Participants and Spectators: Modernization of Sport as Leisure

The transformation of modern sport in many ways sums up the complexity of industrial-era leisure. In the ways that competitive physical games changed, we see all the elements of the history of leisure: Rural, often chaotic, games rooted in custom and community combined with status-affirming contests of the elite to epitomize traditional forms of play. The regulated activities of the gymnast and school-boy ball game of the 19th century were common forms of rational recreation. Finally, the professionalization of soccer and baseball and the mass appeal of spectator sports in the late 19th century fully expressed the commercialization of much of public leisure in that period.

Preindustrial Sport: A Review

As we saw in Chapter 3, physical contests between men and animals were integral to play in rural society. Local variations of ball, club, and target games predominated in most preindustrial societies. Major modern ball games (like soccer, rugby, American football, cricket, baseball, and rounders) can be traced in a general way from this mixture of traditional ball games. Only in the 19th century would these games deviate sharply from one another, specializing in kicking or throwing and batting. The undifferentiated character of these games was reflected, also, in mass football contests in rural England. Lacking clear boundaries, restrictions on illegal tactics, referees, and even a clear distinction between players and spectators, these rough, sometimes brutal contests were hardly distinguishable from riots. Sporting "champions" were no more than the local butcher or plough boy whose prowess was seldom recognized beyond the parish or county. Traditional sport was also closely associated with gambling. Athletic contests before 1850 were deeply rooted in agrarian society. Foot races, often involving extra feats of physical strength and endurance, such as runners pushing carts or carrying heavy stones, displayed talents germane to an agrarian society. To be sure, there are numerous examples of competitive
spectator sports long before industrialization. But the games of ancient Greece and even more of Rome were a part of urban life and escape from its tedium and responsibilities that, until the 19th century, few had known.2

Traditional plebeian recreations, of course, were thwarted by elites. English Kings, like Edward II in 1365, outlawed ball games, bowling, and hurling because they competed with work and were associated (often justly) with crowd disorder. And, as we have seen (Chapter 4), clerical and reform-minded Puritans attacked sport as a threat to Sunday worship and work. Elites, however, participated in socially exclusive sports such as hunting and the mock war of tournaments. For relatively affluent merchant and tradesmen, there was archery, which kings supported as essential for military preparedness until the 17th century. While King Henry VIII forbade laborers from playing games (except at Christmas and in the presence of the master), he tacitly allowed it for the propertyed, and Queen Elizabeth enjoyed bearbaiting while her 17th-century successors were fond of skittles and golf.4

Following the defeat of the Puritans and the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, well-to-do Englishmen tolerated and even encouraged popular sports. The Whig oligarchy in London accepted the rough play of the masses (probably more than on the European continent) as a worthwhile price for a weak king and army; the landed gentry (mostly Tories) actually patronized village sport.4

For the rich, sport was a way to display privilege and status. Many innovations in aristocratic sport can be traced to the landed elite of England, which emerged from the late 17th century with a great deal of local autonomy and prestige. Not only did they own hunting lands and blooded horses, but they developed a rich culture of sporting clubs. A center of this society was Newmarket, a horse track inaccessible to all but those with carriage and horse, from which the races were usually watched.5

A similar search for status may explain the southern American planter’s fascination with horse racing at Williamsburg (modeled after Newmarket). Colonists imported hundreds of English thoroughbred horses for racing in the 18th century and imitated the English gentry when they founded Jockey Clubs. Even more illustrative was the “revival” of the chivalric tournament in the 1830s as southern knights, announced by trumpets, jousted with lance and armor in front of admiring ladies.6 In addition to the extravagant attention the rich lavished on their horses, some also indulged in yachting, an expensive hobby dating from the 17th century and revived in the mid-19th century.7

While most of these aristocratic sports were rural in origin, in 17th-century capitals, more “civilized” games like tennis emerged. This sport was developed in France by the urban aristocracy and spread to England in Elizabeth’s day. Tennis and cricket (a rural sport taken over by the English gentry in the 18th century) came to be characterized by the genteel notions of “sportsmanship” and courtesy, codes of honor that shaped the modern ideals of amateurism.8

The poor and, in the U.S., even slaves participated in aristocratic sporting culture as horse grooms and jockeys. Spontaneous wagers between gentlemen sometimes involved races between their footmen. The rich bet on boxing contests between their laborers in much the same way as they made wagers on horses or cocks. This aristocratic tradition of patronage of boxing champions continued into the modern era.9

Of course, sport had long been commercial. Gamblers promoted boxing and wrestling matches for crowds of both rich and poor gamesters. And professional athletes relied not on a share of the “gate” as entertainers did, but as partners with their wealthy sponsors in any prizes that they could win. In fact, the very centrality of gambling encouraged the “rationalization” of sporting contests in boxing and racing. In the 18th century, race courses were standardized and horses were classified by age in an effort to make the gambler’s risks more predictable and to reduce fraud. In English boxing, Jack Broughton introduced a primitive set of rules in 1743 to create a more rational setting for gamblers. The mid-1880s saw another major innovation, the Marquess of Queensbury rules, which introduced the three-minute round, a ban on wrestling, a ten-second knockout, and padded gloves.10

Despite the fact that gaming introduced regulations into some sports, in 1800, sports were hardly reformed. Among the elite, traditional athletic contests remained exclusive; the wealthy used plebeian contestants largely as playing pieces in games that the rich controlled. This attitude would continue during the development of commercial sport in the 19th century and would color the character of the amateur ethic as well. The games of the poor remained chaotic, community affairs, deeply rooted in local custom. These games, however, would be taken up and “purified” by educational and religious reformers in the 19th century to create most modern ballgames.

Nineteenth-Century Transformation

The key to change was in making sport respectable. Activity that the religious middle classes had associated with gambling, drunkenness, and violence gradually gained legitimacy in the 19th century when sport became equated with character building as well as with physical perfection. A new attitude toward the body emerged. It no longer was understood as merely the source of temptation which had to be disciplined by the mind and spirit, as in the notion of the “flesh” in traditional Judeo-Christian thinking. Instead, the body became an extension of moral power concretely expressed in the display of physical courage. By training the body, the new ideology ran, the individual disciplined the will. Morality continued to mean self-restraint, but it also increasingly implied vitality and action in the “real world,” values that could be inculcated in sport.11 Early in the century, Friedrich Ludwig Jahn had popularized “athleticism.” This famous Prussian teacher and nationalist founded the Turner or gymnastics movement. By the 1840s, Jahn’s exercises on poles, bars, ladders
and ropes and competitive gymnastic matches had been introduced to many German schools. But, despite encouragement of American disciples in Boston as early as 1826, few schools built gymnasiums until much later. England similarly did not embrace the Turner system. German immigrants brought gymnastics with them when they entered American cities in large numbers after 1848. But the movement was ethnically isolated and suffered decline with the assimilation of the second generation. The Caladonian Games, imported by Scottish immigrants to the American northeastern seaboard in 1853, promoted track and field events. From about 1869, the American YMCA began to build gymnasias as well as libraries.12

In the Anglo-American world, however, it was not these individual sports that dominated the transformation of middle-class attitudes toward physical games, but the team games. And these group sports emerged not in the athletic club but in elite schools.

Between 1840 and 1860, the doctrine of "muscular Christianity" in the English Public (private boarding) school laid the foundation for a new attitude toward sports in the upper and middle classes. Sports-conscious headmasters of Harrow, Uppingham, and Loretto (more than the famous Thomas Arnold of Rugby school) promoted the ideology of the "healthy mind in a healthy body." From about 1845, these educators outlawed disorderly unsupervised games and blood sports (like the hunting and killing of frogs), which were ruining the reputations of the schools. Headmasters replaced these rough games with both a far more disciplined educational environment and enthusiastic support for organized sport. By the 1860s, physical games were the core of the curriculum. For H.H. Almond at Loretto School, education was to inculcate, "First—Character. Second—Physique. Third—Intelligence. Fourth—Manners. Fifth—Information." This anti-intellectualism, which condemned the anemic scholar and glorified the "perpetual school boy," dominated the English Public School. In the late 19th century, school boys at Eton devoted from 5 to 7 hours a day to cricket compared to only 4 to 6 hours to study.13

But sports were also to promote morality: "Cricket is a game which reflects the character—a game of correct habits, of patient and well-considered practice." In fact, school-boy sports appeared to have largely replaced drinking and disorder. According to the "muscular Christian" writer, Charles Kingsley, the physically fit were less apt to be tempted by indecent thoughts; only on the playing field could the child learn courage, fair play and teamwork. This type of thinking was as influential in America where headmaster, S.R. Caltrop, could write in 1858: "I cannot tell how much physical weakness, how much moral evil we have bated and bowled, and shinned away from our door; but I do know that we have batted and bowled away innocence and listlessness, and doing nothing, which I believe is the Devil's greatest engine."14

Groton, the college preparatory school founded on the British model by the Anglophile New Englander, Endicott Peabody, in 1884, stressed sports, as did its many imitators among the northeastern American boarding schools.15

More important, however, was that the American colleges and universities also embraced the muscular Christian idea and endorsed athletics as part of the extracurriculum. The American patrician Henry Cabot Lodge went so far as to claim in 1896 that college sports actually inculcated the skills of competition and accountability that were at the root of business success. President Theodore Roosevelt found in the "strenuous" life an antidote to the moral degeneration of modern prosperity and materialism. The threat of self-indulgence and even derangement could be averted only by the self-sacrifice of disciplined, competitive sports.16

The growing popularity of sport had still other implications. In the 1870s, in a peculiar adaptation of Darwin's theory of evolution, sport became a means of displaying the "fitness" of the individual to prevail. Athletic prowess was also believed to reveal the superiority of the privileged classes, and the right of the imperial nation to "survive" or, more accurately, to dominate the future "evolution" of the world.

Popular songs and romantic adventure stories published in boys' magazines glorified sports and nationalism:

- The playing fields of England
- All up and down the land,
- Where English boys play English games,
- How bright and fair they stand!
- There each one plays for side, not self,
- And strength and skills employs
- On the playing-fields of England,
- The Pride of English Boys.17

Loyalty, engendered at public school and college, was to carry into adult life in the company, regiment, or government office. The English Public Schools used games to forge a new elite around the new industrial and older landed classes.17 The association of sport with the proper and educated affected the emergence of the amateur sporting ideal. To be an amateur meant more than not playing for pay and fair play; it required separation from the plebian element. In fact, the amateur philosophy emerged, in part, as a reaction to the flooding of the working classes into the games that the elite had refined.

The emerging cult of health and amateur sport also appeared outside of the school. The urban Amateur Athletic Movement emerged in both countries after 1860 for the sedentary businessman of the city. Athletic Clubs, united in England in 1880 (and America in 1888) into amateur athletic associations, strove to maintain the elite character of gymnastic and field-and-track sports. Some clubs openly excluded the "mechanic, artisan, or labourer," even though others hired workmen athletes in the heat of competition. Athletic clubs provided a setting for indoor exercise but also were used for business and social
contacts. The American country club, originating in 1882 near Boston, provided similar opportunities. Designed first for cricket and golf and later for golf, these clubs were exclusive and imitated similar British sports groups (e.g., Wimbledon’s All-England Croquet and Lawn-Tennis Club); they allowed “old boys” from elite colleges to continue to play the games they learned in their youth. The amateur-gentleman, of course, was also at the heart of the ideas of Pierre De Coubertin, who founded the modern Olympic Games in the 1890s.18

Amateur athleticism guided also the YMCA. It was at the Springfield Massachusetts “Y” that James Naismith invented basketball in 1891. Basketball was designed to provide exercise and competition without the threat of injury common in other ball games. The key was the raised goal or basket, which obliged the player to throw the ball softly in an arc in order to succeed. Its “civilized” character conformed to the amateur ideal.19

Those men of the middle classes who sought refuge from the sedentary and competitive environment of urban business were sometimes attracted to hiking and camping. These sports swept Europe and America from the 1870s. A romantic quest for the simplicity and purity of nature combined with a striving for fresh air, physical vigor, and self-reliance. The mountain, which prior to the 19th century had been the object of superstitious fear of evil creatures, became to thousands of “alpinists” a pinnacle to be conquered and a site of invigorating purity. In America, the camping movement was directed primarily toward children. From the late 1870s, clergymen, seeking a wholesome alternative to the dirty, hot streets for slum children, organized primitive camps. Other leaders were headmasters of private schools seeking for their students a retreat for nature study and moral training during the summer recess. Camping gradually became an integral part of the scouting and church summer programs in the urbanized northeast. In Britain, similar efforts of clergymen to offer parishioners wholesome summer outdoor recreation led to the holiday camp movement of the 20th century. These camps catered to adults and, later, to families.20

The athletic cult of the late 19th century, however, was usually militantly male. It reaffirmed the doctrine of the vulnerable female, treating her as constitutionally unsuited for vigorous physical activity, and the male’s God-given right to chivalric dominance (as well as to a lifetime indulgence in his boyish games). To be sure, in the 1860s, middle-class women were given croquet and in the 1870s, an unstrenuous form of lawn tennis. So central, however, was sport to late Victorian leisure that women could not be totally excluded from the cult of athleticism. They entered it in a gradual process. First, women were offered exercise, promoted as early as 1832 by the founder of American Home Economics, Catherine Beecher, as an antidote to the physical dangers of sedentary life. Then, individual sport became respectable (for example, in such progressive American women’s colleges as Vassar in 1875) but only in sex-segregated games. A similar pattern appeared in the girls’ public schools in England.21

Despite the elite (male) origins of 19th-century sports, reformers had a “civilizing” mission. In effect, they rationalized the rough, traditional games of the masses and then returned them to the people.22 In this process too, schools played a major role; unwittingly, they contributed to the emergence of the mass spectator sports of the 20th century. Most generally, this change involved the creation of national rules codified by elite bodies like the (English) Football Association (1863) or the American Bowling Congress (1895). These organizations replaced the muddle of contradictory regulations that customarily governed play in the village or school and made possible contests at the national and even international level. This phenomenon paralleled the nationalization of many other aspects of life in the second half of the 19th century.23

Game rules were freed from custom and made subject to the logic of innovation. Like other leisure products, sports became more efficient (especially fast-paced), intelligible, and safe. Rule changes in soccer and American football encouraged individual skill and teamship rather than mass play and the violence that it engendered. Athletes also were encouraged to specialize and train to assure maximization of natural ability in order to meet the increasingly more keen competition. This too paralleled trends in business. Part of this rationalizing process was the emergence of records, which was facilitated especially by the technology of time-keeping when the second hand appeared in the 1860s. The keeping of team and individuals records in cricket and baseball came to resemble modern business accounting. Sport, in effect, underwent a “civilizing process,” which parallels a similar decline in personal violence and rise of emotional restraint in many other areas of modern life.24

Late 19th-century sport reflected the “improving” values of the middle classes, as well as the stress upon individual competition and nationalism that dominated these social strata. Sport gained support from the reforming middle class because games expressed a new attitude toward the body and promised to discipline the young and blend the upper class with the new industrial classes. Through the amateur ethic, sports gained legitimacy by stressing sport for sport’s sake (rather than winning), self-restraint in both victory and defeat, and “fair play” or voluntary acceptance of the rules and chivalrous attitude toward rivals. So powerful were these values that they eventually transformed the games of those lower down the economic and social scale, even if the affluent amateur had misgivings about their “democratization.” 25

The transformation of sport went beyond the conscious values of the reforming middle class. Participation in athletic play was shaped also by complex technological and economic factors. Most basically, modern sport reflected the new urban environment, its restricted space, and even the time constraints of industrial work. The mile-long stretches of land used in medieval football and the hunting forests of the aristocracy largely disappeared with increased population and economic activity. Not only were playing grounds given uniform boundaries, but space-concentrated games like tennis or
Ping-Pong emerged. Time-consuming games like cricket (suitable, perhaps, for the rural cycle of work and festival) declined in favor of far briefer games like football and baseball, which could be integrated into the lives of industrial workers. Invention also bred a number of new physical recreations: among them, the development of the roller skate in 1863, which led a craze among the affluent in the 1870s and 1880s in Australia, Europe, and America. Roller skating rings offered not only exercise but an arena for courtship and socializing. This was a sport that lacked masculine traditions and thus was open to women. The same was true of the safety bicycle (1887), which replaced various bone-shaking high-wheel cycles. Although expensive (over 100 dollars in the 1890s), the bicycle attracted thousands of middle-class men and women. New business techniques assured the rapid spread of sports fads like tennis and croquet in the 1870s and 1880s to the urban middle class.24

The "nationalization of sport" was also a creation of nation-wide networks of railroad and mass communications. Baseball and soccer thrived only after the completion of interregional railroad lines. The prominence of English commerce in world trade explains the globalization of English football in the generation before World War I.

Technology and economic growth contributed also to the rise of the spectator. The city's concentration of people and the advent of rail and streetcar travel made possible the modern sports stadium. Spectators subtly changed from a throng of gamblers to the partisan crowd. Sports wagers hardly disappeared, but rather were increasingly shifted to the football pools and off-site pari-mutuel betting. These activities were too complex and distant from the contest to spark the excitement that fan loyalty engendered. Arguably, it was in the 1880s that the modern spectator emerged. Although only 2,000 watched the English Soccer Cup Finals in 1872, by 1885 the crowd had reached 10,000. It increased to nearly 101,000 by 1901 and to at least 200,000 at the Wembley Cup Final in 1923. Moreover, once the prize or wager declined as a source of financial support for the game, the "gate" became more important. Only in the 1870s did the enclosed stadium with the turnstile (1871) for paying customers become the norm. Admission charges not only made sport a profitable business but helped to screen access and preserve a sought-after "social tone" of respectability. The crowds not only grew but their character changed as fans identified with the celebrity player and developed passionate loyalties to teams. The fact that early ball clubs were rooted in neighborhoods or colleges made this identification with the team possible.27

Another product of industrialization, the mass newspaper, also encouraged "fan" consciousness. Sports journalism created and sustained daily sports mindedness. From 1792, with the English Sporting Magazine, sports journalism grew; by the end of the 19th century, there were already 25 sports papers published in London alone. Americans quickly followed in 1819 with the American Farmer, which promoted horse racing. Mass-appeal papers like the New York Clipper (1853) and the weekly Police Gazette in the 1870s also featured sports journalism. Still, it was only in the last quarter of the 19th century that the sports page became an institution.28

Finally, the general bureaucratization of modern life perhaps indirectly encouraged the development of spectator sports. Industrial society placed a premium on orderly, predictable behavior; yet it also stimulated competitive and even aggressive impulses. Together, these pressures may have encouraged the shift (or sublimation) of "excitement" from everyday life to the playing field or viewing stands, providing relief from accumulated tensions.29

So far, we have considered three strands of modern sports: a) their traditional roots, b) the middle-class sources of their 19th-century reformation, and c) the impact of technology on sports and the creation of the modern spectator. These trends, however, did not converge into a uniform product. Rather, modern sport revealed complex patterns of 19th-century society, patterns that were products of differing mixtures of reform and tradition and even of contrasting responses to technological change. Sports both democratized and excluded. Not only the professional athlete (and the spectator) but also the affluent amateur embodied sports values. Let us try to understand some of these complexities, first by briefly exploring the origins of several modern British sports and then by comparing and contrasting these games with those of their American cousins.

In the 1830s and 1840s, the English Public School modernized the rough, rural game of football. The rules that shaped the modern game were taken beyond the gates of such schools when "old boys," or alumni, continued to play at the university and in urban clubs. Footballers from different Public Schools found it necessary to codify common regulations; the result was the Cambridge rules of 1848 and eventually a national code which, in 1863, became "Association" (or in its shortened form, soccer) football. Not only did the rules encourage individual ball play (specializing in kicking rather than handling the ball), but in the 1870s rules began to police play (in 1878 armed with a whistle). In 1891, the penalty kick was introduced to control illegal and unsportsmanlike behavior. The game of rural youths had become the sport of gentlemen.

Soon, however, modern football returned to its popular roots. Clergy with Public-School upbringing and imbued with the philosophy of muscular Christianity taught football to parish boys on Saturday afternoons. Other working-class children learned the game in YMCA's, boys' clubs, or schools. Soccer was easily learned with its simple rules and was widely popular because of its premium on agility rather than on brute strength or unusual size. Industrialists, businessmen, or churches organized teams as a wholesome recreational outfor their young charges. The St. Domingo's Vale New Connection Methodist Sunday School founded a football club that later became Everton, the winner of the Cup Final in 1893. Other early famous teams like Aston Villa and
the Wolverhampton Wanderers began in churches; the Blackburn Rovers and Leicester City started in grammar schools. Employees of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway and Thames Iron Works formed Newton Heath (later Manchester United) and West Ham United.

The professional player gradually emerged from these local teams. The laborer often required financial support to pay for the time lost from work and for long-distances travel to matches. Competitive pressures encouraged play for pay. Local teams bid for the talents of the country's best footballers, especially those from Scotland.

In the 1880s, the amateur elite protested when clubs seeking an edge hired professionals (often clandestinely). The F.A. Cup Final assured that the inherent conflict between the professional and amateur clubs would come to a head because it pitted the best teams in the nation against one another. In 1883, the working-class Blackburn Olympics triumphed over the Old Etonians in the F.A. Cup Final. This victory ended a decade of Public-School dominance. By 1888, a fully professional league was founded with teams from the industrial North and Midlands. The Football Association, however, remained in amateur-gentlemen's hands, and a separate amateur cup competition was established, thus eliminating direct competition between the gentleman player with his prided amateurism and the working-class professional.

