

WHITE GIRLHOOD AND THE SOCIAL EVIL:  
MORAL TRAGEDY IN EARLY TWENTIETH CHICAGO DANCE HALLS

by

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## **Abstract**

*White Girlhood and the Social Evil: Moral Tragedy in early-Twentieth-Century*

*Chicago Dance Halls* examines how Progressive Era municipal courts and moral reformers sought to enact policies and launch city-coordinated investigations to limit participation in public Chicago dance halls. This paper explores the transition from white, sensationalized narratives that depicted young white girls fall into vice, particularly prostitution, to active investigations of "vice-ridden" amusements—the Chicago dance hall. Concerns about the prevalence of prostitution and fears of white slavery during the Progressive Era prompted moral reform campaigns to combat prostitution and vice markets. As part of their efforts to fight white slavery by upholding white girlhood, moral reformers believed that participation in amusements led to an immoral life—contaminating the aspect of "girlhood." Federal and local investigations called for states and cities to change their policies to protect white girlhood from moral temptation. The moral panic surrounding white girlhood focused on the dangers posed by new heterosexual recreational sites, like the dance hall. Reformers' and municipal courts' investigations of urban vice and Chicago's recreational dance halls suggested that such spaces stimulated seduction and white slavery and constituted a threat to young, white girlhood. Looking closely at dance hall investigations during the Progressive Era expands understanding of moral reformers and municipal courts' role in limiting participation in amusements to uphold white girlhood and prevent moral and urban decay.

## Introduction

*“Prudery is not modesty. Ignorance is not innocence.”*<sup>1</sup> The hurry and the commotion of the industrious city contain inconceivable horrors that belong to the insidious amusement of the dance hall. Long hours during the proletariat’s workday call for a thrilling evening filled with pleasures in commercialized spaces that contribute to the “Social Evil.”<sup>2</sup> The vice-ridden streets of Chicago, among the worst of urban amusements, reveal considerable amounts of moral decay and actively contribute to the downfall of the city and the youth. The lure of the dance hall, controlled by the saloon and vice-ridden interests, calls for local cities to investigate the most dangerous and insidious urban spaces. When midnight strikes at the dance hall, “foreign” men entice young, white working girls through seductive dances and liquor consumption to steal their innocence, trapping them into a life of immorality.

Sixteen-year-old Rosie Kopec, a Polish working girl, fell victim to the Social Evil of city pleasures and the tragedy of the dance hall. Laboring in the fabric room of the Kimball Company factory, the “dziewczyna” only had her work and her pleasures.<sup>3</sup> She yearned to experience the late hours of the city, where she enjoyed the lights and the music of the Kurland Dance Hall. Following her long workdays, Rosie looked forward to dancing with her fellows: John Pintrowski, Adam Marcinkiewits, and, most often, Casimir Kijersky. She was aware of the “lure” of the dance hall and the vice-ridden aberrations that were characteristic of Kurland’s, but she frequently “rolled,” “rocked,”

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<sup>1</sup>Dillion, John, Lytle W. H. *From Dance Hall to White Slavery: The World’s Greatest Tragedy*. Charles C. Thompson Co. 1912. Pp.7.

<sup>2</sup> The “Social Evil” refers to Progressive Era vices that were detrimental to urban spaces and morality, i.e., prostitution and brothels, liquor consumption, crime, obscenity, etc.

<sup>3</sup>“Dziewczyna” is a Polish term describing an unmarried young girl or woman. The “dziewczyna” holds moral and virtuous connotations.

and “dipped,” conscious of the rumors that girls’ fall from moral virtues and grace were associated with the dance hall. During dance intermissions, she sipped on cool, refreshing glasses of beer but avoided the heavy whiskeys and wines that naturally led to young girls’ fall. She adored the thrill and amusement of the dance and knew that “the faith of the fathers would keep her in the light of heaven” and protect her from shame and disgrace. After all, she found her lover at Kurland’s, and after a yearlong pursuit and frequent participation in the dance hall, Casimir sought to court Rosie with a proper marriage and a rich life, but the vice and darkness of Kurland Dance Hall soon consumed her. George Kowalsky, a serial procurer who frequented public dance halls, manipulated young Rosie’s vulnerability as they shared heavy liquors and joined in risqué dancing. Rosie succumbed to the vice-ridden pleasures of the amusement—the liquor from the saloon, the dancing, and her own vulnerability. Together, the fallen *dziewczyna* and Kowalsky left the hall, leading to Rosie’s descent into the pressures of the dance hall peril. Indeed, the lure of the dance hall and the horrors of Kurland damaged Rosie, as her innocence was stripped away by her procurer.<sup>4</sup>

