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## **Redefining American Dance in the Classroom: Responsibility to Racial Justice**

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### **Abstract**

After what was eighteen months of isolation and remote learning for some due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, it is imperative that dance classroom spaces become community spaces united in solidarity for all. Calling attention toward the racism systemically ingrained in the American dance legacy serves as an impetus to eliminate that racism while transforming American dance education into a sincerely American (multicultural) dance experience that is better informed, empathetic, and equitable. This essay based on literature in the fields of dance, education, and social

justice discusses the racism embedded in America and American dance, the conglomeration of cultures and identities that inherently forge American dance, the need to see and understand thyself and others in the classroom, and methods for curricula diversification.

### **Introduction**

America is widely known as a melting pot of cultures.<sup>1</sup> However, the aforementioned reputation does not reign accurate in terms of American dance, whose (White) legacies are typically incorporated into its curricula as focal points and whose (non-White) voices, cultures, and contributions are habitually excluded. American dance as it is educationally presented is not sincerely “American,” for America is not solely a history of those who colonized it but also of those who were colonized by it. Essentially, the educational presentation of the genre is not culturally holistic. Thus, it is essential to consider: Why and how must American dance curricula and pedagogical approaches be diversified to reflect and honor America’s true conglomeration of cultures and identities?

The COVID-19 global pandemic has indubitably proven that we are all interconnected. While battling this virus and its aftermath, we simultaneously are in the midst of the largest international racial justice movement in history: Black Lives Matter. Yet, the value placed on Black lives in the American dance canon is absent, as perpetuated by the Whitewashed curricula and pedagogical approaches employed in our classrooms.

### **Racism in America and American Dance**

#### ***Whiteness***

Post-racial discourses claim that America has progressed beyond racism, discrimination, and prejudice directed toward African American and Black people, but there are immense inaccuracies in these ideologies (Kerr-Berry, 2012). The evidence of our consistently racialized society lies in the role of Whiteness (Davis, 2018; Davis & Phillips-Fein, 2018; hooks, 2013; Kerr-Berry, 2012; McCarthy-Brown, 2018) and its impact on all racially marginalized (non-White) groups. Whiteness, an institutional and cultural force (Davis & Phillips-Fein, 2018), a universal standard for other groups to be held to (Davis, 2018), and a supremacist form of thinking and practice (hooks, 2013), manifests itself in inescapable influences and forces (Davis, 2018; McCarthy-Brown, 2018). Resulting from the echoes of colonialism (Domnwachukwu, 2019), Whiteness is engraved in America’s political foundation where it has and continues to enforce a distorted power relation that promotes a

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of this literature review, the term America refers to the United States of America.

system of domination, White hegemony, and a racial divide (Domnwachukwu, 2019; hooks, 2013; Kerr-Berry, 2012; McCarthy-Brown, 2017; Prichard, 2016).

Although apparent in American national society and its functioning as a whole, these racialized controls based on skin color and ethnicity additionally and specifically infiltrate American dance. Similarly to its position as the owner of American culture, Whiteness is the owner, regulator, and dominator of concert dance and dance education (Davis; 2018, Davis & Phillips-Fein, 2018; McCarthy-Brown, 2018). Its overseeing capacity permeates through dance education in copious ways, including but not limited to its institutions, policies, cultural norms (Davis, 2018), structure, pedagogy, terminology, curricula, evaluative measures (Davis & Phillips-Fein, 2018), theories, applications, implications (Kerr-Berry, 2012), dance forms, training models, aesthetic criteria, faculty hires, and student enrollments (Kerr-Berry, 2018). The frequent Whitewashed content chosen to represent American dance in educational settings and the respective White hegemonic ways in which it is recurrently implemented is a testament to this exhaustive list, the pervasive nature of Whiteness, and the need for diversification.

