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Power Delivered Through Dance: Choreographer Intent in Creating American National Identity 1935-1965

Patricia Yvonna Hernandez

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POWER DELIVERED THROUGH DANCE: CHOREOGRAPHER INTENT IN CREATING
AMERICAN NATIONAL IDENTITY 1935-1965

A Thesis

by

PATRICIA YVONNA HERNANDEZ

Submitted to Texas A&M International University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

December 2019

Major Subject: History and Political Thought

Power Delivered Through Dance: Choreographer Intent in Creating American National Identity

1935-1965

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Chair of Committee,	Deborah Blackwell
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ABSTRACT

Power Delivered Through Dance: Choreographer Intent In Creating American National Identity
1935-1965 (December 2019)

Patricia Yvonna Hernandez, Bachelor of Arts, Texas A&M International University;

Chair of Committee: Dr. Deborah Blackwell

This study examines the impact of American choreographers' personal experiences in their works of dance, and the constructions of American national identity that surface as a result during the period of 1935-1965. Individual choreographers included in this study are Helen Tamiris, Edith Segal, Anna Sokolow, Martha Graham, Alvin Ailey, and George Balanchine. Primary source material was gathered mainly from the choreographers' published writings, interviews, and personal notations kept in archival collections at either the New York Public Library Jerome Robbins Dance Division or the Library of Congress Music Division. Other primary sources were gathered from archived governmental files such as FBI papers or official U.S. Department of State memoranda. Secondary sources were mainly used to provide background research and reference choreographer actions that were not central to my study.

This study has found that choreographer intent and experiences on a personal level not only shaped the choreographies that were created, but shaped a national identity that defined

aspects of “Americanness” that gave their audiences a relatable sense of identity. These identities thus transcended assumptions that dance was only a recreational pastime, and instead gave dance a greater role in the creation and shaping of Cold War American nationhood and a cultural space to critique that identity as well. Furthermore, the United States government harnessed the abilities of these choreographers and their dances to offer a sort of “cultural diplomacy” to the world as one facet of its efforts to containment of Soviet communism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Navigating the entire process of putting together my thesis and its research components was a challenging feat, one that probably put more stress on me than I ever imagined. To have someone helping me out along the way, giving me pointers, answering all my nitpick-y questions, reassuring me of my sanity, and always encouraging my research was something I will forever appreciate. For that, I thank Dr. Deborah Blackwell. As head of my thesis committee, she was involved deeply in my progression through the thesis process, and I'm glad to have had her on my team.

That being said, I of course would also like to acknowledge the efforts of my thesis committee: Dr. Aaron Olivas, Dr. Alfonso Vergaray, and Dr. Donovan Weight. Each brought me closer to the finished project with much inspiration and helpful insight. As a crowd of non-dancers, having them on my committee was beneficial to my research. With them, I was able to target areas that would suit the needs of a non-dance specialized reader. The fact that my thesis was born from Dr. Vergaray's Historical and Political Thought class is something I should also be thankful for, because it led me to follow the idea into researching and development of my current thesis.

My time spent in archives, shuffling through papers and boxes of newspaper clippings were made so enjoyable thanks to the efforts of Libby Smigel of the Music Division at the Library of Congress and Dominique Singer of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre Archives in New York City. Libby was so helpful in locating boxes of interest and scouring for certain time periods with me, and was a delight to converse with. The prompt communication

between us via e-mail was also very much appreciated. Dominique provided me with a plethora of amazing information and photocopies of materials as soon as I had arrived at the Ailey archives office. Even though most of the Ailey collection had been moved to the Library of Congress, she dedicatedly and generously gathered what she could from their small collection in New York relating to my subject matter and made sure I had photocopies to take home and scans sent to my e-mail. Both women ensured that my research trips were successful and well worth the miles traveled.

Lastly, I believe Servando Benavides deserves some acknowledgement. As my significant other, he supported me wholeheartedly even when I was certain of failure. Above all else, he kept my head from falling beneath the tides of mental exhaustion and demanded I take breaks for myself. Without his insistence that I care for myself and step back from researching from time to time, I would surely have burnt myself out.

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INTRODUCTION

As an important form of cultural expression, dance has the potential to both embody and critique the social and political landscape of a society. Professional dancers, trained in ballet and modern forms since childhood, are not diplomats or candidates for government jobs where elections are held so that they may represent the American people. They do not sign bills into laws, nor have the prestige of the president. However, it would be a mistake to underestimate this group of people. Dancers are choreographers, and they can create notable works that identify what it is to be American, as Americans themselves. Such work is exportable to the world in times of need, as propaganda. These choreographers translate the issues of the day into movement, and discuss social injustices with an audience. Dance becomes a lens from which to view American history that few historians have looked through. This thesis argues that twentieth-century choreographers worked with their own lifetime of experiences to create dances that pieced together a vivid interpretation of an American national identity that could be shared by domestic audiences of diverse backgrounds. In doing so, these choreographers utilized dance as a tool that bound politics and social awareness of “Americanness” into one relatable presentation of movement that often times was recognized by the United States government and sent abroad as cultural diplomacy. This is not a study of dance as a recreational activity, but of dance performances, specific choreographic works, that were staged and documented.

The idea that choreographers can insert political messages into their work is not a new idea in itself, but rather a topic that has already gained attention as a subject of debate amongst recent dancers and choreographers who teach professionally. The people who have started this discussion are not historians, but rather teachers of dance who find that dance is much more than just a series of unassuming movements for the sake of beauty or entertainment. Because the

scope of discussion thus far has been limited, in that only those directly interested in the arts or dance specifically delve further into these studies on dance as a political vehicle in historical terms, it is hopeful that this thesis allows the subject to breach wider audiences. By treating dance studies with a thorough historic analysis, perhaps the subject can gain a new visibility and an important restructuring in the minds of other fellow historians. Instead of viewing dance as an ethereal and somewhat untouchable existence historically because of its fluid and difficult-to-document, in traditional textual form, nature, this thesis demonstrates that even dance can be analyzed with historical methods and is not as fleeting and untouchable as many historians have thought.

Twentieth-century historiography provides historians with no lack of topics to pursue engaging research. Out of many existing studies, scholars have been actively publishing large amounts of military, political, and social histories that revolve around two major historical events. World War II and the Cold War have no shortage of academic scholarship being written. Take for instance World War II, where more than a dozen historians have treated either the war front on the Pacific or on the European continent. There are numerous books written on the life and undertakings of Adolf Hitler, analyzed many times over for the reason he became the leader that he was. Concentration camps built in both Russia and Germany are the subject of hundreds of published books and articles, with historians vying for new information from old survivors or lost journals recently discovered. The Cold War is similar in that it has continued to grow as a popular topic for historians seeking to provide new insights into a historiography that has a steady and well-written base of facts and information. Cold War propaganda has been the subject of study by historians, where lines are drawn to ideals and ways of life that a social structure either has or is striving toward.

However, there is another history that has, for the most part, gone unacknowledged and sparingly researched. During a time when nationalism and sub-nationalism were important factors in defining an identity, Communism was a feared threat amongst Americans. Americans themselves had to re-establish their concepts of citizenship amidst war and foreign ideals, and significant numbers turned to dance. Choreographers used dance to reshape these concepts, but so did American government officials when it became apparent that the dances being created during this time period were already striving to display “American” imagery. The American public, conscious or not of the nationalisms apparent in these dances, also tended to look to dance as representative of an America they could identify with and thus constructed a shared identity.

In regard to the historiography and recent works on the subject of dance, *Choreographic Politics* by Anthony Shay, a dancer and a choreographer specializing in dances from Europe, is a book published in 2002 that looks at political manipulations of dance both in the choreographic process and in the way governments utilized it. Specifically, it looks at folk dance companies created in Turkey, Egypt, Mexico, Greece, the USSR, and Croatia. In general, the author brings to light many ways in which governments harnessed the artistic power of dances both modern and unique to the individual countries. Sometimes they were used in large campaigns of politics, while other times they were used on smaller scales within the country.

The Routledge Dance Studies Reader by Jens Giersdorf and Yutian Wong is a collection of essays regarding new methods of investigating dance as of its publication in 1998. Included in the book are sections dedicated to analyzing performances, the creation process, and placing dance in history and in society. The focus here is not limited to modern dance themes, as I have chosen to do, but includes popular dance forms such as Tango and Hip-Hop among many others.

In recent years there have been a few publications done by dance historians that place American modern dance on a national platform and identify the politics that surround it. Most notable is Clare Croft's 2015 book, *Dancers as Diplomats*. Croft is an Assistant Professor of Dance at the University of Michigan. In her book, Croft aims primarily to tell the story of dancers as official representatives of the United States in cultural diplomacy abroad. In doing so, she seeks to explore how politics and identity become both performative and embodied. For Croft, exploring themes of "Americanism" in dance are prevalent in that they surface in a multi-layered consciousness that the dancers themselves communicate when performing. Following those companies that were selected by the United States government, Croft examines what dancers themselves constituted as their national identity when performing abroad, and how sometimes their accepted identities clashed or fell outside the norms they presented onstage when experiencing life in another country. In this way, Croft focuses more on what the dancers themselves understood about the pieces they were performing, rather than the choreographers' intent. By leaving out choreographer intent and experience, Croft has perhaps overlooked a large part of the dance's intended meanings. In my study, I tackle the subject from the opposite direction, focusing on the choreographers rather than the dancers. Similarly, while Croft had more concern with examining reception of companies abroad and basing the "Americanness" on display on how successfully they were received and how the dancers felt, I consider opinions from home as well as the intentions given by choreographers regarding their work.

In *Stepping Left* by Ellen Graff, a former Martha Graham Dance Company dancer and Associate Professor of Dance at California State University, the research focuses on dance and politics in New York City during the post war years. Graff focuses more on activist dance and the politics that ignited some of the first times that choreography was used in blatantly political

ways. Understandably, a huge focus is placed on the fight for dancers in the 1930s to be treated fairly and payed regular working wages at par with any other factory-worker of the time. However, there were more universal issues which apply to the dancers and their political choreography that gets less attention in Graff's writing: racism, sexism, war, and Communism. These are things that I explore more, as well as focusing on how these early choreographers transmitted ideas about national identity into their dance. Graff isolates instances of choreography and ethnicity to a point where it almost appears separate from being American, something that may not have been intended. However, it is clear through my own research that these choreographers did not focus on single ethnic groups for the sake of celebrating tradition or culture, but to state and celebrate that this was one facet of what it meant to be "American". It was not meant to isolate, but to draw attention to as being one part of America's melting pot ideal. In this way, I try to showcase a cohesive understanding of the America that is inclusive rather than separating choreography from the larger picture of what the choreographer seemed to be trying to accomplish.

Mark Franko is a professor of Dance and Performance Studies at the University of California, and has written two books about dance and its place as a vehicle for making statements. These statements are not always political, but he does focus on those that are. Franko's work presumes that his reader has a substantial knowledge of performance theory and its terminology, making it less accessible to the scholar outside of the arts disciplines and frankly harder to prove definitively. In his books, the choreography is dissected primarily by movement rather than choreographer intent. It does however, open a door to realizing that movements can indeed be connected to messages of intent.

Since the early 1920s, American dance has been used as a method for political activism. It was common for time period for choreographers to form dance troupes from within the ranks of workers' unions who wanted to literally embody the change they sought through the legal system.¹ In many ways, this became a method to make workers' voices heard and their struggles seen on a larger scale than perhaps would have been possible with letters and meetings alone. Choreographers and their dances also aimed at making the concerns of the working-class American more accessible to onlookers, hoping that they could sympathize and perhaps even identify with the message. Dances staged in public spaces—ones that depicted working class Americans in their production-line factory jobs—were often meant to draw attention to situations faced by most working-class citizens of the United States. Choreographers frequently showcased topics such as the demand for better work conditions or pay and the poor standard of living that most endured despite long hours in rough jobs. Dances performed in this way and about these subjects gathered large amounts of support from workers who wanted to be part of political change and were introduced to this manner of activism through their union groups.

Amidst the social and economic upheaval that was the Great Depression, Franklin D. Roosevelt introduced the New Deal in efforts to repair the failing state of the American economy. The Works Projects Administration (hereby referenced as the WPA) was established under the New Deal soon after, in an attempt to employ Americans in various public works projects.² It was an opportunity for many unemployed citizens to be trained and placed in a job that would not only improve the overall American infrastructure, but lift workers out of poverty

¹ Ellen Graff, *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1999) 1-10.

² "Today in History - April 8: Works Project Administration," Library, Library of Congress, accessed September 4, 2019, <https://www.loc.gov/item/today-in-history/april-08/>

and raise the standard of living. Work most recognized involved the paving and construction of roads and buildings, but the WPA also sought to employ artists, musicians, and writers who had been left jobless. Government jobs for theatre arts specifically were placed under a smaller program titled the Federal Theatre Project (herby referenced as the FTP). While not as extensively researched as the WPA or other sub-programs, there is a small amount of scholarly research that has been conducted on the FTP. Under the Federal Theatre Project, established in 1935, dancers were first employed by these specially designed government programs to reinstate art and employment into the national system.³ However, dancers who were selected to lead the dance portion of the program, as well as those few dancers employed, were unsatisfied with the reach of their specific art in the Federal Theatre Project. They were secondary to the theatre group's needs, and thus given less opportunity and less quota for employable dancers.

Intense pressure from dancers and leaders of the dance division of the FTP, such as Helen Tamiris, allowed the collective voice of dissatisfaction to be heard by those in charge of the FTP. Helen Tamiris was born in New York City and trained in dance for most of her life. She learned modern dance under Isadora Duncan, one of the acclaimed "mothers of modern dance". Dancing aside, Tamiris also thought of herself as an activist. She protested on behalf of dancers' rights in the FTP to the government, and she acted out her dislike of racism and war in choreographies she set on public stages. Though she was not alone in orchestrating the picket lines, sit-ins, and literal dance protests that demanded better use of the FTP's funding toward dancers, she was one of the most notable leaders that put her name behind the movement.⁴ The work of Tamiris and the other FTP-employed dancers proved successful in getting their message across. Officials

³ Susan Quinn, *The Furious Improvisation: How the WPA and A Cast of Thousands Made High Art Out of Desperate Times* (New York: Walker & Co., 2009)11-12.

⁴ Pauline Tish, "Helen Tamiris," *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, March 20, 2009, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/tamiris-helen>.

quickly got tired of seeing the dancers blocking their building entrances with movement or their silent picket lines and signs.⁵ Roosevelt established the Federal Dance Project in 1936. The program itself was short-lived, but many choreographic works were created under the FDP that formed representations of identity and embodied perceived American values as the respective choreographers themselves understood them. Tamiris herself choreographed several pieces for the FDP about racism and its evils.⁶ Many of these works stemmed from personal experience and effectively emboldened other dancers to help with the construction of “America” as the people themselves knew it.⁷ Outside the government’s federal programs aimed at employing struggling artists, existed choreographers and dancers who employed themselves. These artists labored immensely along the way, but still found an outlet through which they could create choreographic works that represented their vision of America. Anna Sokolow, one such choreographer, focused many of her pieces on the working class of American society, war, and the humane concepts of Democracy that the United States promised all its people.⁸ Anna Sokolow, like Helen Tamiris, was attempting to navigate issues of social and political concern to the American public by looking to her own personal experiences, and creating dances which brought the issues attention and encouraged action to solve them. It was the precursor to what direction choreographers took dance and its capabilities in later years.

⁵ Ellen Graff, *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1999) 90, 101.

⁶ Christena L. Schlundt, *Tamiris, a Chronicle of Her Dance Career, 1927-1955* (New York, NJ: New York Public Library, 1972) 44, 52.

⁷ While Tamiris’ best-received works were those dealing with issues of racism in the United States, she also choreographed to draw awareness to the plights caused by war, which certainly must have seemed like an important topic of focus as her work was prominent during the pre-war years of WWII. Similarly, being a Jewish woman, her works also tended to reflect her personal experience with being a Jewish woman in America.

⁸ Hannah Kosstrin, *Honest Bodies: Revolutionary Modernism in the Dances of Anna Sokolow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017) x-xi.

Reaching beyond post-WWI years to the World War II and Cold War era, the use of dance began to evolve. No longer was dance simply a tool for achieving political victories amongst working class citizens and defining communities, it was utilized as a diplomatic tool by the United States government in foreign relations. By 1938, the Federal Dance Project had been retired and instead dance was overseen on a governmental level through the American National Theatre and Academy⁹. ANTA was left under the charge of the US State Department, and both agencies actively participated in hiring choreographers and dance companies that the American government could utilize in producing fundamentally “American” shows abroad.¹⁰ Such government action was cultural diplomacy deliverable through the dance. The hope was that through showcasing different perspectives of American life and assuring audiences overseas that America held democracy and freedom as its highest values, that rumors regarding the United States’ inequality could be put to rest. It was a crucial countermeasure to defend against the Soviet Union’s startling picture of the “real” America that was invisible to the rest of the world. For example, Russia pointed to the way black Americans were treated in their own homes, with segregation and violence completely common. This was the real America, even as America claimed progress and good values. It was an unsavory image, but Russia could use it because it was true. It was an assault on the national image, and the US State Department utilized dance as a defense.

The most obvious example of this defensive attempt to rectify Soviet accusations of an unfair and unequal America would be the State Department’s hiring of Alvin Ailey and his dance

⁹ The American National Theatre and Academy was a non-profit theatre-producer and training organization for the theatre arts, established in 1935 by the United States Congress. It was most prominent in producing the American National Theatre and Academy panel, which oversaw the production of international tours in various forms of art during the 1950s and 1960s. Government interest in certain areas of the world dictated where the ANTA panel was to plan tour stops, and included tours of theatre troupes, dancers, musicians, and comedic theatre troupes.

¹⁰ Clare Croft, *Dancers as Diplomats: American Choreography in Cultural Exchange* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) 6.

company to perform in the Soviet Union and tour Africa amidst Cold War tensions in 1960s and 1970s. Alvin Ailey was an African American choreographer born in Texas, who later became one of the first black Americans to found a major dance company.¹¹ He lived through segregation and violence, and used those experiences to fuel the narratives of his choreographic works. To the US State Department, Ailey and his predominately African-American dance company were a perfect fit for cultural diplomacy abroad. It could disprove the accusations which were marring the American image by showing that African Americans were given the liberties of performing on stage the same as any other American artist. Choreographers like Ailey could tell their sub-nationalistic history of America, share the story of their struggle, and ultimately release the audience from a preconceived doubt that Americans had the freedoms to do what the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre could. This ability of the choreographer to produce work that related his own personal experience as an American of a minority ethnic group that was not always treated equally in the the United States resulted in the development of a national identity through dance.

What the US State Department chose to do with Alvin Ailey and his company was not an isolated event. They also selected other choreographers and their dance companies through ANTA to be representative of American culture and values. These were all aspects which ultimately defined the choreographers as dance geniuses who set movements to stages a vision of American national identity that could be shared by all Americans, as well as exported overseas as an example of what American identity looked like. Such manifestations of the American identity that could be shared amongst all Americans came through the personal experiences of those choreographers employed by the United States government. From 2010 until 2018, the US State

¹¹ “Explore our History,” About, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, accessed August 20, 2019, <https://www.alvinailey.org/about/history>

Department continued to promote a special program set aside for cultural diplomacy through dance that toured the world called DanceMotion USA.¹² DanceMotion USA was run jointly by the US Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and the Brooklyn Academy of Music. With this program, an emphasis on providing master classes, workshops, talks, lectures, and offering educational experiences for the dance community in the host country in an attempt to promote cross-cultural relations was prominent. This differed greatly from what the US State Department and ANTA focused on providing on tours abroad, even though ANTA-planned tours were occasionally furnished with a workshop or master class. For ANTA-planned tours abroad, the focus was placed primarily on staging performances abroad. In both programs, however, the goal was the same: to promote American ideals and advance American foreign policy.

The idea of "soft power" is what we see in these cases of dance being exported to exemplify American ideals and image. Joseph Nye, a political scientist at Harvard University, wrote extensively on the idea of "soft power" in politics in his book, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. In short, soft power is a persuasive approach to international relations through appeal and attraction. Usually, cultural and economic policies are what form this brand of power as opposed to "hard power" where the means are typically militaristic and economic.¹³ The idea of "soft power" and cultural diplomacy in this thesis are used interchangeably and refer to the same concept.

