In August of 1921 Hiram Johnson, U.S. Senator from California, and his wife decided to escape the heat of Washington, D.C., and motor north for a vacation. Quite taken with Atlantic City, they remained for their entire vacation, staying at the Ritz, where they enjoyed “one of the handsomest apartments at a greatly reduced rate (but still a sufficient sum for a U.S. Senator’s income)” and found “everything possible for our convenience and comfort.” This was, Johnson explained, “the enjoyable part of Atlantic City.”

But two miles down the boardwalk was the “other part”—a “vastly different” sort of place. There huge crowds overran boardwalk and beach. But it was not so much the number of vacationers that disquieted the senator, it was who those vacationers were. “On Labor Day,” he wrote, “it was estimated that 350,000 people were in Atlantic City. If this estimate was correct, I am perfectly certain that 249,000 of them were the chosen people. Everywhere, and in everything, the Israelite predominate.” He even found Jews among the guests at the Ritz, but explained that “they are the sort that we know, the rich, assertive, self-sufficient.” Farther down the boardwalk, he discovered hordes of poor, immigrant Jews—“the short, swarthy men,
the squatty, dumpy women, and the innumerable daughters, at an early age bursting into overblown maturity.” In some parts of Atlantic City, Senator Johnson “felt a stranger almost in a strange land.”

By the 1920s a variety of people were becoming vacationers. Many who once could manage only a one-day excursion to an amusement park, beach, or lake were participating in an experience that a few decades earlier had been restricted primarily to the white middle class. During the first three decades of the twentieth century middle-class African Americans and both native-born and immigrant members of the working class joined the growing numbers of white middle-class vacationers. Some chose places like Atlantic City, others opted for very different sorts of ventures.

This chapter will examine the experiences that the crowds of American vacationers created for themselves during the early decades of the twentieth century. I hope to locate those places where the vacation experiences of white middle-class people, working-class people, and African Americans converged and where they parted. Did people of different races and classes vacation together or separately and when, if at all, did their vacation experiences mingle or merge?

The question goes beyond an exploration of different patterns of vacationing. It asks, as well, about the cultural impact of a broadly based vacationing public. In the nineteenth century, as we saw, vacationing came to be one of the ways that the middle class identified itself. Did access to vacations—something once restricted to the middle class—help to confer status and privilege on all vacationers? Ultimately, did vacationing serve as a unifying force in early twentieth-century America, or did it reinforce distinctions of class and race? Finally, I hope to suggest the impact of this broadened vacationing public on cultural attitudes towards vacations. Specifically, what happened to the long-standing suspicions of and prescriptions about vacationing as those who were not members of the white, native-born middle class increasingly claimed the privilege as their own?

The first third of the twentieth century witnessed continual growth in the size and diversity of the vacationing public. The increasing ease of travel, especially the creation of an automobile culture, made vacationing more accessible to both the middle and working class, rendering vacations cheaper, easier, and often more enjoyable. The vacation industry became more organized as it promoted, advertised, and fostered its product. American Express introduced its travelers check in 1891 and by 1906 both the New York Times and the New York Herald had instituted Sunday travel sections. In 1912 New York City held its second annual travel and vacation exhibition where railroads, resorts, chambers of commerce, hotels, and
hotel associations all exhibited their “wares” at booths designed to entice potential clients.6

The expansion of the vacationing public no doubt was connected, as well, to broader changes in American culture during the early twentieth century. Historians John Higham, T. J. Jackson Lears, John Kasson, and others have chronicled and analyzed a “reorientation of American culture” that occurred around the turn of the century. Americans—particularly members of the middle class—displayed an interest in vigorous physical activity, a longing for “authentic” experience, and a tendency to reject stuffy and confining Victorian norms. Moreover, middle-class men and women who, in the nineteenth century, had been busy producing goods became, in the early twentieth century, increasingly preoccupied with consuming them. These changes fostered an interest in vacationing, even as the growing numbers of vacationers helped to move American culture in the direction that Higham, Lears, Kasson, and others have described.7

But the growth of vacationing in the early twentieth century was not solely due to expanding numbers of white middle-class vacationers. What differentiated vacationing in the twentieth century was the participation of working-class men and women, including immigrants and their children, as well as an increasing number of middle-class African Americans.

Working-class men and women fashioned a range of vacation experiences in the early twentieth century. Given that many of the early blue-collar vacationers still earned no paychecks for their weeks off, vacations that required minimal outlay or that saved money—visiting relatives, fishing, and camping—were popular choices. The National Cash Register Company's monthly newspaper, the NCR News, frequently reported that an employee had “paid a visit to his old home town,” had “spent two weeks in the western part of the state fishing and hunting,” had been “with a party of friends . . . camping at Bear Creek,” or had gone “to his mother for pies, cakes, etc.”8 Typical was the fellow who hoped to organize a camping party during the vacation: “We want to get a place near town on the Stillwater, where we can take a run down to the Island Park in our canoe, and where we will be close enough to the Y.M.C.A. Athletic Park to play a couple of sets of tennis when we so desire.”9

Fishing no doubt provided these vacationers with entertainment and sport. But it may have represented more than mere recreation. Fishing probably also served as one way of feeding the family during the time the plant closed “for vacation,” or at least offered the possibility of saving on grocery expenses so that limited funds might be put to the cost of an inexpensive, nearby camping vacation.

Visiting relatives, camping, and fishing in nearby waters were the prevalent but not the only sorts of vacationing in which working-class people
indulged. Beginning in the late 1910s workers with cars used them to expand their vacationing horizons. The numbers of working-class people who owned automobiles grew dramatically during the 1920s. Not only reduced automobile prices and the availability of credit, but a growing market in used cars made it possible even for members of the working class to purchase cars.\(^{10}\)

While many workers had few choices but to spend their vacations fishing and camping, those with cars could pursue these activities in a wider geographic area. Toolmaker Charles Jackson, for example, outfitted his “flivver” with “new parts all around” and then drove it to Spring Lake in Michigan.\(^{11}\) Indeed, the “flivver” became, for some workers, as important a part of their vacation gear as the reel and the tent, frequently, in fact, serving as replacement for the latter.

An automobile expanded not only the geographic range but the variety of these workers’ vacations. Cars, for example, made touring a distinct possibility. John Brower “made an auto trip, stopping in Toledo, Detroit, Kalamazoo, Michigan City, Battle Creek, Chicago and back by way of Indianapolis.” Leo Geers and his family “covered over 1,000 miles by auto” in their trip around Ohio and reported “a dandy time.”\(^{12}\) No doubt these people still camped along the way, but the focus of such a vacation was the touring and driving as well as the camping.\(^{13}\)

For some working-class men and women, vacations became sightseeing adventures. In 1920 two employees from NCR’s cutter department “went over the road in a Ford, visiting New York City, Philadelphia, Harrisburg, and other eastern cities.” Both reported “a very enjoyable trip.”\(^{14}\) In the *NCR News*, R. H. Kuhlman wrote about what he called “An Ideal Vacation” — a motor trip to Washington, D.C. “Steady driving” allowed him to make the nation’s capital in about three and a half days, and he found the drive through the mountains “beautiful.” He claimed that the trip would be “even more interesting” and doubtless cheaper “if you take a camping outfit and camp along the way.” He recommended visiting the usual tourist sights — the Capitol, the Congressional Library, the Pan American Building, the Bureau of Printing, the Smithsonian, the Zoo, the White House, Mt. Vernon — and suggested, as well, a side trip to Baltimore and the Naval Academy in Annapolis. He concluded, “[T]his is about the best two weeks’ trip that I know of.”\(^{15}\) Enough NCR workers were apparently taking autotrips by the mid-1920s that *NCR News* began offering advice on safe motoring vacations.\(^{16}\)

Growing numbers of working-class vacationers began to frequent other sorts of vacation places. Summer communities that offered more than open spaces for camping but considerably less than luxurious resort accommodations took shape during the 1910s and 1920s. A group of employees from
Campers having breakfast, Fayette Lake (?), Idaho, 1918–1920. Cars became an important part of the vacation equipment for campers in the early twentieth century. Working-class people found that cars increased their vacation possibilities. (Library of Congress, Otto M. Jones Collection, J731-232b.)

