

Main street amusements: movies and commercial entertainment in a southern city, 1896-1930.

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Main street amusements: movies and commercial entertainment in a southern city, 1896-1930.

Author(s) : [Waller, G. A.](#)

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Abstract : This publication views the history of film and commercial entertainment in the USA during the silent era from the bottom up. It is concerned with exhibitor programming strategies, ticket prices and seating arrangements, promotional efforts and attempts at legitimation, reform campaigns and moviegoing habits from

perspective. Focusing on the history of silent film and other leisure time activities in a small biracial city of Lexington, Kentucky, it traces both black and white Lexingtonians' reactions to the local premiere of moving pictures and shows how the new medium competed with tent shows, amusement parks, and skating rinks. Surveying local movie and vaudeville theatres from 1906-16, reform efforts and protests that concerned theatre safety codes, Sunday film showings, censorship, and notably, the highly controversial screening of *The Birth of the Nation* are all examined. Providing both black and white civic and church responses to these developments, the study demonstrated that the emergence of movies fostered the rise of Lexington's contradictory self-image as both a cosmopolitan centre and a guardian of traditional southern values. It is concluded that, although they were greeted at times with suspicion and contempt, movies gradually won the hearts of Lexingtonians because movie owners convinced the public that the movies' promise of pleasure rested safely within the bounds of middle class propriety.

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