

# Florida State University Libraries

---

Electronic Theses, Treatises and Dissertations

The Graduate School

---

2003

## Working Women and Dance in Progressive Era New York City, 1890-1920

Jennifer L. Bishop



THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF VISUAL ARTS AND DANCE

WORKING WOMEN AND DANCE IN PROGRESSIVE ERA NEW YORK CITY,  
1890-1920

By

JENNIFER L. BISHOP

A Thesis submitted to the  
Department of Dance  
In partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

Degree Awarded:  
Summer Semester, 2003

The members of the committee approve the thesis of Jennifer L. Bishop defended on June 06, 2003.

---

Tricia Young  
Chairperson of Committee

---

Neil Jumonville  
Committee Member

---

John O. Perpener, III.  
Committee Member

The Office of Graduate Studies has verified and approved the above named committee members.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Some of the ideas presented in this thesis are inspired by previous coursework. I would like to acknowledge the contributions of Dr. Neil Jumonville's U.S. Intellectual History courses and Dr. Sally Sommer's American Dance History courses in influencing my approach to this project. I would also like to acknowledge the editorial feedback from Dr. Tricia Young. Dr. Young's comments have encouraged me to synthesize this material in creative, yet concise methods.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1. REFORMING AMERICA: Progressive Era New York City as Context for Turn-of-the-Century American Dance.....	6
2. VICE AND VIRTUE: The Competitive Race to Shape American Identities Through Leisure and Vernacular Dance Practices.....	31
3. THE VIRGIN IN THE MACHINE: Ziegfeld <i>Follies</i> and the Construction Of the American Girl's Sexuality.....	70
CONCLUSION.....	102
REFERENCES.....	107
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.....	114

## ABSTRACT

This study provides a historical examination of working women's relationship with social and theatrical dance in New York City during the Progressive Era. These years, between 1890 and 1920, were seminal in bringing America into the modern age, as well as providing a unique framework for women's activism against restrictive sociopolitical roles. The purpose of this thesis is to illuminate the relationship between New York City working class women, dance, and intellectual ideas in an attempt to broaden the scope of both dance studies and history.

By utilizing historiography, women's studies, cultural studies, and movement analysis, this project addresses the shift of women (from Victorian to Modern) through the lens of dance. Social dancing, especially in dance halls, was an outlet for working class experimentation with new attitudes of social and financial independence, as well as in defining a more liberal attitude of sexuality. Likewise, the chorus girls of Ziegfeld's *Follies* used a theatrical medium in which to explore new identities of independence and sexuality. These high-grade chorines epitomized the working girl dream--they earned their own money while gallivanting through elite social circles. Throughout these two spheres--social or theatrical--the social and sexual transformation of women was underscored through ideas of conspicuous consumption and ethics of leisure.

A brief introduction and outline of this study begins the text of this thesis, elucidating the interweaving ideas of leisure and conspicuous consumption as they relate to working women and dance. Next, a chapter devoted to the historical background of the Progressive Era is followed by an examination of dance halls and then Ziegfeld's *Follies*. Finally, a conclusion ties together the overarching ideas of this project.

## INTRODUCTION

The Progressive Era (1890-1920) was a reformist period of social, political and cultural change. Working women during this time reflected the changing role of the American female through their embodiment of new socio-cultural attitudes of individuality and sexuality. On and offstage, in private and social spheres, dance became a tool through which these women gained power in a world dominated and constructed by male-oriented ideals. Specifically, exploration into the social interactions of dance halls, as well as the rise of female chorus lines in theatrical, musical extravaganzas, illuminates two types of women at work during this epoch. Women in the dance hall empowered themselves through the appropriation of leisure, while chorus girls radiated a new, overt sexuality onstage and established an acceptable profession for American girls. By juxtaposing historical influences with the emergence of new dance styles and outlets for recreation, an integrated approach to exploring Progressive Era dance history increases the scope and understanding of the evolution of the contemporary, liberated, American woman.

Like the African-Americans freed from slavery, women were gaining civil liberties and independence, though these freedoms were combated by intricate interpretations of legislature. This significantly altered the attitudes and actions of women as they actively sought employment, created social lives away from the family, carved out autonomy within marriages and rediscovered the sexuality that was repressed during the reign of Victorianism. Many middle class women became reformists and urged working women to join labor unions, fight for

secure wages, and contribute to the financial security of the household in order to break free from the confines of male dominance. These liberations were reflected in women's bodies, especially through social and theatrical dance. Through fashion and leisure, both of which converged within the world of dance, a female dominion emerged as gender equality began to establish itself. Though life was grim at times, women were gaining equality and power and were capable of expressing their growing liberation in public spheres. Dance, in particular, became an avenue of rebellion and articulation where women could shape their opinions and dominance.

The transition from the 1890s to 1920s evidenced a vast shift in artistic conventions in dance. Paving the way for the next generation, innovations from Delsartism to dance halls contributed to one of the most influential products of Progressivism-- American Dance. Women's participation in this arena--as dancers, choreographers, company managers or benefactors--provided the predominant impetus for dance's achievement. Without the social and political developments of the Progressive Era, women may never have been able to participate as fundamental pioneers in the dance sphere.

Therefore, the intention of this thesis is to tie together the intellectual history of the Progressive Era with the cultural importance of dance, specifically the contributions of women.

Most of the sources I unearthed during the process of writing this thesis specifically addressed the climate of Progressive Era New York City. Due to this abundance of material, my focus naturally centered on the historical relevance of New York City to the issues of the Progressive Era. Because these sources offered an array of possible research projects, I narrowed my topic to cover only New York City working women and their relationship to dance. This choice to focus on working women was made because the turn of the century was a turbulent period in American society, especially as far as notions of female propriety and conduct were concerned. Progressive America and the change that women experienced (leading them from Victorian to Modern) shaped the

identity of the “new” woman. The experiences of these working women offer new insights to American dance studies, illuminating the historical impact of this class upon social and theatrical dance, as well as the attitudes and ideas that these dances reflected. In this thesis, I have chosen to use scholar Kathy Peiss’ definition of working women, as it is the most concise example that supports my research. Peiss defines working class women as, “...immigrants or daughters of immigrants, [who] lived in well-defined tenement districts, and labored for wages while unmarried, usually in factories, homes, and sales and service jobs.” (Peiss 9)

The social change that working women experienced directly resulted from Progressive Era political and social reforms. With the development of business and the expansion of industrialization, both U.S. citizens and immigrants flocked to cities in search of jobs. This urbanization created concentrated numbers of diverse populations living within the tight boundaries of city limits. Various ethnicities, races, heritages and genders were crammed together in the poorly constructed tenements and slums of cosmopolitan areas. Economic instability created a need for women and children to seek employment in factories and to work at home, exacerbating the strained environment of daily existence. Poor sanitation, low wages and booming business painted the backdrop of Progressive Era America, which urged women to take control in the fight for a better lifestyle. These factors of industrialism, urbanization and immigration contributed to the development of reform centered environmentalism (playground reform, higher standards of tenement living, sanitation) and social work (settlement houses and social activism organizations) of which women were at the forefront. These concerns were negotiated onstage in chorus lines and in the social dance halls.

Furthermore, by limiting the scope of this thesis to New York City, the workings of this specific, targeted group become clearer. The city’s growth and influx of immigrants supplied a fertile ground for the core issues of Progressive Era America. Radical renovations in the home and workplace auspiciously

contributed to a rise in female equality through the re-evaluation of women's place in the world. Because of the intensity of these issues in areas of dense populations, urban spaces emerge as hotspots for evaluating significant shifts in women's history and dance. Specifically, New York City exemplified the growing tension between past and present, reform groups and conservative agendas, shifts in political, social, cultural, and secular views, and the changing gender roles within Progressive, contemporary life. Because of this, the evaluation of working women and leisure in New York City presents a clear example of the larger, paradigmatic transformation that Progressive Era women experienced and later shaped into the embodiment of the "modern," "liberated" American woman.

Yet, it should be noted that this thesis attempts only to draw conclusions about New York City as one example of Progressive Era life. This project by no means implies that New York City reflected the whole of America. Naturally, the results of reform and social change affect each population differently, yet New York City was certainly one of the most visible metropolises of modernity during the American Progressive Era. To address the impact of the turn of the century across the entire United States is beyond the scope of this thesis.

This thesis consists of three main sections. The first chapter addresses the historical context of the Progressive Era, examining industrialism, urbanization, immigration, environmentalism and social thought as the foundation from which vernacular and theatrical dance, as well as women's issues emerged. Chapter Two explores Progressive Era social dance, concentrating on the influence of conspicuous consumption and dance hall reform as factors in shaping cabarets, *thés dansants*, dance halls, and the working woman's social sphere. The final chapter illuminates the importance of the chorus girl--specifically the Ziegfeld *Follies* showgirl--within American culture. In conclusion, ideas that thread these chapters together will be summarized, including the formation of the working woman's "American" identity through dance and the consumption of leisure.

The methodology of this thesis integrates a variety of theoretical approaches. Historiography and cultural studies have been used to develop a holistic view of the Progressive Era. Intellectual history and dance history are viewed as interactive entities, which provide context for one another. Additionally, the lens of gender studies is used to examine the social roles of Progressive Era women, and the development of the dance practices in which they participated. By unearthing information concerning the lives of Progressive Era women and applying those findings to the evolution of dance, feminist scholarship of the most general nature emerges as a tool through which women's history can be re-evaluated. Finally, movement analysis will aid in explanations of gender shifts in power. Through descriptions of Progressive Era dances, this thesis will illustrate a vital correlation between woman, body, and society.

CHAPTER I  
REFORMING AMERICA:  
Progressive Era New York City  
as Context for Turn-of-the-Century American Dance

The issues that we face are very different from those of the last century and a half. The difference, I think, might be summed up roughly this way: those who went before inherited a conservatism and overthrew it; we inherit freedom, and have to use it.

Walter Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery*

The years surrounding turn-of-the century America were shaped by reformist sociopolitical and cultural reactions to ideological issues concerning society, the nation, and intellectual thought. This period, known as the Progressive Era, is roughly placed between 1890 and 1920 and was characterized by changes in dance as well. Tensions between industrialization, urbanization, immigration, environmentalism and social science are illuminated through the shifts in gender identity and cultural aspirations of a generation who modernized America. These distinct, yet intricately connected factors, provide a valuable analytical framework with which to examine not only American history, politics and economics, but also American social and theatrical dance.

The Progressive Era, characterized by rampant change and national reform, witnessed significant changes in women's roles in American society. The

Victorian, genteel social structure transitioned into a completely new set of values. Previously marginalized groups of African Americans, immigrants, and the emerging independent woman redesigned their roles within the framework of American culture. Dance emerged as an outlet for these women to assert independence, cultivate their sexuality, and literally embody the contemporary ideas of their generation.

The Progressive Era was most noticeably typified in the sprawling metropolis of New York City, a place where the issues surrounding turn-of-the-century America collided, flourished and were met head on by savvy businessmen, political leaders and commoners alike. New York--industrial, modern and teeming with people--emerged as a paradigm of the period. Once known for housing more Irish than Dublin and more Italians than Rome, New York illuminated the progressive issues that formed the new American identity. Furthermore, the city was a glorious artistic sanctuary. Theater, visual arts, literature and dance flourished on an island full of inspiration. The fine and performing arts captured the essence of a New York that was open to change, becoming a mosaic of American life and ideas. (Burns 1999, vol. 4)

For this reason, examining New York City elucidates the characteristics of the age and the historical and cultural importance of the Progressive Era. This chapter will use New York City as the landscape in which to explore the beginnings of the Progressive Era, starting with a brief background of American women's history directly predating the 1890s. Concentrating on the Cult of Domesticity, the shift in social expectations of women (From Victorian to modern) will exemplify the life experiences of the turn of the century female. After addressing the background of women, the causes of the Progressive Era (and the characteristics of industrialization, urbanization, social science, immigration and environmentalism) will be covered in relation to women's history, but also with reference to the correlation between the Progressive Era, cultural studies and dance history.

Most noticeably, the Progressive Era is important for its transition from nineteenth century ideologies to twentieth century thought. One of the most difficult factors during this era was the abandonment of the agrarian lifestyle for technologically-centered ways of life. This shift permeated every issue of the period and left many conservative thinkers alienated and confused. Moreover, most progressive concerns resulted from problems ignited by the Civil War. This idea is integral to the realization that the Progressive Era did not exist in a vacuum. The issues of the time grew out of previous concerns. Thomas K. McGraw writes of the progressives,

With one foot stuck firmly in the nineteenth century, the other striding overconfidently into the twentieth, they were certain to react in a manner that would strike us as ambiguous. Habituated to outmoded patterns of thought, they nonetheless sensed that the impersonal, cosmopolitan, ultimately post-industrial twentieth century was, without question, a new type of world.... To their credit, they accepted the responsibility it implied and acted on it.... (McCraw 1974, 199)

At the beginning of the Progressive Era, the United States was deeply entrenched in the ideals of the Victorian Period (1837-1901). Social structure and gender roles were heavily dependant upon the codes of morality purported by Victorian values. Because of this, the Progressive Era is particularly valuable in its temporal situation--it marks the change in society's expectations of women, as well as women's assertiveness in society. During this time, it became evident that the conservative values of previous generations no longer accommodated budding American modernity.

The Cult of Domesticity was a social standard that dictated general behavior and actions in the household, on the streets, even within marriages. The premise was that ideal woman should be innocent, pure, chaste, and, a mother. Above all, she should be submissive to her husband, whose "position was ordained by biology and theology." (Campbell 1979, 2) According to the Cult of Domesticity, marriage was the ultimate goal. Motherhood was the ultimate responsibility in fulfilling a woman's social role. Such demands were combined

with theories that women's denial of sexual nature produced a spiritual and religious superiority. Naturally, then, it was understood that men were not bound to the same codes of morality (or sexuality) as the strict codes imposed on women.

The establishment and enactment of feminine, social sexuality had long been an issue of investigation and interpretation, full of contradictory expectations and effects. Within the Progressive Era, though, women's sexuality was amplified in social concerns as a point of moral contention. Intellectuals and scientists debated the essence of feminine sexuality, some of which crushed the confines of Victorian ideals by redesigning the social female role. New ideas of womanly independence were asserted within a sexual construct. Yet, many Americans still clung to the conventional, older ideals that supported the Cult of Domesticity.

To a large extent, conservative views of women's sexuality informed and shaped the Cult of Domesticity, the republic of motherhood. In fact, the presumed inferiority of women was used as the foundation for such ideas. "Most of what is known about sexual ideology before the twentieth century comes from 'prescriptive' sources--those manuals, essays, and books that tried to establish norms of behavior." (Cott 1978, 221) Yet, some contemporary scholars and feminists refute the simplistic tenet that women were sexually repressed. When compared to the motivation of Progressive Era heterosocial relationships, the suggestion that Victorian ideals of sexuality created a surge of feminine power has emerged as an interesting revisionist theory in explaining the history of women's sexual placement.

In her essay, "Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850", Nancy F. Cott wrestles with this theme. Cott asserts that the social beliefs regarding women, sexuality, and power were potentially invigorating assets to the liberation of the nineteenth century woman, not impediments obstructing her progress. Cott's theory asserts that Victorianism began to work to the advantage of women, instilling in them a sense of morality

that stemmed from the ascribed lack of sexual motives. While men were revered for their sexually charged behavior, women were expected to be devoid of such interest and to regard sex with subservience to the ideology of domesticity.

In contemporary life, scientists recognize the inherent sexual impulse within every living organism. Women are no longer expected to be moral icons, devoid of sexuality. Yet, Cott argues that these previously accepted confines surrounding the presumed absence of women's sexual desire actually motivated women to aspire to social control in the years directly preceding the Progressive Era.

The correlation between passionlessness and a distinctly improved view of women's character and social purpose begins to suggest the appeal of the concept to women. By replacing sexual with moral motives and determinants, the ideology of passionlessness favored women's power and self-respect. It reversed the tradition of Christian mistrust based on women's sexual treacherousness. It elevated women above the weakness of animal nature, stressing instead that they were 'formed for exalted purity, felicity, and glory.' It postulated that woman's influence was not ensnaring but disinterested. It routed women out of the cul-de-sac of education for attractiveness, thus allowing more intellectual breadth. To women who wanted means of self-preservation and self-control, this view of female nature may well have appealed.... (Cott 1978, 228)

Cott continues her position by writing,

In this perspective, women might hail passionlessness as a way to assert control in the sexual arena—even if that 'control' consisted in denial. Some scholars have claimed that women adhered to the ideology of passionlessness to bolster their position in a disadvantageous marriage market, that is, to play 'hard to get' with conviction. More essentially, passionlessness served women's larger interests by downplaying altogether their sexual characterization, which was the cause of their exclusion from significant 'human' (i.e., male) pursuits. The positive contribution of passionlessness was to replace that sexual/carnal characterization of women with a spiritual/moral one, allowing women to develop their human faculties and their self-esteem. The belief that women lacked carnal motivation was the cornerstone of the argument for women's moral superiority, used to enhance women's status and widen their opportunities in the nineteenth century. (Cott 1978, 233)

The opportunities of nineteenth century women began to include an authoritative voice within the framework of religion. The separation established between church and state in the mid-1800s left clergymen floundering in a society that looked toward politics instead of Christ for answers to immediate problems. Attempting to regain control, the clergy solicited the support of women, now the majority of the churchgoing population. The church became a repository of female dominion where clerics and women empathized with one another's isolation from power and the sexual roles expected of them by society. One was expected to be celibate and virtuous, the other to act celibate and virtuous. "Under the sanction of sentimentalism, lady and clergyman were able to cross the cruel lines laid down by sexual stereotyping in ways that were clearly historically important and undoubtedly personally fulfilling." (Douglass 1998, 10) This new alliance emphasized the influence of woman's ideas, reshaped social spheres, and provided a surplus of charity work to fill middle class women's free time. Women became instruments of God, underscoring their moral fiber and radically highlighting the importance of the female within American society.

According to the Cult of Domesticity tenets, if a woman was unfortunate enough never to marry, she failed in her duty to humanity. Subsequently, single women were expected to mother their families. Their fathers and brothers usurped their energy because "...women without a family were denying their chief function in life." (Campbell 6) In addition, Christian ethical standards called for work among the unfortunate. Women without offspring were viewed as having no legitimate reason for not contributing their maternal skills to those less fortunate. Women were constantly expected to uphold their biological role as nurturers. This type of woman--single, charitable, educated and middle-class--gave rise to the foundation of public institutions that attempted to alleviate the concerns that immigrants and poor experienced during the time. Through these establishments, known as settlement houses, leading reformers, such as the famous Jane Addams, founded institutions, like Chicago's Hull House.

Innocence was a grave concern for Victorians, and expected of all women. Unfortunately, innocence was often confused with ignorance. Mothers felt it wisest to impart as little worldly knowledge as possible to their daughters. Sex, childbearing, and eroticism were taboo topics. Consequently, women knew virtually nothing about men, relationships, or even themselves, when they announced their expected vows of matrimony. Since women were not supposed to engage in sexual pleasure, it was not explained. Not surprisingly, with all these regulations governing the human body and emotions, there was an extremely high rate of prostitution among working class women. Promiscuity was a consequence of the repression of natural instincts and natural urges that these women experienced. This sexual behavior was expected to be cast out from “good” society.

Thus, women of good status showed real ambivalence toward sexual impurity in other women. Pity, sympathy, strongly flavored with condescension was proper; tolerance of impropriety was not. These attitudes resulted from the asexual ideal held up for emulation and from the prevalent ignorance about social conditions in general and sex in particular among well-bred women. (Campbell 1979, 13)

Venereal disease continued to run rampant and sexual ignorance was taking its toll. An increase in medical knowledge allowed doctors to take a stand on the subject, supplying America with investigations and experiments that replaced innocence with a new combative strategy of education. “The laymen who promoted sex education felt it to be a basic human right for men and women to understand the functioning of their own bodies.” (Campbell 1979, 13) Within this context, women began to assert a new independence. The reforms and results of Progressive Era scientific investigations provided women with opportunities to voice educated opinions. Women became their own advocates by educating themselves with the latest data, then representing their sex with open arguments for equal rights. Women used this foundation to legitimize their liberation, which began with the expectations of their social function, then spread

to making and managing their own money, and exploring an open, “natural” approach to sexuality.

These shifting gender identities arose from the radical changes beginning to influence America. Following the American Civil War, the North and South were bound by interstate roads and mass railroads. Still a time when America was dependent on foreign investments for economic stability, big business manufacturing outstripped farm production. Railroads were the most conspicuous of these businesses, which, out of sheer necessity for survival, depended on new economic strategies, employing such techniques as pools, trusts and holding companies. Big business led to mass industrialization and the creation of large urban areas in which workers and buyers could co- exist. The conditions of industry, including, for example, long hours, poor sanitation and crowded tenement living, ignited activist reforms centered on pragmatic, reform Darwinism.

In 1893, the worst depression in American history struck. This catastrophe was a result of over-production and under-consumption of farm and manufactured goods during a time of economic flux. A major component of society was left homeless, hungry, and angry with a government that was struggling to keep up with the expansion and technological advancement it had created. “In the wake of economic catastrophe, reform groups and reform concerns mushroomed almost overnight.” (Holli 1974, 136)

The many immigrants who flooded ports seeking the American dream exacerbated this situation. Streets were filthy, crowded with an impoverished population. Political leaders, like New York’s Boss Tweed, corrupted the neighborhood political systems (wards) for their own benefit. The rich could afford to protect themselves within this biased, dishonest structure of local politics by bribing officials to support upper class agendas. The working class, however, was too poor to enter into negotiations with these politicians. As a result, the working class had no significant political voice. Meanwhile, the working class struggled to survive. “The reform impulse that pervaded American life after 1901

had clear roots in the turbulence of the 1890s. The depression that lasted from 1893 to 1897 dramatized the social problems of the country and raised the troublesome prospect of more violent upheavals if reform did not occur.” (Gould 1974, 1) Now, more than before, the wide gap between rich and poor was too pressing to be ignored.

The presidential election of 1896 was another landmark moment in shaping the Progressive Era. In the 1880s, farmers were becoming increasingly disturbed by the development of industrialism and plummeting agricultural prices. Attempting to make special interest political changes, these agrarian-minded men banded together and formed the Farmers’ Alliance. The group quickly gained a vast amount of outside interest, and in 1892, they formally named themselves the Populist Party. In 1896, Republican William McKinley was elected president, which brought an end to the balance that formerly existed between political parties. The emergence and dissipation of the third Populist Party made it clear that more extreme measures were needed to incite change during such turbulent times.

Key factors in exacting this change were industrialism and urbanization. These two elements propelled America forward, into a modern nation. Industrialization defined the period and evidenced the growing affluence of America, especially in New York City. Industry created booming businesses, most of which found little space in Manhattan to create expansive, corporate buildings. The people and industry of New York were forced to find alternatives. They expanded upwards. Certainly the most visible icon of industry was architecture. Skyscrapers with sleek, metal lines symbolized prosperity and futurism. America’s identity was molded into buildings that tried to touch the sky. The spires of these landmarks jutted out from the horizon of corporate buildings, banks, and factories, proclaiming America as nation supreme. The New York skyline not only testified to the possible wealth that America offered, but also stood as an icon of modernity. “In no area of fine or applied arts was there a closer relationship among the spirit of the twentieth century, the accelerating

urbanization, and the latest technology, than in architecture. The skyscraper towering over the city became a symbol of the new century and the new America.” (Boardman 1970, 122) Furthermore, New York’s success was not always apparent to the eye. By 1904, the most extensive and modern transportation system--the subway--was opened, adding enigma and new possibilities to the city. (Burns 1999, vol. 4)

New machinery and methods of producing goods lured workers into large cities where jobs were available. Wages were unsteady and demand varied according to gender, race and ethnicity of the worker. There was relatively little political protection for laborers, who constantly formed unions to beat out the prejudice and unfair practices of big business. What protective laws *did* exist were nearly impossible to manage or enforce. Yet, growing dependence on an industrial-based economy provided new opportunities for the country as a whole.