NCR’s toolmaking and model making departments, for example, took their families to Island Park in Hamilton, Indiana, where they found “good accommodation and good eating at the hotel, good fishing, boating, and bathing.” Moreover, the price was “within reach of any N.C.R. employee.” Primitive cottages situated around various lakes also attracted NCR employees. Joe Greers favored Ackerson Lake, near Jackson, Michigan, where he found “plenty of fish” and where cottages could be “secured for ten to fifteen dollars per week.” Greers made sure to tell readers, however, that “this little spot is not a summer resort, no jazz or merry-go-rounds, just one of those beautiful spots that nature blessed Michigan with: a place to get a good work-out at something different than we have an opportunity to do all the year round.” Moreover, since cottages often could accommodate from four to eight people and came equipped “with all the necessary furnishings except linens,” those willing to share cottages could manage an inexpensive vacation.
Areas in other parts of the country sprouted similar sorts of working-class vacation communities. Libby’s Oceanside Camp on the coast of Maine offered camping sites to working-class autotourists while Lake Winnipesaukee in New Hampshire advertised “little rough shacks” at affordable prices. Salisbury Beach, located not far from the Massachusetts mill cities of Lowell and Lawrence, catered to a predominantly working-class clientele and provided vacationers with “fishing-shacks-turned-cottages” as well as a merry-go-round, bumper car rides, and a dance hall.19 “Tent City” on Coronada Beach, California, housed rows of vacationing campers who could either rent tents for $3 to $5 a week, or “bring their own tents and camp free.”20

Most working-class vacationers fashioned inexpensive vacations. Few, for example, could afford the cost of a stay at Mohonk or Newport or Mackinac Island. The numerous camping ventures—both informal camping and fishing expeditions or trips to more formal campgrounds at lakes or seashore—in which large numbers of working-class vacationers indulged kept them out of the haunts of the more comfortable middle class. In fact, working-class campgrounds that encroached too closely on elite or middle-class vacation communities sometimes brought complaints from patrons. On the coast of Maine, for example, the presence of Libby’s Oceanside Camp disturbed the residents of the genteel resort community at nearby York Harbor, who took the campground owner to court to keep him from expanding his facility.21 Autocamping may have initially brought people of different classes together at various campites. But by the 1920s the free municipal campgrounds where working-class vacationers in their “flivvers” might have rubbed up against middle-class autotrippers were beginning to charge fees in the hopes of excluding those who could not afford the price.22

Some sorts of vacationing did bring middle and working-class people together in the same place. The campgrounds of the national parks, for example, attracted both working and middle-class vacationers. Some of the latter no doubt chose to camp, but others had no alternative since the hotels at the national parks could accommodate only a small percentage of the visitors. Of the more than 51,000 tourists to Yellowstone in 1922 only 1,500 slept in hotels.23 The remaining 49,500 certainly included both working and middle-class vacationers.

Evidence suggests that campers in the national park, regardless of their actual social standing, sometimes believed themselves the object of invidious class distinctions. William Gossel maintained that campers got decidedly short shrift compared to the tourists who could afford to patronize the hotels. In his letter to President Taft, Gossel complained that campers in Yellowstone were forced to “turn aside” to make way for the coaches that
brought people to the hotels and had to enter the park through the “unsightly” side road rather than through the “beautiful Roosevelt Arch” through which the hotel coaches passed. Moreover, the campgrounds were “located at a great distance from the points of interest and often in low, damp localities” while the hotels were “situated one-eighth of a mile from the points of interest.”24 Rather than conferring middle-class status on working-class vacationers, camping in the national parks may have diminished some middle-class vacationers’ sense of their own social position.

During the early twentieth century a few large resorts offered sites where vacationers might encounter not only people of a different class but of a different race. Atlantic City was a good example. Atlantic City had, since the 1890s, attracted a diverse clientele: working-class visitors (primarily from Philadelphia) on one-day excursions, along with middle-class and elite vacationers who enjoyed the pleasures of a longer stay at one of the numerous hotels.25 By the 1920s Atlantic City was offering overnight accommodations even to people of limited means. While hotels continued to welcome
both the rich and the middle class, cheaper boarding houses catered to socially and ethnically diverse clienteles. One woman, whose husband worked for the Reading Railroad, explained to an interviewer from the Department of Labor that “when she has had some money ready it has all gone for trips to Atlantic City.” She and her family spent a week there every summer where they “take rooms and she does the cooking and the stores are not near, so she doesn’t find much rest.” Occasionally even an NCR employee mentioned a summer visit to Atlantic City. One, for example, reported that he had found there a “good reasonable-priced hotel . . . that is one block from the boardwalk and one block from the Pennsylvania Depot.”

Resorts like Atlantic City included not only white working-class and immigrant patrons, but African American vacationers as well. African Americans had been a presence at many resorts throughout the nineteenth century, but primarily as workers. Black men, for example, worked as waiters at elite hotels in places like Saratoga, Atlantic City, and Mackinac Island. As early as the 1890s African Americans were also beginning to open boarding houses and hotels for black vacationers at some well-known resorts. By the turn of the century some of these hotels were substantial establishments that catered to a middle-class black clientele. The Hotel Dale in Atlantic City, for example, accommodated as many as 150 guests, boasted the most up-to-date conveniences and amenities, and attracted vacationers from as far away as Texas.

Black vacationers at these resorts shared many of the experiences of middle-class white vacationers. They swam in the surf, strolled on the beach and boardwalk, attended “hops” and dances, enjoyed afternoon teas and euchre parties, played tennis and croquet. But their vacation experiences could also be circumscribed by restrictions of race. A reporter for the *Baltimore Afro-American* interviewed many of the proprietors along the boardwalk at Atlantic City and learned, for example, “that they do not want our people to enter their places.” While such policies focused partly on black hotel and restaurant employees who tried during their free time to enjoy the benefits of the summer resort at which they worked, some animosity was clearly directed at African-American vacationers. In August of 1904, the *New York Times* reported an incident involving Dr. William Crum, the “negro Collector of Customs at Charleston, South Carolina.” Crum and his wife were vacationing at Asbury Park, where one day Crum tried “to hire a wheel chair for his wife for a ride on the boardwalk. Proprietor J. L. Schneider refused to order any of his white lads to push the chair, but said that Dr. Crum might have it if he would wheel his wife himself. Dr. Crum refused in a gentlemanly manner and left.” When the Reverend Matthew Anderson, the African-American president of the Berean School in Philadelphia, bought
a cottage in Atlantic City, many of Philadelphia’s aristocratic families—amongst them the Biddle family—became “vexed.” The cottage was “across from the Biddles’ home.” The *Indianapolis Freeman* reported: “Formerly a Mrs. Burton owned the Anderson cottage. She was ignored by the blue blood colony, and this, they think, is her revenge. William Wanamaker and other rich Philadelphians who finance the Berean School are to be asked to induce the Rev. Mr. Anderson to take his family to some other summer resort.”

Despite such problems, blacks continued to frequent these resorts, building their own hotels, boarding houses, and bathing establishments. Niagara Falls advertised the Hotel Vancouver where blacks could enjoy “first class” appointments at the rate of $2 a day. African Americans vacationed in Newport, Rhode Island, where black-run boarding houses accommodated them. And in 1911 another Hotel Dale opened, this one at Cape May, with claims to be “the finest and most complete hostelry in the United States for the accommodation of our race.” The new hotel advertised a magnificent view “of the harbor and the sea glistening like gems in the sunlight,” electric lights throughout, tennis courts and croquet, private bath houses, suites with baths and long-distance telephone connections, an elegantly furnished dining room, and a “full Abyssinian Orchestra to render afternoon and evening concerts ... daily during the entire season.”

