measures, the rate of "delinquency"² actually declined substantially from 1946, when 2,697 juvenile cases were known to the city's Crime Prevention Bureau, through 1952, when cases bottomed out at 1801. By the judge's own calculation, juvenile cases heard in Children's Court reached an all-time low in 1950. Yet Wylegala had not been writing history but predicting the future, and in that endeavor he seems to have been remarkably astute. Youth arrests and Crime Prevention Bureau cases increased substantially in 1953, and by the late 1950s delinquency rates in Buffalo were approaching the relatively high levels of the mid-1940s.³

Buffalo's war against juvenile delinquency was waged on many fronts.



FIGURE ONE: This scene, from the 1957 *Report of the Buffalo Youth Board*, recreates a “delinquent” act. The original caption reads, “For delinquency-prone youngsters whose respect for the law is marginal, idleness and corner lounging may have serious consequences. The street corner may become the rendezvous where amateur criminals plan an act of petty car theft, such as rifling the contents of a parked car.”

Police broke up gang fights and drove youth off street corners. Wylegala called for “spiritual guidance” and sent vandals off to “reform” school.⁴ But if juvenile delinquency was regarded as a bitter enemy, the struggle against it was not always carried on as overtly as the term “war” might suggest. This essay examines two devices, each more subtle than police activity or the threat of reform school, by which the community of Buffalo—more precisely, Buffalo’s middle class—sought to keep juvenile delinquency at arm’s length. One device took the form of a large, media-based club called Hi-Teen, launched in 1946 during the first postwar wave of delinquency, and active until 1961. The other was Dress Right, a voluntary dress code for the Buffalo public schools developed in the mid-1950s, when delinquency rates were again rising.

Though both Hi-Teen and Dress Right were created during surges in delinquent behavior, the eras in which they emerged were very different in terms of youth culture and its relationship to the adult world. The years of Hi-Teen’s greatest popularity, the late 1940s, found youth relatively receptive to adult authority and guidance. In contrast, the youth culture of the mid-1950s was more peer-oriented and less receptive to adult influences. The difference can be seen through changing teen-age perceptions of band leader and singer Vaughn Monroe. Monroe was warmly received

as Hi-Teen's first guest in 1946, yet by 1953 he was having considerable difficulty understanding the new youth culture. Venting his frustration in an article in *American Weekly*, a nationally distributed newspaper insert, Monroe lamented the failure of modern youth to dance to the "jive" beat of his orchestra. "When my orchestra beats it out," he wrote, "I'd be a lot happier if I saw a whole floor of windmilling arms and legs."⁵

Given the somewhat more cooperative youth of the 1940s, Hi-Teen was content to operate largely through adult authority. Although the program made some concessions to democratic, participatory organization and structure, Hi-Teen was clearly controlled and shaped by adults. Dress Right, on the other hand, was created with the strength of the adolescent peer group in mind; the code was intended both to penetrate the peer group and to utilize its social authority. The "democratic" methods through which youth were involved in Dress Right's development, dissemination, and enforcement—methods that I have labeled democratic social engineering—were an integral part of its social reformism.

Nonetheless, Hi-Teen and Dress Right were alike in two significant respects. First, both were based on the understanding that social engineering could take place through the most obvious manifestations of youth culture—music and dress.

Second, neither was really designed to eliminate juvenile delinquency, or even to operate on the most wayward youths. As the word "containment" suggests, Hi-Teen and Dress Right were defensive in spirit; they sought to contain juvenile delinquency within the black and working-class cultures where it was most common.⁶ Hi-Teen accomplished this by creating a middle-class environment that implicitly excluded the delinquent population; similarly, Dress Right's democratic methodology excluded all but middle-class students from the process by which the dress code was created. Hi-Teen and Dress Right were products of white, middle-class culture, and each was intended to protect and insulate middle-class youth from outside contamination.

Thus Hi-Teen and Dress Right exemplify the most characteristic feature of postwar efforts to deal with juvenile delinquency. What was new in the post-1945 era was not adult concern with juvenile conduct, nor even the effort to cope with the problem by utilizing the peer group. What was new was that the American middle class sensed its own vulnerability. Once understood as a serious social problem restricted to the working class, delinquency now seemed to have spilled over the boundaries of social class and neighborhood and to threaten the children of the middle class.⁷ Hi-Teen and Dress Right were efforts to redraw and clarify those social boundaries.

hi-teen

Hi-Teen went on the air for the first time in January of 1946. The program was developed by WEBR, a station owned by the Buffalo *Courier-Express* and concerned with maintaining its middle-of-the-road programming reputation.⁸ For fifteen years, until 1961, when the program went off

the air, Hi-Teen's emcee and guiding spirit was Bob Wells, whose background and musical tastes were consistent with WEBR's conservative mission. Born in 1918, Wells attended one of Buffalo's better public high schools, where he played flute in the school band and orchestra. After two years of high school, Wells attended Culver Military Academy in Culver, Indiana on a musical scholarship and in 1936 entered Oberlin Conservatory of Music, where he earned a B.A. (1941) while studying flute. Wells became Assistant Director of Music for the Batavia, New York schools and in 1945 joined WEBR.⁹

