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A STUDIES IN DANCE HISTORY BOOK

DANCING MANY DRUMS

EXCAVATIONS IN AFRICAN AMERICAN DANCE

EDITED BY
THOMAS F. DEFRANTZ

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This volume is a tribute to African American dance archivist Joe Nash. Its title comes from a 1976 article by Nash that underscored the variety of expressive idioms danced by Africans of the diaspora.¹ That article—and the “many drums” of its title—suggested a continuous history of African American dance practice with commonalities that spanned movement idioms.

In many ways Nash can be viewed as a progenitor of the field of African American dance studies. Born in New York in 1919, Nash taught himself basic ballet positions from books he borrowed as a child from the library.² He met Pearl Primus at the National Youth Administration in the early 1940s and became her first dance partner, until he began formal study with Syvilla Fort and Katherine Dunham. After serving in the U.S. military, he danced in the 1946 revival of the musical *Showboat* choreographed by Helen Tamiris and began collecting programs, photographs, clippings, and other memorabilia related to African American dance artists. In the late 1940s and 1950s he appeared in a string of West End and Broadway musicals, including *Finian’s Rainbow* (London, 1947), *Inside U.S.A.* (1948), *Bless You All* (1950), *Flabooley* (1951), and *My Darlin’ Aida* (1952). He danced in the New York City Center Light Opera Company’s production of *Carmen Jones*; was a founding member of Aubrey Hitchen’s Negro Dance Theater in 1953; and performed as a guest artist with the companies of Primus, Charles Weidman, and Donald McKayle. All the while he kept adding to his collection, and he continued to collect memorabilia after he retired from performing. In 1982 he began teaching the dance history course at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center. Five years later he became a senior consultant to



Joe Nash and Pearl Primus in Primus's *Haitian Play Dance*, on tour, ca. 1946 (Photographer unknown; Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the New York Public Library–Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations; reproduced with permission)

the African American Tradition in Modern Dance program at the American Dance Festival.

Eventually, Nash's priceless collection of memorabilia came to include some 2,000 items, which he divided between the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, in New York City, and the Tallahassee Black Archives and Museum in Florida. His prescience and the passion he brought to his subject result in the creation of the first major collection about African American dance, and many of the photographs in the pages that follow come from the Joe Nash Collection at the Schomburg Center. Without Nash's committed effort to preserve the history, practice, and theory of African American dance, this volume could not exist.

The second part of the title derives from the sensation of archaeological recovery that permeates African American dance scholarship today. While Nash's collection is remarkably rich, it is also, necessarily, a fragmentary offering. It is hardly an understatement that the history of African American dance performance has been documented insufficiently. Combing through archives, newspapers, literature, and oral histories, the scholars here reveal materials neglected by traditional studies of American dance history. While the subjects scrutinized in these explorations of sacred, social, and concert dances may be unfamiliar to many readers, these same subjects represent verifiable "high-points" for the few scholars working in the field of African American dance history. Although very much alive, this field operates very much on the margins of both African American studies and dance studies.

This volume was prompted by a Congress on Research in Dance Special Topics Conference, "African-American Dance: Researching a Complex History," organized by John O. Perpener III and hosted by the Department of Dance, College of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 25–27 April 1996. That landmark event brought together artists, critics, and historians working within and around issues of historiography and identity associated with African American dance practice. Over three days, the participants explored the process of

dance scholarship as it intersects with African American studies. Among the conference highlights were a thorny panel discussion about generational affiliations within “black dance” by choreographers Ronald K. Brown, Ralph Lemon, and Bebe Miller; a reminiscence by Bella Lewitzky, whose company was in residence during the conference, about Lester Horton’s interracial modern dance studio in Los Angeles in the 1940s and 1950s; and a final dinner in honor of Katherine Dunham, in which she spoke about her East St. Louis cultural and performing arts center.³

Eight of the twelve chapters included here have not been published before. Of these, three developed from materials presented at the conference. I commissioned several new essays and solicited various reprints to illumine the range of scholarly material presently available in the field. I hope that the diversity of analytic approaches will inspire new and probing studies of African American dance history, criticism, theory, and practice.

The volume is divided into three sections: theory, practice, and history. These are porous categories, and the source materials found among them certainly overlap. Still, I find the distinctions useful if only to remind the reader that scholarly *approaches* to African American dance history distinguish how work becomes categorized. The chapters in the theory section offer speculative analyses of dance events from fresh readings of extant documentation. Practice sits at the center of the volume, with its strong emphasis on oral history as a reminder that, in African American tradition, the act itself supersedes its discussion. The history section pays tribute—by way of thick description and analysis—to artists, companies, and works typically relegated to footnote status in other volumes.

The two exquisite James Van Der Zee photographs that are the cover and frontispiece (p. 2) of this volume complicate the notion of African American dance practice, theory, and history. The young girls captured here are students of tap dance, a hybrid form that drew on, at least, African and Irish traditions of percussive musicality. This pictorial evidence of tap dance being taught in Harlem studios in the 1920s and 1930s avoids easy assumptions of a “naturalized” history of dancing black bodies. These

carefully dressed girls suggest a socializing feature of dancing lessons, and introduce implications of class and gender in the formation of African American dance history. For me, the photographs raise other practical and theoretical questions. Could these girls have become professional dancers? What sorts of roles would have been available to them? Who were their teachers? Do these images invoke a minstrel-era stereotype of cavorting, infantilized dancing black bodies? If not, why not? Does the “black lens” of photographer James Van Der Zee somehow mitigate the exoticism of black bodies in motion? These images, like the others that follow, invite this sort of speculative perusal.

My hope in bringing this volume to fruition is to inspire more focused explorations of African American dance. Few will dispute the importance of African-inspired music and movement to the world culture we now share; in terms of popular music and dance, the African American influence has been profound. This volume arrives at the millennium as the first scholarly anthology devoted to African American dance.⁴ May many others follow, and may they plow even more deeply into its beautiful black ground.

NOTES

1. Joe Nash, “Dancing Many Drums,” *National Scene Magazine Supplement* 4, no. 8 (September–October 1976): 2–3, 8–11.
2. Joe Nash, telephone interview with the author, 3 February 1999.
3. For a detailed report of the conference, see Naomi Jackson, “Report on the CORD Conference African-American Dance: Researching a Complex History,” *Dance Research Journal* 28, no. 2 (fall 1996): 107–10.
4. *African Dance*, ed. Kariamu Welsh Asante (Trenton, N.J.: African World Press, 1996) offers a striking collection of Afrocentric essays detailing African dance practice on the continent and in diaspora.

African American Dance: A Complex History

Thomas F. DeFrantz



“Dance Class, 1928” (Photograph by James Van Der Zee; copyright © Donna Mussenden Van Der Zee; all rights reserved; reproduced with permission)

Scholars of African American dance history face a battery of unusual challenges. Reliable documentation of dance events predating the mid-twentieth century is slight; few research centers or major libraries contain specialized collections chronicling African American dance performance, and misreadings of racial separation and racist attitudes permeate early writing about African diaspora culture in America. Frustrated by the painful lack of focused research and criticism and the absence of credible source material, many historians interested in African American dance slip away from the field to the safety of literary studies, labor studies, cultural studies, or art-making. Finally, there is the issue of categorization, complicated by critics who variously refer to the broad spectrum of expressive idioms practiced by African American artists as “African American dance” or the equally amorphous “black dance.” How has this happened?

WORD SLIPPAGE: THE B(L)ACKGROUND

Since the mid-nineteenth century, the term “race” has served as a shorthand for expressing variance from a preferred European norm. In the mid-1980s, when cultural historians and literary theorists began placing “race” in quotation marks, they attempted to undermine this long-uncontested social category.¹ Denying biological, critical, or even descriptive truth to “race” as an identity marker challenged rigid assumptions American critics had long held about “black art,” including dance. “Race” is principally a means of labeling, a politically motivated system of assigning

people of color to a position outside the hegemonic mainstream of (white) Western civilization.

Still, the use of "race" as an identity marker has not disappeared from the academy, nor have forms of racism abated simply because theorists have identified "race" as a construction. Instead, "race" has taken on more complex nuances of meaning and usage. For instance, in academic as well as in more general usage, "African American" and "black" now flourish side by side. I notice a contextual shift in my own usage of the words in writing and teaching. To black students I say "black" unless I'm trying to historicize an event, in which case I'll rely on the more ponderous term "African American." But if my class has international or white students, I tend to say African American exclusively. I like to think that the seven syllables, or two written words, indicate a stratification of inquiry that forces the listener or reader to consider the implications of cultural hybridity and invention. The words stop the eye, ear, and tongue. But in conversation with someone I do not know well, I always catch my slippage of using "black" to a person who is not African American. For me, "black" as a descriptive marker is reserved for conversation with those who might be able to imagine its implications in the United States, including a history of political and economic inequity, institutionalized social affliction, and spiritual resiliency. Like other African American scholars, I slip upon "black" to underscore an imaginary cultural coherency. I acknowledge that this impulse is in part sentimental, a romanticized sway toward the comfort of neat binary opposition: "black" as the polar opposite of "white." But I must confront this slippage in order to write about work made by African American choreographers, American social dance practice, and "black dance."

