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Publication Date

2024

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Dancing with the Hips, Butt, and Pelvis: Pleasure, Respectability, and Intracommunal

Literacy in Majorette/Dance Team Performance

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Cultures and Performance

by

Saroya Corbett

2024

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2024

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Dancing with the Hips, Butt, and Pelvis: Pleasure, Respectability, and Intracommunal
Literacy in Majorette/Dance Team Performance

by

Saroya Corbett

Doctor of Philosophy in Cultures & Performance

University of California, Los Angeles, 2024

Professor Janet M. O'Shea, Chair

I highlight the racialized and gender politics of dancing with the hips, butt, and pelvis (h/b/p) and I examine the engagement and complex relationship with the politics of respectability and pleasure in Black culture in the United States. Additionally, I explore Black social dance as a means to attend to the lived experiences of people in Black communities. I focus on the autonomy of creative communities to form their own standards and aesthetics for generating their cultural materials; these standards may function inside and/or outside of mainstream narratives. The creators of these cultural products are influenced by the dominant culture and other external narratives, yet their materials operate within the community's own value system, which may not be legible to outsiders. Additionally, I discuss how Black women negotiate these systems to create individual and communal practices that utilize the h/b/p to find joy and pleasure in their existence. Overall, the goal of this research is to provide a deeper understanding

of how Black folks navigate creative practices of the everyday in interracial environments. When Black folks are out of the direct view of the White gaze, they are able to create spaces that are fashioned to their unique perspectives, values, and inclinations.

To contextualize these movement cultures, I explore the use of the h/b/p in Black majorette/dance team performance, a movement practice that originates from the marching band culture at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The Black majorette/dance team genre is popular throughout parts of the U.S. South and comprises three main groups: HBCU teams, youth teams, and queer teams. I focus this research partially on my fieldwork in the Southern Louisiana region and the two main dance teams at Southern University and A&M College (Southern University): Fabulous Dancing Dolls (FDD), the team that performs with the band during football season, and the Gold 'N Bluez (GnB), the team that performs at basketball games and other school events. In addition to the dance teams on Southern University's campus, I refer to examples in the wider Black majorette/dance team genre and Black popular culture to contextualize matters pertaining to U.S. Black culture and community.

The dissertation of Saroya Corbett is approved.

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2024

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Acknowledgements

Community is my strength and superpower. I would not have made it to this point without my folks. I have either stood on their shoulders or been surrounded by their love, support, and prayers. While I acknowledge them here, my written words are not enough to express my deep gratitude.

My community exists both in the spiritual and physical world and I start by giving honor to God, my ancestors, and my spirit guides. Through their healing, guidance, protection, and love, I have expanded my understanding of myself and reached realms of my existence I did not think were possible. They set me up for a life where I am able to reach for my dreams and they helped me become aware that my dreams are attainable. *ashé*

My family is an extension of my spiritual community and I am grateful for how my family has and continues to show up for me every day through their words of encouragement and prayers. To my mom, Mattie Knight, and my dad, Leonardo Corbett, I thank you for never missing an opportunity to encourage me and to let me know how proud of me you are. In addition to the emotional support, I acknowledge I would not have made it through this program without your financial and logistical resources. You helped me make a way in moments when I wasn't sure how I could continue. Thank you for understanding that I'm a beautiful reflection of you.

Next, I want to acknowledge my writing mentor and editor, Patricia Wilson. Out of the kindness of her heart and her love for me, she has read almost everything I have written over the last eight years. Even in moments when she was too busy, she made the time to give me the help I needed. Ms. Patricia, I am a better writer because of you and there are no words that can

express how thankful I am. I do not know how I would have made it out of this program without you.

My writing groups are examples of the power of community. They are a demonstration of how professional sisterhood can be invaluable and needed in the isolation of the academy. Thank you, Zena Bibler, Rachel Carrico, Andria Cole, Elizabeth Titrington Craft, Joanna Dee Das, Adanna Jones, Shana Kent-Smith, Esther Kurtz, and Chaundra Whitehead for your critical feedback, understanding, advice, encouragement, and accountability.

My inner circle of support does the bulk of the labor for helping me keep it together on a daily basis. They ground me and are constant reminders that family does not have to be biologically related to you. Thank you and I send love to Heather Himes, Leslie Arbogast, Deronte Williams, Omilade Davis, and David Samuels. As an extension of them, I want to also acknowledge my Dunham family, my CDSM family, and my greater dance family.

Additionally, I want to acknowledge my dissertation committee and the mentors that have helped me along this journey. Janet O'Shea, thank you for being the leader of the pack and pushing me over the finish line. Halifu Osumare, and Aisha Finch, you have my gratitude for supporting me on the development of this project and getting me through my exams. Anurima Banerji, thank you for sticking it out with me through this entire process. Yvonne Daniel, you joined this journey right when I needed you most and kept me going in moments when I was deeply struggling. Thank you. Brenda Dixon Gottschild, I brag to people that I am one of your children! Thank you for your wisdom and unwavering support. Will Rawls, without hesitation, you stepped in during the final hour when I needed it most. I appreciate you beyond words. Ruby Streate, my dance mom, thank you for providing me with the foundation that led me to this career path. Dr. Glory Van Scott, thank you for opening up worlds of knowledge to me and

staying on me to finish this dissertation. Lastly, I want to acknowledge my mentors that are now ancestors; I love and miss you Katherine Dunham and Mama Kariamua Welsh. *asante sana*

Lastly, I am grateful to the institutions that have buoyed me on this journey. Thank you to those not directly named here who have offered support along the way.

ayibobo

VITA

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19

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- 2024 “Dunham Technique as...an African American Form,” International
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- 2023 “Dancing with the Hips, Butt, and Pelvis: Black Majorette/Dance Team
Performance and the Politics of Pleasure,” Williams College, MA, Apr. 19
- 2021 “Decolonizing the Mind: Meeting Ourselves Where We Be,” International
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- 2020 “Katherine Dunham as a Model for Social Activism,” Collegium for African
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- 2019 “Performing the Catch On: The Dancing Dolls, Black Social Dance, and
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Introduction

Getting Grounded in Black Dance and Dance Team Cultures

In a 2013 performance at the MTV's Video Music Award, Miley Cyrus entered a stage filled with gigantic teddy bears to perform her song "We Can't Stop". In the attempt to display youthful rebellion, she juxtaposes the innocence of teddy bears with perceived symbols of vulgarity. These symbols include constantly sticking her tongue out, grabbing her crotch, and twerking. Her staging of twerking included surrounding herself with twerking Black women and, at one point emphasizing the butt shaking of a thickly shaped Black woman by jiggling her face close to the woman's butt and slapping it. Cyrus also twerked on stage. She made several attempts to bend over and shake her butt, one of which was on the artist she shared the performance with Robin Thicke. In these moments, her butt barely shook and the movement in her butt came from the shifting of her hips and less from the vigorous shaking of her butt. To say the least, her performance of twerking was mediocre, and the strength of the performance came from the dancing Black women.

Through this performance, Cyrus fetishized Black women's bodies, while relying on Black women's labor, to evoke the presumably outrageous. She partook of an existing hyper-visualization of Black women's bodies by making their bodies a spectacle. She supported myths that define Black women's bodies as exotic, unruly, and vulgar by juxtaposing them with the innocence of teddy bears. In this process, Cyrus flattened the physical practice of twerking. Twerking was presented as a symbol of unruliness and, not incidentally, was distanced from the

everyday lived realities of Black people. Cyrus reduced twerking to a symbol of her “coolness” and erased the practice’s cultural context and complexity.

This Miley Cyrus incident was an example of how the everyday Black experience in the United States is overridden by a fetishization of a limited representation of African American culture. Miley Cyrus’ exoticizing foray into twerking was not only a choreographic display, it became a brief cultural phenomenon. Many people were disturbed and outraged by her behavior and slut-shamed Cyrus, pointing to her clothing, the way she danced, and her overall sexualized behavior. The internet exploded with social media posts and articles analyzing her performance. Critics focused on several issues with her performance. The first was her appropriation of Black culture. Cyrus surrounded herself with Black women who twerked around her. The thickly shaped Black woman appeared as a foil to Cyrus and as a caricature. *The New York Times* referred to the performance as “clumsy white appropriation of Black culture” (Caramanica, 2013). *Vulture* magazine critic, Jody Rosen, (2013) described the performance as a minstrel show. Many feminists defended her sexual behavior, while at the same time criticized her use of Black culture.

In some of the criticisms she received, particularly regarding her sexual behavior, she was condemned not so much for twerking, but for presenting a performance of twerking on television. This type of criticism came from inside and outside of the Black community. This judgment was targeted not only at Cyrus, but also at twerking. Twerking was condemned and considered lewd and inappropriate. Black opponents to twerking called on respectability politics to judge the dance form. I waited patiently for a blogger or a columnist to give a comprehensive

history of twerking, as did several on cultural appropriation, slut-shaming, and minstrelsy. No one did.

I realized this lack of critical engagement with these parts of the body was a symptom of a larger issue in public discourse. Dancing with the hips, butt and pelvis (h/b/p) has been a topic that is enmeshed in shame and reflects a cultural reading that is defined by hyper-sexualization, anti-Black actions and behaviors, White supremacy, and patriarchy. The moving h/b/p is made visible by Black and Brown bodies particularly women and queer folks, and these parts of the body are used to explain their “depraved character” (Dixon-Gottschild 2003; Pérez 2015; Henderson 2013; Hobson 2018). While the acceptance of dancing with these parts of the body has grown over the years, the moving h/b/p continue to be contested as a legitimate form of cultural expression. However, despite the social rhetoric, Black people incorporate these movement vocabularies into their everyday existence and they create cultural communities that embrace and utilize the vocabularies of the h/b/p vocabularies.

In my research, I highlight the racialized and gender politics of dancing with the h/b/p, and I examine the engagement and complex relationship with the politics of respectability and pleasure in Black culture in the United States. Additionally, I explore Black social dance as a means to attend to the lived experiences of people in Black communities. I focus on the autonomy of creative communities to form their own standards and aesthetics for generating their cultural materials; these standards may function inside and/or outside of mainstream narratives. The creators of these cultural products are influenced by the dominant culture and other external narratives, yet their materials operate within the community’s own value system, which may not be legible to outsiders. Additionally, I discuss how Black women negotiate these

systems to create individual and communal practices that utilize the h/b/p to find joy and pleasure in their existence. Overall, the goal of this research is to provide a deeper understanding of how Black folks navigate creative practices of the everyday in interracial environments. When Black folks are out of the direct view of the White gaze, they are able to create spaces that are fashioned to their unique perspectives, values, and inclinations.

To contextualize these movement cultures, I explore the use of the h/b/p in Black majorette/dance team performance, a movement practice that originates from the marching band culture at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The Black majorette/dance team genre is popular throughout parts of the U.S. South and comprises three main groups: HBCU teams, youth teams, and queer teams. I focus this research partially on my fieldwork in the Southern Louisiana region and the two main dance teams at Southern University and A&M College (Southern University): Fabulous Dancing Dolls (FDD), the team that performs with the band during football season, and the Gold 'N Bluez (GnB), the team that performs at basketball games and other school events. The FDD are revered by their local community and within HBCU culture as the best in their field. Their style and their performances not only inspire a community of movers and supporters, but are cycled into popular culture through artists like Beyoncé and the Lifetime Network reality tv show, *Bring It!*. While not as widely known outside the local region as the FDD, the GnB is another thriving force for the social and performance culture of Southern University and its surrounding community. In addition to the dance teams on Southern University's campus, I refer to examples in the wider Black majorette/dance team genre and Black popular culture to contextualize matters pertaining to U.S. Black culture and community.

Positionality

I enter this topic as a lifelong practitioner of African Diasporic dance. I grew up in a Black dance community in East St. Louis, IL, a small city to the east and across the Mississippi River from St. Louis, MO. In the mid 1960s, Black dance pioneer Katherine Dunham relocated to East St. Louis and started to use the arts and dance to support the community, especially the youth. Dunham positioned East St. Louis as the geographic center of her dance tradition, Dunham Technique, and she brought artists and individuals from all over the world to the predominantly Black populated city. Dunham used the theory of socialization through the arts to invest in the youth of East St. Louis and developed a training program aimed at cultivating the young people to be more knowledgeable citizens. I was first exposed to this program at the age of 5 while attending a summer dance program and later, at the age of 10, I started to consistently train and joined the youth pre-professional dance company. These experiences helped develop my world view and were foundational in my understanding of who I was and how I could negotiate the world both inside and outside of my community.

Through the training and exposure to multiple cultures of the African Diaspora, I danced and performed movements that utilized the h/b/p. In Dunham Technique, dancers are trained to embrace the multiplicity of meanings and movement of the mid-section of the body. Fellow modern dance pioneer Martha Graham once called Dunham “the high priestess of the pelvic girdle” because Dunham was known for fiercely and unapologetically engaging dance from this part of the body (Bernstein 2006). Therefore, as I trained in dance and developed my concept of self, I embraced h/b/p movement as an integral part of the dancing body and I understood this movement as a form of cultural expression. However, this cultural expression was more of a

historical lesson than an engagement with the vernacular movement of my environment. We learned about h/b/p movement in other cultures through Dunham's research that occurred decades before I was born. Some of these usages felt distant from my own, that is, disconnected from the social dances I experienced in my youth. Additionally, in my Dunham Technique training, articulating my h/b/p was more about technical prowess than the liberation of my mid-section. I was taught that knowing how to move my h/b/p gave me greater control of my body and made me a better dancer. Through this process, the h/b/p movement was desexualized for me. I attribute this to the fact I was in a children's company. The director of Dunham's youth company was careful about how we interacted with dance material that might be deemed sexual in training and performance. I was taught to not think of the movement sexually or sensually. We learned and performed Dunham's choreographies, but the director admitted to not teaching us choreography she thought was too risqué for children. Therefore, I moved my h/b/p through a sense of control that was more in alignment with the values of respectability politics than a sense of liberation.

The training I received framed my dance experience in college. Right after high school, I attended Spelman College, an all-women liberal-arts HBCU. Spelman prides itself on empowering Black women through academic excellence to be leaders in the arts and sciences. Spelman is considered to be one of the more elite HBCUs and is included in what many consider to be the Black Ivy Leagues.¹ These are HBCUs that produce high performing and affluent,

¹ Black Ivy league Schools are Spelman College, Morehouse College, Howard University, Hampton University, Dillard University, Fisk University, Clark Atlanta University and Tuskegee University.

groomed to step into Black middle-class culture through the traditions and values of the school and Black society leadership. These schools use their traditions and values to promote “racial, heteronormative, patriarchal, classist, and dominant cultural values” (Decker 2014, 281). During my time at Spelman College, I these experienced respectability politics as a part of the culture of the school.

Spelman’s brother school and next-door neighbor is Morehouse College, an all-men institution and another member of the Black Ivy League. Because the men’s school has a football team and a marching band and Spelman does not, the majorette/dance team for the schools, Mahogany-N-Motion, is housed at Morehouse and is composed of Spelman students. As a member of Spelman’s modern dance company, I trivialized Mahogany-N-Motion’s performances and judged dancers in the modern dance company that divided their time between the two groups. I believed the performance work of the modern dance company took more skill and was more respectable. I can remember thinking, “all they are doing is shaking their butts.”

D. Soyini Madison explains that the work of the critical ethnographer is to “take ethical responsibility for our subjectivity and political perspective” (8). In this regard, I had to evaluate my previous positions and ask myself some critical questions regarding my perceptions of the teams. Why did I separate out this particular type of dancing from other African Diasporic forms I engaged in? What does this say about my internalization of ideas around the dancing h/b/p and social dance, while also engaging in this type of movement in other aspects of my dance career? How much of my perceptions were influenced by the elitism of my environment and my previous training in Dunham Technique? In my self-examination, I started to realize how disconnected my dance training was from the dance in current Black popular culture. While I

worked in movement genres that engaged the h/b/p, my experiences were situated around the culture of concert dance. I learned Caribbean and Black social movement vocabularies in a formal dance class or performed them on stage. Whereas, dance team performance is in the realm of vernacular engagement and teams dance at sporting events and everyday social gatherings. Additionally, HBCU majorette/dance team culture embraces sensuality and erotic energy that I was taught to avoid. Therefore, my judgments were situated in the divisive and classist argument of high and low art. I defined modern dance and Dunham Technique, particularly my experience of the technique, as ventures of high art because they are within the canon of concert dance; they are distant from current vernacular movement and from any sexuality and sensuality associated with these popular movement vocabularies. Since majorette/dance team culture operates in Black social settings and embraces the erotic energy of the h/b/p movement, I deemed it as low art. Once I placed Black majorette/dance team performance within the sphere of low art, I disconnected it from the aesthetics of my own dance practice and “othered” the genre.

After doing this evaluation of myself, I was able to shift how I viewed the practice and I humbled myself in a process of discovery. My has research allowed me to see the practice with new eyes and enter this topic as a gracious visitor. As I learned more about the practice, I realized how much of my previous judgements were based on ignorance and profound institutionalized ways of thinking. For example, I watched an episode of the youth majorette dance tv show *Bring It* that featured a youth majorette/dance team from Mississippi led by Dianna Williams. Throughout the show, Williams gave the students feedback regarding their “technique”. In some cases, the dancers showed “good” technique and in other instances, they

did not. As I watched the show, I could not decipher what constituted “good” and “bad” technique, as defined by Williams and others on the show and I remain confused by their definition of technical proficiency. While I have researched the genre of majorette since 2017, I am an outsider to the practice and I lack the intracommunal literacy that I address in chapter 4. In this research, I critically observe these practices with the understanding that my analysis has gaps and with this awareness, I work to provide a deeper conceptualization of this culture.

Note on Language

During the first interview of this study, I was told by a former FDD dancer that “we don’t identify ourselves as majorettes.” This statement set the tone for defining the language I use to describe the teams. Generally, the teams are referred to as “majorettes” and when the practice is referenced in mainstream media, this term is likely to be used. However, throughout my research, I realized that self-definition varies among groups. Of the three main practicing groups (HBCU, youth, and queer teams), youth teams utilize the term “majorette” the most and some groups refer to themselves as “hip hop majorette dance teams.” Examples of this are the Chattanooga Dance Elite in Chattanooga, TN and the Soul Deevas’ Hip – Hop Majorette Dance Team of Newark, New Jersey. Youth groups are frequently connected to a dance studio and these studios teach classes or have programs defined by the term “majorette.”

“Dance line” is the term used to define HBCU teams that work as auxiliaries of marching bands. This term derives from marching band language; sections of the band are referred to as a line, for example, the drumline or the bassline. However, not all HBCU teams work within a band. Grambling State University’s dance group, Orchesis, is considered a dance company that is a part of the school’s Department of Visual & Performing Arts (VAPA). Students are able to

obtain a degree in VAPA with a concentration or a minor in dance along with other studies. Additionally, Southern University's GnB does not function within the marching band structure and they are defined as a "dance team." While my research of queer teams is limited, I noticed those groups using terms like "squad" and "dance team" instead of majorette.

For the purposes of this research, I decided to use the term "Black majorette/dance team" or just "majorette/dance team." By using this combined term, I want to both utilize the general recognizable word "majorette" while also acknowledging the variations in self-definitions through the term "dance team." The term "majorette", particularly "Black majorette", provides a level of specificity with regards to the topic and recognizes the histories and aesthetics of Black dance. While "dance team" is a broad term used across different genres, when coupled with "majorette," the term recognizes the multiplicity of meanings in the practice. I use the term "Black majorette/dance team" only for my research. This combined term is not used in this way by participants of the majorette genre, and I am not suggesting they should. I use Black majorette/dance team as a matter of utility for the project at hand, and not in an effort to redefine the practice.

Methodology

My research is derived from the participant-observation method and I ground my approach in the particularities of critical ethnography. D. Soyini Madison (2020) explains that critical ethnography is situated in critical theory and "the complexity of intersectional experience" (4). Furthermore, critical ethnography is more than data collection in an effort to obtain some level of scientific objectivity. Ethnographers research social worlds with the complexities of meanings, embodiment, and power. To grasp a better understanding of the social

worlds of Black vernacular dance practices, particularly Black majorette/dance team practice, I focused my ethnographic research on two main areas.

The first area is my in-person field research in Southern Louisiana. From 2017 to 2019, I traveled to New Orleans and Baton Rouge and observed events, participated in dance classes and social dance gatherings, conducted interviews, and built relationships with community members. My trips to New Orleans grounded my understanding of the cultural climate as a place of constant cultural production and dissemination and the region's cultural leader. While my main research inquiry was focused on the Black majorette/dance team practice, my participation in activities like second line parades, bounce club events, and Black Masking Indian rehearsals provided me with a broad context to understand the teams.² In Baton Rouge, I primarily focused on the culture of Southern University dance teams. I attended football and basketball games, homecoming events, FDD 50th Anniversary activities, and GnB rehearsals. Additionally, I served as a judge during the GnB 2019-2020 team audition.

The second area of my ethnographic research was focused on virtual methods and materials that included activities such as zoom interviews, engaging with social media groups geared towards the teams, and analyzing performances. Due to the Covid pandemic, I was unable to continue my trips to the region and I shifted to virtual methods to continue my research. I was able to alter my research strategy because the HBCU team genre incorporates social media and

² Second line parades are community-based processions that are led by a jazz band and are often sponsored by local community groups, or what are called social aid and pleasure clubs. These parades travel through the streets of New Orleans and I speak more about them in Chapter 4. Bounce is a genre of hip hop that I address later in this chapter. Lastly, Black Masking Indians, also known as Mardi Gras Indians, are part of the Mardi Gras tradition wherein groups of people, referred to as tribes, wear elaborate costumes and parade through their community.

videos into the culture. Due to the ready availability of camera phones, Black majorette/dance team performances are recorded by multiple cameras and then uploaded to social media for the public to view. Through these videos, a virtual social world is created that includes private social media groups and content creators. I was able to tap into this virtual world through private social media groups and YouTube. I joined three Facebook groups, two of which were focused mainly on the FDD and one generally focused on HBCU teams. I disclosed that I was a researcher and I posted questions to the groups. I centered my inquiries on gaining general information about how the genre operates or is defined. Although I asked a few questions, liked posted material, and made some comments, I obtained the bulk of my information from observing what group members posted and how the community responded to these posts. Through this critical observation, I gained a greater understanding of the values of the community, the language utilized by the community, and the history of the practice. Additionally, I stayed abreast of what was occurring within the genre. With the help of the literature I gathered from multiple disciplines, I was able to interpret the in-person and virtual data I obtained.

Literature on Majorette/Dance Teams

The majority of the scholarship on majorette/dance team culture surfaces from master's thesis projects. Graduate students are generating work that recognizes majorette/dance team culture's ability to produce new realities. Additionally, this work questions the contradictory presentation of women in the practice and documents the majorette/dance team aesthetic and cultural history. In these projects, the researchers are producing generative knowledge about a practice that focuses on the nuances and intracultural realities within culture.

In *The Prancing J-Settes: Race, Gender, and Class Politics and the Movements of Black Women in the African Diaspora*, Amber Wicks (2013) asks, “Why is it that Black women’s movements are read in a linear fashion and viewed as dispensable and/or simple and regressive?” (11). Through her examination of the Jackson State University’s Prancing J-Settes dance team, Wicks explores how the everyday politics of the dancers’ lives is woven into their choreography and performance; Wicks specifically emphasizes the interaction between the team and its audience. Wicks offers the “plaza theory” as a framework to understand the politics of the space that surrounds the teams’ performance. By plaza, she is referring to the physical and figurative space created by Black communities that are outside of the view of the White gaze. Instead of the gaze of Whiteness, dance teams are negotiating the gaze of community that is wrapped in the politics of gender and class.

Similarly, Lamont Loyd-Sims (2014) addresses the team’s participation in the creation of culturally specific spaces. In *J-Setting in Public: Black Queer Desires and Worldmaking*, Loyd-Sims uses j-setting to analyze Black queer folks’ process of worldmaking. J-setting, the style most embraced by queer teams, is a style of majorette/dance team performance that was created by the Prancing J-Settes.³ Loyd-Sims posits that j-setting provides opportunities for Black men in the South to celebrate their personhood and to embrace alternative forms of gender performance.

Mary Paige Blessey’s 2016 study “*Thrill of a Billion Eyes*”: *The Prancing J-Settes* is designed to create a greater understanding of the team by documenting their personal stories and

³ I discuss j-setting in detail in Chapter 1.

group history. Additionally, Blessey's research describes the aesthetics of the practice and works to provide detailed information on the specifics of the j-setting style.

Furthermore, J'aime Griffith was the first researcher to focus attention on aspects of the dance team aesthetic that were not related to the Prancing J-Settes or j-setting. In their study *Historically Black College and University Dance Lines: Redefining and Identifying Elements to Determine Aesthetic Value*, Griffith (2022) brings several teams to the forefront including Alcorn State University's Golden Girls and Grambling State University's Orchesis Dance Company. Griffith's focus is on an analysis of Africanist and European dance aesthetics within the genre. As practiced by the dance teams, Griffith defines Africanist dance aesthetic through hip hop and West African dance, and European aesthetics through the styles of ballet, modern, and jazz. She also notes that the roots of jazz dance are in Black vernacular culture. While this analysis misses the complexity of ethnic and cultural influences across these styles of dance, Griffith's framework presents a broader view of the teams than had been previously discussed in scholarship. Additionally, Griffith discusses the influence of queer males on the dance line teams and unpacks how some of the dance line's style utilizes male embodied femininity.

In addition to thesis projects, a few seasoned scholars have mentioned the majorette/dance practice; however, all of them have addressed the practice through j-setting. Choreographer and dance theorist Thomas F. DeFrantz (2017) examines queer social dances in his article, "Switch: Queer Social Dance, Political Leadership, and Black Popular Culture," and analyzes the manner in which they "resist and reinscribe gender conformity" (1). In his article, "Switch: Queer Social Dance, Political Leadership, and Black Popular Culture," DeFrantz highlights the histories of queer social dance worlds and discusses how queer creativity informs

Black social dance. Interdisciplinary scholar Antron D. Mahoney (2021) writes about j-setting in his critique of the documentary *When the Beat Drops* (Sims 2021), which focuses on the queer performance world of j-setting. Mahoney argues that marching band music is overlooked in the documentary and in his analysis, he brings marching band music back into the conversation about j-setting. Lastly, in “The Booty Don’t Lie/Pleasure, Agency, and Resistance in Popular Dance,” dance scholar Takiyah Nur Amin (2020) analyzes j-setting, along with twerking and the “Harlem shake”, as examples of how Black popular dance is a site of resistance and pleasure for Black folks. Amin contends that through Black popular dance, Black people are able to engage in new possibilities for their existence.

While the canon of literature on majorette/dance teams is small, these works provide a glimpse into the practice. Additionally, these writers highlight the multiple complexities of this practice and how these dances inform the politics of the body, culture, and existence. Furthermore, this scholarship demonstrates the importance of Black social dance as a tool that supports the sustainability of Black communities and people.

Pleasure, The Erotic and Twerking

While people move their h/b/p for a myriad of reasons, I argue in Chapter 3 that pleasure is chief among those reasons. Pleasure is a source of agency and joy that connects to a person’s self-actualization. I connect this idea of pleasure to feminist writer Audre Lorde’s (1984) iconic text “The Uses of the Erotic.” Lorde defines the erotic as an act of experiencing the fullness of one’s life. She states,

When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives (89).

Pleasure is a source of the lifeforce Lorde discusses and is a vehicle for individuals to become more aware of themselves, connect to others, and expand their “capacity for joy” (Lorde, 89). Hip hop feminist scholar Joan Morgan (2015) theorizes pleasure as an investment in our expansive rendering of the erotic. Morgan argues for a pleasure politics in response to Black feminism’s silence regarding sexual desire. She contends that Black feminists have been more concerned with sexual trauma and violence and they have neglected to engage in the complexity and benefits of desire, pleasure, and sex. Furthermore, she critiques Black feminists for articulating Lorde’s theory through heteronormativity and deleting sex and sexuality from their readings of the erotic. By calling for a politics of pleasure, Morgan asserts that sex is a part of our lifeforce and joy. She states,

My interest is in a capacious casting of the erotic that includes black women’s variegated sexual and non-sexual engagements with deeply internal sites of power and pleasure—among them expressions of sex and sexuality that deliberately resists binaries (40).

Morgan is joined by other feminists and scholars that recognize that pleasure is complicated and messy (Blanco Borelli 2016; Johnson 2024; Lee 2010; White 2013). Instead of writing off forms of pleasure because they are enmeshed within oppressive systems of power and hegemonic tropes, these scholars acknowledge that Black women access their pleasure from their positions in a spectrum of identity and marginalization (Blanco Borelli 2016; Johnson 2020; Lee 2010; White 2013). Within this consideration, we can stop defining certain practices of the body, particularly those that appear sensual and sexual, as “bad,” “good,” or anti-feminist and begin to consider how they provide new possibilities for the people that engage in them. I explore this context in Chapter 3 through my theorization of Black lemonade. I discuss the process by which

Black women utilize tools from oppressive systems (lemons) to express creativity, joy, and fulfillment (lemonade).

Additionally, Morgan is a part of a group of scholars that define themselves as hip hop feminists. Hip hop feminism is a movement that is situated in the knowledge generated by women of color in the hip hop generation (Durham, Cooper, and Morris 2013); which includes people born after the civil rights/Black power generation circa 1965 -1984 (Kitwana 2002). Hip hop feminists embrace contradiction as a means to move beyond the academy (Durham, Cooper, Morris 2013). They resist the all or nothing critiques from previous generations of Black feminists and demand what Morgan calls, “a feminism brave enough to fuck with the grays” (2000, 59). In this era of knowledge production, feminists are addressing pleasure through the contradictions of popular culture.

When it comes to the engagement of pleasure through the dancing h/b/p, twerking is a signifier for opposing respectability politics and is recognized in popular culture as a tool for decolonizing the body (Amin 2020; Halliday 2020; Johnson 2024; Pérez 2015). As a strategy of survival, Black people embraced respectability politics as a form of protection from White supremacy through the adoption of behaviors that aligned them with mainstream White middle-class culture. However, some Black women and queer folks are no longer sold on respectability politics’ promise of racial protection. Because Black people have observed countless examples of the Black middle-class and elite experiencing discrimination and racism in education, politics, policing, etc., they have witnessed the failures of respectability politics (Cooper 2015). Furthermore, due to its functioning outside of White middle-class culture, twerking violates the codes of the respectable and well mannered; it serves as a tool to liberate the body (Amin 2020;

Johnson 2024; Pérez 2015). In the shaking of one's butt, twerk performers are centering their embodied pleasure beyond labels that categorize the body as unruly, lascivious, and vulgar.

Communication professional Mariah Johnson (2024) states,

As a Black woman who loves to twerk...Twerking has provided me, and those in my community, with an outlet through which we release negativity and tension. As a young, fat, Black girl, I had many experiences of both pleasure and power while twerking. Twerking is an embodied practice, a form of dance, and a system of nonverbal communication (36).

Twerking incites tension from the larger society because of its perceived sexual context.

However, twerking is laced with complex meaning and multiple contexts (Gaunt 2021; Pérez 2015) Religious studies scholar Elizabeth Pérez (2015) explains, “[T]werk has not functioned solely – or even primarily – to arouse, seduce, or satisfy the male gaze. Twerk and similar dance moves have long been performed by both children and adults” (4). Pérez clarifies that twerking is a dance that connects people and can elicit emotional intimacy beyond the voyeurism of men.

Twerking is most notably associated with New Orleans bounce culture. Bounce is a genre of hip hop that originates from the Black working-class of New Orleans. In 1993, bounce artist DJ Jubilee was the first to use the term twerk in his song “Do the Jubilee All” (Amin 2020; Johnson 2024; Pérez 2015). Yet, through the music of bounce artist Cheeky Blakk, the term twerking became associated with the butt shaking dance (Kandake 2024) that is also known by several names in New Orleans including “p. poppin” and “shaking.” Bounce artist Big Freedia elaborates on the language used to define the dance in New Orleans. Big Freedia states,

And another thing, we don't call it 'twerking.' We shake, we wiggle, we wobble, we bust open, we bend over, we pounce, bitch, down here. We release our wiggle, yah heard me. We swiggle, wiggle all that (Freedia 2023).

Big Freedia's comments point to the reality that twerking is not a term consistently used in New Orleans' culture to describe the booty shaking dance. During my field research in the city, I learned from multiple people that common usage of the word twerking was imposed on the local culture by outside influences. In fact, twerking has become a term used indiscriminately to describe all movement of the h/b/p. Ethnomusicologist Kyra Gaunt (2021) describes the practice of conflating all h/b/p movement into the term twerking. Gaunt states,

Many diverse African and Latin dances tagged as "twerking" socially bind, blur, and separate Black ethnicities on YouTube's platform. These dances are rarely understood in their unique, complex, and locally meaningful ways... (9).

While Gaunt points to the contradiction in the use of the word twerking, dancing with the h/b/p, in its multiple iterations, provides Black women and queer folks with access to pleasure on their own terms. The moving h/b/p is the embodiment of the life force Lorde describes in her interpretation of the erotic. Because this type of dancing inherently disrupts the status quo of gender and class norms, dancing with the h/b/p unleashes the possibilities for its practitioners to as Lorde (1984) states, "...make our lives and the lives of our children richer..." (88).

