DANCING BLACK POWER?: JOAN MILLER, CAROLE JOHNSON AND THE BLACK AESTHETIC, 1960-1975

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the work of two African-American female choreographers, namely Joan Miller and Carole Johnson, and their engagement with the Black Aesthetic during the height of the Black Arts movement in America. The work seeks to examine how these subjects articulated, shaped, responded to, extended, critiqued or otherwise engaged with the notion of the Black aesthetic primarily through the mediums of concert dance and choreography. In consideration of the above, I conducted two, single subject case studies with Joan Miller and Carole Johnson in order to better understand the complexity of the experience of these African-American female dance makers during the selected period and gain a richer understanding of the ways in which they did or did not engage with the notion of the Black Aesthetic through the medium of dance. The subjects for the single case studies were selected because they fit the criteria to answer the research question: each woman is an African-American dance maker who was generating choreography and working actively in the dance field during the identified historical period (1960-1975.). The study employs content analysis of individual semi-structured interviews, cultural documents (including but not limited to playbills, photographs, newspaper clippings, video documentation, and choreographers' notes) and related literature (both revisionist and of the period) to generate a robust portrait of the experiences of the subjects under study. Taken simultaneously, critical race theory and Black feminist thought supply an analytical framework for this project that has allowed me to study the intersecting and mutually constitutive aspects of race, class, gender and economic location from a unique standpoint--that of African-American

female choreographers during the Black Power/Black Arts Movement era--in an effort the answer the research question and sub-questions central to this project

The dissertation ultimately posits that both Johnson and Miller did, in fact engage meaningfully with key concepts articulated under the banner of the Black Aesthetic during the height of the U.S.-based Black Arts Movement. Moreover, the project asserts that both women extended their understandings of the Black Aesthetic in order to embrace additional issues of interest; namely, gender and class (on Miller's part) and international human rights (on Johnson's part.) As such, this project ultimately discusses the implications of the inclusion of Miller and Johnson's work within the canon of dance history/studies as a radical shift from the dominant narratives concerning the work of Black female choreographers during the period. Additionally, the dissertation asserts that the inclusion of these narratives in the context of literature and scholarship on the Black Power/Black Arts Movement supports moves in contemporary revisionist scholarship interested in broadening the research on the work of women in the creative arts during the period of interest. Lastly, the project suggests new research trajectories and areas of inquiry but explicating Patricia Hill Collins's work on Black Feminist Thought. By looking at the defining characteristics of Collins scholarship, the project extends the discussion on African-American women's epistemology to include dance performance and creation and complicates the role of who is empowered to make meaning through the lens of Black Feminist Thought and in what form.

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This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to
my mother, Karima Amin and my father, the late Abdul Jalil Amin
in recognition of their undying love for God, me and for Black people.
This project is also dedicated to the generations of
Black women scholar-activists whose work is helping to shatter dominant
narratives that write our bodies and experiences out of the story. Never again.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE

ABSTRACT .... iii-iv

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .... v-vi

DEDICATION vii

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS .... x-xi

CHAPTER

1. APPROACHING THE STUDY 1

Introduction 1-11

Primary Motivation and Purpose of Research 11-13

Intended Audience/Readership for this Study 13-14

Methodology 14-20

Limitations, Delimitations and Scope of the Study 20-21

Significance of the Research 21

Notes 22-23

2. EXAMINING THE LITERATURE/FRAMING THE RESEARCH 24

Search Strategies 25-26

Relevant Review of Literature 26-50

Developing Black Power: Influences of Pan –Africanism 26-27

The Black Power/Black Arts Movement: Determining the Era 27-28

Defining Black Power: Claiming Our Politics 29-30

Art For A Purpose: The Black Arts Movement 31-32

Speaking for Ourselves: Defining the Black Aesthetic 32-34

One Step Forward, Two Steps Black: Black Power, Gender and Sexual Politics 35-37

Men, Messages and Music: Preoccupations in the Black Arts Movement 38-40

Missing Links: Omissions in Dance Scholarship 40-46

Conceptual Framework: Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought 46-50

Summary 50-51

Notes 52-62

3. "THERE IS NOT JUST ONE WHO CAN SPEAK FOR US": INTRODUCING MILLER AND JOHNSON 63

About Joan Miller 63-88

About Carole Y. Johnson 89-109

Conclusion 108-109

Notes 110-115

4. "YOU GOTTA LET THE WORLD KNOW WE DO MANY, MANY THINGS": MILLER, JOHNSON AND THE BLACK AESTHETIC 116-156
Notes 157-159

5. WHERE WE GO FROM HERE?: IMPLICATIONS, RECCOMENDATIONS AND REFLECTIONS 160-167
Reflections 168-173

Notes 174

BIBLIOGRAPHY 175-194

PHOTOGRAPHS 195-215

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Figure **Page**

1. Joan Miller's Chamber Arts /Dance Players in *Robot Game*, 1969 196

2. Joan Miller in *Pass Fe White* (sec. 1, "Miss Jane,") 1970..197

3. Joan Miller in *Pass Fe White* (sec. 1, "Miss Jane,") 1970..198

4. Joan Miller in *Pass Fe White* (sec. 2, "Miss Liz,") 1970..199

5. Joan Miller in *Pass Fe White* (sec. 3 "Miss Mercy,") 1970 200

6. Joan Miller in *Homestretch*, 1973..201

7. Chamber Arts/Dance Players Members Chuck Davis and Jackie Earley in Joan Miller's *Blackout*, 1971 202

8. Joan Miller, Studio Portrait, 1970..203

9. Cover of First Brochure for Joan Miller and the Chamber Arts/Dance Players, 1970..204

10. Company Flyer/Program Insert, Joan Miller and the Chamber Arts/Dance Players, circa 1970; Design by Art Bauman...205

11. Announcement of Carole Y. Johnson as Affiliate Artist for New York's Department of Cultural Affairs—*The New York Times*, April 3, 1970 206

12. Announcement of Carole Y. Johnson as an Affiliate Artist for New York's Department of Cultural Affairs—*Dance Magazine*, January 1971, page 12...................207

13. Program Insert for Eleo Pomare Dance Company Concert at New York City's American National Theater and Academy, February 1971 208

14. Flyer Advertisement for Carole Y. Johnson's Solo Programs and Lecture Demonstrations, circa 1971-1973 209

15. Program for Carole Y. Johnson's Solo Concerts, circa 1971-1972 210

16. Carole Y. Johnson's Lecture Demonstration Offerings, circa 1971 211

17. Cover of *The FEET*, November 1971, vol. 2, no. 5 212

18. Dance Theatre of Harlem on the Cover of *The FEET*, November 1972, vol.3, no. 3...213

19. Cover of *The FEET*, December 1972, vol. 3, no. 4 214

20. Carole Y. Johnson, Studio Portrait, 1973 215

Chapter One: Approaching the Study

Introduction

It seems to me that no matter where you go, there you are. Ever since I was three years old, I knew that I was a dancer. As a child, I would go into my living room or my "play room" in the back of our house and put on my parents' records--Al Jarreau, Sweet Honey in the Rock and Michael Jackson were favorites--and I would dance until I felt complete; in the dance I became everything that I should or could be. All of the answers to my questions came to me when I was dancing and I felt a sense of peace that, to me, was evidence of the presence of God in the world and in my personal life. As I grew up, I developed a love for music, literature and art but it was still through dance that I found a pathway to connect with my history and culture. The first dance I ever remember learning was "Fanga," an interpretation of a traditional Liberian dance developed by noted anthropologist and choreographer Dr. Pearl Primus. This dance, an expression of both welcome and spiritual affirmation, confirmed within me that as a person of African descent, I had a rich heritage that upheld high ideals and strong values. Dancing made me feel good both physically and on a deep psycho/emotional level because it allowed me to develop my body's capacities and abilities while teaching me valuable information about history and culture.

Over the years, I studied West African dances (mainly from Guinea, Senegal and the Gambia) as well as other dance forms including ballet, tap, jazz and American modern dance. In classes at African-American cultural institutions in Buffalo (such as the African-American Cultural Center and the Center for

Positive Thought) I was exposed to not only the technique and the "steps," but to the history and development of dance by my earliest teachers, Dr. Kariamu Welsh, Yvonne James-Brown and Ronnie Latham. I came to know dance as being fundamental to human experience; the idea that moving the body was a primary form of communication and marker of cultural perspective is something that at this current point in my life, I cannot remember *not* knowing and believing in. When I was about 12 years old I decided that I would develop myself as a dancer: as someone who would use dance to educate, uplift and teach the community in the ways through which I had been taught. I wanted to be a dancer who used the skill and art of choreography in particular, to address the community's needs and make our lives better. I was raised in a community which prided itself on its commitment to the liberation of African people and believed that each of us was to have a role and a hand in making that happen, artists included. The problem was, no one ever told *me* or showed *me* what my role as a dancer could mean in terms of bringing the liberation of African humanity into fruition; I wanted to be a part of our cause, but I had no idea how to accomplish this.

I was born into a community of African-centered, grassroots activists in Buffalo, New York who taught me about some of the ideas that emerged from the Black Power/Black Arts Movement of the 1960's and 1970's. I grew up in a community where I was taught that the life and experience of people of African descent were to be central to how I understood the world. Moreover, I grew up seeing and participating in local action campaigns that addressed issues

impacting our predominantly blue collar, African-American community—we worked for social change on issues of employment, education, healthcare and access to economic resources. My parents and their contemporaries were coming into their own as community leaders, activists and artists during the period that immediately preceded my birth in 1979. My mother taught English, drama and social studies in the Buffalo public schools in grades 7 through 12. My mom, Karima Amin (Carol Ann Aiken and later known as Carol 11X) was a member of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense and served the community actively through their Free Breakfast for Children Program; this was in addition to her work in a number of independent African-American cultural institutions near our home. My father was a security guard at the Buffalo Public Library. My dad, Abdul Jalil Amin (Julius Abner Mingo and later known as Julius 3X) joined the Nation of Islam (NOI) while living in Newark, New Jersey prior to moving to Buffalo and meeting my mother, who later joined the NOI as well. When I was growing up, Dad wrote articles on religion, health and political topics for both The Challenger and The Criterion, Buffalo's two oldest, independently run African-American community newspapers. Both of my parents were avid readers of African-American history and literature and lovers of Black culture; our home boasted shelves of books by a wide variety of authors like Haki Madhubuti, Amiri Baraka, Ntozake Shange, Sonia Sanchez, Langston Hughes and many others. The art on our walls easily included family photos right alongside work by both prominent and local visual artists of the African Diaspora. Our home was always filled with music that reflected our culture—everything from Babatunde

Olatunji and Miriam Makeba to Miles Davis, Billie Holiday, Earth, Wind and Fire and the sounds of Motown could be found playing in our home on any day of the week. My godparents, Sharon and Kenneth Holley owned and operated Harambee Books and Crafts, Buffalo's premiere bookstore featuring the works of African-American authors and artisans. Our family was well known because of my parents, their work, and various affiliations, even though they had left the NOI by the late 1970's in favor of attending a more moderate mosque. I grew up knowing lots of people from a variety of cultural backgrounds and social strata, but the people I would refer to as "friends of the family" were mainly African-American business owners, musicians, teachers, drummers and dancers who saw their everyday work as activism on behalf of liberation for all African people; these were the folks who shaped my bourgeoning consciousness. As a result of my parents, their friends and our broader community, I became the "beneficiary" of ideas that were shaped by the Black Power/Black Arts Movement, which had impacted them so greatly. I was taught about the importance of each of us taking it upon ourselves to work on behalf of African humanity both at home and in African-American cultural institutions in our city. I was taught at home what my parent's understood about the role of the artist and the purpose of art: art should be *relevant* to the *needs* of the community in which it was created and they stressed that the goal of art should be to *improve* the social and political conditions of the people to whom it is addressed. Furthermore, my family and community fostered the idea that art makers in any genre were supposed to leave their world more beautiful than they found it by virtue of what they created; this

is what I grew up understanding as the Black Aesthetic as it emerged from the Black Power/Black Arts Movement.

It was in my own home and in local, community-based cultural institutions that I began to deepen my understanding of the Black Aesthetic and see its manifestations. My mother loved literature and so I grew up reading the works of James Baldwin, Alice Walker, Malcolm X and Gwendolyn Brooks along with whatever predominantly White literature was assigned in school. The writing I was exposed to at home reinforced that the artist—in this case, the author—had a responsibility to use their skills to speak to the conditions in which African-Americans in particular found themselves and to offer solutions which addressed our political condition. I memorized poems and stories by Langston Hughes, Virginia Hamilton and Laini Mataka and performed them at cultural events; they reinforced in me a belief in the richness of African-American culture and of our shared commitment to developing our community. My mother later retired from her position as a public school teacher and continued her professional life as a storyteller, specializing in African and African-American fables and folktales. She is also an author of textbooks, children's books, plays, poems and short stories in addition to her work as a drummer and community activist. In everything, I saw my mother using her skills to articulate the idea that art was for a purpose: to remind us of the depth and breadth of our history and to encourage us toward community uplift and development. My father's love of music led him to share with me the works of artists like John Coltrane, Nina Simone and Thelonious Monk before his

untimely death when I was 12 years old in 1992. Before he died, Dad taught me that music could raise our consciousness and our spirits and that it was to be used to reinforce the development of our best selves. The community events we attended—like Kwanzaa and the annual Malcolm X, Juneteenth and Marcus Garvey Day Celebrations—always featured music, poems and stories which reinforced the idea that the arts were both relevant and instrumental to who we were as a community and to what we would become. While today, this idea does not reflect what I feel should be the intention of art in general or dance in particular at *all* times[i], I am aware that a variety of African-Diasporan artists have tried to live up to and embody this ideal in the creation and deployment of their work. My current challenge is akin to one that developed many years ago while growing up in Buffalo: I want to know now, as I did then, how African-American female choreographers in particular created work that engaged the concept of the Black Aesthetic during the Black Power/Black Arts Movement and to what end or outcome.

When I asked people in my community to share with me the stories of how African-American female artists employed the Black Aesthetic through dance in the cause of our liberation, they were at a loss for information. I addressed my questions to my teachers, community leaders and family friends and either my inquiry was dismissed as an unimportant question or people simply did not know what to tell me. I also began to notice that at our cultural events,

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[i] While I remain committed to the idea that art should be grounded in purpose and have a positive intention, I am also supportive of the notion that the role of art may be a deeply personal and/or therapeutic one that does not necessarily extend itself into larger social/political dialogues at all times.

dancers were invited to perform at the top of the program to excite the crowd, but these same dancers were never asked about how their work fit into the overall landscape of our efforts for freedom. Of the numerous panel discussions and keynote speeches I heard in my community growing up at cultural events, I cannot recall any dancers as speakers or panelists. I began to notice very early on that the dancers—who were mostly women—were never invited back to the table to participate in the discussion of what Black people needed or to strategize around social/political concerns. When I asked my parents about dancers who used their art in the cause of the liberation of our people, they shared with me the names of several prominent choreographers—Garth Fagan, Eleo Pomare and Alvin Ailey—and were happy to take me to their companies' concerts or get me videos of their work from the public library (Dad did that for me.) When I pressed them for the names of women choreographers of the same ilk, they mentioned Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus, but admittedly, they did not know much about them or their work and they did not have any other names. I knew my parents and their friends had been actively involved and influenced by the Black Power/Black Arts Movement, so I asked about women during that time who were employing the Black Aesthetic through dance to uplift the community; surely there had to be *somebody* during that time whose name they could give me or whose work they could share with me. Unfortunately, my questions were still met with blank stares and an attitude of bemusement. While my parents did a great job of exposing me to African-American concert dance, I was still dissatisfied. I was disappointed that the role of dancers in my community seemed

to be marginalized and relegated to the opening and closing of cultural events and that the names of African-American female choreographers were not widely known or celebrated. I was perturbed that my community did not empower me as a dance maker to help the cause of our people and that I was not taught how to use my art—*my gift*—to explicitly make our community a better place. Those recognized as writers and musicians—who were predominantly male—were given the role of speaking to and addressing my community's needs while the dancers were silent/silenced. While dance was an integral part of my community's life and expression women's leadership in, of and because of dance was far lesser recognized as being relevant or important to our struggle as people of African descent.

As a woman/dancer/scholar that is proud to identify as African-American I am particularly sensitive to the absence, marginalization, intentional omission and/or silencing of narratives about those with whom I am so deeply connected. Admittedly, when the voices of African-American women are not present in the re-telling of historical narratives, I am suspicious; women of African descent have always existed, so why are our voices missing from the story? The absence of African-American women's voices as choreographers during the Black Power/Black Arts movement era in particular is something that I confronted first in my own community and then later in the academy. When I enrolled as a dance major during my undergraduate years, I searched for answers to my questions/concerns in my African-American Studies, Women's Studies and Dance Studies textbooks. What I found was a gaping and apparent hole in the

literature where the voices of African-American female dance makers were missing. Instead of blaming my community for what they were unable to give me or raging against the academy for its omissions, my goal with this study is to make a contribution that would be in service to rectifying this major absence.

During the years leading up to my studies at Temple University I considered several questions concerning the relationship between dance and politics. I had become increasingly preoccupied with how dance, as a moving "text," had been or might be used as a way to extend, comment on, respond to, interrogate or undermine dominant social and political ideas in a shifting and complex global landscape. I was not interested in engaging with an "arts for art's sake" discourse; I wanted to use my time at Temple to think and write about dance and its *utility* in informing, shaping and ultimately changing constructions of knowledge and power. (It should be noted that during the audition/interview process for acceptance into the Ph.D. program, I presented this emerging, wide-ranging research agenda to the faculty committee.) Having completed my coursework with exposure to literature in related disciplines (namely African-American Studies, Women's Studies and Cultural Studies,) I am deeply invested in translating my broad interests into a focused examination of the intersection between dance and politics for my dissertation. As a dancer, I want to know how others have used this art form—*my* art form—to answer the call of the Black Aesthetic and what that might mean.

From examining the literature, I am aware that some of the dominant political rhetoric that came out of the Black Arts Movement, taking its

cues from the prevailing Black Power discourse of the 1960's and 1970's, was misogynistic, anti-female and openly denigrating toward women at the same time that it championed racial/cultural uplift. This perspective is supported by examining period literature from the era of interest and is given attention in my literature review. Consequently, I am all the more interested in whether or not African-American female choreographers made a conscious choice to address this aspect of the politics of the Black Power/Black Arts Movement era when choosing to deploy the Black Aesthetic in their work. Since there were African-American female authors who challenged the gender politics of the Black Power/Black Arts Movement in their writing[ii], I want to know if and/or how African-American female choreographers might have used the concept of the Black Aesthetic through dance to critique or interrogate the gender issues and tensions which were present in the Black Power/ Black Arts Movement. I also wonder if these women chose to abandon the notion of The Black Aesthetic altogether as a result of feeling alienated by the anti-female rhetoric of the Black Power/Black Arts Movement.

Broadly speaking, my chief concern at this time is the ongoing relevance of the intersections of race and gender in the discussion of knowledge production in the dance field. As such, both critical race theory and Black feminist thought are the conceptual frameworks that best contextualize the complexity of both my lived experience and current research agenda. While critical race theory provides me with the necessary lens to argue that race

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[ii] For more information, please see the bibliography for works by Francis Beale, Linda LaRue, and Patricia Haden, Donna Middleton and Patricia Robinson.

matters at least as much as class and economic structure, Black feminist thought provides a lens through which to think about African-American women's lives and creative work from a distinctive and particular standpoint—that of African-American women themselves—on their own terms. Additionally, Black feminist thought is a relevant perspective that allows me to examine the intersections of race and gender in understanding the social phenomenon identified by my overarching research question. The relevance of these theories to my study is further demonstrated in my Review of Literature.

In approaching this project I seek answers to questions that are personal, cultural, artistic and political. I want to understand my own story in light of the lineage of African-American female choreographers who engaged the Black Aesthetic and who were unafraid to shape, challenge, critique or otherwise respond to the political ideas of their time. My research is conceived as a contribution to several academic discourses as much as it is a journey toward the fulfillment of my own interests and deep need to understand myself in the scope of history. The research agenda presented herein emerges from my own very rich lived experience—an experience that has not been able to account for or provide answers to my most pressing, long-held questions as a woman/dancer/scholar.

Primary Motivation and Purpose of Research

The major aim of my research is to actively re-dress dominant historical narratives and academic discourses which omit African-American female choreographers' engagement with the Black Aesthetic during the Black Arts Movement of the 1960's and 1970's. I contend that the cultural and political

preoccupations of the Black Power and Black Arts Movements, coupled with existing inclinations in dance studies scholarship and the interlocking mechanisms of both racism and sexism, work together to create a space where the work of African-American female choreographers during the era of interest is largely erased from the narrative. As an emerging scholar, I am motivated by the lack of descriptive narratives of the work of African-American female choreographers during the selected period and the absence of both scholarly and non-academic work on women who were significant contributors to the Black Arts Movement in general. Omissions in both academic and popular literature in dance and previously identified related disciplines, coupled with my lived experience, have necessitated my current research agenda. By bringing this particular understudied area into view I have an opportunity to raise new questions about the Black Aesthetic, the relationship between dance and politics and the ongoing, mutually constitutive nature of both racism and sexism.

I am conducting this research to make a significant adjustment to prevailing discourses about the Black Arts Movement, the Black Aesthetic, dance, political ideology and African-American female choreographers. My objective is to ultimately restructure the content of courses in dance studies and related disciplines in terms of what is taught about African-American female choreographers in general and their work during the era of interest in particular. The research is significant because it actively challenges customary notions about dance and the voices/work of African-American female choreographers as interlocutors with contemporary political issues; this research stands to re-

configure dominant discourses that suggest that art, art-making and the voices of African-American female dance makers in particular are fundamental elements in the telling and re-telling of history in general and of the chosen era in particular.

Intended Audience/Readership for this Study

The study is intended to significantly contribute to the expansion of the knowledge base related to the intersecting disciplines of dance studies, African-American history, Women's studies and Cultural studies. Scholars and students with an interest in the Black Arts Movement and its intersections with issues of art and gender will find an existing omission in both the scholastic and mainstream literature filled by the research. Women's studies specialists will benefit from a broader narrative about African-American women's lived experience, knowledge production and creative work while scholars in dance studies will be able to access a richer account about the development of choreography during the era of interest identified by the study.

This study focuses on the work of two African-American female choreographers and their engagement with The Black Aesthetic during the height of The Black Arts Movement (1960-1975.) Specifically, this study examines the work of Joan Miller and Carole Johnson in an effort to understand how these women in particular used the skill/art of dance and choreography to interact with the Black Aesthetic during the era of interest. My research explores these specific questions:

- Research Question: Did the selected African-American female choreographers

(i.e. Johnson and Miller) engage with the Black Aesthetic during the height of the Black Arts Movement (i.e. 1960-1975)?

- Sub-questions:
    - Did Johnson and Miller use dance to shape, articulate, respond to, extend or critique the Black Aesthetic during the Black Arts Movement? If so, how?
    - Did Johnson and Miller use dance to respond to the prevailing anti-female rhetoric that emerged from the Black Arts Movement vis-à-vis the Black Power Movement?
    - What are the implications of the engagement of the selected African-American female choreographers with The Black Aesthetic for the future of dance and politics with respect to Black women's activism?

For this study I employ qualitative research methodology in order to approach my identified questions noted here. Specifically, I apply the case study method, cultural document analysis and qualitative interviewing techniques to approach my research questions. Additionally, both the premises of critical race and black feminist thought are employed as the theoretical framework for this study.

Methodology

Qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to (a) situate themselves within the context of their selected topic; (b) employ an "interpretive, naturalist approach" to the research; (c) make sense of phenomena by seeking to understand the meaning(s) which people bring to them, and, (d) make use of "interconnected" strategies in order to gain a deeper understanding of the research subject (Denzin and Lincoln 3-4; Schwandt 248.) In qualitative research, the problems under study are "social" or "human" in nature and the inquirer "builds a complex, holistic picture" of the data in order to address their

research questions (Creswell 15.) By definition, qualitative research "involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials" including personal experience, interviews, historical texts, and cultural products (Denzin and Lincoln 5.) While the case study method produces research that is not "generalizable" or applicable to every person across a given period, (Taylor-Powell and Renner 9), it is an appropriate strategy for providing clarification and a deeper understanding of the richness and complexity of the chosen subject(s) under study (Becker, Dawson, et. al. 1.)

The case study method is often employed in research that asks *how* and *why* questions concerning a situation or phenomenon over which the researcher has very little control or ability to manipulate events (ibid.); this is especially relevant given that the selected time period for my research precedes my own birth. Moreover, it should be noted that the application of the case study method has proven valuable in cases when a researcher is striving to gain "knowledge of the particular''—that is, understanding about an individual or group that is rich in detail and complexity (Stake 3.) Unlike biography or other qualitative research methods (including grounded theory and phenomenology,) the case study method lends itself to understanding the *context or conditions* of and for each subject under study (Schwandt 28.) The case study method requires that I, as a researcher, confine my study within a "bounded system"—that is, a specific period limited by both time and place—and that I spend a significant amount of time describing the context or setting for the case(s) under study (Creswell 37.) My research proceeds to demonstrate these aforementioned characteristics.

In consideration of the above, I conducted two, single subject case studies with selected African-American female choreographers who were working during the selected historical period. By conducting case studies of choreographers Joan Miller and Carole Johnson I will be better able to understand the complexity of the experience of these African-American female dance makers during the selected period and gain a richer understanding of the ways in which they did or did not engage with the notion of the Black Aesthetic through the medium of dance. The subjects for the single case studies were selected because they fit the criteria to answer the research question: each woman is an African-American dance maker who was generating choreography during the identified historical period. Carole Johnson, a graduate of the Juilliard School in 1963, began her early training with the non-segregated Philadelphia Ballet Guild and later directed the Harlem Cultural Council's Dancemobile for two years in addition to forming the organization that presented the First National Congress of Blacks in Dance with some 400 participants (Gatzke, par 1, 4-5.) Additionally, it should be noted that Johnson had played an integral role in the dance community in her role as founder and editor of *THE FEET*, an Afro-centric dance magazine launched in 1970 during her tenure as a dancer with the Eleo Pomare Dance Company ("Great Performances: Free to Dance-Dance Timeline, 1970-1976," sec. 6.) Johnson toured Australia with Pomare's company in February and March of 1972 and decided to stay in Sydney to teach and choreograph with The National Black Theatre (Robinson 26.) Johnson later founded the Bangarra Dance Theatre in 1989 in New South Wales, Australia ("Chronology," 1.)

Similarly, Harlem native Joan Miller began her dance training with a local Girl Scout troop and later earned a diploma in dance from the Juilliard School in 1962. Miller performed with Ruth Currier from 1960-1967 and established her own company, the Chamber Arts/Dance Players (for which she created choreography) in 1970 (Lewis-Ferguson, sec. 1-3.) I proceed with this research agenda, assuming that the social and cultural pervasiveness of the Black Arts Movement in the United States was such that it would not have been possible for either Johnson or Miller to avoid engaging it—even by way of rejection. Moreover, while both women are substantiated in the available literature as having worked as dancers and choreographers during the era of interest, neither has been treated as the focus of any substantial research publications to date. Consequently, my chosen case study subjects support the overall research design by being essential to answering the questions in this study.

It should be noted that the case study method is a vehicle through which rich descriptions emerge via a triangulation of data sources; this process allows for information to be generated by multiple sources of data (Becker, Dawson, et.al. 9.) The study employs content analysis of individual semi-structured interviews, cultural documents (including but not limited to playbills, photographs, newspaper clippings, video documentation, and choreographers' notes), related literature and my own research journal in order to generate a robust portrait of the experiences of the subjects under study. Persons identified by both Johnson and Miller as significant to the trajectory of their careers were interviewed, if possible, to support and contextualize my research. To the extent

that this occurred, the development of a richer, deeper and fuller collection of data to inform my study has been fostered. After conducting the interviews, I conducted member checks with all participants. A member check (also known as "respondent validation") is a term applied to asking participants for feedback on the research findings culled from their interviews. During this process, study participants were able to approve or redact information from their interview transcripts before their words were incorporated into the actual dissertation. This aspect of the research process is often deemed essential in social science research in terms of confirming or authenticating research findings (Schwandt 187.)

Importantly, all case study subjects and additional interviewees were given a letter and consent form detailing the scope of the project and their involvement in the study. The documents also contain information regarding whom participants should contact if they have concerns about the project. Upon recommendation of the Coordinator of Temple University's Institutional Review Board, all consent forms and documents were developed in light of the current guidelines of the Oral History Association. In consideration of the preferred data collection strategies discussed above, the case study method along with cultural document analysis and interview strategies have been identified to approach my research questions and sub-questions.

Both the conceptual framework and theoretical foundation for the research is comprised of both critical race theory and black feminist thought. Critical race theory developed out of the context of both Marxist and critical theory (Tate, 41.) While Marxism held that an analysis of class was central to understanding

social structure and inequality, critical theory forwarded the idea that both a class and economic structural analysis was imperative in order to understand social phenomenon—particularly as it related to discerning inequality. By extension, critical race theory (which first emerged out of legal studies) added that analyses of both class and economic location were fundamentally incomplete without an understanding of the function of race; critical race theory assumes that "race and racism are at the very center of social and institutional life" and as such, social conditions are connected to by at least as much as they are based on class location and economics (Schwandt 53; Tate 196.) Plainly, critical race theory supports an analysis that privileges race in the study of social conditions, along with the contexts of both class and economic location.

Black feminist thought argues that while class, economics and race are central to understanding one's social location and analyzing structures of inequality, the omission of gender renders the analysis incomplete. Black feminist thought is concerned with the intersection of race, class and gender in order to understand the particularity of human experience faced by non-white women of African descent in the US especially. (Collins 24-25.) As a by-product of both Marxism and critical theories, Black feminist thought as a theory adds gender (in this case, "female-ness") as an additional component necessary to studying the fullness of social phenomena—that of race, class, gender and economic location.

Taken simultaneously, critical race theory and Black feminist thought supply an analytical framework that has allowed me to study the intersecting and

mutually constitutive aspects of race, class, gender and economic location from a unique standpoint--that of African-American female choreographers during the Black Arts Movement era--in an effort to answer my research question and sub-questions. The theoretical framework for my research will be further discussed in the Literature Review in chapter two.

Limitations, Delimitations and Scope of the Study

In terms of limitations for the study, the reader should note that due to the relatively small/unique sample available for the study, conclusions may not necessarily be applicable beyond the specific population from which the sample was drawn. I am primarily examining the influence and engagement with the Black Aesthetic via the self-report of Johnson and Miller and their collaborators/colleagues. Moreover, it is important to note that due to the time period relevant to my research, I have not seen the subjects under study perform in a live context, though I have had some small access to video footage of their work to review. Concerning delimitations, in order to assure manageability of the collected data, the study will focus on the specified historical period of 1960-1975, the height of the Black Arts Movement as determined by a review of the literature. Additionally, I will not be travelling overseas to the home of one of the subjects under study (Johnson.) As such, my research will draw primarily from archival research for both subjects and interviews conducted over a significant distance in at least one instance (Johnson.) Last, I will focus my discussion on the literature, politics and rhetoric of the Black Power and Black Arts Movement without the inclusion of a substantial and wide-ranging

discussion of other movements taking place in the U.S. at the same time (i.e. Women's Movement, Ant-War Movement, etc.); it is imperative that I define the contours of the research narrowly in order to have a focused examination of my selected topic.

