



# **Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York**

*Kathy Peiss*

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## **Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York** Kathy Peiss

What did young, independent women do for fun and how did they pay their way into New York City's turn-of-the-century pleasure places? *Cheap Amusements* is a fascinating discussion of young working women whose meager wages often fell short of bare subsistence and rarely allowed for entertainment expenses.

Kathy Peiss follows working women into saloons, dance halls, Coney Island amusement parks, social clubs, and nickelodeons to explore the culture of these young women between 1880 and 1920 as expressed in leisure activities. By examining the rituals and styles they adopted and placing that culture in the larger context of urban working-class life, she offers us a complex picture of the dynamics shaping a working woman's experience and consciousness at the turn-of-the-century. Not only does her analysis lead us to new insights into working-class culture, changing social relations between single men and women, and urban courtship, but it also gives us a fuller understanding of the cultural transformations that gave rise to the commercialization of leisure.

The early twentieth century witnessed the emergence of "heterosocial companionship" as a dominant ideology of gender, affirming mixed-sex patterns of social interaction, in contrast to the nineteenth century's segregated spheres. *Cheap Amusements* argues that a crucial part of the "reorientation of American culture" originated from below, specifically in the subculture of working women to be found in urban dance halls and amusement resorts.

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