### ***The Color of Dance Forms***

Whiteness has determined how dance forms are categorized, with assumed color being the divisive determinant (Davis, 2018; DeFrantz, 2002; Dils, 2007; Foster, 2009; Kealiinohomoku, 2001). The blatantly binary division of dance genres at a first glance is geographically distinguished between Western and non-Western, but is ultimately another way in which Whiteness has lobbied its ownership of the landscape of dance, othering dance forms that are not White. Hip hop (with its Black origins) serves as a prime example as it is a dance form that originated in America (anchored in the West), and yet is considered non-Western out of racial bias (Davis, 2018). It is then Western dance forms, which do not need to indicate themselves as “White dance” for they are normalized as part of the dominant culture without the requirement of naming their ethnic or cultural origins (DeFrantz, 2002; Kealiinohomoku, 2001), that diverge in identity from non-Western dance forms, additionally referred to as “ethnic,” “world” (Foster, 2009), “social,” or “traditional” dance forms (Dils, 2007). These dance forms of non-White bodies always include mention of racial or ethnic signifiers (Kealiinohomoku, 2001). Notably, the Western/non-Western binary distills to a White/other binary.

American modern dance has a myriad of benefits such as its foundational ability to inform embodied knowledge, instill versatility through a wide movement vocabulary, grant kinesthetic understanding, and prepare dancers for professional careers (Lushington, 2017), yet it is prioritized in dance education as a result of its ability to pass within the Western/White side of the dance form binary. Western concert dance forms and their

commanding Eurocentric ideas are hierarchically valued in American dance education (Horrigan, 2020; Kerr-Berry, 2012; Koff, 2021; McCarthy-Brown, 2014). These Western dance forms that are centered in educational institutions under the guise of offering “technique” specifically refer to ballet and modern dance (Anderson, 2020; Davis, 2018; Dils, 2007). Although ballet does have European origins, modern dance, an American staple, is categorized as Eurocentric due to its presentation on proscenium stages that result from European performance origins (Kerr-Berry, 2018). The importance and focus of American modern dance in American dance education is historically visible through its employment in early higher education dance pursuits, which were administered through physical education departments (Koff, 2021). With its crucial position at the center of American dance education, modern dance represents American culture, yet it is taught from a Eurocentric perspective that is devoid of any recognition of source materials that are not White (Kerr-Berry, 2017). It is its partial Whiteness, although only a facet of its identity, that allows it to prosper in the first place.

If White dance forms and the Whiteness of modern dance are the curricula, then dance forms of color and the otherness of modern dance are the null curricula, or the curricula that students do not have access to because it is absent, whether purposefully or unknowingly, from the classroom (Anderson, 2020; Kerr-Berry, 2017, 2018; Monroe, 2011; Walker, 2020; Young, 2018). If these dance forms of color, exemplified by the dances of the African Diaspora (including jazz dance), are even included in the higher education curricula, they are integrated as optional electives that are not viewed as essential for the development of the dancer (Anderson, 2020; Davis, 2018; Salfran, 2019; Vaccaro, 2014; Walker, 2020). The lack of or partial integration of dance forms of color is a systemic and overt manner of marginalizing non-White dance forms and bodies of color as subservient and illegitimate cultural and artistic offerings in comparison to their White counterparts (Anderson, 2020; McCarthy-Brown, 2018; Monroe, 2011; Walker, 2020). This marginalization is a demonstration of the racism entrenched in America and American dance education.

A colorblind approach (Prichard, 2019; Wakamatsu, 2020) that negates the presence of racism or racist tactics is sometimes used to ignore the abovementioned marginalization; the legacy of race in the dance classroom is often disregarded (Mabingo & Koff, 2018). Social hierarchies are invisible to those who are in power, allowing these hierarchies to sturdily continue in cyclic configurations (DiAngelo, 2018; McCarthy-Brown, 2017). Regardless of how it prospers, in addition to its immoral implications, this marginalization of people of color and their affiliated cultures and art has led to an inaccurate and limited depiction of America, and in turn, a limited depiction of American dance. Currently, Whiteness may be the dominant culture, but its existence as the majority culture of the nation is beginning to misalign as racial and cultural identities of students continue to shift at exponential rates

(McCarthy-Brown, 2014). However, the dominant White culture ran rampant with stark omissions and dismissals of groups that did not fit into the dominant approaches of teaching concert dance in the past, inclusive of American modern dance history (Kerr-Berry, 2017, 2018). The analysis of this historic and continued refusal to tell the comprehensive narrative of American dance, inclusive of non-White contributions, lends a reason to abolish the dichotomic and imbalanced power dynamic between the Whiteness and otherness in American concert dance (Kerr-Berry, 2017, 2018) through the diversification of curricula and pedagogical approaches.