Summary of Chapters

In **Chapter 1**, I begin with a detailed discussion of the previous scholarship and work and investigation of the majorette/dance team practice. The academy and concert dance community have conceptualized and discussed majorette/dance team practice through the style of j-setting. Using the information I gathered in my ethnographic research, I explain that j-setting is only one style of many in the majorette/dance team practice. I argue for the importance of providing a fuller account of the practice. Additionally, I explore the histories of HBCUs, marching bands, and majorette/dance teams. Specifically, I provide the histories of Southern University's Human

Jukebox marching band, the FDD, and the GnB. Lastly, in an effort to provide insight into the visuals of the practice, I end the chapter with a choreographic description of the performance and movement aesthetics of the FDD and the GnB.

After discussing the history and aesthetics of the majorette/dance team genre, I open **Chapter 2** discussing the theories and practicality of Black dance and Black social dance as well as the Black body and the dancing h/b/p. I explore these terms to establish an understanding of how majorette/dance team performance and other African diasporic movement forms function within Black culture and the larger U.S. society. I frame this conversation particularly around Black women. As the cultural bearers of the h/b/p movement, Black women carry gendered and racial histories that inform their engagement with their moving mid-section and how this type of movement is understood and perceived. Their bodies are both fetishized and condemned in a process that masks their humanity. I further explore Black women's experiences of their moving h/b/p are framed through respectability politics; Black women are supposed to police their behavior and sexuality in an effort protected themselves from White Supremacy. I conclude the chapter by discussing the culture of Black people in the U.S. South or what is sometimes referred to as the "Dirty South." I examine how movement and music cultures of the Dirty South juxtapose sexualization of the female body and adherence to respectability politics through the use of Christianity. Since most HBCUs are located in the South and are products of Southern culture, it is important to investigate the underlying Southern culture that is part of dance team foundations in order to fully understand majorette/dance team culture.

Despite systems like capitalism and White supremacy that classify, define, and restrict the bodies and movements of Black people, Black folks continue to find joy and humanity in

their bodies and community existence. In order to do this, they utilize the tools at their disposal to facilitate acts of pleasure and resistance. Oftentimes, these tools derive from the same systems and environments that marginalize them. Therefore, in **Chapter 3**, I explore how Black folks transform the lemons they were given into the sweet lemonade of their creativity, resilience, strength, love, and joy, or a process that I call Black lemonade. By centering pleasure in their lemonade, Black women, especially, openly resist respectability politics by engaging in tactics like ratchetness and twerking. They navigate such lemons as the male gaze, White aesthetics, and capitalism to achieve a level of self-actualization and pleasure. To explore Black lemonade, I examine Beyoncé as a symbol of pleasure, ratchetness, Blackness, feminism, capitalism, and male desire. As Beyoncé navigates her lemons, she is also the personification of pleasure. Additionally, I utilize the work of Beyoncé to explore the lemonade of majorette/dance teams. Majorette/dance team culture is a key influencer on the brand of Beyoncé's brand and both are negotiating similar lemons. One major aspect of the practice, utilized by both Beyoncé and the teams, is beauty. Beauty is an anchoring aesthetic in the majorette/dance team practice and the value of the dancers, particularly the HBCU dancers, is assessed through their physical appearance. Dancers are expected to exemplify a high standard of beauty through their make-up, costuming, and hair. I end the chapter by specifically exploring the history and cultural particularities of Black hair.

In **Chapter 4**, I examine the dominant culture's perception of Black dancing communities and their creative practices. I argue that cultural communities develop their own ways of knowing and operating, which are not completely readable to those outside of those communities. I begin by discussing Harvey Young's theory of the Black habitus as a framework

to describe how knowledge and norms are created and regenerated in community inside the Black experience. Within this process, Black communities operate in a cultural experience that is stable and legible to its members because it's a reflection of their identity. Yet, to others, their cultural practices may appear overly sensational and spectacular. Due to the nature of Africanist dance aesthetics, Black dance movement vocabularies often appear as a spectacle to mainstream sensibilities.

Next, I investigate the concept of communal literacy and differentiate it from other concepts such as cultural competency and cultural literacy. Moreover, I discuss how a false sense of communal literacy results in Black cultural communities being chastised and ridiculed by outsiders. Lastly, I delve into how the internet is a tool for Black folks to expand and develop literate communities. Black people utilize the internet as a tool of resistance against problematic narratives such as police brutality. Further, Black folks are able to facilitate communal conversations and extend the reach of their literate communities. Likewise, the internet is an invigorating force in majorette/dance team culture. Through social media, the thriving majorette/dance team community is able to connect across geographic distance; get instance information and share videos; and influence the larger genre of majorette/dance teams.

I conclude this dissertation research by addressing the possibilities that scholarship on vernacular cultures provide to students and researchers. Through research on vernacular cultures, students of color or with diverse backgrounds are able to recognize and experience their cultural identities within the academy. Additionally, empowered scholars of color can help redefine conversations about their own cultural communities by contradicting inaccurate interpretations of non-dominant cultural materials and practices that are too often circulated in and by the

academy. By advocating for the fair treatment their communities deserve, the scholars will help to expand the collective mind of the academy.

Chapter 1

Not Just J-setting: The History and Aesthetics of HBCUs, Marching Bands, and Dance Teams

Orienting the Research

I was in the midst of the usual after-performance talk in the Gloriana Kaufman Hall theater on UCLA's campus. I just witnessed the performance of Germaine Acogny's "Mon Élué Noire – Sacre #2" and I was itching to connect with others about the exhilarating performance. I stood in a circle with several people: two were friends from my Ph.D. program at UCLA and three others were new to me. We introduced ourselves around the circle. Once it was my turn, I introduced myself as a Ph.D. student. An individual in our little circle, who introduced themselves as the program director of a major dance presenting organization in the city, asked me a question. "What are you researching?" I composed myself and gave my 'research elevator' statement. "I'm focusing on the everyday dance practices in Black spaces that focus on the hips, butt, and pelvis. Particularly, I'm focusing on dance teams in the U.S. South that are a part of marching band culture." The individual then stated, "Oh, you are focusing on 'j-setting'." I responded, "well actually, not really..."

Before I started my research of dance teams, I also believed that Black majorette/dance team culture was singularly focused on the style of j-setting, a style of majorette dance performance that combines masculine and feminine energies. Through my interaction with previous scholarship and my acquaintance with performance practices within concert dance, I assumed the practice was called j-setting and the most prominent community of performers were queer male teams. I came to this conclusion in opposition to what I had experienced as a graduate of a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). During my undergrad years, I was exposed to the dance team practice and it was not called j-setting. Furthermore, queer teams were not openly visible at my school. As culture is forever changing, I assumed the practice of

Black dance teams experienced a name change and the main performers of practice shifted. It was during my initial fieldwork interview that my understanding was first challenged.

In the food court of a busy mall in Louisiana, I met with April Rollins, a former member of Southern University's Black dance line team⁴ the Fabulous Dancing Dolls (FDD). At the time of the interview, Rollins functioned as one of the sponsors of the FDD. Sponsors provide leadership to the team and function similarly as a coach. During my interview with Rollins, I began to ask, "As an outsider, I heard the style of movement you do is called j-setting. What do you think of that term and do you embrace it?" As I was asking my question, her face started to change slightly. It was clear I said something that hit a nerve for Rollins and she appeared slightly confused. Therefore, I ended my questioning with, "Have you heard of that term before?" She then responded, "Yeah [I have heard of j-setting], but I haven't heard anyone say what we do is j-setting."

Rollins' comment was the first indication that my assumptions about Black majorette/dance teams needed to be re-examined. As I continued my research, I realized that the previous scholarship on Black dance teams was misleading and full of gaps. What became clear was that dance scholarship (Blessey 2016; DeFrantz 2017; Loyd-Sims 2014; Mahoney 2021; Wicks 2013) has reduced the practice into one style that is performed by two groups – the queer teams and one female HBCU team, the Jackson State University's Prancing J-Settes. However, in fact, there are three main Black majorette/dance team populations: HBCU, queer, and youth

⁴ "Dance line" is the name used for HBCU teams that perform with the marching bands.

dance teams.⁵ Within these groups, there are multiple different styles and types of dance team performance. Therefore, by defining the whole dance team practice based on this limited material, scholarship erases and minimizes major aspects of the practice in the U.S. Thus, it is important to bring into focus what the scholarship has overlooked or marginalized and support a more comprehensive understanding of the practice.

One of the reasons behind this gap is limited scholarship. Few scholars mention Black dance team culture in their work and most of the scholarship is in the form of master's thesis papers. Without a breadth of scholarship critically engaged in the subject, the few articles and master theses discussing the practice end up defining the whole practice for the academy. Without any additional context from a variety of practitioners, and other sources, the knowledge from these few and limited sources gets disseminated in classrooms, referenced in new scholarly work, and utilized by projects and initiatives as the authority on the subject. Since most dance scholars are far removed from these particular practices and practitioners, Dance Studies scholarship builds an understanding of the practice that may not completely align with how dance teams exist in reality. Additionally, the academy has influence in other realms like artistic funding and politics. Thus, the knowledge produced by academia has far reaching implications in places and spaces that these practitioners may not be able to access.

What are the misalignments in scholarship regarding Black dance team culture? First, as I mentioned above, there is a general belief that the movement style practiced by dance teams is

⁵ Here are examples of the three groups: HBCU - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETlt-roPL-M>, Queer - <https://youtu.be/aGXieuiKdiE?si=JtVm1UVJvjhxxztT>, Youth - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLbaynqD7JI>

called j-setting. In fact, j-setting is a specific movement style produced by the Prancing J-Settes, a female HBCU dance line team. While the teams share a general aesthetic, each HBCU team has crafted their own style within the aesthetic that defines their team. In addition, among HBCU teams, there are many different styles, and j-setting is just one style that is particular to the Prancing J-Settes.

Eventually, in dance team culture, queer male teams surfaced due to college and youth teams being almost entirely composed of cis women and girls. These teams made it possible to include different types of bodies into the practice. By utilizing a female-gendered form, queer teams are directly confronting gender norms and the heteronormativity of the female teams. Due to their outsider status, queer teams eventually formed their own separate communities and spaces to practice and perform the genre.

Dance researcher Lamont Loyd-Sims's (2014) explores j-setting as a form of world-making for Black queer teams and queer communities. Loyd-Sims recognizes that j-setting creates space for queer folks and supports their well-being. Loyd-Sims states,

We might ask if j-setting represents a form of world-making or a counterpublic for Black gay men, providing new racial, sexual, and gender possibilities. I use "worldmaking" here to reference the act of creating possibilities for Black queer male subject positions (rather than reacting to dominant narratives or constructions about them). "J-setting in Public" suggests that j-setting operates as a discursive strategy that illustrates the survival and celebration of Black queer ways of being (4).

In their Oxford Handbook article "Switch: Queer Social Dance, Political Leadership, and Black Popular" (2017), Thomas F. DeFrantz is one of the first Dance Studies scholars to acknowledge the dance team practice in scholarship and define it as j-setting. DeFrantz recognizes the queer male team practice within queer social dance forms and explores how these

performers negotiate gender conformity and histories of the body. The article sets the tone for readers to begin to understand these practices and how they function in the communities where they flourish. However, by defining the entire Black dance team practice as j-setting, DeFrantz establishes a perspective for the academy that does not completely align with a practitioner's understandings on the ground. DeFrantz states,

J-setting became a competition form as it developed embedded within drum corps and marching band exercises at sporting events. Historical records point toward Jackson State University as an epicenter of the development of the form in the 1970s. But as several schools developed dance groups in the following decades, J-setting became more competitive in “shine” and showing-off moments that could rouse the stadium crowd and demonstrate the heightened ability of one school's expressive dance abilities over another (8).

In this quote, DeFrantz centers the Black dance team experience around j-setting and the creation of the Prancing J-Settes. Yet, additional HBCU historical research shows that dance team culture began in 1968 with the introduction of the Alcorn State University's Golden Girls (Alcorn State University 2018) and followed the next year in 1969 with Southern University's Fabulous Dancing Dolls. As HBCU marching bands continued to evolve and compete with each other over style, pageantry, and performance innovation, the bands started to develop dance teams to further solidify their stamp on marching band culture. Competition fueled a need for bands and dance teams to be distinct from their rivals. Despite developing their own styles, teams do influence each other's styles, particularly teams in the same athletic conference. Most of the larger HBCU programs are divided into two main athletic conferences – the Southwest Athletic Conference (SWAC) and the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC)⁶ (Milburn

⁶ HBCUs are dispersed between 5 athletic conferences: SWAC, MEAC, Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (SIAC), Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA), and the GCAC (Gulf Coast Athletic

2019). The dance teams and marching bands in both conferences share characteristics that make the two groups of schools distinct from one another. For example, the SWAC performances are said to be “flashier” than MEAC, and MEAC dance teams are more integrated into the band’s performance than SWAC. Thus, for a myriad of reasons, dance team culture is too complex to be defined by one style.

Beyond HBCU teams and queer teams, youth teams are the third major population that participates in Black dance team culture. They combine many of the styles performed by the college teams. Yet, the youth teams craft their own specific styles that are particular to each group and their performances have a different feel than the college performances. I have often heard individuals refer to the youth teams’ style of dance as “majoretting”. It was clear during my research that both HBCU and youth teams do not collectively define their performances as j-setting.

In scholarship, a second misalignment is the main focus on the queer teams and the female dance team that was pivotal to their practice, the Prancing J-Settes. As these two groups are the main performers of j-setting, this narrow focus helps produce the widespread misunderstanding that the entire practice is j-setting. This creates a belief that the Prancing J-Settes are the center of HBCU dance line culture. In their 2021 discussion of HBCU marching band music and dance culture, interdisciplinary scholar Antron Mahoney (2021) furthers this perception by stating,

Conference (GCAC) (LHP Limited, n.d.). Yet, SWAC and MEAC school’s marching band and dance team culture is more recognized than the schools in the other conferences.

Golden Girls performed a choreographed feature at halftime; they are believed to be the first dance team to accompany an HBCU marching band. But, arguably, the J-Settes and bucking have come to epitomize this theory in motion (89).⁷

While the Prancing J-Settes is considered to be one of the top teams, no one team carries the entire culture. Fans form an allegiance to certain teams based on multiple factors that may be attributed to the school they attended, the school in their local region, or the team whose aesthetics they value the most.

Through this lack of inclusion, the other groups and styles are rendered invisible by the scholarship, leaving an incomplete picture of the practice. In some instances, the existence of HBCU teams beyond that of Jackson State University is mentioned, but the analysis does not go further than a mere acknowledgement. J'aime Griffith's recent master thesis project *Historically Black College and University Dance Lines: Redefining and Identifying elements to Determine Aesthetic Value* (2022) is the only scholarship I have found that is invested in discussing dance team culture beyond the queer teams and the Prancing J-Settes. Griffith was a member of Grambling State University's Orchesis Dance Company, an HBCU dance team. While she also focuses on the Prancing J-Settes, Griffith does the critical work of including other HBCU dance teams and discussing the diversity of movement styles within the practice. Griffith also discusses the youth teams and their practice, a subject that is almost completely left out of the literature except for references to *Bring it!*, the reality tv show about youth teams.

⁷ Bucking is a dance movement that is performed in a wide-open second position with the pelvis and torso thrusting back and forth simultaneously. The movement is associated with j-setting, although it is not the only dance style in Black dance team culture that uses bucking. Yet, in the queer practice of j-setting, bucking is more than one movement. It refers to the masculine characteristics of the j-setting. In some instances, I have witnessed bucking used as another name for j-setting.

Additionally, the scholarship produced on dance teams suggests that queer male teams are currently the most visible and main producers of the practice. DeFrantz states,

We note with interest that the modest mainstream celebrity afforded the form of J-setting comes only after queer men take on its physical strategies. In the first decade of the 2000s, the public spectacle of Black queer J-setting became more noteworthy than the form's original dancing by women of color; queer titillation beat out heteronormative fantasy. In this consideration of value associated with Black social dance, male participation proves to be more important to a profitable racialized and sexualized narrative than that of female invention (483).

To justify this conclusion, DeFrantz refers to the mainstream reality tv show, *Prancing Elites*.

The *Prancing Elites* is an Oxygen network show that focuses on a male j-setting team. DeFrantz uses the popularity of the show as an indication of how the male practice of dance team culture has eclipsed the female practice. With further research, my findings question this conclusion.

The *Prancing Elites* aired for two seasons in 2015 and 2016. However, *Bring it!*, the other dance team show, first aired in 2014 – before the *Prancing Elites* – and ran for five seasons. *Bring it!* focused on a youth majorette dance studio in Jackson, Mississippi called the Dollhouse Dance Factory. If reality tv shows are an indication of the popularity of certain groups of dance teams, then the girl youth teams demonstrated their position as a powerhouse in the culture.

Also, the embrace of j-setting by concert dance specialists helped to solidify some of the misunderstandings of the practice. There is a symbiotic relationship between concert dance and dance scholarship, and in the U.S, most college and university dance programs are situated at the intersection of concert dance and dance scholarship. Dance scholars and artists are trained together in these programs and build work in collaboration with or in proximity to each other. Beyond higher education, concert dance is a common subject discussed in dance scholarship; dance research is often centered in the creation of dance works.

Within concert dance, the work of choreographer Jumatatu M. Poe is the main representation of dance team culture. Poe's recent project *Let 'im Move You* is a series of performances that utilize the queer practice of j-setting to explore matters around the human experience. Poe began building the works in collaboration with j-sette artist Jerome "Donte" Beacham. For the last decade, *Let 'im Move You* was workshopped and performed at multiple prominent theaters and spaces in concert dance including Jacob's Pillow in Massachusetts and REDCAT in California.

Due to the connection between scholarship and concert dance, *Let 'im Move You* is the only interaction with Black majorette/dance team culture that many dance scholars have experienced, given that most dance scholars do not attend dance teams events and social gatherings. Since Poe and Beacham's performances are presenting the queer j-setting form of the culture, their performances align with the ideas about the practice previously generated in dance scholarship. Again, this is a matter of limited representation. As the only artists presenting Black dance team culture in these venues, the labor of representation falls on the shoulders of Poe and Beacham. They carry the burden of representing the entire genre in the minds of many of their viewers and support the bubble of incomplete information about dance teams.

Additionally, I argue that positionality is a determining factor in how dance scholars represent and perceive dance team culture. The knowledge they produce about the practice is dictated by how they enter into and interact with the culture. Several of the scholars writing about the practice identify with the queer practice of dance teams. For example, Antron D. Mahoney (2021) begins his discussion on marching band and dance team culture by describing his experience as a youth navigating his masculinity, queer identity, and his love of Black dance

and marching band culture. Mahoney structures his argument around j-setting, the Prancing J-Settes, and the queer performance of the style. Mahoney singles out j-setting and bucking from other styles of movement because of the combination of masculinity and femininity in the dance vocabulary. He argues that due to this masculine/feminine energy in bucking, female dance teams are able to challenge the patriarchal gaze and tap into embodied intellectualism. Yet, bucking – the movement and the bucking aesthetic – is not embraced by all teams. For example, The Fabulous Dancing Dolls’ style “dolling” is a negotiation of femininity and sensuality rather than a combination of femininity and masculine energy. While I respect the merits of Mahoney’s argument, I question his conclusion that dismisses the agency of female dance team members that utilize other movement styles. As I discuss in detail in Chapter 2, all of these practices continuously navigate elements of power with simultaneous resistance and complicity. In other words, there are multiple ways in which cultural practices uphold hegemonic social, political, and economic structures, while also resisting these structures to maintain humanity and agency.

Thus, I posit that Mahoney’s intellectual priorities in his scholarship and analysis are a result of his identity as a queer person; his positionality creates bias in how he interprets the subject matter. Likewise, I argue that DeFrantz’s work on the subject matter is also influenced by his Black queer identity. When DeFrantz states that dance team practice’s “broadest reach is probably found in its queer iterations (482),” I posit that DeFrantz’s argument is grounded in how they enter into the subject. As a queer identifying individual, DeFrantz comes into the culture with a greater understanding and connection to queer spaces than the other communities within Black dance team practice. Therefore, DeFrantz’s argument is grounded in his bias. Such biases could occur also in an entirely different circumstance. For instance, an individual entering

into the Black dance team culture through their experiences with youth teams might center these teams as the most important part of the culture. They would be justified in arguing that the longest aired tv show about the practice focuses on the youth teams that are in abundance throughout the country, especially in the south. As well, they have a huge following of devoted dancers, parents, and fans. This too would be a biased point of view.

Yet, it is not just the queer male scholars who present dance scholarship from their positionality. Most of the women who write about the dance teams discuss the practice from the perspective of the female teams, particularly the Prancing J-Settes.⁸ Through this perspective, women writers identify how in general female teams have been left out of conversations about the practice and how the practice has influenced mainstream popular culture. Dance researcher Amber Wicks (2013) discusses how aspects of the culture are based on the labor of the Prancing J-Settes and yet, they are forgotten in these reiterations. Wicks states,

At times, the bodies of the Prancing J-Settes are taken out of the conversation completely and replaced with a queer, male body or the J-Sette dance style that manages to stand on its own. In all of these iterations the women who make up the group are seen as bridges for everyone else. A bridge is viewed as stationary, stepped on, under foot, and not as memorable as the places that one uses it to travel to (84).

Wicks research was one of the first to focus on the Prancing J-Settes beyond a mere mention of their existence. Additionally, as the only researcher thus far to perform extensive research on a female dance team besides the Prancing J-Settes, Griffith is able to form her argument around her experience as a former member of the Orchesis Dance Company from Grambling State

⁸ Most of the female scholars that write about dance team culture (Blessey 2016; Griffith 2022; Wicks 2013) do so in master thesis projects.

University. Thus, Griffith's research provides a more expansive analysis of the diversity within the female teams.

I recognize that I am not exempt from intellectual bias. Similar to other women scholars, I have chosen to focus on female teams as I recognize a deficiency in the literature about them. I enter into the research from the perspective of a cis gender woman and an HBCU grad. Thus, my analysis and research priorities are framed around my experiences and identity.

While an individual's positionality will always be front and center in research, I argue that it is important that scholarship not paint a different picture than what is happening on the ground within these practices. While the ideas, thoughts, and opinions of community members are not monolithic, I have come across many community folks that would reject some of the information disseminated through dance scholarship. Additionally, it is important to note that these communities are not looking to academic scholarship for validation or understanding. Many of these participants and community members have no idea about the information being generated about the practice in the academy. Black dance team communities are evolving and thriving regardless of what is produced about them in dance scholarship.

For the remainder of this chapter, I focus on building an understanding of Black dance team culture and its historical roots, choosing to focus primarily from the perspective of HBCU dance teams. I do this not to suggest that this is the only lens to view the culture, but to deepen the knowledge of the genre by broadening the outlook of the culture.

Dance line teams are rooted in the development of HBCU culture and Black marching band culture; therefore, I start with the histories of HBCUs and Black marching bands. I focus on HBCUs overall significance to the education of Black people and the role Black marching bands

play in this evolution. I anchor my conversation in Southern University's marching band, the Human Jukebox, and the school's dance team culture, which includes two main dance teams, the Fabulous Dancing Dolls (FDD) and the Gold'N Bluez (GnB). Finally, I conclude by describing the elements of the teams' performances and their overall aesthetics.

Black Dance Designed for Black Culture

During the 2022 college football season, a new dance team surfaced and grabbed the attention of mainstream media. Through a social media post by the team's creator Princess Isis Lang, the Cardinal Divas dance team of University of Southern California (USC) was introduced to the world. The post shows a short video clip of a team of Black women performing in the stands during a game amidst a cheering crowd. In the captions of the post, Lang states

oh, nothing...i created a majorette team at a PWI and performed at our game. truly through i'm so blessed and can't thank God enough. Thank you to my parents and to everyone who supported me along this LONG journey. and my girls FYE [star symbol] The Cardinal Divas of Scare UP NEXT.

Lang's post generated a lot of attention around her newly formed squad and the team was featured on local and national network news shows, a national syndicated talk show, and other print and digital media outlets. Viewers and readers of outlets like the *Jennifer Hudson show*, *Good Morning America* 3, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Huffpost* were introduced to this new dance team on the USC campus. Yet, the media attention and the existence of the team activated a major debate among supporters of HBCUs, particularly through social media.

Supporters of the team were thrilled to see a Black cultural tradition initiated for Black students at a Predominately White Institution (PWI) for Black students. One Facebook commenter stated,

Hbcus were formed to give black people an opportunity at education that pwi's were denying them. Obviously there is strong black presence on these pwi campuses they need and deserve the opportunity to express their culture and style of dance. I applaud them and their journey. And sis was SITTING in that buck.

Others expressed a desire for the HBCU culture to be accessible everywhere and get a larger platform. One tweeter commented,

I absolutely love this. As a USC mom who went to an HBCU with a daughter at an HBCU, I appreciate you putting our style on a major scale. USC football is huge and whether folks wanted to see it or not, they did. Culture isn't restricted to HBCU's. Culture is for us wherever we go.

Yet, there was a big backlash from many for bringing a Black cultural practice to a White institution. Critics of the team and the media articulated several points. First, some argued that HBCU culture should stay only at HBCUs and if students want the HBCU experience, they should attend an HBCU. One poster argues,

I mean they look good I'm not hating. My thing is...that the black pwi students will say so many reasons to not go to hbcu but want the hbcu experience. It's like you can't do that. I will guarantee you that my hbcu experience and their experience as a black student at schools like Bama, Clemson, LSU, whoever, are not going to be the same. Let's be fr, the main reason why a lot of them are there because the school is trying to boost "diversity". To them, we are number but to the hbcus, we are individuals.

Secondly, several expressed concern that the Cardinal Divas are receiving a lot of attention from mainstream media because they are practicing Black culture at a PWI and HBCU teams, who have been doing this practice for years, do not receive the same attention. A youtuber comments,

I [am] trying to remember the last time an HBCU's majorette team was invited to a national show and celebrated. Happy for theses women, but the J- Settes, Dancing Divas, Golden Girls, Stingettes are beautiful and amazing. Let's see them celebrated. Hopefully that will be the outcome of this.

Within this argument, commenters also expressed concern for Black cultural practices needing the validation of White spaces to be legitimate. Furthermore, commenters accused the team and the media outlets for not providing and acknowledging the history of HBCU dance line teams.

Thirdly, many argued that the USC team exposes Black dance team culture to cultural appropriation and being colonized in White spaces. One person argues, “Well when the white girls integrate it and take it over, no one at the school can complain.” Several debaters gravitated to a video clip of the team on the local Los Angeles ABC7 affiliate to validate this claim. In the clip, the team is performing their “fight on” movement outside with news anchors Leslie Sykes and Tony Cabrera. In the movement, the dancers stand with one hand on their hip, while they swing the opposite arm over their heads, hand in a peace sign. At the same time, their hips are swaying forward and backwards. Sykes and Cabrera awkwardly attempt to perform the movement with the team. At one point, Sykes takes the long braids of Lang and tries to pretend they were coming from her head, then drapes the braids around her shoulder.

Several cited the video for reducing the practice to a parody and mocking the practice for a predominately White news station. One person responded to the video by stating, “I thought it was a cool idea now it just seems like they’re trolling the HBCU culture....” Another comments, “And to think this is supposed to uplift the community? Ha!!! This is complete Tom foolery and mockery.” While Sykes is a Black woman who attended Spelman College, an HBCU, many commented that Sykes grabbing Lang’s hair was deeply problematic.

What surfaces in this debate is whether Black cultural practices designed for Black spaces should be performed outside of these environments. Do these practices lose something by transitioning to White spaces? Does this transition affect the environments where these practices

originate? How are these practices a testament to the power and cultural engine of HBCUs? To add context to the argument, Black dance team culture is not the only practice to surface outside of HBCUs. Most of the major Black Greek sororities and fraternities were also founded at HBCUs and now have expanded to PWIs. Regardless of their location, Black Greek organizations maintain a mostly Black membership and are still designed to support the Black experience. These organizations tend to be larger and have more social and political capital on HBCU campuses than on the campus of PWIs.

I find the Cardinal Diva example important to understanding why these cultural practices are so sacred to the HBCU experience. HBCUs are a force in the educational trajectory of Black people in the U.S. and in the production of Black cultural material. HBCU dance teams are an example of what happens when Black experiences are able to flourish in spaces designed for Black bodies. When Black people are not pressured to justify their presence or constantly fight against racial microaggressions and anti-Black occurrences, they are able to facilitate a different type of engagement within their bodies and their environments. Thus, when the material that is rooted, critical, or even sacred to these spaces of refuge are moved into less safe spaces, Black people are left to grapple with subsequent meanings that surface for both the practices and their spaces of origin. When the safety of these practices that are still needed in their cultural communities is questioned, the need to protect them arises.

In order to understand what so many are working to protect, I find it important to discuss the history and significance of HBCUs. They are the foundation of dance team culture and the particularities of HBCUs' existence is important to understanding how dance team culture is able to evolve.

Early History of HBCUs

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have been a thriving source of education and inspiration for Black people. HBCUs offer a safe space for Black folk to explore a multitude of opportunities and support their history and cultural traditions, while receiving a quality education. The earliest HBCUs date back before the Civil War. Cheyney University (est. 1837 in Pennsylvania), Lincoln University (est. in 1854 in Pennsylvania), and Wilberforce University (est. 1856 in Ohio) were the first schools dedicated to Black higher education (Essoka 2014; Albritton 2012; Ebright 2019; Clark 2019). With Black Codes in the South prohibiting Blacks from reading and writing, these northern institutions were the first major opportunities for Black people to receive formal advanced education (Ebright 2019; Decker 2014).

Throughout the Civil War, emancipated Black folk followed Union soldiers North to ensure their safety from Southern Whites (Ebright 2019). Once the war ended, these newly freed people did not have employment or a means to financial stability (Ebright 2019). Southern Whites lost their rights to own enslaved people and the federal government took control of their enslaved people and other property (Ebright 2019). Thus, newly freed Blacks were “contraband of the war” or wards of the government (Ebright 2019, 33). To support the transition of a new workforce into the free labor economy, two months before the Civil War ended, the federal government established the U.S. Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands or better known as the Freedmen’s Bureau (Ebright 2019, 33). The Freedmen’s Bureau was created to provide medical care, resolve labor disputes, establish schools, and assist in locating family members displaced during slavery (Ebright 2019).

After the Civil War, White Northerners wanted the recently freed Black people to gain education and thereby, have a means to care for themselves. The Freedmen's Bureau's efforts to open up schools in the South was supported by White Christian groups in the North (Ebright 2019). While Southern White people felt it was their moral obligation to enslave and oversee the “inferior” and “fallen” population of enslaved Black people, Northern Whites believed Blacks were equal to them but were morally corrupted by slavery (Ebright 2019; Decker 2014). Thus, education was seen as the way to enlighten Black people and free them from the degradation that had been imposed on them by Southern Whites. Northern Christians believed that a basic and liberal arts education was needed to cultivate formerly enslaved Blacks into good citizens (Albritton 2012; Decker 2014). Therefore, White Northerners began to fund Southern schools; many of which started off offering high school level education and eventually elevated to college level instruction (Ebright 2019).

The early schools were operated particularly by White people, particularly White men (Ebright 2019, 37). Black people wanted to be educated and flooded to these schools as education was seen as a step towards freedom (Decker 2014). However, as time progressed, Black students started to question the White leaders and funders of these schools (Ebright 2019; Albritton 2012; Decker 2014). White people's control of the schools meant Whites could determine and limit the opportunities experienced by Black people. This would help White people maintain the racial hegemony and social order they wanted in the South and throughout the country (Ebright 2019).

In “Not in My Backyard: Puritan Morality Versus Puritan Mercantilism and Its Impact on HBCUs,” scholar Tiffany Decker (2014) explores the shifting moral compass of Whites in the

North. During reconstruction, Northern White people believed it was their Christian duty to correct the moral depravity of Blacks corrupted by enslavement. During Reconstruction, Northern White people were estranged from their Southern counterparts. However, as time progressed, Northern and Southern Whites reunited under their White identity. In this reunification, Northern White people embraced Southern Whites' belief that Black people were inferior and began to support a racial caste system. Additionally, Northern Whites began to prioritize industry over religious goals. While they still funded Black schools, Northern philanthropists funded schools to build a workforce they could then exploit through capitalism. Due to their shifting goals, Northern Whites started to focus on agricultural and engineering or trade schools rather than liberal arts schools.

The U.S. government supported Northern philanthropists' new priority to fund agricultural and engineering schools. As well, the federal government created two legislations that supported the growth of higher education institutions for everyone. The Morrill Act of 1862 established state colleges or land-grant institutions (Ebright 2019, 39). However, these newly formed institutions struggled financially and the Second Morrill Act of 1890 was established to provide financial assistance to these institutions (Ebright 2019; Albritton 2012). After the passing of the second act, an influx of HBCUs sprang up in the South, particularly agricultural and engineering schools (Ebright 2019). While these institutions were set up to educate workers for a Black workforce controlled by Whites, these agricultural and engineering schools were also established to support community segregation. These schools gave Blacks training in teaching, medicine, theology, and other skill sets so they could build their own self-sustaining communities and reduce the intermingling of Black and White communities (Ebright 2019).

