Cross-Cultural Perspectives on the Creation of American Dance

1619 – 1950

By Alex Moore

Project Advisor: Dyane Harvey

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[We] need to understand that African slaves, through largely self-generative activity, molded their new environment at least as much as they were molded by it. …African Americans are descendants of a people who were second to none in laying the foundations of the economic and cultural life of the nation.

…Therefore, …honest American history is inextricably tied to African American history, and…neither can be complete without a full consideration of the other.

--Sterling Stuckey

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Cross-Cultural Perspectives on the Creation of American Dance

When people leave the society into which they were born (whether by choice or by force), they bring as much of their culture as they are able with them. Culture serves as an extension of identity. Dance is one of the cultural elements easiest to bring along; it is one of the most mobile elements of culture, tucked away in the muscle memory of our bodies.

> When people from different backgrounds find themselves living side by side in a new setting, the result is often a fusion of dance forms, as people borrow from one another and transform what they borrow to reflect new social realities. Nowhere has this process been as dramatic in its consequences as in North and South America and the Caribbean, where European and African influences combined to create new dance forms of great power and lasting import. (Jonas 164)

In order to gain a global perspective on dance in the United States, one must recognize the many immigrants to the U.S. and the cultures that they brought, particularly those from West Africa and from Europe. Europeans brought court dances such as the Waltz as well as folk dances such as Irish clogging.[1] These dances mixed with dances brought by Africans[2] to create uniquely American styles.

> Thus, as the dance evolved, the Afro-American elements became more formal and diluted, the British-European elements more fluid and rhythmic, but the over-all trend was one way—Afro-American dance exerted an increasingly strong influence on the dance as a whole. This trend reverses the usual pattern described by anthropologists in which the culture of an early majority swallows up the cultures of later minorities. Coming as it did from people who arrive late in the United States, the Afro-American vernacular demonstrated a rare vitality. (Stearns 24)

It is normal for the culture of the oppressor to be taken up by the oppressed; it is much less common that the culture of the oppressed profoundly influences that of the oppressor. That African dance has played such a historically important role in American life and society is a testament to the importance that dance played in African social life, to its resiliency, and to its ability to change with the pressures of new surroundings. A similar

[1] See Appendix A for basic principles of the European dance aesthetic.
[2] See Appendix B for basic principles of the African dance aesthetic.

study could begin with European dance brought to the New World, follow it through the generations to understand a unique American story, watch it merge slowly with African American forms, and conclude, as I will, with Swing dances. However, this study will begin with the African trajectory in order to reach the same end. In choosing this trajectory, I hope to raise awareness of and give respect to the inordinately large influence that African and African American culture has had in the creation of American dance and culture; to understand through a landscape of dance the difficult and many struggles of African American history; and to demonstrate how dance can be used to illuminate other fields that study the social, political and cultural evolution that took place in the Americas.

That the African culture of dance [didn't disappear but] persisted against the oppressive surroundings in the United States is less surprising when we take a deeper look at African dances' cultural role. In describing African dances of the people, it is important not to let "traditional" be confused with anything that is static; rather African dances' great culture of improvisation acts as a catalyst for change, creating a constantly flowing and changing art form. Also, unlike Europeans who historically saw a distinct separation between work and the creation of art,

> The African attitude toward work could scarcely have been more different: Africans and their descendants in America went on creating while working as before. With such a heritage of fashioning art while working, of seeing no conflict between the two, artistic expression was largely regarded by slaves, as it had been by their ancestors, as part of the life process, like work itself. Small wonder that blacks—except for Native Americans the most oppressed people in American history and preeminently a working-class people—have remained at the forefront of artistic creativity in modern world history. (Stuckey 1)

A rich variety of African dance forms merged on the plantation; reacted to social realities in the new environment; and mixed with European dance forms to eventually create not only uniquely African American dance forms, but uniquely *American* dance forms. In this thesis, I will compare several dances and assess their creation and progression chronologically as times and influences changed, analyzing the influences that came together to affect their change. I will do this by comparing movement quality, music, setting, participants and contemporary society. Throughout, this thesis will show how the

principles of the African aesthetic either became more or less pronounced as such influences changed, how certain principles interestingly re-emerge generations later, and how principles of the European aesthetic also had lasting influence.

The three principle dance categories that I will explore in chronological order are early plantation dances, early partner dances, and Swing dances. While my analysis will unfortunately only brush upon a small fraction of the rich history through which African American and American dance passed, the dances that I chose can be used to trace African culture through the landscape of the African American experience from the plantation to emancipation, and finally toward integration. I have included four appendixes with more in depth descriptions of certain dance forms, terminology, and video examples. This will hopefully prove a useful aid to the reader while not cluttering the content of this thesis. The dates that I present to frame each period and each dance are not to be seen as demarcating each from the others into successive, definitive categories. Rather, they should be understood to be fluid, one often bleeding into and often overlapping with another.

While drafting this thesis and researching dozens of texts, I found numerous different terms in use to describe people. As this can be a sensitive subject and terms flow in and out of popular usage and political correctness with time and location, I would like to address the terminology that I will use in the discourse of this thesis. Some of the numerous terms I encountered in my research were: African, African American, Black, Negro, Colored, Slave, Enslaved African; White, European or Euro- American, slave owner, and plantation owner, among others. When referring to pre-Civil War America, I will use the term "Enslaved Africans" rather than "Slaves", defining those sold into slavery by who they are as Africans rather than by the role of slavery into which they were forced. I will use "plantation owner" rather than "slave owner" as to delegitimize the concept of *owning* anyone. Post-Emancipation, I will define Americans based on their heritage, using either "African American" or "European American". This is because a) other terms can or have at times had negative connotation, and b) terms such as "Black" and "White" convey that every individual presumably comes from either a homogeneous "white" background or a homogenous "black" background, ignoring not only the spectrum of difference within Africa, but also that within Europe and that which was created within the Americas. The

exception will remain within quotations, when I will maintain the terminology used by the author.

Finding the Familiar and Expressions of Resistance in Plantation Dances

"There's a narrative here. It's expressions of resistance." –Ayanda Clarke

Timeline

Versions of the Ring Shout emerged as part of plantation life very early. The first enslaved Africans who arrived in North America beginning in 1619 arrived in small numbers, and the Ring Shout took time to develop. However, because the initial arrival of Africans to plantations is integral to the development of the Ring Shout, I will consider its development to have begun in 1619. For the purposes of this timeline, I place the end of the Ring Shout with emancipation, but it is necessary to note that the Ring Shout maintained a strong presence in small circles in the South until the early 1900s. As time advanced, it became more entwined with Christian life and worship, and its consistent presence in southern African American life influenced the development of Blues and Jazz. The second plantation dance—the Cake Walk—was common on plantations by at least the early 1800s, as Africans became more conscious of the culture and ways of the European Americans that they observed at the plantation house. In the second half of the century, the Cake Walk was popularized as performance, traveling through performance and minstrel stages, Vaudeville, and even lasting to be showcased in the early 1900s on Broadway stages. Just as in the case of the Ring Shout, my focus is Cake Walk as folk dance and as response to life on the plantation, so for the purposes of this study the Cake Walk will also end with emancipation.

The Ring Shout

Africans arrived to their new lives on American plantations often relatively alone. Those organizing the slave trade made sure to separate family and community members. It was in their best interest to prevent any possibility that these newly enslaved peoples had

for organizing against enslavement, so they took extra precaution to separate Africans based on language and culture.

