

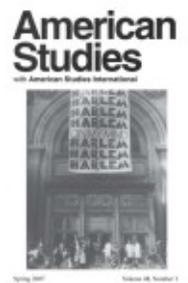


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*Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion , and: Dancing
Many Drums: Excavations in African American Dance (review)*

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Mumford worked toward “a decentralized, green vision for an aesthetically, politically and ecologically reconstructed urban and rural environment” (104).

This tradition continues today in the form of Natural Systems Agriculture and the ecologically-oriented community planners commonly lumped together as the New Urbanists. This reader wished Minter had more thoroughly explored the intersection of conservation with the cultural pluralism that civic pragmatists also championed. Rather than a defect of Minter’s research, however, that criticism suggests important directions for scholarship that builds from this important and timely book.

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MODERN DANCE, NEGRO DANCE: Race in Motion. By Susan Manning. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 2004.

DANCING MANY DRUMS: Excavations in African American Dance. Edited by Thomas F. DeFrantz. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. 2002.

Literary criticism analyzes written language to understand its social and aesthetic significance while dance criticism reads, interprets, and analyzes the language of the human body in a similar way. Two recent critical volumes, *Modern Dance*, *Negro Dance* by Susan Manning and *Dancing Many Drums* by Tommy DeFrantz intervene in narratives of American studies by introducing dance as a barometer of social history. Even though both volumes cover the dance performance work of twentieth century African American artists, the two authors’ perspectives on the work differ. Manning provides a complex critical reading of social art practices based upon reviews and primary documents, while DeFrantz edits a collection of African American writers and artists who respond to dance aesthetics and practices. Manning is an outside critic, digging through the archive and questioning the social, racial, and gender presumptions behind each dance document. In contrast, De Frantz uses multiple scholars’ voices to describe the social and cultural elements that influence African American dance work.

DeFrantz is interested in definitions: “What is Black dance? What does it have to do with race? How is it different from African American dance?”(4). At the same time, he allows the investigations of his contributors to speak to crossover and disjuncture between and among the artists and their forms. DeFrantz wants to reclaim a history that is not defined by binaries of black and white, one that recognizes African American artistry. In his volume, the individual nuances of performance spring from the page in each perceptive essay.

Even though the editor divides the book into three sections: Theory, Practice, and History, the sections are not distinct; their subjects cross, intersect, and remain in dialogue with one another. In the theory section P. Sterling Stuckey discusses Christianity and the challenge of reading dance hidden within religious contexts. Nadine George comments on the politics of negotiating gender, race, and black-face identities in Vaudeville. Marya McQuirter analyzes the aesthetics of the awkward, and Richard Green demonstrates how Pearl Primus allowed her dancing body to resolve racial dilemmas.

The theory section mutates into a discussion of dance practice. Authors in this section decipher the means and mechanisms of making dances. Their collective writings respond to questions about art production, collaboration, and dissemination. Marcia Heard and Mansa Mussa for example, trace the histories of contemporary African dance through the practices of artists like Chares Moore and Nana Yao Opare Dinizulu. Photographs of bodies in motion provide context for the cultural studies readings. Other essays are more concerned with aesthetics and trends. Sally Baner and John Szwed revisit dance

instruction songs that teach European Americans how to dance to black music while Veta Goler discusses blues aesthetics in Diane McIntyre's lifelong collaboration with jazz artists. The anthology concludes with a history section that excavates information about under-documented African American artists: Asadata Dafora, Margot Webb and Harold Norton, Katherine Dunham, and the New York Negro Ballet.

Manning takes a different approach to social activism within dance. Whereas most critical studies of modern dance focus on primarily white choreographers with a nod towards including African American artists, Manning integrates the histories of black and white dance in modern America. Her carefully crafted writing describes continuity and change in the "staging of blackness and whiteness during the period when the term 'Negro Dance' was in common usage" (xxiv).

Her book discusses some of the same African American artists as the De Frantz volume, however the strength of the writing is the way that it illuminates the complexities of race, culture, and artistic production. Because she includes white (and other) artists, she places the work of the African American artists within a wider social and historical context. Manning thematically groups her material around political approaches to content. For example, the first chapter "Danced Spirituals," describes the work of black and white choreographers who were inspired by African American spirituals. It includes close readings of performances by Edna Guy and Helmsley Winfield as well as Ted Shawn and Helen Tamiris. What is unique about Manning's approach to chronicling these dance works is her consideration of text, venue, audience response, and artistic intent. Her reflection on each of these diverse elements allows her to astutely analyze the political implications of the performances.

The chapter "Dancing Left" is particularly interesting in this respect. During the 1930s, both the Worker's Dance League (a consortium of leftist dancers) and the Federal Theatre Project produced dance projects about the underclass. Only the Federal Theatre Project however, supported African American dance productions. Manning notes that "When African American performers linked dances of the Black Atlantic to dances of social protest, Martin [a *New York Times* dance critic] and his peers hardly took notice" (101). She then delves into the complexity of shifting racial landscapes by describing a 1991 reconstruction *How Long Brethren* by African American choreographer Dianne McIntyre. Manning confronts the reader with the irony of having a protest dance by white Jewish choreographer Helen Tamiris' reconstructed 55 years later by a choreographer who would not have been recognized when the dance first created. Through nuanced writings that include multiple critical outlooks, Manning is able to bring politics to dance history.

The two books *Modern Dance, Negro Dance* by Susan Manning and *Dancing Many Drums* by Tommy DeFrantz offer alternative perspectives about African American dance in the twentieth century and make strong contributions to academic understandings about how dance speaks to American societies.

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A NATION OF REALTORS: A Cultural History of the Twentieth-Century American Middle-Class. By Jeffrey M. Hornstein. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 2005.

Jeffrey Hornstein's *A Nation of Realtors* is an important addition to American culture scholarship, arguing persuasively that the U.S. real estate industry architected a twentieth-century cultural paradigm that equated owning one's "own" home with authentic middle class status. In addition, *A Nation of Realtors* has a spooky relevance today (2007), as