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“This is a piece that was originally written for a class, it was so impactful to me that I felt compelled to share it with the world.” -Mya Evans

Dancing Body

So I want to start by saying this is not my first time taking this class. Being that this isn't my first time in this course I have this appreciation of experiencing the same class twice and with a different teacher. It speaks to the very thing we first talked about in this class. Perspective. My last professor's approach to history was very linear, something very opposed to our current professor's theoretical way of seeing history. We were challenged to view dance as something, “That is happening now,” we also came to the conclusion that dance is timeless. One of the first epiphanies that I came upon was realizing that even after movements or experiences happen the sensation can still linger. These viewpoints have awakened a new sense of sensing or awareness in my whole being. Hearing, seeing, understanding, feeling and moving the body. It has made me a better person, a more thoughtful as well as understanding student. A more aware dancer, and a more impactful performer. I am so grateful to have been able to lift this veil from my understanding of self and how I am somehow interwoven into the very thing that I am learning about and trying to understand better. I feel this will make me a better student and teacher.

Dance Is Primitive

Dancing is an experience present in all stages of life. Infants often react to your spunky movements when you move your body in front of them to make them laugh or stop crying, Babies and toddlers wiggle their bodies side to side or bend their knees rhythmically when they hear a song they like. Kids, teenagers, as well as adults log into these social media apps to learn the latest dances and record challenges. Our elders move on the dance floor to the song that played when they met their first love. Dance is a sensation that generates feelings, connects and brings forth community, dance at one point was so powerful that people thought it could invoke the gods. In class we watched a crash course video about agriculture and for the life of me I couldn't understand what it had to do with dance. After the video was over Professor Adesola talked to us about how hundreds and thousands of years ago dancers were asked to perform dances to the gods to ask them for a numerous amount of things to ensure a successful agricultural season. By doing this we were shown how dance and history exist together, they are not separate. Learning this in class pushed me to do some research of my own. When I got home I researched “tribal dances used to ask gods to bring agriculture”, and numerous websites and articles appeared that reference Native Americans or as the colonizers (or colonized minds) call it “indians”. I read a few articles and came across this website titled *Legends of America*. The article was called, “Native American Dances” The author talks about the importance and significance of dancing in Native American culture and history before talking about specific dances and their meanings. I came across a dance called, “The Rain Dance”. “This ceremonial dance is performed by numerous agricultural peoples, especially in the southwest, where summers can be extremely dry. The ceremony was performed to ask the spirits or gods to send rain for the tribes ‘ crops. The dance usually takes place during the spring planting season and before crops are harvested. However, it was also performed in times when rain was desperately

needed.” (Legends of America, page 1, Native American Dances) I loved learning that this dance required both men and women signifying to me, acknowledging the importance and need for both women and men. In our readings *First Steps: Moving into the Study of Dance History* the author talks about there being, “a generational gap in people’s reaction to your work”, even though ceremonial dance is not necessarily a work I think this point speaks to how ignorant I was to the impact of dance even the earliest points in history based on my modernity.

One class we also had this interesting conversation about what primitive dance was. blank faces lingered all around the room then like clock work you saw eyebrows scrunch together as movers began to contemplate how to develop their new understanding of this term. I came to the conclusion that primitive dance is remnants of dance done then that is still done now connecting our echoed experiences through the ages. Primitive in my opinion is not characterized by specific movements being done, primitive for me is found or more based on the intention, meaning, and or impact of dance throughout time. I arrived at this epiphany by the information that was presented to us in class. We watched a video that talked about cave paintings found on a wall in India that were estimated to be about 13,000-20,000 years old. After watching this video we were asked about our thoughts about the paintings and then we were presented with the question asked above. During exploring our answers we were also expected to make a connection from paintings we saw to our dancing now, and from that my analysis was born. It was from being questioned and talking about our answers that we also concluded that “primitive’ dance is also documented. Another relevant point to add to this conversation. History is ever-evolving because there's always more things about the past being discovered or figured out. It's also important to keep in mind the views and opinions of a time period relevant to the time that is being perceived, again circling back to the modernity point.

The Dancing Body: And How It Is Sexualized

The body; our vessel, the body; our temple, the body; our instrument. So many clear manifestations of the rigor interpretation of our body and its value yet time and time again throughout history we are told to disconnect from our body, time and time again we see our bodies being slaughtered and sexualized often times by people trying to oppress us and keep us under their control. In *Bharatha Natyam—What Are You?* AVANTHI MEDURI, I learned that Purity was a very important part to the image of women in Bharta. The article stated that, “ They believed that “inner purity” (whatever that term means) had to synchronize with outer action. Thus, they promulgated the laws that abolished temple dancing once and for all. The “respectable” women of the south had entered the arena, wrested the dance from these traditional custodians, and mastered it.” (Moving History / Dancing Cultures Meduri, Moving History / Dancing Cultures, 106) In an article I was reading in my U.S. Women of Color class I learned that on a voyage a man named Ligon saw black women and thought, “Their breasts hung below their navels, so that when they stoop at their common work of weeding, they hang almost to the ground, that at a distance you thought they had six legs.” (Morgan, 168, *Some Could Suckle Over Their Shoulder*: Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and Gendering of Racial Ideology) Two different occasions all involving the same thing, the critique of the female body, it's like a woman's body is constantly on a surgery table with the whole world standing over it with scalpel and knives in hand constantly picking and cutting at a women's body. The class had the opportunity to watch another crash course video about the catholic church and we learned about many of their extreme measures throughout history. The Catholitic church went through this whole phase where they took dancing out of churches. In 1206 the Synod of Cahors threatened

dancers. In 1278 200 people drowned and died during a dance protest when the bridge they were dancing on collapsed. In 1317 The Lateran Council labeled dance as a sin. The Narrator was quoting a quote a man said about how he believed that their faith was more important than their actions on one's journey to salvation. From what the narrator quoted I resonated with the words, "Through our actions", the most to me in an instant it all made sense. In my opinion in a christian based faith one of the first things you are taught to do is disconnect from your body. They tell you not to be "of flesh" and they encourage you not to give into your desires and focus on your journey with God. While that can be understandable I would just like to argue that telling someone not to be intune with their bodies can cause more harm than good. To disconnect with your body is to disconnect from thyself and If you're not intune with your body how are you going to know how or what you feel? When you're uncomfortable..sad or upset? That quote brought me to my third epiphany; throughout history the body and movement is not appreciated because one does not acknowledge the good works that come from moving through and in it. What happens when you use your body to communicate with your higher power? How can the body/bodies be used to explain religious teachings? For years many people didn't know or practiced in secret. And instead those crippling teachings in part resulted in people walking around unsure of their feelings, unsure of themselves. We have all these conversations about the body and trying to understand why it's treated the way it is and if you look close enough you may find it in the foundation of a belief system or religion. Why is it a surprise that there's a problem with body identity and mistreatment when belief systems that are supposed to help you want you to belittle or minimize your connection and experience with it.

Dance and history are not two different subjects, they are one. You would be surprised with how often the two coincide or overlap. It is through taking this class that I am able to see that

history is not linear but a collective of experiences that evolves over time as we learn and discover more about the past, future and present.

Bibliography

(Legends of America, page 1,Native American Dances)

(Albright, xiii, First Steps: Moving into the Study of Dance History)

(Moving History / Dancing CulturesMeduri, Moving History / Dancing Cultures, 106)

(Morgan,168, Some Could Suckle Over Their Shoulder': Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and Gendering of Racial Ideology)