Wells' success with Hi-Teen may be ascribed more to qualities of personality than to any appreciation for popular music. He "could sell anything," his assistant recalled, and Hi-Teen enjoyed a large and appreciative audience. Hi-Teen dances, broadcast on Saturday afternoons, drew live audiences of from 300 to over 2,000 teen-agers. Club membership reached 15,000 in 1947, 22,000 by 1954. On the air, Hi-Teen was just as popular. At times, the show drew more than half of the Buffalo area listening audience. In 1949, *Billboard Magazine* rated Hi-Teen the third most popular record show in the United States.¹⁰

From the beginning, Buffalo's civic leaders envisioned Hi-Teen as a response to juvenile delinquency. Judge Wylegala captained the city's campaign against vandalism, gangs, street-corner lounging and other manifestations of what was labeled delinquency. "Juvenile delinquency," Wylegala warned, "can crop up anywhere, under any circumstances. Just providing a so-called good home and good background is not enough. Keeping a child out of trouble means constant vigilance."¹¹ For Wylegala, the most crucial agency of vigilance was the democratic family, but the judge was not unmindful of the therapeutic role of community institutions, including the schools, the churches, the scouts and the Boys Clubs. "There are thousands of cases [of juvenile delinquency]," he wrote, "that have been solved by active participation in some community group."¹²

Hi-Teen was just that: a therapeutic community group activity. Significantly, the first broadcast originated from a club operated by the U.S.O., a private organization whose own wartime therapeutic activities took place through the social lives of servicemen.¹³ When the show moved to elegant, Saarinen-designed Kleinhans Music Hall, one newspaper reporter anticipated a therapeutic effect for the new atmosphere. "The show is a concrete answer to juvenile delinquency," read the story. "It is conducted in a dignified manner at Kleinhans Music Hall, one of the city's most modest and sedate gathering places."¹⁴

It was widely understood that Hi-Teen was designed to combat juvenile delinquency, and that the community retained an interest in what was nominally a private endeavor. No sooner had the first program been broadcast than Hi-Teen was endorsed by public officials and organizations, including the county Sheriff, the YMCA, the Catholic Youth Council and the U.S.O. director. Early in the program's history, Hi-Teen's producers invited fifty city officials to attend the program and to participate in a post-broadcast discussion on "how to combat juvenile



FIGURE TWO: Perry Como signing autographs for Hi-Teens in the late 1940s, while emcee Bob Wells looks on. Bob Wells Collection.

delinquency through the popular series.”¹⁵ The Sample Shop, an early sponsor, apparently restricted its commercial time in order to avoid interfering with the show’s “civic aspect.”¹⁶ Moreover, Wells had no quarrel with Hi-Teen’s civic mission. Recalling the experience from the perspective of 1977, Wells said, “The show was an antidote to juvenile delinquency. . . . We took the kids off the streets.”¹⁷

Hi-Teen took on this reformist challenge in a variety of ways, some very obvious, others quite subtle. The first category would surely include Chamber of Commerce awards presented on one segment for the best essays on “How to Prevent Vandalism,”¹⁸ as well as Mayor Steven Pankow’s appearance on the program to enlighten the Hi-Teen audience with a recording of his inaugural address.¹⁹

Central to the show’s social engineering goals was its attempt to define what a proper teen-ager was. A proper teen-ager was socially committed—at least to the extent of helping to eradicate disease and feed the starving, provided the latter were not located in this country. Thus Hi-Teen members found themselves enlisted in the March of Dimes, collecting food for Europe’s hungry masses or campaigning for traffic safety.²⁰ Through a

regular series of Teen-of-the-Month contests, Hi-Teen members learned that a proper teen-ager assisted neighbors in time of need and participated in a variety of community and church organizations.²¹ Other contests rewarded teens for having “perfect feet” or well-cared-for teeth.²²

Much of Hi-Teen’s social engineering energy was directed at defining appropriate teen-age behavior in two areas of great concern to youth: music and clothing. Musically, Hi-Teen claimed a certain catholicity, and with some justification, for the show’s high ratings made possible a star-studded guest list.²³ Very frequently, however, the stars that performed on the Hi-Teen bandstand were those booked into Buffalo’s Town Casino, a popular Main Street nightclub with an adult clientele.²⁴ As a result, the typical celebrity at the Hi-Teen Club was from the mainstream of American popular music, and many made their basic appeal to an audience that was adult, white and middle-class. Rhythm and blues and, after 1954, rock ‘n’ roll, were seldom heard on the Hi-Teen program. Among those who graced the Hi-Teen stage were Tony Martin, Vic Damone, Lionel Hampton, The Hoosier Hot Shots, Peggy Lee, Benny Goodman, Dennis Day, Danny Thomas, Woody Herman, and in the 1950s Russell Arms (of television’s Hit Parade) and Pat Boone.²⁵ The fact that in 1949 Hi-Teen still held a waltz contest is evidence of the program’s own cultural myopia, or, more likely, of its ongoing desire to shape the musical tastes of postwar youth.²⁶ Another example, and one that demonstrates the community’s continued interest in Hi-Teen and, in particular, in the relationship between music and behavior, comes from 1961—the year Chubby Checker dominated the charts with “The Twist.” Although the recording and the dance were rapidly absorbed within white, middle-class, adult culture,²⁷ Buffalo’s police department feared the consequences if “The Twist” was aired in Hi-Teen’s Delwood Ballroom. Rather than order the show’s producers not to play the song, the police “made certain suggestions.”²⁸