By the 1880s and 1890s, football clubs became limited companies with shareholders and boards of directors. Club sponsors built stadiums that attracted mass fan loyalty. By 1891, games near London attracted about 7,000 on Saturday afternoons; within twenty years the figure was 30,000. The local business elites often owned clubs; their patronage fostered good will from working-class fans. At the same time, football competition encouraged interurban rivalry. In the larger cities there were several teams, each providing a sense of community in the otherwise impersonal English city.

Still, the professional player remained a modest hero; he earned wages that were scarcely higher than the skilled artisan. A maximum wage (by 1901) and the "retain and transfer" system eliminated competition between teams for the talents of footballers. And, an incipient trade union movement among players was crushed in 1909. The game perhaps lost its playful character, becoming the display of the specialized skills of working professionals. For the player, the difference between sport and work largely disappeared; his dealings with the club ownership were similar to the relationship between worker and factory owner.

Yet many aspects of traditional sports survived the emergence of the modern spectator and professional. Reformers who condemned the "rabble" participants in village football in the 1830s might have complained fifty years later about similar unruly crowds on the terraces of the new football stadiums. Football was adapted to working-class leisure styles that had little to do with the ethos of the amateur-gentleman. Soccer players stressed team solidarity and a pragmatic quest for monetary reward for skill. Football crowds displayed noisy partisanship, occasional disrespect for the authority of the referees and club management, and loud festive behavior. Still the "respectable working class" was increasingly drawn into football culture. The turnstile, a policy of segregated seating by ticket prices, security guards, and the practice of fining home clubs that failed to follow rules of order helped to win the support of a family and self-disciplined crowd; even women came out by the end of the century.

If soccer tended to "civilize" traditional football and to overcome social cleavages in English society, rugby had a very different history. About 1841, pupils at Rugby school played a version of football that allowed players to carry the ball and to "huck" (i.e., kick the shins of opponents). Less prestigious schools adopted rugby rather than embraced soccer. These institutions attracted clientele who were less socially secure and perhaps had greater need to prove the "manliness" of their children in a relatively rough sport like rugby. Still, hacking and other expressions of mock war were gradually controlled in a "civilizing" process that paralleled that of soccer.

Like the Football Association, Rugby Football Union emerged from a group of "old boys" clubs in 1871. Rugby, however, was played by a smaller and less influential group and was centered in the south of England. It was not introduced to working classes except in Lancashire and Yorkshire, where socially "open" teams predominated. Professional clubs emerged out of these northern teams in much the same way as they did nationally for soccer. However, southern Rugby clubs were socially exclusive. Perhaps because their members may have been less certain of their social position, they opposed the use of Cup competition to popularize the game. While amateur soccer teams could compromise with the working-class professional club from the industrial north, rugby split in 1895 into an amateur Rugby Union and a professional Rugby League. Rugby remained a relatively insular sport, spreading to the British empire but, unlike soccer, not to most of the world.

The social history of cricket reveals still another variation. Cricket was a relatively old game; it was codified in 1787 by the Marylebone Cricket Club and organized around a unique partnership of amateur gentility and lower-status professionals (often hired hands on estates or tradesmen with flexible schedules). For many years, this arrangement produced little social conflict. Gentlemen players were secure in their elite position and professionals knew their place. Lower-status players specialized in bowling (or pitching), a skill long considered a "workaday, at best, guileful craft," while the upper-class amateurs were the batsmen, masters of "the noble, disdainful, at its best, exquisite art."

A century later, incipient professionalization led to County cricket, requiring players to originate from the county teams they played for. Cricket clubs remained organizations of subscribing members and not businesses. Although they, too, relied on admissions charges for expenses, the lack of mass appeal meant that a whole county (larger than the American equivalent) was
required to sustain a team. Still, growing social conflict between the professionals and amateurs by the 1890s led to formal segregation between the two groups, not on different teams but in separate dressing rooms, in separate travel arrangements, and even in the fact that the gentleman-amateur’s name was posted with his initials before his surname whereas the professional’s initials were posted after.

In an interesting contrast, cricket in Australia became a mass spectator sport. Australia led the industrial world in the introduction of the eight-hour day and the Saturday half holiday. Despite its vast frontiers, Australia was largely an urban society. The result was a cricket game that was redesigned to appeal to mass crowds. Australian cricket was more exciting and competitive than the English version and it certainly tolerated fans who were much more boisterous than those who followed English cricket.39

**Sport and National Divergence:**

**American Sport in the Light of British Origins**

As we have seen, Americans shared much of the British sporting tradition.38 Immigrants brought traditional British ballgames to the United States and Americans embraced similar complex attitudes toward sports. For Americans, sports could be traditional expression of exclusivity or plebian “anarchy,” an agent of moral and social improvement or an entertainment business. Yet Americans profoundly changed British sports—a transformation that reflects important differences between these two societies.

The origins of American baseball is a good place to begin. Much myth surrounds the origins of the “National Game.” The legend of its invention in a cowpunch in upstate New York by the civil-war hero, Abner Doubleday, served to associate baseball with rural life and nationalism. In fact, however, the game most likely emerged from English rounders. Its originator probably was a New York City bank clerk, Alexander Cartwright. In 1845, he codified rules (probably derived from a common book on English boys’ ball games) for the “Knickerbockers,” a club of white-collar employees and tradesmen. By 1858, there was sufficient interest in the game to form the National Association of Base Ball Players, a group whose amateur ethic prohibited pay for play and gambling. By the Civil War, baseball had abandoned the soft ball of rounders (which allowed “soaking” or throwing the ball at the running batter) and adopted the familiar “nine-inning” game.

Why Americans embraced baseball instead of cricket has long interested historians of sport. Cricket was widely played in the northeast, especially among immigrants and Anglophile elites (like members of the Philadelphia Cricket Club). A common view is that Americans preferred the home-grown game, a feeling reinforced by the nationalist upsurge during the Civil War.

Probably more important, baseball (unlike cricket) accommodated both players and crowds by changing rules to shorten, enliven, and balance the game between batter and fielder.39

The myth of the democratic roots of baseball did have a ring of truth. Americans, unlike the colonized peoples of India or Australia, had no incentive to adopt cricket, an aristocratic sport of the mother country, in the hope of gaining self-esteem by beating the imperial society at its own game. By contrast, baseball appealed to the native-born and immigrants from places other than England and, unlike cricket, early baseball was completely amateur and lacked the snobbish associations of American cricket. Even the Knickerbockers, who wore respectable trimmed straw hats, were merely white-collar men—not the moneyed elite who embraced cricket in New York City and Philadelphia. By the 1860s, baseball had trickled down to the urban artisan classes. Groups of truckmen, mechanics, and especially voluntary fire departments formed baseball clubs. Rival fire companies (often rooted in ethnic or religious communities) had long indulged in gang-style violence and fighting fires had been a major recreation outlet for young men in pre-Civil-War urban America. Baseball provided an alternative to this violent leisure culture while preserving many aspects of traditional working-class recreations, including group rivalry, gambling, and drinking.40

Baseball did not originate in elite schools nor was it disseminated via paternalistic clergy and social workers, as was English football. Rather, its beginnings and growth were more socially fluid. Despite the respectability of the Knickerbockers and the amateurism of the National Association of Base Ball Players, the game had unsavory ties in the generation after the Civil War. Boss William Tweed, the machine politician of Tammany Hall in New York, controlled the “Mutuals,” and its successor, the “Giants,” were a club owned by a well-known politician with ties to organized crime.41

The dynamics of unrestrained competition encouraged professionalization. As early as 1858, New York crowds were willing to pay 50 cents to watch quality baseball games. By 1863, the National Association recognized professional players. In 1869, the Cincinnati Red Stockings, the first completely professional team, proved the disadvantage of the amateur player by defeating all comers in a national tour. The result was the National Association of Professional Base Ball Players (1871), which briefly dominated the commercial game. Players were free to offer their services to the highest bidder and they could take advantage of competition between clubs. Thus, players enjoyed salaries about five times that of the average working man. High player costs and the tendency for the richer clubs to attract the best players weakened the commercial position of “organized baseball.” This, plus “hippodroming,” the practice of throwing a game for money, diminished public support for baseball in the early 1870s.
In 1876, William Humbert, a Chicago businessman and club owner, and Albert Spalding, once a player and later a famous sports-equipment manufacturer, reorganized the game. They created a cartel, the National League, in an agreement among club owners that prevented clubs from competing in the same urban "markets." These city monopolies were able to build large stadiums, linked to the new streetcar network. This reorganization created a small number of "major" league teams, far fewer than emerged in English football and with roots less deep in working-class communities.

The National League also reduced the players to serf status with the reserve clause of 1879, which obligated a player to work for the club with which he originally signed unless sold, traded, or released. This, of course, gave the employing club a terrific bargaining position in setting the contract; it created financial stability and even profitability for club owners. None of this was very surprising in this age of aggressive big business in America. The baseball "industry," like other anti-labor businesses, spawned a short-lived labor movement. But the Brotherhood of Professional Base Ball Players (1885-1890) failed to get the owners to negotiate with them. In response, in 1890, they founded the Players League. Lacking money and cohesion, this league rapidly disintegrated. The National League and the American League, which was established in 1900, were able to defeat all competition. With the assistance of sentimental probaseball judges, they escaped antimonopoly laws. Major-league baseball became a part of American big business. Minor-league "farm" teams were permanently made secondary (used for apprenticeship and training). This system contrasts with English football, which includes four divisions and the escalator of relegation and promotion for losing and winning teams.

Finally, the National League attempted to make baseball respectable. Spalding outlawed gambling among players and the relatively steep admission price of 50 cents was the rule. Games were played mostly on weekday afternoons, and almost all teams respected Sabbatarian scruples until after 1900 or even 1920. Many clubs offered special "Ladies Days," and other inducements to raise the social tone of the crowd. Night games were played only after 1935, when improved technology and falling attendance (due to the Depression) induced clubs to light the field. Working people lacked both the means and the time to participate equally in early baseball culture.

American crowds were perhaps more passive even in the early days of baseball than were their counterparts on the English football terraces. This, in part, was due to the more socially mixed baseball crowd. It was, perhaps, also due to the greater distance between stadiums which, of course, discouraged conflict between rival fans.

In 1908, an official commission enshrined the myth of Abner Doubleday, giving wholesome rural roots to this urban game. Even then, however, baseball did not shed its disreputable machine and gambling connections. The American League's franchise in New York City (the Yankees) was awarded to a consortium dominated by a gambler and associate of machine politicians. The "Black Socks" scandal around the 1919 World Series could be stilled only by the appointment of James Kenesaw Landis, a well-respected Federal judge, to the post of Commissioner.

Promoters of baseball liked to stress its "democratic" character. Yet, not only did the game tend to exclude the working-class spectator in its early years, but the player's ranks were not open to all. Four years after the emancipation of the slaves, blacks were formally excluded from the National Association of Base Ball Players (1867). Although some teams used blacks until the end of the 1890s, boycott threats from racist fans and clubs drove the last black from white baseball (as well as from other sports) for a half century. The logic of segregation led to the creation of the Negro National League in 1920. While the black clubs were less financially secure than white teams, they produced superior players like Cool Papa Bell, Judy Johnson, and Satchel Paige. Often, however, black owners were obliged to stress the comic antics rather than the skill of the players in order to attract white crowds.

Baseball, like the rest of American society, only gradually accepted recent immigrant groups. Players in the 1880s and 90s were predominantly Anglo-German. Thereafter, owners recruited Irish and Jewish players to attract immigrant crowds. At the turn of the century, Michael "King" Kelly of the Boston Braves drew Irish-American fans. Italian players followed (although the German-American, Babe Ruth, was mislabeled the "Bambino" by adoring Italian-American fans). Black players were admitted to the Major Leagues only in 1947 and then to face racial threats. Social exclusivity was not merely an English phenomenon; in America, it was reflected in ethnic and racial discrimination.

Like baseball, American football has English roots. It sprang, however, not from the American city but from elite colleges and universities. By the 1870s, higher education (rather than the elite boarding school, as in England) was the center of sports innovation. While clergymen and classics professors often dominated the 180 liberal-arts colleges that dotted America at midcentury, students resisted the heavy stress on a fixed curriculum and denial of youthful pleasures. Students not only periodically rioted against what they took to be unreasonable rules, but created their own extracurriculum. These activities included not only debating societies and the social life of fraternities (in the 1880s), but also intramural sports. At first, these contests were between the younger and older "classes," which shared common courses and self-government. "Bloody Monday," in the first week of the fall term in elite eastern colleges, involved spirited "football" or field-hockey matches between first- and second-year classes. These games served as initiation rites and welded loyalty to scholastic class. The first intercollegiate contest took place in 1852 in a crew meet between Harvard and Yale rowers. Similar contests involving baseball and other sports gradually replaced the inter-class rivalries as colleges grew and class loyalties diminished with the diversification of curriculum.
American football emerged out of intercollegiate athletic competition between the prestigious students of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. Although a soccer-type game had long been played in eastern colleges, a quite different game would dominate the American collegiate Fall term by the 1880s. Harvard students played a variation of rugby (long common in Boston) and refused to join in a league with soccer-playing elite schools to the south. Instead, they met the Canadian McGill University team in 1874, which played English rugby, and quickly adopted this form of football.

Within a decade, this type of football was played at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. Americans, led by Yale's Walter Camp, soon drastically transformed rugby. Key to the change was the rationalization of the "scrummage" of rugby. The scrummage, which began play, consisted of a tangled mass of players from two opposing teams who struggled to work the ball back to a teammate; in turn, this player could then advance the ball by kicking it, running with it, or passing it back to another player. The American innovation of the scrummage provided predetermined plays. One team at a time controlled the ball, which was "snapped" back to a player who orchestrated the play forward. In order to assure a more varied game, the advancing team was obliged to move the ball five, and later ten, yards in three attempts or forfeit control. Between 1883 and 1912, the rules were changed still again, reducing the points awarded for kicking the ball (and raising points for running it) over the goal line. These rules encouraged coordinated play and specialized positions that differed from the spontaneity and individualism inherent in rugby. The result, argue the sociologists, Riesman and Denney, was a game whose:

Choreography would be enjoyed, if not always understood, by non-experts, and its atomic pattern in time and space would seem natural to audiences accustomed to such patterns in other foci of the national life. The midfield dramatization of line against line, the recurrent starting and stopping of field action around the timed snapping of a ball, the trend to a formalized division of labor between backfield and line, and above all, perhaps, the increasingly precise synchronization of men in motion—these developments...fitted in with other aspects of their industrial folkways.

American football stressed, as did the wider culture, the value of aggressive competition, but within clear rules, in contrast with the perhaps more informal game of English rugby, with its roots in a society where "good form" was more implicit, and had less need of codification.49

American football remained, however, injury-prone. The mass tackling that ended plays and the absence of protective equipment guaranteed broken heads and torn knees. Players and alumni boosters may have gloried in the manliness of the game, but by 1905, educators, and even President Theodore Roosevelt (himself a friend of the "strenuous life"), had called for serious reform or even abolition. The result was a commission called by Walter Camp and still another modification of rules. The most important change was the forward pass, which eventually opened up play by reducing the often brutal concentration of players on the ball carrier. Also important, new rules were designed to make the game more interesting to the spectator.

Football games became the focal points of the recreational calendar of the college student. The autumn season often ended with the spectacle of a Thanksgiving Day clash of traditional rivals. At first, students controlled collegiate sport. But with increased competition, as in baseball, the professional coach took over. Hired by the college to enhance its reputation and even financial resources, the coach often sacrificed the amateur ethic for the sake of winning. Some football coaches, like Yale's Walter Camp, attempted to preserve the amateur tradition: "It is not courtesy upon a ball field to cheer an error of the opponents. If it is upon your grounds, it is the worst kind of boorishness." More influential, however, were those who stressed competition and winning. In 1891, the fledgling University of Chicago hired Amos Alonzo Stagg to produce a winning football team as a vehicle for advertising the school. With access to a large budget, Stagg recruited and pampered star players. While, in a few colleges, faculty took control of the sports program in order to root out quasi-professionalism, most college sports were dominated by booster alumni. Intercollegiate conferences emerged by the 1890s to regulate competition (e.g., by outlawing players who were not legitimate students). Still, the moralistic cult of athleticism had largely given way to the obsession with winning by the 1890s.50

Football fever gradually extended beyond students and alumni. Regional pride (state universities, especially) or ethnic identity (for example, the "Fighting Irish" of Notre Dame University) attracted many to the game. However, at least into the 1920s, football crowds remained primarily middle class. Still, football trickled down into the high schools in the 1920s. More important, the great increase in high-school attendance of the working classes from the 1930s introduced football to the broader rural and urban masses. High school football on Friday nights became a main event for many a small town and city. 51

Unlike baseball, football remained predominantly an amateur sport. Despite the formation of a professional football league in 1920, only in the 1960s did it emerge to challenge the popularity of baseball. And, when it did, like baseball, professional football was a big business, organized in the major cities, and very different from the English small-town soccer club. Like its collegiate "parent," professional American football was patronized by a more affluent crowd than attended English football. American football was rooted in a different setting, the college, which was less exclusive than the English public school but also more middle class than the working class that patronized the English game.
Twentieth-Century Challenges to Sport

In some ways, sport has been democratized in the 20th century. In the United States, sports slowly were opened to blacks, a change that parallels desegregation in work and politics. After 1810, when the American black slave Tom Molyneux fought the English champion Tom Cribb, blacks were excluded from boxing whites. The hero of the ring in the 1880s, John L. Sullivan, as well as his rivals, "Paddy" Ryan and James Corbett were all Irish. While the brilliant black heavyweight, Jack Johnson, won the boxing championship of 1910, he did not conform to white expectations because of his display of wealth and his marriages to white women, and he was driven out of the game. In the 1930s, white audiences loved Joe Louis for his "respectful" demeanor and his victories over symbols of fascism (Italian and German challengers). However, he was an exception and played in a sport that had traditionally tolerated the lower-class outsider. Far different was the acceptance of African-Americans in those team sports that had long been dominated by groups who had "arrived" in American society. When Branch Rickey, owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers baseball team, decided to hire the black Jackie Robinson in 1947, he did so over the objection of all other owners.52

Another sign of democratization was the improvement of players' rights. Successful attacks on the "reserve clause" and maximum wage agreements, at least in baseball in 1972 and English football in 1961, returned to players economic rights that they had lost in the late 19th century. These changes probably increased the social and economic distance between player and fan insofar as the former increasingly became an entertainment star; but players were partially liberated from their semislave status vis-a-vis the owner.

Opportunities for athletic leisure for women have also increased. Until the 1970s, the ideology of noncompetition and modesty prevailed in the American movement for female physical education. Educators modified basketball for women (requiring play in zones) to encourage participation and reduce unladylike exertion. In the Progressive era, women's physical education was dominated by a reform-minded elite who rejected intercollegiate competition for Play Days—a setting for exercise and play for play's sake.53 Still, through the Olympics, women like Babe Didrickson and Helen Wills gained attention in individual sports. Only in the 1970s, in the midst of a new of feminism and federal legislation (Title IX of the Education Act of 1972), did American women's sports gain access to funding.54

More generally, public access to sports facilities in Britain has expanded greatly, especially since World War II. Quasi-military drills that were introduced by the School Boards in English schools after 1870 were the only form of organized exercise for most urban youths. This activity was only gradually supplemented by playing fields and gymnasium after 1937, when British legislation supported modern physical education and public recreation at the local level. Voluntary associations for cycling, hiking, and camping in Britain grew, especially in the interwar period. The Keep-Fit movement attracted over 120,000 by 1937, but recreational facilities such as swimming pools and multipurpose sports centers which were adapted to the older individual, have grown most since 1960. By the early 1970s, a million Britons belonged to football clubs, over 1.2 million bought fishing licenses each year, and swimming emerged as the most popular participant sport.55

In America, schools and voluntary organizations have also greatly expanded sports activity. Important examples of the latter are Little League (1939) and Pop Warner Football (1929). Despite excessive competition sometimes encouraged by parents, these organizations have provided millions of children with organized play. Moreover, during the New Deal government of the 1930s, public works projects provided public access to swimming pools, tennis courts, playing fields, and even low-cost golf courses. As in England, swimming emerged in the 1970s as the most popular leisure sport.56

Despite these recent (and often ignored) trends toward mass participation in athletic leisure, sport remains largely a spectator activity. In an age of electronic communications, the character of the spectator has changed significantly. On the one hand, radio and television have greatly broadened audiences: thousands heard the Dempsey-Carpentier fight in 1921 on radio; but the World Cup soccer match of 1982 was seen on television by one third of the world. Television gained large audiences for sports like boxing and snooker, which in England, were well adapted to the small screen. With expert commentary and the instant replay, television has informed the masses on the subtleties of games like American football.57

Television, however, also ended the era of collective leisure that had been introduced with the railroad and streetcar. Crowds at British soccer games declined from a peak of 41 million in 1948-1949 to 18.7 million in 1982-1983; and minor-league baseball attendance dropped from 42 million in 1949 to barely 10 million in 1969. Television certainly distorted the pastoral environment and pace of baseball as viewed from the stands. It fostered financial dependency on commercial sponsors and encouraged the superstar system, which makes athletes into entertainers. Even in the relatively less-commercial media in Britain, tobacco and financial companies dominate sports advertising, helping to supplant declining gate revenue and to make up for salary-driven increases in costs. The commercial profit of sports endorsement and sports-related products has exploded in both countries in the 1970s and 1980s. Still, neither the glamorous athlete nor the commercialization of sport is new to the TV age.58

The continuing problem of football hooliganism and sports nationalism suggests that spectator sports have hardly displaced collective aggression. A number of investigators suggest that, from the 1950s, a change has occurred in English football crowds. The decline of working-class neighborhoods and withdrawal of the respectable working class from attendance prepared the way
for the violence of fans in the stadium, on trains, and in sports bars. The lower English working-class, isolated from the affluence of the relatively satisfied and civilized respectable working class, finds in football a setting for conflicts over turf or territory.59

But in America, sport also has become something other than play or entertainment. At the Olympic Games in Los Angeles in 1984, American fans displayed equally boorish behavior in their partisan chanting, “USA, USA!” The mob attacks on football goalposts indicate the same inability of spectator games to diffuse violence; in addition, sporting events have long been the site of racial strife.60 Sports have not often diffused social problems. Rather, they are a barometer of a society, its values, and its conflicts.