### **The Cultural Conglomeration of American Dance: American Modern Dance**

#### ***Appropriation***

Despite the attempts to Whitewash American modern dance as a way to foster its belonging in the White/Western binary of dance forms, it inherently is a conglomeration of cultures and colors, evident in the cultural appropriations that were historically embedded in it. Dance forms that originate from people of color have been stolen, repurposed through appropriation, and finally redistributed to promote Whiteness (McCarthy-Brown, 2018; Prichard, 2016). American culture has appropriated Native American (Prichard, 2016), African (Kerr-Berry, 2017), and Indian (Kennedy, 2020; McCarthy-Brown, 2018) materials. This theft is apparent in modern dance, in which White modern dance pioneers erroneously announced they discovered movement aesthetics that opposed previous ballet aesthetics: planted feet, bent knees, hip thrusts, pointed elbows, and work close to the ground (Kerr-Berry, 2017). In actuality, Africanist remnants are obvious in Helen Tamiris's and Martha Graham's work, through the use of weight and contraction of the pelvis (Kerr-Berry, 2017); Helen Tamiris additionally appropriated African subject matter (Kerr-Berry, 2017). Classical Indian influences are discernable in the work of White modern dance pioneers Martha Graham and Ruth St. Denis (McCarthy-Brown, 2018). These Indian influences are particularly unmistakable in St. Denis's embodiment of her solo *Radha* (Kennedy, 2020). The movement theft was to such an extent that St. Denis was sued, albeit unsuccessfully, for not acknowledging the originator of this dance, a South Asian dancer named Mohammed Ismail, either verbally or monetarily for this contribution (Kraut, 2016). She instead claimed it as her own. These actions by St. Denis, as well as her racist treatment of Black dancer Edna Guy<sup>2</sup> (Kerr-Berry, 2017), give insight to the racialized and privileged social norms of the time that

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<sup>2</sup> For further reading on the historical claim that Ruth St. Denis mistreated Black dancer Edna Guy, consult Foulkes, J. L. (2002). *Modern bodies: Dance and American modernism from Martha Graham to Alvin Ailey*. Additionally consult University of North Carolina Press and Davis Lacy, M. (Director). (2001). *Free to dance: What do you dance?, Episode 1* [DVD]. Thirteen/WNET.

granted such appropriations as permissible (Kennedy, 2020). Through appropriations, American modern dance did not claim the conglomeration of cultures and identities that inherently forged it; it has refused a diverse existence and maintained a false White identity.

### ***Contributions of People of Color***

Through the appropriations of people of color and the historic exclusion of their contributions to the narrative of American modern dance, the collective identity of this dance discipline is incomplete and a *White lie* (Walker, 2020). Dance history courses and the ways in which dance history is incorporated in the classroom within the 21<sup>st</sup> century largely adheres to a linear (Whitewashed) arrangement of Isadora Duncan, to Martha Graham, to Merce Cunningham, to the Judson Group; the influences of Black artists have been pushed aside and narrowed down to ostracized discussions on specific foci such as Alvin Ailey's *Revelations* (Kennedy, 2020). A through line and all-encompassing narrative would be an authentic manner to relay this history, for American dance is indubitably a fusion of Blackness and Whiteness, or Africanist and European origins (Kerr-Berry, 2017, 2018; Monroe, 2011) as a result of the transatlantic slave trade (Kerr-Berry, 2017). These cultures have intersected and merged to form an American dancing body of no particular color, but rather a body that is a reflection of the intercultural fusion of the multitude of cultures that inhabit it (Monroe, 2011). Historically, this multitude of cultures is just that—a multitude; African and European perspectives inform the American dancing, but Native American perspectives that are fundamental to American society (Prichard, 2016) inform it as well. Following the transatlantic slave trade, and as globalization and migration took a hold of international society, the American dancing body grew to include more and more cultures on the spectrum of color that continue to be marginalized in the canon of American modern dance. The call for diversification is as relevant as ever.