Hi-Teen was also involved in an attempt to influence teen-age dress. This effort occurred on two very different levels. One level involved the show’s major sponsor, a local dry-goods retailer called The Sample Shop, marketing its notion of style and fashion to the Hi-Teen Club and to the city at large. A photograph from the 1940s, titled “Teen Age Models Show Latest Summer Fashions,” reveals how out-of-touch The Sample Shop was with teen-age tastes. The photograph features seven teen-age young ladies, each wearing a neat cotton pinafore and looking as if she were headed for the nearest 8-year-old birthday party.²⁹

The other level of control over dress involved Hi-Teen’s efforts to ensure order among its 1000 live audience. When the show first went on the air, no dress regulations existed. Youths came to the program in jeans and sweatshirts and, according to Margaret Russ, then assistant to the program director, fights broke out. A dress code was imposed, and the fighting ceased. “When you had dress codes,” Russ recalled, “people behaved.”³⁰ From this point on, boys wore slacks and a white shirt, often with a sport coat; girls came in dress and blouse, sometimes with a school

jacket, often in bobby socks and saddle shoes.³¹ A 1958 photograph captioned “This is a typical rock ‘n’ roll dancing couple at Bob Wells’ ‘Hi-Teen Show,’” features a boy in coat and tie and white bucks, a girl in white blouse and dark jumper.³²

While Russ assumed that the dress code had changed behavior—that disorderly teens became orderly as a result of a change in clothes—another explanation is more likely. It may be that the dress code functioned less as a mechanism for dressing up potentially disruptive teen-agers than as a device for excluding whole classes of teens whose presence would have threatened Hi-Teen’s orderly atmosphere. Hi-Teen’s audience was surely no cross-section of Buffalo. The city’s private-school elite did not attend,³³ nor did most blacks,³⁴ nor the tougher elements of the working class. An East Side youth, accustomed to wearing the pegged pants or “drapes” that were one sign of rebellion in the late 1940s, recalled how his friends responded to Hi-Teen. “We tried to get in there a few times . . . it was kind of an elite place . . . we had our hair combed wrong. . . . they were picky-choozy.”³⁵ A working-class girl, whose friends wore sequined Elvis Presley jackets and preferred Chuck Berry to Pat Boone, had this response to Hi-Teen: “We didn’t bother with anyone who went up to the Delwood.”³⁶ Through music and the dress code Hi-Teen excluded those segments of the population most likely to clash with the program’s core audience of middle-class, white youth.

But if this is true, Hi-Teen’s campaign against juvenile delinquency must be redefined. If those most likely to be engaged in the range of behaviors labeled delinquent were not present, how could their behavior be changed? Similarly, if those present were among those least likely to engage in delinquent behavior, how could the program claim to be a force for social reform? Hi-Teen’s claims to social efficacy thus hinged on the assumption, articulated by Judge Wylegala, that the dread disease of delinquency could strike anywhere, anytime, even among the bunny-hopping Hi-Teens. Hi-Teen’s reliance upon this assumption highlights the class bias of the program and casts doubt on its ability—indeed, on its intention—to have any appreciable impact on the vandalism, violence and gang behavior that were the essence of hard-core juvenile delinquency. Unable and unwilling to reach into the Buffalo working class, black or white, Hi-Teen came to have for its most important social engineering function the reinforcement of socially desirable behavior patterns within the white middle class.

This social engineering was attempted, as we have seen, through control of music and dress. These controls were exercised from above; viz., decisions about music and dress were made by Hi-Teen’s production staff. But Hi-Teen also made a largely symbolic effort to bring a democratic flavor to club activities. Judge Wylegala presented the theory behind this democratization in a 1952 article.

