1-8-2016

Learning How to Relax: Culture of Leisure in the Gilded Age

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Recommended Citation
Voigt, Alex, "Learning How to Relax: Culture of Leisure in the Gilded Age" (2016). Curriculum Unit on the Gilded Age in the United States. 27.
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Focus Statement: America as a whole was undergoing dramatic changes during the last quarter of the 19th century. Industrialization was a major part of that change, as it pushed industry to new heights and sparked the biggest wave of immigration in U.S. history. It also helped create a new emphasis on leisure among American workers, as improved production led to shorter work days and higher wages meant those workers had more money to spend with their newfound free time. Additionally, the boom in railroad production and advancement of subways and electric trollies in urban areas made transportation easier and encouraged people to find activities outside their homes. All of those factors resulted in an explosion of recreational activities across all interests and socioeconomic classes. Through an examination of primary sources, this lesson will look at some of those activities and explore the deeper questions of what those activities said about American society during the Gilded Age. The key concepts that will be examined in this lesson will be:

- Leisure as it relates to industrialization
- Entertainment as it relates to leisure
- Economics of leisure
- Supply/demand
- Primary source analysis

MN Standard:

MN Standard 9/12/4.20 As the United States shifted from its agrarian roots into an industrial and global power, the rise of big business, urbanization and immigration led to institutionalized racism, ethnic and class conflict and new efforts at reform. (Development of an industrial United States 1870-1920.

MN Standard Benchmark 9/12/4.20.3 Analyze how the shift to mechanized farming and industrial production changed patterns in social organization, consumption and popular culture, and domestic life, including the rapid growth of cities in diverse regions of the country. (Development of an Industrial United States: 1870—1920)

Learning Objective(s): (Both Content and Skill)

Students will:

- Identify and discuss the connection between industrialization and leisure
- Identify the major forms of popular culture and entertainment of the Gilded Age and discuss possible reasons as to why those activities were popular
- Identify and discuss the role immigration had in creating diverse cultures in urban areas and specific regions of America
- Analyze and discuss American consumerism and how it developed during the Gilded Age
- Analyze the economics of leisure and discuss the reasons why it became a viable industry during the Gilded Age

Resources:

- Computer
- Projection display
**Methods/Procedures**

**Beginning (10 minutes):**
- Begin class by showing students the introductory PowerPoint slide with a quote from Gilded Age industrialist Andrew Carnegie about leisure: “Your always busy man accomplishes little; the great doer is he who has plenty of leisure.” Take a minute to ask students what they think Carnegie means by this and whether or not they can relate to what Carnegie is saying. (3 minutes)
- Next, ask students what they think the term “leisure” means. After giving them a minute to answer and writing down their responses on the whiteboard, show the PowerPoint slide displaying both the Dictionary.com and Thorstein Veblen definitions of leisure. Ask students what they think those definitions are saying about leisure – i.e. whether or not they view it in a positive or negative light – and prompt them to brainstorm reasons why Veblen would describe leisure in that way. (3 minutes)
- Based off the dictionary.com definition, ask students what activities they like to do for leisure and write down their responses on the whiteboard. After hearing their responses, tell students to imagine themselves living in the 1880s and 1890s. There are no cars, television or internet. Also, inventions like electricity, phonographs and personal cameras are still in their infancy. Tell students to keep those factors in mind when comparing their list of leisure to that of the Gilded Age. (3-4 minutes)

**Middle: Instructional Strategies / Learning Activities (35 minutes):**
- Tell students that the cultural perceptions of leisure changed dramatically during the Gilded Age. To illustrate this, show students PowerPoint slides with Leisure and Labor and Sparrow Hall paintings. Ask students the following questions in regard to the paintings:
  - What are the subjects in the painting doing? What are they focused on?
  - With the Leisure and Labor painting, how is the artist depicted the people working versus the person engaged in leisure?
  - How do they think the subjects in the paintings view leisure?
  - What does the painting say about leisure in general? (5-6 minutes total)
- Continue with remainder of PowerPoint slides with the following considerations (10-12 minutes):
  - Put particular emphasis on the link between industrialization and leisure, most specifically that the effects of industrialization – i.e. increased production, shorter work weeks, higher household incomes – helped create a newfound emphasis on leisure in culture. Also take the time to point out other factors contributing to the leisure boom that are indirectly tied to industrialization: immigration, urbanization, technological innovations and an increase in railroad track mileage. Tell students that many of those factors created an overall sense of cultural angst. For example, urbanization made living situations more crowded and immigration brought an influx of different cultures, ideals and beliefs that may not have been shared by those that were already in America. Many were nervous, anxious and unsure about the social and cultural upheaval taking place during that time period. As a result, many sought activities that served as a “release” from this angst.
  - With the slide dedicated to Gilded Age inventions, have students try to think about why those inventions would be relevant in the scope of leisure. For example, the Kodak camera made photography a simple and affordable activity for middle and working class households.
  - For the “What activities were popular?” slide, focus on major activities – i.e. vaudeville/minstrel shows, professional sports, carnivals, cycling, traveling – and give brief descriptions to help differentiate them. For example, explain to students that vaudeville differed from minstrel shows in that it appealed almost exclusively to men and rarely focused
on nostalgia for a theme. Next ask students why they think those particular activities were popular.

