Chapter 3

Primitive Moderns

In the fall of 1932 the noted African American musician and choir director Hall Johnson solicited choreographic help from Doris Humphrey for Run, Li'l Chillun!, a folk drama that utilized the work of the anthropologist and writer Zora Neale Hurston. Humphrey wanted to maintain the "primitive and almost . . . untouched" movement of the Bahamian dancers, and saw her job as editing the rituals "to fit this dance into the play." Carl Van Vechten, a white author, photographer, and supporter of the Harlem Renaissance, also found ritualistic aspects in the lindy hop, a social dance he attributed to African Americans. Writing in 1930 in terms that modernist artists would appreciate, Van Vechten called the lindy hop "Dionysian," exciting and pleasurable, nearly approaching "the sensation of religious ecstasy. It could be danced, quite reasonably, and without alteration of the tempo, to many passages in the Sacre du Printemps of Stravinsky"; the pagan rites in music and dance were transferable from Nijinsky to African American dancers in the Savoy ballroom in Harlem. This heralding of what Van Vechten and Humphrey saw as the savage, "primitive" nature of dance among black peoples was typical of white modernist artists and set a particular place for African and African American aesthetics within modernism. The elemental force and physical exuberance of black peoples' dancing fit into a vision of the fundamentals of being that white artists sought to expose. This circumscribed view of the nature of black peoples, the place of African American artists themselves in modernism was quite restricted. If white women found in modern dance a means by which to work within modernism and refute conventional images of femininity, African American men and women had less success in working
around modernism's fundamental rift between high and low culture, which mirrored and reinforced social experiences of racial discrimination.³

Hemsley Winfield, Edna Guy, Asadata Dafora, and Katherine Dunham trained and performed in the center of these issues forming racial, cultural, and national identities, but contending first and always with racial discrimination that often barred them from the discussions. While segregation persisted in dividing dance studios and theaters into black and white, just as it split cities, collaborations across the color line did occur -- in muted ways, like the one between Edna Guy and Ruth St. Denis, or in politically progressive settings, such as Communist Party pageants. More commonly, white modern dancers tackled the theme of African Americans' oppression in their choreography, most early on with Helen Tamiris' Negro Spirituals (1928), but they did not employ African American dancers with regularity. African American dancers and choreographers formed their own companies and fused the principles of modern dance with the dance and ritual of the Caribbean and Africa. They established a distinct African American aesthetic in concert dance that drew from, but existed between, the primitive movement that Humphrey noted and the lindy hop and social dance that Van Vechten applauded. Following Guy's entreaty to make "the creative dances of her soul," African American concert dancers molded modern dance to incorporate the push for civil rights as well as the recovery of a transatlantic heritage from Africa through the Caribbean to the stages of the United States.⁴

When Hemsley Winfield plunged into the little theater movement via the Krigwa Players in 1926, he entered a vociferous debate about whether artworks by African Americans were in fact art, fitting into a generally white tradition, or propaganda, whose main purpose was to showcase the talents of a besieged population. These questions peaked in Harlem in the 1920s and reverberated beyond that
time and in other cities, especially Chicago, in the 1930s. W. E. B. Du Bois’s Krigwa Players, a short-lived national little theater network, was a product of this fervor. Du Bois, one of the leading African American civil rights activists, who helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and its influential magazine Crisis, fastened attention on theater because he thought African Americans were "an essentially dramatic race . . . accustomed to expressing themselves with greater physical and spiritual abandon than most folks." Advocating for a new movement in theater that focused on black rather than white audiences, he called for an African American theater that would be "about us, by us, for us, and near us." This call for art arising from and within African American communities also shaped The New Negro, a 1925 anthology of essays, poems, drawings, and short stories, that brought together many of these questions and the people intent upon answering them. Dance had little coverage, except as the subject of poems by Claude McKay and Langston Hughes, and as dismissed by Alain Locke, the editor of the collection, who advocated for the revival of the ancestral arts of Africa, particularly painting and sculpture. Even within a general plea for artistic assertion, dance held an ambivalent place, consigned as a talent of spontaneous expression rather than an art of discipline and respectability.

The already impassioned debate about the role of the arts amongst African Americans intensified in 1926 with the publication of two books by white authors focusing on poor, uneducated African Americans: Carl Van Vechten's Nigger Heaven (1926) and Dubose Heyward's Porgy and Bess (1925), both of which Doris Humphrey read. In response, Crisis conducted a questionnaire on the purpose and status of the African American arts; the conclusion of the respondents was that a more varied portrayal of African Americans was needed, one that went beyond depictions of desperation and fecklessness. The questionnaire exposed the class outlook that pervaded African Americans' concern
with their artistic image. The urging to make artistic renderings of educated, middle-class African Americans followed the dictum set by Du Bois to allow the "thinking element of Negro Americans" to lead and inspire the rest of African Americans. At the same time, black intellectuals George Schuyler and Langston Hughes extended the discussion in two noteworthy articles in the Nation, with Hughes praising the "low-down folks, the so-called common element," and the spirituals and jazz with which they were often identified. In opposition, Schuyler pushed Du Bois's loftiness further, insisting that successful African American artists were "just plain American" and, even more tendentious, heavily invested in European traditions of art.

Dance had an uneasy place in this debate. As a social activity, dance exemplified the gaiety and sensuality that most African American critics and intellectuals wanted to offset; as an art form, it had a bodily basis that seemed to overwhelm the possibility of intellectual motivation and purpose. Even in the serious, rigorous realm of the new modern dance, the predominance of women may have precluded its inclusion in the conceptions of African American arts promoted by educated, mostly male, middle- and upper- class African Americans such as Du Bois, Locke, Schuyler, and Hughes. Hughes was a rare exception in his promotion of jazz, which, like dance, often prompted dismissals by African Americans as an expression of natural talent that they feared would be judged as unsophisticated and too exuberant. Like jazz, modern dance offered a vision of a new, more pluralistic American culture that incorporated democratic principles and racial equality made possible by the unsettling economics and leftist politics of the Great Depression. The limitations of that hope, however, proved more visible in modern dance. Looking at a painting, reading a book, or even listening to jazz on the radio, one could ignore the physical presence of African American artists themselves -- an impossibility in dance. Thrusting their bodies on stage, African American concert dancers aggravated and pushed against the
racial preconceptions that divided American society and that indelibly shaped the course of their artistry.

Obstacles were apparent from the beginning when African Americans sought dance training. A director barred Edna Guy from applying to the Portia-Mansfield dance camp in Colorado because, she claimed, "some of the girls were southerns [sic] and they just could not be made to understand." A New York ballet mistress also alleged that white students would be dissatisfied and she would lose money if she allowed Guy into the class.\(^{13}\) When dance teachers and schools did welcome African American students, buildings often banned entry to them and forced out those tenants who allowed them in. In those rare places where African American dancers could take class, more often than not the studios were a long distance from their home, and the travel by public transportation and the cost of the class became prohibitively expensive.\(^{14}\) Black students who made it to a dance school beyond their neighborhood were limited in the activities they could do outside of the school. A white Jewish modern dancer of the early 1930s remembered continually asking a black student out for coffee after class and always being refused. She wondered years later whether the reason the black woman declined was because there may not have been restaurants in which the woman felt comfortable in the Union Square area of Manhattan where dance studios were located.\(^{15}\)

For those few who could afford it, private lessons were an alternative to all-white dance classes. Guy settled on this option, but soon wanted "companionship." She also had continual problems paying for classes. Her parents contributed, as did a patroness from her neighborhood, and St. Denis allowed her to pay in installments. Guy performed duties in exchange for classes and took an occasional job as a model for artists. She even asked St. Denis for loans, and at times St. Denis obliged.\(^{16}\)

Lighter-skinned African Americans had less trouble because passing as white or foreign was
another way to enter white dance studios. Florence Warwick, a black dancer with lighter skin, attended the Bennington School of the Dance in 1938. Katherine Dunham, who began her training in Chicago, had a mixed heritage of French-Canadian, Indian, and African American ancestry that may have helped her gain entry into white dance classes. In Philadelphia, Marion Cuyjet passed for white and studied ballet with Catherine Littlefield. Guy also trumpeted her mixed background, claiming, "My grandmother is not a negro -- she is Arabian and American Indian. Many people ask her and mother if they are colored. My grandfather was French and colored." The director of the dance camp to which she wanted to apply recommended that Guy send a photograph and perhaps pass as East Indian. Guy easily recognized the hypocrisy: "They will let every other foreign nationality come in their classes expect [sic] an American colored girl. Oh! Why are they like that."