The wise parent [he wrote] will let youngsters make decisions in small matters on their own. For more important questions, a child can be made to believe he is making the decision while his parents

have in reality set out his course at his subconscious level. He gets his direction in a less blunt way and, most important, he gets it with the feeling of responsibility.³⁷

In a limited way, Hi-Teen utilized this “democratic” methodology. Hi-Teen was, after all, established as a *club*, with all that word implied about participation. The Hi-Teen Club had “members”; the programs were called “meetings”; and the meetings (the on-the-air broadcasts), routinely opened with group singing of the club theme song. During the broadcast, a Hi-Teen Committee carried out certain functions, such as escorting guests to the stage or turning the bin for the selection of prize-winning tickets.³⁸

The Hi-Teen Club membership card illustrates both the existence of democratic procedures and their limitations. A signature on the card brought membership, and with it, the right to admission to the “meetings.” But that same signature also acknowledged the club rules. The cards were first issued when the program moved to the Elks Club in 1947, and the four rules adopted at that time reflect the concerns of the Elks for their building. One rule limited membership to youths under 16; another required members to “conduct themselves as guests”; a third prohibited loitering in the lobby or entering any part of the Elks’ Building except the ballroom and attached restrooms; and the fourth required a signature as acknowledgment of the other rules. In addition, these rules were enforced not by club members, but by a committee of WEBR and Elks personnel.³⁹ In short, Hi-Teen’s commitment to democratic methods was a minimal one.



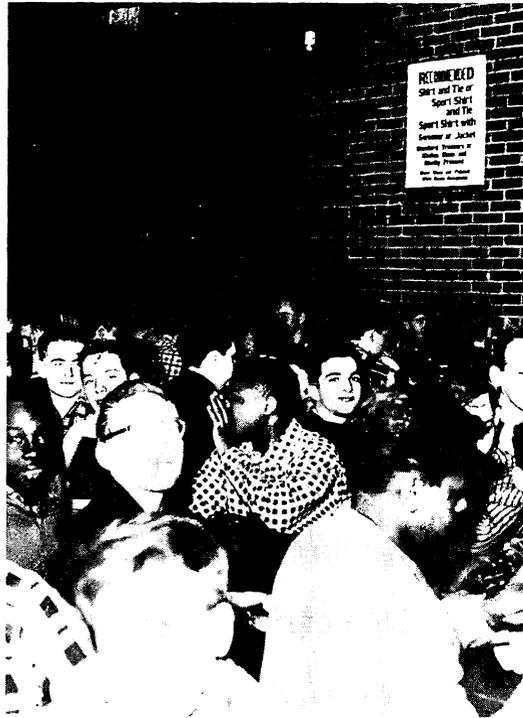
FIGURE THREE: Hi-Teen in Buffalo’s Delwood Ballroom, late 1940s. Bob Wells Collection.

dress right

The 1958 yearbook of Buffalo's Burgard Vocational School contains a lunchroom photograph. On a darkened wall behind the students is a sign. It reads:

**Recommended
Shirt and Tie or
Sport Shirt
and Tie
Sport Shirt With
Sweater or Jacket
Standard Trousers or
Khakis Clean and
Neatly Pressed
Shoes Clean and Polished
White Bucks Acceptable⁴⁰**

Right: FIGURE FOUR: The cafeteria at Buffalo's Burgard Vocational High School. The Dress Right Code is posted on the wall. *Burgard Craftsman*, 1958.



The sign's origin dates to October 1955, when Dr. Joseph E. Manch, one of the Buffalo Public School Associate Superintendents, decided on the need for a dress code. By 1957, two aspects of Manch's original vision were the object of national attention. One was the code itself—the Dress Right Program, as it was called. The other was the process through which the code had been proposed, written, adopted and applied. That process, labeled The Buffalo Plan, was democratic social engineering in its purest form.

Hi-Teen's Margaret Russ was not alone in assuming a relationship between dress and behavior. It was widely believed that one's presentation of oneself—including clothes, hairstyle and physical appearance—reflected one's attitude toward authority and (this was Manch's assumption) that one could change the attitude toward authority by changing the presentation of self. There is plentiful evidence of this politicization of dress in the national popular culture. Marlon Brando's portrait in "The Wild One" (1954) identified anti-social behavior with T-shirts, Levi's, long hair and motorcycles. On records, rockabilly artist Carl Perkins captured the feelings of his working-class audience with the line "you can do anything, but stay off of my blue suede shoes."⁴¹

In Buffalo, school and municipal authorities emphasized the importance of dress. For example, following a dance at South Park High School, several teachers were heard to comment “on the attractive appearance and commendable behavior of the students. . . .”⁴² Police Lieutenant Richard V. Carnival, head of Buffalo’s Youth Bureau, was unable to name a single Buffalo gang, yet he insisted that all gang members dressed alike: in high boots, blue jeans and jackets, and “duck back” haircuts.⁴³ But the event that best captures the politics of dress took place late in the 1950s, following the death of James Dean, Buddy Holly, or some other cult figure (the oral history is vague on this point). In an act of both mourning and defiance, many Buffalo teen-agers began wearing black T-shirts. Convinced that this protest held some danger for the public order, Buffalo Mayor Frank Sedita prohibited the sale of black T-shirts in the city. Although certain elements of this story may be apocryphal, even as myth it represents the extent to which both youth and adults invested clothing with political and cultural significance.⁴⁴

