

Dancers as Diplomats:
American Choreography in Cultural Exchange
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Introduction

In 2009, the US State Department funded the construction of a theatrical stage in the country of Burma. While a special floor suitable for dancing in bare feet and theatrical lighting equipment might seem odd American foreign-policy budget line items, both expenditures made a lot of sense in a country where slow economic development and decades of military dictatorship rule meant that few people had Internet access or mobile phones. Live interactions through performance promised a connection where Facebook and Google could not reach. On a day in February 2010, San Francisco's ODC/Dance Company walked onto that newly built stage at the American Center in the northern Burmese city of Mandalay. (figure I.1) Under many watchful eyes, the contemporary dance company offered some of the first steps in a new State Department initiative: the international dance touring program called DanceMotion USA.

ODC, as well as the Brooklyn-based dance companies Urban Bush Women (UBW) and Ronald K. Brown's Evidence, represented the United States abroad in DanceMotion's inaugural year. The new dance touring program demonstrated a State Department investment in live engagement that seems almost quaint in a digitally-saturated twenty-first century context. The investment in performance, however, gave the dancers hope that art, particularly dance, still counted as a public good—an idea that had catalyzed the American dance boom of the 1960s and 1970s, when government funding helped American dance grow exponentially. As ODC dancer Dennis Adams put it, "It was nice to know that the US government was using dance to further its diplomatic endeavors. . . . It was nice to know that dance [is] still on the radar."¹ (Adams's choice of the



Figure 1.1
Members of ODC/Dance in Rangoon, Burma, performing artistic director Brenda Way's *24 Exposures* (2001). The dancers are (left to right) Elizabeth Farotte Heenan, Jeremy Smith, Dennis Adams, Quiet Rarang, Anne Zivolich, and Daniel Santos.
Source: Photograph by U Kyi Saw.

word “still” references the precipitous drop in public arts funding in recent decades, especially in comparison to the Cold War–era funding levels.) The ODC dancers took to the Burmese stage as an example of government investment in live, embodied engagement and with the personal sense that dance mattered to the life of the nation and the world. State support and public good might be mutually constitutive possibilities.²

Although the US government invested in ODC's performances, the Burmese government, a military dictatorship resisting soon-to-come democratic reform at the time of the 2010 tour, did not. The Burmese government could not cancel the ODC performance because the American Center was technically US property. The Burmese government could, however, make it extremely difficult for people to get to the performance, and circulate misinformation about the performance's date and time so that people interested in attending would miss the event. Dancer Yayoi Kambara said that evidence of the government's misinformation campaign lay in plain sight: the local Burmese-published, English-language newspaper printed an article before ODC even arrived in Mandalay that claimed the performance had already happened.³ Obstacles continued to

proliferate as the performance dates drew near. The government called a ten-day meditation, which included the broadcasting of prayers over loudspeakers across the city. The company feared the broadcasts would have a doubly negative effect on potential audiences. People might stay home feeling they had to abide by the government edict to meditate. If people came to the performance, the chants issuing from the loudspeakers outside the compound would drown out the music.

Neither American officials nor the ODC dancers could have predicted what happened at the Mandalay performance space that night. ODC is a company known for its fresh, athletic dancing, qualities the State Department and the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM)—the State Department's private partner in the touring endeavor—highlighted in DanceMotion materials, which also note the company's “passion.”⁴ But that night it was the Burmese who demonstrated what passion for freedom in the face of government oppression looked like. The Burmese locals did not just come to the performance. They came in droves. And when the conditions onstage grew difficult for the American dancers, the Burmese audience, quite literally, kept them going.

As soon as they stepped onstage that night, the ODC dancers saw ample evidence that state edicts do not always determine people's actions, even in the most extreme circumstances. Dancer Daniel Santos recalled that he had expected a “decent-sized” crowd at the show. He understood from American officials that the Burmese people who frequented the American Center were already accustomed to pushing the limits of governmental rules by just by coming to the center in the first place, so attending the performance would just be another instance of their choosing to disregard government guidelines. But attendance far surpassed expectations.

When the members of the ODC company told me the story of what they experienced in Mandalay, they spoke with such excitement that they physically enacted parts of the story and interrupted one another to interject even more detail. Dancer Jeremy Smith remembered the scene:

All the chairs were filled, and people were standing, wrapping around the stage as well. It was a regular proscenium stage without wings on the side, but people were just standing wherever they could. There were people standing outside the complex, peeping through the fence.⁵

The Burmese government's propaganda campaign seemingly had not deterred any audience members. Other dancers saw audience members perched in trees and in the stage rafters. The State Department estimated

the crowd at about 1,400 for the one performance.⁶ Dancer Dennis Adams said he knew something transformative was happening when even the Burmese police stationed around the complex—not so much to ensure safety as to intimidate potential concertgoers—dropped their vigilant stances and turned to watch the show.

With the ever-growing audience, the program proceeded without incident until the final piece, *24 Exposures* (2001), an upbeat number choreographed by the company's artistic director Brenda Way. Electric service in Burma is erratic, and the American Center staff had warned the dancers that the center might lose electricity during the show (likely another Burmese government obstructionist tactic). If this happened, the center could keep the lights on, but the technical crew would have to scramble to bring generators online to power the sound system. The company had agreed pre-performance on a backup plan. They decided that, if necessary, they would freeze until the music returned. When the company got to *24 Exposures*, the accompanying Appalachian bluegrass music began, but then suddenly cut out. The dancers froze, as planned, but as the silence continued, they realized the music might not be coming back at all. A substantial amount of *24 Exposures* remained. How could the dancers decide as a group, while still onstage, what to do?

As the silence grew interminable, Dennis Adams heard the sound of clapping from the back of the stage. Daniel Santos had begun clapping the rhythm of the piece. (As the group recounts the story, Adams begins clapping, creating a sound that echoes forcefully in ODC's small office but that must have been just a tiny noise in an outdoor theater filled with 1,400 people.) Suddenly, inexplicably, the clapping grew louder and louder. The entire audience had joined Santos, clapping along to the beat he set. Now there was music, but it was not the piece's usual music. It was the rhythmic sound of what dancer Quilet Rarang described as "5,000 hands working together."⁷ Vanessa Thiessen danced the rest of *24 Exposures* with tears running down her face. She recalled, "It was amazing to hear all these people who d[id]n't know us, who d[id]n't know what we do, fully there and fully accepting. I seriously think that experience right there is what the program [DanceMotion] is all about."⁸ ODC had arrived as a symbol—an American group performing for foreigners. Through live performance, a collaborative space emerged, exceeding the frames of national difference that were also present at the performance.