> Cultural sensitivities were not taken into account [and most would argue were specifically labored against] when slaves were brought to fill the need of cheap labor in the Americas. Slaves from numerous ethnic groups would likely find themselves stuck together and expected to co-exist peacefully with total disregard for their unique language, culture, or religion. Yet these Africans did have some similarities. A majority of Africans do share a high value for dance in their day-to-day life and in their religious space. Religion through dance also was able to develop because of its guise. Europeans in North America could not have expected religion to be part of dance… (DeFrantz 42)

Africans coming from otherwise completely distinct tribes and nations in Africa found the "Ring Shout" as their lingua franca. African dance is a complex art, both advanced and varied in its many forms throughout Africa, but academics have found certain commonalities that exist to most traditional African dance. The Ring Shout exemplifies many of these commonalities.[3] It was similar to an ancestral dance, known to most Africans as the Circle Dance, which was common in much of Africa[4]. The Ring Shout came to serve many functions. It created a common language for an otherwise heterogeneous people, building a community that would have otherwise been much more difficult to build. It also provided a common spiritual space for all, including those coming from very different religious beliefs.

One of the Ring Shout's most important functions was to create a common medium for communication for enslaved Africans who had been brought from African communities far and wide and who otherwise had few linguistic similarities. While these Africans were *forced* to cross physical boundaries to reach the Americas, the Ring Shout helped them cross cultural and imaginative boundaries with one another, easing the transition and creating a common bond. Similar to the Bantaba[5] in West Africa, the circular structure reinforced the spirit of community, helping to create a strong sense of oneness amid the heterogeneous group. It allowed them to include all Africans in their collective

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[3] See Appendix B.
[4] See Appendix C.
[5] See Appendix C.

understanding of being African in America, creating a group identification that extended beyond Ibo, Akan, Ashanti, Wolof or a regional classification. The heterogeneous mix of participants, deterritorialized from their villages across Africa, found that the Ring Shout provided a translocality of an Africa they all shared.

Throughout Africa, dance is a large part of religious practice, as evidenced in the Circle Dance common among these different groups of Africans. The Ring Shout, thus, also allowed participants to express their spirituality and provided a spiritual vision in their new lives of enslavement. European American plantation owners had hoped to destroy the culture and world view of their new acquisitions as an instrument of dominance; if any old belief system should be retained, then certainly the newly enslaved would be more difficult to manipulate to their own advantage. This quote by a European American is one indicator, however, that they viewed the Ring Shout in particular as a simple "frolic" and had little fear of its power as a ceremony upholding significant systems of belief:

> Tonight I have been to a "Shout" which seems to me certainly the remains of some old idol worship. The negroes sing a kind of chorus—three standing apart to lead and clap—and then all the others go shuffling round in a circle following one another with not much regularity, turning round occasionally and bending the knees, and stamping so that the whole floor swings. I never saw anything so savage. They call it a religious ceremony, but it seems more like a regular frolic to me.

Unbeknownst to him and other European Americans, African dance and spirituality are necessarily connected. Thus, retaining the Ring Shout allowed Africans to express and retain beliefs secretly but in an ironically overt form, without raising suspicion at the plantation house. The Ring Shout even survived evangelization: in communities where Christianity had a strong presence, hymns were easily integrated into the Shout. The Ring Shout was more tolerated by plantation owners than were other folk dances possibly because it seemed more distanced from what European tradition classified as "dancing". Rather than distinct steps, it employed a shuffle with legs never lifting or crossing, and rather than drums or other instruments, it employed hand clapping and leg stamping. African instruments, in most cases, had been banned before leaving the ships of the Middle Passage. This meant that the enslaved needed to find inventive ways to create music, and they easily employed their own bodies as percussive instruments, not uncommon in Africa.

> What was hidden in the Ring Shout was a desire to express spirituality, joy, and sorrow in ways that were comfortable to them. So you see a lot of African retention, percussive nature, body sounds, rhythmic complexity and polyrhythm consistent with African rhythmic construction. In an attempt to hold onto those elements—if you're thinking back to that which had already been created and looking at how it was expressed in new ways—it allowed them to express themselves. (Clarke 2010)

The Ring Shout provided a common space for the African, representing culture, community and the sacred: a complexity that the plantation owner could never understand. So even during times when it was looked upon with contempt or actively suppressed, the presence of the Ring Shout in African American Society was unchangeable. It proved to be a powerful force in the Americas, influencing dance into the twentieth century.

The Cake Walk

As time passed on Southern plantations, community and culture were created among the enslaved Africans living together. The Ring Shout continued to play a large role in daily life and continued to ease the transition as newly enslaved continuously arrived, but over time learning a common language and acclimating to the new life on the plantation also acted to fortify the sense of community. As they eased tensions and bridged community amid themselves, Enslaved Africans were still subject to the whims of the plantation owner. Some had the advantage of plantation owners who were relatively benevolent, did not overwork them, and did not encroach on the community they had built; but other plantation owners expected constant and perfect work, were liable to bouts of violence, allowed little time for recreation, and were strict about what that recreation could be. Europeans had long known the African population's proclivity toward dancing. On some plantations, masters looked upon dancing positively, encouraging it as healthy exercise. Several accounts testify that during the long Middle Passage, Africans were "danced" aboard ship to keep them healthy, prescribed both to prevent scurvy and to prevent "suicidal melancholy" (Hazzard-Gordon 7). Separate accounts claim that

plantation owners forced the enslaved to dance as exercise if there was little work to do. At other times, plantation owners would ask or force their best dancers to entertain the family at the plantation house with their singing, dancing, and general antics, creating what eventually came to be known as the "Cake Walk".

In the Cake Walk, the plantation families enjoyed what they saw as harmless, silly attempts to mimic the fine manners of Southern gentlemen. The dancers, on the other hand, enjoyed satirizing the ridiculousness of the plantation families. "Songs of illusion, dances of derision"[6] (Gittens 2010, as cited in Thompson and Gottschild) are characteristic of many African cultures. This "derision" translated onto the plantation, as enslaved Africans—trying to both satisfy the interest of the plantation owners and to satisfy their own interests—were able to subtly express their sense of injustice and frustration. The Cake Walk was an inside joke for the enslaved who performed it—lost on the plantation owners—that helped to strengthen the common bond between them in the face of oppression.

> It was generally on Sunday when there was little work…that the slaves both young and old would dress up in hand-me-down finery to do a high-kicking, prancing walk-around. They did a takeoff on the high manners of the white folks in the 'big house,' but their masters, who gathered around to watch the fun, missed the point. (Hazzard-Gordon 47)

Mimicry walks a fine line between flattery and poking fun. Satirical dances such as the Cake Walk helped to deconstruct the imposing and powerful presence of plantation owners. "Blacks could not openly criticize whites, so dance was a safer tool for self-assertion, ridicule, and criticism than song" (Hazzard-Gordon 46). Clarke describes much of the Cake Walk as parody:

> You can't say 'the master made a fool of himself and got drunk last night'…but you can make a dance about it as a parody. Where does the power lie in this scenario? The African people that were making these dances were [poking fun] intentionally toward the people that were going to pressure and treat them badly later on. In part, it was a competition of who can do best [between dancers], but it was also them expressing satire. (Clarke 2010)

[6] See Appendix C.