While reformers never succeeded in turning sport into an agent of moralization, sports businessmen have not quite transformed it into a commodity. In the 20th century, sports and other forms of recreation have encouraged debate about the value of mass leisure and the role of public and voluntary action to improve it. This topic will be the subject of our next chapter.
Dilemmas of Leisure and Public Policy: 1900-1940

The first forty years of this century witnessed the most dramatic expansion of leisure in modern history. Both time and resources grew dramatically for recreational activities. According to John Hammond (1933), this was an era of "Common Enjoyment," and soon leisure rather than work would be the core of personal experience. These new opportunities, however, were challenged by the crisis of the Great Depression, and were subverted by both militarism and commercialism. The growth of leisure intensified a fundamental debate in western societies about the utility of leisure and, even more important, the capacity of people to adapt to free time. This literature produced both a profound pessimism about the future of leisure and provided inspiration for advocates of a "democratic" leisure. The debate reveals some of the dilemmas of public leisure policy that continue to the present.

Growth of Leisure Time

In Europe, if not everywhere in America, the eight-hour workday became a norm after World War I, reducing the week by six to twelve hours. The paid vacation became a right of most wage earners by the mid-1930s. This trend culminated in the 1930s in movements for 40- or even 30-hour work weeks. These efforts sought to correct the maldistribution of work and leisure in an era of technological change and economic depression. The growth of leisure can be explained by several trends:

a) The mechanization and intensification of work eased employers' fears that shorter worktime necessarily meant reduced profits. Reforming employers found in the 1890s that a workday that began at 6:00 AM, before breakfast, was time wasted. In the assembly line factory of Henry Ford in 1913, more could be produced in eight hours (and with greater labor efficiency) than previously could be done in ten hours. Still, the vast majority of employers resisted any reduction of worktime.
b) The quicker and more tedious pace of work also led to demands from health reformers and unions that fatigue be relieved by reducing worktime. Efficiency science in both America and Europe justified rest and recreation as a physiological necessity. In America in the 1900s, progressivists such as Josephine Goldmark argued that more intense factory and commercial work required shorter hours in order to restore physiological and mental balance. These reformers persuaded state legislatures and courts to embrace ten- or even eight-hour laws, at least for women. British efficiency experts gained a foothold in the Ministry of Labour by 1912 with studies that explained low productivity and absenteeism by the influence of overwork.²

c) Perhaps the greatest influence in the reduction of worktime was simply the popular demand for increased personal freedom in leisure. In particular, four years of sacrifice in World War I in Europe created irresistible pressure for an eight-hour work day immediately after peace came in 1918.

From at least the 1910s, organized workers and professional reformers shared a common perspective: technology made reductions in worktime both possible and necessary. Lost work due to hours liberated from labor could inevitably be offset by increased productivity, and shorter hours would stimulate further mechanization. In turn, these improvements would allow a further shift of time to leisure. Reduced worktime would not simply increase the number of jobs; these liberated hours would both lead to the social betterment of laboring families and the expansion of consumer demand.³ No longer was leisure merely a socially useful privilege to be granted to mothers and children, but a right for all—including adult males. Even New England moralists were beginning to argue that it was not work that defined the human essence but “the free spontaneous activity of play.” Reformers believed that the progressive liberation of time from work was a fruit of industrial society that had to be guaranteed by the state.⁴

The popular demand for leisure in the first two decades of the century can be found everywhere. On both sides of the Atlantic, employers complained of increased absenteeism and turnover. Workers apparently were losing their work discipline, preferring a day or two of leisure or even longer vacations instead of increased income. In America, new immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe sacrificed wages for time with family and attempted to retain the traditional Jewish Sabbath on Saturday despite the official six-day week.⁵ Even during the emergency of war, British munitions workers would not abandon their holiday-taking customs; and, despite threats from the authorities, they seldom produced more with overtime because extra-long workdays were followed by absenteeism and tardiness.⁶

The intensification of work, especially during the First World War, surely stimulated a demand for free time. Demand for munitions and labor shortages also improved labor’s bargaining position; governments intervened in order to avoid conflict. Quite likely the American government’s decision to reduce hours to eight per day in some defense works stimulated European and Latin American interest in the eight-hour standard. During the war years, people throughout the world identified President Wilson not only with a democratic peace but with free time. Also influenced was V. I. Lenin’s proclamation of an eight-hour day shortly after his Bolshevik Revolution in November 1917.⁷ The “three-eighths,” the equal division of the day between work, rest, and leisure, had symbolized the aspirations of labor. With unprecedented universality, the eight-hour day became the norm in the aftermath of that war. It spread from the United States and Russia in 1917 to the defeated Central Powers in November 1918 and then on to the British and French Allies in early 1919.⁸

As British Prime Minister David Lloyd George admitted shortly after the Armistice: “It is not a question of whether the men can stand the strain of a longer day, but that the working class is entitled to the same sort of leisure as the middle class.” Both British and American workers went on strike and negotiated for the eight-hour day (48-hour week) in 1919. In the U.S., 28 states passed hour legislations in 1919. These movements were part of an international crisis in which labor militancy combined with reformist legislation to produce a general reduction of working hours throughout the western world.⁹

Paralleling this quest for daily leisure was a movement for paid holidays. Until 1919, the demand for extended paid leave from work was rare among wage earners. Most working people in America and England enjoyed scattered holidays; fewer were able to take advantage of annual plant shutdowns, which often coincided with traditional festivals like Lancashire Wakes Week. Yet these vacations had little in common with the 20th-century movement for extended summer holidays. They often originated in traditional religious celebrations or communal fairs and sporting events. Seldom did they provide enough time for travel far from work and home environments. Moreover, they were generally uncompensated. For many, an annual shutdown, undertaken in order to refurbish machinery or because of slack sales, was merely a seasonal “lockout.” Of course, by the 1910s, civil servants and clerks enjoyed an annual holiday of several weeks. This, however, was a mark of white-collar privilege.¹⁰

After the war, however, about two million British wage earners won paid vacations. More successful were eastern and central Europeans, who gained statutory rights to a vacation. This movement for a legal entitlement to holiday did not catch on in America for reasons that have yet to be explained. In the U.S., the length of vacations was (and remains) part of individual or collective contracts and was generally linked to a period of employment. By contrast, the right of contemporary European employees to five or more weeks of paid holiday is the culmination of the holiday movements of the interwar years.¹¹

In Europe, the movement for a shorter work week was hotly contested by management and government after 1920. However, the paid holiday gained widespread political support especially in the 1930s.¹² An annual holiday was
often relatively inexpensive for employers. It frequently coincided with
seasonal slowdowns in business and it reduced annual worktime by only 40 or
80 hours per worker. By contrast, the demand for a 40-hour week cost about
400 hours. Most importantly, the vacation was understood as a leisure issue, not
an economic one like the 40-hour week.¹⁴

Still, the Depression of the 1930s revived the movement for a shorter
working week as a means for more fairly sharing work and leisure. While
employers blamed the slump on high labor costs, labor groups and reformers
argued that increased productivity in the roaring twenties had not been balanced
by either higher wages or a sharing of worktime. The consequence was under-
consumption and massive unemployment. The solution for organized labor was
to hold wages up and reduce weekly working hours to 40 hours (or even less).
The “problem of unemployment,” noted British unions, was “in its essence a
problem of undistributed leisure.”¹⁵ As the historian Benjamin Hunnicutt notes,
the American labor movement had advocated a 40-hour week in 1927 and, at the
depth of the Depression, the American Federation of Labor supported the
introduction of a 30-hour week.¹⁶

Despite lingering joblessness in Britain, the 40-hour movement met the
implacable opposition of business and the conservative government. In Europe,
only the French instituted the 40-hour week in the 1930s; and they did so in the
midst of massive strikes in 1936. The threat of economic competition and
war forced them to abandon it in 1938. The American New Deal government
had abandoned its earlier support for shorter hours by 1936 and, instead, used
public works, cheap money, and, by 1940, rearmament, to solve unemployment.
A 40-hour rather than 30-hour workweek became the standard in 1938. In this
century, any real improvement in a national labor (or leisure) standard has
almost always occurred also on the international level. Of course, improvement
was impossible in the 1930s when Europe was divided between fascism and
democracy.¹⁷

The shorter workweek posed a number of problems. Employers and
policy makers believed that it was an attempt to restrict production, even though
advocates argued that productivity should and could increase with shorter hours.
The very notion of the distribution of leisure as well as goods increased this sus-
picion that short-hour advocates were antwork. The alternative of government
spending to stimulate demand (Keynesianism) had the advantage of not impos-
ing on capital the burden of job creation. That policy also promised to preserve
the traditional work ethic. As the American sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd
observed in their study of “Middletown” in the Depression (1936), “enforced
leisure drowned men with its once-coveted abundance, and its taste became sour
and brackish. Today, Middletown is emerging from the doldrums of the
depression, more than ever in recent years committed to the goodness of
work.”¹⁸

However, this did not mean that the movement for leisure had ended
by the late 1930s. The 40-hour week was eventually realized in Europe in the
1960s. Moreover, in Europe in the 1930s, if the trend toward additional weekly
leisure was temporarily halted, the annual vacation was not. The mid-1930s
brought successful legislation entitling wage earners to paid holidays. The
British passed a relatively weak holiday law in July 1938, which had the effect of
couraging employers to provide a one-week paid holiday. As a result, the
number of wage earners with a paid vacation increased from 1.5 million in 1935
to 7.75 million workers (40 percent of the workforce) by March 1938. In
France, in the midst of a national sit-down strike, parliament passed a two-week
paid holiday law in June 1936.¹⁹ From the 1930s, the demand in Europe for
greater leisure was primarily expressed through a longer vacation.

The Debate Over Leisure

Between 1910 and 1940 many gained increased leisure and had hopes for even
more; naturally, it was also a period of serious discussion concerning the utility
and future of free time. This debate raised questions about mass leisure and
policies toward it that would be appropriate for democratic societies.

Foremost among those who criticized the growth of free time were
employers who blamed the leisure gains after 1918 for their economic difficulties
and held the line against further erosion of the work ethic. World competi-
tion in coal mining led British management to increase the workday from seven
to eight hours. This effort was largely responsible for the General Strike and
lockout of 1926, which so embittered British labor relations.²⁰ In America,
efforts of Henry Ford to spread his gospel of the five-day/40-hour week in the
mid-1920s met with derision from other businessmen. As John Edgerton,
president of the National Association of Manufacturers, declared: “it is time for
America to awake from its dream that an eternal holiday is a natural fruit of
material prosperity ... I am for everything that will make work happier but
against everything that will further subordinate its importance ... the emphasis
should be put on work—more work and better work, instead of upon leisure.”²¹

Underlying these concerns about an eroding work ethic was the fear
that reduced worktime would undermine growth. For most businessmen, the
objective was not to work less but to create new material needs to stoke the fires
of consumption. Of course, Henry Ford suggested that a two-day weekend
(based on a 40-hour week) meant increased consumer demand and thus lashed
workers ever more firmly to their jobs; however, many businessmen in the
1920s were not convinced that this theory outweighed the more obvious threat
that a shorter, 40-hour week posed to production.²²

Academic economists shared much of this perspective. Many rejected
the claim that economic growth inevitably produced a leisure spinoff or that
productivity had reached a peak in a “mature economy.” Lionel Robbins, for
example, argued in 1930 that any linkage between economic growth and leisure time ignored the fact that higher wages made the price of each additional hour of leisure more expensive; more important, the desire for consumer goods increased the tendency of individuals to work longer in order to afford new products. Even more basic was the economist’s belief that new technology meant not less demand for worktime but rather new forms of labor. Underlying these arguments was the assumption that no economy could function without a common commitment to work and without meaningful “full-time” work for all. Most economists rejected the utopian vision of a four-hour workday advanced by leisure advocates; instead, they foresaw a consumer economy, stimulated by advertising and the imagination of business, that would require endless quantities of labor. 23

Others found moral and social reasons to fear mass leisure. The old idea that free time meant dissipation for a working class still unprepared for uplifting leisure survived in the writings of many essayists. The American George Cutten for example, was uncertain that workers were able to benefit from leisure in 1926. While mechanization may have provided an opportunity for creative thinking, he declared, it also was “not conducive to mental strenuousness — and as modern man is finding substitutes for physical labor, he is also looking for substitutes for thought.” He concluded that “...if recognized creative work is not supplied in the factory system, and if leisure does not furnish the opportunity for self-expression in creative work, may we not expect an expression of sexual looseness?” 24 The American Richard Edwards shares this fear in his 1910 evaluation of Popular Amusements:

The spontaneity of playful activities, and the originality which creates them are being lulled to sleep by the habits of being amused ... Commercial management has been well characterized as tending to sever the individual from the community, to prefer miscellaneous crowds to neighborly groups, to neglect the interest of the child, and to make no provisions aside from moving pictures for the mother of the wage-earning family... In other forms of business, overproduction to the point of “all the market will bear” results in price-cutting, reduction of output, or wider extensions of markets. In the amusement business, overproduction seems to result in a state of glut which drains off in immorality... The lust for profit has picked open the bud. It is no cause for wonder that youth wills under the process ... 25

This general perspective was shared by critics of mass production society. For the Englishman Henry Durant, the “machinery of amusement completes the industrial training of turning actors into spectators.” The impact of industrialism had been the breakdown of family and community life; this in turn had led to the decline in “spontaneous popular leisure.” To the young, “in order to achieve ‘a good time,’ it is necessary to spend money.” 26 In the mid-1920s, many intellectuals held that the mass assembly jobs diminished the capacity of workers to marshal the initiative and imagination required for anything more than passive leisure. The analog to the mechanized factory was the American cinema. Sociologists of work like Georges Friedmann found that mechanization produced more than free time; it shaped the character of leisure. Without meaningful work, leisure became mere escapism; with nerve-wracking labor, the wage-earner sought passive excitement in pleasure. The so-called Frankfurt School, a group of Neo-Marxist German sociologists in the interwar period, developed an even more pessimistic view of what they called the “culture industry.” In pursuit of profit, the pleasure industry manufactured a leisure of pseudochoice and illusory freedom. 27

Leading psychologists and social theorists of the period were perhaps even more pessimistic. Sigmund Freud, for example, was doubtful that civilization could withstand any significant liberation of the play instinct or libido. Instinctual drives had to be repressed or subliminated into constructive activities through work. The pleasure principle, embodied in the play of children, had to be restrained in adult leisure by the reality principle. “Civilized man has exchanged a portion of his happiness for a portion of security.” Unbridled pursuit of pleasure will produce chaos. Freud believed it was only through the example and authority of elites (for whom the reality principle was dominant) that the masses (with their relatively unrestrained libidos) could be “induced to perform work and undergo the renunciation on which the existence if civilization depends.” The Freudian, S. Ferenczi, identified the problem of “Sunday neurosis,” a tendency of the worker to indulge in antisocial behavior on his day off. Mass boredom was at the root of this “death instinct”—an innate avoidance of creative activity and preference for self-destructive behavior. Culture, the Freudians argued, could be preserved only when the nihilistic implications of the “play impulse” were controlled. 28

The sociologist Max Weber was also pessimistic that leisure (or any other activity) could be freed from the overriding trends of bureaucratization. Creativity, “enchantment,” or the restoration of the bonds of community were not possible in a world where economics and politics were increasingly rationalized, Weber claimed. 29

However, the growth of free time in the early 20th-century produced more optimistic points of view. One largely British school of thought argued that increased leisure would create a more egalitarian culture and even more sympathetic people. John C. Hammond, C.D. Burns, and Bertrand Russell advanced the idea of a progressive democratization of leisure. For Burns, the reduction of worktime had created a “widening of choice of the majority,” “a democratic civilization” with a tendency “toward social equality,” and a “freer and subtler community between all men.” Instead of condemning mass
entertainment, Burns argues that "leisure is the time for going beyond what men know of life or can say of it." Travel and experiencing different ways of living could mean greater toleration and openness to change: "The phonograph, moving picture, and radio are bridging the traditional gaps between distinct groups of people." Russell argued that instead of a leisure class, which "produced a few Darwins and many fox hunters, ordinary men and women, having the opportunity of a happy life, will become more kindly and less inclined to view others with suspicion." Erbarker argues that, since manual labor "ceases to be an education," it should be limited and replaced by play for personal growth.

The interwar years were replete with books and articles offering advice on the best use of leisure time. These authors were often unsophisticated and even perhaps naive in their faith in the individual's ability to create a personal leisure culture. However, they generally affirmed the need for a public alternative to the prevailing commercial leisure. While the American Henry Overstreet believed that leisure must grow out of satisfying work and new, more humane environments, he also held that leisure could fulfill needs that work never could. Leisure could provide "the fun of handling materials," the "integrative experiences." chorus and choruses of "building the skillful body," the pleasures of "adventuring with thought" and of "being alone," or of wandering by car or foot, of "taking something seriously" as well as "just fooling around." For Overstreet, such a diverse life of leisure would make a "truly civilized" people:

The older generations have been over much concerned with the tragic business of fighting one another. A new generation, bred to the friendliness and good sportsmanship of play, accustomed to wider horizons of thought and creative imagination, may be more wisely equipped to confront the new adventures ahead of us.

Adult educators held a similar viewpoint; they stressed the need for "training for leisure." Education for life rather than merely for work was the only hope for the full development of the individual. In the 1920s and early 1930s, educators were not embarrassed to advocate a liberal-arts education as the best sort of training for leisure. Unlike vocational education, which trained for a job that soon would be obsolete, liberal-arts education prepared the individual for a cultured, self-initiating leisure life—the "real" occupation of the future. Like the Greeks of classical times, the modern person could live the fully free life of leisure. Yet, unlike the Greek elite (described by Aristotle), who depended on the work of the slaves, the modern leisure class would be democratic and freed from work by the machine. Leisure would allow the rediscovery of individualism lost in the new world of mechanical work and boring labor. Play alone could refresh life by restoring the individual's instincts.

Elements of this optimistic analysis were shared even by those fearful that mass commercial entertainment was weakening the "moral fiber" of the nation. The American Richard Edwards advocated "no repression of the instinct of play, but the full and rich development of that instinct through forms of expression which are not dominated by commercialism or tainted by immorality." In response to the threat of "spectatoritis," he offered amateur athletics, while "improper" dance halls could be regulated and licensed. The Briton Laurence P. Jacks believed that, through the education of the body as well as the mind, people could develop the discipline and initiative necessary to freely develop a creative life of leisure.

Most of this literature reflected the optimism of the 1910s and 1920s, but the Great Depression of the 1930s also stimulated a defense of mass leisure. The general unemployment (or at least a more revealing way, the unfunded leisure time) of that period sparked a new discussion of free time. In Britain, observations of the jobless did not evoke the images of economic destitution or social degradation common in earlier social investigations. Rather, they revealed the psychological disability of workless time. Many studies found that the unemployed were humiliated by unfunded leisure; the jobless felt that free time was a compensation for work and that leisure was meaningless without money and a job.

Adult educators in Britain found that displaced workers grew listless and gradually abandoned pleasures that had been a natural complement to work life. According to William Boyd, "freedom from toil is a curse." Society needed to make leisure more acceptable and to train workers for adult recreation. F. Zweig noted somewhat later that workers defined themselves not as jobholders but as consumers; thus, their ability to express themselves as "funded" time was critical to their self-esteem. The need for a holiday with pay became obvious. Parallel observations are found in the works of the Americans Mirra Komarovsky and Robert and Helen Lynd.

When "free time" was jobless, spare time took on new meaning. For example, the father's unemployment created the tensions of forced family togetherness. Studies found men who were frustrated by the reversal of parental and spousal roles. Wives and children sometimes became primary breadwinners. These reports stressed that the "unemployed man's wife [has] no holidays" because unemployed husbands failed to do domestic work. While both French and British writers advocated that men assume greater housekeeping roles, an obvious palliative for the wife was the holiday. In fact, British social workers called for volunteers to "adopt" children in order to give wives a chance for a "real change of scenery." It is ironic that the leisure deprivation of married women should be "discovered" in the midst of the Depression.

As important, a more positive attitude toward mass leisure emerged in the 1930s. Notables of the English Left, like G.D.H. Cole, C.R. Attlee, and Harold Laski, organized a National Committee to Provide Holidays for
These groups recognized that they faced a powerful opponent in commercial entertainment. They generally decried the "unfair" influence of advertising and mass amusements on the individual's free time. Note Jesse Steiner's assessment (1933):

Business, with its advertising and high pressure salesmanship, can exert powerful stimuli on the responding human organism. How can the appeals made by churches, libraries, concerts, museums and adult education for a kindly share in our growing leisure be made to compete effectively with the appeals of commercialized recreation...? The problem of effecting some kind of equality in opportunity and appeal as between the various types of leisure time occupations, both commercial and non-commercial, as between those most vigorously promoted and those without special backing, needs further consideration."