With little else in the way of comprehensive scholarly source material in dance history, there is still much work to be done to fully explore the impact that choreographers and their

¹² Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, "DanceMotion USA," U.S. Department of State, Accessed August 21, 2018. <https://exchanges.state.gov/us/program/dancemotion-usa>.

¹³ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2009).

dance companies had as cultural ambassadors for America in the Cold War era. This thesis seeks to accomplish the following: successfully argue that the choreographer themselves and their personal experiences are what led dances to become historically connected to a national identity of their creation, and demonstrate that dance was used as a tool either by governments or by choreographers themselves in bringing attention to social issues of American identity.

Choreographer intent and motivations, rather than focusing on dancer and audience interpretation, is necessary in order to avoid the 'subjective' nature of the topic. To do this, the thesis will go on to provide an examination of the personal lives and viewpoints of American choreographers whose work demonstrated a poignant representation of national identity in the way that they portrayed American life. With much of what choreographers staged being representative of America and Americans, the United States government utilizing dance for export further enhanced the idea that the choreographers had successfully created a shared national identity for the country and its people. By doing so, dance was actually a vehicle for spreading ideas, propaganda, and visions of what it meant to be American during a culturally sensitive time between WWII and the Cold War. It gauged and altered perceptions abroad, and within domestic audiences as well. In order to gain an understanding of government intention toward dance as a tool of cultural diplomacy, State Department-published pamphlets, meeting minutes, and testimony is also analyzed.

By analyzing both performance aspects of the subject matter, as well as factual evidence provided in government documents and personal intent as expressed by the creators of dances herein explored, it is my intent to take facets of different disciplines in order to explore how dance has been utilized in movements of political importance. Rather than focusing primarily on what the government says about dance, or focusing only on dancer/audience interpretations, I

make it my goal to focus on the choreographers who create the work themselves. This I think, helps to shed light on dance in its historical importance when it has largely been presented in fragmented and one-sided depictions up until now. Many relevant choreographers exist, however those chosen for this thesis were chosen for their publicly recognized status as “revolutionary” dancers who aided in the creation of a shared American national identity. Their works generated mass followings beyond the dance-viewing elite, and almost always were recorded in reviews and critiques to have been an inspiration of American values and identity. Half of the choreographers who will be discussed in this thesis, were furthermore validated by their US government-funded tours abroad to export images of America as containing a diverse national identity. The other half had few or no governmental ties but still featured prominently in shaping American identity and values in their work. The reason for examining both government and non-government funded dance is to provide a more well-rounded framework rather than focus specifically on government-funded programs. To exclude those that were not funded by the government, would be to deny that there were choreographers working with similar intentions outside of the circle of ANTA funding.

Chapter one will deal with the choreographers that were active mainly in the 1920s and 1930s and their early contributions to creating dance that drew national identity and activism together. While this is not the time period that my thesis is focused on, it is important to examine because it provides the starting foundation on which dance of the 1940s and onward began to build and evolve. Depictions of a shared national identity were present in these early dances, albeit in very different forms from what took shape after WWII. The chapter will examine three choreographers: Helen Tamiris, Edith Segal, and Anna Sokolow. Each choreographer’s background will be examined, as it ultimately influenced the construction of the dance.

Understanding their identity constructs and how it built impressionable audiences from working-class American citizens who sought to engage in activism helps the reader understand the purpose of the dances and the choreographers' intent: to inspire the public to engage in advocating for change politically and socially, and in doing so, enfold the message of activism into a constructed national identity with which the majority of working-class Americans could identify.

Chapter two will focus primarily on the choreographies of Martha Graham during the late 1930s and 1940s. Because this thesis is primarily concerned with issues of national identity, three of Graham's best known works of American theme have been chosen for analyzation: *Frontier*, *American Document*, and *Appalachian Spring*. Each piece will be analyzed for the constructs Graham created of her own perceived national identity from which audiences could relate. These ideas instilled into her dances came from her own living experience or, "blood memories." With Graham, we will see that her approach to creating identity through dance differed greatly from those choreographers discussed in chapter one and thus demonstrate how dance began to diverge from the path of its earlier forms. To further understand the impact of Graham's dances, we will turn to the United States government to analyze their interest in using her work for diplomatic purposes abroad. It was precisely because of her demonstrated national identity as unerringly American that allowed her to transcend beyond domestic audiences into foreign territory on behalf of the US government.

In chapter three, we will move into the 1950s and 1960s with the choreography of Alvin Ailey. As the first man of color in this thesis, it will become apparent how different Ailey's take on the national identity was from those that came before him. This lends to a new perspective from which the national identity was more easily accessible to the minority groups of Americans.

Understanding Ailey's childhood in Texas as a black boy and his transition to the newer regions of California as a black teenager will demonstrate the influences his life had upon his idea of American identity and as a result, the influence it had in his choreography. How he lived, how those experiences manifested in his dances, and the resulting identity that he successfully set up for audiences to digest and find themselves relating to ultimately placed this new version of "Americanness" at the forefront of his work and his company. As with Martha Graham, the construction of this diverse national identity gleaned the attention of the US government, and solidified his vision through government backing. Sent abroad to perform his version of the American national identity, Ailey managed to not only engage American audiences but foreign audiences as well. For the purpose of this thesis emphasis will be placed on the domestic and not the foreign receptions of Ailey's work, though mentions of his work abroad as sponsored by the government will be mentioned. More importantly, understanding why the government found Ailey's work a demonstration of true American identity will be analyzed. Three important works in Ailey's repertoire will be examined, and were chosen based on their significant successes: *Blues Suite*, *Revelations*, and *Masekela Language*. Each of these three pieces bear vital depictions of Ailey's depiction of the national identity.

Lastly, in chapter four, we will advance into the genre of ballet with the choreographic work of George Balanchine. As a Georgian-Russian immigrant to the United States, Balanchine's experience provides a new understanding of the national identity that differs from Graham, Ailey, and even those early choreographers discussed in chapter one. As a choreographer of Ballets, an immigrant who had created a new version of the American national identity, and a former citizen of Soviet Russia, the US government was determined to utilize Balanchine in its program of cultural diplomacy. This chapter will examine Balanchine's

motivations for moving to the United States as a permanent resident, and his adoption of a national identity that was different to the one he was born with. In this transition of identity, we will examine the depiction of American national identity which he created and infused into his ballet choreographies. In doing so, the chapter will show how this newly formed identity also helped to shape a new genre of Ballet that was essentially American, completely removed from the styles of Russia where it was considered a national pride. Three works of American theme are examined: *Stars and Stripes*, *Western Symphony*, and *Square Dance*.

CHAPTER 2

NEW DEAL ERA CHOREOGRAPHERS

Before the United States government began sponsoring dance tours in other countries as a form of cultural exchange and soft-power diplomacy in the 1950s, early choreographers active mostly between 1930-1945 provided highly nationalistic political statements through their work. They often did so at great cost to themselves—without the type of government funding that later companies received during the Cold War. By analyzing the life and choreographic works of Helen Tamiris, Edith Segal, and Anna Sokolow, this chapter aims to highlight the choreographic work done within the political sphere of America during the 1930s and how in doing so, a national identity was being shaped for domestic working-class audiences. Each had a different approach to the task of uniting activism and national identity within the Modern dance movement in its early stages. With each choreographer, we will look to their backgrounds for an understanding of the political stances they imbedded in their choreography, their preferred method of delivering dance to audiences, and when possible we will examine the dances themselves for political elements and national identity. It is important to acknowledge their work as it was a groundbreaking first step in the Modern dance scene at its infancy and influenced how the Modern genre of dance would shift and manifest during the Second World War and Cold War before the United States government began to understand its potential as a soft-power form of cultural diplomacy.

This thesis follows the style of *Journal of American History*.

The genre of “Modern” dance was still relatively new in the 1930s, having been in existence for a mere decade or two¹⁴. The idea that one could base dance on “natural” movement and also embody vital life energy—led the way for others to explore what that meant¹⁵. Because there was an emphasis on energy, life, and what is “real,” finding ways to convey emotion and messages became a large part of Modern dance during the 1930s and continues to be to present day.

Choreographers were developing new political dances that were not only pieces which promoted social activism and national identity, but were also statements that Modern dance was a distinctly American art form. France and Italy could claim ballet, and Russia could boast perfecting it¹⁶. Japan had its Kabuki, and so on. Modernism now evolved into a purely American-born art—an appealing factor that would become a key feature when the State Department began sending more American Modern dance companies across the world to export American culture and ideals instead of ballet companies.

Helen Tamiris and the Federal Dance Project: An Opportunity for Encouraging Change

There were dozens of choreographers who were trying their hand at becoming successful Modern dance choreographers, some of them managing to reach great fame and acclaim after

¹⁴ Isadora Duncan, a dancer born in California in 1877, was raised with ballet, though her training was considered poor as she was from a struggling family with little money to spare for such costly pursuits. Duncan became disillusioned with the formal techniques of ballet and disliked the gaudy showcases that were all too common in popular shows and Vaudeville performances. She instead decided that real dance came from simple movements and positions taken from everyday living—running, jumping, skipping, breathing, and human gestures. With her developing technique, devoid of traditional or popular dance influences, Duncan became known as the “Mother of Modern dance.”

¹⁵ A belief that came from Isadora Duncan.

¹⁶ Considering Ballet had its beginnings in Italy and was transported to France with Catherine de Medici’s marriage to Henry II, the ties that the earlier ballets have are to these two countries. It developed further as a court dance of opulence with Louis XIV’s constant patronage to have it performed within Versailles. Ballet then spread to many countries, but it is Russia who became known for Ballet with some of the most prestigious Ballet companies in the world.

World War II such as José Limón and Martha Graham. These success stories were rare, as most dancers at this time were poor and could scarcely afford the price of renting rehearsal space, paying dancers, and keeping up with their own personal living expenses. The Great Depression made finding work as a dancer or choreographer difficult, as job opportunities were scarce. Most dancers had to find secondary jobs in order to survive—usually unrelated to dance—which often meant less time rehearsing or creating. It was an issue that appeared in many dance pamphlets and flyers of the 1930s. In an issue of *New Dance* in 1935, the sections describing the formation of a Dance Guild and Dancers' Union mention the economic crisis many dancers found themselves in as a point they wished to rectify.¹⁷ Helen Tamiris spoke at the National Dance Congress & Festival in 1936 specifically on the economic status of dancers and all the struggles that were commonplace amongst them such as lack of employment opportunity and low wages when employed.¹⁸ She lamented that dancers were often not considered laborers even though they used their body each day for their work, and suffered unfair treatments in the workplace in similar fashion to the labor worker. In her speech, she mentions the Federal Dance Project, and how it employed a small population of unemployed dancers, but admitted hopefully that it was a move in the right direction.

In order to combat the economic decline caused by the Great Depression, Franklin D. Roosevelt initiated a series of New Deal projects 1935, including the Works Progress Administration (WPA).¹⁹ The WPA ambitiously attempted to employ millions of Americans in public works projects that required both skilled and unskilled labor workers. Originally, there

¹⁷ *New Dance: Anti-war Anti-fascist*, Edith Segal Papers, New York City Public Library, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York, NY, issue —, March 1935.

¹⁸ *National Dance Congress & Festival 1936*, Edith Segal Papers, New York City Public Library, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York, NY, 1936.

¹⁹ "Today in History - April 8: Works Project Administration," Library of Congress, Library of Congress, June 14, 2019. <https://www.loc.gov/item/today-in-history/april-08/>.

was no help for artists under the WPA that allowed them to be employed in their creative careers. However, a few months later in August of 1935, Roosevelt signed off on the creation of the Federal Theatre Project (hereby referred to as the FTP).²⁰ Placed under the direction of Hallie Flanagan, the FTP was mainly created to support and fund theatre projects, but it did also help out other arts projects as well. Actors, writers, directors, and theatre workers were the majority of persons employed by the FTP. The program aimed to employ artists and those involved with theatrical work, extending the idea of offering a place for the economy to recover to those who were not part of the normal work force.²¹

In the initial organization of the FTP, minor arts also fell under its jurisdiction. In the original manual, there was no subsection allotted specifically to Dance as there were for other artistic domains like Theatre, Art, or Music.²² Dancers were regularly employed by the project, but they were often employed as secondary figures who danced in theatre productions. Reasonably, one can deduce that the number of dancers employed was low in comparison to those directly related to theatre work, and so their voice was rarely heard in matters of creative and artistic judgement. They had a small presence, barely mentioned, in the manual of the FTP's creation and likewise can be understood to have had a significantly smaller presence in the real world application of the FTP.

Helen Tamiris, dancer and choreographer, took the lead in organizing herself and other dancers so that their voices would be heard on the issue of dancers being underutilized and underrepresented within the Federal Theatre Project. Tamiris, a New York native from the

²⁰ "The WPA Federal Theatre Project, 1935-1939", Library of Congress, Library of Congress, June 14, 2019. <https://www.loc.gov/collections/federal-theatre-project-1935-to-1939/articles-and-essays/wpa-federal-theatre-project/>.

²¹ *Manual for Federal Theatre Projects of the Work Progress Administration*, October 1935, Federal Theatre Project Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., 1-2.

²² *Ibid.*, 2-5.

Lower East Side, was Jewish and had parents that were Russian immigrants. Tamiris like many other choreographers and dancers, were children of immigrants who recently arrived in the United States and faced discrimination. She grew up poor and participated in weekly dance classes at Settlement Houses in neighborhoods that were mostly made up of Jewish immigrants.²³ With time she began performing with groups such as the Metropolitan Opera and traveled abroad to perform.²⁴ She founded several dance groups, all of which were recognizable to the public in political leftist spheres.²⁵ Tamiris, as a child of Russian immigrants from working-class background and Jewish traditions, was too “other” in a country that prized Protestant traditions as being more “American.” With Tamiris, we see that the negotiation of dance and identity is already visible in the 1930s modern dance scene.

It was in 1936 that Tamiris managed to persuade the Federal Theatre Project director, Hallie Flanagan, to establish a separate government program for dancers.²⁶ She pointed out low employment opportunity for dancers, even within the Federal Theatre Project, and the low wages paid to dancers in comparison to actors and directors. This project came to be known as the Federal Dance Project. In a telegram, she stated that the FTP was insufficiently equipped to provide for dancers’ unique needs and requested a permanent theatre and program that would be established entirely for the dancers of the federal project.²⁷

It is worth noting that the Federal Theatre Project and Federal Dance Project—not unlike the other similar projects created for musicians and writers—was primarily created to alleviate

²³ “Helen Tamiris, Dancer, Dies,” *Press Telegram*, (Long Beach, CA), Aug. 5, 1966.

²⁴ Christena L. Schlundt, *Tamiris, a Chronicle of Her Dance Career, 1927-1955* (New York, NJ: New York Public Library, 1972) 10.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁷ *Western Union Telegram*, January 14, 1936, Federal Theatre Project Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

the unemployment rates amongst workers in the arts amidst the downtrodden depression-era economy.²⁸ However, these programs were also created to democratize art in that it becomes readily accessible to the people. In the FTP manual, one of the main goals listed is “...the establishment of theatres so vital to community life that they will continue to function after the program of the Federal Project is completed.²⁹” In the years that came before the Depression, it was more likely that only those who were better off financially would be able to enter a theatre and watch a performance of concert quality. The government did not seem to hire artists to create new works—or particularly cared what was performed—and therefore did not review much of what went out to the public. This based on the lack of a reviewing panel for specific projects, and the manual never mentioning a need to approve programs that the different arts departments began working on at any time. This indifference to actual performance contents eventually took a turn, when congressmen and government officials began to read reviews in newspapers and magazines of performances that were startlingly political and driven by messages of social change, funded and organized by the Federal Theatre and Federal Dance Projects. Even outside of actual performances, the FTP and FDP’s names were constantly brought into the press with ties to activism in more blatant ways such as protests and picket lines.³⁰ To be aligned with causes that were actively demonstrating outside performance halls can understandably have caused concern. Tamiris definitely had a hand in these alarming projects, as she often used African American spiritual music as her inspiration and told stories of Black oppression and segregation.

²⁸ *Manual for Federal Theatre Projects of the Work Progress Administration*, October 1935, Federal Theatre Project Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., 1-2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ “WPA Workers Strike,” *Anniston Star*, (Anniston, AL), June 26, 1937.

How Long Brethren? was Tamiris's most notable choreographic contribution to the Federal Dance Theatre, and debuted in 1937.³¹ The piece urged for sympathy for the struggles of African Americans, and had great success.³² The musical score was composed of Negro protest songs, sang by a choir.³³ *How Long Brethren?* ran for 3 months consecutively in packed theaters, then was brought back for 3 weeks in December.³⁴ The success and popularity of the piece was relatively unheard of for a dance project at the time—especially a modern dance piece. Like many other Modern dancers of the 1930s, Tamiris focused on African American struggles in her works. Many had never been to the south nor witnessed the extreme disadvantages in person, but they felt they could relate to the struggles of this group. Dancers in the 1930s were understanding towards the minority group because they too were struggling to live. Dancers, even white dancers, were underpaid and unappreciated. They too suffered from poverty and craved a social reform in which they were given more opportunity and more rights alongside regular workers. Dancers could align with the social justice and change that African Americans desired to see happen and in choreographing works based on African American inclusion in American society as equals were ultimately opening up the idea that the national identity of America should include this unfairly treated group of Americans.

Unfortunately, none of Tamiris's pieces depicting African American struggles employed any black dancers. The entire cast was usually Caucasian and female.³⁵ A series of photos from

³¹ Christena L. Schlundt, *Tamiris, a Chronicle of Her Dance Career, 1927-1955* (New York, NJ: New York Public Library, 1972) 44, 52.

³² *Ibid.*, 106-107.

³³ "Dips and Whirls," *New York Columbia Spectator*, (New York, NY), May 12, 1937.

³⁴ Christena L. Schlundt, *Tamiris, a Chronicle of Her Dance Career, 1927-1955* (New York, NJ: New York Public Library, 1972), 106-107.

³⁵ "How Long Brethren? (55 Photos)," Federal Theater Project Collection, Box 1217, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., July 14, 2019. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/musftpnegatives.12170123.0?st=gallery>.

the Library of Congress that were taken of *How Long Brethren?* in the 1930s showcases the dancers in movement, and none of them were dancers of color.³⁶ Despite the raising of social issues and determination to place the black man and woman into the American national identity, the Federal Dance Project did not employ black dancers on account of their training.³⁷ Most dancers of color at the time were only able to receive dance training of a specific kind. Ballet was off-limits, and therefore most people of color could not train in the classical techniques. Similarly, modern schools often catered to whites though some classes were offered to blacks irregularly. The dance styles that African American dancers were usually employable in, vaudeville and tap, were not representative of the Ballet and Modern forms that the Federal Dance Project promoted.

Tamiris, though a talented choreographer who didn't shy away from choreographing social issues that angered congressmen such as racial inequality, was more known for the political activism that she performed off of theatre stages. The program's first director Don Oscar Becque lasted only a year in his position. Becque had never been a popular director choice for the program, not amongst the dancers themselves. Dancers of the modern genre were openly disapproving of his appointment and had staged protests and petitions for his removal, led by Helen Tamiris. Becque eventually resigned from the position stating that the group had "excessive political activity, the virtual impossibility of getting scenery, costumes and theatres for dance productions and the open and avowed efforts to prevent any sort of professional standards being set up."³⁸ Based on Becque's own disagreements with FDP member's constant activism, the group was amongst the most politically vocal of the FTP's departments where

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ellen Graff, *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942*. (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1999) 95.