As DanceMotion performers, ODC was an agent of American cultural diplomacy, a branch of foreign policy that, among other things, presses art and artists into government service abroad—and that national service had clear political and economic goals in Burma.⁹ ODC arrived in the

country as an extension of a US government trying to expand US-Burma diplomatic relations. Burma, like Iran, was one of the first countries targeted by the administration of new president Barack Obama in its efforts to increase communication with countries the US had previously ostracized due to their repressive regimes. American dance and dancers came to Burma as the opening salvo of the new approach.¹⁰ The American dancers' presence in Burma represented one node of international connection between the long-estranged American and Burmese governments, a mode of engagement less-charged than a partisan political visit. When ODC performed in 2010, it would still be more than a year before President Obama announced major shifts in US policy toward Burma, and three years before Obama and then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton would make a much-publicized visit to Burma.¹¹ The tour also happened amid changing economic concerns, since Burma represents a foothold in US foreign relations with China, the country increasingly appearing as the United States's counter global power in early twenty-first-century trade and politics.¹²

Considering these policy developments alongside the dancers' stories shows how the ODC appearances in Burma bolstered official national aims and exceeded those political strategies, too. The title *24 Exposures*, the piece for which the Burmese audience provided the impromptu musical accompaniment, references how photographs capture only one second within complex moments: motion, affect, and exchange always partially occur beyond what the frame holds. And the framing has as much to do with the photographer—the picture's author—as it does with the event itself. On the DanceMotion tour, ODC, as did all the dance companies featured in this book, appeared in frames crafted by the US State Department and its various public and private partners. (In 2010, the nonprofit arts presenter BAM and the arts management firm Lisa Booth Management, Inc. administrated DanceMotion.)

But these frames do not contain the full picture. Understanding ODC as "American," even on an official government-sponsored tour, addresses only one aspect of this multiply diverse, multinational company's identity and misses a number of other important identities and practices. And to see that night in Burma only as evidence of a successful campaign for the United States would miss the complicated feedback loops that make a live performance a dynamic event. In these tensions lives a fascinating possibility for cultural diplomacy, particularly as it is embodied in dance, to be simultaneously propaganda and something more than propaganda. Cultural diplomacy is full of opportunities for dancers to make their mark on ideas of "America." That is what this book is about.

EXPLODING THE STAGE

Dancers as Diplomats examines the American government's harnessing of dance to export an idealized image of "America"—an image dance artists simultaneously fulfill, reimagine, and at times, critique. This book focuses on the early decades of the Cold War and of the twenty-first century, periods when the United States sent artists, as well as art objects, abroad as part of its cultural diplomacy programs. Dance artists' performances on stages, in nightclubs, and in everyday interactions amplify the paradoxical entanglement of dominant narratives of "America" with artistic and personal reimaginings of "America." Focusing on dancers' management of their "official" status on tour understands dancing as a strategy for negotiating the complications of national identity at the levels of individual, community, and nation. Investigating dancers' experiences as cultural ambassadors exposes on-the-ground tensions and possibilities within the often idealized category of American identity—a category seen as exciting or at least approachable by some, but threatening or uninhabitable by others.

While many important distinctions exist between the Cold War and the twenty-first-century programs, one almost mundane idea animates both eras of dance-in-diplomacy: all the State Department programs described in this book moved living artists through foreign countries as representatives of the United States. American forays into cultural diplomacy began in the 1930s and 1940s and centered on visual art;¹³ the performing arts programs did not begin in earnest until the 1950s. As embassies no longer hosted only art objects (such as paintings and sculptures), presented without their makers, but instead presented dancers and musicians, the new emphasis on sending people abroad made cultural diplomacy particularly fertile ground for simultaneously functioning as propaganda and dissent. While art objects can raise questions or critiques about hegemonic national narratives, artists do so more publicly—a situation that, on one hand, government officials had to manage but, on the other, could act as proof of American democracy's promise: a government system that allowed individual dissent. As historian Penny Von Eschen has shown in her work on the State Department jazz tours, musician Louis Armstrong often blatantly spoke out from the stage, critiquing American civil-rights restrictions.¹⁴ In chapter 3, I argue that Martha Graham's provocative onstage and offstage play with gender had a similar, if less blatant, critical function. Such public performances offered evidence of American individual freedom, even as these individual artists and groups of artists pressed back on the claims made by the nation they represented.

To track the shifting and often overlapping, even contradictory, ideas within the public staging of American national identity, I traveled from New York to California and from Minnesota to Texas to interview more than seventy dancers who participated in tours sponsored by the State Department. These interviews form the backbone of this book. I turned to dancers, not just choreographers, as figures who consistently interpret and reinterpret choreography and history. This book reckons with what dance theorist Susan Foster has called "choreographing history," taking seriously "the possibility of a body that is written upon but that also writes."¹⁵ Dance is not just a repository of social ideas and contexts. Dancing produces meanings and contributes to larger cultural ideas. In the case of American diplomacy, dancers constantly reframe what it means to be "American." Taking embodiment seriously does not elevate dance, onstage or elsewhere, to the mythic status of universal communication. Instead, embodiment—in all its iterations: dances of a variety of artistic genres, as well as how people use their bodies in everyday situations—considers how people use their bodies (consciously or not) to express their desires and ideas, communicate with others, and make meaning within a specific time and place. With this frame in mind, I turn to the tours as diplomatic endeavors that unfolded, not just in spoken or written conversations, but in physical interactions between people.

Focusing on dancers as specific actors in these diplomatic dramas has important ramifications for dance history, too, because it is through the dancers' perspectives that we can see how choreography develops both over time and in time. Dancers have a particularly intimate experience of choreographic works shifting across performances, especially the repeated performances that happen over many weeks of touring. The dancers helped me chart how Wednesday's performance both replicated and differed from Tuesday's, rather than treat choreography as though it is frozen in time at a premiere date only to shift upon a major casting change. Place, as well as time, has a huge impact here, too, as sites on the tours infuse and recalibrate meanings within choreography. For instance, when the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater performed Ailey's *Revelations* (1960) for Kenyan postcolonial leader Jomo Kenyatta in 1967, the dancers talked about their sense of the work as part of the African diaspora. Three years later, when several of the same dancers performed *Revelations* in the Soviet Union on tour as the first American modern dance company to enter the USSR, they discussed the work as particularly American. Anyone familiar with *Revelations* knows (as chapter 2 discusses) the work is very much both of the United States and of the African diaspora; these

are not mutually exclusive categories, yet the dancers' stories help us see how one work takes on different inflections across time.

Dance and dancers are the heart of this book, but the book's structure centers on key policy events and shifts in dance-in-diplomacy programming. *Dancers as Diplomats* does not present an exhaustive history of all dance tours supported by the US State Department, but rather follows major shifts in American history and policy history that served as the catalysts for tour planning and execution. Chapter 1 presents the Cold War's most foundational policy frame: the US-Soviet standoff. Chapters 2 and 3 take a more global approach to the Cold War era, focusing on the American presence in Africa and Asia as the US-Soviet standoff intersected with postcolonial movements. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss what I call the "collaborative turn" in American cultural diplomacy, the hallmark of the twenty-first-century programs that focused on building international relationships rather than exporting American superiority.

