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Introduction

Black Moves: New Research in Black Dance Studies

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We dance to demonstrate our protest to the assumption of a unified subject.

Black Moves that emerge under the umbrella paradigm of an African Diaspora become dance that resists category and restores faith. We call this Black Dance to underscore its commonalities and diversity: *common*, in terms of the everyday ubiquity of many forms of physical expression among Black people and in circumstances rendered Black by social circumstance and experience. *Diverse*, in the range of activity that extends multidirectionally toward museums, church sanctuaries, street festivals, basketball courts, college classrooms, dance studios, and literary archives. We claim Black Moves as we claim Black Lives: urgent, meaning-filled, seemingly impossible; conflicted and sanctified; queer, immigrant, and embodied processes of engaged intellect.

In editing this volume, we confirm the vibrant presence of emerging research paradigms for Black Dance Studies: methods and approaches that speak to twenty-first-century manifestations of embodied, kinetic Black knowledge. We dance; we believe in dance; and we wonder at its effects and affects. We seek to open space for unusual and particular studies of how Black dance is foundational—and nurturing—to Black corporealities and Black life.

Black Dance Studies sits at the intersection of dance and black studies—two disciplines that demand we contend with difficult archives, ones that we often must gather and produce as we dance and as we write. Black moves are everywhere, all the time; and yet the potent strategies that dance offers us via bodies in motion often goes unnoticed or brushed off as an object of study. And yet: dance illuminates something particular about Blackness, and Blackness illuminates something distinctive about dance. The compelling avenues of research exhibited in this volume extend—in many directions—the capacities of Black Studies to accommodate nuanced, careful discussions of dance as a site and symptom of historical, contemporary, and future modes of black life.

These seven original offerings reflect the work of researchers in various career positions and geographic sites of study. Tara Aisha Willis zooms in on a repetitive movement that appears in several of choreographer David Thomson's performances to produce a theoretical rendering of the visual field of contemporary dance in relationship to Blackness. Positioning her analyses on a potent concept of choreographic ambiguity, Willis exposes how Thomson's body in contradiction works within his audience's eyes and holds historical terms of dance in complex balance. Takiyah Nur Amin wonders at architectures of knowledge that produce an "outside" to college dance pedagogies that must be occupied by African diaspora dance and its discontents. Examining the curricular models of several undergraduate liberal arts dance programs, Amin suggests the wealth of opportunity offered by placing traditional and contemporary African diaspora dance forms

at the center of study. Rachel Carrico analyzes racialized discourses of the “natural” that echo through both colonialist readings of black dances (like second-lining in New Orleans) and the effects of “natural” disasters (like the havoc wrought by Hurricane Katrina). Pointing to scenes of Black social dance as ritual spaces of knowledge transmission that upend such discourses, Carrico focuses on the “do-watcha-wanna” attitude expressed by many second-line dancers.

The translocations and reiterations of such dances across social contexts make for a complicated archive: Black social dance arrives as excessive to and outside of language. But this excessiveness sometimes paradoxically means that dance must arrive *primarily* as text, rising out of archives mined for the excesses of movement and performance they illuminate, if only partially. Tayana L. Hardin sees such potency in Katherine Dunham’s archival materials, and brings literary strategies to bear on Dunham’s notes for her anti-lynching ballet *Southland*. The image and material presence of the lynching victim’s body in the onstage narrative might seem to fix Black dance in a “never-ending, traumatic loop of despair and tragedy,” but Hardin ultimately asserts that the archival quality of Black dance reminds us of the “many ways the Black dancing body lends itself to the ongoing story of what remains.”

P. Kimberleigh Jordan examines the embodied acts of resistance contained by the performance of spirituals in historical and contemporary contexts. Jordan connects a consideration of the ring shout, the oldest African American mode of “running sound through moving bodies,” to twenty-first

century acts of social protest engaged by Black and brown bodies, reading both congregational and concert performances of spirituals through the powerful lens of embodiment. Dasha Chapman explores the diasporic re-membering of Haitian space materialized through Jean Appolon’s dance classes in the United States. Writing to the variegations of class and culture contained in embodiments of Vodou aesthetics, Chapman confirms the complex praxes of liberation that Appolon’s students engage as they “take Haitian worldviews into their bodies.” Thomas F. DeFrantz finds the queer potentiality in the physical manipulations and moves of Black social dance practices like bone-breaking. He rethinks both normative renderings of gender performance and performance studies rhetorics of “queer failure.”

The authors included here bring their myriad insights into embodied practices to bear on a range of dance materials and sites of emergence for Black Moves: theatrical dance, social dance, ritual and community-building events, literary archives, education, and spiritual exegeses. Taken as a whole, we hope that this special issue of *The Black Scholar* demonstrates an expansive range of excellence in dance studies; a range of presentations that will inspire further research within and through this urgent area of inquiry.

This special issue draws on presentations from the Collegium for African Diaspora Dance conference “Dancing the African Diaspora: Theories of Black Performance” held February 7–9, 2014 on the campus of Duke University. Sponsored by SLIPPAGE: Performance | Technology | Culture, directed by Thomas F. DeFrantz; the Duke Department

of African and African American Studies; the Humanities Writ Large project overseen by the Dean of the Humanities at Duke; and the Duke Department of Dance, the event brought together more than seventy presenters and 150 attendees. Keynote presentations by Ana “Rokafella” Garcia, Kariamu Welsh, and Jawolle Willa Jo Zollar enlivened the convergence of research papers, workshops, film screenings, performances, and roundtables (see <http://www.cadd-online.org>). The editors

extend special thanks to the organizers of that event, especially Shireen Dickson and the founding directors of the CADD, Takiyah Nur Amin, Stafford C. Berry, Jr., Thomas F. DeFrantz, Jasmine Johnson, Raquel Monroe, C. Kemal Nance, Carl Paris, John O. Perpener III, Makeda Thomas, Andrea E. Woods Valdés, and Ava LaVonne Vinesett for their labor to incite bold conference and research paradigms concerned with Black Moves.