Additionally, the Second Morrill act prohibited racial discrimination in schools' admission processes (Ebright 2019; Albritton 2012). However, while the act was established to provide equal resources to Black and White institutions, the Second Morrill Act failed to stop Southern states from funneling most of the federal money to White institutions (Ebright 2019; Albritton 2012). Furthermore, Southern states ensured that state funding and resources were given to White institutions over Black institutions, forcing the Black institutions to navigate inferior funding (Ebright 2019; Albritton 2012).

As more Black folk became educated, they wanted autonomy over their own education. While many of the major funders, administrators, and trustees of Black schools were White churches and White men, Black congregations did attempt to fund these institutions (Ebright 2019). However, Black groups were financially unable to provide the same level of support as White funders and their schools struggled to grow and expand (Ebright 2019, 38). Initially, White funders did not believe Blacks had the intellectual capability to lead these institutions (Ebright 2019, 38). Other controlling parties were concerned Black leadership in these schools would create educational environments where students would learn to disrupt the racial hierarchies and the Southern way of life (Ebright 2019, 38). However, through persistence, Black folk eventually took over the leadership, faculty, composition, and staff positions at these institutions (Ebright 2019; Albritton 2012).

Shifting Tide

Since racial order in the South was regulated by segregation, HBCUs were responsible for educating 90% of college educated Black people (Albritton 2012, 320). However, Civil

Rights legislation changed the accessibility of education and challenged the stability of HBCUs. The 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision began this shift and legally granted Black students the right to be educated at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) (Albritton 2012, 321). Additionally, the Higher Education Act of 1965 required PWIs to increase their enrollment of Black students (Albritton 2012, 321). To attract more students, PWIs began providing financial support to Black students to recruit them. Furthermore, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, better-known as the G.I. Bill, was utilized by Black soldiers returning home from the World War II, the Korean War, and Vietnam War (Albritton 2012, 321).. This allowed Black servicemen the ability to afford education and many of these then enrolled into PWIs. Thus, by 1980, students at HBCUs only comprised 20% of Black college educated students (Albritton 2012, 321).

As HBCU enrollment declined, many questioned the relevance of HBCUs and argued that they should be closed. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) were proponents of desegregation. For some in the NAACP, HBCUs were a threat to full integration of PWIs and thus, they thought HBCUs should be closed. Additionally, the financial struggles of HBCUs were further exacerbated by the history of decreased enrollment already outlined above. HBCUs could not compete with the financial resources of White institutions and they were forced to be creative to ensure their survival (Albritton 2012).

HBCUs in the Present

HBCUs still struggle with reduced enrollment and constrained financial resources and yet they continue to be successful in producing educated Black professionals and intellectuals. Even though HBCUs educate only about 30% of Black college educated people, graduates from

HBCUs comprise 75% of Black people with Ph.Ds, 50% of Black engineers, 80% of Black federal judges, and 65% of Black medical doctors (Albritton 2012, 322). Moreover, HBCUs retain a higher rate of their Black students than predominantly White institutions (PWIs) (Ebright 2019; Albritton 2012); most HBCU graduates get advanced degrees (Ebright 2019); and HBCU students earn better grades than Black students at PWIs (Albritton 2012). This evidence indicates that HBCUs remain an important aspect of Black education.

There are several factors that impact how HBCUs are able to educate Black students. First, HBCUs provide a culturally relevant educational experience that nurtures Black students. These institutions create a learning and social environment steeped in historical Black culture. They focus on uplifting Black culture through education and highlighting the contributions of African diasporic communities (Gasman and Commodore 2014; Albritton 2012; Ebright 2019). By centering their educational structure on the cultural and social needs of Black students, HBCUs offer a welcoming and empowering environment where Black students can feel culturally validated and socially supported.

Additionally, HBCUs are committed to extending admissions to diverse socio-economic populations and they devote resources to populations often ignored by PWIs (Gasman and Commodore 2014). For example, they specialize in providing education to first generation college students. HBCUs developed educational and social structures to support first generation college students' transition into higher education. These support structures help to ensure students will adapt to college life and finish their degrees (Gasman and Commodore 2014; Albritton 2012; Ebright 2019). Furthermore, HBCUs' maintain a racially diverse teaching staff. A 2013 study indicates that HBCU faculty are 64% Black, 25% White, 8.3% Asian American,

and 3% Hispanic (Gasman and Commodore 2014, 1). Conversely, the National Center for Education Statistics reports a different picture for full-time faculty across the nation. Of the 1.5 million professors at colleges and universities, Blacks and Hispanics combined are 3% of the total, whereas White males make up 40% and White females 35% of full-time faculty. (“The NCES Fast Facts Tool Provides Quick Answers to Many Education Questions (National Center for Education Statistics)” n.d.). These statistics are an indication of how HBCUs are crafting a racially different educational experience than other educational institutions. Thus, Black institutions are widening the access to higher education and supporting racially diverse scholars (Gasman and Commodore 2014).

HBCUs are vehicles to expand the reach of education in the Black community, both nation-wide in the US and within Black nations globally; they also provide students and alumni with access to social networks through which resources and information are transmitted. These networks include alumni, leaders, faculty, and staff and set students up for long-term success. Through this system of support, members of HBCU communities gain social capital and opportunities that may have otherwise been denied to them (Albritton 2012). Likewise, HBCUs are spaces for Black people to elevate themselves and prepare for professional achievement. With their unwavering commitment to the education of Black people, HBCUs are far more successful than PWIs at working successfully with a variety of Black populations. Therefore, HBCUs remain integral in Black people’s attainment of professional success.

Despite the success of HBCUs, they still face challenges; the largest issue is funding. As stated earlier, HBCUs struggled with funding from their inception; as well, the nationwide push for integration during the Civil Rights movement further exacerbated this issue. Additionally,

governmental support continues to be unreliable for HBCUs and, in some cases, state authorities have attempted to close HBCUs. For example, in 2009, Mississippi governor Haley Barbour unsuccessfully lobbied to have the HBCU Mississippi Valley State University and Alcorn State University merged into Jackson State University (Associated Press 2009). Barbour's reasoning was that the merger would save the state money. Additionally, the Louisiana State Legislature proposed a bill to close HBCU Southern University at New Orleans campus and merge it with University of New Orleans. In this merger, Southern University at New Orleans would have lost their HBCU status. While this bill failed to pass, Louisiana governor Bobby Jindal supported the merger due to "low graduation rates and inadequate use of facilities on both campuses" (Albritton 2012, 323). Even when states are not threatening to close HBCUs, they continue the legacy of funding White institutions over HBCUs. In the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 2010 report, *The Educational Effectiveness of Historically Black Colleges and Universities*, the commission affirms that states reduce their funding of HBCUs in moments of economic strain and funnel that money to PWIs instead.

Additionally, HBCUs are threatened by the accreditation process (Dennis 2021). Institutions need accreditation to prove they maintain a certain level of educational standards. Furthermore, schools need accreditation to obtain state and federal funding. However, accreditation agencies have a history of stripping HBCUs of their status if the college or university has a low endowment and/or is experiencing financial issues. If HBCUs lose accreditation, students at these institutions are not able to obtain federal financial aid and the schools do not have access to the federal and state funding they need to keep their doors open.

Since the majority of the student population at these institutions receive some form of financial aid, HBCUs are unable to preserve their student populations without accreditation.

Since HBCUs provide opportunities to students not adequately served by PWIs, local communities experience a major loss when these institutions shut down. For example, an alumni and local resident of Jackson, Mississippi states that the closing of Mary Holmes Seminary in 2005 took away a much needed community college in the area (Hazzard 2015). Furthermore, the city of Detroit saw a deterioration in the economic growth of the Black community when Lewis College of Business, the only HBCU in Michigan, shut down in 2013 (Burr 2021).

However, some HBCUs have been able to survive after losing accreditation. In 2018, Bennett College, an HBCU for women, was stripped of their accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). Their accreditation was taken away after they successfully raised \$9.5 million to stay in good financial standing (Bragg 2020). The school sued the accreditation agency and maintained their accreditation during the legal process (Bragg 2020). Then, in October of 2019, the school was able to get their accreditation through another accreditation agency (Bragg 2020).

Additionally, Morris Brown College was granted accreditation in April of 2021 after losing it 20 years ago (INSIGHT 2021) and Lewis College of Business is set to reopen in 2022 as the Pensole Lewis College of Business and Design (Burr 2021). Moreover, Bethune-Cookman University was able to maintain its accreditation after being placed on probation by the SACSCOC. The university was able to save its accreditation by restructuring their debt and reducing its spending (Burr 2021).

There are individuals who continue to argue that HBCUs still represent segregation and should be merged or closed (Albritton 2012). Yet, supporters of HBCUs fight for their existence as one of the few types of institutions in this country that cater to the development and intellectual growth of Black students. Additionally, these supporters argue that PWIs do not provide the level of support and resources needed by many Black students and closing HBCUs would decrease the number of college educated Black students. Author Ebright supports the continuation of HBCUs by stating, “Until black people’s accomplishments are woven into the content of all courses, and all public-school systems benefit poor or Black students equally to prepare them for college-level work, I concur ...that HBCUs will continue to be needed within the American educational landscape” (56).

Introduction Black Marching Band

HBCU culture is built from the ingenuity and creativity of Black folks, particularly those from the middle class. Over the course of their existence, HBCUs have developed a unique culture that sets them apart from PWIs and other institutions of higher education. One of the well-known and visible aspects of HBCU culture is their marching bands. Through the usage of Black popular music, the juxtaposition of dance, their high-stepping marching style, their stylized field formations, and the competitive energy among the teams, HBCU’s bands cultivate a performance aesthetic that aligns with the music and dance of the Black experience. While PWIs and other educational institutions have marching bands, the unique performance style of HBCU marching bands directly relates to Black popular culture.

In the context of Black majorette/dance team culture, HBCU dance line teams came into existence as auxiliaries of the marching bands. Black dance teams were founded through the visionary and creative work of HBCU marching bands. Thus, I argue that it is important to include HBCU marching bands in any discussion on the history and culture of Black dance teams. Here, I explore the history and culture of HBCU marching bands followed by the example of Southern University's Human Jukebox marching bands. Thereafter, I discuss the history of HBCU dance teams and dance team aesthetics followed by the examples of the Fabulous Dancing Dolls and the Gold'N Bluez dance teams.

Black Marching Band History

American marching bands derived from their European predecessors; early American bands date back to before the American Revolutionary War. Black people in the eighteenth and nineteenth century were musical autodidacts, teaching themselves to play both European-based instruments and European music during the enslavement period (Clark 2019). However, the military had the greatest influence on solidifying marching band culture in the U.S. and was the main training ground to educate musicians (Clark 2019; Essoka 2014). During some of the early U.S. American conflicts, Black people were allowed to join the efforts as soldiers; however, they were not allowed to use or work with weapons (Clark 2019; Essoka 2014). One of the major opportunities available to Black soldiers was to work as musicians. The War of 1812 and the American Civil War were main breeding grounds for Black band musicians (Clark 2019; Essoka 2014).

Black military marching bands were used to recruit people in the armed services through social events like parades and parties (Essoka 2014). After the War of 1812, Black bands started to surface in Philadelphia, New York, and New Orleans outside of military service (Clark 2019). Due to racial segregation in most U.S. cities, all-Black bands flourished as soldiers left military service and bands became a major fabric of urban culture (Clark 2019). In New Orleans, particularly, bands were prominent social elements of the city and were sponsored by benevolent societies and fraternal orders to march for social events and funerals (Clark 2019).

Before the Civil War, Black people in New Orleans existed in a racial caste system, which divided folks into the “Uptown” or “Downtown” region (Clark 2019). “Uptown” Black people were mixed-race and their musicians received formal European training, whereas “Downtown” folks were dark skinned, due to their apparent African heritage, and tended to be musical autodidacts (Clark 2019). The two groups developed divergent musical sounds (Clark 2019). After the Civil War, the class norms shifted and Black people were grouped together (Clark 2019). In this new racial climate, the diverse traditions of Black musicians blended to create a new sound that combined European training with Africanist aesthetics (Clark 2019). This merged sound continues today and is present in the sound of HBCU marching bands (Clark 2019).

With the close of the Civil War, military-trained Black musicians began to join minstrel shows and eventually moved into Black schools. Between the 1830s and the early 1900s, minstrel shows were a popular form of American entertainment and, despite their derogatory content, were an opportunity for Black people to cultivate their artistry while making a living as musicians (Clark 2019; Essoka 2014; Milburn 2019). Due to the popularity of minstrel shows and

brass band music, this time period is considered the “Golden Age” of American bands and Black musicians and bands increased in visibility and success (Clark 2019; Essoka 2014; Milburn 2019). One musician of note during this time is W.C. Handy, who was considered a musical legend as the “Father of Blues” (Clark 2019; Essoka 2014; Milburn 2019). Handy was trained in military bands and gained popularity from working minstrel shows. Eventually, he became the musical director of Alabama A&M College (Clark 2019; Essoka 2014; Milburn 2019).

Two major events significantly increased the popularity and prominence of Black musicians during the twentieth century (Clark 2019). The first was the end of World War I. Black musicians again received formal music training due to the war, which evolved and deepened their artistry further. Thus, the war was a catalyst to increase the number of highly skilled Black musicians (Clark 2019). James Reese Europe led one of the most recognized military bands of the time (Clark 2019; Essoka 2014; Milburn 2019). The 369th Infantry “Hellfighters” was organized to recruit Black soldiers from Harlem and they went on to receive critical acclaim, particularly in France (Clark 2019; Essoka 2014; Milburn 2019). The Hellfighters were noted for combining the European style of brass band with Africanist musical aesthetics. Europe’s band was just one example of how Black soldiers brought this new aesthetic to the U.S. military and impacted the military’s practices (Clark 2019; Essoka 2014; Milburn 2019).

The second event was the migration of Black folk to the North from the South. After World War I, Black people moved North to escape Jim Crow conditions that were rampant in the South and to find better job opportunities (Clark 2019). Thus, the musical talent cultivated during the war began to move across the country (Clark 2019). Additionally, HBCUs started to solicit

these musicians to educate their students and work with their bands. HBCUs utilized bands to raise money, recruit students, and entertain their public events.

The earliest HBCU marching bands date back to the 1890s and were at Tuskegee Institute, Florida A&M, and Alabama A&M, (which, as previously stated, was where W.C. Handy was its first musical director) (Essoka 2014; Clark 2019). In the beginning, these bands were led by student or community members; however, in 1907, Tuskegee Institute hired the first faculty band director, Army Major Nathaniel Clark Smith (Essoka 2014; Clark 2019). During this early period in marching band history, the bands did not perform at sporting events and instead performed for parades, chapel on Sundays, local community events, and ROTC/military activities (Essoka 2014; Clark 2019). Later, as the popularity of American football grew, bands began performing for the games as a source of community and school pride (Essoka 2014; Clark 2019).

Today, marching bands continue to be integral to the HBCU experience. They are mostly associated with sporting events, a major aspect in the visibility of these schools (McGreggor 2020). Sporting events provide schools with regional and national attention through the media coverage of the games (McGreggor 2020). Additionally, these games keep alumni and sports fans interested in the school and, consequently, connected to the school's students. For example, HBCU classic games, primarily football and basketball tournaments, attract tens of thousands of people. Classic games are major cultural events that include activities outside of the game (McGreggor 2020). These activities are steeped in the Black experience, including events such as step shows and battle of the bands competitions (McGreggor 2020). These events promote the competing schools, while keeping the schools at the forefront of Black popular culture.

The marching band and dancers are integral to making HBCU sporting events a unique experience. They follow a performance structure that is particular to HBCUs. They craft an experience designed to capture the audience's attention before the game begins and to maintain it well after the football match concludes. For the Human Jukebox, Southern University's marching band and the Fabulous Dancing Dolls, there are four music/dance performances that give a structural order to performances at the football games: these occur outside of the confines of the football game itself: 1) the march-in, 2) march-out, 3) the zero quarter, and 4) fifth quarter. Several bands begin the performance by marching into the stadium from a predetermined location and they return to that location for the end of their performance. The march into and out of the stadium is used to maximize their presence on game day and further display the dancers' and musicians' skills. The zero quarter and the fifth quarter are the bookends to the structured game. They are performed in the stadium stands and they are the pre-show – the zero quarter – and post show – the fifth quarter – of the football game. In order to perform the zero quarter and the fifth quarter, the dancers and the band have to build up sufficient performance material to engage the crowd. The fifth quarter, a back-and-forth battle between the bands, is the main showstopper. It's a final opportunity for each band to play longer selections in order to demonstrate the superiority of their skills, and claim victory over the other band.

Outside of their function at sporting events, marching bands also support HBCUs with recruitment and fundraising. Marching bands attract prospective students who might be interested in joining these groups. Some HBCUs have established relationships with high schools that train their band musicians to transition to Black institutions. For these students, the opportunity to join a band at an HBCU is the continuation of their high school success (Essoka

2014). Additionally, some students choose to attend Black institutions because of their experience watching and admiring the bands and dance teams at events like the HBCU classic games.

Bands participate in competitions and performances that offer cash prizes. For example, the Honda Battle of the Bands is a major fundraising competition for marching bands; each year, it brings about \$200,000 or more in grants to participating bands. Furthermore, Honda supports HBCUs through their Honda Campus All-Star Challenge that highlights the talents of HBCU students. This program is 35 years old and has pumped \$14 million into HBCUs (Honda Newsroom 2024). Additionally, HBCUs use the marching bands to foster school spirit and allegiance, thereby encouraging small donors and alumni to contribute generously to their HBCU of choice.

History of the Human Jukebox

Southern University's band history begins with Ella Amacker-Patty, who started the school's first band ensemble, followed by J.O.B. Mosely who began the school's first marching band (Milburn 2019; "Legacy of the Human Jukebox" n.d.). However, in 1947, T. Leroy Davis is credited with creating the Southern University Marching Band as it is known today (Milburn 2019; "Legacy of the Human Jukebox" n.d.). Davis grew the band from a few students to a 130-person ensemble. After his tenure with Southern University, he went on to train a generation of band directors in Louisiana (Milburn 2019; "Legacy of the Human Jukebox" n.d.).

Dr. Isaac Greggs is the school's most noted and revered director. He led the band from 1969 to 2005 and was known for incorporating current popular music and the New Orleans'

Mardi Gras style into the band's performances ("Legacy of the Human Jukebox" n.d.). In fact, the band adopted the name "The Human Jukebox" in the early 1970s under Greggs' direction ("Legacy of the Human Jukebox" n.d.). Greggs trained the band to be able to play the current "top 40" popular songs. Following a game, a local school journalist commented on the band's performance by stating, "[i]t was just like a human jukebox, they played everything. All you had to do was put a quarter in it" (Milburn 2019, 30). This comment resonated with the band and its supporters and eventually the band would officially be known as the Human Jukebox.

Under Greggs's direction, the band performed at events and venues outside of Southern University. In 1972, the band played 140 performances at Radio City Music Hall with the Rockettes. Additionally, the Human Jukebox performed at Super Bowls, Sugar bowls, U.S. presidential inaugurations, and numerous national/international events (Clements 2021; "Legacy of the Human Jukebox" n.d.). The Human Jukebox was also highlighted in the music videos of Michael Jackson, the Jonas Brothers, and Lizzo (Clements 2021; "Legacy of the Human Jukebox" n.d.).

Yet, the band's biggest performance each year is the Bayou Classic. The Human Jukebox began performing at the Bayou Classic in 1972 under the direction of Greggs ("Legacy of the Human Jukebox" n.d.). The Bayou Classic normally includes a football game against their rival Grambling State University, a Greek Step-Show & Battle of the Bands, which highlights the Human Jukebox band, a parade, and a host of other events. The football game and the Greek Step Show & Battle of the Bands are held at the New Orleans Superdome and the entire event brings an estimated 200,000 visitors to New Orleans each year (The Times-Picayenne 2017). The Bayou Classic is a staple for Southern University and the fans that support the school.

Researcher Claire Milburn describes the Southern University Marching Band “as a beacon of excellence in the HBCU band world” (30). The Human Jukebox is ranked #4 in the nation among other marching bands in the Southwestern Athletic Conference and considered one of the top 10 legendary HBCU marching bands by the Philadelphia Tribune (Philadelphia Tribune 2018). Currently, the Human Jukebox has over 200,000 followers on Facebook and 85,000 followers on Instagram. The Southern University Marching Band is a force among HBCU bands and continues to be revered by fans and supporters.

History of HBCU Dance Teams

HBCU dance line teams, the groups that perform with the marching bands, made their debut in the late 1960s. Alcorn State University’s Golden Girls dance team is credited for being the first dance line team. In 1968, their halftime performance at the Orange Blossom Classic in Miami marked the first time a dance team performed during a half-time show (Sounds of Dynamite, n.d.). They were followed by the Fabulous Dancing Dolls (FDD) in 1969. HBCU marching bands were fiercely competitive; after recognizing the success of the Golden Girls, they started adding dance line teams to their performances to maintain an edge over their rival bands.

In some instances, majorette teams were transformed into dance line teams by dropping their batons and shifting their movement aesthetics. The Prancing J-Settes is an example of a team that started as traditional majorettes. However, other teams, such as the FDD and Grambling State University’s Orchesis Dance Company (ODC) were never majorettes. In the case of the ODC, they were in existence for twenty years before they began performing with the

band in the late 1970s and they currently function as a part of the school's dance department and not as an auxiliary of the marching band. Over time, dance line teams became an important part of marching band performances and the game day experience.

Dance line team's main focus is performing for the football games and usually, they primarily perform with the marching band. For some schools, a secondary dance team is formed to perform for the basketball game season. These teams normally function independently of the marching band, which means they dance to recorded music. Often, the basketball focused teams operate more like pompom teams or pom squads, and some teams perform with pompoms. Yet, what sets them apart from the many pompom teams at high schools and colleges across the U.S is their adherence to Black dance line/majorette movement aesthetics. Before the conclusion of this chapter, I will explain several of the main attributes of Black dance line/majorette aesthetics.

Additionally, the band and dancers are used by the schools to recruit new students and support the school's external visibility. Therefore, dancers represent the school and its highest level of talent. Dancers are expected to embody performance excellence while also exemplifying the attributes of a model student. These qualities are also enmeshed in the heteronormative tropes of femininity. Thus, the dancers should demonstrate high achievement, both as students and as dancers, while exuding intelligence and beauty, grace and humility, desirability and strength.

History of the Fabulous Dancing Dolls and the Gold 'N Bluez Dance Teams

The FDD came into existence through the vision of Southern University's band director Isaac Greggs in 1969. The FDD followed the Southern Belles, who were the first group to dance with the band. The Southern Belles surfaced in 1961, but eventually dissolved. At the beginning

of Greggs tenure, the band performed without a dance team. Greggs's new vision for the band included "a lot of pageantry, excitement and precision maneuvers," and "pretty young women to add pizzazz to his all-male band" (Blitzer 2009).

To actualize his vision, Greggs brought Gracie Perkins into the band's leadership to run the new dance team. Gracie was recruited from the Southern University Laboratory School, which is a semiprivate K-12 school used by Southern University to train educators. Greggs selected the original eight members, who were all former students at the Laboratory school. In the early years of the team, few young women auditioned to join the team. As the popularity of the team expanded over the years, hundreds of women now audition each season.

While the primary focus of the team is to perform at the football games, the FDD also performs at other events. In 1973, the FDD took a pause from performing with the band. Greggs decided he wanted the band's performance to focus on the musicians and not the dancers. The FDD continued to perform at local events at the school and in the Baton Rouge area until Greggs brought them back to perform with the band the following school year. Over the years, the team has performed in four U.S. Presidential inaugurations (Human Jukebox Media 2021)⁹, in a 2019 music video by recording artist Lizzo (Gallo 2020), in several Pasadena Tournament of Roses Parades (KATC 2020), in multiple NFL games (Leach 2019), and many other nationally recognized and local events.

⁹ The Fabulous Dancing Dolls and the Human Jukebox marching band performed in Ronald Regan's 1981 Presidential Inauguration parade, Bill Clinton's 1993 and 1997 Presidential Inauguration parades, and in Joe Biden's 2021 Presidential Inauguration ceremony (Human Jukebox Media 2021).

The Gold'N Bluez dance team (GnB) serves as the basketball dance team and as Southern University's dance ambassadors. While their primary focus is performing at the basketball games, the GnB also performs for other events as needed by the university or surrounding community, such as university pageants and holiday celebrations. GnB was created in 2000 by Jonas Vanderbilt Jr., a graduate of Southern University and a former member of the Human Jukebox marching band (Southern University Gold 'N Bluez Dance Team 2014-2015, n.d.). Vanderbilt continues to be the lead coach of the team. However, after Vanderbilt left his administration position at Southern University to pursue another opportunity in Texas, he brought in former GnB and FDD member Connor McGrew, to co-lead GnB with him.

The GnB is not the first basketball dance team to serve Southern University. In the late 1970s, former FDD dancer Melrose Davis Biagas formed the first basketball dance team called the Fastbreaks. During her time as Assistant Coordinator of Women's Athletics at SU, Biagas created the Fastbreaks to increase attendance at the women's basketball games. The addition of the Fastbreaks so significantly increased the attendance at the women's basketball games that eventually they were asked to also perform for the men's games. The Fastbreak dancers, first led by Biagas and then by Darlene Broussard, performed for about a decade, paving the way for what would eventually be the Gold'N Bluez.

Two Teams, One School

HBCU dance lines are more well-known and have a higher visibility than the basketball dance teams. This was evident during my fieldwork. As I encountered individuals in Baton Rouge and New Orleans and explained my research, most knew about the FDD, however, almost no one was able to identify the GnB. Even when I came across previous students of Southern

University, they were not familiar with the GnB. This has a lot to do with dance lines' connection to the band. As mentioned earlier, marching bands are a major aspect of the branding of HBCUs. They are one of the most recognizable elements of HBCU culture. Through performances like the battle of the bands and the football classics, marching bands receive nation-wide visibility.

As well, I partially attribute this to the popularity of football in the U.S. When comparing professional football to basketball, the National Football League (NFL) outpaces the National Basketball League (NBA) in most categories. For example, in 2017, NFL television viewership was more than ten times higher than that of the NBA. In fact, the NFL's major event, the Super Bowl, brings in more revenue than the NBA Playoffs and the Major League Baseball Playoffs combined (Janvrin 2022). The difference in popularity is also evident in the attendance at Southern University's games. During special games like homecoming, the Southern University's football team plays to an almost full stadium. Even during regular season games, the stadium is usually half to three quarters full of patrons.

Additionally, the FDD are the featured subject of season three of the ESPN television series *Why Not Us*. The series is designed to highlight well-known HBCU athletic programs. For eight episodes, the show follows the FDD during their full season, documenting their work ethic and the lives of the dancers and the sponsor. The FDD are also the subject of several social media fan groups and were featured in Beyoncé's performance film documenting her performance at Coachella titled *Homecoming*. In contrast, even though the GnB performances and auditions are documented and featured on local videographers' YouTube channels, the GnB

are absent from national recognition and conversations about Black majorette/dance team culture.

Additionally, the FDD are very protective over their brand and they are exclusionary regarding who gets access to the internal workings of their team culture. Except for the special situations like the ESPN series, the team only shares internal details with individuals who were previously a part of the team. This appears to come from a need to deter other teams and groups from accessing and copying the elements that make their style distinct. Their audition and rehearsal processes are closed to public viewing and dancers are prevented from sharing information to the public.

Conversely, the GnB are more open to outsiders learning more about their team. They allow local videographers to produce videos documenting their audition process and the culture of the team. Furthermore, the last day of their three-day audition is open to the public. As an outsider, I was allowed to come to GnB rehearsals and was an audition judge for their 2019-2020 team. Additionally, it is a common practice among dance teams to hold dance clinics or camps to teach youth. The GnB co-hosts a dance clinic with Southern University's cheerleading squad. These clinics are ways to share the team's expertise and raise money for the team. The FDD does not participate in these types of events. They prohibit current team members from participating in the clinics/camps and discourage former team member's involvement.

As I did my research, I got the sense that within the culture of Southern University, dancers think they can use the GnB to prepare themselves to eventually get a spot on the FDD. The teams do not support this narrative. Yet, it is a commonly held belief; during the 2019 GnB audition, a GnB staff member addressed the idea to get the auditioners focused on the GnB team

and not on any future ideas of joining the FDD. While some dancers transitioned from the GnB to the FDD, most dancers do not make the transition.

Despite the differences in how they operate and their popularity, FDD and the GnB support each other's work. Connor McGrew, the co-coach of the GnB, is frequently active as a Forever Doll¹⁰ with the FDD and she can be seen on an episode of *Why Not Us* helping select a new season of dancers. Additionally, FDD's former long-time sponsor and coach Dr. Akai Smith has also been an audition judge for the GnB. Through my conversations with the GnB coaching staff, I learned that the leadership of the teams are in constant communication. Instead of fostering a sense of competition, each team has carved out their own domain within the culture of the Southern University and they cooperate and collaborate when needed.

Dance Team Movement Aesthetics

Dance team movement vocabulary is a mixture of studio jazz, hip hop, and Black social or popular dance. As mentioned previously, specific dance teams have carved out their own dance styles, yet, they all adhere to some common movement aesthetics and conventions. I use these common conventions to connect teams across categories of performance. Thus, my justification for including HBCU basketball dance teams, HBCU dance line teams, youth majorette teams, and queer teams into a general category of Black dance teams is their adherence to most of the same aesthetics. Therefore, in this section, I describe a few of the main movement conventions used by the teams. Following these descriptions, I specifically describe the

¹⁰ Former FDD dancers are called "Forever Dolls"

movement culture of the FDD and the GnB to deepen our understanding of how these teams specifically materialize these conventions in their performances.

The Stance and Sitting Pose

The stance is one of the main movement aesthetics used by dance teams. This stationary pose is a standing position where the legs are normally straightened and closed with the hands resting on the hips or one arm extended from the body. The stance position is used as a resting position between movements or when the team is waiting to perform. It is executed in the same manner by each team member to give the team a sense of cohesion and uniformity. Across the varied teams, the stance positions are similar, yet stylized.

In addition to their general stance position, teams (particularly dance line teams) have a sitting pose. This pose is used when they are sitting in the stands during a game. The sitting pose functions similar to the team's stance, as it is used to give the team uniformity and is stylized among the different teams. In most sitting poses, the dancer's legs are either tightly closed or their legs are crossed with their hands placed on their legs or hips.

Stands

Dance teams are known to perform short stationary movement phrases. These movement phrases are traditionally performed in the stands by the dance line teams, which is why they are called stand routines. The FDD also calls these movement phrases "catch-ons." Stand routines are performed by most teams; however, they are not always performed in the stands. For example, youth competition teams perform stand routines in the center of a performance space – often a gym floor – in front of an opposing team. A stand movement phrase is normally

performed by a leader of the group or the captain first, then the rest of the team follows. Teams have a large collection of stand routines and a main job of the captain is to decide what to perform and when to begin the movement. Sometimes called “throwing” a stand routine or a catch-on, a hand signal is used to notify the team they are about to move and inform them what movement phrase they will perform next, thereby creating seamless transitions. Stand routines are normally two to four eight-count phrases that demonstrate the expertise and style of the team.

When performing a stand routine, the team starts in a stance or sitting pose. Then, each person or group performs the phrase the same number of times, normally twice. After they have completed the phrase twice, they return back to the stance or sitting pose. Stand routines are often performed in canon form, also called a ‘round’ in which imitation begins among two or more groups at staggered intervals. In this configuration, teams are broken into different groups that will perform the stand at the different times. Once the captain completes the first full movement phrase alone, the first group will join as the captain repeats the phrase. Then, the next group starts the phrase after the previous group performs the full phrase once. This will continue until all the groups have performed the movement phrase twice. Normally, after the last group completes their second execution of the movement, the captain will start a new movement phrase series.

Stands vs. Field Shows

A field show is generally a performance during the half-time of a game. The name references the performances HBCU dance line teams execute in the middle of the football field with the band. Dance teams that do not perform at games will perform a field show as a center

floor performance at a competition or event. These performances are generally a minute or longer of choreography. While stand routines are stationary, field show choreography travels in space and usually incorporates formation changes. Whereas stand routines are rooted in Black vernacular movement – torso undulations, asymmetrical angular poses, polyrhythms and pelvis/hips/butt rotations – field show choreography combines Black dance aesthetics with White/Euro-centered dance vocabulary –e.g., ballet, and chorus line kicks.

Marching/Parading

Parading is a major cultural activity in Southern Louisiana. From Mardi Gras parades, second lines, homecoming parades, and various other types of parades, parading is a major part of the cultural fabric of the region. For majorette dance teams, especially youth teams, parades are a significant part of their performance season; the community comes out to see their favorite dancer or group march in a parade.

The strut – which is performed when marching – is a stylized walk that is crafted differently for each team: some teams have several different well-known marches or struts. For example, the “salt and pepper” march, one of the signature struts of Jackson State University’s Prancing J-Settes, epitomizes the “high step” style of band marching that involves lifting the knee waist high before each step. The “salt and pepper” march exudes confidence and power, commanding the attention of the viewer. The dancers hold their relaxed fists just below their collar bone and with each high lift of the knee, they jab the opposite hand forward. Their hands, blade-like as they slice through the air, return with each step to the soft fists high on their chests. The arm movement looks like a boxer, warming up, with its protective ready position, fists close

to the body, followed by a fierce jab. The legs are sharp and precise; the arms combine sharpness and softness. The dancer's hips and spines are fluid and responsive, swaying with each step.