The case studies selected for each chapter represent tours by full dance companies rather than the State Department programs that funded individual artist's work abroad. Traveling with companies, especially the kind of companies most often selected for the tours—those with long-standing histories that offered regular employment throughout a year, often over several years—made the dancers aware that they represented something bigger than themselves. They represented a community (the company) and a nation (the United States). The dancers often described this sense of layered identity in the interviews, saying that every day on the tour, they felt the weight and excitement of representing larger ideas. Dancer Bonnie Oda Homsey (figure I.2) recalled the preparations for the Martha Graham Dance Company's 1974 tour of Asia: "Martha did not allow any of us to wear jeans or bring jeans on [the] tour. It was [all] dresses [for the women]. . . . [She said] that we were really an extension of her and the United States. That was definitely drummed in."¹⁶ Homsey described how Graham acted on her own behalf and on that of the nation—and then asked her dancers, as a group and as individuals, to do the same.

One of the key ideas of *Dancers as Diplomats* is that this self-consciousness about representation stems from artists being tapped as "official" representatives of the United States. *Dancers as Diplomats* asks, When people become aware of being marked as "official" Americans, how then do multiple layers of representation—of the nation, various communities, and the individual—either serve the construction of American identity or fall outside of that identity? The answers to this question vary greatly throughout the book, depending on the artists' and dance companies' social locations, but two ideas persist. First, the very constitution of the



Figure I.2

Bonnie Oda Homsey, a relatively new dancer with the Martha Graham Dance Company in 1974, greets a classical Thai performer on the company's 1974 State Department-sponsored tour of Asia.

Source: Photo reproduced courtesy of the Special Collections, University of Arkansas.

category of "official" Americanness implies that something exists beyond that officially recognized national identity—an excess that the government cannot fully control. Second, it is in the dancers' movement between that "official" identity and what lies beyond it that we see how the arts help us to recognize that national identity, especially American identity, is always in process. To be charged with representing a group implies that there is some essential quality to be represented. Dancers move between what has been counted as "official" and what exceeds the "official,"

demonstrating that “American” is truly a performative category—an identity created through “doing,” to borrow philosopher J. L. Austin’s conception of the “performative.” Dance allows us to see how this complex, ever-unfolding process occurs in ways as mundane as dancers’ choice of dress and as extraordinary as the public spectacles they pour their energy into onstage. They make these choices, often with their bodies, always with an awareness of being part of several types of groups.

Performance and national identity, especially in the context of the dance-in-diplomacy programs, share the attributes of being products of collective labor and negotiation. Groups of artists collectively embody and reinterpret what it means to represent “America.” Seen this way, the funding programs emerging from the State Department over the last seventy years contest a common narrative of dance history and American history alike that seizes on the singular, exceptional (often male) figure as a source of paradigmatic social change. On the State Department programs, the responsibility for ensuring the tour’s success and for conveying the conception of “America” was spread across, quite literally, many shoulders. By turning to dancers’ roles in American cultural diplomacy, this book asks how dance sets American national identity and power in motion.

Why Dance?

On a 1962 State Department–sponsored tour, the dancers of the New York City Ballet (NYCB) pirouetted on a stage inside Moscow’s Kremlin Complex as the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev negotiated a resolution to the Cuban missile crisis with the American president John F. Kennedy. The two events, the performance and the nuclear crisis, did not directly affect one another (beyond elevating the dancers’ anxiety), but their coincidence exemplifies the multiple levels on which diplomacy works. Soviet audiences went wild for the NYCB performances: tickets sold out weeks in advance, the audiences in five cities gave standing ovations, and the Soviet dancers remarked about the importance of seeing the 1962 performances in autobiographies written for decades thereafter. In verbal and written diplomatic exchanges, the American and Soviet governments posited an opposition so great that it fed the possibility of mutual destruction; while in the physical and affective sharings in the theater, diplomatic exchanges imagined connection and shared joy. Considered side-by-side, the two events and their respective outcomes serve as a reminder that verbal and written exchanges between leaders constitute much, but not all, of diplomatic exchange.

Dancers as Diplomats, with its specific focus on dance as a mode of international engagement, makes clear that diplomacy has always unfolded in embodied ways. This book looks at dance from three vantage points: as a cultural export that emphasizes the body as a representational force; as a form of social engagement in communal spaces, including both theaters and social-dance floors; and as a mode of analysis. To study dance over the course of a lifetime, as dancers and dance scholars do, is a way of training one’s eyes and body to understand that the world is full of people making meaning with their bodies, even beyond the spaces where people are officially recognized as “dancing.”

Dance and the various modes through which people engage in dance analysis, including the act of making dance as well as the act of writing about dance, foreground not only the effect bodies might have on one another, but also the institutional policies and practices that facilitate cultural diplomacy. How do people and their bodies come together, at what costs and with what gains? With its focus on relationships developed from physical, local interactions,¹⁷ dance helps us see how people come together in social networks, a central concern for policy. In American foreign policy, dance is one of the most concrete couplings of the physical and the political. Considering policy and dance together creates space, in performance theorist Jean Graham-Jones’s words, in which to explore those very real moments when individuals and communities—to cadge the clichéd phrase—“act locally” and “think globally.”¹⁸ One of the most concrete examples of this simultaneous local and global moment constituted through dance arose, not in my interviews with the dancers on the DanceMotion tour, but in my interviews with the dancers who worked together in a dance program partially funded by the State Department from 2003 to 2007 that was an immediate forerunner to DanceMotion. Over a number of years, the San Francisco modern dance company Margaret Jenkins Dance Company and the Kolkata-based Tanusree Shankar Dance Company collaborated on a new dance work, *A Slipping Glimpse* (2007). The State Department funded some aspects of the creation and also partially supported the two companies on a tour of India. While the companies often worked in studios on different continents, the dancers literally found themselves always thinking of their international counterparts. Varshaa Ghosh, a Shankar dancer, described rehearsals when the companies were apart: “We [the Shankar dancers] would be in the studio [in Kolkata] and say to each other, ‘Ok, Steffany [one of the American dancers] is there. How do we go around her?’ I never thought of the other dancers as a completely different aspect. It’s not like we [we]’re existing in two different worlds.”¹⁹ As Ghosh told me this, all the dancers sitting

around her, American and Indian, nodded enthusiastically. The American dancers, too, had been aware of the Indian dancers' bodies, even though those bodies were rehearsing thousands of miles away. The Americans had replaced abstract ideas of Indian people with more specific knowledge of the Shankar dancers. Americans and Indians had to move through their daily jobs constantly thinking about where the bodies of other people were and how the movements of their own bodies would affect others.

