

easy for our community to get involved, because the time, dance schedule, Zoom room, and talent are already lined up for us. I appreciate that the Toronto dance community has set up this new format and invited other communities to participate,” shared Jacqui.

The All Hands In dances have grown to 150-200 dancers every two weeks. Solo dancers and couples are common, with the occasional family or small group tuning in. Some dance off-camera, others joyfully with the camera on, others “pinning” a friend on Zoom or dancing with a stuffed animal. Some folks join just to listen, watch, or socialize.

One dancer recently commented, on the verge of tears, that she had missed contra dance so much when she lost the physical ability to dance; being able to enjoy the music and watch people dance virtually has brought her immeasurable joy, along with the ability to reconnect with her dancing friends.

“There are no expectations about how you should interact. It’s okay to just listen, dance with your video on or off, or play along with the tunes (while muted),” suggests Claire Takemori. “Do whatever is comfortable for you. Most people attending virtual dances are so happy to see friends and meet folks from around the world. We hope it brings you joy, but tears are normal too.”

Online dance will never replace in-person dance and community. But for many of us, it is keeping the spirit of the traditions we love alive—and for that, we are truly grateful.

*The All Hands In virtual contra dance is held the second and fourth Saturday of each month, at 7:00 p.m. ET. To see the schedule of All Hands In and other virtual dances, visit the CDSS online events calendar at [cdss.org/online-events](https://cdss.org/online-events). If your community would like to discuss joining the All Hands In initiative, please reach out to Becky Liddle at [president@tcdance.org](mailto:president@tcdance.org).*

**Drew Delaware** is a caller and organizer in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. For a collection of virtual dance resources, please visit [drewdelaware.com](https://drewdelaware.com).

**PREVIOUS PAGE:** All Hands In screen shot of the Mid-Missouri community breakout room (organized by Molly White). Photo by Bev Bernbaum.

## PART TWO

# Anti-Racism and the Folk Revival

By Ezra Fischer

*This piece was written and published online by long-time CDSS member Ezra Fischer. It has been split into two pieces and abridged. The first half is an analysis of the history of the first folk revival and Cecil Sharp and was published in the fall 2020 issue of the CDSS News. The second half, which follows here, focuses on how our history informs our present and should influence our future. The essay is published in full at [ezrafischer.com](https://ezrafischer.com).*

Although the first folk revival was a hundred years ago, many of its core elements are still alive today. Our community rejects urbanism and modernity as fiercely today as Sharp and his cohort did in their time (despite many of us living in cities and being tech workers of some sort—again, just like Sharp and his cohort).

Much of our song repertoire still celebrates and mourns along the same nostalgic lines of the first folk revival. We sing “hoorah for the life of a country boy” and mourn that “the horse’s day is gone.” Our communal sings honor people who have memorized their songs. A piece of paper may be allowed, but looking at a phone is frowned upon. This has barely changed in over 100 years. Nicholas Hiley, Head of Information, British Universities Film & Video Council, writes of Sharp’s time:

*The myth of the illiterate folk singer grew in strength. As might be expected, contemporary folk singers possessed not only manuscript notes of songs, but also collections of printed ballad sheets and newspaper clippings containing the words to songs in their repertoire. However, the collectors were so insistent upon folk memory that these resources were carefully concealed, as folk singers realized that it was better to appear to have a considerable memory than a large collection of ballads*

(“Ploughboys and Soldiers: the folk song and the gramophone in the British Expeditionary Force 1914-1918” by Nicholas Hiley, Page 64)



In “City Folk: A Narrative of Creating Community in America Through English Country Dance,” Stephanie Smith shares a fantastic and, to my experience, accurate encapsulation of our modern dance communities:

*However, whether as performed at a regular community dance, a special event, or a camp such as Pinewoods, ECD can be seen as what Murrow describes as “a haven from the hurly burly and the high speed of American twenty-first century culture, where we all have our cell phones and emails and computers... a time to go back to an era of graciousness where people can relate to one another politely with elegance and grace.”*

(“City Folk: A Narrative of Creating Community in America Through English Country Dance” by Stephanie Smith, Page 189)

There are many good reasons for rejecting modernity and urbanism, but there are a lot of racist reasons, too. Many of us cringe when we hear conservative politicians refer to the “inner city” or describe cities like Atlanta and Chicago as “crime infested.” We know it for the poorly veiled racist language that it is. We have no patience for people who wrap themselves in the Confederate flag and claim to be celebrating only an amorphous tradition when we know that slavery was the bleeding core of the Confederacy and no amount of historical revision can change that. But we give ourselves a free pass for longing to put our cell phones away in our cabins at Pinewoods for a week. When we yearn for “an era of graciousness where people can relate to one another politely with elegance and grace,” who are the people we are thinking of? How were people of color faring in those days?

These questions are of particular importance in the current political moment, when our government has been run for four years by people whose primary slogan, “Make America Great Again,” calls for a similar return to an earlier time. We know they are talking about a time when racism, sexism, and hatred for LGBTQ+ people had free reign and when white men’s position of power was even more total. Meanwhile, earlier this year in England, a white nationalist group has suggested a hostile takeover of morris teams for race-based reasons almost identical to those of 100 years ago.

By no means am I suggesting an equivalence between our community of dancers and musicians and the red-hat-wearing MAGA supporters or white nationalists in

England. Our nostalgia-driven activities are not their nostalgia-driven activities, and their dream of a backward-looking social revolution has no parallel in our community.

What I do believe is that, because of our tradition’s history of racism, because we continue to venerate many of the qualities from the first folk revival, because we have been joined in rejecting aspects of modernity and urbanism by a group of contemporary racists, it is even more important for us to take explicit steps to speak out against racism of all sorts, including the racism in our own tradition. We must examine our community’s feelings about modernity and urban living and either find ways to actively distinguish them from their historical and contemporary associations with racism or, frankly, drop them.

In *When We Were Good: The Folk Revival*, Robert Cantwell writes:

*“Like blackface minstrelsy, folk revivalism is a form of social theater in which we develop the protocols for negotiating relations among groups and classes...”*

(*When We Were Good: The Folk Revival* by Robert Cantwell, Page 54)

As active participants in an ongoing folk revival, we have the power to shape it. Our modern traditions began in racism, but they don’t have to end there. Through words and action, we can use the strength of our community as an anti-racist force.

My sword team, Still River Sword, found our way to a consensus statement, and I’m proud of our work. As a first step in this community process, we invite you to join us in making a statement and donating money to an anti-racist organization (Still River donated to Lawyers for Civil Rights and the Equal Justice Initiative). By no means are we or I any more authoritative or righteous on this topic than you, so we hope that you are having your own conversations, and we look forward to reading what you come up with. As you can tell from this writing, I do hope that we are all able to acknowledge the past as an important part of our expressions of support for racial justice.

As for what comes next, your ideas are as good as ours! How can we make the “frequent, consistent, equitable choices daily” within our folk communities that being anti-racist requires? I look forward to working with you all on this.