

# TEACHER'S GUIDE

## Primary Source Document Collection

### MISSION 4: "City of Immigrants"

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#### **A Journalist Warns of the Dangers of Dance Halls**

*During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, dance halls became increasingly popular hangouts for young people, in part because they offered an opportunity to mingle and flirt away from parental supervision. But not all New Yorkers approved of the dance-hall craze. In this article, published in 1911, a journalist warns of the "dance madness" sweeping over New York City and points out the perils of the new establishments, especially for young women.*

Diverting a Pastime: How Are We To Protect the City's Youth and Yet Provide for the Natural Demand for Entertainment? By Belle Lindner Israels  
Excerpt

The storm of dance madness has come over the young people of New York. Streets in which the dance halls are located are picturesque enough [on the outside]. The hall is usually up one or two flights of stairs and [is] framed in big windows of plate glass. Brilliant lights shine through. The sounds of a waltz or two-step pounded on the piano and emphasized by an automatic drum flow out to the passer-by. Boys and girls flit past the windows or slip into the doorway in twos and threes, and managers remain outside, announcing the special features of their halls. The noise, the lights, the air of excitement and good time all attract.

In studying the dance hall one comes continually against the liquor problem, so that it is claimed with much reason that the liquor interests control the amusement. In the small saloon dance hall, which is open nightly without an admission fee, it is understood that the dancing is permitted simply as a [way to get people to buy] liquor. The music plays for three or four minutes, and there are intermissions covering a period of from fifteen to twenty minutes between the dances. During these times the people at the tables are constantly [pestered] to buy drinks. Girls not being entertained at the tables rush over to the dressing-rooms to avoid being seen on the floor.

The city, the town, the village must all recognize that playgrounds for children solve only half the problem. The dangerous period in the life of the young girl is during adolescence, between fourteen and twenty. If she can be guided through these years with proper [opportunities] for the wholesome expression of her emotional and mental needs, she will add to the glory of our American womanhood. If she is forced into the [streets] guided by the lowest types of commercialized amusements, there is small hope for her.

Source: *Leslie's Weekly* July 27, 1911 p. 94.

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