Just as the Ring Shout's epic memory alluded back to Circle Dances in Africa, the satire and mimicry of the Cake Walk also expanded upon African tradition. In Nigeria, the Patakato[7] mimicked the English, as frustration mounted with increased English presence during the Colonial Era. The Cake Walk emulated the European mannerisms and culture that the enslaved Africans encountered in the plantation families in the same way. After dressing up in the plantation family's discarded clothing, dancers would twirl their umbrellas, bow repeatedly to one another, walk exaggeratedly upright, and mimic European courtly elegance. As they strutted around each other, their dance contained enough Africanist elements—it was centrifugal, polyrhythmic and made reference to epic memory[8]—that the plantation owners did not fully recognize the satire.

The Cake Walk developed on southern plantations chronologically after the development of the Ring Shout. In Africa, dance and art had been often intrinsically linked with spiritual belief. On the plantation—due to religious repression, influence from European American dance as entertainment, and a new physical reality of Africans sharing space and movement but not necessarily sharing similar spiritual belief systems—over time dance evolved slowly away from spirituality and toward secular entertainment. "As the African was transformed into the African American…a distinction between sacred and secular" occurred. "Over time, a clear demarcation emerged between sacred, ceremonial dance and the secular dancing associated with festivities and parties" (Hazzard-Gordon 15). The Cake Walk did just this: it emerged as a secularized parallel to the spiritualized Ring Shout. It was primarily for entertainment, shared between enslaved Africans and plantation owners. The Cake Walk retained certain elements of the Shout, such as the counter clockwise circular pattern, but the shuffle was replaced with a gay strut and the sacred with entertainment.

While the Ring Shout was shared only within the community of enslaved Africans, the Cake Walk crossed the border between enslaved Africans and European Americans. A young enslaved girl from Beaufort, South Carolina explained that she received special

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[7] See Appendix C.
[8] See Appendix A.

benefits for being a good dancer. She was taken from plantation to plantation and entered into contests with other enslaved, often as betting events for masters. She also explained that she and the others would watch at white folks' parties,

> …Where the guests danced a minuet and then paraded in a grand march, with the ladies and gentlemen going different ways and then meeting again, arm in arm, and marching down the center together. Then we'd do it, too, but we used to mock 'em, every step. Sometimes the white folks noticed it, but they seemed to like it; I guess they thought we couldn't dance any better. (Stearns 22)

In these cases, enslaved Africans received positive reinforcement for certain elements of their dance, encouraging those elements to remain and others to perish. This also encouraged continued creativity and improvisation, as African Americans experimented with European dance elements. "The folk dances of the whites were being adopted and transformed over a long period of time" (Stearns 23), as others like this young enslaved girl improvised with new elements of the European dance traditions. Over this same period of time, the steady arrival of newly enslaved Africans acted to balance this transformation, constantly refreshing African American dance with African tradition.

The Ring Shout's spirit of improvisation was also alive in the creation of music. In addition to the clapping, stomping and body percussion common to the Shout, new methods of creating sound were employed and new sounds were created. Common tools, household items, and instruments of the European tradition became more common and were used with greater sophistication. Africans also tried to recreate many of their instruments from Africa. For example, the African gourd fiddle could be made out of a hallowed gourd and horsehair strings, and an Ekontin—the father of the Banjo (Salaam 2010)—could be made out of an animal hide and some timber. In addition, new "drums, tambourines, gourds, bones, quills, kettles, hand claps, jawbones, hoes, wooden boxes, and any metal pot" were turned into instruments and employed (Hazzard-Gordon 31). Many other inventive materials were used, as one enslaved man reminisces:

> …Pieces of sheep's rib or cow's jaw or a piece of iron, with a old kettle, or a hollow gourd and some horsehair to make de drum. Sometimes dey'd get a piece of tree trunk and hollow it out and stretch a goat's or sheep's skin over it for de drum.

> Dey'd be one to four foot high and a foot up to six foot 'cross. In gen'ral two niggers play with de fingers or sticks on dis drum. …Dey'd take de buffalo horn and scrape it out to make de flute. …then dey'd take a mule's jaw-bone and rattle de sticks 'cross its teeth. Then day'd take a barrel, and stretch a ox's hide cross one end and a man sat 'stride de barrel, and beat on dat hide with he hands and he feet and iffen he get to feelin' de music in his bones, he'd beat on dat barrel with his head. 'Nother man beat on wooden sides with sticks. (Hazzard-Gordon 31, as cited in Federal Writers Project, WPA 4)

Enslaved or free Africans were often employed to play the music at the dances of European Americans, forcing them to learn European instruments and tunes. They then brought these instruments and rhythms back to their own communities, giving them the opportunity to mix sounds and to create new and unique ones.

The Cake Walk's success on southern plantations spread. Soon enough, it had been usurped as an entertainment form and was being staged in minstrel shows and on Vaudeville stages in the North. The performers were European Americans in blackface, notably parodying African Americans who were parodying them, European Americans. "Gaining legitimacy among white audiences, the Cake-Walk soon found its way into white social life, as celebrated, in some areas, as the Waltz. Various interpretations of the Cake Walk, the shuffle and a host of other plantation-inspired dances permeated American culture" (Sherman 61). The African forms had been appropriated by European Americans and "systematized, validated, and institutionalized in the minstrel construct (Gottschild 82).

At first it was only European Americans performing the Cake Walk on stage, but, "the Cake Walk was a great exhibition dance, with such superb theatrical potentialities that it served as a Negro re-entry permit to the stage" (Emery 45, as cited in Winter 45). The Cake Walk and similar minstrel roles that stereotyped African Americans as silly simpletons in blackface became the first and only role available to African American on stage, but eventually this paved the way for African Americans to find roles in legitimate theater and performance space. The Cake Walk is one of the first examples of dominant culture in the United States accepting aspects of the subaltern culture, showing the power that the submissive culture can have. "There is no reason to assume that theory travels whole from center to periphery, for in many cases it is formed as it travels through the interaction between two different regions. The recognition of the existence of a dynamic

exchange between subaltern and dominant cultures, including subaltern and metropolitan anthropologies, may lead to the realization that much of what today is called "cultural anthropology" may be more aptly addressed as "transcultural anthropology" (Ortiz xiii). What was beginning to create American culture and aesthetics was a product of cultural contact and cultural exchange, not the process of acculturation in one direction.

The existence of both the Ring Shout and the Cake Walk were fundamentally linked to the plantation experience. In response to the circumstances in which African Americans found themselves, these dances formed out of a need for personal and group expression of oneness, spirituality, and in response to oppression.

Experimentation and Responding to Hostility in Early Partner Dances

"The addition of Congo hip movements to the dances of the court of Versailles is rather like serving rum in a teacup" –Stearns 17

Timeline

Early partner dances in African American life developed on the plantation, but they blossomed after emancipation. Coming from a culture that welcomed experimentation in the arts, African Americans began experimenting early with the dances they saw created by European Americans. Then after emancipation, the adoption of the European partner structure came to characterize typical African American dance. Hugging Dances exemplify early experimentation, and the Blues exemplifies later responses to post-emancipation hostility. Hugging Dances broadly include early experimentation from the beginning of enslavement in the Americas that integrated partnering. This partner element eventually became a prominent form, marking the creation of what came to be called the Blues— which I will describe as culturally dependent upon the role of the Jook— as a response to emancipation. The Blues never died entirely, but for our purposes the role of the Blues weakened in the 1920s and 1930s with the Jazz Age. Between the two, I am including Slave Balls and Race Improvement Dances, two of many examples of conscious attempts toward assimilation. Including these two dances in our progression is important in order to recognize that African Americans were increasingly becoming a less homogeneous group

and more distinct based on class, education, and geographic location. Slave Balls I will place from the second half of the eighteenth century, when they begin to appear regularly in documentation, until emancipation. Race Improvement Dances I will consider to exist from emancipation until the Swing Era.