What is "black dance"? What does it have to do with race? Is it different from African American dance? Does the moniker matter? Is it about semantics? Can't we simply allow linguistic slippage between "black" and "African American" to imply complexity and leave it at that? Does it matter who is writing about "blackness" and to whom? If there can be "black dance," why is there no critical category of "white dance"? And why has "black

dance" stuck when its etymological predecessors, such as "darky dance," "colored dance," and "Negro dance," have not?

Some answers to these questions can be found within the political metamorphoses of the 1960s. "Black dance" became a category of performance during this era, in large part because of the Black Arts movement and its collective attempt to define a "black aesthetic." Ironically, the term "black dance" seems to have been invented by white critics as a shorthand for work they felt uncomfortable with or ill-prepared to address.

The Black Arts movement inspired a heightened critique of American social order by African American artists.² These artists assumed an inviolable connection between art and politics and through their close association with the Black Power movement sought to create a coherent "black aesthetic" inspired by, about, and for black people. Committed to intensive community involvement, they espoused a model of art production that valued the participation of artists and audiences in the creation of an art that explicitly confirmed the well being of the group.

Not all African American artists working in this era aligned themselves with the Black Arts movement. But throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, many journalists routinely referred to all choreographic work produced by African Americans as "black dance."³ The phrase was originally intended to mark difference from the mainstream of concert performance, and it was employed with divergent connotations in both the "black press" and the "mainstream press." For example, critic Marcia Siegel entitled a chapter of her 1972 collection of criticism, *At the Vanishing Point*, "Black Dance: A New Separatism." In a series of essays covering several years of work offered by African American choreographers, Siegel self-consciously probed the validity of "black art" from her vantage point as a self-described "serious white critic":

I think we all at some time have asked ourselves whether we must adopt special positions from which to view black art. When people were hurling their hatred at us from the stage, we cowered in our guilty shoes and thought of "social relevance" as a possible stan-

dard. When we saw amateurish performances or half-finished ideas being cheered hysterically, we wondered if we could slip out of our telltale skins and see this art as black people see it, or if we should duck the problem and not try to cover it at all.⁴

Siegel's comment illustrates the cultural confusion and critical anxiety of the era that gave rise to the category of "black dance." While she recognizes that these performances satisfy imperatives understood by their artists and "target" audiences, she also assumes a (white) critical "we" unable to understand aesthetic motivations of "their" "black art."

Here, implications of a separate-but-equal (black) dance tradition peek out from behind the harsh words predicting the (white) critic's obsolescence. Of course, the work Siegel referred to *did* feel different from other work chronicled in her book of critical essays. Its political import as a tool of social and cultural coherency—evidenced by the "hysterically" cheering crowds she witnessed—confirmed an undocumented dimension of dance performance. That dimension, linking proscenium forms of concert dance to New World religious practices and contemporary experiences of African American people, developed outside the concert hall and the dance studio. Ultimately, it began in the cultural interchanges wrought on the slave ships crossing the Atlantic during the middle passage—the source of African American hybridity. In the 1960s, some concert dance made by African American artists for African American audiences intentionally dramatized the shared memories, experiences, and aesthetic values of African American people. These dances and their characteristic performance styles became known as "black dance."

ON BEING "BLACK"

According to art historian Richard J. Powell, many artists viewed the recuperation of "black" as a mark of identity during the 1960s as an "emphatic proclamation of an oppressed people's psychological reorientation."⁵ In dance, this decidedly nationalistic reorientation emphasized connections between everyday experiences and art-making to embrace multiple movement idioms

and a range of expressive approaches in the representation of "blackness." However, this strategy held consequences of essentialism for audiences, critics, and artists. For example, the half-hour television series *On Being Black*, produced for a single season by Boston's public television station WGBH, presented dramas by black writers that illuminated the "black experience" for a largely white audience. An episode telecast in May 1969 featuring the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in two contrasting works demonstrated the variety of creative strategies employed by choreographers as well as the competing ambiguities of "racial" identification during that era.⁶

The program begins with a single, silhouetted (black) male fighting and punching against a bright orange background as dissonant chords sound and the program's title flashes on the screen. The dancer stretches against imaginary chains around his neck and hands, his body racked in anger and pain. As if to enact the show's title, the man performs "being black" as an embattled solitary existence in which his body endures a purgatory of tortured muscular contractions and repels attacks by unseen oppressors.⁷ From this opening sequence we understand "being black" at this particular moment in the 1960s to be about physically embodying barely suppressed rage.

Alvin Ailey appears briefly as the on-camera narrator for the program to remind the audience of his own choreographic intention to "project the essential dignity and beauty of men" through concert dance. The program then screens a filmed version of Talley Beatty's recent work *The Black Belt*. According to program notes of the stage version of this ballet, the Ailey company commissioned Beatty's piece in 1968 as an examination of "the realities of the black belt" or ghetto; its "ferment, paradox, conflict and dilemma"; its "aspiration for mobility"; and its "surge toward integration and assimilation into the mainstream of American Life."⁸ *The Black Belt's* carnivalesque depiction of a day in the ghetto includes scenes inside tenement apartments; a sequence in a storefront church, where a gang of marauding male rapists wearing white-face masks attack a female worshiper; an ambiguous crucifixion of a man stripped to his dance belt; a surreal scene of

mourning by a mysterious group of hooded women; and a full-scale riot in the streets, complete with looting, fighting, and general mayhem. The dance ends when all of the rioters are shot by machine guns from offstage white policemen and the dancers are massed in a heap, smothered by useless stolen merchandise.

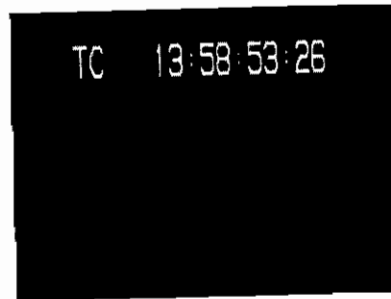
The Black Belt portrays ghetto life without purpose, hope, or apology. Its archetypal characters enact quirky individualistic rituals that, taken together, suggest a community unraveling at its seams. Beatty's choreography employs blocks of hyperkinetic movement phrases built from impossibly fast sequences of turns, leg extensions, leaps, freezes, and shifts of direction, all executed with a suffocating rhythmic precision. A surrealistic protest dance with obvious references to civil rights activism and the contemporaneous Black Arts movement, *The Black Belt* depicts an explosive rage and its narrative consequences in the streets of an urban ghetto.

On Being Black continues with a presentation of Ailey's *Revelations* (1960), which he introduces as a lyrical counterpoint to Beatty's work. On camera, Ailey calls the dance "a ballet" composed "to our own passionately beautiful spirituals." In this context *Revelations*, which by 1969 had been consistently heralded as a classic of the modern-dance repertory, represents the strength and faith held by mature African Americans involved in the struggle for political equity. Choreographed as a suite of dances representing African American religious practice in the rural American South, *Revelations* employs a limited palette of dance movements

that emphasize fully stretched torsos, carefully articulated body isolations, and character-driven interactions enriched by details from the choreographer's memory.⁹

Although both *Revelations* and *The Black Belt* historicize aspects of African American experience, they employ emphatically different approaches to movement vocabularies, musical selection, and overall kinetic effect. Nevertheless, most critics and audiences considered both Beatty's protest dance, set largely to the music of Duke Ellington, and Ailey's traditionally shaped suite, set to spirituals and gospel music, to fall well within the era's amorphous definition of "black dance." The artistic range of these artists was thus diminished by a label that, while it had no aesthetic identity, seemed to refer to one.

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater stands at the center of any study of "black dance" because of its predominance at the moment when the term came into regular usage. Significantly, Ailey conceived his company and its operations as an unabashedly assimilationist project, with three goals he often recounted in interviews: to employ the scores of excellent black dancers in New York who had no performing homes, to give artistic voice to African American experience in terms of concert dance, and to assemble a racially integrated repertory company that could perform both modern dance classics and new works by Ailey and other young choreographers. His achievement of each of these goals is clearly demonstrated by the television program, where three of the thirteen bodies engaged in "being black" are white.