All these modes of interaction propagate intercultural sympathies, a fraught, but persistent goal since the incorporation of the performing arts into American cultural diplomacy. American studies scholar Christina Klein has shown that President Dwight Eisenhower's early cultural diplomacy initiatives in the 1950s made sympathy a central "structure of feeling" of the new performance programs.²⁰ Focusing primarily on the People-to-People program created by Eisenhower in 1956, Klein described sympathy, which she defined as "the ability to feel what another person feels," as the "double-edged sword" of American diplomacy.²¹ Klein feared that sympathy has offered Americans an "emotionally satisfying bond" that imagined "access to another's subjectivity."²² In the context of American attempts to gain global power,²³ cultural diplomacy, then, became a tool of American domination, one enacted through the encouragement of sympathy rather than through the use of force. Klein's suspicions of cultural diplomacy's aims are ones I share, and it is important to see how dance's entry into cultural diplomacy in 1954 was part of the emotional project of American Cold War politics.

Dance in cultural diplomacy relies upon an intercultural emotional appeal that extends into the physical as dance emphasizes the relationship among sympathy, representation, and the corporeal. Through dance, State Department efforts to use cultural diplomacy—to "win hearts and minds," as the saying goes—moves from an emotional appeal to a truly affective one as emotional, intercultural bonds manifest in and through bodies. The performing arts got their biggest consolidated push into the diplomatic arena in 1954 with Eisenhower's creation of the President's Special Emergency Fund. The fund sent \$2,225,000 to the State Department to support dance, music, theater, and sports tours; and \$157,000 to the United States Information Agency (USIA) to publicize the tours.²⁴ (Adjusted for inflation, that would be like President Obama in 2013 sending \$20 million to the State Department to fund dance tours.)²⁵ The fund's first action sent the José Limón Dance Company to Latin America. The choice of dance as the best way to begin the program moved from sympathy as a structure of feeling to empathy, a structure of feeling with an explicitly corporeal manifestation. Dance theorist Susan

Foster has argued that the term "empathy" was invented not to express a new capacity for fellow-feeling [sympathy], but to register a changing sense of physicality that, in turn, influenced how one felt another's feelings.²⁶ Foster, in a theoretical move parallel to Klein's, has demonstrated how dance can mobilize empathy "to rationalize operations of exclusions and othering": the feelings of less powerful groups are displaced by the feelings of those more powerful, as those in the more powerful groups focus on their own feelings *about* the less powerful, rather than actually caring what the other group feels and/or thinks.²⁷ Diplomacy programs tried to make Americans care about other people and, less progressively, also asked people in other countries to care about Americans. *Dancers as Diplomats* considers where physical connection falls into the dangerous exclusionary and domination practices Klein and Foster detail and when physical connection might have liberatory possibilities that exceed state edicts.

In the two eras featured in this book, the affective arguments made through dance took very particular historically constituted forms. During the Cold War, the government turned to dance to offer evidence that the United States excelled not just at capitalism but at culture, too. Dancers on the first dance-in-diplomacy tour, the Limón company's tour of Latin America, discussed the multiple representational burdens they experienced in 1954, naming art's relationship to industry as a particularly potent one at that time. A *Dance Magazine* article summarized the dancers' sense of themselves as scions of culture:

The pressure to perform is at any time enough to rack one's nerves, but how much more so when you have to come across for an audience that (only too well aware of the wonderful automobiles and kitchen gadgets we Americans produce) is waiting eagerly on the other side of the curtain to see what kind of culture we are capable of.²⁸

The dancers' task on tour was to represent *more* than American consumer culture.²⁹ Exporting only consumer goods threatened to foreground capitalism instead of democracy and freedom more broadly. During the Cold War, American cultural diplomacy ensured that US cultural exportation included not only cars, TVs, and refrigerators but also Robert Rauschenberg, the Paul Taylor Dance Company, and jazz improvisation.

Emphasis on live interaction gave dance a prominent role in another aspect of Cold War American cultural diplomacy as dance played a complicated part in the relationship between the federal government and the civil rights movement. Onstage, dancers and artists in other live

performance mediums, such as jazz, presented images the US government could cite as evidence of racial tolerance. By the mid-twentieth century, what the black public intellectual W. E. B. Du Bois predicted would be the greatest American problem of the twentieth century—"the color line," the inequitable and divisive segregation of white Americans from Americans of color—had become, as Thomas Borstelmann and Mary Dudziak have shown, not just a domestic issue, but also an international one.³⁰ How could the US persuade the world to adopt American government models supposedly based on egalitarianism and individual rights when foreign publics saw daily images of violence against Americans of color protesting for rights they did not have, despite being American citizens? As Penny Von Eschen has shown in her work on the State Department's support of international jazz music tours, performances by African American artists offered a way to celebrate American modernist abstraction, which Cold War intellectuals saw as "synonymous with democracy," and also spoke to "America's Achilles heel of racism in ways that a painting . . . could not."³¹ When black artists took the stage, in music or dance performances, they performed an image of racial inclusivity and an official embrace of African American culture.

Performers of color were not, however, merely skills for a government agenda. Von Eschen has described many black musicians' challenges to government structures as they criticized government policy, speaking from the stage or at other public events on tour. *Dancers as Diplomats* takes this possibility for critique a step further, assessing how African American, Asian American, and Latina/o performers did not just voice their criticism, but also choreographed and danced critiques of American policy, inserting embodied narratives of self-determination into American cultural diplomacy, which paradoxically served both to showcase American individual freedom and to disrupt the duplicitous staging of the United States as fully racially integrated.

If the rejection of consumerism and entanglement with the civil rights movement were primary structuring questions of dance-in-diplomacy during the Cold War, how the United States can be both a leader and a global partner has been the animating issue behind recent tours. Since the attacks on New York and Washington, DC in 2001, but even more so since international opinion of the United States turned overwhelmingly negative after the invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, the role of cultural diplomacy has been a topic of debate in Washington. Over more than a decade, these debates have centered on how the United States might project an image of being a global partner, listening to other countries' needs.³² This directive crystallized in the early years of the Obama

administration as a premise for diplomatic policy. As Obama said in a 2009 speech, the United States now "must not lead in the spirit of a patron, but the spirit of a partner."³³

Dance has a particular route to considering what the United States as global partner, rather than just a dominant power, might look like. Dance's possibility, not only as a concert form, but as a way to create space for international collaboration, is a key rationale behind dance's inclusion in contemporary cultural diplomacy programs. DanceMotion USA, which has sent three to four dance companies of a variety of genres and styles abroad for month-long tours, centers primarily on community engagement, rather than concert performances. American dancers teach, but they also act as students learning from local dancers. Since 2012, DanceMotion has matched an American and a non-American company to collaboratively create a work that premieres in New York City at BAM. The logic behind this collaborative turn in dance-in-diplomacy seems to be that physical sharing, considered as less reliant on language, enacts intercultural exchange with US representatives as partners as well as leaders.³⁴

