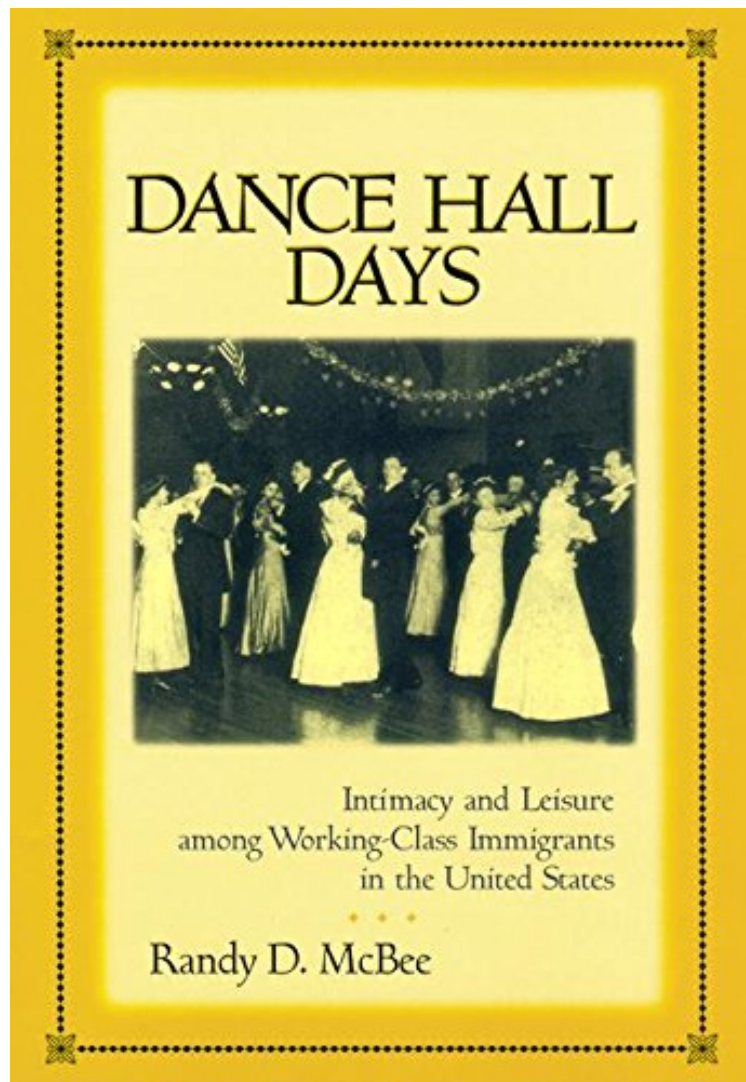


(Download free ebook) Dance Hall Days: Intimacy and Leisure Among Working-Class Immigrants in the United States

## Dance Hall Days: Intimacy and Leisure Among Working-Class Immigrants in the United States

Randy McBee

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**Randy McBee : Dance Hall Days: Intimacy and Leisure Among Working-Class Immigrants in the United States** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dance Hall Days: Intimacy and Leisure Among Working-Class Immigrants in the United States:

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By Rebecca Brown  
This is a simple, rather charming study of a bygone era. It is interesting largely because it takes readers into a relatively recent time society with which most of us are unacquainted. McBee examined the workers' relationships with their parents, living conditions, longings, intense friendships, romances marriages, numbingly boring jobs, carefully researched the importance of class, generation, gender, community in the formation of American character. Commercial recreation was just coming into existence at the time, it is fascinating to observe the differences between the heterosocial relationships of adolescents of the early twentieth century those of today. The former amused themselves not only in dance halls amusement parks, but at picnics, religious festivals, men's social clubs, a far cry from the ubiquitous discos rock concerts of our day. The book is not particularly well written, there is a great deal of repetition. Nevertheless, unlike many works of its ilk, it is easy to read, always interesting. In addition, it is a historical social record which could be useful to students of American gender relations for many years to come.

The rise of commercialized leisure coincided with the arrival of millions of immigrants to America's cities. Conflict was inevitable as older generations attempted to preserve their traditions, values, and ethnic identities, while the young sought out the cheap amusements and sexual freedom which the urban landscape offered. At immigrant picnics, social clubs, and urban dance halls, Randy McBee discovers distinct and highly contested gender lines, proving that the battle between the ages was also one between the sexes. Free from their parents and their strict rules governing sexual conduct, working women took advantage of their time in dance halls to challenge conventional gender norms. They routinely passed certain men over for dances, refused escorts home, and embraced the sensual and physical side of dance to further accentuate their superior skills and ability on the dance floor. Most men felt threatened by women's displays of empowerment and took steps to thwart the changes taking place. Accustomed to street corners, poolrooms, saloons, and other all-male get-togethers, working men tried to transform the dance hall into something that resembled these familiar hangouts. McBee also finds that men frequently abandoned the commercial dance hall for their own clubs, set up in the basements of tenement flats. In these hangouts, working men established rules governing intimacy and leisure that allowed them to regulate the behavior of the women who attended club events. The collective manner in which they behaved not only affected the organization of commercial leisure but also men and women's struggles with and against one another to define the meaning of leisure, sexuality, intimacy, and even masculinity.

"In the diffuse and fragmented world of gender history it is rare to find a work of true originality anymore. Randy McBee's *Dance Hall Days* is, however, such a book. In this vigorously researched study of early twentieth-century heterosocial relations, McBee overturns the long-held consensus that dance hall and new amusement entrepreneurs manipulated the rise of mass culture and hence loosened social relations in the process. McBee's achievement is to see men and women as active agents in the creation of their own heterosocial leisure world, not only in dance halls and amusement parks but in picnics, religious festivals, and even men's social clubs. This often stunning and always surprising book combines traditional scholarly rigor with postmodern wit and savvy. It should become indispensable reading for historians and sociologists of American gender relations for many years to come. A remarkable achievement." -Kevin White, Portsmouth University  
"This book adds important new insights to a growing literature that explores day-to-day immigrant life through the lens of popular amusements." -Journal of American Ethnic History  
"This is a very important book that draws together astute analyses of youth, gender, morals, amusements and ethnic history. After you read it, you will never look into faces on the old dance photos in the same way." -American Historical  
"Randy D. McBee's monograph opens up a new space for thinking about immigrant life, ethnicity, and youth in the context of social history." -The Journal of American History  
"Brimming with human detail and adventuresome argument, *Dance Hall Days* is a major contribution to both labor history and immigration studies. McBee never loses sight of the fact that workers' lives were about romance, intense same-sex friendships, dance, loneliness, longing, and marriage just as surely as they were about jobs. In its intimate portrayal of immigrants' lives, *Dance Hall Days* demonstrates the critical role of class, along with generation, gender, and community, in shaping the particular ways in which Americans encountered mass culture." -David Roediger, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
About the Author  
RANDY McBee is Assistant Professor of History at Texas Tech University.