1

2

Title sequence from *On Being Black*, WGBH television program, 1969



3



4

Ailey integrated his company to counter the "reverse chauvinism in being an all-black anything." As he explained, "I am trying to show the world that we are all human beings and that color is not important. What is important is the quality of our work."¹⁰ This obvious echo of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 speech that counterposed the "content of character" to the "color of skin" confirms the anti-essentialist stance Ailey assumed in relation to "race."¹¹ Ironically, if his intention was to demonstrate the ability of African American dancers as commensurate with their white counterparts, his company set the standard for "black dance."

For some critics, "black dance" came to be signified simply by the presence of African American dancers. Other critics and artists, including Ailey, realized that little could be accomplished by labeling work made by all African Americans as something intrinsically beyond the mainstream of modern dance, even if those artists' offstage lives remained bound by inescapable, everyday American racism.¹² Still other, typically younger African American artists, committed to the political need for a coherent "black aesthetic," viewed their own work as belonging to a category outside traditional structures of dance performance and synergetic with the emergence of Black Power.¹³ These artists sought to invest "black dance" with the proclamation of self-representation, to use it as a tool of mobilization to create work relevant to African American audiences. An impasse of terminology and usage developed along this fault line, as the erratic articulation of "black dance" had to somehow satisfy its artists, its core audience, cultural outsiders, casual observers, disinterested critics, fans, and its own etymological birth as both a component of a vibrant political movement and a shorthand for "racial" difference.

For its practitioners the emergent "black dance" contained political import as a practice that engaged its audience, encouraged call-and-response participation, and communicated connections between art and contemporary political events. According to choreographer and author Carole Johnson, the issue of expressive freedom became central to the controversy surrounding the invention of "black dance": "Freedom is what all Black people are seeking. . . . 'Black dance' . . . does not preach a particular ide-

ology. . . . Rather than a particular style of dance this expression 'Black dance' indicates the particular historical time and the conditions in which Black people currently find themselves."¹⁴ Here Johnson predicted that "black dance" might become an inclusive category, able to encompass a range of expressive dance idioms so long as the work offered a political intervention that aligned it with contemporary "blackness." Surrealistic works, like Beatty's *Black Belt*, could be termed "black dance" in response to their musical selections, use of social dance movements, and archetypal characterizations with obvious culturally specific antecedents. Traditionally shaped dance suites, like Ailey's *Revelations*, mined ancestral memory through musical choices, an abstraction that underlined the representation of a pervasive spiritual dignity, and a narrative suggesting cultural advancement from despair toward triumph. Other successful works created by African American artists in this era included *Tangents* (1968), a precise, cool, abstract work by Rod Rodgers; *Las Desenamoras* (1967), Eleo Pomare's tightly structured adaptation of Federico García Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba*; *Africa's Children* (1968), a full-length ballet employing Ghanaian dance forms created by the Philadelphia-based choreographer Arthur Hall; and various ballet works by Louis Johnson, including *Forces of Rhythm* (1972) for the Dance Theatre of Harlem. By the mid-1970s, "black dance" had come to be defined by its artists as work that was explicitly engaged in the act of black self-identification.¹⁵

JAZZ DANCE/BLACK DANCE

The first two sustained efforts to chronicle African American dance practice were published before and after the 1960s articulation of "black dance." Their differences in title, methodology, and achievement established lasting paradigms for African American dance scholarship. Originally published in 1964, the authoritative *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance*, by Marshall and Jean Stearns, portrays history as a chronological series of biographical portraits of significant popular entertainers.¹⁶ To research their subjects, the couple conducted a staggering number of personal interviews. Much of their documentation came

from oral transcripts of these interviews augmented by research from the popular press. The achievement of their volume lies in the subtle way that they align personal testimony with scholarly research to construct a layered and compelling history of dance practice. Written with a wry, journalistic style that seems to underscore the esoteric parameters of their subject, the volume documents African American dance from the plantation through the 1960s in terms of its practitioners and their practices.

Lynne Fauley Emery's *Black Dance in the United States from 1619 to 1970*, first published in 1972, offers a sweeping chronological history of dance practice traced from the middle passage, through the islands of the Caribbean, to the plantations of the United States.¹⁷ Inspired by the author's desire for a "dance literature with which [her] black students could identify,"¹⁸ Emery conducted a painstaking review of the slim extant literature on African American dance and examined diverse sources such as travel diaries, journalistic accounts, short periodical articles, and critical reviews. Heavily illustrated, the volume described a trajectory of African-derived performance modes from the slave trade to the concert stage as a travelogue of African American presence in dance. Written in a fairly dry, "objective" tone, but with a palpable empathy for the historical difficulties encountered by people of color in America, *Black Dance* arrived as a bibliography transformed into prose to chronicle a history of dance defined by "race."

These two volumes created the mold for approaches to the field and remained the only book-length studies of African American dance practice for nearly two decades. Although each of these books became invaluable as reference works, each had clear limitations. Emery's travelogue approach struggles to document far too much in one volume, careening from slave festivals through nineteenth-century popular entertainments to "classical" twentieth-century forms.¹⁹ Her attempt to be all-inclusive forces an encyclopedic stratification, in which certain "prominent" artists receive limited attention, others receive a cursory biographical paragraph outlining their training and "great works," while still others are reduced to footnote status. Worse, Emery fails to con-

sider what links the dancers and dances she documents beyond "race." Her "slavery-to-freedom" format assumes an undiluted lineage of dance practice from African dance forms to contemporary modern dance and suggests an unfortunate narrative of "primitive" dance under segregation that gave way to preferred "classical" dance after the Civil Rights movement. In essence, "black dance" is defined here as "not-white dance," as a separate stream of performance that may be detached from (white) American dance history.

The Stearnses include white dancers in their study and define its parameters by aesthetic affinities ("jazz dance") rather than "race." But their critical assumption that jazz dance can only be considered a "vernacular" form threatens to overshadow the professional achievements of the artists they interview.²⁰ Surely many of the artists included here, such as Aida Overton Walker and the Nicholas Brothers, achieved transcendent mastery in their transformations of "vernacular" social dance structures for the stage. Were the Stearnses conceptually opposed to the identification of consummate technique *within* these African-derived expressive idioms? If not, why do they end their volume with a prediction that "art dance and vernacular dance will combine more and more effectively as time passes"?²¹ Why was it not possible to consider the dances of the African diaspora they chronicled in their book as art?

Where Emery often reduces the history of African American dance to a story of racial disenfranchisement and victimization at the hands of powerful whites, the Stearnses' smooth portrayal of relations between black dancers and white audiences, including themselves, denies a relationship of dance performance to political strategy. Although researched and published in an era defined by shifting attitudes toward racial segregation, *Jazz Dance* ultimately seems curiously apolitical. The Stearnses offer a normative history of African American dance practice as the foundation of dance in popular entertainment; Emery proposes a corrective history of African American dances and dancers, positioned eternally outside the mainstream of American dance.

Another major distinction between the two volumes may be

found in their starting points. While Emery begins her chronicle in the middle passage, determined to arrive finally at "black dance" in the United States, the Stearnses begin their history with an easily overlooked section on African performative imperatives. Citing research conducted but not yet published by art historian Robert Farris Thompson, they compile a sequence of commonalities linking African dance traditions that survived the middle passage and contributed to "jazz dance." Thompson had conducted extensive fieldwork in a range of sub-Saharan cultures to arrive at his seminal articulation of pan-African dance and music performance eventually published in the 1966 article "Dance and Culture: An Aesthetic of the Cool." His analysis describes "the dominance of a percussive concept of performance; multiple meter; apart playing and dancing; call-and-response; and, finally the songs and dances of derision."²² Thompson's work, extended slightly by separate research in the teaching primer *Modern Jazz Dance* by San Francisco-based scholar and choreographer Dolores Kirton Cayou,²³ predicted a third strain of African American dance scholarship that explored theoretical imperatives embedded within dance practice. The documentation of these qualities of motion provided critical linkage between obviously intertwined sacred and social traditions of African American dance performance. Each of these attributes could also be discerned in concert work made by artists involved in the Black Arts movement, although the final attribute—the songs and dances of derision—most clearly encompassed the political dimension of "black dance" performance. In this category, movement provokes metacommentary and suggests narratives outside the physical frame of performance. For many concert artists of the Black Arts movement, the ability of stage dance to refer to experiences well outside the proscenium frame provided the most important connections of their work to contemporary black experience.²⁴