Dance's impact on American cultural diplomacy has been a two-way street: the US government benefits from dance companies' work abroad, and the dance community benefits from the funding and international exposure. The State Department programs, created in 1954 (Eisenhower's Special Emergency Fund) and 1956 (the Cultural Presentations Program) along with the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965, fashioned the public institutional pillars of what dance historians and enthusiasts often term the American "dance boom," the exponential growth of American concert dance organizations in the 1960s and 1970s. While dance historians often tell the story of twentieth-century dance as one of individual genius—from George Balanchine to Martha Graham—what is less commented on is that these artists enjoyed tremendous institutional support, much of it from these newly created public sources. In the fifties, sixties, and seventies, the State Department supported almost every American dance company that now constitutes the twentieth-century American dance canon. Among those sponsored by the State Department on entirely government-funded or partially funded tours were the companies of Limón, Martha Graham, Alvin Ailey, Paul Taylor, Merce Cunningham, and Alwin Nikolais, as well as ballet companies, including the New York City Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, and the Joffrey Ballet. How DanceMotion funding will affect the contemporary American dance scene remains to be seen; however, the importance of public funding cannot be overstated, especially considering the role funding played in the longevity of specific twentieth-century artists, such as

Graham and Ailey. This serves as an important reminder that dance history must attend to the role economics plays in creating artistic hierarchies and canons. In addition, it is important to note the role that public support has played and continues to play in the arts. My commitment to the necessity for public funding for the arts (always importantly paired with a healthy suspicion about the exportation of empathy) animates the central questions of *Dancers as Diplomats*.

Examining the structural mechanisms that shaped State Department sponsorship of international dance tours exposes another popular myth in the dance community: the idea that modern dance, the genre of dance most frequently exported, is uniquely American. Looking at the tours from an institutional standpoint and from the levels of individuals and communities demonstrates the constructed nature of the category of “American” as it relates to both identity and dance. In identifying modern dance as a primary cultural export, the State Department claimed modern dance as quintessentially representative of and indigenous to the United States. The government’s maneuver required ignoring modern dance’s roots in other nations, for instance, Germany, and in cultures that included but extended beyond the United States, particularly those of the African diaspora. Ironically, the actual tours often made American dance’s transnational ties evident. Touring Europe in 1957, José Limón and fellow American dance choreographer Doris Humphrey enthusiastically met the German modern dance matriarch, Mary Wigman (figure 1.3), who had begun making what Americans would call “modern dance” years before Limón or Graham, the two choreographers most often put forward by the State Department as the “creators” of modern dance. Audiences in Berlin received the Limón company that year enthusiastically, in part, Limón dancer Pauline Koner felt, because work by German modern dance artists like Wigman, Harald Kreutzberg, and Gret Palucca had already taught German audiences “how to watch” modern dance.³⁵ The American government exported Limón’s work as American even as the Germans received it well because of modern dance’s roots outside of the United States.

What became part of the category of “American dance,” too, had influences from beyond the United States, sometimes precisely because of the State Department tours (at least in part). The art and culture American dancers experienced while on tour often became highly influential in the work dancers and choreographers created upon returning to the United States. For instance, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater’s 1967 tour of Africa, according to the dancers, inspired Ailey’s subsequent work (see chapter 2). Notably, Ailey wrote a program note for *Masekela Langage* (1969), one of the pieces he made shortly after returning from the Africa



Figure 1.3

José Limón, Doris Humphrey, and Mary Wigman dine together in Berlin, where the Limón company was appearing at the 1957 Berlin Festival, one of many instances the Limón company appeared abroad under the auspices of the State Department. The formal dinner was likely one of many dinners and receptions organized to introduce the visiting American artists to the locals, though this meeting did not bring together strangers but luminaries of the transatlantic modern dance community.

Source: Photograph courtesy of Charles Tomlinson, Pauline Lawrence Personal Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

tour in which he described how the work intermingled American and South African racial politics. American modern dance, even if made in the United States by a soon-to-be iconic American artist, was a product of transnational influence. The project to claim modern dance as American was just that—a project, not a fact. Dance in cultural diplomacy, in practice, and as a metaphor illustrates that national identity is never stable or monolithic. *Dancers as Diplomats* aims to examine how these unstable national identities were experienced and interpreted through the lives of dancers who were a part of the larger international project of American cultural diplomacy.

THE POLITICS OF AMERICAN CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

It might seem obvious that American cultural diplomacy is a political endeavor: all the tours discussed in this book received the majority of their funding from the State Department, and even when private organizations

selected artists or administered tours, a government presence was always nearby—through embassy officials to name but one example. Yet policy and legislation, particularly through careful language choices, frequently dissociate cultural diplomacy from politics. Policymakers' tenuous framing of cultural diplomacy as apolitical means that dancers must navigate meanings of "political" and "apolitical"—even when their artistic work is quite politically engaged.

How we talk about and define cultural diplomacy reveals its relationship to other forms of diplomacy. Two sets of terminology frequently used to discuss cultural diplomacy name tours and other cultural exchanges as distinct from political diplomacy. The first categorization is of cultural diplomacy as a special subcategory of what is known as public diplomacy. The second categorization is what is known as "soft" versus "hard power," which works to elevate all other forms of international engagement—namely, economic and military engagement—above cultural diplomacy.

The first binary, cultural versus public diplomacy, removes cultural diplomacy from the directness of politics—that is presumed to be the work of "public diplomacy." Political scientist Harvey Feigenbaum has offered the clearest description of how policymakers usually distinguish between cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy. "Cultural diplomacy," he writes, "allow[s] people from different cultures to get to know and understand each other;" whereas "public diplomacy" closely resembles propaganda, getting "America's word out—in a hopefully persuasive way to hopefully receptive publics in other nations."³⁶ State Department officials usually cast dance and other art and education programs as cultural diplomacy, imagining these programs as unsullied by politics. In practice there exists little distinction between cultural and public diplomacy. For instance, the USIA, originally established by the Eisenhower administration to oversee propaganda (public diplomacy), partnered with the State Department throughout the Cold War to administer the on-the-ground international aspect of the dance tours.

In the second binary, soft power versus hard power, cultural diplomacy's distance from the explicitly political diminishes its importance. Political scientist Joseph Nye famously conceptualized "hard power" versus "soft power," where the former (with all its masculinist connotations) refers to military and economic actions, and the latter (with all its feminized connotations) refers to public diplomacy, including cultural diplomacy.³⁷ Leaving aside for now these terms' gendered implications, what is crucial in Nye's formulation is the pretense that culture is separate from and perhaps less than political or economic diplomacy. Acting as though culture is somehow not political or is less political than other diplomatic means

is itself a political choice as it veils the political agendas that are very much embedded in American cultural diplomacy. As Penny Von Eschen has argued about culture in Cold War politics, the "pervasive separation of 'culture' from 'political economy' in historical writing, further incarnated in . . . [Nye's] 'hard and soft power,' remains an obstacle to understanding American culture as well as the exercise of U.S. power in the world."³⁸ In effect, claiming that cultural diplomacy efforts like the State Department support for international dance tours are largely apolitical obscures how US power and influence move in the world.