Significance of the Research

The primary significance of my research is that it challenges prevailing conceptions about the work of African-American female choreographers during the Black Arts Movement—namely, that there was no such work at all or of significance. In so doing the research contributes to the lack of descriptive narratives about the work of African-American female choreographers during the era of interest and broadens the available knowledge on this topic. The relationship between Black Arts Movement era gender politics, cultural preoccupations and the arts—in this case, dance—is further elucidated by bringing the voices of both Johnson and Miller to the narrative. The result of the research is that a richer account of the development of choreography by African-American women during the era of interest has been identified and an existing omission in both scholarly and non-academic writing is being addressed by the presence of this research. Additionally, the study proposes that the work of these African-American female choreographers may have implications for a broader understanding of dance and politics pursuant to contemporary Black women's activism.

Notes

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Chapter 2: Examining the Literature/Framing the Research

The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which African-American female choreographers engaged with The Black Aesthetic during the height of the Black Power/Black Arts Movement between 1960 and 1975. Specifically, I sought to understand how two African-American female choreographers (i.e. Carole Johnson and Joan Miller) used the art/skill of dance making to shape, articulate, extend, critique or otherwise respond to The Black Aesthetic. Moreover, this study sought to understand how these selected choreographers responded through dance to the anti-female rhetoric common during the era of interest and what the implications of this might be for the relationship of dance and politics pursuant to contemporary Black women's activism. In order to carry out this study, it was necessary that I conduct a critical and in-depth review of relevant literature which was ongoing during the data collection, data analysis and synthesis phases of this research.

This comprehensive review explored the intricate and overlapping connections among several related bodies of knowledge, spanning both literature from the era of interest and contemporary scholarship on dance, racial and gender politics as well as revisionist scholarship on the Black Power and Black Arts Movements. A review of the literature from the height of the Black Power and Black Arts Movements provides a historical framework for understanding prevailing attitudes about the role of art and culture vis-à-vis The Black Aesthetic. By examining both contemporary scholarship in dance and revisionist

writing on The Black Power and Black Arts Movements, I was able to isolate the areas where discussion and analysis of the role of African-American female choreographers during the era of interest is absent. Moreover, a review of relevant sources concerning racial and gender politics elucidated both historic and prevailing tensions while at the same time providing a foundation for the development of my theoretical framework for this study. This review of literature allowed me to develop the position that the preoccupations of The Black Power and Black Arts Movements coupled with prevailing attitudes in dance studies scholarship and the interlocking mechanisms of both racism and sexism conspire to create a space where the work of African-American female choreographers during the era of interest is omitted from the narrative. Consequently, the presence of this study is justified because it creates a more historically accurate picture of the era of interest and in so doing, challenges prevailing assumptions about The Black Power and Black Arts Movements, The Black Aesthetic and the connections between dance and politics while undermining assumptions about the relevance of the work of African-American female choreographers.

Search Strategies

In order to conduct this review of relevant literature, I used multiple sources of information including books, Internet resources, academic journals and periodicals. These sources were accessed through ProQuest, Academic Search Premier and university and public library holdings. Due to the nature of the bodies of literature under review, (i.e. period literature from The Black Power and Black Arts Movements era for example,) dates were significant and

were therefore employed to preclude the inclusion of less relevant sources as needed.

During the review, I attempted to identify relevant omissions in the literature as they became apparent. I also worked to identify, include and discuss contested issues and areas in the review. Each labeled section of the literature review that follows closes with a synthesis that focuses its implications for my research. The summary section, which closes this chapter, illustrates how the literature under review informed my understanding of the material and how that material in turn contributed to the development of the conceptual framework for this study.

Developing Black Power: Influences of Pan-Africanism

Much has been written about the historical development of Pan-Africanism as a precursor to The Black Power and Black Arts Movements era in the United States. In The Pan-African Movement: The Search for Organization and Community, Charles Andrain traces the origins of the term "Pan-African" to the Trinidadian-born lawyer Sylvester Williams, organizer of the first Pan-African Conference that occurred in London, England in 1900 (5). Williams' role and subsequent influence on other key thinkers in the movement including W E.B. Dubois, Kwame Nkrumah, George Padmore, Marcus Garvey, Martin Delaney, Amilcar Cabral and Franz Fanon are explored in the literature (Geiss, 362; Mazrui, 35; Shepperson, 346-347; Tsomondo, 41-43; Warren, 16-18; Welsh-Asante, 225.) Definitions emerged during the development of Pan-Africanism in particular that placed emphasis on resistance to European

oppression of Black people on the African continent (Andrain, 12) and later in the Americas. Posited by former Ghanaian-leader Kwame Nkrumah as a cultural and political response to European "imperialism," Pan-Africanism became increasingly concerned with the development of economic independence and communication efforts as elucidated in the scholarship of Adekunle Ajala (Macdonald, 732.) Tenets of Pan-Africanism and Liberation Theory made evident in the literature are an emphasis on cultural similarities between all people of African descent and a focus on common socio-political interests (Adeleke, 505; Tsomondo, 3-4). Additional key themes in Pan-Africanism that emerged and were commonly articulated during the 1960's included the concept of independent "nation-building," African solidarity throughout the Diaspora (Adeleke, 7; Andrain 6; Geiss, 350-362;) economic empowerment and intra-African communication (Ajala, 324) self-government (Davis, 82-83), a sustainable material reality, struggle against racism and capitalism and the emphasis on the necessity of armed struggle (Hill, 67.) The emphasis on these doctrines as key tenets within Pan-Africanism find themselves extended during The Black Power and Black Arts Movements era in the US.

The Black Power and Black Arts Movements: Determining the Era

It is challenging to come up with a definitive time period in which to place The Black Power and Black Arts Movements. While many scholars agree that the height of the era was between 1965 and 1975 (Collins and Crawford 3; Collins 275, Springer 107 and Williams 83,) others make it a point to define The Black Power and Black Arts Movements era as part of a continuum of Black

liberation struggle that extends back into the "heroic" period of the Civil Rights movement. Black Power era historian Peniel E. Joseph supports this perspective in the introduction to his important edited volume, The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era. Joseph suggests that The Black Power and Black Arts Movements era is more appropriately understood as 1950 to 1970 with a "second wave" or resurgence of the movement after 1970 (8, 20-21.) Notably, James E. Smethurst, professor of African-American studies and author of The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960's and 1970's dates the Black Power era as occurring between 1954 and 1970, extending back to the Supreme Court decision that school segregation was illegal in the case Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka in 1954 (377.) This ambiguity surrounding the dates of The Black Power and Black Arts Movements suggests that while the height of activity during the period took place within a ten-year time frame, the roots of Black Power are earlier and inclusive of other struggles for Black liberation both domestically and abroad.

Liberation at Home and Abroad: Global Influences

Harkening back to the emphasis on Pan-Africanism, scholars suggest that the foundation for The Black Power and Black Arts Movements rests in a wider international struggle for liberation by people of African descent and other non-white persons around the world. According to Joseph, "the 1950's African independence movements helped refuel a renewed black American anticolonialism" and by the 1970's, "a broad coalition of Black Power activists had succeeded in placing the quest for independence at the forefront of black

consciousness" (3.) Citing a growing interest in the liberation struggles of the Congolese people as well as student demonstrations in Morocco, Sudan and Ghana, author Komozi Woodard makes plain that these international struggles were instrumental in the growth of Black Power in the US (58-59.) Additionally, resistance to Cold War imperatives and solidarity with the fight for independence in Cuba also had an impact on US-based Black Power/Black Arts Movement era politics (ibid., 56; 61.) Similarly, essayist Mary Ann Weathers connects the black power struggle to examples of revolution fought in not only Cuba, but Algeria, China and Vietnam as well in her manuscript, An Argument for Black Women's Liberation as a Revolutionary Force, first published in 1970 (159.) While scholars agree that the assassination of human rights activist, minister and public speaker Malcolm X in 1965 and Stokeley Carmichael's (later known as Kwame Toure) articulation of the demand for Black Power in 1966 during the March Against Fear were pivotal moments, (Collins and Crawford 4; Joseph 2; Van Deburg 2; Clarke 11-12) it is apparent that The Black Power and Black Arts Movements was indeed a "postwar freedom struggle" (Joseph 22) that had expansive and deep beginnings. The tenets of The Black Power and Black Arts Movements were indicative of an interest in a range of revolutionary activity and imperatives that were similar to Pan-African precepts and perspectives.

Defining Black Power: Claiming Our Politics

Broadly defined, the politics of The Black Power and Black Arts Movements era were concerned with the notion of Black independence, as

opposed to reliance on what proponents saw as a white, racist infrastructure. According to Collins and Crawford, Black Power/Black Arts Movement activists were "inspired by the late Malcolm X's call for collective self-definition, self-determination, self-reliance, self-respect and self-defense" and consequently "began to call for racial solidarity, black pride, independent black leadership and freedom from white authority" inclusive of "armed defense and/or struggle" (4.) In Black Women, Urban Politics and Engendering Black Power, author Rhonda Y. Williams discusses some of the ways that Black Power was defined during the height of the era by national political organizations, including CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality. Citing the "multifaceted" and "elusive" nature of defining the movement, Williams quotes former CORE leader Floyd McKissick as arguing that "Black Power is not Black Supremacy; it is a united Black Voice reflecting racial pride in the tradition of our heterogeneous nation." Williams goes on to note that later, a CORE publication defined Black Power as "the organization of the Negro community into a tight, disciplined group to secure leadership, improve self-image and achieve political, economic and consumer power" (84.) Williams proceeds to cite the "Ten-Point Platform" of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, perhaps one of the most memorable and resonant organizations of Black Power/Black Arts Movement era. In the "Ten-Point Platform," the Black Panther Party listed its aims as "the demand for land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace" (95.) The emphases on securing material necessities and the right to armed struggle during The Black Power and Black Arts Movements were reflective of international freedom struggles and the

ideological influence of Pan-Africanism. These ideas were further developed and expressed through the idea of the Black Aesthetic, the creative philosophy of The Black Power and Black Arts Movements.

Art for a Purpose: The Black Arts Movement

It is important to note that the Black Arts Movement, as a part of the larger movement of Black Power had its own sub-set of tenets and priorities that reflected the larger goal of Black independence and self-reliance. According to literature scholar Houston A. Baker, Jr. the rise of the Black Arts Movement developed in response to the theoretical question, "what would a "black nation"—one gained through revolutionary action—be without arts, artists, theorists, theories and aesthetics?" (370-371.) Scholar William Van Deburg notes that the goals of the Black Arts Movement were "to spur the growth of a dynamic, functional black aesthetic" that insisted on the "distinctiveness" of African-American culture, proclaimed the "virtues of black life-styles and values" and "promoted race consciousness, pride and unity" (181.) This declaration of the Black Arts Movement as a rejection of white cultural assumptions and dominance is supported by the work of key Black Power/Black Arts Movement philosophers, LeRoi Jones (later known as Imamu Amiri Baraka), Addison Gayle, Jr. and Larry Neale. Notably, Baraka founded the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School or BARTS "as a tool for community building and cultural awareness" (Joseph 5) in response to the death of Malcolm X in 1965; he also founded Spirit House Movers and Players a performance troupe in Newark, NJ (Woodard 69.) Widely identified as the "founder" of the Black Arts

Movement (Collins 275; Cole and Guy-Sheftall 79; Woodard 66; Salaam 23,) Baraka defined the role of black art as reflecting a "commitment to revolution" (Clarke 14.) By extension, Addison Gayle Jr.'s classic essay Cultural Strangulation: Black Literature and The White Aesthetic argues that heretofore, black art (in this case, black literature) had been defined by white, Eurocentric imperatives that constrained and undermined the value of black art by not defining it on its own terms (Gayle 45.) Perhaps the most overt articulation of the Black Aesthetic as the creative philosophy of The Black Power and Black Arts Movements comes to us from the essayist, dramatist, teacher and scholar Larry Neal.

Speaking for Ourselves: Defining the Black Aesthetic

Out of The Black Power and Black Arts Movements, an aesthetic perspective developed that prioritized the daily-lived experiences of African-Americans. In his essay, The Black Arts Movement, Neal describes the tenets of the Black Aesthetic as being concerned with questions of self-determination, nationhood and politics (Neal, 1968). Neal goes on to imply that imperatives of the Black Arts Movement had a far-reaching impact on African-American artists of the period including choreographers (though none are mentioned by name in the essay.) As the "quintessential theorist and advocate for the Black Arts Movement" and the Black Aesthetic (Collins, 274) Neal defines the movement as being rooted in a "spiritual ethic" whose purpose was to "liberate Man [sic]" (Neal, 53.) In his free form outline Some Reflections on the Black Aesthetic, Neal posits the this aesthetic philosophy places primacy on the role of sound or

"vibration" over the value of "the Word" itself and that the Black Aesthetic is ultimately a synthesis of "the integral unity of culture, politics and art." The work of scholar Belinda Edmondson helps to clarify Neal's perspectives in her article, Black Aesthetic, Feminist Aesthetics and the Problems of Oppositional Discourse. Edmondson suggests that the Black Aesthetic is typified by "essentially discursive" practices that hold African-American lived experience as key source material appropriate for art making (77.) Edmondson goes on to cite the work of African-American feminist scholar bell hooks who explains the Black Aesthetic as "inherently political" since it challenged white racist notions concerning the ability of Blacks to "produce art in any context, whether it was written texts, music, visual art or dance" (78.) This emphasis on what Edmondson calls "oppositional racial politics" identified in the scholarship on the Black Aesthetic resonates with the work of other scholar-activists during the period who were equally committed to engendering a revolutionary artistic culture as a part of The Black Power and Black Arts Movements.

According to educator, author and cultural critic Hoyt William Fuller, the Black Aesthetic symbolized an anti-mainstream perspective that prioritized a resistance to white, racist cultural tendencies and preoccupations (3-4.) Fuller, former editor of the periodical *Negro Digest* (which later became *Black World*) from 1961-1976 went on to define the Black Aesthetic as "a system of isolating and evaluating the artistic works of black people which reflect the special character and imperatives of black experience" (9.) During the same period, cultural nationalist Ron Karenga (later known as Maulana Karenga) discussed a

system of characteristics that black art should adhere to under the umbrella of the Black Aesthetic. As far as Karenga was concerned, the Black Aesthetic required that "black art respond positively to the reality of the revolution" (32) and that it must subscribe to three basic tenets in order to do so: black art must be functional or useful, it must disavow white cultural imperatives (i.e. "expose the enemy,") and support the ideals of revolution or positive change in Black life (33-34.) For Karenga, an "art for art's sake" ideal was incongruous with the direction of The Black Power and Black Arts Movements—to him, art had no message at all until it was given one by its creator; in this way, all art was a reflection of the culture and values out of which it emerged. As such, art that emanated out of a revolutionary, Black Power culture needed to reflect a "message of revolution" (ibid.) This emphasis on art with a message reflected Karenga's belief that art should be in service to the community or to the collective; art was supposed to remind the viewer of their "distaste for the enemy, love for each other and…commitment to revolutionary struggle" (38.) At the same time, Karenga was unequivocal that art created in line with the Black Aesthetic was "for the people, by the people and from the people" (Collins, 286.) Furthermore, Jeff Donaldson, one of the founders (with Hoyt William Fuller) of OBAC, the Organization of Black American Culture wrote that black artists were creating work intended to "define, glorify and direct black people—an art for the people's sake" (ibid.) This emphasis on art for "the people" as central to the Black Aesthetic articulates the broader commitment to community uplift and liberation that was emblematic of the rhetoric of The Black Power and Black

Arts Movements; unfortunately, this dedication to total liberation of "the people" was not always the primary focus of the Movement.

One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: Black Power, Gender and Sexual Politics

The Black Power and Black Arts Movements has become known for its pernicious gender politics, homophobia, misogyny and antagonism toward feminist thought and activism. For many during the height of the movement, the quest for black liberation was seen as synonymous with the redemption of black masculinity (Murray 192, Weathers 158, Simien 12, Cole and Guy-Sheftall 79.) In 1965 the report *The Negro Family: A Case For National Action* named after Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (and often referred to as *The Moynihan Report*) advanced the idea that the economic and social issues faced by black families were a result of unchecked "black matriarchy" which had undermined the nuclear family in African-American communities (Cole and Guy-Sheftall 79; LaRue 167.) For those committed to the eradication of social ills in the African-American community, the elimination of this so-called "black matriarchy" became paramount; ironically, a preoccupation with the re-assertion of traditional Western patriarchal gender roles emerged in Black Power/Black Arts Movement discourses (Springer, 107.) According to Black Arts Movement "founder" Imamu Amiri Baraka in 1970, the equality of men and women was not "natural" or something to be believed in; the idea of men and women as "complementary" became touted as the appropriate course of gender relations in

black families (Collins, 107-108.) This notion of gender as complementary is best articulated when Baraka states:

> "We do not believe in "equality" of men and women…We could never be equals…nature has not provided thus…But this means that we will complement each other, that you, who I call my house, because there is no house without a man and his wife, are the single element in the universe that perfectly completes my essence. You are essential to the development of any life in the house because you are that house's completion. When we say complement, completes, we mean that we have certain functions which are natural to us and you have certain graces that are yours alone" (ibid.)

Further, according to Maulana Karenga:

> "What makes a woman appealing is femininity and she can't be feminine without being submissive. A man has to be a leader…there is no virtue in independence. The only virtue is interdependence. Black women…should remember this. The role of the woman is to inspire her man, educate the children and participate in social development…We say male supremacy is based on three things: tradition, acceptance and reason. Equality is false; it's the devil's concept. Our concept is complementary [sic]" (Cole and Guy-Sheftall 80.)

As a result of this attitude around gender roles, "there was an explicit message in Black nationalist discourse about the destructive aspects of feminism" (Cole and Guy-Sheftall 84.) This antagonism is explained in the following quote from Elaine Brown, former chairperson of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense:

> A woman in the Black Power movement was considered, at best irrelevant. A woman asserting herself was a pariah. A woman attempting the role of leadership was, to my proud black Brothers, making an alliance with the '*counter-revolutionary, man-hating, lesbian, feminist white bitches*.' It was a violation of some Black Power principle that was left undefined." (Brown, 357.)

One might assume that the call for black women to literally walk behind their men at three or ten paces (Beale 148; Cole and Guy-Sheftall 79) and the assumption of black male superiority in The Black Power and Black Arts Movements (Weathers 158; Murray 189 and 192; Ransby 530) would elicit an outcry from Black women. While some African-American women pushed for a more egalitarian vision of gender relations (Beale 148; Weathers 158; LaRue 173; Haden, Middleton and Robinson 184) there were African-American women who supported the prevailing gender discourse of The Black Power and Black Arts Movements. Notably author Amina Baraka (formerly known as Sylvia Robinson) and wife of Imamu Amiri Baraka touted Karenga's previously quoted statement on gender roles in the movement at the Social Organization workshop hosted by the Congress of African People (CAP,) a prominent Black nationalist organization in 1971 (Smethurst, 88-89.) Similarly, Black Power/Black Arts Movement era activist Queen Mother Moore (born Audley Moore) "urges Black women to stay away from the white women's liberation movement and sympathize with the plight of Black men, whom she believes had been victimized more by racism than Black women" (Cole and Guy-Sheftall, 98.) Smethurst contends that the regressive gender politics of The Black Power and Black Arts Movements were indicative of prevailing discourses in American life during the selected time period (85) and thus, should not be seen as a particular aberration of the Movement. Unfortunately, the omission of expository discourses on women as prominent leaders during The Black Power and Black Arts Movements in favor of a dominant narrative about individual male leaders as public figures

calls the Movement's commitment to "the people" into question. Moreover, the lack of thorough discussions concerning the work of African-American female artists across genres during The Black Power and Black Arts Movements suggests a "taking-for-granted" of their experiences during this era as interlocutors with the Black Aesthetic in particular.

Men, Messages and Music: Preoccupations in the Black Arts Movement

It is interesting to note that in Larry Neal's soaring discussion of the Black Aesthetic, he omits any references to African-American female artists with the exception of blues singer Bessie Smith and comedienne Jackie "Moms" Mabley (Neal outline, 16.) While in the same document Neal extols the virtues of sound or vibration over words themselves, he curiously omits any discussion of African-American female spoken word poets, musicians or vocalists (other than Smith) in his outline. In Ron Wellburn's 1970 essay, The Black Aesthetic Imperative, the author discusses the Movement's emphasis on black music (and its "symbiotic" relationship to the other arts, including dance), but manages to always refer to "musicians" with the use of male pronouns (135), suggesting that the quintessential black musician is a man. When Wellburn discusses specific African-American musicians by name they are always men; this list includes Lester Young, Miles Davis, Ornette Coleman, Ray Charles and Sun Ra (137-141.) In like fashion, writer and publisher Don L. Lee (later Haki Madhubuti) exalts "black music as our most advanced form of black art," citing its presence during both slavery and the post-enslavement era as proof if it's persistence, importance and value in a 1971 essay. (235.) Lee manages, like Wellburn to only

reference black male musicians as examples in his essay. Interestingly as Lee continues his discussion on black music (and poetry as its extension), he erroneously lists African-American female poets Mari Evans and Gwendolyn Brooks in a list of “the men of the movement” (238), suggesting, according to Cherise Pollard, that perhaps:

> “…Lee considered Evans’ and Brooks’ work to be so accomplished that it transcended the limitations of their female gender, or… [perhaps] this inclusion of women was an afterthought. Either way, the emphasis on black male talent is indicative of an even greater issue of aesthetic values that reflects a fusion of the categories of blackness and maleness within the critics’ (i.e. Lee’s) own analytical frameworks” (175.)

While Lee does make it a point to discuss the work of African-American female poets during The Black Power and Black Arts Movements era as his essay proceeds, (namely, Margaret Danner, Nikki Giovanni, Jayne Cortez, June Meyer, Audre Lorde, Mae Jackson and Sonia Sanchez, to name a few,) his conversation is not nearly as exhaustive as that of the male poets he chooses to discuss (244-247.) While Smethurst points out that during this era, the image of “The Black Arts warrior” was “implicitly and explicitly male” revisionist scholarship has worked to pull forth the work of African-American female artists. Author, poet and filmmaker Cheryl Clarke’s work After Mecca: Women Poets and the Black Arts Movement is a remarkable contribution in this vein, along with New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement, a comprehensive volume edited by Lisa Gail Collins and Margo Natalie Crawford. In terms of visual art, Lisa Farrington’s Creating Their Own Image: The History of African-American Women Artists and Salah M. Hassan’s Gendered Visions: The Art of Contemporary Africana Women Artists contribute significantly to the body of

available knowledge about African-American female visual artists during the era of interest, including the work of Elizabeth Catlett, Faith Ringgold and Carol Ann Carter. While the prevailing scholarship, both from the period and contemporarily makes some inroads in discussing African-American women's creative work, it is clear that the emphasis heretofore has been on contributions in the literary arts in particular and on the role of black music in general. The omission of any significant discussion of African-American female artists in other genres, namely dance, during The Black Power and Black Arts Movements signals a gap in the scholarship about this era.

Missing Links: Omissions in Dance Scholarship

While writing on The Black Power and Black Arts Movements generally omits any discussion of African-American female choreographers and their engagement with the Black Aesthetic between 1965 and 1975, literature that is specific to the dance field has not done much better. Lynne Fauley Emery's 1980 publication, Black Dance in the United States from 1619 to 1970 is strong evidence of this oversight. While Emery devotes an entire chapter of her book to African-American concert dance from 1950 to "the present" [read here as 1970,] her work here focuses heavily on Black male choreographers, including lengthy biographical sketches of Fred Benjamin, Rod Rodgers, Alvin Ailey, Arthur Mitchell, Donald McKayle, Louis Johnson, Talley Beatty and Eleo Pomare (272-312.) While Emery's work includes a brief mention of Ella Thompson Moore in this chapter, she is only mentioned in her role as director of her husband Charles Moore's company upon his death, not as a dancer or choreographer (306.) The

text proceeds to discuss the work of several black female dancers and teachers (including Syvilla Forte, Ruth Beckford and Elma Lewis) but omits any discussion of African-American female choreographers creating concert work during the period of interest. Interestingly, Emery's book does discuss a few African-American female choreographers whose work began to emerge in the late 1970's and into the early 1980's (including Dianne McIntyre and Cleo Parker Robinson) but her work suggests that African-American female dance makers were not present during the height of The Black Power and Black Arts Movements era (313.) Richard A. Long's 1989 The Black Tradition in American Dance follows Emery's lead: the text, which claims to provide "a survey of all the major personalities in Black dance from the 1920's to the present day," [read here as 1989] omits any thorough discussion of African-American female choreographers during The Black Power and Black Arts Movements in favor of a discussion of the work of black male choreographers, including Talley Beatty, Louis Johnson, Gus Solomons Jr., Alvin Ailey and Eleo Pomare (129-152.) In like fashion, John O. Perpener, III's African-American Concert Dance: The Harlem Renaissance and Beyond prioritizes the work of black male choreographers during The Black Power and Black Arts Movements era, including Talley Beatty, Ralph Lemon, Donald McKayle, Alvin Ailey and Bill T. Jones. While Perpener highlights Dr. Veta Goler's research on Dianne McIntyre, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Blondell Cummings in the late 1970's and early 1980's (213-216), his text, like both Emery and Long, omit any meaningful discussion of the work of African – American female choreographers during The

Black Power and Black Arts Movements era. Gerald Jonas's 1992 Dancing: The Pleasure, Power and Art of Movement provides a survey of social, religious, cultural and concert dance as a companion to an eight-part video series of the same name. Unfortunately the Jonas text follows the trend of earlier dance scholarship by not including any specific discussion of African-American female choreographers during the era of interest. In the 2001 publication Moving History/Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader, editors Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright compile essays that are intended to provide an overview of dance history "in an innovative and wide-ranging fashion." While the text is inclusive of several essays on African-American dance traditions and choreographers by recognized dance scholars (i.e. including Thomas F. DeFrantz, Kariamu Welsh Asante, Brenda Dixon-Gottschild and Ananya Chatterjea,) none of the essays in the volume specifically address The Black Power and Black Arts Movements in general or the work of African-American female choreographers during that era.

Speaking more generally, dance studies has given attention to the work of some African-American female choreographers whose major work lies outside of the era of interest--namely Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus, Dianne McIntyre, Bebe Miller and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar. While both Dunham and Primus's work took place primarily in the period between 1930 and 1960, McIntyre, Miller and Zollar's impact is primarily felt from the late 1970's into the present moment. Dunham and Primus stand as progenitors of contemporary

African-American concert dance while the latter artists stand as examples of the manifestation of that legacy.

Born near the turn of the century in 1909 in Chicago, Illinois Katherine Dunham is perhaps the best-known and most influential pioneer in Black dance. Dunham studied dance with Ludmilla Speranzeva and Marl Turbyfill before her first performance in the lead role of Ruth Page's ballet, *La Guiablesse* in 1933. She founded her first company, *Ballet Negre* in 1931 while still at student at the University of Chicago. Young Katherine went on to earn a BA in Social Anthropology in 1936 and in the same year, she earned a Rosenwald Travel Fellowship that allowed her to conduct fieldwork in Jamaica, Trinidad, Cuba, Martinique and Haiti. Ms. Dunham later completed coursework leading to a Masters' degree in 1947 at Northwestern University; she published her thesis, Dances of Haiti in the same year as a follow-up to her 1946 work, Journey to Accompong. Ms. Dunham later developed her own dance technique bearing her name; the technique is a blending of African and Caribbean movement vocabulary with Ballet and American modern dance and was informed by her earlier research conducted under the auspices of her Rosenwald Travel Fellowship (Sommers, sec. 1-3.)

Katherine Dunham founded her company, the Negro Dance Group in 1937 for which she choreographed several works, including *L'Ag'Ya*, *Haitian Suite*, *Shango*, *Choros* and *Rites de Passage*. She appeared in 9 Hollywood films from 1941 to 1959 and opened her school, the Dunham School of Dance and Theater in 1945. Before her passing in 2006, Dunham had earned several awards and

honors including the Kennedy Center Honor's Award (1983,) Samuel H. Scripps American Dance Festival Award (1987,) and a 2005 Outstanding Leadership in Dance Research award from the Congress on Research in Dance (Sommers, sec. 4, 6-7, 10.) Her work and life has been profiled in books by noted scholars in both dance and anthropology, including Joyce Aschenbrenner, Brenda Pugh McCutchen, Lynne Emery and John Perpener. Most recently, the 2006 edited volume Kaiso! Writings By and About Katherine Dunham includes several previously unpublished documents and photographs compiled by VeVe A. Clark and Sara E. Johnson.

Dunham's contemporary, Trinidadian-born dancer and choreographer Pearl Primus was raised in New York and studied at both Hunter College and the New School for Social Research. She earned an undergraduate degree in Biology in 1940 and made her dance debut in New York in 1943 her work, "African Ceremonial." In 1944, Primus hosted her first solo recital of what as referred to as "primitive" dances in New York and later proceeded to found her own company in 1946 for which she choreographed several works, including *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*, *Strange Fruit* and *Hard Time Blues*. At that time, Primus's work employed African-American vernacular and American modern dance vocabulary. In 1949, Primus received a Rosenwald Travel Fellowship to study dance and culture in both Central and West Africa; these travels later influenced her to create works that employed Africanist and Caribbean movement imperatives. Pearl Primus later went on to earn both a Masters' degree in education (1959) and a Ph.D. in dance education (1978) from New York

University. Dr. Primus served as professor of ethnic studies and artist-in-residence at the Five College Consortium in Massachusetts from 1984-1990; she became chair of the Five College Dance Department in 1990. In 1991, Dr. Primus received the National Medal of the Arts from then president, George Bush. (Foley, Sec. 1-3.) Dr. Primus's work as a teacher, scholar, dancer and choreographer has been discussed in several texts, including works by Marshall and Jean Stearns and Jamake Highwater; her choreography, like that of Dunham, is preserved in the DVD compilations Dancing in the Light: Six Compositions by African-American Choreographers and The New Dance Group Gala Historical Concert: Retrospective, 1930s-1970s.

The literature in dance studies makes a historical leap at this juncture and moves primarily into a discussion of Dianne McIntyre, Bebe Miller and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, where the work of African-American female choreographers is concerned. Cleveland-born McIntyre earned a BFA in dance from Ohio State University before moving to New York to direct her company and school Sounds in Motion from 1972 to 1988. She choreographed several works for the ensemble, including *Life's Force* (1979), *Take Off From A Forced Landing* (1984) and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1986.) In 1988, McIntyre disbanded her modern dance company to focus on a career as a freelance choreographer; to date she has created new works for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre and Ailey II, the Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble, Dayton Contemporary Dance Company and Philadanco in addition to choreographing extensively for theater, musicals and film. In 2007, Dianne McIntyre was honored as a John S.

