

## Fun in a Financial Funk

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Worldwide stocks tumbling... A showdown at the UN over a Middle East conflict that appears ever more impossible to solve... Heavy stuff. How about a little fun?

**This week, from the J-Vault:** *Leisure Time Activity in the Depression Period* (1932)

"Leisure," writes Samuel J. Rodman, "has been defined as 'the time-surplus remaining after the practical necessities of life have been attended to'":

One's leisure time are those periods in which one is free to do as he wishes or as his interests dictate, it is a period in which one plays. With the above definition as our guide it is quite obvious that it is entirely wrong to call the time liberated by unemployment as leisure time. Picture, if you will, the leisure time of the "true gentleman of leisure" on board the Europa on his way for an extended holiday to the Riviera, as compared to the supposed leisure time of the worker who by 3 P. M. has given up his futile attempt in search for a job—and you have two distinct varieties of leisure time.

The unemployed have special emotional needs which ideal leisure activities should address, Rodman notes. He quotes a report from the Welfare Council of New York City:

"As a result of the economic conditions of the past two years," the report continues, "the family affection has been sorely tried, conjugal and parental ties have been weakened, family groups have disintegrated, the source of income has shifted from the husband and father to the wife and children or to public, paternal authority has lost force, home discipline has suffered, personality difficulties and family problems have been precipitated, instability and insecurity have increased."

I present these excerpts in an attempt to picture the clients for whom leisure time activities are to be planned so that "he may drown his sorrows and divert his mind from his condition."

One of my colleagues in the Jewish center field recently referred to himself in discussing his work as "running a human repair shop." What busy mechanics we should be at this time in repairing the wreck by which we are confronted...

...To keep the Roman unemployed happy and amused, history records that the government presented free circuses and public displays of butchery.

(An aside: I can just see a new kind of government stimulus package: Roman-style gladiatorial games. It has the added advantage of killing off those who lose the games, so... fewer mouths to feed, with no need for a death panel, or a Texas prison, or a Ron Paul health care plan. But back to Rodman:)

Let us boast of a higher civilization, provide civilized outlets for our unemployed by offering public courses in economics, labor history, sociology and other social sciences...

Through tactful guidance and encouragement and influence on our part, we may actually turn this enforced idleness into a golden opportunity for an adult education program which will prepare for the leisure which is bound to come when our economic house is ultimately set in order...

...In Europe, adult education, cultural pursuits and even political study and activity are considered recreational use of leisure. A cultural program, therefore, for our working group, definitely falls within the realm of our program of activity. I am definitely of the opinion that our community centers ought to play an important role in the reconstruction of society. Will we fulfill our responsibility to our community in this national emergency?

So... all you unemployed folks out there: feel like sitting in a Jewish community center and learning socioeconomic theory all afternoon for no money or college credit?

Actually, if I were unemployed myself, I would be happy to spend some time taking social science courses for the sheer fun of it. But I am an inveterate nerd, so let's not make policy based on me.

Interested in the excerpts above? [\*Download the entire publication.\*](#)