Dance teams combine their struts or marching movements with other traveling choreography. When marching, the team starts off performing their main march or strut. The captain, who leads the moving team, will signal to the dancers behind them, before they perform a traveling movement phrase. After a movement phrase or several different movement phrases comes to an end, the team will return back to the basic strut. As the team advances forward in its march, members will perform different movement phrases along the parading route, often in the form of a canon. The main strut is used to give the team a rest between short movement phrases, to help the team maintain a similar traveling pace as the rest of the band, and to allow the team to maneuver complicated terrain as they move through different spaces.

Aesthetic of the Fabulous Dancing Dolls

Just before the game begins, the stadium fills and the crowd talks, while the Alabama A&M University band, Marching Maroon and White, plays in the stands. Suddenly, Southern University and A&M College's band, the Human Jukebox, makes its grand entrance, moving onto the field in crisp formation. The crowd's attention immediately shifts to the marching band. Their performance down the field transforms the energy in the stadium and builds excitement for the much-anticipated Gold Coast Challenge game between the football teams of Southern University and Alabama A&M.

Second in line, after the band officers and before the drum major, the FDD strut into the stadium performing a traveling dance that combines jazz dance and the Las Vegas showgirl

style. Their dance is centered around their signature strut; a pigeon-toed walk performed with the heels off the ground, arms swooping down and up in a half circle to the side of the body, hands in upward flexion, and hips swaying from side to side. The FDD travel down the field, dressed in green and brown leopard-patterned bikinis with tights, jazz shoes, and white gloves. They change formations several times before assembling into a single line. Eventually, the FDD use the single line formation to move into the stadium stands to begin their almost 4-hour performance of hair-slissing, pelvis-undulating, body-dropping dance.

Marching/Parading

For the FDD and the Human Jukebox, their game day performance begins with parading, or what they consider marching, into the game stadium. At home games, the band and the dancers line up outside Isaac Gregg Band Building to begin their journey to the A. W. Mumford Stadium. As the FDD and the Human Jukebox move through the campus of Southern University, cheering crowds line the streets, camera phones ready, as they wait to catch a glimpse of the FDD and the band, performing their well-known strut and march. The march into the stadium builds the excitement of the waiting crowd and creates palpable anticipation for the show. For the fans of the FDD, a game is considered a success when the dancers perform well; a win from the Southern University Jaguar football team is less relevant. To close out their performance in as grand a display as the entrance into the stadium, the dancers and the band line up and march out of the stadium – again traveling through the streets of Southern University to end back at the band building. The march into and out of the stadium is a major performance tradition of the band and the marches are performed at away games as well as at home games. During the away

games, the dancers' and the band's travel buses are the beginning and end of the march instead of the band building.

Normally, when the FDD marches, they form two side by side single file lines of dancers: the captain is front and center between the lines – thus allowing each dancer to see the captain's hand signals as they march. Similar to the stand routines, many of the dance combinations are structured in a canon; the captain performing a short phrase first, then the team joining as the captain repeats the phrase. Some movement phrases are simple and only entail changing the arms. For example, while continuing their pigeon-toed raised heeled swivel walk of their basic strut, dancers twist their torsos to the right for four counts while gliding their arms over their heads – hands slightly flexed with the palms facing the ground. Next, they finish out the remaining eight counts by twisting their torsos to the left; floating their arms back to their sides. During this second half of the step, their palms are faced upward for two counts; then they rotate their wrist causing their palms to float downward for the remaining two counts of the movement.

For more complicated movement phrases, the entire team may begin and end a phrase at the same time; giving their march a more dramatic effect. During one of the more complicated phrases, the whole team will do a series of jazz-inspired pivot turns that will include moments of strutting for a count or two with their arms swaying from side to side and other moments of lifting their legs into a passé position¹¹ while arching their torsos backwards.

¹¹ Passé is a position when the foot comes to the side of the knee of the opposite leg. The term comes from ballet vocabulary.

Stand Performances

During different moments of the game, dance line teams perform stand routines – often in response to activities on the field – while the band plays behind them. In the stands, the team takes up several rows of seats; the captain of the team sits in the center of the first row by herself. Before starting a stand routine, the FDD is positioned in their sitting pose. In this pose, the team sits in unison facing front with their bodies angled to the left, their left leg crossed over their right, and their hands placed on their top knee, right on top of left. Staring straight ahead and without moving the rest of her body, the captain lifts her arm and gives the team a hand signal.

As previously mentioned, each dance team exhibits their own style in their performance and the FDD's style is referred to as "dolling" or "dolls". Dolling is a flirtatious and sensual style with a sense of playfulness at its center. The FDD's stand routines are generally slow and mellifluous. The team takes its time moving through stand routines and they appear to savor every ounce of the movement. In their execution, the FDD are able to direct the attention of the audience and pull them emotionally into their performance. Yet, this playfulness and flirtation functions simultaneously with a sense of sophistication. When described by team members and others in the community, the FDD's performance is frequently referred to as "classy." The FDD work to present a level of sophistication in their performance, achieved through control of their movement and by excluding dance vocabulary perceived by some as vulgar. Although the FDD frequently utilizes the undulation of the h/b/p and the full roll of the body, they avoid "bucking," a signature movement in the majorette and j-setting styles of dance. For the FDD, the bucking movement, performed in an open wide legged stance with the pelvis thrusting sharply back and

forth, does not align with their aesthetic of “dolling.” Among many, bucking is perceived to be vulgar and lacks the merits of sophistication. For example, in 2013, the President of Jackson State University, Carolyn Myers, called out the performances of the Prancing J-Settes for being “unladylike” and “vulgar” and fired the sponsor of the team (Wicks 2013, 128). As bucking is a major element in the Prancing J-Settes signature style, the President’s reprimand is also a criticism of the movement bucking. What this indicates is that within this dance culture not all h/b/p movement is judged by the same standards. While certain movements of the middle region of the body can be perceived as vulgar and lewd, others do not diminish a dancer’s ability to be considered “sophisticated” and “classy.”

Field Show

The Human Jukebox’s performances are around 7-8 minutes long and the FDD dance for about a minute and a half in the middle of the band’s show. The fans expect and anticipate a new show every week and the FDD and the band do not disappoint; every show is different, while still maintaining the core aesthetics across all field shows.

When the band enters the field and starts to perform, the FDD waits poised on the sidelines of the field. Several minutes into the band’s performance and towards the end of a song, the FDD execute their signature strut quickly onto the field and display several traveling dance moves to end in a pose as the song ends. They wait in stillness for the next song to start and for their field performance to begin. The performances are fast paced, and the FDD are able to execute a substantial amount of dance vocabulary during their minute and a half performance. Once the FDD’s performance is complete, they gracefully jog off the field and return to the side

lines. They stand facing the audience in their signature stance – almost a ballet third position with their legs; their fingers are closed and resting on their hip crease, their elbows in a vee pointing away from their bodies – before whipping one arm around the top of their head to turn back toward the band's performance. They stand in their stance position facing the field until the band's performance is complete. Then they strut along the sidelines and off the field, returning to the stands. At times, instead of strutting off to the stands at the end of the band's performance, the FDD and the HJ perform and dance together on the sidelines of the field before the groups return back to the stadium stands.

Fifth and Zero Quarters

For the FDD, the fifth quarter is an opportunity to perform their stand routines without the distraction of the actual football game activity. During the game, the dancers' and the band's performance is connected to what occurs on the football field. For example, when their football team scores, the band and dancers will perform a particular song and dance that actuates the joy of the scoring. However, during the fifth quarter, the dancers and the band are the main focus and they both pull out their best material. While this is considered a battle, a clear winner is normally not determined. The back-and-forth display of skill is a demonstration in the Africanist aesthetic of call and response. HBCU bands are known for converting popular hip hop and R&B music into full band arrangements. The after-game battle is a deeper opportunity for the musicians and dancers to seduce the audience with their skill, artistry and energy.

Aesthetics of the Gold’N Bluez Dance Team

While Southern University Jaguars and the Alabama A&M Bulldogs basketball teams regroup on the sidelines during a timeout, the latest song by Cardi B and Bruno Mars blasts through the F.G. Clark Activity Center stadium. The sound of the music bounced around the sparsely populated stands as the audience waits for the rest of the game to unfold. The GnB dance team, positioned on the side of the gym floor close to one of the baskets and opposite the cheerleaders, is wearing yellow leotards that zip down the front to expose a light blue sports bra over skin toned tights and black jazz shoes. Before the song starts, they assume their stance – hands on hips and legs close together in a ballet third position. The team is tasked with entertaining and energizing the audience. Once the song starts, the captain steps forward to begin a stand routine. The song “Please Me” describes a flirtation interaction between Cardi B and Bruno. As the captain begins to move, her movement accentuates the meaning in the song. She rotates her hips forwards and backwards as her arms reach forward to grab and pull the focus of the audience back to her undulating body. After next performing a moving step that travels forward and back, she ends the phrase by extending her right leg forward and bending over to trace her leg with her right hand as she rises back to standing. In canon fashion, the captain repeats the phrase with the dancers behind her joining to further draw attention from the audience.

The Basketball Game Experience

The GnB’s main performance venue is the women and men’s basketball games. During the basketball games, they perform courtside during the game and center court during half-time.

Normally, they just appear on the side of the court towards the beginning of the game and then exit quietly before the game comes to an end. Both the GnB and the Human Jukebox band perform at the home basketball games. However, only a small fraction of the band plays during the basketball games and the opposing team's band normally does not travel to away games. Therefore, there is no 5th quarter battle of the bands at the basketball games. While GnB normally do not perform at away games, they do perform for both the women's and the men's basketball games that occur back-to-back. In a basketball game, the music comes from both the reduced band and a DJ, who plays the latest hip hop and R&B songs. Therefore, during the game, GnB are prepared to dance to both the band and recorded music.

Unlike the pageantry of the FDD game day performances, GnB's basketball game performances are less elaborate. They do not engage in large entrance and exit spectacles like the FDD and the Human Jukebox band. During a football game, the majority of the music played during the experience comes from the band. Mainly, the GnB perform alone at center court to recorded music.

Sideline Performances and Stance Positioning

The GnB perform stand routines on the side of the court in two ways: in solos and in standard dance team fashion. For some of their sideline performances, the individual style of each dancer is highlighted along with the collective precision of the team. In these stand routines, each dancer performs an 8-count solo to demonstrate their individual skills. This may occur throughout an entire song or for several rounds before the team collectively dances together in

unison. Additionally, the team will perform stand routines in the standard canon structure with the captain starting a movement phrase and subsequent groups repeating the phrase.

The GnB have a unified stance very similar to FDD's standing resting position; however, unlike the FDD, they sometimes perform with pompoms. When using the pompoms, they will hold them in their hands during their stance position. Furthermore, the GnB perform a movement when they transition from a movement phrase to their stance position. In this movement, dancers stand in a diagonal with their body facing front and their left shoulder leading the diagonal. The position is similar to the "écarté derrière" position in ballet. Yet, instead of using ballet arms, the dancers reach their arms directly to the side of their bodies with flat hands and wiggling fingers. They hold the position for only a few seconds, before shifting their bodies into their stance position.

Center Floor Choreography

Half-time shows are a major aspect of the GnB's performance work. These performances are similar to the FDD's field shows as the choreography travels throughout space and is a combination of studio jazz, hip hop, and contemporary dance styles. Ranging from one to four minutes in length, these performances are sometimes choreographed around a theme. For example, during a 2020 Southern University and Alabama State University game half-time performance, the team performed to hip hop song "Plain Jane" by A\$AP Ferg, a rapper from Harlem, New York, whose lyrical style has an East Coast inner city vibe. The GnB matched the style and energy of A\$AP Ferg and his song, not only with their hip hop choreography, but also with their crop top black sweat shirts and black leggings.

Non-Basketball Performances

As the GnB are not limited to performing for the school's basketball games, they perform at pep rallies, school pageants, step shows, music concert, community events and etc. The GnB are not limited by the band which extends their performance opportunities. This freedom from another performance entity allows for the GnB to craft multiple types of performances.

The structure of their performances depends on the type of event. Their pep rally performances are similar to what they do at the basketball games. Throughout the event and as the DJ is playing music for the crowd, GnB perform their stand routines while other activities are occurring throughout the event. GnB are featured at the pep rally for a one-to-three-minute piece of choreography similar to their half time performances at the games. However, at other performances like school pageants and step shows, the team will execute one piece of choreography. During these types of opportunities, GnB can perform longer choreography that explores more elaborate choreographic themes. This could involve changes in the music to facilitate shifts in the tone, introduction of characters and personalities through costume changes, and utilizing different styles of dance to display different ideas. While the FDD at times will perform at parades and pep rallies as well, they are beholden to the band and only perform without the band on special occasions-

Conclusion

This chapter is dedicated to understanding a culture and tracing a history rooted in Black vernacular dance. The history and culture of Black majorette/dance teams is interwoven within the HBCU educational experience and the culture of Black marching bands at these institutions.

Black majorette/dance teams developed in spaces dedicated to the upliftment of Black people and Black culture. These teams are just one example of the ingenuity of Black folks to create and develop cultural material that supports their existence and well-being.

Despite the diversity within the culture of Black dance teams, in previous scholarship, scholars narrowly defined the practice as j-setting and placed the practitioners of j-setting at the center of the practice. Although j-setting holds an important place in the dance team experience, it is by no means the predominant practice in this complex culture. For this reason, it is important that a more diverse and comprehensive representation of this practice is reflected in the current scholarship discourse. In many previous accounts, scholars confused the priorities of their own interest with the priorities of the practitioners and communities who sustain these practices. While I do not claim to speak for the priorities of these communities, I focus on expanding the understanding of these practices by discussing the culture and the history of the founding groups of the practice; HBCUs, Black marching bands, and HBCU dance teams. Black majorette/dance teams' aesthetics were cultivated and nurtured through these histories; it is essential to grasp this history to understand how these dance communities are able to thrive and create.

Black majorette/dance team culture is composed of three main groups: HBCU teams, youth teams, and queer teams. Within these groups, there are diverse approaches to movement and performance. Yet, it is their adherence to a set of common conventions that defines them as a social dance genre. As HBCU dance lines are the blueprint for Black majorette/dance team culture, I explore this dance genre produced by Black educational institutions primarily, in this case through Southern University's Fabulous Dancing Dolls and Gold'N Bluez teams. I utilize FDD and GnB to provide a viable context for grasping the history and culture of Black

majorette/dance team culture. Each team's style and drive for innovation is a testimony to the generative creativity of Black folk. In Chapter 2, I address ideas of black aesthetics in dance, pleasure in the body, and creativity in the midst of adversity. Additionally, I discuss theoretical implications around these dance practices and the mechanisms Black communities deploy in the pursuit of self and communal actualization.

Chapter 2

Africanist Aesthetics: Politics of Pleasure vs. Dirty South Culture

What is the Black body, Black dance, and Black social or vernacular dance? What is the role of the h/b/p in the movement of the Black body? Black vernacular dance is manifested from Black life and Black life is materialized from multiple factors. While concepts like the Black body, Black dance, and Black vernacular dance do not completely define the Black experience, they provide context into how the moving body helps to craft the Black experience. In this chapter, I provide historical and cultural context for these terms and I examine the hips/butt/pelvis (h/b/p) as a part of the politics of the moving body. Furthermore, I center this discussion around Black women. Black women define the experience around the h/b/p and carry the burden of cultural and social tension within these parts/ of the body. Finally, I conclude this chapter by contextualizing Black majorette/dance team practice in relation to the politics of respectability and the dancing h/b/p.

I begin this discussion with the vessel that houses this experience, the Black body. Historian Harvey Young (2010) and American cultural historian Brenda Dixon Gottschild (2003) propose a basic understanding of the Black body. They define the Black body as a sociocultural construct that is not connected to any one particular person or set of experiences. Rather, it includes multiple individuals, bodies, and contexts, recognizing similarity across experiences, and folding these multiple attributes into the idea of the Black body. In his examination of the Black body, Young invokes sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the habitus and applies it to

the experience of race. He posits that the Black habitus is a theoretical framework to use in the interpretation of how Black bodies exist in time and space. The Black habitus is an acknowledgement that the body is not static, but is constantly constructing itself. Within this process, the individual continuously negotiates the internalization of social expectations and subsequently projects back those internalizations onto society.

Furthermore, the Black body is constructed through sociocultural conditions; its corporeal realities exist in the everyday experiences of Black people (Dixon-Gottschild 2003; Blanco Borelli 2016; Kelley 1993). The Black body is intelligent and is a site for embodied knowledge and documentation of human existence (Dixon-Gottschild 2003; Blanco Borelli 2016; Foster 1995). Dance scholar Susan Foster (1995) posits that the body, through interactions with other bodies and differing environments, creates knowledge. Using this aggregate knowledge, Black people are able to navigate their everyday existence with collective wisdom and intelligence (Foster 1995).

The dancing Black body is another layer of understanding within this socio-cultural construct of the Black body. A dancing body can manipulate time, space, energy, rhythm, and emotion in order to navigate, create, or project meaning and disseminate knowledge. Black dance forms are foundational to the Black cultural experience. Therefore, I return to the question, “What is Black dance?”

Black dance is a term, layered in meanings, that is invoked to present the collective memories and kinesthetic experiences of Black folk. Black dance is not just one style or form, but many styles and forms of dance such as social or vernacular dance, concert dance, secular

dance, historical or national dance, spiritual or religious dance, tourism, etc. Additionally, it also varies across bodies. Throughout history, dancers have both embraced and rejected it.

Prior to the use of Black dance, Negro dance was the popular term used to refer to Black concert dance. Susan Manning (2004) situates the beginning of the common use of the term Negro dance to Helen Tamiris's 1928 *Negro Spirituals* and the concert "The first Negro Dance Recital in America," produced by Edna Guy and Hemsley Winfield in 1931. Manning links the histories of Negro dance and modern dance and argues that the two are "mutually constitutive categories", by recognizing a racial dichotomy that defines Blackness through Negro dance and Whiteness through modern dance.

By the 1960s, the term "Black dance" began to surface and began to eclipse the use of Negro dance. In *The Black Dancing Body*, Dixon Gottschild (2003) explores the idea of Black dance and uncovers its origins not in Black dance spaces but among White dance critics and not in Black dance spaces. During the early history of the term, many Black artists did not completely embrace it and only used it in certain situations to appease mainstream expectations for funding and support. Dixon Gottschild notes the term was taken up by institutions that needed to define their support given to dancers in order to adhere to certain goals and measurable aims. While there are still questions around who can and cannot use the term and about what types of styles and movement vocabularies the term includes or excludes, at the turn of the 21 century, Black dance eventually was embraced by younger generations of Black dancers. In fact, Dixon Gottschild notes that dancers wear the term today like "a badge of honor" (14). Dixon Gottschild posits that the terms "Black" and "White" dance are "cultural milestones, not racial markers" (14). Additionally, she argues that the term Black dance is needed to note the work and

contributions of Black dancing bodies. She states, “[u]ntil racism and white-skin privilege are no longer an everyday issue in American life, I believe that there is a good reason to use a term of difference (black dance; black dancing body) that allows us to honor these contributions” (14).

While Dixon Gottschild argues for a term of difference to describe the experience of Black dancing bodies, her colleague, the late choreographer and dance scholar Kariamu Welsh (1989; 1994) argued for the use of African dance as this descriptor. Welsh defined African dance to be “...complex art in an advanced form. Its development encompasses many forms, including ballet, jazz, and modern dance” (1989, 71). In her definition, Africa is used as the container to describe the complex experience of people of African descent. In *Hot Feet and Social Change*, Welsh, with dance scholars Esailama G.A. Diouf, and Yvonne Daniel, explain the use of the term "African Dance" to represent “a complex and continuously reconstituted idea based on race, colonization, economies, nationhood, and ethnicities” (2019, 4-5). Thus, Africa and African dance are not just connected to a location, but they represent the experience of a network of related bodies spread across the world, including those on the continent of Africa.

Whether labeled African dance, Black dance, or another term, dance produced and performed by Black people is identified through its common characteristics. Welsh (1989) posits that this common aesthetic derives from and demonstrates the complexity and particularities of African derived cultures. Thus, what she defines as aesthetic senses in African dance are representative of an African ethos. Dixon Gottschild (1996) builds upon the work of Welsh, art historian Robert Farris Thompson, and several other scholars in her theorization of Africanist aesthetics. Thompson (1974), who wrote *African Art in Motion*, is one of the first scholars to theorize in English about the aesthetics of African art and culture. Dixon Gottschild combines

Thompson's previous scholarship to identify five aesthetic characteristics - embracing conflict, polyrhythm/polycentrism, high-affect juxtaposition, ephebism, and the aesthetic of the cool - which are all prevalent in the U.S. American dance experience. These characteristics do not operate in isolation; they often work in tandem.

When Dixon Gottschild cites embracing conflict, she is referring to how opposites function within Black dance and Black art. Black dance embraces a paradox of the contrary which is often enmeshed in irony. Therefore, dancers can be both awkward and smooth, pensive and direct, and calm and explosive, just to name a few simultaneously expressed opposites. For example, the Fabulous Dancing Dolls (FDD) are often seductive and dignified in their performances. They pride themselves on presenting a level of "class" and "sophistication" in their dancing. They demonstrate this by softening their movements and presenting a smooth quality throughout their dancing. Additionally, the FDD avoid aggressive movement in their choreography, eliminating movements that would be considered "unladylike," including heavy thrusting, or sitting in a squat position while dancing with their legs open. Yet, they perform seductive movements that emphasize their hips, butt, chest, and legs by undulating, rolling and touching their bodies.

Polyrhythm (Thompson 1974; Dixon Gottschild 1996) and polycentrism (Welsh Asante 1985) refer to the multiple engagements with rhythm and energy that are evident simultaneously in the body. In one moment, a dancer can exhibit concurrent rhythms and centers of kinesthetic energy. High-affect juxtaposition describes the intensity of contrast in Black dance. African dance can transition from one quality to the next in a manner that voids subtlety. These drastic shifts can be exhibited by changes in energy, mood, emotion, tone, and movement quality. In

comparing African to European aesthetics, Dixon Gottschild states, “[A]ll traditions use contrast in the arts, but Africanist high-affect juxtaposition is heightened beyond the contrast that is within the range of acceptable standards in the Europeanist academic cannon” (14). Ephebism illustrates the dancer’s youthful approach to movement. Thus, this aesthetic is a display of “power, vitality, flexibility, drive, and attack” (15) Lastly, the aesthetic of the cool describes the calmness and composure evident in Black dance. This last aesthetic element is centered around the balancing of hot and cool. Therefore, in the midst of displaying ephebism and high-affect juxtaposition, dancers will display a sense of control and calmness in their delivery of performance.

Unlike the FDD, the Jackson State University Prancing J-Settes movement style is centered around a more aggressive attack. They often utilize heavy thrusting, deep squats, and quick movements in their choreographies. Additionally, the Prancing J-Settes use high-affect juxtaposition in the contrast between their sitting pose and their robust stand movement phrases. Before a stand phrase begins, the dancers sit calmly in the stands with their legs crossed at the ankle and their hands resting on one knee. Then, once they start to dance, the team appears to explode from their seat creating a drastic contrast from their sitting position. Yet, despite their more forceful approach to performance, the Prancing J-Settes perform with a sense of ease and control. Due to this sense of control, their performances display a quality of vitality.

While Black dance is not one particular style, form, nor technique, acknowledging African aesthetics makes dance of the African Diaspora readable across contexts. The five African aesthetics outlined by Dixon Gottschild are a starting point to begin to develop a literacy for understanding Black dance. There are other aesthetic qualities in Black dance, such as

repetition, grounded “get down” quality, and curvilinearity (Welsh 1989). We can utilize this literacy going forward to foster conversation about African Diasporic dance.

Black Social Dance, Black Memory, and Spirituality in Dance

Black social dance- or what can interchangeably be called Black vernacular dance (Malnig 2009; Johnson, Jasmine E. 2020; Hazzard-Gordon 1985) – comes from the collective Black experience and it calls upon the richness of the whole body. Yet, one of the major defining elements of Black vernacular dance is its resonance in the individual, social, and political experience of Blackness.

Sociologist Katrina Hazzard-Donald (1985) moves away from describing structural attributes of Black vernacular dance and focuses on how dance functions in Black culture. Hazzard-Donald outlines how dance anchors a person’s social position and acceptance within a group. She does this by observing how highly Black community members value a person’s proficiency in dance and their participation in Black culture; she concludes that dance provided both a sense of self -worth and of inclusion within a voluntary social group. In the context of majorette/dance teams, teams play an important role in the socio-cultural particularities of the communities in which they thrive. Dancers on these teams are given an elevated status in the community, particularly HBCU teams. One’s ability to dance well and fit into the dance team’s aesthetic becomes cultural capital for the dancers. This status continues with the dancers after they leave the team. In an interview with a former FDD, she told a story of a moment years after she left the team when she was given special recognition as a former FDD at a work board

meeting. Her story demonstrates the impact dance can play on social and professional possibilities.

Furthermore, Hazzard-Donald refers to political resistance and she defines it through Black people's perception of dance in the dominant culture. Hazzard-Donald states,

This is the aspect of meaning engaged if one views black dance in contradistinction to white dance; for example, if blacks see themselves as better dancers, if blacks ridicule whites who attempt to “dance black” or if they make distinctions that imply resentment, superiority, and a distaste for whites who may be attempting to emulate general aspects of black cultures (429).

Throughout her analysis, Hazzard-Donald privileges the perceptions and opinions of Black folks in their understanding of Black dance. Thus, these social attributes – prowess in dance and aligned community belonging – combined with the previously mentioned African aesthetics, add an additional layer to the complexity of how Black dance exists in time and space.

Dance scholar Thomas F. DeFrantz (2004) situates the power of Black social dance in the language being conveyed in the moving body. DeFrantz utilizes the theory of corporeal orature to describe how the body communicates meaning beyond movement for movement’s sake. Through the language of the body, the dancer provokes action or a performative speech act. Thus, the Black community engages in dance as another form of communication and connection to itself. He states,

Black social dances physicalize a continuity of performative oratory for Africans in diaspora. Dance offers greeting and debate; a mode of cultural identification and recognition that links African Americans in corporeal orature (76).

Furthermore, Black social dance is steeped in African diasporic memory. Vernacular Black dance calls upon the past and present through embodied memory (Young 2010; Roach 1996). In his text *Embodying Black Experience*, Harvey Young (2010) defines critical memory

as the shared memories and recollections of the Black embodied experience. Critical memory is situated in the connections, memories, and histories shared and overlapped across many Black bodies.

Welsh (1989) furthers the importance of memory through her idea of epic memory. According to Welsh, epic memory relies on emotion, experience, and spirituality. Through movement, a dancer is not just reenacting facts or specific historical moments; instead, the dancer is sorting through the metaphysical, spiritual, and physical realms. Welsh states, “[T]his sense is not, however, the idea or the thought which can merely be an intellectual or mathematical exercise. Rather, it is the image within the structure of the thought that provides for the ethos” (80). Welsh (2019) further recognizes that memory is the connective tissue that unites dance across multiple generations and perspectives.

Just as memory serves an important function of Black dance, so too does spirituality. Spirituality is embedded into the fabric of Black dance. Welsh connects spirituality and memory through this idea of epic memory. Within her conceptualization, embodiment of spirituality is essential to the function of epic memory. This spiritual sense is not religious but rather the acknowledgement and understanding of a creative force.

Caribbeanist and dance scholar Yvonne Daniel (2011) recognizes that the line between sacred and secular dance is blurred because the conceptual lines share similar qualities. While the embodiment of both varies among the communities in the Caribbean, Latin America, and the United States, partially due to differing restrictions put on the body by political and social actors, these Black dancing communities exhibit resilience and some forms of African heritage cultures. Daniel states,

Sacred performance—moving toward an out-of-body experience or being totally at one within the dance performance—involves the social experience of compounding aesthetics or heightened interest, intense response, and their combinations. Its result is most often awe, ecstatic excess, intense interest, religious belief, or engaged spirituality (158).

Dixon Gottschild also explores the function of spirituality in Black dance. In *The Black Dancing Body* (2003), Dixon Gottschild acknowledges that the Black dancing body “reside[s] in the geographies beyond biology” and this is the place to understand a foundational aspect of Black existence (222). Within her research, Dixon Gottschild identifies a connection between dance and the spirit and soul of Black folk. She discusses the spirit and soul within the framework of two premises. She states, “[F]irst, spirit and soul are *embodied*, meaning their location and means of expression for all human beings are in the flesh; secondly, through soul power, the body manifests spirit” (222). Within these premises, Dixon Gottschild recognizes that spirit and soul are inseparable and yet, she makes a distinction between the two. On the one hand, the soul is the intermediary between the body/flesh and the spirit. It is connected to the earth and is the thriving engine behind Black performance styles. Dixon Gottschild associates soul with the survival of Black folks. She explains, “[F]or African American performers, soul is the nitty-gritty personification of energy and force that it takes to be black and survive” (223). On the other hand, spirit extends past the flesh and links our corporeal essence to ancestral and cosmic forces. Through spirit, the body is able to engage in phenomenal experiences and make the ordinary extraordinary. Additionally, both spirit and soul interconnect with faith and Dixon Gottschild considers faith to work like a meme, which she defines as “a thought that spreads through the population and seems to take on a life of its own” (223). Faith is a meme that supports the survival of Black folk and exists beyond the fear and powerlessness of domination.

Black vernacular dance is an essential aspect of the Black experience. It manifests across time, bodies, location, and metaphysical existence. It can gauge intra and inter-racial politics and is a common thread that is woven into the fabric of Black experiences. Black social dance is complex and is not situated in one definition or aesthetic. It is the manifestation of cellular memory and collective spirit. It is a demonstration of the diversity in Black culture and the commonalities within Black life.

Dancing with the Hips/Butt/Pelvis

Black social dance is a full body experience; no body part is exempt from Black dance vocabulary (Dixon Gottschild 2003). Because Black dance is polyrhythmic and polycentric, dancers must be able to isolate parts of the body and through this isolation they are able to facilitate multiple centers of energy, movement, and rhythm. In this full body practice, the hips, butt, and pelvis are thriving sources of expression. While White and Euro-centered movement forms have historically silenced this region of the body, the body's midsection is embraced in Black dance (Dixon Gottschild 2003). Through this engagement, Black culture explores the multiple movement possibilities of the hips, butt, and pelvis (Dixon Gottschild 2003).

As mentioned earlier, Black dance is more than just physical movements; dance operates as an essential aspect of Black culture. Black dance pioneer Katherine Dunham brought to our attention the difference between the physical aesthetic and the cultural significance of dance. She explored form and function as a strategy to understand the lives of African diasporic people; form is the physical aesthetic or choreographic patterns of dance and function explains how the dance operates within culture (Dunham 2005). For example, in Dunham Technique, students learn that "Congo Paillette" is a Haitian social dance performed by couples. The dance is

flirtatious and provides two individuals with a physical attraction to each other to connect. As the students learn the cultural context of movement, they also embody the physicality. In Congo Paillette, the dancer is in a wide stance with bent knees, torso leaning slightly forward as their hips sway from side to side in a two-count isolation. After the student has mastered the movement, they may be paired with another person to replicate the experience of performing “Congo Paillette” in a social setting. In this example, Dunham trains the dancer how to execute the movement and perform it socially.

Hip, butt, and pelvic movements have multiple functions in Black communities. While it is easy to minimize hip, butt, and pelvic movements as simple materials of the Black social life, the movements of the mid-section of the body have a complex existence within Black culture. In her research on “twerk dance”, historian Elizabeth Pérez (2015) explores multiple versions of the twerk movement in the Americas. Pérez describes several movements from the Caribbean that are used to deploy female agency, such as the “*limin*” and “*wainin*”/“*whinin*”/“*winin*” from Jamaica and Trinidad; through the movement of their hips, women use these dances to affirm their pleasure and negotiate their interactions with men. In the Cuban *rumba*, Pérez explains that the dancer tells a story with their body. During this process, butt movement is used as punctuation in the storytelling.

Furthermore, Pérez notes the cultural and political implications of the Afro-Columbian dance *mapalé*, which derives from the fishing villages in Colombia. The dance was permitted when other dances were outlawed during Spain’s rule. Thus, the dance became a conduit for transferring ancestral knowledge and it continues to function as a symbol of Afro-Colombian identity and resistance (Pérez 2015).

Hip/butt/pelvic movement is also situated in the spiritual lives of African diasporic people. Pérez (2015) investigates the sacred qualities in twerk type dances and h/b/p movement in Afro-diasporic initiatory practices. African derived spiritual practices in the Americas are vessels for the creolized existence of Black people. African diasporic people embrace these spiritual practices through a history that combines African, European, and Indigenous or Native cultures along with the experiences of the middle passage, enslavement, capitalism, racism, and discrimination. Pérez explains that food, clothing, music, and dance are centered in the worship of spiritual entities; these elements are stylized for different entities and situations.