The increased complexity introduced by technological innovation uprooted many Americans from the security and insularity of their rural past. At the same time machines made possible more variety and a whole new range of options. In the beginning of this century automobiles, new communications, and electrical conveniences served to underscore the faith of Americans in inevitable progress. (Moore 1974, 48)

These new conveniences reshaped the industry of female labor. Women had previously been prized for specific jobs that were regarded as “female” occupations, such as working looms. By the 1890s, handlooms were replaced with automated ones and women were forced to look elsewhere for income. Even though some vocations were made obsolete, technological advancements and inventions created an entirely new job market.

Telephones and typewriters became some of the greatest inventions for opening up work for women. While men were allowed to flourish as bosses and managers, women were heavily recruited to do the menial clerical chores. Typing and answering phones allowed the women who were unaccounted for by the Cult of Domesticity (spinsters, unmarried mothers, orphans and widows) to retain an income. Naturally, their new economic independence was tempered by

their subservient role to men. Women could not actually run the business, though they may *be* the business. “About 20 per cent of all American women over fifteen years of age were employed in 1900, and in ten years another 5 per cent were in shops and offices as the number of jobs increased.” (Boardman 1970, 92)

It should be noted, though, that secretarial work was available to the growing middle class--women whose education afforded them a résumé and whose financial status was likely to flourish from a suitable marriage. The majority of female workers did not have this luxury. Mostly immigrants, the greater part of working women subsisted below the poverty line. Working women were regarded by the upper class as lacking refinement, and subsequently were considered to be morally inferior. These prejudices were further amplified when combined with the influence of individual heritages that immigrants brought from their homeland. Though in a new country, immigrants were often expected (by their families) to uphold the traditions of their native country. These ideals often conflicted with the established social conventions that the American upper class considered to be sacrosanct. As a result, the true working class woman (who found her paychecks in the factory) struggled with the impositions of her family and the elitism of her new country. Some working women were privileged enough to land jobs in the servant sector, but most were resigned to sweatshops--either working machinery under the inauspicious eyes of managers or slaving away at “housework” of hand sewing clothes, rolling cigars, or any other task that might earn a few dollars.

Urbanization created a daunting paradox. New jobs in factories and industrial environments usually meant relocating to large cities. Metropolises boomed with activity, opportunity, and possibilities. Accessible seaports, like New York City, experienced a significant immigrant influx. This immigration altered the way that society and government functioned. Tenement housing attempted to mitigate special concerns over lack of housing, but conditions were cramped and filthy. Often, apartments were one or two rooms that an entire

family (or extended family) shared. Bathrooms were public and windows did not accompany the architecture of most apartments. Laws addressing the construction of these ghetto environments failed to alleviate the inadequacies. Yet, tenement life was integral to the reforms and social shifts that occurred. Inhabitants were forced out of their stuffy homes and onto the street for fresh air. On the pavement, varying ethnicities, races, genders and ages collided. Stoops became meeting places, curbs turned into markets for food, clothing and other necessities, and neighborhoods became simultaneously interactive communities and war zones.

Changes in the way households operated were byproducts of industrialism and urbanity. The working class was not the only group affected. Upper class women and women of the emerging middle class hired immigrants to do housework. Furthermore, new household gadgets and gizmos were marketed to save time. Head-of-house ladies found themselves with extra time on their hands. Leisurely activities filled the gap, from social calls to shopping to engaging in popular women's clubs. "These women had more labor-saving devices, somewhat fewer children, and more education than their ancestors." (Boardman 1970, 93)

A person's wealth began to be measured by how much time they had on their hands. Manicures and new outfits were luxuries that working, lower class women could not afford, even if they had increased spare time. The intricate development of social status evolved out of machinery (and the products produced by machines), giving way to new class structures. These systems soon became codified and analyzed, as in the famous Thorstein Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class*, where conspicuous consumption of goods revealed the social standing of the buyer.

This newfound leisure time led to vast changes regarding how women behaved in public. The power that originally developed within secure, all-female clubs leaked into the streets. During the Progressive Era, the middle and upper class women's clubs that had formerly concentrated on personal refinement and

department began to assert a role in shaping society. The new clubwoman's goals addressed concerns over poverty, prostitution, security for the female workforce and helping immigrants adjust to the American environment. Wealthy clubwomen became philanthropists while middle class clubwomen became fundraisers and protesters. Though these women still cultivated their own sense of leisure by reading books, traveling and being socialites, a serious dedication to progressive idealism surfaced in their attempts to better the conditions of those less fortunate.

From establishing libraries and improving the schools there was no turning back, and clubwomen, energized by their successes, undertook to improve public health services, protect the country's environment, encourage better household economics, ensure the purity of the food supply, reform the civil service, and ameliorate industrial conditions for women and children who labored.

When club members moved their sights from study to action, support from like-minded women was ready all across the country. For middle- and upper-class women, club membership had become commonplace. The small city of Portland, Maine, in 1890 had no fewer than 50 women's clubs. Club membership had been steadily climbing throughout the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and in the 20<sup>th</sup> it soared. It had indeed reached a critical mass, a potentially powerful lobby. True enough, these lobbyists had no vote, but within their families and in the public arena they had a voice. (Schneider and Schneider 1993, 98)

The power of the clubwoman manifested itself in other attributes of the new woman. Men began to witness the growing liberation of the female identity as women began to discard public chaperones, took up smoking and terminated the thinly veiled attempt to hide social consumption of alcohol. "In 1908 it was against the law in New York City for a woman to smoke in public but this was somewhat of a last-ditch defense against a practice that was growing too firmly to be halted." (Boardman 1970, 93) Essentially, women were acquiring "male" qualities.

Fads were racing through the streets with a speed rivaling the furiously evolving metropolis. Magazines marketed the latest fashion, novel, or other consumable object to women, who now had financial resources. Bicycles, board

games and the largest fad of the upper class--the Model T automobile (unveiled in 1908)--all encouraged leisurely activities based on consumption of goods. Men, too, partook of these crazes and fashions. In all of this, "art" was among the most popular of leisure activities. New schools of thought introduced new genres of art and art movements, influencing popular trends in society. Marketed and neatly packaged, everything from furniture to paintings could be advertised as "American," indicating the nation's prosperity and ingenuity.

The visual arts held special appeal for those who could afford to buy paintings or sculptures to decorate their cosmopolitan homes. The vibrancy of color in Fauvism (1905-1908) was attractive to city dwellers. Perhaps its distortions offered a unique approach to the variety of experiences that were to be gained in Chicago, New Orleans, or Boston. The conglomeration of views and personalities meeting in the booming cities were as eccentric as the colors on the canvases. Then, in 1909, Cubism flashed into the spotlight. Soon, it could be seen across the walls of salons and galleries. Natural images, abstracted and deconstructed, evolved into meaningful commentaries on contemporary life.

Of all the visual arts trends, Art Nouveau dominated the scene. Sensuous, ornamental and enticing, it represented an enchanted world of nature and the female body. The most frequently represented female figure in Art Nouveau was American dancer Loïe Fuller. Fuller, a scientist, inventor, dancer, and choreographer was paradigmatic of her time through her self-expression and independent lifestyle. Loïe Fuller's significance lies in the fact that she single-handedly invented, produced, managed, and performed a new art form during a male-dominated period of American history. Fuller's performances showed that females could explore their own movement and perform unhindered or controlled by male conceptions of art or female identity. Fuller was also highly respected in the scientific field. She invented and patented stage lights, costumes and a wide variety of stage production techniques. Loïe Fuller flourished as both a dance genius and as a symbol of the technologically prosperous modern age while

acquiring for herself the emerging autonomy that was becoming available to women.

In addition to Art Nouveau, the Realist movement emerged at this time, influencing a wide range of American cultural institutions, including painting, literature and music. Landscapes of American farmers, people on the street and buildings became subjects of Realism. The attempt to create subject matter out of anything “real” was the ultimate goal. Artists, like Edward Hopper, strove to capture the essence of life in their work, and collaborated with European modernists to display their work in a popular New York City exhibit--the Armory Show of 1913.

Realism went a step further and initiated the sub-category of Naturalism. Author Theodore Dreiser is perhaps the most well-known of the Naturalists. Dreiser exposed the public to the twentieth century wave of new ideas in his 1900 novel, *Sister Carrie*. *Carrie* explored the path of an innocent girl as she negotiates her way through the big city, trying to make a name for herself. Along the way, she encounters men and aspects of the real world with which she is unfamiliar, making choices based on her own will to survive amidst cruel twists of fate. *Carrie* was one of the first novels to explore the impact of Social Darwinism--the social instinct to fend only for oneself, to stay alive among the culture of opportunists long enough to acquire riches and possessions for oneself. Here, “survival of the fittest” was the primary social rule. Morality was no longer blindly rewarded. Virtue was nonexistent.

Darwinism presented a radically new vision of the human condition, based on the relationship between humanity and nature. Industrialism and urbanity, coupled with massive immigration and overpopulation, devastated the environment. In efforts to acquire basic necessities, people were forced to rigorously compete for jobs, food, and personal space. Darwinism maintained that this fight for survival arose from an increase in populations within species, tempered by the limited production capabilities of the land. The law of the city became to do whatever necessary to survive. (Burns 1999, vol. 4) Machinery

changed all this. Industry created more products, but birth rates rose and immigration bombarded American shores. Science and survival intersected culture. Theories of evolution and science were no longer restricted to the study of animals in the wild. Now, humanity's creation of society was regarded as the modern jungle of experimentation. Social Darwinism emphasized that the "survival of the fittest" now rested in the evolution of mentality and character. With this came the development of sociology as a valid scientific approach to social issues. Sociology addressed the raging debate concerning reform and concerned itself with aiding those not strong enough to survive society alone (now considered to be the poor, homeless, drunks, and uneducated).

The introduction of Social Darwinism to American culture radically altered the significance of the physical, social body as well. The increasing physical labor demands, paralleled by decreasing living space in overpopulated cities forced the human body to adapt itself for survival. "In America, with accelerated intensity, manufacturing processes, urban habitation, and ethnic and race relations *shaped* human bodies, or required bodies to *fit themselves to a priori* spatial and energy configurations." (Tomko 1999, 34) In response to concerns over the health of American bodies, a physical culture emerged. Exercise programs were instilled more rigorously into educational systems. Social reformers erected public gymnasiums, and environmentalists petitioned for public parks. Creating space for the exploration of human movement and exercise became a prominent issue. These programs cultivated healthy bodies and provided escapism--no matter how fleeting--from the cramped conditions of labor.

The mobilization of the body and the subsequent physical improvement of Americans was crucial to this change, as well as having jobs deemed suitable for women and a female workforce groomed for the task. Teaching exercise and gymnastics, women were empowered with the ability to change lives. Physically, women were at the forefront of a new and desperately needed activity and supplied an outlet to combat the tension created by industrialization and

accompanying changes to American culture. Another positive aspect involved in the physical culture movement was the class and gender shift that occurred. Now, women were exercising alongside men; both performed the same movements. Unity was created and issues concerning the Progressive Era were literally worked out through the body.

Sweated industrial labor, gendered divisions of that labor, racial disfranchisement, urban residential density, new modes of consumer culture and physical training: these are typical Progressive-era themes that worked themselves out through and upon human bodies. They bear out the centrality of bodies as sites wherein Progressive-era people configured and contested issues of identity. (Tomko 1999, 20)

Physical culture emphasized the necessity of integrating exercise into the social framework. Consequently, this laid the foundation for the acceptance of dance in American education.

As Darwinism and Social Darwinism were revolutionary ideas that concentrated on the connection between man and nature, Freud and psychoanalysis transfigured ideas about human consciousness. Freud's theories examined the existence of the subconscious, suppressed memories and repression, which he believed led to uncontrollable actions; men were no longer the masters of their own minds.

The vogue of mind-cure movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, while on one hand serving to illustrate American belief in the pliability of human nature, indicated that the rapid social change so typical of the whole American past created mental fears, depression, and neurosis. (Moore 1974, 51)

Darwinism and Freudianism were not the only theories to challenge man's ultimate control. While Darwin stripped man of his control over the environment and Freud deprived him of his mental self-possession, John B. Watson introduced the idea of Behaviorism, maintaining that actions are learned and can be conditioned. Science seemed at odds with itself. The world had become a complex place, full of simultaneous, yet often contradictory theories and

experiences. Progressive Era America was characterized by tensions both within the era and, from a historical perspective, as a result of the past.

Scientific ideologies were not the only strains of thought impacting America during the Progressive Era. Pragmatism, a philosophical tenet which maintained that investigation and experimentation were important aspects of inquiry, became an influential American trend. Pragmatism asserted that the value of ideas should be judged solely in relation to their practical outcome. This mode of thought, unlike other Progressive Era theories, allowed for variance and change, instilling some degree of human control. The pragmatic revolution incited change in almost every aspect of American life. Educational systems, political policy, physical regimentals, and social structure were all reevaluated, resulting in the development of sociology. Though men were credited with forming these ideas, women were allowed to share in the implementation of the new beliefs. Settlement houses were the perfect practical application of pragmatist philosophy. The male intellectual world contributed the paradigms, but women made the paradigms work.

An example of how ideologies shaped progressivism is reflected in the impact of immigration. During the Progressive Era, over 12 million immigrants entered the U.S. through the newly built Ellis Island immigration facility. Fewer than one in fifty of these foreigners was denied access to America and one in four of these immigrants remained in New York City. (Burns 1999, vol. 4) Various social and religious influences prompted the mass migration to America. Southern Italians came to America looking for financial gain. Surplus money was to be sent back to their starving families. Most Southern Italians expected to return home after they had saved enough money to help out their families left behind. Despite their goal, most remained in New York City. Another large immigrant population came from Russia. Jews forced from their native land came to America expecting to build a new life for themselves, devoid of the religious prejudices of their homeland.

This mass influx of immigrants affected the U.S. in a variety of ways, through financial, religious, political and cultural influence. The Northern Italians despised Southern Italians; German Jews disliked Russian Jews, and the substantial number of Irish (having firmly established themselves in the U.S. through mass migration forty years earlier) fought with non-Irish Catholics. A hierarchy emerged as people divided themselves into geographic groupings. Factions claimed various parts of the city for themselves, but in the cramped city environment they were never far away from their neighbors. One factor, however, united them all: the struggle for survival. The challenge was to find work, food, clothing and housing. New York City saw no differentiation between religion, race, or ethnicity. It was equally brutal to anyone who was not strong enough to survive the streets.

As a result, tenement housing supplied an alternative to homelessness. Several families could live in one building, share responsibilities, as well as a roof, and not be scraping by in the streets. Although the quality of life in the tenements was only nominally better than living on the streets, it provided improved opportunities to immigrants and the poor. Moreover, "Tenement life overrode distinctions between ethnic and occupational groups and played an important role in the creation of a metropolitan working-class culture." (Stansell 1987, 46)

This new working class created a plethora of problems. Many were unable to acquire basic necessities for themselves. Lack of living space, money, free time and education left many working class individuals struggling to survive. Middle class women left behind by the Cult of Domesticity (singles and spinsters) heard the desolate cries of America's needs. Settlement houses arose as an alternative to the tenements. Settlements were attempts to alleviate the dire impact of urbanization and industrialization upon the less fortunate. They became a refuge from hunger, idleness, and ethnic assimilation.

In 1889, college-educated women and men began to found social settlements, community centers in the heart of big-city slums, where they lived and learned about their largely immigrant

neighbors. The men, mostly Protestant ministers, sought to employ Christian ethics in solving the social problems of their industrializing society. The women, college graduates who by virtue of their sex had limited career options, sought a useful role in society by addressing the problems of poor immigrants in the slums of America's greatest cities. (Diner 1998, 21)

With middle class, educated, female reformers spearheading the settlements, approaches to meeting the needs of the immigrant and poor assumed a pragmatic role. The sight of children, crowded into dirty schools or factories by day, and jammed into the filth-ridden streets for entertainment by night, inspired social action. For example, Jane Addams, founder of the Hull House Settlement in Chicago, built the first public children's playground. When competition in the labor industry became fierce and relaxation was nowhere in sight, the Hull House began to offer recreation and exercise classes for all ages. When factory girls wandered the streets in danger of turning to prostitution for extra money, settlements instituted teatime and socials, encouraging girls to find productive outlets for their energy.

Important, too, was that settlement houses helped preserve cultures and ethnicities that were being threatened by assimilation catalyzed by big, crowded cities. Monthly dance socials were hosted, celebrating a distinct culture or ethnicity at each gathering. Adults could preserve tradition while teaching new generations the importance of the past. Settlements also offered exercise and dance classes to surrounding neighborhoods. The importance of creating community, while sustaining individuality, was underscored by settlement dance events. Settlement houses were safe havens from crime, prostitution, and immorality--they upheld the social implementation of Christian values. The importance of this becomes evident in the next chapter, when dance hall reform will be discussed.

Settlement houses fulfilled another role, as well. Environmentalism was a grave concern among a nation whose frontier had closed and whose industry had begun to destroy valuable natural resources. National parks, river dams and reforestation laws were enacted to prevent further damage and conserve

resources, much to the dismay of big business. Cities mirrored the deteriorating environment through abominable sanitary conditions and few, if any, natural, recreational parks. Concerns over nature turned to concerns over man's manipulation of his surroundings. The squalor and cramped conditions of the cities brought into bold relief the loss of natural beauty. Degeneration of natural resources became equated with the decline of man's moral obligations. "Reform thinking in the progressive years began with an optimistic interpretation of environmentalism. For example, the settlement house idea, which dated back to the 1880s, rested partly on the premise that it was essential to establish havens for workers and immigrants in an otherwise morally dangerous city environment." (Moore 38) Scholar Melvin G. Holli writes,

The interest of social reformers in public baths, parks, playgrounds, and care for the unfortunate was part of a larger effort to humanize the city environment. They hoped within the existing urban framework to redistribute at least in part some of the amenities of middle-class life to the masses. (Holli 1974, 141)

Environmental concerns, like other issues of the time, were approached intellectually. Social Darwinism and Pragmatism were consistently utilized in forming solutions that would shape modernity into a manageable entity. As a result, urban planners, politicians and reformers began to think that the environment itself needed to be reshaped to fit society. Settlement house workers addressed that need in big cities.

During the Progressive Era, struggle characterized life--ideologically, economically, and politically. Where one idea emerged, an opposite retaliation was soon to rise in both compliment and competition. The Progressive Era experienced a vast shift in ideologies, especially concerning social thought. These reactions to the atmosphere of the period included the development of social work and social science, which eventually led to what became known as Twentieth Century Liberalism. This school of thought maintained that America needed more social planning and that in order to understand what society as a unit could accomplish, the community needed to be evaluated. The idea that,

“society is only as strong as its weakest link” became Twentieth Century Liberalism’s unofficial motto.

In such periods of rapid change, people tend to cling to conservative, universal ideologies. Laissez-faire economics and Social Darwinism combined to create the conservative, social body America was searching for. Though these ideas held great import in society, oppositions arose against these anti-Christian theories. Regardless of the platform, pragmatic approaches permeated all progressive shifts in ideologies. The Progressive Era was a period of change. Social, political and environmental conditions were revamped to fit the times. If needs were not being met, solutions were sought to alter the situation in order to accommodate new conceptions of urban life. The United States was prepared to change and to address problems through new, alternative methods. Perhaps this is the reason why the Progressive Era propelled America not only into modernity, but also into the status of a world power.

As industrialism created job markets in urban areas and people relocated to cities, issues concerned with urbanization, environmentalism, sanitation and lack of leisure areas propelled cities into progressive reform. Social science, which addressed such issues as zoning, city planning, beautification and housing reform resulted from data gathering, inspections and commissioned reports--all in the name of improvement. Kindergartens and city parks were instituted in attempts to train the next generation of Americans to be moral and honest, while providing them with the basic skills required to succeed in life. Success seemed to be the catchall term to describe the aspirations of a nation whose skyscrapers echoed the drive towards prosperity.

In Great Britain, the passing of Queen Victoria and the crowning of the new King spawned the brief and gay decade known as the Edwardian Era (1901-1910). Among the elite in the United States, elegance, glamour, and leisure were hobbies perfected with the style of European royalty. The recent wealth acquired by gold, railroads and industrialization surfaced with a decided cosmopolitan flair. Cities were hot spots and conspicuous consumption was the

American expression of new wealth. Gigantic buildings, munificent entertainment, and expressive fashions denoted the prosperity that elite Americans experienced. With this rise in wealth came the prolific birth of philanthropy. American altruism was to become one of the greatest influences in defining national prosperity.

Financial support was an avenue through which socially mobile women could simultaneously control and support their opinions. Using the money their husbands made, upper-class ladies donated to charities, clubs, and settlements, as well as to artists. All the while, these benefactresses maintained the right to manipulate projects to their refined tastes. With the wave of a dissatisfied hand, financial support could be pulled from a foundation or individual. Money was never guaranteed for extended (or secure) periods of time. Because of this financial instability, activists and artists began to look towards federal subsidizing.

One of the most successful physical culture movements supported by wealthy salon women was Delsartism, a form of theatrical expression created by Frenchman Franoise Delsarte in the mid-nineteenth century. Delsarte formulated and codified a system of physical training intended to encourage artistic and spiritual expression through movement.

Delsartism was transplanted to America and permeated culture on a multitude of levels. Wealthy women displayed their status of leisure class by affording to hire private Delsartean instructors. Middle class audiences appeared in droves to see Delsartean technician, Genevieve Stebbins, perform in Madison Square Garden. Even settlement houses implemented Delsartism as physical exercise and as social instruction for young ladies. Through Delsartism, settlements provided a means of cultivation for young, lower class females. Though trapped in the slums, eventual rise in social status might come to those who would utilize the growing power of women and pursue the American Dream. Delsartism prepared the less cultured by equipping them with the elements necessary to succeed in society--elegance, refinement, and an artistic sense of spirituality. Additionally, dress reform was reflected in the popularity of the

Delsartean corset (designed to facilitate easier breathing) and the Greek-inspired Delsartean tunic (also popularized by Isadora Duncan). And, though a man created the form, the heart of Progressive Era Delsartism was deeply rooted in women's experiences.

During this time, Delsartism resembled a religious culture. The idea that a person's physical nature was a manifestation of spiritual nature reconfigured the human body as a primary expressive instrument. (Ruyter 1979, 20) The systematic approach utilized by Delsartism included unique modes of presenting aesthetic ideas, capitalizing on methods of elocution intermingled with gestures. These exercises incorporated principles of relaxation and spirituality, while illuminating through tableaux the Victorian social standards of grace and poise. By engaging in Delsartean practices, women disguised their growing influence under the garb of spiritual art. Women could publicly perform, dress in less restrictive clothing, and safely enact powerful scenes under the auspices of Delsartism.

