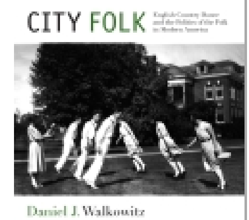
# Conclusion

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# Conclusion

> I hate to admit it, but I do think English Country Dancing is thriving more in the States.
>
> —Colin Hume, British ECD choreographer and teacher, 2002

> I certainly hope . . . [for] a third revival in folk music. . . . A very encouraging thing is that there are some young musicians now. . . . Now if they can find a dance audience to play for of their own age—that would be the best thing.
>
> —Peter Barnes, ECD dance musician, 2004

*London, June 2005.*

It is Thursday evening, "Beginners' Night" for English Country Dancing at Cecil Sharp House in Camden Town, a North London district with a lively and youthful punk nightlife. The House—an impressive, heritage-listed, three-story, Georgian, purpose-built edifice—sits a few blocks away from the tube station in a prosperous, leafy residential area midway between Regents Park and Primrose Hill. Positioned on a triangle formed by the diagonal intersection of Regents Park Road with Gloucester Avenue, the House prominently faces outward from the triangle.

As the national organization committed to folk song and dance from around the world, Cecil Sharp House hosts a range of folk dances, and this night is no exception. Downstairs in the basement, one room is packed with perhaps forty to fifty young people doing lively Irish set dances to recorded music; another small room is filled with a heterogeneous crowd of perhaps fifteen taking a flamenco dance class. But as the home of English Country Dance, the Folk Song and Dance Society reserves the main dance hall on the ground floor—a spacious, chandeliered Grand Ball Room—for its country dance session. The venue could not contrast more with the dances downstairs. There are about a dozen dancers milling about the hall, which is large enough to accommodate several hundred dancers; a few more will trickle in, but the small "crowd" accounts for the low level of energy in the room—and



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in the dance. Most dancers are forty-something to sixty-something, although a couple of young people who are local college students hover anxiously on the sides. They are clearly neophytes. A small platform erected in the middle rear hosts the "band"—a fiddler or accordion player with a person on a keyboard—and the caller, a sprightly, older woman, Brenda Godrich, who is married to the fiddler. (Later a somewhat younger man takes a turn at calling.) Beginners' Night is meant to welcome new dancers, but at least half the dancers are familiar to me from past years.

The caller focuses her teaching on patterns of the dance, not the styling or body carriage. And the music has a raw energy that is mirrored in the repertoire, which alternates American squares, traditional village dances, and older, statelier dances from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The mixture of country dances—English and American and historical and traditional—and the apparent indifference to styling make the evening resemble a "kick-up-your-heels" ceilidh or barn dance, though the presence of such a small group in the vast hall makes the tenor of the evening much more sedate than a barn dance.

*New York, November 2005.*

The entrance to the weekly English Country Dance sponsored by Country Dance * New York (CD*NY), the lineal descendant of the New York branch of the English Folk Dance Society founded by Cecil Sharp in 1915, is quite unassuming and easy to miss. Located on Seventh Avenue on the northwest corner of 13th Street at the margins of the West (Greenwich) Village and Chelsea, the entrance to the dance is through a weathered side door of the Metropolitan-Duane Methodist Episcopal Church. Located across from a Gay-Lesbian Cultural Center in the politically progressive Village, the church describes itself as a "reconciling congregation." Taped to the church door is a notice printed from someone's home computer on a plain piece of paper announcing that there is dancing downstairs. One enters, ascends a few steps, and then passes ten yards down a hallway to a staircase. Descending the stairs two flights, music begins to be heard: it is lyrical and schmaltzy in three-quarters time, and one can discern the sound of a violin, piano, and recorder. The music is Baroque, with an elegant, smooth pace, perhaps 100 beats per minute. (Square or contra dance—American Country Dance—is usually more like 120 beats per minute.)