Of course, there was a substantial growth in noncommercial recreation activities in America during the 1920s: the Boy Scouts grew from 250,000 to 800,000 and youth summer camps expanded from their early roots in the Northeast across America in the 1920s. Government policy shifted from mere conservation toward promoting recreational use of federal and state parks. President Coolidge even advocated that cities set aside 10 percent of public land for parks and community centers. Far more impressive were New Deal public works projects, which built a wide array of playgrounds, parks, tennis courts, swimming pools, and public golf courses."

There was similar movement for public recreation in Britain. Department of Education grants to municipalities for adult education expanded dramatically in the 1920s, and largely private efforts at extending playgrounds in cities were impressive. More important, the 1930s culminated a generation of growing interest in affordable holidays and camping. Although the Holiday Fellowship dated from 1913, its greatest growth was in the 1930s. The Youth Hostel Association appeared only in 1929 and the Ramblers Association began in 1932. The British Camping Club grew from 3,000 to 7,000 members between 1927 and 1935. Although these groups were mostly composed of clerical and skilled workers, some attracted manual laborers with their promise of relief from the bleakness of the industrial horizon."

Although the influence of the Worker's Travel Association (founded in 1921) was always limited, it and other cooperative agencies promoted the right of workers to a vacation away from home. And, the nonprofit holiday camp long predated the commercial success of Butlin's camps after 1937. Nevertheless, the business-oriented twenties and depression-hamstrung 1930s limited the potential of public leisure.

Organizing Leisure: Prospects and Problems

These positive approaches to mass leisure have obvious linkages to the traditions of rational recreation of the mid-19th century. The objective of the 20th-century reformers was not to restrict leisure time but to organize it and to channel it into individually uplifting, self-disciplined, and even familial expressions.

The recreation movement in America was perhaps the best example of this approach. Its early leaders—Joseph Lee, Henry Curtis, Clark Hetherington, and Luther Gulick—had founded the Playground Association in 1907 (Chapter 8). They argued for recreation to educate and socialize children. Frustrated by the growth of commercial entertainment, the Playground Association broadened its perspective to include adults. It attacked commercial amusements for encouraging spectator passivity, which denied creativity and the intimate culture of the neighborhood and exploited sex and violence. The American recreation movement was not "prohibitionist," but rather sought to regulate commercial leisure and to use new forms of communication, like film, for educational purposes. Leaders of the National Recreation Association, (successors to the Playground Association) took the short-hours movement seriously and saw it as an opportunity for a development of an alternative leisure culture that would challenge the "gospel of consumption." Their many and varied efforts at supplying playgrounds and recreation programs in American cities should be seen in this light.

Similar views were held by progressive educators and librarians who advocated "education for the worthy use of leisure" and valued liberal arts and library training. On the same track were adult and workers' education leaders who offered courses in fine and liberal arts as well as amateur science, crafts, and home improvement for adult workers in the years between the wars.
Totalitarian and Democratic Leisure in the 1930s

Nonprofit recreation was provided not only by adult educators and recreation professionals but, especially in Europe, by ideologies of the right and left. The organized vacation, for example, appealed to political organizers of all stripes. Holiday-with-pay legislation reflected a consensus that modern work required compensatory leisure; industrial life made necessary extended periods of time free from work to "recover" lost values of family and community. In the 1930s, Fascists and Nazis shared with the leftist French Popular Front a common view of organized holidays: patriotism would emerge from touring historical sites and meeting fellow countrymen in different regions and walks of life; popular sports and the return to nature would renew national energies; vacations would give dignity and joy to the worker.

Leisure policy was an animating factor in the struggle for political influence. Most factions recognized that the playground and concert hall were terrains on which the contest for popular opinion could be won or lost. Especially after World War I, when the eight-hour working day became nearly universal, elites of both the left and right realized the political significance of organizing leisure time. The question was who would direct the free time of the masses.

The totalitarian right attempted to create loyalty and consensus to the regime outside of authoritarian structures of the work world. Their goal was to create support for Fascist ideas in organized tours, music festivals, and camping trips. Quite similar nationalistic sports organizations flourished, especially in Germany. In competition with the Fascist right in the 1920s and 1930s were communists and socialists. The left attempted to create alternatives to commercial spectator sports and to the sports press and clubs patronized by employers or the Catholic church. Communists organized sports and cultural groups to "train for struggle." They hoped to create loyalty to trade union and party beyond the workplace and to integrate the workers' family into the movement.

As historian Steven Jones has shown, organized workers' leisure in Britain was built upon earlier efforts of cooperative societies, the trade unions, the Socialist Sunday Schools, and the Clarion cycling movement. During the interwar years, "brass bands, teas, rambles, excursions... and most popular of all, the annual rally..." reinforced loyalty to the Labour party. The Fabian socialist, Beatrice Webb, even organized a Half Circle Club for wives of Labour men and women organizers to help them resist the temptations of "London Society." These groups used the British Workers' Sports Federation to try to win wage earners from commercial spectator sports.

A quite different approach, which had a good deal in common with the National Recreation Association of the United States, was "democratic leisure." It was inspired by the International Labour Office (ILO) in Geneva, and its first Director was Albert Thomas. He insisted that leisure could be no longer structured by either government, business, or even trade unions. Advocates of democratic leisure believed that, not only were workers too individualistic to submit to this patronage and its hidden agendas, but only multiclass, community-based leisure organizations could avoid the fragmentation and conflicts of ideological leisure. Thomas was appalled by the attempt of the right to construct blind loyalty through the subversion of "joy;" yet he also opposed leaving leisure to the marketplace and hoped to raise the cultural standard. The idea was an organized freedom, through local, self-initiated agencies composed of organizations representing church, politics, labor, and management. Government was to facilitate, not direct, activities. The ILO repeatedly encouraged mixed-group and international leisure organizations. It stressed alcohol regulation, home economics instruction, improved transportation to reduce commuting time, housing programs, and even more compact workdays as ways of creating more "efficient" and healthy leisure time.

In the late 1930s, especially after the Nazi display of propaganda at the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games, advocates of democratic leisure distinguished themselves from totalitarian leisure. Unlike the Fascist ideal of organized play, which attempted to instill loyalty to the state, these democrats stress voluntarism, local initiative, and individualism. In 1938, the International Commission of Workers' Spare Time met to advance these ideas. The solution to a leisure of "unadorned idleness without recreation" was to train the masses to use their leisure wisely and to provide a wide variety of recreational choices. Delegates were frustrated that the democracies had failed to provide those resources that their Fascist and Soviet counterparts enjoyed; but they were adamant that leisure, like freedom, was to proceed from the individual, not the collectivity.

This perspective prevailed, for example, in the British (and American) adult education movement. Educators found leisure to be the most appropriate outlet for individual expression. Hobbies, E.B. Castle argued, were the best antidote to the "deadening compulsion always to be in a crowd." The same basic idea was expressed by the National Recreation Association in America with its commitment to nonprofit municipal and state-based recreational programs that stressed diversity and accessibility.

Despite organizational innovation, the movement for democratic leisure remained paternalistic. For example, Albert Thomas admitted that he had no problem saying "what is good leisure." He advocated a "well-directed use of spare time, both physical and moral education" as well as the cultivation of general knowledge. L.P. Jacks and other advocates of adult education in Britain shared this perspective.

The French Popular Front government of 1936-1937 and its minister for sports and leisure, Léon Lagrange, emulated the broad-based model of Albert Thomas. In a number of small ways, Lagrange facilitated voluntarism: he cajoled railway companies into accepting a program of inexpensive tickets for family holiday excursions, he built 653 sports arenas in two years, and
introduced physical education in almost half the French schools in hope of encouraging life-long interest in physical culture. Still, the Popular Front opposed "directed leisure." Rather, as Lagrange put it, "we must make available to the masses all kinds of leisure which they may choose for themselves." He advocated autonomous municipal Leisure Clubs, independent of political patronage, which were to express the new "social maturity" of the people.44

At the same time, this policy was hardly undirected or market generated. Lagrange reflected the tradition of rational recreation with his stress upon an "equilibrium" between "the health of the body and the health of the spirit." Like so many before him, Lagrange emphasized that "specialized work" required the corrective of physical culture and sport. And, like his Nazi counterparts, he stressed the critical role of physical fitness for national renewal.45

In Britain, these ideas of democratic leisure were not so well developed; still, there were parallels with the French experience. The Workers' Travel Association provided an array of inexpensive excursions and holidays through nonprofit travel bureaus, summer camps, and holiday savings clubs. A few Labour-controlled towns like Lambeth organized their own summer camps. Trade unionists advocated cruises and even that the government make troop ships available for international cultural exchanges.46 Proposals for a British Ministry of Sports and Leisure failed in 1937, but laws encouraging the protection of lands for parks and camps passed in 1939. The new Labour government after the Second World War developed an avid interest in leisure policy.47

These innovations in public leisure policy met with many, perhaps insuperable, difficulties in the 1930s. First, as we have already noted, the movement for the reduction of worktime was largely defeated. The theory of democratic leisure also met with serious constraints. The key problem was how to organize leisure and yet to guarantee its freedom; how to uplift and yet not to be undemocratic; how to create joy without alienating people by being patronizing. Moreover, the recreation movement seldom was able to compete with commercial leisure. British travel and holiday camp cooperatives lacked the capital, and perhaps managerial skill, to prevail over the commercialized fun of Billy Butlins holiday camps. How many workers would choose the international exchange of workers over the Golden Mile of Blackpool?

The advocates of a democratic leisure recognized these problems even if they lacked the organization, resources, or perhaps imagination to surmount them. Ultimately, the contest was not between totalitarian and democratic leisure but between "organized" and market leisure. And, for many reasons, the latter has all to often won the game.
Consumer Leisure and the 20th-Century Suburb

The inexorable power of technology and the market, which had so forcefully recast leisure in the 19th century, played an even greater role in the mass commercial recreation of the 20th. The descendants of the rational recreationists may have been disappointed with how the masses used their free time, but the inheritors of the Victorian music hall took advantage of the growth in discretionary income and reduction of working hours to create profitable leisure industries. Still, the 19th-century cults of family and individual improvement were hardly abandoned; rather, they were adapted to new settings. Indeed, with new technology and mass marketing, they were democratized in the working-class suburb and, in America, in near universal “automobility.” Popular leisure culture was also incorporated in the new technologies of film, radio, and television, even though these media furthered the long-term trend away from community and toward privatized uses of free time. Most of these patterns were born or developed in the United States, and American dominance of commercial pleasure became overwhelming by the 1920s. For these reasons, I will focus on the American experience, without, of course, ignoring the British story.

Despite the significant interruptions of war and depression, not only time but also economic resources shifted toward leisure in the first half of this century. Between 1909 and 1929 recreational spending in America rose from 3.2 to 4.7 percent of income—a share that has hardly changed since. American consumption of pleasure was furthered by the installment plan, which financed the purchase of over 60 percent of the cars, radios, and furniture by 1930.1 Almost across the board, the cost of leisure declined in the 20th century with the shift from the entertainment of the relatively expensive music hall to the cinema and radio. Massive construction of semidetached houses in England and single-family dwellings in the United States broadened access to the Victorian ideal of domesticity.2

The 1920s were justly famous for the celebration of pleasure and the erosion of the work ethic. Play had become more permissible as an end in itself. There was a perceptible decline of formality in entertaining and housing.
Women’s dress reflected this change when skirts rose over the ankles during World War I, reaching the knee by 1927. The conspicuous consumption that Thorsten Veblen had lambasted in the 1890s in America, and which the rich of Edwardian England celebrated, had become unfashionable in the 1920s. The mistress for the rich male declined but so did the working-class prostitute. The economic status of young women had improved but alternative uses of recreation time also had appeared. Freer attitudes toward romantic or at least noncommercial sex emerged in the 1920s, encouraged in Britain by wartime education in the use of condoms to reduce the risk of venereal disease. In both countries, more recreational attitudes toward sex were revealed in the birth-control campaigns of Margaret Sanger and Marie Stopes to free women from the dread of unwanted pregnancy. Decline of family size between 1900 to 1930 in Britain (from 3.4 children per family to 2.1) and in America (from about 4 to 2.9) freed parents from years of childbearing and opened up new possibilities for leisure. The eight-hour day increased the leisure of working people and daylight saving time (introduced during World War I) made it more pleasurable.²

It seems that the industrial democracies were creating classless societies of leisure consumers. As C. Delise Burns claimed in 1932, “You cannot tell a butcher from a bank clerk, at least in his leisure habit.”²⁶ Despite the admonitions of the intelligentsia that quality leisure required education, it was, for most, measured by the bankbook. Still, significant pockets of poverty among the working class of Northern England and among minorities and ethnic groups in the US barred many from the consumer society even during the booms of the 1920s, 1950s, and 1960s. Many more were excluded during the Great Depression and World War II. But merchandisers offered the less affluent their own “Woolworth’s culture” of leisure goods, sold at a discount. This leisure may have well been a compensation for the decline of purposiveness in work. Many, too, began to believe that work was but a means of earning the ticket to private pleasure. Work surely had lost its central ethical significance.³

Technology and Mass Commercial Leisure

The entertainment of film, radio, and television created both a uniform and privatized 20th-century leisure. The individualized mobility of the car transformed the space of pleasure. New entertainment technology offered an enticing alternative to the social pleasures of the bar, theatre, home, and neighborhood.⁴ Quasi-monopolies dominated these industries and created national and even international markets for their products. The result was mass leisure, and with it, a decline of recreation built around church and pub. These technologies produced an entertainment that was enjoyed in silence at the cinema, at home, or in private cars, creating mass conformity but often without social contact.

Clearly, the most popular form of entertainment in the 1920s and 1930s was the film. By 1939 in Britain, (population about 41 million) about 23 million tickets were sold weekly. In the United States as early as 1930, 100 million attended weekly (from a population of 123 million), double the number just five years before, when films were still voiceless. The British Alhambra and Granadas like the American Orpheums and Magistics were more than film exhibition halls, but “Dream Palaces” with Moorish landscapes and mock Buddhas. The working class, “while there...can with reason consider themselves as good as anyone.” But the movies were also a popular pastime for all classes and both sexes.⁷

At the same time, the cinema was increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few companies. In its infancy in the 1890s, free-wheeling entrepreneurs dominated the film industry; American companies fought bitterly over patent rights to film technology. By 1908, however, the Motion Picture Patents Company, in an effort to create a monopoly, attempted to control all phases of the industry. Independent producers and exhibitors challenged the patent company; some transferred production from the New York area to Hollywood, not only for the sunshine but also for easy escape to Mexico to avoid legal action on patent infringement. These independent film makers soon prevailed in the market with innovations like the “star system” and feature film (Chapter 9). Out of this group emerged the Big Five (Fox, MGM, Paramount, and, with the advent of the “talkies” in 1926, RKO and Warner Brothers). They dominated not only production but also exhibition of American films. With control over the huge American market, and thus lower fixed production and distribution costs, the Big Five easily prevailed over English and European film makers. Despite legislation to encourage British film makers, English audiences often preferred American movies in the 1930s.

The cinema was certainly a business but it was hardly immune from the sensibilities of moral authorities. Moralists in both countries, concerned about the sexual themes often displayed on the screen, threatened to impose legal restrictions and censorship on the movie industry. In 1909, American filmmakers forestalled government intervention by policing themselves through their own Board of Censorship. Later called the National Board of Review, this body sought to conform to middle-class sensibilities. In 1933, the board created a code that not only prohibited graphic violence and sexual innuendo (as, for example, in the comedies of Jean Harlow and Mae West) but outlawed racial or radical political themes. Conservatives in Britain continued to associate the film with lurid sex and violence, thus prohibiting the viewing of the pictures on Sundays until 1933.⁸ As important, Hollywood discovered the profit in the sentimental films of Shirley Temple and Disney cartoons. And, by the mid-1930s, English cinema houses offered children’s matinees with wholesome and educational fare.⁹
Historians have stressed the complex impact of the movies upon leisure and cultural values. Films contributed to changing attitudes toward and styles of women. About 1915, the child-like innocence and Victorian moralism of Mary Pickford’s “Pollyanna” began to give way to films featuring the aggressive sexuality of the “Vamp” of Theda Bara. Even more, the movies set (usually unattainable) standards of fashion and love. Movie magazines like Motion Picture World (1911) and Photoplay (1912) contributed to this education. English women wore their “Garbo” coats and waved their hair ala Norma Shearer or Lilian Harvey.” In 1935, the American study, Our Movie Made Children, complained that stars served as models of faddish experimentation. Despite the strictures of the motion picture code, films sanctioned sex by placing eroticism in an environment of aﬄuence and health rather than poverty and disease; they treated sensuality in marriage as rejuvenating. Cultural historian Jeffrey Richards finds that British film exposed class differences but diffused tensions through the use of humor and stories that ended with the reconciliation of characters representing clashing social groups.

Even more than film, radio was a product of centralized technological development. Shortly after World War I, a few powerful companies like British Marconi, and the American giants of Westinghouse, General Electric, and ATT made wireless military communication into an entertainment industry. Aided by the telephone-line linkages between transmitters, network broadcasting from concert hall and stadium became possible by the mid-1920s. A group of the British radio developers initiated the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in 1922, which soon became a semiautonomous public broadcaster whose monopoly was funded by radio licenses sold through the post office. By contrast, a consortium of American manufacturers formed the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) and subsequently, the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) in 1926. Within a year NBC, with its Blue and Red networks, was competing with the Columbia Broadcasting System, created by independent radio stations.

In both countries, the radio rapidly became an element of mass leisure. In America, there was only one station in 1920, but 600 broadcast programs by 1930; 40 percent of American homes contained a radio despite the price of roughly one hundred dollars. By 1932, Americans devoted about four hours a week to radio listening. In Britain, by 1930, 35 percent of households possessed a radio license and by 1939, 71 percent were licensed.

The BBC helped to create a national taste, even if those purists, who hoped that “BBC English” would be adopted by the masses, were disappointed. BBC radio, led in its formative years by the self-assured John Reith, sought to uplift popular culture with a smattering of educational programs and music. The “Children’s Hour,” for example, was a mixture of wholesome humor, light classical music, and “a judicious sprinkling of information attractively conveyed.” The early BBC respected Sabbatarian sensibilities by restricting Sunday broadcasts to church programs and classical music. In his Broadcast

over Britain, Reith claimed “that to have exploited so great a scientific invention for the purpose and pursuit of ‘entertainment’ alone would have been a prostitution of its powers and an insult to the character and intelligence of the people.”

Nevertheless, the BBC compromised with popular taste. It offered much dance music and music hall favorites. While public opinion on programming was occasionally polled in the 1930s, Reith made decisions mostly on the recommendation of the National Advisory Committee on Education, composed of high-minded individuals like himself. The impact of BBC radio was difficult to determine. It is unclear whether radio hurt the music hall and the amateur performer; but its music programs probably stimulated record sales. Still, it is doubtful whether BBC radio displaced those hobbies that could be enjoyed while listening to the wireless.

By contrast, the American radio network became unabashedly commercial, even though radio officials, and even advertisers, resisted for some years the crude hucksterism that appeared by the mid-1930s. The competitive network system, however, encouraged programmers (often the advertising agencies themselves) to aim entertainment at delivering the largest share of the mass market to sponsors instead of focusing on specialized interests or tastes. Programming developed “a public following comparable to, and in some cases greater than, successful comic strips syndicated in the daily press” noted a government study in 1933. The comparison was apt. Radio produced the peculiar American art of the soap opera (aired in 15-minute segments each weekday afternoon), the situation comedy (beginning with the racial humor of “Amos ’n’ Andy,” which was played by two white men), the western, the mystery, and the child’s adventure program. But NBC also featured classical music concerts. Vaudeville and dance-hall orchestras also gained national audiences through radio. But radio may well have limited the job opportunities of local musicians. By the 1930s, home singing had nearly disappeared and conversation was disrupted by the call of the Lux Hour or the latest episode of Flash Gordon.

Nevertheless, the radio was a perfect accommodation to household activities. It restored the ancient mix of work and pleasure and provided the immobile and lonely with companionship. Although American broadcasting was built on the intermittent listener—15 minute shows—and perhaps led to a reduced attention span, it reached all family members. Radio was an odd combination of popular, commercial, and even improving entertainments.

Television was an extension of radio. It was developed largely by the same companies (NBC and RCA in the United States and the BBC in Britain). The BBC began the first effective television service in 1936. NBC followed soon after at the New York World’s Fair. The Depression, and especially World War II, delayed mass purchase of the “box” until after 1945. But TV came soon to dominate popular culture. In 1950, only 9 percent of American homes had it;
four years later, the figure was 55 percent (a percentage that took 37 years for radio to achieve). By 1960, 90 percent of American homes consumed an average of five hours of television per day.

In Britain, the BBC continued its tradition of non-commercial broadcasting: and, despite the advent of the commercial ITV in 1955, the role of TV as an advertising medium was limited. In the United States, commercialized TV delivered the mass market to national advertisers. Television was nearly a perfect expression of suburban leisure. It celebrated domesticity in “Sit-Coms” and warned of urban dangers in “Action-Adventure shows” while enticing viewers through commercials to the “miracle miles” of fast foods and shopping malls. By the mid-1950s, American critics argued that television was a good example of “Gresham’s Law” in culture: “bad stuff drives out the good, since it is more easily understood and enjoyed.” The intelligent and witty Sherlock Holmes gave way to the gun-happy Mike Hammer. 