Sacred choreographies surface in several African Diaspora practices to facilitate transcendence, spiritual manifestation, healing, or moral-ethical enlightenment. For example, in Haitian spiritual practice of Vodou, *yanvalou* is a dance associated with the *Lwa* or spiritual entity, *Damballa*. Since *Damballa* is often represented as a serpent, *yanvalou* resembles the imagery of a snake or waves. Yet, *yanvalou* has more than one function. In addition to honoring *Damballa*, the dance is also used to open a person up to be possessed by a spiritual entity. Thus, the rolling of the pelvis and spine facilitates a type of spiritual ecstasy which provides a pathway to connect to a spiritual energy. Also, in the Cuban spiritual practice of Lucumí, the orisha or spiritual entity, Ochún, is associated with sensual pleasure, material abundance, and fertility; her dances utilize the hip/butt/pelvis in a smooth, elegant, and sophisticated way that epitomizes attractiveness and allure (Perez 2015). The dances and rhythms of Ochún emphasize an embodied connection to water and the use of feminine sexuality to achieve certain goals and objectives (Pérez and Blanco Borelli).

The spiritual attributes in h/b/p movement are not isolated to dance in religious and spiritual belief systems. The word “twerk” surfaced out of “bounce culture” – a form of hip hop from New Orleans that first surfaced in the early 1990s. In bounce culture, twerking, or what is known locally as “p. poppin’” or “shaking”, is a dance movement focused on the vigorous shaking and articulation of the butt. While this dance is performed in social settings, bounce artist Mia X brings to light the spiritual aspects when discussing popping.

...popping is something we did for us... The beat puts our bodies into a trance. Hips roll. Asses jiggle and bounce. Gyrating and these drums go hand in hand. We become one with the rhythm. Yes, it’s flattering when a crowd makes a circle around them to watch ladies pop that thing to the beat. But it’s deeper than sexual. It’s almost tribal to watch girls mimic moves done in Africa and Jamaica... We feel the beat in our souls. We catch a wall, a chair, the car or anything we can hold on to and bend over. Eyes closed, bodies moving as we dip to every groove the song throws us (Silk 2017).

Due to the complex engagement of the body in Black cultures, h/b/p movement is just one manifestation of the memory and history that live historically and contemporarily in the body of Black people. These dances are a part of a complex network of embodied movements that manifest in Black culture; Black people use these movements to achieve important social, spiritual, and political functions in their lives.

Opposition and Fetishization of the Black Body and the Female Black Butt

As previously mentioned, Black vernacular dance is significant within the cultural and social lives of Black folk. Yet, Black vernacular dance is often left out of the critical understanding of culture. For some, Black vernacular dance is considered trivial and used to indicate Black deviance and pathology. Dance scholar Takiyah Nur Amin (Amin 2020) points to the role racism and White supremacy play in the general understanding of Black social dance.

Many of the systemic issues in the Black community (economic inequality, low performing schools, high rates of chronic disease, high rates of male incarceration, etc.) are attributed to the culture and behaviors of Black people rather than to the structural and political barriers that exist. Thus, Black people and their habits are positioned as the sole causes of their challenging conditions and not mentioning hegemonic structures of power, White supremacy, and capitalism. Moreover, when these structures of power are cited as the sources of inequity, Black people are shamed for not materializing better solutions and actions to combat these challenges (Amin 2020).

Furthermore, the Black body is frequently treated as a marker of pathology and the remedy for this affliction is to distance Black culture from the trappings of the body. Ethnomusicologist Kyra Gaunt (2006) investigates music scholars' hesitancy to address the presence of dance and the Black body in their research on Black music. Gaunt recognizes that musicologists and ethnomusicologists distance themselves from subjects of the body as a means to make their scholarship legitimate. The body must be ignored as the body is a dangerous indication of Black people's erotic and sexual selves (Gaunt 2006). Dixon Gottschild explains that this understanding of the Black body has roots in European enlightenment ideas. She comments on the cultural tendency, "...to see the Black body as sexually deviant; and second, to believe Black bodies are sufficiently abnormal to warrant the inferior, slavish status imposed upon them by European imperialism" (2003, 153).

While Black bodies carry a level of deviancy in the White imaginary, they are also fetishized by dominant White culture. Specifically, the bodies of Black women signify a particular type of meaning in terms of the h/b/p region of the body. Historically, Black women

are associated with the middle region of the body to support arguments of their lascivious and vulgar nature. Scholars point to Saartji Baartman, also known as “Hottentot Venus”, as a historical marker for the fetishization of the Black female body (Dixon-Gottschild 2003; Pérez 2015; Henderson 2013; Hobson 2018). Baartman was from South Africa and of Khoikhoi ancestry (Dixon-Gottschild 2003). In the effort to position the White body as the cultural and aesthetic norm, Baartman’s body was placed on display and then used for scientific study to attempt to demonstrate the inferiority and grotesqueness of the Black body (Dixon-Gottschild 2003; Hobson 2018). There was a need to demonstrate the difference between Black and White bodies to justify the project of colonialism. Therefore, Black people and other people of color were studied and categorized by their divergence from Whiteness (Hobson 2018). An evolutionary hierarchy was formed that placed White people on top and African Diasporic people at the bottom. Baartman’s protruding butt and the shape of her labia are what made her a desired specimen. (Dixon-Gottschild 2003; Henderson 2013). Baartman’s body, with an emphasis on her butt, is used as the evidence and symbol of Black female sexual savagery.

Yet, Baartman fueled White curiosity and fascination with large butts. Dixon Gottschild (2003) points to Baartman’s influence on the Victorian dress code as an indication of white preoccupation with big butts. The bustle in Victorian women’s clothing emphasized an enlarged posterior. Thus, White folk embraced certain ideas of the Black body while also rejecting the Black body. Dixon Gottschild states, “[T]hey loved the aesthetic premise but detested its embodied black precedent” (151). Women’s, gender, and sexuality studies scholar Janell Hobson (2018) describes the fascination with Black bodies through the idea of racial difference. Hobson states, “Without altering dominant culture’s beauty paradigm which privileges white skin and

Euro-based facial features...racial ‘difference’ signals the obsession of popular culture to market from a ‘new angle’ a different body that has historically been associated with freakery and deviance” (9).

Today, the butt continues to be a point of exoticization in popular culture and large butts are now embraced as a major aspect of popular culture. In 2014, fashion and lifestyle magazine *Vogue* published an article acknowledging the popularity of the butt. The article states, “No doubt, butts have never been bigger, both in physical size and as a cultural phenomenon” (Tice Studeman 2014). While the article ignores the histories of Black women’s bodies and gives a whitewashed nod to the cultural prevalence of big butts, the article was a major acknowledgement of the cultural significance of the big butt by a mainstream popular culture institution. The article also recognized the fascination of augmented butts in popular culture.

The Brazilian butt lift (BBL), founded by Brazilian plastic surgeon Ivo Pitanguy, is used to enhance one’s butt by removing excess fat from parts of the body and relocating it to the butt area (American Board of Cosmetic Surgery, n.d.). In the U.S., BBLs gained popularity over the last decade due to social media influencers on apps like Instagram (Jennings 2021). The images and videos displayed on these social media platforms promote a beauty aesthetic that focuses on bodies with a small waist, enlarged butt and hips, and big breasts. These crafted bodies are marketed and meant for consumption by the masses (Jennings 2021). Because this body aesthetic is associated with the bodies of Black women, the idea of the Black female body is used as a consumable product that supports popular trends and exotic fantasies. *Vogue Magazine* supports this claim by monetizing the benefits of celebrities with large butts. They state,

One thing is clear: The message in pop culture right now is that your backside can be your greatest asset. Beyoncé, for her part, came on top of *Forbes'* 100 Most Powerful Celebrities list this year, raking in \$115 million in earnings. Kardashian West brought in an estimated \$28 million and also made the *Forbes* Top 100 list (Tice Studeman 2014).

Black and Brown women as well as White women are lining up to get these procedures. Realistically, Black women's bodies range in shape and size. Although Black women's bodies are already historically marked by these tropes, some Black women are surgically manipulating their bodies and using other body enhancements to fit the socially projected image of their body. Celebrities like Cardi B, Nicki Minaj, and Tiny Harris are examples of this increased trend in popular culture. While this could indicate that Black women are implicated in their own exoticization, I want to suggest another interpretation. I argue that shapely female bodies are embraced and normalized in American Black communities. Rather than function as an aspect of exotic fantasy, the shapely female body is a part of the Black American beauty standard. It is my experience that Black women without a well-formed protruding butt are criticized and seen as less attractive. In fact, Black women with flatter buttocks are ridiculed for having a "white girl booty". Aisha Durham (2012) agrees that Black people have historically valued a different body aesthetic than mainstream culture. Durham cites research that reveals a difference in the body perception of Black and White girls. She concludes from this research that Black girls have a healthier perception of their bodies than White girls.

Yet, surgically altered bodies historically have not been the norm in Black communities. Culturally, plastic surgery is associated with wealthy White people. In general, Black people did not possess disposable income to afford plastic surgery, as it is often categorized as elective surgery and is not covered by health insurance. Additionally, Black folk have historically not

trusted “Western” conventional medicine (Washington 2006). However, over the last two decades, plastic surgery has become more acceptable in popular culture across ethnic, racial and social-cultural lines. Furthermore, plastic surgery has gotten more affordable and is utilized by more than just the wealthy class. In response to these factors, Black folk participation in plastic surgery has significantly increased. According to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, from 2005 to 2013, African American participation in plastic surgery increased by 56% (ABC News 2014).

Furthermore, Black women are not participating in these beauty trends just for cultural acceptance. Their enhanced and surgically altered bodies can result in fame and economic reward. Cast member Suzette Samuel of the reality TV show *Black Ink Crew* on the TV VH1 network openly discusses that she had BBL surgery to receive more job opportunities. Samuel explains that surgically altering her body enabled her to become an urban model and perform in music videos (Germain 2021). She states she went down this pathway because she was struggling financially to care for herself and her two children. Her augmented butt created a pathway for her to care for herself and her children.

Samuel received monetary benefits for her altered body due to hip hop’s long history of presenting the butt as a symbol of sexual desire and beauty. Dating back to the late 1980s, hip hop culture is known for framing Black male artists with the bodies of Black women. The women in these videos, album covers, and performances were objects and their bodies were currency to sell records and solidify the masculinity and sexual prowess of male hip hop artists.

Sut Jhally’s documentary *Dreamworlds* (Jhally et al. 2007) dissects the cinematography conventions used in music videos that reinforces the patriarchal heterosexual male fantasy.

Through the dream world the music videos create, women are depicted to be in a “constant state of sexual arousal that depends on men for their emotional stability” and therefore, these “videos make clear that the most important aspect of a woman is her sexuality” (Jhally et al. 2007).

Jhally’s critique of music videos expands across multiple genres of music. However, he notes that Black women were invisible in the early part of music video history, and it was through hip-hop videos, they became visible. Additionally, Jhally explains that hip hop videos often resemble male heterosexual pornography, and due to this, Black women became recognizable through the sexual objectification of their bodies.

Glenn Fosbraey’s (2021) discussion on rap artist Nicki Minaj further corroborates Jhally’s analysis by revealing the disparity between the number of women presented as musical artists versus the women dancing or just present in the music videos. In 2018, women rap artists only represented 8% of the artists performing in 200 of the most streamed videos. Even though women rappers only comprise 9% of Minaj’s former record label Cash Money Records, women dancers appeared in 70% of the music videos where Minaj performs with another male lead.

Throughout these representations of Black women in music videos, the butt is a featured element of the storytelling. Examples like rappers Sir-Mix-a-Lot’s 1992 chart topping song “Baby Got Back”, Juvenile’s 1999 song “Back that Thang Up”, and Nelly’s 2003 “Tip Drill”, which features Nelly sliding a credit card down a woman’s butt, have flooded hip hop for decades. In Chapter 3, I discuss the shift in popular culture regarding women shaking and moving their h/b/p. Now, women are more willing to publicly move their mid-sections for their own pleasure and enjoyment. Yet, for Black women, the journey to publicly enjoy the midsection of their bodies has a history of cultural resistance.

Black Women and Respectability Politics

In an effort to address the deviance used to define and classify Black bodies, particularly h/b/p dancing Black bodies, Black people often rely on methods that include policing themselves; these methods are used as a protection from White Supremacy. Historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's theory of respectability (Higginbotham 1993) is a set of survival strategies based on the idea that if Black folks present themselves in a respectable manner, they will be treated with dignity by the dominant society. Within this framework, individual behaviors are policed by the greater community in order for Black folks to be considered respectable (Dazey 2020). This reactionary tactic is used to force people to adhere to dominant social norms and establishes a class divide between the Black working class and the Black middle-class/elite (Dazey 2020). The poor and working class are cited for possessing mores that compromise Black middle-class/elite efforts to present the race as respectable. The Black elite admonish the poor/working class for their behavior, exacerbating the class schism and further marginalizing the poor/working class.

While no one in the Black community can escape these tactics, respectability politics is applied to the behavior of Black women in a particular manner that regulates their engagement with their sexual/sensual selves and governs how they are viewed by the larger society. Due to how respectability politics functions, Black women's sexuality is racialized and classed. Baartman is an example of how Black women's sexuality is attached to their racial identity. Baartman was perceived as sexually deviant and her embodied deviance was used as an indicator of Black folks' inferiority.

Literary critic Hortense Spillers (1987) augments this discussion with her discourse on Black women's femininity. Spillers explains how values imposed upon Black women by the larger society creates an unstable relationship with their gender. While tracing the impact of enslavement on Black women, Spillers examines how gender difference was lost in captivity because both women and men were considered a commodity, subject to the hard labor of enslavement, and to bodily acts of violence and violation. Black women's bodies are marked by this history and they are rejected from Western culture's idea of the female body. Thus, their bodies are (mis)recognized by others as caricatures and these misrepresentations are defined by an American grammar that labels them by such terms as "Peaches", "Sapphire", and "Brown Sugar".

Through this history, Black women's femininity was situated in opposition to White women (Decker 2014). Through the "cult of true womanhood" White women have been expected to be in the home caring for their families while adhering to the virtues of piety, purity, submission, and domesticity (Decker 2014). Conversely, many Black women have needed to work outside the home to support their families and were rejected from the category of "lady" because of their race (Decker 2014). Furthermore, Black women carried most of the burden of uplifting themselves and their race (Decker 2014). Their behaviors were a reflection of the community's morality and Black women were also tasked with regulating the morality of family and community (Decker 2014). In this effort, the strong Black woman trope arises from their commitment to others. Yet, to uplift the race, elite Black women tried to adopt aspects of the "cult of true womanhood," which involved suppressing their sexuality and advancing their education (Decker 2014).

Over time, Black women stayed committed to respectability politics in order to obtain economic, political and social power. By engaging in White middle-class femininity, Black women created a pathway to become leaders, business women, and power players (Durham 2012). They gained access to the resources and obtained the power needed to determine what is best for their families, their community, and themselves. Furthermore, respectability politics allows Black women to be seen as deserving of human dignity and protection.

Black women have also been treated with a level of disdain in the U.S. They are often blamed for the immoral behavior of the Black community. Images of Black women as the angry, loud, “ratchet”, single-mother “welfare queen” is used to explain high poverty and joblessness in Black communities (Office of Policy Planning and Research 1965). Therefore, by placing themselves in opposition to the “ghetto” Black women, respectable Black women believe they are able to protect themselves from racialized violence while gaining favor, accessing resources, and obtaining the power they need to be safe and keep their progeny protected and healthy.

Respectability politics is the promise of being visible outside of tropes of hypersexuality. Historically, Black women were considered sexually accessible to anyone. This idea dates back to enslavement and more truthfully, is connected to Black women’s sexual exploitation. During enslavement, Black women could easily be sexually violated by White men with no consequence; Black women were prevented from possessing agency over their reproductive labor, which is due to this labor being commodified by the slave industry. The jezebel stereotype, used as one justification for this treatment, characterizes Black women as promiscuous, lewd and predatory. Following this logic, White men did not rape enslaved Black women, but rather, were seduced by them. (E. Brown 2016). In the U.S., this sentiment continued past the ending of

slavery, leaving Black women unprotected from sexual violation. Thus, Black women submit to respectability politics to obtain some sense of protection.

Similar to Higginbotham's work on respectability politics, historian Darlene Clark Hine (1994) further investigated Black women's survival strategies through the theory of "dissemblance." Clark Hine recognized Black women's efforts to protect their inner selves from the threat of sexual and/or domestic violence. In this process, Black women appear to be congenial and easygoing, while in fact shielding their internal lives and selves from threats to their personhood (Clark Hine 1994). Both respectability politics and dissemblance depend on the use of public behavior to provide a level of protection from sexual and racial violence; respectability politics is situated in the image of Blackness and dissemblance is used to understand the protection of the inner self.

To avoid being labeled promiscuous and vulgar, respectable Black women needed to suppress their sexuality while still demonstrating their femininity. Femininity is important in the realm of respectability. In this paradigm, Black women should adequately present their femininity through their clothing, hair, nails, and behavior. They should adhere to current beauty standards while still maintaining a level of modesty around their appearance. Furthermore, there is social value to being desired by a potential partner and Black women are expected to balance their sexual desirability with their respectable behavior. Therefore, a woman can be sexually appealing as long as she does not reveal too much of her body or wear clothing that makes her appear too open to sexual attention, nor should she admit to having multiple sexual partners. This is true especially for younger Black women. Older Black women are generally perceived to be

asexual and are more frequently associated with the mammy stereotype whereas younger Black women should be appealing to a potential mate while staying clear of the jezebel trope.

These parameters for Black women's behaviors are supposed to provide them with protection. However, history has demonstrated consistently that respectability politics falls short to safeguard Black women and Black people. In her 2015 "The End of Respectability: Black Feminism and Ratchet Politics" at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Brittney Cooper points to the failure of respectability politics. Cooper posits that respectability politics does not work because it is a reasonable attempt to fight against the unreasonable system of racism and White supremacy. She highlights the story of Anita Hill because Hill checked the boxes of respectability. She was the valedictorian of her high school, received her law degree from Yale University, and became the first Black tenured professor at the University of Oklahoma (Armstrong, n.d.). Yet, Hill's accolades did not protect her from the sexual harassment of Clarence Thomas or the attack of her character by members of congress and Black community in 1991.

Today, Black women of varying degrees of respectability are still susceptible to attack. In fact, the #SayHerName movement materialized in 2014 to shine a light on the violent murders of Black women at the hands of law enforcement. Breonna Taylor, one of the most popularized symbols of the movement and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, was an essential worker in the health field with the aspiration of becoming a nurse. On the night of March 13, 2020, Taylor was killed after police entered her home with a "no-knock" warrant and shot into her house, hitting her with 5 bullets (Oppel, Taylor, and Bogel-Burroughs 2023). Hill

and Taylor stories are examples of the unfulfilled promise of respectability as a strategy to protect Black women from racial and sexual violence.

For generations, Black women have navigated these tropes of respectability to withstand a world that questions their humanity and incredulously Black women's butts have been a focal point of this struggle. Despite the societal need to tame the mid-section of the body, to label it as vulgar, or to use it as a vehicle of fantasy or exoticism, Black women have not deleted the moving h/b/p from their experience. The h/b/p yield a power that is actualized in the lives of Black people and is harnessed for spiritual, social, and political purposes. I now conclude this chapter by discussing how HBCU dance line teams navigate the troubled waters of respectability as they dance using their h/b/p.

Majorette/Dance Teams, Black Southern Culture, and Dancing with the H/B/P

Since the majority of HBCUs are located in the South, they share a common culture that contextualizes the pursuit of higher education through Black life in the South. While Black people's experience of the South is not homogenous and varies across bodies and locations, there are some shared embodied attributes that many connect to Black Southern culture. Since the 1990s, hip hop culture has been one of the visible mediums to publicly recognize the Black Southern experience through the idea of the "Dirty South". Adeerya Johnson (Johnson 2021) recognizes the "Dirty South", or Southern hip hop culture, with the imagery of "dance/party-based music, skating rinks, strip clubs, luxury Cadillac cars, and often objectifying women through pimp personas and misogynoir with hypersexual lyrics" (1). Within Black Southern hip hop culture, a hypersexual misogynoir posturing is present along with movement cultures that

are energized by the movement of the hips, butt, and pelvis. Therefore, male hip hop artists use women's sexuality and their bodies to validate or attest to their sexual prowess and masculinity. Through this posturing, movement cultures that use the h/b/p. such as bounce and stripping, are more visible.

Interestingly, this mainly secular experience of the South works alongside Christian conservative morals and ideas that are often associated with the Black church. The Black church is the staple of Black Christianity in the U.S. and represents a collective of faiths and traditions (Gates 2021). Further, the Black church is a thriving engine in the U.S. South and a major aspect of the Black southern experience. After the Civil War, Black communities in the South were supported and stabilized by the Black church through social and educational programs. Over time, Black churches became central to the social and political fabric of Black Southern communities.

The result of these multiple influences is that Black Southerners navigate a sexually charged culture that is rooted in religious conservatism. In regards to dancing with the h/b/p, the practices are both admonished and embraced. Even among Black conservatives, dancing with the h/b/p in certain situations can be acceptable. Thus, the particularities of respectability politics are reflected in the nuances of Southern culture. Additionally, Black women and their bodies are often at the center of this entanglement. As major subjects of respectability politics, Black women are expected to navigate the sexualized culture of the South, while centering themselves in Christian ideals.

The women of dance teams at HBCUs are an example of this negotiation between the sexualization of Black women's bodies and respectability demands. First, it is important to note

that HBCUs are pillars of respectability politics. HBCUs are designed to educate Black elites and socialize Black people into the middle and upper-class echelons. As previously mentioned, Black elites have historically pushed and promoted respectability politics as a strategy for Black survival and upliftment. Furthermore, many HBCUs were founded by Christian missionaries and clergy and therefore based their institutions in Christian values. Due to these factors, HBCUs foster a level of respectability politics in how they operate and how they expect their students to behave and navigate the world.

Yet, HBCUs do not operate in isolation from the “Dirty South” subculture. As a space designed for young adults, their campuses embrace Black popular culture in their social activities while adhering to their honored traditions. Thus, their social activities are a mix of tradition and contemporary popular culture. Dance teams and marching bands are a demonstration of this mix of the old and new. These groups are stamped in HBCU history; marching bands have been a presence at these schools since the 1890s and dance line teams surfaced in the late 1960s. As mentioned in Chapter 1, dance teams and marching bands are a tradition that is linked to the identity of HBCUs. This tradition is one of the aspects that differentiates HBCUs from other types of higher education institutions. While other higher education institutions have marching bands and dancing teams, HBCU dance teams and marching bands have a style that is all their own. For this reason, HBCUs use these groups as a recruitment tool for their institutions; often young people will choose a certain school for the possibility of joining these groups. Furthermore, the style of dance teams and marching bands has evolved over time and in conjunction with the changes in popular culture. Therefore, current trends influence elements such as the songs dance teams use in performance, how they dance, what they wear, and how

they do their hair. Through this connection to popular culture, dance teams and marching bands participate in “Dirty South” culture.

As representatives of both the school and the campus popular culture, dance teams are a result of the mesh between respectability politics and dirty south culture. The young women on these teams are required to operate in a respectable manner. Thus, they are expected to maintain a certain GPA, avoid behaviors and activities that would appear to be “unladylike” or would be considered negative by community members, keep personal relationships private or do not partake in romantic encounters, and avoid visibility on social media. The women on dance teams should be exemplary models of femininity, beauty, talent, and intelligence. Several Forever Dolls, former Fabulous Dancing Dolls, spoke candidly about the rules Gracie Perkins, founding coach, enforced for team members. Perkins monitored their behaviors, established curfews for them, and restricted their involvement with men. In performance, HBCU dance team culture has reconfigured respectability to work within a system of behavior that allows for sensuality and the articulation of hips/butt/pelvis. Their movement vocabulary is composed of poised behavior working alongside the undulating, shaking, and rotating h/b/p. In their sitting and standing poses, dancers embody a sense of composure and refined behavior through positions that include dancers placing their hands on their knees and keeping legs crossed or closed. These poses call upon respectability politics. Yet, once they start to dance, dancers activate their undulating, shaking, and pulsing h/b/p in ways that conflict with the modesty of respectability. In their movement, dancers are calling upon the culture of the “Dirty South” and the legacy of moving with the h/b/p in African diasporic dance.

Additionally, dancers push the boundaries of respectability through their costuming. Dance team costuming is rooted in traditions of ballet and formal “western” dance training that includes leotards, unitards, and tights. Due to the connection to ballet culture, which carries the label of being high art, costuming in this tradition is accepted as respectable in the context of dance, despite the revealing nature of the clothing. Over the time, dance teams stylized their costuming to align more with their creativity and the contemporary cultural climate. Therefore, some of their costuming is more revealing of the body than the traditional ballet uniform. With movement that articulates the h/b/p and clothing that exposes the dancer’s physique, dance teams are publicly indulging in the possibilities of the body that stretch the boundaries of respectable culture. Therefore, the dancer’s body is at the intersection of proper behavior and sensual ecstasy.

Due to the cultivation of their own unique styles, majorette/dance teams engage in respectability politics at varying degrees. As previously mentioned, the Fabulous Dancing Dolls pride themselves on their “ladylike” behavior. Therefore, their movement centers on a sensual flirtatious play with their audience that evokes a level of modesty and avoids movement they consider as “raunchy”. Thus, the Fabulous Dancing Dolls will never perform movements, like bucking, because opening their legs wide in a low squat while popping their butt and pelvis, would contradict their “ladylike” image. Whereas the Prancing J-Settes push respectability politics further by utilizing bucking and similar types of movements throughout their performance style. Within the culture, there is some ideological tension between those that do and do not support bucking like movements. During my field research, I came across individuals that consider teams like the Dancing Dolls more refined and respectable than other teams. While

there is a general support for all the teams among the fans and a sense of respect across teams, there is an undercurrent of tension and judgment cycling throughout the culture.

Dancing Black bodies are navigating the world under/within multiple contexts. Through these realities, Black people are able to ground themselves in spirituality, history, collective memory, and social engagement. In this process, the dancing h/b/p bodies are not silent but vital contributors to this paradigm. Within a practice that is more associated with women, Black women engage in their dancing h/b/p through politics that constantly question their respectability and humanity. Majorette/dance teams provide an example of how Black communities reconcile these multiple influences and continue to enjoy and utilize dance practices that incorporate the h/b/p. In the following chapter, I further discuss how these practices that support Black women are used by Black women to actualize joy and pleasure in their lives.

Chapter 3

Black Lemonade

Feminist writer Audre Lorde (2007) famously said, “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” warning us of using the instruments of our subjugation to liberate us from oppression. Yet, what if we only have access to the master’s tools? Or what if, through a system of violence – political, economic, and social – we are forced to utilize instruments of oppression? What if the only knowledge we have in our tool box is that of oppressive systems? Can we facilitate spaces of liberation and joy while adhering to aspects of these hegemonic tools? In my view, it is imperative that we move away from the “all or nothing” analysis in which one is either completely negating systems of oppression or completely working in service to these systems.

First, I argue that it is impossible to operate totally outside of hegemonic systems. Our entire way of living in the U.S. is designed around interlocking systems of oppression, imperialism, colonization, and White supremacy. In their work on systematic racism, sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2021) identifies how these structures are normalized and reproduced through “neutral” behaviors:

...we all participate in SR [systematic racism] (no one can be outside SR much like no one can be outside capitalism or patriarchy) and that most Whites’ racial behavior is seemingly non-racial, habituated, and even apparently race-neutral. Whites’ normative participation in the racial structures of everyday life, I argue, is more significant for the reproduction of racial order than the actions and behavior of “racist” actors (514).

Bonilla-Silva recognizes that these systems of oppression are ingrained in our everyday lives and White people's neutral behaviors are what solidify them. Bonilla-Silva's argument is designed to challenge ideas that the overt White racist is what creates racism. Rather, he insists there is a collective participation in these structures by which White "neutral" behaviors are racialized and normalized.

I agree with Bonilla-Silva's assertions. It is not possible to completely divorce ourselves from a particular system or set of systems, as we are always participating in some aspect of these systems of overlapping areas of inequality. Due to the ubiquitous nature of these structures, we consciously and unconsciously participate in them. I refer to intersectionality as an additional model to understand this claim.

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) constructed the theory of intersectionality to identify the invisibility Black women experience due to their negotiation of race and gender identity. As scholarship increased about intersectionality over time, the theory became one of the major pillars of feminist theory and methodology. Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2020) define intersectionality by stating,

Intersectionality investigates how intersecting power relations influence social relations across diverse societies as well as individual experiences in everyday life. As an analytic tool, intersectionality views categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, ability, ethnicity, and age – among others – as interrelated and mutually shaping one another. Intersectionality is a way of understanding and explaining complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences (2).

Within this understanding, intersectionality addresses the politics around identity and difference as they relate to how individuals navigate their world. The theory is a framework to understand how individuals can experience both oppression and privilege. An individual's social location,

established by interacting factors such as race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, disability/ability, etc., determines what levels of power may be accessible to that person. Thus, while a person may experience marginalization in one aspect of their lives, they can simultaneously experience residual benefits.¹² While intersectionality is an entry point to begin to understand our entanglement in these systems of power, I argue that our engagement with these systems goes beyond identity politics.

Within the U.S., there is a forced or blind compliance to many of these systems. For example, if you are working in, purchasing goods/services in, and/or own anything within the U.S., you are subject to paying government taxes. These tax dollars are used to fund state-sanctioned police brutality, U.S imperialism, discriminatory legislation, massive incarceration of Black and Brown people, White supremacy in our legal system, etc. If individuals refuse to pay taxes or participate in U.S. financial system, they could be jailed or permanently incarcerated, have all of their property seized, be deported to another country, lose access to basic needs and resources, and/or lose their life. Therefore, it is important to recognize that there could be a high price to pay if an individual decides to resist or not participate in these systems. By merely existing in the U.S., we are in compliance with some aspects of systems of power and oppression.

¹² Black masculinist scholar T. Hasan Johnson (2017) makes the argument that men do not experience privilege from being male or patriarchy. Privilege is attached to systemic power and marginalized people do not have access to this type of power. Therefore, Johnson explains that “residual benefits are crude advantages with the appearance of privilege but lack the institutional backing of privileges... They may give the appearance of privilege in one given regard (male, hetero, or rich), but often for Black men, such intersections often don't mean privilege, but more complex forms of institutional oppression.”

Secondly, due to the impossibility of operating completely outside of these systems, Black folks are negotiating these systems while inventively and collectively finding ways to be whole and thrive. Throughout history, Black folks have used creativity and wisdom to navigate their circumstances, yielding cultural products, mores, and values, which carry the cultural legacies of their African heritages. Thus, their cultural materials are a product of three main influences: their Africanist heritage, their adaptations to the current environment, and their ingenuity. These influences culminate in the production of cultural material different from that of the dominant culture, as well as different from what kidnapped African people experienced before being brought to the Americas. Thus, these cultural materials are unique to the lives and experiences of the Black folks that created them. Sociologist Stuart Hall (1993) recognizes these materials and this process as the underpinning of Black popular culture. He states,

Selective appropriation, incorporation, and rearticulation of European ideologies, cultures, and institutions, alongside an African heritage...led to linguistic innovations in rhetorical stylization of the body, forms of occupying an alien social space, heightened expressions, hairstyles, ways of walking, standing, and talking, and a means of constituting and sustaining camaraderie and community (109).

In this articulation, Hall recognizes the curated assembly of Black cultural material, either through force or creative refiguring, that Black folks formulate in their experience.

I had my ups and downs, but I always found the inner strength to pull myself up. I was served lemons, but I made lemonade (Beyoncé 2016).

In her 2016 album *Lemonade*, Beyoncé highlights how Black people – particularly Black women – take the sour tools they are given and turn them into sweet and glorious creations. Through the story of a woman coping with betrayal, Beyoncé explores Black women's strength and resiliency to work through life's lemons and cultivate love and growth for themselves, their

families, and their communities. In the video album, Beyoncé's grandmother in-law Hattie White articulates at her 90th birthday party that she was able to make lemonade out of the struggles in her life. I similarly use the lemonade metaphor similarly to describe how Black culture is created out of and thrives within systems of oppression. Black cultural traditions not only carry aspects of African remembrances, but also White culture. This is due to the normalizing hegemony of Whiteness. Yet, while utilizing some of the raw materials of Whiteness, Black cultural traditions operate differently than White culture. For example, the practice of Black women straightening their hair is derived from Eurocentric notions of beauty. However, Black women have created their own styling techniques for straight hair that are particular to Black culture like "laying down one's baby hairs" or placing a styling agent to the shorter hair around the forehead. Through practices like hair straightening, Black people are sourcing their ingenuity to find joy and self-actualization through the rearticulation of their lemons. These practices are a way for Black folks to access pleasure, by using the lemons of oppression to create their own unique lemonade, what I call "Black lemonade."¹³

In this chapter, I discuss Black women's pleasure and their work to resist class and gender-based restrictions on their bodies and ultimately, with dance team performance. Specifically, I focus on Black middle-class women's recent rejection of respectability politics and their embrace of ratchet ideologies through h/b/p movement like twerking. I use this analysis

¹³ I want to acknowledge that my theory of Black lemonade has some similarities to the theory of disidentification as put forth by queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz (2009). Both our theories are designed to bring attention to the ways in which marginalized people engage in worldmaking by working within and against systems of oppression. With disidentification, Muñoz focuses on the politics of identity as a means of discussing an individual's negotiation of powerful systems. He grounds their theory in the examples of iconoclastic queer artists and he focuses on small niche practices. However, I utilize Black lemonade to discuss the collective work of Black people and their group negotiation of structural and identity politics.

to contextualize the terrain Black women are navigating to create their own lemonade, and how such navigation influences and affects dance team performance. Next, I explore the idea of Black lemonade further by shifting to Beyoncé, one of the most notable popular culture examples of Black lemonade and the source of my lemonade metaphor. Beyoncé embraces feminism and ratchet behavior; however, she promotes capitalism and openly participates in aspects of patriarchy. Yet, Beyoncé is a pop culture powerhouse and who is generating material and norms that support Black communities and Black women. Furthermore, the majorette/dance team practice is foundational to Beyoncé's artistry and brand since Beyoncé incorporates the movement, fashion, and overall style of the dance teams into her performances and she openly advocates for the culture. Similar to Beyoncé, majorette/dance teams wrestle with their own set of lemons that define their community.