Although various groups participated in many identical forms of summer recreation, this did not spell the beginning of socially or racially integrated vacationing. Rich and poor shared ocean and sand, but they usually repaired to different cottages, hotels, and boarding houses. While some immigrants and African Americans opted for a week at Atlantic City or Cape May or Niagara Falls, others preferred to build and frequent their own, separate vacation communities. The endemic racism of early twentieth-century America motivated African Americans to create vacation places where they could enjoy their leisure without threat of racial confrontation. Rather than visiting a black hotel at a crowded and predominantly white resort, many chose black resorts or boarding houses that were separated or distant from white resort areas. By 1908 a resort for African Americans was growing up at West Baden, Indiana. That year the Jersey European Hotel, a new facility “for colored people,” opened its doors and over the next decade welcomed black vacationers from places like Memphis, Louisville, St. Louis, Chicago, Indianapolis, and Des Moines. In 1923 reputed millionaire Thomas W. Wright was spending $70,000 to build a “new Negro resort” at Shell Island Beach near Wilmington, North Carolina. The *New Pittsburgh Courier* reported that “all businesses and every concession are to be handled by members of the race.” Three years later another group of businessmen were working on a resort at Silver Spring Lake in Warren
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County, New Jersey, about sixty miles from New York City. They planned a hotel, tavern, casino, tennis courts, swimming pools, “sunken gardens and lovers lanes.”

Some of these places succeeded better than others. The resort at West Baden was, by 1916, apparently suffering. A correspondent for the Indianapolis Freeman reported that: “We are not doing so well.’ There are few at the hotels and very little doing in the way of amusement.” Still the early
twentieth century witnessed the beginnings of what would become some enduring black resort communities. Oak Bluffs on Martha’s Vineyard, Highland Beach on the Chesapeake Bay, Sag Harbor on Long Island, American Beach in Florida, and Idlewild in Michigan all began in these decades and survived to serve generations of vacationing African Americans.41

Highland Beach near Annapolis on the Chesapeake Bay attracted its first black families in the 1890s. Frederick Douglass’s son, Charles, built a summer cottage there in 1894 as a place for his family to enjoy the summer free from fear of discrimination. Over the next decades friends and relatives of the Douglasses began to buy real estate and build summer homes. Mary Church Terrell and her husband bought a lot in 1896 and built themselves a summer house in 1915. As early as 1902 Charles T. Bowen opened a nine-bedroom cottage that could be used for “taking in guests.” The Bowen cottage offered tennis courts and the pleasures of the beach and the bay to a number of illustrious members of the black intelligentsia.42

A few African American families—mostly from Boston—bought houses on Martha’s Vineyard at the turn of the twentieth century. During the next decades they were joined by other friends who built small cottages or vacationed at one of two deluxe boarding houses in the community of Oak Bluffs. One of the boarding house keepers, Sadie Shearer, had begun operating a laundry service for white summer residents on the Vineyard in the early 1900s. Within a few years she recognized the potential for a black guest house and converted her laundry into Shearer Cottage—adding rooms and a tennis court. By the 1920s Shearer Cottage attracted prominent African Americans from Boston, Philadelphia, and New York.43

Idlewild in Michigan began in 1915 when the Idlewild Resort Company of Chicago bought twenty-seven hundred acres of land, including Idlewild Lake. Probably the brain child of an enterprising black Chicago real-estate agent, the Idlewild Resort Company published promotional pamphlets and brought prospective buyers—white-collar and professional African Americans, often leaders within their communities—from midwestern cities. Many apparently bought lots and put up small summer cottages, some only “a bit more substantial than tents,” where they could enjoy a week or two of summer vacation.44

Like blacks, Jews also faced exclusion from many vacation places and often chose to build their own resorts. The history of anti-Semitic resort policies may have begun as early as 1877. That summer Joseph Seligman, the well-known and wealthy Jewish banker, arrived at the Grand Union Hotel in Saratoga to learn that the hotel no longer admitted Jews. Seligman had visited the Grand Union for numerous seasons but the new manager of the hotel, Judge Henry Hilton, had instituted a policy of excluding
Jewish patrons. Despite a blistering letter from Seligman to Hilton that appeared in the newspaper, Hilton held to his policy, saying “notwithstanding Moses and all his descendants” he could still do as he wished with private property.

The Seligman–Hilton affair became a cause célèbre. Seligman’s friends boycotted the A.T. Stewart store (which Hilton also managed); Henry Ward Beecher sermonized on behalf of Seligman; Bret Harte wrote a poem about the incident. But Seligman’s exclusion from the Grand Union helped to establish a precedent for other hotels. Adirondack resorts began advertising that “Hebrews need not apply,” and Melville Dewey made the Lake Placid Club off-limits to Jews. During the 1880s some summer resort owners addressed their advertisement: “To Gentiles.”

Whether as a result of the Seligman-Hilton affair or not, by the early twentieth century numerous resorts had instituted anti-Semitic policies. While some wealthy Jews apparently vacationed at places like the Ritz in Atlantic City, many resorts refused to receive them. Mohonk Mountain House, for example, actively discouraged inquiries from potential Jewish guests or from guests with suspicious sounding names. Hotel managers cooperated in informing each other about Jewish patrons who might attempt to crash their resorts. H.C. Philips, secretary to the owner of Mohonk, for example, wrote to the manager of the Chalfonte Hotel in Atlantic City in February of 1916 inquiring about a Mr. H.B. Houseman. Houseman had apparently written from the Chalfonte to inquire about rooms at Mohonk. Philips explained: “From the nature of the application we are just a little bit curious to know how cordially we ought to reply, although from the fact that the gentleman writes from your good house, we are very much inclined to assume that everything is all right.” The manager at Mohonk received the assurance he needed, hearing from his counterpart at the Chalfonte that Mr. and Mrs. Houseman “are both active members of the Christian Science Church. We think you would find them desirable guests.” Each year an update on the “Hebrew problem” appeared in the house manager’s report at Mohonk, usually under the category of “Undesirable Guests.” Not all undesirables were Jews. During the war “Germans or pro-German class” also qualified. Typical was the 1917 report:

Hebrews were few. Wm. W. Cohen, a high-class Hebrew, rather insisted on coming, even after learning that he would probably be unwelcome. It took only three days for him to realize his mistake. George Gravenhorst, on whom we took a chance, may be a Hebrew and has a pronounced accent. He and his wife remained a couple of weeks, and his actions were entirely acceptable. A few Jews crept in on over-night parties, but on the whole the Hebrew question gave no trouble.
Jews, particularly those with anglicized names, found it easier than African Americans to evade discriminatory rules and visit gentile resorts. While some no doubt did, the majority probably preferred to vacation at a place where they would feel welcomed.

As a result, Jews—like blacks—established their own resorts, often in the Catskill Mountains of New York where they could attract New York City’s large Jewish population. Fleischmann’s, one of the earliest, was catering to well-to-do Jews by the 1890s. Novelist Abraham Cahan offered a fictional picture of a place like Fleischmann’s in *The Rise of David Levinsky*. Published in 1917, Cahan’s novel described the Rigi Kulm House—“the largest and most expensive hostelry in the neighborhood.” Populated by families of “cloak-manufacturers, shirt-manufacturers, ladies-waist-manufacturers, cigar-manufacturers, clothiers, furriers, jewelers, leather-goods men, real-estate men, physicians, dentists and lawyers,” the Rigi Kulm attracted an affluent crowd—“ablaze with diamonds, painted cheeks, and bright-colored silks.” The hotel also received some younger, less wealthy people—“salesmen, stenographers, bookkeepers, librarians”—on a two-week holiday.