³⁸ "Quits WPA Dance Group," *New York Times*, February 7, 1937

Helen Tamiris was more often than not the one orchestrating such political activism outside the performance halls.³⁹

For these early dancers, as well as Tamiris, their identity as an American was tied to their immigrant backgrounds as well as their working-class place in society. Being able to organize and protest in various forms as dancers was a reflection of what they imagined was one facet of the American identity. It informed their view of the world around them in the 1930s and allowed them to believe they could relate to the struggles of other minority groups who were facing inequality. Tamiris' own dedication to showcasing racial inequality towards African Americans highlighted her own perceptions of social justice and the necessary inclusion of minority groups into the national identity of America. Because of the major social activism on behalf of dancers as part of the American working class, and the creation of choreography that focused on social issues such as racial injustice and the working-class struggles, Tamiris and the Federal Dance Project had reason to be considered one of the most politically active of the government arts programs established under the Works Projects Administration.⁴⁰

The Federal Dance Project was merged once more with the Federal Theatre Project in 1937 due to congressional cuts to funding for the arts programs. Even with Tamiris actively trying to gain petitions and submitting them to the White House for consideration, the Federal Dance Project never again was its own separate entity. The Federal Theatre Project lasted until 1939, when congress decided that spending money on the program was wasteful and not in the

³⁹ The consistent nature of the Federal Dance Project to participate in protests, sit-ins, and rallies for workers' rights as well as equality for all minorities can be seen throughout the years in newspaper articles published between 1936-1938.

⁴⁰ Various newspaper articles as well as dance magazine articles of the period noted the FDP's activism and the large numbers of dancer turnout to things such as Pickett-lines, sit-ins, protests, and rallies right along the usual dance performances. These occasions have been noted by authors such as Graff and Christina Schlundt, who wrote on Tamiris' life work using documentation from the New York Public Library archives.

interests of the nation due to the group's perceived habit of promoting racial integration and communist values.⁴¹

Edith Segal, Labor Unions, and the Proletarian-Driven Dance

The Federal Dance Project was only one medium that modern dance appeared in to deliver political and social messages. During the 1930's, labor unions were popular amongst workers in different employment sectors. Membership was not unusual for a worker, and the labor unions were usually separated by occupation. Dancers themselves would eventually create their own labor union to demand fair wages and classification as an actual profession and dancers as laborers, but before that, there was the union groups that catered to the majority of labor workers. It was not uncommon for these different labor unions to work with choreographers to present mass-dance performances that could help further their goals and visibility to the government and the public. Some labor unions, such as those backed by the Communist Party in the United States, had regular mass pageants open to the public to promote ideas of equality socially and financially. One such choreographer who became popular with labor union work was Edith Segal.

In defining "American" and what that means to the average person, Edith Segal did not focus on gender or race. Instead, she pulled from the experiences that were commonplace amongst all Americans. Being American meant being part of a working class that felt the weight of unequal and harsh work conditions. Her father and mother worked in laborious jobs that paid very little, and she was no stranger to the poor settlement houses where others like her family

⁴¹ Susan Quinn, *The Furious Improvisation: How the WPA and A Cast of Thousands Made High Art Out of Desperate Times* (New York, NY: Walker & Co., 2009), 239-280.

lived. That was the majority experience of working class Americans.⁴² It was imperative, then, that her choreography clearly reflected American livelihood. In a letter to the editor of the “New Theatre” publication, Segal wrote, “It is necessary that the dances performed for the workers reflect their everyday life and struggles and lead them toward a revolutionary way out of the crisis and toward the building of a socialist society.”⁴³ When this can be achieved, she closed, the dance truly becomes a weapon.⁴⁴ Those who were rich and therefore not part of the laboring class, were something else. They were American, but a bourgeois class that was out of touch with their own Americanness. The outright struggle of finding work, especially during the depression-era years, joined all races and genders in a single group that was simply the American struggle. Being part of that struggle made your identity concrete, and for those who took part in union groups, the activism was the mark of an American rallying to get what he or she deserved.

While Edith Segal had created a number of dance groups that primarily worked with union groups, the most notable that she took part in was The Workers Dance League. Founded in 1932, the WDL advocated for the power of dance to change society.⁴⁵ In later years, the WDL was renamed the New Dance League in an attempt to promote non-labor workers into their ranks who also struggled with unfair treatment or low wages.⁴⁶ Listed amongst their aims is a an attempt at “Building a dance art vital and clear, a dance art that is inspired by and useful to

⁴² “Segal, Edith, 1902-,” Social Networks and Archival Context, University of Virginia Library, National Archives and Records Administration, Accessed September 12, 2019.
<http://n2t.net/ark:/99166/w6wm2k0w>.

⁴³ Letter to the editor of “New Theatre”, “Letter to the Editor,” year unknown, (s)*MGZMD 122, Box 4, Folder 46, Edith Segal Papers 1920-1997, The New York Public Library, Jerome Robbins Dance Division Archives, New York, NY.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Pamphlet for Worker’s Dance League event, “Worker’s Dance League First Workers’ Dance Spartakiade,” 1933, (s)*MGZMD 122, Box 4, Folder 55-56, Edith Segal Papers 1920-1997, The New York Public Library, Jerome Robbins Dance Division Archives, New York, NY.

⁴⁶ Issue of the New Dance League’s publication, “New Dance: Anti-war, Anti-fascist,” 1935, (s)*MGZMD 122, Box 4, Folder 55-56, Edith Segal Papers 1920-1997, The New York Public Library, Jerome Robbins Dance Division Archives, New York, NY.

workers.”⁴⁷ Their slogan was “Dance is a Weapon in the Revolutionary Class Struggle.”⁴⁸ In their publication, the NDL quoted what was written of them by the World-Telegram with great pride as further proof of their activism and dedication to the American working class: “If anyone doubts that the dance is real, live art capable of expressing life today in all its forms, let him drop in on the gatherings of the Communist Party... . Here, he will see workers, men and women, dancing their ideals in vivid pageants of their cause.”⁴⁹ Under this group, two forms of Modernism were utilized: the more abstract version of modern dance that relies heavily on personal interpretation, and the agit-prop style that Segal favored and became a leader in. Agit-prop style modern dance literally is a blend of the words “Agitation” and “Propaganda.” The term is usually associated with Soviet Russia for its Department for Agitation and Propaganda, and therefore carries a negative connotation especially in the United States.⁵⁰

Edith Segal was the daughter of Russian Jewish immigrants, and lived in New York City’s Lower East Side.⁵¹ Her mother did not approve of dancing while her father enjoyed social dancing. Like other working class families growing up, she received her dance education from settlement houses and the local Neighborhood Playhouse.⁵² Being part of an immigrant community that had to work laboriously for their livelihood placed Segal amongst the same lines as many other choreographers like Tamiris when it came down to defining what the national

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ellen Graff, *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942*. (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1999), 7-8.

⁴⁹ Issue of the New Dance League’s publication, “New Dance: Anti-war, Anti-fascist,” 1935, (s)*MGZMD 122, Box 4, Folder 55-56, Edith Segal Papers 1920-1997, The New York Publick Library, Jerome Robbins Dance Division Archives, New York, NY.

⁵⁰ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. “Agitprop,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 20, 1998, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/agitprop>.

⁵¹ “Segal, Edith, 1902-,” “Social Networks and Archival Context, University of Virginia Library, National Archives and Records Administration, Accessed September 12, 2019.

<http://n2t.net/ark:/99166/w6wm2k0w>.

⁵² Ibid.

identity of America was and how it would be constructed in dance. Unlike many growing modern dance troupes seeking to appear professional and be taken seriously as an art form, like ballet, Edith Segal and her dance groups were more concerned with delivering messages. It was the viewpoint of Segal and other left-wing choreographers that professionalism carried the idealism of the higher classes. If they catered to that, they would lose the strength behind their proactive messages of working class peoples and become hypocritical dancers wavering between the two sides.⁵³ This sort of thinking caused a larger rift in the modern dance movement of the 1930's that caused much friction between dancers.

However, the main difference in professionalism that marked the two sides of modernism could be found in the bodies they hired into their troupes. For Segal and like-minded choreographers, the real impact of their messages could come from not only the explicitly political dances themselves, but from the recruiting of average workers into their choreographic undertakings. People with little to no dance experience, introduced to the WDL by their various workers unions, made up the majority of Segal's dancers. Segal truly felt that form and technique needed to fit the content being created because it made the purpose and the end product a matter of absolute clarity.⁵⁴ If she was advocating for the everyday American lower-middle class, she needed to do away with professional dancers and years of training in technique.⁵⁵ It was very unlike growing modern companies such as Martha Graham or Ted Shawn, who hired only trained dancers who had a history of modern or classical technique.

⁵³ Letter to the editor of "New Theatre", "Letter to the Editor," year unknown, (s)*MGZMD 122, Box 4, Folder 46, Edith Segal Papers 1920-1997, The New York Public Library, Jerome Robbins Dance Division Archives, New York, NY.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Tamiment Library, "Edith Segal, Part 1," Interview by Unknown, Communist Party Oral Histories, New York University Tamiment Library, Published August 2, 2017, video, 35:03, <https://wp.nyu.edu/tamimentcpusa/edith-segal-part-1/>.

This inclusive form of dance opened up the path for everyday people, average American citizens, to take part in an active role in politics. The creation process itself, therefore, became political and charged with the urge to create the national identity. It appealed to everyone who had an interest in being involved with their local political agenda and reaffirm their Americanness, but who might not have much of an ability to actually make their voices heard. Workers unions worked with Segal's different dance groups, hoping that the dances being produced could offer some weight to their causes.⁵⁶ Through participation in the dance classes, rehearsals, performances, and events where WDL and NDG groups appeared, a major exchange occurred. Workers were able to participate in politics while being exposed to Marxist ideals of economic equality without Capitalism, and choreographers saw their work was validated and truly spoke for those populations of lower-class workers who wanted change and a bigger space for the American worker in the national identity. Similarly, the messages of social change exposed working-class audiences to new ideas and relatable situations that further urged Americans to embrace dance as a vehicle for change and negotiating identity.

It is noteworthy to mention that most individuals who took part in these unions and WDL performances did not usually identify as Communists, and were most times simply attracted to the message of workplace equality. However, the organizers of the events, pageants, and demonstrations that the WDL and NDG groups performed at were usually explicitly far-left Communists in identity.⁵⁷ The Worker's Dance League and New Dance Group were not officially recognized as being Communist groups by the Communist party in the United States.

⁵⁶ There is a whole collection of letters and correspondence between Segal and various groups from the 1920s up until the 1950s or so, which often are words of thanks for participating in some event meant to bring awareness to an issue of concern. This collection can be found in the Edith Segal Papers 1920-1977 collection, box 3, folders 45-53 at the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of The New York Public Library

⁵⁷ Ellen Graff, *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942*. (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1999).

Segal herself was arrested multiple times during her active dance period, in once case being asked if she was part of the Soviet Union. She responded plainly with, “How can I be part of the Soviet Union when I am an American citizen?”⁵⁸

One of Segal’s earliest mass choreographic works was a piece which she labeled “The Russian Revolution” in her personal notes.⁵⁹ In these notes, she envisioned 4 major scenes which she labeled as, Revolution, Memorial, Reconstruction, and Internationale. She used vivid imagery though formations to display direct representations of the new Soviet Union. For example, she placed her dancers in formations that shaped the hammer-and-sickle that was a popular representation of unity between industrial and peasant workers in Russia. Segal’s decision to create a dance that included such recognizable imagery suited the event in which the piece was to be performed: a pageant sponsored by the American Communist Party in honor of Lenin. She sought to introduce the possibility of those new ideals of revolutionary Russia to American audiences, to share with them the positivity of equality, something blatantly evident in the choreography notes for the piece.⁶⁰ The use of average workers without dance backgrounds again, were very important in the overall message of the performance because they directly coincided with the image of a strong working class that were equal and the backbone of the national identity.

In describing the performance, journalist Moissaye Olgin wrote: “The performance is significant not only as an experience but also as pointing the way for a real proletarian mass-

⁵⁸ Tamiment Library, “Edith Segal, Part 1,” Interview by Unknown, Communist Party Oral Histories, New York University Tamiment Library, Published August 2, 2017, video, 35:03, <https://wp.nyu.edu/tamimentcpusa/edith-segal-part-1/>.

⁵⁹ Collection of personal notes of dance formations for *The Russian Revolution* by Edith Segal, (S)*MGZMD 122, Box 2, Folder 35-37, Edith Segal Papers 1920-1997, The New York Public Library Jerome Robbins Dance Division Archives.

⁶⁰ Collection of personal notes of dance formations for *The Russian Revolution* by Edith Segal, (S)*MGZMD 122, Box 2, Folder 35-37, Edith Segal Papers 1920-1997, The New York Public Library Jerome Robbins Dance Division Archives.

theatre. Where the actors are workers animated by the class struggle and participating in the battles of the working class...where the things performed on the stage are of vital importance to all concerned, there the technique will not fail to assume an original form.”⁶¹

Segal choreographed a number of pieces that directly represented the struggles of the middle and lower classes, but none as popular or remembered today as *Black and White Workers Solidarity Dance*. A statement of equality amongst the races, Black and White showcased black working dancers on a stage alongside whites.⁶² This was one of the first pieces to actually have black dancers perform in a piece regarding equality. Not even Tamiris’ *How Long Brethren?* had made use of black bodies despite the Black Spiritual music used nor message of equality. The focus of *Black and White* not only demanded equality for the races, but implored for the races to come together in a solid partnership to triumph together over the obstacles that held them back.⁶³ The choreography demonstrated labor workers of all kinds working together to triumph over the greedy capitalistic system in place that kept them poor, divided, and unable to better their lives. Through her choreography Segal depicted all peoples as Americans despite race, united through their shared experiences as workers taken advantage of. It was a vision of what shape the national identity should take.

Segal utilized movements that were common to laborers and made them motifs. Simple actions such as using a hammer, sawing, or lifting heavy objects.⁶⁴ These types of movements gave clarity to the audience that these were working men and women. Because the enemy, the upper classes and capitalism, was too strong, the final solution of the dance was to unite. In the

⁶¹ Moissaye Olgin, “M. Olgin Describes Lenin Pageant.” *Daily Worker*, January 26, 1928.

⁶² Ellen Graff, *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942*. (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1999), 37.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁶⁴ Susan Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion* (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 70.

last phrase of the piece, the white and the black dancers rise only with each other's help, demonstrating a union that creates progress and the power to correct wrongs dealt to both of them.⁶⁵ The cover of a March 1933 issue of Workers Theatre showed an image from Segal's *Black and White*: Two male dancers, one black and one white, standing together with upper arms extended out parallel to their shoulders and their fists raising up to the sky. Their expressions are defiant and serious, and their chests bare to showcase the muscles gained from hard labor work.⁶⁶ "Black and White, Unite and Fight" was the slogan that accompanied the dance.⁶⁷

Another notable work by Segal that engaged directly with American political issues of the time and asserted ideals of equal rights amongst Americans was her work *Scottsboro*. As the name would suggest, this piece referred to the 1931 case against nine African American boys who were falsely accused and put on trial for the rape of two white women in Alabama. The case was appealed on the basis of bias present in the jury, lack of a fair trial, and not being issued an effective council. Segal was determined to protest this injustice, and so used dance by choreographing *Scottsboro*.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, no descriptive texts, recordings, or photos of this piece survived. Only mentions of the piece in various programs, flyers, and pamphlets on days it was to be performed have survived as well as Segal's own recollections of it being part of her activist repertoire.

⁶⁵ Ellen Graff, *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942*. (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1999), 38.

⁶⁶ Cover of Workers Theatre, *Workers Theatre*, March 1933, Edith Segal Papers 1920-1997, The New York Public Library Jerome Robbins Dance Division Archives.

⁶⁷ Ellen Graff, *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942*. (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1999), 37.

⁶⁸ Unfortunately, we only know that this dance existed and served the specific purpose of protesting the injustices apparent in the Scottsboro case because Segal spoke of it often in interviews and because the dance appears in program books. What the dance actually looked like, or any descriptions about it, were either not recorded in writing or video, or simply not recorded well enough to last into present day.

Following similar themes of civil rights, identity, and American values of equality, Edith Segal choreographed pieces such as *Kinder, Kuche, and Kirche*. *Kinder, Kuche, and Kirche* was a stark commentary on the ideology upheld by Hitler in Germany for women. That children, kitchen, and church should be the main focuses of German women meant that there was no room for them in a working environment outside the home.⁶⁹ The women who danced in this piece were of German-decent and had immigrated to the United States, and their involvement in the dance was meant to be a direct testament to the disappointing nature of such an institution.⁷⁰ This drew a parallel with American life, where women were more able to act on their own wills, venture out into the workplace, and cultivate lives of their own outside the confines of the private sphere that was the home, such as these dancers. An American woman, as a matter of national identity, was allowed personal freedoms to conduct her life to their liking much easier than the women living through Hitler's regime in Germany.

Anna Sokolow's Dance as an Appeal to the American People

While Tamiris worked exclusively for the federal government via the Federal Dance Project and the Federal Theatre Project while they were active, and Edith Segal organized non-trained dancers from workers unions in mass choreographic pieces, Anna Sokolow was also making contributions to the dance scene. Anna Sokolow, however, was the most active of the three, staging dozens of dances over the course of the 1930s and 1940s. Born in Connecticut in

⁶⁹ Margarete Crelling, "'Kinder, Küche, und Kirche': Women's Work in the Third Reich," (2018), History Undergraduate Theses, 31, https://digitalcommons.tacoma.uw.edu/history_theses/3.

⁷⁰ Ellen Graff, *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942*. (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1999), 45.

1910, Sokolow was raised by her Russian-immigrant parents.⁷¹ Seeking better job opportunities, it wasn't long until Sokolow and her family moved to New York City.⁷² There, Sokolow's mother, Sarah, found work in the garment industry and was the sole provider for the family. Her father, Samuel, fell ill with Parkinson's Disease. Exposure and training in modern dance came from the local Settlement House and Neighborhood Playhouse, as was common amongst poor working class families of immigrant background in New York City.⁷³ From what Sokolow remembered of her childhood in New York City, she recalled a city of immigrants from all over Europe who worked hard each day for their ability to live.⁷⁴

With her Jewish Russian immigrant background, working class status, and American identity, Anna Sokolow was working with similar ideals in her dances that Tamiris and Segal exhibited. She was carving out a national identity while tying activism into her choreography. The way she utilized dance to open discussion and activism about these topics, however, was significantly different from Tamiris and Segal. Rather than focus on what was 'political,' Sokolow focused on what was humanitarian. It seemed that Sokolow wasn't necessarily advocating change through political upheaval or joining political parties, but through appealing to the basic human rights that she thought all people were entitled to, especially belonging to a country that prided itself on ideals of democracy, freedom, and equality for all peoples.⁷⁵ While Tamiris focused all her creative and active energies on working for the Federal Dance Project, and Segal primarily worked with labor unions and untrained average American bodies, Anna

⁷¹ Warren, Larry. *Anna Sokolow: The Rebellious Spirit*. (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998) 1-2.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁷⁴ Anna Sokolow: *Speaking of Dance - Conversations with Contemporary Masters of American Modern Dance: Anna Sokolow: Speaking of Dance*. Directed by Douglas Rosenberg. Produced by Douglas Rosenberg, Charles L. Reinhart, and Stephanie Reinhart. American Dance Festival, 1992.

https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cvideo_work%7C424987.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Sokolow avoided working for Federal programs and staged her choreography using professionally-trained dancers. These were two big differences that defined Sokolow's work.

The way that Sokolow presented works on individual social and political issues was by choreographing a personal representation rather than an elaborate spectacle or macro-perspective. Usually she focused on individuals rather than groups and thus made her content more intimate, and more relatable, to the audience. In most of her choreographic works, therefore, Sokolow worked primarily with small groups in place of the giant mass-dance pieces that were Segal and Tamiris' forte.⁷⁶ Another defining quality of Sokolow's choreographic style was her penchant for leaving choreographic pieces open-ended with no resolution. In her work involving social injustices and demands for change, these open ended dances usually forced the audience to examine the topic, empathize with the dancers embodying the subject, and then end without a guide on how to fix the problem or without an assurance that it would ever end at all. The jarring finale of these dances forced audiences to really think about the consequences of not taking action themselves in the real world, and to make them uncomfortable with the possibilities if they did nothing about these injustices and problems after leaving the performance. This was, again, very different from Segal and Tamiris' approach to using dance as their means to deliver messages on highly controversial and relevant topics of the era. Both used clear resolutions in their dances to incite in the audience a desire to reach that ending in the real world.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Considering that Sokolow choreographed for stages and not rallies, pageants, or protests, there was no need to include mass amounts of dancers. Segal often needed dozens of bodies because of the nature of the environment she was choreographing for. Because rallies and pageants were meant to be the gathering place of possibly hundreds of people for a cause, Segal was determined to create pieces that involved large numbers to mirror the worker strength in turnout. Segal choreographed to showcase numbers, make a statement of power through participation as much as the dance itself, and thus represented a general message. Tamiris used many dancers as well, though perhaps not always as many as Segal, because of her own choreography for pageants as well as concert stages.