As mentioned, Africanist aesthetics (Monroe, 2011) are engraved in American concert dance and their lack of accreditation is a reflection of Black exploitation (Kerr-Berry, 2018). However, it is not only Africanist aesthetics, but also Black artists that were crucial to the emergence and development of this discipline (Kennedy, 2020; Legg, 2011; Lushington, 2017; Prevots, 2001). Katherine Dunham was a major contributor who spearheaded a technique that is continuously practiced (Legg, 2011; Lushington, 2017), albeit not to the same extent as the techniques of White modern dance pioneers within American classroom spaces. Despite the lack of equal recognition, the contributions of Black modern dancers were monumental. Due to the correlation between the government and the arts, and the growth of the civil rights movement which began to capture international headlines in the 1950s and 1960s, Black artists Katherine Dunham, Alvin Ailey, and Pearl Primus were selected as American cultural diplomats who were sent to politically susceptible overseas areas during the Cold War (Prevots, 2001). Their works were viewed as staples of American culture to such an

extent that they were chosen to represent the country in dance diplomatic and cultural exchange endeavors during this politically charged time (Prevots, 2001); however, the inclusion of Black artists simultaneously doubled to save White America from its reputation of overt racism. Their legacies are still othered in American modern dance, exemplified by Dunham technique being considered to be outside of the modern dance umbrella (McCarthy-Brown, 2018) due to its explicit Africanist aesthetics.

It is important to note that contributions of color within American modern dance ranged in culture. Mexican-American artist José Limón was an additional major contributor (Legg, 2011; Lushington, 2017; Prevots, 2001). Limón was also chosen to represent America on an international scale through a 1954 diplomatic endeavor to South America within Eisenhower's inaugural program (Prevots, 2001). More recently in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, more modern dance companies of color, including Urban Bush Women and Ronald K. Brown/Evidence, have had roles in American cultural diplomacy through the DanceMotion USA Program in partnership with the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) and the United States Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (Croft, 2015). The aforesaid contributions debunk the Eurocentric view of American dance history (Kerr-Berry, 2017) and ultimately reject modern dance as a Western (White) dance form (Monroe, 2011). As these contributions of past and present come to light, they draw attention toward the original appropriations and the past suppression of contributions of color; they deprive the authenticity of the complete American modern dance narrative, supporting the need to diversify its Whitewashed presentation in educational settings. In diversifying said presentation, American modern dance as well as American dance generally can be holistically taught from a cultural standpoint, which in turn will allow the consumers of the culture and pedagogy (students) to see themselves and others reflected within it.

### **Seeing Self and Others**

#### ***Representation/Empowerment***

Curriculum and pedagogical choices need to be diversified because students have a visceral need to recognize themselves and their identities represented and mirrored within their education, both within its content and how it is implemented (Gay, 2002; Kerr-Berry, 2017; McCarthy-Brown, 2017; Walker, 2020). Issues of race are then necessary in the classroom (Kerr-Berry, 2017) because their inclusion allows students to discover meaning and have agency in their learning, which fosters their achievement (Gay, 2002; McCarthy-Brown, 2017). The representation of minority (non-White) and ethnically diverse students cannot continue to be excluded for there are struggling achievement gaps of groups of African, Asian, Latinx, and Native American students (Gay, 2002) compared to their White peers. Diverse and all-inclusive representation is indispensable in dance programs because Black

