

# “This Room is Yours, Personal!”: The Rise and Fall of Middle-Class Decoration Expertise in the Bedrooms of America’s Teens, 1900–1985

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## Abstract

This article also examines how the decline of teen-oriented room décor expertise reflected significant changes in the way gender and class influenced teen room culture during the tail end of the Cold War. Earlier teen décor strategies were often aimed towards affluent women; by contrast, the child-centric, do-it-yourself approach, as an informal, inexpensive alternative, was better suited to grant boys and working class teens from both sexes a greater role in the room design discourse.

This article evaluates how middle-class home décor experts during the early decades of the twentieth century re-envisioned the teen bedroom as a space that was to be designed and maintained almost exclusively by teens rather than parents. However, many of the experts who formulated this advice would eventually become victims of their own success. By the 1960s and 1970s, teens were expected to have near total

control over their bedrooms, which, in turn, challenged the validity of top-down forms of expertise.

## Résumé

Cet article explore également comment le déclin de l'expertise des décorateurs des chambres de jeunes reflète certaines transformations majeures dans la manière dont le genre et la classe ont influencé la culture entourant ces espaces à la fin de la Guerre froide. Initialement, les stratégies concernant leur décoration ciblaient les femmes aisées. Avec le temps, l'adoption d'une approche alternative informelle et peu dispendieuse centrée sur les jeunes et leur capacité de réaliser eux-mêmes leur décor a donné davantage de contrôle aux garçons en général ainsi qu'aux adolescentes et adolescents de la classe ouvrière.

Cet article aborde la manière dont les experts de la classe moyenne spécialisés en décoration intérieure ont re-conceptualisé dans les premières décennies du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle la chambre des adolescents comme un lieu devant être sous le contrôle presque exclusif de leur occupant plutôt que sous celui de leurs parents. Ironiquement, plusieurs de ces experts ont éventuellement été victimes de leur propre succès alors que, dans les années 1960 et 1970, leur recommandation a été généralement acceptée, laissant le contrôle de la décoration de ces chambres aux jeunes eux-mêmes, rendant du même coût caduc l'influence des experts en la matière.

## Biographical note

JASON REID is a Ph.D. student in History at York University. His dissertation focuses on the emergence of teen room culture in America during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

## Biographical note

JASON REID est doctorant en histoire à York University. Sa thèse porte sur l'émergence de la culture entourant la chambre des adolescentes et adolescents en Amérique aux XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles.

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