

Childhood in the Life Course

Hugh Cunningham

Obstacles on the Road to Adulthood

- Romantic view of childhood
- Raising the school leaving age
- Adolescence
- Immaturity
- 'Emerging adulthood' – ages 18-25
- Neuroscience

Adolescence

- Adolescents 14-24
- ‘Adolescence is a new birth... The momentum of heredity often seems insufficient to enable the child to achieve this great revolution and come to complete maturity, so that every step of the upward way is strewn with wreckage of body, mind, and morals. There is not only arrest, but perversion, at every stage, and hoodlumism, juvenile crime, and secret vice ... develop in earlier years in every civilized land’.

G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence* (1904)

Maturity

- Adolescents seek the ‘integration of selves, vocational, sexual, social, and moral’. A successful outcome is ‘the poise and inner harmony which characterize the mature adult’.*
- Starting out as an adolescent at eleven, over a decade the child reaches ‘the margins of maturity’.
- ‘The 16-year-old youth, if he rises to tiptoe can almost see the horizons of adulthood. He is himself a pre-adult’. Full adulthood, maturity, at 25.‡

* W. D. Wall, *The Adolescent Child* (1948).

‡ Arnold Gesell, et al., *Youth: The Years from Ten to Sixteen* (1956)

Working-Class Experience

- James Brady, b. 1898, Rochdale
 - ‘I knew that when I was thirteen I would have to say goodbye to my schooling’
 - He discards school clothes ‘for long, smelly corduroy trousers held up by leather braces, a new heavy brown cap’.
 - ‘This was the drab, but completely utilitarian attire of the traditional Lancashire working-man which transformed you in a day from boyhood to manhood’.

John Burnett (ed.), *Destiny Obscure* (1982)

Middle-Class Commentary

- ‘...one of the realities of the time is the independence of the lad. At the age of fourteen, as a general rule, the control of home and school end together. The lad goes to bed a boy; he wakes as a man.’ (Reginald Bray, 1912)
- ‘What father considers his sixteen-year-old son at a public school as an adult?’ (Charles Russell, 1906)
- R. Bray, *Boy Life and Apprenticeship* (1912)
- C.. E. B. Russell and L. M. Rigby, *The Making of the Criminal* (1906)

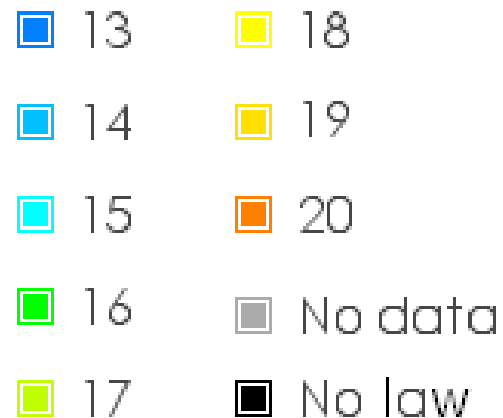
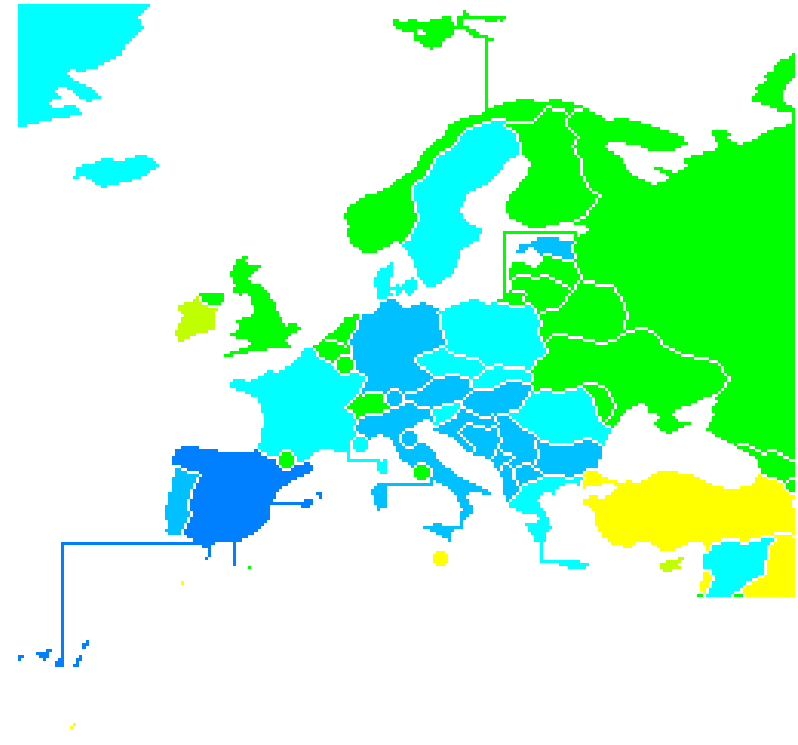
Intoxicating Liquor Bill, 1923

- Aims to raise to 18 from 14 right to buy alcohol for consumption in pub. Passed 338-56.
- Lady Astor: 'Boys up to 18 are children'
- Philip Snowden: 'It is now recognised that up to the age of 18 young people should be more or less under State control. You have embodied that in a hundred Acts of Parliament'
- Dr Clement Dukes: 'the animal instincts of boys are more active and stronger at the public school age than at any other time of life, while on the other hand their characters are immature...'

Age of Consent

- UK 16*
- France 15
- Germany 14
- Ireland 17
- Norway 16
- Spain 13
- USA 14-18 (varying by state; median 16)

* Raised from 13 to 16 in 1885 after the 'Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon' scandal



Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility

- Belgium 18
- Denmark 15
- England and Wales 10
- France 13
- Germany 14
- Netherlands 12
- Scotland 12 (2012 raised from 8)
- Sweden 15
- Switzerland 7
- USA 7 (in most states, but child under 14 cannot be presumed to bear responsibility, though it can be held responsible)