Becoming a popular idea within a Victorian society, Delsartism quickly spread among Americans and into public exercise programs. Further popularity was gained through female participation in, and enthusiasm for, Delsartism, evidenced in a plethora of Delsartean stage performances, private instruction of the Delsarte method (popular in upper class salons) and in the infiltration of Delsartism into the settlement house movement. The spiritual overlay of Delsartism appealed to this generation. And, through the poignant writings of Genevieve Stebbins (Delsartean authority, advocator and performer of the 1880s), basic Delsartean principles were made available to the consuming public. Furthermore, the fame of Stebbins illustrated that women could be influential and powerful social figures, even in the absence of male dominance. Though Stebbins was a student of Delsarte, she was never bound by the dictates or confines of male authority. Stebbins writes,

Experience has taught me that a teacher must be eclectic to the highest degree. Take the good wherever and whenever you find it. Do not stop to consider whether Delsarte or any other man

agreed with it. If you find it true and productive of valuable results, adopt it at once. (Stebbins 1902, 406)

The Delsartean movement in America significantly altered sociocultural representations of the female body while maintaining a conservative appearance. This technique was a crucial element in the struggle of women to gain power. Fundamentally, Delsartism was a leisurely pursuit of middle and upper classes. Though settlements used Delsartism to mitigate Progressive Era tensions, the form, for the most part, was molded towards physical exercise.

The emergence of leisure for middle and upper class women emphasized the fact that working women--young females laboring away as servants and factory girls--needed equal amounts of leisure to escape the drudgery and confinements of every day life. Through dance, they would construct a world filled with sexuality and liberation. Dance halls created a social outlet for the expression of this independence and sexuality by providing venues in which to consume new dance crazes, openly flirt with men, and dress to the nines for the evening. In theatrical dance, chorus lines underscored the contribution of working women to audience leisure, presenting the image of a beautiful, modern woman to those who watched her onstage. Both dance hall excursions and chorus girls redefined the new, liberated woman in connection with leisure and conspicuous consumption. The next two chapters will explore how this changing social and sexual role of women intersected history and culture--especially dance--to produce a modern American identity.

CHAPTER II:  
VICE AND VIRTUE:  
The Competitive Race to Shape American Identities  
Through Leisure and Vernacular Dance Practices

Progressive Era social dance was a conduit through which American women could experience liberation as well as test new social values and personal identities. On the dance floor, Victorian morals were cast off in favor of a new form of social dance that was vibrant and sexual, called tough dancing. New York City surged with life as dance crazes and leisurely pursuits dominated the daily schedules of its inhabitants. Leisure surfaced as necessary escapism from the drudgery of work and included outdoor excursions, visits to the local nickelodeon, magazine reading and shopping. Despite these appealing hobbies, dance was truly at the center of Progressive Era life. Through enthusiastic participation in dance crazes, women embodied a sexual freedom while exploring issues of urbanity, industrialism, modernity and other Progressive reforms. This chapter will address the developing American identity of Progressive Era New York City working women's social lives. Through leisure, conspicuous consumption and vernacular dance, the independence and vitality of a nation was illuminated by the growing social autonomy of the "new woman."

Two distinct groups of working women typified Progressive Era life--the factory girl and the house servant. These women were largely immigrants or children of immigrants, living in tenement housing. They expressed progressive

reforms through their ability to obtain jobs and indulge in leisure. Of the two, the factory girl is perhaps the best known for her role in American turn of the century society.

Tenement living led a vast majority of lower class children to leave school in search of a way to financially contribute to their struggling households. As late as 1916, the presence of an undereducated and overworked younger generation continued to prevail among lower, working classes. A February 29<sup>th</sup> headline from a 1917 edition of the weekly newspaper, *Women and the City's Work*, proclaims "7,000 Children Leave School to Go to Work Each Year in New York City. Who Shall Guide Them into the Right Jobs or Back to School? League to Push Campaign in their Behalf." With relatively little legislation to protect these children, many entered the workforce at a young age, even before puberty. Likewise, young girls were allowed to work, especially since their labor cost only half as much as a man's salary. Already, factory girls encountered social prejudices that stemmed from non-adherence to the Cult of Domesticity. Now, gender discrimination was also evident in salary inequities.

Prior to the Progressive Era, sweatshops in tenement housing enabled women and children to maintain some semblance of the Cult of Domesticity while simultaneously producing marketable items. Though working out of their homes, apartments were cramped, poorly ventilated and often had no windows. In order to compete with growing factories, women (and their children who remained home to contribute to the labor) worked all day and all night in the fight for economic survival. Often, factory girls escaped this environment. Though they drew support away from the family, they gained an autonomy that led them to believe that they might lead a different life than their parent's generation. These women secured jobs for themselves outside the home as seamstresses, on assembly lines, or in other tedious positions. Factory girls found a variety of jobs, most of which were seasonal. This meant that one girl might hold down three or four steady jobs per year, depending on what work was needed most.

Traveling from one factory to another led the working girl to be street savvy, tough, and more adventurous than other workers. Her path from tenement housing to factory exposed her to the various lifestyles on New York City's streets. She might see housewives shopping at the market, shopkeepers dressing their storefronts, charity workers helping someone in need, prostitutes and tricksters, and the occasional elite gentleman riding through town. While the factory girl intersected these lifestyles on her daily commute, no profound reflection of these standards of living was to be found in her working environment. Hours were long. Sometimes, a factory girl might work fifteen to seventeen hours without a break. Sanitary conditions were nearly non-existent and contemporary luxuries, such as bathroom and lunch breaks, were unheard of. The general workplace veered dangerously close to slave labor.

As Progressives became more concerned over women and children's working conditions, the factory girl began to see a new, alternative lifestyle on her daily route--that of the female protester. Campaigns for the eight-hour day (for both sexes) became extremely popular. Reformers tried to reason with factory owners that if employees were more rested, production (and the quality of production) would increase. For women, reformist attempts were often based on gender differences--mainly that overexerting female bodies would greatly hinder their reproductive capabilities. Though this logic was an attempt to secure more protective laws for female workers, it was deeply rooted in Victorian ideas based on the physical inferiority of women and their ideal role as mothers.

Protective legislation to lower women's work hours was pushed by middle-class reformers seeking to safeguard women's health and reproductive capacities, and by craft unions anxious about women's growing role in the workforce. Under pressure from these groups, New York's state legislature enacted a series of laws limiting the hours of labor, beginning in 1866 with the restriction of minors and women under twenty-one from working in manufacturing more than ten hours a day or sixty hours a week. This ceiling was extended to all female factory workers in 1899. In 1912, a revised statute curtailed the working day for women in manufacturing to nine hours, and two years later, this limit covered women's work in the city's mercantile stores. The nine-hour day and fifty-hour week

continued to be the legal standard in New York well into the 1920s.  
(Peiss 1986, 42-43)

Middle class reformers, turning from civic concerns to issues specifically concentrated on women and children, began to spearhead union leagues and federations in attempts to unionize women and rally for equal opportunities. The Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) and National Woman's Party (NWP) were two of the leading groups during the 1910s. Though the WTUL presented the female as needing protective legislation based on gender differences and the NWP fought for the Equal Rights Amendment, both groups brought women's political issues to the forefront of social consciousness. These factions existed within paradoxical situations--fighting for women's equality in the workforce, but knowing that if laws were passed to grant men and women the same hours, wages, and working conditions, women would never even be hired. Unionization for women was difficult among the plethora of male-dominated politics. Though work strikes for men had been popular beforehand, women had trouble pushing their way into public displays of rebellion until after the turn of the century. On November 22, 1909, Samuel Gompers (president of the American Federation of Labor) rallied for a union strike against the repressive conditions in the New York City shirtwaist industry (whose unstable hourly wages and unsanitary conditions were inhumane). Interrupting the meeting, Clara Lemlich (garment worker and labor leader) called for a general strike. Her call to action was supported by a strike of over 200,000 shirtwaist workers the next day. (Enstad 119) Though shirtwaist strikes and negotiations with shirtwaist factory owners continued for several months, the presence of women strikers was heartening to working women across America. Through strikes, women voiced their issues and risked being arrested. In fact, many female reformers welcomed arrest as a tactic of drawing media attention to their causes. These new, public approaches of working women to acquire equal rights in work and society imbued these women with a sense of liberation and tantalizing danger. As a result, women began to more actively assert their independence. The Triangle

Shirtwaist strike was one labor-oriented reformist attempt among many, all of which further defined the working woman's increasing power within modern, American society.

Factory owners and managers became increasingly worried over the mounting strength of workers' alliances. In efforts to keep female workers at their sewing machines--and away from picketing masses on the streets--the manager of the Triangle Shirtwaist factory (located in Washington Square) boarded up the windows and locked the doors to the ninth floor section of the factory. The Triangle Shirtwaist Company occupied the eighth through tenth floors of the Asch Building on the northwest corner of Washington and Greene streets. The company employed over 500 workers. Near closing time, a fire erupted. Nearly 150 people were trapped and died from the fire itself or defenestration. Workers in other parts of the building escaped by stairways, fire escapes and freight elevators, whereas the seamstresses on the ninth floor were trapped. These women, who died in less than fifteen minutes, were mostly Jewish immigrants between thirteen and twenty-three years old. (Cannon 1995, 1) The tragedy of this event brought women's rights to a head. Though the horror of the Triangle Shirtwaist fire was a shocking reminder of how ineffectual existing laws were in protecting working women, the loss of so many brought the plight of the working class more clearly into public view. More and more people began to band together to change legislation and protect the foundation of America's economy--the working class citizen.

Shirtwaist strikers effectively challenged who and what could be considered political. It is little wonder that their example sparked similar strikes across the country as women workers heard and read about their dramatic heroism. Leaders regularly credited the shirtwaist strike for initiating this trend in the nation's garment industry, among workers of many ethnicities and languages. This strike wave not only organized the most women workers to that point in United States history, it also established strong garment industry unions that would represent immigrant workers throughout the twentieth century. (Enstad 1999,159-160)

While factory girls slaved away at machines, another group of working women labored under less horrific, though equally restrictive circumstances. The domestic sector of women's work became a refuge for workers who were fortunate enough to evade factory life. A significant number of women turned to middle class homes as an alternative to the factory. As house servants, these girls received higher wages, but were resigned to limited means of enjoying their pay. Watchful mistresses regulated the behavior and social life of their servants, who, after attending to their duties in the home, had little time to themselves.

The largest faction of domestic service workers was comprised of the well-established Irish immigrant population. While other ethnicities accounted for a part of the domestic service, many immigrant factions (upon arrival in America) still held fast to social ideals of their homeland. Italians, for example, felt that it was improper for an unmarried woman to become a part of another household, no matter what her role was. Young Irish women, free of these impositions, signed on as cooks, laundry women and maids in middle and a few upper class homes. Often, these women lived in the houses and apartments that they cleaned. They were allowed relatively little free time. Moreover, middle class women were gaining reputations among society. These subscribers to the cult of domesticity began to see themselves as refined and cultured. In attempts to pass their morals along to the less cultivated servants, mistresses began to take on the responsibility of educating their uncouth workers. Servants were taught religion and etiquette, among other traits that the lady of the house considered important. "Domestic service dramatized the problems that poor immigrant women presented to the cult of domesticity. Nowhere was the contest between two modes of womanhood more evident than between Irish immigrants and the ladies who employed them." (Stansell 1987, 155)

From this instruction, it was assumed that servant women would appropriate characteristics of middle class morality. This was not usually the case. "Ideally, a domestic served as an extension of her mistress's sensibility, but in actuality she constantly made her own judgments about housework."

(Stansell 1987, 161) Where the domestic worker did acquire middle class sensibilities was through the outlet of leisure. For the factory girl, laws restricting maximum work hours symbolized an encouragement to pursue an active leisurely night and weekend life. For the domestic sector, working women used their savings to model their middle class lessons through leisure. Factory and domestic service girls who were less concerned with appearances secured their independence in a much more male-oriented fashion. These women scrupulously saved their money and moved into apartments of their own.

Because poor and laboring women were in a social position at the intersection of the home and workplace, they did not see themselves as limited to one sphere of activity, for it was precisely their ability to monitor, regulate, and manipulate the public world of rents, prices, wages, and alien laws that allowed working-class women to fulfill female roles and obligations. Securing the bare necessities for their family brought women into the public arena not only as consumers of commodities, but as negotiators for scarce resources and advocates for familial and community needs. Whether haggling at the market, falsifying papers, or outmaneuvering landlords, women acted in ways that assumed an inherent unity between the home and the marketplace, the domestic and the commercial, and they perceived themselves as intimately involved in the comings and goings of each. (Cameron 1991, 68)

During the Progressive Era, leisure surfaced as a viable outlet of showing off one's escalated status. Linda Mizejewski says of this, "The undermining of Victorian prudery and traditional roles for women was well under way by the 1890s as an ethic of leisure gradually emerged as an acceptable strand of modern life." (Mizejewski 1999, 67) Leisure, for the Progressive working women in New York City, included visits to the local nickelodeon theater, Coney Island weekend trips, bicycle rides, reading novels and magazines, and dance hall outings.

During the 1890s, the most popular forms of live entertainment for working women were traveling shows. Among these forms were traveling Chautauquas, which consisted of vaudevillian skits, music and dance combined with moral lectures. "Usually a week in duration, these shows subtly combined the highly

moral and religious atmosphere of a camp meeting, and elements of the lyceum lectures, with the entertainment aspects of a country fair. (Braden 1988, 145)

Another example of popular working class leisure was the circus. Traveling from town to town, these spectacles of dance, animal tricks and freak shows offered the hustle and bustle of city life to rural communities. Likewise, the Wild West shows, utilizing such famous personalities as “Buffalo Bill” Cody, enthralled audiences (including those of New York City) with flashy cowboy stunts and fast-paced rodeos. Wild West shows were the last attempts to hang on to the American frontier. In 1890, a census proclaimed that the American frontier was closed; America had expanded as far as it could reach. When Fredrick Jackson Turner presented his essay, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” at the Chicago Exposition in 1893, the American people became acutely aware of the diminishing American dream. Wild West shows provided an outlet for these fears of cultural stagnation, keeping alive the romanticism of unconquered land ahead. “During their heyday, Wild West shows were phenomenally successful throughout the country, appealing especially to urban audiences and recent immigrants. In a greatly romanticized way, they addressed the prevailing popular curiosity about the West.” (Braden 1988, 149-150)

Yet, despite these live performances, one form of entertainment surpassed both the attraction of circuses and Chautauquas--the moving picture. Nickelodeons rapidly spread throughout large urban areas and offered hours of entertainment for only a nickel. Before nickel theaters, working classes met in places like the Bowery to exchange gossip and interact with other workers and immigrants in boisterous vaudeville houses. As the audience reacted to skits with shouting, stamping and heckling, cheap, live theaters (often associated with the immorality of saloon atmospheres) provided a release valve for cultural tensions while adding excitement to performances. When nickelodeons opened in storefronts, working class girls could safely escape to silent pictures without acquiring the reputation associated with Bowery productions--at first.

The initial passivity of the audience in the film shows and the presentation of films in a physical setting that incorporated the illusion of the proscenium stage's "fourth wall," detached the film experience from live, bawdy vaudeville. However, as nickelodeons gained popularity and became more accessible to the lower classes, the boisterous customs of vaudevillian practices infiltrated them. Audiences reacted with clamorous vigor to the movies and the piano players that accompanied the silent films. Ragtime, pumping out from the piano, escalated the fervor of audiences, as nickelodeons became the fashionable venting arena for working men and women. Though these theaters especially appealed to girls and married women, men took an interest in opportunities of meeting the opposite sex and engaging in flirtations beneath the flickering screen. Most importantly, though, was the reflection of urbanity in the subject matter of the movies.

Despite the standardized product, the experience of the movies took on the flavor of the surrounding neighborhood. The early nickelodeons seemed extensions of street life, their megaphones and garish placards competing with the other sights and sounds of urban streets. Inside the storefront theaters, the atmosphere seemed a heightened version of life in the tenement districts." (Peiss 1986, 149)

Middle and upper class reformers became increasingly worried over the subject matter of, and behavior in, nickelodeons. Many of the movies expressed new values of heterosocial life. Working class youth began to imitate and enact these new recreational mores in urban life, on the streets. A more assertive sexual presence was met with enthusiasm by working men and women alike. Reformers saw these practices as an outgrowth of uncouth movies and as influences of lower class citizens who were, by virtue of their social status, too unrefined or morally incapable of resisting the temptation laid before them. Reformers became ecstatic when Thomas Edison publicized his plans to make morally instructional and entertaining movies for the American family. In a March 27, 1917 column of the weekly New York City newspaper, *Women and the City's Work*, the aims of Edison are commended:

The dominant notes of the stories are to be the heroic and triumphant. Mr. Edison is not aiming after the milk and water, namby pamby type of story. His goal is the wholesome, for he realizes that the sordid sex theme and the vampire photoplay are not wanted by the American family. (*Women and the City's Work* [New York], 27 March 1917)

Once again, middle class values intruded upon working class life in paternalistic efforts to shape and influence a population of “unrefined” people. Donna R. Braden explores the restrictions on working class leisure that middle and upper class reformers attempted to impose:

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Progressive-era reformers were scrutinizing many of the cheaper amusements enjoyed by the working classes, and denouncing places like dance halls, penny arcades, and the new moving picture theaters as wicked and immoral. Goaded by disapproving members of the middle class, they attempted to ban or control these so-called vices of urban life. However, by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, constrained by fewer cultural and moral restrictions, even members of the middle class found themselves eagerly turning to such new entertainment forms as amusement parks, ragtime music and dancing, and, eventually, the movies. (Braden 1988, 157)

One such leisurely Mecca to which middle class members flocked (alongside working class men and women) was Coney Island. In the 1840s, hotels began to be built on Coney Island, a strip of land jutting out from the southern tip of Brooklyn. Legends of pirates and stories of buried treasure further enhanced the exotic appeal of Coney Island for city dwellers. Eventually, an amusement park was built there, becoming the impetus for an amusement park craze that spread throughout the country. In the early 1900s, Coney Island housed hotels, dance halls, saloons, nickelodeons, vaudeville theaters and bathing houses. Coney Island became, paradoxically, a retreat for sensory overload as the miracle of electricity lit up constructed palaces and belly dancers created dreamscapes of distant lands.

Back in New York City, civic-minded reformist groups constructed public parks. These respites of nature provided an environmental terrain where immigrants and working class populations could retreat for the day, engaging in

leisurely walks, participating in communal sports, or riding the now widely advertised bicycle. Working women could cultivate social groups, which gathered on park benches for a few hours of gossip, or perused the park for potential beaux. These attractions, especially the expansive Central Park, became playgrounds for young children and diversions from factory life. Surrounded by trees and walking paths, working women could safely explore the nature that was previously shut out by urbanity. When visits to the city park were impractical, working women could purchase cheap novels or magazines for a day's enjoyment of reading, escaping to foreign lands through the eyes of heroines and sexually expressive characters.

This cultivation of leisure life was a popular feature of the Progressive era. For upper and middle classes, the refinement of operas, highbrow theaters, and salon parties created a sense of superior culture. By engaging in the pursuit of leisure, these women proclaimed that they were independent of lower, working class restrictions. An engendered autonomy emerged, as elegant women espoused their rights to create respectability and social reputations through homosocial activities. Yet, progressive reformers deeply believed that these luxuries were important to the development of a larger American society. Leisure was not a birthright—it was a necessity. Florence Kelley, a social worker, resident of Hull House, and avid subscriber to socialism, was a progressive reform voice at the forefront of women's issues. Kelley's 1905 essay, "The Right to Leisure," espoused her idea that all workers were entitled to leisure. Kelley maintained that society was interdependent and that the welfare of the nation rested in the happiness and equal rights of all factions. Kelley's main argument underscores industrialism's effect on the working class.

As machinery becomes increasingly automatic, and the work of the machine-tender reduces itself more completely to watching intently the wholly monotonous performance of the one part confined to his care, leisure becomes indispensable for him in order to counteract the deadening effect upon his mind exercised by his daily work. Instead of educating the worker, the breadwinning task of today too often stupefies and deforms the mind; and leisure is required to undo the damage wrought in the working-hours, if the

worker is to remain fit for citizenship in the Republic. Without regular, organized leisure, there can be no sustained intelligence.... (Kelley 1996, 106)

Leisure, then, is presented as a social solution for bettering society. A life devoid of leisure is less successful for both the individual and the nation at large. Kelley continues on to say that, "Vice flourishes wherever self-support for honest working-women is unusually difficult.... To be deprived of leisure is to be deprived of those things which make life worth living." (Kelley 1996, 107)

As women began to move about these new spheres of leisurely life that were wrought by progressive reform, quotidian ideas of sexual behavior were challenged by the assertiveness of women's actions. Dance halls and after-hours club filled the nighttime schedules of the younger generation as corsets were cast off in favor of flirtation and a sexually explicit form of vernacular dance called tough dancing. Victorian ideals of beauty and sexuality were defined by the donning of the corset. But, by shedding the whalebone, women were able, both literally and figuratively, to more fully explore bodily movement. Without corsets, the movement of the body radically altered, as did the expectations of feminine sexual stereotypes. Unable to stop the fashion revolution, men began to accept the positive attributes of non-corseted bodies, recognizing the value of health and respiration over body shape or size.

A product of this new woman was the significant female participation in what Thorstein Veblen termed "conspicuous consumption." Veblen aptly recognized that the middle class began to acquire upper class characteristics. No longer tied to the same toils as the working class, middle class families could rest in comfort. This "conspicuous consumption" rapidly spread early in the century, especially with the professionalization of advertising. A trickle-down effect occurred, beginning with the wealth of the upper class and ending with the manifestation of upper class characteristics in the leisurely exploits of the working class. In 1902, Veblen wrote:

In what has been said of the evolution of the vicarious leisure class and its differentiation from the general body of the working classes,

reference has been made to a further division of labour, --that between different servant classes. One portion of the servant class, chiefly those persons whose occupation is vicarious leisure, come to undertake a new, subsidiary range of duties--the vicarious consumption of goods. The most obvious form in which this consumption occurs is seen in the wearing of liveries and the occupation of spacious servants' quarters. Another, scarcely less obtrusive or less effective form of vicarious consumption, and a much more widely prevalent one, is the consumption of food, clothing, dwelling, and furniture by the lady and the rest of the domestic establishment. (Veblen 1934, 68)

Christine Stansell, in *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860*, purports that this craze was, in large part, due to the domestic service sector of women's work. As young girls took jobs in middle and upper class homes, they began to acquire characteristics of moral acceptability. The mistresses of these hired hands took the education of their employees extremely seriously. Teaching etiquette, carriage, and ethics, these prominent women shaped the succeeding generations of independent womanhood. In addition to these lessons, the young, female housekeepers were granted free room and board. Sometimes, the money saved was sent back home to help destitute families. Often, though, these eager girls spent their wages on fashion and entertainment, which not only elevated their appearance, but reflected positively upon their mistresses as well. "A well-dressed servant was an emblem of the employer's own status. There was, however, a countervailing belief that high dress among the poor would erase class distinctions and increase insubordination, a perspective which came to prevail in nineteenth-century America." (Stansell 1987, 164) Now, working class women were subscribing to refined social notions, donning attire that advertised their wealth and independence. Furthermore, they took to nightlife with an insatiable appetite for fun.