dancers, or “mere renters” of Western forms, have questionable access to quality dance education and dance as a profession (Davis & Phillips-Fein, 2018). While all students of color have been marginalized due to the suppression of their cultures in the historical narrative of the Americanization of dance (Walker, 2020), some adapt to traditional (White) pedagogic choices, despite the disadvantage (McCarthy-Brown, 2009). Be that as it may, an immeasurable number of additional students of color quit dancing entirely due to a feeling of exclusion (McCarthy-Brown, 2009). The social, political, and cultural contexts happening outside of school and in society at large undeniably impact the occurrences within school (Zeichner & Liston, 1987); the othering and exclusion of these students at national and local scales can defeat their willingness to participate in their high school dance programs and any facet of dance thereafter.

A lack of diverse representation is a manifestation of the oppressive racist forces in America that invalidate students of color. Curricula and pedagogical approaches must be diversified to instead validate students of color, as education is meant to be a tool of empowerment (Freire, 1970/1993; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2013). Education should not reinforce a dominant ritual of power politics (hooks, 1994) or oppression (Freire, 1970/1993), but should strive toward liberation (Ladson-Billings, 2013). In excluding students of color, the teacher is not honoring the social construct of education, one that is not hierarchical but is between and among students and teachers (Dewey, 1938), regardless of racial identity. By seeing, hearing, and respecting what students have to offer (Kirkland, 2013); working with and not against the community (Ladson-Billings, 2013); and incorporating students’ cultures as a demonstration of respect, appreciation, and value, students will feel empowered because they will be learning about, and in turn teaching about, themselves (McCarthy-Brown, 2017). Understanding oneself is incredibly imperative for students at the high school age who are growing up in this era of social media, for they severely need introspection and the development of an offline self in order to become a fully realized individual (Gardner & Davis, 2013). A crucial function of their racial identity, an inherent aspect of their self-identity, is to have an empowering interpretation of their cultural background in order to oppose the negative stereotypes thrown at them by White America (Chávez, 2019). Through representation and empowerment, students understand themselves and their culture in a positive light.

Dance is the perfect medium for racial empowerment as race is inscribed in the body (Brooks, 2006; Gottschild, 2003; Lee, 1998; Yancy, 2016), which is a carrier of culture (McCarthy-Brown, 2017). The instrument for dance is intrinsically related to race. Generally, arts education is particularly beneficial for students dealing with ambiguity or uncertainty (Eisner, 2004), while dance specifically lends itself for self-empowerment through its push to allow students to become more identifiably themselves (Bradley, 2012). Because racial discrimination is a contributor to poor health (Wakamatsu, 2020), dance studies inclusive of



the empowerment of people of color can work to reverse both this contributor to poor health as well as its physical implications. Curricula and pedagogical diversification encourage non-White representation and empowerment, a necessary educational component for students of color.

### ***Interculturalism***

In addition to seeing themselves, students must see others within what and how they are learning. Education, inclusive of its content and practices, should underscore interculturalism, inclusivity, cross-cultural affirmation, and social integration (Domnwachukwu, 2019) for it is the reflection of pluralism and diversity that enhances student learning (McCarthy-Brown, 2009). The diversity of America is inclusive of copious cultures' existences and human experiences that should be celebrated and acknowledged (McCarthy-Brown, 2009, 2017; Young, 2018). Because the country is exceptionally diverse, its classrooms also reveal a rich diversity (Monroe, 2011) with pupils of different cultural backgrounds working together to sustain a community of collective efforts (hooks, 1994; Smith-Autard, 1994). Indisputably, each student contributes to the classroom dynamic (hooks, 1994). Their cultures, an inbuilt aspect of them, contribute as well. However, interculturalism is not essential solely because classroom demographics may be inherently multicultural but because all citizens have a commitment to get along with people who are different from themselves culturally (Domnwachukwu, 2019). Intercultural education is a vehicle for the coexistence of cultures because it aids students in grasping the diversity of the world they occupy, familiarizes them with culturally diverse resources, and ultimately helps them effectively interact with the different people that they will encounter in their lives (McCarthy-Brown, 2017). Interculturalism breeds cultural humility; cultural humility is beneficial to everyone regardless of race or ethnicity (James, 2020).