⁷⁷ As an example, Segal's *Black or White* ended by showcasing the triumph over Capitalism that would occur after the races came together in a harmonious partnership. Tamiris' *How Long Brethren?*, explored an ending in which black people rose above the injustices they lived with in their daily lives.

Using untrained bodies gathered from workers unions' and the general public in order to demonstrate a connection between dance and politics was not a method Sokolow agreed with. Rather, Sokolow choreographed her pieces using strictly trained professional dancers. Trained in various techniques herself, such as Graham and Duncan, Sokolow spoke with her dancers in terms of the large professional modern dance vocabulary she possessed. Specifically, Sokolow utilized Graham and dancers trained in the Graham technique so that they all were armed with the same technique vocabulary.⁷⁸ By utilizing this professional vault of training and vocabulary in her work, Sokolow was knowingly moving away from the agit-prop style of dance that allowed the average person on stage. Instead, her troupe of professional dancers spoke a more technical language to its audiences. Yet they maintained the ability to portray moving depictions of political and social issues that were of importance to an average audience. Rather than create “new” forms from untrained worker bodies, Sokolow sought to create socially conscious dance “making use of the excellent equipment provided in the systems now being taught.”⁷⁹

While there are over forty-five choreographies staged by Sokolow and her company, the Dance Unit, I will focus on those that were representations of a broader American experience rather than those that were either for Broadway or for popular enjoyment and non-political consumption. Even with this narrowing of choices, the dances available to analyze are in the dozens, so I will focus only on those that were based on issues of American concern. That being said, Sokolow's choreographic involvement in Mexico's communist movement and ignition of the modern dance scene in Mexico City as well as her work in Israel will not be examined.

⁷⁸ *Anna Sokolow: Speaking of Dance - Conversations with Contemporary Masters of American Modern Dance: Anna Sokolow: Speaking of Dance*. Directed by Douglas Rosenberg. Produced by Douglas Rosenberg, Charles L. Reinhart, and Stephanie Reinhart. American Dance Festival, 1992.
https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cvideo_work%7C424987.

⁷⁹ Hannah Kosstrin, *Honest Bodies: Revolutionary Modernism in the Dances of Anna Sokolow* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 35.

Strange American Funeral was first performed in 1935.⁸⁰ It depicted industrial workers suffering wrongful deaths and oppression caused by the Capitalist establishment in the United States. The actual choreographic movements performed was never recorded. Depictions of what the dance might have looked like come from descriptions that critics printed in their columns. The dance was, however, staged to a poem by Michael Gold titled, *Strange Funeral in Braddock*.⁸¹ The poem depicts the death of a steel-mill worker named Jan Clepak, and calls into question the safety and lack of safety regulations of such laborious jobs in America.⁸² The workers are ignored by the wealthy capitalists making their money off these workers without regard for their safety and fair treatment. In the poem, Clepak's wife comes to the resolution that she will become like the steel that consumed her husband, linking humanity to a harsh and impenetrable future where one has to become resilient and strong. This is done in order to push back against the injustices shown to workers of these tough unregulated jobs.

From the critique published in a 1935 issue of *New York Times* by John Martin, there is mentions of how Sokolow focused on this image of humanity and metal hardening from its molten malleable liquid form. Based on this account, we can see the idealism and imagery adopted from the poem and set into choreographic motion. In the poem, Clepak's wife states, "I'll make myself hard as steel, harder, I'll come some day and make bullets out of Jan's body, and shoot them into a tyrant's heart!"⁸³ The movements mimicked this transition from human and soft to inhuman and hard by mixing moments of flowing movement and mimicry of labor work,

⁸⁰ Ibid., 23.

⁸¹ Mark Franko, *The Work of Dance: Labor, Movement, and Identity in the 1930s* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 116.

⁸² Isidor Schneider and Joseph Freeman, *Proletarian Literature in the United States: An Anthology*. Edited by Granville Hicks, Joseph North, Michael Gold, Paul Peters, and Alan Calmer. (New York: International, 1935), 158-160.

⁸³ Ibid.

to mechanical movements that were direct and tough without expression anywhere on the face. It reminded the audience that the harsh nature of labor work, unregulated by those who run the business, forced living humans to adapt and become resilient to an almost mechanical state in order to survive another day.⁸⁴ This, as far as Sokolow was concerned, was one of the nation's problems in functioning and highlighted it through her creation of *Strange American Funeral*.

The 92nd Street Y was founded in 1874 as a Jewish center for community activities in the Upper East side of Manhattan.⁸⁵ It sponsored and hosted dance performances, music events, film screenings, educational programs for children and adults, and community facilities such as fitness centers. In time, it became a notable place for dance performance and remains so to this day. In this location, Sokolow debuted her solo piece titled *Case History No.—* in 1937.⁸⁶ As a nonprofit venue that sought to bring political awareness and general education to both Jewish residents as well as the diverse population of New York City, the setting of this particular choreographic work on the 92Y's stage by Sokolow seems appropriate.

Case No.— was Sokolow's personal observation and opinion on the state of delinquency amongst American youth and the general situation of mass poverty in America.⁸⁷ For poor working-class families, most of which she identified as being immigrant, childhood mischief could easily turn to lives of crime. Because schooling and education were not readily available to these children despite the Compulsory Education Laws that existed in most states, most could

⁸⁴ Mark Franko, *The Work of Dance: Labor, Movement, and Identity in the 1930s* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 116.

⁸⁵ "Mission and History," 92nd Street Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Association, March 22 2019, <https://www.92y.org/about-us/mission-history.aspx>

⁸⁶ Hannah Kosstrin, *Honest Bodies: Revolutionary Modernism in the Dances of Anna Sokolow*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 47.

⁸⁷ Hannah Kosstrin, "Inevitable Designs: Embodied Ideology in Anna Sokolow's Proletarian Dances." *Dance Research Journal* 45, no. 2 (2013): 5-23. <http://www.jstor.org.tamui.idm.oclc.org/stable/23524650>.

not go on to improve their lives nor hope to better the lives of their families. Concern about the state of child labor and employee-worker exploitation grew during the 20s and 30s during Sokolow's lifetime,⁸⁸ herself having experienced the struggle of growing up poor and of an immigrant family in an equally poor neighborhood. Because of Sokolow's experiences as a child living in the tenements of New York City, she was able to directly relate that into her choreography with a validity that was not up for debate. In *Case No.*— Sokolow readily engaged the audience with the mood and image of poverty that she was very well acquainted with.⁸⁹ This poverty-stricken culture, was something she managed to depict as being the reality of 1930s America. It was becoming part of our national identity to be working-class, and to have so much economic strife that children knew no other ways sometimes but to turn to lives of crime to survive.

Through her solo body onstage, Sokolow showcased a walking motif which reminisced on a poor youth who walks through the streets alone. The music, heavy and lethargic, attempted to mimic the feeling of heavy-set uncertainty amongst the scenery of ugly crowding tenement buildings whose facade rose high into the sky to block out the sunlight from the sky above. Dancing without shoes here further symbolized the lack of possessions which such a child of poverty might live with.⁹⁰ With accusatory glances shot at the audience, despondent crumpling onto the ground, and sudden whipping of limbs across various pathways of the dancer's cenosphere, Sokolow aims to project the hopeless nature that society has placed on its poor

⁸⁸ Livia Gershon, "Where American Public Schools Came From," JSTOR Daily. September 1 2016, <https://daily.jstor.org/where-american-public-schools-came-from/>

⁸⁹ Louise Mitchell, *Daily Worker* (New York) March 1, 1937.

⁹⁰ Hannah Kosstrin, *Honest Bodies: Revolutionary Modernism in the Dances of Anna Sokolow*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 48-49.

uneducated youth. This escalates into delinquency and bad behavior that can easily turn illicit and harmful on larger scales.

Reflective dances which targeted key issues with American society were a norm for Sokolow, as seen in dances such as *Strange American Funeral* and *Case No.*—. In general, Sokolow tended to center her dances on issues directly tied to the American working class. Low wages, unregulated safety in harsh labor conditions, poverty, segregation, issues of racial inequality, and concerns that government only favored wealthy businessmen. However, Sokolow also unveiled the concerns of Americans on issues of global concern. For instance, *Slaughter of the Innocents* depicted the dangers of war by focusing on the ongoing events of the Spanish Civil War (1937-1939). The piece was debuted in 1937 and was inspired by a documentary film titled *Heart of Spain*.⁹¹ The documentary's opening scene showcased footage of mothers weeping over their dead children during an attack on Madrid.⁹² Like the opening scene in *Heart of Spain*, in *Slaughter of the Innocents* the main narrative follows mothers who lose their children and loved ones in the midst of violence brought about by wartime. The anti-fascist and anti-war message delivered through this dance resounded with the same audiences that Sokolow usually choreographed about/for. However, because it was portraying a woman's struggle, bringing motherhood to the front of the discussion, it highlighted a new perspective.⁹³ The inclusion of world issues such as the Spanish Civil War in her choreography was done to inspire an American understanding of the suffering that war brought the Spanish people, and that fascism was not something to be embraced in any country. Certainly war and fascism had no place, according to Sokolow's work, in the American way of life or the American national identity.

⁹¹ Ibid., 72.

⁹² Paul Strand en Mexico, "Heart of Spain," Vimeo, Accessed June 26, 2019, video, 7:10 <http://www.vimeo.com/41585756>

⁹³ Owen Burke, "Anna Sokolow and Other Dancers." *New Masses* (1937), 28.

In all, Tamiris, Segal, and Sokolow choreographed to fulfill their artistic needs, but they did so within the political sphere where activism was an important undertaking by working class peoples. Furthermore, they choreographed to curate a national identity that the majority of working class peoples could relate to. Their individual methods differed from each other, but in general their messages were similar in that they all hoped to inspire change, give the masses somewhere to voice their opinions and views, and find a sense of common identity as Americans that could be shared. Doing so helped the masses label what being American was: Immigrant, working-class, strong, and by no means politically passive. Politics became something that the working class could participate in, and this delivered a sort of power through dance. America was primarily a working class nation by this equation, and that included all ethnic groups. After all, each of these three choreographers were from immigrant families themselves, and acknowledged the desperate need for all people to come together to be a united American working class. The early Modern dance movement of the 1930s and 1940s in America was a uniquely American form of artistic expression, that advanced domestic issues to the public while celebrating and creating representations of American life, as recognized by the U.S. State Department in later years.

CHAPTER 3

MARTHA GRAHAM

As the climate for Modern dance in the United States began to evolve from the mass-choreographed demands for social action representative in the 1930s and early 1940s, so too did the stance of the country on the possibility of entering war as World War II drew nearer to American minds. When the United States entered the war in 1941—two years after the fight had begun—it undermined the nation’s claim to neutrality and set the groundwork for an instant reversal in policies regarding the war. Suddenly, the United States was embroiled within an international struggle that would last until 1945. In the midst of so much political change and the everyday involvement of American citizens with the war both abroad and on the home front, the dance community put forth new forms.

Where choreographers such as Sokolow and Tamiris were advocates of dance as a tool to induce change, there was a choreographer, Martha Graham, who inspired others to invoke feelings and reflection in their work without necessarily being outright with a demand for social change. Slowly, the thought that dance should be conducted more as an art form and less as an outright propaganda vehicle began to take hold with the dance community. Communication was possible through dance, and communication was the prime reason anyone danced at all.⁹⁴ For Graham, using the dance to showcase what she believed was the national identity was part of the whole reason for dancing at all, because dance was inherently imbued with one’s nationality and sense of self within that nation.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Martha Graham, “Graham 1937,” in *The Vision of Modern Dance: In the Words of Its Creators*, ed. Jean Morrison. Brown, Naomi Mindlin, and Charles Humphrey (Woodford. Hightstown, NJ: Princeton Book, 1998), 50.

⁹⁵ *Newspaper clipping 1936*, “Famous Dancer Here January 17,” Scrapbooks, Martha Graham Collection. Library of Congress, Music Division, Washington D.C.

This new shift in ideals reflected a need to make Modern dance recognizable as a respectable professional form of art like ballet. Choreographers of modern forms more and more wanted to be recognized as much for their vision and composition as they did the substance of their work. This does not mean they strayed from depicting issues of political or social interest, only that they avoided being blatantly obvious about the subject matter and put the integrity of the art form above the accessibility of the dance to the untrained audience eye. The presenting of dance in this form, formal and concert-based, rejected earlier concepts of informal and simple choreography that was at times presented by untrained bodies. It placed the modern dance scene on a level that was beginning to look a little more on par with the rigorous upper strata taste of Ballet. This caused tension within the modern community, as activist dancers such as Sokolow and Segal tried actively to bring modern dance to the reputation as being a vehicle for the masses to unify in their political goals.⁹⁶

This chapter will focus on Martha Graham as a conductor of national identity through choreographic works. By using her own individual experiences, she put together perceptions of that identity. The importance here is in how Martha Graham choreographed “Americanness,” and how these choreographies gained merit and acknowledgement by the United States government’s cultural diplomacy program. The United States government was attempting to send a visual message that the America presented in Graham’s dance was the one that should be seen and envisioned when trying to imagine what America was, culturally and politically. Though the government exported Graham and her work overseas as representative of the American national identity, Graham’s visions became synonymous with American identity

⁹⁶ This divergence of dance ideals was happening at the same time, creating a large rift in which choreographers began to choose sides though it may not have been readily apparent to outsiders of the dance community. After all, dance in both paths had messages of importance to perform to audiences, they just did so using different methods in starkly different settings.

domestically as well. Graham's personal experiences influence and shaped her understandings of national identity and the ways in which she imbued her beliefs into "American" choreography. The choreography's content itself helps the viewer understand her vision of "Americanness," and the political undertakings her work took via the United States government.

Martha Graham: Creating Techniques that Turned Government Eyes

Unlike most dancers, Martha Graham did not begin dancing until she was twenty-two years old. Starting at an age that was, and still is, considered too old to begin dancing with hopes of professional success, Graham began her training at the Denishawn School.⁹⁷ Born into a strict Presbyterian family of middle-class status who lived comfortably, she was not typical of the stories of struggling artists from poor families in New York City.⁹⁸ Later, however, she would suffer from the same underpaid and struggling problems typical for dancers. Her first encounters with modern dance, or dance at all, were through concert performances staged by Ruth St. Dennis. This may have accounted for her taste in pursuing modern as a concert art and not a direct activist art that could be performed on any street or available space. Though she aimed to make modern dance a more artistry-bound form, she did not agree with ballet's rigid motions.⁹⁹ In many ways she agreed with Isadora Duncan's methods of bringing life and meaning into dance movement, but she implemented this differently. Graham's methods included the ever important "Contract and Release," which was never absent from her works and became a staple for many dancers moving forward into the present day.¹⁰⁰ While Duncan focused movement on

⁹⁷ Martha Graham, *Blood Memory* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991), 56.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁹⁹ Martha Graham, "Graham 1937," in *The Vision of Modern Dance: In the Words of Its Creators*, ed. Jean Morrison Brown, Naomi Mindlin, and Charles Humphrey (Woodford, NJ: Princeton Book, 1998), 51.

¹⁰⁰ Miriam Giguere, *Beginning Modern Dance* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2014), 130-132.

natural movement, Graham found that movement stemmed from the very simple act of breathing.¹⁰¹ To breathe was to be alive, and thus accounted for a person's movement. The natural contractions of the body when exhaling and inhaling fueled her technique.

Graham believed in the dance as a means to communicate memories, ideas, and actions that related to a 20th-century audience. She did not believe that in doing so, the movements themselves had to be blatant or realistic.¹⁰² Rather, she firmly backed the idea that so long as the impression was meaningful to the audience, then the message could be received with the same impact as activism-modern dance, yet would not compromise the artistry of the work. It was because of this distinctive feature of her choreography that Martha Graham was able to gain support from the national government in later years when being sent abroad as part of the cross-cultural diplomacy programs to areas where Soviet influence was considered a threat to the United States. We can see how popular Martha Graham's style of non-aggressive, activist-driven, modern dance was with the auspices of the American State Department via The American National Theatre and Academy (hereby referred to as ANTA) panel minutes. She was in demand for cultural diplomacy in countries all over the world. The pieces she promoted were both telling of "Americanness" and expressive in their creativity. This is something the government could claim as an entirely American trait. Modern dance, as fashioned by Martha Graham and others, was claimed as a purely American art, suitable for export when it contained obvious American themes as well as abstract themes that could be written off as examples of American innovation stemmed from the freedoms granted to do so.

¹⁰¹ Martha Graham, *Blood Memory* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991), 46.

¹⁰² Martha Graham, "Graham 1937," in *The Vision of Modern Dance: In the Words of Its Creators*, ed. Jean Morrison. Brown, Naomi Mindlin, and Charles Humphrey (Woodford. Hightstown, NJ: Princeton Book, 1998), 50-52.

Anna Sokolow was mentioned a few times in consideration for cultural export through the State Department and ANTA, but was ultimately found unsuitable for the position. In the panel minutes, her work is described as “stimulating to Americans” but otherwise problematic to the foreign audiences that it would be presented to.¹⁰³ This would suggest that modern choreographers who were obvious with their activism, such as Sokolow, who based their choreography on bold and direct movements to tell a story that demands political change, were seen as inappropriate to send abroad. If it could “stimulate” an American audience to rally, protest, and make the regular citizen’s voice heard by its government to initiate change, perhaps it was feared that the same could be encouraged of audiences across the sea. The goals of the State Department as implemented by ANTA, were to inspire cultural awareness of America wherein American ideals could be presented and absorbed by foreign audiences by choosing the specific artists that would be sent abroad as per the political undertakings of the United States Information Agency.¹⁰⁴ It was not their goal to incite action on the part of the people.

The style that Martha Graham presented as far as subject matter changed drastically throughout her life. In her early years as an independent artist freshly severing her ties with the Denishawn Company, Graham put out works that were similar to Ruth St. Dennis in that they focused on the ethnic and oriental. It did not take long for her to realize that this style did not suit her own personal desires for choreography, nor did she want to do anything that resembled work from her former school and employer.¹⁰⁵ From the 1930s to the late 1940s Graham focused on creating heavily American themed works. This was an active period where Graham focused on

¹⁰³ ANTA Dance Panel minutes, March 20, 1958, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Collection, Collection 468, Box 101, folder 15, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Fayetteville.

¹⁰⁴ ANTA Dance Panel minutes, September 25, 1958, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Collection, Collection 468, Box 101, folder 15, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Fayetteville.

¹⁰⁵ Martha Graham, *Blood Memory* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991), 103, 120, 123-124.

images that were uniquely American, defining to herself and her audience what “Americanness” meant during a time when patriotism was a high priority. After World War II, she began focusing on expressions of women in various roles and retellings of myths and legends. She began depicting emotions of a single female body amidst the larger populations that surrounded her. This rather large change in subject matter came at a time when Graham herself was struggling with personal problems involving her then husband, Erik Hawkins.

Even though Graham was sent abroad as an official ambassador of United States cultural diplomacy, her work had significant success with audiences domestically as well. Newspaper articles, critic reviews, and mentions of her work in magazines never seemed to fail to note Graham’s pointedly ‘American’ dance.¹⁰⁶ When the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Central Intelligence Agency were tasked with running checks on Graham for potential sponsorship as a US cultural export, everything came back incredibly clean.¹⁰⁷ Graham had never associated with any political parties, nor got involved with rallies or events geared toward any one political goal. She was so unlike Sokolow or Segal, whose FBI files were extensive with problematic political affiliations and activities.¹⁰⁸ Not only could no trace of questionable activity or affiliation be found, all twenty plus persons interviewed gave beautiful testimonies of Graham’s character and work. In almost every single case, the interviewee mentioned Graham as a true patriot, a loyal American, or as an unblemished example of a most righteous American citizen.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Scrapbooks, Martha Graham Collection. Library of Congress, Music Division, Washington D.C.