I conclude this chapter by discussing the lemons within majorette/dance team culture. This mostly U.S Southern-grown tradition developed in the segregated spaces designed for the education and upliftment of Black people. Through this racial isolation, Black dance teams and marching bands developed their own style of performance that comes from the unique experience of being a Black person in the U.S. While dance and band traditions exist in other parts of the African Diaspora, majorette/dance team communities carry the legacy of Black U.S. southern culture. Yet, this dance and music culture does not exist in isolation from U.S. mainstream narratives and aesthetics that normalizes Whiteness. For example, beauty is a valued quality within majorette/dance team performance. Dancers are expected to present themselves within certain beauty tropes that align with aspects of mainstream aesthetics. Thus, performers should have straightened hair, wear professional quality make-up, have slender shapely bodies,

and look pleasing to eyes. While these priorities are sometimes rooted in mainstream beauty trends that reward attributes for their closeness to Whiteness, dance teams are not just replicating White beauty. They are reworking aspects of dominant beauty standards into a tradition that is combined with Africanist mores and cultural aesthetics. Thus, in this process, I argue that they are producing something that is uniquely theirs and represents their creativity and ingenuity. This is their lemonade.

Respectability and the Politics of Pleasure

In the journey to enjoy their bodies, Black women have had to navigate racism and White supremacy, patriarchy, and colonialism. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Black women's bodies have a history of being labeled deviant and vulgar. Through this mislabeling, Black women have relied on tactics like respectability politics to move forward for their best interest as well as for the best interest of their families and communities. In an effort to support Black women and the actualization of their lives, Black feminists have done the hard work of humanizing Black women and centering their voices. Patricia Hill Collins (1989) posits that Black Feminist Thought (BFT) is based on Black women experiencing a different reality than others and “interpret[ing] that reality differently than a dominant group” (748). BFT is situated in the understanding that Black women navigate oppression that is stimulated by their racial and gender identity. As the experiences of Black women vary across the diaspora, BFT focuses on the shared realities Black women experience (Hill Collins 1989).

While Black feminists have done significant work to support Black women's existence, Joan Morgan (2015) criticizes these feminists for also conforming to the particularities of

respectability politics. Morgan states that Black feminists are so preoccupied with Black women's sexual trauma that they have left no room for discussion about sexual agency and pleasure. When discussing pleasure, Audre Lorde's (1984) theorization of the erotic is the canonical framework utilized by Morgan and others. Lorde conceptualizes the erotic as the space of agency for women by stating,

When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the life force of women; of the creative energy empowerment, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives (89).

Morgan aligns with Lorde's theorization of the erotic, yet Morgan accuses Black feminists of falling short of Lorde's ideals by only utilizing a heteronormative read of the theory and claiming that erotic is something elevated beyond sex. In other words, Morgan states that feminists want to delete sexual pleasure from their rendering of the erotic. Morgan argues that BFT is laced in dogma and fails to address contemporary issues. BFT is so fixated on regurgitating its canon of theories, such as Kimberle Crenshaw's "intersectionality", Hine's "cultural dissemblance", and Higginbotham's "respectability politics", that BFT does not adjust for cultural shifts, queerness, technology, and diversity in the Black experience.

To disrupt the erasure of sexual desire in BFT, Morgan calls for a politics of pleasure. The politics of pleasure is a "refram[ing of] the existing narrative about black female sexuality by positioning desire, agency and black women's engagement with pleasure as a viable theoretical paradigm" (36). To put it more bluntly, Morgan asserts that "I want an erotic that demands space be made for honest bodies that like to also *fuck*" (40). The politics of pleasure provides another lens through which to see the subjectivity of Black women. Morgan suggests

that by including the politics of pleasure into their analyses, Black feminists will be more equipped to engage and understand the contemporary reality of Black women.

Over the last 10 -15 years, a cultural shift has occurred and Black women are publicly centering their engagement with pleasure. They are unapologetically shaking their h/b/p, enjoying their inherent magic, shifting beauty norms, and openly engaging with their sexual partners on their own terms. While Black women have performed public displays of pleasure throughout history, what makes this shift notable is that it is occurring across socio-economic divides. Respectability politics have been embraced by all economic/social classes of Black folks; however, Black elites are more associated with acquiescing to respectable behaviors that are aligned with Whiteness, while admonishing poor and working-class Black folks for displaying "hood", "ghetto" or "ratchet" behavior. Now, we are seeing some class divisions dissolve and some Black middle-class folks are embracing the multiple possibilities of Blackness. Therefore, Black folks are identifying as “classy” and “boujee” along with “hood”, “ratchet”, and “ghetto”. Kyesha Jennings (2020) identifies two terms that represents this shift.

The first word is “sophistiratchet” which means,

a person of highly educated pedigree (academically, socially, & otherwise). Fluent in various forms of public etiquette yet is equally knowledgeable of the latest trap music, updated on most prime-time ratchet cable programs & conversant in the tongue of ratchet (57).

Secondly, Jennings recognizes “clatchet” which is “classy + ratchet”. These terms demonstrate that the dividing line between working class/poor and middle-class/wealthy among some Black folks has begun to dissolve. Yet, these terms are not the only language to appear in the popular culture lexicon to demonstrate a shift in respectability politics. Terms and slogans like,

“boughette”, “trash bougie: where hood and classy meet”, “kinda bougie, kinda hood”, “Black AF, Professional AF, but will knuck if ya buck”, are just a few examples of the language being used in social media, on clothing and apparel, in songs, and in conversation to dismantle the class division.

However, Black middle-class folks are not completely abandoning ideas around respectable behavior. Black folks are invested in some “normative” behavior that aligns with heteronormativity, capitalism, colorism, and the male gaze. Yet, they are not limited by the politics of respectability and are willing to move around the world embracing the possibilities of ratchetness.

Black feminists like Brittney Cooper, Nikki Lane, and Ashley N. Payne have been at the forefront of theorizing this shift through the idea of ratchetness. Cooper (2015) defines ratchetness as “a range of African American working-class practices that exceed the boundaries of respectability and propriety” (28:17). Ratchet is a characterization of “bad” behavior that fails to meet the standard of Black middle-class/elite ideologies of appropriate behavior (Lane 2021). Also, Black folks use ratchet as a resistance ideology to what is considered “good” behavior. Previously, ratchet was only considered crude and crass. Over time, Black folks have started to embrace ratchetness as a strategy of defiance to dominant norms. Now, these theorists recognize that respectability is a failed project in its aims to protect Black people and to make Black humanity more palpable within White supremacy.

Although ratchetness is an ideology that is not confined to one gender identity, it is most often used to define the behavior of women. Cooper points to how the body is the marker for ratchetness (Cooper 2015). When it comes to placing restrictions on the body, women, as well as

LGBTQI+ folks, are more likely the target than men and ratchet is used as an indicator of this need to restrict the body. More specifically, society uses the ratchet label to spotlight women's sexual behavior and the butt is often singled out in society's ideas around the untamed ratchet body.

When considering Black women's embrace of ratchet behavior, Cooper asks, "What happens when we think of Black female bodies and booties as archives of pleasure? [Can we] think about this as a resistance strategy?" (Cooper 2015, 38:54). By asking this question, Cooper draws a connection between the rejection of respectability politics and Black women's pleasure. Essentially, Cooper points to the work that is already occurring with Black women's embrace of pleasure and their rejection of class norms around sex and sexual behavior. For example, over the last few years, Black women have embraced what some call the "pro-hoe" movement. Writer Penda N'diaye (2019) coined this term and defines it as "Black people, openly enjoying sex without shame, regardless of the societal and religious ideals some of us might have been taught to uphold".

Public figures and musicians have been at the forefront of ushering in and supporting this shift. In 2015, model, rapper, and television personality, Amber Rose organized the first Los Angeles based Slutwalk march. Slutwalk is a movement, protest, and march that started in Toronto, Canada in 2011 after a local police officer remarked publicly that "women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized" (McAfee 2015). The movement is designed to bring awareness to rape-culture, victim blaming, slut shaming, and sexual violence. Rose decided to get involved because of her experiences being slut-shamed, which first started when she was a teenager. She promotes sex positivity and women's ability to express and partake in sexuality on

their own terms. Music is also reflective of this shift. For instance, R&B artist Jazmine Sullivan's 2021 album was titled “Heaux Tales, Mo’ Tales: The Deluxe”, with the word “heaux” as a stand-in for the term “hoe”, “ho” or “whore”. The songs are framed around interludes of women, some of whom are well known celebrities, telling the stories of their sexual and romantic engagements. The stories are raw, honest, and at times contradictory. Through this honesty, the women are dismantling the good girl/bad girl binary and directly confronting the demands of respectability politics.

Since respectability politics requires women to be more sexually reserved than men, Black women’s sexual openness is often accompanied by behaviors that are more aligned with men’s sexual norms: having multiple sexual partners, and being emotionally detached from sexual partners, demanding sexual pleasure on one’s own terms, and being aggressively honest about what they expect from their partners (in terms of good, services, and/or money). Azra Rajah (2022) highlights this cultural shift in her conversation about the female rapper Megan Thee Stallion. Rajah utilizes the politics of articulation to demonstrate how,

...women express their sexuality and identities to problematise the ideologies and discourses of being a woman—specifically, ideologies and discourses that suggest women should act or portray themselves in a certain way (e.g., as “a lady”) for social acceptance in various spaces (58-59).

Rajah notes that Stallion engages in the politics of articulation to actualize her politics of pleasure. Through her “centering the male-dominated ideologies and discourses and adopting their stances”, Stallion exposes the gender bias between men and women while subverting male centered discourses for her own use (2022, 67). Through the act of articulation, Stallion embraces the “pro-hoe” ideology. In their 2020 song “WAP” or “Wet Ass Pussy”, Stallion and

female rapper Cardi B defiantly make the proclamation in support of female sexual pleasure and dominance. In the chorus of “WAP”, the words “There’s Some Whores in This House” is stated over and over again. This is a sample from DJ and radio personality Frank Ski’s 1992 house song “Whore in This House”. In this act, Stallion and Cardi B take a song that was initially focused on a male exposing the denigration of a woman’s sexual character and claiming it for their own empowerment.

Additionally, journalist and popular culture specialist Evette Dionne Brown (2016) argues that Black pop artists like Beyoncé, Janet Jackson, and Nicki Minaj,

recognize pleasure as a critical piece of liberation and assert that within their music through audacious discussions of sexual pleasure; the empowerment of other women through the rejection of the male gaze; and the illumination of social issues that have a disproportionate impact on Black women” (180-181).

Yet, it is important to note that Black female music artists have had a history of publicly owning their sexual pleasure. Women blues singers, dating back to the 1920s, like Bessie Smith, Lucille Bogan, and Clara Smith, sang music using sexually explicit language and spoke openly about sexual encounters. Furthermore, performer Josephine Baker began her climb to stardom with her topless banana skirt dance.

While Black female musicians have a history of embracing sexual pleasure, what is different now is who is publicly listening to the music and embracing pro-hoe activities publicly. Whereas music and activities that embrace women’s sexual pleasure would not previously be openly embraced by the respectable, women and people of different economic statuses are acknowledging and participating in these materials around Black women’s sexual freedom. Musical artists like Cardi B, Megan Thee Stallion, and Nicki Minaj are being played openly in

mainstream venues like clothing stores, restaurants, and hip-hop dance classes. In the aftermath of the excitement over the release of WAP video, a fan captured a moment from the video of a model walking down a hallway and replaced the model with a fabricated image of Academy Award winning actor Viola Davis. In the image, Davis's curves are exposed as she is wearing the leopard skin bodysuit with thigh-high boots of the previous model. Davis playfully reposted the image and replied to this image "Who did this? 🤔😭😭". Furthermore, at the release of Cardi B's 2018 album *Invasion of Privacy*, media mogul Oprah Winfrey posted the caption "Listening to that Cardi B album 🎵🎵🎵🎵" along with a picture of herself appearing to be pleasantly listening to the album. Also is she just listening or is she watching?

Additionally, Black women are using the dancing h/b/p as a symbol of their work towards sexual liberation. In particular, the dance movement, "twerking," has become the symbol of pleasure, joy, and resistance. Again, twerking is a dance movement that involves the shaking and articulation of the butt. Although it has roots throughout African diasporic traditions, the dance is currently most associated with bounce music.

Bounce is a genre of hip hop that originated in low-income and working-class neighborhoods in New Orleans. Due to the movement's sexual energy and social class origins, twerking bodies have been a target of respectability politics. Bodies that twerk are considered vulgar, untamed, wild, and hyper-sexual. Twerking is often associated with the movement of a stripper, already considered a debased person of immoral character by respectability standards. Thus, a twerking woman is in conflict with the ideals of the sexually reserved and submissive

"lady". Therefore, twerking is gendered as a female dance and male and queer bodies performing twerking are in conflict with heteronormative ideals.

However, Black women and queer folk are engaging in what I call “twerk work.” Twerk work is a tool used to display joy and pleasure in the embodied form of twerk dancing. Instead of relegating twerking to night clubs and clandestine spaces, Black women and queer folk openly and sometimes spontaneously engage in twerk work within any moment that pleases the soul. Folks are twerking on vacation, in workout classes, at various social events, at everyday locations like at the mall and in parking lots, and in online videos.

Black folks are embracing twerking across class lines. For example, Sami Schalk, Associate Professor of Gender and Women’s Studies at University Wisconsin-Madison and a self-proclaimed “twerkademic”, twerked with recording artist Lizzo at a concert after launching an online campaign of videos to catch the singer’s attention (Jennings 2020). Additionally, Tiara Mack, a first-term state senator of Rhode Island, posted a video of herself in a bathing suit twerking upside down in a hand-stand. Amid the backlash for her video, Mack responds, “My behavior on my Twitter, Instagram and TikTok are consistent with a young millennial who is in office and challenging norms...I’m showing that leadership looks different and welcoming people into the many different facets of my life” (Griffin 2022).

Cultural theorist Aria S. Halliday (2020) identifies a similar phenomenon through her theoretical framework Black girl epistemology. Halliday uses Black girl epistemology to recognize,

...that Black girl ways of knowing lead Black girls and women to a collective freedom that dismantles racist paradigms and misogynist dogma that keep us bound in the slavery that is dissemblance and toxic respectability” (878).

In order to understand Black girls' way of knowing, Halliday focuses on embodied knowledge by using twerking as a methodological tool. Within this framework, Black girls use twerking as a type of storytelling, a form of community building, as well as medium to experience pleasure. Thus, Black girl epistemology is supported by twerk work.

Twerk work is also used, paradoxically, used to recognize the innocence of Black girls. In the last several years, Black girls have been centered in public discourse regarding the value and power of Black women. Several expressions, such as "Black girl magic" and "carefree Black girls," have appeared that acknowledge the joy and pleasure in the existence of Black girls and Black women, as well as the power they yield. The idea of the Black girl is implanted into conversations about Black women's humanity, but is also seen on TV and awards shows, clothing and apparel, social media hashtags, and products and goods. In fact, several organizations, groups, and companies have surfaced that have incorporated "Black Girl" into their name, for example Black Girls Rock, Therapy for Black Girls, and Black Girl Magic Wines, to name a few. The term "Black girl" is used to recognize the innocence and joy in Black girls, something that is often denied to them. Stereotypically, Black women are labeled as aggressive and angry and this labeling starts with little Black girls. Thus, by centering what is magical about Black girls, supporters resist the practice of aging Black girls, and Black children in general, and instead, reassociate Black girls with qualities that are normally attributed to children like joy and innocence. Additionally, by acknowledging the Black girl that still exists within Black women, Black women are given a space to be playful, vulnerable, and joyous.

However, I want to assert that grown women experience joy and twerk too. They do this as an act of maturity and wisdom. Actually, the moniker “Black Girl” is used for items, groups, and activities geared toward Black women and not young girls. Often when Black women are twerking, they are often referred to as girls or the moments are associated with girlhood. I want to resist the notion that twerking is only something that can be performed if framed around youthful behavior. With age and maturity, women are expected to publicly silence their h/b/p. Within this narrative, age is considered a gateway to respectability. Thus, in order to engage in shaking the h/b/p, one has to revert to a former version of themselves. Rather, I argue that embodiment deepens with age and a Black woman is a display of the wisdom of knowing oneself and carrying an embodied history. Thus, twerk work is applicable for all ages.

To further explain this process, I connect this act to dance scholar Melissa Blanco Borelli’s (2016) theory of hip(g)nosis. Blanco Borelli talks about the hips as a way of enacting embodied subjectivity. Through the theory of hip(g)nosis, she posits that the moving hips exhibit “kinesthetic corporeal knowledge” (14). Furthermore, hip(g)nosis speaks of the body as an “intelligent, powerful materiality that can (re)write history, comment on socio-political situations, and question the construction of its identity and bodily inscriptions” (14). Blanco Borelli considers hip(g)nosis as a method to reclaim the value of one’s experience and understand the power and pleasure of the hips. `

Although Blanco Borelli’s focus is on the hips and not the butt, I use hip(g)nosis to further contextualize twerk work and read the joy and pleasure within the moving h/b/p for Black women. Therefore, I enact hip(g)nosis as a means to understand Black women's pleasure politics. Pleasure politics works to help understand the large spectrum of erotic power that Black women

can and do experience (Morgan 2015); the moving h/b/p are a part of this spectrum of pleasure. Pleasure politics recognizes women's ability to embody the erotic outside of respectability politics, heteronormative narratives, and binaries.

Beyoncé's Lemonade

Black women's engagement with pleasure does not come without compromise or the work of navigating systems of power and privilege. As Black women and girls delve in the possibilities of their existence, they are often working through their engagement with the male gaze, capitalism, patriarchy, colorism and white supremacy. Therefore, when considering the lemonade Black people are able to create from the conditions of their life, we cannot forget that lemonade is made from lemons. Thus, these systems of oppression, or what I consider the lemons, are entangled in pursuit of pleasure. I refer back to Beyoncé, the person responsible for the more recent popularity of the lemonade analogy, as an example of the complexity around Black women's pursuit of pleasure.

At her 2014 MTV Video Music Awards performance, Beyoncé and her dancers stood on stage illuminated by the word "FEMINIST" as Nigerian feminist author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's voice dominated the space with the definition of the term, "feminist." This was Beyoncé's first major claim to be a feminist and from that moment on, she has incorporated feminism into her identity. Beyoncé's brand of feminism is often centered around empowering women and girls, challenging respectability politics, and engaging in the politics of pleasure.

Throughout Beyoncé's career, she has produced songs like "Run the World (Girls)", "Flawless", and "Diva" that focus on the upliftment of women and girls. She lends her music to

causes like the International Day of the Girl and she now performs with women of various shapes and sizes to encourage the acceptance of women with different body types. Additionally, Beyoncé has been significant in bringing feminist ideas to mainstream pop culture which includes her allyship with the LGBTQI+ community. Her latest album *Renaissance* is an ode to the queer community. She partially dedicates the album to her late queer Uncle Johnny and LGBTQI + folks who are instrumental in shaping popular culture (Chery 2022). Also, over the course of her career, she has collaborated with queer and trans artists like Big Freedia, Frank Ocean, and DJ Honey Dijon (McIntyre 2023).

Beyoncé champions Black culture. In a proclamation of Black power and Black woman power at her 2016 Super Bowl halftime performance, Beyoncé and her cast of Black women dressed in all black with the signature beret to honor the 50-year anniversary of the Black Panther Party. At one of the biggest stages for sports culture, Beyoncé centered the Black militant organization whose work was focused on resisting White supremacy. As an organization known for silencing open claims to support Black life, the NFL was probably unaware of the intention behind Beyoncé's show until the performance; as well, she did this performance through the bodies of Black women. Throughout the history of the Black Panther Party, they struggled internally with misogynoir and supporting Black women. Therefore, Beyoncé's performance was also supporting feminist views in the Black nationalist movement.

Additionally, Beyoncé does not shy away from embracing ratchetness through Black working-class cultures in her songs and imagery. In the lyrics and video for her song "Formation," Beyoncé focuses on the diversity of Black culture in New Orleans and southern Louisiana featuring Black women with colorful hair in a beauty supply shop, local bounce

culture, working-class neighborhoods, local people eating crawfish, and someone speaking in the local vernacular language. She even features herself in the imagery of ratchetness as you see her with long blond lemonade braids and a fur jacket hanging out of an El Camino car window. As she rides around in circles in a parking lot, you hear the words of the late bounce artist and comedian Messy Mya in a deep southern New Orleans dialect say, “Ooh! Yeah, baby. Oh, yeah, I---ooh! Oh yes, I like that.” In this act, she makes working class life visible and highlights its beauty. Additionally, she does this in conversation with multiple types of imagery from Black life in southern Louisiana. Beyoncé displays images of the Black church, high society, Black Mardi Gras culture, and the remnants of flooding after hurricane Katrina. She juxtaposes disparate class-based imagery, thereby embracing the “clatchet” ideologies as she herself demonstrates that she embodies both what is classy and ratchet. She reinforces this with her visual imagery and the lyrics of the song. In a scene from the music video, Beyoncé sits upright in a room decorated in Victorian age aesthetics. The wallpaper, the images on the wall, and a small table with a lamp are signifiers of high society. Beyoncé’s appearance also connotes the Victorian era; decked out in white lace and long sleeves, she wears a corset, her hair in a high bun, while she holds an umbrella over her head. As Beyoncé sits poised in this Victorian inspired room, she states, “I got hot sauce in my bag swag.”

Beyoncé also relishes in pleasure and her sexual power. In songs like “Rocket”, “Speechless”, and “Drunk in Love”, Beyoncé unabashedly displays her sexual desire. In the first verse of her song “Partition,” Beyoncé sings about a sexual encounter in a limo that includes her performing oral sex on her husband and concludes with him “Monica Lewinsky’ed all over [her] my gown”. Additionally, in the song, Beyoncé inserts a woman reciting lines from the 1998 film

The Big Lebowski in French. In the text, the woman is asking if the person likes sex and notes that feminists like sex too; Beyoncé is challenging restrictions on how feminists can engage sexual pleasure as well as ideas around the respectable married woman.

Beyoncé is negotiating lemons in order to produce the lemonade of her work. While she proclaims herself to be a feminist, Beyoncé is not embraced as a feminist by everyone in the feminist community. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who Beyoncé quoted in her feminist public announcement, is recorded stating that Beyoncé's "type of feminism is not mine" and feminist legend bell hooks called Beyoncé a "terrorist" during a 2014 panel discussion (Blake 2016; hooks et al. 2014). Why are these feminists resistant to Beyoncé? Beyoncé's brand is cited for pandering to aspects of patriarchy and supporting the engine of capitalism. hooks questions Beyoncé's simplistic construction of feminism. Beyoncé's embodiment of feminism is framed around the desire for women to be equal to men. Yet, hooks argues that this approach is not about ending systems of domination but allowing women to participate in these systems. hooks states,

In such a simplified worldview, women gaining the freedom to be like men can be seen as powerful. But it is a false construction of power as so many men, especially black men, do not possess actual power (hooks 2016).

This can be directly applied to Beyoncé and her husband's embrace of what is called by some as Black capitalism. Black capitalism is the promise of access to resources and wealth; Black folks are given an opportunity to obtain the economic stability and dominance that white folks have hoarded for themselves. However, capitalism is built on the exploitation of the many for the wealth and prosperity of the few. Therefore, while a few Black folks will be able to bask in rewards of wealth, Black capitalism still thrives on the vast majority remaining under the

oppressive thumb of capitalism. In his song “Family Feud,” Beyoncé's husband Jay-Z notably states, “What's better than one billionaire? Two. 'Specially if they're from the same hue as you.” I counter this claim by asserting that what is better than one billionaire is prosperous communities of people that look like you.

While Beyoncé is branded as a symbol of female empowerment, she frames this message through women's interaction with men and by catering to the male gaze. In her critique of the singer, Adichie says, “I don't think that women should relate everything they do to men: Did he hurt me, do I forgive him, did he put a ring on my finger? We women are so conditioned to relate everything to men” (Blake 2016). This is evident in the fact that the vast majority of Beyoncé's music focuses on narratives framed around romantic interactions with men. Additionally, Beyoncé's image is situated in mainstream beauty standards that work in service of male voyeurism. Instead of confronting and challenging paradigms that define women's worth around their appeal to men, Beyoncé utilizes the male gaze and her sexual attractiveness as a source of her power and strength. She leverages her beauty to commoditize her body and her body becomes a symbol of a fantasy that represents wealth, beauty, and power. In a 2014 panel discussion, hooks points to the politics around Beyoncé's body, particularly her wealth (hooks et al. 2014). She says,

Here is a young Black woman who is so incredibly wealthy. And wealth is what so many young people fantasize, dream about, sexualize, exoticize. One could argue, even more than her body, it's what that body stands for – the body of desire fulfilled, that is wealth, fame, celebrity, and all the things that so many people in our culture are lusting for, wanting (39:40).

As a cultural producer and influencer, Beyoncé stands as a powerful example of Black lemonade. She is not just following trends; she sets them. Through her negotiation of lemons,

Beyoncé produces works of art that focuses on the diversity of the Black experience while highlighting Black women and their pursuit of humanity, which includes pleasure and desire. I argue it is liberating for a Black woman to do this type of work despite working with the materials of these oppressive systems.

Beyonce, a Student of Majorette/Dance Team Culture

I now utilize previous analysis of Beyoncé to frame a discussion regarding the Black lemonade found within majorette/dance teams. While Beyoncé is a cultural producer, she is also influenced by culture. What she and her creative team produces is an amalgamation of different multiple influences. Thus, I argue that Beyoncé and the majorette/dance teams are working out of a similar aesthetic, an aesthetic I first link to the tradition of dance teams. The majorette/dance team style is evident in her movements, her command of femininity as a source of sensual power, and her costuming and beauty choices.

Beyoncé's most notable expression of majorette/dance team culture is *Homecoming*, her 2018 Coachella performance and the 2019 Netflix documentary. The performance was an ode to HBCUs and their culture. Beyoncé highlights the dance team, marching band, and Black Greek culture at these institutions. In the documentary, Beyoncé discloses that she grew up in the South watching the HBCU battle of the band performances and that these events were the highlight of her younger years. I posit that these experiences planted a seed in Beyoncé's creative journey that manifested throughout her career.

"Homecoming" is Beyoncé's largest spectacle of majorette/dance team and marching band culture. However, there are examples that date back to her days with her former group Destiny's Child. The marching band sound is a part of songs like "Lose My Breath" and "Bug-

A-Boo.” In the “Bug-A-Boo” video, the group performs as majorettes with a marching band. Although they are performing with the UCLA band, which is not a HBCU band, Beyoncé demonstrates her connection to the culture in the video. After Beyoncé’s solo career took flight, her connection to majorette/dance team culture continued to be evident. In 2008, Beyoncé rocked pop culture with her “Single Ladies” video. From the popularity of the video, Beyoncé won video of the year from the BET Awards and the MTV Video Music Awards in addition to the song winning three Grammy Awards including, song of the year. More than just the video, the dance became a popular culture phenomenon. Beyoncé danced and sang for over three minutes with little editing or noticeable breaks in the footage. This concentrated view of Beyoncé dancing was an opportunity to highlight the choreography and Beyoncé’s performance of it. After the release of the video, it surfaced that some of the movement was taken from the 1969 Ed Sullivan Show performance of the dance, “Mexican Breakfast”, choreographed by legendary jazz choreographer Bob Fosse and performed by dancer and Fosse’s wife Gwen Verdon. The “Single Ladies” dance also featured majorette/dance team movement vocabulary and aesthetic. For example, this is noticeable in moments when one dancer performs a short movement phrase alone and then repeats the phrase with the other dancers. This influence came from co-choreographer JaQuel Knight, who brought to the choreography his training in southern Black marching band culture. J-setting is evident in the movement and the choreographic arrangements, for example the use of the canon form – dancers performing the same sequence of movements at different times.

Beyoncé and her dancers display a visual likeness to the teams through their style and fashion choices. The dancer’s black leotards and shoes are a reference to the costumes worn by

majorettes/dance teams. Black majorette/dance teams wear standard dancewear— leotards, unitards, jazz skirts, tights, etc. are the underlying structure of their costumes. However, the teams add their own flare to the costuming. Through the cultivation of their individual styles, Black dance teams set themselves apart from other performing groups that also wear dance attire.

The costumes worn by Black dance teams, particularly HBCU teams, are designed by costume designers who design outfits that accentuate the team's movement vocabulary (Griffith 2022). In some instances, they create costumes that bring attention to the movement of the h/b/p (Griffith 2022). In general, the teams' costuming is considered more elaborate than dance teams outside of the Black majorette/dance team practice. J'aime Griffith (2022), a former dancer of Grambling State University's Orchestis Dance Company and the current director of the program, describes this by stating, "Our costumes are very extra compared to costumes that I see at predominately white institutions. We go over the top, with the themes, with the sequence, with the fringe" (106). The Black majorette/dance team community expects the costumes to be elaborate and high quality; it is a major part of the beauty culture of the teams. Currently, Beyoncé wears elaborately designed bodysuits in her performances; examples of her fashion can be traced back to the costuming in the "Single Ladies" video. In fact, Anthony Elle, the clothing designer of the video, was born and raised in the south and is more than likely influenced by Black majorette/dance team culture. Because Beyoncé admittedly grew up watching and admiring Black majorette/dance team culture, I argue that the style of her costumes is directly influenced by Black majorette/dance team culture.

Additionally, I assert that Beyoncé's costuming choices are just one element of her overall style, but that element is in alignment with the culture of dance teams. Beyoncé performs

femininity in a similar manner as Black majorette/dance teams. Beyoncé's sensuality is always present in her presentation of herself. She displays this in the clothing she wears, how she moves and navigates space, and the way she wears her hair and make-up. Beyoncé's presentation of herself mimics the style and energy of dance teams. As the examples above indicate, she hires artists and designers that are informed by Black dance team and marching band culture, thereby further incorporating this cultural style into the Beyoncé brand.

Majorette/Dance Teams and the Lemons of the Male Gaze and Respectability

Black majorette/dance team culture is a genre that supports the talents and performance of women and LGBTQI+ folks. Through this practice, the dancers are able to engage in the politics of pleasure and claim their power, sensuality, and movement acumen through performance. Furthermore, the majorette/dance team genre is a lemonade practice that supports the creations of Black culture. The dance teams and the marching bands have taken these practices and reconfigured them to support the Black communal experience. By inserting Africanist movement and music aesthetics, Black performers have created a practice that is uniquely for and by them.

Yet, similar to Beyoncé, these teams are grappling with some of the same lemons Beyoncé used to deliver her brand of performance. First, majorette/dance team performance, particularly the HBCU female dance teams, is within the purview of the male gaze. These teams work with a sense of beauty and style that indulges male heterosexual fantasy. In their performance, the teams highlight the dancers' femininity to contrast the masculine performance of the marching band. In order to achieve this, women are required to be aesthetically beautiful,

as defined through heteronormative and Eurocentric standards, dress in a manner that highlights their feminine qualities, and engage in movements that define their gender performance. Even when dancers are performing movement styles like J-setting that utilize more masculine energetic movement, the dancer's femininity remains central and continues to not only offset the masculinity of the band, but also the masculine energy of the entire football and basketball game.

The dominance of the male gaze was embedded into the practice from the very beginning. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Black dance line teams were created by male directors of HBCU bands to embellish the performance of the bands. Legendary Human Jukebox band director Isaac Greggs openly admits the desire to add "pretty young women" to the band's performances (Blitzer 2009). As dance lines remain under the direction of male band directors, they continue to operate within the intent of their creation. Because HBCU teams are objects of male fantasy, dancers are expected to exemplify beauty within the current standards of Black popular culture. At this moment, this includes women who have long or longer hair, wear false eyelashes, are not too overweight, and wear professional quality make-up. Without the adornment of makeup, eyelashes, and other additives, dancers must be physically appealing to the campus community. As another function of the male gaze, dancers perform movements that can easily be sexualized. Dance line teams undulate, shake, thrust, and rotate their h/b/p in performances. Additionally, dancers often touch and trace their bodies with their hands as they simultaneously show ecstasy in their facial expressions. Due to how Black women's bodies are hyper-sexualized in dominant culture, as mentioned in Chapter 2, these types of movement are

read as sexual; perceived sensualized movement can easily be skewed to further support men's sexual desires.¹⁴

Furthermore, as discussed in chapter 2, dancers are expected to abide by the rules of respectability in their public and private lives. When they are not performing, dancers are expected to be upstanding members of the campus community and to be models of respectable character for their fellow classmates. In order to control and sanitize the image of each dancer, dancers are required to limit their social media presence and, in some cases, they delete their social media accounts totally; they are censored on what they can say publicly. As public figures for the college and the band, they are required to keep their ideas and opinions about most matters to themselves. For example, the FDD only speak publicly when they are participating in interviews or other events sanctioned by the team. Thus, the dancers are mostly seen and not heard, which further indulges the male heterosexual fantasy. Patriarchy thrives on the silence of women; a silent beautiful woman can then be a vessel upon which men can project their ideas, power, and fantasies. The women are targets of people's thoughts and opinions and their silence prevents them from expressing their agency. Social media is full of people judging the performance, bodies, and looks of these women. As pillars of respectable behavior, they are required to remain silent and "dignified" against all attacks and projections.