By the early decades of the twentieth century working-class Jews were also finding vacation places for themselves, primarily at kosher boarding houses in the Catskills. Motivated primarily by the hope that country air and wholesome dairy products would protect them and their children from the “white plague” of tuberculosis, poor working-class Jews found their way to summer boarding houses in the southern Catskills. These places were hardly elaborate resorts. Called *kochalein* (meaning, in Yiddish, cook alone), they were usually dingy farmhouses for which families paid from $50 to $100 a season for a room and kitchen privileges. Writing for *The Survey* magazine in 1923, N.B. Fagin described a typical *kochalein*: “Fifteen women used one kitchen with one small stove. Forty children lived under one roof, occupying, with their mothers, but fifteen dingy pigeonhole rooms, playing and sunning themselves on one narrow porch. There was incessant noise.” Those who came seeking a respite were often sorely disappointed.

Not only were these boarding houses crowded and noisy, some presented significant health threats. As many as 250,000 summer visitors had brought some serious sanitary problems to Ulster and Sullivan counties in New York. The severe overcrowding—sometimes as many as twenty-five to one hundred people crammed into houses built for five or six—made for a not very salubrious environment. Too many boarding house keepers failed to make any effort to upgrade water and sewer systems. By the late 1910s the New York State Department of Health, with the help of the Jewish Agricultural Society, began “a vigorous campaign to clean up ‘the mountains.’” They focused on clean water, disposal of human waste, and keeping flies from contaminating food.
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Mitchell's House, New York, c. 1926. Kosher boarding houses in the Catskills attracted Jewish patrons who hoped to escape the heat of New York City. The large numbers of people living in close quarters often made for a less-than-

restful vacation. (Thanks to Evelyn Distelman for this photograph.)

A very different vacation experience awaited some working-class people—Jews and non-Jews—who had reaped the benefits of union membership. In 1919 Local 25 of the Ladies Waist and Dressmakers' Union of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) purchased what had been the Forest Park Hotel, a resort “for the idle rich,” and turned it into Unity House, a vacation place for union members and their families.53 Located on seven hundred beautiful acres in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania, the facility included twelve spacious houses “grouped about an open square.” Guests enjoyed large, light rooms “equipped with electricity, carpets, curtained wardrobes, sanitary beds, immaculate linen, window screens, shades and other articles of comfort too numerous to mention.”54 The main house offered a central recreation area for meetings and dances, a library and reading room, lovely carpets throughout, and a grand piano. The grounds were apparently equally impressive, with “nooks and groves and thickets abounding.” Visitors could enjoy a beautiful lake, fifty rowboats and canoes, seventy-five bathing houses, a swimming pool, tennis courts, and acres of trails for hiking.55
Forest Park also boasted its own electricity plant, laundry, and “a kitchen so large and sanitary and scientific that one imagines oneself in the 50th century.”

This was neither the first nor the only of the Waist and Dressmakers’ vacation resorts. Two years earlier a smaller and less elaborate Unity House had opened in the Catskills. By 1922 Villa Anita Garibaldi, the Staten Island summer home of the Italian Dress and Waistmakers’ Union, and the Philadelphia Waist and Dressmakers’ Unity House in Orville, Pennsylvania, were also receiving guests. But the Unity House at Forest Park remained the largest, most elaborate, and luxurious of these working-class union resorts. Although originally the property of the female members of Local 25, by the mid-1920s the International had assumed control and welcomed visitors from a variety of other unions as well. Vacationers swam, boated, danced, hiked, sang, slept, bowled, played tennis, and wolfed down huge portions of reputedly wonderful food.

Unity House, however, was about more than recreation. It grew out of the educational work that both the International and specific locals were undertaking during the 1910s. New York’s Local 25 had by 1915 organized Unity Centers in New York City where union workers could congregate for lectures, shop meetings, language courses, and physical education. Unity House was intended not only as a vacation resort, but as a place to continue the union’s educational work and to display and affirm the spirit of unionism. Supporters of Unity House saw in it a way to demonstrate the union’s ability to enhance workers’ lives and the workers’ ability to “own and control a large scale enterprise.”

Unity House purportedly had a significant impact on the workers who vacationed there. According to one visitor, the rest, recreation, and good fellowship of Unity House helped to “make the workers less mean, less selfish, more idealistic.” Hiking at Unity House, for example, was thought to be different from hiking elsewhere, because there vacationers often hiked in groups, singing and reinforcing bonds of community. Those who vacationed at Unity House allegedly left with a renewed belief in the possibilities of collective efforts. The beauty and pleasures of the estate at Forest Park came to represent “a foretaste of what the workingmen and women of all countries will have some day not only during the summer months but also throughout the year.”

Such statements, coming from the pens of Unity House’s promoters, may not have reflected the opinions of all vacationers. But it seems clear that many of those who chose Unity House as a vacation destination expected more than a week of frivolity. Vacationers at Unity House certainly indulged in lighthearted amusements. They sang around campfires, enjoyed
presentations by Yiddish comedians, watched folk dances performed by members of different ethnic groups, and danced to jazz orchestras—sometimes "until the wee small hours of the morning." Entertainment at Unity House, however, also assumed a more serious nature—readings of dramatic poems, recitations from the works of various playwrights, and concerts by classical musicians.64

By the mid-1920s the Unity House program included formal lectures on a variety of topics, some but not all of which related to trade unionism. One visitor reported that "hundreds of our members relaxed on the lawns under the pines overlooking the lake last Tuesday and Wednesday...and listened with great interest to two lectures given by Miss Theresa Wolfson." The topics included "women in the labor movement" and "changing morality."65 During the summer of 1927 the Educational Department offered "several lectures each week on Psychology, Sociology, Economics, Literature, Art, Drama, and affairs of the day."66

Unity House, in some ways, resembled Chautauqua. Like the middle-class Methodist-inspired educational resort, Unity House invested leisure with purpose. Indeed, promoters maintained that Unity House served a spiritual as well as an educational and recreational mission. It functioned to combine leisure with self-improvement, drawing on a working-class tradition that had since the early nineteenth century sought to limit work hours so that industrial laborers could engage in education and study. Yet, different from Chautauqua, Unity House seemed little concerned with protecting vacationers from the moral temptations of other vacation places. What the Unity House experiment did sustain, however, was the hope that workers would cease to contribute their hard-earned dollars to the coffers of capitalist resort owners.

Workers, both immigrant and native born, thus established a range of vacation alternatives during the early twentieth century. The vast majority either camped, rented inexpensive tents or cottages at a nearby lake or at the seashore, or repaired to some cheap country boarding house. Those with cars could expand their alternatives—either a trip to a less populated and more attractive camping spot or a sightseeing adventure to a city or a national park. Some working-class vacationers opted for trying to find a low-priced hotel or boarding house at a large resort, where they could combine the enjoyment of various commercial amusements with the pleasures of ocean or lake. Others enjoyed a vacation at a union-run resort or camp. Since money determined where and how working-class people vacationed, few shared the same vacation places with elite or middle-class vacationers. Ethnicity complicated the choice for some poor people. Working-class Jews, for example, faced not only financial restrictions, but cultural ones as well.
Some were self-imposed, as many Jews required vacation places that served kosher food. But Jewish vacationers also confronted anti-Semitic policies of growing numbers of gentile resorts.

Race as well as class and ethnicity influenced vacation patterns. Black men and women found their possibilities circumscribed not only by hotels that would not serve them, but by railroads that relegated them to Jim Crow cars. Still, African Americans established their own hotels and boarding houses at major American resorts. The presence of a local black community at many such places—often composed of waiters and other hotel employees—may have made other institutions, such as churches, available for African-American visitors. Despite the always real possibility of racial confrontation, some blacks nevertheless continued to frequent these resorts. Others chose to create their own, separate vacation communities—enclaves where they could relax amongst family and friends.

