America during the 1920s was a country where rapid intellectual and economic changes left many people with a sense of loss and displacement. The America of this time also represented an “extreme example of both demographic and technological change in our modern times” (Ostrander 7). Changes such as these ultimately produce changes in values and social interaction. The youth of this period in particular may be seen as an accommodation with the values of this new modern America.

The youth of the 1920s were finding that the beliefs society held in generations prior to theirs were totally inappropriate for the conditions that existed now. Religion, for example, no longer played the dominant role it once had. Science now became an important influence on the traditions of mortality. Publications such as Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* provided new trends in thought. Man became a creature shaped by the environment and only through struggles and adaptations could he survive. The new metropolitan centres with their increased industrial capacity provided perfect examples of this concept of the survival of the fittest. For the youth of this time, changes such as these “added to the intellectual pressure toward change in attitudes about mortality,” (Handlin 137) as well as other religious, social and personal aspects of life.

The industrial revolution produced an urban society where children and youths were no longer necessary as bread earners. Instead, children were viewed as a separate entity, removed from the sphere of work into the sphere of the family. The industrial revolution provided a planned and precious part of the family unit. Parents attempted to limit the number of children they had so
that the fewer number who were born could reap the rewards of technological progress. In this sense, the children would be able to enjoy a better life than their parents had. The changed relationship between age and youth disturbed American society fundamentally in the 1920s. We find, therefore, that the industrial revolution led to a social revolution, which in turn provided for changing trends in social and moral values.

The changing trends of the 1920s, according to Gilman M. Ostrand, in his work *American Civilization in the First Machine Age 1890-1940*, may be seen as:

the blanket repudiation of the traditional farm-oriented, church-oriented, somewhat patriarchal moral order of the Protestant Republic, and the crux of the revolution was the reversal of the authority in society from age to youth (239).

We see a trend in this society from maturity to youthfulness, or from a patriarchal-based society to a filiarchy.

It would appear that America by the 1920s was becoming a culture for the young. Harold Stearns comments in *America and the Young Intellectual* that, “youth revolt...[a]ny civilization which has the wisdom of self-preservation will allow a certain margin of freedom for the expression of this youthful mood” (159). Many felt that these freedoms of expression had gone too far. Magazines and journals at this time were concerned with writing about the “bulwark of social morality; the home” (*ushistory.org*).

During the Great Depression of the 1920s, America’s economic policies left its citizens with a sense of loss and displacement. The country at the time was instrumental in founding the values and social interaction that America that exists today.
Works Cited


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