These performance characteristics indicated a continuity of aesthetic approaches to dance and music-making in line with the articulation of a "black aesthetic" in the 1960s.²⁵ Reconceived in the 1990s by cultural and literary theorists as "Africanist retentions" or "Africanisms," these hallmarks of African-derived per-

formance provide a theoretical framework for the identification and interpretation of diasporic traditions of art-making.²⁶ Africanisms discernible in concert dance, for example, are qualities of design and execution based on insistent rhythmicity, angularity, percussive rupture of underlying flow, individualism within a group dynamic, and access to a dynamic "flash of the spirit" that simultaneously confirms temporal presence and ubiquitous spirituality.²⁷ These qualities are not particular movements so much as compositional strategies that may inform any given moment in a dance. As such, they are recurrent aesthetic imperatives that may be employed both by African diaspora artists and, significantly, by others following this tradition. While some scholars have resisted this theoretical approach because of its implication of a narrow and singular "African dance" idiom, the identification of these conceptual traditions has created the most consistent approach to documenting Africanist performance across generations and geographies of African American dancers and choreographers, as well as in work by others, including white Americans, Europeans, and Asians.²⁸

Subsequent literature devoted to African American dance followed the three perspectives outlined above: the use of brief biographical narratives describing the practice of individual performers and companies, the documentation of historical narratives culled from research, or the articulation of theoretical principles of performance, usually in tandem with case studies. But as the literature expanded, the discursive category of "black dance" was rejected by many scholars, critics, and artists because of its controversial invention and frequent use as a condescending label by journalists in the 1960s and 1970s. Over time, the term disappeared and resurfaced clumsily, and rarely without apology, in the titles of volumes of sweeping historical documentation following Emery, including Alice J. Adamczyk's useful *Black Dance: An Annotated Bibliography* (1989) and Edward Thorpe's highly inadequate *Black Dance* (1990).²⁹ Neither of these authors convincingly define their use of the category of "black dance" beyond its obvious implications of "race"; for me, this essentialist use insidiously compresses dance practice into an amorphous

mass shaped by its variance to the dominant (white) histories of dance. Other scholars recognize this ambiguity. African American historian Richard Long titled his 1989 volume that documents more than a century of participation by African American artists in dance *The Black Tradition in American Dance*. This title suggests black presence coherent to American dance history. Long's technique incorporates Africanist compositional strategies, including the political implications of certain dances, within the biographical documentation of artists and artistic trends.³⁰

By the late 1990s, some cultural theorists proposed a strategic reclaiming of "black" as a marker of cultural ubiquity.³¹ From this perspective, "black dance" suggests a wide range of practices, from forms of Argentinian tango to South African gumboot dance and the *Creole Giselle* performed by Dance Theatre of Harlem. While this strategy underlines the increased presence of scholars exploring African-diaspora performance and predicts their collaboration across academic disciplines, it fails to acknowledge the peculiar history of the term in American discourse outlined in this essay. Ultimately, there can't be a singular idiom called "black dance" that contains a clear definition for all who invoke it. As I've argued, the category has to occupy several discursive spaces simultaneously, defined at least by who is speaking and to whom. Surely scholars have to be willing to define their use of the term if we are to move toward a more complex rendering of the material it may contain.

This volume and essay refer to "African American dance" in part because of the term's less problematic invention, but also to invite its readers to look beyond how "black" can be defined by its racial opposite "white." The black body in motion does not render itself as an alternative to anything; as Fanon writes, "it is."³² While "African American dance" may seem as equivocal as "black dance," its linguistic origins are not so clearly politicized along the lines of white spectatorship of Africanist performance. I first became aware of the term in the 1990s as it was used by African American dance historians; to my mind these authors granted it a crucial elasticity of meaning.³³ Here I intend for the term to accommodate practice, history, and theoretical hallmarks of perfor-

mance as they are realized by African diaspora dancers and others concerned with diasporic forms. Some of the authors in this volume are more forthcoming than I; they refer to "black dance" as a corporeal reality, a socially and politically circumscribed idiom of undeniable cultural coherency. Other authors write around the essentialist implications of "black dance" to describe particular Africanist aesthetic processes and dance practices. Ultimately, I appreciate the conceptual complexity suggested by the interplay between "black dance" and "African American dance" and the ways in which the two phrases suggest divergent audiences and critical strategies. Surely any dance made by African Americans is not automatically "black dance." But just as surely "black dance" exists, even if only in the United States as an echo of the fomentation of its 1960s genesis.

The chapters in this volume explore an array of theories, geographies, and historical periods of African American dance. Fifteen years separate the publication of the earliest essay from the most recent offering. I have not smoothed over their digressions in terminology or approach to "black dance." Instead, I intend for the tension between their assumptions to reflect the great flux of discursive and methodological strategies in African American dance documentation. Most of the authors included in this volume claim African ancestry, a fact that points to the formation of a vibrant literature steeped in an experiential understanding of black cultural processes. In all, this volume reflects the emergence of new critical and historical strategies that underscore the instability of ideas across different historical periods.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES: HISTORY — CHOOSING STORIES TO TELL

Dance history is created by the documents historians assemble. Because sustained inquiry into African American dance has come only in the past three decades, the field is unusually open to a range of methodological approaches. Until recently, however, many authors, including Arthur Todd writing in the 1950s and Joe Nash writing in the 1970s, anticipated or followed Emery in the burdensome task of tracing a comprehensive chronological

narrative of African American dance practice.³⁴ Separated by decades, their writings arrived at crucial moments in the formation of the field and by the irrefutable breadth of their source materials confirmed that a range of unexplored subjects awaited documentation. But for too long, they remained among the few documents that did not question the viability or “historical accuracy” of African American dancers in professional American dance. This latter strain of critical writing, represented in two essays from 1944 by *Dance Observer* correspondent Lois Balcom, continued unabated throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, especially in daily newspaper and weekly periodical pieces concerned with the “suitability” of African American dancers in ballet.³⁵ Another prevalent type of article, replicated by this Introduction, attempts to trace the history of “black dance” as a critical category. Among these, Julinda Lewis Williams (1980) and Zita Allen (1980) both acknowledge that the field is far too wide to be contained by a single designation.³⁶

Recent historical scholarship offers in-depth exploration of single performances, careers, or events.³⁷ In this volume two pairs of essays detailing overlapping eras confirm the contemporary trend to complicate the rendering of African American dance history through close reading and political contextualization. Maureen Needham details the 1934 Asadata Dafora work *Kykunkor*. This seminal dance opera set a standard for the participation of African dance idioms on the American concert stage. Brenda Dixon Gottschild’s documentation of the career of Norton and Webb during the same era offers insight into the construction of “high-class” popular entertainment by African Americans.³⁸

Constance Valis Hill documents the intriguing history of what may be the lost masterpiece of Katherine Dunham’s career, the 1951 ballet *Southland*.³⁹ Despite the dance’s many merits, it was the creation of this work that tore the fabric of interracial trust that bound Dunham’s dancers together. Valis Hill’s essay connects the political dimension of performance, always palpable in Dunham’s work, to the political intricacies of government sponsorship for dance artists during the Cold War era.⁴⁰

In telling the story of the New York Negro Ballet on tour in

Great Britain, Dawn Lille Horwitz writes a chapter long missing in American ballet history. The African American presence in classical ballet, ultimately confirmed by the founding of Dance Theatre of Harlem in 1969, grew slowly alongside a waxing American interest in theatrical stage dancing.⁴¹ Dance writer Zita Allen has separated the history of African American dancers in ballet into two categories—the individual dancers who struggled to take ballet classes long before there were dance companies of any sort, and the “all-black” ballet companies that served, often only temporarily, as vehicles for these dreamers.⁴² The New York Negro Ballet provided a full-scale convergence of dancers and dance in the still-segregated America of the 1950s.

THEORIES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN DANCE

The implications of Africanist performance imperatives for African American dance have been extended in excellent scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s by Kariamu Welsh Asante (1985), Katrina Hazzard-Gordon (1990), Jacqui Malone (1996), and Brenda Dixon Gottschild (1996).⁴³ Each of these authors build upon Robert Farris Thompson’s evocation of an abiding “aesthetic of the cool” linking performance practice to aesthetic hallmarks of the African diaspora. It may be useful here to offer a brief précis of these works to illustrate the complexity that has enriched the field in recent years.

In *Jookin’: The Rise of Social Dance Formations in African American Culture*, Hazzard-Gordon replicates the chronological narrative of cultural causality suggested by Emery, tracing dance practice from Africa, the middle passage, and slave culture in the United States to the “jook joints” of Cleveland, the principal site of her research. Her text offers a reading of social dance history inflected by her interest in working-class black dance arenas. In *Steppin’ on the Blues: The Visible Rhythms of African American Dance*, Malone follows the Stearnses to mine “African American vernacular traditions” but looks well beyond the proscenium stage to examine fraternity and sorority stepping, the Florida A&M University marching band, and dance in Mutual Aid Societies. Dixon Gottschild’s groundbreaking study, *Digging the Africanist*

Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts, explores the obvious but unacknowledged presence of African performance elements in work by European Americans. The implications of her book suggest innumerable directions for further study of how African American performance practices saturate American dance idioms, whether or not black bodies are present.