Guggenheim Fellow (Goler, secs. 1-5.) McIntyre's work has been highlighted in The Oxford Dictionary of Dance as well as in dance scholarship by Ann Cooper Albright, David Gere and Selma Jeanne Cohen.

Both Bebe Miller and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar have had similar career trajectories and honors for their work. Both artists born in 1950 hold undergraduate and Masters' degrees from major American universities. Bebe Miller formed her postmodern dance company in 1984, the same year that Zollar established her all-female, contemporary dance ensemble, Urban Bush Women. These two choreographers have created work for several prominent dance companies, including commissions from the Boston Ballet and PACT Dance Company in Johannesburg for Miller and Dayton Contemporary Dance Company and Philadanco for Zollar. Both choreographers have received awards and honors for the work: Miller has earned a Guggenheim Fellowship and American Choreographer Award while Zollar has been the recipient of three Fellowships for Choreography from the National Endowment of the Arts and two Inter-Arts Grants (DeFrantz, sec.1; Malone, sec. 1-4.) Bebe Miller's work has been profiled in Gayle Kassing's History of Dance: An Interactive Arts Approach and Janet Layson's Dance History: An Introduction, as well as in scholarship by Sharon E. Friedler, Melanie Bales and Rebecca Nettl-Fiol. Similarly Jawole Willa Jo Zollar's artistry has been a subject of interest in Ananya Chatterjea's Butting Out: Resistive Choreographies Through Works by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Chandralekha and Sally Banes's Writing Dance in the Age of Postmodernism as

well as in research by Brenda Dixon-Gottschild, Naomi Jackson and Toni Shapiro-Phim.

Conceptual Framework: Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought

Critical race theory emerged in the mid-1970s in the United States out of legal studies and draws from radical feminism, the Black Power and Chicano movements (Delgado and Stefancic, 3-4.) It was the result of the work of several pioneering legal and cultural studies scholars (including Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Chrenshaw, Juan Perea and Eric Yamamoto) who began to notice that "the heady advances of the civil rights era of the 1960's had stalled and in many respects, were being rolled back" (ibid.) This concern caused legal thinkers to begin to analyze the meaning(s) of race and racism in understanding power relations through the lens that (a) racism was ordinary and commonplace, (b) that elite white political interests can result in "interest convergence" or material determinism that suggest the advancement of poor people and non-whites and can prove to be false and (c) that the concept of race is a social construction without biological or genetic reality (7.) As a philosophy, critical race theory supports the development of revisionist histories that "reexamine America's historical record, replacing comforting majority interpretations of events with ones that square more accurately with minorities' experiences" (20.) This perspective requires that a researcher using critical race theory recognize and examine intersectionality—that is the belief that individuals and classes have shared or overlapping interests or traits (149.) Critical race theory prioritizes the analysis of how race functions "at the very center of social and institutional life"

and "how an establishment of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color has been created" (53.)

While critical race theory considers racism as fundamental to the oppression of people of color, black feminist thought extends this framework by considering an analysis of gender as well. According to Beverly Guy-Sheftall, black feminism assumes the position that black women have a unique and particular experience of oppression because of their "dual racial and gender identity and their limited access to economic resources" (Guy-Sheftall, 2.) This perspective suggests that the lived experience of African-American women especially reflects an existence that is simultaneously impacted by "racist, sexist and classist" social structures and institutions (ibid.) As author Kimberly Springer suggests, "black feminism needed to, in addition to challenging, racism and sexism, tackle poverty and patriarchy as it impacted *all* black women" (113.) Deborah K. King's 1988 essay Multiple Jeopardy: The Context of Black Feminist Ideology, echoes this sentiment in her statement that "the dual and systematic discriminations of racism and sexism remain pervasive, and for many, class inequality compounds those oppressions…; the necessity of addressing all oppressions is one of the hallmarks of black feminist thought" (294-295.) King proceeds to articulate the tenets of black feminist thought as first and foremost a "declaration of the visibility of black women," followed by the idea that "self-determination is essential" to black women's lives. A third tenet is that black feminist thought must fundamentally challenge "the oppressions of racism, sexism, and classism in both the dominant society and within movements for

liberation" and finally, that "black feminist ideology presumes an image of black women as powerful, independent subjects" capable of speaking and theorizing for themselves out of the reality of their lived experience (312.) This emphasis on lived experience as a way of knowing is re-articulated in the groundbreaking 1990 text, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment by social scientist Patricia Hill Collins (349). While Collins affirms the position that black feminist perspectives are in fact grounded in the lived, material experience of black women themselves, she goes on to posit that black feminist ideology challenges not only what one can know but also *how* knowledge or truth itself is constituted (352.) Collins warns the reader that " alternative knowledge claims in and of themselves are rarely threatening to conventional knowledge" and "such claims are routinely ignored, discredited or simply absorbed and marginalized in existing paradigms" (351.) This latter point suggests that the omission of the work of African-American female choreographers and their engagement with the Black Aesthetic in scholarship on The Black Power and Black Arts Movements as well as in dance studies is an example of the marginalization of not only the creative work of these women, but of their knowledge production as well, vis-à-vis their own perspective or standpoint concerning their lived experience.

Deborah K. King's work points out that often times black women's experiences have been assumed as analogous and/or synonymous with those of either black men (from the vantage point of race) and/or white women (from the vantage point of gender.) She states:

> "…since the experience of both are equivalent, a discussion of black women in particular is superfluous. It is mistakenly granted that either there is no difference in being black and female from being generically black (i.e. male) or generically female (i.e. white.) The analogy obfuscates or denies what Chafe refers to as "the profound substantive differences" between blacks and women" (296.)

As a consequence of this collapsing of the experiences of African-American women, Collins makes a case emphasizing an understanding of black women's standpoint in seeking to analyze their lived experiences. Collins contends that black women's standpoint is characterized by their "political and economic status which provides them with a distinctive set of experiences that offer a different view of material reality than that available to other groups" and that "these experiences stimulate a distinctive black feminist consciousness concerning that material reality" (339.) While the author concedes that "the presence of an independent standpoint does not mean that it is uniformly shared by all black women or even that black women fully recognize its contours" (353,) the concept is of some use in making a case for the teasing out of African-American women's narratives and experiences.

Summary

While dance scholarship that discusses the lives and work of Dunham, Primus, McIntyre, Miller and Zollar make significant inroads in telling the stories of female choreographers of the African Diaspora, the literature demonstrates a significant gap. The absence in both dance studies and scholarship both from and on The Black Power and Black Arts Movements concerning the choreography of African-American women suggests a wide opening for further investigation on the topic. It is my opinion that ultimately,

tendencies in Black Power/Black Arts Movement philosophy (which prioritized masculinity and the redemption of black male patriarchy,) coupled with revisionist histories about the era (that have generally prioritized African-American women's contributions in the literary and visual arts) conspire to create a space where the work of African American female choreographers during the era of interest is simply overlooked. This circumstance, coupled with the emphasis on the value of music and poetry under the umbrella of the Black Aesthetic in partnership with the absence of meaningful discussions on African-American female choreographers and their work during the era of interest in dance studies combine to forge a formidable absence in the literature. As such, the marrying of both critical race theory and black feminist thought provide a useful framework for approaching this deficiency in the currently available body of knowledge. The application of a class, economic and race-based analysis (as articulated in critical race theory) taken in concert with the particularity and specificity of the lived experiences and standpoint of black women (as expressed in black feminist thought) create a dynamic and flexible theoretical context in which to approach the proposed research questions. This flexible and dynamic framework stands as the foundation of the research design for my proposed study regarding the work of African-American female choreographers and their engagement with the Black Aesthetic during the height of Black Power/Black Arts Movement era between from 1965 to 1975. Applied simultaneously, both theories create a foundation for the proposed research that will allow me to

approach the research questions through the mutually constitutive aspects of race, class, gender, and economic location.

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Chapter 3: "There is Not Just One That Can Speak For Us": Introducing Miller and Johnson

In this chapter, I outline relevant biographical information about my selected subjects, both Joan Miller and Carole Johnson, so that I can explicate the relationship between their work as dancers and the Black Aesthetic in a subsequent chapter. This section makes use primarily of interviews and cultural documents including press reviews, photographs and marketing materials to properly contextualize the professional work of both Miller and Johnson. The following detailed biographies of both Miller and Johnson are put forth in order to lay bare the social, cultural and political influences that served as a framework for their work so I can then analyze their creative production in relation to the Black Aesthetic and the implications for dance studies and contemporary Black women's activism.

About Joan Miller

Joan Miller was born Joan Ann Bernadette Theresa Floissac on September 30,1936 in Harlem, New York to Beryl and Hubert Floissac. Joan's mother, Beryl, was of Jamaican heritage while her father, Hubert claimed ancestry from St. Lucia. As a young woman, Joan's family made it a point to foster her early education by enrolling her in parochial school as a reflection of the family's Catholic religious heritage. Interestingly, it was Joan's attendance at Saint Thomas Parochial School on 118th St. that signaled her first exposure to dance. While Beryl and Hubert only attended dances at New York's Renaissance and famed Savoy Ballroom two to three times a year, (Personal Interview 4, p. 6)

they encouraged Joan's experience with dance training at school through local Girl Scout Troop 3105:

> JM: I was started in a Girl Scout Troop at the age of I don't know. I was a Brownie and then a Girl Scout. And, by the time I became a Girl Scout, the troop leader was interested in dance. So the whole troop became a dancing troop and that's how I got interested in dance.
>
> TNA: Your whole Girl Scout Troop started dancing because the troop leader wanted to?
>
> JM: Yes, I mean she taught dance at the time on 135th street. So her enthusiasm spilled onto us and we did folk [dance] things and simulated balletic things and national dance and did that for Girl Scout badges and things.
>
> TNA: How do you remember feeling when you were dancing at that age with the troop?
>
> JM: I was probably ten or eleven; nine, ten or eleven. It was exciting. I was always learning something new; new dances and I had new parts. I played the women's part and the men's part in the national dances because we had—you know, it was a Girl Scout troop. [laughs] We didn't realize what we were getting from her but it was exciting to us. (Personal Interview 4, pp. 4-5)

It was troop leader Vivian Roberts, a black woman (ibid.) who was responsible for this early novice exposure to dance training and performance for young Joan and her peers. After this early training through the Girl Scouts, Joan proceeded to study modern dance at Carnegie Hall:

> JM: Some of us went on to what was called modern dance at the time. I was 11 or 12 or 13 or 14; somewhere in there. It was a small group that was trained at Carnegie Hall with a teacher who was white, but she had us, she choreographed little vignettes for us to perform…
>
> TNA: How often was the training?

> JM: Probably once or twice a week. Not more than that. (Personal Interview 4; p. 7)

While the Carnegie Hall training only lasted approximately two years Joan's interest in dance flourished and continued into high school at the Saint Francis Xavier Academy for Young Ladies from 1950 to 1954:

> JM: It was just at that time it was something I just knew I wanted to do. I didn't know anything about it in terms of the academics of dance or the politics of dance. I just wanted to dance. And I belonged to a dance club and then I eventually became the president of the dance club. And then I choreographed for the dance club. [I danced] for the whole four years and completed doing a dance program my senior year. And I was hooked. (Personal Interview 4; p.8)

By the end of high school with her interest in dance assured, Joan wanted to leave during her senior year to attend the famed Juilliard School in order to continue her dance studies more intensely. While her parents were always supportive of her dance pursuits, Beryl and Hubert required that Joan complete her high school studies (Interview 4; pp. 7 and 9.) After high school, Joan's parents encouraged her to pursue a "stable" occupation as an educator and as such, Joan enrolled and completed her undergraduate studies in physical education at Brooklyn College from 1954 to 1958 (It was during these undergraduate years that she began to study during the summer months with major teachers and choreographers in modern dance at the Connecticut College School of Dance/American Dance Festival summer program:

> JM: …in the middle of my college years I went -- someone introduced me to the school of dance in Connecticut College, which

> was a very well known school and that's where I studied with José Limón and Doris Humphrey and all of the biggies of that era. And that just sold me. I wasn't thinking of doing a lot of what I [eventually] did, which was socio-political dance work, but I just knew that that's what I wanted to do. (ibid.)

Upon completion of her studies at Brooklyn College, Joan pursued and completed a Master's Degree in Dance Education at Columbia Teachers' College from 1958 to 1960, even though she felt some ambivalence about that choice:

> TNA: So after Brooklyn [College] you decided to pursue a master's degree?
>
> JM: Yes.
>
> TNA: Why was that?
>
> JM: I don't know. I'm trying to figure that out. I did do that and mainly it was academic things. You know, dance education because the degree was in dance education. And maybe it was because I was going to teach dance. And at the time that's where you went. And I kept saying to myself, 'how can you teach dance when you don't know enough about dancing, per se, ' which is why I kept wanting to go to Juilliard to perfect my technique and the choreography and learn more about the craft.
>
> TNA: Okay, and what was the experience [at Columbia Teachers' College] like for you in terms of being exposed to the sort of academic discussion around dance education?
>
> JM: I don't remember it very much. I remember Jane Dudley (see her obituary for citation) and I remember they had square and folk and not very – I mean I didn't get a technical dance education there. I learned about dance history and the survey and things of that nature. And I know that they wanted me to write some kind of dissertation…but I was just so out of my head in terms of the aesthetics of dance…
>
> TNA: So while you were at Columbia, in your mind, you still wanted to go to Juilliard?
>
> JM: Oh yes! Yes I hung onto that. (Personal Interview 5; p. 3)

Throughout the late 1950's, Joan continued to study dance and composition with both Pauline Koner and Louis Horst (Lewis-Ferguson, sec. 1.) By 1960, Miller achieved her long held goal of attending The Juilliard School under the auspices of the John Hay Whitney Fellowship. The Fellowship, awarded "for research, coordinating professional & educational dance material for college & university departments" allowed Joan to focus on studying ballet and modern dance; during that time she was exposed to classes with Antony Tudor, Leon Danielian, Margaret Black, Perry Brunson and Betty Jones (Miller, p. 4.) During the same year that she began her studies at Juilliard, Joan began performing with the school's Dance Ensemble and Ruth Currier's dance company ("Chamber Arts/Dance players Special Residency Activities," sec.1) While it would be almost another 10 years before Joan started her own company, her commitment to dance and desire to perform professionally at that time laid the groundwork for her future endeavors in the field.

During her years at Juilliard, Joan began to try her hand as a choreographer. In the same year that she began her studies for the professional diploma, Joan created her first work, *Protest,* as a way to articulate her disapproval concerning the pending execution of Caryl Chessman, a man convicted of robbery, kidnapping and rape who had been sentenced to death (Personal Interview 5; p.1) When asked why she thought she could use dance in that way, Joan noted that it was because of her performance in a duet with Betty Jones, choreographed by Ruth Currier, entitled *The Antagonists.* (ibid.) Notably, dance critic Jack Anderson described Currier's work as a dance that "seemed to

be trying to show how a victim so obsesses an inquisitorial zealot that it is, finally the victim and not the zealot who is the dominating force" (Anderson, 30.) Joan was lauded for her performance in *The Antagonists* by Don McDonagh, a critic for The New York Times, for her ability to dance with a "suitably chilling quality (McDonagh, 53.) This aesthetic sense of using dance to illustrate intense human struggle informed Joan's development of the *Protest* work and found its way into subsequent choreographic explorations.

Joan's second choreographic work, *Freudian Slips*, continued in this vain of probing and illustrating fundamental aspects of the human condition. In *Freudian Slips* (alternately titled *Egomania*), Joan dramatized the psychological concepts of the ego, the id and the superego through choreography. Notably, Paula Kelly a Juilliard colleague who later became a critically acclaimed Broadway and television actor, performed the role of the id in *Freudian Slips*. In a 1961 review of the work when it premiered at New York's Master Institute Theatre, Ernestine Stodelle noted that this was a work "in which the audience was gaily reminded of the vanity and questionable sanity of modern man" (Stodelle, 103.) Stodelle indicated that the work had a delightfully comic aspect which would come to signify the other side of Joan's choreographic and aesthetic predilections as she continued to develop as an artist; this emphasis on struggle and humor in the human condition typified the ironic and satirical twists that would later become a signature in Miller's work.

After completing her studies at Juilliard in 1962, Joan continued to perform as a principal dancer with Ruth Currier's company while pursuing other

opportunities for work as a dancer ("About Joan Miller and the Company," sec. 1.) As a result, Joan danced as a guest artist with the companies of José Limón and Anna Sokolow and as a member of the Lincoln Center American Dance Theatre Company (ibid.) Due to her extensive professional background at that time, Joan was invited to teach dance on a one-year appointment at Smith College from 1962-1963 (Personal Interview 5; p. 10.) After her brief teaching stint at Smith, Miller was hired in 1963 to teach modern and folk dance at the Hunter College – Bronx Campus (which became Herbert H. Lehman College-CUNY in 1968.) In addition to teaching at Hunter, from 1963 to 1964, Joan danced with the New York-based group the Merry-Go-Rounders, a company that performed for adults and children and toured both locally and as far away as Canada (Personal Interview 6; page 1.) In 1964, Joan began to dance with the Rod Rodgers Dance Company where she "observed the transition that he made from making dance-y dances to his socio-political era" (Personal Interview 5; p.10.) From 1965 to 1968, Joan danced with James Waring, Remy Charlip, Yvonne Rainier and Rudy Perez, artists who were associated with the Judson Church and avant-garde dance communities (Lewis-Ferguson; sec. 2.) After officially leaving both Ruth Currier's and Rod Rodger's dance companies in 1967 and 1968 (Personal Interview 6; p. 5) respectively, Joan was ready to embark on the next chapter of her career not only as an important dance educator, but as a professional choreographer and as the artistic director of her own dance company.

While working at Herbert H. Lehman College-CUNY (formerly Hunter College – Bronx Campus) Joan continued to explore the craft of choreography working with students in what would become the college's newly minted dance division. From 1969 to 1970 Miller developed, choreographed and continued to refine *Robot Game*, alternately referred to as *Hereabout the Little Hazards* (Jowitt, 31*)* a work according to Joan that was about the "rote aspect of living, the inability to be creative, the inability to be daring, the inability to get out of the box." (Personal Interview 8; p. 1.) During the performance of the piece, a film by J.A. Levy and Anne Rothstein was projected on the back of the stage that showed Joan's students and members of the Lehman College faculty walking for a full twenty minutes in various shoes and in bare feet. The film incorporated "funny effects with speeded-up [sec.] film and superimposed images in a Prologue that introduced the company" as well as a "collage of marching feet, a gas-masked Uncle Sam and people with guns for heads" (Hering, 86.) The walking images would be projected while three dancers on stage moved throughout the space wearing red tape recorders that played a monotonous voice saying what Hering referred to as "repeated phrases of everyday politesse" including "hello," "fine, thank you," and "how are you?" In addition to the dancers, the work had small toy robot "dolls" that walked around the stage randomly during the performance; the "dolls" would often walk to the edge or to the back of the stage where they couldn't go any further; in which case, the dolls would fall onto their faces and continue moving their legs in a walking motion or just continue walking, facing the back wall of the stage without the ability to go

any further. The work premiered in 1970 when Joan founded her company the Chamber Arts/Dance Players. The new dance company "became a forum for Joan's socio- political ideas and satires (Lewis-Ferguson; sec. 3.)" In reminiscing about the company performing *Robot Game* during their inaugural season at New York City's Cubiculo Theatre, Joan remembered:

> JM: A lot of it has to do with consciousness of who you are. I mean not only in terms of color, but also in terms of integrity. I had six dolls and the dolls were mechanical dolls walking around the stage, which is why I guess at the time they said I was experimental – because black -- I don't know, men or women who were doing pieces like that. I had dolls walking around and the dolls would say 'hello, fine, thank you, how are you and you'—just rote. And so these mechanical dolls walked around the stage. Plus I had a film of rote kind of materials, things that were repetitive, walking, running, mindless things. And then the dance. So I had three things going on before people did all that stuff. (Personal Interview 6; pp.8-9.)

Notably, *Robot Game* was originally performed by Milton Bowser (later known as Abdel Salaam, Founder and Executive Artistic Director of Forces of Nature Dance Theatre Company,) Chuck Davis (who founded his own company in 1968 and the African American Dance Ensemble in 1984,) William R. Munroe and Wanda Ward. The work featured music by Joel Press, a sound collage by Richard Burke and film by J.A. Levy and Anne Rothstein, both of whom were on faculty at Lehman College at that time. Elvira Lopez created the slides while the video collage featured in the film was actually conceived of and directed by Joan Miller herself. The work employed text from an article in *Psychology Today* entitled "Robot Game," which was published in April of 1969; Anne Indianer designed and created the costumes for the Chamber Arts/Dance Players in that work ("Joan Miller and the Chamber Arts/Dance Players; Montage A.")

In a review of the company's performance at The Cubiculo from February of their first season, Dance Magazine critic Marcia Marks noted that "the cumbersome catchall name for the performers is indicative of the performance – it's hard to put your finger on it all" (Marks, 86.) In the early years, the company's performances that Joan would often refer to as a "montage" (Jowitt; 46) would feature live music and visual art presentations in addition to concert dance:

> JM: In the beginning it was called Joan Miller's Chamber Arts/ Dance Company. And because I always had two slots, I would do three dance pieces and two music. And I always would do things like I would put a painting up, you know and we used the slides we had in those days with regular slide projectors and I'd put up a slide of color and line and design and ask probably three musicians to do it. Dance with it. And that was the piece. That was the second piece on the program. Then I would do a dance piece. And then I'd put another slide – that's why I called it Chamber Arts. And I did that for years until it became mainly a dance company. (Personal Interview 6; p.12)

In the same year she founded the Chamber Arts/Dance Players, Joan successfully designed and began to implement Lehman's two baccalaureate programs in dance as Associate Professor and director of the program, in addition to her role as Director of the Arts Festival and Director of the Dance Theatre Company ("Choreoconcerts and Critiques: Biographies, p.2.) The dance program at Lehman quickly attracted several high quality dancers to teach in the program, including Chuck Davis, Miguel Godreau, Nadine Revine, Louis Falco and John Parks. The student-dancers in the program quickly became so technically proficient under the faculty's direction, including Joan's that a young Alvin Ailey set his seminal work, *Revelations* on members of the Lehman dance division's student body:

> JM: He [Alvin Ailey] let us do "Revelations"; everything except the male solo part. We did the entire thing; we did it two years in a row… I mean it was a momentous event. And they did it well. I mean we had good dancers. (Personal Interview 6; p. 9.)

In addition to attracting quality teachers to Lehman and ensuring the two-year partnership with Ailey, Joan and the Chamber Arts/Dance Players found a home at Lehman where it remained as company-in-residence until 1980, primarily showcasing her original choreography and works by other artists of the period including Rael Lamb, Eleo Pomare and later, Abdel Salaam (Lewis-Ferguson, sec. 3.) The company employed Gwendolyn Watson, a cellist, pianist, vocal music and percussion artist as resident composer; notably, during this period, Watson created "tape collages, and chamber music scores for live performance and improvisations" for the dance companies of both Rod Rodgers and Paul Taylor and had been commissioned to write dance scores for Bertram Ross, Ethel Winter and James Cunningham ("About the Company," p.2.)

Importantly, the repertory of the Chamber Arts/Dance Players company was a reflection of Joan's personal aesthetic preferences, commitments and political influences. In discussing her mission and purpose for the company, Joan shared that her " vision" for it, as reflected in their mission statement was to "enlighten and educate" the audience through dance works that were made in a "socio-political vein" dealing with non-traditional subject matter (Personal Interview 6; p. 3.) Joan noted that as "a product of the sixties" she was deeply influenced by the socio-political activism of that time and that she desired to have more participation in it (Interview 6; page 4.) Citing such artistic influences as the poems of African-American artists Nikki Giovanni, Maya Angelou and

Jamaican-born poet Louise Bennett as well as the music of Leon Bibb, Richie Havens and the spirit of reggae music, (ibid.) Joan's choreographic explorations reflected the socially contentious spirit and activism of the late 1960's and 1970's processed through the lens of her personal experiences. In her most celebrated work, *Pass Fe White*, Joan explored questions of race, gender, identity and the desire for independence as a Black woman against the backdrop of poems by Louise Bennett-Coverley, Amiri Baraka (then known as Leroi Jones,) Jackie Earley and Nikki Giovanni. Heralded in the Springfield, Massachusetts Daily News as a "tour de force" (Conway, 1) and celebrated as "a dance of true sophistication…which stems from honest feeling and a clear viewpoint about that feeling," (Hering, 26) *Pass Fe White* was a fifteen minute, four-part work that was originally conceived of and developed as an autobiographical solo, danced by Joan herself.

Joan envisaged and developed *Pass Fe White* from 1968 to 1970; notably, the autobiographical work did not make use of narrative form. In her choreography Joan eschewed narrative choreographic structure in her work finding it too predictable and commonplace for the ideas she wanted to explore; instead she privileged the juxtaposition of complex moving images against music, film, poetry or other text (Personal Interview 4; p. 14.) By way of example, the first section of *Pass Fe White*, referred to as "Miss Jane" originally featured Miller dressed in all white motorcycle gear from head to toe—jacket, pants, boots, gloves and goggles, with a white bathing cap on her head.

In discussing this first part of the work, Joan noted:

JM: I was the motorcycle upside down trying to right itself with the wheels spinning and trying to find himself and wasn't able…when I did the actual movement, none of the movement had anything to do with [narrative] and I loved it and I still love it. I never actually did a "passing" – a person passing for white and they want to be black.

This image of the dancer - as - motorcycle "trying to right itself," was paired with a recorded voice over of Joan reciting Louise Bennett-Coverley's poem "Pass Fe White," originally published in the groundbreaking 1968 collection, *Jamaica Labrish: Jamaica Dialect Poems*. In the poem, the author recounts that the work's central character, Miss Jane (pronounced 'Jan') has a daughter in America who has decided to "pass" as a white person :

Miss Jane jus hear from 'Merica
Her daughta proudly write
Fe say she fail her exam but
She passin' dere fe wite!

She say fe tell de truth she know
Her brain part not so bright,
She couldn't' pass tru college
So she try pass fe wite.

She passin wid her work-mate dem,
She passin wid her boss,
An a nice wite bwoy she love, dah–
Gwan wid her like say she pass.

But sometime she get fretful an
Her heart start gallop fas'
An she bruk out eena cole-sweat
Jus a-wonder ef she pass!

Jane get bex, sey she sen de gal
Fe learn bout edication,
It look like sey de gal gawn weh
Gwan work pon her complexion.

She noh haffe tan a foreign
Under dat deh strain an fright
For plenty copper-colour gal

Deh home yah dah-play wite.

Her fambily is nayga, but
Dem pedigree is right,
She hope de gal noh gawn an tun
No boogooyagga wite.

De gal pupa dah-laugh an sey
It serve 'Merica right
Five year back dem Jim-Crow him now
Dem pass him pickney wite.

Him dah-boas' all bout de districk
How him daughta is fus-class
How she smarter dan American
An over deh dah-pass!

Some people tink she pass B.A.
Some tink she pass D.R.
Wait till dem fine out sey she ongle
Pass de colour-bar

In the second section of the work, Joan donned a blond wig and danced the part of the acceptable, high-society lady. Joan noted that the section was referred to as "Miss Liz" because it reflected a cultural preoccupation with Elizabeth Taylor as the idealized feminine person and form that all other women, regardless of race, should aspire to (Personal Interview 7; p. 2.) Interestingly, this section of the work was performed with an image of Joan projected on the back of the stage looking down onto the dancer with a somewhat horrified expression; it was as if Joan was watching herself make a fool out of herself for trying to be someone else (i.e. the "perfect" Miss Liz archetype) as opposed to claiming self acceptance and appreciation. The solo in this section was danced to a poem by Amiri Baraka (then known as Leroi Jones) entitled *Poem for Half-white College Students*:

> Who are you, listening to me, who are you
> listening to yourself? Are you white or
> black, or does that have anything to do
> with it? Can you pop your fingers to no
> music, except those wild monkies go on
> in your head, can you jerk, to no melody,
> except finger poppers get it together
> when you turn from starchecking to checking
> yourself. How do you sound, your words, are they
> yours? The ghost you see in the mirror, is it really
> you, can you swear you are not an imitation greyboy,
> can you look right next to you in that chair, and swear,
> that the sister you have your hand on is not really
> so full of Elizabeth Taylor, 'til Richard Burton is
> coming out of her ears. You may even have to be Richard
> with a white shirt and face, and four million negroes
> think you cute, you may have to be Elizabeth Taylor, old lady,
> if you want to sit up in your crazy spot dreaming about dresses,
> and the sway of certain porters' hips. Check yourself, learn who it is
> speaking, when you make some ultrasophisticated point, check yourself,
> when you find yourself gesturing like Steve McQueen, check it out, ask
> in your black heart who it is you are, and is that image black or white,
> you might be surprised right out the window, whistling dixie on the way
> in.

Dance Magazine critic Doris Hering described the movement in this section:

> Miller twitches each limb, each joint, as though being shocked. She goes off, reappearing in a blonde wig, long white gloves and white sheath, slinky and coy. After looking down her dress (is this really me?) she poses in an attitude, then crumples, bit by bit like a broken doll. Like a broken spirit.

In the third section of *Pass Fe White*, Joan danced to a poem entitled *One Thousand Nine Hundred & Sixty Eight Winters* by Jackie Earley. In this section (alternately referred to as 'Miss Mercy',) while the poem was being read, Joan would walk slowly downstage dressing herself in Black clothing. This segment of the work featured Joan working in a more spare and stripped down vein:

> JM: That was my minimal piece because the poem was read three times [with] cello accompaniment and all I did was walk down from upstage to downstage and you know how long that took. Each time I took off a wig or something [from the Miss Liz costume.] This was the just the opposite [from the first section]; I put on a black jumpsuit during the walk. And that was it. No dancing. That was part three. (Personal Interview 7; p. 2.)

During this third section, Jackie Earley's poem suggested the irony of accepting and appreciating "blackness" (symbolized by Joan putting on black clothing) while still being confronted with a "white" phenomenon:

> Got up this morning
> Feeling good & Black
> Thinking black thoughts
> Did black things
> Played all my black records
> And minded my own black bidness!
>
> Put on my best black clothes
> Walked out my door
> And…
>
> Lord have Mercy!
> *White*
> Snow!

