



## From Playgrounds to PlayStation: The Interaction of Technology and Play

By Carroll Pursell



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In this romp through the changing landscape of nineteenth- and twentieth-century American toys, games, hobbies, and amusements, senior historian of technology Carroll Pursell poses a simple but interesting question: What can we learn by studying the relationship between technology and play?

*From Playgrounds to PlayStation* explores how play reflects and drives the evolution of American culture. Pursell engagingly examines the ways in which technology affects play and play shapes people. The objects that children (and adults) play with and play on, along with their games and the hobbies they pursue, can reinforce but also challenge gender roles and cultural norms. Inventors—who often talk about “playing” at their work, as if motivated by the pure fun of invention—have used new materials and technologies to reshape sports and gameplay, sometimes even crafting new, extreme forms of recreation, but always responding to popular demand.

Drawing from a range of sources, including scholarly monographs, patent records, newspapers, and popular and technical journals, the book covers numerous modes and sites of play. Pursell touches on the safety-conscious playground reform movement, the dazzling mechanical innovations that gave rise to commercial amusement parks, and the media’s colorful promotion of toys, pastimes, and sporting events. Along the way, he shows readers how technology enables the forms, equipment, and devices of play to evolve constantly, both reflecting consumer choices and driving innovators and manufacturers to promote toys that involve entirely new kinds of play—from LEGOs and skateboards to beading kits and videogames.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

Drawing on a wide variety of primary and secondary sources, *From Playgrounds to PlayStation* examines technical play, an important topic that has not been sufficiently studied in the history of technology. The prose is smooth, the arguments clear, and the research sound; a real pleasure.

(David E. Nye, University of Southern Denmark)

An engaging social history of play... Pursell's text helps inform readers how capitalist structures focus as much on leisure as they do work or politics to cement their structures in US culture.

(*Choice*)

[From Playgrounds to PlayStation] is a fascinating read, and the mixture of facts, anecdotes, quotes, and other sources of research makes it quite an impressive work.

(*PsycCRITIQUES*)

Pursell's account is masterful in its ability to draw a wide range of cultural sources, sometimes from unexpected quarters, into a unified yet nuanced historical narrative.

(*Journal of American History*)

A most engaging read...one that no scholar or layperson interested in the parallel development and interplay of technology and leisure activities can ignore without missing out on a significant contribution.

(*Australasian Journal of American Studies*)

... The real strength of this book is his striking detail in analyzing the technologies that have shaped play, especially his frequent and imaginative use of sources like patent records and advertising, too often neglected in histories of play and leisure.

(*Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*)

#### About the Author

**Carroll Pursell** is an adjunct professor of history at The Australian National University and professor emeritus of history at Case Western Reserve University. He is the author of *The Machine in America: A Social History of Technology*.

## Users Review

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