¹⁰⁷ FBI Files, Victoria Phillips Collection, Box 2, Folder 3, Library of Congress, Music Division, Washington D.C.

¹⁰⁸ FBI Files, Victoria Phillips Collection, Box 1-4, Library of Congress, Music Division, Washington D.C.

¹⁰⁹ FBI Files, Victoria Phillips Collection, Box 2, Folder 3, Library of Congress, Music Division, Washington D.C.

Also adding to Martha Graham's political merit on both a government and citizenry level was her decision in regards to an invitation sent directly to her from high-ranking Nazi officials. In 1936, an invitation was sent to Graham on behalf of the Third Reich requesting her presence at the Summer Olympic Games in Berlin, Germany for a performance.¹¹⁰ Though the Second World War did not start until 1939, tensions between Germany and the United States had already begun to show. Nazi activities that isolated and condemned Jewish citizens of Germany were already a topic gaining news coverage from foreign news outlets, and certainly Martha Graham was well aware of these acts of the Nazi government as well. Graham, having several Jewish dancers employed in her company, found fault with the German government as it existed during that time. Promptly after receiving the invitation, she declined it. Graham stated:

“I would find it impossible to dance in Germany at the present time. So many artists whom I respect and admire have been persecuted, have been deprived of the right to work for ridiculous and unsatisfactory reasons, that I should consider it impossible to identify myself, by accepting the invitation, with the regime that has made such things possible. In addition, some of my concert group would not be welcomed in Germany.¹¹¹”

Though she declined formally, she did not hesitate to include that the reason was because the Nazi government treated its people unfairly and that Jewish members in her group would have to feel that injustice were she to take her company.¹¹² Hitler made a response to Graham's refusal to participate in the games, assuring her that she and her all members of her company would be treated well and were most welcome. Still, Graham declined. Graham recalled being

¹¹⁰ *Official Invitation to the Berlin Olympics*, “XI. Olympiade Berlin, 1936,” Scrapbooks, Martha Graham Collection. Library of Congress, Music Division, Washington D.C.

¹¹¹ Martha Graham, *Blood Memory* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991), 151.

¹¹² *Newspaper clippings 1936*, “Martha Graham Won't Dance in Germany,” Scrapbooks, Martha Graham Collection. Library of Congress, Music Division, Washington D.C.

alerted that her name had been discovered on a list of unfavorables to be “dealt with” amongst Hitler’s papers after the war.¹¹³

This bold stance against making an appearance in a country who violated human rights came from Graham’s feeling that to do so would only glorify the Nazi regime. Even though the appearance would have given Graham lots of attention and opportunity, she held fast to her anti-fascist ideals. It informed not only her decision to decline the invitation to perform at the Summer Olympics, it inspired multiple other dancers to also decline invitations. In the end, there were no dance participants from the United States and several western European countries.

Creating the American Identity through Choreography Using Blood Memories

Although she did not intend to inspire protest or action with her decision, it became clear that Graham had as much of a political voice as the more outspoken of her colleagues. Instead of focusing on what needed change in the United States and the world, generally Graham focused on what was good about this land that she called her home. Rarely did she cross over into making direct political statements of change such as in *Chronicle*, which depicted the dangers of the rise of fascism.¹¹⁴ Instead, she tended to focus on what America was, and what being an American meant. This landed her a unique political voice that was magnified by the U.S. government’s constant sponsorship of her to countries that were in danger of falling to communist and fascist regimes. Because the Graham repertoire consists of dozens of pieces, and many of them focusing on the human pathos, three of her most important that focus on American

¹¹³ Martha Graham, *Blood Memory* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991), 151.

¹¹⁴ “Chronicle (1936).” Martha Graham Dance Company. October 31, 2018. Accessed August 18, 2019. <http://www.marthagraham.org/portfolio-items/chronicle-1936/>.

identity will be examined here. These three pieces were written, choreographed, and staged prior to her eventual shift in subject interest in the 1960s.

Frontier, “American Perspective of the Plains”, is one of Graham’s earlier works, having debuted in 1935.¹¹⁵ It was one of the firsts in which she brought to the stage the idea of the American West, or as it is titled, the American frontier. A solo piece choreographed for herself, Graham felt that the promise of the frontier was a shining beacon of hope to many Americans. Born in Allegheny, Pennsylvania Graham’s family packed up and moved to distant Santa Barbara, California in search of opportunity.¹¹⁶ In this way, Graham and her family did not differ from many others who took on the long journey to settle during the new and growing age of westward expansion. For Graham, when talking about *Frontier*, she recalls that the piece came together from her vivid memories of moving to California. The railroads, the small communities scattered along the way, and the limitless possibilities that she felt awaited her family.¹¹⁷ Graham always felt that the frontier was a hopeful future with vast explorations and endless discovery. All were positive feelings and ideas that she had about the west, ones that others likely shared. This gave birth to the dance, where Graham portrayed an American pioneer woman whose ventures into the great unknown of the American West, were a testament to her strength, courage, and independence.¹¹⁸ The pioneer woman surveys the great open land that she has come upon in the dance, and reacts with a willingness to take on the landscape that she chose to inhabit and call her new home.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ “Frontier (1935).” Martha Graham Dance Company. October 31, 2018. Accessed August 18, 2019. <http://www.marthagraham.org/portfolio-items/frontier-1935/>.

¹¹⁶ Martha Graham, *Blood Memory* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991), 41.

¹¹⁷ Martha Graham, *Blood Memory* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991), 42-44.

¹¹⁸ “Frontier (1935).” Martha Graham Dance Company. October 31, 2018. Accessed August 18, 2019. <http://www.marthagraham.org/portfolio-items/frontier-1935/>.

¹¹⁹ Planetbenjamin, “Frontier,” YouTube, July 24, 2016, video, 6:34, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wX--wIO82FY>.

Adding to the dance is the use of set design. Graham's works from early on in her career were inclusive of very detailed sets that often times were not just background pieces, but interactive parts of the performance. For *Frontier*, however, Graham relayed her ideas to landscape architect and sculptor Isamu Noguchi and received a minimalist set design: two ropes that went from floor to ceiling represented the endless train tracks across the west that Graham remembered during her travels, and a single unit of fence post that gives the impression of homesteading families.¹²⁰ Keeping the stage clear of detailed props and set design, Graham was able to invoke the feeling of the great empty unknown that was associated with the American West.¹²¹

Interestingly, when performing *Frontier* abroad, Graham recalled a time when she came to realize that not everyone in the world understood the idea of a frontier the way Americans did. After a performance in Europe, a member of the audience approached Graham and questioned her about *Frontier*.¹²² This individual only knew a frontier as a border, wherein there was definite limits and simply an end to the country. Graham's piece gave this individual a glimpse at what the frontier in America meant, and gave a new perspective on possibility and limitlessness in the American frontier. This highlighted a distinct American trait. Space, the ability to push forward and explore, and hope existed in the American outskirts where other countries could not say the same for their own lands. Through *Frontier*, Graham was bringing a new awareness to foreign audiences of the ever-changing metamorphosis of what America could offer its people and the pioneering spirit that existed.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Martha Graham, *Blood Memory* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991), 219.

After *Frontier* debuted in 1935, Graham turned her attention to an issue that was gaining notoriety amongst not just Americans, but the world. The rise of Fascism prompted Graham to choreograph more works that identified Americanness and the ideals of democracy. Never one to place herself in outright political platforms such as *Tamiris* or *Sokolow*, Graham showed a brief departure from her previous reluctance. She spoke at the “Nazi War Over Europe” panel held by the American Committee for Anti-Nazi Literature, and attended the American Artists’ Congress convention in 1937 when it spoke out against Fascism abroad.¹²³

One work that came out of this period was Graham’s *American Document*. With a premier date in 1938, the dance explored the simple question of what it means to be American, again setting out to define the national identity. Graham found the inspiration for the work in written words, specifically, those words that were used to create important American documents such as the Declaration of Independence and Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation. Direct quotes from these documents were included in the dance, spoken orally as the dancers moved about onstage. Living during the rise of Fascist support across the sea, Graham heard many terrible words that came from radio transmissions that in turn made her realize that the United States had its own powerful words. As she stated in 1941, ““our own country - our democracy - has words, too, with power to hearten men and move them to action.”¹²⁴”

Continuing to express what drove her to create *American Document*, she told a reporter, “Europe was in such a mess, and I was afraid we might become a mess, too. Then I thought of some of the eloquent words in our documents, and I decided to use them.”¹²⁵”

¹²³ Mark Franko, *Martha Graham in Love and War: The Life in the Work* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 15.

¹²⁴ Jack Anderson, “‘American Document,’ a Dance Classic Brought Up to Date,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), Oct 1, 1989.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

American Document was one of Graham's most well-received works that continually brought cheers from audiences throughout her career.¹²⁶ About fifty years later, Graham reconstructed the piece with additions to the quotes used. Words from Martin Luther King Jr. and John F. Kennedy were amongst some that had the possibility to join the piece. By revitalizing *American Document*, Graham was hoping to renew the piece's significance to the times.¹²⁷ The piece begins by establishing the dance as part of the present with the audience, and not being a representation of the past:

“Ladies and Gentlemen, good evening.
This is a theatre.
The place is here in the United States of America.
The time is now — tonight.”¹²⁸

The speaker then goes on to name different ethnicities that make up America while the company dancers enter and exit the stage with Martha Graham and Erik Hawking as the main duo.

“These are Americans.
Yesterday — and for days before yesterday —
One was Spanish,
One was Russian,
One was German,
One was English.
Today these are Americans.”¹²⁹

After this, the speaker asks the question that will come up consistently throughout the dance: “What is an American?” The dance is separated into five parts. The first one is titled *Declaration* in which a quote from the Declaration of Independence is read. Second is

¹²⁶ As evidenced by the many positive reviews of the piece as seen in the Martha Graham Scrapbooks at the Library of Congress, and the many times it has been restaged for audiences after her death.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ *American Document* by Martha Graham, box 224 folder 2, Martha Graham Collection. Library of Congress, Music Division, Washington D.C.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Occupation, which showcases and celebrates the Native Americans and their claim to the lands. Here, a dancer acting as a Native woman laments the removal of her people from their land, while the speaker reads a quote from a letter of Red Jacket who grieved at the loss of his people. Next is the part titled, *The Puritan*.¹³⁰ *Emancipation* came next, celebrating the freedom of slavery while the speaker reads from the Emancipation Proclamation and the Gettysburg Address. Lastly there is *Hold your Hold!*, which celebrates the present (1938, and each year specifically when it is being performed) while also expressly voicing the problems of the world. Two women represent the lamentations of two thousand women, and one man represents the same of one thousand men.¹³¹ Specifics regarding the tragedy of the Holocaust and other ordeals are mentioned, but in the end the dancers are still joyous and hopeful as they declare:

“America! Name me the word that is courage.
 America! Name me the word that is justice.
 America! Name me the word that is power.
 America! Name me the word that is freedom.
 America! Name me the word that is faith.
 Here is that word - Democracy!¹³²”

The end comes with a quote from the Gettysburg Address: “That government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth.”¹³³ As Mark Franko has pointed out, it would do well to consider *American Document* as a bluntly anti-fascist work based on how it approaches the theme of national identity. Instead of dancing an iteration of national myth that gives way to identify righteousness of that identity, Graham took solid textual documentation of American democracy and values and utilized them to showcase American

¹³⁰ This segment of the dance has seemingly been lost to time, for few details of it exist in various sources.

¹³¹ *American Document by Martha Graham*, box 224 folder 2, Martha Graham Collection. Library of Congress, Music Division, Washington D.C.

¹³² *American Document by Martha Graham*, box 224 folder 2, Martha Graham Collection. Library of Congress, Music Division, Washington D.C.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

history.¹³⁴ Along these lines, I would suggest that this showcase of American history presented in what was distinguished at the very start of the work as being the “now,” placed the audience in a position to feel their connection to America as it has evolved and continues to evolve thus suggesting a multiethnic and shared identity.

Just before World War II came to an end, in 1944, Graham debuted her next large-scale success at the Library of Congress in Washington DC. *Appalachian Spring* was created under the auspices of the Coolidge Foundation with music by Aaron Copland and set designs again by Isamu Noguchi.¹³⁵ On the surface, the piece was a simple work that depicted a young pioneer couple moving to the west and celebrating their wedding day amongst a host of other characters.¹³⁶ However, when contextualizing the piece in the time frame of its creation and debut, and looking at the subject matter of the piece itself, one can see that yet again, Martha Graham was feeding her audiences a taste of American patriotic imagery and shared identity. Above all, *Appalachian Spring* brought to life a conceptualization that many Americans had of the territories west of the Mississippi River. Tales of the old west, cowboys, Indians homesteading, the Gold Rush, and adventurous families braving the wild unchartered lands were part of the American national story.¹³⁷ It was part of the American identity even if many urban and city-bound folk had no access physically to that identity.

¹³⁴ Mark Franko, *Martha Graham in Love and War: The Life in the Work* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 20-21.

¹³⁵ Erin Allen, “Documenting Dance: The Making of “Appalachian Spring,” Library of Congress Blog, Library of Congress, October 9, 2014, <https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2014/10/documenting-dance-the-making-of-appalachian-spring/>.

¹³⁶ “Appalachian Spring (1944).” Martha Graham Dance Company. October 31, 2018. Accessed August 18, 2019. <http://www.marthagraham.org/portfolio-items/appalachian-spring-1944/?portfolioCats=21,18,20>.

¹³⁷ Ray Allen Billington, Martin Ridge, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier*, (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2001).

Graham, however, avoided addressing specifics in the piece so that it could be marked as spanning any number of years in no one specific region of the west.¹³⁸ In this way, she had freedom to engage with various subjects and include them in an overall picture. Nothing was set in stone, so to speak, so that the audience could identify with the intended meaning and relate on their own to images of the national legacy of expansion. To do this, Graham chose costumes for her dancers that reflected the period but were not wholly accurate in detail.¹³⁹ Copeland, the composer of the music for the piece, followed her direction and included some Shaker music influence throughout the piece but kept it simple and not wholly obvious. For the set, she asked that Isamu Noguchi create something that was solid yet showed “bones.”¹⁴⁰ Noguchi produced a set that included a simplistic Shaker rocking chair, and a house whose majority is structural beams with only a few solid walls.¹⁴¹ In this way Graham was able to express both the bare simplicity of living in pioneering terrain and the basic fundamentals that living gives us.

In analyzing *Appalachian Spring*, many dance scholars have focused purely on what was performed.¹⁴² This ignores entirely all that did not make it into the piece, and what Graham had full intentions of including before the cuts were made. It would seem that Graham cut large parts of her original idea out for reasons of practicality and clarity.¹⁴³ The intention of these removed

¹³⁸ Danceonfilm, “Martha Graham’s *Appalachian Spring* Part 1/4,” YouTube, Jan 11, 2010, video, 8:04, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XmgaKGSxQVw>.

¹³⁹ *Martha Graham and ? in Appalachian Spring*, Photograph, Martha Graham Collection. Box 240, Folder 32, #442, Library of Congress, Music Division, Washington D.C.

¹⁴⁰ Mark Franko, *Martha Graham in Love and War: The Life in the Work* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 46-47.

¹⁴¹ *Isamu Noguchi’s set for Appalachian Spring*, Photograph, Library of Congress, Music Division, Washington D.C., <https://www.loc.gov/item/copland.phot0120/>

¹⁴² Mark Franko, Professor of Dance at Temple University, is one of the few who have acknowledged the potential importance of these cut pieces of *Appalachian Spring*. In his book, *Martha Graham in Love and War*, he determines that understanding what is not present in the dance helps contextualize what did make it onto stages as the final product.

¹⁴³ American Document Notes to Aaron Copland, box 224, folder 3, Martha Graham Collection. Library of Congress, Music Division, Washington D.C.

parts is important because they show us what sort of “Americanness” Graham was attempting to convey and what she was reasonably able to do in the end. While the finished version of *Appalachian Spring* included characters such as the Husbandman, the Bride, the Pioneer Woman, the Revivalist, and the Followers that worked harmoniously to create a simple picture of America and the west, the original notes from Graham included far more political characters.¹⁴⁴ Along with the characters that made it to the final version, the original version included the Fugitive, the Citizen, the Abolitionist, and the Indian Girl.¹⁴⁵

In her original plans, Graham had a whole opening scene planned out that was intended to be seen as inspired by *Uncle Toms Cabin*.¹⁴⁶ It would depict the struggles of the slave and touch on the humanity of life. Martha Graham wrote of this character in her notes to Aaron Copland, “This is the man who is hunted, persecuted; who becomes almost clownish in his supreme agony. His goal is freedom. He is represented in the Civil War period by the slave.¹⁴⁷” She did not, apparently, seem to want to portray a stereotype. It is clear in these notes that she did not want the Fugitive to be dressed as a slave, nor did she want the music to reflect what people might judge as being “negro.” What she wanted was a truthful interpretation of bodily movement that reflected not only the Fugitive’s struggles but a whole history and ethnic experience. This attempt at portraying race in dance was considerably different from methods employed by Tamiris and Segal.

The Indian Girl was meant to be another large and important character in *Appalachian Spring*. Graham wrote, “She is like a tree or rock in her relationship to place. At times we forget

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Mark Franko, *Martha Graham in Love and War: The Life in the Work* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 53.

¹⁴⁷ American Document Notes to Aaron Copland, box 224, folder 3, Martha Graham Collection. Library of Congress, Music Division, Washington D.C.

her but she is always with us as part of the romance of our youth as a land. ... She is the supreme ruler of all we do... In that sense she is the protagonist of all that happens here.¹⁴⁸ Like *American Document*, with an important section dedicated to the native origins of America, *Appalachian Spring* was intended to portray the native spirit that remains always part of America. However, this new production aimed to take the role of the Indian further in that the native girl would be a constant character that never left the stage. Sometimes she would be simply standing nearby, sometimes she would be partially hidden, but she would always be present.¹⁴⁹ This, for Graham, implied an acknowledgement of Native American influence and presence in America's history and development up until present day. Even if they are forgotten, or pushed aside, they are not gone nor able to be removed from the spirit of America.

The Citizen was the term that Graham officially used for her idea of an abolitionist-type character. She constantly related him to John Brown, who was an abolitionist in the 1800s that advocated armed disturbances to remove slavery from the land. She described this character as possessing fanatical qualities "with the overtones of the Puritan about him," and while shy he is not someone to avoid fights if he knows the good change will come from it. This, Graham wrote, is the American man.¹⁵⁰

All of these characters are steeped in historical and political importance, but none of them expressly made it into the final version of *Appalachian Spring*.¹⁵¹ Instead, they were reworked and quietly included as iterations of other characters.¹⁵² For instance, The Citizen became the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Danceonfilm, "Martha Graham's Appalachian Spring Part 1/4," YouTube, Jan 11, 2010, video, 8:04, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XmgaKGSxQVw>.

¹⁵² Mark Franko, *Martha Graham in Love and War: The Life in the Work* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 53-60.

Husbandman. The Indian Girl disappeared as a character, but Graham invoked the idea of her presence through musical cues that Copeland wrote into the score. The opening scene of the Fugitive and Uncle Toms Cabin was removed entirely, and the Fugitive's solo cut. Mark Franko provides an in-depth analysis of the ways in which these cut characters surfaced in other characters that did become part of the finished work.¹⁵³

“A dance reveals the spirit of the country in which it takes root. No sooner does it fail to do this than it loses its integrity and significance.¹⁵⁴” This is a direct quote taken from one of Graham's essays published in 1937, where she discussed the importance of sense of nationality in the dance. Without it, she felt that dance held no meaning and thus was simply movement for entertainment's sake. She had enthusiasm for depicting the America that was steeped in moral values and democracy, as well as acknowledging the many ethnic groups that mixed to form the country, and figuring into this grand image of American ingenuity the role of the American women in as much a major role as the American man. Graham did not seek to incite change or stir audiences to action politically or socially. Instead, she identified through her dances what “Americanness” was, and helped define the multifaceted nature of what it is to be an American. This is a form of politics because it catered to the nationality of the country, and reaffirmed to audiences what America and democracy were when faced with the perceived threats from warring ideals and governments that surfaced overseas.

