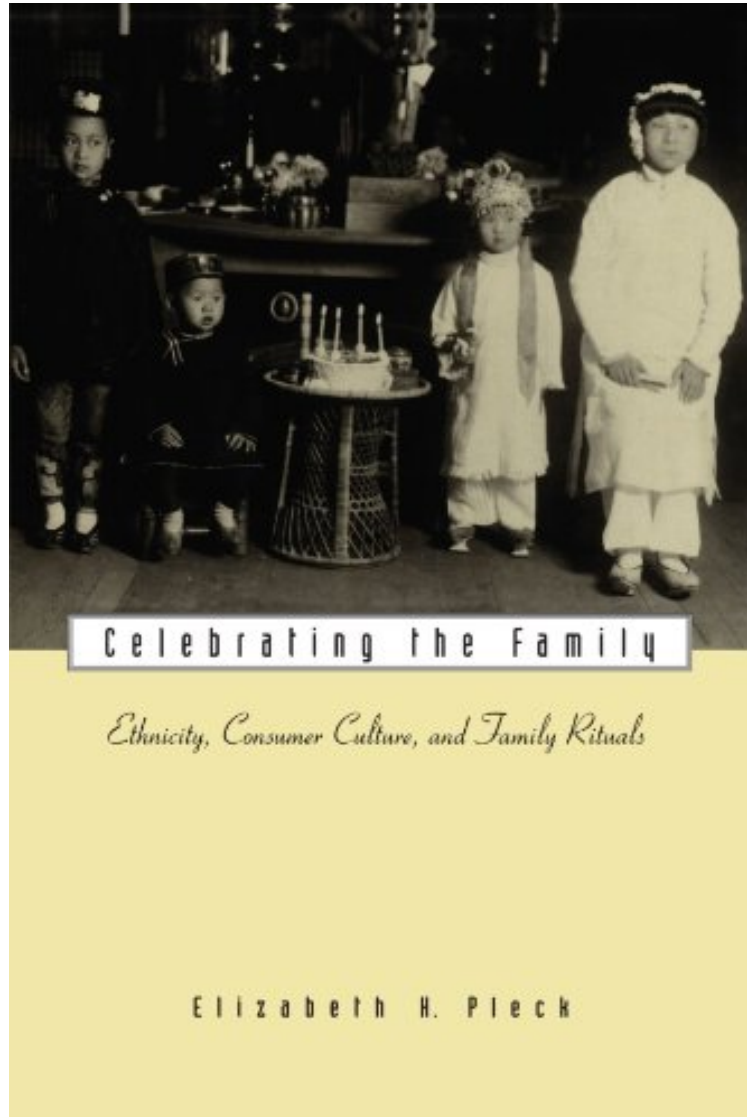


Celebrating the Family: Ethnicity, Consumer Culture, and Family Rituals

Elizabeth H. Pleck

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Elizabeth H. Pleck : Celebrating the Family: Ethnicity, Consumer Culture, and Family Rituals before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Celebrating the Family: Ethnicity, Consumer Culture, and Family Rituals:

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Nostalgia for the imagined warm family gatherings of yesteryear has colored our understanding of family celebrations. Elizabeth Pleck examines family traditions over two centuries and finds a complicated process of change in the way Americans have celebrated holidays such as Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, Chinese New Year, and Passover as well as the life cycle rituals of birth, coming of age, marriage, and death. By the early nineteenth century carnivalesque celebrations outside the home were becoming sentimental occasions that used consumer culture and displays of status and wealth to celebrate the idea of home and family. The 1960s saw the full emergence of a postsentimental approach to holiday celebration, which takes place outside as often as inside the home, and recognizes changes in the family and women's roles, as well as the growth of ethnic group consciousness. This multicultural, comparative history of American family celebration, rich in detail and spiced with telling anecdotes and illustrations and a keen sense of irony, offers insight into the significance of ethnicity and consumer culture in shaping what people regard as the most memorable moments of family life.

From Library Journal This work is the fascinating history of the changes in holiday customs in our multi-cultural, socially, economically, and technologically evolving American environment over (roughly) the past two centuries. "In colonial America, derived from the Protestant Reformation," holidays and festivals spawned carnivalesque, often bawdy group celebrations. Over time, with the rise of a middle class, these gradually evolved into family-based and family-oriented, sentimentalized ceremonies with ritual in both religious and secular contexts. Later, as a multicultural America and its institutions wrestled with gender and ethnic identity and equity issues, the potent growth of a strongly consumer-oriented economy generated further changes. Conspicuous commercialism came to overshadow reverence and sentiment, as decor, gifts, flowers, and message cards became *raisons d' tre* at ceremonies in the current postsentimental culture. Pleck (history, Univ. of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign) sees an eclectic American society that is still in flux and continuing to shape and reshape the social content of our myriad and various celebrations. Strongly recommended for academic and public audiences. DSuzanne W. Wood, SUNY Coll. of Technology (Emerita), Alfred Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. "A very enjoyable, provocative, and scholarly sound book. Celebrating the Family is significant, thorough, and eminently readable. Pleck is especially interested in the way that celebrations have been transformed from 'carnavalesque' qualities, involving various types of social inversion and disorder, into 'domestic' rituals that reinforce women's roles and child-centeredness. She treats each holiday and ritual with impressive sensitivity. She acknowledges the 'dark side,' the social critiques of various celebrations and understands the effects holidays have had on those at the margin of the family--single people, gay people, and others not completely accepted into a family--and those who lacked resources to partake of socially constructed celebrations. Pleck's book will have a major impact. It represents social history at its best. It is thoroughly researched, ahead of more than reflective of recent scholarship, and clearly articulated. (Howard P. Chudacoff, Brown University) Holidays and other family functions have slowly over the past few hundred years become romanticized and commercialized by popular American culture. Pleck, a professor of history at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, has dissected the various common rituals associated with many holidays and other family gathering events... This book is not only an eye-opening look at the characteristics of traditional rituals but also an insight into ourselves. (Julia Glynn, Booklist) An impressive work. Pleck's argument that most American holidays, as now practiced, are Victorian inventions--reinvented and altered several times along the way to the present--seems accurate and persuasive. Modern American culture, in terms of its commercialism, various changes in child-rearing, increasing life expectancy, and work patterns, have all impinged upon holiday celebrations and profoundly altered them. (James Gilbert, University of Maryland, College Park) "A very enjoyable, provocative, and scholarly sound book. Celebrating the Family is significant, thorough, and eminently readable. Pleck is especially interested in the way that celebrations have been transformed from 'carnavalesque' qualities, involving various types of social inversion and disorder, into 'domestic' rituals that reinforce women's roles and child-centeredness. She treats each holiday and ritual with impressive sensitivity. She acknowledges the 'dark side,' the social critiques of various celebrations and understands the effects holidays have had on those at the margin of the family--single people, gay people, and others not completely accepted into a family--and those who lacked resources to partake of socially constructed celebrations. Pleck's book will have a major impact. It represents social history at its best. It is thoroughly researched, ahead of more than reflective of recent scholarship, and clearly articulated. --Howard P. Chudacoff, Brown University