Another source expands on the theory of leisure among working class women. Kathy Peiss maintains that these attempts at glamour by servants (and factory girls) were good-humored, not malicious, in nature--more of a "plan for

the future.” Peiss writes, “The fashions such young women wore often displayed aristocratic pretensions...this seems to have been one manifestation of a broader pattern whereby working-class youth played with the culture of the elite.” (Peiss 1986, 65) Her research in *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* reveals the various outlets that Progressive Era women exploited for their happiness and social advancement, including Coney Island excursions, dance hall “madness” and visits to the neighborhood nickelodeon. These attempts to blur class lines and engage in leisurely activities would surface on the stage, too. Out of the dance halls and onto the dancing bodies of chorines, the refinement that perpetuated a sense of success (and accompanying fantasies of glamour) would be utilized in shaping the image of the “new” American woman through the Ziegfeld Girl.

Within everyday life, conspicuous consumption was most clearly evidenced in women’s consumption of fashion. Changing fashions in clothing not only typified the lessening of social constraints on women, but also elucidated the new ways in which female bodies were negotiating their urban environment.

Early Progressive Era fashions still clung to Victorian ideas of beauty. “Victorian women’s clothing reflected their place in society; although frequently beautiful, their dress was extremely constricting and confining” (Darnell 2000, 5). Corsets--a size too small--and bodies fully covered in layers of fabric mirrored the social conservatism surrounding the image of an ideal woman. The hourglass shaped, corseted figure--enhanced by bustles and puffy, mutton sleeves--paralleled the restrictive morals of Victorian life. Blouses and skirts were meticulously bound together, further limiting the range of motion for women. Casey Finch, in her article, “‘Hooked and Buttoned Together’: Victorian Underwear and Representations of the Female Body,” suggests that these confining fashions reconfigured the female form as a moral and chaste repository of social values. Devoid of a round, supple stomach, Victorian women’s clothing accentuated a concave middle section. The tightly laced corset alluded to the

idea that women were not reproductive vessels--their spiritual and moral composure indicated the absence of sexual activity.

...the female body's erotic zones had shifted from the belly backward to the posterior and from the pelvis outward to the breasts and limbs. The new female *objets du désir* possessed exaggerated breasts, thighs, posteriors, and relatively diminutive waists and bellies. A markedly different form had emerged.

We should not, of course, either exaggerate or oversimplify the history by which the fertile, belly-centered body was replaced by the so-called hourglass shape as the new desideratum. What was created by the end of the Victorian period was not the hourglass shape per se (which had taken many nuanced forms in many periods) but a particular and extreme variety of that shape. (Finch 1991, 341)

By the Edwardian Era, dresses took on an s-shape. A new "health" corset resulted from the reforms of the physical culture. This style of corset was less restrictive and promoted better respiration. Women were moving away from the waspish image of Victorianism and into a sturdier look, which resulted from participation in gymnastics and physical activity. In efforts to cultivate healthier bodies through exercise, activists rallied for dress reforms that would reflect new and able bodies as well as the society in which they operated. Yet, there were still refined elements of this new fashion.

The curvaceous clothing line of this period resounded with the curving lines of Art Nouveau style. In addition, ladies' hats became larger, a trend that continued steadily until 1911. The Art Nouveau style also invaded women's jewelry styles, as peacocks, dragonflies and moths created out of dazzling enamels and gold filigree became standard adornments for ladies' combs and brooches. Throughout the Edwardian period, women's fashions were highly influenced by the advancing feminist Suffrage movement. Women modeled their behavior and appearance upon the "Gibson Girl", the popular image of the "New Woman." (Eras of Elegance Database)

Charles Dana Gibson, perhaps the most popular illustrator of his time, was famous for his drawings of beautiful women. Born in 1867, Gibson reached his artistic prime during the Progressive Era. His drawings became famous social

commentaries within the pages of popular magazines. Through shaded pen strokes, he contributed to shaping the new image of the American girl. His women were stunning and curvaceous, romantic and sultry. They wore the most contemporary fashions and engaged their time in leisurely pursuits, all the while with cool, composed faces.

The *Gibson Girl* smiled—alluring and demanding, showing the world the American dream if not its fulfillment—from the pages of magazines that came close to monopolizing America’s popular culture. Millions followed her as they would later follow movie stars: and sensing that he controlled fashion, millions modeled themselves on Gibson’s view of them.

This lush and self-possessed woman would have been more like the ladies of King Arthur’s court than those in the American kitchen. Her glowing and mysterious face, empty but full of an indefinable desire, is poised at the top of a stalk-like neck, resembling in many of Gibson’s drawings, the nub of a flower, with the high-piled hair forming a brilliant collection of petals above it. Her breasts are commanding but delicate; her waist is clearly and tortuously narrow, in contrast to her hips and rear, whose magnificent outcropping is emphasized by a vestigial bustle. More than the American girl, certainly; but more like what the American girl hoped to be was the Gibson Girl. (Warshaw 1968)

Henry C. Pitz writes of Gibson’s work,

A gifted artist, instinctively in tune with his time, was presenting the panorama of an American dream which he, too, believed in with all his heart.

The followers of that dream numbered millions.... His pictures carried a message of hope, a tantalizing reach for a superior life. It was a dream that could not last, at least in that form. It was dissipated by the explosion of World War I. (Pitz 1969, xi)

These “Gibson Girls” became icons of American femininity. Though Gibson’s drawings painted a romantic, yet strong woman on the page, reality was much less fantastical. “Gibson Girls” provided escapism from the toils and blemishes that urbanity created.

Nonetheless, Gibson’s genius was in his attention to fashion crazes, which kept in stride with fast-paced New York City. For example, a July 1897

advertisement in *American Home Magazine* markets a gadget of fashion that is reflective of industry's invention, productivity and time saving machinery, as well as targets a female audience enthralled by fashion and leisure. The device: an "Ideal Button Hole Cutter." According to the ad, "Every Lady Should Have One." The idea that a household cannot manage without a buttonhole cutter emphasizes the importance of style and clothing within Progressive Era female life. Another ad from February of the same year in the same magazine sells "The Safety Skirt Fastener," capitalizing on the product as an "American' Skirt Protector." The purpose of the skirt fastener is to keep the popular seven-gored skirt from catching in the wheels of the now popular bicycle. In fact, a good portion of the advertisement is taken up by two pictures of a woman on a bicycle—one with the Safety Skirt Fastener and one without. This ad elucidates the importance of changing fashions with the time.

Advertising was the most popular conduit through which the culture of consumption became aware of new products, fashions and ideas. Magazines were especially popular among women. Not only did magazines bring to light the prosperity of industrialism (mass production, inexpensive cost, ads for new inventions), but these magazines, developed by savvy businessmen, encouraged women to take part in transforming their public image through the products they bought. This tactic of selling the American dream through materialism underscored a turn of the century values shift.

Prior to the Progressive Era, moral and ethical standards were determined by a person's work ethic. Taken from Benjamin Franklin's ideas concerning individual contributions to society, this doctrine has become known as the "Protestant Work Ethic." The main tenet of this belief is that, through good works and continuous labor, a man or woman can improve society as well as display their diligent adherence to God and the Golden Rule. In an essay entitled, "Information to Those Who Would Remove to America," Franklin writes,

Much less is it adviseable for a Person to go thither who has no other Quality to recommend him but his Birth. In Europe it has indeed its Value, but it is a Commodity that cannot be carried to a

worse Market than to that of America, where People do not enquire concerning a Stranger, *What IS he?* but *What can he DO?* If he has any useful Art, he is welcome; and if he exercises it and behaves well, he will be respected by all that know him; but a mere Man of Quality, who on that Account wants to live upon the Public, by some Office or Salary, will be despis'd and disregarded. (Franklin 1993, 322)

Franklin later continues,

The almost general Mediocrity of Fortune that prevails in America, obliging its People to follow some Business for Subsistence, those Vices that arise usually from Idleness are in a great Measure prevented. Industry and constant Employment are great Preservatives of the Morals and Virtue of a Nation. (Franklin 1993, 328)

Yet, by the 1890s, this Puritanical approach to life was no longer applicable to the progressives and the stream of immigrants coming to America. Industrialization produced new accessibility to gadgets, clothing, and labor-saving devices. Urbanity brought people into close proximity with each other, urging competition for resources and social reputations. Individuality within large cities not only displayed social power, but also instilled a sense of comfort that proved a person had not become like the machines that were beginning to dominate the workforce.

An ethic of pleasure replaced Franklin's ideas. Now, an individual's worth was measured by material possession in the home and in public. America became a cult of personality as people vied for individualism. The value placed upon external appearance gave rise to the importance of celebrities. Ironically, in efforts to appear individualistic and stylish, as well as wield social power, men and women began to imitate the image of these famous celebrities. (Susman 1973, 282-283) Advertising fulfilled this desire.

The old value system of unity and community was replaced by Progressive Era competition. Advertising began to market the newest and best that materialism offered. Department stores capitalized on billboards, magazines and newspapers as ways to sell images and reputations to women with

ambitious, social aspirations. What was really being sold, though, was the American dream. Even though a woman might be a factory girl, spending her paycheck on a new dress or hat brought her one step closer to looking like a Gibson Girl. Furthermore, the factory worker (though now broke) feels a sense of economic independence by being able to choose how she lets go of her own money. “The engine of fashion existed now in thousands of cities at the heart of everyday life, churning up desire for commodities that carried with them the promise of personal transformation.” (Leach 1984, 328)

Of course, the theories of leisure and consumption of materialism through advertising are charged with hotly contested arguments concerning the amount of independence buyers truly exert when purchasing a new item of clothing, a new book or a new bicycle. Veblen himself was quick to see that “conspicuous consumption” was yet another psychological and economic setback for women’s rights. Though women were cultivating style, they were transforming themselves by image only. Images, however, are powerful symbolic tools which, when redefined or reconfigured, can effect very real social change. Women of the Progressive Era transgressed the literal and symbolic barrier that had restricted their sexual and financial identities. Though most women were still prisoners of these sexual and financial barriers at the turn of the century, by 1920, more women had real power over their money and their engagement in consumption. Veblen reveals these barriers when he writes,

...the high heel, the skirt, the impracticable bonnet, the corset, and the general disregard of the wearer’s comfort which is an obvious feature of all civilised women’s apparel, as so many items of evidence to the effect that in the modern civilised scheme of life the woman is still, in theory, the economic dependent of the man,—that, perhaps in a highly idealised sense, she is still the man’s chattel. The homely reason for all this conspicuous leisure and attire on the part of women lies in the fact that they are servants to whom, in the differentiation of economic functions, has been delegated the office of putting in evidence their master’s ability to pay. (Veblen 1934, 181-182)

It is apparent that Veblen is speaking of married women, but single girls suffered the same dependence by donning fashion in order to attract a partner for an hour's stroll down the street, a night of dancing, or a lifetime of marriage. Whether or not these gendered roles were conscious thoughts in Progressive Era men and women, though, is another matter. For this theory, contemporary scholar Jackson Lears provides a unique outlook on the psychological function of advertising and consumption.

Lears suggests that advertising urged people to buy happiness through consumption of products. For instance, if a woman felt unhappy about her social image, she could appropriate characteristics of the latest, most popular female celebrity by buying--and wearing--whatever style that celebrity thought was fashionable. Lears saw this consumption of popular image as the definitive factor in cultivating a "therapeutic culture." Individuals became their own doctor by indulging in shopping sprees to cure their unhappiness. Through shopping, a new sense of self could be adopted. Instead of the Puritanical work ethic, the cult of personality extended to changing one's image to fit an advertised product. In the end, Lears found advertising to be manipulative, to sell dreams based upon false desires and images created by others.

The plainspoken critique of advertising could also serve as a focus for more personal concerns. Advertising agencies were not only the masters of misrepresentation but also the heralds of the ever-increasing material comfort that mass production brought. For many advocates of plain living and plain speaking, who overlooked the driven rationality behind much advertising ideology, advertisers could be blamed for slackness and self-indulgence as well as for systematic deceit. (Lears 1994, 349)

Despite theories that "conspicuous consumption" was detrimental to the liberation of Progressive Era females, the culture of consumption led sports, recreation, fashion and leisure to become major occupiers of women's time. As women began to become more physically active, their clothes changed to fit their needs. The new woman was not only more autonomous in her social sphere, she was freer in fashion, too. Yet, middle class women benefited most from

fashion crazes. Simply put--middle class women could afford magazines and nice clothes and therefore more easily assumed a new sense of style and character of refinement. Working women were not at a loss, though. Factory girls and maids would save their precious money and spend it on less expensive attire (competition in department stores led to clearance items of beautiful designs). These dresses served two functions--to reflect the latest style and to make the girls look sensational on their night out on the town in dance halls.

Putting on style seemed to fly in the face of the daily round of toil and family obligation—an assertive flash of color and form that belied some of the realities of everyday life. Yet this mode of cultural expression, linked to the pleasures of the streets, clubs, and dance halls, was closely shaped by the economic and social relations of working-class life. Maintaining style on the streets, at dance halls, or at club functions was an achievement won at other costs—going without food, sewing into the night to embellish a hat or dress, buying on installment, leaving school early to enter the workforce, and forcing confrontations within the working-class family.” (Peiss 1986, 66-67)

For working women, nightlife and social dancing became necessary pursuits in escaping the reality of work and life. On weekends in immigrant sections of New York City, the working class met and danced away the night.

One of the most popular social dance arenas of Progressive Era New York City occurred with the birth of American nightlife--with females going out to cabarets. Cabarets sprang up everywhere, from restaurants to hotels. Cabarets provided food, drinking and dancing and became instantaneously popular. Any restaurant big enough and financially able remodeled to accommodate a cabaret-style atmosphere. Dance floors were added and tables configured to encourage intermingling among diners and dancers. Additionally, professional dancing couples were hired, such as Vernon and Irene Castle (the enormously popular and influential predecessors of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers).

The cabaret’s most important feature was that it obscured the line between professional and amateur dancers. Intermingling among the dinner tables, professional dancers invited partners from the crowd. When the

professionals slipped away, the amateur dancers (now solo) invited other partners to join them. This custom extended to the easygoing practice of any dancer inviting any diner onto the dance floor. This intermingling provided a democratic dance/space relationship. Now, anyone could be a performer.

The cabarets of the teens made stars of the ballroom teams who danced there. The public flocked to cabarets to see theatricalized versions of contemporary social dances. A unique pattern developed: on the heels of the ballroom teams' performances, couples crowded the dance floor to imitate them. (Malnig 1992, 37)

With this shift came a renewed consciousness of being watched. Ladies and gentlemen, rising from their dining tables to "cut a rug" were acutely aware that they were being observed. The attention from audiences encouraged friendly competition and individuality among the dancers.

Slipping from viewer to doer, patrons tasted the difference between passive and active seeking of pleasure in bodily motion and the shifts in kinesthetic awareness that must have accompanied such a translation. The sheer mutability of the situation, the capacity for changeableness that it afforded, for plural and changing identities, was arresting. This was a context that rendered quotidian dancing an instance of performance, while performance came to be an activity available to any sociable body. (Tomko 1999, 27)

The professional dancers did more than encourage cabaret patrons to participate in dance--they also encouraged the patrons to test new identities of individuality through dance.

A new dance style was emerging, one that fostered greater individuality and freedom of expression, and the teams' intimate and exuberant couple dances were an open invitation to patrons to experiment with these dances themselves. Through their stylish interpretations of one-steps, hesitation waltzes, and tangos the teams suggested new movement possibilities. Couples could 'linger' with their partner for a sequence of dances, inventing their own personalized movements. The teams embodied the idea of a single dance couple performing as a separate entity, instead of the concept of 'group dancing' characteristic of nineteenth-century social dance. (Malnig 1992, 39)

Another interesting social dance practice developed with the rise of *thés dansants* (“tango teas”) in 1913. Held by private hostesses in cabarets, tango teas became a popular activity for women who wanted an alternative to an otherwise boring teatime. Additionally, appearances at tango teas announced that ladies with leisure time had arrived. “Lasting from two or three in the afternoon until six in the evening, *thés dansants* drew all kinds of women to public dance institutions during the formerly sedate tea hour, which was transformed into merely an ‘excuse for dancing.’” (Erenberg 1981, 61)

Though these activities were seen as excuses for dancing away the day, *thés dansants* held greater importance for women in Progressive era American culture. These events escalated into popular social dance gatherings where unescorted ladies were presented with opportunities to dance with professional male partners. The tango teas created a change because no longer were the women merely consuming dance styles, they were consuming men--tango pirates, to be exact.

The tango pirate was an extension of the professional dancer, a man heavily involved in sensual expression, combining the traits of expressiveness, absence of work, love of luxury, and fascination with women. The opposite of the male business ideal of disciplined will, the pirate represented what could happen to men who directed limited bodily energies toward women. (Erenberg 1981, 85)

This directly reflected an alteration in social roles, power and economic exchange. Men were not the only ones able to buy personal pleasure. Women were equally making decisions over whom they would spend their money on, their free time with, and put their bodies next to. Gender roles were negotiated, if only for a fleeting moment. “Tango teas thus positioned women as the consumers of dance services supplied by men. They reversed the roles, the flow of power, in the economic relation that usually obtained when male patrons purchased entertainment provided by dancing girls.” (Tomko 1999, 23) Certainly, these social dances were not what the moral Vernon and Irene Castle had in

mind, but perhaps this is why the gatherings were named after one of the most provocative dances--the tango.

These Progressive Era vernacular dance practices were exciting for patrons, but they often excluded most of the lower and working classes. Dinner costs and admission fees of the cabarets and tango teas produced elitism by keeping out those with little or no money. Though working women were a presence at these venues, they were a marginalized faction of the audiences and participants. The rising popularity of public dance halls opened a forum to all wanting to dance. Located in working class, immigrant districts, dance halls admitted people regardless of gender, ethnicity or economic background. Admission was affordable, costing between ten and fifteen cents for a female, a quarter for couples.

Unlike cabarets (restaurants that specifically catered to live entertainment during dinner time), or hotels (which had separate ballrooms for upper class cotillions and debutante balls), dance halls were public buildings that could be rented out by various clubs or individuals for an evening. Once leased out, sponsored dances (essentially public parties) began mid evening and lasted well into the night--sometimes ending at four or five in the morning. In New York City, the majority of these establishments were located in the Bowery, the lower east side of Manhattan, though other dance halls could be found dispersed throughout all five boroughs. "By the 1910's, the old multiple-purpose neighborhood hall and saloon no longer could meet the demand for dance space, and huge metropolitan halls and ballrooms designed specifically for dancing sprang up." (Peiss 1986, 95) These public spaces became social spheres where the working class could define their identity while pursuing less refined pleasures. "Dance palaces attracted people of all nationalities, but they appealed more to factory and office workers than to middle-class and elite amusement-seekers, who flocked to Gotham's cabarets and restaurants." (Peiss 1986, 95)

Dance halls were started for a variety of reasons. For club owners, dances meant financial profits from alcohol sales. For musicians, these events

provided late night work and opportunities to not only indulge in ragtime revelry, but also as a performative outlet for aspiring professional pianists and instrumentalists. For parents (who were at first unaware of the reality of dance hall life), ideal dance hall functions represented a harmless night of entertainment for their daughters. Young men perused these dances in search of female company and a good time. And, for working women and girls, dance halls promised a night of freedom from their families and work. Though parents initially believed that dance halls were socially non-threatening environments for their children, the popularity of these dances (and the media that covered dance hall activities) informed the public of the true dance hall behavior--late night, bawdy parties where young men and women gathered, socialized, defied social propriety by smoking, drinking, cursing, and dancing dangerously close.

According to a report, published in 1917 by The Juvenile Protective Association of Chicago, dance hall events were promoted through the establishment of regular patrons. At one function, the next gathering would be announced and advertised by the circulation of small flyers. Often, crowds of up to seven or eight hundred would attend a single dance hall social. (Peiss 92) Of this, *The Public Dance Halls of Chicago* report claims:

Dances are advertised by "pluggers," bright colored cards with the dance announcement on one side and a popular song, often indecent, on the other. They are distributed in the halls and thus become scattered on the floor. Announcements of future dances are also made at the halls through a megaphone and are greeted with cheers and cat calls; the boys at tables voice their approval by pounding on the tables and backs of chairs with empty bottles and pieces of broken glass, while young girls sit upon men's laps and allow all kinds of indignities. (Bowen 1917, 6)

Dance hall culture involved various styles of dancing, including a trend involving "animal dances," known as "tough" dancing. This style of movement was radically different from the refined cotillion dances that Progressive Era middle and upper classes preferred. These animal dances encouraged open displays of sexual behavior on the dance floor through the close proximity of the partners and the suggestive bodily motions of the dances themselves.

By turning to the animal world, black culture, and the red-light district for the sources of their cultural regeneration, well-to-do urbanites were searching for a way to liberate some of the repressed wilder elements, the more natural elements, that had been contained by gentility. Their liberation found their way into dance and into social relations. The new dances were part of the rebellion against the older sexual mores. (Erenberg 1981, 154)

Created after common animals, these dances--such as the turkey trot--involved repetitious turns and spinning.

The dancers' movements ranged from a slow shimmy, or shaking of the shoulders and hips, to boisterous animal imitations that ridiculed middle-class ideals of grace and refinement. Performed either in a stationary or a walking position, such dances were appropriate for a small, crowded dance floor. Moreover, they were simple to learn, requiring little training or skill, while permitting endless variations on the basic easy steps. Indeed, one of the common complaints of reformers was that these dances had no standard positions, and dancers could simply walk and glide over the dance floor. (Peiss 1986, 102)

This description of general tough dancing illuminates a possible reason why very few exact descriptions of the turkey trot, bunny hug, and other animal dances exist. Tough dancing, in essence, was a general umbrella term for the style. The importance of tough dancing resides in the sexual and liberating quality of the movement rather than in specific, codified steps.

As the waltz created scandal during its day, so did the animal dances in the Progressive Era. Whirling and turning fast, getting sweaty, and dancing with partners of the opposite sex became morally tricky, especially for women. Yet, this negotiation was what made dance halls appealing for many working class youth. Chances to intermingle with the opposite sex became increasingly popular as women began to test the limits of social acceptability through their bodies. "For women, in particular, dance meant the chance to define what were acceptable heterosocial relations and to challenge the conventional gender norms they confronted in their day-to-day lives." (McBee 2000, 83) The turkey trot was by far the most popular style of dance hall dancing. Among its

contemporaries were three other popular dances, the “Bunny Hug,” the “Grizzly Bear,” and the tango.

In the late 1890s, the waltz, polka, two-step, and “set and figure” dances were standard. But by 1900, southern black ragtime and cakewalks had moved north. Cakewalks, performed in minstrel show plantation scenes, featured free-form prances, “buck and wing” steps, and toe dancing. These styles made their way into music halls, and from there into dance halls where they merged with ragtime to become “animal” dances. One of these was the famous Turkey Trot, in which couples moved in fast one-step circles occasionally flapping their arms like crazed turkeys. The Grizzly Bear, Bunny Hug, and Kangaroo Dip encouraged close body contact. Songwriters such as Irving Berlin began telling dancers to “Hug up close to your baby,” and “Everybody’s doin’ it.” Then South American dances, such as the “Argentine Tango,” became the rage, with its medley of dips and glides that suggested sexual conquest. These new styles proved irresistible, especially to the young. (Perry 1985, 727-728)

The development of these steps occurred in San Francisco’s Barbary Coast, an underworld of crime and prostitution that was glamorized by fortune seekers during the gold rush. From there, tough dancing spread east across the U.S., filling metropolises with dance crazes. From the start, New York City fell madly in love with these animal dances. One possibility of why tough dancing was termed “tough” is that it was danced to fast-paced ragtime music. The dancers flew across the dance floor in circular patterns, moving to the rhythm. The compelling energy in tough dancing drew from “spieling,” (circular patterns of close dancing couples that continuously spun across the dance floor), which was popular in Progressive Era dance halls.

