Rhythms of the Afro-Atlantic World

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Located simultaneously inside and outside Western modernities and aesthetics, Afro-Atlantic peoples have used music and dance to continually represent and reinvent their multiple bases of identity—physically, emotionally, and intellectually.\(^1\) Through the two genres, these communities dramatize, articulate, and appreciate their historical narratives in relation to their African, European, and American genealogies. As venues for the staging of these dramas of contact, conflict, and synthesis, music and dance are crucial sites for the narration of Afro-Atlantic modernities as well as key arenas in which Black agency, creativity, and dominance are at once recognized by the West and claimed by Afro-Atlantic people.\(^2\)

Along with linked modes of religiosity, music and dance have also figured prominently in scholars’ approaches to documenting the results of the multidimensional cultural contact brought about by the Atlantic slave trade. The focus of pioneers like Fernando Ortiz on these genres was not a coincidence but, rather, a recognition of the fact that Afro-Atlantic music and dance simultaneously carry history and memory within them and show the ways communities have blended past with present realities, yielding wholly new cultures. Widely considered to be the most visible contributions of African-descended communities to the making of the Atlantic world, music and dance have been identified, along with orality, not only as the main modes of occurrence and dissemination in the world of black culture but also as linked channels of black expressivity and presence in the world scene.\(^3\) African music is “always music for dance,” and African dances are “polymorphic music, with the upper and the
lower parts of the body appearing to move to two different, related clocks.” Not only are they “pleasurable and erotic,” but they are also powerful spiritual grammars and rituals of socialization, languages of interventions in nature and society, contributing to the expression of African religious and cultural beliefs and manifestations of and engagements with historical (dis)continuities.⁴

This unique collection of essays connects nations from across the Atlantic—Senegal, Kenya, Trinidad, Cuba, Brazil, and the United States, among others—highlighting contemporary popular, folksloric, and religious music and dance as living evidence of the ironically productive potential of this age of consumerist globalization, especially for Afro-Atlantic artists and communities. In this most recent era of financially driven flows of culture and peoples within and among the nations of the Atlantic, Afro-Atlantic music and dance have become prime commodities. As economic commodities they fatten the bank accounts of multinational media companies and well-positioned artists. As cultural commodities they are employed by individuals and communities to craft cultural and ideological weapons for their battles against colonialism and neocolonialism, governmental corruption, and the inequalities created and perpetuated by the same multinational/mercantile system that makes this transnational weaponry possible. Religion and religious cultural products are key commodities in the contemporary moment of globalization, commodities that inspire, illuminate, and disseminate approaches to defining and enacting community and citizenship. Along with secular music and dance, these traveling consumer products are constitutive elements of Afro-Atlantic communities’ perceptions, expressions, and enactments of conceptions of identity, often even when they appear to be wholly local. As such, they exemplify what can be usefully termed “globalization creolization.”

By tracking the continuous reframing, revision, and erasure of aural, oral, and corporeal traces, the contributors to Rhythms of the Afro-Atlantic World collectively argue that music and dance are living indices of a constant (re)composition and (re)mixing of local sounds, gestures, epistemologies, and memories. These multiple and intersecting itineraries are transformed by continuous movements across time and geography, becoming at once more local and more transnational while also representing African and diasporic communities’ economies of knowledge about the Atlantic world—particularly around issues of citizenship, consumerism, and the social and political mission of arts and artists.

Scholars have long sought to map the circuits of Afro-Atlantic music and dance, tracing the travels and revisions of specific sounds, forms, and gestures.
among sites. With regard to the role of drums brought along (by slaves) from the African coast, in particular, Ned Sublette notes that they “allowed slaves to dance at a certain place on deck” during the Middle Passage and on “Sundays and holidays or even at break,” because the planters “realized that dancing was important for—it is not an exaggeration to say—keeping the slaves alive.” Although both forms are vital, music has been accorded more attention than dance. As noted by Alexander G. Weheliye, music, more than dance, “has and still continues to function as one of the main channels of communication between the different geographical and cultural points in the African diaspora, allowing artists to articulate and perform their diasporic citizenship to international audiences and to establish conversations with other diasporic communities.” The plethora of books and articles on African and African American music, more specifically on jazz as the embodiment of American music, is ample evidence of this perception.

