

# The Truth About Teen

by Jack Ryan

Art by Bernard Glochowsky

A WAVE of teen-age violence spread across the country last Summer. Gang wars and stabbings in New York City were a weekly occurrence. In Chicago, a motel operator was shot down by teen-age hoodlums on a "crime spree."

Smaller communities did not escape. Two rural youths were killed when their stolen auto went out of control during a chase by police. Wild "beer busts" in a state park scandalized parents in another small town.

Yet Newark, N. J., only a few miles from the bloody gang fights of New York City, was seemingly bypassed by the upsurge in juvenile delinquency. Officials were asked why.

"We keep on top of trouble," a police spokesman told reporters. "We enforce a teen-age curfew that helps us stop crime before it starts."

In Illinois, some influential people considered curfews so hopeful they asked the state legislature to give every county the right to impose nighttime restrictions on youths. Such a bill was passed, but Gov. William Stratton vetoed it with these words:

"I believe that the correction of the (juvenile delinquency) situation primarily is the responsibility of the parent. . . . In those counties which felt it necessary to employ (a curfew), youth might well suffer from the substitution of governmental for parental control."

Gov. Stratton's veto was hailed by an imposing list of experts on social problems, law enforcement, and municipal government. But then so was the curfew drive by Newark police.

The argument over the merits of teen-age curfews is endless, with both sides even quoting statistics to prove their point. A while back, a judge in North Dakota, responsible for the enactment of several local curfews, showed that 90 percent of juvenile crimes occurred after 11 p.m. Meanwhile, the juvenile court of Connecticut was rejecting curfew proposals because it found only 14 percent of delinquency occurred at night.

The differences are not due entirely



to local conditions, either. In the same city, convincing arguments have come from proponents and opponents alike. Major groups concerned with delinquency also split on the issue. A spokesman for the National Sheriffs' Association says, "We are of the considered opinion that 'curfews' should be established by parents rather than by law." Yet it was the Illinois Sheriffs' Association that backed the curfew measure vetoed by Gov. Stratton.

Which side is right? Are curfews a deterrent to adolescent waywardness, as more and more communities believe? Or do they merely aggravate youthful rebellion instead of correcting it?

If numbers are any measure, curfews are an answer to our delinquency problem. Before World War II only 3,000 communities restricted youths at night. The war caused widespread adoption of curfews, and recent teen-age troubles have accelerated the trend. Now, in some states, 90 percent of the communities have curfews.

Curfews vary as much as opinions about them. Ages range from 14 to 20; times from sunset to midnight. Most laws hold parents responsible for violations, calling for fines as low as \$1 in Santa Fe, N. M., to \$500 and six months in jail in Glendale, Calif. Very few

cases, however, get beyond the "reprimand" stage.

Some curfews are unique. Philadelphia, for example, has legislated against proprietors of teen-age hangouts who fail to clear out young customers after curfew. Dickinson, N. D., punishes parents of young night owls by publishing their names and addresses in the local newspaper.

THE ADOPTION of a curfew by a community follows a more recognizable pattern than the curfew itself. A wave of teen-age vandalism usually triggers the move. Indignant citizens demand measures against young hoodlums and, in an atmosphere bordering on hysteria, the city council enacts a curfew ordinance.

The city fathers realize curfews may be unconstitutional; courts in California and Florida have ruled so on specific ordinances. But they can feel fairly safe by writing "escape clauses" into their curfews—that is, sections which permit youths to be on the streets after curfew if accompanied by parents or while on emergency errands.

After a curfew is legislated, the police department enforces it rigidly for about a month or so. Youths are rounded up and delivered to their parents or held in

the district station until chagrined parents pick them up. There is a lecture, some threats, and everybody goes his way hoping for the best.

The intense police efforts reduce juvenile crime immediately. Atlanta, Ga., for instance, reported a 30 percent drop in the first month of its curfew. But usually curfew enforcement dies with public hysteria over "our wayward youth," and the law gathers cobwebs until the next juvenile outbreak.

Most advocates recognize that curfews are no more than a stopgap measure. To be truly effective, they say, a curfew must be supplemented with more positive programs like increased recreational facilities, studies into the causes of delinquency, and special police units trained to help, not coerce, young people of the community.

Unfortunately, that ideal is seldom realized. A former city manager of a community with a curfew tells of his experience—a fairly typical one—with these words:

"After a series of teen-age troubles, I proposed to the city council a program to help juveniles adjust to their problems. A curfew was part of the program—a small part. It was passed with a minimum of discussion.

"The rest of the program, ranging