Still others found American television to be an electronic throwback to the 19th-century tradition of popular commercial entertainment: TV revived the “old tabloid yellow press...and carnival sideshows at county fairs,” an America of freakishness and sensations treated with solemn import, an America of prurience and violence, nicely coated with sanctimony. Its situation comedies and especially “soap operas,” provided a familiar “family” of personalities in a “society that has been in constant transformation through geographic mobility and loss of extended families.” The soaps offered a “stand-in for the moral community,” where real personal problems (although in mostly middle-class settings) are confronted, affection and advice shared, and family values affirmed. By 1969, American toy manufacturers used Saturday-morning and after-school cartoon hours for “feature-length advertisements” of licensed characters (like Strawberry Shortcake) sold as toys. While reform groups, concerned about manipulation of children through TV, won some government regulation in the 1970s, these practices returned in the 1980s. Still, despite the frustration of reformers, American television probably tended more to homogenize leisure than to debase it.

Automobility

Probably no consumer product has shaped 20th-century leisure more than the mass-produced automobile. In Britain, a fine railway network and suspicion of self-propelled vehicles on public roads meant a slow embrace of the auto. The early British automobile industry was dominated by luxury cars like the Rolls-Royce and heavy military vehicles rather than mass-produced, light-weight cars. Even though the cost of the small family car in England was halved in the 1920s, a small minority owned automobiles (1 car for 20 people as late as 1939). Only in the 1950s and 1960s would this ratio change. In the interwar years, the auto brought picnicking, camping, and touring to the smart set. But the

working-class couple still enjoyed the “mystery tour” on the open-air bus, the “charabanc,” which offered a meandering afternoon of pub crawling to be capped by a visit to a “surprise” site. Like the private car, the bus and interurban coach in Britain freed working people from the confines of their immediate neighborhoods and from the fixed routes of the rail. 

The manufacture of autos in America also began as a handcrafted luxury. The car in 1900 not only cost several times the working person’s annual income, but required as much in yearly maintenance. The innovation of the mass-produced Model-T Ford (1914) offered, according to its creator:

A motor car for the great multitude. It will be large enough for the family, but small enough for the individual to run and care for...It will be so low in price that no man making a good salary will be unable to own one—and enjoy with his family the blessings of hours of pleasure in God’s great open spaces.

By 1927, the United States built 85 percent of the world’s cars, and by 1929 there was one car for every five people (about one for every three in California). Ford’s innovation included not only a cheap car (costing scarcely $290 in the early 1920s), but the promise of working-class participation in the car culture. Ford’s assembly line, introduced in 1914, may have ushered in the era of intense, repetitious, unskilled factory work, but Ford compensated these workers with additional leisure and income (in the unheard-of eight-hour/five-dollar day). Even factory workers could share in the good life of automobile. 

The car revolutionized leisure by liberating the pleasure-seeker from the timetables and routes of the streetcar and train. Time and space was freed for a degree of individuality. By the 1930s, if the auto had often become a necessity for work, the car also was a ticket to pleasure. The parkways (first built in New York in 1911) were designed to be aesthetically pleasing as well as useful. And the Interstate Highway System (begun in 1956) made the vast expanses of America accessible to millions of vacationers who could bypass small towns and metropolitan congestion. Still, improvements reduced both the adventure and aesthetic pleasure of driving, increased speed (an average of 125 miles per day’s journey in 1916 increased to 400 miles by 1936), limited-access roads, and even uniform traffic signs limited the visual experience of driving. The unplanned commercial strip emerged in the 1920s, and with it the billboard, to clutter well-traveled roads. Solitary travel became a semisomnambulant experience, as the radio stimulated memories and dreams. 

The car obviously revolutionized tourism. As noted in Chapter 9, rail travel had tied tourists to schedules and fixed destinations. However, with improvements in roads by the 1920s, the freedom of auto touring attracted thousands of easterners to picturesque New England towns in the summers and to the Florida seashore in winter. Older midwesterners found rest and respite.
from snow in rented cottages in St. Petersburg, while businessmen sought excitement in night clubs of Miami Beach. The increased mobility of Americans stimulated a variety of tourist experiences from the manufactured historic sites of Williamsburg, Virginia, and Henry Ford’s Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, to urban cityscapes, promoted by local Chambers of Commerce. The result may have been, as Daniel Boorstin writes, the “pseudo-event” of tourism. Passive visitors expected an assault on their senses in the prepackaged art of museums or “quaint” if, unhistoric European villages, “restored” to the specifications of the popular imagination. At the same time, the car liberated the average person from an even more unreal “tour” in the mock-orient of the traveling carnival sideshow.25

As early as 1908, managers of national parks in the United States began to encourage automobile tourism with improved roads and guidebooks. By 1934, national parks in the West had attracted 34 million visitors (a four-fold increase in the 1920s, alone) who came mostly by car. Auto vacations created a demand for roadside camping. Small-town businessmen hoped to lure tourists to central business districts by providing cheap or free municipal camp grounds nearby. Close quarters guaranteed a cautious familiarity with neighboring auto campers: “You could tell a stranger virtually anything about yourself, except your name.” By the end of the 1920s the influx of jobless “hobos” in used cars put an end to this form of small-town friendliness. Soon, “cabin camps” appeared in the west and in Florida, often little more than a semicircle of clapboard cottages set in a grove of trees. Motels sprang up in the 1930s along the new highways. These lodgings catered not only to traveling families but also to couples seeking a few hours of privacy. It was only in 1952, however, that the age of the standardized chain of motor inns appeared with the Holiday Inn that, thanks to the rise of the interstate highways, gradually displaced the small-time motor courts. By the mid-1930s, tourist lodgings had become mobile in the trailer. The mobile home was not only a vacation vehicle but semipermanent shelter for many in the Depression; after the war, the trailer provided housing for the retired in Florida and newlyweds in many small towns, especially in the West. The internal combustion engine also made possible the middle-class lake and mountain vacation, especially in the American West, complete with private cabins and speed boats.26

At the same time, airplanes had an immense impact on American tourism. Indeed, in their first commercial use in 1914, “flying boats” transported tourists between Florida and Caribbean resorts. The first transcontinental service (1929) combined air and rail travel in a grueling 48-hour trip. The plane, a tri-motor “Tin-Goose,” covered barely 100 miles per hour and carried only ten passengers. Because of high accident rates (1 in 2,200 passengers was injured), many travelers preferred the train in the 1930s. The popular DC-3 was far more reliable but still only carried fourteen. In 1954, the Boeing Company revolutionized travel with their “707,” a plane that could transport 189 at 600 miles per hour. Air travel may have dissolved the barriers of distance and time, but it also eliminated sightseeing in transit and focused attention on the destination. By the 1960s, cheap mass air transportation attracted millions of sun-starved Northern Europeans to Mediterranean resorts and led to the decline of the Victorian English seaside resort.27

The car was still more central to everyday leisure. In the 1930s, Coney Island, tied to the streetcar, partially gave way to the cleaner if, still commercial, amusement parks. Playland, at Rye Beach near New York, was approached mostly by car or bus. In 1955, Disneyland was opened along the Santa Monica freeway, accessible by car to the sprawling network of highways linked suburban Southern California. ABC television (part owners) provided publicity in the Sunday-night program, “Disneyland.” Unlike Coney Island (or Blackpool), Disneyland was designed to appeal to the affluent middle class. Thousands of scrubbed, crew-cut, and smiling youths roamed the grounds keeping Disneyland spotless and orderly. Visitors entered the gate onto “Main Street USA,” an idealization of a late-Victorian small town. A Plaza led to amusement rides featuring Walt Disney’s images of the American frontier, African adventure, cartoon fantasy, and the space-age future. Disney hoped that the crowds would be edified as well as entertained: the old would recall the past; the young would learn the “American spirit” and the adventure of the future, and families would grow closer in their shared experience.28

The car culture produced a plethora of new pleasures, some “improving,” others not. As early as 1933, the first drive-in movie appeared in New Jersey; by the 1950s, 4,000 of the big screens stretched across suburban fields. They offered cheap films to romancing teenagers and children’s fare accompanied with playground equipment. The drive-in restaurant first appeared in Dallas, Texas, in the Royce Hailey’s Pig Stand; from the 1940s, these drive-ins (often providing “car-hop” waitresses and “soft ice cream”) became havens of millions of adolescents and their cars; by the 1960s, their disorderly ways drove away families and largely destroyed this colorful institution. The car displaced the downtown business district when parking and congestion problems forced major retailers like Sears to build large stores in suburban districts with large free parking lots. The modern suburban shopping center first appeared in Kansas City’s Country Club Plaza in 1923. More than a strip of stores and offices with ample parking, it was a carefully planned commercial “community” complete with a replica of the Giralda Tower of Seville, Spain, and water fountains with expensive landscaping. After 1960, the shopping mall would replace “main street” as not only the retail district of choice but as a place for youths to socialize. Perhaps even more typical was the roadside commercial strip with its gaudy neon signs, which tried to attract fast-moving cars to its bowing alleys, road houses, and fast-food chains.29

The American car culture had an ambiguous effect upon Victorian customs, especially domestic leisure. In the 1920s, car ownership forced working families to make choices, replacing other “luxuries” including
bathroom fixtures. As it was said, “you can’t go to town in a bathtub.” In their 1929 study, sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd cite a worker from “Middle-town”: “We don't spend anything on recreation except for the car. We save every place we can and put the money into the car. It keeps the family together.” Yet, for the more affluent “Middle-towner,” the car had probably the opposite affect: “Our daughters [eighteen and sixteen] don’t use our car much because they are always with somebody else in their car when we go out motoring.” How different from the social life of the generation before the car:

In the nineties, we were all much more together.... People brought chairs andcushions out of the house and sat on the lawn evenings. We rolled out a strip of carpet and put cushions on the porch step to take care of the unlimited overflow of neighbors that dropped by. We'd sit out so all evening. The younger couples perhaps would wander off for half an hour to get a soda but come back to join in the informal singing or listen while somebody strummed a mandolin or guitar.98

The car transformed not only social life but even domestic space. In the 1920s, the formal parlor and front porch, which had so long served as a buffer between the intimacy of the interior of the home and the public, were eliminated from new houses. They were replaced by a more informal “living room” and the attached garage. So central was the car to the new lifestyle that, even during the Great Depression, the jobless did without necessities to keep their automobile. For the American worker, noted the Lynds in 1937, a car “gives the status which his job increasingly denies, and, more than any other possession or facility to which he has access, it symbolizes living, having a good time, the thing that keeps you working.”99

Suburban Leisure

The corollary to personalized mobility was the privacy of the individualized dwelling. And, like the car, the suburb was democratized in the 20th-century. Home ownership, facilitated in both countries by building booms after World War I, became, at least, standard for the upper working class. In America, cheap land and inexpensive “balloon” or wood-frame housing made the detached home surrounded with a yard an attainable goal for the working classes. From the 1920s, public-supported housing estates in England freed many from the “back-to-back” lodgings of Victorian slums by offering the relative privacy of the “semidetached” home (a duplex). In the 1930s, in both countries, the spread of low-interest, low-down-payment mortgages made ownership possible for millions. In the United States, the Federal Housing Administration (1934) encouraged the standard 30-year mortgage with a down payment of 10 percent (rather than the traditional 50 or 40 percent). By the end of the 1950s, two-thirds of American families were homeowners (twice the rate in Britain).33

The key to the new domesticity was suburbanization, made possible by improved transportation. In both England and America, the suburb was early associated with the rich and their carriages; the middle classes joined them after the appearance of the horse-drawn omnibuses in the 1820s and, a decade later, the steam train. Cheaper and more rapid transportation, which became available for urban workers only when the streetcar appeared in the 1890s, made possible the luxury of separating work and living (leisure) space. In America, the cheap streetcar or trolley extended early beyond built-up areas into open land owned by trolley companies, which hoped to persuade the less affluent to build homes there. This practice helped to create decentralized urban areas from Boston to Los Angeles.34 Yet it was only the automobile that guaranteed the suburban sprawl of the 20th century. In England, the car, and perhaps more often the bus, freed the suburbanite from the railroad station, allowing the places between to be filled in. Because the suburb was identified with affluence, it became a symbol of upward mobility for aspiring working-class families in both countries.35

The suburb was more than an product of technological or economic change. As we saw in Chapter 8, suburban domesticity was a creation of an Anglo-American quest for natural surroundings and freedom from the disorder and decadence of the city. Rather than clustering in enclaves of middle-class respectability in the midst of a cultural urban center (like Paris or Vienna), English, and especially American, elites fled the city. The affluent Victorian suburb, with its “lawn culture,” turned inward and cultivated genteel family life. At the same time, 19th-century suburban society was vitally linked (via the railroad) to the cultural amenities of the city.

In the 1920s, the suburb was “democratized” and, with the sprawl made possible by the car and bus, it was gradually divorced from the urban center. Homes in the USA were erected at the rate of 0.85 million a year in the 1920s. Los Angeles opened 3,200 subdivisions to midwestern migrants seeking a promised land of sunshine and bungalow privacy. The car and freeway gradually displaced the streetcar. The city center no longer was a commercial or pleasure hub—for virtually all amenities were widely distributed along the arterial streets.36

In the interwar period, the British built some 3.4 million housing units, mostly in relatively spacious suburban estates with their semi-detached houses distributed at 8 to 12 per acre. Small private gardens fulfilled the promise of domesticity, but the lack of sufficient pubs, shops, or cinemas in these estates obliged residents to commute (mostly by bus) for services and entertainment.37

Decentralized living meant new ideals of domestic and leisure space. Perhaps most characteristic was the English bungalow. This low, broad-roofed structure imported from British India became popular as a vacation home on the
southern coast of England in the 1870s. The bungalow offered the London businessman and his family an escape from the city’s bustle into a natural and relatively informal setting. Although hardly modest (sometimes including towers and up to 12 bedrooms), the design was adapted to cheap prefabricated iron houses, which dotted beaches near Blackpool and Bournemouth by 1900. Even earlier, in the 1880s, the bungalow was exported to the New England shore as a summer cottage, and in the 1910s and 1920s to California and Florida suburbs.

The American bungalow soon became a practical solution to the middle-class quest for suburban comfort. Plans books and even the *Ladies Home Journal* helped to create a craze for the inexpensive design of these one to one-and-a-half story houses. In contrast to the Victorian house, the bungalow featured an informal living room adjacent to the kitchen, a wrap-around porch, and a low overhanging roof. These themes were designed to enhance a feeling of closeness to nature and to encourage more informal family living. In the 1930s, builders transformed the bungalow into the one-story ranch home spread out on even larger, more private lots.

In the generation after 1945, the American suburb was further democratized. Between 1950 and 1970, largely suburban homes increased the housing stock in the United States by 50 percent, with as many houses added in the 1970s. Gradually, the suburb offered more variety and domestic space. By the mid-1950s, the mass-produced “cape-cod” and “ranch” houses, quickly erected in hundreds of “Levittowns” and “Daley Cities” and satirized in the song “Little Boxes,” were replaced. Developers built more spacious bi-level and split-level houses that provided family or “recreation” rooms for domestic leisure.

Mass suburbanization often broke the traditional symbiosis between city and suburb; increasingly, suburbanites both worked and played on the periphery of the city along commercial strips, industrial parks, and shopping malls. This change, critics argue, has reduced not only cultural diversity but has weakened urban cultural centers.

Of course, the suburb was supposed to offer an attractive alternative to the cramped space of the urban town house. Its 19th-century theorists, like Patrick Geddes and Frederick Olmsted, envisioned a symbiosis between the vitality of the city with its theatres, museums, and restaurants and the natural environment of surrounding “green belt” communities. The suburb was to create a spatial segmentation of work and pleasure, a duality of male industry and female domesticity.

These dreams were only partially realized. In his 1934 study of Westchester County, a wealthy area near New York City, George Lundberg analyzed suburban leisure and what he believed was the future of all America. Lundberg painted a picture of self-indulgent conformity, which would set the tone of many subsequent studies of the suburb. In particular, he noted a life separated by gender. Westchester’s 63 golf courses provided males with a time-consuming leisure activity and, in the country club, both business contacts and social status. From the 1910s, middle-class men joined luncheon groups like the Rotary, Lions, or Kiwanis clubs. “[Members] find here,” note the Lynds, “some freedom from isolation and competition, even from responsibility, in the sense of solidarity which Rotary bestows.”

The more demanding lodge, popular in the late 19th century, with its complex ritual and round of social activities, was on the decline. Businessmen simply lacked the “time.”

Lundberg found women in garden clubs (with social as well as horticultural purposes) and the genteel home-like settings of women’s clubs. “Service” groups flourished around committees “work,” dances, luncheons, and often rather perfunctory philanthropy. Athletic and more active leisure was more popular for women than in early generations with fads of vigorous dancing, tennis, and golf.

However, these social activities often were more work than leisure. As Lundberg noted: “The round of club meetings, visiting, parties, and ‘going places’ are no longer ends in themselves, but have become part of the obligatory activities of life. They have become instrumental to ulterior practical ends of various sorts and therefore have lost their essential nature as leisure.”

To be sure, the Victorian ideal of self-improvement and association survived and even thrived in the early 20th century suburb. There were, of course, amateur theater and music group; but the center of community leisure was the church. Rather than mere religion (much less traditional community festivals), the suburban church provided the affluent an endless array of individual activities. Committees and special youth organizations met and played in the fellowship halls and Christian education complexes that were built onto the traditional places of worship in the 1920s. Lundberg noted both strong loyalty to church (59 percent of his suburbanites were members) as well as a decline of attachment to religious denomination. Instead of focusing on doctrine, many churches competed with each other to provide leisure activities for members.

The postwar suburbanite was perhaps even more devoted to the social leisure of the church (with a record of 63 percent of Americans in the suburbs belonging to a church by the end of the 1950s). The 19th-century ideals of rational recreation were accommodated to the suburban age.

Despite increased free time and a tradition of “self-improvement,” few in Lundberg’s study spent much time engaged in “improvement.” While housewives, who had the most free time, spent 58 minutes per day playing cards and 38 minutes in general “visiting,” only 10 percent of any group in the study devoted any time to the fine arts or crafts. Few middle-class adults read or discussed books in Lynds’ Middletown. The old study group, which had been an important part of the late-19th century women’s club, seemed to be giving way to the more passive attendance at luncheon lectures.