Because of its benefits and necessity, teachers then have an obligation to endorse inclusivity through curricula that advances socio-political consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2011; McCarthy-Brown, 2009). By creating a communal environment and cohesive learning community, a safe space is birthed in which differences can be celebrated (McCarthy-Brown, 2009, 2017). Intercultural education has these immediate effects in the classroom, but also far-reaching societal impacts in terms of equity and denouncement of Whiteness as the owner of culture. This method of alternative pedagogy instills equity, challenges policy and practice, remedies inequality and exclusion, and champions freedom and inclusion (Domnwachukwu, 2019; James, 2020; Young, 2018). By incorporating issues of race and culture in pedagogy, White dominant teaching practices and the Eurocentrism of the past are renounced (Kerr-Berry, 2017; Prichard, 2016). The refusal to embrace interculturalism would perpetuate hegemonic dominance and supremacy (McCarthy-Brown, 2017), which cannot be afforded in the realm of education for education is the equalizer of our society (Domnwachukwu, 2019).

Dance is an ideal candidate for intercultural education. It is a principal mode through which exchanges of culture might happen because dance is an intrinsic capability of the body and inherently a teacher of and about the culture(s) that that body exhibits (Smith-Autard, 1994). Culture is taught through shared and social activities; dance meets these requirements and has a long history of teaching culture through it (McCarthy-Brown, 2009). It has the capacity to address points of discomfort and racial tension (Albright, 2003) in order to progress beyond them. Through its ability to allow understanding to seep into the learner's body, dancing is not only an approach that lends for deeper comprehension but also an approach that fortifies conventional but incredibly dire human exchanges (Koff, 2000). In providing a culturally holistic American dance experience through the use of intercultural education and diverse representation, students will see themselves and others reflected in history, creating a better informed, empathetic, and equitable classroom experience that will produce humane and culturally cognizant individuals.

### **Methods for Diversification**

Practical strategies that will assist in implementing diverse curricula with diverse pedagogical approaches are needed because authentic diversification requires not only proper intentionality but also concrete actions (McCarthy-Brown, 2017). Many teachers reject teaching for social justice because they lack the exemplars that display the success of such teaching, which leads to a cycle of students continuously being deprived of the diverse education to which they are entitled (Ladson-Billings, 2011). The following serve as some ways to approach answering the question: How must American dance curricula and pedagogical approaches be diversified to reflect and honor America's true conglomeration of cultures and identities?

### ***Non-Western and Intercultural Pedagogies***

The installment of non-Western and fundamentally intercultural pedagogies (pedagogies in which multiple cultures engage meaningfully with one another) will help diversify American dance's existence in educational settings. Western pedagogic approaches have reigned supreme in teaching all forms of dance, both Western and non-Western (Mabingo, 2015), in which students face the teacher, copy the teacher's demonstration in short digestible pieces, apply the teacher's corrections, and repeat (Davis & Phillips-Fein, 2018). This is a form of assimilation to Whiteness (Davis, 2018). Dance educators often emulate the Western canons in which they were taught when it becomes their turn to teach (Davis, 2018), though there are urgencies to release these patterns (McCarthy-Brown, 2017). Even so, there have not been revolutionary changes or shifts made in pedagogic decisions (Kerr-Berry, 2012) or instructional methodologies to reflect diversity even when curricula become more diversified (Mabingo, 2015). Culture should be explored not only through content but also through methodology (McCarthy-Brown, 2009). Underrepresented pedagogies should have equal

implementation for not only the dominant culture is worth studying (Davis, 2018; McCarthy-Brown, 2017). Class formats should then be restructured to feature non-Western methods of existing and interfacing (McCarthy-Brown, 2017), which will promote the decolonization of spaces, spread of knowledge, and sustainment of non-Western traditions (Mabingo et al., 2020).