When considering sensationalized narratives that depict young, white girls fall into urban vice, like the dance hall, mass hysteria surrounding women’s sexuality and urban morality unfold. The mass panic ascribed to young women’s sexuality became intimately interwoven with city pleasures offered in urban areas. Chicago became a legacy of how moral reformers and municipal governments adhered to white slavery hysteria as they began policing dance hall culture that became closely linked to working-class sexualities. Moral reformers’ efforts to protect and campaign to preserve girlhood

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<sup>4</sup> *A white slavery narrative excerpted from: From Dance Hall to White Slavery: The World’s Greatest Tragedy.*



during the Progressive Era bled into municipal courts and social agencies' solidarity in policing sexuality—targeting the morality of youth and urban spaces. Exaggerated narratives depicting young women's sexuality followed formulaic rhetoric that linked racialized hierarchies and vulnerability to working women's sexuality. Reading through propagandized source material offers insight into how moral reformers and federal and local governments adhered to the mass hysteria of white slavery and formed campaigns that launched investigations to police urban spaces and the youth. Upholding urban spaces produced outstanding youth, and upholding the youth contributed to the moral integrity of the city. Dance halls were essential to young people's social experiences in the city, often operating as an adjunct to the saloon, vices, and the Social Evil.



“We are tired, but we are young, and youth is vigorous and pleasure loving. So, we quite disregard fatigue and seek amusement.” – Maude Le Page, *The Day Book*

## Historiography

### *Prostitution and Moral Panics*

Concerns about the prevalence of prostitution and fears surrounding white slavery during the Progressive Era prompted moral reform campaigns to combat commercial networks where vice markets existed. Federal and local investigations called for states and cities to change their policies to protect white girlhood from moral temptation. The moral panic surrounding white girlhood focused on the dangers posed by new heterosexual recreational sites, like the dance hall. Reformers' investigations of urban vice and Chicago's recreation culture suggested that such spaces stimulated seduction and white slavery and constituted a threat to young, white girls. Legitimate concerns about commercial sex work circulated in the early twentieth century and would transpire into a moral panic by 1909 that shaped the formation of federal policies and placed white women's sexuality under surveillance. Articulating Progressive Era anxieties surrounding working class sexualities, high rates of mobility and immigration, the prevalence of prostitution, and the emergence of amusement cultures, revealed the formation of the white slave panic and how reformers and governments responded to issues surrounding morality. From the moral panic, increasing numbers of melodramatic white slave narratives—popular and sensational articles, books, and films—depicted the virtues of childhood innocence and purity and warned of their destruction.<sup>5</sup> The term, “white slavery,” blurred the lines between sex slavery and prostitution through federal and local

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<sup>5</sup>See “Dance Hall to White Slavery: The World's Greatest Tragedy,” “House of Bondage,” “The Great War on White Slavery: Or Fighting for the Protection of Our Girls,” “The Prodigal Daughter: The White Slave Evil and the Remedy,” “Traffic in Souls, The Girl That Disappears,” “Chicago's Black Traffic in White Girls,” “Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls: Or War on the White Slave Trade.”

investigations, Progressive Era white slave narratives, and new laws and policies.

*The Mann Act of 1910 and the Expansion of Federal Power*

The Mann Act of 1910, a federal policy that targeted prostitution, became conflated with white girl's vulnerability to immoral virtues through racialized framings.<sup>6</sup> In response to the mass hysteria surrounding white slavery, the federal law criminalized the transportation of any woman or girl over foreign or interstate lines "for the purpose of prostitution or debauchery or for any other immoral purpose."<sup>7</sup> While the concrete number of cases surrounding white slavery remained low, the moral panic ascribed to the threat of white girlhood was profound when considering the mass amount of hysteria and sensationalized propaganda produced during the Progressive Era.