Reaching the basement, one enters a gym. More formally called Metropolitan Duane Hall, the room is bare and the flooring is in need of repair, but the hall is quite full, with about fifty men and women (in about equal

numbers) in three longways sets of lines up and down the hall. Two parents have brought their children along to dance, and while thirty-year-old dancers partner with those in their seventies, most seem to be between the ages of forty-five and sixty-five.

Basketball rims and nets hang at either end of room. The elevated stage at the far end hosts three musicians, some sound equipment, and a standing microphone at which the caller, Beverly Francis, leads the dancers through their paces. The evening, which runs from 7:00 to 10:15, has a theme. This evening is the Gotham Assembly, with a program of thirteen dances that the dance community has voted as its favorites. More than half the dances—seven—were composed in the past half century, six by Americans and one by a Belgian choreographer. Equally noticeable is the tempo of the favorites: the majority are in triple time (and are often florid waltzes). There are no traditional rants or reels or any American contra dances. Rather, the evening consists of all Playford-style "gentry" dances. The older repertoire emphasizes dances in 2/2 and 4/4 time, and the triple-time dances consist of three steps of even length and contain a more languid, emotive style. One Washington, DC, dance wag describes the dances as "ooey-gooey."[1] The dancing has a modern feel, with lots of flirtation and intense eye contact during the dance, and the waltz time encourages exaggerated balletic gestures and flow.

In all, the atmosphere is festive, almost boisterous. The social atmosphere and conviviality extends to a back-room kitchen where juice, cookies, cakes, and candy treats are laid out for the middance break, much as if it were a Sunday after-church event. Chocolate seems to be the flavor of choice.

## *The Modern Conundrum*

As the preceding portraits illustrate, English Country Dance thrives in New York (and the United States) today, while, comparatively, it languishes in London (and the United Kingdom). In interviews, two leading British choreographers and dancing masters, who have danced in the United States, bemoan the current state of ECD in the United Kingdom. Nicolas Broadbridge, the leader of the ECD community in Scotland, sums up the problem: "There's very little dance technique taught in Britain now which is very sad. But in the days when dance technique was taught, when I grew up, people learned to dance carefully and properly. And that is the kind of dancing I found in Berea [College, the folk arts center in Kentucky]."[2] Colin Hume, a computer programmer by day and leading choreographer and caller by



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night, gets right to the point: "I hate to admit it, but I do think English country dancing is thriving more in the States."[3]

The ease of travel in the late twentieth century has meant that the difference in the two dance communities has become common knowledge on both sides of the Atlantic. The dismal state of the beginners' class at Cecil Sharp House in Camden Town, London, the EFDSS home, is apparent to visitors from abroad who stop by to dance, although it is important to note that local dance groups in and outside London report more robust regular ongoing biweekly or monthly dances. And, as suggested earlier, ceilidh dances do attract a crowd. Still, Broadbridge's and Hume's assessments speak to the general poor state of the older ECD historical tradition in the United Kingdom.

As important, though, is the emergence of distinct styles in these two countries, in both the sound and the styling of the dance and in what is constituted as ECD. Colin Hume summarizes some differences that were also reiterated many times in interviews with dancers across the United States who had danced in England. In the United States, ECD offers a narrower repertoire of dances in the historical Playford style. As Hume notes,

> We have a much wider definition of English Country Dance in England. In the States, when people say English they usually mean Playford Style, and they usually mean slow and gentle in three-time with a beautiful tune, and they drift through it. And sure, that is part of the English, but there are a lot of other parts of English. Traditional English dances and traditional style dances. And also we saw the Flamborough dance, which is another aspect of English dancing, which is just as English as the Newcastle and the Playford dances. So it's quite a varied thing here. Much more varied than in the States.[4]

Thus, the range of dances that British and American dancers imagine to be "English" differs; but so, too, does the style and interactions on the floor. Eye contact and partnering are the two areas of difference often noted. As Hume observes,

> In the States, they are taught you must have eye contact, you must look at people, and you must change partners every dance. And people in England are not good at either of these because it's not what we're taught. So you find a lot of people get embarrassed and stare at the floor, especially if you give them the "American stare." Then they really don't know; they think, is this woman after me or what?[5]