Using movement approaches from one culture to teach a dance of another culture, such as using Asianist somatic movement approaches to teach Afro-Haitian dance, can be successful (Young, 2018). Approaches from any and every culture can be applicable to American dance, which is already a fusion of cultures. Particularly, Asianist meditative practices can bode well (McCarthy-Brown, 2017). Instead of using music as an abstraction, music that is interdependent to dance can be used, which is common in Native American, African American, and Latinx communities (McCarthy-Brown, 2017). Additionally, improvisation can include a non-Western focus on community through use of eye contact and physical interactions with others, as opposed to the Western focus on the individual (McCarthy-Brown, 2017).

Majority of the research, though, focuses on Africanist pedagogies (Banks, 2019; Mabingo, 2015; McCarthy-Brown, 2017, 2018). These pedagogies include verbalization of syllables as opposed to counting, lack of a determined hierarchical front of the room to honor communal learning (McCarthy-Brown, 2018), communal random mirroring, the use of music as a teaching aid, ethnic dance terminologies, children games as warm up exercises, and storytelling as modalities of dance teaching (Mabingo, 2015). The African dance circle, *fare ra lankhi*, is applicable across genres (Banks, 2019). It connects to African American communities due to its usage in West African and plantation dances, as well as Native American communities, through their familiarity with it from powwows and other traditional ceremonies (McCarthy-Brown, 2017). The circle, a formational change from the typical Western usage of lines, can also be used to end class with a cipher that incorporates students' dance histories, connections to one another, and through lines to the curricula, validating their cultures and embodied truths (Walker, 2020).

### ***Dismantlement of White Privilege/Racial Oppression***

White privilege and its respective use of racial oppression must be dismantled in order to make room for diversified curricula and teaching methodologies that are inclusive of a broader assemblage of other voices, pedagogies, and aesthetics (Davis, 2018). However, it is imperative to realize that there is no singular way to correctly disturb the effects that Whiteness has had on dance education (Davis, 2018). A first step to dismantling institutional Whiteness in the pursuit of implementing a diverse curricula and diverse pedagogical approaches can be recognizing and naming institutional Whiteness (Davis, 2018) through

color-consciousness (Prichard, 2019). Color-conscious approaches identify the role of race in all occurrences and name racist practices (Prichard, 2019). Dance educators can do this by recognizing the varying human experiences of individuals of different ethnicities and races, including the discrimination they have received and their lack of privilege (Prichard, 2019). Dismantlement cannot occur, meaning diverse implementation cannot wholeheartedly occur, without the initial recognition of racial oppression.

Interrupting racial and cultural biases that present themselves in all facets of dance classrooms (Davis, 2018) and encouraging students of color to contribute thorough expressions of their identities (Prichard, 2019) can then challenge the neutrality of Whiteness and dismantle racial oppression. Such dismantlement would bring all marginalized racial groups closer to equal ownership of the dance world's terrain (Davis & Phillips-Fein, 2018). All dance educators can check their biases, but dance educators who specifically identify as White must overcome White fragility by not framing systemic racism and its implications as an attack on their moral character (DiAngelo, 2018).

Finally, in pursuit of genuine diversification, dance educators must go beyond the dismantlement of White privilege and racial oppression. Racial hierarchies must be contested through speech, actions, and decisions on a daily basis (Prichard, 2019). Naming, counteracting, and even annihilating microaggressions is a start, but will not suffice as a finish (Wakamatsu, 2020). Through continuous everyday decisions and actions that employ microprogressions (acts of dismantlement that are conducive to liberation efforts in challenging biases, stereotypes, discrimination, and oppression), an anti-racist reality becomes more obtainable (Wakamatsu, 2020). An anti-racist reality is the environment in which diversified curricula and pedagogical choices flourish.