This valuing is not new. Building on Frederick Douglass’s identification of the magnetic and soul-stirring power of the “sorrow songs,” as he termed them, W. E. B. Du Bois, in The Souls of the Black Folk, devotes “[an] unforgettable chapter to the songs created in the doldrums of slavery in order to give them a serious and proper interpretation, just as later Mr. Henry Edward Krehbiel in his Afro-American Folksong: A Study in Racial and National Music gave them their most serious adequate musical analysis and interpretation.” Du Bois’s musical interpretation focuses on songs that “are indeed the siftings of centuries” and on “music . . . far more ancient than the words and in it,” in which “we can trace here and there signs of development.” According to Du Bois, music is the foremost accomplishment of the black humanity, ahead of slave labor and the various modes and rituals of black religiosity. Alain Locke, editor of The New Negro—“our first national book . . . representing a unified community of national interests set in direct opposition to the general economic, political, and theological tenets of a racist land”—dedicated an entire section to music and dance, with articles contributed by himself on Negro spirituals, by J. A. Rogers and Langston Hughes on jazz, and by Claude McKay and Langston Hughes on dance. This tradition has been upheld and revised by scholars and activists, such as Amiri (Leroi Jones) Baraka, who are interested in the connection to African forms and/or the transforming effect of colonial musical influence. Music and dance have been used to restore the sense of humanity and rootedness that slavery took away, while participating very powerfully in their reconfiguration and reinvention by modernist traditions.

Edouard Glissant, by adding “the gift of speech [orality] gesture and dance”
as “forms of communication”18 to Du Bois’s “three gifts” of music, labor, and spirit, illuminates the historical connection between music and dance and the interwoven dialogue about both forms embedded within discourses on African and African American identity, memory, and cultural expression. Negritude authors Aimé Césaire and Leopold Sédar Senghor have eloquently ascribed to music and dance the critical functions of defining Blackness and Black presence in the world stage together or separately. In addition to Du Bois’s invitation to listen to the “souls of Black folks,”19 Senghor stresses their physical and corporeal exposition. They are not only sung but danced, blending sensuality and spirituality through rhythm; thus they have to be seen. For Senghor, rhythm is “the architecture of being, the internal dynamics that gives it form.” He explains, “Rhythm is the vibratory shock, the force that, through the senses, strikes us to the root of our being and expresses itself in the most material, sensual ways: lines, surfaces, colors, volumes and architecture, sculpture and paintings, accents in poetry and music, movements in dance. But, in doing so, it orders all this concreteness toward the light of the spirit.”20 In conversation with Du Bois,21 Senghor opposes rhythm, considered the defining feature of African musical and dance practices, to the two significant attributes of Western music, harmony and melody, thereby connecting the gifts of work, music, and spirituality. He describes the physical, oral, and aural enactment of rhythm as “constructing the last and only vestiges of the corporeal, sonically folding the body into the voice and vice versa.” “In this process of folding,” he continues, “the ear is directed toward the sound process itself, that is, the way in which a black voice performs and constructs its corporeality.”22

Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* is credited by many scholars with inspiring a vibrant discourse on the narratives of selfhood, community, and race embedded in the cultural products born of the movement of people of African descent throughout the Atlantic. He attempts to account for the place of music in modern black culture, affirming it a privileged place in diaspora cultures through the interactions of the performers and the audiences, and the intimate relationships to modernity, “beyond ethnically coded dialogue.” In addition to explicating the Atlantic dimensions of the work of intellectuals such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Richard Wright, and Martin Delany, Gilroy sought to pay particular attention to the import of the creations of musical artists such as Soul II Soul. Houston Baker, in *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, explores how music and certain black vernacular oral expressions are inscribed in African American literary works, in particular how certain sounds are replayed in literary artifacts. The work of music historians
and musicologists such as Robert Bennett, Ingrid Morrison, Elijah Wald, and Alexander G. Weheliye also reveals an increasing attentiveness to the musical products of the Black Atlantic. New approaches in literary as well as in music and dance studies are attempting to attend to the complexities of the transactions between instruments (including the body and the technology of production and dissemination of music), sites of performance, innovations and repetitions, audience, and commodification, as well as the politics of music and dance in different regions of the Atlantic. Much of the work, particularly that published by major presses, has centered on U.S. African American music or Cuban music and, to a lesser degree, on African, British Caribbean, and non-Cuban Latino/Latin American music. Nevertheless, lacunae remain, particularly in terms of religious/ritual/spiritual music. In addition, monographs published on other forms of music are often nationally bounded.

_Rhythms of the Afro-Atlantic World_ seeks to fill those persistent voids by foregrounding the traffic between and among communities, the cross-cultural and/or transnational movement of Afro-Atlantic cultural products, their consumption by other Atlantic communities, and the extent to which they result in new forms of and approaches to defining and enacting citizenship. This moment has made it possible for communities to be even more aware of the strategies that others are using to “talk back,” so that even when a community creates and/or enacts a form that is “local,” it still has within it elements born of a translocal awareness, whether the signs of that are easily recognizable or deeply embedded. Consequently, local forms cannot easily be cordoned off or definitively distinguished from global ones. It is not that the local or the nation are disappearing but, rather, that the national citizen himself/herself, like the national music or dance itself, is constituted in part by a historical and present-day transnational. The essays in this collection are case studies of modes and means of exchange in the contemporary Atlantic cultural marketplace, more specifically of those that serve as a way for populations to empower themselves, express their power, and move their struggles against local inequality forward. The transnational traffic, therefore, becomes a medium for the production of empowered citizenries. The developments in music and dance explored here, born of circum-Atlantic capital and consumer goods flows, are responses to, critiques of, and consciously crafted alternatives to the top-down contact made possible by this most recent era of globalization—markers of processes of globalization creolization. Lateral engagements create an alternate route map for commodity traffic, albeit cultural and ideological traffic, enriching the local rather than dominating or silencing it or making it unrecognizable. As such,
they demand greater attention from scholars working to delineate Afro-Atlantic peoples’ places in and responses to this contemporary moment of globalization, especially since these peoples were the core/basis of the previous era of major trans- and circum-Atlantic traffic. Being attentive to the sorts of lateral engagements addressed here allows further insight into their position vis-à-vis this contemporary one.

THE ESSAYS

For decades, the tracking of Africanisms and creolization, often through studies of religious practice (i.e., syncretism), has been fundamental to studies of Afro-Atlantic culture, particularly those done by Atlanticist historians and anthropologists (e.g., Sidney Wilfred Mintz and Richard Price’s *The Birth of African-American Culture* and Edward Kamau Brathwaite’s *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*). The essays in the first part of this volume illustrate the extent to which this era of globalization creates a multidirectional cultural and economic traffic in religious music and dance, fueling the creation of new forms of religious expression and new approaches to linking the religious and the secular, genres that cannot be as easily comprehended through traditional syncretism/Africanism models. They acknowledge the foundational significance of the earlier scholarship on religious syncretism, particularly the extent to which it helped to provide the language and conceptual tools for talking about the cross-cultural dynamism inherent in Afro-Atlantic religious and cultural expression, while also illustrating the ongoing and particular importance of religion to Afro-Atlantic peoples’ attempts to reconcile their multiple cultural, epistemological, and psychological worlds and identities in this era of consumer culture globalization.

