

Should Dancing be Abolished as a Pastime?

WOMAN WRITER THINKS DANCING SHOULD GO

Drusilla Dungee Houston
Raises Cry Against Pastime,
Ruining Youth, She Says.

Should dancing as a pastime be abolished? Are the effects of dancing on youth more harmful than beneficial?

This is a timely question raised at a time when Baltimore is this week witnessing its second big marathon dance in which a host of dancers are prancing steadily day and night in an effort to win the prizes offered and to establish a record for long distance dancing.

Writing this week about dancing, its history and effects on youth, Drusilla Dungee Houston, in an article for the Associated Negro Press, says:

"I do not think that we have a right to criticize forms of amusement until we have shown clearly where they are wrong or are not expedient. Men are like sheep and we follow leaders, thinking little if we feel that a thing is the vogue. If we knew the history of dancing we would know that its present forms came in only after the fierce opposition of all respectable people.

"Our young people in America are ruined largely through our amusements. It will be for true leadership to show them those that are vicious and weakening and to endeavor to substitute something better in their place.

Cause Downfall

"There are parents who have very high ideals for their children. They want their lives to be worth something to humanity. If they get the start of levity early and the stirring of sex impulses there will be no hopes for our aims. The idea of Henry Ford to return to the purer dances may be good but when the child learns the revolting, lustful movements of the popular dances of today, there will be no way to turn him from them later.

"I heard a young man of a fine Southern family say: 'My mother taught me to dance but today I believe it the most pernicious influence that carries women downward.' The police statistics of New York City show that women, questioned as to the cause of their downfall, admit that dancing had more to do with their ruin than all other influences put together. If this be true, then, we should abolish its present forms.

Danced Separately

"Let us look into the history of dancing. The character of the dance in its beginning was very different from ours. Oriental dances most often are simply led by one principal person, whose motions of grace are imitated by a company following. So they often relieve the tedium of a long journey. At a very early day dancing was enlisted in the cause of religion. Hebrews had their sacred dances in which they expressed joy and thanksgiving. This way was always a performance of women.

"Then David danced on the auspicious occasion of the returning of the ark to Jerusalem, an act of religious homage and rejoicing at the return of favor from God. Later, members of the Sanhedrin and leaders of the synagogues, men eminent for their piety, leaped and danced at night with torches in their hands, while the women looked on. You will observe that the men and women danced separately. From this time on, dancing was introduced at any season of mirth and rejoicing. Religious dances among the Greeks were immoral.

Panders to Passion

"In early times, those who perverted the exercise from religious use were considered by all as profane and infamous. During the classic ages of

Dancing Her Forte



MISS ALMA TRAVERS
clever little dance, now appearing on the Coast, who would give an excellent argument why dancing should not be abolished.

Greece and Rome the dance became popular but it was turned over to professional performers as it was considered beneath the dignity of persons of dignity and character.

"The dance of natural races are innocent when compared to ours. They imitate the sports of the chase. Some have advanced to dramatic dances. All of these differ from the modern dance that panders to passion. There was an outcry in England upon the introduction of the waltz but opposition decreased with their children. Today we have dances pandering to every grade of indecency. They have advanced from immoral classes to become the popular vogue of more decent groups. We know they are wrong but lack the backbone to stand out against them. Their influence should be carefully studied by wise parents.

Hard on Health

"We all realize the joy that comes to youth out of innocent dancing. It gives a becoming grace and confidence. It calls into play a great number of muscles but all this benefit is lost if the hours are late and the dance rooms overheated. I heard a young man say: 'Oh, we used to have so many fine dancers.' I do not know how I came to ask the question: 'Where are they now?' He thought for a moment and, bowing his head, said: 'They are all dead.' "The late hours, the over-exertion, the strain on their nerves had been too much. Our people do not live in steam-heated houses and they ought to realize that their indulgence in many things that the rich white classes do will be fatal to the poorer classes of the race. The return to cold, icy rooms, in thin dress, overheated from strenuous exertion has carried many a dancer away. To innocent folk dances, the sex crazed masses now would not change.

And they Kept on Dancing



This picture, taken in New York in 1928, shows a group of marathon dancers none the worse after several weeks of dancing as they were moved from one hall to another on a truck. They are still dancing as they pass through the streets.

Wrecked Civilization

"There have been periods of the world when men gave themselves up to dancing. Were they better, wiser, ages? In France, it was when the rich had become obscene and corrupt. By extravagance and lavish entertainment, they had brought the

finances of their country to ruin.

"In the sixteenth century a dancing mania spread over the country. The most revolting and gross immoralities accompanied the craze, so that the mania had to be put down by legislation. The world war hurried us on to similar tendencies. If

we want to see civilization advance, those who are wise and sane must regulate or abolish dancing."

EDITOR'S NOTE—Next week the AFRO will carry an article on the other side of the dance controversy.

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