The spieling dance...was performed not with self-control, but as a dance out of control, its centrifugal tendencies unchecked by proper dance training or internalized restraint. Instead, the wild spinning of couples promoted a charged atmosphere of physical excitement, often accompanied by shouting and singing. (Peiss 1986, 101)

Dance halls were open well into the night. As one observer, named Prof. Duryea, noted in a January 27, 1912 *New York Times* article, the speed and

vivacity of tough dancing dwindled as the night progressed. Here, he describes the wane of the turkey trot as the early hours of morning approach.

Closer and closer the partners dance and more and more perceptible becomes the tremor that keeps time with the “ragging” of the orchestra. That was the evolution, according to Prof. Duryea, a teacher of dancing...

“Right here on Fifth Avenue I have seen it change in the course of the evening,” he said. “At the start they would be dancing with the hop and the arms held out. Four hours later, with the room more crowded and the dancers more weary and more in the spell of the music, the man and his partner would dance closer and closer as they circle the floor, and the hop becomes more and more of a glide.” (*New York Times*, 27 January 1912)

The bunny hug was essentially a variation of the turkey trot, only it included more hops and less arm flailing. In the same *New York Times* article, a West Coast native explained his experiences with the bunny hug.

Jolson said he picked up the art as he saw it on the Barbary Coast, where he used to sell papers as a San Francisco boy. It’s all the same dance, he said, call it “Turkey Trot” or “Bunny Hug” as you will. Stripped of the variations, despoiled of the precautions, all the new variants drop insensibly into one thing. (*New York Times*, 27 January 1912)

And though the third most popular animal dance, the Grizzly Bear, was also considered a variation of the turkey trot, French historian Léon La Farge printed original research which attempted to give the dance a unique origin. La Farge asserted that the tough dance popular in America--the grizzly bear--actually found its roots in an ancient Greek “bear dance.” In Ancient Greece, young girls would climb the Acropolis in springtime as they participated in a ritual dance to honor the goddess Artemis. The purpose of this rite was to eradicate Artemis’ wrath, ensuring that crops and animals would flourish during the spring season. Sometimes dressed as bears, these girls danced up the Acropolis and into the temple as their parents followed with sacrificial goats.

This discovery of the illustrious lineage of a dance thought to be of American origin, is causing people to regard it with increased respect and interest. It is now hoped that records of the turkey trot

may be found in Egyptian inscriptions, or the bunny-hug among the brick tablets of Assyria. (*New York Times*, 31 January 1913)

Finally, the tango made an uproarious return through the tango teas and then down the class system into the dance halls. Most advertisements for social dances were printed alongside a picture of a couple in typical tango positions. Often, the couple faced each other, one arm around the other's waist, free palms locked together and pointed in the viewer's direction, challenging them to partake of this sexy dance. Torsos are hinged back and the couple's faces are slightly cocked back, smirking. Their weight rests on their back, bent legs as their free legs extend toward the viewer. Forming a sultry slope of flesh, the woman's leg is bare and tantalizing. Though the tango did not surpass the turkey trot in dance hall popularity, it certainly made its presence well known.

Tough dancing was not the only form to be found in the dance hall. Other, older dances remained a part of the social scene. Though these waltzes and two-steps were radically less popular, they provided occasional relief from the fast and furious animal dances. Moreover, these more conventional dances could clear a dance floor in an instant, bringing consumers to the bar for a quick drink.

In part, the resurgence of older (considered more refined) dances were a result of the famous dancing duo--Vernon and Irene Castle. The Castles were a married, professional ballroom team who performed in Vaudeville and in cabarets until Vernon Castle was drafted into service in World War I. The "Castle Walk" was an especially popular dance of theirs and was essentially a promenade on the beat of the music interspersed with little hops. (Malnig 1992, 41) What made the Castles important was that they adapted Progressive Era vernacular dances, making them acceptable for middle and upper class social dancers.

Many of the early forms of the social dances...such as some versions of the Turkey Trot and the Grizzly Bear, with their ungainly arm flaps and awkward, jerky movements, had earlier provoked outcries from conservatives and some Progressive reformers. But once the dances had been "tamed" by the Castles and other teams into elegant and streamlined couples dances, Wilson [Hepburn

Wilson, New York City dance instructor and editor of *The Modern Dance Magazine*] promoted ballroom dance as a symbol of cultivation and grace, and as a seemingly timeless, ancient form of beauty. It was an image that served well to assuage any remaining fears that contemporary social dances might be uncouth. (Malnig 1999, 39)

The Castles believed in the importance of physical exercise and even published manuals, which instructed the public on dancing fashions, deportment, etiquette, beauty, and “proper” dancing. The Castles instilled the social dances of the teens with respectability and morality. In their 1914 book, *Modern Dancing*, the argument for dance to be socially accepted by people of refined taste was presented.

Objections to dancing have been made on the ground that it is wrong, immoral, and vulgar. This it is certainly not—when the dancers regard propriety. It is possible to make anything immoral and vulgar; all depends on how it is done. (Castle and Castle 1914, 32)

Because of the Castles’ influence, polite versions of tough dancing spread to elite ballrooms, debutante balls, and even the prestigious Waldorf hotel. Soon, though, the gentility of the steps reverted back to the gritty, raw quality of the dance halls by way of rebellious middle and upper class youth. A true dance craze penetrated society. Regardless of class status, American youths were embracing the wild energy of animal dances. Vulgar dancing was banned by the mayor, yet the animal dances continued. People were even arrested for sneaking away to private corners during formal balls and dancing the turkey trot. New York City raged in debate over the essence of tough dancing now that it threatened the morality of more than just the working class. Arrests and continuance of tough dancing became a power struggle, pitting reformers against rebels. Scandals ensued when, in December of 1911, Philadelphia society leaders admitted that they were taking lessons in the turkey trot. Furthermore, these women wanted public approval for the dance.

At the heart of this issue was the animalistic quality of the movement that was spawned by ragtime music. Tough dancers were seen as out of control and

sexually suggestive. But, these “animalistic tendencies” could not be squelched. Chaperones strolled among couples on the dance floor of “respectable” places, making sure no one broke out into the animal dances. But socialites made apparent their attachment to tough dancing as they continued to tough dance under scrutinizing eyes.

For conservative idealists, dance halls represented the worst of American modernity. In fact, more articles denigrating dance halls exist than actual descriptions of the dances themselves. The word used most often to describe tough dancing styles is “freaky.” Investigations were commissioned to report on this “degradation” to society. Reformers attempted to weed out dance halls and the disreputable behavior that these “seedy” environments evoked. New York City was not the only area of concern. Apparently, anxiety over dance hall activities raged across America. One of the most thorough reports was the *Report of the Dance Hall Committee of the San Francisco Center of the California Civic League of Women Voters* (published in San Francisco in 1924). This formal investigation attributed the “problem” of dance halls to the infiltration of immigrants (and subsequent tainting of morals). It asserted that, because immigrants comprised a substantial population of dance halls, the “American” blood stream was being compromised by foreign ideas and, for men and women who became sexually involved with their dance partners, the “American” gene pool was intermingling with outside racial and ethnic influences. In the section titled, “The Effect of Immigration,” the San Francisco report summarized the perceived negative impact of immigration.

The wealth of customs brought to the United States by different races, embodying as they did philosophies of life at variance with each other, inevitably conflicted. The result was moral chaos. Youth was quick to perceive that in this chaos of customs lay freedom for itself, freedom which claimed a right to enjoy without restraint. Naturally, it sought the activities that gave most opportunity for the expression of impulse, particularly because impulse was so consistently baffled in work; as mechanization and specialization in industry advanced. The urge to adopt a superficial ‘Americanism’ which required the complete abandonment of parental authority added force to this assertion.

The young working population of the cities, largely second-generation foreign-born, growing up in the increasingly tense atmosphere of industrial life, found dancing—even its degenerate forms—a more profound relief for tired nerves and overstrained attention than any so-called ‘respectable’ amusements. Because it was rhythmical it tapped new sources of energy, because it was a large-muscle operation it called for exercise radically different from that of the daily occupation. Unfortunately, it was considered more ‘American’ to go to the saloon dance hall than to the foreign society hall. Furthermore, many foreign groups lacked the solidarity and organization to conduct dances for their own people. (Lambin 1924, 6)

The report continues,

Thus relegated to the dive by religion and custom, the dance became the scapegoat for many of the social problems of the nineteenth century. The consequences of youth, inexperience and adventurous spirit were laid, not to the blindness of the community, indifferent to the need of youth for play and joy, but to the dance hall—to the very dance itself. (Lambin 1924, 6)

Other reports link tough dancing and dance halls to prostitution. These moralistic reform-based investigations alluded to the absence of Christianity in the actions of ballroom dancers and saloon frequenters. Subscribers to Social Darwinism and the Social Gospel were at the forefront of dance hall abolition. Social Darwinist Herbert Spencer applied a theory that combined science and culture, using Charles Darwin’s idea of “survival of the fittest” in social terms. Spencer maintained that human mental character could be passed down. With sociologist Lester Ward’s additions to Social Darwinism, the theory that humans interacted with evolution became an important aspect in shaping culture. Humanity was now equipped with the ammunition to change life for the better, not just evolve in order to survive. Ward asserted that the most important tools in this process were social enjoyment and education. (Hofstader 1955, 75-77) The Social Gospel was the religious equivalent of Social Darwinism. During the Progressive Era, many reform programs of religious enclaves felt that the purpose of the established church should be to deal with social problems. Charity was not an effective means of abolishing poverty and vice. New York

City had too many desolate beings and not enough money to help each individual. Believers in the Social Gospel strove to provoke change pragmatically, without using scare tactics or evangelism.

Questionable dance hall behavior was seen as a result of the detrimental influence of alcohol, rather than the innate moral failings of the clientele. Mostly young adults, dance hall patrons were seen as having been swayed by the sleazy tactics of owners and alcohol distributors. A 1917 investigation of Chicago dance halls, published by the Juvenile Protective Association of Chicago, reveals the tension between conservatives and the social use of alcohol. "The recreation of thousands of young people has been commercialized in the interest of the liquor dealers, and as a result hundreds of young girls are annually started on the path to ruin, for the saloon-keepers and dance hall owners have only one end in view and that is profit." (Bowen 1917, 3) The Chicago report concentrates on the effects of liquor on the dance hall environment, although it obliquely acknowledges that most outbursts of dance hall brawls were caused by late night wanderers from nearby saloons in search of more to drink (by law, saloons ceased selling alcohol at midnight, whereas dance halls could sell liquor until 3 a.m.).

Besides fighting and insolent behavior, reformers were concerned over the frequent intoxication of dancers. Owners did whatever necessary to boost alcohol sales, including giving out pre-paid tickets for beer and wine prior to 3 a.m., but letting patrons redeem their tickets after three o'clock. (Bowen 1917, 6) Even raffles were common for dance hall frequenters. Whoever won the raffle received a prize of alcohol. In attempts to make people thirsty (and therefore buy drinks), dance hall windows were regularly boarded up, creating a stuffy atmosphere, drawing crowds to the bar for quick refreshments. The temptation to indulge in drinking surrounded the dance hall visitor. Furthermore, a tactic for inducing higher alcohol sales was the lack of anything to drink besides liquor. Despite the mandatory law for the presence of sanitary drinking water, public cups (regularly found in the bathrooms) were used to circulate water among

guests. Overindulgence was often the result as the rebellion of youth intermingled with the coercion of dance hall proprietors. In 1917, there were reported to have been 440 Chicago dance halls operating lawfully with liquor licenses. Investigators estimated that there were at least as many operating without the necessary legal permits. (Bowen 1917, 9) These concerns over alcohol consumption in dance halls and the behavior associated with intoxication helped to later shape the reforms of prohibition in the United States (1920-1933).

In the opinion of dance hall reformers, continuous drinking led to compromised morals for the young ladies, luring them away from the cult of domesticity. "Men and women become intoxicated and dance indecently such dances as 'Walkin' the Dog,' 'On the Puppy's Tail,' 'Shaking the Shimmy,' 'The Dip,' 'The Stationary Wiggle,' etc." (Bowen 1917, 4) The close proximity of partners and inebriation of the women and men encouraged sexual intimacy-- which some young women were beginning to enjoy, but most adults discouraged and abhorred.

In many of the halls, the crowd is so great and the space for dancing so limited, that the dancers are obliged to stand almost still and go through the motions of dancing only. Couples stand very close together, the girl with her hands around the man's neck, the man with both his arms around the girl or on her hips; their cheeks are pressed close together, their bodies touch each other; the liquor which has been consumed is like setting a match to a flame; they throw aside all restraint and give themselves to unbridled license and indecency. One investigator said, in speaking of a dance, 'These young people did not appear vicious but rather like children who with blood aroused by liquor, their animal spirits fanned to flame by the mad music, simply threw caution and restraint to the winds in a manner they would never do elsewhere. Rigorous supervision and no liquor would have made this dance almost an innocent party.' (Bowen 1917, 5)

This formal retaliation against drinking and dancing inevitably led to links between dance halls and prostitution. "It is a startling fact, but a fact nevertheless, that *two-thirds of the girls who are ruined fall through the influence of dancing*" (Faulkner 1894, 117). So wrote Thomas A. Faulkner in his 1894 essay, "From the Ballroom to Hell." Faulkner was not alone in his statement of

the “facts.” A large portion of the reports on Progressive Era prostitution in America link vernacular dancing to illegal sexual acts, especially of a woman selling her body. Perusing these reports, one similarity appears--a large number of prostitutes during the turn-of-the-century began as working girls--in factories and as servants. Why then the change over into prostitution? In 1909, Belle Linder Israels proposed that the situation stemmed from two main causes--the “summer problem” and the “winter problem.”

It is an industrial fact that the summer months find thousands of working girls either in the position of compulsory idleness through slack season in the trades with which they are familiar, or attempting to ‘kill time’... The distinction between the working woman and her more carefully guarded sister of the less driven class is one of standards, opportunities, and a chaperon. Three rooms in a tenement, overcrowded, with the younger children, make the street a private apartment. The public resort similarly overcrowded, but with those who are not inquisitive, answers as her reception room.... (Israels 1909, 119)

Israels claimed that during the working season of the winter months, the cheap, local distractions--especially dance halls--lured working women into unappealing lifestyles as a result of interacting with “promiscuous amusements.” Yet, Israels does not lose hope. She adamantly called for reform. Her agenda rested in the idea that society was not unsalvageable, nor were the American people so evil that they could not recover. Israels suggested closing saloons (which she said had no good qualities), but supported the regulation of other forms of pleasure and recreation that she felt all young people needed and deserved. Saloons were an affront to the respectable leisure to which all classes were entitled. These male-oriented bars were seedy places where prostitution and gambling were encouraged. Even working women, scared for their safety or of being mistaken for a prostitute, rarely visited these establishments. But, Israels’ approach was empathetic and progressive in its pragmatic attempt to keep open more respectable places, such as dancing academies, evidencing that she was not completely opposed to social dance, like some other of her contemporary reformers.

By 1914, even Belle Israels conceded that the tango was beautiful, if danced well. 'I think it is a mistake to condemn all the modern dances,' she now said, but since one should 'do them correctly,' she offered to send teachers around to instruct dancers in proper form. (Perry 1985, 729)

Israels was unsuccessful in both shutting down saloons and saving girls from turning to prostitution, but she did propagandize new dances in an attempt to stamp out illicit versions of tough dancing. An October 11, 1912 *New York Times* article titled, "To Beat the Turkey Trot: Aviation Glide and Tangle Two-step Come with Stamp of Approval," proudly announces Israels' institution of introducing working class girls to refined social dances (which incorporated a dance hall flair). Through dancing teachers recruited from upper class private clubs, Israels hoped to cultivate socially acceptable forms of working class leisure. Other "polite" dances included a return to quadrilles and cotillion dances. No follow-up article was printed describing her success, but for months afterwards, the *New York Times* championed regulated dance halls for "proper" dancing opened by the Committee on Amusements leader, Mrs. Belle Israels.

A 1911 report on Minneapolis prostitution emphasizes the general reformer's belief of why dance halls begat prostitution. In addressing the Minneapolis Mayor, James C. Haynes, the commissioner wrote:

The public dance hall, your Commission believe, and speak advisedly, is one of the most demoralizing social influences present in the modern city, directly or indirectly leading to the downfall of more girls than any other one agency. While outwardly decorous, these places, through their broad opportunities for the mingling of the sexes without adequate discrimination as to age and character, and without home or neighborhood surveillance, constitute a most dangerous menace to the social welfare (The Vice Commission of Minneapolis 1911, 78).

While this investigation concluded that the environment of dance halls encouraged lascivious behavior, the 1913 report by the Vice Commission of Philadelphia attacks another part of the problem--the dancing itself. The following section reveals one investigator's experience while visiting a dance hall on October 12, 1912.

While there, [the] investigator witnessed all kinds of dances—turkey-trot, bear, cat, etc. Such stunts as men holding their women partners tight and bending backward so that the woman cannot keep her feet on the floor and dancing around in that position are permitted. (The Vice Commission of Philadelphia 1913, 72)

The whirling, twirling and close proximity of partners made dance hall excursions improper in the minds of reformers who clung to Social Gospel beliefs. The imprudence of young men and women--drinking, devoid of chaperones, dancing until morning, and in close physical contact--dismayed the older generation who clung to Victorian ethics and strict Christian morals. Yet, these were the very reasons dance halls were so appealing to young bodies. While drinking and dancing inevitably led to prostitution in the minds of elders, illegal sexual bartering was only a fraction of dance hall behavior. Popularly known as charity girls, some working women did engage in trading a night out on the town for sexual favors with their male escorts. Charity girls, though, never exchanged sex for money. Dinner and dancing were bartered for kisses and more. However, the majority of female dance hall frequenters were not charity girls or prostitutes. They were merely working women looking to escape the drudgery of everyday life.

The goal of most dance hall female patrons was to spend a few cents in admission to the most accessible form of their new liberation--tough dancing. Working women saw themselves as justified in pursuing dance hall leisure. What reformers condemned as "vice," working women termed "virtue." Their idea of virtue rested in self-reliance, independence, and the ability to choose their own fate. The cult of domesticity's influence was waning, but dance hall reformers continued the race to stamp out working class behavior and replace it with the American identity of the middle class.

An important attraction for Progressive Era working women--the reason they relentlessly engaged in tough dancing--was that dance hall life created social and familial autonomy, as well as cultivated homosocial relationships and heterosocial flirtations. Unchaperoned, working women--the factory girl and the

house maid--spent their own money on their own form of leisure. Additionally, women arrived and departed from the social dance scene in tightly knit groups. These women formed barriers against unwanted male sexual approaches while appearing more respectable than charity girls. (Peiss 1986, 113-114) While they flirted and danced with men at these functions, it was the friendship of other women that kept the working woman happy and safe on her way home to her family.

The relationship between women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was essential to social life. Living together in tenements, girls braved street life together. At work in the factory, women supported each other during trying times of sexual harassment from their bosses or when long hours became taxing to the mind. In the domestic sector, homosocial relationships between servants mitigated the strain and isolation between the workers and the lady of the house. Working women spent their free time together, talked about beaux, and escorted each other to social functions. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg writes:

These female friendships served a number of emotional functions. Within this secure and empathetic world women could share sorrows, anxieties, and joys, confident that other women had experienced similar emotions.

...This was, as well, a female world in which hostility and criticism of other women were discouraged, and thus a milieu in which women could develop a sense of inner security and self-esteem. (Smith-Rosenberg 1975, 14)

Dance hall behavior reinforced these ideas. Though a woman could experience a liberating feeling of sexuality through tough dancing, the close friendships between women contributed to their active pursuit of equality in the workplace and in leisure. Through protest and leisure, working women began to define themselves as a significant component of Progressive Era life. This security would propel them forward in their efforts to gain independence. Thus, the modern, female American identity materialized from an ethic of political and social consumerism. "The commercial culture of the dance halls meshed with that of working-class youth in a symbiotic relationship, reinforcing emergent

values and 'modern' attitudes toward leisure, sexuality, and personal fulfillment.”  
(Peiss 90)

CHAPTER III  
THE VIRGIN IN THE MACHINE:  
Ziegfeld *Follies* and the Construction of the American Girl's Sexuality

Progressive Era theatrical dance reflected the growing independence of women differently than dance halls and other vernacular dance activities. On stage, the dancer was a working woman, demonstrating her ability to obtain a job, make money and contribute to culture through her performances. In dance, chorus lines were perhaps the easiest work to get--choruses always depended upon large numbers of performers. The Ziegfeld *Follies*, immensely popular revue format spectacles created by Florenz Ziegfeld in 1907, enlivened New York City with a sense of cosmopolitan beauty through dance and song. The new and modern America, urban and industrial, cultivated posh audiences, ready for culture, but still yearning for sex. Middle class theatergoers aspired to the lavishness of the upper class by attending *Follies*. Through chorus lines--especially the Ziegfeld spectacles--the mechanical, egalitarian movements of dancing girls, coupled with lavish sets and costumes, simultaneously veiled and embellished the emerging sexual identity of the modern American female. The Ziegfeld *Follies* underscored the technological developments of the day while presenting the working woman (the showgirl) as an attractive commodity whose appeal lay in her representation of liberated sexuality. This chapter will briefly explore the history of *Follies*, followed by an examination of American identity, conspicuous consumption and the creation of the American, female, sexual

image through the working chorus girl. These ideas will be illuminated by an analysis of the format, environment, scenic design, costumes and the choreography of Ziegfeld's *Follies*.

As discussed in the previous chapter, elements of Progressive Era social dance met with widespread disapproval from reformers. Many of the social dances of the day were adapted from the dance hall floor (or used verbatim) and presented in Florenz Ziegfeld's shows. Ironically, what was unacceptable in the social dance arena became glorified and widely accepted on the concert stage. "At the same time that ballroom dance was enlivening the waltz operas, it added inspiration to a newly emerging form of American popular theatre, the musical revue. Epitomized by the renowned *Ziegfeld Follies*, these glossy, spectacular compendiums of song, dance, and comedy routines found success by drawing on the latest styles of popular song and dance." (Malnig 1999, 91) Women were now encouraged to embody the values of dance hall life onstage.

From 1907 to 1931, the *Ziegfeld Follies* were among the most popular revues in New York City. Middle class audiences appeared in droves for a night of entertainment. These audiences appropriated upper class ethics of leisure by frequenting Ziegfeld's lavish productions. Florenz Ziegfeld made each audience member feel as though they were a part of the glamour seen onstage. Surrounded by expensive sets, extravagant costumes and beautiful girls, *Follies* patrons were inculcated with an air of sophistication and elitism. Now, middle class theatergoers participated in the legitimate theater circuit by supporting Ziegfeld's shows. For Ziegfeld, spectacle met respectable every night onstage.