○ After engaging students in discussion in why those activities were popular, show students the PowerPoint slide titled “Why were these activities popular?” and ask them if they can relate any of the listed reasons -- i.e. reflections of cultural ideals, cost/affordability, escape from routine, statement of status -- to their own leisure activities.

○ When showing students the PowerPoint slide on conspicuous leisure and conspicuous consumption, explain that Thorstein Veblen was a prominent economist and sociologist of the Gilded Age who was one of the first people to realize the link between economics and social institutions. Also explain that Veblen’s most famous work, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, differed from other sociological books of the time period in that it focused on consumption instead of production.

○ Give students the definitions of conspicuous leisure and conspicuous consumption (both on PowerPoint) and explain that Veblen saw these characteristics as being harmful to society because they encouraged intentionally wasteful behavior for the sake of vanity. Have students draw on their own experiences to engage them on a discussion about conspicuous leisure/consumption in modern society. Specifically, ask students:
  ▪ What examples of leisure can they think of as “conspicuous leisure”? 
  ▪ What would be a modern example of “conspicuous consumption”? 
  ▪ Do they agree with Veblen that these actions are harmful to society? Why or why not?

○ Make the economics of leisure part of the PowerPoint more of a general discussion with students on the cost/affordability of their leisure activities. Also, have students consider leisure from the perspective of an entrepreneur. Inform them that businessmen like A.G. Spalding and P.T. Barnum became very wealthy thanks to general demand in leisure industries.

- Assuming a class of 30 students, divide class into 5 groups of 6 and distribute the six primary sources and accompanying primary source worksheets to each group. Explain to the class that each group member will analyze one of the sources, answer the questions listed on the worksheet for that source and rotate to another source every 3-4 minutes. Additionally, be sure to explain that primary sources should be viewed within the context of the time period they are from. Tell them to analyze about the sources from the perspective of people from the Gilded Age rather than their own perspective. Also, explain that the views and perspectives depicted in these sources – particularly that of the minstrel show sheet music titled “My Mississippi Home” – is not meant to be revered or repeated in modern settings, and doing so will likely get students into trouble. (2 minutes)

- Have students begin the primary source activity and make yourself available for any questions they might have about the worksheet. (20-25 minutes)

**End / Summary (5 minutes): Should include Evaluation / Assessment / Student Achievement (# of minutes if formal)**

- After the primary source activity is complete, ask the class if they noticed any similarities between their sources and what socioeconomic class the activity shown in the source is intended for.
- Next, ask the class what sources they found interesting and what they think those sources say about society in general.
- To close the lesson, ask students what they learned from the activity and how it helps them understand the Gilded Age better as a whole.

**Assignment if there is one:**

- Students will turn in the primary source activity worksheet at the end of class for participation and assessment points. The worksheet will eventually be returned to students, as the general concepts of the lesson could be part of an eventual unit quiz.
Afterwards

Provisions for Individual Differences:

- In the event of teaching a class with ELL learners, the lesson would need revision in the form of digitized primary sources with multimedia options, as well as iPads, computers or other devices for them to view the content on.
Primary Source Activity Worksheet

Source A: Cross Cut Cigarettes ad

What type of product is the advertisement selling?

What is the overall theme or message being conveyed in the advertisement?

Given the product and overall theme/message, who do you think the ad is appealing to and why?

Source B: Hecker-Jones-Jewell Milling Co. ad

What type of product is the advertisement selling?

What is the overall theme or message being conveyed in the advertisement?

Given the product and overall theme/message, who do you think the ad is appealing to and why?

Source C: “Business Aspects of Baseball” article

Why does Commodore Wiman see great potential in the business of baseball?