Hugging Dances

Just as there was a convergence, a sharing and a recreation of dance between Africans, there was a similar convergence, sharing and recreation of dance between the social traditions of Africans and Europeans. The partnering of European court dances merged with African dance principals to create a new kind of partnering with greater improvisation. Depending on time and location, there were many opportunities for intermingling. Even before ships on the Middle Passage arrived to North America, Africans may have encountered European court dances. Often ships would stopover in the West Indies for a repose off-ship before carrying on to the mainland to increase the rate of survival (i.e. profit). This would have been an important encounter because the Catholic Spanish were much more accepting of Africa's culture of dance, allowing it to exist much more openly than in it did in Protestant North America. The enslaved from aboard ship may have seen or participated in European court dances such as the Quadrille, the Reel, the Jig, or Contra Dance. If so, they were sure to have encountered blends with native African forms already being shaped, transformed in style and function.

Once on the plantation, the African American musicians who played and the workers who may have served in the plantation house or at European American social events all would have encountered European dance and music forms. They then could have brought back what they experienced to their own communities of dance and music. As African principles slowly began to experiment with styles, partnering, and eventually male-female partnering[9] that were encountered through the European American plantation owners and dominant culture, blends were created that are often generally called "Hugging Dances". In these early blends, the elegant formations of European courtly

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[9] See Appendix A.

dances originally remained while to the slow, stately style were added Africanist shuffling and hip and shoulder movement. The dances became wilder with increased improvisation and became more community oriented. Stearns quotes folklorist Lisa Lekis when she describes Africans in Cuba: they use "steps and figures of the court of Versailles combined with hip movements of the Congo". Stearns concludes that "the addition of Congo hip movements to the dances of the court of Versailles is rather like serving rum in a teacup" (Stearns 17).

Slave Balls and Race Improvement Dances

Well-to-do families of European Americans (and even aristocrats of mixed European and African descent) sent their children off to Europe to learn European culture and dance to bring back to the U.S. Knowing Waltzes and popular European dances was important if one was to be considered "cultured". This kept European forms relatively unaltered in elite circles: as new generations learned the unadulterated versions of European dance styles in Europe, they returned with them to the U.S. At the same time, this traveled elite was a small fraction of society. The majority of European Americans were not making regular visits to Europe for the consumption of art and culture to bring home. So, whether they liked it or not, the cultural arts of European Americans were no longer exact replicas of those of Europe, just as the cultures of African Americans no longer replicated any one African culture.

Both Slave Balls and Race Improvement Dances merit mention because, unlike the mixes that we saw emerge before, they showed a complete abandonment of African and African American heritage for the complete acceptance of the dominant group's habits and values. In this process of acculturation, the flow of culture was predominantly unilateral. Enslaved or freed, African American communities had never been monolithic. Before emancipation, free African Americans enjoyed higher status than those enslaved, and even between the enslaved there were hierarchies in status. Those in household service enjoyed higher status than field workers, urban artisans higher than laborers, and status may also have depended on the status of one's plantation owner (Hazzard-Gordon 48). Later, after

emancipation, the distinctions continued to grow within this hierarchy and between those "highly educated blacks who could gain limited access to the mainstream, and at the other [end of the spectrum] …illiterate sharecroppers who could be considered… America's peasant population" (Perpener 12). While the latter had less incentive or even ability to acculturate, those further up the pecking order were more likely to try to fit into dominant society.

"Slave Balls" were formalized affairs typically in urban settings, documented back to the second half of the eighteenth century and lasting in this form until emancipation. Urban enslaved Africans organized the affairs with elaborate invitations sent, "not only to the fashionable slaves, but to some of the more esteemed white people… All of the fashionable dances are executed…and a grand supper always forms a part of the entertainment" (Hazzard-Gordon 51-2, as cited in Olmsted). Participants danced the same proper, refined dances of European American society, or more specifically they emulated European Americans who were in turn emulating Europeans. Because European American men had total access—both to their own dances and to those in the African American community—they sometimes attended these dances (and especially one closely related referred to as the "Quadroon Ball") with the intent of finding an African American woman to keep as a mistress, or concubine. Under these circumstances, the African American women participants' desires to make modest economic and social progress meant that they had to relinquish any African or African American culture. The growing mixed-blood population, the fruits of such relationships, existed in yet another social ranking somewhere between the enslaved and the European American. In response to such assimilation attempts by African Americans and this growing mixed-blood population and out of fear of both free and enslaved African Americans gaining power, the Territory of New Orleans 1806 legislature is one example that, "adopted a statute forbidding slaves or free people of African descent to presume themselves 'equal to the white'" (Hazzard-Gordon 55, as quoted in Everett, 167). Despite their attempts, successful assimilation into mainstream society was simply not going to be accepted by society at large.

Another type of affair developed after emancipation, also an example of succumbing to the culture of the dominant majority and discarding one's previous culture. "Race Improvement Dances" paralleled contemporary dancehalls of European Americans. A

rising African American middle and upper class grew whose culture began to differ more and more from that of the African American working class. This reflected in their dance. Either for more opportunities or to debunk stereotypes about the African American, these groups often chose to reject dominant African American culture and conform to, identify with and aspire to dominant mainstream American culture. Race Improvement Dances were created with the hope of gaining access to European elements of American culture, and thus the style of these dances emulated these elements as best they could. Traditional African American foods, dance, music, and dress were discarded and replaced with European American ones. So strong were the cultural imperialism and the occidental bias permeating society that in such cases African Americans frequently abandoned as much of their old culture as possible. Acculturation, they hoped, would bring eventual equality through the eyes of those in the dominant culture.

The Blues

At the end of the Civil War, many freed African Americans regarded mobility as an expression of their emancipation and headed directly toward urban centers. Never again would they find themselves in the relatively homogenous communities that they were able to create within the confines of the plantation. When Africans had first arrived to plantations, a deculturation occurred, first as numerous groups were uprooted and placed together in a space of relative cultural void to work and live in isolation. Neoculturation was a gradual process of learning how to survive in these new, frequently hostile conditions of the plantation; learning how to coexist with Africans from entirely different backgrounds; and understanding the culture of the oppressor. The new cultures created by the African population in the Americas were unique: as much a product of their American experiences as of their African ones. These new cultures were created by the social forces around them on the plantation, the work that was expected of them, and social roles that were created within their isolated plantation life. Dance played a large role in this life. Dance performed an educational function; provided a language through which Africans of different background could communicate or comment on their work, each other, or their

masters; helped organize behavior; and formed a structure for social morality. With emancipation and upon leaving the plantation, a process of deculturation and neoculturation occurred once more: the common culture of the plantation was uprooted and was replaced by the culture of freed dominant and often hostile society (Ortiz xxvi).

