

ENG 660
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Office Hours, Villard 216
Tues. 1-3, Thurs. 10-11

Cultures of Leisure: America, 1875-1925



This seminar will explore the astounding emergence and institutionalization of “leisure” as a cultural phenomenon in post-Civil War America. Most, if not all, of the defining leisure activities and organizations of our own era—amateur sports and fitness associations, professional spectator sports, national parks, amusement parks, international tourism, urban playgrounds and pleasure parks, art museums, vacation resorts, health spas, etc.—developed during the years between the Civil War and World War I. With Thorstein Veblen (*The Theory of the Leisure Class*), William Gleason (*The Leisure Ethic: Work and Play in American Literature*), Bill Brown (*The Material Unconscious: American Amusements, Stephen Crane, and the Economies of Play*), and other critics and theorists as our guides, we will examine some of the major fiction of the period to explain how writers understood, engaged with, and perhaps participated in the phenomenon of American leisure.

Texts are available either via Canvas or at the University Bookstore.

Every other week, two students will collaborate in leading discussion for approximately one hour on a topic that intersects with, but extends beyond, the assigned reading.

At the end of the term, each student will present a 20-minute conference-style paper to the rest of the class. A revised draft of the conference paper will be submitted in lieu of a traditional seminar paper.

Please complete the following reading assignments before class:

Week 1: Robert Frost, “Two Tramps in Mud-Time”

Mark Twain, chapter 2 of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*

Gleason, Introduction to *The Leisure Ethic*

Brown, Introduction to *The Material Unconscious*

Week 2: Crane, “The Open Boat”

Brown, “Interlude: The Agony of Play in ‘The Open Boat’”

Huizinga, from *Homo Ludens*, “The Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon”

“Theories of Play,” from *The Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*

Week 3: Crane, “The Blue Hotel”

“The Stove”

Brown, “Deep Play”

“American Childhood and Stephen Crane’s Toys”

Freud, from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*

Discussion Leader: Childhood and Play

1. Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood*
2. Matthew Kaiser, *The World In Play: Portraits of a Victorian Concept*

Week 4: Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (first half)

Clifford Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight”

Discussion Leader: Recreation Spaces

1. Richard Grusin, *Culture, Technology, and the Creation of America’s National Parks*
2. Scott Herring, *Lines on the Land: Writers, Art, and the National Parks*

Week 5: Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (second half)

Gleason, “Anxiety and Identity in Twain”

Veblen, “The Discipline of the Machine”

Adorno, “Veblen”

“Free Time”

Discussion Leaders: Work and Craft

1. Cindy Weinstein, *The Literature of Labor and the Labor of Literature*
2. Peter Betjemann, *Talking Shop: The Language of Craft in an Age of Consumption*

Week 6: Henry James, “The Great Good Place”
 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper”
 Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences”

Discussion Leaders: Post-Structural Play (Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida)

- 1.
- 2.

Week 7: Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (first half)
 Veblen, “Conspicuous Leisure”
 James Livingston, “Fuck Work”

Discussion Leaders: The End of Work

1. Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics and Postwork Imaginaries*
2. Livingston, *No More Work: Why Full Employment Is a Bad Idea*

Week 8: Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (second half)

Discussion Leaders: Leisure and Gender:

- 1.
- 2.

Week 9: Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (first half)
 Gleason, “Play, Display, and the Self”

Discussion Leaders: Sports in America

1. Mark Edmundson, *Why Football Matters: My Education in the Game*, 2014.
2. Franklin Foer, *How Soccer Explains the World: An Unlikely Theory of Globalization*

Week 10: Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (second half)
 Student Conference Presentations