This distancing of cultural diplomacy from the political is not just a scholarly comment on how the US government works; it is an argument built into cultural diplomacy legislation and organizational choices, too. American legislation displaces politics' role in cultural diplomacy in favor of more neutral language of "connection" and "understanding." In 1961, the Fulbright-Hays Act (officially known as the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961), the single most important piece of legislation in cultural diplomacy history, clarified the programs' aims: to be "non-political," represent "America," and promote "excellence in the arts."³⁹ These ideals remain foundational to today's cultural diplomacy programs. Yet representing "America" is political—only one of many contradictions inherent in the legislation. The contradiction between international connection and exporting the United States's supposedly "superior" art vibrates at the core of all the programs discussed in *Dancers as Diplomats*.

In some eras of American cultural diplomacy, the government has hidden not just its political agenda but also its role. The most publicly fraught moment in the relationship between politics and arts funding occurred when the CIA covertly sponsored cultural programs in Western Europe after World War II. The CIA designed the programs to diffuse cultural elites' passion for communism—an intellectual containment plan of sorts—and to assess how strongly various communities felt about communism. Historian Frances Stonor Saunders' book *The Cultural Cold War* (1999) describes how the CIA created shell foundations to funnel American government funding to literary magazines, conferences, and performing arts presentations, including arts festivals in Paris and Berlin, which both presented several dance companies.⁴⁰ The CIA ceased funding cultural initiatives in the mid-1960s after a series of news articles revealed their funding source.⁴¹ Cultural diplomacy often catches the government in the gaps between rhetoric and practice: arguing for the benefits of openness while practicing the covert dissemination of ideas. Such covertness is only possible if cultural programs are presented as apolitical.

When State Department officials prepare the dancers for the tours, they sometimes explicitly instruct them to maintain that their work is apolitical. In these warnings, it seems apparent that “political” usually equals what artists say, not what they do as dancers. For example, when DanceMotion companies traveled to Washington for pre-tour briefings in 2010, many dancers reported that State Department desk officers gave them specific instructions to avoid all political conversations while abroad. (It was up to the dancers to determine what constituted a “political” conversation.) Dancers from the Cold War-era tours remembered being warned to avoid saying anything that could be construed as a political comment. On early tours, the State Department officials briefed the companies in their studios, and, according to most dancers, emphasized that everyone must remember that their actions represented the United States. As the Vietnam War became a hot-button issue in the late 1960s, the warnings turned explicit. Embassy officials at every single tour stop overtly warned the dancers to avoid talking about the war.

If the government eschewed anything that seemed too political at the micro, everyday level, there can be no doubt that at the macro level, particularly in the choice of tour destinations, politics had real influence in dance-in-diplomacy programs. In the early Cold War, the State Department targeted regions thought to be susceptible to Sino-Soviet Communism. Even though dance companies frequently expressed greater desire to travel to Europe than elsewhere, the State Department rarely routed tours there. Instead tours generally went to Eastern Europe, Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and southeast Asia. More recently, countries with significant Muslim populations have been chosen for DanceMotion tours, and the first four years of funding also suggest that Asia is the most important region for American cultural diplomacy. Tour destinations are also important choices because that is the area where the State Department has clearest power. Other decisions about tours—the artists chosen, the choreography presented, and community partners tapped—have often been made outside the State Department and, in some cases, outside of government agencies entirely.

To be fair, it is not true that every era of diplomacy or every governmental official or agency involved in cultural diplomacy has obscured programs’ political agendas. Most notably, since 2009, former secretary of state Hillary Clinton has adopted Nye’s newer term, “smart power,” to advocate for a foreign policy agenda that uses any tools necessary—cultural, economic, and military—to advance American government goals in the world.⁴² The more capacious term puts the three strains of diplomacy previously put into a hierarchy by Nye on the same level, although there

might be another political strategy inherent in Clinton’s vocabulary: elevating cultural interventions to the same level as economic and military interventions potentially raised the cachet of the State Department, which Clinton led at the time.

Clinton’s expansive understanding of diplomacy, though it does explicitly pull from Nye’s recent work, also hails back to very early Cold War foreign policy, which took an “any means necessary” approach to containing Communism. As theater historian Charlotte Canning has noted, NSC-68, the 1949 document that defined the United States’s policies for the containment of Communism, named “image, prestige, and credibility,” not just military and economic efforts, as key to winning the Cold War.⁴³ These broader conceptions of diplomacy undoubtedly facilitate more roles for the arts and culture in diplomacy, even if that role is still sometimes suspiciously framed as apolitical.

These broader understandings of how culture and politics might be interrelated also invite questions about the relationship between cultural diplomacy and economics, particularly since a hallmark of American cultural diplomacy in comparison to almost all other countries’ cultural diplomacy efforts, is the United States’s hybrid public-private funding structure.⁴⁴ *Dancers as Diplomats* focuses solely on international tours primarily funded by the US government, though few tours (if any) traveled abroad with only State Department funding and almost none happened without input from private partners. Private investment in the tours continues to be key to their breadth and reach. For example, in the 2010 DanceMotion pilot program, the pharmaceutical company Pfizer financed the tours’ educational efforts, providing funds for the distribution of dance books and DVDs to libraries in the countries visited. This would not have been possible without private funding, but it also raises questions about the influence private companies could have on program choices.⁴⁵ There is no way to extricate American politics from American commerce; thus the market, represented by the private sector, always, often explicitly, factors in American cultural diplomacy.

WHO MAKES DECISIONS AND WHY

The entanglement of the private and public, often framed as fully public, makes it necessary to denote what have been the various organizations playing a role in the history of American cultural diplomacy. It is important to avoid treating the US government, or the US State Department, as monolithic institutions; it is also key to recognize how public-private

divides structure American cultural diplomacy. Four organizations are most important in *Dancers as Diplomats*: the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), the USIA, the American National Theatre and Academy (ANTA), and BAM. The ECA has been (although sometimes under slightly different names) the US State Department's central artistic and educational hub. Government employees in this bureau helped administer and shape all the tours described in this book. While the State Department employees worked on the tours from Washington, the USIA officers, known abroad as USIS representatives, facilitated the artists' travel. Created in 1953 by the Eisenhower administration (and closed in 1999 as part of the Clinton administration's National Partnership for Reinventing Government), the USIA is best understood as the agency responsible for American propaganda efforts abroad. The agency, like the Special Emergency Fund that first sent the Limón company abroad in 1954, grew out of President Eisenhower's Communist-fighting foreign-policy efforts.⁴⁶ During the Cold War era, the ECA and the USIA ostensibly handled the political aspects of the tours, leaving most artistic decisions to the New York-based ANTA. ANTA ran three selection panels—for dance, theater, and music—composed of arts administrators, critics, and, less often, artists.⁴⁷ The government, in Washington and at posts abroad, designated what parts of the world would see the chosen American artists.⁴⁸ ANTA, however, usually knew the countries the State Department planned to target, so the panel conversations often included considerations of the match between artist and locale, even though that fell outside of ANTA's official charge.⁴⁹ When the State Department ended its contract with ANTA in 1963, the panel system continued under the auspices of the State Department's Advisory Committee on the Arts, though significant overlap remained between the ANTA administration, former ANTA panelists, and the advisory panel membership.⁵⁰