It should be noted that, as country dance in England continues to mix contras and squares with Playford dances, the difference in style in the two countries extends to contra dance as well. The British variant is more sedate: swinging is done without the flourishes and extra twirls common in the United States, and balance steps—performed as a step right, lift left, step left, lift right in England—are energetically weighted forward-and-back partner balances with body swizzles in the United States.[6]

So, while an Anglo-American folk dance tradition emerged on both sides of the pond, it did so with national inflections. Observers point, for instance, to differences in social interactions on and off the dance floor which they attribute to national character: British reserve or American brashness (i.e., American dancers look their partners in the eye more than their British equivalents do). "National character" does not, however, account for the apparent similarly in the dancing for the first two-thirds of the twentieth century. Neither does it account for a difference in the politics of sound: the tempi, orchestration, and the energy, pace, and flow of the dance as mirrored in the energy, pace, and melodic line in the music. In the United Kingdom, according to dance caller Michael Barraclough, "As audiences dwindle and clubs have to cut costs there is a significant trend towards 2 piece bands for club dances. This will typically be a violin + accordion or piano or keyboard." The dwindling dance scene, in fact, compelled Barraclough to emigrate to the United States in 2008. In contrast, U.S. dancer and dance historian Allison Thompson notes that the "typical band line-up" at an American dance event consists of a "piano plus a few melody instruments (violin, concertina, flute/recorder, clarinet) with sometimes guitar/mando[lin] filling in the middle but also acting from time to time as melody. Percussion, if any, is typically hand-percussion (bodhran, bones, triangle)."[7] The relatively robust American dance band allows instrumentalists to trade lead roles playfully and to energize the dancers with riffs and tune variants while the band creates a strong melodic line. In contrast, the English dance band sound, which has traditionally been dominated by the accordion (and often with percussion from a drum), sounds relatively thin and places greater emphasis on the beat. The raw energy it produces does feel more in keeping with the less fussy "knees-up" dancing of Britain that mixes the Playford historical dances with traditional village dances and squares.

The "decline" of Playford-inspired dance in England can be traced to the differing responses to changes there in midcentury. Kennedy's imposition of his couples-only rule after World War II coincided with his deemphasis on Playford dances. This shift also meant that there was less attention to and



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encouragement of the training of historical ECD teachers and musicians. Cecil Sharp had worked tirelessly to train a corps of teachers who could carry on his work, and the summer and vacation schools continued that project into midcentury. But EFDSS never developed the formal apprentice programs for teachers and musicians that subsequently arose in American dance communities such as New York, Boston, and Philadelphia and carried on throughout the twentieth century.

In place of Playford dances, Kennedy substituted a new focus on traditional village dances, squares and reels, many of which he published in seven volumes of the *Community Dance Manuals*. In the process, he reshaped the EFDSS repertoire and a typical country dance evening in midcentury England. The second folk revival brought American square dancing to England and spurred the rise of a folk song culture of folk clubs, folk festivals, and traditional "popular" village dances. The passion for square dancing easily morphed into the new emphasis on traditional reels and jigs to create a boisterous ceilidh-like "knees-up" atmosphere with little concern for dance styling. As important as the transformation of the country dance, though, were changes in the dance community. EFDSS had been an elite group since its inception, but the entry of young folkies in the 1950s and 1960s democratized the English folk movement and, in time, the dance community as well. By the 1960s, the country dance community in England was younger and represented a broader social base than it had in the past. Ironically, at the same time as ECD was a national English (and not British) dance tradition with less apparent traction for young people attracted to the Celtic nationalist revival, the second revival became the cultural expression of a British counterpolitics, of young people who marched for nuclear disarmament and identified with American jazz and radical folk singers while opposing American (and British) Cold War politics.

