



Working At Play: A History of Vacations in the United States

Cindy S. Aron

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No one works harder at playing than Americans. Indeed, as Cindy Aron reveals in this intriguing account, the American vacation has seen a constant tension between labor and leisure, especially in the 19th and early 20th century, when we often struggled to protect ourselves from the sin of idleness.

In *Working at Play*, Aron offers the first full length history of how Americans have vacationed--from eighteenth-century planters who summered in Newport to twentieth-century urban workers who headed for camps in the hills. In the early nineteenth century, Aron shows, vacations were taken for health more than for fun, as the wealthy traveled to watering places, seeking cures for everything from consumption to rheumatism. But starting in the 1850s, the growth of a white collar middle class and the expansion of railroads made vacationing a mainstream activity. Aron charts this growth with grace and insight, tracing the rise of new vacation spots as the nation and the middle class blossomed. She shows how late nineteenth-century resorts became centers of competitive sports. Bowling, tennis, golf, hiking, swimming, and boating absorbed the hours. But as vacationing grew, she writes, fears of the dangers of idleness bloomed with it. Self improvement vacations flourished; religious camp grounds became established resorts, where gambling, drinking, and bathing on Sunday were banned. Asbury Park, named after Francis Asbury, the first American Methodist bishop, quickly became one of the most popular getaways for the devout.

With vivid detail and much insight, *Working at Play* offers a lively history of the vacation, throwing new light on the place of work and rest in American culture.

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