Private domestic leisure was surely key to the suburban ideal. With the prosperity of the 1920s, the wealthy American family increasingly had play rooms for adults as well as children, furnished with ping-pong or pool tables and
often with a bar. The open porches of the 1900s were giving way to the privacy of the glassed-in den and sleeping porch. However, while the home was designed to encourage domestic togetherness, Lundberg found that many middle-class families in the 1920s used the house mostly as a dormitory. Only 16 percent families ate three meals together and a mere 38 percent gathered regularly for one. Automobiles and the rigors of commuting defeated the domestic ideal of suburbanism. The teenage couple escaped the front parlor for the privacy of the automobile, movie theatre, or high-school dance.50

This trend did not mean, however, the abandonment of domesticity. The suburban homeowner was usually committed to the ideal of home improvement and display. The do-it-yourself movement was largely the creation of the 1920s suburb. Unlike the urban renter, the suburban owner assumed responsibility for maintenance and home improvement. It was also a form of leisure as home-owners competed with neighbors for the most elaborate patio or handsome flowering shrubs. At the same time, the suburb became the democratic equivalent of the life of the landed gentry, where the common man and woman might forget politics and stultifying work in this “last refuge of competence and control;” there, they could “regain a reassuring sense of individual dominion.”91

The individualism of the suburb had its impact. While socializing across backyard fences may have survived in the American suburb, sidewalk conversation often disappeared with the coming of the car. As Kenneth Jackson describes it: “Residential neighborhoods have become a mass of small, private islands; with the back yard functioning as a wholesome, family-oriented, and reclusive place. There are few places as desolate and lonely as a suburban street on a hot afternoon.”92

But, the middle-class suburban home was not merely a playroom. Betty Friedan’s immensely influential *Feminine Mystique* (1963) stressed that the ranch house was also the work space of the wife. Centered around the open kitchen, the suburban home provided little private space for the wife’s relaxation, much less reflection. Isolation and boredom generated the housewife’s obsessions with sex and bread baking as well as psychological and physical maladies. Despite advances in home technology, housework continued to absorb as many hours in the 1960s as it did in the 1920s. Homemakers failed to gain more free time not only because domestic servants were increasingly expensive but because of the “inefficiency” of suburban life. Each household required its own cook, laundress, and chauffeur for active children. Unlike the husband, whose worth was measured by his salary, the housewife felt her value as a marriage partner depended upon the time she spent at housework. Thus, Friedan emphasizes, “housewifery expands to fill the time available.” And even those wives who worked outside the home continued to do a disproportionate share of domestic chores after hours.93

These suburban ideals (and realities) surely “trickled-down” to the skilled working classes in both Britain and the United States. The desire to escape from the urban tenements and even the intrusive eyes of neighbors and kin led working-class American ethnics to the cheap “cracker-box” developments of the postwar period. Working-class suburbs in both England and the U.S. became relatively quiet places of contented domesticity in comparison to the old communal and extended family social networks of inner-city tenements. American buyers of those monotonous rows of ranch houses gradually gave them individuality with additions, trim, and landscaping. Because few residents expected to move up the job ladder, they instead concentrated on forming tight-knit neighborhoods organized around familial consumption.54

There were obvious differences between affluent and working-class suburbs and everybody certainly did not move to the suburbs. Still, in the generation after 1945, the image prevailed of a virtually classless society where economic and ethnic differences were blended in a “second melting pot” of consumer culture. A lifestyle was, it seemed, a matter of personal choice, not like the “way of life” of the past, a matter of birth and class.55

**Age of Consumer Leisure**

As early as the 1920s, leisure had become firmly identified with consumption. This equating of free time and spending, of course, had been encouraged by the commercial pleasures of the Coney Islands and Blackpools of the urban working-class of the 1890s (Chapter 9). Mass amusement provided, says historian John Kasson, an antidote to nervousness and boring work in “a homeopathic remedy of intense, frenetic physical activity without imaginative demands” and “instant pleasure and momentary release from work demands and social prescriptions.” It gently mocked “genteel” traditions of morality without challenging the political or economic status quo.94

There were other sources of this association of recreation with spending. It was doubtless fostered by the growing American belief in the 1920s that only mass consumption could absorb the increasing capacity of the economic machine to produce. “To keep America growing,” wrote an automobile dealer, “we must keep Americans working, and to keep Americans working we must keep them wanting, wanting more than the bare necessities; wanting the luxuries and frills that make life so much more worthwhile, and installment selling makes it easier to keep Americans wanting.” Such views became even more prominent in the wake of the Great Depression.95

However, the consumer culture also had roots in shifting values of the middle classes. The religious underpinnings of rational recreation were being eroded by 1900. The quest for salvation was being displaced by the desire for social adjustment and self-fulfillment. This glacial but profound change in the modern personality has been attributed to a fundamental shift in Anglo-American society; an entrepreneurial, production-oriented economy that required self-control and thrift gradually gave way to a bureaucratic and consumer economy that demanded cooperative and more spend-free attitudes. The work ethic and
an absorbing individualism (corresponding with a faith in personal salvation) was partially replaced by the ideals of "personal magnetism" and "team-playing" on the job and "social adjustment" and "life-affirming" consumption after working hours.\textsuperscript{38}

The excitement of consumption may have also helped to overcome a growing feeling of "unreality" and "emptiness." This unpleasant awareness was a by-product of newly acquired comforts of urban life, which were isolated from the reality of physical nature and decision making. Combined with a revolt against the formalism and repressive self-control of the Victorian era, this sense of vacuum led to the popular idea of the "Gospel of Relaxation." At least for an elite, the goal by the 1910s was to be both "other-directed" and experientially subjective; it was to seek both peer approval and "self-fulfillment." The quest for intense experience led to an attachment to the "new," even conformist fadism, in a cult of youth over aged sterility. But this longing for fulfillment also produced a nostalgia for the rural and the complex, in the name of natural vitality. By the 1920s, these contradictory desires fed into an immense industry of self-help books and movements, both religious and secular. They offered techniques of self-fulfillment through seeking "more life." It was a philosophy of letting-go, removing inhibitions, of positive-thinking, returning to the innocence and vitality of childhood, and, with Luther Gulick, thinking "strong and happy thoughts."\textsuperscript{39}

The Gospel of Relaxation invaded liberal religion, sports, and even advertising. As self-proclaimed "apostles of modernity," advertisers adapted to prevailing cultural attitudes from the 1920s on. Through new consumer goods, they promised to provide both social acceptance and vitality. Advertisers assured women that they were free when they assumed their "right" to smoke Luckie Strike cigarettes along with men; they guaranteed social success for users of Listerine mouthwash which conquered "halitosis." Advertisers became cultural advisers, partially replacing traditional authority figures like parents and pastors; they offered clues into the complex world of adjustment and "happiness." Even the movie star became a model, not by his/her solidity of character but by the star's display (or even commercial endorsement) of "roles, identities, and styles."\textsuperscript{40} As an authority on "lifestyles" and trendy consumption, the star offered advice on new leisure choices. As Roland Marchand argues, advertisers in the 1920s and 1930s did not always encourage mindless consumption; rather, they saw themselves as therapists in the "adaptation of consumers to the intensities of a new, complex scale of life" even as they sold Camel cigarettes as a healthful way of soothing frayed nerves and tried to convince people that in free time "you can have it all."\textsuperscript{41}

Advertisers attempted to make utilitarian consumption, like the buying of bathroom fixtures, into a personal statement of status and taste. A good example is the merchandizing of cars from the mid-1920s. General Motors and its chairman, Alfred Sloan, developed the annual style change. Cars would allow one to participate in the beauty of classical Greece or to express one's manhood. And, while Henry Ford grumbled that "we are no longer in the automobile but in the millinery business," he soon acquiesced when he abandoned the utilitarian Model-T to the more stylish Model-A in 1927.\textsuperscript{42}

This consumption of style and "self-expression" reached its extreme form in the 1950s when Americans indulged in an orgy of mass-buying. This period (which Thomas Hine aptly calls "Populuxe") released a pent-up demand for consumer goods resulting from the depression and the war. Advertisers and the government prepared Americans during the war for this splurge with the message that they were fighting for the "glorious future" of "mass distribution and mass ownership."\textsuperscript{43} The 1950s produced the extravagant tailfin on cars, the flying-saucer lamp, the two-tone refrigerator, chip-and-dip, the lounge chair, the aesthetic contradication of the colonial living room next to the space-age kitchen, and the sheer magic of the push button in thousands of products. This decade "celebrated confidence in the future, the excitement of the present, the sheer joy of having so much."\textsuperscript{44} Shopping had never been such a central leisure activity.

Consumption brought not only self-fulfillment but status and a feeling of belonging. This social function of consumers' leisure had been pointed out in Veblen's Theory of the Leisure Class. He wrote this book in the 1890s, during a period of extravagant consumption of ultra-rich industrialists. What drove these men was the hope of winning status through the possession of wealth and the display of freedom from work. Leisure, then, was not valued as an opportunity for self-expression or growth so much as a means of demonstrating social status. Wives of businessmen surrounded themselves with servants and luxurious homes, and even wore impractical clothing (like corsets) in order to display their freedom from the herd who had to labor. Such women provided successful hard-working businessmen with "vicarious leisure."\textsuperscript{45}

This meaning of leisure time hardly died with the income tax or the decline of aristocratic fortunes in the 20th century. When the automobile became the toy of the American masses in the interwar period, the well-to-do played in private airplanes. When the crowd invaded the golf course in the 1930s in Middletown, the rich took up equestrian sports. The same principle was democratized in the modern suburban obsession of "keeping up with the Joneses;" the display of home furnishings in the ranch house picture window; and the "vicarious consumption" which parents lavished on their children.\textsuperscript{46}

This cultural impact of leisure as status-seeking was analyzed in the 1920s by the Lynds:

In 1890 Middletown appears to have lived on a series of plateaus as regards standards of living...; it was a common thing to hear a remark that so and so 'is pretty good for people in our circumstances.' Today the edges of the plateaus have been shaved off, and every one lives on the slope from any point of which desirable things belonging to people all the way up to the top are in view.\textsuperscript{47}
Some contemporary critics of commercial leisure argue that leisure has become the "self-management of appearance," leaving to a power elite the management of society. As Richard Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears see it: "While the few make decisions about managing society, the many are left to manage their appearance, aided by trained counselors in personal cosmetics. Leadership by experts and pervasive self-absorption have developed symbiotically in American consumer culture." Self-indulgence, driven by the quest for group acceptance, combines with the bureaucratic economy to produce a consumer leisure culture.

By the 1950s, mass (but privatized) leisure built around mass media, automobility, and the suburb seemed to have obliterated most remaining remnants of local, ethnic, or class traditions of play in Anglo-American society. The sheer pervasiveness of this culture led social critics to write of a "one-dimensional" society. To be sure, this consumer culture may have disguised the fact that power was concentrated in few hands and that the real purpose of leisure was often to climb the pecking order. Still, affluence seemed to produce the opposite of traditional class society: the rich and powerful devoted their lives to long workdays, while the masses minimized their hours of toil to enjoy the pleasurable fruits of material progress.

The recessions of the 1970s and 1980s produced a somewhat more sober assessment. Scholars rediscovered that the working classes and ethnic and racial minorities were often bypassed by (or even resisted) this modernization of free-time. Moreover, social change in the 1960s and 1970s produced groups that questioned mass suburban leisure. The young especially rejected at least part of familial suburban leisure culture. How these exceptions and challenges to mass leisure emerged is the topic of our next chapter.
Working-Class and Youth at Play in the 20th Century

Leisure uniformity was not the inevitable product of 20th century technology and the international entertainment corporation, nor did the car and the suburb destroy all remnants of traditional popular culture. There remained pockets (and even seas) of traditional working-class and ethnic leisure. The domestic ideal of the suburb was also undermined by generational conflict. A youth leisure culture emerged in this century that was poorly controlled or understood by parents and authorities. And, if only briefly, the ideal of suburban privatized consumption was rejected by the children of suburbanites in the late 1950s and early 1970s.

Persistence of Traditional Working-Class Culture

Many working-class cultures survived in the 20th-century, Anglo-American world. Divided by ethnicity and race, as well as region and economic status, these subcultures have been often strikingly different and often in conflict. Yet, relative to the emerging middle-class suburban leisure style, they had much in common. In this section, I will concentrate on the broad English pattern but will review some of the varieties of American working-class leisure culture for comparison.

The "traditional" English working-class neighborhood (really emerging as late as the 1880s) was built around an urban-industrial calendar: the weekly round was predictable. Evenings were spent at home or the pub, and Saturday afternoons were devoted to shopping, gardening, or the football match followed by an evening at the music hall, pub, or cinema. Sundays were dedicated to a bacon-and-eggs breakfast, several tabloid newspapers, and a mid-day dinner. Toward evening a big tea of "tasty food," often with relatives, would be followed by talk around the fireplace and maybe singing in the parlor. Perhaps because of the density of row housing with the ever-present fear of gossip, neighbors and workmates seldom entered each other's homes. "The wife's social life outside of her immediate family is found over the washing-line, at the corner shop, visiting relatives at a moderate distance occasionally, and perhaps
now and again going with her husband to his pub or club." Leisure focused on the cramped environs of the flat or semi-detached houses. Richard Hoggart found that working-class leisure before World War II was "of the people" rather than "of the masses," and rooted in neighborhood rather than marketplace.¹

Studies of American working people well into the "suburban age" reveal a similar pattern of relatively closed domesticity. Blue-collar couples, studied by Mirra Komarovsky in the 1950s, entertained an average of twice a year (outside of the family). Not only did they lack money but the social contacts necessary for more extensive socializing. Few working-class families participated in the sort of clubs that formed the basis of middle-class society. Another sociologist found Italian-American couples met regularly, if informally, but socializing tended to be separated by sex. The peer group was small and frequently life-long.²

It is easy to romanticize this domestic leisure. In England, the cramped four-room, two-story house or the tenement apartment of the Depression era often lacked privacy and even amenities like the radio. In the 1930s and beyond, children continued to reign in the streets with their time-honored games of marbles and hoops as well as with pranks like "tip it and run." In America, too, street-corner gangs of teenage boys gathered around the crap game, waged battles with rivals, and just grouped around luncheonettes and candy stores. These gangs often formed friendships that lasted a lifetime. The code of loyalty and sharing among the peer group prevailed over the domesticity and individualism of the middle class. This leisure culture, divorced from school and the wider community, ill prepared American working-class youth for success beyond a local career in crime, petty jobs, or the political machine.³

Between the wars, the pub or bar remained the center of male urban working-class leisure in both countries. At the heart of pub culture was the reciprocity of "treat ing" for drinks. A British study of pub life in the late 1930s likened the Saturday-night pub habit to a church service, a liturgy of group drinking and treating and a litany of verbal exchanges. "The same remarks can be repeated indefinitely in these conversations without any sense of ennu. So long as the subject is right, and everyone has his chance to speak, the purpose of them appears to be served."⁴

Men, who would not think of inviting workmates or neighbors inside their homes, freely gossiped with them in pubs. While respectable women were increasingly appearing in pubs by the 1930s, the age of pub-goers also rose because the young were more attracted to the cinema or dance hall. Drink was more or less incidental to socializing, and actual alcohol consumed had decreased from World War I, even if per capita income spent on drink did not. Still, on Saturday evenings, one witness in the late 1930s counted an average of 3.75 pints consumed per customer in a Lancashire pub; few, however, drank anything stronger than beer. The pub landlord continued to perform the complex role of social mediator, banker, and participant in the nightly round of gossip, drinking, singing of familiar music-hall numbers, and bar games. Pubgoers were not mere customers but members of a community. The pub continued to be a site of the casual sexual encounter, which often culminated in sex performed in the semi-privacy of back alleys, the only recourse to the promiscuous in a world that lacked cars, motels, or private apartments.⁵

The American pattern was somewhat different, owing to the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution of 1919, which prohibited alcohol consumption. Although the law was widely violated in speak-easy clubs, in 1933, with repeal, there was a sudden upsurge in public drinking. And, of course, a similar bar culture prevailed in the neighborhood tavern in America. In the Italian-American "Urban Village," studied in the early 1960s by Herbert Gans, customers sometimes played the role of bartender, while the owner played pool or cards. This informality, based on the solidarity of ethnic neighborhoods, had hardly changed since the heyday of the late-19th century saloon.⁶

Beyond the bar was the workingmen's club, which continued to grow between the wars. In the mid-1930s, 102,000 Londoners belonged to 300 clubs. In addition to providing insurance benefits, these clubs provided rooms for moderate drinking (often clubs owned their own breweries), darts, billiards, and sing-songs, and occasionally fund-raising card games. Lodges provided a semiserious aura of ritualized meetings and the "status" of office-holding shared, in time, by most members. English lodges like the Odd Fellows easily made the migration to the United States.⁷

Boxing, patronizing of prostitutes, and other male pastimes were on the decline in the interwar years. But the male-oriented and causal leisure of the mechanical gaming arcade flourished in the cities. The English "fun fairs" included pinball, board games, dodge 'ems, and curiosity shows (featuring, in one case, the car of the American gangster, Al Capone). Saturdays at Association Football matches were common diversions that built upon local pride. London, alone, had 11 teams.⁸ The old hunting culture, of course, continued to flourish, especially among American men in the annual ritual of deer and fishing seasons. Even urbanization did not destroy this ancient expression of male togetherness and prowess.

These activities were bastions of old-fashioned male informality. The boisterous music hall had become respectable "family" entertainment by the 1890s, preparing the way for the silent viewing of the cinema. Roy Rosenzweig shows how the informal male sociability in the American saloon partially gave way to the orderly couples and families who thronged the movie houses. By the 1910s, movie houses offered the matinee, which allowed housewives a few hours of fantasy interspersed by shopping trips. But English working-class homemakers had little time for leisure outside the their work at home. For them, the radio was a boon in the 1930s. Those women who held jobs outside the home had scarcely two hours of their own per day because of the domestic chores waiting for them at home.⁹
The most notable development in working-class leisure in the 20th century was the growth of off-site gambling. Betting focused not only on horses, but also greyhounds. As English observer H. L. Smith put it (1935): "the place which drunkenness occupied in the category of vices in the minds of moralists during the last century has to-day largely been surrendered to gambling." While a 1903 law in Britain prohibited street betting, bookies freely practiced their trade in and around pubs, as police looked the other way. Gaming gained strength when otherwise unemployed men served bookmakers as runners gathering bets at pubs. In the interwar years, the Littlewood football pools were especially popular; bets were small and the mail-in coupon due the Thursday before the Saturday games, became a weekly ritual for millions. The psychology of the gambler was often observed: "certainly more pleasure is gained in anticipation than is lost in disappointment. The pleasure lasts for some days; but the disappointment is momentary and easily forgotten. Also the fact that many people are excited at the same time about the same event increases the pleasurable excitement of each." Perhaps 80 percent of the working-class families of London engaged in some form of gambling in the interwar years.10

Commercial gambling was, of course, widespread in the American urban working classes. For example, in the 1930s, blacks from south Chicago patronized some 500 pool stations (almost as many as churches) which provided an illegal (but protected) lottery for these poor people. And, in the American West, the gambling towns of Las Vegas and Reno served the population centers of southern and northern California. The gambling strip offered a new leisure culture characterized by a new intensity of consumption and activity.11

The prevalence of gambling suggests that the traditional quest for excitement in leisure had hardly been "civilized" by the rational recreationists. As Hoggart argued, the English working class of the interwar years had a love for a:

... sprawling, highly-ornamental, rococo extravagance. Oriental themes prevail in designs of cinema houses, sideshows at amusement parks, and in popular magazines. Plastic gewgaws and teapots shaped like country cottages settle very easily with complicated lace-paper d'Oyleys, complicated lace half-curtains, crocheted tablerunners, fancy birthday and Christmas cards, coloured wicker shopping baskets, and "fancies" (curiously constructed and coloured little cakes) for tea.

Related to this fascination with the extravagant was the workers' persistent affection for the crowd. In Britain, factory workers, far from avoiding the mob that they knew at work, thought nothing of going by crowded trains to the same packed seaside resorts. Liberated briefly from a life of austerity, everyone spent with abandon. Working-class materialism was a moral necessity in a drab life of stress-filled routine; and tight budgets precluded more "imaginative" holidays. But workers also shared little longing for privacy so valued by the middle-class.12

Of course, some categories of "improving" leisure (such as gardening or amateur participation in football and cricket) grew during the interwar period despite persistent complaints of inadequate facilities. But many families had no books other than those given to children for good Sunday-School attendance.13 Church activities were for many women (and less often for men) a counterculture to male pub or saloon sociability. This pattern can be illustrated among the black urban poor in America. Store-front churches provided nightly friendship as well as emotional outlets in singing and demonstrative religion for many respectable black families. The church was an alternative to the informal card and dancing party, which dominated the leisure hours of many working-class blacks of the 1930s.14

Working-class leisure culture often fascinated both American and British intellectuals in the 1930s, who saw in it a survival of a lost innocence and honesty. Listen to this description of a working-class dance hall by a young university-educated Englishman in 1937:

What strikes me most about this place, its people, is the spontaneity and genuineness of everything. All present are working-class people.... To them, this dance is temporary freedom from hard work and worries—"Let's enjoy ourselves to-day for to-morrow we...." No class; no snobbery; no forced laughter—just reality.15

Selling Fun to Working People

Still, the allure of commercial leisure challenged this culture long before that watershed of World War II. As noted in Chapter 9, the pleasure industry had been integral to the traditional leisure of workers. The historian G. Stedman Jones suggests that, by the 1890s, commercialized leisure, organized around the "pub, the race-course and the music-hall," had driven out earlier interest in education and politics. After World War I, the cultural landscape surely was leveled when almost all Britons and Americans began to watch the same films and listen to the same recorded music on radio, if even they (especially in Britain) continued to read different newspapers.16

It may well be true that workers used this commercial leisure for their own purposes (as they did in the 19th century), creating for example, a distinct social style in pubs owned by chains of brewers. Working-class cinema audiences, dance floors, and football stadium were still different. Even the American "urban villagers" studied by Gans in the early 1960s watched television selectively to confirm their values and to express their skepticism about the outside world.
Still, commercial leisure, not the recreation organized by trade unions or political parties, dominated workers’ free time. And, despite the growth of labor theater or documentary, it was the song and humor of Gracie Fields, George Formby, Fanny Brice and Eddie Cantor, not the socialist works of Bertold Brecht or Sergei Eisenstein, that the people wanted. Workers had no more sense of the past than the more affluent: their “traditions” were seldom more than two generations old, and they seldom sought to preserve them. Given the willingness of pleasure industries to service profitable popular taste, commercialization inevitably crept into traditional working-class leisure. English working-class migration to the new “housing estates” tended to break up the peer group and the pub culture. The same process occurred in America, accelerated by the advent of mass automobility in the 1920s. Those institutions, which had sometimes integrated work, home, and leisure, gradually succumbed to more commercialized culture. In the United States this process often coincided with the “Americanization” of immigrant working-class communities.17

Popular British reading tastes (similar to what we encountered in the discussion of the 19th century) were continuously updated in the magazines that Lord Northcliffe and his successors published: Tidbits of gossip about the famous and notorious were combined with cheesecake in weekly magazines and the tabloids. The entertainment press continued to appeal to separate gender and age groups as new magazines appeared, each with their own form of sensationalism.18

The commercial dance hall, which emerged in the 1920s, provided a vital service as a sex market. The dance-hall manager created a “social tone” and, through an often elaborate system of exclusion, assured a homogeneous crowd, prized by patrons. English men, whose ranks had been thinned by war, enjoyed a great advantage. As Robert Roberts describes the English dance hall in the 1920s, “Plenty of working-class girls, in their efforts to ‘beat the market’, went well beyond the tenets laid down by mothers. Some, we knew, dared all and failed; others got their man with a pregnancy... And the wise boys with their ‘self-protectors’ went on happily dancing in a city littered with ‘common’ halls.” Paul Cressy’s study of the “Taxi dance-hall” in Chicago in the 1920s reveals a complex world of commercial sexual encounter, where men, often from minority ethnic or racial groups, could find a partner at a dime a dance.19

The seaside holiday was another leisure provided by the marketplace. By the early 20th century, the seaside holiday was the focal point of the year for many an English working family, prepared for in months of saving and anticipation. In addition to largely perfunctory sebathing, the seaside holiday was a compacted assault on the senses, a candyfloss world of an ersatz exotic of gypsy fortune-tellers and Indian Sharma, of pinball boards and amusement rides featuring Noah’s Arc, as well as the opportunity to see George Formby, Gracie Fields, or dance in a sumptuous hall to Reginald Dixon’s playing on his “mighty Wurlitzer Organ.” Austerel people spent with abandon and time-card punchers

celebrated a week of living without clocks. “Improvers” of the left and right might have preferred that they enjoy a Holiday Fellowship camp, making new friends and communing with nature. But most working people surely favored the mob scene of places like Blackpool; there, all the amusements that the market would bear were provided by the all-powerful Tower Company and the petty stall holder.20

While the American “common man” continued to enjoy the Coney-Island-type of amusement park, mass automobility gave their quest for a change of scenery a wider vantage, as we have seen in Chapter 12. The growth of trade unions during the Roosevelt years and World War II, as well as postwar prosperity, democratized the vacation. By 1949, 62 percent of Americans took vacation trips averaging slightly over 10 days.21

The Great Depression of the 1930s, of course, interrupted this long trend. The trauma of unemployment (peaking at about 25 percent in America and 22 percent in Britain in 1932) had far more than an economic impact. To be sure, there was “love on the dole.” The poor still had access to a “Woolworth culture” of what George Orwell described as “fish-and-chips, art-silk stockings, tinned salmon, cut-price chocolate... the movies, the radio, strong tea, and the football pools.” In Britain, clubs for the unemployed were opened by both patronizing elites and labor groups to provide outlets for hobbies and other “improving” activities. The jobless were able to continue the betting habit (in the inexpensive Littlewood football pool) and cinema (often by attending cheap matinees), but they cut back on drinking mostly to avoid the humiliation of being unable to treat mates.22 On both sides of the Atlantic, observers noted sharp increases in library usage and, especially in the United States, public works projects made available many parks and sporting facilities.