Most commonly, African American dancers schooled themselves. Hemsley Winfield established a dance school in Harlem at 35 West 134 Street in 1932, where "in a well-equipped gymnasium, classes are given in the School of the Negro Dance for those interested in Negro Art." The Harlem branch of the YWCA at 137th Street offered dancing classes for adults and children; the school of Grace Giles at Lafayette Hall on 131st Street taught ballet and pointe. Dance schools on the South Side of the Chicago, populated largely by African Americans, offered toe, tap, and ballet. Generally training girls for careers as chorus dancers, these schools were featured in the Chicago Defender when the Chicago girls moved on to success on the New York stages. It was a parallel world, in many ways, in classes and theaters. In 1933 the white fan dancer Sally Rand went from her success at the Chicago's World Fair to New York's Paramount Theatre in midtown; the "Sepia Sally Rand," Noma, went from a similar success at the World's Fair to Harlem's Lafayette Theatre.

Occasional crossings of the segregated divide occurred. Katherine Dunham took ballet and
modern dance classes in the white dancing schools in Chicago, often as the lone African American student, and in 1930 she attempted to start a black ballet company with the white poet and dancer Mark Turbyfill. They encountered firm resistance.²² Turbyfill and Dunham enlisted the help of Edith Sampson, a prominent African American philanthropist and lawyer in Chicago, to raise money for the project, but their efforts were unsuccessful. Dunham and Turbyfill also had to move from a studio in the Loop because the manager of the building did not want African Americans coming in and out. After moving south to 57th Street in Hyde Park next, they had very few students, and Dunham's classes devoted to "basic rhythms as they related to the Negro" waned. In August 1930 they accepted white students in the classes to help pay rent.²³

Resistance came in ways beyond geographical segregation, too. When Turbyfill met with New York dancer and choreographer Agnes de Mille, de Mille told him that a Negro ballet was "all wrong." "She reminds me that it has never been done, that it isn't physiologically in the picture. I tell her that I'm not thinking of a physiological picture, but rather an abstract one," he wrote in his diary.²⁴ Dunham fought prejudices among African Americans as well. She thought students dropped out too early because they assumed they were "natural born" performers and dancers. Dunham stressed the need for discipline and training in dance and criticized white viewers for praising African American dancers "too quickly." She also recognized a mistake she made in naming one of her first dance companies the Negro Dance Group, saying, "[T]he Negro mothers immediately disapproved! They refused to send their children to me for fear they might be taught Negro dancing!" In contrast, her ballet classes were always crowded.²⁵ The definitions of "Negro dancing" as tap and social dancing pervaded black communities as well as white ones and challenged Dunham's attempts to teach and choreograph modern dance and ballet.
Dunham’s collaboration with Turbyfill ended in December 1930, but she kept dancing. In the Artists’ Ball of 1932, a program intended to provide money for artists hard-hit by the Depression, she performed Fantasie Negre, choreographed by her Russian ballet teacher, Ludmilla Speranzeva, to music by African American composer Florence Price. In 1933 Dunham set up a dance studio called the Negro Dance Art Studio, this time deeply within the segregated black community of Chicago’s South Side at 3638 South Parkway. Margaret Bonds and Florence Price were listed as pianists and composers for the school. Dunham and modern dance were a part of a larger African American artistic community -- apparently as a subset of women within that.26

Dunham’s inclusion in Chicago’s Artists’ Balls represented a kind integration within the dance world. Although none of the major modern dance groups employed African American dancers in the late 1920s and early 1930s, some African American dancers appeared occasionally. For Communist Party pageants, Edith Segal, a Brooklynite born of Jewish immigrants from eastern Europe, depicted a proletarian revolution against racial and labor discrimination led by the combined force of white and black workers in Black and White, Unite and Fight.27 Segal often appeared in the dance with Allison Burroughs, whose father was a Party leader and active in Du Bois’s Krigwa Players.28 Randolph Sawyer appeared with lesser known choreographers Senia Gluck-Sandor and Felicia Sorel in productions in New York as early as 1926. Most often, Sawyer danced roles suitable to his skin color, such as the Blackamoor in Petrouchka (1931). Similarly, Ruth Page, a prominent white ballet dancer and choreographer in Chicago, cast Dunham in a small but important role in La Guiablesse in 1933. With music by the noted African American composer William Grant Still, La Guiablesse depicted a folkloric tale of love from Martinique. Page solicited Dunham to gather a large group of African American youth for background roles. Page herself first performed the leading role of a "she-devil" who
forces a tragic ending between lovers, played by Dunham and her first husband, Jordis McCoo. When the production moved from the Chicago World's Fair to the Chicago Grand Opera the next year, Dunham danced the lead. In most integrated productions in the early 1930s, African Americans dancers added authenticity to productions with specifically identified black roles, but they were not used beyond those roles.

Even if white modern dance companies had employed African American dancers, they certainly would have encountered problems in touring. Edna Guy accompanied Ruth St. Denis on a tour, but not as a dancer; she was a personal assistant attending to details such as costume repairs. On tour in 1930 a rift occurred when St. Denis refused to fight Jim Crow segregation policies that persisted in hotels, restaurants, and transportation in the South, and Guy's relations with St. Denis and other company members began to fray. St. Denis eventually fired Guy for the tension she was causing amongst other students, but Guy understood the conflict differently: “You say I'm ungrateful to all you've done for me. And not honest. What do you know about anything outside of your Hotel. . . . All that I have ever been or hoped to be is lost in these weeks--because of the south and its high standards. Mary [a white friend] always said not to put so much belief in you and you were like all other white people. But because you had beauty I stayed and wanted to stay near you.”

Guy and St. Denis continued to be in touch, and St. Denis appeared at a talk organized by Guy on "Dance as an Art" at the Harlem YMCA on 138th Street in May 1931. But racial tensions underlay their relationship and severely restricted Guy's career with Denishawn. She was never an official member of the company, although she did appear in some student recitals. The problem that arose on tour exposed the menial roles that Guy actually fulfilled in St. Denis's life: that of seamstress and maid.
The small, even daily, achievements of Edna Guy and Hemsley Winfield in New York City and Katherine Dunham in Chicago were path-breaking successes in showing that African Americans could master different dance styles and treat many subjects, ranging from abstract studies such as *Plastique* and *Song Without Words* to evocations of Negro spirituals and *African Themes*. In early 1934 Winfield died prematurely of pneumonia at the age of twenty-seven, and Guy plodded along, frustrated by persistent racism and performing only rarely before giving up dance by the end of the 1930s. The success of Asadata Dafora and his production *Kykunkor* in 1934 eclipsed that of Winfield and Guy and preceded Dunham's triumphs in New York City in the late 1930s. If Winfield and Guy achieved recognition for their tackling of contemporary innovations in American concert dance, Dafora brought African dance to New York stages with an exuberance and theatricality that received greater notoriety.

