WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE THINK

'Beat Generation' Denounced by 86 Per Cent of Teen-agers

By EUGENE GILBERT

The emotional letdown after World War I produced what literary critics are fond of calling "The Lost Generation."

Escapism reigned. It was the hedonistic era of the Roaring Twenties, of prohibition and bootlegging, of American ex-patriates like Ernest Hemingway and Gertrude Stein living the gay, intellectual life on Paris' famed left bank.

Now it seems that World War II, somewhat belatedly, also has fathered a generation all its own. It's been called "The Beat Generation." The accent still is on pleasure—madcap parties, speedy sports cars and motorcycles, cool jazz, lots of loving and lots of drinking—but pleasure no longer is an end in itself.

While "The Lost Generation" tried to get as much as it could out of life, "The Beat Generation" has altered the formula without changing any of the ingredients. The idea still is to live life to the fullest but not to enjoy it. The generation is beat because it resists any kind of emotional response about anything.

The term "Beat Generation" was coined a year ago by novelist Jack Kerouac in his book "On The Road," which now serves as a sort of manifesto for his beaten followers whom he claims are "mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved."

Adults readily believe the first two articles of Kerouac's creed but strongly doubt the salvation angle. So, it appears, do most teen-agers.

TEENERS DOUBT IT

In a nationwide survey of what young people think of "The Beat Generation" we found that most boys and girls are as horrified as their elders at the excesses attributed to this postwar phenomenon. Few of them care to consider themselves part of "The Beat Generation", and even fewer are willing to accept the title as aptly descriptive of their times.

"Does this beat generation really exist?" asked 17-year-old Fred Charles of Waukegan, Ill. "I read about it, but does anyone ever see its practitioners face to face or are they just a figment of some fiction writer's imagination?"

His skepticism was echoed by many teen-agers, 94 per cent of whom insisted that neither they nor their friends could be numbered among the beat generation.

"When my brother came back from service, he acted real 'beat' for a year or two," volunteered 17-year-old Ted Doniger of Des Moines. "I guess my crowd is just too young for that sort of stuff."

Others, particularly among the 12 per cent who confessed past or current membership in the beat generation, were more explicit. "Two years ago I started out with a real beat crowd," confessed a Los Angeles youth who for understandable reasons declined use of his name. "We stole cars to race them; anything for kicks. Thank God, I got out in time."

This Is How It Is

Frank Manor, 17, of San Francisco, where the beat generation seems to have its largest following, made a stab at explaining the motivating philosophy behind the group. Said Frank, "Man, you're looking for something. You look and you look and may never find it, but there's crazy kicks along the way."

Fern Stavey, an admitted member of Chicago's beat bunch, had nothing but scorn for non-believers. "What do they want—New Year's horns all the time?" she inquired. "This is a messy world we're stuck with, and the squares don't even know how to make the best of it." In the beat formula, as Fern would admit, making the least of it emotionally is the best way to make the best of it.

Or, as 18-year-old Ralph Charles of Cincinnati explained: "Getting a charge out of something, anything, is nowhere. The whole idea is to be able to exist without personal attachment. You go just for laughs but you don't laugh."

But to the vast majority of the teen-agers interviewed, the whole idea of a beat generation was absurd and repugnant.

"Not my speed," maintains 16-year old Lucy Cott of Portland, Ore. "Acting like a hood is strictly for the brainless. I think it's disgraceful."

Even More Beat

"I read about it sure, but as far as I can see I've got no connection with any crazy beat generation," insisted 16-year-old Rosalie Simons of Syracuse, N.Y.

According to 19-year-old Beth Davidson of Montclair, N. J., "to be beat you must think that the whole rest of humanity is square and you are the only one who knows. It's all nonsense."

To 86 per cent of the teen-agers the term "Beat Generation" has no valid application to themselves or their friends. Said one Detroit interviewee: "They've blamed just about everything else on the teen-agers, but they can't hang that one on us. My crowd is anything but beat. We're alive. They're dead and don't know it."

The 12 per cent minority who accepted the beat title also had a spokesman.

"I guess beat is a fair enough term," agreed 18-year-old Ricki Goldberg of New York City. "After all you can't say the lost generation was really lost when you look at this one. This is the even lost-er generation. The bottom, absolute least."

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