

Department of the Interior Office of Indian Affairs  
Segments from the Circular No. 1665 and Supplement to Circular No. 1665  
April 26, 1921 and February 14, 1923  
Washington

Indian Dancing

To Superintendents:

It is not the policy of the Indian Office to denounce all forms of Indian dancing. It is rather its purpose to be somewhat tolerant of pleasure and relaxation sought in this way or of ritualism and traditional sentiment thus expressed. The dance per se is not condemned. It is recognized as a manifestation of something inherent in human nature, widely evidenced by both sacred and profane history, and as a medium through which elevated minds may happily unite art, refinement, and healthful exercise. It is not inconsistent with civilization. The dance, however, under most primitive and pagan conditions is apt to be harmful, and when found to be so among the Indians we should control it by educational processes as far as possible, but if necessary, by punitive measures when its degrading tendencies persist.

The sun-dance and other similar dances and so-called religious ceremonies are considered "Indian Offences" under existing regulations, and corrective penalties are provided. I regard such restriction as applicable to any dance which involves acts of self-torture, immoral relations between the sexes, the sacrificially destruction of clothing or other useful articles, the reckless giving away of property, the use of injurious drugs or intoxicants and frequent ant or prolong periods of celebration which bring the Indians together from remote points to the neglect of their crops, livestock, and home interests; in fact any disorderly or plainly excessive performances that promotes superstitious cruelty, licentiousness, idleness, danger to health, and shiftless indifference to family welfare. . . . .

At a conference in October, 1922, of the missionaries of the several religious denominations represented in the Sioux country, the following recommendations were adopted and have been courteously submitted to this office:

1. That the Indian form of gambling and lottery known as the "ituranpi" (translated "give away") be prohibited.
2. That the Indian dances be limited to one in each month in the daylight hours of one day in the midweek, and at one center in each district; the months of March and April, June, July and August be excepted.
3. That none take part in the dances or be present who are under 50 years of age.
4. That a careful propaganda be undertaken to educate public opinion against the dance and to provide a healthy substitute.
5. That a determined effort be made by the Government employees in cooperation with the missionaries to persuade the management of fairs and "round-ups" in the town adjoining the reservations not to commercialize the Indian soliciting his attendance in large numbers for show purposes.
6. That there be close cooperation between the Government employees and the missionaries in those which affect the moral welfare of the Indians.

Please acknowledge the receipt hereof. Sincerely yours,

CHAS. H. BURKE, Commissioner