Born in 1890 in the colonial society of Freetown, Sierra Leone, Asadata Dafora continued a prominent lineage that included his great-great grandfather, the first African to be knighted by Queen Victoria and the first black mayor of Sierra Leone. Dafora's mother and father met while in England, he studying at Oxford and she, the piano. Following this tradition of European schooling, Dafora received a British education at the local Wesleyan School in Freetown and went on to study music and dance in Italy and Germany. Seeing more opportunity in the United States, Dafora moved to New York City in 1929 to pursue singing but also continued drama and dance. He combined all these elements in his 1934 production *Kykunkor*. Only sixty people showed up the first night, but after John Martin's favorable review in the *New York Times* on May 9th, 425 people appeared at the theatre that evening, 200 of whom had to be turned away because of an overflowing theatre. The show moved from smaller theatres to larger ones throughout Manhattan for a four-month run, most often to sold out audiences.³¹

The story of a tribal wedding ritual in West Africa, *Kykunkor* appealed to many senses. [see
Figure 3.1] Continuous drumming, according to audience members and critics, provided relentless aural accompaniment to a visual feast of "semi-naked black men and women, posturing, writhing, crazily whirling, dancing insanely--vitaly." Dafora's African dance consisted of vigorous movements, often at a rapid tempo, that included flat-footed stomping, isolated actions of hips, torso, and shoulders in rhythmic patterns, and bodies bent forward from the waist on deeply bent legs with protruding buttocks. Vastly different from the linear and tightly held backbones of ballet and even modern dance, African dance stimulated interest merely in its exuberant use of the body. Compared to the austerity and starkness of Graham and Humphrey-Weidman concerts, the African dance of Dafora offered different pleasures. A story added a frame of reference and narrative progress unlike modern dancers' evocation of one emotion, such as Graham's Lamentation. Kykunkor depicted the flirtation of romance and mating rituals with vibrant group dances and pantomime solos. The bridegroom selected his bride from young women who performed a maidens' dance; dances of welcome occurred between the two families. Kykunkor, a witch woman, cast a spell on the groom for a jealous rival eager to marry the bride himself. A male witch doctor saved the groom from death and the wedding and celebratory festival closed the drama on a note of gaiety. Dafora's group of eighteen men and women filled the stage with bright costumes, colorful backdrops, and live music and gave no heed to the modernist creed of stripping the stage of adornments that Graham and Humphrey followed.

In its disavowal of certain modernist theatrical principles and its embrace of other Africanist ones, Dafora's vibrant performance neatly fit into contemporary conceptions of white critics and audience members of so called primitive and black peoples that exalted their closeness to nature, to animals, and to the basic functions of living -- especially sex. The story of mating rituals abetted movement that depicted sexual attraction between men and women. The explicit heterosexual base of
the story, and the overt masculinity of the male dancers especially, countered the common association of effeminacy and dance. In fact, white male modern dancers such as Ted Shawn plundered African and Native American dance traditions for heroic images to display in their choreography that would affirm the masculinity of male dancers. The sexual play of Kykunkor elicited an ease in reviews as white intellectuals praised elements that they understood as distinctly black and primitive, with the well-respected critic Gilbert Seldes in Esquire naming it "a real sexual drama." He added that this show was "proof that Harlem still draws on its racial memories for its typical shouts and steps." Linking all the cast by their innate racial talent -- dancing barefoot to pounding drums on African ground -- white critics proclaimed that the American-born performers could "trace their lineage back to the tribes from which their forbears [sic] came."

Audience members came to the theater with preconceptions. A photograph of Dafora and his dancers promoting a performance of Kykunkor in Asbury Park, New Jersey, in 1934 displays nothing specific about the dance but is rich in meaning about the context in which these performers were seen. [see Figure 3.2] Ostensibly, the dancers are publicizing a performance by making music as a truck drives them around town. The truck, with its slogan "We sell good coal," holds a driver, a white man who looks unswervingly at the camera. A young white boy can be seen looking through the driver's window and into the camera, giving a kind of generational comment on the ways in which young people learn how to see from those who are older. A white woman, replete with a flowing dress and a parasol, distracted and apparently uninterested, gazes behind the truck and frames the photograph on the right. The woman could be an icon of white womanhood under threat from the unquenchable sexual desires of black men. In its overwhelming contextual clues, the photograph renders symbolic the racial preconceptions that clouded the ways in which white people saw black people.
Beyond the sexual elements of racial conceptions, Dafora's performance also fortified interest in Africa, a fascination of many white modernist artists and intellectuals in Europe and the United States. Proclaimed for its authenticity in representing the rituals of the African jungle, the show attracted "scientists and explorers of Africa" as well as leading theatrical managers of New York and other artists and intellectuals including George Gershwin, Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, Virgil Thomson, Carl Van Vechten, and modern dancers Charles Weidman and Helen Tamiris. Edmund Giligan, a white novelist, was so impressed by the performance that he wanted the cast of Kykunkor to appear in a film version of his book, One Returns, which told the story of the sole survivor of a journey by white explorers into the African jungle. Adding to the claims of authenticity, Dr. James Chapin, the curator of the American Museum of Natural History, declared that "the drum rhythms and most of the singing rang so true as to carry me back to the dark continent." Dr. Chapin's comment exhibited the tendency of many white viewers and critics to lump all Africans together as inhabitants of the "dark continent." White anthropologists and artists supplanted the dislocations created by a rapidly changing society and imagined an Africa that was unadulterated, unspoiled, and a clearly utopian vision of simplified nature.

Kykunkor was a re-visioning of a place, a transferring of Africa to American ground where it still stood apart, as the use of witch doctors and dances of welcome between families reinforced. For white viewers, Dafora's Kykunkor confirmed the distance and distinctiveness of Africa, and, by extension, the black peoples there and elsewhere that it featured.

African American critics also praised Kykunkor but had different considerations. "Here it is, at last, Godmother -- as you have dreamed and prophesied -- and though it will not take root immediately -- it is here and cannot be denied," Alain Locke wrote in 1934. Godmother was Locke's white patroness, Charlotte Osgood Mason, and the realized prophesy was Asadata Dafora. Mason had long
pressed for more primitive work from African American artists of the Harlem Renaissance; she had given financial support for the folklore investigations of Zora Neale Hurston, for example. Locke often resisted Mason's appeal, wanting to encourage the mastery of what he deemed more sophisticated art. But in Dafora's Kykunkor Locke finally saw an African art arrive on American stages with the stylistic purity that he extolled in The New Negro. For other African American critics, Kykunkor refuted the frightening, maniacal picture of the jungle in the popular play Emperor Jones, which had been turned into a movie with Paul Robeson in 1933. "Kykunkor Gives the Lie to Fantastic White Beliefs/Beauty and Charm of Native Life Shown in Presentation," a June 1934 article in the New York Amsterdam News announced. The article went on, "[H]ow different the customs of the land appear on the stage from the depressing tales which missionaries bring back! No unclothed savages preparing a juicy stew of some hapless fellow man. No listless natives wallowing in filth. Instead here are a beautiful black and brown people, colorfully clad in gay raiment of brilliant hues -- gold, green, crimson and white -- riotously dazzling [sic] against the background of their dark bodies."

The brilliancy of the colors and action overwhelmed African American critics as it did white ones, but in their praise for African authenticity these black critics did not include all dark-skinned peoples as indistinguishable "natives" and saw instead variations of "black and brown." They made particular mention of the different West African tribes depicted in the drama, the Mendi and Temne; they distinguished between the "Harlem origin" of some of the dancers and the "native-born African artists"; and they credited Dafora with a presentation "devoid of New World influence." One article exposed the attempt by some dancers to prove their authenticity, noting that "[a]lthough many of the actors are obviously of Harlem origin, the theatre program lists them in the cast with beautifully euphonic African names." Francis Atkins became Musu Esami; Alma Sutton, Mirammo. Most African
American critics pointed out connections and variations between African American culture and the native picture Dafora presented.