Deterritorialized once to the New World plantations, emancipation deterritorialized Africans in America once again, removing the little structure they had been able to create for themselves and giving many families full responsibility for their own upkeep for the first time in unfamiliar, hostile surroundings. "Increased autonomy should have allowed for a more varied social life for African-Americans, but whites successfully continued to restrict most facets of their lives" (Buzzard-Gordon 66).

The "Blues" developed in response to this hostility and in juxtaposition with the Race Improvement Dances that were simultaneously developing of a typically more privileged African American class. The "Jook"[10], fundamentally linked to the culture of the Blues, became synonymous with a "Negro pleasure house…a bawdy house for dancing, drinking and gambling" (Emery 220-1). Both freed African Americans who had migrated northward and those who remained in the south—"free" but still segregated—sought to fill a void with the creation of their own spaces of entertainment and spaces to express their culture. In the intensification of white supremacy, African Americans were further separated from mainstream society and further forced into smaller, tight-knit African American communities. Jooks provided community and entertainment space when African Americans were often not admitted into places of entertainment for European Americans. Jooks allowed them to enjoy a greater sense of freedom than was felt outside and allowed them to create and celebrate their own culture, their own music, and their own dances in relative freedom and on their own terms. Their history of slavery had precluded the option open to most other newcomers to the United States: assimilation. The Blues, then, tempered the desire to assimilate into a society that was not ready to accept them, assimilated or not:

> In earlier days, musical expressions such as spirituals had grown out of the communal experience of a deep metaphysical suffering. The blues were a sensuous

[10] See Appendix C.

> moan that welded together pain and pleasure with seamless irony. Jazz became the black music that expressed a desire to be free of cultural restraints. These artistic expressions mirrored the paradox African Americans faced—the paradox of *being* and *not being* American. (Perpener 91)

During this period, the dances of working- and lower-class African Americans in particular relinquished some of their European American characteristics. Several trends emerged with the rise of the Blues and the Jook, including a further secularization of many dances once linked to ritualistic or religious importance and the diminishing role of the group, placing greater importance on the relationship between partners.

The Jook provided a space where, "an immeasurable amount of core black culture including food, language, community fellowship, mate selection, music, and dance found a sanctuary of expression when no other secular institution flourished among the folk," Hazzard-Gordon explains (inside cover). The Jook was a secular institution both rooted in West African tradition and necessarily an offspring of the clandestine dances held on plantations. Slavery had fostered the creation of African American social institutions that defied European American control, which in turn continued to foster a recurring pattern of covert social activity (Genovese 570-1). To folks excluded from the dominant economy, the Jook provided economic alternatives for entertainment, including quasi-legal activities such as liquor sales, gambling, illegal lotteries and numbers. In these Jooks, dances and culture were secularized and shared, and new dances were created by ordinary African Americans who brought their unique African American experiences with them in the Great Migration. "When blacks moved from one community to another, one of their first acts was to find a Jook Joint and show off the new dance steps they had learned during their travels" (Sherman 61). This culture meant that Jooks were of the first to see "large-scale cross-fertilization of dances, as thousands of freedmen sharecroppers as well as traveling entertainers migrated from towns and faraway regions searching for employment" (Hazzard-Gordon 81, as cited in Hurston 44).

In addition to a further shift toward the secular, the nature of the community and the movement also changed in the new context. In some ways it reached back toward African culture of movement, and in other ways it distanced itself from elements of the African aesthetic in its new urban environment, far from the village or the fields. Hip and

torso movement reemerged from an African culture that had no sense of shame associated with sex, as African Americans rejected the dominant European American culture that denied human sexuality. The hip-shaking and pelvic innuendo characteristic of much African dance returned, but it became more directed toward one's partner than toward the community. These "inappropriate" movements were developing on the dance floors of working-class African Americans where "upper class [European American] notions of respectability had little power" (Hazzard-Gordon 130).

In Africa and on the plantation, dances had often mimicked life in the fields, work at the plantation house, and movements of wild animals. Dances adjusted to an urban environment of new occupations, constantly reconstructed to fit new purposes. The "Milking the Cow" of the plantation, for example, became "Rolling the Toilet Paper" of the service worker. Dance became more upright and less flat-footed, both subtle changes that indicated a move away from agrarian movement. At times, dances remained identical to their predecessors on the plantations; at other times they were derivatives of those dances. The friendly competition and "songs of illusion, dances of derision" seen in the Cake Walk and common to African verbal and dance tradition remained a part of Jook dances, taking the shape of a competition of friendly one-upmanship known as "cutting". This characteristic has lasted in African American culture through the plantation to Jooks, Jazz clubs, Playing the Dozens[11], Hip Hop, and is still an integral component of African American culture today.

Blues music—an extremely broad category depending on time and location—integrated African call and response and varying amounts of European harmonic structure. In a Jook, one guitar was enough to dance, one or two more would have been considered excellent. Later pianos and eventually player pianos[12] became part of the Jook experience. "Musically speaking, the Jook is the most important place in America. For in its smelly

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[11] See Appendix C.

[12] Player pianos were accepted into African American cultural space *much* later than they were accepted elsewhere in mainstream American society. This is because the player piano necessarily removes the call and response dialogue between musician, dancer and other participants that is fundamental to the African and African American tradition. Had this style of set, unchangeable music been fully accepted into African American culture sooner, later forms of Jazz and Swing dances may have never developed as they did.

shoddy confines has been born the secular music known as the blues, and on the blues has been founded jazz" (Hazzard-Gordon 83, as cited in Hurston 44).

While by and large the working class was rebelling against mainstream society, assimilation in the higher classes remained common. Consequently, elite African Americans had been the more visible arbiters of publicly displayed African American culture in the North and in cities. This was finally beginning to change. As more southern African Americans migrated North at the turn of the twentieth century, the old elite became a minority within a minority. The culture of the southern working classes took the place of perceived dominance and set the new standards among African Americans, and soon, among society at large.

Crossing the Racial Divide to Find Uniquely American Forms in Swing Dances

The trend toward the adoption of anything black—and particularly of Afro-American dance—all began with 'Shuffle Along, Running Wild, and the Charleston,' as Langston Hughes wrote. –Stearns 223

Timeline

By the 1920s and 1930s particularly in New York, the immense amount of art that African Americans were producing—music and dance, but additionally novels, short stories, poetry, paintings, and sculptures—caught growing attention beyond the African American community, leading to a period of great creativity known as the Harlem Renaissance. African American art forms were increasingly appreciated, and in response African Americans used art increasingly to gain access and acceptance. "The black intelligentsia of the Harlem Renaissance saw artistic pursuits (as opposed to economic or political pursuits) as a relatively easy way for African Americans to gain entry into mainstream American society" (Perpener 22). The Harlem Renaissance artist capitalized on art to advocate a social agenda, "Like black writers and intellectuals of the time, [black dancers] adopted the underlying philosophy of the Harlem Renaissance: art should serve the specific social mission of changing how their people were perceived by the rest of the

world" (24). Swing dances were able to slowly change this perception, with steps that crossed the racial divide.