In general, segregation rather than integration characterized the experience of most early twentieth century vacationers—regardless of race, class, or ethnicity. Vacationing thus operated somewhat differently from other forms of commercial leisure. Historian David Nasaw has examined the socially integrative role of urban public amusements in the early twentieth century. Nasaw suggests that city dwellers whose home and work lives remained segregated by class and ethnicity were nevertheless “beginning to share a common commercial culture and public amusement sites, where social solidarities were emphasized and distinctions muted.” Accessible to a broad cross section of the white population (for blacks remained excluded), urban public amusements were, according to Nasaw, where “the city’s peoples came together to have a good time in public.” Vacationing, in contrast, reinforced rather than diminished social distinctions.

Vacationing did, however, help to create a collective cultural experience that crossed class and racial lines. People of diverse origins joined in the increasingly familiar experience of “being on vacation.” This experience was in certain respects more inclusive than that of public urban amusements because it reached not only members of the white working class, but middle-class African Americans as well. The entire American public did not, of course, enjoy a yearly vacation, but a significant and growing cross section of American men and women shared the expectation that they could or should have the privilege. During the early decades of the twentieth century vacationing began to become part of the American mainstream, something in which increasing numbers of people—regardless of class, race, or ethnic origin—participated.

Moreover, people of different races and classes came to share many of the same sorts of vacation experiences and to hear the same cultural messages and instructions about vacationing. Rich and poor alike, for example,
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strolled the boardwalk at Atlantic City and frolicked in the surf at Cape
May, even though the well-off no doubt enjoyed more comfortable accom-
modations. Middle-class Protestants and working-class union members
(many but not all of them Jews) shared the experience of self-improvement
vacations at Chautauqua and Unity House respectively. While Unity House
vacationers were certainly trying to disrupt rather than promote class har-
mony, they nevertheless participated in the same sort of cultural experience
that many middle-class Protestant vacationers at Chautauqua enjoyed.

An examination of white, middle-class vacation patterns in the early
decades of the twentieth century reveals a variety of ways in which people
across classes were coming to share similar vacation experiences. Like their
African American and working-class counterparts, the white middle class
was busy creating and expanding their own homogenous, summer commu-
nities. Since the nineteenth century the elite had built summer cottages at a
variety of resorts. During the early twentieth century more middle-class
vacationers chose to build or buy modest summer vacation places where
their families could enjoy domestic rather than hotel life along lakeside or
seashore. And while white middle-class men and women had no desire to
welcome black, ethnic, or white working-class vacationers into their sum-
mer communities, the experience of vacationing in a homogenous summer
neighborhood—whether the middle-class African-American community at
Oak Bluffs, the white-working class autocamp around Libby’s Ocean
Camp, or the white middle-class retreat at York Harbor—crossed racial and
class lines.

By the early decades of the twentieth century vacationers across the
social spectrum were also sharing similar vacation problems. White middle-
class vacationers increasingly encountered inconveniences and difficulties
similar to those that afflicted their less privileged counterparts. Even as
working-class people were coming to participate in what had once been the
middle-class experience of vacationing, middle-class vacationers faced situ-
sations that heretofore had troubled primarily people with lesser means.

Overcrowding, for example, plagued vacation places from the eastern
seashore to the national parks of the West and affected the quality of mid-
class vacations—usually for the worse. Max Sieperman of New York
City, for example, visited Mt. Rainier National Park in July of 1920 where
he found the public toilets at the Paradise Inn in “deplorable condition.”
Sieperman was not a camper, but somebody who could afford the price of
the hotel.69 The numbers of people visiting national parks not only over-
taxed toilet facilities, but sleeping and travel accommodations as well. E. E.
Sykes, a wholesale lumber dealer from New Orleans, complained that the
Harvey Company, which ran the transportation facilities in Grand Canyon,
put him into a seven-year-old Pierce Arrow for a drive around the rim. Dur-
ing the trip the axle broke, the wheel fell off, and only the skill of the driver saved the passengers from injury or death. The Harvey Company responded that they were using anything "which would run on four wheels" to accommodate the large crush of people.  

Even more troubling were some of the sleeping arrangements. A.H. Thompson, the pastor of the First Methodist Episcopal Church in Vancouver, described the accommodations at Mt. Rainier as "positively indecent":

People are placed in separate compartments or bungalow tents, which are separated only by a piece of canvas. No provision is made to separate the sexes. So that it often appears that a girl or girls are on one side, and a strange man on the other. This is an invitation to immorality.

Not only were visitors forced to share their tents with strangers, but the bed coverings were "too narrow to cover two. Some had no blankets at all, and the night freezing cold." As a result, he and his wife "were compelled to lie rigidly in one position all night. If either moved the other was without cover." Middle-class people who could afford comforts were finding themselves forced to accept less than desirable accommodations.

The growing numbers of middle-class vacationers brought problems not only to national parks, but to an array of resorts and vacation communities. Over taxed dining rooms caused occasional outbreaks of food poisoning. As many as one hundred guests fell sick on one occasion from ptomaine poisoning at the upscale Mohonk Mountain House, the result of spoiled cream pie. Mohonk guests complained throughout the 1910s and 1920s about bed bugs, red ants, roaches, mice, and even rats—problems with which working-class people were all too familiar. If guests at Mohonk with its nearly fifty-year history of catering to the respectable middle and upper middle class encountered such problems, there is little reason to doubt that vacationers at other resorts—both working and middle class—faced similar ones.

Even more serious was the increasing frequency with which even white middle-class vacationers found themselves in places with an unsafe water supply and inadequate sewer and garbage disposal. Rich and poor people alike needed water and toilets. And too many people of whatever social class could overtax primitive sewer systems. As a result, vacation places that were once touted as the cure for illness became, instead, potential breeding grounds for disease. Articles in newspapers and magazines warned of the numerous health problems that threatened vacationers. Water contaminated by sewage and garbage posed the real possibility of typhoid. In 1924 the American Journal of Public Health reported that repeated complaints "about nuisances at resort places" had prompted the state of Michigan to
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investigate. A traveling laboratory visited seventy-two of the state’s resorts and found that only 58 percent had a safe water supply, 46 percent offered adequate sewage disposal, and 42 percent discarded garbage in a safe and healthful manner. The report concluded: “High rates are charged and the front porch, lobby and dining room are made as attractive as possible. In sanitary features . . . the place often falls short. The water supply is frequently from a well, poorly situated; toilet plumbing is antiquated and inadequate, while sewage disposal is neglected. Garbage is improperly handled. The kitchen and food storage facilities are dirty.”73 Increasingly both newspapers and magazines warned vacationers that the cities they had just abandoned—often in search of health—may well have provided more healthful environments than the summer resorts to which they had flocked.

The numbers of people who vacationed close to cities found different sorts of health problems. The water and beaches near places like New York were, by the 1920s, foul with urban refuse. Swimmers at Long Island beaches might encounter not only a little extra seaweed or an occasional beer bottle. B.C. Myers wrote a letter to the editor of the New York Times complaining about both beach and water pollution at Long Beach on Long Island:

It is an uncanny feeling to have a dead body of a dog, sheep, chicken or cat roll against one’s leg while in the surf, but a more serious blow to one’s nerves to get a crack on the head from a bottle in the crest of a wave, and still more painful to cut one’s feet, while walking to and from the surf, and this is a daily occurrence in our community.74

People at beaches along Long Island, Fire Island, and New Jersey confronted “thousands of bottles, boxes, barrels, broken furniture of every description, . . . [and] a mass of general garbage that smells to heaven.”75

While nineteenth-century middle-class vacationers certainly faced their share of uncomfortable hotel rooms, dirty dining facilities, and substandard country boarding houses, the growing numbers of vacationers in the early twentieth century may well have exacerbated such problems even at places that had earlier offered relatively satisfactory services. Being middle class did not, necessarily, guarantee a pleasant, hygienic, or successful vacation. The difficulties and disappointment of vacations, like the pleasures, were crossing class lines.