In her essay titled “The Economic Vitamins of Cuba,” Yvonne Daniel argues that African diasporic dance and music practices in the Caribbean are important parts of religious ritual but are also targeted economic commodities that many governments use to boost tourism. As evidence, she discusses the ways in which Cuban worshipers and dancers use their own African dance practices as a form of public display, as spiritual offering, and as a national “guardianship” of the orichas, while the performers are also keenly aware of the government’s economic interest in these practices and so perform for tourists in order to aid Cuba’s struggling economy. Additionally, the large numbers of instructional workshops and dance and music festivals held on the island have lured international students to Cuba, thus creating a subtourist group that also contributes
greatly to the nation’s economic welfare. Additionally, the revenue from students allows instructors access to foreign goods and helps students form important professional connections, a greater knowledge of Cuban culture, and more expertise in their art. Nevertheless, the seductive lure that ritual performances like dance hold for tourists has also created some social problems, like the rise in the sex trade, prostitution, and HIV/AIDS. Nevertheless, argues Daniel, ritual performances are part of a secularization process that is inherent in Cuban communism/socialism, and dance and music will continue to be used strategically by Cubans for the greater benefit the national government, foreign visitors, and themselves.

In contrast to Daniel’s essay, Melvin L. Butler’s contribution to this volume discusses the ways in which African American and Jamaican reggae-influenced music has been received and appropriated among Pentecostal Jamaicans at home and abroad. He argues that music coming from the United States to the island of Jamaica plays a complex and often contradictory role in how churchgoers identify themselves in relation to religious and cultural outsiders. For example, younger Jamaican Pentecostals are now drawn to African American gospel music styles, often characterizing them as “black,” though not necessarily “Jamaican.” In fact, for many urban congregations, African American gospel styles provide a means of expressing a “modern” Pentecostal aesthetic while counteridentifying against the “white” hymnody and “white-sounding” traditional Pentecostal music of earlier generations. At the same time, “black” styles are also associated with the traditional “clap-hand” choruses that are characteristic of indigenous musical genres like ska and dancehall. Despite their global and local cultural connections, some Jamaican preachers are vehemently opposed to either of these influences and criticize contemporary church practices, which they contend have strayed too far from those of traditional Pentecostalism. Butler argues that for them, worldliness, “African Americanness,” and gospel reggae all seem to be interchangeable terms. For many Jamaican churchgoers, though, gospel music with African American and island influences is a means of expressing both religious authenticity and cultural distinctiveness. Additionally, for Pentecostals living abroad, it can often serve as a source of personal strength and a foundation for minority group consciousness, allowing Jamaicans to partake in cathartic acts of cultural solidarity and celebrate a common national identity, even when they are far away from home.

Deborah Smith Pollard’s “The Women Have on All Their Clothes” shows how the financial, lyrical, stylistic, and market infrastructure created by hip-hop’s success (evidence of the new ways and places capital circulates) opened
doors for the creation and popularization of the gospel hip-hop hybrid, “holy hip-hop.” Smith Pollard’s chapter focuses almost exclusively on holy hip hop, the term she uses to discuss Christian rap music. She begins by outlining the controversy that often arises from the fact that, although its fans and practitioners see it as one of God’s many ways to reach the “post–civil rights, post-R&B generation,” many of holy hip-hop’s opponents accuse the genre of being sacrilegious. However, Pollard argues, a closer examination of the testimonies and lyrics of many artists reveals that, even though their musical evangelism is generation-specific in its “packaging,” the general goal of the music is the same as that of traditional gospel music: to bring Christianity to the masses. Furthermore, Pollard argues, in several of its performative elements and lyrics, holy hip-hop illustrates many cultural traditions of the African diaspora in general and of the African American church and its traditional gospel music in particular. Such traits include call-and-response, vocal intonation, testimony, and evangelical zeal.

The second section centers on dance, foregrounding the ways that dance inspires, reflects, and enacts the productive dynamics of cultural circulation in this era of globalization. Significantly, the essays here focus variously on the specifics of the body gestures born of cross-cultural and intercultural contact and on the politically and epistemologically subversive possibilities and implications of dance as an art form.