Manch had come to grips with the politics of dress in the early 1950s. As Associate Superintendent for Pupil Personnel Services, he conducted hearings on students suspended for improper conduct (what Manch referred to as “my work with juvenile delinquents”). During those hearings, Manch noted what “seemed to be a rather close relationship between the way boys and girls dressed and the way they behaved.” Thus “delinquents” charged with “serious misconduct were often dressed in extreme or bizarre fashion or rather sloppily, wearing soiled dungarees and T shirts or sweat shirts.”⁴⁵

Late in 1955, Manch moved to turn this correlation between dress and behavior into a program of social action. But rather than impose a code from above, and risk its rejection as a manifestation of adult or administrative authority, Manch turned to the Inter-High School Student Council. This body, organized in March 1954 at Manch’s suggestion, consisted of two representatives from each of Buffalo’s secondary schools, “able students,” as Manch described them, “who were accepted as leaders by their peers.”⁴⁶ At an Inter-High meeting on October 25, 1955, Manch, acting as a “guide,” broached the idea of a dress code and outlined how a committee of the Council might be structured and selected to develop such a code.⁴⁷ The proposal, Manch reported, was “accepted . . . enthusiastically,” and within a month, the Council’s committee recommendations for a dress code had been approved by the whole Council and cleared with Manch. “The recommendations,” Manch concluded, “thus were the result of student thinking and as such, became student, not faculty, recommendations.”⁴⁸ Convinced that the “peer group” exercised enormous influence over the behavior of youth, Manch believed he had found a way to enter the peer group and utilize its authority for his own purposes.⁴⁹

The Dress Right code contained separate recommendations for boys and girls as well as for academic and vocational high schools. Code recommendations for girls were clearly designed to restrict sexuality. V-neck sweaters without a blouse were “not recommended,” and the code

FIGURE FIVE: To encourage adherence to the voluntary Dress Right Code, some Buffalo schools installed 2-way mirrors and observed student behavior from behind them. *This Week Magazine*, November 23, 1958.



urged that “all recommended wear for girls should fit appropriately and modestly.” Recommendations for boys—academic and vocational alike—were designed to eliminate soiled clothing, T-shirts and sweatshirts, and “extreme” shoe styles, with specific reference to the “motorcycle boots” so strongly identified with delinquent youth. Recommended wear for all boys included “khakis,” a word of military connotation. Vocational students were allowed a greater degree of informality than their academic counterparts; they might wear a simple sport shirt with tie, while academic students were held to the higher standard of a “dress shirt” and tie or a “conservative” sport shirt and tie with suit jacket, sport coat, or sweater.⁵⁰

Manch’s enthusiasm for democratic methods of social engineering is apparent in his efforts to have the code implemented. In theory, student adherence to the code’s recommendations was entirely voluntary. Compliance was secured through a series of persuasive techniques that were part of the methodology of democratic social engineering. At many schools, student councils, “with the encouragement and guidance of principals and teachers,” discussed, approved and recommended compliance with the new code.⁵¹ School newspapers carried editorials endorsing the recommendations, special assembly programs emphasized the advantages of proper dress, and one institution installed a full-length mirror at the head of a stairway, inscribed with the words “Look! This is you. Are you satisfied?” In accord with the democratic ideology through which compliance was urged, most of these persuasive techniques had first been suggested by the Inter-High Council.⁵² On the other hand, some institutions seem to have pursued compliance through coercive methods.

At one school, for example, boys without ties found themselves in the principal's office, renting gaudy neckware at two cents a day.⁵³

The non-coercive methodology of democratic social engineering seems to have been effective in securing general, though not complete, compliance with the code. A survey of school principals, conducted a year after the code's introduction, found principals unanimously agreed that school dress had been improved as a result of the code, and that students had not "as a whole" been resistant to it. Ten of 14 principals found students more courteous and respectful of authority, and the same number said the dress program had improved student behavior. On the other hand, four principals believed that students had not "shown enthusiasm about accepting responsibility and leadership for improving their attire in school."⁵⁴ Just as positive were the results of another, more informal, survey of students and administrators conducted by the Buffalo *Evening News* in November, 1957. The principal at Seneca Vocational claimed that dungarees, sweatshirts and engineer boots had been entirely eliminated, and that only a small minority of perhaps 5% of the student body still wore ducktail haircuts. At Fosdick-Masten Girls Vocational High School, the principal reported a dramatic change in student attire. "They used to come to exams in dungarees, but not anymore," he said. Now there were "no pin curls, no dungarees, no slacks—all dresses." Several principals, and the president of the Inter-High Student Council, commented on how compliance with the code had brought pronounced changes in attitude, behavior and discipline.⁵⁵