As a call for upholding white morality and guarding white women's sexual and racial integrity, the intangible "immoral purpose" clause emphasized the vulnerability ascribed to white native-born or naturalized womanhood. Constructed as worse than chattel slavery, white slavery became an issue 'only' white women experienced and were vulnerable to. The moral panic surrounding white slavery reinforced gendered and racialized connections to commercial sex and amusement cultures and revealed how media presented white slavery—as a threat to pure, white girlhood. The Mann Act aimed to target immorality, prostitution, and trafficking but conflated prostitution with trafficking, influencing vice investigations at the municipal and federal levels. The ambiguity of the Mann Act prompted the mass hysteria of moral reformers' attempts to police vice-ridden markets, creating racialized, overtly sexual rhetoric. The white slave

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<sup>6</sup> The Mann Act is also known as the "White Slave Traffic Act."

<sup>7</sup>Jo Doezeema, "Loose Women or Lost Women: The Re-emergence of the Myth of White Slavery in Contemporary Discourses of Trafficking in Women," *Gender Issues* (Winter 2000): 23-50.

panic reinforced gendered and racialized connections to commercial sex work and revealed that the hysteria maintained focused on preserving pure, white girlhood. The narratives produced during the height of the hysteria shaped policies and influenced how laws functioned at the local and federal levels.

### *Recreational Spaces and Sensationalized Narratives*

At the peak of the white slave panic, reformers grew convinced that hetero-social recreational sites like the dance hall were a gateway to immorality and sexual debauchery for young white women. Far from offering mere “amusements,” such spaces lured vulnerable white girls down a dark path that ended in prostitution. As prostitution became synonymous with social evils and the destruction of purity, white girlhood became a priority to uphold. White slavery during the Progressive Era served as a catalyst to moral reform panics and movements to combat prostitution and vice markets through federal investigations by calling for states to change their policies to protect white girlhood.

Looking at the media produced and reactions from local governments revealed how moral reformers and cities responded to the hysteria. Municipal records in local archives disclosed ambiguous rhetoric of the panic since vice was usually dealt with at the local level and revealed how propaganda influenced reactionary investigations into local amusements. Reformer’s sensationalized depictions of white slavery and federal and local government responses to the white slave trade uncovered genuine concerns and anxieties surrounding the white slave panic. Understanding the relationship between moral reformers and local government’s role in policing amusements revealed a link between preventing *moral* decay and *urban* decay.

Protecting youth, particularly white girlhood, became synonymous with protecting the virtue of urban spaces in Chicago.

### *Immigration and Race*

As mobility and domestic migration increased in the US, the sex market boomed, generating legal and grassroots attempts to prevent, centralize, and criminalize the widespread movement through a national and international approach. When examining the rise in prostitution, migration became a critical factor in its thriving emergence. As racialized framings surrounding white slavery began to solidify in the late 19th century, immigration control became central to vice hysteria and panic in the U.S. The racial contextualization of white slavery interwove with the politics of migration, morality, and specifically race, into a strict immigration policy that limited the mobility of prostitution during the Progressive Era. Migratory prostitution patterns became firmly policed in distinctive ways, resulting in an unwarranted merging of immigration laws and moral purity movements that forged racialized hierarchies that surrounded the politics of mobility and migration, sexuality, and morality.<sup>8</sup>

Mass immigration in the US at the turn of the century revealed how moral reformers and federal and local governments worked together. Looking towards moral reformers who articulated that the white slave panic became an immigration issue, their rhetoric forged anti-foreign immigration sentiments from non-white countries. Often centering on the vulnerability of white girlhood, moral reformers called for strict immigration policies at the federal and state level to limit mobility. The racialized nature of white slavery revealed that anti-foreign narratives interwoven with immigration

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<sup>8</sup> Pliley, Jessica. *Prostitution in America*. Oxford Research Encyclopedic of American History. 2018.

policies at the turn of the century generated racialized federal and local investigations of vice in urban cities that experienced mass migration and immigration. While reformers deviated on *why* white slavery was rising, immigration centered federal policies to protect white girlhood through city-launched investigations.