Part four of *Pass Fe White* was the "celebratory" section (Personal Interview 7, p. 2) that reconciled the beleaguered soloist to herself. Initially, during part 4, Joan danced the entire section to musical accompaniment and a voice over reading of Nikki Giovanni's seminal work, *Ego-Tripping (their may be a reason why.)* In the poem, the author extols the virtues of being a person of African descent who feels unabashed and shameless pride in their heritage and personage:

I was born in the Congo
I walked to the fertile crescent and built
    the sphinx
I designed a pyramid so tough that a star
    that only glows every one hundred years falls
    into the center giving divine perfect light
I am bad

I sat on the throne
    drinking nectar with Allah
I got hot and sent an ice age to europe
    to cool my thirst
My oldest daughter is nefertiti
    the tears from my birth pains
    created the nile
I am a beautiful woman

I gazed on the forest and burned
    out the sahara desert
    with a packet of goat's meat
    and a change of clothes
I crossed it in two hours
I am a gazelle so swift
    so swift you can't catch me

    For a birthday present when he was three
I gave my son Hannibal an elephant
    He gave me rome for mother's day
My strength flows ever on

My son noah built new/ark and
I stood proudly at the helm
    as we sailed on a soft summer day
I turned myself into myself and was
    jesus
    men intone my loving name
    All praises All praises
I am the one who would save

I sowed diamonds in my back yard
My bowels deliver uranium
    the filings from my fingernails are
    semi-precious jewels
    On a trip north
I caught a cold and blew
My nose giving oil to the arab world

I am so hip even my errors are correct
I sailed west to reach east and had to round off
    the earth as I went
    The hair from my head thinned and gold was laid
    across three continents

I am so perfect, so divine , so ethereal, so surreal
I cannot be comprehended except by my permission

I mean...I...can fly
    like a bird in the sky...

Notably, the choreography in section four, was eventually divided up to be danced by three members of the company; each would perform one of the solo sections of part one through three and then all three dancers would perform during the part four section (Personal Interview 7; p.3)

Over the years, Joan's performance of *Pass Fe White* yielded mixed reviews.   In 1970, Dance Magazine's Marcia Marks, noted that in the context of an evening length program, " only in Pass Fe White did [Joan's] movements come to terms with her inner motivations" though she went on to describe the work as making use of "jerky, almost spastic movements of a rigid body to express the plight of a black passing for white" (Marks, 86.) In 1971, Deborah Jowitt, formerly of The Village Voice exclaimed:

> …Miller's 'Pass Fe White' looks better every time I see it. The first section is especially fine. Not only does Miller whip through the dancing with a ferocious drive and focus but the choreography itself is taut and has no wasted places. Part of the reason for the strength is that while the taped voice reads a poem about "passing," the dancer in white racing outfit and goggles steams along her own track. She doesn't attempt to illustrate the poem and as a result, she illumines it."

In January 1972, celebrated dance writer Doris Hering celebrated the work, noting:

> Miss Miller's body sprang and curled through the anguish of a woman passing for white… even Ms. Miller's costume became blacker and blacker, as her body stance became more resolute and the gestures more cutting. In this one work Miss Miller stood gloriously defenseless before the real demands of her art. It was moving to see.

Writer Kitty Cunningham described Joan at a July1975 performance of *Pass Fe White* at Jacob's Pillow as "an involved dancer who moves gracefully" and the choreography as "particularly heartfelt "(Cunningham, 1.) During the same season, Nancy Altman described Joan's performance of the four - part solo as follows:

> The poetry itself is fascinating to hear and it is used as music rather than narration. That is, Miss Miller does not simply act out what is being expressed with the words, she is reacting to and amplifying it, just as a dancer would use music. Although slides used as a backdrop were not always in focus, the overall effect of the dance was unmistakably honest and sophisticated. Miss Miller dances with the finely tuned musculature of a cat. (Altman, 69)

Interestingly, in 1975 when Joan was still performing the work as a full solo, she was heralded by critic Joan Pikula as "moving with languid grace" throughout the performance which "brought her deeper and deeper into the black experience and a pride in that experience (80.) While dance writers may disagree somewhat concerning the performance and delivery of *Pass Fe White* over the years, it remains the most celebrated and well-known work of Joan's choreography and certainly her most celebrated work during the period of interest.

Coming off of the success of the initial season, the Chamber Arts/Dance Players Company became the resident dance company at Herbert H. Lehman College in 1971; the college proceeded to award the company a grant to support

it's work during the 1972-1973 season (see "February Calendar of Events.") Joan, along with members of the company "taught and performed in Geneva, Switzerland where they were in residence at Etudes et Recontres Artistiques during the summer of 1973 "as a result of an affiliated artist relationship with Dance Theatre Workshop" (see Company Brochure: "Company Touring.") (In the same year, Joan was awarded a Creative Artists Public Service Program (CAPS) Fellowship "to construct parts III and IV of her work *Homestretch,* a dance theater work for three to four dancers and to revise parts I and II of the work" which had been previewed earlier that year (see "Presstime News: CAPS Fellowship Awarded to Fourteen Choreographers.") *Homestretch*, described as a women's liberation work, employed popular images of female caricatures on order to comment on contemporary gender relations:

> "No doubt about Joan Miller's 'Homstretch' – a Women's Lib piece for sure. Out stride three women, in bridal dress, graduation cap and gown and ratty bathrobe. While Sawako Yoshida runs in circles, Wanda Ward reads, 'See Dick run. Dick runs a lot. Jane watches Dick run.' Ward does a whole masculine number, from cool pop dances to Mr. America muscle-flexing. Rapid-fire slides of a bikini-clad woman, Virginia Slims ad and Superman and snatches of the song "I'm Your Puppet." (Stodolsky, 90.)

*Homestretc*h's theme of exploring male/female relationships was later discussed as follows:

> In another sequence, Yon Martin performs for Jane Lombardi, shouting 'See Dick run. Dick runs fast. See big Dick…See Jane run. Jane runs…'Except Jane isn't running. She's sitting looking bored and frustrated. He coaxes her, performs a display of energetic masculine leaps and bounds across the stage: 'See Dick run and jump and fly.' Finally, Lombardi puts on a blond wig [and says]: "I'm Barbara. Fly Me.' (Jowitt, 46.)

February of 1973 was a whirlwind time period for the company. On February 6th, the Chamber Arts/Dance Players hosted a "Jam Session & Improvisation" with Joan, accompanist Gwendolyn Watson and members of the company. On the 9th, the recently revised work *Homestretch* premiered at the Minor Latham Playhouse at Barnard College. On the 11th of that month, Joan presented a concert of what she then termed "audio-visual-choreo-graphics;" the matinee concert at the New York School of Education featured *Pass Fe White, PLUS or minus, Soundscape, Blackout* and *Mix*, all works by Miller in addition to a work entitled *Improvisations on a Theme* by Rudy Perez (Stodolsky, 92.) Later that year, the company, in partnership with the American Dance Guild Northeast Regional Committee, presented a full day conference which included a participatory movement/music workshop, an open meeting, lunch, classes in classic/contemporary forms and ethnic/jazz forms and a lecture-demonstration hosted by company members (see "The American Dance Guild Northeast Regional Committee: Music and Dance or 'Integration is a Bitch.')

In 1974, the company was featured by the Clark Center in a "choreoconcert." Interestingly, the program included company guest artist Chuck Davis reading "Black politically and socially oriented poems" as a part of the program. By this point, Joan was known as a choreographer who would "use one or more of the following: live musicians, props, costumes, slides, pre-taped verbal accompaniment, live dialogue or whatever else she needs to communicate her chosen theme" (Jowitt, 46.)

1975 was also a landmark year for the ensemble when they participated in a week-long residency at the Ted Shawn Theatre during the Jacob's Pillow Festival in Lee, Massachusetts where they performed *Pass Fe White* and *Thoroughfare* (Cunningham, 1); by that time, the company had performed across New York City at the Delacorte Theatre, Japan House, The Theatre at Riverside Church, Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall, New York University, Barnard College and the Hunter College Playhouse in addition to regular engagements at Lehman College (see 'JMDP's Performing History.) In a review from *The Village Voice* in that same year, dance critic Deborah Jowitt described the company's performance as a "blunt traffic jam of people" alternately describing the Players' repertory as "confusing," "impressive," and "powerful" (99.) During the same season Joan Pikula described the company as "city streets with all of the hustle and bustle, much of the light and some of the darkness" (80) and Don McDonagh of *The New York Times* described Joan's work as a series of "smoothly finished pieces," that presented 'ideal, cool, shapes" that were "clear, humorous and neatly joined together" in terms of the sensibility of the choreography (53.) The critical response by this time in the company's history suggested somewhat of a refinement and growth in their overall aesthetic. According to a correspondence from Margaret W. Armstrong, former manager for Arts and Lectures in 1976, Joan's company had begun to try its hand at touring with a residency and concert at the University of California of Santa Barbara.

After ten years of existence, the company, officially known by then as Joan Miller's Dance Players, was poised to host its 10th Anniversary Gala Benefit Concert. Hosted April 13th at the Poe Theatre/Fordham University at Lincoln Center, the concert featured a guest performance by Broadway actor Avon Long and the premiere of *Lyric Song…Lyric Dance*, (alternately referred to as *Lyric Dance #1*.) The work was dedicated to Elza and Graeme Graydon of the New Age Health Farm of Neversink, NY (where, according to program notes, the work was realized) and used Johann Pachelbel's famous work *Canon in D* presented in three variations including "a minimal variation by Brian Eno, a jazz variation with a country blues flavor by Bob James and a synthesis of the Eno-James concept by William Fleet, Jr." (see Tenth Anniversary Program.) Notably, *Lyric Song…Lyric Dance* was the first of one of Joan's only forays into choreographing a pure dance work without socio-political overtones; described as being a venture "into a more peaceful and rhapsodic continuum," the 30 minute work was created in four sections including a theme entitled "The Melodic," and three variations entitled "The Poetic," "The Rhapsodic," and "The Exuberant," respectively. According to the concert press release, Mr. Long was featured in *Thoroughfare 80* (a reworking of the earlier piece *Thoroughfare* from the company's 1973-1974 season) and *SCAT Dance,* a piece performed by Long, Miller and Gwendolyn Watson. The concert featured the first section of *Pass Fe White* (alternately known as *Miss Jane*) as well as Eleo Pomare's '*Nother Shade of Blue* (1972) set to the music of Judy Collins, Roberta Flack and Laura Nyro. During that season writer Julinda Williams heralded the ensemble as one that

presented “a thoroughly satisfying evening of dance.” In the same year, the Dance Players hosted a special showcase for the Youth Council of the Community Service Council, Inc. to raise funds in order to support future touring activities in the southeast region (see “To Taste and See.”)In the following year, the 11th anniversary concert held at New York City’s Martin Luther King, Jr. high school included special guests performances by dancers John Parks, Dyane Harvey, Loretta Abott and Al Perryman and featured the work of former company members Chuck Davis and Abdel Salaam alongside the work of Eleo Pomare. In 1981, the ensemble ended their official relationship as company in residence at Lehman College but remained in an unofficial capacity while performing across New York City, in New Jersey and Connecticut (Lewis-Ferguson, sec. 3.) By 1984, Joan Miller’s Dance Players were being presented alongside other important African-American modern dance companies of the time including a performance during that year at Symphony Space alongside the Fred Benjamin Dance Company and the Philadelphia Dance Company, known as ‘Philadanco’ (Taylor, 11.)

According to the 20th Anniversary Company Brochure, by 1990, the company described itself as:

> …a unique multi-ethnic, street smart, mixed media company with a zany sense of humor, a slightly off-beat point of view and an electric sense of dance theatre. The repertory is judiciously balanced with pure dance works, which feature the fourteen performers in styles that range from the neo-classic to the contemporary. The company is best known for its bold social satires which combine the talents of dancers, musicians, narrators and visual artists in outrageous mixed-media events.

By this time, Joan Miller’s Dance Players had become a permanent fixture on the New York dance scene, including performances at The Joyce Theatre and

the New York Dance Festival's Delacorte Theatre in addition to performing at the various colleges associated with the City University of New York (CUNY) system. The company had managed to do some touring, as a part of the National Endowment for the Arts Dance Touring Program, to the southwestern and western US as well as the US Virgin Islands in addition to performing on the same roster as the Eleo Pomare Dance Company, Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble (Later the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre) and the Joyce Trisler Danscompany at the Bronx Modern Dance Festival, sponsored by the New York State Council on the Arts, the Bronx Council on the Arts and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. The company routinely hosted residency programs at Lehman College and for the surrounding community; notably, residency offerings including master classes taught by company members in ballet, modern, jazz and "ethnic" dance as well as workshops in improvisation and lighting design for dance. The residencies hosted by Joan's company also featured discussions on the relationship between music and dance and opportunities for participants to attend class with the company, a technical rehearsal and a full-fledged concert performance. The dance players continued to perform throughout the 1990's and into the new millennium with critics heralding Joan's choreography as work that demonstrated "a highly impressive ability to use the techniques of mixed media and modern dance with wit and originality" and a "keen choreographic sense of humor" (see Company Brochure; Press Quotes.) Company marketing materials described Joan's choreography as work that "penetrated the ironies of urban life, using mixed media and pure

dance to focus on today and the recent past;" Joan herself was described as " a committed artist, noted for her perception in serious matters, and for her satirical treatment of the contemporary scene" (see Company Flyer; "Joan Miller and the Chamber Arts/Dance Players.") At it's height, Joan Miller's Dance Player's were performing in annual concerts, hosting lecture/demonstrations, workshops, master classes and residencies, in addition to hosting events for National Dance Week, Women's History Month and Black History Month in partnership with local middle schools, high schools and colleges. By the time of the company's 35th anniversary concert in 2005 hosted at the Citigroup Theater at the Joan Weill Center for Dance, Miller had won several awards and citations including the Thelma Hill Dance Award, Alpha Omega Theatrical Dance Company Award, the Living Legend Award and a proclamation from the office of former mayor of New York, David Dinkins. In September of 2007, after 37 years in existence, the company hosted it's farewell concert at the John Jay College theater in New York. Even though Miller retired in 2000 from teaching at Lehman College, she'd still managed to maintain her company as an outlet for her unique and satirical choreographic explorations for another seven years.

About Carole Y. Johnson

Dancer, teacher, choreographer, arts administrator and activist Carole Y. Johnson was born in Jersey City, New Jersey in 1940. When she was five years old, Carole's parents moved her to Philadelphia, PA after short stints living in Summit, New Jersey and Baltimore, Maryland. The Johnson family's move to Philadelphia came as a result of Fred's work as an officer with the United Services Organization (USO); he'd been invited to come to the city in order to set up a branch of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in north Philadelphia. Notably, the branch started by Fred S.A. Johnson is still in existence today as the Columbia North YMCA. Carole's youth in Philadelphia was situated in a predominantly African-American middle class community:

> [Growing up] my neighbor's father was working for RCA and during the war he was a technician. He was a janitor to begin with and evidently a quite special technician in the electronics of the period. And, Cab Calloway's sister lived across the street and Roy Campanella's wife lived on the street. There were all these dentists and doctors and teachers, for the most part, that lived in the community. It was very special and it was sort of like a little black community [with] whites surrounding it. But gradually, the whole thing became black. Now it's relatively rundown but at the time, it wasn't. (Personal Interview 2; p. 7.)

Carole began studying ballet at the age of 10 in the basement of her neighbor's home with Sydney King, a prominent African-American ballet dancer and teacher. King, who traveled to Philadelphia weekly to teach the local classes taught in the home of Mrs. Lurlene Dales and later fostered the continuing interest of Carole and her peers by encouraging them to continue their dance studies by training at her studio. After a year of dancing in the basement school Carole began to take extra classes at the Sydney King School of Dance. Notably,

she studied at the King school at the same time that Joan Myers Brown, (who would later found and direct The Philadelphia Dance Company) was taking ballet classes there. Carole gives Joan the credit for encouraging her to continue her ballet studies beyond the King School:

> I guess Joan encouraged me to go to the Philadelphia Ballet Guild where they had special classes. Teachers from New York came down and Anthony Tudor was the primary teacher, but teachers from the Metropolitan Opera Ballet came and taught at the school so that people who really were serious went in and they allowed blacks because the schools – the other schools in Philadelphia didn't allow blacks. But the Philadelphia Ballet Guild was open. (Personal Interview 2; p. 4)

In addition to watching dance-related films like the 1948 motion picture *The Red Shoes*, Carole continued growing her love of dance by attending live performances in both New York and Philadelphia with her mother (Personal Interview 2; p. 6.) Carole's mother, recognizing that she had an "athletic child", tried previously to enroll her young daughter in dance classes while living in Baltimore (see Alumni News 'Spotlight') but it is clear that her serious training began in Philadelphia. By her mid-teen years, Carole was studying ballet regularly at The Philadelphia Ballet Guild, an experience she had mixed emotions about at the time:

> I was both excited and intimidated. I can remember the feeling about being there because first whenever anybody came in [the] dancers would come in and say, 'Who's she? Who's she? Who's she?' But I didn't feel intimidated specifically because I was black. There was always the sense that I didn't belong. And then there was so much I didn't know -- that I found out I really didn't know in terms of body positions and that they hadn't given us so that I felt that when I was actually doing the classes, although I did them, I felt really backwards. And I can remember going to the library and trying to learn all the different positions—ecarte, croise, -- and it seemed to take me forever. So, I felt like I was always catching up, always catching up and never, never quite there. But I persisted with it. (Personal Interview 2; pp. 8-9)

Attending classes at The Philadelphia Ballet Guild put Carole in good company; she was able to study with Tudor, Madeline Gavers and Alfredo Corvino (see Alumni News 'Spotlight') and attend classes with other Black dancers, including Betsy Ann Dickerson, Billy Wilson and Joan Myers Brown. (Personal Interview 2; p. 9.) Notably, Dickerson went on to perform on Broadway, teach at the New York City High School of Performing Arts and to establish The Dickerson Performing Arts Center in Merrick, NY (see "Nassau County Ballet Schools) while Billy Wilson danced, directed and choreographed on Broadway, taught at both Brandeis and Harvard Universities and directed his own company, Dance Theater of Boston. Though Carole had occasional forays into studying tap dance and Dunham Technique (Personal Interview 2; p.8,) ballet was her main focus. In addition to studying at the Guild, Carole continued at The Sydney King School with the financial support of her parents and on scholarship:

> They paid and I also paid and I got scholarship to Sydney King. I used to save my allowances and lunch monies to pay for some of the extra classes—because I was always trying to take as many classes as I could. So, I guess we all contributed…I would save my lunch money and not eat…(Personal Interview 2; p. 10)

During these early years, Carole's performance opportunities included the King school's local dance recitals, debutante balls and African-American cotillions hosted across Philadelphia; productions were often hosted in conjunction with Marion Cuyjet's Judimar School of Dance (Personal Interview 2; p.19.) Later in her teen years, Carole attended Philadelphia High School for Girls where she actively participated in dance opportunities:

> It was good—it was great for me and it was a good time—I was a part of the modern dance group. During the period that I was there and I was working along with dance and programs, it took on a vitality. And then with gym contests and performing in gym contests, it was a lot of fun. At the end of graduation, I got an award in service for dance—they did give me that honor there. (Personal Interview13; p.13)

While Carole benefitted from the support of her parents, they were, in fact, concerned about her future career prospects. Believing that there were not a lot of opportunities for Black dancers at that time, Johnson's parents urged her to pursue a career in physical education. While Carole dreamed of attending The Juilliard School, her first audition was unsuccessful:

> I had always wanted to go to Juilliard and I took the audition for the first time and I didn't pass the first audition. And they didn't even—my parents, when they saw the letter and got the letter –because I just knew I was going to Juilliard—they knew how disappointed I would be. And I was. But, they said I could try again the following year. And I am glad I did try again. (Personal Interview 2; p.11.)

Carole, whose interest in dance was clear by the end of high school did her own research and decided to attend a college where she could study dance; she ended up studying first at Adelphi College in Garden City, NY as a dance major. The dance program at Adelphi unfortunately did not address all of Carole's artistic interests because it was still in its formative stages; nevertheless, Carole "became more aware of the elements and qualities of movement that go into the making of dancers and dance" under the guidance of department head Harry Bernstein (see Personal Correspondence, 1960.) While a student at Adelphi, Carole was able to study modern dance which she credits with ensuring that she was "probably not so stiff" during her second audition for

The Juilliard School in 1960, when she was accepted as a dance student. Pursuant to her desire for attending Juilliard, Carole wrote:

> I have found that Juilliard offers the fullest program for the development of a dancer as a total being. It approaches the actual technical study of dance, ballet and modern dance, on the professional level and with the viewpoint that one gains a mastery of dance expression through the knowledge and control of one's own body. However, this only came as one matures under the watchful eyes of teachers with vast knowledge and experience who are interested in the individual students. Juilliard fosters an atmosphere conducive to such development (ibid.)

Carole was not the only African-American student at Juilliard at that time; her colleagues at the school included Dudley Williams, Bill Luther, Mabel Robinson, Mary Barnett, Betsy Ann Dickerson and later, Joan Miller (Personal Interview 2; p.16.) A typical day for Carole at the famed conservatory included coming to school early to prepare and stretch for classes, which began at 9:00 a.m. The day, which typically ran from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. included classes in Ballet, (with Margaret Black, Margaret Craske, Alfredo Corvino and Antony Tudor,) modern dance-Graham Technique (with Helen McGehee, Mary Hinkson, Ethel Winter, Bertram Ross and Donald McKayle) literature, the materials of music, Labanotation, stagecraft, anatomy, composition (with Louis Horst) dance history and criticism as well as extra rehearsals and studio time to work on dance technique. While a student at Juilliard, Carole had a chance to "work as an understudy in school performances of Doris Humphrey's *Passacaglia* and *Fugue in C Minor*" (see Personal Correspondence, 1960.) Additionally, Carole occasionally visited the New Dance Group to take additional technique classes in both ballet and modern dance (Personal Interview 2; p.15.) Noting that Juilliard lacked a bit in academic rigor, Carole supplemented her studies with additional

courses at Temple University and New York's City College in French, the humanities and social sciences (Personal Interview 2; p.13; see Resume, p.6.) After completing her studies at Juilliard and graduating with a Bachelors of Science degree in 1963, (see Alumni News, 'Spotlight',) Carole stayed in New York City and continued to study ballet with Antony Tudor and Margaret Black at The Metropolitan Opera and jazz dance at the Luigi and Matt Mattox schools (Personal Interview 13; 2.) In order to develop skills in addition to dance, Carole also attended several seminars and advanced training courses in speaking, effective leadership, communication, business organization, negotiation and general management (see Curriculum Vitae, p. 20.) During this period, she also began auditioning for dance opportunities, most of which proved both unsuccessful and unsatisfactory:

> I was trying—I was auditioning, but I could never – I was never a quick pick-up. I was auditioning to go into different shows and things like that, but I hated it. First of all, you were in the open call and there were just so many hundreds and thousands of people. They would stand you up and then they would dismiss a whole bunch of people because I guess you didn't look right or you weren't the right height or you weren't the right color or whatever. I just felt like cattle going in and I just hated it although I was doing it. (Personal Interview 2; p.30)

During that period of frustration, Carole began teaching dance in New York City to make ends meet. While she had done some teaching for adults and children during her teen years at a YMCA branch in Philadelphia, she didn't feel particularly proficient as a dance educator at that time (Personal Correspondence, 1960.) Now, with her Juilliard training in tow, Carole began teaching dance in 1962 to children at various community centers across the city under the auspices of New York's Board of Education during the fall and spring semesters. Notably,

through this position, Carole actually produced the Board's Summer Dance Program, which included "formulating the dance program for the entire school district" on the city's Lower Eastside; the program spanned 12 local schools. Annually, the program concluded with a dance festival that included both folk dance and creative movement; some 1000 children were serviced each year through the Summer Dance Program. While continuing with the Summer Dance Program, in 1963 Carole began teaching modern dance to adult learners at the Harlem Branch YMCA. During the same year, Carole started teaching ballet to children at the Waltann School of Creative Arts in Brooklyn (See Curriculum Vitae, p. 18.) Though Carole never felt she was a good teacher at that time, especially with young children (Personal Interview 2; pp. 31-32,) the teaching supplemented her income as did periodic performances with Ballet Guild, Ballet Players, Ballet Concepts and the companies of Helen McGehee and Cleo Quitman. Carole continued teaching dance in the aforementioned capacities until 1965 when she left her position at the Harlem Branch YMCA and 1967 when she left both the Waltann School and her position with New York's Board of Education. Previously, in 1966, Carole met Eleo Pomare through a stroke of luck when she was leaving a dance studio to audition for a John Hay Whitney Fellowship and he was coming in; at that time, she began to pursue an opportunity as a dance artist in his company, which she achieved:

> He was very exacting and he just simulated you in terms of what you were about – what you were going to dance about. I was always working with him in the studio whenever I could. I would just come back and he would work things out on me. He was very exciting and very precise about what he wanted. And I think he really brought the dance and the performance out of me, certainly. You would do things over and over and he would

> look at it. He was very slow and deliberate. He didn't just throw things on you; he was very slow and deliberate and would work with the movement and work with patterns until he could – until he got what he wanted to say. And if, as a dancer, you weren't able to do or weren't doing it – weren't bringing out what he wanted—he would work with you. And if he couldn't, he would find other ways to do it, different movements even – until you as a human being were communicating whatever it was he wanted to see in the patterning and coming out emotionally in the dances. I think he was fantastic and he taught me to really dance and to perform – to dance, I would say and what the strength of it is. (Personal Interview 2; p.35)

In addition to working as a dancer in the company, Carole worked to foster visibility and development opportunities for the ensemble in her role as Assistant Manager for the Eleo Pomare Dance Company from 1966 to 1967:

> I wanted to see the company grow and develop. I worked along with [the company's] manager, Michael Levy at the time and started learning how to do things because I wanted to make sure the company got work and all of that. And so, I would make calls. And I remember being really frightened about it at first, to make calls and talk about Eleo and engage. But I just started doing those things because I wanted the company to succeed and become a company that would be a full-time company, if possible. I sensed the difference and was so glad to have worked along with Michael in the way that he presented Eleo and Eleo's company. He believed in it as we did and he wanted to get the best price and everything and the best accommodation and the best that he could for all of us. I was really interested in making Eleo's company a first-rate company – not artistically but first rate in terms of working consistently and being able to pay dancers (Personal Interview 3; pp. 6-7.)

Pomare, who was known for examining contemporary issues in his choreography, engendered a commitment on Johnson's behalf to finding visibility opportunities for the emerging dance company. Notably, the purpose of the Pomare company, adopted in 1959, was to employ "the creative utilization of Negro talent and ability in American Modern Dance" in order to "break away from confining stereotypes" (see concert program, "The Eleo Pomare Dance

Company at Fordham University.") The company, which saw its purpose as "two-fold – both Creative and Educational," devoted a large part of its time to "presentations of instructional dance lectures on the Negro contribution to the Dance" (ibid.) It was Pomare's preoccupation with social issues that encouraged Johnson to work as not only a dancer but in an administrative capacity for the company:

> …I liked what he was saying with the work in terms of the pride in the black community and in oneself—the whole identity, the whole thing that we could talk about in relation to issues, social issues…[it was the] social consciousness that he brought up related to his stance. (Personal Interview13; p.16.) He believed dance could help change people and things like that very strongly (Personal Interview 3; p.6.)

During her year as assistant manager, Carole raised all of the funds to support the Dancemobile, a project of the Harlem Cultural Council that took concert dance (in this case, Pomare's company) into artistically underserved communities by having the dancers perform on the back of a flatbed truck or in another public space. It was also during that year that Carole served as a consultant to the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) for their Study on Black Dance Development and coordinated master classes with renowned choreographer Talley Beatty for the Association of Black Choreographers (ABC.) The ABC, originated in September1966 by Eleo Pomare, Rod Rodgers, dance writer/critic Bill Moore and Johnson which, according to Johnson "was a Black structure that developed as a contrast especially to Dance Theatre Workshop," a presenting and dance development organization created in 1965 by Jeff Duncan, Art Bauman and Jack Moore. The first workshop program presented by the ABC began on January 14th, 1967 and ran for a four - week

period; the concert presented choreography by Eleo Pomare, Rod Rodgers and Raymond Sawyer. On the printed program for the workshop, the statement of purpose for the ABC was shared as follows:

> The Association of Black Choreographers was formed last year to cope with some of the more difficult problems facing the creative Black artist in Dance. A basic assumption of the ABC is that it will be the Black artists who will define and delineate the image of American Black people. It would indeed be a sad day if all definitions and creative endeavors about Americans were fabricated by Frenchmen (a random example.) Nevertheless, to a large extent, this has been true in the past with the Afro-American. The result has been a confusion of identity for Blacks and Whites alike. When the question "who are you?" is asked, we feel the answer should not come from the inquisitor. This would indeed be a "minstrels" imposition. ABC hopes to make it possible for the question to be answered, and from the variety of styles and techniques, we know there will be many different answers. They will all be right because we are all of these many things."

From 1967 to 1972, Carole became a principal dancer with Eleo Pomare's company performing in works such as *Serendipity* and *For Now*, originating roles in *Witness* and *Las Desenamoradas* as well as solo roles in *The Angels Are Watching Over Me*, *Construction in Green*, *From the Soul*, as Bessie Smith in *Gin, Woman, Distress* (from the longer work *High Times*) and as Angela Davis in *Jailhouse Blues*. In a review of a concert hosted by the ABC at the Clark Center for Performing Arts dance writer Jacqueline Maskey described Pomare's choreography for Gin, Woman, Distress as "a bitter solo," danced by Carole Johnson as "a recording of Bessie Smith moaned in matter-of-fact recognition of the unhappier aspects of life" (Maskey, 29.) Notably, Maskey went ton the describe Carole's work by saying, "Miss Johnson danced as if every contraction were induced by a kick and every totteringly erect stance were the aftermath of a blow" (ibid.) While working with the Eleo Pomare Dance Company Carole

continued working in the dance field in other capacities as well. From 1967 to 1969, Carole became the Director of the Harlem Cultural Council's Dancemobile project, which later showcased not only Pomare's company but also Rod Rodgers Dance Company and the Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble (later known as the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre.) The project served communities all across New York City as well as surrounding cities including Albany, Rochester, Buffalo and parts of Westchester County ("Process and Development of Dancemobile, 1967-1968, p. 45-47.) The Dancemobile, which ran for 23 years, got its formal start under Carole's leadership:

> …the Harlem Cultural Council had created a Jazzmobile several years before and they had always said they were going to do a Dancemobile, but they hadn't been able to quite get it together until Emery Taylor (check) found me and asked me to put it together. He said he was going to help me, but he didn't help and then he went to summer stock and just left me – introduced me to Doris Freeman (check) at the Parks Department and then left it at that.
>
> …I had to figure out how to get the truck – how to get a stage and get that all designed, went searching around and finally came up with somebody in Jersey, I think, who rented flatbed trucks. But I guess even before that I had to get the money. The Parks Department had a certain amount that they could contribute and then she introduced me to Ken DeWitt (check) at the New York State Council in the Arts. And then there still wasn't going to be enough money, so she [Doris] found a beverage company that – a commercial sponsor, corporate sponsor—Hoffman Beverages—and they came in with money and also they provided soft drinks at the show to everybody in the audience afterwards.
>
> We got the budget met on a piece of paper, but then neither the Parks Department nor the New York State Council was going to be able to put the actual cash in the bank so that I could distribute it to the dancers and pay for all the costs in terms of renting the truck and things like that. So, they helped me organize a bank loan. There was a black bank in New York in Harlem. So, they introduced me to the President or the CEO there and we talked about getting a loan. And they made the guarantee that the money would be coming back. I got all that in writing. I organized the

> bank loan and then once the bank loan was set and we opened the bank account, I could then officially really hire the dancers, although while I was in the process of all this negotiating, I kept going and going. And then halfway through I told the dancers, 'Well, I guess it's going – I think – I'm pretty sure it's going to come through.' So, they started rehearsing in earnest and I did that the following year as well. I just kind of got everything organized. It was a big job, actually, doing it. (Personal Interview 3, pp.4-5.)