Graham was not a political woman, at least not of the same magnitude that Tamiris, Sokolow, and Segal were. She did, however, take a firm stance on issues like war and fascism and develop choreographic works that would showcase her country's better side. A fact that no

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Martha Graham, “Platform for the American Dance,” in *I See America Dancing: Selected Readings, 1685-2000*, ed. Maureen Needham (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2002) 203.

doubt placed her high in the considerations to tour abroad under U.S. government sponsorship when the need for cultural diplomacy became a primary goal of President Eisenhower. The work that she undertook as a dancer then became work that she undertook as a cultural ambassador, bringing American ideals and values to stages across the globe where communism and fascism were at risk of becoming dominant in the governments and in the minds of average people who sought the change that was promised by such groups as well as delivering to domestic audiences a visual representation of what America was.

From 1955 until about 1962, Martha Graham and her company traveled to countries that the US government considered “at-risk” such as Japan, Burma, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand. Under the auspices of the cultural ambassador title granted to her from the United States government while abroad, she was expected to attend banquets and meetings with local officials. Furthermore, Graham’s politically active promotion of Americanness abroad as well as domestically allowed her to become the first dancer to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1976.¹⁵⁵ Thus, it can be seen that Martha Graham showcased American nationality and politics in her work, utilizing it as a response against foreign threats by reminding domestic audiences of their shared unity as well as showcasing that unity and hopefulness to foreign audiences who were unsure of the American way. Using her own experiences as a young girl crossing the country to live in far away California on the American frontier, and her experiences dealing with challenges to the American democracy that she’d known her entire life that were rooted in unjust treatments of peoples, she created American dance that was suitable for domestic intake and foreign export.

¹⁵⁵ Anna Kisselgoff, “Martha Graham Hailed by Nation; Given Freedom Medal by Ford,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), Oct 15, 1976.

CHAPTER 4

ALVIN AILEY

The closing of World War II may have ended with victory for the Allies but the idea of warfare was far from gone. Almost immediately after World War II, the Soviet Union and the United States entered a tense geopolitical relationship that spanned about forty-five years. This period of tension came to be known as the Cold War. The United States faced off against the Soviet Union in attempting to gain influence in areas such as Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Where the USSR would launch campaigns to establish influence that would strengthen their Communist holds, the United States would often follow with their own designs to influence the population and its officials. The U.S. State Department, through the Cultural Presentations Program, sent many cultural institutions abroad with the goal of counteracting the possible influence of Soviet Communism with American Democracy in the form of art, music, theatre, and dance. In terms of dance, Martha Graham was already doing tours as part of the Cultural Presentations Program, many times in Asia.¹⁵⁶ In the 1960s, however, Alvin Ailey was added to the repertoire of choreographers whose companies were sent abroad for cultural diplomacy.

This chapter aims to focus on the choreographer/dancer Alvin Ailey and his dance company, and how he took a new step in molding the national identity to include an abundantly visual representation of the diversity that America claimed as a point of pride. Through his personal experiences as a black man in the South during the 1930s-1940s, he developed an idea of American identity that while not necessarily different from Graham's, was more willing to be bold in addressing various ethnic groups that were living American lives. As a result, the United

¹⁵⁶ ANTA Dance Panel minutes, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Collection, Collection 468, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Fayetteville.

States government took notice and agreed that Ailey's adaptation of national identity was perfectly suited for export abroad in tours that would influence the way foreign audiences understood America. This chapter will aim to identify major points of national identity that Ailey sought to reconstruct in his choreographies by analyzing his life prior to becoming a dancer as most of his dances became representations of his experiences in earlier years. By understanding how Ailey got his start and the sort of identity he was aiming to produce, studying the United States governments' willingness to work with Ailey and include him in their cultural-political exchange abroad to secure the American image will further enhance the understanding we get of Ailey's creation of the American national image through choreography. Lastly, by examining choreographic works that narrated American identity, Ailey stands out as a choreographer who worked to bring shared national identity to ethnic minority Americans and will help us understand how he achieved his goal in the dance form.

The United States Information Agency and the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs were vital conductors of the activities of arts programs being sent abroad for propaganda purposes. In the case of dance specifically, these two institutions worked closely with the contracted entity the American National Theatre and Academy to select, prepare, plan, and discuss what dance companies were fit to be sent abroad as cultural ambassadors against Soviet culture.¹⁵⁷ Up until 1954, the Soviet government had been spending lavishly on tours abroad for their own cultural treasures such as the Moscow Ballet in places they had interest in their expanding influence. President Eisenhower recognized this as a problem and asked that Congress approve his request for emergency funds to begin a program to combat Soviet influences through

¹⁵⁷ Clare Croft, *Dancers as Diplomats: American Choreography in Cultural Exchange* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 22.

American cultural tours in the same countries.¹⁵⁸ Emphasizing the image of American “freedom” became an important theme in this soft-power battle of cultural display abroad. At home, the image of “freedom” was less definitive and instead audiences focused on relatability to their everyday lives. Domestic audiences saw ideals of freedom not at the forefront of choreographic works, but instead were drawn to depictions of America as Graham staged. Alvin Ailey followed this approach to everyday American life in his work and began a new movement in the dance scene.

Where Martha Graham became an important producer of American Modern dance that showcased women and the greatness of a shared history made up of different ethnic groups through Caucasian dancers, Alvin Ailey became an important producer of American Modern dance that emphasized not the Caucasian body but the bodies of people of all colors. As such, Ailey created the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre in 1958—the first dance company in the United States that was entirely made up of black dancers.¹⁵⁹ Very quickly, Ailey integrated his company with dancers of all ethnicities, including blacks, Asians, and Latinos.¹⁶⁰ For Ailey, giving the chance to minorities to perform professionally was important since the dance community of the 1950s was rigid and only afforded opportunity to mostly white dancers in the circles of prestigious ballet companies and modern schools.¹⁶¹ This inclusive environment in his company also informed the name of his company: the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre. Using “American” in his company name suggested that all Americans were represented in his

¹⁵⁸ Naima Prevots, *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy & the Cold War* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 11.

¹⁵⁹ “Alvin Ailey,” Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, AAADT, Accessed June 16, 2019, <https://www.alvinailey.org/alvin-aley-american-dance-theater/alvin-aley>

¹⁶⁰ *Newspaper clipping 1973*, “Alvin Ailey’s,” Scrapbooks, Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation Collection. Library of Congress, Music Division, Washington D.C.

¹⁶¹ Alvin Ailey, *Revelations: The Autobiography of Alvin Ailey*, ed. A. Peter. Bailey. (Bridgewater, NJ: Replica Books, 1999) 51.

program, both through actual dance choreographies and the dancers dancing them onstage. These were all little details that made the company so attractive later on when the U.S. State Department and ANTA approached Ailey and his company to tour abroad as representatives of the United States.

Alvin Ailey: Man of the South Developing Dance, Defining American Identity, and Gaining Government Sponsorship

Ailey was born in 1931, a whole generation after the likes of the earliest iterations of the Modern dance movement in America, in Rodgers, Texas.¹⁶² A community very distant from the rambunctious streets of New York City, Ailey grew up amongst the constant backdrop of lynchings, segregation, and general anti-black sentiment in the American South. There are multiple occasions that Ailey could recall in his later life that involved some sort of violence against a friend or discrimination against himself while living in Texas.¹⁶³ Work was hard to come by, and his father abandoned the family soon after Ailey was born.¹⁶⁴ Thus Ailey and his mother moved often to find employment until they relocated permanently to Los Angeles, California.¹⁶⁵

In 1942, the Second World War was in full swing, and jobs that supported the war effort drew in those who sought employment. Ailey began his schooling in a predominately white junior high school but opted to transfer to a black majority school out of discomfort even though

¹⁶² *Newspaper clipping 1989*, "Ballet Legend, 58, dies of blood disease," Scrapbooks, Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation Collection. Library of Congress, Music Division, Washington D.C.

¹⁶³ Alvin Ailey, *Revelations: The Autobiography of Alvin Ailey*, ed. A. Peter. Bailey. (Bridgewater, NJ: Replica Books, 1999) 19-20.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

the bus ride was significantly longer.¹⁶⁶ He enjoyed school and excelled at writing poetry and learning languages. Eventually he would go on to study Romantic Languages in college, but then Ailey became acquainted with the world of dance and theatre.

Introduced to Lester Horton and his work by a friend, Ailey spent more and more time attending classes and seeing shows. Horton, at the time, was a successful choreographer and teacher of his own modern dance movement style: Horton Technique. Horton, unlike many of his peers, did not segregate his classes and allowed anyone to participate and perform for him.¹⁶⁷ With Horton, Ailey received a wide artistic education that included costuming, set design, ballet, modern, and forms of ethnic dance. In 1958 Ailey created the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre with heavy leaning toward the Horton Technique that he had been instructed in.¹⁶⁸ It is notable here to realize that Ailey never created his own language in movement like Graham or the other big dance innovators of the time like Jose Limon or Doris Humphrey. Instead he focused on teaching Horton and it has remained at the core of his company ever since.

For Ailey, Modern dance was too rigid and spoke to precious few. He fell under the camp that favored concert-based performances that speak to the national identity rather than informal demonstrations of social activism, but he desired to extend the appeal of his company beyond dance-going audiences to the general American public.¹⁶⁹ As part of this effort, Ailey utilized popular music in some of his choreography and mixed dance techniques to produce something that was both artistic and yet still accessible to anyone who happened into a performance.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 33.

¹⁶⁷ "Horton Technique," Dance Spirit, Dance Spirit, March 23, 2017, <https://www.dancespirit.com/horton-technique-2326036575.html>.

¹⁶⁸ "Explore Our History," Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Accessed August 19, 2019, <https://www.alvinailey.org/about/history>.

¹⁶⁹ *Newspaper Clipping 1973*, "Alvin Ailey's ballet: the kind folks can relate to," Scrapbooks, Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation Collection. Library of Congress, Music Division, Washington D.C.

¹⁷⁰ "Flowers," Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, May 02, 2016. Accessed August 19, 2019,

Many of Ailey's pieces focused on ethnic subjects, which he took a pride in because his work covered not just black experience, but American experience.¹⁷¹ Even works that were staunchly rooted in black subject matter were conversations that Ailey himself believed were more than basely black and could resonate on a personal level with anyone.¹⁷² This furthered his belief that he was creating and performing works of American art, not a singular ethnic art within the American umbrella. Efforts to create a space for black dancers to succeed in a harshly segregated world with prejudices against the black body in dance was one of Ailey's early goals when creating his company.¹⁷³ This vision, however, changed as they years went by. Instead he found himself opening his company to all minorities who faced similar prejudices and difficulties in the dance world, so long as they had a strong talent and were technically advanced.¹⁷⁴ The Alvin Ailey American Theatre became then a company of that emphasized diversity, where talent surpassed race and racial stereotypes and the national identity could be composed of many different bodies. This also gave the U.S. Government a reason to look to Ailey's work with interest for export abroad.

When the U.S. government and ANTA first considered Alvin Ailey for activities abroad, they described his group as an "All-Negro company" that was "quite good" but unsuitable for export at the time of their 1958 meeting.¹⁷⁵ It is possible that ANTA did not feel that the company was suited for official government backing due to the company and Ailey's sudden

<https://www.alvinailey.org/performances/repertory/flowers>.

¹⁷¹ *Newspaper Clipping 1971*, "Daily Closeup," Scrapbooks, Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation Collection. Library of Congress, Music Division, Washington D.C.

¹⁷² UCLACommStudies, "Alvin Ailey Speaking at UCLA 3/9/1983," YouTube, April 27, 2016. Video, 42:46, Accessed August 19, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1O2ZJYrVio>.

¹⁷³ Alvin Ailey, *Revelations: The Autobiography of Alvin Ailey*, ed. A. Peter. Bailey. (Bridgewater, NJ: Replica Books, 1999) 89.

¹⁷⁴ UCLACommStudies, "Alvin Ailey Speaking at UCLA 3/9/1983," YouTube, April 27, 2016. Video, 42:46, Accessed August 19, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1O2ZJYrVio>.

¹⁷⁵ ANTA Dance Panel minutes, December, 1958, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Collection, Collection 468, Box 101, folder 15, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Fayetteville.

emergence in the dance scene. The company, after all, was created the same year that ANTA passed their decision and had few works of original in their repertoire. When the company came up in ANTA discussions again in 1961, the response was much different. By this time, Ailey had staged what would become his signature work, *Revelations*, and was creating lots of buzz around themes such as the Blues and gospel of the American south. The ANTA panel members were enthusiastic about these pieces and the company as a whole now that their reputation was growing, and Ailey was demonstrating a constant stride in professionalism and productivity.¹⁷⁶

Moreover, it was becoming somewhat of a necessity to include and showcase black Americans as dancers, choreographers, and performers as an example of the unified image of freedom and equality that the United States was attempting to broadcast to the world at large.¹⁷⁷ Otherwise, bad press about the state of hypocrisy in America regarding racial relations and equality fueled by Communist Russia would continue to spread and undermine the image and values that the United States projected on an international stage. The visibility of the Civil Rights Movement in America was not missed by the world. The Freedom Riders, the Greensboro Sit In, and the arrest of Rosa Parks had more than a domestic audience and the U.S. government struggled to rectify these unjust images.¹⁷⁸ As a result Alvin Ailey and his company, headlined by Carmen de Lavallade, were approved by the federal government to tour Australia and the Far East in 1962.¹⁷⁹ Ailey and his company became the first African-American dance company to tour abroad under government auspices. The tour was a success, and Ailey would be sent on

¹⁷⁶ ANTA Dance Panel minutes, September, 1961, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Collection, Collection 468, Box 101, folder 16-17, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Fayetteville.

¹⁷⁷ ANTA Dance Panel minutes, July, 1963, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Collection, Collection 468, Box 101, folder 16, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Fayetteville.

¹⁷⁸ ANTA Dance Panel minutes, July, 1963, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Collection, Collection 468, Box 101, folder 16, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Fayetteville.

¹⁷⁹ "Explore Our History," Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Accessed August 19, 2019, <https://www.alvinailey.org/about/history>.

other government-sponsored tours in 1967 to Africa, and again in 1970 to Russia.¹⁸⁰ The 1970 tour to Russia marked the first all-black dance company to perform behind the Iron Curtain, and the first American modern dance company to visit since Isadora Duncan.¹⁸¹

The American government clearly had the intent to push the idea of equal opportunity and economic success of those peoples who were known to have been suppressed previously onto foreign audiences. The recording and development of a simple film by the USIA of the Ailey company in 1967 showcased excerpts of various choreographic works intermixed with footage of Alvin Ailey discussing his inspirations and personal background. This film was meant to be sent to various countries abroad to add to their cultural offensive. In the outgoing message note that was sent to the USIA Circular, it is recorded that, “This program of their selected performances presents a uniquely American contribution to the world of dance. It testifies not only to the eminence of negroes in the performing arts in this country, but to the vitality and freshness with which they infused them.”¹⁸²

Ailey and his dancers, before departing on tours, were given a small informational packet filled with ways to respond to questions regarding the Cultural Exchange program, their personal opinions, and any and all things pertaining to the American way of life. It provided a detailed description of the Cultural Exchange program so that they would know the history and be free to reference all the things that had been accomplished by it, and urged them to behave as a model representative of the United States. For the government, it was imperative that the act being sent abroad understand their diplomatic status. The packet states, “We hope that by your acceptance of this tour, you have demonstrated your belief in this program, and its importance in

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² *USIA Film Review Memorandum*, Courtesy of the Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation.

strengthening mutual understanding throughout the world. For this is a moment when never was this comprehension more important for the survival of our country and our way of life. Thus, you are soon to become an official part of the foreign relations of the United States Government.¹⁸³

Alvin Ailey's Choreography: Making the American National Identity more Diverse

The choreographic work that Ailey produced generally varied in subject matter. For the most part, however, Ailey and his company became known for his original pieces worked around the African American experience. There were a number of works that explored different ethnic experiences, and in addition, Ailey often acquired permission from other choreographers outside his company to re-stage and perform their pieces. For example, Ailey picked up works from Edith Segal and Jose Limon that focused on Jewish and Mexican cultural affections.¹⁸⁴ Ailey had planned to take one such piece abroad with him on a government sponsored tour, but was advised by the ANTA panel against it. The piece was *To Jose Clemente Orozco* choreographed by Lester Horton. The panel did not feel that bringing a dance about a Mexican muralist with heavy political agendas fit with the program's aims.¹⁸⁵

Blues Suite premiered in 1958 and was Alvin Ailey's first big choreographic success.¹⁸⁶ For this piece, Ailey drew on his memories of the parties that lasted through the night at the bars that were local to his childhood hometown.¹⁸⁷ He recalled the Dew Drop Inn specifically, a place in the black part of town that was rough and wild at night, where people danced to the Blues in

¹⁸³ *Department of State letter to Alvin Ailey 1962*, Courtesy of the Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation.

¹⁸⁴ Scrapbooks, Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation Collection. Library of Congress, Music Division, Washington D.C.

¹⁸⁵ Naima Prevots, *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy & the Cold War* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 97.

¹⁸⁶ "Blues Suite," Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Accessed August 19, 2019, <https://www.alvinailey.org/performances/repertory/blues-suite>.

¹⁸⁷ Alvin Ailey, *Revelations: The Autobiography of Alvin Ailey*, ed. A. Peter. Bailey. (Bridgewater, NJ: Replica Books, 1999), 22-23.

what was considered vulgar movements and men got into violent brawls.¹⁸⁸ This, he portrayed through his dance, was a vitality and energy that blacks in the South carried with them through their sorrowful pasts and currently harsh lives amongst a society that placed them on unequal grounds.

In an early program note Ailey describes the dance: “The musical heritage of the southern Negro remains a profound influence on the music of the world... during the dark days the blues sprang full-born from the docks and the fields, saloons and bawdy houses...¹⁸⁹” In this way, Ailey hints at the Blues as being a significant contribution to the culture of the United States as well as the world, and its development from slavery till the present day of loud drinking establishments. This cultural staple, the Blues and all the stereotypes that come with it, formed for Ailey a large part of the narrative that he wanted to bring forward in his dance of Americanness. It was an agreeable artistic statement for the United States government as well, as they believed the representation of the black American genre of Blues was important and a major centerpiece for audiences abroad. In almost all programs that the state government sponsored, Blues Suite was included on the program list.¹⁹⁰

Staunchly opposite to the majority of pieces that Ailey created, *Masekela Language* was a radically agitated depiction of politics and the state of black oppression. When the piece premiered in 1969, the Civil Rights Movement was an undeniable part of American life.¹⁹¹ Perhaps the growing hostilities and militant activism to ensure black equality had a large

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 22-23.

¹⁸⁹ Thomas F. DeFrantz, *Dancing Revelations: Alvin Aileys Embodiment of African American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 38.

¹⁹⁰ Various programs and publicity materials, Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation Collection. Library of Congress, Music Division, Washington D.C.

¹⁹¹ "Masekela Language." Ailey Pressroom, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, Accessed August 19, 2019, <http://pressroom.alvinailey.org/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater/repertory/masekela-language>.

influence on the more accusatory tone of *Masekela Language* in comparison to Ailey's other works. Ailey himself stated that the piece was meant to draw parallels to South African apartheid and racial violence in Chicago, while keeping in mind the shooting of Fred Hampton, leader of the notorious Black Panther Party.¹⁹² Within the piece itself, the stage set includes a jukebox, wicker chairs, stark wooden stools and tables, bushy potted plants, and an idly rotating ceiling fan. The atmosphere is both dreary and harsh using red and green lights cast against the dancers.¹⁹³ The dancers include both men and women, dressed in typical pedestrian clothing. The well suited man and the raggedy labor worker are represented, as is the sultry woman and the man struggling with addiction.¹⁹⁴ A startling scene comes near the ending, when a man wearing bloodied and torn clothing bursts onto the stage, causing all the dancers to pause and take note of his hurried and desperate movements. The bloody man writhes and gestures out the "door" to what is assumed to be a violent party of white men, and they all begin dancing their shared despair and anger at the news. In the end, the man dies.¹⁹⁵

Like *Blues Suite*, the piece takes place in a bar-type environment. *Masekela Language*, however, does not portray the vivacity of a culture or the thriving survival of a people. Instead, it showcases the darker side of oppression. *Masekela Language* depicts the oppressed status of black people both in South Africa and America in a way which leaves them tired, languid, full of tension, and a misplaced urgency since they cannot move against the social systems beyond their enclosed bar area. Even when the men and women dance together, it is with a heaviness and

¹⁹² Thomas F. DeFrantz, *Dancing Revelations: Alvin Aileys Embodiment of African American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 120.