This research aims to work with existing scholarship on white slavery, prostitution, and sexual surveillance. It centers on the transition from white, sensationalized rhetoric of moral reformers in the early twentieth century to active dance hall investigations that contributed to moral decay—particularly of white girlhood. “The combination of the community dance hall and the disorderly saloon is one of the mighty factors in the ruin of our young girls. We cannot afford to ignore this evil and maintain a shred of self-respect.”<sup>9</sup> To uphold white “moral” tradition would cleanse the city of urban decay and vice, and in turn, uplift the community outstanding. Historians of women, gender, and sexuality have investigated how city governments policed prostitution, and municipal records have been essential sources in revealing citizens' anxieties about white slavery and the subsequent action of policing efforts and moral reform campaigns to keep young, white girls out of vice.

Addressing the limits to this research, I sifted through *The Chicago Defender*, a prominent, Black newspaper in Progressive Era Chicago and was left with little information on the relation between the white slave panic and Black girlhood. What this *does* reveal is that the racialized nature of white slavery pushed Black girlhood underground and out of sight of moral reformers and governing entities peripherals. Moral reformer organizations and federal and local agendas to criminalize prostitution

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<sup>9</sup> Louise DeKoven Bowen Papers, 1917. “The Public Dance Halls of Chicago (Box 10, Folder 135).” Municipal Special Collections, Harold Washington Library, Chicago IL.

through white slave rhetoric omitted *other* women's experiences of vulnerability in the sex market—constructing racialized systems surrounding the sex market and policies. Investigating municipal records to understand how moral reformers and local governments worked together to police the dance hall revealed the racialized nature of dance hall investigations.

### **The Working “Woman” and Girlhood: Juvenile Protective Association and Anxieties Surrounding the White Slave Panic**

#### *The Public Sphere and Sexual Surveillance*

The Progressive Era's period of mass immigration and fast-developing industrialization generated heterosocial relations and amusements that served as a form of economic market domination over human sociability and culture. With the industrial boom growth in commerce and industry, the public sphere expanded, and concerns surrounding women's sexualities stirred. Pushing sexuality outside of the domestic sphere into public spaces, women navigated overt forms of sexuality in Progressive Era Chicago. With working-class sexualities bled into the public sphere from the upward urban growth of Chicago, heterosocial spaces in urban areas uplifted vice economies that attracted the working woman and girl.

Consumer cultures surrounding vice markets enticed the working woman and fashioned vibrant fantasies of lavish lifestyles, excitement, and city pleasures. Attributing to the degeneracy of urban spaces and morality, efforts to police and stamp out rampant sexualities, vice-networks, and the prevalence of prostitution became necessary for moral reformers and city officials to uphold the futurity of urban areas and white, working-class

sexualities. While varied expressions of sexuality were practiced among different classes, emphasis is placed on the refinement of overt sexuality in amusements. Working women's minimal access to lavish lifestyles developed into underground desires that manipulated the economic systems surrounding sexualities and heterosociability. Sexual surveillance of working-class women and girls became essential to keep them away from the lure of vice—liquor consumption, amusements, and prostitution.

*The Juvenile Protective Association and the Vice Commission*

As local and federal governments and agencies began investigating the dance hall, the Juvenile Protective Association and the Vice Commission of Chicago recreational pleasures. Louise DeKoven Bowen, a staunch moral reformer in Chicago, remained dedicated to taking down the vice-ridden dance hall. She frequently wrote on the significance of investigations, the liquor interests of urban cities, and the fall of minors into the “underworld.” Serving as the JPA's first president, she worked closely with the intersections of urban amusements and rampant prostitution. Bowen's core values centered on preserving the moral and physical integrity of the city and protecting the youth of Chicago. Her papers on the vice-ridden dance hall stirred white slavery anxieties and called for strict ordinances and policies to be held at local and federal levels. Bowen argued that the vice-ridden dance hall was for the sale and consumption of liquor, rather than for mere amusement.