According to the February 1969 report authored by Johnson concerning the Dancemobile, funding support for the project grew from $15,000 in the first year to $100,000 in the second year of existence; still, the project had no committed funding in 1969 and was still functioning primarily as a summer project as opposed to being a year-round operation (Process and Development of Dancemobile, 1967-1968, p. i.) The report proceeds to explain that since the Harlem Cultural Council's goal was "to share the achievements of Black artists with the people of its community who are so often overlooked in the planning of special events," the purpose of the Dancemobile was not only to create work for Black choreographers, dancers, musicians and technicians, but also to "return the artists to the community so that local people can experience the achievements of the individual artists who originated in similar neighborhoods" (ibid., 1.) Interestingly, the decision to have dance in the streets on a mobile unit was based on the assumption that "the average person of the streets can identify with and relate to dance" and "that, like music, the dance forms developed by Afro-American choreographers and dancers have influenced not only modern dance, but the overall American theatrical style," citing jazz music and modern dance as America's only indigenous art forms (ibid., 2.) Dancemobile also saw itself as a way to promote the idea that "the movement, rhythms, and themes of the Afro-

American choreographer" were relevant to the social climate of the time and that "the combination of live music, exhilarating movements and color of the costume and lights is visually exciting and should work well in the streets" (ibid., 3.) In terms of accomplishments during Carole's tenure with the project, the Dancemobile had 15 performances in 1967 and 50 performances in 1968 across New York. Additionally, in 1968, the Dancemobile presented the work of African-American choreographer in Albany (9 shows,) Syracuse (5 shows,) Buffalo (4 shows) and one performance each in New Rochelle, Mount Vernon, Yonkers, Ossining and Fairview, NY. (ibid., 45-47.) It must be noted that while administering the Dancemobile project for the Harlem Cultural Council, Carole also performed at the various locations as a premiere member of the Eleo Pomare Dance Company.

In 1968, while still performing with the Eleo Pomare Dance Company and serving as Director of the Dancemobile, Carole also organized a performance series for pre-schoolers in New York City for the Rod Rodgers Dance Company (ibid., 51.) In 1969, Carole founded her own organization, which she called M.O.D.E., Inc. or Modern Organization for Dance Evolvement. M.O.D.E., Inc. was a non-profit organization that held as its purpose "providing supportive services for Blacks and Third World Artists in the dance field." Through this new organization, Carole both accepted and articulated the following objectives:

1. To assist Black dance personnel to define and develop their own images
2. To become an effective mechanism and voice in events which affect the economic livelihood and cultural values of Black Artists and other Third World Artists
3. To create a national archive

4. To provide training programs in all areas related to dance
5. To coordinate lines of communication between ghetto schools and professional companies
6. To stimulate more interest in dance as a career and in the cultural life of Black communities

According to Brown, under the auspices of M.O.D.E., Carole produced and served as editor of The Feet, " a monthly dance and arts magazine dealing with dance from a Black perspective." As the only monthly periodical of its kind, The FEET included audition and award announcements, performance reviews and editorials, pictures of Black dance companies and information on resources including grants, rehearsal and performance space. During the same year that she founded MODE, Inc., Carole served as the production coordinator for New York City's Black Expo at City Center in partnership with Summer on Wheels, Inc. At Black Expo, Carole produced the Dance Evening for Dance Caravan that featured the work of both Eleo's company and the Rod Rodgers Dance Company; in the same year, under Carole's direction, MODE, Inc. collaborated with Summer on Wheels to produce a concert for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre in Rochester, New York. It was during 1969 and forward into 1971 that Carole began to lay the ground work for what would one day be the first and largest national gathering of Black dancers and choreographers in the U.S.

In addition to her ongoing work with M.O.D.E., Inc., Carole was selected as the first dance ambassador for New York City, under the Department of Cultural Affairs of the city's Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs Administration in 1970; according to Kisselgoff, in that capacity, Carole was asked to "perform modern dance programs and work with youngsters in

community centers of various income levels." Notably, Carole was selected due to her extensive work in the field as a dancer, organizer and administrator and particularly for her groundbreaking work with the Dancemobile project; the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey and Humble Oil and Refining Company sponsored her new position with the city. During that year, Carole was available to present a series of "Informances" or lecture/demonstrations addressing such topics as "Introductions to Styles in Modern Dance," "Creating a Dance," and "Dance and Black Culture." Additionally, Carole hosted master classes for school age children and adults on the basic elements of dance and performance in addition to full recitals that included solos choreographed by Eleo Pomare, Rod Rodgers and Ronald Pratt (see "Dance Presentations.") After the successful completion of her year as a City appointee, Carole was designated to continue as a lecturer on dance for Affiliate Artists in New York and served New York City from 1972 to 1975.

1971 proved to be both a pivotal and landmark year in Carole's career. During that year, Carole conceived and collaborated with *Like It Is*, a television show produced by ABC-TV to produce their first ever dance program with panelists Katherine Dunham, Alvin Ailey, Eleo Pomare and Nannette Bearden; the show included dance performances from the companies represented by the panelists. After producing the successful television episode, Carole pursued a personal research trip to Senegal, Sierra Leone and Ghana under the auspices of a Personal Arts Fellowship from the New York State Council on the Arts. The purpose of the travel, which extended from October 1971 to February 1972 was to

allow Carole to study and observe dance in these various nations; notably, the tour included opportunities to work and study informally at the University of Ghana at Legon (Curriculum Vitae, p.4):

> [NYSCA] was offering a very special grant around about that time. And they had never done it before. And I wasn't going to apply for it, but all my friends said, 'Oh, apply! Apply! Apply! You ought to do it.' And then they sat me down and made me write the proposal. I did the proposal and I ended up getting the highest grant. I think it might have been $250,000, but that was a lot at the time, I guess. That's what I used to make the trip. (Personal Interview13; pp. 26-27)

After completing this study tour, Carole returned to the U.S. to rehearse with the Eleo Pomare Dance Company and to complete a two-week tour. The tour with the Pomare company extended itself abroad – beginning March 14 1972, Carole traveled to Australia with the Pomare company to perform at the Adelaide Festival of the Arts. The first part of the tour took place until early April with the company performing in Australia; from April to September of 1972 Carole stayed on in Australia to work with and teach dance to Aboriginal People under the auspices of a grant from the Arts Council of Australia. With funding support and the invitation of the Council, Carole worked as a consultant and organizer of a dance and drama workshop for the Black Theatre in Sydney (Curriculum Vitae, p.6.) During the same time, she worked to form the Sydney Urban Aboriginal Dance Group, which had its first performance that year at the Friends Meeting House in Surry Hills. Interestingly, the Sydney Urban Aboriginal Dance Group performed and participated in the historic Embassy Demonstrations held by Aboriginal people to protest the ongoing disenfranchisement of indigenous Australians. In June of that year, Carole appeared as a soloist and guest dance

teacher with the Australian Dance Theatre in Adelaide, South Australia and taught dance at the University of New South Wales as well.

Carole's first stint in Australia ended in September of 1972 when she embarked on a solo dance tour of Southeast Asia. With funding from the U.S. Department of State-Cultural Affairs Section, Carole performed in Malaysia, Hong Kong and the Philippines until October of that year. According to a flyer for Carole's solo programs, her presentations included choreography by Eleo Pomare (*I Am A Witness* from *Blues for the Jungle*, *Construction in Green* and *To Cleaver's Wife*,) Rod Rodgers (*Lament* from *Harambee*) and Jack Moore (*First Omen.*) Upon returning to the U.S., Carole was invited as a guest lecturer at the University of California, Irvine and as a Guest Artist for the City of Seattle at the Pacific Northwest Ballet respectively in January and March of 1973 (Curriculum Vitae., p. 4.) From June 26th to July 1st of 1973, Carole organized the First National Congress of Blacks in Dance, which was held at Indiana University – Bloomington in June of that year; the Congress was sponsored officially by M.O.D.E., Inc. and the University's Black Music Center. While the impact and implications of the Congress will be engaged more fully in a subsequent chapter, it is important to note that it's primary objective was to "contribute to the continuing struggle toward the inclusion of the black artist, technician and administrator from the media, education, concert, motion picture and entertainment fields" (Brown p. 52.) By August of the same year, Carole was in Iran as a U.S. International Theatre Institute delegate for the Third World Theatre Committee's Conference and Festival; as a result of the trip, Carole provided a

report on the Australian Aboriginal Theatre Activities to the organization. After completing her stint in Iran, Carole traveled back to Australia to work with a Dance Club she had begun to form on her initial travel to that nation During that time, Carole worked to support the development of the National Black Theatre with the assistance/ under the direction of Betty Fisher. After working in Australia from November of 1973 to June of 1974, Carole returned to the U.S. briefly to work at Karamu House in Cleveland, Ohio; she developed a funding proposal for the organization to support their arts programming.

1974 to 1975 saw Carole's first sustained work in Australia; it was during this year that she began to organize the Six Week Training Course at the Black Theatre in Redfern. This six week course which was intended to expose aboriginal community artists to the possibilities of and necessary skills to pursue dance as a profession. Eventually, the program became known as AISDS—the Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Scheme (known contemporarily as NAISDA with the addition of the word 'National' to the name in 1987.) The program was the first full-time dance training course for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people interested in working professionally in the dance field. For 13 years, from 1975 until 1988, Carole continued to serve as Director of the AISDS program in Australia. In 1976, Carole worked diligently to create the Aboriginal/Islander Dance Theatre (AIDT) in order to "provide performing experience to students, traditional dancers and performing/teaching work to graduates of AISDS" (curriculum vitae, p. i.) Most notably, in 1979, the AISDS initiative became the first full time dance training course for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island

people; the program was fully accredited by New South Wales Higher Education Board. The AISDS program became the first institution in New South Wales to achieve any kind of higher education accreditation.

From 1979 to 2002, Carole traveled back to the U.S. periodically to attend conferences, plan tours and introduce Australians to American dance artists in various dance companies and schools. 1985 saw the development of the Dance Now Center in New South Waleswhich was established to "provide Aboriginal and the wider community access to [learning] both modern and traditional Aboriginal dance at an interest level." In 1989, Carole continued her work by founding the Bangarra Dance Theatre Australia to create " a professional outlet for the talents of AIDT graduates" and "to provide professional dance performances to local, national and international audiences;" she served as Coordinator of Bangarra until 1990 (Rubin, p.78.) After leaving the leadership Bangarra, Carole worked in the US periodically in 1990; she served as a panelist for various conferences on Black dance in Denver and Philadelphia and as a lecturer on the development of contemporary Australian Aboriginal dance at several local schools and churches in her former hometown of Philadelphia. Carole also laid the groundwork in partnership with Bess Pruitt Associates for Bangarra Dance Theatre Australia to tour the U.S. in addition to developing an independent business as a word processor. From 1994 to 1995, Carole served as a consultant in Australia under the Department of Community Services; in this capacity, she worked with the Wilcannia Drop-in Centre on the development of arts workshops for isolated communities. Later in 1995, Carole also developed an

educational kit on modern dance for the New South Wales Board of Studies. In 1999, Carole Johnson was inducted into Australia's Dance Hall of Fame in recognition of how she "played a key role in helping Australians discover the richness of its Indigenous dance," her founding work with NAISDA, Bangarra Dance Theatre Australia and for developing "arts programs in isolated communities" throughout Australia (see "Australian Dance Awards Hall of Fame.") In 2003, Johnson was awarded the Australian Government Centenary medal for her work with the Indigenous Community through dance and for "service to Australian Society through dance" (Alumni News, 'Spotlight.') Still interested in international exchange, in 2004, Carole traveled to New Zealand under the auspices of the Australian Council of Dance Fellowship to research Maori dance activities and possible opportunities for exchange with Aboriginal dance artists.

Conclusion

The foregoing narratives make clear that both Joan Miller and Carole Johnson had significant aspirations and notable lasting achievements in the dance field during both the height of The Black Power and Black Arts Movements from 1960 to 1975 and beyond. Through their work in dance, both Miller and Johnson engaged with, responded to and extended the central or key idea of the Black Aesthetic in so much as it's proponents were concerned with encouraging African-American artists to create work that reflected their own cultural norms, standards and preoccupations. Moreover, it is clear that both Miller and Johnson, artists with radically different career trajectories (despite their common

experience at Juilliard) actualized a central notion of the Black Aesthetic; that is, both artists used dance as a medium through which to pose a separate symbolism for African-Americans as an act of self-determination and chose to prioritize the merging of their politics and cultural commitments with their artistic/cultural production. In the following chapter, I will analyze in detail the ways in which the artistic contributions of Joan Miller and Carole Johnson demonstrate an engagement with the ethos, intentions and preoccupations of the Black Arts Movement through their embodiment and realization of the Black Aesthetic and by extension, how their work has implications for contemporary Black Women's activism and shifts the dominant narrative in dance studies regarding the work of Black female choreographers during the relevant period.

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Chapter 4: "You Gotta Let the World Know We Do Many, Many Things" – Miller, Johnson and the Black Aesthetic

In this chapter, I argue that both Joan Miller and Carole Johnson used dance as the medium through which to express some of the central themes and preoccupations of the Black Aesthetic as articulated by thinkers in The Black Power and Black Arts Movements. I contend that both women also extended several key ideas identified within the Black Aesthetic in their work in order to engage issues of gender and class (primarily in Miller's case) and to embrace international human rights concerns (primarily in Johnson's case.) By revisiting key aspects of the Black Aesthetic and drawing from the words of the central case studies and supporting information, I elucidate and summarize both Miller and Johnson's meaningful engagement during the period of interest and lay the groundwork for further discussion of the implications of their work on dance studies (and related disciplines) and to contemporary Black women's knowledge production, evaluation of knowledge claims and activism.

Central to the idea of the Black Aesthetic was the notion that art created by Black people should reflect a sense of self-determination, self-reliance and independence. In Amy Abugo Ongiri's groundbreaking 2010 text, Spectacular Blackness: The Cultural Politics of the Black Power Movement and the Search for a Black Aesthetic, the author importantly reminds readers of Larry Neal's insistence in 1971 that this new aesthetic perspective required "art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of the people (90.) Ongiri rearticulates the point that the Black Arts Movement posited itself as the "academic and cultural

branch of what was intended to be an armed revolutionary political struggle (97)" and that as such, a focus on "African American cultural expression" as the unifying point for the development of a Black Aesthetic was a key identifier of the movement (102.) While Ongiri's text proceeds to examine and question the emphasis placed by key proponents of the Black Aesthetic (including Neal, Amiri Baraka and others) on the lived experiences of the bottom one-third of those living in Black communities, the central point useful to this project is to understand that the Black Aesthetic was, at its core, concerned with Black artists speaking for and defining themselves on their own terms and with their own culturally informed aesthetics and understandings at the center. Similarly, in Kellie Jones's essay Black West: Thoughts on Arts in Los Angeles, the author highlights the emphasis in the Black Arts Movement on maintaining an independent perspective and cultural specificity outside of and distinct from the mainstream:

> …the Black Arts Movement…encompassed visual, music, theater, and all the arts. Among its hallmarks were: social and political engagement; a view that art had the ability to encourage change in the world and in the viewer; separatism—a belief in a self-contained "black aesthetic" walled off from white culture [and]; forms that were populist, that could easily be distributed and understood by audiences (43.)

This emphasis on Black art reflecting a worldview that was grounded in one's own Black cultural specificity and was intended to both inform and foster change in the viewer necessitated that the art be politically interested, informed and engaged as opposed to a dispassionate or flippant expression. In Michelle Joan Wilkinson's essay To Make a Poet Black: Canonizing Puerto Rican Poets in the Black Arts Movement, the author reminds readers that "black artists wrested

the meaning of 'the aesthetic' away from the Kantian stronghold" and "proposed alternatives to the 'arts for art's sake' version of aesthetics," including "art for the people's sake," "art for survival," and even "art for the revolution" (318.) It is with these ideas in tow that I turn my attention here to the work of both Miller and Johnson and their engagement with these central aspects of the Black Aesthetic.

First, it must be noted that Joan Miller in particular was already keenly interested in using dance to articulate socio-political understandings both *before* these ideas were being held up under the banner of the Black Arts Movement and its accompanying aesthetic philosophy *and* before she started her own dance company in 1970. Importantly, Joan's desire for self-determination and independence as an artist was first informed by her rejection of her strong Catholic upbringing:

> JM: …the years of Catholic [education] heavily influenced me. I mean all the writings and the whole rote thing. Who made you? God made you. Why did God make you? God made you to love, honor and something in this world. I didn't know what I was saying. The catechism. You just repeat. And I was good at it, which was why I never raised my hand when I got to college, because I didn't know that I could say anything. I could read the pages on the book and repeat it back to you. But ask me about what was on the page and did [I] have an opinion about it and would [I] have done something differently, no. I just do what I'm told. (Personal Interview 8, p. 8.)

After Joan "broke away from the Catholic Church in essence" and "went from that into Zen Buddhism overnight," she began to explore the depths of her own ideas and ability to not only receive but to create and to analyze information as well (ibid.) The beginning of this independent exploration and commitment to a newly realized self-determination and artistic voice began to

crystallize in Joan's world in 1960. Interestingly, this was around the same time that Miller developed her first work of choreography, *Protest*, which was not only informed arguably by Joan's newfound sense of self, but by her experience in Ruth Currier's *The Antagonists* as discussed in the preceding chapter. As such, Joan's interest in and ability to use dance as a medium through which to express her own unique, politically charged, culturally informed perspectives and experiences had begun to take shape and crystallize prior to the height of the Black Arts Movement.

Similar to her attentiveness to using dance as a medium for self-determined expression, Joan's interest in and commitment to engaging meaningfully with the larger community through the arts was a part of her personal and professional ethos before a broad-based articulation of the Black Aesthetic was circulating in the U.S. in the late 1960's. Miller's early work as a member of The Merry-Go-Rounders (as discussed in chapter three) was her first foray into arts in education and residency experiences. Importantly, during that time Joan had also begun teaching at Hunter College, with an average day including four hours at The Merry-Go-Rounders rehearsals at the 92nd Street Y and four hours teaching dance in the academic setting (Personal Interview 6, p.1 .) By the time Joan went on to found the Chamber Arts/Dance Players, her commitment to engaging with her audience and community through the arts was cemented in the ensemble's mission:

> TNA: You talk about how your mission for the company was to educate and enlighten the audience. Educate them about what?

> JM: Educate is a bad word. It's a nice active word and I think I only used it because—not only did I come out of simultaneously the educational background, but I guess I wanted to be able, in addition to doing the concert work and the touring and all that, to go into the schools and the community. I always wanted to do that. And, grants people understood that word. But I never went in there to teach them anything, you know what I mean? I went to expose them to my way of thinking…
>
> TNA: So, was it maybe less about educating and more about exposing people to…
>
> JM: Advising and exposing, yes.
>
> TNA: Enlightening and exposing people to ideas?
>
> JM: Yes. (Personal Interview 10; p.9.)

It is clear that the Chamber Arts/Dance Players were established as a vehicle for not only artistic production, but as a way to present issues to audience members in order to foster dialogue about matters of concern that wee social and political in nature. As noted in the excerpt above, this perspective was informed by Joan's experiences as an educator both in community and higher education settings as well. This commitment on Joan's part to meaningful community engagement was not only embedded and articulated in the company's mission statement – it was actualized through the company's various residency activities in schools, community centers, senior citizen centers, prisons (including the infamous Rikers Island) and out door settings (ibid.; 10-12.) The impetus for presenting work in these various community locations that were outside of traditional theater settings was arguably an expression of Joan's desire to share various viewpoints through movement with others (both within and beyond the Chamber Arts/Dance Players) and to foster dialogue around the sociopolitical ideas presented in the

dances; interestingly, Joan recounted that the company was often unpaid for their extensive community work across New York City (ibid.) This commitment to not only making art but sharing it with the masses in an effort to foster their engagement with the ideas held within it demonstrates a confluence between Joan's personal ethos as a choreographer, her reasons for creating the Chamber Arts/Dance Players and the Black Aesthetic ideology.

When Joan founded the Chamber Arts/Dance Players in 1970, this aforementioned connection between her artistic commitments and the Black Aesthetic was further realized. Regarding the vision of the company and artistic influences, Joan shared:

> JM: Well my vision in my mission statement said that [the company] was to enlighten and educate. And enlighten, to me, meant working in a socio-political vein and dealing with subject matter that was not – that was just not traditional. I didn't do love pieces. I never did a love duet. Around that time, I must have been working also with Eleo [Pomare] because you know the kind of pieces that Eleo did. Eleo was an influence on me when I started. And Rod [Rodgers], certainly because like I said, he was making the transition into more political and social pieces. And…the things I was reading like the poetry and Nikki (Giovanni) influenced me. It must have come out of being a product of the '60's because that's where I was influenced by the activism of the time…that's how it just kept developing. And I just turned out doing more socio-political pieces. (Personal Interview 6; p.1)

Joan's aesthetic interests—to present fresh subject matter to the audience through non-traditional approaches to choreography—were actualized through the establishment of the Chamber Arts/Dance Players. Importantly, while the company functioned in large part as an outlet for Joan's socio-political choreographies, the Players' concerts also featured work by

other choreographers whose work was similarly aligned; over the years, the company performed works by both Eleo Pomare and Rod Rodgers, two of Joan's cited influences, who were engaging with issues of contemporary Black identity in dance/performance (ibid.) In an interview with former principal dancer, soloist and original Chamber Arts/Dance Players member, Abdel Salaam (formerly known as Milton Bowser) emphasized Joan's public consciousness as a dance artist:

> I met Joan Miller in 1969 and she was to become my first modern dance teacher. [She was] socially, politically extremely aware … Joan used to do dances called *Robot Game* which talked about people being victimized by a robotic-like society that didn't teach us to think as individuals and thin for ourselves. All that stuff was then structured in her choreographic work. Everything that she started to create at that time also had socio political messages. So, my first intro into the dance world was that in order to dance, you had to be highly trained, fine tuned, but you also had to focus on some kind of social, political, historical message.

It should be no surprise that Joan demanded rigor and physical acumen from her dancers as mentioned by Mr. Salaam; as a choreographer with training from the famed Juilliard school Joan had been exposed to dance educators in ballet, modern dance and choreography. Consequently, Joan's aesthetic sense privileged dancers that not only had remarkable physical ability but that also had an emerging political consciousness. To this point, after dancing with the Chamber Arts/Dance players, Abdel Salaam later danced with Fred Benjamin's Dance Company, Ronn Pratt's Alpha Omega Theatrical Dance Company, Otis Salid's New Art Ensemble until he later became Associate Artistic Director of an ensemble founded by another one of Joan's original dancers, the Chuck Davis Dance Company, a precursor to the internationally renowned African American

Dance Ensemble. In 1981, Salaam founded Forces of Nature Dance Theatre Company, a now 30 - year - old New York-based critically acclaimed dance ensemble; this company holds as its mission the presentation of dance/music of the African diaspora in order to “communicate its histories, legends and political events,” to encourage people to live in harmony with the environment and to enable others to “be more socially responsible toward each other and to live together in diversity” (see Forces of Nature website, “Artist Roster;” sec. 8.)

Joan herself, as artistic director, made the choice to showcase readings of contemporary Black poetry from the period as interludes during the company’s performances (Stodolsky, 92.) Arguably, the fact that Joan chose to create her most autobiographical work, *Pass Fe White*, against the backdrop of revolutionary Black poetry of the period is most telling; by using the works of Bennett-Coverley, Baraka , Earley and Giovanni as the ground upon which to explicate her deepest feelings about her emerging identity as a Black artist, Miller articulated a strong personal engagement with the ideas presented in those poems. According to critic Nancy Altman, Joan’s use of the poems in *Pass Fe White* was likened more to music than text with the movement actually “reacting to and amplifying” the poems as opposed to “simply act[ing] out what is being expressed by the words” (69.) Accordingly, Doris Hering noted that it was in this work more than others on the Chamber Arts/Dance Players program that as Joan transformed in the work, “her body stance became more resolute and the gestures more cutting” while noting that the rest of the program never reached the “pinnacle of *Pass Fe White*” (26.) Joan’s work in this most celebrated piece of

her choreography interrogated ideas of cultural identity, femininity and personal acceptance and culminated finally in a celebration and full-scale embrace of her Black heritage. This engagement with the tensions and ambivalence that confronted Joan on her personal journey to acceptance of her Black self in *Pass Fe White* strongly suggests a coherence with the Black Aesthetic idea that art had the ability to change the world, the viewer and arguably, the artist; as Joan herself *changed* and became more resolved to herself within the context of the dance, her transformation served as a metaphor for the conversion of the audience into an acceptance and/or greater understanding of this emerging Black consciousness and experience as demonstrated in the piece. Concerning the development of *Pass Fe White*, Joan shared:

> …at the time that I did it I was doing what had to be done. I didn't intellectualize that this was what I was going to do – I wanted to move an audience. I knew already that I was being disliked because I said or exposed some negative things about Black folks. A lot of people didn't like the fact that I did part two in a blonde wig. Did I dislike black people who wore [blonde wigs?] I was making an independent statement (Personal Interview 6; p.6.)

Joan's creative process was, at least in her perspective, a natural and organic yet arguably incisive and thoughtful one. In concert with Joan's aesthetic preferences and commitments to community engagement through the arts, her enthusiasm in using work that was popular in the period – in this case, poetry by some of the most celebrated revolutionary Black poets -- was a nod toward a willingness to present art that could be easily understood and accessed by audience members – at least those familiar with the popular ideas and personalities circulating on the Black Arts scene at that time. Concerning

her use of popular music and texts, Joan recounted that she would willingly use it if it worked in the context of her choreography which suggests that as an artist she was willing to embrace whatever assisted the exposition of her ideas through dance—and the more non-traditional, the better (Personal Interview 8; p.24.)

While Joan's work as a dancer/choreographer was in meaningful conversation with certain aspects of the Black Aesthetic, her work as an artist extended beyond it as well. Joan's interest in critiquing contemporary constructions of gender as examined in her piece *Homestretch* suggested a direct engagement with patriarchy and social interactions between men and women. As *Homestretch* concludes with the female soloist adopting a symbolic acquiescence to contemporary constructions of beauty by donning a blonde wig (in contrast to Joan *removing* a similar wig in *Pass Fe White*,*)* and asking that "Dick" (the male protagonist in the work) "fly her," Joan is making a comment on the prevalence of male social control, a prerogative that was not always considered as a central concern in The Black Power and Black Arts Movements by its predominantly male proponents (as noted in chapter two.) Similarly, in a later work entitled *The BUMPS*, Joan levied a class critique against Black, male, upwardly mobile professionals. In writing about the solo as danced by Milton Bowser (later known as Abdel Salaam,) in 1974, Deborah Jowitt noted:

> …[Joan] uses all those elements and the theme is the inequities and oppressions of our society. Milton Bowser's solo is full of dissipating energy: tours, jetes, runs, a snatch of social dancing as the tape announces: "I am the modern black businessman." Bowser performs for us

> and looks frequently to see if we (the society?) approve. Eventually he collapses, exhausted. The tape: "I am the black businessman, digging his grave" (46.)

Interestingly, *The BUMPS* suggests a criticism of some of the newfound, so-called opportunities embraced by the bourgeoning Black middle class as a result of many of the gains of the Civil Rights Movement. This conflation of Black male professional elitism with the act of digging one's grave implies another connection between Joan and The Black Power and Black Arts Movements's privileging of the lives and experiences of the African American underclass and general suspicions concerning integration into the American mainstream (as inferred in the Jones/Baraka work, *Poem for Half-White College Students* noted in the previous chapter and used during part two of *Pass Fe White*.) By contrast to the Black Aesthetic ideal, while the bulk of Joan's repertoire reflected her choreographed sociopolitical satires and commentaries, Joan's willingness to create pure dance works without the undertone of contemporary issues (as in the case of *Lyric Song…Lyric Dance* for example) demonstrates that she did not embody a total disavowal of the "arts for arts sake" idea. Even with that caveat however, Joan's reasoning for creating her predominantly sociopolitical works seemed to emerge, at least in part from an instinctive process that actively resonated with a Black Aesthetic ethos. Joan's aesthetic preoccupations were informed by an intrinsic, rigorous exploration from which her creative work emerged:

> I guess people comment on the way my works were going, that there weren't that many African-Americans who were making commentary in that way, in that manner, that I was approaching the politics of the era. And it just, I mean it came—I didn't start out saying I'm going to do a

> political piece about so and so and protest thus and such. It just came out. You know? I birthed it. {Laughs.} I went through the pains and I did the reading and I took –I'm a prolific writer. I write forever. I take notes forever. Dog eared, underlined and exclamation points; I mean I just – I eat up the work. And I don't think about it when – I mean that's the way I work. All that energy is…it just consumes me and it comes out. But I don't sit down and intellectualize, "now I need to do a piece about…' I don't know how one work develops into the next, into the next. I was just working. I just did what I had to do and I would feel that kind of energy. (Personal Interview 6; p. 7.)

Interestingly, even with Joan's commitment to sociopolitical choreographies and congruence with ideas reflected in Black Aesthetic philosophy, her perception of her own career during the period reflects a sense of rejection from the African-American arts and cultural scene. Concerning her relationship to the Black Aesthetic specifically, Joan recounted:

> If I was part of the mainstream Black Aesthetic, I would have had more gigs, I would have been on more programs when they wanted collaborations and they wanted a series of Black choreographers. I wasn't asked because I didn't do the slave ship dance and I didn't do the—whatever our –we have our pool of subjects that we address. But I addressed none of them in a way that you knew this was a slave ship and we were all rowing. (Personal Interview 7; p.7.)