Change, however, does not take place overnight, nor is it necessarily all-encompassing. Playford enthusiasts persevered in England. The key is that EFDSS's move away from Playford dances and its couples-only policy meant newcomers encountered less teaching of the older historical dances and fewer experienced partners from whom to learn. In practice, the community of Playford dancers aged in place over time, leading to ever-diminishing numbers. At the end of the century, the scene at the monthly Saturday-night Cajun dance at the Cecil Sharp House contrasted sharply with that at the monthly Friday Experienced ECD class, which a group of veteran dancers had sustained. The former overflowed from the large upstairs Kennedy Hall with several hundred young people, whereas the latter labored to sustain one

longways set in the smaller room downstairs. The ECD dancers were mostly octogenarians who had danced since midcentury. Without an infusion of new dancers, the group had become an increasingly small and insular band, numbering perhaps two dozen, if they all ever came on the same night. In 1998, unable to find a musician (in all London!) to replace their accordionist, who had tired of commuting in from Oxfordshire, the group folded.

In the United States, in contrast, the ECD community remained fairly stable into the 1960s. It began to change only in the late 1960s and 1970s with the infusion of dancers from international song and dance and the countercultural "contra boom." In the latter stages of the second folk revival, the U.S. country dance movement added many younger members with diverse ethnic backgrounds and built strong local communities of dancers. As in England, CDSS became a more democratic organization with a somewhat broader social base. Early in the century, members were mostly New England and East Coast elites; in the last third of the century, while CDSS remained a relatively privileged group, the new generation of members were drawn mostly from the professional-technical class with upper-middle-class incomes. Representatives of both the working class and corporate echelons were notably absent. Moreover, while virtually all members were still "white," by the end of the century they included ethnics who often would not have felt at home in the Anglo-Saxon culture of the prewar American Branch of the EFDSS.

## *The Culture of Liberalism*

The problem of whiteness (and its contrary, the absence of other racial groups) in the country dance community is implicated in the history of liberalism in the twentieth-century United States. The Progressive Era, of which the folk revival was an integral part, inaugurated the era of modern liberalism—the point at which the word separates from its nineteenth-century classical form, which was associated with laissez-faire capitalism, and takes on its new associations with state intervention to support greater social equality. For modern liberals, reforming "bad" capitalism would allow the "good" variety to provide opportunity for all. Earlier leaders such as Sharp, Karpeles, and Burchenal were Fabians and Progressives who advanced liberal reform agendas. They were at home with conservative Anglophiles such as Helen Storrow whose considerable beneficence shaped the American ECD community in its first fifty years.

The elites who dominated the years of the American Branch and the affluent professional-technical-artist-intellectual group who make up the more



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recent membership constitute a social class fraction that has occupied a specific liberal political space. The ethnic profile of this fraction has changed over the course of the century, however (and with it, imaginings of these ethnics' "whiteness"). The new members who came out of the second folk revival more often had Jewish, Italian, or another eastern or southern European heritage. Liberalism, blossoming in the Depression years, focused on how economic abuses restricted individual opportunity, and many of those who entered CDSS after the 1960s were reared or shaped by the left-liberal political culture of the second folk revival. Thus, spanning as it does the better part of the twentieth century, ECD in the United States provides a window onto the political valences of liberalism and social relations during the last century.

There has been a substantial, impressive literature that traces the development of modern liberalism and its apotheosis in the New Deal state's commitment to reforming capitalism. This scholarship then follows liberalism into its postwar "decline" with a weakened state. Although Alan Brinkley's *The End of Reform* (1995) is arguably the best statement of this thesis, his view has been refined by Judith Stein, David Plotke, and others in important ways: they demonstrate how New Deal liberals drew on an antimonopolist tradition that restructured industries and actually set in motion patterns of deindustrialization that emerged out of the civil rights era of the 1950s. Thus, since liberals believed they had solved industrial problems, and did not see either the first signs of deindustrialization (in steel) or their collusion in it, they understood the United States' postwar "race problem" as one of educational opportunity, not structural change. As Stein observes, black people were educated for jobs that did not exist or were downsized.[8]

