

EDITORS' NOTE: In our efforts to make FAMILY WEEKLY a stimulating and important magazine for its millions of readers, we have brought to its pages such leading literary and international figures as Winston Churchill, Charles de Gaulle, Pearl Buck, Quentin Reynolds, Taylor Caldwell, and many others. This is the third article Philip Wylie has contributed. Known for his popular fiction as well as for his controversial opinions ("Generation of Vipers," for instance), he calls issues as he sees them. We don't expect that every reader will agree with Mr. Wylie's ideas (he causes arguments among our own editors), but we present them for their vigor and provocativeness.

YOUTH TAKES OVER!

This distinguished critic of the American

scene assesses a current phenomenon and decides he's all for it; here's why

By PHILIP WYLIE

THE PRESIDENTIAL contest between Senator John Kennedy, 43, and Vice President Richard Nixon, 47, has drawn attention to a fact that usually goes unnoticed: youth is taking over many key jobs in this land.

To many people, this causes distress. Aren't time-tested, "experienced" older men better able to direct the affairs of a nation, or a company, or a major scientific project? they ask. Don't judgment and wisdom improve with age? Is it right, in a time of world crisis, to be considering for national leadership men who have not yet reached even the moderately "ripe" age of 50?

Sounds logical, doesn't it? But I cannot say I am alarmed by the visible evidence that people decades younger than myself are taking over. They've always done so. Many of the greatest pioneers, scientists, military men, national leaders, reformers, and statesmen—from ancient history until now—have been virtually kids. Those of us who have come to imagine that age-plus-experience necessarily equals wisdom are mistaken as are those of us who, on reaching middle or old age, tend to imagine we, not youths, are the ablest judges, leaders, and opinion molders.

It is the young men of every nation who usually are the doers, the pioneers, the bold innovators. The founding fathers of the United States—Washington, Jefferson, Adams, and others—were younger than Kennedy or Nixon when they led 13 colonies to independence, united them, and wrote our Constitution. Comparative youth is no handicap and often a great advantage. Senior citizens are inclined to overlook or dismiss with scorn the fact that nearly all new knowledge, original thought, and scientific discovery is made by young men—and women.

We adult Americans seem afraid of young people. Teen-agers in our country—as Margaret

Mead recently observed—now live in their own community, apart from adults, lacking much communication with grownups. This withdrawal of older persons from youth is due in large part to our adult translation of what we call our youthful "pranks" into something we now fearfully call "juvenile delinquency." The result is one of the most serious calamities in our present culture. Our fear and our virtual segregation of teen-agers undoubtedly add to the reluctance of many older people to admit youth is taking over—everywhere.

Most mathematical discoveries, mathematicians assert, were made by people under 30; and, in many cases, people under 21. Most minds begin to "harden" with age; they reject new and different data. That is why the Nobel Prizes in science usually go to young men. Only in the arts, where a lifetime's work is rewarded, do many oldsters win Nobel laurels.

Today, whole industries and great corporations are being founded by men in their 20's and 30's. Scores of multimillion-dollar electronic companies, for example, are the creation of young men, and young men run them. Why? Electronics itself is so "young" that not many men over 50 have had sufficient theoretical training to direct such enterprises. Wernher Von Braun and his staff, who launched the first long-range rockets—the V2s that bombarded Britain—were mere kids. The American who gave them their idea—Robert Goddard—was young when he began trying to prove the rocket was an



PHOTOGRAPH BY RONNIE ROJAS

ideal vehicle for weapon-carrying and space investigation. Old men in our military command laughed at Goddard. But the young Germans went to work on young Goddard's notion. Examples of this kind could go on endlessly. From the young politicians who founded this nation and the young generals who fought for its independence to the young men of science—who have made the world so different that only young men and women can best adjust their thoughts to the future of us all—it is youth that must take over. The problems we face, such as the unchecked and alarming "explosion" of populations (in a world where half of us are already undernourished), are problems for young, not elderly, men. Our senior citizens aren't up to resolving the threat of all-out H-war, let alone the problem of how to prevent such North Temperate Zone suicide.

That, in my view, is the reason youth is "taking over" today. On the whole, only young people are equipped to keep pace with the ever-more-complex "facts of life." In centuries past, when knowledge of a fundamental and revolutionary sort remained virtually unchanged from one generation to the next, the experience of older people *did* mean they had more wisdom than their sons and daughters. But all the wisdom on earth is useless if it is applied to problems the "wise old men" don't understand. Caesar was leading Roman legions in his 20's. Alexander the Great had conquered most of the known world when still in his 30's. And I might add—with no intention of irreverence but merely to emphasize my point—that the Founder of Christianity was 32 years of age when they crucified Him.

The reader will by now see that I am not distressed to find Presidential candidates in their 40's. I trust youth. As a parent, I felt a kinship for teen-agers that apparently was as welcome as it was rare; for many former teen-agers and many new ones, of their own accord, come to visit my wife and me for days, a weekend, a week. We consider that a prodigious compliment.

I'll admit it startled me when, recently, my not-yet-30-year-old son-in-law phoned to say he'd just raised a million dollars for a new corporation he'd planned with two other young men. But my amazement was momentary. I think his company will be well-managed and very profitable. Evidently, the notoriously hardheaded (older) money men of Manhattan agree.

Why shouldn't we expect youth to take over? Isn't that exactly what we hope they will do and why we teach them at home and educate them in schools and colleges? What hope exists that transcends hope for kids—yours, mine, everybody's on earth? What better hope is needed?

For me, none.