Manch's results, and his democratic methodology, found a receptive national audience. Manch and Caesar Naples, student head of the Inter-High Council, went to Chicago to discuss the Dress Right program on CBS' "Good Morning Show," hosted by Will Rogers, Jr. The New York *Herald Tribune* and the New York *World-Telegram and Sun* carried well-illustrated features on the code, and *Newsweek* illustrated its coverage with two photographs, one of a "bejeaned" girl, the other of a better-behaved counterpart in "ladylike dress."⁵⁶ In February, 1957, when Manch described Dress Right for some 5,000 school principals at the annual meeting of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the story received extensive national press coverage.⁵⁷ Dress Right also garnered elaborate publicity through the American Institute of Men's and Boys' Wear (AIMBW), an apparel-industry trade association that must have relished the prospect of dressing up millions of American youth in new and more costly garments.⁵⁸ Partly because of the Institute's influence, many schools—some thirty-one in New York City alone—were ready with the Buffalo Plan when school opened in the Fall of 1957.⁵⁹

The media was most likely drawn to the Dress Right program because of the compelling image, conveyed in the *Newsweek* photographs and inherent in Manch's vision, of a juvenile delinquent rather easily and quickly converted into a model citizen. Nonetheless, it was generally understood that Dress Right was newsworthy and important only because it came packaged as the Buffalo Plan; that is, only because the code was



United Press Photos

Rejoined, "I behave better when they're in ladylike dress

FIGURE SIX: *Newsweek* captured the prevailing view that clothes affected behavior. *Newsweek*, March 11, 1957, p. 102. (Reprinted with permission from The Bettmann Archive.)

“democratic” in origin and voluntary in application. The *World-Telegram and Sun* story took pains to assure youth that Dress Right involved no imposition of authority from above. And Francis DeW. Pratt, president of AIMBW, was as eloquent a spokesman for voluntarism as Manch.⁶⁰

conclusion

Dress Right and Hi-Teen shared several qualities. Both were originally

conceived as antidotes to juvenile delinquency. Because juvenile delinquency was understood as closely related to youth culture, the solution to delinquency was thought to require modifications in the culture of youth. Both Hi-Teen and Dress Right sought behavioral change through modification in dress and appearance, though producers of Hi-Teen were perhaps more interested in shaping teen-ageaste in music.

Hi-Teen and Dress Right shared another understanding of teen-age behavior and delinquency. In differing degrees, these programs were shaped by the perception that youth could not be controlled effectively using traditional subject-object modes of influence. The producers of Hi-Teen and, to a much greater extent, Joseph Manch, understood the centrality of the peer group to youth culture. What this meant was that youth had achieved a certain undeniable separation from adult authority. This in turn meant that adult authority could be effectively exercised only if it were mediated by, or laundered through, the peer group. At bottom, this perception of delinquency and youth culture recognized, if only tentatively, that the growing gulf between youth and adults had to do with authority, and thus had to be approached gingerly.

Hi-Teen, founded almost a decade before the emergence of rock 'n' roll, was created with less awareness of the importance of this aspect of youth culture. Lacking that awareness, the program opted for a more direct kind of authority. Although the "club" concept recognized the peer group in a general way, Hi-Teen's commitment to democratic methods of social engineering was relatively primitive; club rules and the Hi-Teen dress code were developed by adults. A decade later, the independence of youth culture would be undeniable, and Manch's approach the more obvious.

If Hi-Teen and Dress Right shared certain common insights into juvenile delinquency, they were also fatally flawed, and in the same way, as approaches to that problem. It is not just that Hi-Teen and Dress Right were built on rather simplistic or partial understandings of delinquency, nor even that their methods—from democratic social engineering to the modification of youth culture—were inadequate to the task. Rather, Hi-Teen and Dress Right were bound to fail because they did not operate on the "delinquent" population. As we have seen, Hi-Teen was not popular with, and was not intended to attract, the working-class teens who were most likely to engage in delinquent behavior,⁶¹ and Hi-Teen's dress code no doubt discouraged the participation of some who might otherwise have been tempted to attend. Similarly, although Dress Right was the product of a participatory process, it is unlikely that the process represented, or was intended to represent, the problem youth who had been coming before hearing officer Manch. While Manch understood the power of the peer group and the necessity of working through it, he did not understand how little influence the middle-class Inter-High Council would have over the school system's delinquent population. Thus Dress Right sidestepped one problem of authority—the relationship between adults and youth—only to encounter another, embedded in social class, that could not be so easily

bypassed. Compliance, after all, was voluntary, and school principals admitted to difficulty in securing conformity from a small percentage of students. Yearbook photographs indicate that Dress Right eliminated sweatshirts, but not jeans. And there were youth who found the code an intrusive imposition, its democratic origins notwithstanding.⁶² In the end, there were limits to the influence of middle-class youth over a subculture to which they did not belong.

Neither Hi-Teen nor Dress Right was really designed to eliminate hard-core juvenile delinquency. Bob Wells did not expect vandalism to cease and gangs to fall away when Hi-Teen went on the air, and Joseph Manch did not anticipate that Dress Right would mean the end of delinquency hearings. What they did expect—or at least fervently hope—was that their programs would prevent the disease of delinquency from spreading to the white middle class. Hi-Teen and Dress Right were preventative medicine: the former was intended to provide youth with a social setting under the control of adults and, not coincidentally, removed from the more threatening elements of the working class; the latter provided a standard of dress around which school administrators and parents could circle their middle-class wagons against the threat of working-class delinquency.