¹⁹³ Constance Stamatiou, "Masakela," YouTube, October 16, 2015, video, 4:44, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxsWWYBxKE0>.

¹⁹⁴ Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, "Masakela Language," YouTube, March 9, 2009, video, 1:25, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZuK6ziaO0co>.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

constant underlying aggression that simply does not match the carefree and passionate atmosphere of *Blues Suite*. Though *Masekela Language* was a piece created with a more jarring intent than most of Ailey's other works, and had startling connections to racism and its uglier side in the real world (something Ailey did not try to hide in his explanations), the American government allowed it to be showed overseas. Most likely because the imagery was strikingly foreign even if it was still, in a very distant way, criticism of racist violence in Chicago. In a way, *Masekela Language* was a more critical but real interpretation of the American national identity. One that people would perhaps be more comfortable ignoring, but one that existed nonetheless. A reason why, perhaps, Ailey made the scenery in the piece appear more foreign than American despite its obvious American parallels as intended.

The single biggest success for Alvin Ailey was his creation, *Revelations*, which premiered in 1960.¹⁹⁶ Originally, the piece was an hour and a half long. Ailey trimmed it down to half an hour before taking it to a performance at Jacob's Pillow in Massachusetts.¹⁹⁷ This, along with *Blues Suite*, were two of the biggest choreographic choices for the U.S. State Department to insist on having included on all programs that Ailey performed while abroad.¹⁹⁸ For the American government, as well as Ailey himself, *Revelations* was a vivid picture of African American culture and experience. Ailey choreographed *Revelations* with several things in mind: wanting to depict black culture as accurately as he could, showcasing the memories he had as a young man growing up in rough Texas, and creating a piece that included the rich culture of the

¹⁹⁶ Thomas F. DeFrantz, *Dancing Revelations: Alvin Aileys Embodiment of African American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3.

¹⁹⁷ Alvin Ailey, *Revelations: The Autobiography of Alvin Ailey*, ed. A. Peter. Bailey. (Bridgewater, NJ: Replica Books, 1999), 99.

¹⁹⁸ This is based on numerous press materials and tour arrangements as requested by the State Department. Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation Collection. Library of Congress, Music Division, Washington D.C.

black American in the national identity.¹⁹⁹ Spiritual music and faith were two aspects of this portrayal of black Southern culture that Ailey focused on. The church, as Ailey recalled, was dominant in a black person's life especially in the South. The faith exhibited within church walls defined a sort of strength that Ailey saw existing amongst his neighbors and friends. This faith and strength reached back to times of slavery, when slaves sang during their work and carried over to blacks of the day who were by law free but still suffering injustices.²⁰⁰

Revelations is made up of three sections. The first, "Pilgrim of Sorrow," depicts the black man during slavery. The lowest point for the history of blacks, this section shows struggle and burden but still manages to depict hope and faith.²⁰¹ This, Ailey writes about in his autobiography, was a way to historicize the experience and tie it to the main theme of faith that became so prominent in black culture later on during his own lifetime.²⁰² That, in some ways, these traditions and beliefs carried on. Music includes the spirituals, *I Been 'Buked, Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel*, and *Fix Me, Jesus*.²⁰³ Ailey stated that, "The songs... They reflect my own feelings about being pressed into the ground of Texas."²⁰⁴ The dancers stay relatively low to the ground in this section, reflecting on their positions and where they move. However, they often come together as a group and completely in sync, they raise their arms to the sky as though

¹⁹⁹ Alvin Ailey, *Revelations: The Autobiography of Alvin Ailey*, ed. A. Peter. Bailey. (Bridgewater, NJ: Replica Books, 1999), 101.

²⁰⁰ Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, *Celebrating Revelations at 50 Film*, directed by Judy Kinberg (2011; New York: Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, 2011), Vimeo. Accessed August 19, 2019. <https://vimeo.com/17307366>

²⁰¹ *Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre: Chroma - Grace - Takademe - Revelations*, directed by Matthew Diamond, performed by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre (2016; C Major, 2016), DVD.

²⁰² Alvin Ailey, *Revelations: The Autobiography of Alvin Ailey*, ed. A. Peter. Bailey. (Bridgewater, NJ: Replica Books, 1999), 98.

²⁰³ Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre. "Revelations," Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater Repertory, Accessed August 19, 2019, <https://www.alvinailey.org/performances/repertory/revelations>.

²⁰⁴ Alvin Ailey, *Revelations: The Autobiography of Alvin Ailey*, ed. A. Peter. Bailey. (Bridgewater, NJ: Replica Books, 1999), 101.

reaching for something they cannot touch. They wear simple clothes of deep shades of brown or tan reminiscent of earthy tones and dirt. The women wear floor-length dresses and the men wear pants and shirts that are more holes than shirt. The lighting is dark and dim, adding to the ambiance of sorrow and struggle.²⁰⁵

The second section, “Take Me to the Water”, focuses on one of Ailey’s most vivid images of his childhood.²⁰⁶ This section reflects the image of a baptismal processional held by a lake.²⁰⁷ It is a dance of purification and joy, evident in the event that is religious in practice and led by a great faith that has not wavered since the darker times of slavery. The dancers in this section all wear white to signify the purification of baptism, and are dressed in nice dresses and trousers. One woman wields a parasol throughout the piece, adding to the feeling of progress of the status of a once enslaved peoples. No longer are the dancers wearing simple plain clothes in a dreary atmosphere. Now, they are wearing nice garments in a more modern-era fashion moving about a much more joyous atmosphere with more vigor and enthusiasm though they still showcase moments of deep struggle. Again, spirituals and gospel are the musical focus here and include the songs: *Processional/Honor, Honor, Wade in the Water*, and *I Wanna Be Ready*.²⁰⁸

“Move Members Move”, is the third and final part of the choreography. Gospels such as *Sinner Man, The Day is Past and Gone, You May Run On*, and *Rocka My Soul* lead the dancers to envelop the audience in the most celebratory and uplifting atmosphere of the piece yet. This section depicts the formal church setting, where female dancers sit on stools in a hot and humid

²⁰⁵ *Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre: Chroma - Grace - Takademe - Revelations*, directed by Matthew Diamond, performed by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre (2016; C Major, 2016), DVD.

²⁰⁶ *Rocka My Soul, 1967*, directed by U.S. Information Agency, performed by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre (1967; Washington D.C.: National Archives), DVD.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre. “Revelations,” Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater Repertory, Accessed August 19, 2019, <https://www.alvinailey.org/performances/repertory/revelations>.

building as the mass begins. They wave fans to cool themselves and the men begin to dance enthusiastically, caught up in the gospel and their delighted expressions of devotion. Eventually the women join the men, rising to their feet and dancing enthusiastically. Again, there is a sense of progress as we see the dancers dressed in their Sunday best, the ladies all sporting magnificent hats and the men done up in tidy suits. They no longer dance close to the ground and instead dance upright with a lightness that is contagious. The clothing are all bright tones of yellow mixed with black, and match facial expressions that go from indifferent to smiling.²⁰⁹

Choreographic works such as *Revelations*, *Blues Suite*, and *Masekela Language* were prime choreographic works that focused on celebrating and revisiting the history and culture of a people while contributing to the national identity of what it mean to be American and live in America. This ultimately not only served Ailey and his company, but the United States government during the tensions of the Cold War era across the globe in countries that were thought to be at risk of falling to Soviet influence. The success of Ailey's international tours sponsored by the U.S. State Department were always deemed successful and beyond being simply 'well received'.²¹⁰ Ailey himself recognized that the spirit of pieces like *Revelations* did well abroad because the music was so similar to many cultures who use rhythm and clapping in their own folk songs.²¹¹ Of course, it is more complicated than just depicting a unified stance on race and what it means to different groups. To Ailey, his race and cultural heritage were something to be celebrated as well as remembered while still affirming his "Americanness". To the government, it was in their best interest to enfold Ailey as an American company of

²⁰⁹ *Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre: Chroma - Grace - Takademe - Revelations*, directed by Matthew Diamond, performed by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre (2016; C Major, 2016), DVD.

²¹⁰ cite box 132 folder 5 & 128 folder 6 & box 128 folder 5

²¹¹ Alvin Ailey, *Revelations: The Autobiography of Alvin Ailey*, ed. A. Peter. Bailey. (Bridgewater, NJ: Replica Books, 1999), 100-101.

American talent that had a long past history of struggle and survival that was overcome and now only existed as a part of American memory when in fact, African Americans were still undergoing struggle and inequality. Being presented so simply to audiences abroad sparked Ailey's personal attempts to speak about the quality of life for African Americans in America in opposition to what the government was attempting to showcase in printed materials that accompanied his performances and tours.²¹² His vocal attempts in conversation and interviews were eventually toned down as it is suspected the government had words with Ailey about the way he responded to questions.²¹³

Regardless, it is evident that Alvin Ailey was a man choreographing his version of "Americanness" into the dance scene and wanted to expand the national identity to become a more visually diverse place. Graham may have acknowledged diversity, and celebrated it in her constructions, but she focused more on ideas of the American West, freedom, and democracy. For Ailey, as a man of color, born during a time when men and women like him were treated unfairly, his experiences gave him a subject matter to work into a political vehicle that had previously been reserved for Caucasian dancers in metropolitan areas. Dance was this vehicle, and it carried the legacy and subtle politics of African Americanness through audiences that would not have otherwise seen such imagery or stories all the way to the United States government. There, it was picked up and shelved with the likes of choreographers like Martha Graham under a banner of "American dance" that could be used in soft power politics that showcased the spectrum that was the American national identity, across the globe.

²¹² Clare Croft, *Dancers as Diplomats: American Choreography in Cultural Exchange* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 95.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 95.

CHAPTER 5

GEORGE BALANCHINE

Modern dance was, and remains, a representative art form of the United States of America. Its beginnings were put together in America, and it grew for decades amongst socially conscious individuals in major dance hubs such as New York City. Modern dance became a vehicle for messages, propaganda, the desire to illicit change, and a determination to showcase varying visions of America as experienced by Americans in effect creating a national identity. Even the United States government recognized that the Modern dance genre was one wholly birthed by American aesthetics and people.²¹⁴ No other country during this time period had any claim to Modern dance. No other country had a Modern dance movement nor produced any semblance of similarity to Modern choreographers. It was a dance form that was uniquely American, without recreating exact replications of ethnic ties to other countries. When presented to audiences abroad, it was a new kind of entertainment. It was received with confusion at times, but it was usually received with great enthusiasm. For American audiences, Modern was equally as new and confusing. Even dance trained audiences and critics at times had difficulty digesting the visuals because many came from backgrounds that considered only elite forms such as Ballet to be true dance. Still, it was an American art form developed from people who were born to the land with vastly different yet similar experiences as an American working-class people and showcased their own ideas and beliefs in politics and life as an American.

²¹⁴ ANTA Panel minutes continually reference Modern as a purely “American” art form that other countries would be both curious to see and confused to understand upon first exposures.

Though Modern became the quintessential example of America's contribution to dance heritage as well as a medium in which social messages could be relayed, Ballet evolved significantly to become Americanized and part of a new and growing form of older and more rigidly classist traditions. Ballet, whose popularity and technical mastery was raised by the Russians to unapproachable heights, had its beginnings as early as the 16th Century. This chapter will turn our focus to Ballet, and in particular the choreographer George Balanchine. Balanchine played an important role in the Americanization of Ballet, and then utilized his new Ballet style to celebrate American national identity through patriotism in his Ballets. To understand the effect that Balanchine had on an almost singularly Russian art form, it is imperative to first turn our attention to a brief history of Ballet itself. Doing so provides better insight into how Balanchine's influence drastically modified this genre of dance and situated it as an American one. Then, looking to Balanchine's life to understand his transitional undertaking of both dance and the national identity, and the United States governments' hand in reaffirming the American identity Balanchine was creating. Lastly, analyzation of the choreography itself for themes of American identity will provide the final approach to understanding Balanchine's intent to create American imagery and how it manifested on a physical stage.

Ballet Through the Ages: From Courtly Pastime to Cold War

The earliest stylings of Ballet took shape within the court dances of Italy, and then were introduced to France with the help of Catherine de Medici when she married Henry II.²¹⁵ In France, Ballet bloomed as an aristocratic form of entertainment of which King Louis XIV

²¹⁵ "A Brief History of Ballet," Atlanta Ballet, Accessed August 20, 2019, <https://www.atlantaballet.com/resources/brief-history-of-ballet>.

eventually would become exceedingly fond of.²¹⁶ It was performed by his court, and on occasion Louis XIV himself would dance the leading roles, such as Apollo the Sun God.²¹⁷ A role that ultimately pressed his image as the “Sun King” into the public mind.²¹⁸ From France during the reign of Louis XIV, Ballet began to evolve and spread into the form most audiences are familiar with today. Romantic ballet rose to be the primary form of ballet practiced and performed, and the pointe shoe was at the center of it all. Widely credited to being first introduced to stages by ballerina Marie Taglioni in a production of “La Sylphide” in order to appear more ethereal and other-worldly, the pointe shoe became a staple of ballet productions.²¹⁹ Choreography went from focusing on grounded court steps to more technical and airy suspended steps in order to appear ethereal. Increasingly, ballet became more feminine and dictated the use of female bodies by male choreographers and musicians. As ballet became more widely practiced, various schools of technique developed. Some examples include the French, Italian, and Russian schools.

Russia adopted ballet as its national art form, ultimately codifying the technique and drilling precision into its dancers to the point where Russian ballet was considered a world-class act. Audiences admired the Russian ballet for their ornate sets, unparalleled ballerinas, and classic stories such as *The Nutcracker*, and *Swan Lake*. These and most of all well-known classic productions of the ballet world originated from a French-born ballet master named Marius Petipa who signed on to work in a Russian dance school. Petipa worked as the First Ballet Master of the St. Petersburg Imperial Theatres for most of his adult life.²²⁰ The choreographies that he created

²¹⁶ “The Origins of Ballet,” Victoria and Albert Museum, Accessed August 20, 2019, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/o/origins-of-ballet/>.

²¹⁷ Georgia Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure: Louis XIV and the Politics of Spectacle* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014) 1-10, 36.

²¹⁸ Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005) 2-5.

²¹⁹ Brown University, “13 Things: History of the Pointe Shoe,” History of the Pointe Shoe. Accessed August 20, 2019, https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Joukowsky_Institute/courses/13things/7615.html.

²²⁰ American Ballet Theatre, “Marius Petipa,” Repertory Archive, Accessed August 20, 2019, <https://www.abt.org/people/marius-petipa/>.

for the Imperial Ballet in Russia were ones that would have lasting influence on the world of ballet and are still prominent today. His techniques helped build up the Russian school of ballet to its eventual worldwide fame, and had a large impact on 20th century ballet. With the level of respect that the Russian ballet commanded from not only within Russia, but internationally, it is unsurprising that it was utilized in matters of politics and diplomacy. When the Soviets took control, they looked to the ballet legacy that had been established to push forward with reorganizing political agendas and reeducating the masses. The two premier ballet companies, the Mariinsky and the Bolshoi, struggled to retain their classical hegemony and traditions whilst being pressured into bending to Soviet uniformity.²²¹ Once synonymous with the Tsars, the Ballet was under increasing pressure to embrace the Soviet agenda.

By the time the Cold War had come about, the Soviet Union was consistently sending its grand ballet companies out into countries as cultural diplomacy. The aim was to extend their soft power influences upon people and governments who were unstable and had a possibility of leaning in with Communist ideals, therefore siding with Soviet leadership. According to ANTA panel minutes throughout the years, panelists were often commenting on the consistency and large amount of financial support these ballet companies were given by Soviet government in order to ensure successful performances abroad.²²² Nothing but the best was used for productions and the Soviet Ballets were always well received, as was noted throughout the years in ANTA panel minutes when discussing how to afford similar expenditures for the United States' own top-notch Ballet companies of large scale size.²²³ When brought up, it was usually followed by a

²²¹ Christina Ezrahi, *Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia* (Alton: Dance Books, 2012) 1-9.

²²² ANTA Dance Panel minutes, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Collection, Collection 468, Box 101, folder 15, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Fayetteville.

²²³ ANTA Dance Panel minutes, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Collection, Collection 468, Box 101, folder 15, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Fayetteville.

discussion of necessity. The panel felt that it was of utmost importance to counteract Soviet success as achieved by their exquisite ballet companies by sending American ballet companies of equal stature to the same locations not long after the Soviets had departed.²²⁴

While the United States government and ANTA were ensuring that the world saw pure American innovation and creativity through its unique genre, Modern dance, these government entities were also attempting to showcase America's ability to produce quality classical dance that was more familiar to the rest of the world through Ballet. In this way they were assuring the world that America could embrace the new while retaining ties to classical forms. It was important for the State Department and ANTA to send equal amounts of modern performances as they did Ballet to any given place.²²⁵ At the time of the Cold War, there were only three major ballet companies that the State Department and ANTA saw fit enough for export: the San Francisco Ballet, the American Ballet Theatre, and the New York City Ballet. Only two of these three companies were large-scale companies, however, on an almost equal par with Russia's Mariinsky and Bolshoi. The San Francisco Ballet was a smaller company with a growing reputation that was no match for the bigger companies in terms of opulence and grandiose presence. But, it was masterful enough in technique and production that it was deemed suitable for countries whose stages could not house anything too large.

Of these two larger ballet companies, the New York City Ballet and the American Ballet Theatre, we will be focusing on the former. More specifically so because the New York City Ballet was headed by a man who developed what has become widely known as the American style of ballet and was considered a major asset for American cultural diplomacy by the State

²²⁴ ANTA Dance Panel minutes, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Collection, Collection 468, Box 101, folder 15, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Fayetteville.

²²⁵ ANTA Dance Panel minutes, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Collection, Collection 468, Box 101, folder 15, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Fayetteville.

Department. George Balanchine co-founded the New York City Ballet alongside Lincoln Kirsten in 1948, but was one of the first choreographers for the company and established the School of American Ballet.²²⁶ The school was established before the company, in 1934, as Balanchine believed that dancers should be learning strict adherence to classical techniques that would then enable them to be fluid and strong dancers when transitioning into a company as professional dancers.²²⁷

Balanchine: Ballet Master, Immigrant, American Cultural Ambassador

Balanchine, unlike any of the choreographers explored in previous chapters, was a Georgian-Russian immigrant who fled the country as Soviets pushed for dominance over the country and Vladimir Lenin rose to power. With luck, his departure coincided with ample opportunities as a dancer in Germany, London, and Paris.²²⁸ Opportunity continued to present itself to Balanchine with Lincoln Kirstein's suggestion that he teach Ballet in the United States and open a professional company.²²⁹ The School of American Ballet and the New York City Ballet were the eventual result of Balanchine's move to America. In 1939, Balanchine officially was granted his United States citizenship.²³⁰ It is interesting to examine this case because Balanchine, a Georgian-born man, became one of the United States' examples of American exceptionalism through his art and his background. Even though he had ties to a foreign country by birth, one that unsettled the United States, he was repackaged entirely as a full-fledged

²²⁶ George Balanchine Interview, New School of Research, (NYCPL Archives, Jerome Robbins Dance Division) (MGZTL 4-367 No.1).

²²⁷ New York City Ballet, "Our History," NYCB History, Accessed August 20, 2019, <https://www.nycballet.com/Discover/Our-History.aspx>.