¹⁴ I apply this analysis only to the HBCU teams and not to youth teams and queer teams; the movements across all three groups are similar, but each group is framed differently, changing how the movement should be read. For example, the intent of youth team performances is entirely different than that of the HBCU teams, while queer teams do not function within the heterosexual cis-male gaze that characterizes the HBCU teams. However, as I argue in chapter 4, if the youth teams are analyzed outside of their native communities, they can be subject to criticism that perceives the sexual nature of their performances differently than was intended.

While dance teams have carved out distinct cultures that encompass three main groups HBCU teams, youth teams, and queer teams, in many circles they are still only considered to be augmentations of male-dominated marching bands and in this way, are viewed as less important. For example, schools are known for providing band members with some type of remuneration. They may get full or partial scholarships or some type of expense support. However, in the case of the FDD, they normally receive little or no financial support from the band or the school. I was told, by former dancers, that at one point they did get something called a book award; this is money used to help students pay for books. However, dancers were only given the book award for a short time. In order to get financial support, the FDD has incorporated sponsors into their coaching staff. These individuals are tasked with finding funds and support for the team in the larger community, support that is used to help with purchasing items like costumes, make-up, etc. While it varies across schools, most dance teams do not receive scholarships and if they receive any financial assistance, the money is used to pay for costuming, make-up, hair and other performance/production materials.¹⁵ It is important to note that limited funding is a major contributing factor to this disparity. Generally, HBCUs are working with smaller endowments and operational budgets than many PWIs. Therefore, Black institutions are unable to fund programs and activities at the same level as other institutions. Yet, I argue that the lack of funding to support dance teams is also about priorities. Institutions indicate what they deem important or value through how they spend their money. While it is understood that dancers do

¹⁵ This critique of payment structure only applies to dance line teams, or teams that perform within a marching band. The funding structure of other teams is different. For example, the Gold 'N Bluez are not under a marching band and a percentage of the general college tuition goes to the team. Yet, it is not a lot of money and it is used mainly for performance materials only.

receive some level of training, particularly professional dancers, there is a general sense that dancing is just something anyone can do. Because dancing is believed to be tied to the body and not the mind, it is considered a natural talent void of any higher intellectual rigor. Due to this belief, dance is often undervalued in academic spaces.

Because the Black dancing body triggers essentialist racist ideology that defines Black people as “primitive” or “backwards”, Black academic spaces have a history of distancing themselves from dance and the body to appear more intellectual and legitimate.

Additionally, the teams receive some form of validation because they are the objects of desire. As founders and leaders of the practice, HBCU teams are desired by the male heterosexual ego. Youth and queer teams model themselves after the HBCU teams so HBCU teams set the tone for the genre. HBCU teams are bonded by the rules of respectability that silences them and impedes their agency. The women of these teams are fashioned to fit into the heteronormative idea of the perfect wife: intelligent, beautiful, physically skilled and yet ladylike and reserved. Women’s dance proficiency and use of the h/b/p can be construed to be an indication of their sexual performance. As I discussed in Chapter 2, majorette/dance team practice is a manifestation of southern U.S. culture. Thus, the dancers on HBCU teams exist at the intersection of respectability and the hip hop understanding of “dirty south” culture. Therefore, I refer to southern hip hop artist Ludacris to sum up the amalgamation of these multiple influences. Ludacris states, “We want a lady in the streets, but a freak in the bed.”¹⁶

¹⁶ This quote is used by recording artist Ludacris in the 2004 song “Yeah” and his 2009 song “Nasty Girl”.

Beauty and its Complicated Lemonade

Beauty and style are crucial elements in majorette/dance team culture. Dance team communities equally value the quality of dancing and the beauty and style of performers. While style is significant to the entire genre, the embodiment of beauty is particularly important for female teams. As the founders of the practice, HBCU teams are the originators of priorities that continue to be central to the HBCU aesthetic. In her memoir of her time as a FDD, Gaybrielle Leeann Dixon (2021) describes her interaction with people regarding her initial interest in joining the team. In one of her encounters, she was told by a person, “You’re so pretty. You look like you could be one of the band’s dance girls” (23). This was one of several comments Dixon received that equated her beauty to her viability as a dancer on the team.

Because beauty is foundational to HBCU teams, marching bands leverage the beauty of the young women to heighten the band’s visibility. In this act, the dancers function as adornments for the band and are designed to add value to the musicians. Furthermore, dance teams are singularly responsible for bringing the beauty aesthetic or physical attraction to the band experience. Band members are not expected to be beautiful or attractive. In fact, the physical appearance of the musicians is hidden by their uniforms; unlike the costumes worn by the dancers, the band uniforms are not designed to emphasize the physical body.

Additionally, when a team falls short of displaying a certain level of beauty, the majorette/dance team community takes note of it. For example, Dianna Williams, founder of the well-known Dancing Dolls youth team, commented on a podcast about the new college majorette team at University of Southern California (USC). The USC team is controversial because they

are at a PWI and not an HBCU.¹⁷ On the podcast, Williams supported the team, but discussed that the team was missing a look. Therefore, she is working with the team to improve the quality of their wigs, costuming, and make up. In her comments, Williams inferred that the team's beauty and style aesthetic fell short of the expectations of the practice. HBCU dancers are explicitly told this expectation before they are able to join the team. At the beginning of the 2019-2020 season, I served as a judge for Southern University's Gold 'n Bluez team. Throughout the three-day audition process, the coaching and support staff enforced beauty standards and at times, admonished auditioners or made jokes of those who fell short of the expectation. During our deliberation to select the final team members, we thoroughly discussed a dancer's ability to present a certain look and appearance; a dancer's beauty was a major factor in the decisions.

I argue that this hyper-emphasis on beauty is a result of the genre's original patriarchal lemons. Beauty is a function of the heterosexual male fantasy and within heterosexual male desire; beauty is a crucial component in the molding of these women into conduits of desire. For HBCU teams, beauty is a major component of the dancer's value. Given that the creators of these teams, the marching band leadership, are male, and the setting, the football stadium, is male dominant, it is not surprising that the value of the teams is defined by the male gaze. Furthermore, the teams functioning under marching bands are still defined by their ability to add aesthetic value and function to the mostly male bands.

Still if beauty is central to the genre; what is considered beautiful in majorette/dance team culture? To answer this question, I begin with a discussion on how Black beauty in general is

¹⁷ I discuss the controversy of the USC team fully in Chapter 4.

formulated. Sociologist Shirley Anne Tate (Tate 2009) work relates Black beauty to performativity. Tate centers performance on the,

...ongoing negotiation of aesthetics, stylization and politics produced through the mobility and mobilization of beauty knowledge, stylization technologies, feminist and anti-racist/Black Nationalist ideology in the Black Atlantic diaspora (1).

I agree that Black beauty is a performance of aesthetics, stylization, and politics. Yet, I emphasize that Black beauty is conceived through the particularities of Black popular culture and Black majorette/dance teams emphasize this type of Black beauty. Black popular culture is a mediation of politics that involves colonialism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism, along with feminist and anti-racist/ Black Nationalist ideology. I define Black popular culture as a set of values, behaviors, actions, styles, etc. that are popularized through the Black experience, culture, and the body. Additionally, I align with Stuart Hall's (1993) recognition that Black popular culture manifests through contradiction and instability. Hall argues that this is because Black popular culture is multifarious. Due to this, he asserts that there is not one Black popular culture and it can exist differently within each person, group, space or community. I add that Black people experience continuities and shared realities across time and space. I argue that Black folks are generally able to recognize and read these shared attributes because they share a base literacy.

Because Black popular culture is a negotiation of Africanist culture and the lemons of white supremacy and colonialism, certain White beauty norms – like straightened hair – surface in Black popular culture. This comes from a history of devaluing Black physical characteristics, while normalizing and defining beauty through Whiteness. Ayana D. Byrd and Lori L. Tharps (2014) discuss how Black folks were forced to adopt White beauty norms to exist in their

surrounding world maintain employment, attend school, and avoid some of the negative repercussions of White supremacy. Thus, to support their livelihood, Black people had to emulate Whiteness to make White folks feel more comfortable around them. Furthermore, Byrd and Tharps assert that society not only placed value on mimicking White beauty, but also on possessing White physical features. Features such as light skin tone and straight hair were associated with social mobility and wealth.

Yet, Black folks reconfigured the lemons in their environment to engage in the possibilities of their Blackness. As Tate contends, Black women's beauty aesthetics are not about "inscribing a white aesthetic onto their bodies" but rather "expanding the boundaries of what counts as Black beauty" (376). Thus, Black women used their forced alignment with White beauty aesthetics to produce an aesthetic that embodied their creativity and Africanist sensibilities. Furthermore, Susan B. Kaiser and Sarah Reboloso McCullough (2010) recognize that Black people transform hegemonic discourse to formulate cultural products and practices that take on a new significance. In this way, Black people are subverting and "out-styling" White aesthetics.

For Black majorette/dance teams', beauty is a function of style and style is central to the overall practice. Teams are defined through their style and their style is the cornerstone for their visual aesthetic. Dress, diaspora, and transnationalism scholar Carol Tulloch (Tulloch 2010) defines style as the "construction of self through the assemblage of garments, accessories, and beauty regimes that may, or may not, be 'in fashion' at the time of use" (276). In terms of majorette/dance team culture, I shift this definition to focus on the construction of a communal identity. Majorette/dance teams express style through their collective adherence to shared

characteristics; the group reinforces these practices, which give their style cultural relevance. I expand this idea of style to include the movements and behaviors of the body. In addition to how you adorn your body, folks express their style in and with their bodies through how they move and convey emotion. I argue that the embodiment of style is what makes style readable. For example, a person can exhibit their style by how they walk down a street, move their body while speaking, and dance.

In majorette/dance culture, style is the umbrella for several components including beauty, fashion, make-up, and movement aesthetic. Style provides the team with a cohesive appearance. For example, the FDD derive their “classy” style from their straightened hair styled in pin-up curls, their carefully crafted sequin-adorned body suits, their white gloves, their smooth undulating torso and hip movements, and their natural-looking makeup with golden tones. The FDD pride themselves on centering sophistication in their style; this functions in opposition to ratchetness. As stated earlier, they avoid movements like bucking because it is considered less sophisticated and “ladylike” to pop and thrust one’s pelvis in a wide legged squat. Whereas ratchetness is a resistance to respectability politics and behaviors, the FDD embrace these politics as fundamental to their style. The doll style is unreadable if components of their style are missing. Once this style is established, their community and supporters expect that this general style will continue with each new team. That said, each team filters this style through the latest trends and technology of Black popular culture. Due to continual shifts and changes in popular culture, teams constantly shift and update their style and beauty aesthetics.

I conclude this chapter by focusing now on hair, one of the main style elements of the majorette/dance team genre. Black hair culture is crafted as a lemonade that represents Black

people's struggle to frame their visual appearance on their own terms while acquiescing to aspects of dominant hair culture. Black women, particularly, forged a path to define their hair care and style that speaks to their identity and how they have to navigate the world.

Black Hair

Hair is one of the most visible characteristics of Blackness (Byrd and Tharps 2014; Tate 2009; Mercer 2000; Awad et al. 2015). Since beauty has a history of being defined in the U.S. by its closeness to Whiteness, American culture places a greater value on straighter hair or hair that is less coarse or coiled. Byrd and Tharps provide a history of Black hair since enslavement that explains how White society pathologized Black hair. Dominant culture used Black hair as an indication of Black folks' inferiority to White people and a greater reward was given to Black people with straighter hair and lighter skin. For example, enslaved people with lighter skin and straighter hair than others were able to work in the enslaver's household, which was less backbreaking work than those working in the field. Over time, a "good hair/bad hair" paradigm surfaced, in which "good hair" was less curly more straight and "bad hair" was coarse and kinky. The good hair/bad hair ideology was solidified in Black culture and continues to be prevalent in the configuration of Black beauty.

However, some Black folks resisted the idea that straight hair is superior. Byrd and Tharps point out that leaders like Nannie Helen Burroughs, founder of the National Training School for Girls and Women in 1909, Booker T. Washington, and Marcus Garvey promoted pride in Africanist features and pushed against the need to appear closer to Whiteness. Additionally, during the 1960s, a massive shift occurred in beauty politics. With the Black power movement and the rise of Black nationalism, Black people began to embrace unstraightened hair

and “the afro” became a cultural phenomenon. Byrd and Tharp further point out that breaking the bonds with White hair aesthetics became political and an act of resistance to White-focused beauty norms.

Over time, Black folks’ hair politics shifted and changed. Throughout the 1970s, the popularity of afros and natural hair started to decline (Byrd and Tharps 2014). By the 1980s, straight hair dominated again as a cultural norm for Black women (Byrd and Tharps 2014). Yet, young Black women were not imitating White hair trends. Byrd and Tharps explain that Black women, particularly working-class women, were using straightened hair as a medium for their creativity. Thus, they experimented with color, asymmetrical haircuts, gel hair styles, etc.

Additionally, hair extensions grew in popularity and hair extension technology improved. Therefore, Black women were able to make hair extensions appear to be their natural hair. The research of Byrd and Tharps revealed that critics admonished Black women for using hair extensions, accusing them of using hair extensions and wigs to align more with White beauty aesthetics. Yet, proponents argue that hair extensions are a means of protecting their natural hair from the damage caused by continuous styling.

During the 2000s, Black women began to embrace unstraightened hairstyles again. This progression began slowly with a few Black women wearing their natural hair texture. By the 2010s, a major cultural shift occurred and many more Black women embraced the natural texture of their hair. Before this cultural shift, mostly young Black girls wore natural hairstyles. Once a girl matured, she was expected to wear her hair straightened. As Black women began to embrace the natural techniques for styling their hair, they shifted this paradigm and they demonstrated that unstraightened hair could represent maturity and style.

Yet, Black people wear their natural hair at a cost. Black folks can experience major professional consequences for wearing their natural hair texture in mainstream culture. For example, in 2021, a Louisiana woman filed a discrimination lawsuit against her employer for firing her because she would not cover up her naturally textured hair with a wig with straight hair (Fowler 2021). In similar case, during the 2019-2020 school year, two Texas cousins were expelled from their high school because they refused to cut their growing locs¹⁸ (Bradford 2020). To address these issues, the CROWN, Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair, Coalition was formed to implement research and legislation around the U.S to stop racially-based hair discrimination (Crown Coalition, n.d.). In their 2023 Workplace Research Study, the Crown Coalition reports that Black women with straight hair are 2.5 times less likely to experience microaggressions than Black women with coiled or textured hair. Additionally, in their 2021 Study for Girls, the coalition found that 66% of Black girls in predominantly White schools experience hair discrimination and 45% of Black girls in all school environments. To combat hair discrimination, the CROWN Coalition is implementing the CROWN Act, which has passed in 51 cities and the U.S Virgin Islands.

With the shift towards unstraightened hair styles in the 2000s, hair product manufacturers and professional hair stylists were slow to adapt to the change. Therefore, Black women began to educate themselves on natural haircare and styling. Black women started YouTube channels, blogs, and websites devoted to educating each other on how to navigate unstraightened hair. In

¹⁸ Locs are frequently referred to as “dreadlocks” or “dreads.” I, along with some others, no longer use these terms because of the negative connotation associated with the word “dread.” Because locs have a history of not being accepted by mainstream culture, I prefer to subscribe to language that affirms the hair style.

this act, Black women took control of their hair narrative and haircare became an act of agency. During this time, several themes surfaced in the online haircare community; most were focused on promoting healthy hair practices and products. Black women were starting to question the safety and long-term health effects of using chemicals to straightened their hair. As a form of promoting healthy hair, Black women started focusing more on protective hairstyles. Protective hairstyles are designed to cause less damage from the constant hair styling and manipulation. Black women started to embrace the idea of protective hair styling in the decades before the use of hair extensions. Yet, it was never socially acceptable to publicly acknowledge the use of hair extensions or wigs. As the popularity of protective hairstyles grew, Black women openly acknowledged using hair extensions and wigs and the culture of secrecy around these methods dissolved. Additionally, Black women utilized hair extensions and wigs to explore their creativity. Thus, hair extensions and wigs were a means for Black women to experiment with the color, length, thickness, and shape of their hair.

Despite unstraightened hair being more socially acceptable now, straight hair is still the hallmark of Black hair culture. Black women with straightened hair dominate the representation of Black women in media and Black popular culture. In Black popular culture, lace-front wigs are the current hair trend. Lace-front wigs are a category of wigs made of lace in the front. Black women prefer these types of wigs because they can blend the lace into their skin to give the appearance that the hair is growing directly from their scalp.

In alignment with Black popular culture, Black majorette/dance teams focus their hair culture around long straight hair and the use of hair extensions and lace-front wigs. From a practical perspective, the teams are able to execute uniformity in their hair styles by using added

hair. Therefore, through hair extensions and wigs, dancers can all achieve the same hairstyle. However, practicality does not completely explain the culture's preference for straight hair. Consumers can purchase hair in almost any texture. Thus, I argue that the majorette/dance team culture preference of straight hair reflects Black popular culture's constant negotiation with the lemons of hegemonic White beauty standards. Black culture has displayed an internalization of the dominant culture's messages regarding natural beauty and therefore, Black folks utilized the lemons of anti-Blackness to create a lemonade of their own unique beauty standards. While Black people have devised a beauty culture that reflects their ingenuity, creativity, and style, they are still enmeshed in dominant culture's tendency to pathologize or exoticize Black characteristics.

Conclusion

I use Black lemonade as a metaphor to describe the complexity that surrounds Black people's existence. Black lemonade is a tool to identify the contradiction that Black people must reside in order to maintain their humanity and pursue joy. While twerk work, ratchetness, and other forms of Black pleasure are acts of resistance, these methods operate in combination with capitalism, patriarchy, White supremacy, and other systems of oppression. This is due to the fact that these economic and socio-political systems are built into the framework of Black people's everyday lives. These systems are the raw materials of Black folks' existence. Therefore, Black folks create their hair, beauty, style, dance, and performance cultures from their negotiation with contradictory materials.

Despite Black people's work within these structures of power, they are also forced to work against them to survive and live. Therefore, I use Black lemonade to further contextualize

how this fight materializes, particularly when Black folk's work does not appear to meet the standard of more radical forms of resistance. Yet, Black people are living radically.

Majorette/dance teams and Beyoncé are examples of Black folks crafting realities that influence and create culture, which is a radical act.

Chapter 4

The Intracommunal Reading and Spectacularization of Black Dance

In this chapter, I discuss the communal knowledge that derives from creative practices. Communities form their own literacy for reading culture through dance practices that sustain and support the community's continuation. I begin the chapter by exploring how Black communities generate and circulate dance and other cultural material that are only fully legible to community members. These groups form a literacy around Black dance practices that instructs them on how to read and interpret the dance's meaning and significance. Without this knowledge and context, Black dance practices are susceptible to being misunderstood and often spectacularized. I situate this conversation in majorette/dance teams to ground my argument in a Black community and practice that continues to thrive. Through the expanded possibilities of online spaces, I conclude the chapter by exploring Black communities' use of the internet to continue their intracommunal literacy. Throughout the chapter, I posit that outsiders may never obtain a certain type of "knowing" with regards to how these communities operate and express their values and mores. Therefore, I argue that outside individuals and entities can treat these communities fairly without this knowledge and that judging these communities is, for the most part, inappropriate.

Black Habitus of Creative Communities

The dancing h/b/p has a history of being misread in dominant U.S. culture. This is because Black spaces have their own values and rules of engagement, and traditions that operate separately from those of the dominant culture. Within Black communities, culture is embodied

and replicated by community members and over time, distinguishes itself from mainstream cultural meaning. Cultural theorist Harvey Young's (2010) theorization of the Black habitus works to explain how Black culture is accessed and generated by its community practitioners. Young uses Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the habitus and posits that the Black habitus is a theoretical framework to use in the interpretation of how Black bodies exist in time and space. The Black habitus is an acknowledgement that the body is not static and is constantly constructing itself. Within this process, the individual continuously negotiates the internalization of social expectations and subsequently projects back those internalizations onto society. Thus, through the Black habitus, we learn how to be in our environment; his process generates and sustains community culture.

With regard to the actions of the body, certain body movements, gestures, and behaviors become embraced, normalized, and replicated through the choices and preferences of community members. Black communities' embodied movement, whether pedestrian or in artistic performance, will carry some aspects of Black dance aesthetics. In Chapter 2, I discuss Brenda Dixon Gottschild's identification of 5 aesthetics elements found in Black dance – embracing conflict, polyrhythm/polycentrism, high-affect juxtaposition, ephebism, and the aesthetic of the cool. These aesthetic elements describe the dynamic energy and quality of Black dance. For Black communities, these aspects of Black dance are normalized within the culture of the community. Therefore, the community carries an understanding of embodied histories; nuances in execution and performance; clothing and costuming choices; musical selections; the significance of performance spaces; and interaction and connection to audience. Thus, when

community members watch these performances, they are analyzing the mastery and detailed nuances of the performer as well as the overall quality of the performance.

To further explain internal community understanding, I refer to the practice of second line parading in New Orleans. Second line parades, or known simply as “second lines,” are a Black cultural practice associated with public spaces in New Orleans. The parades are often recognized by outsiders as jazz funerals. While second lines are performed for funerals, they more commonly occur as a weekly Sunday community celebration. Weekly parades are sponsored by social aid and pleasure clubs that are the main features of the parade, and parade routes mostly travel through local neighborhoods that are usually off the beaten path of tourism. Additionally, second lines also have their own dance aesthetic. Their dance style includes three types of dancing – stepping, footwork, and buck jumping. In her research on second lines, dance scholar Rachel Carrico (2015) explains the three dance forms in second lines. She states,

“Stepping” describes a buoyant, high-knee strut; “footwork” is the art of executing intricate rhythmic patterns with the feet; and “buck jumping” refers to what happens when dancers turn up their energetic output, which often manifests in multiple uses of levels, such as dropping to the ground and leaping in the air (21).

During my field research in the region, I attended several second lines and met some of the followers of the parades. At one point, I met up with a White photographer that regularly follows the parade. The photographer was not from New Orleans but had fallen in love with the city and decided to relocate. He discussed with me at length about how he admired the skills of the dancers and he referenced specifically the dance battle that sometimes occurs in second lining. In these dance battles, two or more individuals will casually come face to face and dance with each other. There is a back-and-forth energy that turns into competition. Each dancer is

trying to out-dance the other by demonstrating the best skills. At one point, as the photographer explained, one dancer prevails over the other, and when this happens, both dancers acknowledge the win. He told me that in his years of following second line culture, he was still unable to determine why the victorious dancer won. The photographer said there was a shared understanding of the “win” that he was yet to grasp.

The photographer’s inability to fully understand the “win” in a battle is due to his status as an outsider. His time photographing and learning the culture was not enough for him to understand the community’s habitus and thereby fully read the embodied knowledge in the dance battles, while the dancers and second line community possessed a deeper understanding of the mastery. Note, I am unclear if the photographer danced at second lines. During my observation, I only witnessed him walking and taking photos; it is possible that dancing could have heightened his understanding of the practice. This example demonstrates how difficult (or sometimes how impossible) it can be for an outsider to fully contextualize a dance event without the intimate insider knowledge of intangible aspects of the dance culture.

The Spectacle of Black Dance

Black social dance is easily interpreted as a spectacle. This is due to the racialization of Black bodies and the larger society’s need to place dance in a system of capitalism. The work of both Stuart Hall (1997) and Susan L. Foster (2019) explores spectacularization as a result of societal forces. Hall recognizes that Black people are defined as a spectacle through the act of “othering.” Through the process of stereotyping, fetishizing, and disavowal, Black people become grand performances of difference. Foster investigates the spectacularization of dance as a part of a system of capitalism. She analyzes how dance is assigned value through its

transformation into a commodity. In the process of assigning dance a value that individuals are willing to financially support, dance is sensationalized in order to make it “striking, marvelous, or alluring” and this task is achieved by movement that is “pushed to the limits of what is physically possible, or movement [that] is infused with exotic or sexualized appeal” (Foster 2019, 58).

Within these frameworks, Black social dance obtains value or usefulness in American society because it is spectacularized through the process of “othering.” Following the explanation provided by Foster, Black social dance is spectacularized in two main ways. First, due to the nature of Black dance, Black dance appears sensational to those without the cultural knowledge to read it. As described by some of its main aesthetic characteristics, Black dance focuses on the intensity of contrast, a youthful approach to movement, embracing opposites, and engaging multiple centers of movement and rhythm. For outsiders, these characteristics can be a jolt to the senses. Thus, viewers can be taken aback by what is perceived as drama and be unaware of the cultural and historical context, nuance of execution, and mastery of performance. For dance theorist Thomas F. DeFrantz (2016), Black dance is perceived to be a spectacle because of its instability. DeFrantz states,

The oppositional force of Black social dance tends to stem from its novelty; from the places where it differs from normative, habituated movement. This is both the problem and the resourcefulness of social dance. Its contents are unstable, even when bound by name or genre; its practice tends toward the crucial subject category of “expression.” The dancing body is lively and animated, unusual in its portrayal of emotional valence tied to physical possibility (72-73).

I posit that the “unstable contents” that DeFrantz recognizes are the core aesthetic characteristics of Black dance. Yet, I argue that Black dance is only perceived as unstable by outsiders. To its

community members, these characteristics are what make the dance stable and legible.

Therefore, when comparing Black dance to dance cultures within the dominant culture, Black dance will always appear unsteady.

Secondly, due to the “othering” of Black people, Black dancing bodies are often exoticized and sexualized in mainstream narratives. In the process of “othering”, Black dance is defined through its difference from the norm, which is most often defined through Whiteness. The h/b/p dancing body is subject to narratives that singularly interpret it as sexual. Due to the societal tension around this part of the body and a long history of restraining h/b/p movement in White/Euro-centered spaces, the moving h/b/p is easily reduced to a spectacle; the fetishization and opposition to the moving h/b/p – discussed in Chapter 2 – contributes to why it is viewed in this way. The h/b/p is hypersexualized and historically associated with the so called “deviancy” and “lewd nature” of Black women. Along with the lack of literacy around moving h/b/p, this is what makes it a risqué spectacle. With the current popularity of twerking and the h/b/p in popular culture, mainstream culture is going through a period of tolerance for the h/b/p.

This tolerance is short-lived when children are involved. While scrolling through Facebook in August of 2022, I came across a video of a group of children performing the majorette/dance team style. It was a team of approximately 13 girls around the ages of 8-10 years old. The team wore tight-fitting red sequined costumes consisting of a long halter top and shorts with fabric draped around the back and the sides – from certain angles the shorts appeared to be a skirt due to the draping fabric. The girls also had on tights that matched their skin tone flesh with

matching red sequined fabric at the ankle. With about an inch of their bellies exposed, these costumes conformed to the average jazz/tap dance wear of children.¹⁹

The video begins with a lead dancer throwing her arms to the side like she was challenging the audience and then nonchalantly fixing her hair. Subsequently, the rest of the team followed her movements. Next, while the team stood in their performance stance – bodies facing forward with their hands on their hips and their left leg extended forward in a ballet tendu - the lead dancer performed a movement phrase. The movement phrase mostly involved the young dancer performing the bucking movement. Bucking is a major dance movement in the majorette/dance team tradition that involves the dancer sitting in a low second position or in a deep plie and popping their pelvis forward and back. While not all teams use the movement in their style, collegiate teams like the Jackson State University Prancing J-Settes were known to buck in their performances.²⁰ Over time, the bucking movement has become less visible in HBCU teams' movement vocabulary. However, for youth teams, bucking is a major staple of their aesthetic and most youth teams will display some form of bucking in their performance.

After the lead dancer finished the short dance phrase, she performed the phrase again with the whole team. Then, the team performed the phrase one more time while the lead dancer extended one leg to her face in a standing split. The video ends with a girl on the end jumping to

¹⁹ Online, I reviewed the children's dance costumes for sale at two dance wear companies, Discount Dance Supply and Dancewear Solutions. Particularly regarding what was on sale for the jazz and tap genre, the companies sold costumes with similar shapes and designs as the costumes worn by the young girls in the video. In fact, Dancewear Solutions has on sale a version of the exact same costume worn by the girl teams.

²⁰ The Fabulous Dancing Dolls pride themselves on not including bucking into their performance. I was told this is because they have more of a classy approach to their dancing and choreography.

the floor with her legs extended to each side in a wide second position and the rest of the team throwing up their hands again as a challenge to the audience.

The video was posted by Southern Heritage Classic (SHC) with the captions “Let the Good Times roll Memphis.” Additionally, SHC tagged the main dancers name in the post followed by “ready for war baby 🥰!! 🔥”. It is clear that SHC posted the video to highlight the virtuosity of the dancers, particularly the lead dancer. The reference to war describes the way the dancers attacked the movement and the force displayed in their deep pelvic thrust. Yet, in alignment with the aesthetic of the cool, the lead dancer exhibits a level of composure in the clarity of her movement and the expressions on her face. In her performance, she displays a confidence that states, “I know what I’m doing and I dare anyone to challenge me.”

In addition to providing praise for the dance team, SHC is also giving a nod to the local Memphis dance culture. Dancers in the video come from a local Memphis dance academy, the Ladia Yates Entertainment Academy or L.Y.E Academy. The school is founded and run by Ladia Yates, a commercial dancer in the entertainment industry. Yates specializes in Black social dance forms with a particular focus on the local street dance style, “Memphis Jookin”. During her career, she has performed with major recording artists like Usher, Missy Elliot, and Janelle Monae. As well, she and the school were featured on the TV show *So You Think You Can Dance*. The academy focuses on teaching youth Black social dance forms like hip hop and majorette/dance teams forms. In fact, their mission “is to create industry opportunities for the youth in our community, keep them active and inspire them to make great decisions in life whether in the entertainment field or abroad” (L.Y.E. Academy, n.d.).

Additionally, by posting the video, SHC also highlights Memphis's HBCU majorette culture/dance team culture. As the main HBCU classic in Memphis, SHC has a finger on the pulse of HBCU culture in the area. As mentioned in Chapter 1, HBCU classics are football games between two rival HBCU teams. They occur annually in the same location and normally feature the same two teams each year. Classic events bring thousands of people to a city to take part in the weekend experience. In addition to the football game, classics feature other events around the main game, like concerts, parties, step shows, and a parade. As well, a battle of the bands (BOTB) is a central feature of most classic events. The BOTB is either a formal or informal competition between the bands and dancers of different schools. Sometimes, the BOTB is as simple as the bands of the two rival schools performing at halftime during the main football game and at other times it is a full event separate from the game that includes the bands of multiple different schools competing for a title. By posting the video, SHC brought attention to its own culture and the HBCU cultural work of its local community.

While SHC posted the video in a moment of pride, the video went viral and was met with negative criticism. Most of the criticism surfaced from the perception that the dancing and the costuming were too adult and sexual for children. The implication was that by performing these movements, the youths will be exposed to or will indulge in adult sexual behavior. These comments came from both White individuals, Black individuals, and people from other ethnicities. Here are a few of the negative comments from the 7.8 thousand comments from the post:

Maybe if we stop teaching them to do this, they would be at home instead of in a grown man's bed.

They are definitely too young to be dancing like this. This is very unacceptable behavior. Why do parents allow their children to do stuff like that? This is not right! You are supposed to protect your children and let them do stuff like this for the whole world to see. Please watch your children and stop this. This is not good. These children are growing up too fast...

Why do these young ladies need to know how to twerk? There are many other appropriate dance moves for them to learn.

Honestly, they have wasted the talent they were blessed with to hump the air and call it dance. It's sad and they look silly. And being silly isn't exactly the type of performance to give goosebumps or standing ovations. I wish the best for the kids. They need a new choreographer.

Please... Even their uniforms skirts are cut shorter in the front to reveal more crotch while performing the moves. Why is that even necessary? ...

The criticisms also came from individuals who claimed to be dance professionals. Here are two of their comments:

As a former dancer, there is no depth to the choreography. It's a repeat of the same 4 eight counts. At that age, the routine should not be mainly booty popping, but just at the height or end of the routine. It's clear the girls are very talented.

As a dancer myself, ALL OF THIS IS INAPPROPRIATE, and it's not truly considered dance. First kids shouldn't be posted on social media. Underage girls/boys should not be twerking, popping their 🐼, legs should not be gapped open, doing sexual dances. My father WOULD NEVER ALLOW THIS. Children can dance, express themselves artistically, w/o sexual music, adult music, and being sexualized. To hear BW [Black women] in the back cheering is unbelievable. None of this is cute, this is not talent, this is sad. Period? They are going to ruin their hips, pelvis, etc. doing dead drop on the floor. Let me mind my business tho 🙌.

Many of the posts expressed concerns over exposing the children to pedophiles, pedophilia behavior, and child trafficking; many individuals felt that by posting this video, child predators are being encouraged to target children.

... The problem is not them dancing per say. Although I agree it's too sexual in this case. The problem is the sick world we live in where horrible, disgusting people get off on this

every single day. Little girls and boys being sold on the dark web. It's sick. No, the girls probably don't get. But as adults, we do and as adults and parents we need to do better for our children...