Liberals came to believe that the solution to the "race problem" lay outside the economy. They put cultural reform at the center of the liberal project in the United States, a project to incorporate shared values and priorities through associational life (e.g., folk dance groups). But in contrast to the rich literature on liberalism as economic state policy, liberal cultural policy is a relatively untouched subject. Andrew Camberlin Reiser has caught the spirit of this liberalism in his description of the history of the Progressive Era Chautauqua movement as "inchoate liberalism [whose] embodiment of participatory democracy resonated with those [Jews, Catholics, and immigrants] whom . . . [reformers] hoped to keep on the margins."[9] Progressive Era liberals similarly embedded economic and political reforms in cultural forms such as folk dance to make immigrant workers "democratic" and "produc-

tive." Left-liberals carried these cultural traditions forward into the postwar era; they hoped that cultural reforms—whether in Great Society programs such as Head Start or in the counterculture—would become the engine of change. Across the century, English Country Dance fully embodied this liberal cultural expression. As a cultural text, it inscribes the body as a form and product of the expression of liberal class consciousness and the disposition of power in society.[10]

Today, Modern English Country Dancers express the politics of contemporary liberalism in their communities and in the social relationships that define them. Almost exclusively white and affluent, MECD groups provide a sanguine view of the putatively democratic politics of associational life.[11] MECD members welcome all and speak of themselves as a family. But, of course, families discipline their members and mark out deviants. And though the censors are not always visible, their effects are, and it compels analysis of the content of the relationships in the dance community—who stays home, who joins, and what happens on the dance floor—and the politics of the dancing body.

In the new millennium, children of the counterculture, a core group within CDSS and its MECD constituency, celebrate their dance community as a "safe" alternative to a fast-paced material world to which they are often tethered in their day jobs. It remains for a historian of country dance in England to determine whether or not the MECD dance floor as a "safe" space is a uniquely American phenomena. It seems likely that as a transatlantic and transnational movement, English and American dance communities do share many of the social and political characteristics of the MECD world. Still, contemporary MECD dancers on both sides of the Atlantic increasingly look for inspiration to the United States, where the dancing is thought to thrive.

By the mid-1980s, MECD in the United States had become an almost exclusively Playford-style dance form. The contra community was large enough to sustain itself, and not enough dancers in either the MECD or contra community wanted to do the other's dances. Ritual morris and sword teams also had lives of their own and were no longer taught at weekly community dances. And many people in the MECD community rejected traditional rants and reels: for some, they were too exhausting or hard on aging joints; for others, the lack of style beyond the stepping made them uninteresting.

As the new millennium dawned, MECD relatively thrived in the United States, but not without internal contradictions, and many of its leaders continued to worry about its ability to re-create itself. Two aspects of MECD as a



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cultural formation, however, suggest how liberalism as a political culture both shaped the social relations of members and might affect CDSS's future prospects. First, with a core of dancers who had come from the counterculture, at the opening of the twenty-first century, the broader CDSS membership sought and could frequently be heard celebrating a sense of "community"—a space they saw as "spiritual," "feminist," ecologically friendly, peaceful, and inclusive. It was a space that provided a respite from much they found alienating in the highly technological world that they ironically served in their day jobs. The language and idealization of "community," however, may have reflected post-1980s foci on the private sphere and consumer identities more than a countercultural communitarianism. "Community" in the new millennium obscured the workings of racial and class exclusiveness and commercialized leisure activities that defined the boundaries and interactions of the community.

Second, MECD was a bodily and aural expression of a "reluctantly modern" liberalism. The classical music's romantic and lyrical tones and the dances' "easy" walking and skipping style at a slow pace contrasted with the "thrusting hips" and "jarring" aerobic music that MECD devotees associated with urban sounds. Ironically, then, MECD dancers' discomfort with the materialist "speed-and-greed" culture represented in the cultural expressions of black urban youth highlighted the contradictions of their urban racial liberalism. Increasingly viewed as an alternative "safe" social space, the MECD community served its members' need for sociality, not for English national identity.