### ***Culturally Relevant/Responsive Teaching***

American dance curricula and pedagogical approaches can be diversified to reflect a myriad of American cultures through the use of culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching, or teaching in ways that are affirming of and inclusive of students' cultures. In doing so, the multitude of cultures within the classroom will be reflected, providing a snapshot of the innumerable cultures of the nation. These teachings incorporate the application of cultural aspects, happenings, and perspectives of non-White students in an effort to teach them personally (Gay, 2002), as the current education system is personalized to White students. In order to employ culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching, an instructor must get to know their students, which can be done through the demonstration of care (Gay, 2002; McCarthy-Brown, 2017), building community (Gay, 2002), and administering surveys (McCarthy-Brown, 2017). Personal insight regarding dance can be gained by showing an interest in students' movements, learning about their movement affinities, and asking them to

teach dances they enjoy (McCarthy-Brown, 2009), all of which can be integrated into the curricula. Getting to know students also includes the educator familiarizing themselves with their communication by communicating with ethnically diverse students (Gay, 2002) and learning about their communication styles (McCarthy-Brown, 2009). These communication styles may be different from those of the White dominant culture that is systemically engrained in educational institutions. An added layer to understanding their communication is validating the languages spoken (Wakamatsu, 2020), even and especially if it is not English or the language in which the class is facilitated.

In partnership with getting to know their students, a teacher can familiarize themselves with their cultures by developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity (Gay, 2002). It is important to note that there is not one manner to learn about cultural nuances, and as a result, one must be careful to not stereotype students through this endeavor (McCarthy-Brown, 2009). With newfound cultural knowledge, an instructor can reflect on the content and methods of their instruction. Teachers of culturally relevant and responsive classrooms should strive to include ethnic and culturally diverse content in the curricula, respond to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction (Gay, 2002), reflect on chosen lecture styles, decenter power (McCarthy-Brown, 2017), create a class structure that incorporates other cultures and establishes new customs (in a true American conglomerate effort), and reflect on that newly established classroom culture (McCarthy-Brown, 2009). In terms of dance, educators may additionally open dialogue about the historic influences of stereotypes in dance (McCarthy-Brown, 2009) while simultaneously working to actively dismantle those stereotypes. An educator can successfully find ways to relate each culture present in the classroom to the coursework (McCarthy-Brown, 2017), while concurrently diversifying that coursework in the process. The aforementioned methods are a start to reflecting America's true conglomeration of cultures and identities.

### **Conclusion**

American dance curricula and pedagogical approaches must be diversified to reflect and honor America's true conglomeration of cultures and identities. Racism is systemically ingrained in America and the American dance legacy, namely through the pervasive role of Whiteness and the historical narratives that are prioritized because of it. Currently, American modern dance is viewed as a Eurocentric dance form and it clings to its partial Whiteness to anchor itself at the center of American dance education. Through the appropriation of people of color and the erasure of their contributions, this Whiteness has been maintained. However, because of its position as the center of American dance education, American modern dance has a responsibility to authentically represent itself and the ever-evolving American culture as a whole. By diversifying the curricula and pedagogical approaches used to bring this genre and all dance genres into educational spaces, students of color will be represented and feel

empowered. Through engaging in interculturalism, all students will become global citizens and benefit from learning about the people and cultures around them. Methodologies to diversify the American dance canon include applying non-Western and intercultural pedagogical approaches, dismantling Whiteness and racial oppression, and teaching in culturally relevant and culturally responsive ways. In providing a culturally holistic American dance experience through the use of culturally relevant teaching, interculturalism, and intercultural pedagogies, students will see themselves and others reflected in history, creating a better informed, empathetic, and equitable classroom experience. Calling attention toward the racism systemically embedded in the American dance legacy serves as an impetus to eliminate that racism while transforming American dance education into a sincerely American (multicultural) dance experience. Future scholars may examine the underresearched topics of the appropriated voices and cultures that got lost along the way, other neglected artists of color that contributed to the American modern dance legacy (such as Michio Itō), recent contributions of color to 21<sup>st</sup> century American dance diplomacy efforts, and prominent non-Western learning and teaching methodologies (including those that are outside of Africanist methodologies).

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