Chile whatever, I've been shapely since forever and wore baggy clothes as a child. Never dance like this but yet was violated since a tender age. This bs here really draws the attention of a vulgar man.

While the criticism was overwhelming, there were some commenters that came to defend the video. Many of these supporters were familiar with the culture.

I'm trying to see where you people see gyrating and grinding sexually? THIS IS A SPORT? My mother was a majorette...anything you want to be good at or recognized for you have to train up your children early these days! It's COMPETITION. These girls are having fun and y'all will probably be watching them on someone's field on tv one day! #GOGETTEMGIRLS

I love it! As a professional Dancer growing up in the south to moving to NYC to LA working with A list Artist. Now being a mother. There is NOTHING wrong with this. The energy is THERE. The facials are ATTITUDE exuding confidence! If you're sexualizing it, you definitely must not be from the south or have any familiarity with this style of dance. No one is being touched and only TALENT is being showcased. Half of your daughters couldn't even make the team if they couldn't move like this, you wouldn't have to worry about "letting them join". It's tryout which means any girl you see here earned her SPOT. All these young ladies are destined for greatness. If I have a daughter I would be proud to let her join & excel in the arts. Most sheltered girls I went to school with were the first ones pregnant. So do not put your negative stereotypes on these young innovative talented girls.

As a dancer myself there is NOTHING wrong with majorette dancing. If it's not your cup of tea don't watch it or comment on it simple. Y'all adults need to find better business than to be worried about some little girls !

Y'all must never watched dancing dolls??? 🤔🤔🤔 GO CRAZY LIL LADIES

Admittedly, I joined the conversation to defend the performance and culture displayed in the video. I responded,

A lot of these comments are sad and prove many people's lack of knowledge about movement, Black dance, and truly a whole genre of dancing. Black folks around the

world have been moving our bodies like this throughout time. It's vulgar because you are making it that. Also, in the dance world, what they are wearing is no different than children at a ballet performance wearing leotards and tights.

My post generated 557 likes – including a nod from Ladia Yates – and over 216 comments and responses. In the comments and responses to my post, I debated with people about their perceptions of the sexualization of the dance, their issues with the video encouraging pedophilia, their understanding of Black dance/culture and majorette/dance team culture, and their issues with the children's costumes.

I mentioned the example of the youth team to demonstrate how Black dance is spectacularized and misread by those outside of the communities that foster it. For the viewers unfamiliar with bucking and the majorette/dance team practice, the dance was a hypersexual spectacle because it sensationalized h/b/p movement beyond their comfort level. I argue that this sentiment is the result of the use of the h/b/p along with other Africanist movement aesthetics. During the performance, the dancers ignited a forceful and aggressive display of their dancing h/b/p while simultaneously challenging competitors with their facial expressions. As the movement vibrated through their bodies in a display of polyrhythms, vitality, and power, the bucking movement was juxtaposed with their identity as little girls. The force of the bucking movement was more in alignment with masculine qualities. This type of movement works against society's framing of girls as innocent, kind, generous, and empathetic. Eventually, girls with these characteristics are supposed to mature into polite, accommodating, and nurturing women. Therefore, polite tamed girls should not aggressively thrust their pelvises.

These attributes work in concert with respectability politics. One of the rules of respectable "ladylike" behavior is always keeping one's legs closed; girls and women are

supposed to abide by this rule to ensure their chastity remains intact. Open legs are treated as an indication of a woman's willingness and desire to engage in sexual activity and publicly opening one's legs is perceived to be an open invitation for anyone's sexual advances. As mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3, Black women, and girls especially, have to work against narratives that define them as hypersexual. Therefore, for some, little Black girls bucking vigorously is threatening to the resolve and viability of Black women and girl children and their work to resist hypersexual narratives.

Intracommunal Literacy

Creative communities form their own standards and aesthetics for generating their cultural materials, which may function inside and outside of mainstream narratives. These cultural products are influenced by the dominant culture and other external narratives, yet may operate within the community's own value system that may not be legible to outsiders. The community members combine external influences with language, body behaviors, activities, social interactions, and mores that are particular to the dance team community, such as bucking and stand performances. The creolization of these external and internal influences creates an experience that defines a community and its Black habitus.

Dance is a language that can be understood by those with the education or sensibilities to interpret it. In his chapter, "The Black Beat Made Visible: Hip Hop Dance and Body Power," DeFrantz (2004) discusses the readability of Black social dance. DeFrantz posits that dance has "speechlike qualities that contain meaning beyond the formal, aesthetic shapes and sequences of movement detailed by the body in motion" (66). Therefore, through dance, dancer's bodies speak

and can also be read. Additionally, DeFrantz recognizes the failure of some to read and interpret Black dance. He states,

While stationary audiences may sense the imperative power of hip hop dance, they often fail to interpret the movements effectively; they fail to read the dances as actionable. Without recourse to the spiritual vocabulary that inspires movement, without talking back with the body, it may be impossible to interpret and write about black social dances effectively (79).

In this assertion, DeFrantz attributes the inability to read dance to one's lack of body engagement with the material; DeFrantz suggests that performing Black social dance supports a person's literacy in the movement. While I agree that performing educates the dancing person about the language of movement, I posit that nondancing community members can also acquire and possess the literacy to read these dances because they have been acquainted within and/or trained in the cultural material and its nuances.

What constitutes membership in a community? I argue that it is different for each community and the community sets up this criterion. For example, in New Orleans, community members value a person's longevity in the community. I interviewed a local Black DJ who expressed the limits of his belonging. He was in his early 30s and had lived in New Orleans since he was in the 7th grade. However, because he didn't spend his entire childhood in New Orleans, he was not completely embraced as a full New Orleanian. He explains by stating,

People want to know your background because people in New Orleans are really proud of their heritage and where they come from. So, they want you to pay respect for the fact that you weren't born with us. You didn't had to deal with walking to the corner store and getting nachos with you mama holding... It's all that little stuff, you know. So, a lot of people, they say what ward you are from, right really. Are you from the 6th ward. Oh then, you know Auntie Carol and them. If you don't know Auntie Carol and them, they looking at you sideways.

In the local artist's explanation, he reveals how the values of the community determine a person's membership. While not their only reason for inclusion, the people of New Orleans value history and heritage as one major criterion; to be considered a full member of that community, you have to locate yourself and your family within that history and heritage. It is important to note that there are multiple factors that determine a person's inclusion in a community; some of which can be race/ethnicity, family origin, economic status, etc.

While an outsider may be able to identify the external influences within a community, they possess a limited understanding of the internal community mores and values. This can result in a false sense of literacy. In the youth dance team example above, community outsiders may have recognized youth dance performances, as youth performance showcases are a visible staple of the U.S. dance-studio culture. They may also be familiar with the music, jazz dance costuming, and some of the movement vocabulary. Additionally, many may have recognized and identified with the performance location. In the youth example, the performance location appears to be an older U.S. public school or public location. I came to these conclusions due to the location's white tiled laminate flooring, the dropped ceiling with a few stained panels, rectangular fluorescent ceiling lights, and red lit "exit" sign over glass double doors. Additionally, throughout the performance, the audience was activated in the tradition of call and response as they cheered in English certain words like "hey", "what", and "period". Due to these details, the video was read as a performance that occurred within the U.S. By knowing and understanding general mainstream American culture, many may believe they have enough context to assess these performances. What is evident in the comments, however, is that this is

preliminary recognition emboldened some individuals to believe they possess enough intracommunal literacy to judge these performances.

Additionally, it is important to note that race and ethnicity are not always the sole and stable criteria for inclusion into a culture community. While the participants in these communities are often of the same racial and ethnic background, being of that same racial and ethnic background does not provide you with automatic membership, nor does it always give you an understanding of the mores and values of that community. Black and African diasporic culture is not homogenous; these communities are diverse and maintain their own individual mores and values. Therefore, outsiders of the same racial and ethnic identity as the cultural community can possess a false sense of literacy and misread the cultural values, mores, and materials of that community. This is why many of the comments criticizing the youth dance team performance came from Black people. Black people do not always possess intracommunal literacy in all Black spaces. Thus, other factors like class, gender, nationality, regional location or community relationships, to name a few, affect understandings and knowledge. Furthermore, in situations dealing with the moving h/b/p, Black folks are still working through a legacy of respectability politics, the internalization of White supremacy, and ongoing colonialism. Without internal communal understanding and context of a particular set of mores and values, Black folks can replicate some of the same responses and behaviors as dominant culture folks.

Within the work of understanding and interpreting culture (Flaskerud 2009; Gurney, Muyanga and Pieterse 2022; Campbell Peck, Flower, and Higgins 1995; Wood, Landry, and Bloomfield 2006), community literacy, legibility, cultural competency, and cultural literacy are used to grapple with internal cultural knowledge. These terms, with their minor nuanced

differences, are deployed as tools for cross cultural knowledge building and to provide outsiders with a bridge to understand diverse communities. For example, cultural competency is frequently utilized by the medical and health sciences to support medical professionals' efforts to provide services to different groups of people. Likewise, Wood, Landry, and Bloomfield (2006) define cultural literacy to be the "ability to read, understand and find significance of diverse cultures and, as a consequence, to be able to evaluate, compare and decode the varied cultures that are interwoven in a place" (20). Yet, what separates them collectively from intracommunal literacy, my proposed theoretical concept, is how they frame engagement with outsiders of a cultural community. Cultural competency, cultural literacy, and the other terms are built on the idea that in order for these communities to receive the justice and proper treatment they deserve by the larger society, they need to be understood. However, with intracommunal literacy, I argue that certain information may never be known by outsiders. Therefore, instead of basing their equitable treatment on understanding of these niche groups, outsiders would do well to support these groups in obtaining and maintaining their human and civil rights. At the very least outsiders should get out of their way and withhold judgment, because everyone is entitled to fair treatment. If we do not understand cultural values, attitudes, and related activities, how can we know what equitable treatment is? I suggest we ask these communities what they need and deserve and trust their ability to advocate for themselves. I argue that the members of the larger society must divest from paternalistic notions that they know what is right, wrong, and needed for other groups. Furthermore, I contend this paternalism stems from the need to control and have power over these groups. With their perceived "knowledge" of these groups, entities in power too often get to control these communities' access to resources and services.

Intracommunal Literacy of Majorette/Dance Teams

Majorette/dance team practice is supported by creative communities versed in the movement vocabulary and nuance of this type of performance. Members of these communities understand the practice beyond the sexualization and exoticization of h/b/p. In the youth team example above, the SHC, L.Y.E Academy, and the post commenters familiar with the culture of majorette/dance team performance possess the intracommunal literacy to read and contextualize the youth team's performance fairly and appropriately. They have the ability to judge if, in fact, a dance team has over-stepped community boundaries surrounding sexuality and explicitness. Majorette/dance team community members read skill, artistry, and proficiency, while those outside of cultural communities may view these performances as dangerous, sexually suggestive, and exploitative to youth. One of the commenters supported this claim by stating,

Those of us from the south know what it is 🔥🔥🔥...if not it's okay. Because you are unfamiliar with this style of group dancing don't be hateful and acting all colonial. These young girls killed the routine like they said. PERIOD

Additionally, these communities are not homogenous and each has its own particular priorities when it comes to performance quality. Performance priorities are dictated by multiple factors including the team's identity (youth team, queer team, HBCU dance lines, etc.), the venue of their performances (competitions, sporting events, parades, night clubs, music concert, etc.), and the music they use during performance (whether marching band derived or from a musical recording.) For example, HBCU dance lines, the teams that perform as auxiliaries of the marching band, are expected to be more polished and professional than youth teams. The HBCU

dance line teams are considered to be the celebrities of the majorette/dance team genre and are the major influencers of the entire practice.

The venue of the performance serves as a significant factor in how the performance is understood and interpreted. For example, queer teams that perform within small crowded nightclub spaces may battle face to face with an opposing team. At these venues, the performers and the audience experience an increased sense of intimacy due to the up and close atmosphere. In these close quarters, dancers are influenced by the audience's response and they may alter their performance in real time because of this direct feedback. However, dance line teams' stadium performances operate differently than club performances. Whereas the intimacy of the audience and other teams are woven into the performance experience for night club dancers, the dance line teams are completely separated from their audience by distance due to the performers' placement in the stadium. Because of this distance between the opposing performers and the audience, the performers are able to engage in a heightened level of pageantry in their performance. Dance line team performances with marching bands are grand spectacles and require space to implement. Additionally, a dance team may perform in more than one type of venue and each type of space creates a different performance and way for viewing it. For example, queer teams, besides performing in nightclubs, perform in competitions, at community events, and in performances on a proscenium stage.

One of the most noticeable elements in majorette/dance team culture is the use of video recordings and social media. When dance line teams began over 50 years ago, viewers had to be in the stands or at a performance to see the dancers. Now, with the evolution of technology, team performances are visible to anyone with the internet. Particularly for HBCU teams, every

performance is documented by several professional videographers, as well as anyone with a camera phone. The introduction of this technology resulted in some major shifts in the culture of majorette/dance teams. One is the introduction of online communities that support and patronize the practice. These communities demonstrate the expansion of community and its intracommunal literacy to new spaces. In this next section, I explore the existence of Black culture and community in the virtual space.

Internet as a Tool for Black Communities

The introduction of the internet and social media into the lexicon of American popular culture initiated a shift in cultural materials. Through the various iterations of the digital and virtual platforms, cultures are being engaged, produced, and shared in a new way. As is common in many cultural communities around the world, the way Black cultural communities utilize virtual space affects and determines how Black communities produce culture and are affected by political forces, as well as how Black communities interact with political forces.

Scholars have begun to identify and investigate the ways in which Black communities surface and take up space and surface on the internet and social media. As one of the major uses, scholars identified Black folks' use of the internet as a means to counteract White supremacy (Lee 2017; Klassen et al. 2021; Knight Steele 2018; Schuschke and Tynes 2016; Sutherland 2019). Social and political resisters shifted their methods to align with the current tools and technology available to them. Thus, in this contemporary moment of social resistance to racism and anti-Black policies and behaviors, social activists are using digital technology as a tool to support their activities against anti-Black politics and behaviors.

The videos documenting the deaths of individuals such as George Floyd, Eric Garner, and Philando Castile were instrumental in galvanizing people to take to the streets and demand justice. People shared tragic videos through social media before mainstream media decided to display the contents of these videos. Through social media, Black people were able to bring stories to the national spotlight and force a response from the legal system and politicians. Two recent examples of this are the cases of Ralph Yarl and Jordan Neely. In April of 2023, Ralph Yarl, a Black 16-year-old bass clarinet player, was shot twice after ringing the doorbell of an 84-year-old White man (Calfée 2024). Yarl was attempting to pick up his younger siblings from a friend's house and was mistakenly given the wrong address by his mother. Andrew Lester, the shooter, shot Yarl through a glass door without exchanging words with the teenager. Yarl then had to knock on the doors of several neighbors before anyone would give him assistance. Initially, law enforcement released Lester after several hours of questioning him without any charges filed against him. Outraged by the release of Lester, Yarl's family posted a video on social media condemning the lack of action by local law enforcement and asking for support. It was not until the story went viral and was shared by celebrities that the authorities finally brought charges against Lester.

Luckily, Yarl survived the shooting and was released from the hospital days later. However, Jordan Neely was not so fortunate in his attack. Neely was a 30-year-old man experiencing homelessness and mental health issues (BBC 2023). On May 1, 2023, Neely entered a New York City train yelling he was hungry and he was ready to die. Daniel Penny, a 24-year-old Marine veteran, surprised Neely from behind, placed him in a choke hold, and

eventually killed him. It was not until after the medical examiner declared Neely's death a homicide and online Black community online demanded justice that Penny was finally charged.

These cases demonstrate how Black folks have used social media, a tool originally for pleasure, and shifted it to be a resource for political action (Campbell and Valera 2020; Sung 2021; Williams 2021). Sociologist Latoya A. Lee (2017) considers social media to be a theoretical playground that is transformed into a battleground by Black folks. Because social media gives an individual or group the opportunity to access a large audience, people are able to directly share information and organize others without relying on third party media sources.

Additionally, social media is used as a medium for Black folks to connect and create safe spaces. Several scholars have focused on how Black communities use social media to find ways to navigate and survive White supremacy. For example, Information Studies scholar Tonia Sutherland (2019) and Klassen et al (2021) studied travel groups as a means to give Black travelers information on how to safely travel and find locations affirming their identity. These travel groups and blogs are akin to *The Negro Motorists Green Book (The Green Book)*. *The Green Book*, created by postal worker Victor Green, was a travel guide published from 1932 to 1966 that gave Black people information on safe places to travel throughout the United States (Sutherland 2019; Klassen et al. 2021; Dillette, Benjamin, and Carpenter 2019). Similar to *The Green Book*, these travel groups and pages provide Black folk with information on how to navigate white supremacy while pursuing pleasure and enjoyment. Sutherland speaks to how Black people have shifted the architecture of social media to function as a space of liberation. Through developing autonomous and anointed spaces, Black people shift the structure of social

media to work against White supremacy and provide Black folks with spaces where they feel safer, if not freer.

While these scholars provide useful information on how Black folks are using the internet to fight anti-Black behavior and actions, many of their arguments are centered around Black people negotiating around Whiteness. Yet, Black people find enjoyment on the internet that is not directly in conflict with regimes of Whiteness. Communications scholar Catherine Knight Steele (2018) posits that online spaces are a continuation of Black folks' communal oral traditions and offline conversations. Therefore, social media is a space for Black communities to continue to flourish.

Knight Steele recognizes that online spaces reflect the diversity in Black communal spaces. Communication Studies scholar Catherine Squires (2002) recognizes the diversity of Black communal configurations by utilizing philosopher Nancy Fraser's (1990) theorization of the "counterpublic." The counterpublic is a recognition that marginalized people occupy a separate public existence from the dominant public sphere. Frazier acknowledges that marginalized people use multiple types of public spheres to achieve their autonomy and resist regimes of power. Squires is specifically interested in the Black public that she describes as a collective of people, "who (a) engage in common discourses and negotiations of what it means to be Black, and (b) pursue particularly defined Black interests" (454). Squires posits three types of Black publics: the enclave, counterpublic, and the satellite. Enclaves are publics where the members hide their counter hegemonic ideas from the dominant public for their protection and survival. Within enclaves, members are a part of an active discourse regarding these ideas and themes, but this material does not leave the safety of the group. Counterpublic groups leave the

safety of their enclaves to have open discussion with other publics in order to push actions and agendas in favor of their group. Counterpublics are connected to direct social resistance in the form of protest to persuade actions from state actors and other dominant publics. Out of these three publics, counterpublics are more susceptible to violence due to their open engagement with counter discourses. The last Black public Squires theorizes is satellite publics. Satellite publics exist mostly in solitude from other publics. They do this less as a survival mechanism against oppression than as a way to maintain their cohesive identity. However, when it is in their best interests, satellites will enter larger public discourse when there is a need to advance their interests.

Internet as an Extension of the Majorette/Dance Team Community

Over time, the internet and social media have become a major force in majorette/dance team culture and caused shifts in the performance practices of the teams and the bands. As Steele identified, these groups use the online space as an extension of their oral communal practices. As the Black majorette practice is mostly outside the view of dominant culture, these communities continue to operate as such in the online sphere. In this manner, they operate as satellites.

Claire Milburn's (2019) research on marching bands reveals that before the current culture of social media, dance teams and bands would develop one or two main field shows and stand performances that they use all season. Since audiences had to physically attend games and performances to see the groups perform, teams were only concerned with providing their in-person crowds with an entertaining experience. Now, because every performance is shared on the internet, fans expect to see new content every week. Since the dance teams and the bands are

fiercely competitive, performers use each week as an opportunity to demonstrate their superior skills and to appease their fans.

Additionally, while I argue that majorette/dance team culture functions as a satellite public, its online presence is both visible to and hidden from the general public. Online fan groups are mostly exclusive and often individuals have to correctly answer questions based on the history and culture of dance teams to gain entry. Thus, members are required to demonstrate they have intracommunal literacy to join. However, YouTube videos and material posted to the teams', bands', and other affiliated groups' official social media is publicly visible. Therefore, outsiders of the community can access content pertaining to the teams. The youth team video discussed earlier in this chapter is an example of majorette/dance team content being publicly accessible. Yet, individuals with no communal or cultural connections to majorette/dance teams are less likely to come across this content. This is because an individual's experience on social media is mostly regulated by a complex set of factors based on the individual's online habits and behaviors. Media companies created software and mathematical algorithms that track user actions and present material to us based on this information. For example, if you watch videos about majorette/dance teams, engage in HBCU culture online, or view dance material based in Black vernacular practices similar to the teams, you are more likely to come across content related to the teams on social media. While the internet appears to be an open medium to interact with unlimited amounts of information generated from infinite sources, it operates like a silo and what someone experiences is curated by social media companies and advertisers. Therefore, openly accessible majorette/dance team material remains mostly hidden from individuals outside of the culture.

Yet, because content on the teams and the culture is accessible to outsiders with little intracommunal literacy, these materials can make teams vulnerable to outside judgment and recourse. Ethnomusicologist Kyra Gaunt (2015) frames the vulnerability of Black content in the context collapse theory. Context Collapse is often used to describe the culture of social media and refers to what happens when individuals and groups of different mores, values, and traditions are placed in the same environment. When this occurs, groups of multiple contexts are collapsed into one. Therefore, a person loses their ability to perform different versions of themselves for specific audiences and their multiple selves are exposed to everyone. Without the specific contexts or in some instances I would call intracommunal literacy, individuals and groups can receive backlash caused by a lack of understanding of the original context. For example, people outside of the majorette/dance team community judge and make comments about the practice without understanding the specifics of the community.

Gaunt (2015) recognizes that the singular context that becomes the default in social media is grounded in White cultural norms and often anti-Black behavior. Therefore, societal views about marginalized groups surface on social media and frame how content created by folks of color is viewed and analyzed on these platforms. Gaunt is specifically concerned about the repercussions of young Black girls twerking on YouTube. She recognizes that the context viewers bring to these videos is laced in negative stereotypes and misinformation about Black women, girls and their bodies. Gaunt points to the long-term social and professional implications these young girls may experience. Since content uploaded on the internet can never be truly erased, young girls can experience negative repercussions that could impact future opportunities. While Gaunt's argument does not consider the worldmaking these young dancers are

participating in that exists outside of mainstream cultural norms, nor that this new world they are creating can generate fruitful future possibilities for them, Gaunt's analysis does support the argument for the need for safe spaces for online cultural content and marginal communities online.

As Black folks have carved out safe spaces online to engage in cultural material and exercise their autonomy, these spaces are subject to internal derisive discourse that can question the true safety of these spaces. Sutherland recognizes that online Black spaces are not necessarily safe, but rather, safer spaces for Black folk. She cites the fact that these spaces often adhere to "ritualized relationships and codified behaviors" that can be exclusionary to "those who exist at the intersection of identity groups" (Sutherland 2019, 2188), meaning these spaces can be unwelcoming to certain types of Black folk or can push rhetoric that is limiting to the Black experience.

For majorette/dance team performers, social media can be a battleground of harsh criticism from members of their own cultural community. Every performance and movement of the dancers is highly scrutinized. Community members judge the dancer's execution of movements, choreography, style, costumes, hair, make-up, costumes, and etc. The video recordings of the dancers' performances are the engine behind this activity. Before videos of the performances were frequently recorded and heavily circulated, dance team performances were an ephemeral experience for audience members. Viewers had to rely on their memories of the performances to discuss, analyze, and admire the performances. Thus, fine details of the performances were fleeting. Now, viewers have a more permanent record of performance details that can be watched and rewatched; each detail of these performances can be dissected and

scrutinized by audience members. Therefore, dancers on these teams are subject to positive but also very negative comments about their performances and body appearance. As the main celebrities of the practice, HBCU dance line teams are often the subjects of criticism and receive the brunt of this scrutiny. In a self-published autobiography about her time as an Alabama State University Stingette, Asia N. Martin (2021) discusses the emotional toll of the constant surveillance of their performances and overall personal life.

As a "public figure" on campus and to the HBCU Dance community, we are praised and admired. Still, we are also constantly over-analyzed, lied on, and ridiculed by people who seem to think that we are not real; like we don't cry, or bleed, or say "ouch," when something hurts. We receive a lot of ill-informed—and many times, vicious criticism from those on the outside looking in. When you are working your absolute hardest to withstand all that pressure, the last thing you want to see at the end of the day is hate being spewed from faceless and nameless people hiding behind screen names, with fake avis, no couth, and no credentials (20).

Martin reveals that the internet is not a safe space for dancers. In fact, dancers have to protect themselves from the dangers of social media. As previously mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3, HBCU dancers are required to silence their private social media accounts or delete their accounts altogether. These requirements serve two main purposes. First, they protect dancers from their personal content being used against them. As public figures within the culture, dancers are highly visible to these groups and content about them is consumed, dissected, and used for other purposes. Therefore, any content about them can easily be used to fuel negative criticism and lies about them and the team.

Secondly, teams manage their public image through this restriction. In Chapter 3, I discuss how dancers are silenced in this practice and they become the objects of male heterosexual fantasy. Moreover, mediated public appearances of the dancers support the ideals of

respectability. Dancers are required to maintain a certain level of respectability in their actions and behaviors. One of the mores of respectability is rising above criticism and perceived negative behaviors. Thus, dancers are restricted from addressing internet feedback and producing content that would fuel negative ideas about them. Except for mediated content produced by the teams, dancers are silenced from public commentary and are unable to defend themselves from internet criticism. Therefore, in the online space, HBCU performers have little agency and are required to quietly endure what is produced about them. Thus, while social media can be a safe space for the members of this satellite community, it can also be hostile for the dancers.

While the virtual supporters of the majorette/dance team practice are engaging in Black communal practices, they are not operating in a vacuum and are therefore subject to the mores and norms of general internet culture. In this way, the majorette/dance team online community replicates some of the broader problematic behaviors of people on the internet. Due to the possibility of anonymity on the internet, individuals are emboldened to say things they would likely not articulate in person. Therefore, the internet can be a space for people to spew anger, hate, and disrespect.

Over time, the online majorette/dance team community has begun to self-regulate their commentary. At least in the groups I observe, I noticed an effort to focus mostly on positive and funny content and scale back on highly critical and judgmental posts. Yet, many posts continue to focus on comparing dancers' performances, costumes, and choreography, which can still cause stress or concern for the dancers.

Majorette/dance team online communities represent one example of how Black folks show up in online spaces. While Black communities are able to leverage the engine of social

media to resist White supremacy, they are able to use social media to meet their needs and expand their communal possibilities. Yet, marginalized communities are always negotiating their safety whether virtually or in person. As evident in the internal behaviors of the virtual majorette/dance team community, the lines of safety are not just drawn down the lines of race. Online communities may not be safe for some folks within and on the fringes of their cultural community. Therefore, the internet is a complicated and evolving space for Black communities to exist and thrive.

Conclusion

Communities have cultural specificity that lives within its people. Intracommunal literacy is derived from a community's embodied knowledge and through its literacy, communities participate in worldmaking that sustains the community's existence. Black and other marginalized communities create spaces where they feel some level of safety due to shared aesthetic values and commonalities within cultural understandings.

Outsiders can easily misunderstand and misrepresent these distinct cultural communities; their actions and reactions can be significant to marginalized communities, which who operate outside of the view of mainstream cultural norms. Black communities are susceptible to attacks that could work against their interests and well-being. Black majorette/dance communities in particular, but also similar communities, which are formed around a physical movement practice (like queer and youth dance teams), are further at risk of these attacks because they engage the body in a manner not embraced or fully understood by mainstream culture and narratives. Due to messaging about the Black body in discourse informed by White supremacy, these Black dance communities are also defending the Black body against ideals that label it as inferior, untamed,

hypersexual, and grotesque. Therefore, without intercommunal literacy, I argue it is best for most folks to refrain from judging and compromising these communities. Instead, they should seek to understand and recognize their positionality as an outsider.

Further, Black communities have embraced the internet as a tool to resist White supremacy and continue their own communal discourse. In moments when violence against Black folks is ignored and erased by the mainstream or when matters arise that need more widespread attention, the Black community uses the internet to fight for justice and their existence. Additionally, Black folks use social media to connect and expand the reach of their communities outside of the full view of the mainstream. For majorette/dance team communities and other satellite communities, they are able to expand communal conversations and discourse through the tool of the internet, while staying under the radar of non-community members.

While these virtual satellite and enclave communities may offer some protection from those outside their community, they must still grapple with their internal politics, which can mean further isolation for some within the collectives. For majorette/dance team members, they have to protect themselves first from their internet communities. These dancers are critiqued and are forced to keep silent on internet platforms even when they are under attack. People on the internet and social media have heightened their lack of safety. Despite the challenges of virtual spaces, internet access allows Black communities to expand beyond their geographic locations and create new possibilities for their collectives.

Conclusion

Towards a More Inclusive Future

In this project, I focused on U.S. Black dance and culture created in Black spaces for Black people, exploring the movement and culture of the everyday. Social dances reflect the everyday experiences of community; they reflect distinct community values, traditions, and mores. Yet, those communities are still situated within larger structures of power that are dictated, in the U.S., by capitalism, White supremacy, anti-Blackness, and patriarchy – just to name a few oppressive structures. Black folks across the U.S. are forced to navigate these structures and incorporate aspects of them into their communal values, behaviors and productions.

I have utilized the term, “Black lemonade,” as a framework to articulate how Black folks work through systems of power to produce cultural material and realities that represent their ingenuity, creativity, and resilience. While incorporating aspects of dominant norms into their culture, Black folks are not replicating White mainstream habits and behaviors. They are incorporating Africanist aesthetics, generational and lived history, and everyday practicality into cultural materials that support their lives and pursuit of joy and self-actualization. However, these practices are encumbered by complexity and contradiction. In one sense, Black folks are generating cultural material, values, and mores that support their humanity (lemonade). In another sense, these cultural materials are derived from problematic and sometimes violent anti-Black norms (lemons). Yet, Black lemonade is a recognition that Black folks are making the best out of their situation to obtain fruitful and positive lives.

Additionally, my study demonstrates how Black people employ Black lemonade to produce an internal communal culture. This culture is specific to each particular community; Black communities establish their own set of norms and ways of knowing that reflect their complex existence and vitality. Members in a community are educated in the community's language of culture and the body. Communal dance practices reflect the norms and the aesthetic values of the community and community members are able to read the multitude of meanings of the body beyond narratives that define the body as dangerous, untamed, and hypersexual. Intracommunal literacy is what sustains these communities and their practices.

Black lemonade is created when Black majorette/dance teams perform within communities versed in intracommunal ways of knowing. As dancers sway, undulate, and thrust their h/b/p, they engage the possibilities of their bodies to produce joy and fulfillment. Performance is an opportunity for these women to engage the "lifeforce" Audre Lorde describes in her explanation of the erotic. Additionally, the community is able to read and contextualize the particularities of the Prancing J-Settes deep pelvic thrust in the bucking movement and the DDS hip undulations. They can decipher the quality of a performance and how these performances vary across divergent groups and situations. Yet, these performances are situated in the heteronormative male fantasy and White beauty aesthetics. Dancers are objects of desire and must adhere to the community's beauty standards through elements like straightened hair.

Why does it matter that we consider the complexities of how Black communities and groups operate and generate culture? While there are multiple reasons, I to focus on two implications within this research. First, as mentioned in Chapter 4, I argue that it not important that we know and understand Black communities, and other diverse communities in general, to

provide them with equitable treatment and access to the sources and support they deserve. I posit that we allow communities to determine what they need and require from the larger systems of power and that these systems comply with these groups. If the public at large were to allow these groups to self-determine and advocate for their best interests, then they could grow their communities in ways that support their collective humanity and prosperity. In order for this process to be actualized, the larger society must relinquish its paternalistic control and its need to impose dominant culture and norms on these groups. Therefore, it is a goal of this research to support a shift in the thinking of how the larger society should engage with diverse communities.

Secondly, I engage in scholarship focused on Black vernacular practices because it is important to me to provide students of color with an access point into the academy. The culture of higher learning is based in White and European norms and mores, which can alienate students of color. These students often have to compartmentalize their cultural practices in order to survive and thrive in the academy. In this regard, students of color are required to navigate a double consciousness. Sociologist and Pan-Africanist W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) conceptualizes double consciousness to explain Black folks' negotiation of two subjectivities; one that is based in a White supremacist view of Blackness and the other focused on our cultural understanding of ourselves that is inclusive of our Africanist identity. I argue that the academy's primary focus on White and European ways of knowing, to the exclusion of other cultural perspectives, are often erased from history and society's consciousness. Therefore, I want my scholarship to resist this erasure and present opportunities for students of color to begin to unite aspects of their subjectivities.

Additionally, I want to support the value of students' epistemological understanding to be equivalent to Euro- and White-based ways of knowing. The process of erasure supports the belief that these alternative perspectives and knowledge are inferior. By centering these perspectives in my scholarship, I am asserting their validity, complexity, and importance. Furthermore, I want to provide space for students to defend and honor their vernacular practices, while also thinking critically about them. By opening up space in the academy for scholars of color, we allow them to be at the forefront of generating knowledge about their specific communities. As insiders, they get to utilize their intracommunal literacy to advocate for their communities and set agendas for how their communities should be supported and understood by the outside world.

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