For the ethnic members of MECD, the exclusive nature of this sociality represented the promise of liberal Americanness as Englishness. In this version of Americanness, the community negotiated race with a set of attitudes that ranged from multiculturalism to assimilationism. At times their attitudes resembled the attitudes of ECD proselytizers in the settlements and playgrounds a century earlier, albeit with one major difference: Sharp, Burchenal, Gulick, and others sought to transform urchins into "proper" boys and girls; MECD dancers mostly sought refuge from the "jarring" music of youth culture.[12] As an alternative, MECD offered its members contained sexual physicality limited to hand holds and eye contact, reliance on classical music, and the privileging of English dance as the root of Anglo-Americanness. The physical and cultural space of the dance, then, was an alternative urban space, but one that ironically advanced Anglo-Saxon cultural hegemony.

## *A Third Revival?*

A new round of transatlantic crossings that began at the end of the twentieth century hint that a third folk revival may be dawning—and, like the second, it is one drifting eastward to revitalize London ECD. Rather than crossing the Atlantic, however, geographic compression and cultural convergence may better locate this next revival as transnational. The urban sociologist Harvey Molotch, ever the wordsmith, uses the acronym NYLON—an amalgamation of New York and London—to suggest the embeddedness of the two experiences, or the emergence of the transnational city.[13] To be sure, national inflections remain, but they are increasingly muted. This cultural exchange also mirrors the political mimicry of Reagan-Thatcherism, New Democrats and New Labour, and the importation of people such as New York financier and urban planner Richard Ravitch to "repair" London transit, while the Australian-born media mogul Rupert Murdoch communicates to New Yorkers through tabloid print and television journalism his personally inflected version of their "news."

The influence of the BBC and Hollywood may be one source of the cultural amalgam, and international travel is another. We have seen how, when American dancers described ECD to strangers at the end of the twentieth century, they referred to the BBC's Jane Austen dramatizations; in the past their reference was more often to square dancing. In the international perambulations of folk dancers and country dance bands such as Bare Necessities, however, we have also seen the emergence of MECD as a transcontinental and transatlantic dance form. To be sure, it has been the prerogative of dance leaders and the social elite to transport the dance across the sea since the early decades of the twentieth century. By the end of the twentieth century, however, international travel had become common for people of modest means. Increasingly, British dance tourists combined vacation travel to the United States with visits to dance camps and local city dances, while Americans appeared to reverse the pattern in even larger numbers, including through package dance tours.[14]

Even as international travel began to create an international dance community, differences remained. Traveling Americans in search of a familiar Playford-style dance evening found the Thursday Beginners' Dance at Cecil Sharp House in London, the longstanding traditional EFDSS program, dispiriting, and if they could, until 2008 they attended a new biweekly Wednesday advanced MECD dance at the House. Various prominent British and visit-



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ing American teachers took their turn running these classes, although in my occasional visits they were often hard-pressed to gather two dozen dancers with modest training.

The revival of the ECD group for experienced dancers started in 2004. Admission was by invitation, which the leader extended only to advanced dancers. The history behind the new group once again suggests the impact of the New World on the Old. During the previous decade, EFDSS leaders such as Colin Hume invited leading American MECD teachers, notably Fried de Metz Herman and Gene Murrow, to England to teach English Country Dance. Herman took her first of four visits to England to teach dance in 1993, and Murrow arrived almost a decade later. As was her wont, Herman railed at dancers' lack of style and pressed them to relate to one another better on the dance floor—to look at one another and to dance with different partners.[15] Her memorable personal style and provocations, however, whetted British dancers' appetites for more-advanced dancing and greater attention to styling.

The two British leaders of this third revival of dance in the United Kingdom were a new dancer, Judith Hanson, and the British dance leader and choreographer Colin Hume. Each had been transformed less by the visiting Americans than by the melodious and full sounds of a New York and U.S. MECD experience. Both also had the money or professional position that gave them the time and means to travel or relocate.