Linking Afro-Atlantic religion with the corporeal intellect inherent in sacred dance, Yvonne Daniel’s “Rhythmic Remembrances” explicates how African-originated valuations of rhythm and ritual have persisted in the African diaspora, particularly in the “danced, sung, and drummed knowledge” that survived New World slavery and is now retained in the religious practices of Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Brazilian Candomblé. Daniel points out that although the general objectives of such rituals are to gain personal strength, achieve spiritual balance, worship divinities, and maintain the solidarity of the ritual community, some of their effects include the awareness of the “stored knowledge” within the human body and the discovery of the vast knowledge that still exists within the rituals of African diasporic religious performance. For example, some traditionally African religious chants contain rich information about the religious and therapeutic uses of herbs and plants, drum patterns exhibit sophisticated mathematical complexities, and dance movements challenge and strengthen the body’s physiological and psychological capacities.

The bridging of healing, education, and arts, and the affirmation of their
constant interactions with politics and resistance are central to Millery Polyné’s chapter in this volume. He examines the development of *danse folklorique Haïtienne* (Haitian folkloric dance) by Jean Léon Destiné and Lavinia Williams, discussing the ways in which each dancer employed it to entertain and educate their audiences on Haitian culture, as well as to better train Haitian dancers in the 1940s and 1950s. Polyné concedes that although they were not completely successful in eliminating all of the stereotypes associated with *vodou* and its sacred dances, their “innovation and transmission” of the art form educated dancers and their audiences on Haitian and West African–based cultural heritages that helped attract tourists to the island and advance Haiti’s project of economic and cultural development. Through “cultural ambassadors” like Destiné and Williams, popular dance became evidence of Haiti’s cultural progress, even as government officials and upper-class Haitians feared that Haiti’s modern image was being challenged by dancing’s focus on the “primitive” elements of the Haiti’s *vodou* religion. Indeed, by advancing *vodou*-inspired Haitian culture, both the dancers who performed and the officials who supported them were making a bold statement against a Eurocentric Haitian (and global) society that ignored and demeaned African diasporic peasant art forms. By doing so, individuals like Destiné and Williams used the “popularity and evolving representation” of Haitian folkloric arts as a means to address both the economic and sociocultural challenges to modern development in mid-twentieth-century Haiti.

A similar quest for economic development, cultural modernity, and a history and a historicity located in the performances, rituals, and reenactment of remembrances has created an obsessive search for alternative forms to Western modernity, and this quest has had a great influence on the Brazilian development project. In her contribution, “Citizenship and Dance in Urban Brazil,” Lucía M. Suárez utilizes the concept of *anthropophagy* in order to discuss modern Brazil’s failed and ever-evolving attempts at “aesthetic and economic progress.” By arguing that the modern Brazilian city is in a natural but perpetual state of ruin, she contends that perhaps the dancing body can represent that city, since it, too, is in constant movement. She goes on to argue that dance memory performed by Brazilian artists celebrates a rich African musical, cultural, and religious past but is also an act of rebellion that challenges the rigidity of the country’s complex class, gender, and racial hierarchies. For illustration, she examines the Grupo Corpo, a Brazilian dance company that has performed over thirty original choreographies in the last four decades. She argues that the company’s technical style integrates ballet, African, and modern dance, thus mirroring
Brazil’s complex sociocultural history, and that with its first major performance, Maria Maria, it became one of the first “highbrow” dance troupes to do so on an “elite” national and international stage. According to Suárez, such events are important because the violence committed against the poor and other marginalized groups in a virtually lawless police state has placed Brazilian democracy in grave danger. Citing the 2002 documentary Bus 174 as proof of the desperation of the underclass, Suárez argues that groups like Grupo Corpo and its offshoot Corpo Cidadão are crucial in modern-day Brazil—they serve as powerful examples of how art and community can work together to better the lives of those most negatively affected by mid-twentieth-century Latin America’s failed modernizing projects and most heavily affected by today’s neoliberal economics and globalization. Suárez concludes by declaring that modern dance has become far more than a “rebel movement” against classical European dance forms; it now serves as the body’s illustration of Brazil’s “multiple narratives of tradition and progress” and as a tool for sociocultural change.

