

CURRENT BOOKS

FELLOWS' CHOICE

Recent titles selected and reviewed by Fellows of the Wilson Center

GROWING OLD IN AMERICA

by David Hackett Fischer
Oxford, 1977
242 pp. \$10.95
L of C 76-42645
ISBN 0-19-502159-2

rites of passage: Adolescence in America 1790 to the Present

by Joseph Kett
Basic Books, 1977
327 pp. \$16.50
L of C 76-43465
ISBN 0-465-07043-4

What went wrong in relations between generations in America? When did it happen? Those are the animating questions that inspired these two excellent books, one of them the first history of old age in any country, the other the first substantial history of youth in America. In David Fischer's view, the critical change in the status of the elderly occurred long ago, at the very beginning of the 19th century, when a spirit of social atomism loosened the ties of obligation between generations and elevated youth at the expense of age. To Joseph Kett, who provides a more finely grained (though less vivid) analysis, the nub of the problem has been the gradually increasing segregation of age groups since the mid-19th century. Society's confinement of teen-agers in educational institutions that shield them from the adult world has evidently resulted in good measure from the glorification of youthful innocence. Approaching our own time, the two books converge: Fischer notes recent improvements in the status of the elderly; Kett indicates that the isolation of adolescents from other age groups may be breaking down. An optimistic reader may conclude that the life cycle is becoming less coercive, and that our society is beginning to concede more dignity to the old and more maturity to the young.

—John Higham ('77)

DAY BY DAY

by Robert Lowell
Farrar, 1977, 138 pp. \$8.95
L of C 77-6799
ISBN 0-374-13525-8

Lowell's first collection of new poems since 1973 was published only five days before his death last September 12. It includes some of his strongest poetry since *Life Studies* (1959). A triumphant exercise of those powers that made him the central poet of his generation in America (and winner of every important poetry award, including two Pulitzers), *Day by Day* is charged with his relentless intelli-