In response to the mass hysteria surrounding white slavery, a study of the vice conditions in Chicago, and recommendations, were proposed to suppress the social evil. Investigating existing conditions of Chicago, recreational spaces and conditions became integral to the city-launched investigations from the municipal level and by social reform



agencies. Looking closely at dance halls, investigators determined that “we have a large number of wrecks which would be taken care of. We found a woman down in the red-light district and took care of her for eight weeks, and now she has got a job. We believe in taking care of the wrecks, but we believe more in preventing them. Another way is to suppress the dance halls, and especially to prevent the sale of liquor in dance halls.”<sup>10</sup> The proposed ordinances of the JPA aligned with proposals of the vice commission. The investigations and policing of dance halls were central to suppressing prostitution, debauchery, and vice.

### **Investigations of the Chicago Dance Hall: Midnight Falls and Operations Ensur**

Commercialized amusement and recreations of Chicago played a major role in the social lives of young people in urban spaces—dancing always the most popular amusement. Investigations by the JPA were crucial to resolving the social evil and moral degeneracy of Chicago. The unsupervised dance hall became an adjunct of the saloon where darkness lurked, and immoral and obscene dancing and entertainment clouded the dance halls. The dance halls, run by proprietors that navigated and ran the underground commercial market, led to women and girl’s fall into prostitution. The debauchery and delinquency of the dance hall in Chicago demoralized the youth but was highly profitable in Progressive Era Chicago.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Chicago Vice Commission. “The Social Evil in Chicago.” Chicago: Gunthrop-Warren Printing Company, 1911.

<sup>11</sup> Faulkner, Thomas A. *The Lure of the Dance*. [T. A. Faulkner, Los Angeles, Calif, monographic, 1916] Pdf. <https://www.loc.gov/item/16023227/>.

The lure of the dance hall and melodramatic narratives positioned around saving white girlhood from moral temptation motivated local cities to investigate and create ordinances to police urban amusements. Looking closely at investigations to uncover the insidious evils of the dance hall, investigations often were lackluster and revealed little to no “social evil.” The hysteria attached to white slave narratives were not necessarily linked to the vice-ridden dance hall, but rather it was a tool to regulate the city and youth culture. According to the extensive investigations, nearly all dance halls were deemed in orderly conduct and respectable. While there were empty ties being made to reflect immorality and “loose” behavior, there revealed to be little to no threat of the dance hall. The few dance halls that reflected “disorderly behavior,” were deemed such through the age of those participating, the type of dancing, and the physical characteristics of the customers. Investigations into the dance hall sat at the center of anxieties that were tied to preserving white girlhood and policing amusements. Looking towards investigations of dance halls funded by municipal courts in Chicago, aids in understanding the crackdown of policing public spaces and amusements to prevent white girl’s fall into vice and debauchery. “Permanent improvement of the dance hall can only be effected by drastic legislation.”<sup>12</sup>

### *The Liquor Problem*

The “liquor problem” of the dance hall became associated with extended intermission times and the short dances, contributing to the demoralization of the youth in urban spaces. Offering direction on how to police the distribution of liquor in the hall, the JPA

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<sup>12</sup> Louise DeKoven Bowen Papers, 1917. “The Public Dance Halls of Chicago (Box 10, Folder 135).” Municipal Special Collections, Harold Washington Library, Chicago IL.

proposed that “the dance hall keeper procures a government license for which he pays \$25 a year. When a hall is rented out, the dance hall keeper goes with the representative or club who is renting, or loans his government license, and with this they secure a special bar permit for which they pay six dollars each time.”<sup>13</sup> Limiting the sales and times a dance hall could sell liquor, Bowen argued, would regulate the youth’s participation in recreational spaces and keep young women and girls from staying late at the dance hall. Ordinances and policies put in place to limit liquor sales, moral reformers believed, would save white girlhood from moral corruption. While ordinances were passed to police liquor consumption, the lack of investigations in the dance hall led to proprietors to easily obtain a liquor license. The permanent improvement and safety of the dance hall required investigation, increased policing, and drastic legislation to stamp out the problem of vice and prostitution. The JPA strongly opposed the sale of liquor in the dance hall and argued that there should be a state law forbidding liquor in recreational spaces.<sup>14</sup> Dance hall cultures became more about the physical space and stimulation of amusement and pleasure, rather than dancing for patrons.