As we noted in Chapter 11, enforced idleness created less destitution (thanks to public-assistance programs) than a social, indeed psychological, crisis among the unemployed. Not only did unemployment mean a loss of social status and authority in the family for men, but it seemed to undermine their masculinity and caused psychosomatic illness. Work was the anchor in the identity of most wage earners; leisure was both a compensation for and an extension of work. As one British observer noted, “Work is fundamental, there is no leisure without it.” Unemployment befell women as often as men; but it led less to idleness than to more domestic work for women because they had to do without “store-bought” goods. Homemakers found their routines disrupted and made more time consuming by the presence of unemployed husbands at home.24

Perhaps most important, the Depression reinforced a commitment to the values of work and the things that wages could buy. Instead of a militant class of the jobless, numerous British and American studies found that workers were humiliated by unfunded leisure. E. Wight Baake noted that unemployed English men made a tenacious effort to maintain a leisure schedule structured
around the (now absent) work cycle; they tried to stick to the “right sort” of cinema and vacations. And, yet, as the novelist Walter Greenwood noted in his *Love on the Dole*, the unemployed person was “suddenly wakened to the fact that he was a prisoner. The walls of the shops, houses, and places of amusement were his prison walls; lacking money to buy his way into them, the doors were all closed against him.”

The notion of fulfillment through consumption grew, if anything, with the experience of the Depression, during which so many were deprived of the feeling of self-worth and freedom that money bought. Advertising, the media, and installment buying had already created a precocious consumerism in America in the 1920s. And the identification of leisure with consumption won many to hard and steady work in disagreeable jobs. By the 1950s and 1960s, millions of working-class Americans could join the middle class in sampling the satisfactions that advertisers had continuously promised during the lean years. As historian Richard Fox summarizes: “[A]ll seemed united by their commitment to acquiring the mass-marketed tokens of the American standard of living.”

Yet again it is surely an exaggeration to speak of a “classless” or “affluent” society. Even in the prosperous 1960s, cultural differences between middle- and working-class leisure persisted despite the relatively high incomes of many industrial workers in both countries. To be sure, in Britain, the growth of automobile ownership produced a change in lifestyle quite similar to that noted in America a generation earlier. The worker with wheels shifted income from drink and other forms of casual recreation to the mobility and status of the private car. The old holiday to the plebian Southend and Blackpool resorts were partially replaced by budget package tours to the sunny beaches of Spain and Greece.

Still, old patterns of sociability survived economic change. Workers remained outside middle-class social organizations and, instead, built a leisure society around the neighborhoods and family. In the 1960s, same-sex socializing or mixed groups organized by the wife rather than the husband were still common. Shift work of blue-collar employees may explain some of this difference, but it was also due to the persistence of a traditional working-class culture.

**Youth and Leisure in the Early 20th Century**

In 1942, the famous American sociologist, Talcott Parsons, coined the term, “youth culture” to describe what he saw as a juvenile fixation upon consumption and a heteronormative denial of responsibility, an inversion of the adult roles of routinized work and acceptance of family duties. After 1945, social observers increasingly saw youth as a “class” removed from the world of work and adult expectations, “consigned to a self-contained world of juvenile preoccupations.”

This thinking merely confirmed a generation of research that had observed the widening chasm between adult and youth culture, the latter often perceived as delinquent. The British C. M. Machnes (1961) went further:

> We are in the presence...of an entirely new phenomenon in human history: that youth is rich... In this decade [1950s] we witness the second Children’s Crusade, armed with strength and booty, against all “squares,” all adult nay-sayers. An international movement, be it noted, that blithely penetrates the political curtains draped by senile seniors, as yet unconscious of the rising might of this new classless class.

This anxiety toward youth leisure was hardly new. Concern with the independence of youth had long been a major topic of social commentary (Chapter 7). By 1900, there had emerged distinct territories and styles of youth, for example, dance halls, milk bars, the joys of colorful clothing forbidden at work and in school, and the hero worship of sports and entertainment figures. The autonomy of male youth began at 12 or 14 years of age, when the mother’s and schoolmaster’s control ceased with employment. Because of overcrowding, older English children were chased out into the street, where they freely played games and traded collections of comics and picture cards of trains and cricketers. Teenage English boys looked forward to the day when they could leave school for the freedom and the pleasure that the full-time wage could bring. Apprenticeships had long been in decline; in any case, many youths preferred the relatively high wage in unskilled jobs to the uncertainties of training. Until reaching the age of 16, English boys hung out in small groups. “[D]eprived of all decent ways of spending their little leisure,” says Robert Roberts, “they sought escape from tedium in bloody battles with belt and clog—street against street.” Only gradually did these gangs break up as boys discovered girls. Often housework and parental fears of pregnancy kept daughters at home.

In the generation before World War I, American commentators also observed youthful leisure but, because of the American teenagers’ greater access to pocket money, it was organized perhaps more often around dance halls, poolrooms, penny arcades, and amusement parks. Yet, like their British counterparts, American critics agreed that these activities undermined the work of school, church, and philanthropic social work. As one moralist in 1915 described Coney Island: “A large number of unescorted young girls and boys stroll about, an easy prey for exploitation... The carnival spirit of freedom and relaxation frequently degenerates into one of license and gross immorality in the public dancing pavilions and unlighted places.” This allure of commercial entertainment was a threat to the influence of parents and their professional surrogates.
In the U.S., alienation between immigrant parents and their American-born offspring also contributed to the problem of a rebellious "Street-Corner Society," which William Whyte (1943) found among second-generation Italian-Americans in the 1930s. For the middle-class youth, the opportunity for "automobility" in the family car added another dimension to the autonomy of teenage boys and couples from the 1920s.

In the interwar years, merchandisers learned how to fully tap the youth leisure market. Among younger children, pleasure makers combined film fantasy with licensing characters for toys. Leading the way was the "Disneyification" of children's fairy tales and the mass-commercialized fads created around Mickey Mouse paraphernalia in the 1930s. Later, in the 1950s, millions of babyboomer boys (including the author) proudly wore their Davey Crocket "coonskin caps."

Armed with pocket money and time, teenagers rapidly adapted to new leisure forms. As we have seen in Chapter 9, the dance hall had been a focal point for the display of fashion and sexuality from the 1980s. Perhaps even more influential was the cinema. Moralists feared that movies harmed the impressionable minds of youth in the 1930s. They believed that films led to copycat delinquency or to superficial values. As one teenage American girl observed in the early 1930s:

The movies have given me some ideas about the freedom we should have.... My notion of the freedom I should have... is to go out have a good time, but watch your step.... I believe that "when you are in Rome, do as the Romans do." I used to think just the opposite, but after seeing Our Dancing Daughters and the Wild Party I began to think this over, and I found out that it is the best way to act.

In part, adults feared youth leisure because it symbolized rapid cultural change; it expressed the inability of parents to control the education of their offspring, which seemed to be dominated by commercial entertainment. Youth slang, dance, and clothing frightened adults not only because they represented rebellion, but because adults did not understand them. Insofar as the content of teenage leisure constantly changed, adults did not see it as similar to their own period of "sowing wild oats." No parent or community could control access to youth culture when media was commercial and international. While the cinema was willing to censor itself (to a degree), the free market's appeal to the novel and exciting prevailed over traditional morality.

Beyond the pervasive influence of commercial leisure was a play culture built around the college and secondary school. In the United States, well-organized extracurricular activities, by the late 19th century, had been accepted by faculty and future employers alike as central to the educational process. In effect, a growing group of affluent American youth enjoyed a moratorium on the responsibilities of adults. The student generation after World War I challenged their elders in new ways. Rejecting the formality of Victorian society (and in some cases, the folly of war), college youth in the 1920s were far more insistent on their "right to self-expression, self-determination, and personal satisfaction," notes Paula Fass. "To traditionalists this smacked of immorality, self-indulgence, and irresponsibility."

Why this quest for fulfillment should appear early in the century has been analyzed in Chapter 12. American college students of the 1920s had grown up with only about half the siblings of their grandparents; with greater opportunities for parental attention, they enjoyed a more "democratic" childhood with less stress on rules and chores and more on "mutual confidence and understanding." This likely encouraged a more spontaneous and experimental youth, even if it did not always prepare them for competitive adult roles. In the 1920s, American college students were less inhibited. They often expected sexual satisfaction in marriage and separated coitus from procreation. They intended to delay and limit pregnancy after marriage. Moreover, this generation of students was bound to be influential: between 1900 and 1930, there was a 300 percent increase in college enrollments and a 650 percent rise in high-school population. By 1930, 20 percent of the college-age population attended an institution of higher education while 60 percent of the high-school-aged population were enrolled in secondary school.

In Britain, school-based leisure culture was far less important than in the United States. In 1926, only 10 percent of elementary school graduates went on to secondary school and only one in a thousand attended a university. Despite the 1944 Education Act, far fewer Britons remained in school through their teenage years than in the United States. Those years that they were in some educational facility were segregated by class, unlike the relatively heterogeneous American high school.

In the United States, despite the demands of study and long lists of college regulations, student life was mostly organized around a peer culture. In the interwar years, fraternities and sororities dominated college life. Through the rituals of "rushing" and "hazing" recruits and daily peer supervision of members, these social clubs set standards of style, language, and behavior. They punished individuality and rewarded conformity and the person who "mixed well." In a word, they helped to shape the "other directed" person. One university observer noted, "failure in studies is not as important to college students as failure in social adjustment." And a midwestern student newspaper went so far as to say:

Who hears of a University as having a reputation for the number of hours the students study each day? The youth of America is attracted to a university which has a strong football team, a talented band; a university which has students who are willing to build up its
activities, to work for it. If a college has a strong faculty, that is
good advertisement among the teaching profession but it has little or
no weight with the high school graduate. The candidate for college
wants to know what the students are doing....

The ritual of pep rallies, football games, and fraternity dances domi-
nated social life. That student newspaper went on to admit that the average
student "cannot plead lack of time. He knows that the requirement of two-and-
a-half hours of preparation for each class is a joke, and that every day he has
from three to seven hours to use absolutely as he chooses." The real work of
American collegians was responding to the peer culture, which demanded
constant adjustment to fads in dress, speech, music, and dance. While such a
recreational culture placed a premium on shallow thought, it taught the useful
skill of rapid response to change and social blending in a consumer-oriented
society.

Yet this collegiate culture of the 1920s was also innovative. It popular-
ized social drinking (despite prohibition and in anticipation of recreational drug
use on the 1960s campus). The student of the 1920s turned the formality of
courtship into dating and created codes of behavior for recreational petting.
These changes both channeled sexual energies and tested compatibility for
future marriage. While perhaps 50 percent of college men and 25 percent of
college women in the 1920s had coitus, the real innovation was not premarital
intercourse, but a wider, if self-regulated, expression of intimacy in preparation
for marriage. Recreational peer culture provided a transition from childhood to
adulthood; it offered the student an accepting, but educational, environment for
a life of companionate marriage, corporate-business "getting-on," and status-
conscious consumption.

The American collegiate lifestyle trickled down into high school.
These adolescents imitated the extracurricular activities of their elders even if
they lacked the time and freedom to express it fully. Especially after World War
I, high school became a powerful setting of peer culture. In the corridors before
class, in the cafeteria, and at sporting events, there was ample opportunity for
the creation of a deeply imitative culture.

Leisure of a Youth Generation: 1945-1970

In both countries, the impact of commercial youth leisure and extracurricular
recreation was felt with particular intensity following World War II. Adult
concerns focused on the growing autonomy of the teenager. Youths naturally
gained independence when fathers entered the military and mothers took jobs
during the war. Access to recreational income increased as American high-
school students took part-time jobs (about half of these students did so in the
1950s). In England, in the 1950s, there was perhaps a doubling of teenage
discretionary income, at least 75 percent of which was spent on junk food, ciga-
rettes, drinks, records, dances, and magazines. Almost all of this teenage
market in England was concentrated in the wage-earning adolescent; the school
or university youth generally lacked this autonomy. In England, "between
leaving school [at age 16] and going into the army [at age 18 years], [working
teenagers] could live out a fantasy life, their pockets full of money from a dead-
end job." Earlier dating and consequently earlier marriage in the USA began
during the war. Adolescents created a premature adult culture with access to
cars and spending money. Young males sometimes tweaked the consumer
sensibilities of adults by turning their vehicles into "hot rods" and young
Hispanics and other minorities in American cities produced a threatening street
culture around the flamboyant dress of the zoot suit during World War II.

In the United States, the result was a unique popular culture, nurtured
both on the street and in the protected environs of the high school. It was a
social construct shaped also by the teenager market for magazines, 45-RPM
records and the soda fountain. Youth leisure was not tied to tradition, neither
did it admit to the participation of more than one generation; rather, it was
driven by fads and an international celebrity system.

At the same time, the American high school was not a classless culture.
It was not a social melting pot, as was sometimes suggested in the 1950s.
Rather, the high school created (or affirmed) social divisions through a system
of testing and tracking students into different programs. Failure in school had a
powerful effect upon working-class youths; it often led to withdrawal from
sponsored extracurricular activities, antagonism toward authority, and anti-
intellectualism. Moreover, during free time, working-class youth retained the
traditional "ethic of reciprocity," giving and taking resources among a close-knit
group. Few embraced the "ethic of individual responsibility," with its presump-
tion of "getting ahead." And, displays of physical aggression had a legitimacy
in home as well as on the street.

As the American sociologist Albert Cohen observed in the 1950s, "the
modesty of working-class aspirations is partly a matter of trimming one's sails
to the available opportunities and resources and partly a matter of unwillingness
to accept the discipline which upward striving entails." The sociologist Robert
Hollingshead found in the American high school of the 1950s that far fewer
working-class students participated in extracurricular activities (such as dances,
sports, and even the scouts) than did the offspring of the middle classes; often
this was the result of snubbing by the more affluent. Moreover, differences in
access to spending money and expectations regarding college produced the
chasm that separated the recreational style of the working-class "greaser" and
middle-class "soc" in the early 1960s. These styles were stereotyped, for
example, in the film, American Graffiti. The working-class youth, alienated
from the middle-class extracurricular culture at school, retreated into a male-
dominated society built around the hot rod, its upkeep, and its use in the social
and sexual rites of cruising main street."
The English version of postwar youth leisure was influenced less by collegiate and high-school society than by neighborhoods. In Britain, the secondary school played a far smaller role, in part because many youth left school at 16 years or earlier and schools were more socially segregated into the state-supported "comprehensives" and the elite schools. New youth leisure was dominated by the working-class entertainment market; middle-class youth were far more restricted in school and university and lacked both the car and spending money of their counterparts in the U.S.

Economic change after World War II broke up many old English neighborhoods with ambiguous consequences for the young. New housing developments weakened old kinship networks and traditional recreational zones. As sociologist Tony Jefferson (1975) noted:

High-density, high-rise housing [destroyed] the function of the street, the local pub, the corner shop, as articulations of communal space. Instead there was only the privatized space of the family unit, stacked one on top of each other, in total isolation, juxtaposed with the totally public space which surrounded it, and which lacked any of the informal social controls generated by the neighborhood.45

This led to a cultural crisis particularly for youth. Cut off from the recreational traditions of their parents, they adopted styles associated with the upwardly mobile consumer culture. For example, the amphetamine-driven and clothes-conscious "mods" of the early 1960s protested the dead-end jobs, which they knew to be their collective fate, through the ritual of consumption. Groups like the Teddy Boys (in the 50s) and later the Skinheads retained the tough macho image associated with the working class. Some protested their loss of territory by attacking immigrants. From the early 1950s, the English media widely publicized youth gang disruptions of dance halls and cinemas and contests between rival groups for "turf." In the "relative freedom of leisure," young wage earners expressed both the values associated with survival (for example, macho behavior) and a consumerist release from the discipline of school and work. Youth subcultures came and went, each in turn reacting to the style that preceded it; yet all shared this ambiguous mixture of working-class values and consumerism.46

While the street life of the English male youth gained the most attention, the female also developed her own style of leisure. The teeny-bopper culture of adolescent girls gathered in bedrooms surrounded by posters of rock icons and played rock music. Although the teeny-bopper might display herself in the highly demonstrative rock concert, she reaffirmed traditional sex roles in her retreat to same-sex socializing, passive gender roles, and fanaticizing.47

In both countries, the most characteristic feature of youth leisure from the mid-1950s was rock music. It was not only commercial and highly transient, but also a folk music. Rock was produced by youth themselves and reflected their lives, thus the popularity of "oldies," which evoked adolescent memories. What predated rock was the Tin-Pan-Alley or Music-Hall tradition of popular song. Such tunes not only remained popular far longer than rock, but were sung by sentimental ballad crooners with cross-generational appeal. While in the U.S., Frank Sinatra, and even Benny Goodman, attracted screaming young women to their concerts before the war, their sophisticated style quickly attracted adults as well.48

When rock emerged in 1954, it was a melange of a variety of popular musical styles as different as black American Rhythm and Blues and white Country and Western. Nevertheless, it was essentially a protest against the "lifelessness" of prevailing popular music. The first internationally successful hit, "Rock Around the Clock," was introduced in the film Blackboard Jungle, which dealt with the rebellion of urban youth. Elvis Presley, with his gyrating hips, long hair, and tight, outlandish clothes, represented both for adults and for teenagers the vitality and rebelliousness of youth. Rock dance styles also reflected youthful spontaneity by abandoning ballroom steps and substituting dances appropriate for an untrained youth. Some of these dances, as in the case of the Twist, was imitated by adults (1961).