²²⁸ The George Balanchine Trust, "George Balanchine 1904-1983," About, Accessed August 20, 2019, <http://balanchine.com/george-balanchine/>.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

American creating a new ballet legacy that was a uniquely American attachment of the national identity and patriotism. When Balanchine spoke out about his life in Russia, did so to vocalize his distaste for the country and the harshness of life there. During an interview at the New School of Social Research in New York City, Balanchine spoke in-depth about his life growing up in Russia. He spoke about the terribleness of the Russian Revolution, hearing Vladimir Lenin speak to the public, and the poor state that one had to endure in order to live in the country.²³¹ He pointed out that Russians only survived off of things like bread and tea, while Americans drank coffee and exotic fruit like Grapefruit in an attempt to showcase how different daily life was for the two countries in something as simple as daily diet.²³²

Similarly, Balanchine did not hold back in vocalizing his contempt for Lenin and his Communist party. His Anti-Lenin stance affected his dealings with the State Department and ANTA when they approached him multiple times to consider touring to the Soviet Union with his company. Stubbornly, he refused the tour on Soviet land multiple times on grounds that he felt unsafe and would be detained upon arrival.²³³ Though he refused, the ANTA panel kept up their requests for an appearance in the Soviet Union because they were convinced his appearance with the company would be a monumentally victorious message to send abroad.²³⁴ Sending a Russian-born Ballet master who now openly spoke out against Lenin, was an American by choice, and a model of American values was too great a possibility to pass up. To add to the

²³¹ George Balanchine Interview, New School of Research, (NYCPL Archives, Jerome Robbins Dance Division) (MGZTL 4-367 No.1).

²³² Interview with George Balanchine, Washington National Public Radio, (NYCPL archives, Jerome Robbins Dance Division).

²³³ ANTA Dance Panel minutes, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Collection, Collection 468, Box 101, folder 15, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Fayetteville.

²³⁴ ANTA Dance Panel minutes, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Collection, Collection 468, Box 101, folder 15, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Fayetteville.

positives of such an appearance, Balanchine was considered amongst the best in the Ballet world and he was part of America's growing artistic legacy, not the Soviet Union.

Eventually, with great reluctance, Balanchine was convinced to take on an eight-week tour of the Soviet Union in 1962.²³⁵ Officials were pressed to grant Balanchine diplomatic immunity.²³⁶ In doing so, Balanchine and the NYCB became the first American company to appear at the famed Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg.²³⁷ Balanchine's reluctance to return to the country he had left behind was evident to his dancers, as noted by Arthur Mitchell, a former New York City Ballet principal dancer who was with the company on their tour to the Soviet Union.²³⁸ As far as location goes, this was incredible news as the Mariinsky Theatre was reserved for only the world's best ballet companies such as Russia's own Mariinsky and Bolshoi. All in all, a USIA officer reported that the tour of the Soviet Union proved to be a large success.²³⁹ Russian audiences took the NYCB mostly with enthusiasm as evidenced by their rushes of applause and sold-out performances. However, as noted by Lincoln Kirsten, the Russian press often downplayed the success of the NYCB, probably in order to maintain some form of control over the influence Americans might have in a realm where Soviets believed they had the upper hand.²⁴⁰ Balanchine himself recognized the enthusiasm for the performances his company put on by Russian audiences, and felt it had a lot to do with how sparingly Russians were allowed to see what was developing beyond their borders or think beyond what the

²³⁵ The George Balanchine Trust, "George Balanchine 1904-1983," About, Accessed August 20, 2019, <http://balanchine.com/george-balanchine/>.

²³⁶ Rachel Marcy, "Dancers and Diplomats," *The Appendix*, September 9, 2014, <http://theappendix.net/issues/2014/7/dancers-and-diplomats-new-york-city-ballet-in-moscow-october-1962>.

²³⁷ Naima Prevots, *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy & the Cold War* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 81.

²³⁸ Nancy Reynolds, "When Balanchine Went Home," *Dance Magazine*, Aug. 1, 2012, https://www.dancemagazine.com/when_balanchine_went_home-2306896549.html.

²³⁹ Clare Croft, *Dancers as Diplomats: American Choreography in Cultural Exchange* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 64.

²⁴⁰ Lincoln Kirstein, *Thirty Years: The New York City Ballet* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1978), 175.

government indicated was okay.²⁴¹ To see Ballet that was quick-paced, held no classical ties to the revered Petipa Ballets, and challenged all that Russian Ballet tended to focus on technique-wise, it was shocking for Russian audiences but they enjoyed it as much as their own Ballets.²⁴² The tour did not come without its problems, however. Balanchine begrudgingly stated in an interview how the Soviets had an official approach him in order to demand that he change the lineup of his program with the reason being that the government would not like certain pieces. Balanchine refused changing anything, though he was “scared to death” and worried that he might be dragged away afterwards by the authorities for detainment.²⁴³ Pieces such as *Prodigal Son* were deemed as unworthy of the stage by Soviet officials, as it was about a biblical story, but it remained on the program list by Balanchine’s staunch refusal to obey.²⁴⁴

Navigating identity and patriotism were some of Balanchine’s biggest tasks on events such as the 1962 Soviet tour. Balanchine always claimed his American identity, through dance and loyalty to the country that he had settled in. However, in occasions when ethnic ties were heavily drawing onto his identity, he settled to claim his Georgian identity before any association with Russia or Soviets could present itself.²⁴⁵ Being Georgian was not the same as being Russian, as Georgians were generally unhappy to be included in Soviet reaches of control. In this way he admitted to being a Georgian-born man and harbored an affection for Georgian ways of life such as dancing, but he also distanced himself from Russia while assuring the people he came across that he was happily integrated into the welcoming culture of American freedom and

²⁴¹ New York Public Radio, “George Balanchine Part II,” The NYPR Archives, New York Public Radio, Accessed August 20, 2019, <https://www.wnyc.org/story/george-balanchine-part-ii/>.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Interview with George Balanchine, Washington DC National Public Radio (NYPL Archives, Jerome Robbins Dance Division)

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Bernard Taper, *Balanchine: A Biography* (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 1996), 278.

democracy. In this way, Balanchine balanced American identity with that of his birth country in a way that many choreographers discussed previously did not have to attempt because they were unarguably American by birth.

Putting “Americanness” into Ballet and Choreographing American Ballets

Aside from his personal attempts to manage identity and strengthen the bond his name shared with the American national identity, Balanchine also became fond of adapting American kitsch culture into his choreography. This fondness of staunchly American imagery led to incredibly patriotic ballets that were unable to be called anything other than American. *Stars and Stripes*, *Western Symphony*, and *Square Dance* were amongst some of his more well-known creations that focused on American patriotism. Former dancers with the New York City Ballet who worked under Balanchine recalled that “He loved the American spirit.”²⁴⁶ It reflected grandly in his everyday life, including his daily attire.²⁴⁷ Dancers recalled Balanchine often wearing western-cut suits with cowboy shirts and bolo-style ties.²⁴⁸ For Balanchine, telling a story through the dance was not important.²⁴⁹ Many of his creations did not center on depicting a story and instead took on abstract roles that were meant to pull a certain emotion out of the audience. This was true of his American works as well.

²⁴⁶ Peter Tonguette, “George Balanchine and the United States,” National Endowment for the Humanities, January/February, 2016, Accessed August 20, 2019, <https://www.neh.gov/humanities/2016/januaryfebruary/feature/george-balanchine-and-the-united-states-artist-in-love-his-adopted-country>.

²⁴⁷ New York Public Radio, “George Balanchine Part II,” The NYPR Archives, New York Public Radio, Accessed August 20, 2019, <https://www.wnyc.org/story/george-balanchine-part-ii/>.

²⁴⁸ Peter Tonguette, “George Balanchine and the United States,” National Endowment for the Humanities, January/February, 2016, Accessed August 20, 2019, <https://www.neh.gov/humanities/2016/januaryfebruary/feature/george-balanchine-and-the-united-states-artist-in-love-his-adopted-country>.

²⁴⁹ As is seen in a majority of his original choreographed Ballets, in opposition to those that he choreographed as a matter of repertoire necessity such as the classic *Nutcracker* or *Swan Lake*. Original Ballets such as *Agon* and *Jewels* had no narrative.

Stars and Stripes, for example, was undeniably a Ballet meant to celebrate America. It featured both female and male dancers in bright costumes that were explosions of red, white, and blue and exhibited a pageantry that strikes the audience as reminiscent of a 4th of July parade.²⁵⁰ The American flag fills the backdrop space in its entirety, while dancers prance on pointe across the stage to patriotic-sounding tunes. The men's costumes are modified versions of old military dress uniforms or military band uniforms, and they dance with an exuberance and showiness that perhaps suggests a boastful quality of patriotism.²⁵¹ In a series of turns, *Fouettes*, the movement is melded with the gesture of a saluting hand. *Stars and Stripes* told no story, it only celebrated and put on display various images and a pride of identity associated with American patriotism in a way that was all spectacle. *Western Symphony* followed the same formula. Choreographed in 1954 and set to traditional American tunes by Hershey Kay that at times sound like what would be heard at a rodeo, this piece was fundamentally a ballet about America's Western frontier as part of the national identity.²⁵² There was no detailed narrative, only visions of men dressed as cowboys and women rustling their saloon-girl skirts in front of a detailed backdrop that brought stereotypical wild west imagery to life.²⁵³ Balanchine further called upon the American West by integrating classical Ballet techniques with aspects of American folk dance. In 1957 Balanchine debuted *Square Dance*, a ballet that focused on celebrating the American culture of square dancing.²⁵⁴ Unlike with *Stars and Stripes* or *Western Symphony*, *Square Dance* was not an

²⁵⁰ John Clifford, "Stars and Stripes (Berlin 1973)," YouTube, September 3, 2016, video, 27:57, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTZ-kgiA_WM.

²⁵¹ Nycballet, "NYC Ballet's Andrew Veyette on George Balanchine's STARS AND STRIPES," YouTube, August 5, 2018, video, 3:19, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRniHdoypsY>.

²⁵² "Western Symphony," The Repertory, New York City Ballet, Accessed August 20, 2019, <https://www.nycballet.com/ballets/w/western-symphony.aspx>.

²⁵³ Violet, "Western Symphony Miami City Ballet," YouTube, October 15, 2018, video, 27:30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AmT4v4rDwHc>.

²⁵⁴ "Square Dance," Ballets, The George Balanchine Trust, Accessed Aug 21, 2019, <http://balanchine.com/square-dance/>.

explosion of American imagery. Rather, this piece was meant to be a combination of Ballet and its classic forms with the square dance traditions of the American people. This was evident in the intricate square dance formations throughout the ballet, and the addition of square dance steps on an almost equal level as all Ballet steps.²⁵⁵ In the original choreography that was performed in 1957, the Ballet included a square dance caller who called out the steps onstage to be performed in similar fashion to a real square dance event.²⁵⁶ Other than the obvious homage to square dance through dance steps and formation, there is no supporting imagery that would denote an American theme. The backdrop was kept blank, simple white tinted with the lighting used onstage, and the dancers' costumes were variations on what look like simple dance wear that one uses during rehearsal time: tights, leotards, and for the women sheer short transparent training skirts.²⁵⁷ The music is starkly un-American in that it is set to Vivaldi. For Balanchine, this was a Ballet that celebrated the adventurous nature of Americans and their spirit.²⁵⁸

Simple ballets such as these, that celebrated images widely associated with American patriotism, were useful to government officials who wanted to export a more Americanized ballet across the sea to other countries. Even *Square Dance*, with its subtle set design and costumes celebrated American culture. However, arguably the most important component of Balanchine's work was his modification of the ballet technique itself so that it became a new style unique to America and his dance company, the New York City Ballet. In general, it was useful in showcasing America's growing base of artistic talent modifying and bettering techniques that had become classic. Innovation was a quality that Americans tended to claim to

²⁵⁵ Navarre Brixen, "Square Dance 1/2 - Balanchine - Delgado, Cerdeiro," YouTube, May 26, 2017, video, 11:04, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZztXWk_Unyg.

²⁵⁶ "Square Dance," The Repertory, New York City Ballet, Accessed August 21, 2019, <https://www.nycballet.com/ballets/s/square-dance.aspx>.

²⁵⁷ The Kennedy Center, "New York City Ballet's 'Square Dance'," YouTube, May 23, 2017, video, 0:35, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2cvgy2545Ag>.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

have, and this innovative reshaping of a classical form could elevate that. Balanchine himself had rigorous training under the Russian school of ballet via the Imperial Ballet Theatre, but upon his immigration to the United States, began to develop a new style that fundamentally changed the way his ballets looked.²⁵⁹ With this new style, Balanchine's American ballets no longer looked the same as Russian ones.²⁶⁰ There are many differences between the two schools of ballet, of which these are a few examples: The Russian school tends to focus on a delicacy and moderato tempo of steps whereas the Balanchine American style encourages a more bold athletic approach with much faster tempos in which dancers must be quick with their feet and fly through variations with little to no time between to prepare for the next set. For Balanchine, focus should be placed on lines of the body and an abstract composition of the arms and legs, whereas Russian techniques tend to hide the lines of the body and retain more classic positions of the arms (in first, second, third, fourth, and fifth positions). For transitional steps that led into, for example, a plié (a movement where one bends the knees with the upper body remaining upright and straightened) there was usually always an attempt to cover it up so that it appeared as fluid as the plié. In Russian technique, transitional steps are usually more notable when dancers go from one movement to another.²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ The George Balanchine Trust, "George Balanchine 1904-1983," About, Accessed August 20, 2019, <http://balanchine.com/george-balanchine/>.

²⁶⁰ The knowledge of technique comes from my personal experience with Ballet as a dancer with years of dance training in Ballet. However, most of the forms of technique discussed from here on out can be read about in the following book for a more thorough understanding of Balanchine technique: Suki Schorer, Lee Russell, and Carol Rosegg, *Suki Schorer on Balanchine Technique*, (Florida: University of Florida Press, 2006). For information on the Vaganova Technique, that which the Russian schools tend to favor, one can find some basic information at the Dance Spirit website: Dance Spirit, "Mastering the Vaganova Technique," Dance Spirit, Accessed August 20, 2019, <https://www.dancespirit.com/mastering-the-vaganova-technique-2326050346.html>.

²⁶¹ Dance Spirit, "Dancing Balanchine," Dance Spirit, September 1, 2013, <https://www.dancespirit.com/dancing-balanchine-2326223886.html>.

So in general, Balanchine's form of ballet was faster, bolder, and more intricate than the classical Russian school. It also set aside the Russian penchant for plot and narrative, preferring to utilize abstract imagery that was devoid of storytelling.²⁶² As far as costuming goes, Balanchine also preferred to utilize the shorter and stiffer tutus, or "pancake" tutus, rather than the long flowing romantic tutus that were popular in Russian ballets. The reason being shorter tutus gave the audience a better view of the dancers' lines when they danced and the intricate footwork they did on pointe.²⁶³ Balanchine's dancers were also considered more athletic in build compared to Russian ballerinas, most likely due to the more rigorous nature of his choreography style.

It is clear that while not part of the Modern dance movement, George Balanchine did contribute in a unique way to the development and usage of dance as a political vehicle for showcasing American culture and patriotism. Not only did he embolden the United States by developing a new style of Ballet that stood staunchly in opposition to that taught by the Russian school, but he celebrated symbols of American pride in his ballets. This comes with the unique position that Balanchine had as a Russian émigré during a time of unrest between the United States and the Soviet Union. Undoubtedly this unique position amongst the modern choreographers examined in this thesis lets us examine how the United States government approached the possibility of an immigrant representing their country to the country he left behind, and to their insistence that Balanchine was a paradigm of American possibility to the world at large and included yet another facet to the American national identity.

²⁶² New York City Ballet, "George Balanchine," NYCB History, Accessed August 20, 2019, <https://www.nycballet.com/Explore/Our-History/George-Balanchine.aspx>.

²⁶³ George Balanchine Interview, New School of Research, (NYCPL Archives, Jerome Robbins Dance Division) (MGZTL 4-367 No.1).

Conclusion

Between 1935-1965, American dances were visibly affected by the personal influences of those who staged them. Rather than approaching dance as recreational or passive, choreographers made it active and relatable to audiences—thus drawing the nation together. With their own individual experiences as Americans, twentieth-century American choreographers constructed a national identity that varied distinctly in method and tone but with an overall consistent message—patriotic celebrations of democracy, diversity, and America’s future prospects. Geographic region did not place a limit on the construction of these identities, but instead gave each choreographer a version of the American experience from which to draw upon.

Ailey, as a Texan, experienced the harshness of Southern life for African Americans and Mexicans. His move to California brought up questions of possibility and new hope as it did for many others making similar migrations to the region. These experiences came through in his choreography because he wanted them to. His experience was an “American” one that many could relate to, especially those belonging to minority groups. Graham, as a Pennsylvanian, grew up amongst Protestant families until her family relocated to distant California in hopes of better prospects in America’s newfound Western frontier. She saw the early railroads, felt the glimmer of hope that surrounded her in the crowds of other moving families, and found diversity a strong part of the American narrative when getting acquainted with new neighbors in her California home. These experiences colored Graham’s interpretation of national identity visible in much of her early work—namely, her hopes for showcasing America as a distinct land of endless possibility and freedoms afforded to all people. Balanchine, as a Georgian-Russian immigrant,

became an American citizen after much experience both abroad and in the United States. He lived to see Vladimir Lenin speak to crowds in Russia and the Soviet party gain power before eventually fleeing the country. In America, he was thrilled by the nation's freedoms, democracy, and very culture. Balanchine became openly verbal with his enthusiasm for American life and his distaste for anything Russian aside from the Ballet technique he excelled in. Celebratory ballets choreographed for the patriotic imagery he had come to know in America became a staple of his repertoire. This was starkly evident staged retellings of the American West, one of America's claims of identity and heritage. Balanchine's version of the American national identity was based on his individual experience as a man who had made their home in America like many others.

As much as Ailey, Graham, and Balanchine were instrumental in the development of the national identity represented in dance domestically, they also showcased that shared American identity abroad during the Cold War. Directed by the United States government through sponsorship for tours in countries considered a high-risk of falling to Communist regimes, these choreographers had a political undertaking to fulfill as ambassadors of cultural diplomacy where sharing the image of "Americanness" was the primary goal. Similarly, being chosen by the United States State Department for sponsorship on tours abroad gave choreographers prestige and a solid backing that could be used to prove just how "American" their work was. However, before choreographers were sent away on official State Department business, Depression-era artists such as Tamiris, Segal, and Sokolow were moving dance towards activism and the first iterations of a national identity that could be shared between all Americans. Their concerns were mostly political, and they strove to induce change all while presenting such activities as part of the American identity. Working class citizens of all ethnicities were part of that national identity,

and being part of it was a form of claiming Americanness. The personal backgrounds of Sokolow, Tamiris, and Segal shaped this identity and likewise helped countless others of similar background find the danced identity relatable. As the first true manifestation of dance as a tool for developing national identity and activism, these early three choreographers represent the important shift that gradually took place within the dance community. Blunt dances that were meant to unite Americans and urge them to political activism, turned into artistry-driven dances which claimed a level of professionalism. The latter was not common prior and were distanced from blunt messages of social reform. Rather, these dances began to focus almost solely on themes of identity and expectations of living as an American. In turn, the experiences of these choreographers resonated with audiences who shared similar understandings or backgrounds.

Approaching dance through historical analysis is not difficult. This thesis has proven the potential of examining the motives behind choreographers' work through the use of their personal papers as well as state papers left by governments that funded them. Although interpreting the individual choreographic works themselves can perhaps attest to a level of identity-making showcased to audiences that witnessed such performance first hand, the use of private and official archival sources provides a more solid understanding of the human intent involved in their creation. These sources demonstrate the extent to which choreographers between 1935-1965 worked to imbue American dance with a constructed national identity that could be shared by a whole country. Numerous other choreographers worked on building this shared identity, but it was arguably the efforts of Graham, Ailey, and Balanchine that were the most successful. Future research on lesser known choreographers may reveal other nuances to this process. For example, choreographer José Limon, a Mexican immigrant to the United States, was sponsored by the United States government on tours overseas around the same time that

Graham and Ailey were making appearances on their own respective government-sponsored tours. The personal experience of Jose Limon would make for an interesting addition to the dance studies already conducted, and perhaps in the future will be considered more closely when looking at Cold War era dance as diplomacy. For the purpose of this thesis, however, importance was given to Ailey, Graham, and Balanchine for their rich field of primary source materials and their constant ties to the national identity of America.

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