Admittedly, while Joan's work did address African American themes, her own aesthetic preferences, satirical sense and ironic wit did not lean towards interpreting Black experiences on stage in a traditional or narrative format (Personal Interview 6; p.13-14.) Since her tastes in dance lent themselves to a more experimental kind of process and choreographed product, Joan sometimes felt ostracized and left out of events showcasing other Black dance artists:

> I was so in to doing what I did that I didn't so much analyze it in that way except for after the fact when I wasn't invited to things [like] Black festivals and events. And then I realized it was because I was so oddball that I didn't fit into any of the – and not that – within the dance festival

> they had many different kinds of choreographers. But on a scale of 1 to 10, it may have been traditional one and traditional ten, right? They had lots of variations, I don't mean [the festivals] didn't have lots of variations, but I may have been 14 and it was too much and didn't hit. It didn't [clapping hands] do that you know? (Personal Interview 9; 4-5)

By contrast, when a prominent white dance scholar reached out to Joan in order to interview and include her in a seminal text that showcased and explored Black dance artists, Miller responded somewhat negatively to the invitation and declined the opportunity to be a part of the volume:

> JM: I think she asked me – called me and asked me…It was at that time that I was really trying to figure out who the hell I was and I said, "I'm a black person. Why you gotta ask me if I [do] black dances? What does that mean and do I have to do a slave ship?"
>
> TNA: So, you don't know if [what you do] is black dance?
>
> JM: It depends on what you consider – it – there's a whole group of folks who consider black dance [to be] dance that incorporates – that uses material that comes out of Africa and African American sources, okay? When I felt that that was – that did what I wanted to do, I used it. I didn't go around saying, "I'm not going to use music by African American people." I have several [pieces that use it,] but they came just as organically as the next piece.

Perhaps Joan's wrestling with categorizing her work within the context of Black Dance was problematized by her commitment to avant-garde, cutting edge approaches despite her confluence with Black Aesthetic ideals. By extension, Carl Paris, former Eleo Pomare Dance Company member and scholar, asserts that Joan's commitment to maintaining a self-determined Black identity while choosing to work in a non-traditional vein definitely impacted her reception in the larger dance landscape during the period:

> What was significant for, me in discovering her work was this – this non-rejection of her identity which, at the time the postmodernists were demanding upon Black people – she did not do that. That was one of the

> most significant things about the fact that she picked up on this postmodern – which is an important part of intellectual, perhaps philosophical reasons or her particular place in that historical moment. But she did not reject her blackness or her Jamaicanness and her womanness. All of those things were things she wasn't supposed to be talking about at that time because she was a Black woman and especially not in that particular milieu which was the postmodern. So, that's what makes her a huge pioneer in my opinion. She was doing it (i.e. dance) within the context that still affirmed who she was. So, therefore, it was deemed as still ethnic or still black, which postmodern dancers were rejecting at the time. You see that's why she was not invited or accepted fully into that community. Because she didn't really fit. She didn't *really fit*. She would not have fit with sort of the mainstream postmodern ethos – because she was too black and too woman and too outspoken about both. And then she wouldn't really fit with traditional perspectives around black dance because the work was too satirist and postmodern. During that time on the black side if you weren't towing the nationalistic line, you didn't get no props. And then on the other side if you were too black, you still weren't getting no props (Personal Interview 13-14; 16.)

The Black Arts Movement's blatant disengagement with dance and questionable gender politics coupled with Joan's aesthetic preferences and somewhat trenchant personality seem to have very well coalesced to marginalize her unique contributions during the period of interest with regard to her engagement with the Black Aesthetic. It must be considered as well that the Chamber Arts/Dance Players was always an integrated company (Personal Interview 10; page 14) even though they were sometimes dealing with material from the African American experience. Moreover, Joan's movement vocabulary was mainly composed of ballet, modernist and European-influenced avant garde/experimental forms as opposed to movement that was directly derived from African diasporic motifs or vocabularies; as such, she did not adopt the Black Aesthetic ideal of totally rejecting "whiteness." The unique blend of cultural and social influences and dance experiences that informed Joan's artistic

perspectives and performance aesthetics over the years complicates Miller's relationship and connection to the Black Aesthetic; her engagement with this philosophy is not constructed as a straight line. However, it can be argued as demonstrated above, that Joan Miller actively engaged with key tenets of the aesthetic philosophy that emerged out of The Black Power and Black Arts Movements; while her connections are perhaps less obvious, they are nevertheless important to both the historical dance landscape and the outpouring of creative expression by female African American artists across genres that emerged during the period of interest. Importantly, Miller was able to merge her own satirical aesthetic and strong technical skills as a classically trained dancer with the political influences and discourses of the moment during the height of The Black Power and Black Arts Movements. Joan's ability to both develop and maintain her own creative voice while embracing key aspects of Black Aesthetic philosophy and contemporary performance modalities resulted in a work that was at once personally revealing and reflective of concerns emerging from her engagement with the larger world. Miller actively challenged limited and narrow understandings about how Black dance artists could work and engage with African/African – American experiences and material on stage; this truth is perhaps best expressed in an interview she gave to host Celia Ipiotis on the television show *Eye on Dance*:

> What I do sometimes find detrimental is when there are presenting organizations and they have a Black Dance Festival and your slotted down a specific road and therefore they only accept works that fall into a particular category. I would like someone to have a Black Choreographers' Festival so they could include classicism and neo-classicism [i.e. work that extended traditional Western

> movement vocabularies] and contact improvisation and the experimentalists. We're all working and we're all making a contribution and I may do it in terms of socio-political pieces but I am working on a piece with a script…what category do you put that in? You've gotta let the world know that we do many, many things!

Joan Miller synthesized sociopolitical concerns—including issues of racial, gender and class identity—with wit, humor and stunning abilities as both a thoughtful choreographer and highly skilled dancer. Moreover, Joan was able to embrace aspects of Black Aesthetic philosophy without being consumed by it or beholding wholeheartedly to the various perspectives on Black art that were circulating during the period of interest by key proponents of The Black Power and Black Arts Movements. Consequently, Joan Miller stands as not only as an artistic pioneer but as a model or living archetype that represents the dynamic processes of self-awareness, political consciousness, social action, cultural pride and creative ingenuity that is, at once a revolution in and of itself.

Similar to Joan's complicated relationship with the Black Aesthetic during the period of interest, Carole Y. Johnson's work existed both as an expression and an extension of that concept as well. As noted in chapter three, Carole's primary exposure to merging issues of Black identity, social and political concerns and performance came from her time dancing with Eleo Pomare's company, beginning in 1966. While Carole's own choreography didn't emerge until later during her work in Australia, it cannot be overlooked that her solo dance programs often included works created by Pomare, including *I Am A Witness* (from the longer work *Blues for the Jungle*,) *To Cleaver's Wife* (a work dedicated to first female communication secretary for the Black Panther

Party for Self Defense Kathleen Cleaver) , *Construction in Green* and *Gin, Woman, Distress: Bessie Smith*. Notably, Carole's solo program included *Lament*, a work by Rod Rodgers to the music of Civil Rights era activist, former member of *The Freedom Singers* and later, *Sweet Honey in the Rock* founder, Bernice Johnson Reagon. Notably, Carole's solo programs also included *First Omen* by Jack Moore, former Juilliard faculty member, assistant to Louis Horst and founder of the Dance Theater Workshop (with Jeff Duncan and Art Bauman in 1965.) Arguably, as a dancer with broad training and a diverse background, the fact that she chose to present these works on her solo programs is telling; Carole was obviously committed to not only *espousing* key tenets of the Black Aesthetic through her work as a community leader/organizer, but to actively *embodying* them in dance performance. While it is true that Carole's solo programs didn't only embrace sociopolitical works about the Black experience, the vast majority of her repertoire at that time did—this suggests that Johnson was not only committed to propagating the work of other African American choreographers, but that she was dedicated to fostering greater visibility of the ideas presented and engaged in their work as well. This commitment to synthesizing, embodying, sharing and upholding African American cultural expression through dance on Carole's part is a demonstrable connection to Black Aesthetic philosophy.

Johnson's ongoing work throughout the period of interest as an artist, organizer and activist continued to express a commitment to aspects of the Black Aesthetic ideal. As an Affiliate Artist for the City Department of Cultural Affairs

of New York, Carole actualized an “art for the people” position by working in schools, recreation and senior citizen centers, neighborhood houses, addiction service agencies and state institutions for youth with mental disabilities. According to a Presstime News announcement in *Dance Magazine* in January 1971, Carole presented “lecture-demos of spiritual, classic, jazz and abstract dance” at some 56 facilities of the City Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs Administration of the State of New York. Importantly, in discussing her reasoning at the time for choosing to work as an Affiliate Artist, Carole unequivocally stated:

> I am trying to concentrate on the audiences of the forgotten. There are so many people here in hospitals, prisons, drug rehabilitation centers and ghetto neighborhoods who have never witnessed an artistic event of any kind, and their positive response to what I do is absolutely overwhelming. They always want to know when I'll be back and that makes me very sad in a way because there is so much territory to cover (Schnessel, 26.)

This comment suggests that Johnson had more than a passing or cursory interest in working with community members who were not necessarily connected to concert dance in any direct way. Carole's statement on her work as an Affiliate Artist was clearly reflective of a strong desire on her part not to just be a beautiful and skilled dancer, but to be a dance artist who actively taught and shared with persons who were disenfranchised at most and underexposed to the arts at least; her professional life could have gone in many directions but it is clear that Carole chose a life of service and meaningful engagement with oppressed and underrepresented communities both in the U.S and later on an international scale. Johnson's professional life reflected a commitment to quality

performance, exposing the socially/politically conscious work of African-American dance artists and fostering access to that art for community members. Carole's administration of the Harlem Cultural Council's Dancemobile was a clear commitment to that ethos as well. According to the 1969 report on the two-year project, the Dancemobile was dedicated to not only creating more work for Black dance artists, musicians and technicians but to "return the artists to the community so that local people can experience the achievements of the individual artists who originated in similar neighborhoods" (1.) This commitment to exposing Black people to the socio-politically charged dance works of African American artists from their own communities through the Dancemobile is a tangible connection between Carole's work and the aesthetic philosophy of the Black Arts Movement. Even the rationale for having dance performances presented in local neighborhoods on the back of a flatbed truck resonated with the Black Aesthetic's preoccupation with engaging the community in a populist, accessible manner:

> The decision to have dance in the streets on a mobile unit was based on the following realities –
>
> 1.) That, like music, the dance forms developed by Afro-American choreographers and dancers have influenced not only modern dance, but the overall American theatrical style. Jazz music and modern dance are America's only Indigenous American art forms.
> 2.) That the average person of the streets can identify and relate to the dance.
> 3.) That the movement, rhythms and themes of the Afro-American choreographer are almost always very relevant to the mood and atmosphere of today.
> 4.) That the combination of live music, exhilarating movements and color of the costume and lights is visually exciting and should work in the streets (p. 2.)

Notably, each of the points addressed above suggests something about Carole's aesthetic interests, personal philosophy and commitments. First, we see that as administrator of the Dancemobile, Carole took on the task of supporting the development of cultural literacy for community members; this is indicative of her commitment reaching the underserved and going beyond the status quo represented by the ticket buying dance audience. Next, we see in the second point above that the Dancemobile itself was an effort to reach the laypersons; by taking on the job of directing the Dancemobile project, Carole was picking up the mantle of bringing the work presented by the project to the "everyman." Lastly, points three and four suggest that Carole's job was, at least in part, to present work that was not only relevant to community members exposed to the Dancemobile but that the work itself would be stimulating and engaging in an accessible fashion. By agreeing to take on the Dancemobile project Carole was actualizing her commitment to the Black Aesthetic ideals of presenting culturally relevant art, working for the betterment and uplift of the community and building/instituting structures that reflected Black identity and self-determination. Importantly, the Dancemobile project also had a set of both "community and educational objectives" that reflected an "arts for the people" perspective which emphasized community involvement as central to the undertaking. Those objectives were:

1.) To bring art (quality, professional performance) to people who would not otherwise see it.
2.) To present to the Black community by artistic methods something of their own African-American heritage.
3.) To show the community intense dedication and training necessary in the presentation of dance and music.

4.) To develop a way of working with community groups who are inexperienced in organizing and have not yet been effectively bringing activities into their community.
5.) To involve the community in dance theater on as many levels as possible (p. 7.)

Clearly, Carole stood at the helm of a project that prioritized, presented and promoted a Black Aesthetic ethos as articulated during the height of The Black Power and Black Arts Movements. To be clear, the Dancemobile was a public effort that, under the direction of Carole Y. Johnson, presented socially conscious, politically engaged and culturally relevant dance works while engaging the community, encouraging pride in Black heritage and supporting the economic uplift of Black people by employing Black dancers, musicians and technicians.

At the same time that Carole was working to ensure the visibility and viability of the Harlem Cultural Council's Dancemobile, she was active in co-founding and organizing the Association of Black Choreographers (ABC) alongside Eleo Pomare, Rod Rodgers and writer/critic William (Bill) Moore. It bears repeating that, according to Carole, the success of the ABC was due to the work of those within and outside of the established dance community and that at the core of ABC's founding was that both laypersons and it's originators "were interested in Black structures as well as creating Black works that spoke to the 'revolution' of the period" (see Personal Correspondence; March 23, 2010.) The fact that the interests and participation of laypersons were considered and welcomed in the development and institutionalization of the ABC is reflective of Carole's willingness to work with those who were not necessarily a part of the

artistic mainstream or milieu; plainly, her desire was to work with those who had a shared sense of values concerning the performance and promotion of dance from Black communities. This desire for a self-determined, independent Black structure that would promote the creative works of its artists in dance mirrors the call on the part of Black Aesthetic proponents for celebrating and promoting African-American cultural expression and specificity. As the ABC was founded in 1966 as a contrast to the Dance Theatre Workshop (founded by Moore, Duncan and Bauman one year earlier), its existence suggests a desire on the part of these Black artists to lean on their own skills, creativity, acumen and resources in the creation, presentation and promotion of their work. The ABC's emphasis in their statement of purpose on ensuring that "it will be the Black artists who will define and delineate the image of American Black people" is neatly in line with Black Aesthetic philosophy in that it demands that the works created by Black artists speak to the needs, heritage, cultural specificity and desires of the Black community and make use of symbols from that basis in its deployment.

By 1969, Carole's work as a dance artist, presenter and organizer on behalf of the promotion of Black dance as an extension of Black aesthetic ideology took shape through her creation of the Modern Organization for Dance Evolvement, Inc. (known as M.O.DE, Inc.) As noted in the previous chapter, M.O.D.E's purpose was explicitly to provide support services for "Blacks and Third World Artists in the dance field (Brown; 12.)" Importantly, the fact that the ABC emphasized not only the work of African-American artists reflected

Carole's commitment to and interest in the human condition—especially the conditions faced by underrepresented and oppressed persons; this embrace of dance artists of "Black" or African-American heritage as well as other artists who have faced a similar plight suggests a broadening of ideas beyond the purpose and mission of the ABC. MODE's two major accomplishments, *The FEET* and The First National Congress of Blacks in Dance demonstrate Carole's expanding consciousness and mindset. As founding editor of *The FEET*, a "monthly dance and arts magazine dealing with dance from a Black perspective" (ibid.,) Carole was instrumental in crafting the publication's content which embraced dance and performance by Black artists across genres, communities and national origin including announcements from an array of Black dance companies such as The Olatunji Dance Company, Dance Theater of Harlem, Puerto Rican Dance Theatre, Inc., The Black Dance Workshop of Buffalo, NY and a special feature on the development of Joan Myers Brown's Philadelphia Dance Company (PHILADANCO.) Notably *The FEET*, through Carole's efforts supported the promotion of work from both recognized and lesser-known dance companies and repertory ensembles and is so doing embraced a broad range of artists.

The FEET also functioned as a medium through which those interested in writing about and commenting on Black dance and related issues could have an opportunity to do so, including Carole. In the July 1971 issue, Carole took on the task of trying to define and delineate a comprehensive, holistic and inclusive definition for the term "Black dance" which had come to use recently:

> The term “Black dance” must be thought of from the broadest point that must be used to include any form of dance and any style that a Black person chooses to work within. It includes the concept that all Black dance artists will use their talents to explore all known, as well as to invent new forms, styles and ways of expression through movement. The term demands that within a particular style, the dancer will constantly strive for higher levels of artistic consciousness and will communicate the truths he finds in his personal search with the people of the community who also share in his artistic evolvement. Since the expression “Black dance” must be all inclusive, it includes dancers that work in (1) the very traditional forms (the more nearly authentic African styles), (2) the social dance forms that are indigenous to this country which include tap and jazz dance, (3) the various contemporary and more abstract forms that are seen on the concert stage and (4) the ballet (which must not be considered solely European) (p.1)

Carole’s writing on Black Dance says a lot about her personal philosophy and aesthetic sensibilities. In Carole’s effort to define Black Dance, she forwards a holistic understanding that embraces artists of African descent across genres and styles while foregrounding an emphasis on quality artistry, self-awareness/determination and community engagement/relevance. Moreover, the way Carole address this newly coined and hotly contested term in *The FEET* suggests an interest at least and preoccupation at best with the quest for cultural specificity and self-definition that the Black Aesthetic demanded. Similarly, in *The FEET*’s tenth anniversary issue in June of 1973, Carole’s article, *Reflections on Organization in the Dance World* took white dance critic Marcia Segal to task for her comments about the publication:

> In her book *At The Vanishing Point*, Marcia Segal terms *The FEET* magazine ‘militant.’ If organizing to give voice to Black people throughout the nation is ‘militant’ then the FEET is indeed ‘militant.’ And maybe the Modern Organization for Dance Evolvement should be called the Modern Organization for Dance Revolution. M.O.D.E. organized in 1969 so that Black dance people would not be completely subjected to the whims of the system. The 1960’s was a period for the establishment of

> many new organizations. During these years, the Black community was becoming more aware of itself. The community was demanding changes in schools, housing and electoral power; politicians were coming to the forefront; and art projects and cultural centers were demanded by many community organizations…; Black dancers, in response to both the demand of the professional and the demand of the Black community began to try to organize. (p. 26.)

Carole's response to Siegel is especially revealing. First, she dismisses the negative connotation implied by the use of the term 'militant' by foregrounding the mission and vision of *The FEET* as a vehicle for the development of the Black dance community. Johnson proceeds to flippantly suggest a name change for her organization, M.O.D.E. Inc., and in so doing reaffirms the commitments of the organization pursuant to its goal of supporting Black dance artists across genres. Carole grounds the work of M.O.D.E., Inc, including The FEET within the context of growing self-awareness on the part of Black communities; her words seem to challenge readers in general and Siegel in particular, to question why Black people would demand institutional change in other areas and leave the "dance world" alone as if it was somehow not prone to issues of discrimination and racial bias. Carole's writing on Black dance is at once a challenge to the dance establishment (represented by Siegel) and a clarion call for the need of self-determination on the part of Black dance artists, inkeeping with Black Aesthetic philosophy.

Interestingly, while *The FEET* featured Carole's own writing, it also included commentaries by poet Jackie Earley (former collaborating and featured artist with Joan Miller's Chamber Arts/Dance Players) and then emerging Black female dance critics Zita Allen and Bernadine Jennings as well as essays on

issues concerning African/African-American history and culture (including *The Structure of African Culture: Religion and the Role of the Supernatural* by Leonard Goines, *African Dance as Human Behavior* by Miriam Greaves and Alicia Adam's two-part article *The Black Aesthetic and Dance*.) Importantly, Zita Allen was hired as Dance Magazine's first African-American dance critic in 1973 in response to concerns raised by the ABC and M.O.D.E. (see Great Performances: Free to Dance-Dance Timeline, 1970-1976, sec. 13.) As the only monthly publication of its kind devoted to Black dance, *The FEET* often included grant and funding opportunities and advertisements for other kinds of performances by Black artists (including playwright Lorraine Hansberry and the Negro Ensemble Theater.) The contents of *The FEET* are clearly in line with Black Aesthetic priorities pursuant to the promotion of Black cultural specificity and expression; ironically, the publication was partially funded by the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) making its position as an independent, self-determined publication by, for and about Black artists somewhat negligible. Nevertheless, M.O.D.E.'s accomplishments, including *The FEET* were decidedly committed to a Black Aesthetic ethos and to Black performance, including the Dance Service Award ("to recognize Black dancers who have made contributions to dance but who lack international reputation and exposure;") the Community Dance Series (which gave performances and lecture demonstrations "to build audiences for Black dance companies and to stimulate the development of community sponsorship of dance companies") and the production of a panel discussion on Black dance on ABC TV's show *Like It Is* with host Gil Noble.

Importantly, the aforementioned panel (organized by Carole in 1971) included dance experts Alvin Ailey, Katherine Dunham, Eleo Pomare, and Johnson herself. On the panel, Carole spoke at length about the Dancemobile project and the work of M.O.D.E., as well as offering commentary concerning the need and desire for Black dance artists to be able to work within their communities:

> I guess the big alternative is coming into the Black community and developing theatres within the Black community… that's where most of the dancers want to dance…its actually much more exciting dancing in the colleges or in the communities that are predominantly Black rather than the so-called "shi shi" and very sophisticated audience which is extremely cold…with everybody seeing how many turns you can do and technical things. But, when you're performing before just people who enjoy it and also dance themselves but maybe aren't specialists – there is a certain kind of excitement and electricity…so that dancers can dance for the people and [they can] get to know the dancers and there isn't this gulf and separation that currently exists primarily because of economic reasons.

Carole's focus in the aforementioned remark suggests that she placed a high premium on Black dance artists including herself making a conscious choice to dance for audiences that were outside of the mainstream; her emphasis on performing for communities for whom the work was relevant as opposed to some upper echelon resonates with her previous work as both dancer in the Pomare company and organizer with Dancemobile, ABC, M.O.D.E., Inc. and through *The FEET*. Carole's focus on Black dance artists showcasing their work "for the people" and the prioritization of dancing in Black communities suggests a remarkable affinity for Black Aesthetic ideals. Perhaps the most definitive example of this commitment is demonstrated by Carole's work in helping to organize and promote the First National Congress on Blacks in Dance at Indiana University in the summer of 1973; importantly, this gathering of Black dancers,

choreographers, administrators, musicians, and enthusiasts predates the International Conference of Blacks in Dance hosted by Joan Myers Brown and PHILADANCO by some 15 years. According to Cecilia Brown, writer for *Dance Dimensions*, the gathering boasted a full and diverse roster of both activities and artists:

> Participants arrived from across the country for the Congress with an excitement and expectation not knowing how the Congress would be conducted. The excitement grew from the fact that this Congress was the first, the beginning of a movement which was long overdue and which cannot be stopped. No longer would the white dance population relegate and establish the contributions or standards for us. We will do this for ourselves.
>
> The schedule for the Congress was very full and busy from the first to the last day. It was a thrill for us to be able to participate in master class taught by black professionals in the different areas of dance such as: Percival Borde and Arthur Hall in Caribbean and West Indian dance roots; Chuck Davis, Olatunji and Akwasiba in African dances; Rod Rodgers in Afro-Jazz; Bob Johnson; Rael Lamb, Eleo Pomare and Ural Wilson in modern dance; Carole Johnson and Walter Raines in ballet. These artists have to be commended and thanked publicly for they all donated their time, skill and knowledge to the Congress.
>
> There were also a number of panel discussions on the various topics of: Black American Dance Priorities led by Bob Johnson, Black Dance Aesthetics discussed by Eleo Pomare, Olatunji, Elma Lewis, Acklyn Lynch and Charles Thomas moderator; Non-Performing Career Possibilities discussed by Glorianne Jackson, Gwen Lewis, Vivian Gandy, Ken Miller, Ural Wilson and Acklyn Lynch moderator and the Media discussed by Olatunji, Earl Calloway and Alicia Adams.
>
> The Congress was truly representative of Blacks of all Black cultures. For there were African and Afro-Americans from the United States and the Caribbean; all in attendance and coming together to be a part of the First National Congress of Blacks in Dance (Brown; p. 13.)

The fact that the Congress encouraged and welcomed broad participation by Black dance artists across genres and actively welcomed artists of the diaspora without concern for national origin is congruent with Carole's personal

aesthetic interests and philosophy as explicated in her prior work as both dancer and organizer. Importantly, while the outcome of the Congress did not immediately yield a lasting structure for the national/international promotion of Black dance, the gathering is historically important as the first of its kind hosted by African-American dance artists, with Carole Johnson at the helm. Moreover, the Congress was a demonstrable response to both The Black Power and Black Arts Movements's emphasis on the literary arts (as emphasized in the review of literature) and the lack of inclusion of Black dance artists at the September 1970 Congress of African People hosted in Atlanta, GA by Amiri Baraka and other cultural nationalists (Woodard; p. 2.) While the larger Black Power/Black Arts Movement did not place a focus on a relationship between dance and the Black Aesthetic ideology, Carole's work as a dancer and through the Dancemobile, the ABC, M.O.D.E., Inc. and the coordination/hosting of the Congress clearly demonstrated a kinship with the ideals of Black cultural specificity, promotion of African-American cultural expression and self-determination/independence on behalf of Black artists.

Carole's engagement with the Black Aesthetic and its emphasis on sociopolitical consciousness informed her embrace of the challenges facing indigenous Australians in the early 1970's. Historical sources indicate that from 1880-1960, Aboriginal children were systematically stolen from their families and placed in missions where they were forbidden to engage with or demonstrate any of their traditional cultural practices; instead, these indigenous youth were actively "westernized and used as cheap labor" (see Moving With The

Dreaming.) According to Australian cultural activist and songwriter Bob Randall, the impact of this cultural breach was domination on the part of Whites in Australia:

> Psychologically, spiritually and emotionally the institutionalization of me being brought here stayed with me wherever I lived in the city environment because it was a white system that one had to fit into and the white man's way…his ways [were] the dominant ways, in fact, the only ways (ibid.)

Until 1967, indigenous Australians were not counted as human beings in the country's national census records, affording them, including the Torres Strait Islanders, a lower status even than dogs, cats and other animals that were listed on the census. By the 1970's, indigenous Australians were engaging in formal active resistance to the dominant white cultural and political regime. Political activist Chicka Dixon recounts that the young Aboriginal people (called "Blacks" in Australia) were influenced by the African-American political struggle in the U.S.:

> In this country you had the young Blacks wanting to be Malcolm X and the ladies wanting to be Angela Davis – it was really hitting the streets – that was unusual for Aboriginal people. In the 70's, we talked about Black Power – the media got a hold of it and twisted it [calling its proponents] "Black terrorists" and all this rubbish. When we were talking about Black power, we were talking about the power to control our own destinies (ibid.)

When Carole first encountered the plight of indigenous Australians during her touring with the Eleo Pomare Dance Company, she felt an immediate affinity with the struggles that African-Americans were facing at the same time. Notably, Carole's sense of connection with the struggle of Indigenous Australians echoes

her interest in the lives and plight of third world communities as articulated in her earlier formulation of M.O.D.E., Inc.:

> I came to Australia with the Eleo Pomare Dance Company and then I became more involved with the urban people who wanted to express their ideas and political situation. So I started teaching the dance and they gave me materials and ideas in terms of the things they wanted to say and we worked together…and the things they wanted to say were very similar to the things Black Americans wants to say except it was another culture and another place. (ibid.)

While 1967 marked the year that indigenous Australians were counted as a part of the national census, granted the right to vote and given validation as Australian citizens, their material and living conditions did not change in any meaningful way; as such, by the early 1970's Aboriginal people had begun to "take note of African-American political methods and they began to actively become visible and also verbally identified as part of the global Black world" (see Personal Correspondence, March 21, 2010.) Taking a cue from the U.S. Civil Rights era "sit-ins," (a type of nonviolent sociopolitical protest that involves one or more persons occupying an area,) Indigenous Australians protested their condition directly with the establishment in Canberra of a Tent Embassy, a semi-permanent collection of small activist settlements that clamed to represent the political rights of all Indigenous Australians, including Torres Strait Islanders. In a later essay concerning her work in Australia and the Tent Embassy, Carole remembered:

> The Tent Embassy, which remained in place from January until the end of July influenced me greatly. This symbol of Aboriginal resistance captured the imagination of the national and international press. I still hold vivid memories of the Australian television coverage of the erection of the Tent Embassy. Four months later I would be seen on television as one of the

> crowd of supporters defying the Commonwealth government's hastily made law that enabled police to tear it down. For the first time ever, viewers saw Aborigines being beaten by police as they forcibly removed the tents and the people. This action initiated two demonstrations to replace it and I participated in both. It was finally removed, though not permanently because it is up now as a reminder of that period and the current struggle to uphold the High Court's overturning of the concept of "terra nullius" – that the continent was empty, unowned land before 1788 (p.2.)

Carole's embrace of the social and political struggles faced by Indigenous Australians can be understood as an extension of her commitment to the plight of Black people, even if in this case the term "Black" does not only include people of African/African-American heritage. The demonstration by Indigenous Australians of a desire for self-determination, cultural autonomy and specificity was informed by the struggle of African-Americans in the U.S. as noted above; consequently, Carole's ability to not only empathize but become a part of their movement signified an active and tangible broadening and application of the Black Power/Black Arts aesthetic ideal in that it embraced the plight of non-White oppressed persons and encouraged its adherents and proponents toward greater social and political agency. According to Carole, the insistence by Indigenous Australians on self-determination was informed in part through performances by the Pomare company during their time in Adelaide:

> My interest in performing was beginning to lessen by the time the Pomare Company had been invited to participate in Adelaide, South Australia's prestigious international arts festival. Little did I imagine that I would become committed to Aboriginal Australia's struggle for self-determination. The Pomare Dance Company arrived in Australia in March about six weeks after the Aboriginal Tent Embasssy was established on the lawns in front of Australia's national Parliament House in Canberra. We stayed one month performing in Adelaide and Sydney. The company's socially relevant performances alerted Aboriginal cultural leaders that

> modern theatrical dance was another way to express political issues. (p. 3.)

This engagement with Indigenous Australians had a life-changing impact on Carole's career as an educator, organizer and choreographer during the period of interest. After leaving Eleo's company after their engagement in Australia, Carole decided to remain in the country and work directly with the Indigenous population as a dance teacher and community organizer:

> As previously planned with Eleo, I left the company and encouraged by an invitation from the Arts Council of Australia, chose to remain in Australia. In the next five months I visited rural and traditional Aboriginal communities and initiated regular workshops with Sydney's Redfern Aboriginal community. In these classes urban Aboriginal people learned how to create dances to express their social concerns, were introduced to traditional movements and began to explore ways to fuse traditional Aboriginal movements with modern dance movements. These workshops initiated the practice of inviting Aboriginal Elders to connect with urban Aboriginal youth. Although white university students had been encouraged to meet and learn from Aboriginal elders before this, formal opportunities for Aboriginal people to learn from Elders had been mostly unavailable to urban Aboriginal people. (ibid.)

Interestingly, Carole's activities in Australia drew on her previous work as a community organizer in the U.S. but was also heavily informed by her time in West Africa. Carole spent some 5 months between 1971 and 1972 in Senegal, Sierra Leone and Ghana on a study and observation tour where she both worked and studied informally at the University of Ghana at Legon. It was at that time, that Carole witnessed three approaches to community engagement and development through the dance as a way to reclaim traditional culture that later influenced her work in Australia. During her studies on the continent, Carole witnessed the work of artist/dance scholar Albert Opoku and his pioneering work

of bringing traditional dancers into the University setting to share their movement vocabulary with urban people in Ghana. Carole also noted that there was an emphasis on taking urban Ghanaians out on field trips to rural settings where traditional dance forms had been somewhat preserved so that they could learn the dances within their lived context and receive the approval of elders and community members that the dancing was being done correctly. In Sierra Leone, Carole witnessed small camp-style communities set-up by the national dance company where young people in the apprentice or "second" company could live and learn dances in a residential setting from elders and work on perfecting the dances under their watchful eye as well as with the supervision of the touring/professional company. Carole later adopted the models she saw in Ghana in particular to inform her work in dance with urban Indigenous Australians (Personal Interview 13; pp. 27-31.)