*Kykunkor* signaled the arrival of black choreographers commanding artistic authority on American stages and an increase in theatrical presentations of Africa and the Caribbean. Dafora and Clarence Yates, the dance director of the Negro Unit of the WPA's Federal Theatre Project, choreographed dances for Orson Welles's Haitian version of *MacBeth* in 1936, often called the "Voodoo MacBeth." That December the project produced *Bassa Moona* with choreography by Momodu Johnson, a Yoruba from Nigeria. In Chicago, Katherine Dunham created *Haitian Suite* in 1937, first appealing to William Grant Still to write the music for a large, historical piece about the Haitian revolution. Still was quite intrigued by the idea and eagerly questioned Dunham about music she had heard in Haiti, asking, "[W]ill you advise me as to the characteristic use of the rada drums, i.e. whether they are played intermittently or constantly?" and "[W]ill you describe as fully as possible the sounds of native instruments other than drums?" Although he soon had to pull out of the project because of demands for movie scores, Still's questions and Dunham's pursuits suggest that both of them were mining sources in the Caribbean in new ways.

In the mid-1930s, at the same time that African American dancers turned more resolutely to Africa and the Caribbean, more white modern dancers began to decry racial discrimination within the dance world. As fascist policies became widespread in Europe, American modern dancers looked more closely at the ethnic and racial prejudices in their own society. The success of a few African American dancers such as Winfield, Guy, Dafora, and Dunham also brought new attention to all black dancers, whose plight had been easily ignored before. The first National Dance Congress, held in New York City in May 1936, passed a resolution stating, "Whereas the Negro people in American have
been subject to segregation and suppression which has limited their development in the field of creative dance, be it resolved that the Dance Congress encourage and sponsor the work of the Negro People in the creative fields. At the congress itself, Lenore Cox, a "Negro Dancer and Instructor," gave a talk entitled "On a Few Aspects of Negro Dancing," in which she called for more training of African American dancers in concert dance techniques. Edna Guy danced a solo in one of the evening performances that accompanied the days of meetings and lectures.

Guy and Cox were instrumental in maintaining this heightened attention and organized a Negro Dance Evening on 7 March 1937, at the Kaufman Auditorium of the 92nd Street Young Men's Hebrew Association, the most prominent new theater for white modern dancers. The occasion proclaimed the formal inclusion of African Americans into the largely white concert dance scene and illustrated much of what had occurred since Guy's discouraging attempts to train in the mid 1920s. The organizers, Guy, Cox, and Allison Burroughs, were prominent African American dancers who had gained recognition among white concert dancers: Guy through her contact with Ruth St. Denis, Cox at the National Dance Congress, and Burroughs in Communist Party functions. But this concert was a call to independence. The organization of the program revealed their intentions "to make immediately apparent to the audience the roots of the dancing in the Americas today." Beginning with dances of Africa, the next section moved across the Atlantic Ocean to North America, featuring slave dancing and spirituals. The final section began with contemporary social dances, such as the lindy hop and truckin', which "help to brighten drab moments . . . [a]nd then comes the contribution of the contemporary Negro artist," the modern dance pieces. Providing a history of the dancing of dark-skinned peoples, the Negro Dance Evening reinforced the importance of dance to African Americans in the past and the present by crossing the globe, from Africa to the Americas, moving from African rituals and depictions of chattel
slavery to the high jinks of Harlem. The variety of dance styles, and particularly the inclusion of more abstract modern dance, went beyond stereotypes of the natural dancing ability of African Americans -- most commonly associated with tap and social dancing -- although the dancers and choreographers of the evening did not deny these traditions either. Instead, they provided a narrative of African American identity through and in dance that presented African dance as the foundation of later concert and social dance styles and foretold the emergence of a combined style of African and modern dance.

The Negro Dance Evening in 1937 presented Katherine Dunham from Chicago to New York City, and it was Dunham who would build on the contributions of Winfield, Guy, and Dafora and secure long-term fame by creating a distinctive African American modern dance style. [Figure 3.3] Born near Chicago in 1909, Dunham was the daughter of a light-skinned woman of French Canadian and Native American ancestry who died when Dunham was only a few years old. Her father remarried, ran a laundry business, and promoted the educational achievements of Katherine and her older brother, Albert. Her father's volatile rage and fluctuating finances, however, tore the family apart, and Dunham went back and forth between her father's home and that of her stepmother's relatives. Directing a cabaret for a church social, track, basketball, and the Terpsichorean Club in high school offered some relief. At eighteen she left home, began taking classes at Joliet Junior College, and received a job in a Chicago library on the basis of a civil service exam. She participated in theatrical productions of the Cube Theater, co-founded by her adored older brother, and eventually followed her brother to the University of Chicago, where she took sociology and anthropology classes from Robert Redfield beginning in 1928 and from which she graduated with a bachelor’s degree in 1936. She also began taking dance classes with the Russian ballet teacher Ludmilla Speranzeva, white modern dancer Diana
College inspired her to pursue both anthropology and dance and offered a way to combine them. Anthropology interested her because it was the "study of man" with the purpose of recognizing "universal emotional experiences," but dance and art pulled her too, for similar reasons: "Every person who has a germ of artistry seeks to recreate and present an impression of universal human experience--to fulfill either human needs or wants." She thought that looking at the intersection of artistry and anthropology would lead to greater understanding of both fields. More specifically, she wanted to know "why [people] dance as they do."

Anthropologists who began exploring these kinds of questions in the first part of the twentieth century promoted the belief that cultural traits were acquired, not innate. By the 1920s and 1930s this idea began to affect understandings of male and female roles, most famously in the work of Margaret Mead. It also led to studies of the differences between nations; Ruth Benedict applied this approach to the study of North America in her 1934 *Patterns of Culture*. Franz Boas, one of the founders of the field and still influential in the 1920s and 1930s as a mentor to many graduate students at Columbia University (including Mead, Benedict, and Zora Neale Hurston), inspired important work on the cultural roots of racial distinctions. This represented a radical leap in regard to common understandings of race: refuting the biological determinism of eugenics, cultural relativity overturned the idea that skin color signified fundamental dissimilarities (and, for many, inequalities) among people.

Melville Herskovits, a white Jewish student of Boas, became one of the most well-known anthropologists exploring the heritage of dark-skinned peoples. Herskovits contributed to *The New Negro* with an article affirming "The Negro's Americanism," in which he argued that the Harlem community of New York represented "the same pattern [of other American communities], only a
Historian Sterling Stuckey has noted that Herskovits began to emphasize the survival of African traits in the diaspora (despite "The Negro's Americanism") in the mid 1930s when he started to do more field work in the Caribbean. From then on Herskovits's work increasingly charted the behavior and abilities common among dark-skinned peoples. In his 1941 book, The Myth of the Negro Past, he looked at different black peoples, judging the extent of interaction with white or European cultures and describing the resulting syncretism. Dance "carried over into the New World to a greater degree than almost any other trait of African culture," Herskovits argued.

Herskovits's views of dance were certainly impacted by the field work of Dunham, who contacted him at Northwestern University in 1932. Seeking his opinion as an expert in the field, she wanted to know if he thought a "comparative study of primitive dancing," beginning with Native Americans and moving onto "such primitive groups of American Negroes as remain" was a worthy topic of research. Dunham never accomplished this comparative project, but she tackled parts of it. Through Herskovits's advice and help in obtaining grant money from the Rosenwald Foundation, Dunham traveled to the Caribbean in 1935 to conduct field work. She spent most of her time in Haiti and Jamaica, going between the social dancing scene in Port-au-Prince and the ritualistic dancing in smaller villages. When she returned, she created Haitian Suite (1937) and traveled through a snowstorm in March 1937 to appear in the Negro Dance Evening at the 92nd Street Y. Graduate work in anthropology pulled her, but she chose performance and choreography and never completed a graduate degree. She put her anthropological work on theatrical stages.