From their conception, the *Follies* were spectacles whose appeal depended upon the performances of beautiful showgirls. The attraction of chorus dancers had been a theatrical staple in America for a number of years, since the appearance in America of European-trained Romantic Ballet dancers in the early 1800s. The *corps de ballet* (as the dancing chorus in ballet is called) provided architectural frames for soloists onstage, performed transitional numbers, and sometimes character work. The length of the Romantic tutu was somewhat

shorter than that of the previous era, making it a point of contention for more traditionally-minded audiences. Additionally, corsets enhanced and accentuated curves as sleeveless bodices revealed bare arms. As the Romantic era progressed, the chorus girl became associated with loose morals and prostitution.

At the same time that the chorines of the Romantic ballet were being sexually objectified by male audiences and considered temptresses of evil by female audiences, burlesque shows were rapidly gaining popularity. “The ballet girl, however much she might have had, in the 1840s, a flavor of the chorus girl about her, remained—however tenuously—connected with ‘art’. Her sisters who took part in burlesque were much closer to ‘the chorus’....” (Parker and Parker 1975, 21) In trendsetting performance venues, like Paris’s *Moulin Rouge*, the can-can was wildly popular. The appeal of this dance in the late Nineteenth Century was easily explained—it gave men a chance to see the exposed thighs (and other tantalizing body parts) of the female dancers. Likewise, in America, Broadway’s first musical, *The Black Crook*, became a sensation for its seemingly nude beauties. *The Black Crook* opened at Nilbo’s Garden on September 17, 1866, boasting of “FIFTY AUXILIARY LADIES selected from the principal theatres of London and America.” (Freedley 1978, 67) The sensuality of Europe finally infiltrated America. Audiences were delighted.

Was it any wonder that New York was excited? It was rumored that the chorus girls and dancers were to be nearly nude. Such ladies as were willing to risk something of their reputation to view this edifying spectacle wore long veils to conceal their identity. (Freedley 1978, 66)

Forty years after *Black Crook*’s premiere, audiences were still interested in beautiful women onstage. Ziegfeld’s *Follies* refined the chorus girl, making her non-threatening and desirable to audiences across class boundaries by packaging (and selling) her sensuality as “artistic.” Year after year, these plotless spectacles were the most lavish productions on Broadway. The *Follies* chorines were undoubtedly the highlight of the dance numbers--strutting and

styling their way across stage. Body after beautiful body dressed in elaborate costumes was commodified onstage, personified by the showgirl. Through these hand-picked girls, Ziegfeld tried to create the prototype of the modern, “American” female: simultaneously refined, accessible and sexy.

The *Follies*’ successful recipe also included elements of the widely popular Orientalist movement, which sought to capture the allure of the Far East. Orientalia permeated various aspects of both American and Western European culture. Clothes, house décor, music and even ballet reflected the “Othering” of distant cultures. Surprisingly lacking in authenticity, American Orientalism provided fantastical images of harem girls and gypsies, which transplanted theatergoers into a romantic realm of possibilities. This was the epitome of escapism during an era preoccupied with the productivity of American industry. In a nation of boundaries, Orientalism provided a new imperialism to supplement the closed frontier of the American west. The allure of the exotic developed into a gratifying mode of expression.

Shifts in gender roles and feminine power also occurred during this time, changing the way audiences viewed women. In dance and theater productions, audiences watched women glide about harems, fight for true love and thwart the advances of sultans, all the while retaining Eurocentric movement vocabularies. “Eastern customs bowed to Western ideals of behavior in these and other theatrical works; Eastern dance styles and postures seem scarcely to have made a stand.” (Jowitt 1988, 63) Other elements of Orientalism included the display of the submissive heroine, the sexy warrior slave and the triumphant harem girl who never questioned the institution of harems. These romantic ideas were gratifying to male audiences, yet women gained power onstage by controlling the desires of men. The *Follies* of 1913 incorporated Orientalism in dance titles such as, “Opening of the Panama Canal,” “Turkish Trottishness,” and “Palais d’Danse,” while the following year presented “Tango-Palace.” One of the top-billed numbers of the 1916 *Follies*, “On the Banks of the Nile,” showcased designer Joseph Urban’s backdrop of a far-reaching desert.

In the 1917 season yet another number, entitled “Garden of the Girls,” brought Orientalia onstage. As headliner Edith Hallor spread flower seeds over the stage the showgirls, each costumed to resemble a flower, quietly posed. America also met Far East in this production through scenery. “The Chinese lacquer scene, described by the *New York Times* as ‘unbelievably lovely,’ depicted a rooftop parapet adorned with fruit. The moonlight revealed lower Manhattan in the background.” (Ziegfeld and Ziegfeld 1993, 245)

Although Orientalism revealed the western fascination with foreign shores, an underlying statement of American superiority prevailed. In the Follies, this was most evident in the assertion of America’s superior beauty by selecting only female performers with particular physical characteristics. Women were expected to represent the “American” image through curvy, but not voluptuous, bodies and distinctive facial characteristics. This idea of “American” was extremely important during a time of massive immigration and cultural imperialism. Between 1880 and 1920, a surge of immigrants flooded American shores in search of financial, religious and social opportunities. As discussed in Chapter Two, these newcomers often established their own social or religious enclaves, but sometimes met resistance from the previously established inhabitants.

Tensions rose as politics became divided over the issue of immigration. Supporters of immigration claimed that it was unfair to celebrate America as a land of opportunity while keeping out those in search of a better life. Dissenters from this idea maintained that immigrants were taking American jobs and undercutting the financial security of the working class. Politicians, like Henry Cabot Lodge, pushed for immigration restriction laws, statutes based on biased literacy tests, racial studies, and the Substitution Theory (the idea that immigrants were taking over society through an overly productive birthrate). Now, more than ever, being a true American meant simultaneously arguing for the legitimacy of one’s race, ethnicity and religion.

The closing of the American frontier further enhanced immigration problems. Though in reality there was plenty of land ripe for cultivation, Americans saw the disappearance of this imaginary boundary as a nationalistic suffocation. To supplement westward expansion, America began to look to the Caribbean and Philippines as alternate frontiers in which to cultivate American ideas. The United States began a policy of cultural imperialism. The advancement of technological and industrial capabilities provided the assurance needed to justify America's role as global leader. Eyes turned outward in an attempt to continue the expansion of American ideas.

This growth of American industrial power and overseas trade was accompanied, perhaps inevitably, by a more assertive diplomacy and by an American-style rhetoric of *Weltpolitik* [world politics]. Claims to a special moral endowment among the peoples of the earth which made American foreign policy superior to those of the Old World were intermingled with Social Darwinistic and racial arguments, and with the urging of industrial and agricultural pressure groups for secure overseas markets. The traditional, if always exaggerated, alarm about threats to the Monroe Doctrine was accompanied by calls for the United States to fulfill its 'Manifest Destiny' across the Pacific. (Kennedy 1992, 11)

The Monroe Doctrine began as an attempt to protect territories in the Western Hemisphere from being traded as colonies between European powers. By the 1890s, and especially by Roosevelt's presidency, American foreign policy implied to the rest of the world that The Monroe Doctrine was an American excuse for cultural imperialism. Since Europe was prevented from interfering in Mexico, South America, and the surrounding areas, America began to feel that, by colonizing countries (directly or by manipulating foreign political leaders), America's influence would create prosperity abroad. Many felt that the morals and social and political guidance that America offered would help countries whose values had strayed from Christian principles. "Americans were also discovering that they needed new spiritual and commercial frontiers abroad to replace an exhausted continental frontier and a saturated home market." (Hunt 16)

Thus, in attempts to culturally imperialize parts of the world, America provoked controversy and war. Between 1893 and 1903 alone, the United States was involved in the Boxer Rebellion, the Spanish-American War; overthrew Hawaii and the Philippines; stationed itself in Cuba and Panama; and established spheres of influence in China that ensured it would gain as much from the divided country as the rest of the world. While the United States became an increasingly dominant foreign figure, especially under Woodrow Wilson's foreign policy of "watchful waiting," racial and ethnic problems continued at home. Ziegfeld made use of these tensions, striving to create hegemony of American beauty on the New York stage.

Ziegfeld boasted he had some of the most beautiful girls in the world on his payroll. By insisting that his beauties were American, he cultivated an aesthetic value of implied superiority for his country, which was vying for dominance in all matters. Ziegfeld marketed his shows (and dancers) in such a way that every new show, year after year, was more spectacular than the one before. Ziegfeld's choice of *Follies* themes, song lyrics, and musical numbers reflected the issues of his time. The modernity of *Follies* illuminated the fact that the Ziegfeld aesthetic evolved concurrently with American political and cultural superiority. Through his marketing methods, Ziegfeld became an American legend in his own right--pushing the frontiers of leisure and the American dream on the New York City stage, just as political leaders spread the American dream through imperialism.

In *Ziegfeld: The Great Glorifier*, comedian Eddie Cantor recalls, "That was the Ziegfeld touch. Glorifying the American girl was not merely a press agent's slogan—it was an actual process invented by Zieggy." (Cantor and Freedman 1934, 11) Cantor goes on, "Never before did the women of the world—good looking or not—have such a gallant and chivalrous champion. And never before was the art of feminine beauty developed into such a vast industry." (Cantor and Freedman 1934, 12) The Ziegfeld touch reinforced America's progressivism,

evidencing a triumph over economic and cultural tensions through lavish productions filled with beautiful, American women.

Ziegfeld “Americanized” his beauties by insisting on certain facial structures, shade of skin and height. He chose dancers from various social classes (believing that this decision made him *racially* liberal), yet the girls he chose all had Aryan features. Furthermore, he instilled this “look” during a period when attempts were made to curb immigration. Ziegfeld even went so far as to measure facial characteristics of hopeful showgirls, comparing their features to a standard of acceptability in much the same way Hitler later used to prove his people were pure Aryan Germanic. The parameters of acceptability were based on the distance of eyes from the cheeks, or the width of foreheads. Ziegfeld’s works, therefore, displayed what he considered to be the ideal American female form.

The national reputation of the *Follies*, combined with the deluge of press releases on the selection and audition process, produced Ziegfeld as a prime national expert on female beauty, the wily industrialist on par with Henry Ford or Thomas Edison, processing national resources into glossy display items. (Mizejewski 1999, 112)

Ziegfeld publicized these press tactics throughout magazine articles, on posters and in interviews. His outspoken ideals of the perfect American female image coincided with an imposed curb on immigration that was invigorating racial and financial security for already established American populations. The surge of newcomers in American ports, especially New York City, created an unsettling power struggle over labor wages and national identity. As America fought to emerge as a world power, the threat of foreigners increased racially and ethnically biased reforms. Conservative Progressives began to use the infiltration of immigrants as justification for limiting immigration, as well as for instituting a social hierarchy based on the homeland from which these new bodies migrated. “The many attempts to create an American Girl in popular media during this era symptomized the need to impose a singular

model...against these confusing ethnic multiplicities and emerging concepts of what American modernity might mean.” (Mizejewski 1999, 115)

A pecking order emerged in daily life that delineated ethnic and racial boundaries and constructed a spectrum of physical attributes associated with Christian morals. For instance, western Europeans (especially English) were considered to uphold “American” ideals of the Puritan work ethic more so than Southern Italians. Additionally, Southern Italians were more socially desirable for their cultural values than Chinese immigrants. The hierarchy of ethnic and racial prejudices grew as more immigrants from various countries came to the U.S. These impositions of racial and ethnic status were reflected in the work force (who was hired for what job) and reform agendas (which minority or new immigrant population received financial support from philanthropists). The performing arts reflected these tensions, and for Ziegfeld, this meant that American values were upheld in his definition of American beauty. “Beautiful” women had physiological characteristics of preferred ethnic and racial groups, and made them eligible for positions among Ziegfeld’s elite showgirls. A meticulous audition process was set up in an effort to appear fair in recruiting new dancers, but really, the selection of showgirls was based on the political biases reflected in immigration laws.

Other practices such as the beauty contest, the film and theatrical star industries, and magazine advertising similarly promoted Anglicized images of the American Girl at the exact moment when immigration from southern and eastern Europe, along with migration of African American populations from southern states, challenged nineteenth-century ideas of American identity. (Mizejewski 1999, 110)

The popularity of Ziegfeld’s shows emphasized the Ziegfeld aesthetic as America’s choice. *Follies* girls were slender, modern, independent working women. Yet, they were also portrayed as fitting social norms of the past through the insinuation that, following their show business career, they would settle down and marry. The implication was that these girls were cosmopolitan reflections of America’s success. It was assumed that these women also upheld the Christian

morality and respectability that was connected to marriage and homemaking. As a wife, then mother, these women would bestow their beauty, intelligence and ethical composition to future generations, ensuring the stability of American society.

His philosophy of beauty was blazoned in numerous publicity articles; and when women followed his dictates hoping to emulate the Ziegfeld Girls' social success, his ideas became the American ideal. To Ziegfeld beauty was good bearing, a girlish silhouette, the ability to wear clothes well, medium height, expressive eyes, regular white teeth, lips that form a meaningful smile, a straight nose, becomingly arranged hair, feminine shoulders, a full but not busty chest, shapely feet and trim ankles. (Stone 1985, 52)

Moving from the Cult of Domesticity to working girl, these showgirls both reflected and helped to define modern American female identity. Ziegfeld capitalized on his combination of overt sexiness and respectable refinement, advertising them as virtuous commodities. Ziegfeld girls were marketed as the quintessential girl. The sense of working hard and gaining respect, while securing a prosperous future, was the public image of the Ziegfeld women. It was never stated--but always implied--that the virtue of these dancers lay in the assumption that after gaining professional autonomy for themselves, they would have earned a good reputation, marry well and ultimately return to the socially accepted role of wife and mother. While most of these girls preferred to remain in the spotlight, sacrificing marriage for independence, the illusion that Ziegfeld created perpetuated the sense of the "Virgin in the Machine".

Though even the most romanticizing theatrical histories admit that relatively few Ziegfeld Girls married into great wealth, the claim was often made in Ziegfeld press releases that 'rich men, particularly rich men's sons, tend to look for and to find their heart's ideal in some beauty of the chorus.' Within the dynamics of the *Follies*, the chorus girl rich-marriage myth takes on further implications, not just as guaranteeing the end of a career but also suggesting that, as the wealthy wife, the chorus girl continues her function as high-class décor. (Mizejewski 1999, 102-103)

*Follies* revolved around themes and ideas rather than plotlines and narratives. As in Vaudeville, each performance sequence was a non-sequitur and early *Follies* capitalized on political satire. Public figures, political scandals, historical events and reformist agendas were scrutinized in Ziegfeld's shows. Audiences came in droves. However, what they came to see were the girls. While headliners sang or performed comedy skits, it was the chorus of beauties that kept men and women wanting more.

Their beauty and sexiness won the admiration of both men and women; neither felt threatened by what they saw. The Ziegfeld Girls gave the impression of wholesomeness, innocence, availability, sophistication, and passion. She tempted instead of seduced; she enticed instead of pursued. She was always a lady with a capital 'L'.... (Stone 1985, 27)

For men, these dancers supplied the fantasy of glamour and sensuality, while women fantasized about *becoming* the chorus girl. The chorines were simultaneously objectified and empowered through the *Follies*. But how did Ziegfeld accomplish such a feat? He achieved it, in part, by creating spectacles that utilized gigantism: the sets and costumes of the *Follies* were so extravagant, and so grand in scale, that they competed with the dancers in their sensational effect. The overt sexuality of the chorines became less shocking since they were considered simply part of the *mise en scene*, simply one of many elements necessary in making Ziegfeld's shows dazzling. Ziegfeld also made the overt sexuality of his shows more acceptable through presentation of the chorines as an All-American stereotype. By emphasizing elements of sex intermingled with nationalism, Ziegfeld minimized their scandalous nature, seducing the public every step of the way.

Another important element of *Follies* was its theater environment, which shaped spectacular scenic design. The *Follies* were mainly presented at two theaters--the Jardin de Paris (the rooftop of the New York Theater) and the New Amsterdam. Ziegfeld himself ran the Jardin de Paris, where the *Follies of 1907* opened on June 8 (after a brief trial in Atlantic City). Roof garden theaters had become popular during the Progressive Era, drawing elite crowds to lavish shows

where consumption of alcohol and rowdy behavior was acceptable, even encouraged. Because summers were grueling and rooftops were breezy, “gardens” made it possible to keep the theater circuit open year round and also provided convenient spaces for late night frolics with after-hours chorus girls, who mingled with the audience after the show to engage in flirtation. Of the rooftop theater, Charles Higham writes:

Entry to the roof cost \$5. The customers could take an elevator to the roof, where there was a restaurant surrounding a dance floor with a drop curtain on each side. A balcony was suspended from the ceiling by chains. The balcony floor was a plate of glass; when the girls danced and the lights blazed, the people could look up between their legs. The stage was moveable, thrusting out between the diners by means of special machinery. (Higham 1972, 108-109)

In *The Ziegfeld Touch: The Life and Times of Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr.*, Richard and Paulette Ziegfeld describe the Jardin de Paris, explaining that 480 people could sit at tables situated around a dance floor, much like a cabaret. An additional 280 audience members could sit in the balcony. While there was no raised stage, Joseph Urban’s scenic designs were draped across a back corner of the roof, where skits were performed. (Ziegfeld and Ziegfeld 1993, 62) The dancers performed around the dinner tables, allowing for intimate communication between performer and audience member, even audience participation. Ziegfeld later had a platform flanked with steps added in front of Urban’s designs. The cast would emerge from this backdrop and strut down to the dance floor.

In December 1917, [Ned] Wayburn introduced a telescopic stage...Like the platform it abutted, the stage was four feet tall and had steps to the dance floor. It could be rolled out on rubber wheels until it covered the central dance floor, separating the performers from the audience when desired. The stage also elevated cast members so they could be seen. When the telescopic stage was added, the platform in back of it was deepened and the circular backdrop was replaced by an arch. Tableaux could be presented on the platform while other scenes and numbers unfolded on the stage or the dance floor. (Ziegfeld and Ziegfeld 1993, 63)

However, the design of the Jardin de Paris was not what gained it the most popularity.

The roof, just as other cabaret-style entertainment did, let respectable people try out new values. As the barriers between men and women were being lowered, both sexes learned new lifestyles. The chorus girl was a symbol of the single urban working woman. Money enabled her to lead an independent life. She symbolized the modern woman who could enjoy big-city freedom but could also attract and hold a man. The *Frolic* let her meet a variety of men. Likewise, it allowed stage-door Johnnies to meet chorus girls without creating a public scandal. (Ziegfeld and Ziegfeld 1993, 69-70)

The success of the 1907 *Follies* earned Ziegfeld's show the reputation of "the must see summer event". The Parisian décor and reorganized layout of the garden theater advanced the popularity of the "revue." "The success of *Follies* changed the face of legitimate theatre after 1910 by introducing the modern revue format. In New York during the summer Ziegfeld's roof garden show became widely imitated in an effort to keep legitimate theatres open." (Johnson 1985, 132) Scholar Rosaline Stone concurs.

The revue was planned as escapist summer entertainment satirizing American events as the European revues commented on continental happenings. When this first edition made a profit, a second edition was planned; the revues soon became annual, and their opening nights traditionally began the New York season. (Stone 1985, 11)

During these first five years, *Follies* were quite different than the later, more popular shows. Julian Mitchell, the first *Follies* choreographer, emphasized the individual personalities of all the dancers. This contrasted with the stylized chorus lines Ned Wayburn later made famous. Yet, Ziegfeld almost single-handedly refreshed the revue format into consistently sold out shows. This helped to hold the summer theatre circuit together and his shows benefited from the growing freedom that was occurring in American life. Soon, the roof garden theaters became too limited in space and technological possibilities to contain

*Follies*. Ziegfeld briefly moved his show to the Moulin Rouge (the New York Theater, renamed), and then to the New Amsterdam.

Gone along with the old garden setting were the limitations of the small stage, poor sight lines, faulty acoustics and the noise of the street, the fans and the bar. The chorus grew in numbers, beauty and talent, until it took precedence over all other revue elements, and turned the *Follies* into a variety spectacle, without its former satirical bite. Gone also, along with the garden setting, was the freedom of the audience—to smoke, to drink, to move, and to participate in the performance. These elements remained in the roof garden, and were co-opted by the cabaret. (Johnson 1985, 135)

The New Amsterdam was one of the few new theaters built during the period. “This structure was a monument to the business of entertainment, combining as it did both the most efficient and technologically sophisticated architectural style of the time, and the most ornate.” (Johnson 1985, 110) In the New Amsterdam, Ziegfeld’s productions continued to mirror the cosmopolitan, modern temperament of Progressive Era New York City.

The shows emphasized escape from the drudgery of work and, for women, the isolation of home life. Patrons left the New Amsterdam feeling they had participated in the fast life available only in the city. In a continuation of a *Follies* theme, the city was a place of freedom and pleasure. (Ziegfeld and Ziegfeld 1993, 69)

Ziegfeld’s new theater added even more life to his productions. Every element of Ziegfeld’s shows became larger, reflecting the grand space of the new theater. *Follies* sets and scenery are perfect examples of the growing scale of Ziegfeld’s *Follies*.

Typically, Ziegfeld’s scenery constituted a large part of the *Follies* spectacle. *The Ziegfeld Follies: A Study of Theatrical Opulence from 1907 to 1931* traces the organization and décor of the shows in order to explain the aesthetic characteristics of Ziegfeld. Author Rosaline B. Stone purports that the extravagant sets and political satire tempered the overt sexuality of the performances.

Grandiose paintings of dreamscapes, larger-than-life backdrops of pretty faces and stately arches ranked high on Ziegfeld's list of staging techniques. This emphasis extended beyond décor. Costumes reflected the gigantism of *Follies* scenery, essentially justifying (and embellishing) the colossal display of sex onstage. For instance, the *Follies* of 1909 presented girls in short-shorts with naval ship hats. Entire battleships were represented on top of the pretty girls' heads. These women were dressed in tight, striped shirts and shorts that resembled underclothing. All of this was a disingenuous tribute to the American Navy. Through intertwining sex with politics American audiences began to see images of themselves as patriotically attractive people. "Interestingly, jingoistic military numbers disappeared after World War I, and postwar spectacle concentrated on beauty parades. Apparently Ziegfeld felt the United States had no need to express military dominance on stage since it had it in reality." (Stone 1985, 68)

By the time Ziegfeld took over the New Amsterdam, scenic designs for the *Follies* were unparalleled. Architect and designer Joseph Urban joined the *Follies* production unit in 1915. Urban is remembered for his attention to detail, as well as his monumental set designs.

The most striking element in Urban's work was his use of color. He applied his paints to the canvas by the use of *pointillage*, a technique employed by many artists of the Impressionist school, but new to scenic design. Avoiding solid colors, in the manner of Monet and Seurat, he achieved magical effects with lighting....  
(Carter 1974, 44)

In addition to backdrops and lighting effects, platforms onstage (much like the ones used in the Jardin de Paris) reorganized the spatial patterns of performers. These platforms later proved especially useful, not only freeing up room on stage, but also in providing unique risers that caused the development of the famous "Ziegfeld Walk": The Ziegfeld Walk was the quintessential *Follies* showgirl move. It was characterized by uneven footwork patterns and swinging hip movements, but what distinguished this walk from others was that it was performed walking down platforms with narrow, angled steps. Though the

following description does not specifically reference *Follies*, it illuminates Urban's implementation of platforms in two of Ziegfeld's other revues.