Once back in Australia, Carole began the work, using the models witnessed in Africa, of teaching dance to Indigenous Australians and facilitating theatrical engagement for them with the assistance of Chicka Dixon and film director and human rights activist Brian Syron. Students participating in the Redfern workshops learned Ballet, Jazz and African dance in addition to traditional movement from Indigenous Australian Elders. This work with indigenous Australians in dance led to Carole's creation of the dance theater work, *Embassy*, based on the protests in Canberra. Borrowing from the choreographic structure of one of Eleo Pomare's most celebrated works, Carole,

in collaboration with several Indigenous students, created a piece to illustrate both the struggle and emerging consciousness prevalent in Australia at that time:

> Eventually, I would evolve a dance work patterned after Eleo's *Blues for the Jungle*, portraying this major turning point in Aboriginal people's political struggle for recognition of their prior ownership of the land. The dance group presented a second version of *Embassy* in the first modern dance concert held at the Friends Meeting House in Surry Hills just before my September 1972 departure. The first version had been part of the demonstration to protect the Embassy in Canberra. The third version of the work – *Embassy: The Challenge* retained the basic structure but replaced the American music of Sun Ra, Bernice Reagon and Gary Barts to Aboriginal music by Bobby Mcleod, Bob Randall, Harry Williams and the Country Outcasts and traditional Aboriginal music and spoken words. New solos and connecting transitions were created. The first modern dance show of 1972 must be remembered as a milestone for urban Aboriginal people. The students who had never had any dance training presented the first politically relevant dance work that grew directly from their participation in the Canberra Tent Embassy demonstrations. Embassy and other works included the first attempts of continuing Aboriginal exploration of blending and adapting traditional dance movements within modern dance (see Johnson's 1997 essay, p. 6)

It can be argued that Carole's work with the indigenous community in Redfern demonstrated a major confluence with Black Aesthetic ideology. Here is a clear demonstration of an "arts for the people's sake" and revolutionary ethos using in this case, dance, to present sociopolitical ideas in a way that spoke directly to the cultural specificity, needs and objectives of the "Black" community. *Embassy* marked the beginning of the emergence of Carole's voice as a choreographer; during this same period she created *Underwater Study*, *Parting*, *Woman's Lament* and other works that incorporated specific elements of Indigenous Australian culture. In Carole's piece, *Trio*, the musical accompaniment was the playing of the Didgeridoo by a Yirrkala Elder—notably, Yirrkala is an indigenous community in the northern territory of Australia known

as Arnhem Land. In *Milkyway* and *Brolga Dancing Girl*, Carole blended story songs from Aboriginal culture into modern dance works meant for the concert stage. Johnson collaborated on the work *Kuyam* with Indigenous Australian artist Dujon Nuie to create a dance work that incorporated traditional music from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditions. In *Dances of the Dreaming*, Johnson included modern dances created by a variety of emerging Aboriginal choreographers based on traditional dances of the Yirrkala. While this particular "Black" community was not the focus during the development of The Black Power and Black Arts Movements in the U.S., Carole's work with these Indigenous Australians demonstrated a correlation between her embrace of this international human rights struggle and a Black Aesthetic ethos as it had been demonstrated in her earlier work with in African-American communities in the U.S. This commitment actually brought Carole out of Australia briefly to return to the U.S. and the work of M.O.D.E., Inc. to organize and plan the First National Congress of Blacks in Dance in 1973. Nevertheless, Carole's work in Australia would continue at the request of Indigenous Australian community members:

> The dance club that I had started in Redfern was now the major workshop of Sydney Black Theatre Arts and Culture Centre. It was going to lose its teacher, Lucy Jumawan, a Filipino ballet dancer/teacher who had studied many dance forms including modern and African forms at Jacob's pillow, a world famous dance summer school and festival established by Ted Shawn in Lee, Massachusetts. Euphemia Bostock – a dedicated member of the group, wrote me in hopes that I would return to assure the opportunity of the group. It had taken them [i.e. the students] nearly six months after I left in 1972 to find Lucy, an inspirational teacher who continued their development.

Here we see that Johnson again used her skills, as a dancer, educator, community leader, organizer and administrator to help with the work of creating and institutionalizing a structure to meet the artistic and cultural needs of an underserved population. Again, Carole's work in embracing the lived experiences of Indigenous Australians connected deeply with her own understandings and sociopolitical sentiments as informed by the Black Aesthetic:

> Finally, in November 1973, I returned to Australia. I needed relief from organizing pressures in the U.S. This time, my work primarily supported Lester Bostock, the interim director of Black Theatre Arts and Culture Centre. My activities included assisting him to obtain the building for the Centre; limited dance teaching; and finding a permanent director who turned out to be Betty Fisher. My major artistic accomplishment was choreography for *Cradle of Hercules*, a play about the establishment of the first colony in Australia.
>
> Aboriginal people resented that they were almost never employed in theatre or television – even to play Aboriginal people. I related strongly because as an African-American dancer, I was part of our fight to open doors in U.S. theatre, film and television industries. It was significant that the director of this play decided to use Aboriginal people to play Aboriginal people. In addition to creating a minuet to represent English culture, I was asked to stage an Aboriginal burial using urban Aboriginal dancers/actors from the recently established Black Theatre (ibid.)

In a similar fashion to the work of the Dancemobile project, Carole worked to build a structure in Australia that would forward the work of these 'Black' dance artists, create employment opportunities for disenfranchised persons and share the dance with a community to whom it was most directly addressed. In November of 1974, Carole began working with the newly established Aboriginal Arts Board as a consultant, along with Brian Syron. Their work laid the foundation for the first ever Six Week Performing Arts Workshop held at Black Theatre. Out of this workshop series the award-winning

documentary *Sunrise Awakening* by Ande Reese (another African-American residing in Sydney) was created; the film showcased dance, drama, writing, karate workshops, the culminating performance of the workshop series, speaking of the Pitjantjatjara language (indigenous to central Australia) and a segment "in which participants clearly state that six weeks is only an introduction to the type of training required to launch people into professional careers" in the arts. Out of Carole's work as a dance educator, organizer, choreographer and activist, the dream of professional training opportunities for Indigenous Australians interested in arts careers was realized:

> It took three trips between the US and Australia to commit me to work permanently with Black Australians. Since 1972/73 three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (Wayne Nicol, Euphemia Bostock, Dorathea Randall) and a South African (Cheryl Stone) had been regular students dedicated to becoming professional dancers. Within the current Australian system each had been unable to obtain consistent training and nurturing required to become a dancer. Because I began to see my future in building the possibility of a dance career for them and their children, I remained in Australia to start a training program. The course which I called "Careers in Dance," started in October 1975. About a year later, community leaders and I named and established the Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Scheme (AISDS) to provide an organizational structure for the course. (ibid.)

Carole served as director for 13 years of AISDS, the beginning of an opportunity for Indigenous Australians to participate actively in the mainstream arts community in their country (see 2nd page of letter.) The program, (which later became NAISDA—the National Aboriginal /Islander Skills Development Association in 1987,) spawned the creation of the Aboriginal/Islander Dance Theatre (AIDT) in 1976 as the performance outlet for graduates of NAISDA. It bears repeating that NAISDA was accredited in 1979 by the New South Wales

Higher Education Board as the first institution in that part of Australia to achieve recognition as a full time dance training course for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. While it lies outside of the period of interest, it must be noted that the AIDT became the Bangarra Dance Theatre in 1989, founded by Carole to "provide professional dance performances to local, national and international audiences" of Indigenous Australian contemporary dance. Notably, according to the dance theatre's website, the word 'Bangarra' comes from the Wiradjuri indigenous language of New South Wales, Australia and translates as "to make fire" in English.

Carole Y. Johnson's career during the period of interest reflects a lived connection with the aesthetic philosophy birthed by The Black Power and Black Arts Movements. While Johnson's career trajectory was very different from Joan Miller's her commitment to Black Aesthetic ideals was also embodied (through performance and choreography) and actualized (through the development of community projects and institutional structures both in the U.S. and in Australia.) As a dancer, her career reflected a commitment to learning, perfecting and performing the socially conscious and politically charged works by other African-American choreographers of the period, especially Eleo Pomare and Rod Rodgers. As an organizer and community activist, Carole's work as an Affiliate Artist with the City of New York and as director of the Harlem Cultural Council's Dancemobile project demonstrated a commitment to the "arts for the people" ethos articulated by the Black Aesthetic as well as its prioritization of African-American cultural expression through the arts. Carole's pioneering work

as a founder of the Association of Black Choreographers (ABC), as founder of the Modern Organization for Dance Evolvement (M.O.D.E., Inc.,) as founding editor of *The FEET* and as a key organizer for the First National Congress of Blacks in Dance is a testament to her extensive commitment to the promotion and perpetuation of African-American cultural expression as well as Black self-determination, community building and organizational independence. By the time Carole got to Australia, with her political and artistic commitments crystalized, she willingly embraced the plight of Indigenous Australian people and lent her talents to a new "Black" freedom struggle that had resonances with her own, even if it was happening halfway around the world. Her participation in the Tent Embassy protests and later work in Australia as a choreographer, dance educator, organizer and advocate on behalf of that country's "Black" population demonstrates an extension of the aesthetic philosophy and preoccupations of the U.S.-based Black Power/Black Arts Movement.

While the names of both Joan Miller and Carole Johnson are absent from any discussion concerning The Black Power and Black Arts Movements and by extension, the Black Aesthetic, the research indicates that both dance artists were actively engaged with its key concepts during the period of interest. In their own distinct ways, both Miller and Johnson wove their own aesthetic preferences, abilities and lived experiences within the larger social fabric informed by the Black Power/Blacks Arts Movement during the period of interest. Their contributions extended beyond their individual careers with both of them empowering other artists to pursue their own paths in the arts as socially

conscious, politically aware persons on their own accord. This new understanding of the work of both Johnson and Miller clearly demonstrates the need for a shift in the dominant narratives in dance studies (concerning the work of African-American female choreographers) as well as the typical understandings concerning Black women's activism and critical/creative engagement during The Black Power and Black Arts Movements. The implications of this shift, recommendations regarding curricular and disciplinary inclusion and questions for further research are addressed in the subsequent chapter.

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Chapter 5: Where Do We Go From Here?:

Implications, Recommendations and Reflections

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, both Joan Miller and Carole Y. Johnson actively engaged and proactively extended the aesthetic philosophy of The Black Power and Black Arts Movements during the period of interest. Through their work as dancers, choreographers, educators, community organizers and cultural workers, the contributions of both Johnson and Miller are reported by their own remembrances and substantiated by supporting interviews and cultural and historical documents. Both Miller and Johnson's careers during (and beyond) the period of interest have meaningful implications for dance studies, African-American studies, women's studies and related fields. Moreover, Miller and Johnson's extensive work suggest that a new reading of Black Feminist Thought and by extension, African-American women's contemporary activism may be imperative at this time as well.

As noted in the review of literature in chapter two, dominant narratives in dance studies generally prioritize and place emphasis during the period of interest on the work of Black male choreographers and White postmodern choreographers of both genders. Taking note of this trend, some contemporary dance scholars have taken up the mantle of challenging this telling of dance history though it has largely focused on work outside of the period of interest. James Frazier's 2007 dissertation <u>Saying it loud: The cultural and socio-political activism of choreographer Jawole Willa Jo Zollar</u> and Carl Paris' 2008 dissertation <u>Aesthetics and Representation in Neo-Modern African Dance in the</u>

20th Century: Examining Selected Works by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Ronald K. Brown and Reggie Wilson extend and inform common narratives in dance studies by complicating aesthetic assumptions, placing Zollar's work as an African-American female choreographer as central to the research and placing emphasis on African-American cultural expression and specificity. Even Anthea Kraut's 2008 book, Choreographing the Folk: The Dance Stagings of Zora Neale Hurston challenges the contemporary dance studies "canon" by turning contemporary understandings of Hurston as solely a literary and folk arts specialist on their head. As groundbreaking and necessary as these projects are, they do not address the central issues of this inquiry, namely, the inclusion of African-American female choreographers during the height of the U.S.- based Black Power/Black Arts Movement in contemporary understandings of dance studies. My research on Miller and Johnson suggests that their work as dancers and choreographers in dance must be inserted within the creative and epistemological timeline between the early work of Pearl Primus and Katherine Dunham in the 1940's and 1950's and the more contemporary work of Dianne McIntyre, Blondell Cummings, Bebe Miller and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar in the late 1970's to the present. Moreover, the inclusion of Miller and Johnson in the manner suggested above decidedly requires that further research might be conducted to examine the meaning-making and process-oriented connections among these Black female artists and others. The inclusion of Miller and Johnson within dance history narratives suggests a meaningful curricular impact; that is a fuller understanding of the national and in Johnson's case, the international picture of the dance landscape

during the period of interest. Miller and Johnson's work explicates some of the challenges faced by African-American female choreographers and demonstrates how they were able to navigate a complex historical moment in order to make a broad and indelible mark on the dance field in performance, choreography, education, community organizing/engagement and activism. Plainly, the inclusion of Miller and Johnson's sustained and distinctive work in the dance studies canon only enriches, broadens and deepens commonly held understandings of *who* was working and *what* kind of work was being generated during the period of interest and as such, their inclusion positively expands the discipline in a meaningful and important way.

As noted in the review of literature, contemporary scholars, including Cheryl Clarke, Lisa Gail Collins, Margo Natalie Crawford and others have worked diligently to shed light on the work and contributions of Black women artists during The Black Power and Black Arts Movements. While this new scholarship, including the work of Amy Abugo Ongiri as noted in the previous chapter, makes mention of and is careful to include the work of African-American women as cultural workers and artists in the literary genres of mainly poetry and theater, contemporary scholarship has yet to shed any kind of bright and sustained light on the work of Black female dance artists/cultural workers during the period of interest. As a consequence, even the new body of revisionist scholarship that is seeking to redress errors of omission and foster broader inclusion is somewhat lacking. By revising the dominant narratives of The Black Power and Black Arts Movements to include the work of Miller and Johnson as

dance artists who embraced, worked with and extended the notion of the Black Aesthetic, African-American studies and related fields are given a broader picture of the work of those artists/activists who were creating during the period of interest. Additionally, revisionist scholarship that seeks to include the voices of African-American women and their creative work in The Black Power and Black Arts Movements would benefit from this shift: instead of creating a picture of the period that deals primarily with the literary arts and with the visual and musical arts to a lesser degree, new scholarship can explore and further engage with the dynamic interplay of the contributions of Black female choreographers and dancers with the politics of the period. Plainly, the inclusion of the work of Miller and Johnson (and arguably, other Black female dance artists from the period of interest) not only provides a fuller picture and more accurate picture of the cultural work and creative activity during The Black Power and Black Arts Movements but suggests that there very well may be other social actors whose work in the period may need to be brought to the forefront in order for scholars and laypersons alike to truly make sense of the sociocultural landscape of the period of interest.

By extension, women's, feminist and gender studies benefits from the inclusion of Miller and Johnson's work in terms of deepening and broadening contemporary conceptions of what Black women's activism might look like and include. Using Patricia Hill Collins' framework for Black Feminist Thought, we see how the consideration of the work of Miller and Johnson (and by extension other African-American female dance artists) might re-shape and inform the

dialogue. In her groundbreaking work, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment, Collins discusses the characteristics of “Black Feminist Epistemology,” or the process by which Black women make sense of and meaning in their own lives. The four characteristics of Black Feminist Thought are identified by Collins as (a) lived experience as the criterion of meaning, (b) the use of dialogue, (c) the ethic of caring and (d) the ethic of personal accountability (p.66.) According to Collins, these four elements are hallmarks of the basis upon which African-American women have historically produced knowledge and evaluated its claims, value and application. In Black Feminist Thought, lived experience stands as a central criterion for one’s ability to claim the right to know about, speak about, and derive meaning from a situation; it is lived experience which functions as the “cutting edge” between awareness of a situation or experience and wisdom (that is, the intimate fact of having lived the situation or experience (p. 257.) Collins proceeds to introduce the use of dialogue through her explication of the notion of connectedness, suggesting that “African-American women may find it easier than others to recognize connectedness as a primary way of knowing. Dialogue is defined in the text as a mode of Black discourse that emphasizes “connectedness rather than separation [as] an essential component of the knowledge validation process;” what we know for sure is contingent on what we know in communion with others (p. 260.) As a tertiary point, Collins discusses the “ethics of caring” as placing emphasis on the “individual uniqueness” of each person engaged in the process of developing knowledge as having value as a result of being an

“expression of a common spirit, power or energy inherent to all life.” The development of deep empathy and respect for various perspectives and viewpoints taken into consideration under this “ethics of caring” combine to develop a “truth” that emerges though “care”; it is a truth that privileges and is woven out of multiple voices, emotions, realities and experiences that are ideally contextualized by respect and concern (p. 263.) Finally, the “ethic of personal responsibility” speaks to the idea that “people are expected to be accountable for their knowledge claims” (p. 265.) Plainly, one is expected to act upon the knowledge that they claim to possess; if you know it, you have to show it. This provides a basis for assessing an individual’s character, values and ethics through the lens of what they claim to know, making it possible to challenge one’s claim to knowledge based on their personal choices and actions.

Collins asserts that the aforementioned attributes emerge as common elements in Black Feminist Thought as it is concerned with the production of knowledge and the knowledge validation process employed by African-American women. Interestingly, the author proceeds to state that the “intellectual work” of developing Black feminist epistemology was often taken up by African-American female “blues singers, poets, autobiographers, storytellers and orators.” By adding choreography to this understanding of “intellectual work” and dance artists to this collection of African-American female knowledge producers, we begin to understand the work of Miller and Johnson through the lens of and as an extension of Black Feminist Thought. This inclusion raises significant questions for women’s, feminist and gender study scholars. First, if

Black Feminist Thought prioritizes lived experience as the criterion for evaluating experience, can knowledge and meaning be gleaned from the explication of lived experience in the choreography of both Miller and Johnson? What knowledge can be extracted from Joan Miller's lived experience and journey into the self as expressed in *Pass Fe White*? Does that knowledge change when the choreography is being presented by someone other than these Black female choreographers (like a man or an Indigenous Australian, for instance?) What do can we know for sure and what meanings are concretized in Carole Johnson's *Embassy* or in her choreography for *Cradle of Hercules*? With the emphasis on dialogue in Black Feminist knowledge production, how might choreography and/or performance function as the "dialogue," "text" or "vehicle" through which meaning is made? What "truth," if any, can be derived or understood from the danced texts that emerge out of the many voices, realities, experiences and feelings that emerge out of a context for mutual respect and concern and are then explicated in the resulting choreographic product as in Carole Johnson's work with Indigenous Australians and Torres Strait Islanders? Finally, what, if anything, can we ascertain about the character, values and ethics of these dance artists based on the presentation of knowledge claims in their choreography and performance? If we will embrace dance and choreography as intellectual production, these various threads suggest a set of research trajectories and pointed questions that complicate at least and re-define at best how we understand Black women's epistemologies, ways of evaluating knowledge claims and subsequent sociopolitical activism as a result of that

process as it is actualized through creative endeavors and in this case, through dance in particular.

Plainly, the inclusion and recognition of the work of both Joan Miller and Carole Johnson in dance studies and in contemporary scholarship on The Black Power and Black Arts Movements reshapes dominant assumptions concerning not only the work of Black female choreographers but how that work interacted with the social and political landscape of the period in question. As such, the research not only suggests but demands that an adjustment to not only the historical understanding of African-American women's creative work and activism during The Black Power and Black Arts Movements be broadened to include dance artists, but that dance studies as a discipline must reconsider popular understandings in the field that omit rigorous and sustained engagement with the work of Black female choreographers during the period of interest. By extension, this project requires that curricular shifts in dance studies, African-American studies and women's, feminist and gender studies (and related disciplines) be enacted to ensure the recognition of the valuable work of Black female dance artists during The Black Power and Black Arts Movements and that long-standing assumptions about the absence of Black women as cultural workers, social actors and artists as discussed within the context of other dominant historical narratives be interrogated, challenged and thoroughly engaged in contemporary scholarship.

Reflections

Journeying through this project has been a profound academic and personal pursuit. As articulated at the onset, I felt strongly that my ability to understand myself within the context of the lineage of Black female dance artists would be significantly impaired without the information that I would glean from pursuing this particular line of inquiry. Honestly, I was unsure of how I might continue to walk in the dance landscape and felt that I needed to hear from and study those who had come before me to understand what the potential and possibilities for me could be in terms of creating a life in dance. Consequently, this moment necessitates that I not only put forth the fruit of my research but that I lay bare what it is that I know now and understand more fully about this aspect of dance history and my own place within that.

The first thought that has crystalized for me as a result of this exploration is that embracing a particular ideology or philosophy may be a starting point for my creative practice and work but need not become a hedge that either limits or contains my explorations. Both Miller and Johnson were aware of, in dialogue with and inspired by aspects of the Black Aesthetic—this is demonstrated thoroughly by examining their work in the period of interest. Still, what I find most striking and tantalizing at this point in my own development as a scholar/artist/activist is that both women seemed to operationalize the Black Aesthetic as a launching pad or base for their work, not as a set of strict ideas or laws to which they had to adhere with both artistic and personal zeal. The women in this study used and actualized the Black Aesthetic but they were not slaves to

either its precepts or the ideas articulated by its most staunch supporters and proponents. Through this project, I can see that one can embrace a philosophy and still be true to their most natural and human self.

I am struck that both Miller and Johnson were well-trained in dance in the mainstream sense and yet chose really divergent and unconventional paths. I have often been fascinated by the extent to which dance is a lineage-obsessed field—it's all about *where* you trained and *who* you studied and performed with. These Black women were able to interact with some of the most celebrated teachers and choreographers of there time and were exposed to world-renowned dance training during their years at the Juilliard School. Even so, each of the women in this study chose to strike out on a non-conventional path; Miller and Johnson were not actively concerned with being a part of or recognized by the dance mainstream—they seemed to be, to me, much too busy going about the work they had chosen and felt they needed to do as dance artists. What this says to me is that I needn't necessarily stick to an expected, easily defined and well-traveled paths as a Black woman in dance…I needn't follow any dominant model, regardless of its cultural genesis, if it is not in line with my most deeply held values and reflective of my personal philosophy and aesthetic preferences. These dancing women grew and changed and embraced a broad variety of roles within the dance field from educator and artistic director to community organizer and cultural activist. I am reminded of the person who told me many years ago, upon learning of my interest in arts administration, that if would be a "shame" for me to pursue that route because it meant I would "never dance again" and

that I should know that life "is on the stage." Both Miller and Johnson's lived experiences demonstrate that having a life in dance can mean many things and that one can create a life in the field that reflects political interests, social consciousness, a commitment to community engagement and is demonstrated both on and off the stage in a variety of ways. This project shows me that one can, in fact, do many, many things, do them well, and do them in a way that is both revolutionary and self-determined and life affirming.

I am stunned and humbled at how both Miller and Johnson used their considerable interests in dance and formidable skills as dance artists to serve those outside of the cultural mainstream, share ideas/concepts with others to foster dialogue and further exploration and to expose audiences to new ideas. Plainly, these women could have done anything they wanted to do and could have potentially danced in anyone's company who was interested in capitalizing on their considerable talents. Remarkably, both of these Black women chose to use their skills to not only create a place for themselves but to inspire, educate and position others to create their own legacy in dance—neither artist was especially interested in creating clones of themselves, devotees or followers. Moreover, both subjects of this study addressed a variety of subject matter and issues and embraced a multitude of people both within and beyond the period of interest; this demonstrates to me that one's position in and engagement with the world has meaning when it is both broad and deep and free in the plainest sense of those terms.

The fact that both Johnson and Miller engaged in the work of self-exploration and self-definition through dance is major to me. These women defined themselves as Black women through dance as performers, choreographers and as sociocultural actors. By deciding and articulating who they were and what kinds of life in dance they wanted to create, Joan and Carole both engaged in the challenging and difficult act of interrogating the self and developing a keen sense of self –awareness without feeling the need to reinforce unnecessary hierarchies. These characteristics of both women remind me of the saying that being "pro me" (in this case, proud of ones place in the world as a woman, person of African descent and dance artist) does not have to make me "anti you or anyone else" (in this case, those somehow unlike Miller and Johnson or other Black dance artists.) This blending and balancing on the part of Joan and Carole of self-definition with a genuine interest in others and an embrace of broad social and political issues suggests a kind of freedom and creative liberation that I think is downright enviable and worth working toward.

What is clearest to me at this point is that both Joan Miller and Carole Johnson made professional choices in dance that were values-based and not simply situational in nature. In my understanding both women made choices in the dance field that reflected their particular aesthetic preferences and that aligned with their personal ideals. This commitment to being one's self…to being true to one's own interests and creative desires in the context of a discipline/field that can demand certain kinds of aesthetic conformity from those who choose to enter here demonstrates a real sense of personal courage and

conviction on the part of my subjects. And yet, when I had the pleasure of interviewing both of these remarkable dance pioneers, they each talked about their work as if it was nothing particularly special. Both Joan and Carole described their work in dance repeatedly as especially commonplace -- simply doing what had to be done at the time or creating work out of their own sense of being and understanding of the world and what needed to be said at that moment. Both Miller and Johnson hint that their work was simply the outgrowth of a natural, organic process; I understand this process to be one that requires and includes listening deeply to one's own voice and actively exploring one's ideas as they function and manifest outside of the mind. By foregrounding their own aesthetic preferences, cultural specificity, social/ cultural interests, political influences and pride in their heritage, Joan and Carole carved out for themselves a space in dance history that is at once fascinating, remarkable and grounded in the material reality of their lived experience. The possibility of being in the world—this possibility of living in a manner that is corporeal, self-aware, actively engaged with the social/cultural/political landscape, informed by cultural pride and yet is not easily defined is what following this line of inquiry has given to me. My thoughts at this time concerning The Black Power and Black Arts Movements, the Black Aesthetic and my own place in the dance landscape as a Black woman are perhaps best stated in Nikki Giovanni's 1970 poem, *Revolutionary Dreams*:

i used to dream militant dreams
of taking over america
to show these white folks how it should be done
i used to dream radical dreams

of blowing everyone away
with my perceptive powers of correct analysis
i even used to think
id be the one to stop the riot and negotiate the peace
then i awoke and dug
that if i dreamed natural dreams
of being a natural woman
doing what a woman does
when she’s natural
i would have a revolution

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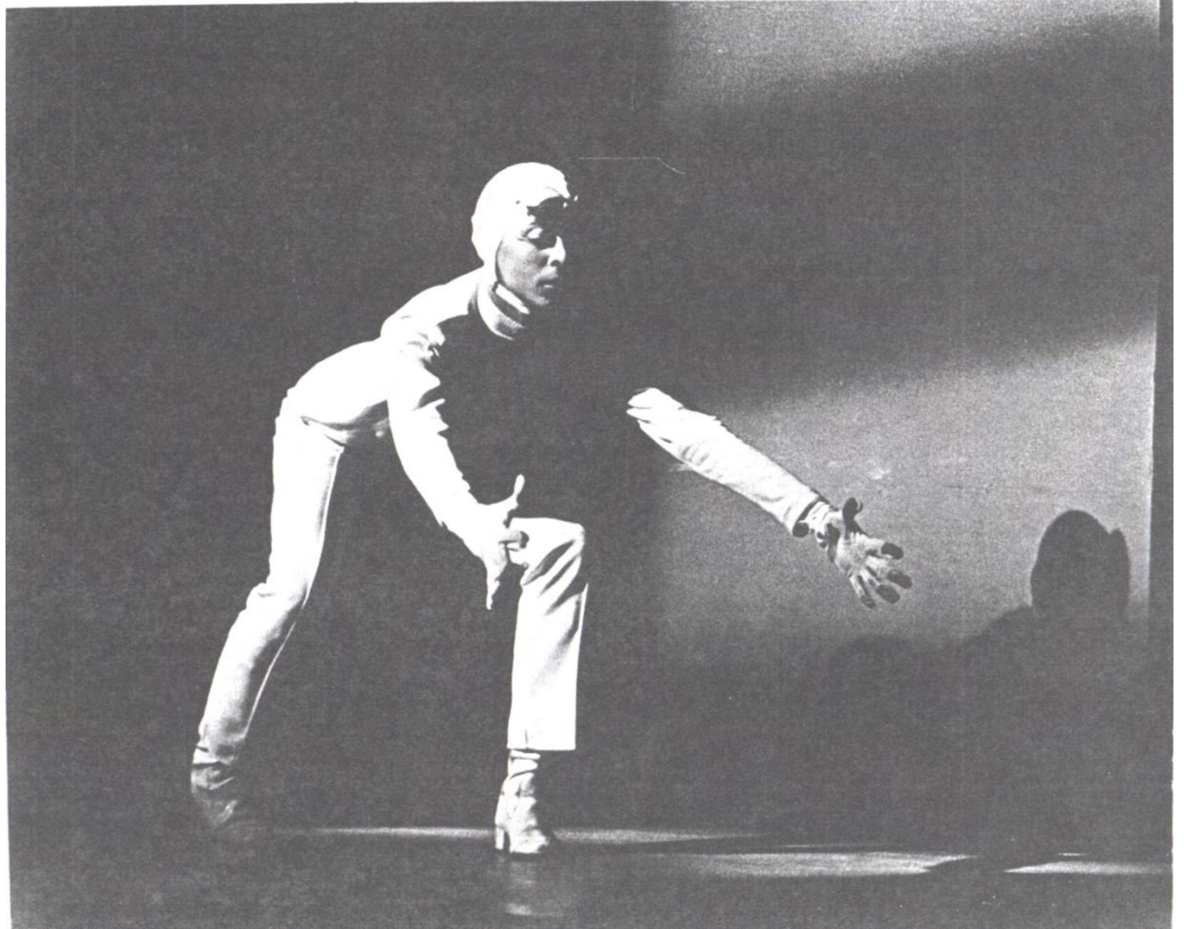
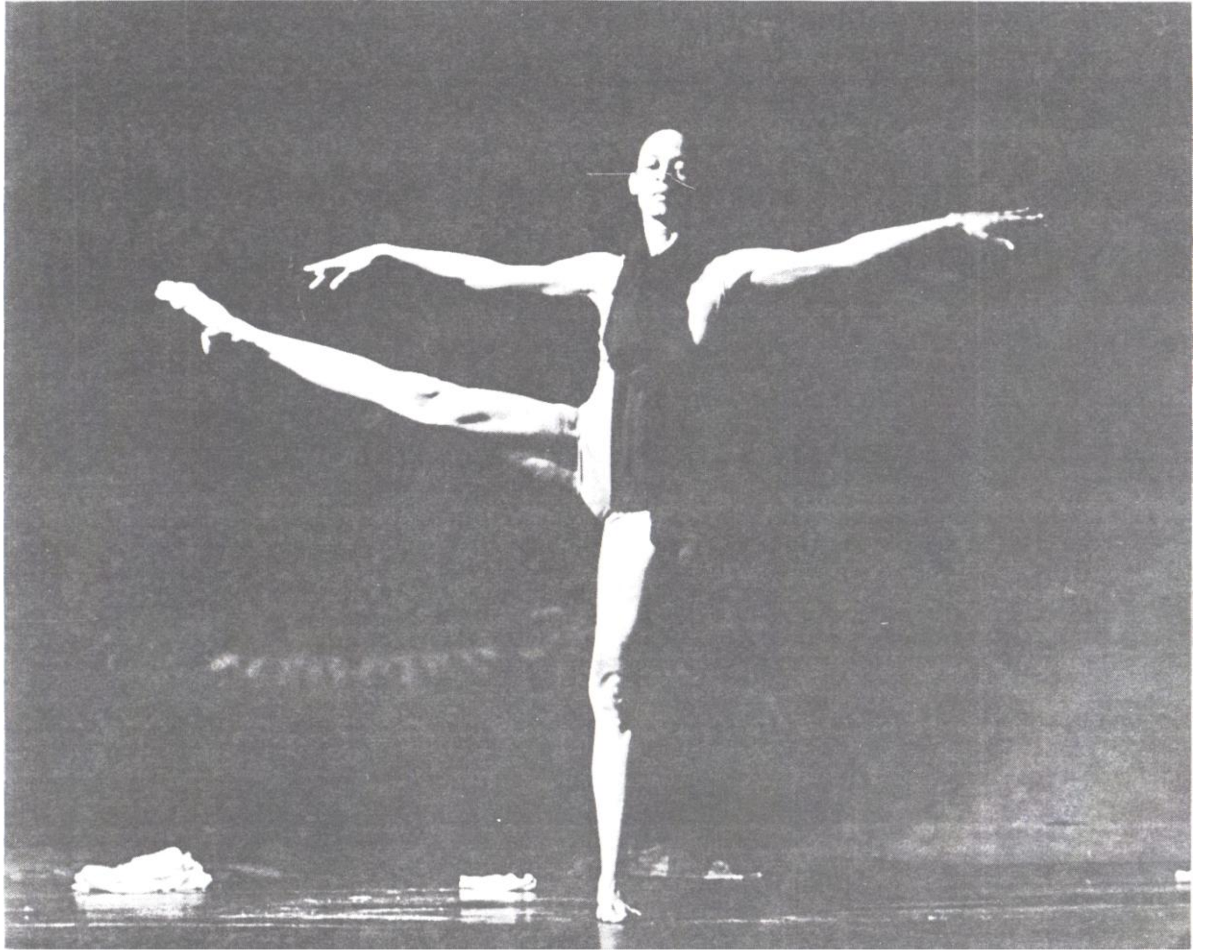
Joan Miller's Chamber Arts/Dance Players in *Robot Game* (alternatively titled *Hereabout the Little Hazards*,) 1969.