What about the pleasures? Vacationers of all classes enjoyed many of the same diversions: the excitement at leaving home, the adventure of new places and sights, sunny beaches, bracing surf, cool breezes, mountain air. But they also, no doubt, shared some of the less innocent forms of recreation and amusement.
In the late nineteenth century, working-class codes of conduct allowed for considerably more latitude than did those of the middle class. An urban working-class culture of young people enjoyed dance halls and clubs, alcohol, and frequent encounters with members of the opposite sex.\textsuperscript{76} While middle-class norms discouraged all such behavior, fashionable summer resorts throughout the late nineteenth century offered places where middle-class people began to let down their hair.\textsuperscript{77} Twentieth-century middle-class vacationers not only continued this tradition, but pushed even farther at the boundaries of the acceptable.

Flora Ward, for example, encountered just such vacationers during her stay at Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel in Yellowstone National Park. In July of 1909 she wrote in a letter of complaint: “Last night there was held a drunken carousal of both men and women on the 4th floor of this hotel.”\textsuperscript{78} The problem of alcohol—whether or not it should be consumed and in what quantities—remained a source of contention for resort owners, hotelkeepers, residents, and guests. Asbury Park, New Jersey, had long been dry—the result, in part, of the efforts of its founder James Bradley and of its contiguity to the Methodist campground at Ocean Grove. But by 1905 hotel owners and cafe proprietors were fighting with residents over whether to allow the sale of liquor. The manager of one of the hotels explained that “Asbury Park has progressed beyond the point of being a backwoods settlement and the people who come here demand the same liberties they enjoy in other places.” Even Bradley had altered his once firm opposition to alcohol. Trying to prohibit vacationers from drinking had, apparently, become increasingly difficult, and regulating the sale of alcohol seemed a better solution. “Conditions in Asbury Park have changed,” Bradley conceded, “and what was good then is not so good now.”\textsuperscript{79}

Mohonk Mountain House, known for its rules prohibiting liquor, dancing, card playing, or traffic in or out on the Sabbath, began by the 1910s to encounter problems with the behavior of some guests. Willie Martin, who worked as a telegraph operator at Mohonk in 1912 and 1913, recalled an incident when a Mr. Hoe, a close friend of proprietor (and strict teetotaler) Albert Smiley, arrived for his vacation: “It was early June and rather cool and when Mr. Hoe’s top coat was handled, a pint bottle of whiskey fell out of the pocket and broke on the stone floor.” Smiley asked his friend: “Robert, what was that bottle that thee had in thy pocket?” Hoe responded: “Albert, that was my cough medicine.”\textsuperscript{80}

Other visitors at Mohonk were more successful at sneaking contraband liquor into their rooms. The 1917 annual report of the hotel manager described problems with the conduct of some guests: “It was said that a crowd of young men were indulging in vile talk, cigarettes and liquor, in room 427 (Thomas Crawford) and 431 (F.W. Hamilton).” The hotel staff
did “a good deal of midnight watching and room investigations” but found “nothing incriminating beyond the discovery in young Crawford’s room of some empty liquor bottles.” By the 1910s, the management at Mohonk no longer considered empty liquor bottles very serious. Guests at Mohonk engaged in other forbidden activities as well. In 1921 the house manager reported that “card playing in the public rooms happened a few times,” and that “dancing was formally reported but once, but happened a few times in the playroom.” It was obviously becoming difficult for Mohonk to enforce the rules that had once made it a model Christian resort.

If twentieth-century resort-goers continued to drink, they also continued to gamble. But gambling, which had engaged primarily men in the nineteenth century, had become—at least at some resorts—entertainment for women as well. At Narragansett Pier, Rhode Island, for example, the police raided a “sumptuously furnished gambling den” in August of 1910 where they found “about thirty or thirty-five persons..., half of them being women in evening gowns.” These were not ladies of the night. The raiders “recognized several women whose presence, if the names were mentioned, would shock the world of society in New York and Philadelphia.” The next day numerous “prominent matrons, personally or through emissaries” contacted the constable and “beseeched” him not to “give out their names.”

Not all of the women worried about their reputations. One of the prominent matrons caught in the raid, a Mrs. John Hanan, declared that “the whole affair is more or less a joke, and [I] am treating it as such.... The Narragansett Club is like any other well-regulated club, like that in Palm Beach, for instance, or in other places where fashionable people gather.... I have been all over the country and it’s just the same everywhere as it is here. There is no harm in it.” Others agreed, explaining that summer vacationers played only “for small stakes, using it as an after-dinner diversion and not for the gain to be had.”

Letting down one’s hair and burning the candle at both ends had traditionally been associated with leisure pursuits of the working class. These were not cultural standards to which the middle class was supposed to aspire. During the early twentieth century the behavior of middle-class vacationers continued to push norms of respectability in a more permissive direction. And, increasingly, cultural critics seemed to relax their warnings about the moral perils associated with certain forms of vacationing—specifically, resort vacationing. Even as resort-goers continued to drink, gamble, and enjoy the opposite sex (as well as engaging in more innocent forms of sport and play), the warnings about the perils of resort life diminished significantly. Occasional exposes of illegal gambling at Saratoga hit the pages of the New York Times, but in general the popular press seemed more worried about various health hazards—germs, mosquitoes, sunburn, and conta-
minated water—than about virtue and propriety. By 1927 etiquette expert Anna Steese Richardson informed readers of Woman's Home Companion that it was “now quite the usual thing for a party of girls to go unchaperoned to a summer resort.” She advised such “girls” not how to avoid sexual dangers, but how to choose the right resort, how to select the right clothes, and how to master the rules for tipping. As resorts grew in number and popularity, resort vacationing no longer seemed to pose such a serious moral threat. Middle-class vacationers increasingly enjoyed amusements that once would have jeopardized their claims to middle-class status and respectability.

Cross-class sharing of vacation experiences, if not vacation sites, was nowhere more evident than in the growth in popularity of camping among the middle class. As increasing numbers of working-class vacationers turned to camping as their most economically feasible alternative, large numbers of middle-class people embraced camping for other reasons as well. Numerous mass market magazines ran vacation essay contests during the summer months and offered cash prizes and publication for the best vacation articles and essays. Summer issues of magazines like The Independent, Women's Home Companion, Ladies Home Journal, and Colliers published not only the one or two prize-winning stories, but several others that offered personal accounts of varied sorts of vacations. By far the most frequent were those that described camping vacations. Indeed, readers of mass market magazines might have assumed (incorrectly) that vacationers had rejected resorts or touring vacations and replaced them with an abundant variety of outdoor adventures.

Some of these camping experiences mirrored the ones that nineteenth-century campers had enjoyed, specifically the practice of traveling by rail or horse cart until finding the most opportune spot, pitching camp, and enjoying the beauties of nature and life in the outdoors. Such camps functioned somewhat like summer cottages—only at a fraction of the cost and with more exposure to nature and the elements. Ruth Harger of Abilene, Kansas, for example, described spending her eight-week vacation camping with eleven other people “On a Mountain Shelf” in western Colorado. They pitched three sleeping tents, one cook tent, and “a dining-room ‘fly,’ which sheltered [their] long table very well in sunny weather.” The cost of this eight-week adventure was “about $32 per person, not including railroad fare.” And the group returned home “in good spirits, with vigorous health and in splendid condition.”

Throughout the early twentieth century camping came to encompass an increasingly varied range of experiences—some of them different from what nineteenth-century campers had enjoyed. Specifically, middle-class vacationers in the early twentieth century, like their working-class counterparts, engaged in peripatetic forms of camping. During the nineteenth cen-
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tury only the hardiest and most adventuresome of campers had, with the help of guides, traveled through woods and forests, setting up camps each night and continuing to travel the next day. But in the early twentieth century growing numbers of campers expressed an interest in “gypsying”—a less strenuous if still rambling form of camping.

