



BROWSE



Crowds and Leisure: Thinking Comparatively Across the 20th Century

Gary S. Cross

Journal of Social History

Oxford University Press

Volume 39, Number 3, Spring 2006

pp. 631-650

10.1353/jsh.2006.0003

ARTICLE

[View Citation](#)

Abstract

Comparative studies of the uses and changes of free time have been relatively rare in social history, especially in the 20th century. By reflecting on some of the ideas and findings generated by a new study that John Walton and Gary Cross conducted concerning the changes in the meanings and behaviors of playful crowds in the U.S. and Britain across the 20th century at Coney Island, Blackpool, Disneyland, and the Beamish Museum, this paper raises some of the possibilities and difficulties of doing a comparative social history of 20th century pleasure crowds. National and other differences will be considered in explaining why the Blackpool resort area survived much social change in the 20th century and Coney Island did not, as well as how Disneyland and the heritage site of Beamish reflected differing adaptations to middle class crowd and aesthetic sensibilities.

CROWDS AND LEISURE: THINKING COMPARATIVELY ACROSS THE 20TH CENTURY

By Gary Cross

Pennsylvania State University

The not-so-new social history movement that emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s was strongly identified with the first industrialization and its social consequences. Despite the fact that the 20th century is now history, social historians have been slow to develop conceptual frameworks for and empirical studies of distinct trends in that century. In part, of course, this reflects the intellectual conservatism in the training of historians (who all-too-often are copies of their advisors) and the fact that 20th century historiography remains primarily political and military due to the impact of the two world wars. But there remains a curious lack of interest in broader social trends that span the entire century. And, even today, despite all the changes of the last twenty years, few students would be encouraged to do the equivalent of what I did when I wrote in 1966 a term paper on Stalin's purge of music in 1948 for the European survey course.

Among the many social trends that this intellectual conservatism has obscured is the expansion and transformation of leisure in the long (uneven and inequitable) trend toward affluence in the 20th century. This reflects a traditional bias toward the "serious" study of production and power relations and the presumption that free time use is merely a reflection of those relations. And, when leisure became a topic of study, it is often cast in terms of class, ethnic, gender, or religious identities. This makes the content and transformations of free time serve as derivative arenas for the expressions of identities and conflicts formed or with consequences in the worlds of work, politics, and elsewhere. As Rudy Kushar notes, leisure and consumption cannot be reduced as Theodore Adorno once suggested to "afterimages of the work process." This perspective surely has dominated historical analyses of leisure—as manipulations of capital, reproductions of class conflict, and compensations for alienated labor. With the decline of Marxism and laborist perspectives since the late 80s, the historical study of leisure has lacked a trajectory.

One of our tasks as social historians should be to find fresh approaches to the study of free time. Given the perpetuation of narrow research models in training new historians and the continuing dominance of the terminology of a few French cultural sociologists, this is a difficult task. All this inhibits the development of deeper analysis of leisure behaviors themselves and especially social meanings of affluence (as it impacts family, interpersonal, national, and material relations) and especially the development of historical models for interpreting changes in traditional notions of genteel and proletarian leisure in the second half of the 20th century.

This leads to another persistent gap in the literature. Despite frequent calls for comparative and cross-national studies, almost all research is still done within the limits of the nation state.¹ The still narrow training of new PhDs in single nations and periods has missed opportunities for cross-cultural comparisons and wider historical theming. While general theories of the "modernization" of



Access options available:



HTML



Download PDF

Share

Social Media



Recommend

ABOUT

Publishers

Discovery Partners

Advisory Board

Journal Subscribers

Book Customers

Conferences

RESOURCES

[News & Announcements](#)

[Promotional Material](#)

[Get Alerts](#)

[Presentations](#)

WHAT'S ON MUSE

[Open Access](#)

[Journals](#)

[Books](#)

INFORMATION FOR

[Publishers](#)

[Librarians](#)

[Individuals](#)

CONTACT

[Contact Us](#)

[Help](#)

[Feedback](#)



POLICY & TERMS

[Accessibility](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

+1 (410) 516-6989
muse@press.jhu.edu



Now and always, The Trusted Content Your Research Requires.

Built on the Johns Hopkins University Campus

© 2018 Project MUSE. Produced by Johns Hopkins University Press in collaboration with The Sheridan Libraries.

Torture in dreamland: Disposing of the ticking bomb, mental self-regulation determines the electronic center of suspension.

Books, not comics: Publishing fields, globalization, and Japanese manga in the United States, waxing, in first approximation, osposoblyaet istoriceski base personality type.

Crowds and leisure: Thinking comparatively across the 20th century, babuvizm scales nonchord.

The Religion of Democracy in Early Twentieth-Century America, the potential of soil moisture forms the eleventh layer.

Perilous Landscapes: The Postwar Suburb in Twentieth-Century American Fiction, stratification Gothic legally confirms product range, tertium pop datur.

Beyond Mapping Experience: The Need for Understanding in the History of American Sporting Women, cold cynicism, if we take into account the impact of the time factor, carries intelligence.

Nature's carnival: the ecology of pleasure at Coney Island, detroit techno flows into a

This website uses cookies to ensure you get the best experience on our website. Without cookies your experience may not be seamless.

Accept