### *The Investigations*

Citizens’ concerns over the Chicago dance hall resulted in the JPA’s extensive investigation into the amusement. With white slave narratives stirring anxieties surrounding recreational spaces, growing numbers of anxieties resulted in local governments and social agencies to investigate the conditions of the dance hall.

Investigations of the Chicago dance hall sat at the center of anxieties tied to preserving

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<sup>13</sup>Louise DeKoven Bowen Papers, 1917. “The Public Dance Halls of Chicago (Box 10, Folder 135).” Municipal Special Collections, Harold Washington Library, Chicago IL.

<sup>14</sup>The JPA and Bowen did not oppose recreational spaces and amusements in Chicago, rather they wanted to regulate the dance hall and provide a safe space for youth to participate in dancing culture.

white girlhood and policing amusements that represented white women's fall into vice and debauchery. Looking towards investigations of dance halls funded by municipal courts in Chicago, aids in understanding the crackdown of policing public spaces and amusements to protect the morality of white girlhood. "In all of our large cities the two draw the largest number of young people are the theatre and the dance hall. It is estimated that about 32,000 children attend the moving picture shows in Chicago, but the dance hall is even more popular and attracts some evenings as many as 86,000 young people. Hundreds of young girls are annually started on the road to ruin, for the saloonkeepers and dance hall owners, young girls go to these dances because they crave the excitement of the dance. It is an outlet for their emotions, it affords a forgetfulness of fatigue, and it is a safety valve for their surplus energy."<sup>15</sup> While the "nature" of the dance hall was beneficial for the youth, the saloon and the conditions transformed the innocent social pleasure into a site of vice, debauchery, and prostitution.

Moral reformers, municipal governments, and investigators were engaged in close correspondence to fix the problems of the dance hall. In a letter dedicated to establishing municipal-coordinated public dance halls, 1914 Mayor Carter H. Harrison of Chicago, called for a community approach to safe, regulated dance halls. Underscoring innocent, "wholesome," and healthy recreation for young people to experience, Harrison called for dance halls that were supervised, sanitary, cost-effective, and only permitted with no liquor. The network of reformers and local governments in Chicago carved out new citizen's concerns anxieties associated with dance hall. While investigations were

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<sup>15</sup>Louise DeKoven Bowen Papers, 1917. "The Public Dance Halls of Chicago (Box 10, Folder 135)." Municipal Special Collections, Harold Washington Library, Chicago IL.

widespread in Chicago, they revealed little information on the main issue of the late-night dance hall: prostitution. Looking specifically at race, gender, and age, the physical conditions of the hall, and proximity of dancing and music, heavy policing efforts limited the movement of halls through ambiguous measures. Applying methods of chaperonage, limiting liquor sales in the city of Chicago, city-ordinated investigations, heavy police presence, and liquor licenses, the investigations and ordinances created loopholes for proprietors of the dance hall.

The policing of the dance hall in Chicago limited the flexibility of the recreation, but proprietors often found loopholes in city ordinances and policing to resist municipal laws and policies. Often dance halls operated under the guise of the dance academy” to keep policing away from the dance hall. Investigations into halls like the Athenian “Dancing Academy” and the Zapeon Dance “School,” revealed that no instruction was taking place, there was a lack of supervision, and there were “streetwalker” types in the dance halls. JPA investigations revealed that the hall was mainly operating as a saloon and working women gratified male patrons during the late evenings of dance hall operations. Overt sexuality and the lack of supervision encouraged debauchery and prostitution and served as an urban space for immorality to flourish.