L'Ag'Ya (1938), which premiered on 27 January 1938, as part of the Federal Theatre Project's Chicago unit, showed how Dunham's studies affected her choreography. Program notes and photographs from these early productions and a later filmed version show that L'Ag'Ya, named for a
Martinique fighting dance, presented a variety of Caribbean dances such as the Creole mazurka, the beguine, the Cuban habañera, and the Brazilian majumba, all performed to music composed by University of Chicago music professor Robert Sanders. The first scene gave a sense of a Caribbean market, with pantomime, gesture, costuming, and lighting slowly exposing the daily rituals of a small fishing village. The second scene took place in the jungle, where animal cries accompanied a steady drum and slow dancing. Dunham repeatedly used a step from the Maroons in Jamaica: a male dancer moved back and forth, right and left in a deep second position, legs wide and turned out, knees bent, hopping -- a grounded, portentous but open stance. [see Figure 3.4] The final scene depicted a festival day, with the revelry more persuasive because of its contrast to the even routine of the first scene. The energetic mazurka and beguine matched the bright light and vibrant costumes. But a jealous lover entered, moving in the menacing second position from the jungle scene, and conducted a fighting dance, L'Ag'Ya, which resulted in a death.56

Dunham created a full picture of a Caribbean village, with joy and pathos and even the tedium of life. Although she combined dances from various places in the Caribbean, many of the steps used were taken directly from her own observances of those particular dances. L'Ag'Ya joined Dunham's anthropological sensibilities and her choreographic and dancing skills; it was neither an exact rendering of the dances as she had seen them, nor a flashy spectacle of constant skirt tossing and whirling moves, nor a wholly accurate picture of Martinique. Instead, Dunham designed a sense of a place, where gesture, sound, and color existed in a variety of ways, and dance was a sensory experience among many. As dance scholar VéVé Clark argues, Dunham created a diasporic vision.57

Dunham's anthropological field work strengthened her belief in the forceful ties binding the African diaspora together. In the language of anthropology, she was a true participant-observer,
entering deeply into the societies she observed. Part of the ease with which she did this was due to the fact that she was a black person investigating other black people. For Dunham’s trip to Haiti in 1935, Herskovits wrote many letters of introduction to people there; Dunham wrote back that she discovered she did not have much need for the letters because she met people easily and they led her around. Closer to Haitians because of similar skin color and finding her way quite comfortably, she acknowledged that she may have used some unconventional methods, but "there are ways and ways of doing field work, I find." Her great-grandparents were Haitian, and she thought this won her friends too. The Haitians at first thought she had spiritual powers because of her dancing ability, and at the end of her time there she was initiated as an obi, a sort of spiritual guide, that symbolized her acceptance into that society. 58

Anthropology also attracted the writer Zora Neale Hurston, who primarily investigated the religious beliefs, folklore, and language of black Americans in the south in the 1930s and wrote both fiction and nonfiction based on this research. The pull to anthropology of Hurston, Dunham, Sylvia Fort in Seattle (who later was a member of Dunham’s company), and Pearl Primus (the next leading African American modern dancer) was a way for African American women to uncover their past and explore the heritage of peoples of the African diaspora. These women received legitimacy for their artistic endeavors through higher education, a common path for African American women. Anthropology itself attracted many women, foreigners, and Jews who because of their marginal status in America felt compelled to examine the roots of that marginality. 59 Under the rubric of cultural relativism, they defended other cultural patterns and held out hope for changing the lives of people who had secondary status in the societies of which they were a part. Hurston and Dunham relied on ethnography and their personal experiences as black participant-observers to validate their conceptions of the black peoples
they surveyed. They transferred their knowledge and experience of African diasporan cultures to an African American setting and, in the process, rejuvenated notions of blackness. Dunham found that movement, the cultural patterns of gestures and action, stretched past the American South to the Caribbean and Africa, preserving a racial heritage that extended beyond words.\footnote{60}

In a 1938 interview Dunham rejected the notion of dance as a "more natural medium of racial expression," but she tied dance and racial identity together again when she wrote that same year, "[T]o predict the future of the Negro in dance would be, in a large measure, to predict the future of the Negro as a social entity. It is impossible to separate the two concepts."\footnote{61} Dunham rightly bound together the place of African Americans in society with their place in the dance world, flattening the distinction of art as a rarefied realm of insight and experience that existed above or outside larger societal beliefs. Her training as an anthropologist led her to put art into the broader category of culture, the social repository of a group's values and beliefs. Dunham, Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and Zora Neale Hurston promulgated an anthropological definition of culture that encompassed social stratifications in art and made visible the relative nature of definitions of high and low within modernism. During the 1930s anthropologists began uncovering the dramatically different meanings ascribed to race, gender, sexuality, and class around the world. They promoted a malleable view of these categories, pushing against restrictions and prejudices based upon preconceptions. But limitations remained. Societal beliefs steered women to dance, and racial, sexual, and class characterizations underlay the division between high and low culture in modernism -- despite Dafora's and Dunham's attempts to circumvent them. Within these constraints, Dunham's path to success lay in making high art in the United States from African and Caribbean sources, capitalizing on a heritage of dance within the African diaspora and raising perceptions of African Americans' capabilities.
Dunham faced obstacles in surmounting racial prejudices embedded in modernism that were exacerbated by being a woman. Critics easily deflated the artistic import of her work because of its sensual overtones. In the 1930s Josephine Baker represented the archetypal success for African American women performers. On stage and off, Baker's playful embodiment of an erotic "primitive" formed the foundation of her celebrity. In Paris, Baker thrilled audiences at the Théâtre de Champs-Elysées in 1925 and the Folies Bergères in 1926 and reigned thereafter. Her U.S. appearances were rare; she appeared in the Ziegfeld Follies of 1936 in New York to reviews that discredited her singing and dancing talent and upheld the notion that her primary talent was what lay beneath her banana skirt. Dunham wandered into this maelstrom of varying sexual play, from the seductive banter of Baker to the sexlessness that white women modern dancers successfully deployed. In confronting audience expectations of sexual provocation and the association of artistic legitimacy with sexlessness, Dunham remained steadfast in her inclusion of African dance traditions that featured more forthright acceptance of sexual elements in dance.

Dunham's determination, combined with her worthy talent and education, provoked a variety of responses. White critics almost never missed an opportunity to comment on both her anthropological studies and the sensual, sometimes even sexually explicit, movements she included in her choreography. "As an anthropologist the gist of Miss Dunham's report seems to be that sex in the Caribbean is doing all right," John Martin, the influential New York Times critic put it. "Did you ever see a Degree in Anthropology dancing?" another critic asked. Reviewers slighted the seriousness of Dunham's academic study by continually using it to justify the sexy movements, while at the same time anthropology legitimated these so-called primitive movements in the sanctified realm of the theater for
white critics. In either case, as anthropologists uncovering primitive dances or as a black woman rotating her hips, Dunham decidedly affirmed white critics' conceptions of all black peoples as inherently more sexual.

Criticism of Dunham that focused on her over-use of the hips prompted attacks of vulgarity, lack of artistry, and sensationalism. Critics described Dunham as hot and performing in a sexually taunting, splashy, and theatrical style. She was the originator of the role of Georgia in the Broadway version of *Cabin in the Sky* (1941), about which John Martin proclaimed, "She is 100% seductress." The city censor of Boston even forced Dunham to drop a part of her *Tropical Revue* on a 1944 tour there because it was too sexually explicit (prompting a friend of Dunham's to comment that Boston was "more like a Clothing Convention than an Art Center"). Dunham did choreograph more revue-like dances that played up the steel drums and flashy colors of Caribbean culture, perform in bigger theaters as a part of a line of shows that had more popular appeal, and appear in Hollywood movies in the 1940s. But some of the splashiness came from the encouragement of the impresario Sol Hurok. For *Tropical Revue*, the show that received the heaviest criticism for its sensual allure, Hurok persuaded Dunham to leave out *L'Ag'Ya*, thinking it too heavy, and include the more lively *Rites de Passage*. This apparently appealed more to Hurok's sense of what would sell, at least outside Boston with its well-known puritanical attitude toward theater. Boston critics attempted to save Dunham's reputation, once again, by pulling out her anthropological background to legitimize the sexual moves. To counter the city censor, Elinor Hughes of the *Boston Herald* listed Dunham's work toward a master's degree, her winning of research fellowships, and her brother's position on the faculty of Howard University. Still, Dunham provoked censure while Shawn and His Men Dancers, performing as nearly nude as possible on Boston stages, did not. The sexual allure of black women caused more consternation than that of
white men.67