What does Commodore Wiman say about the popularity of baseball? (be specific)

What does Wiman say about the “leisure class” in general?

Source D: Picnic photo

Where do you think this photo was taken?

Which economic class do you think the people in this photo are from? Why?

What other conclusions can you draw about the people in this photo?
Source E: Beach photo

Where do you think this photo was taken?

Which economic class do you think the people in this photo are from? Why?

What other conclusions can you draw about the people in this photo?

Source F: “My Mississippi Home” sheet music

What is this song about?

What are the general themes and messages conveyed in this song?

Given those themes and messages, who do you think is the intended audience of this song?
Something for Mamma.

Manufactured by the Hecker-Jones-Jewell Milling Co.
New York.

Copyrighted 1893 by The Hecker-Jones-Jewell Milling Co., N.Y.
NONPAREIL COLORED TROUBADOURS

ORIGINAL SONGS

SUNG WITH GREAT
SUCCESS EVERYWHERE

My Mississippi Home

Tired of Life in the City

COMPOSED BY WALLACE A. A. FERNANDEZ.

PUBLISHED BY
FRANK P. ANDERSON 36 COURT ST. BROOKLYN N.Y. 4

Copyright 1882 Frank P. Anderson.
MY MISSISSIPPI HOME,
Song and Chorus.

Arr'd by C. S. E.

Words and Music by
Wallace Fernandez.

1. My old home in Missis-sip-pi, previous to the war, Where the
darkies liv'd so happy gay and free; But the tide now is turned and it
2. My old home in Missis-sip-pi, by the run-nin' brook, I have
list'n'd to its music all the day.

The
col-o-nur, rice and corn, And the barn where we oft-times stacked the hay;

Copyright, 1862, by Frank P. Andrews.
woods and the groves are there where oft I used to play, And the more do we hear the darkies sing-tog in the cane.

little pump that stood so near the door; The used to do in happy days gone by,

old fash-lord cottage where old Massa used to dwell. But those old Massa's gone and left us in this world of pain. And those

happy days I'll never see no more; happy days we'll never see again.
Chorus.

My old home in Mississippi, precious to the war, Where the darkies lived so happy, gay and free! But the tide now has turned, and it runs another way, And those happy days will never come back to me.
BUSINESS ASPECT OF BASEBALL.
COMMODORE WIMAN SEES GREAT PROFITS
IN THE NATIONAL GAME.

BALTIMORE, Dec. 31.—The business aspects of baseball were referred to by Mr. Erastus Wiman, in a speech at a dinner given here last evening, to Hamilton Disston and other prominent Philadelphians, by the Directors of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Mr. Wiman said that the fact was significant that the negotiations for the securing of a trunk line entrance to the Harbor and city of New-York were carried along side by side with the negotiations for the control of a first-class baseball club. The same motive inspired both negotiations, namely, to obtain for the Staten Island project a large increase of traffic. Now that the trunk line and baseball club had both been captured, he was not quite clear that the baseball business would not yield an earlier, and certainly a larger, return for the money invested than the trunk line connection, greatly as he valued the latter. Mr. Wiman quoted statistics to show that the attendance at baseball matches in certain cities throughout the season approached 850,000 persons, and if he could draw this additional number over the Staten Island ferries in the Summer afternoons, and even a greater number in the Summer evenings by other attractions, the increase in the traffic would be very considerable, without much additional cost for handling it.

The growth of the leisure class in New-York exceeded the increase of any other class, he thought, and the extent of capacity, capital, and culture now employed for their amusement in theatres, operas, concerts, &c., yearly increased, indicating a distinctive class of business, employing a large army and the free circulation of large sums of money. He did not see why the national game should not be elevated by elegant surroundings and correct business methods to a level as high as the average theatrical performance and made equal in public esteem to the Roman and Grecian games. Discipline, temperance, self-control, decision of character, and a clear head were just as essential to success as brawny arms or strong muscle, and all these had a strong attraction to the average public. A glance at the newspapers showed that baseball matters occupied the attention of the American public to a greater extent than the question of the balance of power in Europe or the rise or fall of a Continental dynasty. Further, this interest indicated that in the business and its attendant traffic were possibilities of profit beyond the dreams of avarice. A suggestion from Col. Snowden that this seemed not unlike Col. Sellers sent Mr. Wiman to his seat, but not until he had made his point that the baseball departure was full of promise for his pet project on Staten Island.