Joan Miller in *Pass Fe White* (sec. 1; “Miss Jane,”) 1970

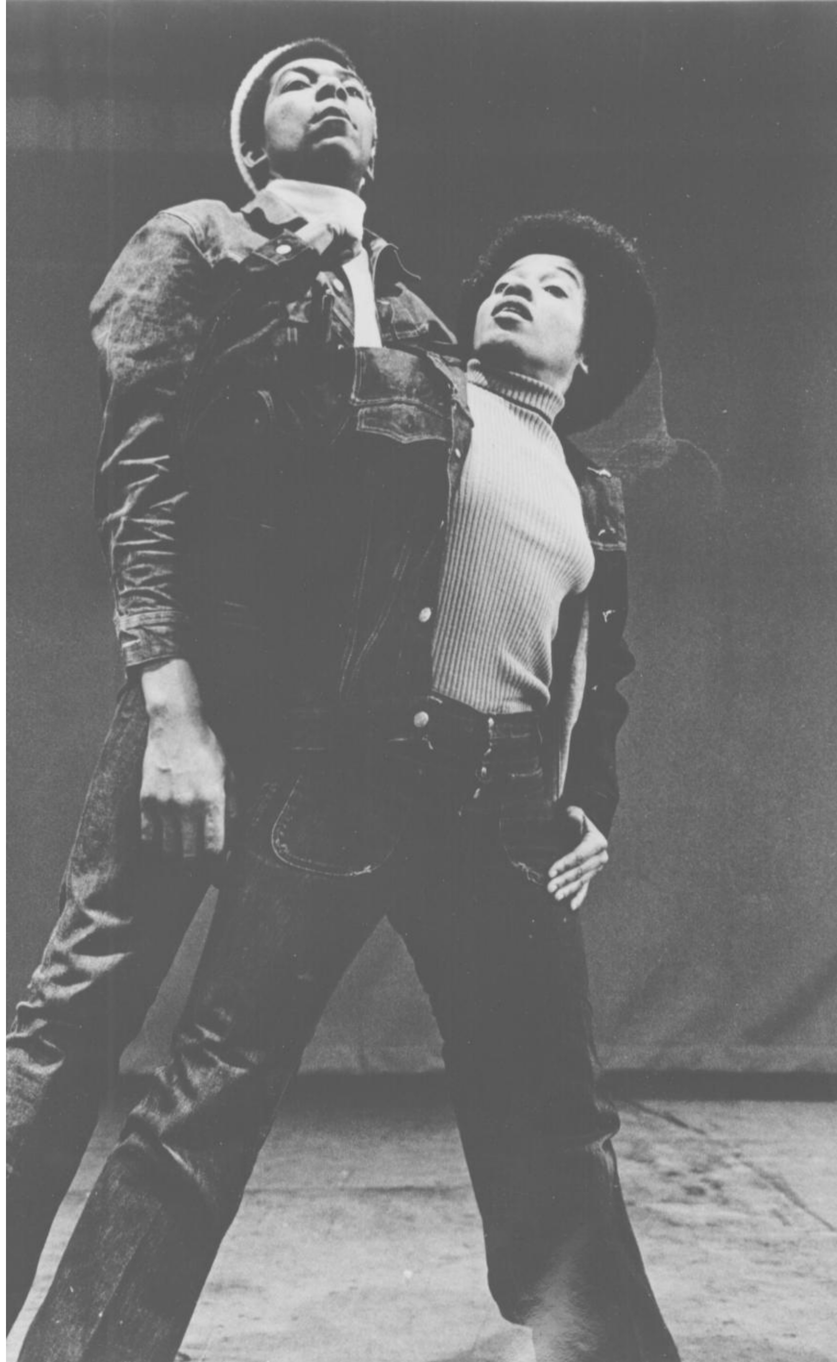
Joan Miller in *Pass Fe White* (sec. 1; “Miss Jane,”) 1970

Joan Miller in *Pass Fe White* (sec. 2; “Miss Liz,”) 1970



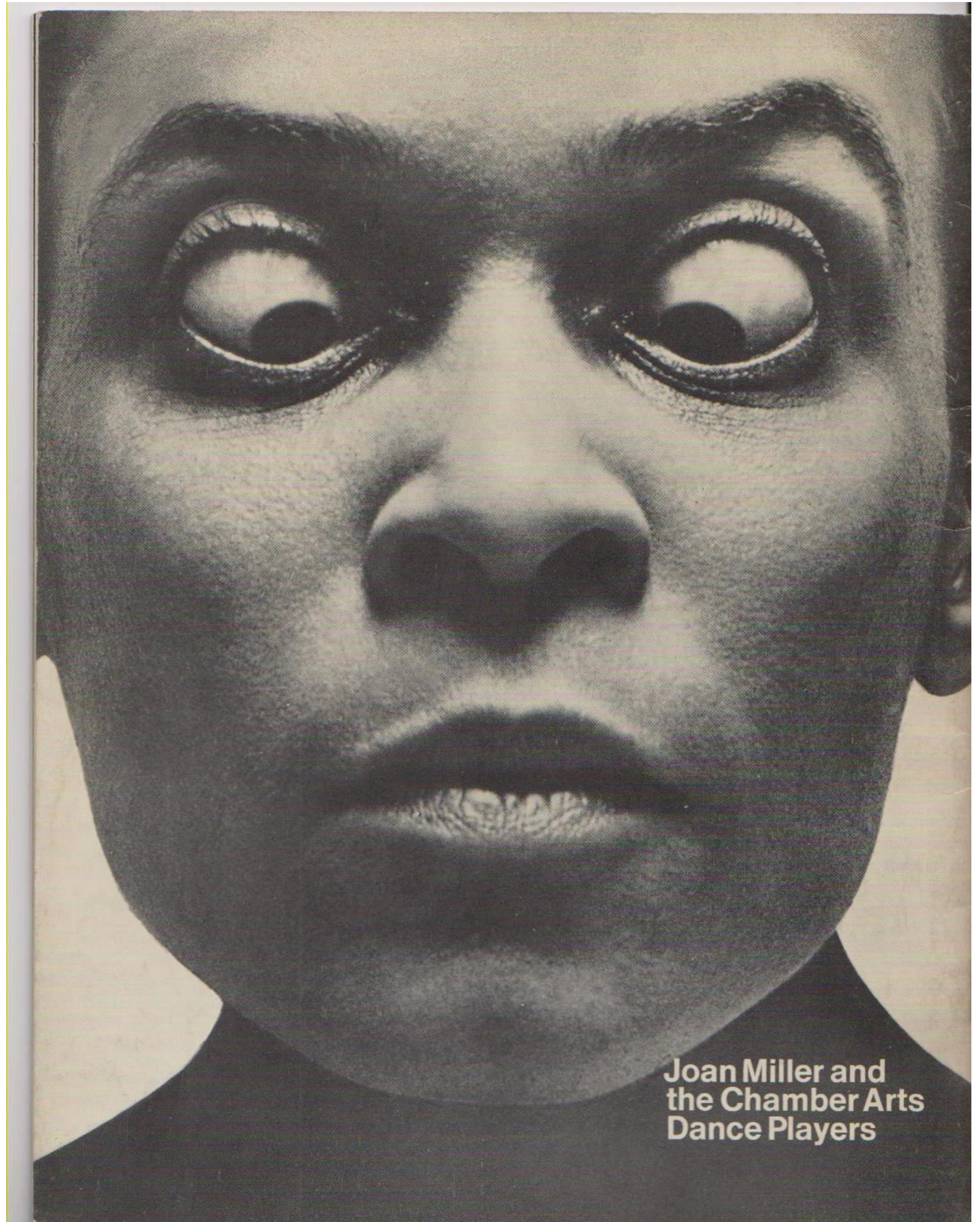
Joan Miller in *Pass Fe White* (sec. 3; “Miss Mercy,”) 1970

Joan Miller in *Homestretch*, 1973.



Chamber Arts/Dance Player Members Chuck Davis and Jackie Earley in Joan Miller's *Blackout*, 1971.

Joan Miller, Studio Portrait, 1970



Cover of First Brochure for Joan Miller and the Chamber Arts/Dance

Players, 1970

Company Flyer/Program Insert, Joan Miller and the Chamber Arts/Dance Players

circa 1970; Design by Art Bauman

Back row from Left to Righ: Unknown, Chuck Davis, Unknown, Milton Bowser (Abdel Salaam)

Second Row from Left to Right: Sheila Kaminsky, Joan Miller, Saeko Ichinohe, Jackie Earley

City Designates Affiliate Artist For Dance Plan

By ANNA KISSELGOFF

The city named its own ambassador at large for dance yesterday. She is Carole Johnson, a dancer, who will be Affiliate Artist of the Department of Cultural Affairs.

This will be the first time that Affiliate Artists, Inc., a nonprofit group that places performing artists in colleges and community arts programs, will have an artist presented by a municipal agency. For the next 12 months, Miss Johnson will perform modern dance programs and work with youngsters in community centers of various income levels. The Standard Oil Company of New Jersey and Humble Oil and Refining Company are sponsoring the pilot program.

"I take great delight in naming an Affiliate Artist," August Heckscher, Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs Administrator said in introducing Miss Johnson to the press at the administration's headquarters, 830 Fifth Avenue.

Citing the city's outdoor Dancemobile, a project for which Miss Johnson was largely responsible, Mr. Heckscher said that "dance is an area that the department wants to work in very much."

The New York Times

Carole Johnson during the announcement of her appointment here yesterday.

4/3/70 N.Y.T.

Miss Johnson, a graduate of the Juilliard School, is in her 20's. She said she planned at present to perform solos from works by two black choreographers, Rod Rodgers and Eleo Pomare, and hoped to "keep talk down to a minimum" in demonstrations.

Announcement of Carole Y. Johnson as Affiliate Artist for New York's Department of Cultural Affairs, *The New York Times*, April 3, 1970

Carole Johnson, Affiliate Artist for the City Dept. (in NY) of Cultural Affairs, is the first artist to be associated with a municipal government agency in a unique program, which takes her to schools, recreation and golden age centers, neighborhood houses, addiction service agencies and state institutions for retarded children. At each session she presents lecture-demos of spiritual, classical, jazz and abstract dance. She is appearing at 56 facilities of the City Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs Administration, and is sponsored by the Standard Oil Co. (NJ) and Humble Oil and Refining Co.

Announcement of Carole Y. Johnson as an Affiliate Artist for New York's Department of Cultural Affairs,

Dance Magazine, January 1971, page 12

ELEO POMARE DANCE COMPANY

Artistic Director and Choreographer ELEO POMARE
Managing Director MICHAEL E. LEVY
Lighting GARY HARRIS
Costumes and Props Designed by JAMES SNODGRASS

FRANK ASHLEY
LILLIAN COLEMAN
CAROLE JOHNSON*
DIANNE NELSON
ROBERTA PIKSER
ERNEST ROYSTER
SHAWNEEQUA BAKER-SCOTT
DYANE HARVEY
STRODY MEEKINS
JACQUES PATAROZZI
ELEO POMARE
SHIRLEY RUSHING
JAMES SNODGRASS

Assisted by

Chantal Belhumeurt Susan Congdon† Gertrude Sherwood†

*Guest Artist

(†February 6th only; members of the Eleo Pomare Dance Workshop.)

The performances of the Eleo Pomare Dance Company at the A.N.T.A. Theatre were made possible through the support of the New York State Council on the Arts and the Foundation for the Vital Arts.

Thursday Evening, February 4, 1971

LAS DESENAMORADAS

(1967)

Choreography: **Eleo Pomare**

Music: **John Coltrane**

Inspired by **"The House of Bernarda Alba,"** Garcia Lorca's play about the frustrations of five sisters confined to their mother's manless household: heartless pride and sterile convention destroy love and life.

Mother .... **CAROLE JOHNSON**
Suitor .... **FRANK ASHLEY**
Daughters:
To be married .... **SHIRLEY RUSHING**
Hunchback .... **SHAWNEEQUA BAKER-SCOTT**
In love .... **LILLIAN COLEMAN**
Defiant .... **DYANE HARVEY**
Watchful .... **ROBERTA PIKSER**
The imagined .... **STRODY MEEKINS, JACQUES PATAROZZI**

INTERMISSION

MOVEMENTS

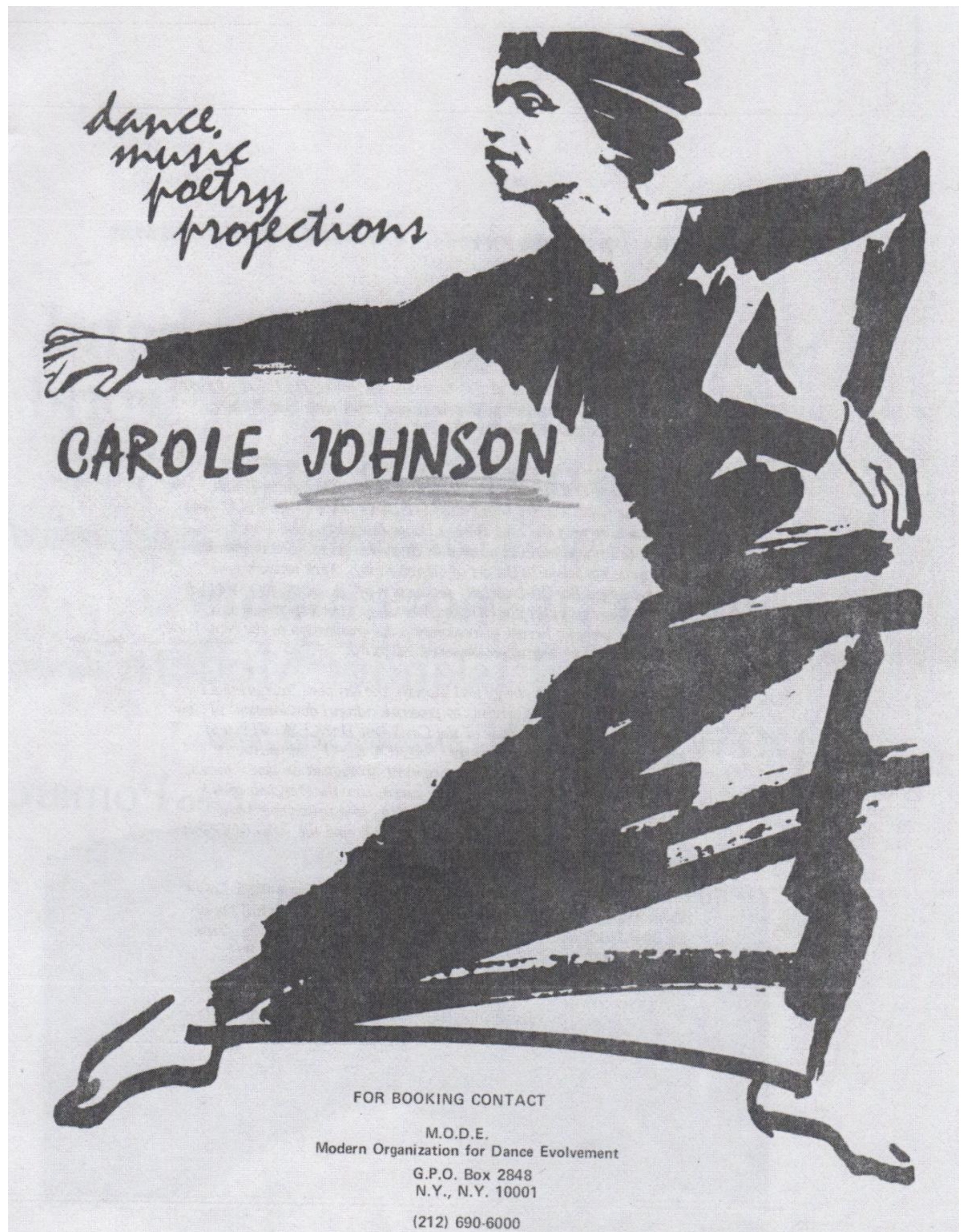
(Premiere)

Choreography: **Eleo Pomare**

Music: **Morton Subotnick**

Movements for One .... **ROBERTA PIKSER**
Movements for Two .... **DYANE HARVEY and STRODY MEEKINS**
Movements for Threes .... **(In order of appearance)—JACQUES PATAROZZI, FRANK ASHLEY, ROBERTA PIKSER, STRODY MEEKINS, LILLIAN COLEMAN, DYANE HARVEY**

Program Insert for Eleo Pomare Dance Company Concert at New York City's American National Theater and Academy, February 1971



Flyer Advertisement for Carole Johnson's Solo Programs and Lecture

Demonstrations, circa 1971-197

C A R O L E J O H N S O N

I am a Witness - Traditional

Choreography by Eleo Pomare
A solo from the work "Blues for the Jungle"

Lament - Bernice Reagan

Choreography by Rod Rodgers
A solo taken from "Harambee"

To Cleaver's Wife - A. Franklin, R. Flack

Choreography by Eleo Pomare
Specially created using audio-visual
techniques of the current period.

I N T E R M I S S I O N

Construction in Green - Bach

A solo from the work choreographed by
Eleo Pomaro

First Omen - Chavez

Choreography by Jack Moore
An abstract piece depicting a distressed woman

P a u s e

Gin - Woman - Distress - Bessie Smith

Choreography by Eleo Pomare
A solo in three parts after Bessie Smith
Look behind the face of a woman standing
on a bandstand singing the blues, and what
do you see?
Troubles with men, with other women, with
nightclub owners, with money:
Not having enough - having too much for a while
Gin / Sickness / Jim Crow / Persecution

Program for Carole Y. Johnson's Solo Concerts, circa 1971-1972

CLASS ONE: **Full Program - Dance Recital - 60 to 90 minutes**

This program offers an evening of dance By Carole Johnson, drawn from numbers choreographed by Eleo Pomare, Rod Rodgers, Ronald Pratt and other leading choreographers. When desired, this program can be combined with one of the "informances" of Class Two, to provide part of a program with one of the subjects in lecture demonstration, and part of the program in a dance recital.

REQUIREMENTS: TapeRecorder, PA system (if combined with Lecture/Dance and Recital) stage or suitable area for dance.

CLASS TWO: **"Informances" Lecture/Demonstrations**

Program A — "Introduction to styles in Modern Dance"

Miss Johnson introduces, explains and demonstrates various techniques and styles of dance and their evolvement into contemporary dance including African, Ballet, Modern and Jazz .

Program B — "Creating a Dance"

Movement, though a major part, is only one element that goes into the creation of a dance work. Scenario, scenery, props, music, lights, costumes, backdrops and sculptures are an integral part of a performance. Miss Johnson explores and demonstrates how all these elements are used to create a dance.

Program C — "Dance and Black Culture"

Miss Johnson illustrates various idiomatic movement and emotional expressions identifiable with black life-style. Walk patterns, gestures, physical expressions, combined with music forms such as the Spiritual, Blues, Jazz and Electronic music, evolve into what can now be called "Black Dance".

CLASS THREE **Audience Participation in the Dance**
Master Classes

Program D — Young Children - Basic elements of Dance

A presentation wherein the children participate by learning how various everyday activities, such as skipping, running and galloping can be turned into dance. The children are given the opportunity to "compose" their own "dances" for part of the period.

Program E - An Experiment in Learning the Dance

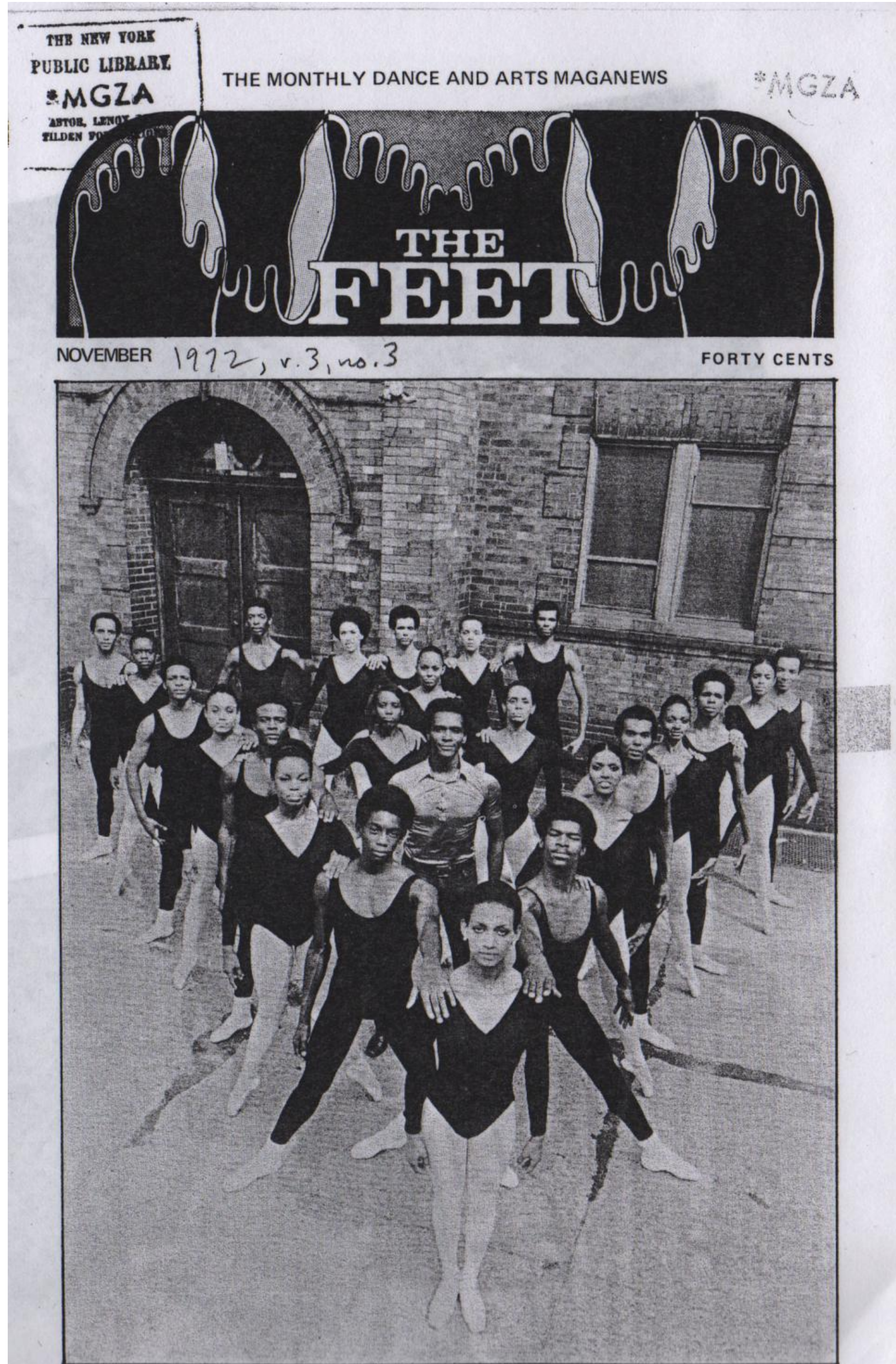
Miss Johnson works with a group of students and involves them in portions of a professionally choreographed dance work. Then with Miss Johnson, they "perform" the work in the class. (This is best done with young people who have had a little dance or athletic experience but it is not necessary).

Age Levels : School age to young adult: Duration - 30-60 minutes depending on age and experience of audience.

REQUIREMENTS: Enough room for pupils' participation in the dance, tape recorder and phonograph.

Carole Y. Johnson's Lecture Demonstration Offerings, circa 1971

Cover of *The FEET*, The Monthly Dance and Arts Maganews, November 1971, vol.2, no. 5; Design by Dwight E. Dates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THE FEET
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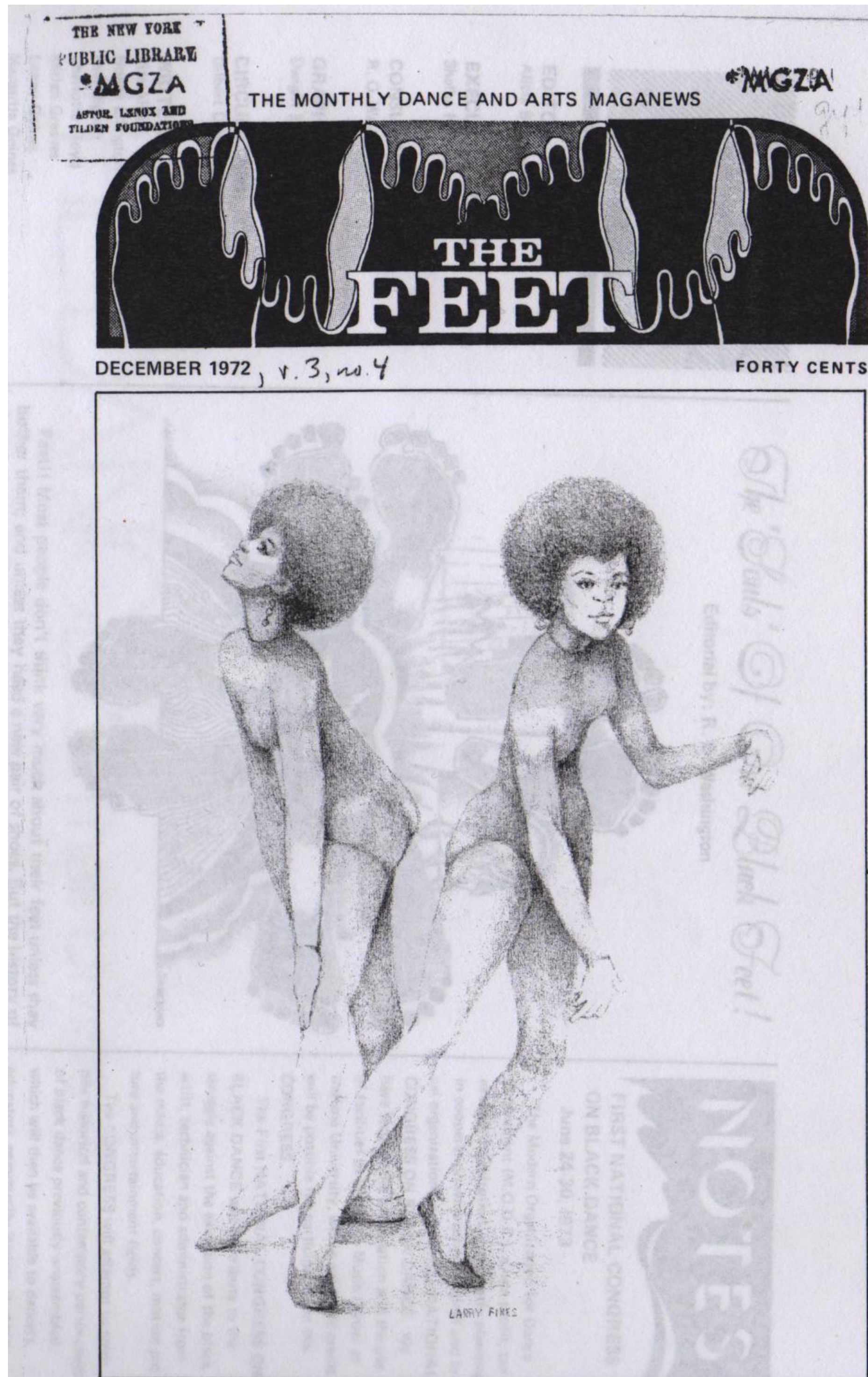
FORTY CENTS

Dance Theatre of Harlem on the cover of

The FEET, The Monthly Dance and Arts Maganews,

November 1972, vol. 3, no.3



Cover of *The FEET*, The Monthly Dance and Arts Maganews, December 1972, vol. 3, no. 4; Design by Larry Fikes

Carole Y. Johnson, Studio Portrait, 1973