The rise of another African American woman, anthropologist-cum-dancer Pearl Primus, elicited comparison with Dunham in the 1940s. Critics often noted differences between Dunham and Primus and their use of sexual movements. Primus's body more broadly conformed to the stereotypical male or female "Negroid": broad nose, large expressive eyes, dark pigmentation, and muscular thighs and buttocks. Although only five feet two inches tall, she was described as strong and sturdy rather than petite. Perhaps largely due to her distinguishable physical characteristics, descriptions of her dancing generally pointed to how well she performed the "primitive rhythms." White reviewers described the muscular and barefooted Primus as a "strong, rhythmical, wild creature," a "young filly" romping over the pasture showing all the signs of being a "thoroughbred," and looking out from "jungle distances" as, in Martha Graham's words, a "panther."68 Identifying Primus as a member of the animal kingdom reinforced prejudices about African Americans' sexual nature and their place on the evolutionary scale. Put a different way, one audience member of the 1940s I spoke to said she did not know until she saw Primus that women could move with such weight, strength, and masculinity.69

The difference in the criticism that Primus and Dunham received might suggest that Primus -- because of her easily identifiable "Negro" features -- reinforced expectations and stereotypes and provoked less discomfort than Dunham. Dunham was "always lovely to the eye," but Primus's "technical equipment" apparently overwhelmed her sex appeal.70 Primus was sexual without being sexually attractive. With her lighter color, taller and leaner build, and narrower facial features, Dunham more closely fit white ideals of dancers and beauty and may have triggered a more hidden and festering reason for the derisive comments: she reminded Americans of the truth of their racial heritage -- miscegenation. Dunham sometimes consciously flaunted her erotic appeal but perhaps unconsciously
aggravated this nagging implication. And her marriage to a white man, set and costume designer John Pratt, may have added to the unease on this topic. In contrast, Primus -- of "unmixed African descent" and with a stockier build that helped her "outjump any man" -- generated less criticism.  

Dunham and Primus mediated sexuality within their artistry in a different way than Graham and Humphrey but garnered enough praise to challenge some white critics to rethink assumptions about the capabilities of African American dancers and the difficulties they faced. Lois Balcolm, writing in the more intellectual of the dance periodicals of the time, Dance Observer, reported comments she overheard during a concert by Primus in October 1944 that reflected contradictory beliefs: "[She's] at her best when she is most Negro" and "[She's] at her worst in the primitives -- just a modern dancer's approximation." Most audience members were more comfortable seeing Primus dance jazz. Balcolm, on the other hand, advised Primus to continue to explore the more "serious" avenue of modern dance, seeing neither "tribal ritual" nor "Harlem high spirits" as expressing the "things of most importance." Franziska Boas, the daughter of pioneering anthropologist Franz Boas who also was involved in modern dance, urged the African American dancer to steer clear of African and Caribbean dance material as it encouraged the "mistaken notion that this is the well-spring of his inspiration and he must return to it from time to time." Boas argued that black dancers needed to step beyond the folk-dance level and continue to explore the aesthetic principles of modern dance, thereby challenging the expectations of the white audience. 

If Boas and Balcolm illuminated some of the preconceptions of a predominantly white audience, they also betrayed judgments about the difference between entertainment and art that haunted African American concert dancers. They believed African and Caribbean dances ("folk dance," according to Boas) and "Harlem high spirits" lacked aesthetic elements; these judgments upheld distinctions between
entertainment and art based on class and racial prejudices and often refracted in sexual terms through
denigration of erotic appeal. They rejected Dunham's and Primus's attempts to imbue the popular
dances with artistic intention -- by choreographing, not improvising, them and by performing the
numbers on stage alongside other kinds of choreography. Boas and Balcolm insisted on the superiority
of the higher art form created and sustained by white critics and dancers as the path to pursue in
breaking down the discrimination facing African American artists.

Commentary about Dunham and Primus amongst African American critics manifested similar
elements. Peggy Galloway of the Chicago Defender advocated pursuing ballet because "it does possess
great possibilities towards polishing our cultural aspirations," thus tying black achievement to success in
traditionally white fields. More generally, African American critics focused on how Dunham and
Primus represented "the race." The New York African American community quickly embraced Dunham
upon her triumphant show in 1940; she graced the cover of Crisis in March 1940 and was hailed as "the
leading colored dance artist in the country." As with white reviewers, Dunham's Tropical Revue
provoked some discomfort among black critics and revealed that sexual allure was a component in
measuring racial authenticity. One critic recognized the lack of authenticity in Rites de Passage and
Primitive Rhythms but rationalized that "the inadequacies of material are surmounted for the sophisticates
by the beauty and vitality of the production and for the barbarians by the hip-swinging that is a hallmark
of the show." While the comment recreated a dichotomy between sophisticates and barbarians, it also
recognized that both types might be in the audience. In the end, the reviewer strongly endorsed the
show, saying "hip-wriggling is relegated to its proper place," in contrast to white reviewers' toilsome
efforts to justify such movements with anthropological insights. In fact, most reviews of Dunham in the
black press gave only passing comments on the sensuality of movements, as in the above remark,
although attractiveness did affect her success. An African American soldier wrote Yank magazine in 1944 claiming "[T]here are four or five battalions, three or four regiments and two or three division of fellows around here who would like for you to put in a photo of Katherine Dunham," following one of Lena Horne.78

Primus's rise in the early 1940s prompted analysis about both dancers in the African American press that stressed authenticity and political purpose rather than sexual attraction specifically. As with white reviewers, Primus fared better, designated as a "strictly classic dancer" and "an artist of the people."79 While the reviewer Nora Holt declared comparisons "odious," she ranked Primus as one of the best dancers of the era, and congratulated her for expressing a "deep and sincere understanding of her people, of the Negro's struggles, his frustration." What Dunham first displayed so brilliantly, "the natural dancing technique of the Negro," Primus expanded upon, "leaping from the heart of a dark continent and spreading its symphonic beauty through an unbounded universe in a story of freedom . . . unstemmed and thunderous."80 The critic Don Deleighbur worried that Dunham had let Hollywood and commercial success inspire a taste for "the glitter and glamour of the extravaganza and mimicry."81 The worry masked a concern that Dunham had fallen sway to white ideals of entertainment, copying their ideas of dance for African Americans -- with its emphasis on sexual provocation -- and losing the racial originality she had possessed earlier. Dunham's flashier style, her mulatto appearance, and perhaps her white husband brought her racial authenticity into question. In these ways, the attributes of womanhood folded into the argument of authenticity and supported the critical favor Primus received.

From the 1920s to the 1940s questions of racial representation and artistic responsibility burdened African American critics and dancers. Responses to these artists and artworks reinscribed the
questions so that "Negro art" was never free from the tentacles of representing "the race." For white reviewers, African Americans' natural dancing ability confirmed their closeness to so called primitive societies, unsophistication, nature, bodies, and sex; white critics had difficulty acknowledging African American dancers' contributions to an aesthetic project that included philosophical ideas about art. For African American critics, the debate between high and low transformed into one of art and propaganda; they recognized that aesthetics were inextricably linked to racial perceptions within society at large. Black critics satisfied the demands of both propaganda and art by heralding the innate dance talent of African Americans as a unique cultural offering and as a racial tradition among peoples of the African diaspora.