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notes

1. Buffalo *Courier-Express*, (January 28, 1951), sec. 5, p. 14.
2. The phrase “juvenile delinquency” held a great many meanings, some of them complex. Most simply, it was a set of behaviors, including the destruction of property, participation in social groups called “gangs,” a tendency to personal violence, even street corner lounging. Juvenile delinquency was also identified with musical tastes running to rhythm and blues and, in the 1950s, rockabilly, and with ducktail haircuts, heavy boots, leather jackets, black T-shirts and other characteristics of physical appearance and style.
3. Buffalo Youth Board, *Delinquency and Youth Crime* (n.p., n.d.), 3-5; Buffalo Youth Board, *Youth Crime, 1958-1960* (Buffalo, New York, n.d.), 2-5; Buffalo *Courier-Express*, (January 28, 1951), sec. 5, p. 14.
4. Buffalo *Courier-Express*, (February 16, 1953), 1, 9.
5. Vaughn Monroe, “Why Don’t You Dance?” *The American Weekly*, insert to the Buffalo *Courier-Express*, (April 12, 1953).
6. Buffalo Youth Board, *Delinquency and Youth Crime*, 8, 10, 12 (maps of delinquency by census tract).
7. James Gilbert, “Worried Parents: Looking in the Mirror of Youth Culture,” unpublished manuscript.
8. Personal interview with Margaret Russ, June 20, 1983.
9. Clipping, Buffalo *Courier-Express*, (October 30, 1955), “Bob Wells Today Marks Ten Years with WEBR,” in Bob Wells Scrapbook. The scrapbook is in Wells’ possession.
10. Jack Allen, “Move Over Dick Clark,” *The Courier Express Magazine*, (March 6, 1977), 10, 11; and the following items, all in Bob Wells Scrapbook: flier, using information from October 2, 1948 issue of *The Billboard*; clipping, “Hi-Teen Dance and Radio Show Highly Successful”; undated column, Don Tranter’s “Radio Comment, Highlights”; clipping, “Hi-Teen Radio Show to Come from Elks Club,” Buffalo *Courier-Express*, (February 10, 1947); WEBR memorandum (1954), on club membership.
11. Buffalo *Courier-Express*, (January 28, 1951), sec. 5, p. 14.
12. Victor B. Wylegala, “Outside Leadership Important to Child,” Buffalo *Courier-Express*, (February 27, 1952), 13.
13. On the social engineering functions of the USO, see the materials in Record Group 225, “Records of the Joint Army and Navy Committee on Welfare and Recreation,” National Archives, Washington, D.C., General Subject Files, Boxes 15, 45, 46; especially “Music: USO,” *Bulletin* (n.p., n.d.), Box 46, file United Service Organizations, Inc. Ray Kendall, p. 14.
14. Clipping, “Hi-Teen Dance and Radio Show Highly Successful,” Bob Wells Scrapbook.
15. Items from Don Tranter’s “Radio Comment: Highlights,” in Bob Wells Scrapbook.

Wells' Scrapbook also contains letters from public officials responding to this or a similar invitation. One from the Fire Commissioner states: "Juvenile Delinquency is one of the biggest problems confronting us today, and this program should prove of real interest." (Letter from Joseph S. Masterson to William A. Schweitzer, July 27, 1946).