The Charleston

Shuffle Along in 1921 was the first successful African American musical. It marked the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance and introduced the Black Bottom[13] to mainstream culture. "The Black Bottom [had been] a well-known dance among semi-urban Negro folk in the South long before 1919. …" but *Shuffle Along* popularized it. "Like the Charleston and all the other dances that were too abandoned in their early phases…the Black Bottom went through a refining stage in which the movements and steps were modified until it finally emerged as a dance suitable for the ballroom[14]'" (Stearns 110-1). "All the Swing steps that migrated with the people—The Charleston, Messin' Around, Susie Q., Pickin' the Cherries, all a little suggestive—eventually cleaned up" to be acceptable outside of the Jook environment and in mainstream America (Davidson 1). Two years after *Shuffle Along*, the 1923 musical *Running Wild* popularized the Charleston.

The "Charleston", which had emerged as early as plantation times and in Jooks, made particular use of movements and improvisation characteristic of the African aesthetic.[15] These characteristics seemed to have finally affected mainstream society as their rough edges were softened and they were showcased on stage. As the Charleston crossed the racial divide into the mainstream, "the distinction between popular dances to watch and popular dances to dance was eradicated: everybody was doing it" (Stearns 113). Its generic step could be varied in seemingly limitless ways, but it was simple enough that it could be taught in ballroom dance classes, the method of dance transmission typical in European and European American culture. One man's description summarizes mainstream culture's fascination with the Charleston at the time,

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[13] See Appendix C.
[14] At the time, dance studios were all the rage in cities for middle and upper class white society. Teachers like Vernon and Irene Castle and Arthur Murray often "cleaned up" popular dances to make them more acceptable for the ballroom.
[15] See Appendix C.

> The first impression made by the Charleston was extraordinary. ...[I felt] pleasure in seeing a dance which uses the whole body far more than the now conventional steps of the Fox Trot and One-Step (both dances of European origin). The Charleston as an exhibition dance employed to advantage what the extravagant shimmy had brought in—the quiver of the body otherwise motionless, the use of the torso in dance; it added the movements of the hips, thighs, buttocks, made familiar since *Shuffle Along*—the characteristic negro freedom of movement, frank and engaging; the patting which accompanies the Blues was varied to slapping and the hand fell on any portion of the body, in a frenzy. As if excited by the dance to the point where they did not care whether they were graceful or not, the chorus assumed the most awkward postures—knock-knees, legs "akimbo," toes turned in until they met, squattings, comic little leaps sidewise. And then the visual high point of the dance, these seemingly grotesque elements were actually woven, in the rhythm of the dance, into a pattern which was full of grace and significance, which was gay and orgiastic and wild. (Emery 226, as cited in Seldes 283)

First the Black Bottom and then the Charleston supplied to America what European dances were lacking. They allowed the freedom already associated with the American spirit, and their engaging, full-body motion and disregard for what was graceful and what wasn't spoke to a nation "attempting to break away from the constraints of post-Victorian morality and into the freedom of the modern world" (Perpener 9). In a time commonly referred to as "The Roaring Twenties" and the "Jazz Age" in addition to the "Harlem Renaissance", they marked a cultural revolution in many strata of society. As these new social dances along with the new dance culture spread, one convention to be broken was dress. The aesthetic attire that came to be associated with Swing dances mixed African and European dress norms in twentieth century America. European skirts rose to expose more of the calves and tops shrunk to bare the arms. Popular woman's Charleston attire often had tassels, fringe, bows, or pleats around the waist, accenting the movement of the core. This runs in contrast with what was acceptable in the European or Judeo/Christian aesthetic in which such attention drawn to a woman's sexuality would have been forbidden. In many African cultures, however, using costuming, beads, and cowry shells to accent a woman's waist, behind, or breasts would have been both common and entirely acceptable. The classic Zoot Suit of the Jazz Age male also was a mix of European and African aesthetics. The suit of the modern male developed pants with baggy legs and tight ankles, and the jacket grew longer, looser, and free flowing. The billowing that this created

gave tribute to an African aesthetic of flowing clothes to accent bodily movement (Salaam 2010).

The Lindy Hop

The numerous public dancehalls that had emerged in the nineteenth century often maintained a policy of "Whites-only". Most eventually adopted one day a week dedicated to the African American community, but the commitment to segregation was clear. Although divided publicly, as African Americans were creating new styles, mainstream American culture became more and more interested in what they had to offer. Young European American men began sneaking out to frequent locales of African American entertainment, mesmerized by what they saw, taking back new tricks to their own dance halls and leading to the more adoption of African American dance, music, and culture by mainstream society. The new opportunities created during the Harlem Renaissance for African Americans to entertain created an environment ripe for exchange.

Harlem's Savoy Ballroom was one of the few entertainment exceptions that opened its doors simultaneously to both African and European Americans, and it may have changed the course of history because of it. It openly catered to integrated dancing, making it immensely popular and influential in the convergence and sharing of culture (not without causing substantial concern and unrest). European Americans from downtown went up to visit famous Harlem nightspots like the Savoy Ballroom, the Cotton Club, and Smalls' Paradise, driving more improvisation and leading to the spread of these new African American dances beyond Harlem and out into mainstream society.[16] Langston Hughes wrote of the time,

> The lindy-hoppers at the Savoy [Ballroom] even began to practice acrobatic routines, and to do absurd things for the entertainment of the whites, that probably

[16] To be clear, by the early twentieth century the term "African American dance" refers to dance in the United States belonging predominantly to the African American community. It is important to note that while of the African American community, African American dance at this point had been heavily influenced not only by European dance forms but by factors present in American culture and the American experience.

> never would have entered their heads to attempt merely for their own effortless amusement. (Stowe 43)

Uniquely new to many African Americans, the Harlem Renaissance was giving them the opportunity to take pride in the art that they created.

The "Lindy Hop" found the perfect marriage between the individuality of African dance and the partnering of European dance. It was a partner dance, but what made it unique to partner dances was the breakaway. "The breakaway is a time-honored method of eliminating the European custom of dancing in couples, and returning to solo dancing—the universal way of dancing, for example, in Africa" (Stearns 324). By way of the breakaway, Lindy Hoppers were able to incorporate many other dance steps into its general frame—including those derived from both African Americans and European Americans—and to create many new ones. The small but ubiquitous 'itching' improvisation movement, for example, was a direct descendent from African dance. The influence of "songs of illusion, dances of derision" emerged in Lindy Hop just as it had in the satire of the Cake Walk and the cutting of the Blues. Just as in the Jook, couples would stand back in a circle to allow a good couple to take center floor. Then new couples would jump in one or two at a time as a sort of sociable game of competition, driving innovation.

The dress of Lindy Hoppers continued to push boundaries set by mainstream culture. All of the legs and even undergarments were exposed in the aerials that became common, something that would have created even more cultural controversy if it had not been for the fleeting nature of such fast movement. This new dress aesthetic further integrated African and European American society into one *American* society: just like the music and the dance, it was enjoyed by both.

The Lindy Hop and Swing music evolved co-dependently. "Great musicians inspire great dancers—and vice versa—until the combination pyramids into the greatest performances of both. ...One of the reasons for the early development of great big-band Jazz at the Savoy was the presence of great dancers" (Stearns 325). The tempo quickened, and in reply the dancers increased their energy and speed of execution, a necessary preliminary for the acrobatics to come. Leon James described a night at the Savoy in 1937, "Dizzy Gillespie was featured in the brass section of Teddy Hill's screaming band. …Every time he

played a crazy lick, we cut a crazy step to go with it. And he dug us and blew even crazier stuff to see if we could dance to it, a kind of game, with the musicians and dancers challenging each other" (Stearns 325). Swing music's mix of elements from African and European cultures made it uniquely accessible to all. Swing "physicalized the pervading spirit of abandon of the 1920s" (Perpener 17). The "sensuous moan" of the Blues had been revved up to create the fast paced, "spirit of abandon" (91) of Swing.