Judith Hanson, a child of empire, had immigrated to the United Kingdom from New Zealand (and her family had immigrated beforehand from Hong Kong).[16] Introduced fleetingly to ECD in Britain, she discovered that she loved the historical Playford dance and wanted to do more of it. She found Beginners' Night at Cecil Sharp House inadequate, and hearing of superior dancing in the United States, she traveled to New York. There she danced at the annual New York Ball and with Fried Herman at her annual dance weekend in the Berkshire Mountains. Transformed by the quality of dancing, Hanson returned to London and resolved to start a new experienced Playford-style dance in the city. The caller she enlisted, Colin Hume, had himself had a similar American experience.

Colin Hume had moved to the States in 1997, originally planning to settle there to partake of its more vibrant dance community. Fortunately for the prospect of a revived ECD dance community in London and England more generally, Hume met a woman whom he married just before leaving for the United States, and he returned to London, where he has played a major role in trying to revitalize ECD, not the least by arranging for tours to England by Gene Murrow. Thus, two Londoners, transformed by dance in New York,

returned to remake ECD at the Cecil Sharp House in the American image as MECD. Hanson, elected to the EFDSS National Council in 2004, and Hume—programmer by day, renowned teacher and choreographer by night, and itinerant transnational dance master—have sought to seed a growing core of transatlantic English MECD dancers. Less than five years later, the fruit of their efforts remains uncertain at best. Both remain committed to a revitalized English Country Dance movement that includes a robust number of well-danced Playford-inspired dances in London at Cecil Sharp House and in England more generally. Hume, however, has largely withdrawn from teaching the advanced class, and for weekly recreational dancing in London, Judith Hanson and her husband, Michael, have turned to Scottish dance.[17]

What do developments in the new millennium portend for MECD in the United States and the nagging concern among its devotees for younger and more numerous recruits? Earlier sources of dancers offer one hope: contra dance could produce another generation of young dancers who segue across that fraternal CDSS tradition; or maybe they could benefit from the penumbra effect of the ballroom revival. ECD foremothers and forefathers fled from the "tango craze" a century ago, but could not the contemporary passion for Argentinean tango and ballroom dance lead people to try country dance, including MECD?

Of course, there was another source for the first folk revival that could be reprised to rebuild enthusiasm for an Anglo-American dance form, although it would fundamentally alter the transnational trend of the past half century: nationalism. The politics of the folk have been mobilized to serve national chauvinism before, and there is no reason to believe it could not happen again, however much one hopes it is unlikely.

Finally, what of the legacy of the culture of liberalism in which MECD is embedded? The solution to the problem of sustaining or growing the movement need not lie in a missionary project to "reform" black urban youth culture. Indeed, as many "nerds" recognize, that culture deserves and merits its own autonomous expression. If the changed relationship of white ethnics to MECD is any basis, a more likely answer than simply flight to a "safe" insular space may come from the rise of a black middle class for whom MECD signifiers no longer appear alien. To make this more possible, CDSS—and the United States—has a challenge: to the extent that CDSS means to represent American (or Anglo-American) national culture, it must think about broadening those dance forms it shelters under its umbrella, without presuming they must be "whitened" or made "respectable."

This latter possibility is not as outlandish as it may seem. Cecil Sharp's "discovery" of the "Kentucky Running Set" as an "authentic" link to English Country Dance effectively obliterated two centuries of complex cultural exchange among African Americans and back woodsmen of diverse origins. A century later, CDSS preserves a sanitized "American" legacy without reference to dance of Native Americans, free blacks, the plantation, or the reservation, although occasional folk dance texts recognize some of the African American influence in clogging. The challenge for CDSS will be to incorporate dances with "thrusting hips" as an integral part of the folk dance tradition within the Country Dance and Song Society of America. In doing so, CDSS will further realize the ambitions of members such as Carl Wittman to make the community more inclusive and, in the process, may begin to ensure its future.