The automobile was partly responsible. Some of the first automobile owners—people with considerable means—found that cars could serve as portable vacation homes. Despite the problems of bad roads and unreliable machines, many vacationers looked to autocamping as a way to simplify their vacation. They also viewed autocamping as a new sort of adventure and as a welcome alternative to the boredom and restraints of Victorian resorts. Keat Hodyer, a resident of New Brunswick, Canada, for example, wrote to The Independent describing his “Vacation in a Portable Lodging House.” He explained that the goal of his vacation was “to lead ‘the simple life’; to be independent of hotels and boarding houses as much as possible; see interesting parts of the country off the usual track of sightseers; get away when we wanted to from the people and the nerve-racking noise.” In an automobile customized for that purpose—windows could be raised and lowered, screens installed against mosquitos, and seats converted to beds—the Hodyters drove along at their leisure, provisioning themselves by fishing and hunting along the way, buying chickens from an occasional farmer, and stopping for “one substantial meal each day at a restaurant or hotel, if we happened to be near such.” For Hodyer and his wife, “the fashionable seaside and mountain resorts, with their round of social frivolity—just a repetition of city life” held no attraction; rather, for them, autocamping proved “an ideal way to spend a vacation.”

Gypsying did not require a car. A horse and wagon could achieve the same end, and did for many campers. Other vacationers used various sorts of boats—canoes, houseboats, canal boats, small motorboats—on their camping ventures. George Walsh, for example, described his “motorboat vacation” for Country Life in America in 1910. He and two friends bought a motor boat (costing each of them $65) that they sold for nearly that amount when their two-week vacation was over. They used the boat to get from New York to Lake Hopatong in New Jersey, where they “negotiated with a landowner for camping privileges at $5 a season. This included firewood to be gathered nearby, water from a neighboring well, and such other little odds and ends of things as [they] might pick up.” Their vacation afforded them the best of both possible worlds—the pleasures and healthful benefits of being in the outdoors, and the resort-like “attractions” around Lake Hopatong, including “dancing pavilions, music, and merry-go-round thrown in.”Mary Melvin of Baltimore recommended a different sort of boating trip. She and her mother spent a “delightful two weeks” camping and boat-
ing on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal during the summer of 1911. Melvin described their vacation as “a pleasant trip with just enough of the rough in it... Cool springs along the way will refresh your thirst, fresh milk and other provisions purchased at the lock-houses will rest you after long tramps, generous hospitality will be repaid to you by the canal people for all your unpatronizing courtesy. You may fish, sleep out of doors and breathe good pure air at all times.”91 Life in the outdoors brought neither fear nor danger. Melvin and her mother apparently felt entirely safe on their vacation.

Other campers relied on their feet. Tramping was perhaps the most strenuous form of camping, requiring campers to carry provisions on their backs. In the nineteenth century this would have been a form of camping that only men would have attempted. But by the 1910s tramping was becoming popular for women and men alike. In 1910 Eva Foye kept a diary describing a tramping and camping trip she and three other women took in Yosemite. They included no men in their party, but escaped some of the heavy carrying by putting their packs on stage coaches that happened by, collecting them at a convenient stop along their route.92

Camping afforded these twentieth-century middle-class vacationers a variety of pleasures. Whether rambling or staying put, camping provided release from the problems, boredom, and restraint of hotel or boarding houses. And, as these magazine articles continued to point out, camping was cheap. An economical vacationer could buy a tent for the “price of a week’s board at a summer resort, and the tent [would] last many years.” Even those who could afford neither tent nor travel money could still find ways to camp—even if it meant just moving outside. People camped in their own back yards, on porch hammocks, on remote quarters of their farm, and even on the roof of “a three-story store.”93

The large number of camping stories that appeared in mass market magazines reveals more than the popularity of camping vacations. Like the businessmen who encouraged their workers to take camping vacations, the editors who printed camping stories were promoting camping over other sorts of vacations. Camping, these numerous stories counseled, would yield untold advantages. It promised health. Not only would fresh air and sunshine invigorate bodies, but contemplation of nature would refurbish souls and lift spirits.94 Another important “advantage,” the press seemed to suggest, was that camping required work.

The camping stories that filled mass market magazines often detailed the sorts of work in which campers engaged. Camping vacations—regardless of the class of the vacationer—were usually not vacations spent in idleness. Campers needed to find and prepare food, plot routes, set up tents, wash their clothes in the rivers, chop wood, build fires. Twentieth-century middle-class campers sounded much like their nineteenth-century counterparts in
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Ladies of an Idaho camping party washing clothes, c. 1918–1920. Camping required work, and some vacationers suggested such work was fun. (Library of Congress, Otto M. Jones Collection, J731-41-b.)

celebrating the “fun” that such work provided. Ruth Harger, who spent eight weeks with eleven other campers in the mountains of western Colorado in 1910, explained: “In our camp each had his day’s duties—and no more. . . . It would have astonished some society friends to have seen us, barefooted, cleaning linen at the river—but we played we were French peasants, and what fun it was!” Not only vacations spent out-of-doors, but those that demanded some physical labor, these stories suggested, were optimal ways to maximize enjoyment and health.
Mass market magazines offered an even less subtle endorsement of the advantages of combining work and vacationing. The vacation essay contests that many of these magazines ran received the largest number of stories from people who camped. But stories and essays about work ran a close second. Indeed, according to the letters and articles sent from readers, large numbers of early twentieth-century women and men spent their vacations working.

The sort of work varied. High on the list was the decision to do some sort of agricultural work—picking fruit, haying, maple sugaring, helping on a farm. A young female office worker from Minneapolis, for example, explained in her letter to Woman’s Home Companion that she had “no money in my pocket . . . and doctor’s instructions to spend two months out of doors.” So she resigned her office position, took a job picking berries on a farm “in the beautiful region of summer homes and small farms around Lake Minnetonka,” and persuaded her sister to join her. The two remained two months, gained twenty pounds, and returned to Minneapolis “brown and strong with fifty dollars clear apiece.”96 Two other sisters, musicians rather than clerks, described a similar sort of “vacation,” but they picked apricots rather than berries.97 And when James H. Hoadley of New York City decided to vacation in March, rather than during the summer, he set out to help with the maple sugaring back at his boyhood home: “There followed such a month of joy and healthfulness in the open woods, gathering sap, cutting wood and keeping up the fires, boiling the sweet liquid to amber syrup, and making some of it into cakes of delicious sugar, as cannot be described.”98

Although most of these articles and essays came from the pens of middle-class vacationers, some were purportedly written by working-class men and women. One, called “A Factory’s Girls’ Vacation,” not only won first prize in the vacation essay contest of The Independent, but was apparently good enough for The Literary Digest to reprint a few weeks later. The “factory girl” had only one day, the Fourth of July, for her vacation. Moreover, she could not afford, even for that one day, carfare out of the city. Her roommate suggested that by spending the day picking strawberries they could earn the necessary carfare plus a little extra and enjoy a “vacation” at the same time. Bright and early they boarded the train and by eight o’clock they were picking berries in Mr. T’s berry patch: “We worked hard all morning, but work under such circumstances is a pleasure; although we did get somewhat stiff getting up and down so often.” At the end of the day they had each earned about a dollar, plus as many berries as they could eat or carry, and returned home “well pleased with the day’s vacation.”99

A similar story won first prize in a Woman’s Home Companion contest the following year, this time written by a working-class immigrant boy from
Germany, who, on the suggestion of a "lady at the Boy's club," decided to take a vacation picking berries on a farm. His vacation lasted three weeks, not just one day. He, too, complained at first about stiffness from the stooping, "but soon I felt all right." Not only did he earn a dollar a day, but he spent evenings swimming, fishing, or playing ball. He concluded that "work in the country is a vacation. I like it. I can make something of myself instead of bumbling around the streets and smoking and going to moving picture shows."100

