

From the J-Vault: Girls Gone Wild

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This week from the J-Vault: *The Delinquent Girl* (1914)

Writing in the Bulletin of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, Mrs. Julius Andrews (her own first name is not listed) discusses wayward girls in Boston's juvenile justice system.

Statistics show that only about 10 per cent, of the Boston juvenile cases from 1906 to 1911 were girl offenders... But the wayward and stubborn girls are more difficult problems— only too often indicating immorality...

...Girls congregate on the streets, in low dance halls and other commercialized amusement places—free from public interference. It is in such surroundings that many of our young people, seeking diversion from miserable home conditions, begin their downward careers. In an investigation of recreational opportunities in Greater Boston, a pretty young girl naively informed us that she went to the public dances twice a week and wished she could go every night. When asked by the manager of the store whether she was escorted, she said, "No, we dance with any fellow who asks us."

Of course, the dalliances Mrs. Andrews discusses go far beyond dancing, and she notes that although it takes two to tango, society does not dole out its disapproval equally:

When the inevitable harm has been done we ostracize the girl, making reformation almost impossible, while the boy or man, if charged with his share of responsibility, easily escapes by paying a small penalty... Until the law holds man and woman equally guilty and all sex offenses are consistently punished, we shall not be able to control immorality.

Obviously the term "sex offenses" in this usage is not referring to rape and molestation, as we would use the term today -- or at least, it is not *exclusively* referring to sexual violence. Consensual premarital sex, it seems, is also included under the umbrella of "sex offense."

Interestingly, years *before* the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, which secured the right of women to vote in the United States, delinquency is already being blamed (in this case, by a woman) on women's rights:

In speaking to the superintendent of a well-known maternity home for

unmarried mothers in regard to the causes which were responsible for girl immorality, she said: "The freedom and privileges allowed girls during the past fifty years were now bearing fruit. They had influenced for good and for evil. The mentally strong girl had benefited and is today our best standard of American womanhood, but the weaker girl and many of foreign parentage, not understanding the ethics of such freedom, fall easy preys to what is presented to them as American privilege and liberty."

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