The most common theoretical approach to African American dance history follows Asante's "Commonalities in African Dance: An Aesthetic Foundation" by invoking the omnipresent spiritual dimension that permeates African-diaspora performance traditions, including dance and music. In the present volume, P. Sterling Stuckey connects the relationship of dance to religion as a cultural imperative through an examination of their documentation in literature and music history.⁴⁴ His essay suggests a theoretical source of religiosity as the root of African American dance. As he points out, the compression of sacred and "secular" events in many African cultures contributes to a palpable sensation of urgency common to African-diaspora dance events. The importance of spirituality to the African American concert stage inspired a series of seminars begun in 1998 and sponsored by the American Dance Festival entitled "The Black Church, Spirituality and Modern Dance."⁴⁵

While scholars have underscored the importance of minstrelsy and vaudeville to the establishment of the professional black performer,⁴⁶ the experiences of African Americans on public stages deserve greater scrutiny. Here Nadine A. George untangles a web of spectatorial ambiguities surrounding dance performance by the Whitman Sisters, a quartet of light-complexioned African American entertainers who worked at the beginning of the twentieth century. She argues that dance performances by the Whitman Sisters actively upset race and gender categories and challenged the expectations of audience members, producers, and theater owners, making the vaudeville stage an unlikely site of resistance.

The importance of music and dance in African-diaspora culture prompted the widespread assumption that all black people dance well. In truth, segregation in the first half of the twenti-

eth century allowed few cultural outsiders access to the process of African Americans learning to dance. This process was further concealed by literature that featured fantastic accounts of African Americans dancing and by the disproportionate visibility of professional black entertainers who danced.⁴⁷ Marya Annette McQuirter questions this erasure and the anxiety that surrounds the public performance of social dance. Her depiction of *awkwardness* for African American dancers in the social realm provides a long-deferred critique of stereotypical assumptions of how people achieve "vernacular" dance.

Studies that acknowledged the slippery nature of "race" in dance began to appear in the 1990s with the publication of work by Anne Cooper Albright, Sally Banes, Ramsay Burt, and Susan Manning.⁴⁸ On the whole, these authors resist Emery's approach by avoiding historical narratives that stratify African American artists according to the prominence granted them by mainstream critics. On the other hand, few African American dance artists have received full biographical exploration. For example, Pearl Primus figures unequivocally among the "pioneers" of African American concert dance, but there has been no book-length study of her life, career, or choreography.⁴⁹ But it is also true that the impulse to document history through the work of an individual artist runs counter to the collective imperatives of "black dance" practice. Richard C. Green addresses this paradox in an essay that gives a biographical account of the first part of Primus's career, then challenges the current revisionist effort to canonize her. His arch skepticism of a "new" literature of African American dance history that reproduces existing paradigms of dance analyses reveals the complicity of dance scholars in constructing "race" as a research methodology.

PRACTICE—WRITING "BLACK DANCE"

As Emery points out repeatedly, the development of journalistic criticism that can engage the complexities of "black dance" and acknowledge its political dimensions has been slow to emerge. The few African American critics sensitive to this task and published frequently in both the black press and national dance publi-

cations have included Zita Allen, Brenda Dixon Gottschild, Doris Green, Bernadine Jennings, Carole Johnson, Julinda Lewis, William Moore, C. S'themble West, and Arthur T. Wilson.⁵⁰ Now, with arts criticism and column space in national decline, the additional task of chronicling performance while illuminating its cultural underpinnings poses a challenge few dance writers are seemingly prepared to meet.⁵¹ In 1980, critic Zita Allen described the severity of this cultural divide in which "white critics seem so totally unfamiliar with Afro-American cultural heritage and history and ignorant of the processes of their interaction with, and influence on, their own" that they were "ill-equipped to either identify those roots or determine when they are being demeaned and denied or drawn from for inspiration."⁵² Two decades later, this cultural divide persists.

Beyond education in African American cultural processes, alternative methods of documentation may also be useful in bridging this divide. In this volume, Marcia E. Heard and Mansa K. Mussa offer a photo essay that chronicles the history of African dance practice in New York City. Their essay confirms the continuous and vital presence of traditional African dance idioms, practiced today by a host of American dancers. As Heard notes, African dance forms currently rank among the most popular idioms offered in college dance departments, but the artists and companies she documents here remain unknown to the public at large.

The close correlation between African-derived music and dance has enormous research implications for the study of African American musical idioms. Sally Banes and John F. Szwed suggest that dance instruction songs, buoyed by technologies of mass distribution, have served crucial functions in the formation of a syncretic American dance culture rooted in African-diaspora performance practice.⁵³ Their study of these tangible documents that lie well outside the traditional domain of African American source materials is indicative of the widening research strategies employed by dance historians.

Although videotape and film allow viewers to see the silhouettes achieved by dancers in the past, they are unable to con-

tain the expressive essence of performance. Still, films provide glimpses of dance practice and individual performances long gone. Archivist Ernest Smith contributed a "Selected List of Films and Kinescopes" to the first two editions of the Stearnses' *Jazz Dance*. That detailed listing included important sources, from Hollywood footage of the late-nineteenth century through 1966.⁵⁴ Two other key documentaries of African American dance styles are Mura Dehn's six-hour opus *The Spirit Moves: Jazz Dance from the Turn of the Century 'till 1950* and *Dance Black America*.⁵⁵

Unlike literature, painting, or music, whose texts are not limited to the moment of performance, dance studies must rely heavily on the memories of creators and practitioners to re-create the dance. Interviews and oral histories shed important light on the creative impulse and can prove more important to the subject than research gathered from secondary sources such as performance reviews. For example, African American dancers and choreographers were particularly forthcoming about their work at the crucial juncture preceding the emergence of "black dance," as is clear from choreographer Donald McKayle's 1966 essay "The Negro Dances in Our Time," the spring 1967 *Dance Scope* devoted to "Negro Dance," and the 1968 *Dance Magazine* feature, "Three Leading Negro Artists and How They Feel about Dance in the Community: Eleo Pomare, Pearl Primus and Arthur Mitchell."⁵⁶ Read in chronological order, these pieces outline a shift in attitude: from the multiracial, integrationist model of African American presence in American dance favored by postwar artists like McKayle, to the transitional moment that identified white aesthetic domination of concert dance practice (represented in the *Dance Scope* collection by Joan and Tom Hartshorne's "Jolly Black Minstrels Need Not Apply: A Report from Karamu"), to the need for a "black dance" mode that satisfied African American audiences, a position espoused by Pomare, Primus, and Mitchell.

In addition to statements by the artists themselves, the ephemera generated by conferences, performances, and festivals can be useful in recapturing and contextualizing the past. Besides articles that appeared occasionally in mainstream dance publica-

Booty Control

Thomas F. DeFrantz

Two years ago choreographer Jawolle Willa Jo Zollar stood in front of a crowded panel titled "How Black Dance Is Perceived" at the 8th Annual Conference of the International Association of Blacks in Dance. She wanted to speak to the power of the butt. "Most young women I've talked to," she said, "have been through some very strong, traumatic, sexual abuse. I think there comes a way that you want to reclaim your sensual being through the dance. In Nigeria, shaking the butt is raised to a powerful level of artistry. We have to work with that energy here, and raise it to a higher level so that we can begin a healing cultural momentum."

Later that year Zollar premiered two versions of a dance that explored this theme: for Philadanco, she made *The Walkin', Talkin', Signifying Blues Hips, Lowdown, Throwdown*; for her own company, the New York-based Urban Bush Women, she premiered *Batty Moves*. (In a program note, the choreographer reminds us that "batty" refers to the buttocks in Jamaica. It is also a derogatory term for gay men, but Zollar didn't share this information with her audiences.) Each version cast Zollar's gauntlet onto the stage, exploring in dance terms the momentum of the booty as satire, da butt as a treatise for gender education, da backside as initiator of movement, as a source of heat, as fun, as a focal point of conversation and desire, and as a celebration; in other words, *the derriere* as a cultural aesthetic.

Three simultaneous solos open the Bush Women's version of the dance like a careful conversation a woman is having with herself. "Now where did I put my left cheek? Oh here it is, connected to my thigh and belly." The women allow their cheeks to slope toward the corners of the space; to support precarious balances on one leg; to bat against the air in syncopated skirmish with a sudden percussion burst. Each woman works it out in her own good time, sometimes circling her torso and breasts slowly, magnificently—as if to finally discover her anatomy in motion. Sometimes they drop to the floor and get nasty with "the butt-erfly"—a dirty dance done at parties when the good girls have all gone to bed. A song breaks in—"Big Mama Coming Down"—a signifying rhyme that promises much body, much attitude, and no regrets. These sisters will have their bodies, all of their bodies, and it will please them.