16. Clipping, "Hi-Teen Dance and Radio Show Highly Successful," Wells Scrapbook.
17. Allen, "Move Over," 10, 13.
18. Clipping, "Hi-Teen Dance and Radio Show Highly Successful," Wells Scrapbook.
19. Photo, labeled "High Fidelity," Wells Scrapbook. The caption reads, "Three Fans of Mayor Pankow, still too young to vote, but interested in local politics, listen with the Mayor to a recording of his inaugural address. . . ."
20. Clipping, "10,000 Assist WEBR Boost to Polio Fund," Wells Scrapbook; Clipping, "Hi-Teen Dances Scheduled at Brown Motors," June 10, 1948, Wells Scrapbook.
21. Clipping, *Buffalo Courier-Express*, (August 9, 1959), 22A; *Buffalo Courier-Express*, (March 8, 1959), 3B.
22. Photo, "Perfect Feet," in *Buffalo Courier-Express*, (May 16, 1954), 12A, and photo, "King and Queen Crowned at Hi-Teen Club Session," both in Wells Scrapbook.
23. Allen, "Move Over," 10.
24. Russ interview.
25. See advertisements for Hi-Teen in Wells Scrapbook; Russ interview; *Buffalo Courier-Express*, (July 2, 1954), 24.
26. Photo of winners of Hi-Teen Waltz Contest, ca. 1949, Wells Scrapbook.
27. Iain Chambers, *Urban Rhythms: Pop Music and Popular Culture* (New York, 1985), 50, 236n.
28. Russ interview.
29. Wells Scrapbook.
30. Russ interview.
31. Clipping and photo, "Hi-Teen Dances Scheduled at Brown Motors," June 10, 1948, Wells Scrapbook.
32. Photo, *Buffalo Courier-Express*, (January 8, 1959), 28, Wells Scrapbook.
33. Russ interview.
34. See the photos in Wells Scrapbook.
35. Personal interview with Jerry Szeffel, August 15, 1984.
36. Personal interview with June Bihl, August 10, 1984.
37. Victor B. Wylegala, "Home Life Shapes Child's Character," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, (February 26, 1952), 13.
38. Clipping, "WEBR Hi-Teens Celebrate First Birthday," and undated and unidentified clipping, both in Wells Scrapbook; Russ interview.
39. Clipping, "Hi-Teen Radio Show to Come From Elks Club," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, (February 10, 1947), Wells Scrapbook.
40. Burgard Vocational High School, *The Burgard Craftsman*, 1958 (Buffalo, n.d.), 81.
41. Perkins' recording was issued in 1956 on the Sun label. It was one of many 1950s recordings on the subject of dress, including Bobby Freeman's "Betty Lou Got a New Pair of Shoes," Joe Bennett's "Black Slacks," and Perkins' "Pink Pedal Pushers."
42. South Park High School, *The Dial*, 1954 (Buffalo, New York), 73.
43. *Buffalo Courier-Express*, (June 15, 1955), 1-2.
44. Personal interview with Lee Johansson, July 20, 1983; personal interview with Al Triem, August 2, 1984.
45. The quotations are from Joseph Manch, "The Dress Right Program in the Buffalo Public Schools," mimeograph, in the possession of Dr. Joseph Manch, Buffalo, New York (hereafter referred to as the Joseph Manch Papers); personal interview with Joseph Manch, June 27, 1983. Biographical information on Manch is available in the files of the *Buffalo Courier-Express*, now located in the library at the State University College at Buffalo, file "Manch, Joseph."
46. Joseph Manch, "Dress and Conduct: An Inter-High School Student Council Program," *Journal of the New York State School Boards Association*, 22 (September, 1958), 31 (quotation); Manch interview; Manch, "Dress Right Program."
47. Manch, "Dress Right Program."
48. Manch, "Dress and Conduct," 32; Manch, "Dress Right Program."
49. Manch, "Dress and Conduct," 32.
50. Manch, "Dress Right Program."
51. *Ibid.*
52. *Ibid.*, Jhan Robbins and June Robbins, "Buffalo's Magic Mirror," *This Week Magazine*, (November 23, 1958), 8.
53. Robbins and Robbins, "Magic Mirror," 8.
54. A copy of the survey results is presented in "Report on 'The Buffalo Plan,'" Manch Papers.
55. Clipping, "Better-Dress Drive in Schools Effective, Survey Reveals," *Buffalo Evening News*, (November 13, 1957), copy in Manch Papers.
56. *Newsweek*, (March 11, 1957), 102; Manch interview; clipping, *Buffalo Evening News*, (August 23, 1956), in Manch Papers; Robbins and Robbins, "Buffalo's Magic Mirror"; Chris Cominell, "The Proper Dress for High School," *New York World-Telegram and Sun Saturday Magazine*, (September 7, 1957), 10, 11, 19.

57. Clippings, "Pupils Act to Better Behavior with Dress," *Washington Evening Star*, (February 26, 1957); Jeanne Rogers, "Dress Code for Pupils Proposed to Principals," *Washington Post*, (February 26, 1957), both in *Manch Papers*.

58. Everett M. Smith, "Students Dress Up Now—Fashion Show Keys Shift," *Christian ScienceMonitor*, (September 5, 1957), 1.

59. Cominel, "Proper Dress," 10.

60. *Ibid.*, 10, 19.

61. This assumption of a high correlation between juvenile delinquency and the working class is not one universally held. The 1950s' interest in "teen" culture subsumed class in a larger analytical framework in which leisure and affluence were seen as the key factors in the emergence of a unique teen-age style. See, for example, Jessie Bernard, "Teen-Age Culture: An Overview," in Jessie Bernard, ed., "Teen-Age Culture," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 338 (November, 1961), 1-12. European scholars have been more willing to come to grips with class. See Paul Willis, *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (1977; New York, 1981); Geoff Mungham and Geoff Pearson, eds., *Working Class Youth Cultures* (London, 1976); Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds., *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (New York, 1975); and John R. Gillis, *Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations, 1770-Present* (New York, 1981), 191-96.

62. Clipping, "Better-Dress Drive," *Buffalo Evening News*, (November 13, 1957), *Manch Papers*; McKinley Vocational High School, *The President*, 1955 (Buffalo, n.d.); Lafayette High School, *The Oracle*, (1957), 42 (account of reaction to Dress Right). See also personal interview with David Holdsworth, August 22, 1984.