The line of inquiry opened by Du Bois and the Negritude authors on the conversation between the African and the African American through dance, a “form of [corporeal] communication” (Glissant), is at once recalled, revised, and restaged in this volume by Susan Leigh Foster, who shows how two contemporary women choreographers—the Senegalese Germaine Acogny and the African American Diane McIntyre—are able, through a repertoire of corporeal techniques, to recover, (re)imagine, and rescript their African heritage in order to index a range of experiences, emotions, practices, and narratives of the Black Atlantic. By “choreographing” black bodies, they reenact and unveil the histories of joy, sorrow, worship, war, pain, and pleasure, but they also (re)draw the geographies and itineraries carved in black skins and cut deep into black flesh. Using Bourdieu’s and Foucault’s theories of the corporeal memory in the oppressed, as well as scholarship on Africanist dance aesthetics, Foster explores conceptual possibilities of “muscle memory,” the body’s capacity to store and then evoke personal, psychological, cultural, and historical memories by muscular movement. She proposes that dancing has the capacity not just to remember but to reconnect the body to a cultural heritage by using a set of actions to evoke past instances of bodily movement.

Undoubtedly, this line of queries identifies music and dance as both marker and (re)enactment of black radical difference and alterity. Senghor, for example, considers musical and dance notations and rhythms as the mediating devices interconnecting music, speech, and dance as specific modes of represen-
tation recurring in specific strategies aimed at producing “another reason,” emotional and affective, “the reason of the touch of the Negro-African” rather than the “reasoning eye of the European.” This essentialism has a radical subversive function: to deconstruct the ethnological invention of African cultural manifestations—dance in particular—as primordial, primitive, and prelogical forms of communication and cultural expression and as the privileged sites for the understanding of “primitive cultures.”

The third section offers rich contributions on contemporary expressive and performative genres, paying close attention to emergent or totally ignored musical, discursive, or dance forms and particularly to the ways in which they are used by their practitioners to address issues of race and identity. This volume’s concern with the organizing features and categories of the literature on the cultural expressions of the Atlantic world is remarkably reflected in the fresh exploration of the historical and continuing circulation and exchange that has shaped the poetics and politics of that world. These essays remap the different routes of the musical and dance waves by examining the multiple sites as well as the bridges between the performances, rituals, commodities, and expressive art forms aimed at enjoyment and political claims. Through focused case studies, this volume—particularly the third section—assesses the economies of knowledge and singular black modernities, narratives, and modes that the artists and their work create, thereby intervening in the debates surrounding “world music” and dance histories. *Rhythms of the Afro-Atlantic World* distinguishes itself as a collection that focuses on the circulation of cultural forms across the Atlantic world, tracing the paths trod by a range of music and dance forms within, across, or beyond the plethora of locals that constitute the Atlantic world. The editors and contributors of this volume do so, however, without assuming that these paths have been either always in line with national, regional, or continental boundaries or always transnational, transgressive, and perfectly hybrid and syncretic.