"Booty Control," an attempt at dance criticism that acknowledges African American cultural underpinnings in the choreography of Jawolle Willa Jo Zollar, read at "New Critical Voices," sponsored by the Dance Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, February 1997

In a second section, four women stir so slowly that you can feel the heat pulsing down from the hot Caribbean sun. They cross the stage in a hurry for no one, brimming with contempt for any notion quicker than a nod. Sometimes the quartet falls into step, moving through a brief unison passage phrased with the cleansing fullness of a complete exhalation. Mostly, they take their cp time—that's "colored people" time—working a turn with one leg held in attitude position to demonstrate how the gluteus maximus runs even that show.

Other sections feel like extended snapping contests. "Your butt's so big that when you bent over the roaches thought it was an eclipse" the seven women seem to say to us, dancing in a line stretched across the stage, backfields prophetically in motion before our gaze. Responding to a leader's calls, the women break the beat, shout, leap and play, shifting rhythmic modes in familiar blocks of eight-counts each. It's all big fun, like a sorority initiation where the women share party dances and test out very necessary steps such as the "four corners," "chillin'," and the eponymous "attitude walk." They call each other out as they move, and their banter takes our attention away from their bodies; it helps normalize the presence of the backside, 24-7. By the time the women answer a call to "go for what you know"—we begin to see how the bottom is shaping specific theatrical dance movement, how it informs pirouettes and battements as much as shimmies, leaps, and rolls across the floor.

Last month I witnessed the dance as performed by Philadanco and the Urban Bush Women within a single week, and the differences were instructive. Where the Bush Women were hard and precise in the line dances, the 'Danco dancers asserted their individuality, filling the actions with the loopy logic of giddy adolescent play. Where the Bush Women fed controlled energy into the breakout sections, imbuing motion with careful fury, the 'Danco women treated the pure dance sections as fun release, as an animated conversation. The women of Philadanco, I thought, had a better time with the dance.

This onstage moment to exhale is, I think, part of what Zollar meant when she prescribed a rump-shaking cure. She means to heal the dancers and the dance by reminding us how our bodies are profound not just in the metaphors they inspire, but in the memories they contain. The end of Philadanco's *Walkin' Talkin' Blues* says it best: the soloist who began the dance works out in the center of the stage as we hear recorded singing. She moves her bottom as she did before; but now we see the motion more clearly. We see context for these movements, provided by her sisters who encircle her, witnessing her successes, teasing her missteps, cajoling her to strength. We understand these to be dances of presence and desire; movements that celebrate the power of the individual and challenge the realm of the social. They are movements of the bottom that inspire controversy and healing at the top.



Desiree Piña of Philadanco in Jawolle Willa Jo Zollar's *The Walkin', Talkin', Signifying Blues Hips, Lowdown, Throwdown* (Reproduced with permission of the Philadelphia Dance Company)

tions, small books originally produced to accompany festival programming may also be useful. Of these, *The Black Tradition in American Modern Dance* (1988), *Black Choreographers Moving: A National Dialogue* (1991), and *African American Genius in Modern Dance* (1993) meld interview with critical analyses of concert work and their underlying conceptual methodologies.⁵⁷ In this

volume Veta Goler's essay takes this approach. Goler uses the idea of a "blues aesthetic" as a prism through which to explore the work of choreographer Dianne McIntyre.

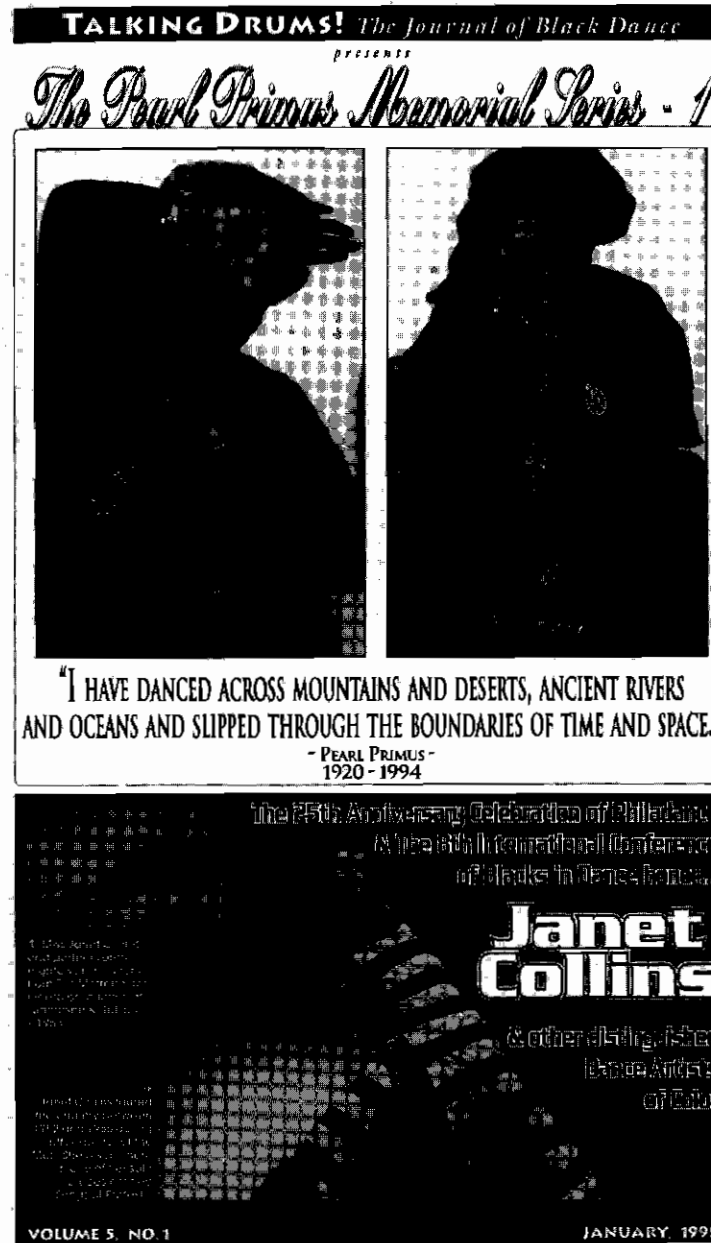
WHERE WE DANCED

Clearly, a diverse body of scholarship reflecting the diverse body of African American artistry has emerged in the last decades of the twentieth century. This volume hopes to complicate the scholarly examination of African American dance: document that a vibrant literature is in the process of formation, while advancing the basic idea that dance, like its research, is something that black people *do*. As we recover and interpret details of these processes across historical eras and geographies, we pay homage to an ancestral legacy of direct participation in the arts, to the life-affirming choreographies that have sustained and nurtured African American corporeality.

For dancers and choreographers the most fruitful sites of discussion have been dance festivals. In a tradition begun even before the nineteenth-century "Congo Square" gatherings of New Orleans, African Americans convened frequently to celebrate and share movements, compete in dance challenges, and consecrate a common artistic heritage of dance.⁵⁸ In concert dance Edna Guy and Hemsley Winfield began a tradition of shared programming by African-diaspora artists when they organized the "First Negro Dance Recital in America" in April 1931; Guy extended this gesture in 1937 as organizer of the "Negro Dance Evening" with Alison Burroughs at the Ninety-second Street YM-YWHA.⁵⁹ Later important conventions of African-descent artists, each of which merit scholarly exposition, include the 1973 Congress on Black Dance at Indiana University, organized by the Modern Organization for Dance Evolvement and the Association of Black Choreographers; DanceAfrica, the annual festival of companies based in traditional and neo-African idioms founded by Chuck Davis in 1977; Dance Black America, presented by the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1983; Black Choreographers Moving toward the Twenty-first Century, conceived and organized by Halifu Osumare in 1989; and the Sixth Biennale de la Danse, "Mama Africa," which took place in Lyon, France, in 1994.

Currently, the largest gathering of African Americans involved in professional dance occurs at the annual conference of the International Association of Blacks in Dance (IABD). Spearheaded by Joan Myers Brown, artistic director of the Philadelphia Dance Company (Philadanco), the IABD was founded as a clearing-house organization where artistic directors of regional companies presenting modern dance and ballet in the African American grain could network. IABD conferences began in 1988 to showcase Philadanco and the companies of founding artistic directors Anne Williams (Dallas Black Dance Theatre), the late Jeraldyn Blunden (Dayton Contemporary Dance Company), Cleo Parker Robinson (Denver's Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble), and Lula Washington (Los Angeles Contemporary Dance Theatre). For these companies and their close affiliates the IABD fulfilled the promise of resource-sharing proposed at the First National Congress on Blacks in Dance held at Indiana University in 1973.⁶⁰

More than this, IABD events function like family reunions. The conferences offer dance classes, scholarly panels, skill-building workshops for company directors, an annual awards dinner honoring individual contributions to the field, and a range of performance showcases.⁶¹ Internationally recognized companies share the stage with local aspirants, and young dancers are introduced to elders in the dance community.⁶² The idioms represented in performance have ranged from the African-inflected pointwork of Atlanta's Ballethnic to African-inspired work performed by a host of companies, including Chicago's Muntu Dance Theater, as well as jazz dance soloists, modern dance groups, and experimental ensembles forging links between African and modern dance techniques. At these events the complex history of African American dance comes into contemporary focus, dramatizing issues of "black dance," cultural retention, personal style, dance technique, and spirituality. Like the chapters in this volume, the artists, critics, and scholars who attend IABD events attest to the fact of black people dancing many drums while drawing from the abundant wellspring of African diaspora culture.



