



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

Elizabeth H. Pleck

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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.

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