It is precisely from such a perspective that Raquel Z. Rivera examines, in this volume, the aesthetics of Puerto Rican and Dominican New York–based musicians and dancers who embrace traditionally Haitian and Afrodiaphoric culture in their art. By doing so, she argues, they challenge the “hegemonic notions of Latin American/Latino nationality/ethnicity/panethnicity” that, though it claims to promote cultural inclusiveness, often ignores Latin Americans’ rich and undeniable African heritage. These musicians forcibly introduce and celebrate their African heritage through various performances of bomba, the musical genre that most scholars and practitioners consider to be the oldest
known of Afro–Puerto Rican forms, one that contains numerous subgenres and whose musical traits can be found in Cuba, Trinidad, the Virgin Islands, the southern United States, and, most important, Haiti. Indeed, bomba’s use of Kreyól lyrics and devotional hymns to Vodun gods and its infusion of other Afrodiasporic-identified genres like rumba and hip-hop have angered many members of older generations, who want to retain bomba as a national product of Puerto Rico, not a genre that links together the African heritages of Caribbean New Yorkers. Nevertheless, asserts Rivera, bomba dancers and musicians “refuse to let their blackness be steeped in the bleaching waters of Latino self-denial,” and this refusal allows for intercultural creativity and solidarity that is impossible through most of the overtly Eurocentric concepts of Latinidad, using Haiti as a much-needed bridge linking together the Afrodiasporic populations of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean.

Following the intensification of the music and dance traffic across the Atlantic animated by the youth, Halifu Osumare, in her essay titled “Motherland Hip-Hop,” discusses the social dynamics of African hip-hop, using two rap groups—Positive Black Soul of Senegal and Kalamashaka of Kenya—as examples of hip-hop artists who have appropriated hip-hop music and are using it in an effort to improve socioethnic conditions on the continent. Using her theory of connective marginality, Osumare argues that overlapping global social spheres of culture, class, historical oppression, and youth itself complicate the typical explanation of American popular cultural imperialism for the perceived wholesale adoption of rap culture by global youth. By looking at groups like Kalamashaka (K-shaka) and Positive Black Soul (PBS), one is able to see that a large part of Africa’s hip-hop movement is actually quite different from its contemporary American counterpart. According to Osumare, African hip-hop’s focus on social critique, black liberation, and specific political challenges in various African nations is a far cry from the “bling-bling booty music” currently popular in the United States. She contends that African hip-hop, though comprised of a range of subgenres (many of which promote as much materialism and hedonism as their American counterparts), often promotes a rise in consciousness that actually has much more in common with U.S. hip-hop’s earlier forms and its current underground scene.

This collection seeks to reorient the discourse on traveling cultural forms around and between Atlantic enclaves by being attentive to the specifics of the forms—their specific geneses, the specific uses to which they are put by their creators and consumers, and the specific ways in which they travel or churn in place. In doing so, it connects the attentiveness to music and trans-, circum-,
and inter-Atlantic movements evident in the work of Atlanticist literary and cultural studies scholars with the linked explications of form and culture present in the work of ethnomusicologists and with the great emphasis on the particular nature of particular movements and/or particular locales in the work of Atlanticist historians such as Franklin W. Knight, Julius S. Scott, and Richard Price. This methodological blending widens the intellectual conversation while also pushing the scholarly discourse within the individual fields. For example, after giving a brief introduction to the origins and aesthetics of calypso, soca (the child of calypso), and go-go music, Deirdre R. Gantt presents her argument within such parameters, insisting that, despite differences in location and sound, both genres share a common goal: offering underrepresented populations the power to “negotiate and express their African heritage” and to “revise, affirm, and project their collective cultural identities” through music. Additionally, Gantt argues that both soca and go-go also share three African musical traits: polymetric ensemble drumming, call-and-response techniques, and the use of allusive repetition that can span the works of various artists over a number of years. After discussing the nuances of each of these traits in each genre, Gantt makes illuminating observations about how soca and go-go music have positively affected Trinidad’s tourist industry and the public image of Washington, DC.

Patricia van Leeuwaarde Moonsammy, in her essay titled “Warriors of the Word,” discusses rapso, an indigenous form of Trinibagonian music that, although it is a variant of calypso, is often overlooked as a part of the earlier genre’s musical legacy. She argues that, like calypso, rapso artists often use their lyrics to enter into dialogue with the cultural, social, and economic politics of identity in their native land. By tracing rapso’s offshoot from calypso through the experimentation of artists like Lancelot “Kebu” Layne, Moonsammy recovers the genre’s long history of political involvement in union activism, labor strikes, and grassroots community development. Nevertheless, despite such a long activist involvement with the “downpressed,” rapso is often ignored by Trinibagonian music lovers in favor of other, more popular (and, at times, less socially conscious) genres of music, like dancehall and American hip-hop. Moonsammy laments that cultural biases and unscrupulous owners of radio stations and record labels encourage rapso’s marginalization; however, she also expresses hope that burgeoning technological advancements and a growing global cultural awareness will soon save it from the threat of obscurity.