Cover, *Talking Drums! The Journal of Black Dance* 5, no. 1 (January 1995)

NOTES

I extend special thanks to Susan Manning, Carol Martin, and especially Lynn Garafola who commented on previous versions of this chapter.

1. The anthology *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) includes several essays that demonstrate how "race" is a literary and political construction.
2. Thomas F. DeFrantz, "To Make Black Bodies Strange: Social Critique in Concert Dance of the Black Arts Movement," in *A Sourcebook on African American Performance: Plays, People, Movements*, ed. Annemarie Bean (New York: Routledge, 1999), 83–93.
3. Critic Walter Terry, who wrote at regular intervals about "Negro Dance" in his *New York Herald Tribune* column, titled a section of his collected essays published in 1971, "The Black Dance." Walter Terry, *The Dance in America*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 156–64.
4. Marcia B. Siegel, "Black Dance: A New Separatism," in *At the Vanishing Point* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1972), 137.
5. Richard J. Powell, *Black Art and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1997), 121.
6. I thank Vladimir Stefanovic, footage manager for WGBH, for his help in discovering information about this series.
7. Certain movements in this video sequence seem to be inspired by Donald McKayle's 1959 work *Rainbow 'round My Shoulder*, a concert dance that details oppressive life on a Southern chain gang.
8. Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater program notes. The stage version of the work premiered at the Edinburgh Festival, 26 August 1968.
9. See Jennifer Dunning, "The Life and Times of an American Classic," *New York Times*, 3 December 1995, sec. 2, 1 for an account of the genesis and popularity of *Revelations*.
10. Anna Kisselgoff, "Ailey: Dancing the Dream," *New York Times*, 4 December 1988, 1.
11. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. speech, 15 June 1963, at civil rights demonstration, Washington, D.C.
12. For example, in 1967 Ailey was arrested and held overnight in New York on suspicion of having murdered four policemen in Cincinnati. The police were looking for a black male with a mustache and beard; Ailey, like a million other black men, fit the description. See Ellen Cohn, "Alvin Ailey, Arsonist," *New York Times*, 29 April 1973, 33.
13. The dozens of choreographers and musicians affiliated with the black dance movement included Nanette Bearden, Chuck Davis, Syvilla Fort, Arthur Hall, Bob Johnson, Carole Johnson, Louis Johnson, Elma Lewis, Mike Malone, Joan Miller, Clyde Morgan, Walter Nicks, Eleo Pomare, Ronald Pratt, Rod Rodgers, Raymond Sawyer, and hosts of African dance companies across the country.
14. Carole Johnson led the published effort to define "black dance" in the short-lived journal *The Feet*. Carole Johnson, "What Is Black Dance?" *The Feet*

(July 1971): 2. Also, see DeFrantz, "To Make Black Bodies Strange: Social Critique in Concert Dance of the Black Arts Movement."

15. Of course, many other works and performances enlivened the era. These works number among those deemed successful by contemporary critics.

16. Marshall Stearns and Jean Stearns, *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1979; 2d ed., New York: Da Capo Press, 1994).

17. Lynne Fauley Emery, *Black Dance in the United States from 1619 to 1970* (Palo Alto, Calif.: National Press Books, 1972; 2d ed., Pennington, N.J.: Princeton Book Company, 1988).

18. Emery, *Black Dance in the United States*, ix.

19. A second edition, published in 1988 by Princeton Book Company, featured an ill-advised additional chapter, "Popular Dance in the Twentieth Century," by Brenda Dixon-Stowell. Burdened by an excess of source material and theoretical approaches, the addition underscored the impossibility of chronicling centuries of dance practice in a single volume.

20. The Stearnses define their use of vernacular to be "in the sense of native and homegrown" (*Jazz Dance* [1994], xvi); Jacqui Malone specifies her intention that the term "vernacular" "refers to dance performed to the rhythms of African American music: dance that makes those rhythms visible" (*Steppin' on the Blues: The Visible Rhythms of African American Dance* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996], 2).

21. Stearns and Stearns, *Jazz Dance* (1994), 361.

22. Robert F. Thompson, "Dance and Culture, an Aesthetic of the Cool," *African Forum* 2 (fall 1966): 88.

23. After defining common physical stances and approaches to movement in African dance forms she studied, Cayou extends Thompson's list to include "functionalism—becoming what you dance—the art of real life." Dolores Kirton Cayou, *Modern Jazz Dance* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1971), 8.

24. See DeFrantz, "To Make Black Bodies Strange: Social Critique in Concert Dance of the Black Arts Movement."

25. The articulation of "Africanisms" offers a conceptual framework for the discussion of performative commonalities between West African cultures and Africans in diaspora. See *Africanisms in American Culture*, ed. Joseph Holloway (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) for essays that describe artistic traditions shared by Africans and Africans in diaspora; and Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996) for a discussion of how Africanist art-making processes have been adopted by Europeans, Asians, and white Americans.

26. Prominent among cultural critics working with articulations of African diaspora culture are Paul Gilroy (*Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* [London: Serpent's Tail, 1993]); Stuart Hall (*Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen [London: Routledge, 1996]); and Kobena Mercer (*Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* [New York: Routledge, 1994]).

27. See Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: First Vintage Books Edition, 1983) for a further explication of Africanist aesthetic commonalities in diaspora.

28. The approach allows us to see affinities in, for example, music video dance performed by diverse groups of dancers, as well as in concert dances performed on a proscenium stage. For example, white choreographers, including Twyla Tharp and George Balanchine, have been clearly and profoundly influenced by the Africanisms outlined above. See Sally Baner, "Balanchine and Black Dance," in *Choreography and Dance* 3, part 3 (Reading, England: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1993), 59–77; and Dixon Gottschild, "Stripping the Emperor: George Balanchine and the Americanization of Ballet" in *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996).

29. Thorpe's poor offering features ridiculous statements throughout, such as this from the introduction: "Whereas the dances of the white races are so often concerned with conveying grace, dignity, pride or elegance. . . . The beauty of black dance lies in its total lack of inhibition." Edward Thorpe, *Black Dance* (Woodstock, N.Y.: The Overlook Press, 1990), 13. Adamczyk's helpful, but extremely hard-to-find reference book finally succumbs to the effort to be all-inclusive. Alice J. Adamczyk, *Black Dance: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland Press, 1989). Other volumes in this vein include the young adult book by James Haskins, *Black Dance in America: A History through Its People* (New York: Thomas Y. Cowell Junior Books, 1990) that recounts events in the lives of certain artists.

30. Richard A. Long, *The Black Tradition in American Dance* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1989).

31. See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993) for an explication of contemporary usage of "black" by cultural theorists.

32. Frantz Fanon, writing of Negro consciousness, explains: "black consciousness is immanent in its own eyes. I am not a potentiality of something, I am wholly what I am. I do not have to look for the universal. . . . My Negro consciousness does not hold itself out as a lack. It is." *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 135 (original emphasis).

33. John O. Perpener III, "African American Dance and Sociological Positivism during the 1930s," *Studies in Dance History* 5, no. 1 (spring 1994): 23–30; and Malone, *Steppin' on the Blues*. As stated in the preface, Perpener organized the 1996 CORD conference, "African American Dance: Researching a Complex History," which provided the impetus for this volume.

34. Arthur Todd, "The Negro Folk Dance in America," *Dance Magazine* (January 1950): 14–15, 41; Arthur Todd, "Negro American Theatre Dance," *Dance Magazine* (November 1950): 20–21, 33–34; Arthur Todd, "American Negro Dance: A National Treasure," *Ballet Annual* 16 (May 1961): 92–103; Joe Nash, "Dancing Many Drums," *National Scene Magazine Supplement* 4, no. 8 (September–October 1976): 2–3, 8–11.