Another of Urban's impressive innovations was his use of platforms. The rooms in *Pelléas and Mélisande* were raised two or three feet above the footlights and, as a consequence, the setting seemed smaller and more intimate; on the other hand, in the *Tales of Hoffmann*, the platform, built on a larger scale and lighted in a different manner, gave the opposite effect of distance and space. (Carter 1974, 43-44)

Joseph's Urban's set designs displayed in theatrical terms the dazzling opulence of growing America. Beneath the proscenium arch, art deco curves merged with flora and fauna to exude glamour and gigantism. Looking at sketches of *Follies* sets, the scale and majesty with which Urban painted his ideas is clearly evident. Tucked away, draped platforms intersected with flowing, ripe flower vines, and strategically placed French doors revealed idyllic landscapes. Amidst all this were the parading beauties of Ziegfeld Girls, glamorous women surrounded by a world of style.

Costumes were the most obvious element through which to display sexuality. Known for elaborate and prophetic fashion designs, *Follies* productions epitomized cultural consumption through dress. Charles Higham suggests that the consumption of fashion in costumes encouraged Ziegfeld girls to feel as though they were as stylish as the richest woman in the audience. In effect, Ziegfeld transformed his showgirls into cultural icons. Higham writes of the *Follies* showgirl costume:

Her lace must be real, her silks and satins of the finest available in quality, her hats made for her by the most expensive milliners in New York and Paris...No one except the reigning stars must be permitted individual selection: Ziegfeld knew what was best for each of them. (Higham 1972, 107)

Ziegfeld also knew that his girls had to be sexy, but classy. Slit skirts, bare arms, tight bodices and silky stockings were *de rigueur* for *Follies* dancers. "Ziegfeld's genius was his uncanny ability to package titillation and naughtiness with the

label of middle-class respectability, to blend idealism and voyeurism.” (Glenn 2000, 170)

Like the set designs, the costumes were detailed and lavish, heightening the sensuality of beautiful girls while codifying their appearance as “American.” “Beginning with the costumes for Anna Held, Ziegfeld banked on the allure of expensive authenticity, not just the illusion of onstage glitter and elegance but the use of genuine silks and real jewels in performances. The Ziegfeld standard for high quality was famous for including apparel not even seen by the audience: Irish linen petticoats and silk bloomers” (Mizejewski 90).

Yet, early performances with Held (Ziegfeld’s first wife) represented more of a European aesthetic than American. Held’s S-shaped, corseted body resembled the burlesque chorus girls of Parisian nightclubs. This costuming choice reflected the burlesque format to which the early *Follies* adhered to and also reflected the fashion silhouette that had not really altered in respect to the growing female liberation. Early Ziegfeld costumes (pre-*Follies*) were designed with the refinement of the early nineteenth century Victorianism and with a touch of Parisian sensuality. Covered legs, ornamentation of dress and lace were regular costume features on the stars and dancers. Corsets and layered petticoats alluded to the female within, as the corset shaped the hourglass figure.

By 1907, skirt lengths were being raised. The boldness of this maneuver was veiled through the implementation of earlier, more conservative fashion designs. In the first *Follies* (1907), the dancers of the opening scene of Act Two were seen in bathing suits consisting of knee-length, pleated skirts, corsets, puffed sleeves, draping neckties, and hats whose sashes fell down to mid calf. This style, refined and conservative compared to later *Follies* costumes, is still a dark contrast to the image of Anna Held. In the same year, Ziegfeld filled his show with two different types of women. One was the newer image as explained above. The second type of 1907 *Follies* girl was the more conservative Anna Held Girl (a group of chorines who looked and dressed almost identical to Held). These women, all with elegant necks, round faces and pinned-up dark hair, are

resplendent in Victorian costumes that have tailored, long-sleeved jackets. (Ziegfeld and Ziegfeld 1993, 40) It becomes clear that the Ziegfeld girl image was in transition. *Follies* was slowly changing, and with it the girls changed, too.

With the succeeding *Follies*, Ziegfeld began to seek out a new type of woman. He personally chose taller, slender girls who would literally become his mannequins of American fashion consumerism.

The development of the clothes-model showgirl was furthered with the hiring of dance director Ned Wayburn for both the *Follies* and the *Frolics* in 1915, the same year that Lady Duff Gordon was hired for costumes. Traditionally, most revue chorus girls functioned as décor or background, simply twirling their parasols or swaying to the music, with a talented team of the more talented dancers brought forward for special numbers. (Mizejewski 1999, 93-94)

New dancers, coupled with new fashions, allowed for new, active choreography. *Follies* costumes, though, were not of the Victorian mode. The first showgirls in the 1907 edition still wore bodices and floor-length dresses, but their shoulders were bare, their arms milky white. Their hair was romantically swept up and a crown made of metal starbursts nestled in the tresses. Peacock-like fans, large and ornate, were attached to their lower backs. These transitional costumes seemed to add a touch of elegance to the star performer as well, who was dressed as Salomé, kneeling, her face stern, with her hands behind her head.

As *Follies* continued its successful run, many of the showgirls appeared nearly nude onstage. A photo of the 1916 *Follies* shows a dancer posing in front of an Urban set. (Carter 1974, 65) Her arms are raised over her head, her hands holding a bouquet of small feathers. Her right arm is adorned with gold bands--one on her wrist and one at her elbow. Her chin is slightly raised and her eyes dare you to test her power. She's wearing a small halter-top that is only large enough to contain her breasts and bunches up at her cleavage. A necklace drapes just below this elusive cleavage, drawing attention to the fleshy, smooth stomach. Her hips are barely covered by satin shorts. Her legs are bare. Attached to her waist is a semi-translucent train of painted peacock feathers.

They wrap around her and fan out in front, extending the exotic space this beauty occupies. This woman is a siren, an elegant animal--a wonder to behold.

Later, Ziegfeld's costumes became even skimpier. Nearly-nude women with strategically placed lace or flowers appeared onstage. These costumes were sometimes considered scandalous to audience members (depending on the circumstance and amount of nudity). Yet, it is possible that, despite Ziegfeld's tactics of pushing the accepted norms of society and indulging in his own fantastic ideals of womanhood, these performers were not actually nude. Like a good many of the Salomé costumes, nude-colored "fleshings" actually covered the entire body. Ziegfeld marketed his women around the idea of illusion; in reality, they were respectably covered from head to toe.

Adding to these enticing fashions were elaborate headdresses of long feathers or metallic sculptures, lace overlays and beaded gowns, sequined bras with tassel accents, patterned leggings and expensive shoes. Attention to detail and the large budget set aside for costumes allowed Ziegfeld (and fashion designer Lady Duff Gordon) to display some of the most extravagant costumes ever seen onstage. The "over the top" approach to showgirl *couture* kept stride with the gigantism of the other *Follies* elements. And, as discussed later in the choreographic stylings of *Follies*, costumes served to both veil and embellish the perfect American woman. These displays accented natural curves and revealed plenty of flesh, yet they presented the female body as an icon of art, not lust.

In presenting the *Follies* girl as a symbol of art, Ziegfeld manipulated his girls, using them as decorative objects. This decorativism not only made *Follies* stagings more artistic, but it also toned down the sex appeal exaggerated by the costumes.

During the Progressive Era, representation of women in the visual and decorative arts remained relatively conservative. While new metropolises sprang up in attempts to cultivate industry, painting held fast to Victorian notions of feminine sobriety and conservatism.

Before the turn of the century, beauty in America was equated more with spiritual qualities than the artistic rendering of the female body. The women in art represented elevated awareness in a less subtle way--they were often painted with wings. (Van Hook 1996, 162) This concern with moral correctness stemmed from a Puritanical heritage, yet was deeply influenced by the influx of contemporary European ideas. "The particular twist that the late nineteenth century gave to this trope was its belief that women's beauty was a gift that might purify, ennoble, and elevate the world around them," (Van Hook 166). Perhaps that was why genteel virtues were attached to the image of beautiful women.

The qualities usually associated with beauty—taste, elegance, refinement, charm—imply holding back, containing, restraining. To make something refined is to remove, pare down, and take away. Those qualities intimate a conservatism that is often associated with American painting of this generation. This conservatism was manifest in both subject and technique. The subjects were sealed off in a hermetic environment of art or upper-class surroundings—a garden, a walled veranda, a drawing room—that protected them from outside forces. (Van Hook 1996, 168)

After the 1890s, however, a shift occurred. "A formalist approach, less tied to subject or underlying significance and more associated with decorative or aesthetic beauty, became more common in the 1890s." (Van Hook 1996, 163-164) This change reflected the growing appreciation of feminine beauty from a male perspective.

The idea that the female form was beautiful contrasted sharply with the accepted image of the male. "The masculine gender was constructed too much in terms of strength and character to be beautiful and was perceived as having too much ideological weight to be decorative." (Van Hook 1996, 170) In society's estimation, women in art reflected the woman of reality. No longer seen toiling and providing essential labor for the functioning of households, middle and upper class women were viewed as decorative elements of society. Industry now manufactured what women formerly produced. These women began to reflect the prosperity of the men they married through their conspicuous consumption of leisure. The elements of formalist, decorative art included, "...lack of narrative,

unimportance of subject, air of poetry and mystery, and emphasis on formal values. It indicated an arrangement of form, line, and color constructed primarily for beauty and harmony of effect.” (Van Hook 1996, 170) Through decorativism, feminine beauty was represented in abstract form. By the early decades of the twentieth century, however, decorative art idealized women in more concrete terms. Beauty could now be found within specific parts of a woman’s body-- especially her face.

Griselda Pollock has noted that abstracted faces function as screens upon which masculine fantasies can be played, but they also function as screens for the artist’s aesthetic ‘ideas’—whether they be about poetry or spirituality or decorative harmony. Women’s faces, and their bodies, were an artistic vocabulary upon which men fielded their ambitions. (Van Hook 1996, 178)

Ziegfeld used images of women to his advantage, utilizing the values of formalist, decorative art. He shaped these images into an active force within highly theatrical spectacles, pushing the boundaries of conventionality into a new aesthetic principle as he capitalized on techniques from the fine arts. As actual backdrops for his shows, he had draped, printed female faces larger than life.

Decorativism was also exemplified through Ziegfeld’s choice of thematic content. Having no narrative, his spectacles starred abstract images of formally arranged women. The performers represented material objects, landscapes, or seasons but never specific characters. Ziegfeld’s attention to form was evident in the ways in which he used color, costumes, sets, and even choreography.

Woman as ornament became an inescapable image beginning with the 1915 edition when Joseph Urban’s settings encouraged the chorus girls to be placed or moved around the sets as abstractions rather than as characters. In this edition the Ziegfeld Girls portrayed seductive mermaids, a creature in need of protection, a slave to fashion, an attainable dream, patriotic symbols, and harem girls. (Stone 1985, 84)

Every element meshed seamlessly to create a specific *Follies* theme.

Decorative art employed the motif of repetition in a work, rather than the motif of concrete narrative. These motifs were expressed as seasons, musical

themes or epochs of time, and their artistic substance came from the continual use of thematic replication. The abstract nature of these motifs added to their decorative aspect. "Only women could assume the passive role necessary for a successful decorative composition. Male figures, reflecting the construction of the masculine gender as active, were rendered with too much presence in painting to function well as flat and decorative art." (Van Hook 1996, 178-79) As we see here, "decoration" came to mean "non-assertive". Men were painted according to "active" identities (hunter, sportsman, etc), but women were displayed as socially mute. Clumped together on canvas or stage, women were devoid of individuality, allowing them to be physically active, yet intrinsically interchangeable and passive.

Women were most extraordinarily objectified when costumed to represent inanimate, functional objects. At the *Midnight Frolics*, whose audience was mainly male, women were considered decorative entertainment: "Girls ran about dressed as switchboards, and telephones on each table connected each customer to the switchboard of his choice. Some girls dressed as Zeppelins, with sweeping searchlights moving over them against an Urban background of a burning city." (Higham 1972, 108) Here, the female body as consumable sexual object is unmistakable. However, women in the *Follies* less obviously assumed erotic roles as well. As showgirls, the dancers were illusionists of dreams--not explicit pornography. While they were sexy and sensual, their goal was to flirt through innuendo rather than actively pursue men. The feat accomplished by these women was that they portrayed respectable beauty, despite their limited role as consumer object.

An inherent anonymity resides in the two-dimensionality of decorative aesthetics. The chorus groupings, the repetitive, synchronized steps, and the simple, graceful movements of the Ziegfeld chorines underscored the cultural bent toward "collective femininity." While disrupting the conventions of two-dimensional mediums such as painting, Ziegfeld's dancing girls still embodied the idea of the female body as a decorative entity. Ziegfeld accomplished this by

creating theatrical murals of moving bodies. Onstage, Ziegfeld's girls were a montage of beauty and refinement. "In murals, American artists transported ideal women out of the confines of the drawing room or garden and had them assume a more active appearance, embody public-spirited qualities, and express expansionist values." (Van Hook 1996, 169) Through *Follies*, Ziegfeld presented a living collage of decorative women, all participating in the consumption of contemporary products and images in a mural of action. "Without a role, without a narrative to play out, without space enough to act in, women in decorative paintings were powerless." (Van Hook 1996, 185) Not so with the *Follies*.

Of course, action in *Follies* stemmed from staged dances. Choreographer Julian Mitchell worked on the early *Follies* (1907-1915). Mitchell was intent on developing individual personalities for all of the performers and only used a small chorus (this was probably due to the size of the smaller rooftop theater). Mitchell also staged numbers that involved audience interaction with scantily-clad dancers. Vying for a successful summer theater run, Ziegfeld used extreme means to draw crowds. On the rooftops, audiences were allowed to smoke and drink during performances and the presence of alcohol in this small space heightened a sense of intimacy. Yet, "Sexual intimacy was never blatant in the *Follies*; instead Ziegfeld approached it obliquely by parades of chorus girls in diaphanous costumes and especially by innuendo in lyrics." (Stone 1985, 37) Early *Follies* girls did not wear fleshings. They truly were close to nude in their costumes, resembling more of the "entertainment for hire" that what would later become Ziegfeld's *Midnight Frolics*. While Ziegfeld's *Frolics* took over the Jardin de Paris, the *Follies* moved to the New Amsterdam. There, the proscenium clearly divided the audience from the performers, the house was much bigger, alcohol was no longer allowed to be consumed while watching a performance, and new scenery and lighting techniques were possible. *Follies* was becoming more classy entertainment. Along with the development of the show, the chorus girl image was revamped until it represented the model ideal of the new upper class American woman. From 1916 to 1923, Ned Wayburn was the principal

choreographer for Ziegfeld's works, including various musicals such as *Nine O'Clock Frolics* and *Midnight Frolics*.

The staging of the early *Follies* had been largely the work of the brilliant Julian Mitchell with Ziegfeld more in the role of promoter, but Ned Wayburn, who had joined the organization in 1915, was equally talented and possibly an even better organizer. Rehearsal discipline became increasingly rigid, and Ziegfeld's mania for perfection of detail, pacing and balance fused the myriad elements of the revue into a perfect unit. (Carter 1974, 78)

Wayburn was already well established as a name in New York and abroad, having staged various productions for the Shubert Brothers, the London Hippodrome, and having established a talent agency from which he drew his own group of dancers (Stratyner 11). Ziegfeld offered Wayburn an exclusive contract in 1916, but the relationship was turbulent, finally ending after the *Ziegfeld Follies of 1923*, when Julian Mitchell resumed choreographic responsibility. However, the years with Wayburn helped Ziegfeld establish the reputation of his shows. Wayburn's choreography highlighted the showgirls and, coupled with Ziegfeld's advertising schemes, propelled the Ziegfeld Girl into the American spotlight, making her a household name.

Wayburn stylized the dancers, interspersing precise, quick drills with Delsartean *tableaux*. The moments of stillness he incorporated into performances (coupled with the revealing costumes the girls wore) gave rise to concerns over the "nudity" of the dancers. While in motion, the semi-nudity of the scantily dressed dancers enhanced the movement. But, once at rest in an artistic pose, audience members would have a chance to fully view their bodies. Ziegfeld cunningly defended the *Follies* by turning the tables on this rationale. "Ziegfeld replied to objections to nudity by saying it was necessary in *tableaux* when reproducing artistic masterpieces in which nude figures appeared, and therefore was not exploitative." (Stone 1985, 22) Using Delsartean movements in *Follies* also contributed an air of acceptability amidst the sensuality. The implementation of Delsartean *tableaux* gave *Follies* an air of morality and artistry

and, in some ways, harkened back to the Victorian practices to which some Americans still desperately.

The factory atmosphere that Wayburn fostered veiled blatant sexuality even further. Previous use of chorus lines utilized groups in small numbers, never exceeding six. *Follies* exponentially increased the number of women dancing together. Wayburn crowded the stage with up to fifty women and later, with the popularization of movie musicals, Busby Berkeley staged dances for a hundred or more girls. In fact, late in his career, Ziegfeld mentored Berkeley.

A 1909 story in a New York Hearst newspaper claimed with great ado that a “chorus girl factory” had opened in Manhattan to train those with potential...the newspaper story is actually about the opening of a dancing school on Broadway, but the factory reference obliquely acknowledges the working-class appeal of chorus girl life and—perhaps with unintended irony—how popular images of women had become factory processed by 1909. (Mizejewski 1999, 65)

Ned Wayburn viewed the training of chorus girls methodologically and established codified techniques for teaching large numbers of students. The geometric patterns and steady pulse of the movements (such as line kicks and sultry walks) invigorated the chorus girl image as a commodity of mechanical efficiency. Every dancer looked like the next, danced like the girl next to her, and wore the same costume. Grouped together, the chorus formed a working machine, each dancer one gear in a great dancing engine. In his meticulously written book, *The Art of Stage Dancing: The Story of a Beautiful and Profitable Profession: A Manual of Stage-Craft*, Wayburn explains:

So exact is the execution that it arouses your wonder how the dancers ever manage to get so many intricate steps and rapid motions and pretty flings of their heels into a united and harmonious picture; all working in perfect unison, to a pleasing tempo, smiling the while and doing it all as a mere matter of course, with seeming unconcern, just as though the steps and kicks and posing and grouping were second nature to them all. (Wayburn 1925, 84)

Wayburn exemplified American industry in his machine-like choreography. The showgirls, through their meticulously rehearsed movements, embodied precision and synchronicity. The fact that they were selected for their adherence to a set standard of physical beauty, were dressed identically, and moved with the clockwork precision of automatons gave them a sense of anonymity and androgyny. The difference between one girl and the next was indecipherable from a distance. Only when Ziegfeld had Urban amplify girls' faces on the backdrops did the audience catch a glimpse of individual identity and personality. The anonymity of their onstage chorine status (not to be confused with the backstage and after-hours chorus girl image), coupled with implications of "woman as object" and allusions to the female as machine, created a cunningly packed female icon. She was an objectified, sexual being who was both titillating and coolly distanced enough, physically and psychologically, to be socially acceptable and non-threatening. This was the genius of Ziegfeld.

The correlation between Ned Wayburn's stagings and industrialism may stem from Wayburn's childhood. Reportedly, he studied "mechanical drawing" and "...worked for his father, who manufactured heavy machinery" (Ziegfeld and Ziegfeld 316). Furthermore, Wayburn's choreography was developed during a period of industrial obsession. As mentioned in Chapter One, Loïe Fuller embodied the futurist aspirations of technological advancement. Both the Chicago Exposition of 1893 and the Paris Expo of 1900 were brilliant and influential displays of modern-day industrial ability. Fuller typified America's response to industrial success and technology. "Industrial productivity, with science and technology, became an ever more vital component of national strength." (Kennedy 1992, 6)

Tension in industrial America arose from a conflict between the idyllic agrarianism of the progressive generation's childhood and the nationalistic security that industrial prosperity instilled in Progressive Era society. Henry Adams, great-grandson of John Adams, is considered to be symbolic of

America's response to the social and intellectual changes caused by industrialism.

The intellectual alienation that stemmed from technology ousting older, conservative thought led Adams to step back from society and don the role of cultural critic. During the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, Adams saw the death and irrelevance of his nineteenth-century mindset. As a historian, Adams didn't like being dismissed so easily, yet he eventually found a way to amalgamate history and technology. His new outlook was influenced by his visit to the Paris Exposition of 1900, especially the Dynamo exhibit.

The Dynamo was a monumental, electric generator displayed at the fair in the Gallery of Machines. In *The Education of Henry Adams*, Adams wrote about the exhibit. He compared the contemporary dynamo to moral past in his 1900 essay, "The Dynamo and the Virgin". The impressive demonstration of power emphasized the growing distance between old and new American values. The dynamo pressed forward, symbolic of the world's technological intelligence and of the lifestyle shift that accompanied industry. The idea of the "Virgin" lent itself more to the older, conservative force in America--religion and agrarianism.

Adams wrote,

...to Adams the dynamo became a symbol of infinity. As he grew accustomed to the great gallery of machines, he began to feel the forty-foot dynamos as a moral force, much as the early Christians felt the Cross. The planet itself seemed less impressive, in its old-fashioned, deliberate, annual or daily revolution, than this huge wheel, revolving within an arm's length at some vertiginous speed, and barely murmuring—scarcely humming an audible warning to stand a hair's-breadth further for respect of power—while it would not wake the baby lying close against its frame. Before the end, one began to pray to it; inherited instinct taught the natural expression of man before silent and infinite force. Among the thousand symbols of ultimate energy the dynamo was not so human as some, but it was the most impressive. (Adams, Henry 1)

Though Adams found the pathway to modernity somewhat unsettling, the industrial and technological innovations of the World's Fairs of 1893 and 1900 evidenced the expanding power of industrial nations. America entered the

struggle for technological superiority; it was the youngest, but determined to be the most powerful.

The World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, a celebration of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Columbus's journey to the New World, was a germinal influence in American culture and industrial progress. Chicago's "White City," as the Exposition was popularly dubbed, was a plaster actualization of a prophetic New Jerusalem, a perfect world, created from America's technological ingenuity, engineering prowess, capitalist enterprise, frontier spirit, and the relentless, all-encompassing planning of its designers. (Adams 1995, 45)

The rising popularity of technology and the rapid continuous creation of new inventions spawned a specialized field within the world of technology. Professional designers began to institute technology into urban planning and commercial enterprises. Design, then, emerged as an important indicator of productivity. For Ned Wayburn, design equaled symmetrical patterns and meticulously staged choreography.

According to Barbara Stratyner, Wayburn based his stagings on two patterns: the formation and the frame. Formations were geometric shapes, created by the chorines' bodies. They were meant to be seen from above in order to display the mechanical, gear-like quality of the dances. Later, Ziegfeld's protégé Busby Berkeley incorporated these same techniques in his choreography for motion pictures.