These descriptions of improvisation that respond to factors in the environment along with atypical rhythms and scales are much more traditional to African musical and dance traditions than to those of Europe. Jazz instruments, however—the saxophone, bass, tuba, piano, snare drum and cymbals—are nearly all from a European school of music. Just as on the plantation enslaved Africans who were employed to play music during the parties of the plantation family took aspects of the music and the instruments back to their own dances, the same occurred to create Jazz. African American Jazz musicians learned to use European instruments, learned to play European melodies and learned European musical structure, but they then added some of the syncopation, sound, and polyrhythm with which they had grown up. Rather than playing the piano with the bent, gentle fingers of Mozart, for example, they played it as a percussive instrument (Salaam 2010) with the flat fingers and heavy strikes of a djembe[17] player from Mali. But unlike the music of that djembe player and more akin to that of Mozart, Jazz music did have a relatively firm and systematic mathematical structure.

Due to both its popularity and factors of the times, the new Swing culture disseminated beyond big cities, across racial boundaries, and across the United States. This was made possible because of the rise simultaneously in the speed and frequency of travel and the speed of mass communication. Its spread occurred quickly between the 1920s and 1940s, a time when railroad trains were moving people and cargo across the nation and shows like The Ed Sullivan Show were moving culture and ideas. Pullman porters on passenger and freight trains were frequently African Americans; the job was difficult but provided mobility and thus possibility. Segregation, for better or worse, ensured that in all cities and stops along the tracks, there would have been an entertainment space for African

[17] See Appendix C.

Americans to congregate. On each extended stop, it was here that Pullman porters could show off the new dance moves or the latest musical riffs that they had learned in the last city, ensuring a quick spread of new material.

By the 1950s, teenagers were watching the Lindy Hop on television and then trying it out at local dances. "The Lindy became the first step youngsters learned, and it remained the foundation of most of their dancing" (Stearns 329). Despite its growing appeal, this new art form continued to struggle for acceptance: the apparent lack of order terrified many middle class parents, and the abandon with which Lindy Hoppers danced with the whole body ensured that certainly it would corrupt the moral fabric of society. The "Jitterbug" is often the term used to describe a Lindy Hop modified to meet European American tastes halfway, taught at dance studios in America's big cities, small towns and suburbs across the country. As teenagers danced these versions of Swing at high school proms, it slowly gained acceptance as dance, regardless of age, race or social status. It caused a general revolution in popular dance in the U.S., referred to by some as "the only true American folk dance" (Stearns 329).

The bridge that Swing dance created opened the stage for many American dance and music creations that were to come. The Stearns credit the African American tradition: "All in all the Negro style of dancing…was in the Afro-American tradition, which stresses two characteristics: continual improvisation and propulsive rhythms. These qualities became energizing factors in American vernacular dance." They then illustrate its influence in 20th century dance in the United States:

> From this Afro-American tradition, much that came later surfaced—from the tasty tapping of Bill Robinson and Fred Astaire…through the naïve shimmy of Gilda Gray and social dances such as the Charleston, to the Lindy (or Jitterbug) and other ballroom dances, up to, including, and after, the Twist. Most of the dancing we see today on stage and screen, in ballrooms and nightclubs, at discotheques and on television, owes what vitality it has to this barely tapped reservoir of American vernacular dance. (Stearns 83-84)

After Swing dances, American dance continued to evolve. It responded to unique attitudes in the American experience, often unconsciously tipping its hat to both the African *and* European dances of its past.

In Summary

From the African's first forced encounter with the New World through to the twentieth century, dance has played an important role in both the African American and the American experience. It evolved as a heterogeneous mix of African and European cultures and traditions were forced to mix on the plantation; it evolved as it continued to mix with European American culture and hostility; and it took part in creating entirely new, uniquely American dance forms out of the encounter. An analysis of the different trajectories of African American dance forms goes far beyond the scope of dance. This paper told one small story, following a few of the thousands of unique trajectories that dance took. These trajectories were shaped in response to the surrounding conditions, making them useful indicators for assessing those conditions. With this study, we can explore and interpret the psychological, the sociological, the economic, the political, and the cultural realities at distinct times and places in the experience of the African American in the United States.

In addition, this study may bring attention to the profound influence of African Americans on the culture of the United States, allaying concern by those such as the Historian Sterling Stuckey:

> Despite the fact that slave art, and the art of the descendants of slaves, has left a major imprint on American culture, it does not appear that white Americans regard themselves, in any degree, as Africans culturally, a matter seldom discussed even in specialized studies of slavery. Few scholars, white or black, have so much as touched on this subject. (Stuckey 1)

Stuckey draws attention to our lack of cultural self-awareness in the United States. With hope, the work of this thesis will inspire a greater understanding of the collective influences that merged to make our culture and our nation what it is today.

Topics for Further Study

This thesis lays the groundwork for future research. I addressed a relatively small sample of dances that stopped with the 1950s, leaving an opportunity for deeper analysis expanded in breadth. In my research, the role of music and song was constantly a topic that I felt necessary to explore but from which I had to draw back, lest I clutter the thesis. However, the role of codification in song on the plantation and later in Blues and Jazz is a role that merits deeper analysis in a separate study. I also hope to expand upon West African dance and music during the time of enslavement and the Middle Passage to the Americas. A better understanding of the role of dance and music in African society will aid in an understanding of their role in the Diaspora and the reasons why certain elements remained relatively unchanged, certain elements evolved in the new context, and others were disregarded entirely.

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Appendix A:

Basic Principles of the European Dance Aesthetic

Convention and Uniformity—Rather than emphasis on individual improvisation, invention, or freedom of expression, the emphasis was on convention and uniformity.

Dancing Masters—To become fluent in the dances of the time, it was expected that everyone (in the socio-economic classes that could afford it) take private classes from a dance instructor who arranged and taught in a limited number of repeatable patterns.

Fixed Steps—Dancing masters taught a limited number of fixed steps in repeatable patterns, allowing for only slight improvisation

Floor Patterns and Leg Movement—European dance put very little emphasis on arm movement, and deemphasized entirely the movement of the torso. Instead, walking patterns and challenging leg patterns were important. The ideal was an erect back and torso high toward the heavens.

Male Dominance—Men were given the role of ordering these fixed steps with their own ingenuity while the women learned a broad repertoire of fixed steps but submitted themselves to being led.

Male-Female Couple—By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, popular European dances had developed to put full focus on the couple—reflecting societal gender roles—rather than on the larger group or individual.

Metered Music—European music is traditionally very mathematically situated in meter and counting schemes. The main instruments are wind, string, and piano.

Slow Rate of Change—Particularly in the cases of Baroque and classical dance, neither dance nor music could evolve too quickly because they were both dependent upon society's acceptable rate of change. Artists needed to fit the music and steps they presented into that framework in order to be commissioned. In General, how much nuance is acceptable is determined by tradition, and such nuance or change was generally less acceptable in European art than in African (Clarke 2010).