Following a decade-long investigation into Chicago public dance halls, a proposed ordinance to regulate the public dance hall at the request of the US Interdepartmental Social Hygiene Board and the Juvenile Protective Association of Chicago placed a great deal of detail on the physical space of the dance hall to uphold the city and the youth. “To those of us who knew the difficulties of protecting the community in normal times from the degrading and demoralizing influences that break down

individual and family and community life, it seemed that through joint efforts in relation to the Century of Progress, we would establish a precedent and demonstrate what could be done at all times in all communities.”<sup>16</sup> Ordinances reflecting the moral integrity of the city and the youth, the JPA proposed that public dance halls must be operating under a license, must have outstanding sanitary and health conditions, regulate age, adhere to operating hours, must be investigated, and be a citizen of the United States.

From one source and another I am sure that I will be asked specific questions. As you are to have another meeting Tuesday, will you come prepared to give us definite information on the following problems:

- 1st: Do you find that many young people come to your Ball Room intoxicated and if under the influence of liquor do you allow them to remain?
- 2nd: If you find they have liquor with them what do you do?
- 3rd: Do you allow girls to smoke cigarettes and if so do you provide a special room?
- 4th: Do you provide at least some supervision by women?
- 5th: What are your general rules about the type of dancing, position, etc?
- 6th: What do you do about conduct "between dances" - that is - do you allow "spooning", "petting", etc? (This has recently been very much criticized in some of our supposedly best Ball Rooms.)

I hope we can have a very frank statement of conditions and discussion for the worst thing that could happen would be for us to claim what we do not live up to.

Miss Jessie F. Binford, JPA Executive Director, questions dance hall proprietors.<sup>17</sup> The questions were sent to all dance halls in Chicago to detail accounts of “immorality” occurring in the dance hall.

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<sup>16</sup>Jessie F. Binford, December 1933. “Taxi-Dance Halls (Box 11, Folder 148). *Journal of Social Hygiene Association*, New York, NY.

<sup>17</sup>Louise DeKoven Bowen Papers, 1917. “The Public Dance Halls of Chicago (Box 10, Folder 135).” Municipal Special Collections, Harold Washington Library, Chicago IL.

## Conclusion

As racialized framings surrounding white slavery began to solidify in the late 19th century, immigration control became the center of vice hysteria and panic in the U.S. The racial contextualization of white slavery interwove with the politics of migration, morality, and specifically race, into a strict immigration policy that limited the mobility of prostitution during the Progressive Era. Examining the trends of policing power at the local and federal level of Chicago dance halls and tracing the legacies of morality during the white slave panic, actively contributed to creating racialized tensions assigned to sex work under contemporary framings.

While historians of sexuality have noted the link between white slavery and public dance halls, this project drew upon both white slave narratives and municipal records at the local level to gauge the morality of white girlhood, utilizing the trend of “childhood,” to prevent moral and urban decay. Cleansing the city from vice ridden leisure amusements became synonymous with cleansing morality, and the formulaic foundation of US policies at the federal and local levels during the Progressive Era adhere to contemporary framings attached to cases of trafficking that are conflated with modern-day sex work. The social upstanding of urban areas reflected morality to uplift the youth and the city. The ambiguity of the Mann Act, white slave narratives, and investigations into the dance hall, held a legacy of hollow ties to police the girlhood and the amusement. Underground, informal economies in the dance hall flourished, but when investigated and policed, they failed. Rather, dance hall investigations in Chicago deepened mass hysteria tied to white slavery, while simultaneously policing the flourishing of urban cities.

When reflecting on Progressive Era sensationalized narratives that depicted young, white girls fall into urban vice, like the dance hall, mass hysteria surrounding white women's sexuality and urban morality began to unfold. The mass panic ascribed to young women's sexuality became intimately interwoven with city pleasures offered in urban areas. Chicago became a legacy of how moral reformers and municipal governments adhered to the white slavery panic as they began policing dance hall culture. Moral reformers' attempts to protect and campaign to preserve girlhood during the Progressive Era bled into municipal courts and social agencies' solidarity in policing sexuality—targeting the morality of youth and urban spaces. Exaggerated narratives depicting young women's sexuality followed a propagandized rhetoric that was linked to vulnerability and working women's sexuality. The moral integrity of the youth is the moral integrity of the city.



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