

Nancy L Struna, *People of Prowess: Sport, Leisure, and Labor in Early Anglo-America*. Champaign, University of Illinois Press, 1996. pp. x + 271. US\$34.95 cloth, US\$18.95 paper.

Everybody knows, even without help from Disney, the name of one fictional sportsman in early America and his sporting activities. Some years before 1776 there lived near the Catskill mountains a layabout who instead of working his farm went fishing and hunted pigeons and squirrels. Children loved him because he 'assisted at their sports, made their play things, taught them to fly kites and shoot marbles and told them long stories of ghosts, witches and Indians'; but his wife 'kept continually dinning in his ears about his idleness, his carelessness and the ruin he was bringing on his family'. Sport changed his life definitively when he encountered 'a company of odd looking personages playing at ninepins', the noise of which 'echoed along the mountains like rumbling peals of thunder'. He had come upon Hendrick Hudson and the crew of the *Half Moon*, dead for two centuries but playing games in the Catskills every two decades in order to check out (somehow) the New York scene. And while they bowled these revenants were downing a kind of gin; of which Rip Van Winkle drank too and thereupon, as Washington Irving related in 1818, slept a twenty years' sleep. These themes, of profitable labour and idleness, of sports and conviviality, of ethnicity and American nationhood, from the time of Raleigh and Cabot up to Irving's and Jackson's generation, are the themes of Nancy Struna's book.

In a little over 200 pages of text she tackles an enormous task: to examine the three areas of life called work, leisure and sports, not merely describing their American manifestations in the colonial and early national periods but also analysing the dialectical relations between the three. The book succeeds in being a most useful compendium of reliable information on its subject, but I have to report that its ambitious agenda is not carried out. I am no clearer having closed the book than I was when I opened it, about what work is, what leisure is, and what sports are, about the relations between them, and even about what Anglo-America was.

Let us start with the last point. It is not clear who is supposed to be excluded by the term 'Anglo-America'. One would imagine its coverage restricted to the British inhabitants of England's colonies. Certainly the book begins about 1580 with Raleigh *et al* and a Strutt-style survey of English sports and not with Spanish forays into California and Texas, nor

with Knickerbocker holidays and sports. The British are central, even though the Cornish get more notice than the Scots, Irish, and Welsh; but the activities of African Americans are mentioned, and those of (generic) Native Americans; and, yes, the Dutch of New Amsterdam are there, working and playing. So who is not in the book? Well, the inhabitants of Louisiana (even after 1803) are unexamined; that's all I can see. I must suppose that 'Anglo-America' was chosen in order to leave everyone else on the periphery but it seems an unnecessary part of the subtitle.

The real nexus of work and leisure is explored most fully after page 161 and in a note on page 25. This is a bit late in the book. Until that point we have been told only what successive generations of colonials and various groups of colonials thought the nexus was. Struna continually refers to definitions given by people at the time: for example, 'in the Puritan scheme of things, idleness was the antithesis of labor' (p. 63); and, 'by late seventeenth century in Britain, middle- and upper-rank agents of capitalism had constructed leisure not as the opposite of work but as time both for less physical forms of work and for recreational activities that they believed benefited their capacities to work' (p. 168); and so, in America, 'a few merchants and planters, as well as recently arrived British emigres, conceived of and used leisure in the post-Restoration British sense, as a portion of time to be devoted to necessary but not necessarily physical labor' (p. 169).

There are two things to be said about this trafficking with the understanding of contemporaries as to what things are: first, it tends to the pernicious nominalism that is rife in post-modernist writings, where something not yet named is declared not to have existed, so that we must believe with the dictionary that there was no gravity before 1692, no boredom before 1852, and no capitalism before 1854. Historians have the right and the duty to stipulate the meaning of the terms they will use, and are not in the slightest obliged to talk only in terms used by people in the period. The second point is that by concerning herself only with what contemporaries said, and restricting herself therefore to their conceptual framework, Struna ignores the huge area of human activity which is called the reproduction of everyday life. What is lacking here is the understanding that there are other things besides productive work that fill the hours before we can be at leisure. They are not play activities but they aren't work either. People devoted maybe half their lives to sleeping, sex, funerals, eating, church-going, religious festivals, town-meetings,

civic duties ... all these things are neither productive work nor leisure. Nor are they idleness. It is crass to call them unproductive just because they are not paid, and so reopen the question of housewifery. They are the other side of social production, that is they constitute, as distinct from the production of concrete exchangeable goods and services, the reproduction of everyday life. But since Struna's early Americans did not talk about the reproduction of quotidianity, she cannot either.

The book summarises a mass of research on what people did in early America, and is well enough organised according to successive periods. Although it would seem to be aimed at undergraduates, it is thoughtful; my strictures say that I do not always agree with Struna's thinking. What interests me is the way in which leisure pursuits mirror the social relationships and recreate them. For instance, gambling on the stock exchange is the quintessential capitalist activity while gambling on horse races circulates money within the upper class or between classes: and, though gambling individuals are not winners perennially, the upper class as a whole is. This mirroring has been worked out this century in paradigmatic relationship between baseball and American society; the work being done on masculinities and various sports carries the inquiries further; the images of athletes and athletics in the mass media is a matter becoming of increased interest as we arrive at sports played before a crowd solely of cameras. Struna does verge on this theme, but has no space to enter into it thoroughly. We can hope that she will in a later book.

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