In the project of modern dance, African American concert dancers had a marginal but critically defining role. Racism limited their involvement in modern dance as training, monetary support, and performance opportunities were scarce. Questions of race, however, were crucial to the definition of modern dance as a new art form. In the performances of the National Dance Congress in 1936, Edna Guy danced on a program of "Variety and Theater Dance" rather than a program of modern dance. White modern dancers set themselves against the low art of the dance halls, the revue shows, and the sensual play black dancers aroused. Recognizing their slighted place in the United States, African American concert dancers celebrated the traditions of Africa and the Caribbean. Graduate work in anthropology lent credibility and helped Dunham, and later Primus, mold and legitimate an African American aesthetic in a dance field mostly populated and supported by white Americans. Dafora, Dunham, and Primus enhanced the importance of dance when they stressed its function as ritual in African and Caribbean societies. In this they contributed to changing ideas of art in the 1930s, forcing a bleeding into the larger category of culture that emphasized the distinctive social grounding of values and
beliefs. As much as African American dancers expanded definitions of culture, however, when they performed in American theaters they remained bound by traditional notions of art as Culture. The path for African Americans to segregated theaters through side doors, back stairs, and balcony seating was a spatial representation of the circuitous way critics reviewed and affected the careers of African American dancers. African American concert dancers involved in artistic and anthropological realms strengthened the significance of dance, but more important, exposed the enduring constancy of race as a foundational element in structuring ideas of art and culture within modernism.
Endnotes--Chapter 3

1. Doris Humphrey, "Dance, Little Chillun!," The American Dancer, v.6 #10 (July 1933), 8; see also Doris Humphrey to her parents, 30 January 1933 postmark, Folder C329.10, DH, DC/NYPL.


4. A variety of books in dance history are devoted to the topic of African Americans in dance but without the historical specificity I hope to lay out. The venerable Jazz Dance by the Stearnses still provides an entertaining introduction to the subject through interviews conducted with dancers of the period. Emery's Black Dance From 1619 to Today offers an overview that is exhaustive in tracing the occurrence of American black dance over time but cursory in its analysis. Two books give good pictorial narratives: Long, The Black Tradition in American Dance and Thorpe, Black Dance. Hazzard-Gordon, Jookin', addresses the varying sociological spaces in which black dance has occurred. John O. Perpener III offers the best overview of this period and provides biographical information on dancers who will not be discussed in depth here: Randolph Sawyer, Ollie Burgoyne, and Charles Williams; see
Perpener, African-American Concert Dance. See also Creque-Harris, "The Representation of African Dance on the Concert Stage" and Begho, "Black Dance Continuum."

Two recent books point to growing attention to dance in African American studies scholarship. Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance by Dixon-Gottschild accents the application of theoretical concerns to dance. Malone, Steppin' on the Blues, skillfully examines the tradition of step dancing in African American communities. Two short collections of essays edited by Gerald Myers, The Black Tradition in American Modern Dance and African American Genius in Modern Dance, give a good overview of the issues that now concern dance scholars. Manning explores the relationship between white and African American dancers in various articles including "Cultural Theft--or Love?" and "Black Voices, White Bodies."

5. Richard Bone first suggested a Chicago renaissance in "Richard Wright and the Chicago Renaissance" and Floyd, The Power of Black Music, elaborates on this idea (118-35). Apparently interest in dance occurred in the early 1930s in both Harlem and Chicago, whereas other art forms began rejuvenation in Harlem in the mid 1920s. The Chicago movement does seem to have taken off in the early 1930s (as opposed to Bone's date of 1935), and performance arts appear to have been more active than literature. Douglas, in Terrible Honesty, explores the different natures of the black and white communities in New York and Chicago, which may have contributed to less fluidity between black and white literary folk in Chicago.

6. Crisis v.32 #3 (July 1926), 134-36.

8. Doris Humphrey to her parents, 11 April 1927, Folder C265.10, DH, DC/NYPL.

9. The questionnaire first appeared in *Crisis* v.31 #4 (February 1926), 165. Answers by various writers, white and African American, appeared in the following months.

10. *Crisis* v.31 #4 (February 1926), 165.


13. Edna Guy to Ruth St. Denis, 27 May 1924, Folder 323, and 7 June 1924, Folder 324, RSD, DC/NYPL.

14. Katherine Dunham encountered problems in renting dance space in buildings in Chicago in the late 1920s and early 1930s; see Barzel, "The Lost 10 Years," 94. On transportation problems and prohibitive costs, see the memoirs of Alvin Ailey and Judith Jamison: Ailey with Bailey, *Revelations*, Jamison with Kaplan, *Dancing Spirit*.


16. For example, see letters from Edna Guy to Ruth St. Denis, 27 May 1924, 7 June 1924, 7 November 1924, 8 January 1925, 27 October 1931, RSD, DC/NYPL. St. Denis and Guy shared a spiritual religiosity that fused a strong base of Christianity with the mysticism of Eastern religious
practices. St. Denis wrote in her autobiography, *Ruth St. Denis*, "I called her my little black prophetess as she called me her white prophetess" (348). Guy's letters to St. Denis are full of spiritual musings and poems.


18. Edna Guy to Ruth St. Denis, 27 May 1924, Folder 323, RSD, DC/NYPL.

19. *Dance Events* (3 December 1932), a short-lived weekly publication; Clipping file, New Negro Art Theatre, DC/NYPL. The Writers Program of the WPA also gathered information about dance schools under "Negroes in New York: Dance." For general overview of dance education amongst African Americans in New York and Chicago, see Sherrod, "The Dance Griots."

20. See advertisements in *New York Amsterdam News* (4 October 1933), and picture of young girl on pointe (8 February 1933).

21. On segregation amongst the audience, see *Crisis* v.37 #10 (October 1930), 339-40, 357-58. On Rand and Noma, see *New York Amsterdam News* (1 November 1933).

22. Carmencita Romero talks about integrating all-white schools in Chicago during this same time; Anne Haas, "More Than Samba," *Manhattan Plaza News* (November 1995), 1, 8, 11, Romero File, Ann Barzel Collection, Newberry Library.


26. See letterhead of a letter from Katherine Dunham to Mark Turbyfill, 24 August 1933, Box 1, Folder 8, MT, SIU.

27. Naison, Communists in Harlem During the Depression, 36. Miriam Raphael Cooper also remembers occasions when people of "different colors and different ages" performed the piece, due to the lack of African American modern dancers. As a Jewish woman with dark hair, she played the "Black" opposite a "very blond boy" as the "White" at another Communist function; Miriam Cooper Raphael, interview with the author, 8 December 1994.


29. Edna Guy to Ruth St. Denis [n.d., 1930?], Folder 747, RSD, DC/NYPL.

30. Edna Guy to Ruth St. Denis, 5 June 1933: "you may count on me to maid you." Folder 431, RSD, DC/NYPL. Even later in life, Guy seems to have provided these kinds of services for St. Denis. In a later letter [n.d., 1939?], Guy tells St. Denis that she has a friend who is a college graduate, speaks several languages, can clean well, and would work for 50 cents per hour. Guy encloses her key to St. Denis's apartment with the letter, perhaps suggesting that Guy's friend is a replacement for cleaning services Guy had been providing; Folder 533, RSD, DC/NYPL.
31. Kykunkor survives only in a few photographs, reviews, and programs. Photographs in DC/NYPL; program of the Little Theater performance, 18 June 1934, AD, Sch/NYPL. Reviews include New York Times (9 May 1934); New Yorker v.10 #14 (19 May 1934), 14-15; Joseph Arnold, "Dance Events Reviewed," The American Dancer v.7 #10 (July 1934), 12; and others noted below.

32. Daily Mirror (19 May 1934).

33. Esquire (August 1934).

34. Souvenir Program [n.d., 1935?], AD, Sch/NYPL.

35. New York Times (9 May 1934), New York Post (19 May 1934), New Yorker (19 May 1934), Souvenir Program [n.d., 1935?], AD, Sch/NYPL.