Much as the State Department did with ANTA during the Cold War, DanceMotion relies on its private partner BAM for artistic guidance and for logistical support around arts presenting. The partnership makes BAM an even greater gatekeeper than was ANTA, since, rather than gathering experts from the field-at-large to choose the artists for the tours, BAM, with minimal outside input, selects the artists. (Artists from previous DanceMotion tours sometimes contribute to the current selection process, as do some State Department employees.) Although American cultural diplomacy promotes ideas of egalitarianism and partnership abroad, the selection process for the tours is anything but egalitarian and open. During the Cold War, dance companies could approach ANTA or the State Department to be considered, though few made it into the discussion. There was no official avenue

through which artists could apply. Today there is still no application process. The DanceMotion website states: "Please note that there is no application for this program. Dance companies and countries are selected by a panel of dance experts, as well as representatives from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and the grantee organization."⁵¹

In part, the tight grip on the selection process stems from the often small, often unstable history of cultural diplomacy funding in the United States. The early infusion of funds into performing arts diplomacy, first with the 1954 inaugural program, and then with Congress's 1956 vote for long-term institutional support, were exceptional increases in the budget. From the late fifties through the early sixties, Congress kept the program's budget flat, and then slowly decreased funding through the 1960s. Shifting global politics in the late 1960s, largely tied to US involvement in Vietnam, further reduced program support in Washington. By the late 1970s, funding for large dance company tours had mostly disappeared.

The Cold War's end in the 1980s precipitated American cultural diplomacy's major decline, although smaller groups and individuals continued to tour through the eighties and early nineties. Three factors eventually decimated American funding for cultural and public diplomacy: the end of the Cold War, the Clinton-Gore administration's reinventing government initiative, and the communications and information revolution. That said, it was the State Department's decades-long reliance on the Cold War to justify cultural programming that truly foretold the program's demise: no more Cold War, no more funding for cultural diplomacy.⁵² On a broader level, the end of the Cold War also facilitated a turn in attention from the international to the domestic, which contributed to the downsizing and then closing of the USIA in 1999.⁵³ The State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs remained, but the programs were small and staffing was minimal.

Less than a month after the September 11, 2001 attacks, Congress convened hearings about cultural diplomacy. After later hearings that circled around the negative international opinion of the United States following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, public diplomacy again became a priority.⁵⁴ From this resurgent interest, the State Department created, first, Rhythm Road, a program that sent musicians, mostly jazz musicians, abroad, and then, in 2010, DanceMotion USA.

SPEAKING WITH DANCERS, SPEAKING THROUGH DANCE

This book brings together the cultural recognition of physical action, writing, and orality as mutually constitutive of dance practice and dance

history and, indeed, American history. Although policymakers principally think of dance as a nonverbal art form, dance practice and creation are, as dance theorist Judith Hamera has noted, always enmeshed in language. Hamera writes, "Relationships between corporeality and language are sometimes represented as especially, even uniquely fraught, with dance serving as a special limit case. But this line of reasoning ignores the practical reality that all performance, including dance, is enmeshed in language, in reading, writing, rhetoric, and voice."⁵⁵ Dance is a practice that is always, at least partially, transmitted through oral history. Older generations of dancers pass technique, choreography, and dance history onto the next through discussions in the studio. As dance theorist and oral historian Jeff Friedman writes, "Both the teaching and creative practices of the profession rely on orality during the transmission of kinesthetic knowledge."⁵⁶

I tap the practice of dancers telling their stories to one another in my interviews for this book. *Dancers as Diplomats* brings those dancerly conversations to a larger readership. Over the last eight years, I have interviewed more than seventy dancers who traveled on tours sponsored by the State Department (as well as several of the administrators associated with the tours). These dancers represent a broad sample, ranging from those who traveled on ballet tours in the early 1960s to those who toured through DanceMotion in 2012. Some are now household names—stars like New York City ballerina Allegra Kent and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater soloist and former artistic director Judith Jamison. But most are known primarily within the dance world—many of them journeyman members of ensembles. Dancers of all types, from those who danced in the corps to those who danced the solos, contribute to the creation and reinterpretation of dance history.

Talking with the dancers about multiple performances across multiple countries and tours reckons with the insufficiency of what performance theorist Diana Taylor describes as the "archive," the more officially recognized, often text-based historical record.⁵⁷ Following Taylor's argument for expanding the notion of "archive" and "repertoire"—the embodied acts that often resist cultural practices' hegemonic constrictions and documentation—I examine dance and the dancers' stories as additional forms that support, exceed, and, sometimes, critique the written word. Indeed, I argue that through dancers' repeated performances of their dancing—onstage across months of touring and as they recalled their experiences in the oral histories that inform this book—that they reenact, in performance theorist Rebecca Schneider's terms, the fleshy "histories of body-to-body transmission of affect and enactment."⁵⁸ Their memories

demonstrate that physical performance both has impact and remains with us across time. The book pairs information and perspectives gathered through interviews and performance analysis with archival material, government memos, and meeting minutes, as well as newspaper articles and reviews. Looking at archive and repertoire together opens dance history to various acts of transmission, as the dancers share knowledge and ideas among bodies, with one another, and across time, rather than imagining knowledge as happening only in one moment, one body, or one iteration of a choreographic work.⁵⁹

Interviews also allow me to unsettle dance history's singular emphasis on the choreographer, undoing a familiar narrative that focuses on a choreographer (often a man) as the genius who guides and shapes a group of dancers (often primarily women). In this way, approaching dance as a collective process does more than provide multiple perspectives; it also marks larger cultural, gendered power dynamics that have too often been transferred unmarked from dance organizations into dance history. For instance, autobiographies and biographies of NYCB artistic director and choreographer George Balanchine usually relegate the NYCB dancers, particularly the company's women, to the status of choreographer's "muse," refusing to acknowledge their impact on the choreography in creation, in performance, and in cultural diplomacy efforts. In chapter 1, my focus on dancers disrupts the hagiographic literature about Balanchine. The 1962 tour was Balanchine's first return to his homeland. While the complications of the Russian émigré's role as American ambassador make a compelling story, that narrative ignores the enormity of the tour, on which eighty-seven people traveled, including sixty-six dancers who danced eight performances per week for two months.

Some of the dancers I interviewed have written about the tours in their autobiographies,⁶⁰ but this project seeks to bring together multiple voices from the tours in ways that a single person's perspective—particularly a star dancer's, rather than a dancer who performed mainly in a company's ensemble—cannot. I bring the dancers' voices and experiences to the center of the historical record in an effort to expand a dancer's role beyond that of a muse or mute object, and, in fact, to understand dancers as acting as national mouthpieces and politically astute respondents to the nation.