In *Timba Brava*, contributor Umi Vaughan argues that timba is more than just an Afro-Cuban genre of music—it is also a rich cultural site on which sev-
eral of Cuba’s most heated social debates intersect, including those on economic policy, identity formation, gender roles, and, most important, the island’s long history of complicated race relations. He further asserts that although it was born in the face of challenges posed by a radically changing Cuban society during the “special period” of the 1990s, timba is also the culmination of a centuries-old love-hate relationship between Cuba and its Afro-Cuban population. In fact, Vaughan dissects timba into four main stylistic elements (structure, timbre and texture, content, and context) and then focuses on the ways in which each area illustrates diverse musical influences—some of them traditionally Cuban, but many more of them Afrodiasporic. Even more interesting, Vaughan establishes very firmly that timba is heir to a long tradition in which Afro-Cuban culture persisted in the face of very strong opposition nourished by an upper class that wanted to present Cuba as a monolithic white country to the outside world. This history makes the genre most appealing during a time in which black and mulatto Cubans must assert their identities inside the country’s rapidly changing culture and social structure. Vaughan concludes by stating that timba continues to negotiate complex relationships with the nation’s government and international markets, maneuvering power and opportunity from a marginalized position to one of agency and power.

This volume closes with “Salsa Memory,” a collaborative production by scholar Juan Flores and musician René López that enacts on paper the meeting of rhythms embodied in the pioneering salsa bands that are the focus of the piece. As a bridge between two political and musical eras (the 1970s and the present), René López and his bands enable an in-depth comparative case study that illuminates the possibilities inherent in the contemporary globalization moment. In tracing the historical and present-day versions of López’s band and the ways in which they parallel and carry within them signal moments in the history and present of the conflicted story of salsa, “Salsa Memory” “amounts to an exercise in musical and cultural memory.” Delving into the details of the bands’ music, the role of each player and instrument in particular songs, and the very specific musical and cultural histories that rhythm and dynamic invoke, the essay lays bare the mechanics of various sorts of memory making through the aesthetic expressions explored throughout this volume. In this particular essay, the voice of the practitioner whose production process is underpinned by the corporeal and aural connection to the historical and rhythmic dimensions of the beats blends with the voice of the critic/historian/fan who cannot resist the call of the rhythm.

These interventions illuminate music and dance forms that at once restage
and revise aesthetic, corporeal, aural, cultural, and political conversations about Africa, Europe, and America that have been going on at least since the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade. Born of this era of globalization, though, these forms also embody the distinctive tools available to Afro-Atlantic communities in this moment, not the least of which is the global market.

Notes


3. In an interview with Benetta Jules-Rosette, Paulin Joachim, one of the first West African cineasts and an active participant in the Negritude movement, insists on such a quest of inserting “African culture into the civilization of the white man. It was to affirm our presence, pure African presence, because the colonizers have always negated our culture, as if they could be a people without a culture . . . We wanted to create an African renaissance in Paris, to signify to the European in which we were immersed that blacks had their own culture and could assert that culture and that presence in the white world” (Benetta Jules-Rosette, *Black Paris: The African Writers’ Landscape* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998], 35).


5. Ibid., 58.

6. Moreau de St Méry cited in ibid.

7. He adds CDs, twelve-inch singles, MP3s, and videos to the repertoire of black Atlantic sound channels mentioned in Peter Linebaugh’s remark that “the ship remained perhaps the most important conduit of Pan African communication before the appearance of the long playing record” (as quoted in Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993], 13).