Despite the didactic tone, these working-class narratives differed little from the essays and stories submitted by middle-class vacationers. Take, for example, an article called "A Haying Vacation," sent to The Independent by the Reverend Lincoln Long of Martanville, New York. Leaving "a young minister in charge of my church," Long put on "workmen's clothes" and set off "on foot to hunt up a 'job in haying,'" Three weeks' work on a farm earned him not only $26.25, but, more importantly, enormous pleasure and benefit: "I had a fine vacation. Up at four thirty, milk, eat breakfast, grind scythes and... mow by hand or with machine, rake, 'bunch up,' 'draw in', 'mow away'—that was the daily program. My nerves were rested, my muscles became hardened, my skin was browned and I was a new man. I came back to my work with vigor and enthusiasm..."101

The previous month Colliers had run a similar set of stories—also the result of readers' responses to the magazine's request for "the best short account of a vacation experience." The editors claimed that they had received fifteen hundred manuscripts, and first prize went to Frederick Brush for his story called, interestingly, "The Hayin'." Brush returned to the farm where he had been raised and decided to help an old friend who needed extra hands for the haying. The work was hard: "Unused tendons creaked in their slots. Blisters—blisters?—a spot without them became notable." But slowly, "the tide of vitality turned." He rediscovered his "boyish sleep, appetite, and afternoon staying power... I got to look back on the man I had been as a head, a few clinkered organs and a heavy load." But the best part, he maintained, was the spiritual and intellectual rebirth: "Certain problems seemed to solve automatically and life lined out clearly for the coming year. The most effective thinking of years was done on that mowing machine." Farm work, he discovered, was the perfect vacation for city people: "Not always to do hayings or dig ditches, but to do something, preferably productive, with the hands, close alongside of plain men."102

The sorts of work in which such vacationers engaged varied considerably. School teachers and clerks took vacations working as waitresses, cooks, baggage boys, and chambermaids at camps, ranches, and summer hotels. The benefits of fresh air, lovely scenery, and fine weather allegedly offered sufficient compensation for the hard work that such a "vacation"
entailed. Other vacationers devised a variety of ingenious ways of combining income-producing labor with vacationing. L. D. Clarke claimed he was tired of his usual vacation routine—a month at a resort from which he returned “so grouchy that the entire office force hated to see me coming.” He decided he had no desire “to sit on any shaded veranda for four weeks, nor catch fish where no fish had ever been.” He wanted to travel, but did not have sufficient funds. The answer was to be a traveling sales representative for a publishing firm. Although he found the work “somewhat hard at first,” in the end he enjoyed “a fine vacation” that made money rather than costing money: “It gave me the opportunity . . . to be out of doors, and it was wonderful, the number of fine people I met. I saw many of the places I had wanted to see, and next vacation I’m going to do the same thing, in new fields, and see some more places.”

While most of these stories and articles described ways of enjoying vacations by combining them with work, there were some that entirely erased leisure from the experience. Instead work itself became a vacation, as long as the work differed from one’s usual routine. For example, William C. Wilson, a clerk for a manufacturing firm, decided to spend his two-week vacation from the office working in the mill itself. The work was, he said, “thoroughly strenuous” manual labor, but “everything was so different from the routine to which I had been accustomed that the work was fun.” Hoping to become acquainted with all aspects of the business, Wilson expected his vacation to make him a more valuable employee. He concluded that “the most restful thing in the world, particularly for people who deserve a rest, is just to tackle a different kind of work.” Wilson required none of the compensations that other working vacationers mentioned—time for an occasional swim in the lake, change of location, the possibility of sightseeing in a new part of the country, meeting and enjoying the company of fellow “working vacationers.” For him, work itself had become a vacation. Indeed, this vacation was, he claimed, “the very best vacation I ever had.”

These stories echo a number of similar themes. Work rather than play was the key to real enjoyment and benefit. True recreation could be found not in tennis, ocean bathing, bowling, and dancing, but in the performance of hard, physical, outdoor labor. Moreover, it mattered little whether the vacationer were male or female, middle or working-class. A vacation spent doing agricultural work would, these stories and essays suggested, bring innumerable advantages. Working on a farm meant exchanging the city—a potentially unhealthful place both morally and physically—for the beneficent countryside. Both “haying” stories implied that for middle-class men, such a vacation served as well to reaffirm manliness in the face of occupations that demanded little in the way of bodily vigor or strength. The minister and the office worker could prove that they were as strong and able as the farmhand.
For working-class people, these stories posed working vacations as potential tools for advancement and upward mobility. And for all vacationers, time spent doing agricultural labor promised health and pleasures.

The vacation contest stories raise, of course, a number of questions and problems. Were these authentic accounts of people’s vacations or were they the fabrications of writers and editors? Probably both. Some were, doubtless, fabrications. The same Frederick Brush who won first prize for his story, “The Hayin’,” in 1909 won first prize again the following year for his story about gypsying in a horse and cart. Brush may, of course, have actually taken both these vacations, but he also knew how to write the sort of stories that won first prize. Articles like Brush’s clearly bear the stamp of the professional writer—lively prose, engaging humor, didactic conclusion. But even these often differed little in content (although considerably in style) from those straightforward and probably genuine descriptions of readers’ vacations.

Do these articles offer evidence of how people spent their vacations or evidence of the cultural message that editors hoped to send to readers? Again, I would suggest both. Editors obviously printed what resonated with their readers. The range and variety of these stories—as well as the frequency with which they appeared in magazines—suggest that people along the social spectrum were familiar with working vacations. That the majority of these stories came from middle-class readers is not surprising, for only people far removed from demands of daily manual labor could have made arduous physical work into a vacation. By the early twentieth century middle-class men and women, like their working-class counterparts, were coming up with imaginative and innovative forms of vacationing. Despite the explosive growth of vacationing throughout the late nineteenth century, the cost of a vacation still could strain a middle-class budget. As a result, some people apparently sought either cheap vacations (hence the large numbers of articles about inexpensive camping vacations) or ingenious ways to combine vacationing with some income-producing work. Since vacationing had by the early twentieth century become almost a cultural imperative for the middle class, some financially strapped middle-class people looked to creative means of paying for a vacation. Those without the necessary funds fashioned “working vacations,” which they then claimed to enjoy immensely.

At the same time, these vacation stories offered a powerful cultural directive to readers: vacationers should remain, in some ways, connected to the world of work. The effort to link work and vacationing had throughout the last half of the nineteenth century influenced not only the vacation patterns of the middle class, but their attitudes about vacations. In the twentieth century the nature of the vacationing public began to change, but the lesson
remained the same. Middle and working-class vacationers alike became the object of a similar, ambivalent message about both the benefits and the potential pitfalls of time away from work.

Vacations, increasing numbers of people agreed, were a good thing. They brought health, restoration, and spiritual peace. Most importantly, they returned people refreshed and renewed to the workplace. The belief that vacations would produce better workers took on increasing importance in the early twentieth century. It helped both to persuade some progressive businessmen to extend vacations to their factory workers and to calm middle-class trepidations about the risks of extended periods of leisure. As a 1922 article in Colliers' put it: "You'll hoe your row better if you stop to rest once in a while." The author quickly, however, offered the following caveat: "Only, of course, it's hard each time just when you first start at it again."107

Here was the rub. Vacations, reputed wisdom held, would make better workers.108 But lingering doubts remained that vacations might, instead, spoil workers. While the stakes may have seemed higher as the vacationing public came to include more working-class people, the message was not class-specific. Indeed, it mattered little from which class the potential vacationer came. A vacation spent camping or having, rather than relaxing or, worse, debauching, might well have made it a little less difficult for a member of any social class to "start at it again." During these decades middle and working-class vacationers not only began to share many of the same sorts of vacation experiences, they also heard the same warnings about the importance of keeping themselves somehow connected to work.

The history of vacationing in the early twentieth century reveals that, when it came to leisure, ideas changed more slowly than did behavior. As the multitudes began to enjoy an array of vacation pleasures, the public discussion about vacations reflected the persistent and continuing American suspicion of time spent away from work. Searching for ways to accommodate new behavior to traditional values, keepers of the public conscience offered the vacationing public an equivocal message—attempting to reinforce the importance of work in a culture in which the opportunity for and the desire to vacation were becoming widespread.