Appendix B:

Basic Principles of the African Dance Aesthetic

Aesthetic of the Cool—The goal is to present the self with a mix of carelessness and calculated aesthetic clarity. The dancer's face may remain detached and cool while the body and energy may be working fast and hard, and his/her expression may play with opposites, juggling cool with sinister or seductive.

Collective—The group is extremely important and most frequently takes the form of a circle formation. Individual solos or smaller groups in the center are encouraged while there is a shying away from any bodily contact between either sex.

Embracing the Conflict—This is the encounter of opposites. Dealing with opposites is inherent in Africanist cultures' worldview, and is thus inherent in their dance.

Ephebism—(from Greek *ephebe*, meaning youth.) This principle encompasses attributes such as power, vitality, flexibility, drive, and attack. Alive and articulate movement is more valued than alignment or form.

High-affect Juxtaposition—Mood, attitude, or movement breaks may omit the transitions and connective links valued in European aesthetic. This also includes the emphasis on balance through the combination of opposites.[1] (Gottschild 11-19).

Bare Feet—Dance takes place outside on the naked earth. This is important for the lack of sound, unlike the European Jig or Clog where sound is an integral factor to the dance.

Centrifugal—Dance begins in the hips and radiates outward.

Curvilinear—Seen in form, shape and structure, it applies to the individual and to the group. There is power emphasized in the circle and symmetry.

Dimensionality—This is texture in music and motion.

Epic Memory—This draws upon memories, feelings, and experience.

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[1] These are the five elements that Brenda Dixon Gottschild codifies as the most visible in the African Diaspora.

Grounded—Dancing with a flatfoot on earth encourages the use of gliding, shuffling, and dragging steps. The combination of being grounded with bare feet later combines with European influences to produce tap dance.

Holism—The parts of a creation are not emphasized or accentuated beyond the whole.

Imitation—African dance frequently imitates the motions of daily life such as harvesting the crop, and it imitates animals in realistic detail.

Improvisation—African dance places a high importance on allowing freedom of expression and flexibility in evolution of dance.

Polycentrism/Polyrhythm—Polycentrism refers to the numerous centers from which movement emanates, counter to European aesthetics in which the ideal is for movement to emanate from one locus. African dance is polyrhythmic because different parts of the body may follow the rhythms of different drums, maintaining distinct patterns.

Repetition—There is frequently repetition and the intensification of one movement, one sequence, or the entire dance.[2]

[2] These elements can be found in several sources. I took them specifically from Kariamu Welsh Asante, Jean and Marshall Stearns, and Abdel Salaam.

Appendix C:
Definitions of Terminology

Bantaba—In West African Dance, the "Circle of the Bantaba", or literally interpreted as "The Dancing Ground", is a community space around which the community revolves.

Cake Walk—The Cake Walk often took place at crop-over or harvest time, or at other times of celebration as a common festival dance. In the dance, enslaved Africans would dress up in the old clothes of the plantation family and imitate that which they saw going on in at the big white house. Everyone—plantation owners and enslaved—would assemble en masse, and the enslaved would entertain the plantation families with music, strutting, and other antics. Often the winner would receive a prize cake, thus creating the name "Cake Walk". Sometimes Cake Walkers would also walk with a pail atop their head, competing to see who could balance it best in their strut. Just as in the Ring Shout, The Cake Walk integrated elements of daily life into its movement. "Pitchin' Hay," "Corn Shuckin'," and "Cuttin' Wheat" were often used as embellishments.

Charleston—The Charleston was created in African American communities in the rural South (named after Charleston, North Carolina) and became a popular dance craze in the 1920s starting in Harlem and growing internationally. At the time considered a provocative dance, the steps follow the basic movement of walking, done in place with various levels of exaggeration. Movement can be as simple as a relaxed twisting of the feet and can also speed up to fast kicking forward and back, low, high, with taps and without. The arms swing opposite the legs, the entire performance taking on the relaxed, "aesthetic of the cool" characteristic. It can be danced alone or with a partner.

Concubinage—Concubines were fairly common in most regions of African slavery, including French Louisiana, Haiti, Dutch Guinea, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Jamaica, Peru, and Mexico (Hazzard-Gordon 53).

Djembe—A drum common to West Africa, especially Mali.

Jook—Commonly known as a Jook House or Jook Joint, this was a community space fundamental in the post-emancipation era for the creation and sharing of African American culture. While I refer uniformly to the Jook, a wide variety of similarly clandestine spaces for the sharing of core African American culture are included: after-hours joints, Honky Tonks, rent parties, house parties, and membership clubs.

Lindy Hop—The Lindy Hop was named after Lindbergh's "hop" across the Atlantic in 1927. Its basic step was a syncopated two-step accenting the offbeat. The Lindy Hop mixed the African aesthetic's traditional improvisation, European partner dance, and early Big Band Jazz or Swing music. The break away that developed, when the dancers separated and had the opportunity to be independently creative with improvisation, set it apart from all other dances.

Patakato—See "Songs of Illusion, Dances of Derision".

Playing the Dozens—Playing the Dozens is an African American oral tradition of using insults to both gain verbal dexterity and to confine aggressive expression within the African American community, directing it away from its source within oppressive mainstream society where its expression could lead to dangerous consequences (Abrahams 213). It is a form of "Songs of illusion, dances of derision" that developed as a healthy means of expression and has continued in African American culture, greatly influencing Hip Hop and Rap.

Ring Shout—Participants move around the radius of a circle counter clockwise, bodies moving as one. One participant beats a large stick rhythmically on the ground. Common movement elements include shuffling, swaying, stamping, clapping, and shouting. Also included are imitation movements of daily life on the plantation, such as shucking the corn, polishing the silver, rocking the baby, or working the fields. Individuals detach themselves from the collective circle one or two at a time, move to

the inside, and improvise more complicated steps before joining the circle again. In the circle, all participants are connected in a continuous ring with clear vision of each other.

Songs of Illusion, Dances of Derision—This can manifest itself in numerous ways. In the culture of call and response, this means the friendly competition of one-upmanship between dancers or between drummer/musician and dancer. A competition of creativity, stamina, and dexterity proceeds back and forth as each seems to say to the other, "that was neat what you just did, but watch this as I match your ingenuity and then do better." This same competition can be seen later in Blues and Lindy Hop. In all cases, it is both flattery and a challenge.

It can also manifest itself in a different sort of mimicry. In the Nigerian dance the Patakato, dancers would add bustles to their waist to mimic the contemporary style of European female fashion, wear white masks and wigs, and dance around in petit movements emulating Europeans. Such political dances were often created to make fun of Europeans as their presence increased at the beginning of the Colonial Era. In these cases, the mimicry is more of an outlet for frustration than a compliment. As Africans felt growing pressure brought on by their European Colonizers, satire through dance was one acceptable outlet for their discomfort and frustration.

Appendix D

Selection of Dance Video

Ring Shout

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WrDJ0aIBu7k&feature=related

Cake Walk

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sDnVIeSn_k

Charleston and Black Bottom Historical Timeline

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RGPnPHrrZeA

Charleston and Swing

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJsBa2u9aMQ

Jitterbug

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSpWJss5Gjc&p=F3CF73269FD5FE0D&index=8&feature=BF

Lindy Hop

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTg5V2oA_hY