36. New York Amsterdam News (7 July 1934). I have found no evidence that the film was ever made.

37. Souvenir Program [n.d., 1935?], AD, Sch/NYPL.

38. Torgovnick, Gone Primitive, 244-45.

39. Locke quoted in Lewis, When Harlem Was in Vogue, 303, 154. Zora Neale Hurston received support from Mason from 1927 to 1932 and Mason held all the technical rights to the folklore she collected during that time; Dearborn, Pochahontas's Daughters, 64-65. Dearborn also claims that Mason and Locke demanded an attention to folk culture and African traditions that the African
American artists supported by her did not always want to pursue (65). Lewis's account suggests that Locke felt more ambivalent about that focus as well.


42. New York Amsterdam News (23 June 1934); Sherrod, "The Dance Griots," 293.

43. William Grant Still to Katherine Dunham [n.d., 1936?], Box 1, Folder 7, KD, SIU.

44. Dance Observer v.3 #6 (June-July 1936), 64.

45. Press release, Edna Guy Programs, DC/NYPL.

46. Accounts of Dunham's life include Dunham, A Touch of Innocence; Beckford, Katherine Dunham; Aschenbrenner, Katherine Dunham; and a consolidated article on Dunham's influence, Joyce Aschenbrenner, "Katherine Dunham: Anthropologist, Artist, Humanist” in Harrison and Harrison, African-American Pioneers in Anthropology, 137-53.


48. A full exposition of Mead's work on gender roles can be found in Mead, Male and Female; Benedict, Patterns of Culture.

49. On the history of anthropology in the 1920s and 1930s see Marcus and Fischer, Anthropology

50. Herskovits, "The Negro's Americanism," The New Negro, 353-60. Ruth Benedict also uses the example of African Americans in the United States to demonstrate the success of acculturation: "most Harlem traits keep still closer to the forms that are current in white groups"; Patterns of Culture, 13.

51. Stuckey, Going Through the Storm, 199.

52. Herskovits, The Myth of the Negro Past, 76.


54. Dunham did eventually publish her findings in 1946 in Katherine Dunham's Journey to Accompong. It was an unconventional anthropology book. Essentially a descriptive travelogue of her experiences, the book offered neither scholarly analysis nor statements of broader impact about anthropology or the West Indies. This book and another of Dunham's, Island Possessed, have received renewed interest recently among some anthropologists because of their descriptive style. As the discipline of
anthropology has struggled with questions about objectivity and the limitations of one's own cultural myopia, Dunham's subjective approach has received praise. See Joyce Aschenbrenner, "Anthropology as a Lifeway: Katherine Dunham," a 1978 lecture reprinted in Clark and Wilkerson, Kaiso!, 186-91; Harrison and Harrison, African-American Pioneers in Anthropology, 19-20. My thanks to Yvonne Daniel for originally calling my attention to this point.

A significance of her journey often overlooked was her extensive use of a 16mm Kodak motion picture camera, visually recording for the first time many of the scenes, rituals, and dances; Roy Thomas, "Focal Rites: New Dance Dominions" (1978), reprinted in Clark and Wilkerson, Kaiso!, 112-16.

55. Melville Herskovits to Katherine Dunham, 8 May 1937, Box 7, Folder 12, MH, NUA. More recent research into the place of non-whites in anthropology suggests that other factors may have contributed to Dunham's leaving academia. Hsu, "Prejudice and Its Intellectual Effect," argues that non-whites have generally had the role of fact-gatherers rather than theoreticians, stemming at least in part from the belief then that you could not be objective about "your own" people.

56. Description of L'Ag'Ya from Program, 8 May 1950, Katherine Dunham file, Archives of the Museum of the City of New York; Clark, "Katherine Dunham's Tropical Revue." For a more analytical review of L'Ag'Ya, see VéVé Clark's "Performing the Memory of Difference in Afro-Caribbean Dance: Katherine Dunham's Choreography, 1938-1987," in Geneviève Fabre, Robert O'Meally, History and Memory in African-American Culture, 188-204.

57. Clark, "Performing the Memory of Difference," 197.
58. Katherine Dunham to Melville Herskovits, 23 June 1935, Box 7, Folder 12; Katherine Dunham to Melville Herskovits, 28 December 1935, Box 7, Folder 12; Melville Herskovits to Katherine Dunham, 6 January 1936, Box 7, Folder 12, MH, NUA. In this last letter, Herskovits wrote: "I am not surprised that the natives are amazed at the way you pick up the dances, and that it induces them to believe that you probably have an inherited loa that makes this possible." Herskovits's view of field work differed from Dunham's, although he did not deride her in these letters. In his Life in a Haitian Valley, however, Herskovits describes his methodology clearly arguing that it is not wise to "go native." "This may be feasible among some folk--in the South Seas, perhaps--but let it be stated emphatically that this is neither possible nor of benefit among West African Negroes and their New World Negro descendants" (322). Respecting the "dignity" of set caste lines and, foremost of all, not opening yourself up to ridicule laid the foundation for good ethnography, in his opinion. Hsu, "Prejudice and Its Intellectual Effect" and Harrison and Harrison, African-American Pioneers in Anthropology, suggest how this might have contributed to the racism within the discipline of anthropology.

59. Marcus and Fischer, Anthropology as Cultural Critique, 130.

60. Hazel Carby argues that Hurston romanticized the rural folk of the American south, finding words and speech patterns around which to conceptualize an essentialist view of blackness; "The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology, and the Folk: Zora Neale Hurston" in Awkward, New Essays on Their Eyes Are Watching God, 71-93, esp. 87. For a discussion of views of women, see Gwendolyn Mikell, "Feminism and Black Culture in the Ethnography of Zora Neale Hurston," in Harrison and Harrison, African-American Pioneers in Anthropology, 51-69.


65. John Martin quoted in Bogle, *Brown Sugar*, 98-101. The part of Georgia was given to Lena Horne in the MGM movie version. Bogle suggests that perhaps Dunham was "too brazen" for the movie.

66. *Boston Herald* (20 January 1944, 23 January 1944). The City Censor's move caused a wave of protest against him among Boston critics. In particular, they lamented that Boston would continue its reputation and "black name" in theatrical circles for being especially puritanical. Clark, "Katherine Dunham's *Tropical Revue*"; Martin Sobelman to Katherine Dunham, 5 April 1941, Box 2, Folder 2, KD, SIU.

68. Copy of personal letter dated 27 February 1945 (name unclear), Pearl Primus Manuscripts, DC/NYPL; Dance Observer v.10 #8 (October 1943), 88; Lloyd, The Borzoi Book of Modern Dance, 266; New York Times (18 March 1979).


70. Dance Observer v.10 #8 (October 1943), 90; Dance Magazine v. 18 #11 (November 1944), 14.

71. Afro-American (Baltimore) (22 July 1944); Martin, John Martin's Book of the Dance, 183.

72. Dance Observer v.11 #9 (November 1944), 110-11; Dance Observer v.11 #10 (December 1944), 122-24. Also illuminating are comments of two other white critics addressing different audience reactions to a dance concert in North Carolina which included a white and black troupe: Dance Observer v.11 #7 (August-September 1944), 80-81.

73. Franziska Boas, "The Negro and the Dance as an Art," Phylon v.10 #1 (1949), 38-42. A more contemporary and theoretical look at the distinction between dancing for a white or black audience can be found in Hazzard-Gordon, "Afro-American Core Culture Social Dance."

74. Audience composition remains a barely tangible issue. My judgment that the audience was predominantly—if not exclusively—white is drawn from the assumptions I see the critics making; I believe these critics are commenting on a white audience as well as to a white readership. Critics probably would comment if there were an unusually large number of African Americans in the audience. See sources mentioned in footnote 72. Also, the lack of black public support for concert dance by
African Americans drew concern, especially in the 1960s and 1970s; see Dance Magazine v.53 #10 (October 1979), 81.

75. Chicago Defender (22 May 1937).

76. Crisis v.47 #3 (March 1940).

77. New York Amsterdam News (25 September 1943).

78. Yank v.2 #42 (7 April 1944), 14.