35. Lois Balcom, "What Chance Has the Negro Dancer?" *Dance Observer* (November 1944): 110–11; Lois Balcom, "The Negro Dances Himself," *Dance*

Observer (December 1944): 122–24. A steady stream of position pieces outlining the African American presence in classical ballet stretch from the 1930s to the late 1990s, including Arnold Lionel Haskell, "Further Studies in Ballet: Negro Dancing," *Dancing Times* (London) (January 1930): 455–57; "Negroes in Ballet," no author, *Dance and Dancers* (October 1957): 9; Harriet Jackson, "American Dancer, Negro," *Dance Magazine* (September 1966): 35–42; Don McDonagh, "Negroes in Ballet," *New Republic* 159 (November 1968): 41–44; Clive Barnes, "Barnes on . . . the Position of the Black Classic Dancer in American Ballet," *Ballet News* 3, no. 9 (March 1982): 46; DeFrantz, "The Black Body in Question" *Village Voice*, 23 April 1996, 29–32.

36. Linda Small, "Black Dancer/Black Traveler," *Dance Magazine* (October 1979): 78–81; Julinda Lewis Williams, "Black Dance: A Diverse Unity," *Dance Scope* 14, no. 2 (1980): 54–63; Zita Allen, "The Great American 'Black Dance' Mystery," *Freedomsways* 20, no. 4 (1980): 283–91.

37. John O. Perpener III's excellent Ph.D. dissertation, that details the lives and careers of several key figures in concert dance history, including Hemsley Winfield, Edna Guy, Raymond Sawyer, Ollie Burgoyne, Charles Williams, and Asadata Dafora, belies this trend by grouping a series of sustained biographical essays around a theme of historical era. John O. Perpener III, "The Seminal Years of Black Concert Dance" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1992).

38. Dixon Gottschild's article "Between Two Eras: 'Norton and Margot' in the Afro-American Entertainment World" originally appeared in *Dance Research Journal* 15, no. 2 (spring 1983): 11–20, as written by Brenda Dixon-Stowell.

39. Valis Hill's article originally appeared in *Dance Research Journal* 26, no. 2 (fall 1994): 1–10.

40. See Naima Prevots, *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1998) for further details of the Eisenhower administration and its sponsorship of dance during this era.

41. For an extended treatment of African Americans in ballet, see Thomas DeFrantz, "Ballet," in *Encyclopedia of African American Culture and History* (New York: Macmillan Library Reference, 1995). See also Thomas DeFrantz, "Ballet in Black: Louis Johnson and African American Humor," in *New Writings in Dance*, ed. Anne Flynn and Lisa Doolittle (Banff, Alberta, Canada: Banff Centre Press, 2001), 178–95.

42. Zita Allen, "Blacks in Ballet," *Dance Magazine* (July 1976): 65–70.

43. Kariamu Welsh Asante, "Commonalities in African Dance: An Aesthetic Foundation," in *African Culture: The Rhythms of Unity*, ed. Molefi Kete Asante and Kariamu Welsh Asante (Philadelphia: Greenwood Press, 1985; reprint ed. Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1990), 71–82; Katrina Hazzard-Gordon, *Jookin': The Rise of Social Dance Formations in African American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990); Jacqui Malone, *Steppin' on the Blues*; Dixon Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence*.

44. Stuckey's essay originally appeared in *Choreographing History*, ed. Susan Foster (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 54–66.

45. Philosopher Gerald Myers, cultural historian C. Eric Lincoln, and dance archivist Joe Nash participated in this series of symposia.

46. See especially Marian Hannah Winter, "Juba and American Minstrelsy"

(1947), reprint in *Inside the Minstrel Mask*, ed. Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch, Brooks McNamara (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1996); and David Krasner, *Resistance, Parody, and Double Consciousness in African American Theatre, 1895-1910* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997) for overviews of this area.

47. Charles Dickens offers an early example of this tendency in his often-quoted description of Master Juba. Charles Dickens, *American Notes* [1842], introduction by Christopher Lasch (Glouster, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1968), 110-12.

48. Ann Cooper Albright, *Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1997); Sally Banes, "Balanchine and Black Dance," in *Choreography and Dance* 3, part 3 (Reading, England: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1993), 59-77; Ramsay Burt, *Alien Bodies: Representations of Modernity, "Race," and Nation in Early Modern Dance* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Susan Manning, "Black Voices, White Bodies: The Performance of Race and Gender in How Long Brethren," *American Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (March 1998): 24-46.

49. Of African American concert dance artists, only Alvin Ailey, Katherine Dunham, Judith Jamison, and Bill T. Jones have received sustained biographical inquiry. To my knowledge, Beverly Anne Hillsman Barber's unpublished Ph.D. dissertation is the sole extant monograph devoted to Primus. Beverly Anne Hillsman Barber, "Pearl Primus, in Search of Her Roots: 1943-1970" (Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1984).

50. This listing, of course, is in no way exhaustive.

51. See fig. on pp. 24-25 ("Booty Control") for an attempt at criticism that acknowledges cultural underpinnings of work by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and the Urban Bush Women.

52. Allen, "The Great American 'Black Dance' Mystery," 287.

53. Banes and Szwed's article originally appeared in *Performance Matters*, no. 27 (winter 1995-96): 59-79.

54. Stearns and Stearns, *Jazz Dance* (1994), 395-419. The listing includes brief annotations.

55. Mura Dehn, *The Spirit Moves*, produced in New York; directed, edited, and narrated by Mura Dehn; camera by Herbert Matter (1950). *Dance Black America*, filmed in performance by Chris Hegedus and D. A. Pennebaker at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (21-24 April 1983); produced by the State University of New York and Pennebaker Associates. Several African American companies and artists have created film records of their work or been the subject of documentaries, including the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, the Dance Theatre of Harlem, Ulysses Dove, the Katherine Dunham Dancers and Drummers, Garth Fagan Dance, and Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company. The American Dance Festival has produced *Free to Dance*, a three-part documentary of African Americans in concert dance, scheduled for completion in 2001. The films are available commercially and may be viewed at the Dance Collection, the New York Public Library of the Performing Arts.

56. Donald McKayle, "The Negro Dances in Our Time," in *The Dance Has Many Faces*, ed. Walter Sorell, 2d ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 187-92; Ric Estrada, "3 Leading Negro Artists and How They Feel

about Dance in the Community: Eleo Pomare, Pearl Primus and Arthur Mitchell," *Dance Magazine* (November 1968): 45. The *Dance Scope* publication also features interviews with and articles from Rod Rodgers, Gus Solomons Jr., Clyde Morgan, William Moore, and Ellis Haizlip (*Dance Scope* [spring 1967]).

57. Gerald E. Myers, ed., *The Black Tradition in American Modern Dance* (Durham, N.C.: American Dance Festival, 1988); Julinda Lewis-Ferguson, ed., and Halifu Osumare, comp., *Black Choreographers Moving: A National Dialogue* (Berkeley: Expansion Arts Services, 1991); *African American Genius in Modern Dance* (Durham, N.C.: American Dance Festival 1993).

58. For an overview of the historical sites of dance festivals, see Emery, *Black Dance in the United States*; and Roger D. Abrahams, *Singing the Master: The Emergence of African American Culture in the Plantation South* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992).

59. See Perpener, "The Seminal Years of Black Concert Dance."

60. The First National Congress on Blacks in Dance was held 26 June-1 July 1973 at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

61. For example, at the 1997 conference, held in Dallas, Texas, and hosted by Dallas Black Dance Theatre, master classes were taught by Chuck Davis and Ronald K. Brown; Donald McKayle offered a keynote speech about the role of education in a professional dancer's life; and the artistic directors of founding regional companies honored their tireless associate directors with awards: Darryl B. Sneed of Dallas Black Dance Theatre, Kim Y. Bears of Philadanco, Kevin Ward of Dayton Contemporary Dance Company, Tamika Washington of Lula Washington Dance Theater (formerly Los Angeles Contemporary Dance Theater), and Marceline Freeman of Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble. Panels included "How Are National Issues of Education, Dance Licensing and Training Impacting the History and Legacy of Black Dance and Dancers?" where moderator Walter Nicks wondered that esteemed black dance teachers without advanced degrees are too often passed over by colleges hiring faculty; "Alternative Careers in Dance," in which former Ailey company dancers Sarita Allen and Christopher Huggins explored possibilities such as criticism, coaching, and producing dance events for dancers making the transition from performing; and "Black Dance, Blacks in Dance, Dance Black: What Does It All Mean?" where choreographer Kevin Jeff reflected on the empowering spiritual connections that artists make to connect people to their communities. Jeff's comment deserves quotation: "Black dance facilitates growth, healing, and the economy of the people—that's what makes it relevant. We talk about what art can do from an aesthetic level, but it's the spiritual level which has made a difference in my life."

62. Closely linked to the formation of the IABD, the periodical *Talking Drums!: The Journal of Black Dance* (published by the Los Angeles-based International Center for Dance Orthopaedics and Dance Therapy) has served as the program for IABD conferences.