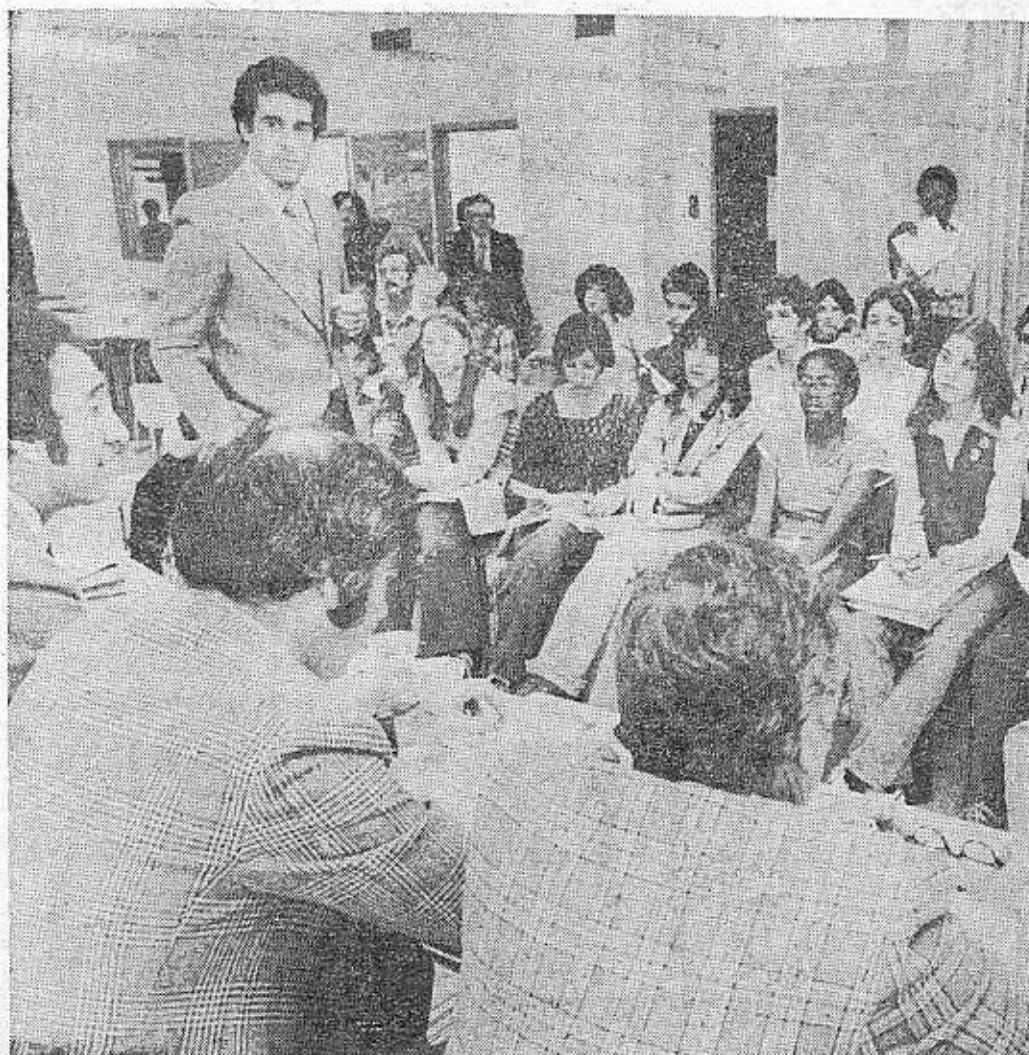


The old American dream? Here's a wakeup call

Kids search for new, no-nonsense values



Students meet with a panel of local politicians, peppering the visitors with tough questions and responding with some answers of their own.

By CYNTHIA R. FAGEN

The old ideal of "apple pie and 2.3 kids in the backyard" is putting this generation of kids to sleep. But a cluster of Brooklyn high school students is trying to dream up a new one for America.

At John Dewey High School, more than 120 kids, notably dressing less rebelliously than the turbulent 60's, are trying to unearth the alternatives.

"It's a heavy question," said red-headed Stephanie Epstein, a 10th grader who is probing these questions in a unique weekly class called "The American Dream."

"Yesterday it was success, money and having your kids go to college. That's not for the majority today," she said, pointing down the hallway. "It's not that we have defined a new America dream, it's that we are separating the American ideal from its reality."

"We haven't come to any conclusions yet," explained one jean-clad student, "but the 2.3 statistical children our parents raised is not going to be my way of life."

"We'd like to have more control over our own destiny," shouted Julius Davis, a black student over the din of the hallway. "I want to be a doctor, I think money is still part of our lifestyle."

"The course changed my life," said graceful Oneitia McDaniel, 17, "I was going



Post Photos by Louis Lioffo

Melissa Schubnell is part of the John Dewey High School program that is taking a piercing new look at accepted priorities. The Brooklyn girl with the cute cap says: "What we aim for is experience."

to go to college to be a lawyer, then I got a job modeling Vidal Sassoon clothes at A&S and I realize I'm happy doing this. Furthermore I don't feel guilty..."

The course devised by two young enthusiastic teachers, Paul Weiss and Larry Abrams, charts contrasting urban and rural lifestyles and their effects on values. For the past six years this special class life-swapped with kids in small towns in the New England and tri-state area. But throughout the year the American Dream program studies the history of America through literature, film, art. The curriculum includes student-written plays dealing with controversial parts of history. Recently the class rewrote the Constitution, heavily editing slavery and equal rights clauses.

This week the students invited five local politicians

and grilled them with questions on abortion, homosexual rights, ERA and the death penalty. The forum helps the students to see for themselves the difference between what the politician says and what he does.

"Do you believe in dirty politics?" bellowed one voice from the audience.

"It depends on what you mean by dirty."

"I mean smearing the guy's name to win an election."

"If the facts show the guy is doing something wrong. If it happens to be true, yes I do," said one local district leader.

To the students, honesty is one thing you don't skimp on.

"What we aim for is experience," said Melissa Schubnell, sporting an Irish cap and vest. "We need it to be better people and isn't that what life is all about?"