Rock was, of course, closely associated with the mass media. With the advent of television in the early 1950s, radio lost audiences for network programming. Recorded rock music filled this vacuum (and, just as importantly), provided a vehicle for youth-oriented advertising. Disc jockeys, such as Alan Freed and "Wolfman Jack," identified with the youthful listener and were closely associated with the music. They were a radical departure from the authoritative voice of traditional radio announcers. About the same time, the inexpensive 45-RPM record appeared on the market to fit perfectly this new music culture. These records could be rapidly distributed, were inexpensive, and thus were easy for the young to collect; the teenager could play or reject them in an instant. The 33-RPM, long-playing record, which also emerged in the mid-1950s, did not fit this casual listening style because it required a longer commitment to an artist than most youths were willing to give. While originating in the United States, rock, of course, became an international entertainment absorbing the black Calypso and later the Reggae style; and, from 1962, dare we forget, the English sound of the Beatles, Rolling Stones, and Dave Clark Five supplanted the southern American style of early rock.49

In the 1950s, adults found it difficult to distinguish youth from delinquent culture, for teenage leisure often shaded toward criminality in street-corner lounging or (in America) in cruising by car and congregating at drive-in restaurants. In particular, adults feared that teenage movies, rock music, and comic books undermined parental authority. In the 1950s both J. Edgar Hoover, the conservative chief of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Frederic Wertham, the civil-rights advocate and psychologist, campaigned for the censorship of lurid comic books. While little came of such efforts, film makers responded to criticism that teenage films encouraged delinquency. They
precensored story lines to guarantee that fictional lawbreakers were punished in the end. The middle-aged American band leader, Mitch Miller, condemned rock as "musical baby food; it is the worship of mediocrity, brought about by a passion for conformity." The title of the best-selling The Shock Up Generation: Teen-Age Terror in Slum and Suburb, by noted writer, Harrison Salisbury, sums up this attitude. At the heart of this anxiety was the fear that working-class values would penetrate (via rock and films) the middle-class teenage culture.50

At the same time, enterprising adults saw the potential of the youth entertainment market. In the 1950s, movies had to be tailored to youth because adults stayed at home to watch TV. Advertising moguls, like the American Eugene Gilbert, gushed about the profitability of youth leisure markets. By the end of the 1950s, he wrote popular magazine columns seeking to reassure adult anxieties regarding the crazes of their offspring. Moreover, despite the publicity given to Elvis (The Pelvis) Presley, surveys of youth during the height of his popularity in the late 1950s revealed that only about one-fifth declared him as their favorite singer; a majority preferred the clean-cut, born-again Christian, Pat Boone. A similar point could be made about Tommy Steele and Cliff Richards in Britain.51

By 1960, the great fear of teenage leisure had abated when a clearer distinction between youth and delinquent culture emerged. Often this relaxation of anxiety represented merely the discovery that the middle-class and working-class teenager remained in two cultural worlds. When middle-class youth embraced the relatively tame folk song and the "loveable moppets," anxious American parents were relieved. By the mid-70s, longer school attendance and decreased job opportunities reduced the spending money, and thus freedom, of English working-class youth.52

The threat of youth leisure had hardly ended, however. It reappeared in the cultural rebellion of the beats in the late 1950s, of hippies from the mid-1960s, and, slightly later, of feminists and the cultural left. At base, all of these movements had in common a rejection of suburban leisure culture and were rooted in the middle classes. Many contemporaries did not see them as transitional rebellion, an age-old response to the moratorium granted to some youth prior to the assumption of adult responsibilities; rather, they found a counterculture, "a definite challenge to the values and norms" of the status quo.53

The counterculture of the 1960s was far more individualistic than the gang culture of the working class of the 1950s (and later). Working-class youth focused on a definite space in the traditional social environment, pub, street, or sporting field, and they were constrained by the need to work within the traditional economy. By contrast, middle-class rebels lived in a more diffuse countercultural milieu. They attempted to create alternative institutions (communes, for example), which allowed the children of affluence to "drop out." At least for a time, they rejected family, school, traditional sex roles, and career, all traditional bastions of the status quo.54

This dissent emerged first among the beats in their coffee-house enclaves. The wandering existence of the beat hero, Jack Kerouac, and the cult center of San Francisco defined this rebellion from bureaucratic work and conventional family life. It was isolated to a tiny intelligentsia until the 1960s, when the baby boomers hit college campuses in America. Opposition to the Vietnam War and especially to conscription, which had long served to end the freedom of youth, was an important focus of the counterculture. Even though "deferments" protected college students temporarily from the military draft, the possibility of conscription was, for many youths, a gnawing anxiety and sensitized them to the threatened loss of personal freedom. This mood was captured in the popular musical, Hair.55

Radical youth in the United States were often children of affluent, but liberal parents, who had imparted in them a critical attitude toward suburban culture. So did the satirical Mad Magazine, which many read as children. Their parents also encouraged racial tolerance and other liberal ideas, without necessarily acting on these principles. Radical youths felt guilty about their comfort and often rejected affluence as "unauthentic," they sometimes embraced romantic notions about Black or working-class life. The counterculture rejected the dress codes of high-school for long hair and other unisex styles. Bohemian districts of big cities attracted hippie communities from about 1967, built around the defiant (because illegal) use of marijuana and other mind-altering drugs.56

In 1970, there may have been 2,000 communes in the United States which attempted to live an alternative to the domesticated, commercial suburban culture of the majority. Many were rural; others involved more informal collective living in urban tenement apartments; some were politically oriented; others quasi-religious, often fueled by drugs.57

Countercultural youths enjoyed a freedom from adult economic and family responsibilities that continued into their late 20s or beyond. Perhaps this was only part of a long-term trend of extending the age when careers ended the experimentation and freedom of youth. Kenneth Keniston discovered a generation of the "uncommitted," youthful males insulated from (and fearful of) the professional lives of their fathers and nurtured to value creativity by their mothers. They resisted the male role of provider. Similarly, young women rejected the domesticity of their mothers. But surely also important to the counterculture was the moral opposition to the cultural conformism of the 1950s, as analyzed by David Riesman, Vance Packard, and Herbert Marcuse.58

Still, despite efforts of countercultural leaders in the 1960s to avoid commercial manipulation—cooptation as they called it, these rebels were deeply influenced by the suburban commercial culture from which they came. Hippies, far from being a "vanguard of a bloodless cultural revolution" or "fanatically alienated from the parental culture," in fact, expressed the individualistic values of middle-class society. And, if many scorned suburban commodities, most still embraced the goods of their own rock culture. Moreover, the 1960s youth
culture perpetuated the class divisions of the adult world. When hippies embraced the "progressive" rock on the LP stereo record, they left the 45-RPM "singles" to the working classes. Seldom was the subordination of the female effectively challenged among the hippies any more than it was among the openly macho working-class subcultures. In any case, the counterculture sparked a reaction from both the adult middle class and working-class youth. This reaction helped to lay a groundwork for the conservatism of the 1970s and 1980s.28

In the 20th century, pressures toward a leisure consensus never succeeded in overcoming the fissures of class and generation. A blend of Victorian domesticity and middle-class consumer culture failed to take hold in the ethnic communities and working classes of either country, despite the affluence of the postwar generation and homogenization of car and suburb culture. Still, the autonomy of the bar community and working-class neighborhood was hardly immune to the corrosive impact of powerful media and new leisure technology. A similar pattern fits the history of 20th-century youth culture. It was at once a rebellion against received culture and parental authority and an affirmation of consumerist values of parents. Although for a time, youth gained independence from parental control and economic responsibility, their leisure seldom challenged the status quo or it did so ineffectively. The innovations of the American collegiate in the 1920s probably facilitated adjustment rather than resistance to a new business and family culture. Even the American greasers and English Teddy Boys were rebels without a cause. Still, as shown by the creative, if ephemeral and even self-destructive play of the 60s counterculture, leisure could be a site for social experimentation and dissent.
Conclusion: Looking Forward from the Recent Past

History cannot really be expected to point to the future. Its study can only suggest trends, which are often conflicting, and never is it beyond the realm of human decision to change course. This is true also of the future of leisure; it is not simply an extrapolation from the past or present. In this concluding chapter, I offer, instead, a few trends already evident in the 1960s that suggest future problems and options.

A Harried Leisure Class

One major theme of this book has been that the sheer growth in leisure time has not been the simple by-product of increased productivity. Powerful political, economic, and cultural forces have biased the distribution of the fruits of economic growth toward consumption and investment rather than toward time away from work. We saw this trend in our investigation of the quest for time in the 19th century (Chapter 6) and in the frustrations of leisure advocates in the early 20th century (Chapter 11). In the generation after World War II, the tendency for leisure time to lag behind consumption and economic expansion has, if anything, widened. From the 1960s, time available for recreation has declined in many families. Since then, the dual-job family has increasingly become the norm. Of course, for many women, entry into the workforce was an opportunity for a meaningful career or, at least, a degree of economic independence. Yet, for others, it was more a response to declining real incomes, especially as housing and (especially in America) health costs rose sharply in the 1970s. The traditional job (mostly held by married men) no longer provided a family wage sufficient to support house, wife, and children. The net effect of the dual-income household was often a drastic reduction of disposable time available per couple. Fewer hours per week for either domestic (and child care) work and for personal activities was one consequence of the two-income family. This entailed a “domestic speedup” as the traditional realm of personal life, family
care, and leisure was crammed into shorter periods of the day. The problem of time, even within a 40- or 35-hour work week, was exacerbated by the spatial division of work and home. Time lost to commuting, traditionally an often unpleasant but perhaps bearable sacrifice of male breadwinners, was increasingly the fate of women, too. This situation combined with the experience of shift work, often at different periods for husband and wife, compounded the harried lives of the dual-job family.2

Naturally, families adapted to this change by a vast array of shortcuts—eating out far more, a return to catalog shopping, greater tolerance of messy houses, daycare centers for fewer children, and or even rejection of family responsibilities. The so-called traditional gender division of time (really a 19th-century invention), based on the marketplace for men and domesticity for women, has been seriously disrupted. Just what will be the effects of the two-income family and how individuals will adjust to it is, as yet, unclear.

The dual-wage family was not merely an adaptation to economic change. As early as 1898, the feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman argued that equal participation in public life was essential to free individual development and true mutual love between couples. As long as women were relegated to the status of a domesticated “leisure class,” performing inefficiently childcare and housework that best should be assigned to paid specialists, women would always be man’s dependent.3 Gilman’s powerful idea was largely ignored until the second half of the century when it was revived by a second wave of feminists. In any case, the position of homemaker as organizer of family leisure, has increasingly become a privilege of the wealthy or a costly option of the culturally conservative.

Yet not only has Gilman’s dream of economic equality been imperfectly realized, but the problem of domestic work has been hardly solved. The two-job family has yet to create a new division of work and leisure based on sexual equality. Employed women continue to do the vast majority of housework and childcare, depriving themselves of the afterwork leisure time enjoyed by many men. While public domestic and childcare services may have reduced this burden for some employed women, few would argue that such facilities have replaced the labor of the traditional homemaker. New home-based entertainments, video tapes as well as other electronic media, may well have resolved some of the logistic and time constraints of the harried two-job family, but these changes could hardly be said to satisfy needs for more active exploration of leisure options. Despite the many and often creative maneuvers of families to solve these problems, they remain and they will probably evoke new public policy and market responses in the future.

Conclusion: Looking Forward from the Recent Past

Play for the Seniors

If the recent past suggests problems for those obliged to balance work, family, and play, it points also to new leisure opportunities for those beyond such cares. Retirement for the masses is a recent phenomenon. In the 18th and 19th centuries, it was a privilege of the very successful or idle rich. Increased longevity, improved health in late life, and pensions have recently made retirement possible for the majority. In the United States, in the first half of this century, life expectancy from the age of 20 increased by 8.4 years, which partially explains the doubling of the percentage of population over 60 (8.1 percent by 1950). A 60-year-old white female could expect 18.6 more years of life at midcentury (2.8 years longer than white men and 3.5 years more than nonwhite males). The aged in Britain likewise doubled between 1920 and 1970 to over 16 percent of the population.4

But changes in public policy explain why these additional years of life were increasingly spent in retirement rather than work. The American Social Security Act of 1935 and the British state pension program which began in 1908 provided (along with private pensions) a minimum income for retirement. From the 1930s, many employers imposed mandatory retirement, which policymakers believed would increase business efficiency, provide jobs for the young, and create a new consumer market in a new leisure class of the elderly. As a result, far fewer held jobs until illness or death.5

These trends may have made old age more secure, but they did not answer the question of what the elderly would do with life beyond work, especially when so many of these people had been committed to the work ethic. The solutions offered ranged from calls for only a gradual disengagement from jobs to replacing employment with well-planned and purposeful leisure as a “moral equivalent of work.” Groups like the American Association of Retired Persons (founded in 1955) propagated the idea of an independent, informed, and leisure retirement. It was not to be a brief period of rest before death but a new life stage of fulfillment and compensation for work, an opportunity for leisure unfettered by geographical or time constraints.6

Of course, most of the elderly continued to live in their old neighborhoods and nearby their children; as late as 1950, 45 percent of American widows lived with an adult child. In the 1950s, aged Americas were only half as likely to move as was the younger population. The same pattern applied to Britain, yet a small minority had begun a trend toward migrating to warmer (and sometimes less expensive) regions far from old jobs and family. With no economic responsibilities tying them to the “frostbelt” or city, they were free to pursue a life in a more comfortable climate. Since the 1920s, the elderly had begun a trek to Florida. By 1950, almost 22 percent of the population of St. Petersburg was over 65 years old, about three times the national rate. With the retirement of the veteran of World War II in the 1980s, a uniquely affluent
cohort began to change the meaning of old age. This group, which benefited from often generous pensions, private assets, and improved health care, had the resources to retire even before age 65. Affluent Britons also moved to the southern coasts, hoping to make the annual seaside holiday a permanent way of life. 

The appeal of improved climate and freedom from the problems of the industrial environment is self-evident. But the apparent abandonment of family by the elderly was rather harder to explain, given their tradition of domesticity. One answer is the segmentation of generations, a trend evident early in the 20th century as the young, middle-aged, and old peeled off into distinct peer cultures. Moreover, many of the old experienced an "empty nest," as adult children moved far from home and as smaller and delayed families meant the retired had fewer opportunities to play the role of grandparent. In any case, children were far more likely to move away than were their parents. Entitlements (like pensions and even welfare) provided substitutes for the traditional reciprocity between generations. In the U.S., the proportion of the elderly that lived with children declined from 60 percent in 1900 to scarcely 9 percent in 1970. Still, the reality of elder migration was more complex. Many were "snowbirds," seasonal visitors to the trailer parks, apartments, and condos of Florida or the American Southwest, spending warm months near family. And migrants were predominantly the most affluent and healthy of the elderly. More typical were residents in multipurpose geriatric centers near family and old neighborhoods.

Still, a brief look at sunbelt or seaside retirement is worth our trouble for it may be suggestive about the future of leisure. Sun City, Arizona, is a good example of a desire to equate retirement with leisure. Dating from only 1960, this planned suburb in the American Southwestern desert promised maintenance-free housing and a community rich in golf courses, recreation centers, imported entertainment, churches, and shopping malls, with easy access to the boom city of Phoenix. By prohibiting permanent residency to anyone under the age of 50, Sun City people were assured a community of shared values. It was a peer culture, similar to that which many retirees knew when they were young. Municipal restrictions also liberated residents of Sun City from industrial blight and school taxes. Not only did they avoid sharing the responsibilities of urban life (like many suburbanites did), but they evaded the problems of the younger generation. Few residents had difficulty justifying this, for they had already "paid their dues" to society.

One observer rather uncharitably labeled Sun City "a resident Disneyland for old folks." Sun City offered an alternative to a retirement of stagnation; it provided an active life with old friends and people of similar tastes. The developer was especially successful when he advertised Sun City as a resort or vacation community; yet what brought people there was its suburban quality, which offered not only a status house, but a "hometown" feeling. The developer encouraged buyers to refer neighbors or friends back home to join them. The social and even regional homogeneity of residents encouraged a shared vision of active retirement, making aging more satisfying for many. In many ways, then, retirement (at least in this privileged form) was a nearly perfect expression of the modernization of leisure. Play was radically separated from work, shared in a peer culture, and built around a suburban base of wholesome consumption.

An Alternative to Suburbs: Return to the Cities

A very different recent trend is the rejection of suburban familism. Since the late 1960s, a relatively small affluent group has participated in the restoration of central-city neighborhoods and the refurbishment of their cultural and recreational amenities. This process, somewhat misnamed gentrification, was a product of demographic, economic, and ultimately cultural change. The new urbanites were seldom "returnees" from the suburb. More often, with increased affluence, they moved from modest urban districts to new (or often restored) fashionable districts, where they bought homes and flats and sometimes refurbished them. The entry of the post-war baby boomers in the housing market accelerated this process. So did the trend toward later marriage, double-income households, delayed and reduced arrival of children, and dramatic increases in divorce rates.

The Young Upwardly Mobile Urban Professional (Yuppie) and the Double Income No Kids (Dinks) were surely stereotypes, but rooted in reality. People who fit this profile were naturally less interested in access to quality schools and playgrounds for children (a common advantage of the suburb); they also were willing to trade off living space, backyard patios, and two-car garages for easy access to the urbane night life, high culture, and specialty shopping that was missing from suburbs. Gentrification provided an alternative to the urbanites' often frustrating effort to balance the demands of work, family, and leisure. Urban residence was a partial adaptation to the time pressures of dual-job households. City living reduced commuting time and provided access to public dining and numerous other services made necessary by the lack of a homemaker.

This was a culturally varied world, comprising not only yuppie districts but also the hippie ghettos that survived into the 1970s in university towns and cities. Yet both groups rejected rigid sex roles and the separation of work and play. The decision not to move to suburbia was the choice of a minority but reflected a significant cultural milieu. Some American children raised with "populux" and educated in the counterculture of the 1960s reacted against the homogeneity of suburban culture. Both men and women rejected the cult of domesticity. If some women resisted (at least for a time) the constraints of children, men also bolted against the limited role of the provider. The avoidance of these traditional roles had been expressed by the lifestyle of the "playboy" in
the 1950s as well as by that of the beatnik and later the hippie. Even those urbanites who embraced marriage and eventually parenting sometimes sought an alternative to suburbia. The city, as a center of ethnic and cultural diversity, was treasured by this minority, even if that meant primarily a sanitized ideal of exotic restaurants, specialty stores, and quaint architecture rather than the crime and chaos of the traditional "dangerous classes."  

A new urban economy made all of this possible. Clean financial and commercial businesses sometimes replaced "smokestack" industries near city centers. Municipal governments attempted to revitalize selected central city districts in order to attract affluent residents and customers. However, gentrification can hardly be called the major social trend of the recent past. Not only did the new urbanites not reverse suburbanization in the 1970s, but they inhabited only highly selected neighborhoods: the Washington Square district in New York City, Georgetown in Washington, DC, or Canyonsby near London, for example. The homeless and racial minorities, as well as neighborhoods of the older white working class, surely were as important to the social geography of the city of the 1970s and 1980s. Finally, it is not clear whether these gentrified societies will remain unchanged as the young city-dwellers age, have families, and perhaps move to the suburbs.  

Still, this group, along with the metropolitan suburban affluent, were the principal constituents of the revival of the "pleasure city." In the 1960s, new freeways and improved rapid transit made the city's leisure services accessible to the suburbanite. The industrial city had long been changing into a consumption center. In fact, major metropolises like London and New York City had never been production centers; their principal attractions had been commerce and leisure. In the 1920s, New York offered as many as 32,000 clubs and speakeasies despite prohibition; white tourists and businessmen found excitement in Harlem haunts like the Cotton Club; the skyscraper offered the thrill of the bird's eye vista; and the "Great White" light of nighttime Broadway was an attraction in itself in the 1920s. The same, of course, was true of Piccadilly Circus in London. Museums and historic districts provided tourists with a convenient, if condensed and often artificial, glimpse at art and history.  

In the 1960s and 1970s, urban renewal brought neighborhood revival and the building of downtown cultural buildings. Lincoln Center in New York, initiated in 1955 by a consortium of wealthy backers and municipal planners, became, by the mid-1960s, a multipurpose complex for the performing arts, dining, and specialty shopping. It was the first major example of many such cultural renewal efforts in American cities. Public support for the arts grew significantly in this period. The National Endowment for the Arts increased from 2.5 to almost 150 million dollars from 1966 to 1980. Between 1965 and 1975, the number of professional theaters grew from 25 to 101; opera companies increased from 23 to 43; and orchestras expanded from 58 to 103. Paralleling these American trends was the building of London's South Bank complex of cultural facilities.  

In both countries, central-city shopping districts were refurbished and, in the cold climates of the American north, indoor downtown malls were constructed. Such revived districts attracted investors to build luxury condominiums and townhouses, often in imitation of 18th- and 19th-century styles. In some ways, these efforts were patterned after the Baroque idea of the walking city with its townhouses, enclosed parks, theaters, coffee houses, and specialty shops. Reformers criticized these urban cultural districts for their tendency to displace poor and elderly residents and for their isolation from and indifference to deteriorating neighborhoods that surrounded them. The high culture of the performing arts and museums remained the preserve of the affluent and well educated. For example, a survey of American audiences in the 1970s suggests that from 41 percent (of museum patrons) to 65 percent (of ballet audiences) were college graduates compared to 14 percent of the general population. And even if there was a trend toward a broadening of audience, high culture remained largely the preserve of an elite, creating a self-perpetuating culture.  

Still, these facilities provided an alternative to suburban life and attracted tourist income to cities with declining economic bases in industry.  

Concluding Remarks  

We have come a long way and have covered many topics in this book and, unfortunately have neglected others. This volume has been about societies of leisure and how modern technology, economic organization, and public policy transformed them. We encountered a variety of types of play: traditional (both popular and elite), reforming, and commercial. These complex and diverse orientations toward leisure were sometimes in conflict. But over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, they often were fused by the market. This history was not simply a specific form of the modernization process, a shaping of leisure by the inexorable trends of industrialization and rationalization. Rather, it was a far more complex history of people and processes.  

While traditional forms of leisure had been in decline since the eighteenth century, they survived and reappeared often in unexpected places, in riots at football games, in the pale reflection of pseudo-baroque housing for the rich, and in the glitzy world of the seaside resort. The reformer's quest for a new standard of work and leisure helped both to intensify labor and to create a familial focus on recreation. It informed policymakers in defining "permissible pleasure" and in regulating and sometimes in domesticating popular leisure, creating, in general, a less violent culture. But their efforts to reshape the the people (and the elite) in their own image was never totally successful. Moreover, the reformers' dreams were radically transformed by the commercialization of leisure in the 19th-century city and in the 20th-century suburb. Impresarios of pleasure "improved" popular entertainments to attract the rational recreationists of the middle classes while "popularizing" the domestic culture of
Victorian reformers. The mass demand for free time gradually overcame the prejudice of elites, whose fear of popular leisure was rooted as much in hostility to working-class pastimes as it was in economic considerations.

Yet leisure time did not grow with the economy in the 19th and 20th centuries. Its expansion was episodic, the result of infrequent and hard-fought movements for freedom from work. And, despite the enormous economic gains of the mid-20th century, leisure time actually shrank for many. The efforts of adults to shape the free time of the young met frustration again and again as the young, ever sensitive to social change, created new leisure styles, and the leisure entrepreneur satisfied their quest for autonomy.

What had emerged by the mid-20th-century was a contradictory phenomenon of individualized leisure organized on a mass scale by a pleasure industry. This surely was an achievement of the “hidden persuaders” of capitalism, but this culture was also a product of people’s felt needs. It was a rich and contradictory mixture of traditional, reformist, and commercial recreation. Twentieth-century leisure was a continuously changing blend, the product of economic and technological factors, but also the fruit of individual and social choice.

Notes

Chapter One


4. See, for example, J.P. Donajgrodski, ed., Social Control in Nineteenth Century Britain (London, 1977) as well as numerous sources in Chapter 8.


Chapter Two