...since Wayburn seldomly worked on a flat stage, his formations could be appreciated to some extent by the entire audience. The most commonly used configurations were rectangles, rhomboids, and parallelograms (as in Wayburn's early feature acts), circles, ovals, and ellipses, inverted V's and straight lines. (Stratyner 1996, 52)

Frames were commonly used when the chorus flanked a soloist. In semi-circles and architectural group poses, the showgirls merely draped the stage with their quiet, graceful bodies, allowing the featured performer to have center stage and the spotlight. "Framing work was the primary function of both C- and B-choruses. Although both were made up of skilled dancers, they were frequently employed in scenes in which primary effect was not choreographic. They were

used, for example, in the many Wayburn-Ziegfeld scenes featuring black light and phosphorescent effects.” (Stratyner 1996, 55)

Both the frame and the formation were attained by Wayburn’s use of processions (long, winding paths that dancers glided along as they displayed their extraordinary costumes). “Processions...were a Wayburn trademark. He staged them for various editions of the Ziegfeld Follies *and* Midnight Frolics, using the staircases and platforms designed by Joseph Urban. The simple procession was an uncomplicated form based on the fashion show.” (Stratyner 1996, 57)

In addition to structured stagings, chorines were split into groups according to body size and dance specialization (ballet, acrobatic, tap, posing, etc.). The groups were labeled A through E, the “A” group being showgirls, and the “E” group known as the “Pony teams.” The “E”s were precision teams who replicated an embodiment of the English Equestrian Ballets. Stratyner writes,

E-dancers always worked in musical comedy technique. Their numbers frequently included the shadowing devices of tandem work. In a typical formation a line of 16 faced the audience, each dancer kicking her right foot to the left while tilting her body to the right. Although Wayburn’s choreography for E-dancers anticipated the precision style associated today with the Rockettes, the scale of their movements was very different. Kicks, for instance, seldom rose higher than fifty degrees. What gave the steps their impact was that they were performed by a large number of dancers simultaneously. (Stratyner 1996, 54)

D-Dancers, otherwise known as the “ponies,” did the same work as the E group, only they incorporated more individualization and often performed on stairs and raised walkways. C- and B- groups (the “chickens” and “peaches”, respectively) did framing work that involved acrobatics, eccentric buck dances and ballet. Wayburn created a detailed form of notation, which he used to document his dances. It shows the detail with which he analyzed the movement. For example, in his notation of the “Eccentric Buck #1” routine, Wayburn has classified the foot as having four distinct parts (toe, ball, flat and heel) and has dissected the simple shuffle into six individual parts. His categorizations and

organizations of styles and steps are so detailed that they become cryptic. These clues to his assembly-line style illuminate something about the tightly regimented classes and rehearsals the chorines experienced under Wayburn's direction.

Wayburn took pleasure in offering instruction at his dance school (then located on Broadway at Columbus Circle). His attention to detail and classification of the various forms of stage dancing were as painstakingly formulated as his groupings of chorus and specialty dancers.

First let us consider the type that I have named American Specialty Dancing, the one that is more truly and distinctively American than any other type of dancing to be seen on any stage today.

This classification comprises every variety of tap and step dancing, and also what is commonly known as 'Legmania,' the latter including high-kicking features, where the leg will execute front, back, and side kicks, and other forms of the acrobatic type of dancing. Legmania is not a possible development for every student of dancing, as nearly every other form of the art is, but is available to the few who are adapted to its exacting technique, which ensures that this interesting field will never grow too many blossoms, and that supply is not likely to equal demand. (Wayburn 1925, 57-58)

The "ponies," "chickens," and "peaches," were certainly to be respected for the technical skill that Wayburn expected of them. Prized above all, though, was the A-group, the elite chorus girls known as "Ziegfeld's Showgirls." They were among the best-paid chorines in the world. As Barbara Stratyner keenly observes, "Of all the dance numbers staged by Wayburn, the best known involved the least movement. They were choreographed for the A-girls...and their basic movement was the 'Ziegfeld Walk.'" (Stratyner 1996, 55) The "Ziegfeld Walk" was the quintessential *Follies* showgirl trademark, though Charles Higham suggests that it originated in another of Ziegfeld's shows besides *Follies*. "At the *Frolics* Wayburn introduced the famous 'Ziegfeld Walk': that straight-backed strut with the breasts jutting out sharply, designed to show off the brilliant Ziegfeld costumes. The walk had another purpose: to prevent

customers from pawing the girls as they came past the lighted tables.” (Higham 1972, 108)

Still, the platform with narrow, angled steps is what remains important to the development of the walk, not the name of the show in which the walk originally appeared. This walk was a highly regimented way of moving across the stage and slinking down stairs. An angular positioning of the dancer’s body highlighted the sheer couture of the showgirls’ costumes, step after step. Opposition and isolation worked to create the illusion of a symmetrical stance through a precariously balanced walk. Always looking directly at the audience, these women were sultry, sexy, and powerful. Accented, tilted pelvises, uneven footwork patterns and the elongation of the legs from high heels presented these girls as sirens of seduction; they glided across stage in winding patterns, radiating beauty to audiences. And, as Mizejewski points out, “the choreography of the Ziegfeld walk and the replacement of the ramp with the staircase is also an organization of gender, with the regimented female body marched into laboriously artificial poses to accommodate an architecture.” (Mizejewski 1999, 98)

By 1922, the idea of the “Glorified American Girl” was well established as the Ziegfeld motto. Ziegfeld’s showgirls personified every American’s dream. Blatant sexuality was acceptable onstage if it was framed with extravagant, gigantized sets and expensive costumes. Highly disciplined movement enhanced the dancer’s appeal, either by commodifying and objectifying her, suggesting androgyny through overly precise mechanical movements, or through the sly media tactics Ziegfeld used to market his show. The affluence of American society was seen in Wayburn’s stagings, Urban’s Designs, Lucille Duff Gordon’s costumes and Ziegfeld’s uncanny entrepreneurship. The *Follies* lasted until 1957. After Ziegfeld’s death in 1932, *Follies* moved to the Winter Garden. In an attempt to settle his debts, Ziegfeld’s wife (and former star), Billie Burke, sold the rights to *Follies* to the Shubert Brothers, who never quite captured the essence of Ziegfeld’s aesthetic. In fact, Ziegfeld’s high standards of productivity

and artistry were rarely paralleled. The most notable exception is Busby Berkeley credited with carrying on the Ziegfeld tradition by adapting it to the new medium of motion pictures.

Through examination of the phenomenon known as the Ziegfeld Girl, one can see that these women are culturally significant. As some of the first and best paid professional dancers, the Ziegfeld Girls were savvy icons of the American dream. Although it has been argued that they constitute an affront to feminism, and were used as sexual pawns, these “ponies,” “peaches,” and “chickens,” were women who enjoyed the social and sexual liberation, and the financial security that was becoming available to females by the end of the Progressive Era. More than embracing a new lifestyle of stardom, the Ziegfeld Girl shed the confines of the Victorian cult of domesticity and became famous and idolized in her own right. These women were presented as simultaneously being patriotic, domestic, independent, refined, American, and always *very* beautiful.

## CONCLUSION

The Progressive Era marked a turning point for the identity of the American female. Between 1890 and 1920, the conservative ideologies of Victorianism were replaced by modern, pragmatic approaches to political, intellectual, social and cultural issues. Women in general benefited from this shift, but working women especially felt its effects in their struggles to shed the constraints of their class. Factory girls, domestic servants, clerks and other working women redefined their role within a previously male- dominated system. As these women began to obtain jobs, make money and assert independence within their lives, a social liberation surfaced. Working women began to participate in conspicuous consumption and leisurely activities. They became a viable force through labor strikes and other forms of political action. And, as working women became autonomous, they defined their identity through less restricted sexual conventions and social standards. These women protested against gender and class discrimination, joining their middle and upper class sisters in the fight for equal rights. By 1920, they won the first step in their battle. Federal law mandated women's right to vote.

Industrialism and urbanity brought people physically together through the creation of jobs in major metropolises. Immigration brought new heritages and cultures from overseas, inculcating America with alternative values and social standards. Amidst all this, social thought and environmentalism developed in an effort to keep the United States productive and clean. The United States was evolving into a modern nation.

Progressive Era social and theatrical dance reflected the changes of their times. While working women practiced leisure consumption through their patronage of dance halls, the chorus girl provided leisure onstage. Both dance genres provided opportunities for women to redefine their social roles and assert an unprecedented authority over their own lives. Dance hall behavior allowed women to smoke, drink, curse and sneak off to private corners to flirt and engage in public displays of affection with men. On the dance floor, both men and women were less restricted by moral standards of “acceptable” dancing. Working girls expressed their liberation by dancing lasciviously and floating from one dance partner to the next. While these interactions seemed immoral to Progressive reformers, the freedom women held over their own bodies radically altered their social lives. Working girls no longer measured their worth by Cult of Domesticity standards. They shaped their own future, which included the possibility that they could break the cardinal rule by choosing not to marry.

The chorus girl typified the growing social acceptance of feminine sexuality through theatrical performance. Even though men objectified these showgirls, no one truly saw the chorus girl as a threat to society. The proscenium’s fourth wall served to symbolically distance the dancing girl from the voyeuristic audience. She was perceived as illustrious and sultry, yet refined and malleable. The ability of showgirls to appropriate, adapt, and embody acceptable standards of sexuality created an outlet for talented working girls who wanted to escape the factory or domestic life. The perceived glamour of a Progressive Era chorus girl’s life indicated that women could participate in conspicuous consumption by assuming the identity of consumable image. Ironically, this empowered women in much the same way that working women were empowered through dance hall excursions. Working women on all fronts were expressing their sexuality and consuming ideas of leisure— benefiting from evolving social mores. These elements of conspicuous consumption and leisure coalesced to create new images of the “American” woman. The shifts in what was socially acceptable as well as new, expressive freedoms that accompanied

these changes, posited the Progressive Era working woman as independent, street savvy and willing to voice her opinions. Though these women did not fully experience the comforts of middle and upper class lifestyles, class structure no longer completely repressed working women. Despite their low economic and social status, these women enjoyed the freedom to choose their leisure activities and openly display their sexuality (a trait that was hindered by “higher” standards of morality in middle and upper class enclaves). The emerging identity of the American woman represented the independence to break free from past social expectations, the strength to survive, the choice to avidly pursue life, the ability to consume leisure, and the rebellious voice to advocate change.

Progressive Era working women evolved in stride with America. They reflected the modernity of their nation and the fast pace of New York City in their ability to adapt to their environment and emerge victorious. When the nation was called to war, women replaced their absent male counterparts in the work force. At home, women became a foundation of support and productivity for the men overseas. When WWI ended, men returned home and resumed their superiority in the workplace. Though many women lost the financial security associated with war work, as well as the jobs they held while men were at war, the perseverance of these women firmly established the female as a valuable asset to American life. Working women’s presence during in the war efforts proved that women could be independent, reliable, and industrious. These women were the prototypes of what became known as the “New” woman.

It is important to realize that women were not the only marginalized group that experienced the ramifications of the Progressive Era, nor were dance halls and chorus girls the only influential dance genres of the period. Though the focus of this thesis is the exploration of the working woman, other Progressive Era factions were also influential. For example, the African-American experience and influence during the Progressive Era provides an invaluable source of information about the period. Intellectuals, like W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington, fought for the equality and rights for Blacks. African-American artists were

forging new paths and beginning to be taken seriously among white groups. Some even argued for equal rights based on the idea that America was built on the assimilation of the African and European aesthetic. In the struggle to define "America," and through the fight of progressivism and reform, African-Americans were a defining voice amidst the cacophony. In fact, at the end of the Progressive Era, it was African-Americans who took the torch and defined the next generation: America's Jazz Age known throughout the world. African-American literature, dance, and music were at the heart of the Roaring 20's. Though during the Progressive Era, African-Americans were socially limited, during the 1920's their contributions became a vital and undeniable pulse, helping define modern America. After all, even the Charleston was a dance craze that seeped out of Harlem's nightclubs and into the white community.

Additionally, Native Americans felt the impact of Progressive Era reform. From 1890, when the Ghost Dance gained national attention as an attempt to save the Native American population from annihilation, through to 1920 (by which time the Native American was established as a prominent reformist voice), Native Americans not only became more respected by the American public at large, but also acquired legislative rights as a people.

In the world of dance, modern dance pioneers, such as Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis and Loïe Fuller, represented a significant artistic voice. These women shed the confines of ballet and developed modern approaches to dance, utilizing Delsartism and Orientalism. At this time, dance was being shaped by other nations, as well. Serge Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* performed in the United States, exposing Americans to oriental exotica in ballet packaging. While these various Progressive era dance genres receive only a brief acknowledgement in this thesis, they are all significant areas of academic exploration in their own right, and deserve further scholarly attention. Dance was a remarkably lively and influential presence during the Progressive era; it served as both a response to, and a catalyst for, sweeping social changes of the period. The Progressive Era is

characterized by tensions between interconnected, yet competitive, ideas, and various ethnic, racial, and cultural identities of the turn-of-the-century.

Because contemporary society still struggles with dilemmas over the significance of Progressive Era reforms, the relevance of this period to American history is often debated. Yet, despite arguments, the influence of reform-based Progressive Era ideologies was a key factor in shaping America's modernity. By the 1920s, the United States had emerged as a premier global leader, full of prosperity and success that resulted from industrialism and urbanity, as well as Progressive reforms and modes of social thought. By looking at dance within this context, the modernization of America illuminates the symbiotic relationship between the impact of intellectual history and the scholarly importance of American dance history.

## REFERENCES

### *Primary Sources*

- Adams, Henry. "Chapter XXV: The Dynamo and the Virgin (1900)," from *The Education of Henry Adams*.  
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/HADAMS/eha25.html>. Date accessed: 1/17/02.
- American Home Magazine*. Monthly Magazine. Chicago & New York: American Fashion Co., 1897.
- Cantor, Eddie, and David Freedman. *Ziegfeld: The Great Glorifier*. New York: Alfred H. King, 1934.
- Castle, Vernon, and Irene Castle. *Modern Dancing*. New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1914.
- Faulkner, Thomas A. "From the Ballroom to Hell (1894)." In *I See America Dancing: Selected Readings, 1685-2000*, ed. Maureen Needham. 112-118. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002.
- Franklin, Benjamin. *Autobiography and Other Writings*. Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Ormond Seavey. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Israels, Belle Linder. "Dance-Hall Reform (1909),' in *I See America Dancing: Selected Readings 1685-2000*. ed. Maureen Needham. 118-122. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002.
- Kneeland, George J. *Commercialized Prostitution in New York City*. Publication of the Bureau of Social Hygiene. Introduction by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Chairman of the Bureau of Social Hygiene. With a supplementary chapter by Katharine Bement Davis, Superintendent of the New York State Reformatory for Women. New York: The Century Co., 1913.

- Lambin, Maria. *Report of the Public Dance Hall Committee of the San Francisco Center of the California Civic League of Women Voters*. San Francisco: The San Francisco Center of the California Civic League of Women Voters, 1924.
- Lippmann, Walter. *Drift and Mastery: An Attempt to Diagnose the Current Unrest*. 1914. Revised Introduction & Notes by William E. Leuchtenburg. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.
- Kelley, Florence. "The Right to Leisure: Florence Kelly, 1905," in *Muller V. Oregon: A Brief History with Documents*. The Bedford Series in History and Culture. Ed. Nancy Woloch. 105-107. New York: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996.
- Report of the Vice Commission of Minneapolis to His Honor, James C. Haynes, Mayor. *Minneapolis, MN, 1911. Reprinted in The Prostitute and the Social Reformer: Commercial Vice in the Progressive Era. Advisory eds Charles Rosenberg and Carroll Smith Rosenberg. New York: Arno Press, 1974.*
- Stebbins, Genevieve. *Delsarte System of Expression*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Edgar S. Werner Publishing & Supply Co., 1902.
- Veblen, Thorstein. *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*. New York: MacMillan Company, 1899. With a Foreword by Stuart Chase. Reprint, New York: The Modern Library, 1934.
- Vice Commission of Philadelphia. A Report on Existing Conditions with Recommendations to the Honorable Rudolph Blankenburg, Mayor of Philadelphia*. Published by the Commission. Philadelphia, 1913. Reprint in *The Prostitute and the Social Reformer: Commercial Vice in the Progressive Era. Advisory eds Charles Rosenberg and Carroll Smith Rosenberg. New York: Arno Press, 1974.*
- Wayburn, Ned. *The Art of Stage Dancing: The Story of a Beautiful and Profitable Profession, A Manual of Stage-Craft*. New York: The Ned Wayburn Studios of Stage Dancing, 1925.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Ned Wayburn's Stage Dancing Routines: Eccentric Buck #1*. New York: Ned Wayburn Studios of Stage Dancing, Inc., 1926.
- Women and the City's Work*. Weekly newspaper. New York: Woman's Municipal League of New York, 1917.

## Secondary Sources

- Adams, Judith A. "The Promotion of New Technology Through Fun and Spectacle: Electricity at the World's Columbian Exposition," in *Journal of American Culture*. Vol. 18, No. 2 (Summer 1995): 45-56.
- Boardman, Fon Wyman. *America and the Progressive Era, 1900-1914*. New York: H.Z. Walck, 1970.
- Bowen, Louise de Koven. *The Public Dance Halls of Chicago*. Revised Edition. Chicago: The Juvenile Protective Association of Chicago, 1917.
- Braden, Donna R. *Leisure and Entertainment in America*. Based on the Collections of Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village. Dearborn, MI: Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village, 1988.
- Burns, Ric. *New York: A Documentary Film*. From *History's Best on PBS Series*. Produced by Lisa Ades and Ric Burns. Directed by Ric Burns. 600 min. A Steeplechase Films Production for The American Experience in association with WGBH Boston and Thirteen/WNET; A PBS Home Video, 1999. Videocassette.
- Cambell, Barbara Kuhn. *The "Liberated" Woman of 1914: Prominent Women in the Progressive Era*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1979.
- Cameron, Ardis. "Landscapes of Subterfuge: Working-Class Neighborhoods and Immigrant Women," in *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era*. Eds Nancy S. Dye and Noralee Frankel. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1991.
- Cannon, Donald J. "Triangle Shirtwaist Fire," in *The Encyclopedia of New York City*. Ed. Kenneth T. Jackson. Published by Yale University Press, 1995. Internet Database. [http://www.yale.edu/yup/ENYC/triangle\\_shirtwaist.html](http://www.yale.edu/yup/ENYC/triangle_shirtwaist.html). Accessed 08 June 2003.
- Carter, Randolph. *The World of Flo Ziegfeld*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974.
- Cott, Nancy F. "Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850." *Signs* 4 (Winter 1978): 219-236.
- Darnell, Paula Jean. *Victorian to Vamp: Women's Clothing 1900-1929*. Reno, NV: Fabric Fancies, 2000.

- Diner, Steven J. *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era*. New York: Hill and Wang (A Division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 1998.
- Douglas, Ann. *The Feminization of American Culture*. Reprint, New York: The Noonday Press (A Division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 1998.
- Enstad, Nan. *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. Popular Culture, Everyday Lives. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- Eras of Elegance*. Internet Database. <http://www.erasofelegance.com>. Accessed 02 June 2003.
- Erenberg, Lewis A. *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- Finch, Casey. "Hooked and Buttoned Together': Victorian Underwear and Representations of the Female Body." *Victorian Studies* (Spring 1991): 337-363.
- Freedley, George. "The Black Crook and the White Fawn," in *Chronicles of the American Dance*. ed. Paul Magriel. 65-80. Paperback edition. New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1978.
- Glenn, Susan A. *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism*. Cambridge (MA) & London: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Gould, Lewis L. "Introduction: The Progressive Era," in *The Progressive Era*, ed. Lewis L. Gould. 1-10. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1974.
- Higham, Charles. *Ziegfeld*. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1972.
- Hofstadter, Richard. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. Revised Edition. Boston: The Beacon Press, 1955.
- Holli, Melvin G. "Urban Reform in the Progressive Era," in *The Progressive Era*, ed. Lewis L. Gould. 133-151. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1974.
- Hunt, Michael H. "American Ideology: Visions of National Greatness and Racism," in *Imperial Surge: The United States Abroad, The 1890s-Early 1900s*. Problems in American Civilization. 14-30. Edited and with an introduction by Thomas G. Paterson and Stephen G. Rabe. Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1992.

- Johnson, Stephen Burge. *The Roof Gardens of Broadway Theatres, 1883-1942*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1985.
- Jowitt, Deborah. *Time and the Dancing Image*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988.
- Kennedy, Paul. "The Rise of the United States to Great-Power Status," in *Imperial Surge: The United States Abroad, The 1890s-Early 1900s*. Problems in American Civilization. 3-13. Edited and with an introduction by Thomas G. Paterson and Stephen G. Rabe. Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1992.
- Leach, William. "Transformation in a Culture of Consumption: Women and Department Stores, 1890-1925." *The Journal of American History* 71, No. 2 (September 1984): 319-342.
- Lears, Jackson. *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America*. New York: Basic Books, 1994.
- McBee, Randy D. *Dance Hall Days: Intimacy and Leisure among Working-Class Immigrants in the United States*. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
- McCraw, Thomas K. "The Progressive Legacy," in *The Progressive Era*, ed. Lewis L. Gould. 181-201. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1974.
- Malnig, Julie. "Athena Meets Venus: Visions of Women in Social Dance in the Teens and Early 1920s." *Dance Research Journal* 31/2 (Fall 1999): 34-62.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Dancing Till Dawn: A Century of Exhibition Ballroom Dance*. New York: New York University Press, 1992.
- Mizejewski, Linda. *Ziegfeld Girl: Image and Icon in Culture and Cinema*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1999.
- Moore, R. Laurence. "Directions of Thought," in *The Progressive Era*, ed. Lewis L. Gould. 35-54. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1974.
- Parker, Derek, and Julia Parker. *The Natural History of the Chorus Girl*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975.

- Peiss, Kathy. *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986.
- Perry, Elisabeth I. "The General Motherhood of the Commonwealth': Dance Hall Reform in the Progressive Era." *American Quarterly* 37:5 (Winter 1985): 719-733.
- Pitz, Henry. "Introduction," in *The Gibson Girl and Her America: The Best Drawings of Charles Dana Gibson*. Selected by Edmund Vincent Gillon, Jr. With an Introduction Essay by Henry C. Pitz. New York: Dover Publications, 1969.
- Ruyter, Nancy Lee Chalfa. "The Genteel Transition: American Delsartism," in *Reformers and Visionaries: The Americanization of the Art of Dance*. New York: Dance Horizons, 1979.
- Schneider, Dorothy, and Carl J. Schneider. *American Women in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920*. New York: Facts on File, 1993.
- Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America." *Signs* 1:1 (Autumn 1975): 1-29.
- Stansell, Christine. *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987.
- Stone, Rosaline B. "The Ziegfeld Follies: A Study of Theatrical Opulence from 1907 to 1931." Ph.D. diss., University of Dancer, 1985.
- Stratynner, Barbara. *Ned Wayburn and the Dance Routine: From vaudeville to the Ziegfeld Follies*. Studies in Dance History, No. 13. Madison, Wisconsin: Society of dance History Scholars, 1996.
- Susman, Warren I. *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.
- Tomko, Linda J. *Dancing Class: Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Divides in American Dance, 1890-1920*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999.
- Van Hook, Bailey. *Angels of Art: Women and Art in American Society, 1876-1914*. University Park (PA): The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996.

Warshaw, Steven. "The Artist," in *The Gibson Girl: Drawings of Charles Dana Gibson*. Edited by Steven Warshaw. Berkeley: Diablo Press, 1968.

Ziegfeld, Richard and Paulette Ziegfeld. *The Ziegfeld Touch: The Life and Times of Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr.* Foreword by Patricia Ziegfeld Stephenson. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jennifer L. Bishop is a native of New Orleans, Louisiana, where she attended various arts schools and danced with several dance groups. She received her B.A. from Huntingdon College in Montgomery, Alabama in 2000, where she majored in Dance (Choreography) and English. Since being a member of the M.A. program in American Dance Studies at The Florida State University, Ms. Bishop has continued to perform dance, as well as present research at various conferences and co-author an encyclopedia article on La Meri in the *Notable American Women* encyclopedia series (to be published in 2004). In the Fall of 2003, Ms. Bishop will join the History Department at FSU to pursue her Ph.D. in Women's History, concentrating on the relationship between American history and dance studies.