In each of the interviews, I asked the dancers about the reasons they felt cultural diplomacy was important (or not). I wanted my narrators to discuss how they understood and valued cultural diplomacy, rather than to position myself as the sole interpreter of the information they provided. In this choice, I follow oral historian Michael Frisch's exhortation to oral historians to ask all narrators, not just those in leadership

positions, to discuss the broader implications of everyday actions.⁶¹ This intermingling of voices from a variety of positions in the hierarchies within dance companies and between government officials and artists results in an account that intertwines micro and macro political histories. Taking an oral-history approach to the interviews allowed me to traffic in the specificity of individual experiences and, with my narrators' assistance, to tie those experiences to larger historical and cultural issues.

Though oral history offers a multilayered, dancer-centered approach to the history of dance in cultural diplomacy, the interview format has its limits. Many dancers from the early tours had passed away or, often because of their age, did not want to be interviewed. In writing about the Ailey company, for instance, I feel the absence of Miguel Godreau (figure I.4), the company's leading dancer on the 1967 Africa tour. (Godreau passed away decades ago, while only in his early forties.)

Several of the Ailey dancers I interviewed spoke about Godreau's importance on the tour and their fear that he has been left out of Ailey history (and as a result, American history). Other gaps in the interviews speak to larger trends in dance: some of the absent voices are those of gay men lost in the eighties when AIDS ravaged the ballet and modern dance communities, especially in New York City, where most of the companies selected for diplomatic tours were based.

Most, but not all the interviews were done one-on-one. When interviewing dancers involved in the DanceMotion tours—interviews that often took place during rehearsal breaks—time constraints often meant interviewing them in small groups. On the one hand, this meant that individuals spoke less and probably curtailed comments that they might have made in a more intimate exchange. On the other hand, the group format often prompted back-and-forth exchanges among the dancers that simulated the studio conversations that often animate the creation and restaging of choreography. Another limiting but important factor in the more recent interviews has been that many of the companies who have traveled on the DanceMotion tours hope to be chosen for the program again. And, given my own investment in dance, I hope many of these companies, especially those committed to rigorously investigating what it means to use dance to engage with multiple audiences, are chosen again for the tours. The financial reality of future funding must have shaped how artists talked to me about their experiences, leaving me to hypothesize not just about what the dancers said but also about the absences and silences within their comments.

My emphasis on returning dancers to dance history offers many opportunities for complex historiography, but the danger of my approach lies

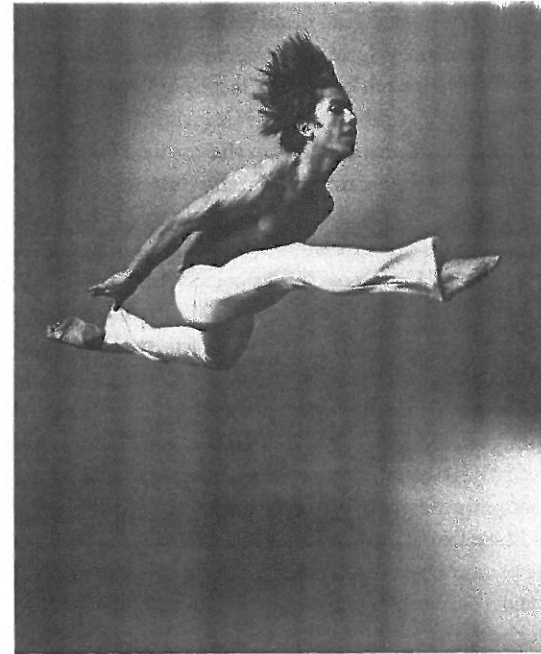


Figure I.4
Miguel Godreau in Alvin Ailey's signature masterpiece *Revelations* in 1966.
Source: Photo by Jack Mitchell. Courtesy of the Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation, Inc.

in the potential overvaluation of the voices of narrators, what Frisch calls the placement of "unquestioned authority on direct experience."⁶² I mitigate this effect through archival work, gleaning information about governmental mandates and agendas, and the companies' institutional structures. These documents, mostly collected from government archives and dance company archives, along with press material from American and foreign newspapers, create a fuller picture of the tours and their impact and help me discern how various government agencies and individuals had different, even competing goals. The USIA officers situated abroad often had different conceptions of the tours' value than did those based in Washington, DC, for instance.

In addition to the USIA officer reports, press coverage offered a primary link to audience reactions abroad. Companies gave me access to their collections of tour reviews, usually from foreign newspapers, and embassy reports in government archives contained foreign press clippings, too. Both sources have limits: the government and companies valued positive

reviews over negative ones; hence negative reviews have often disappeared from archives. Too, the relationship between the press and the tours unfolded differently for each company. The New York City Ballet received much more attention abroad, and, since *New York Times* dance critic John Martin traveled with the company for the entire 1962 Soviet tour, the NYCB also received extensive coverage in the United States. A wide variety of African newspapers wrote about the 1967 Ailey performances, though many of these reviews speak very cursorily about the company's actual dancing onstage, making the reviews better for assessing the general response, not the specificities of dancing. There was copious news coverage of all the tours by the Graham company, in part because Graham was famous well before State Department programs began in the 1950s. The dearth of contemporary dance criticism in print journalism has translated into less coverage of the DanceMotion tours and the choreographic works they featured. The twenty-first-century rise of the Internet, however, means that blogs figure prevalently in the documentation of recent tours. Notably, the State Department maintains a blog on all the DanceMotion tours, so I had some access to dancers' reflections while they were still on tour, rather than only relying on their memories of past events. Given the blogs' "official" nature, however, these mini-essays likely offer only a slice of the dancers' thoughts.

Written documentation of the tours offers insight into the governmental agendas behind international, state-sponsored dance tours. Those agendas, however, are most fully realized *and* most clearly subverted from the stage, as American dancers, sometimes joined by dancers from other nations, perform. All the dance company tours, in the Cold War and more recently, raise questions about why national identity might be productively considered as performative. I use the term "performative," not in its lay definition as a mere synonym for "performance," but as an evocation of an act/action that has impact in a social sphere: to name dance as "American" does not just describe the choreography or the dancing, but the "issuing of the utterance is the performance of an action . . . not just saying something."⁶³ While J. L. Austin coined the term "performative" as a form of linguistic or written speech, I, following Rebekah Kowal, consider dancing as a form of utterance, too, capable of *doing*.⁶⁴ Considering American identity as performative reckons with nationalism, as theorist Paul Gilbert writes, as "not so much a system of beliefs but as a set of practices, through which national loyalty is cultivated and nations sustained."⁶⁵ Gilbert's definition connects representation and embodiment, pointing to how people construct and enact national affiliations, and how these constructions and actions change over time and in different

contexts. Even when governments sponsor artists in hopes of promoting what dance historian Anthony Shay calls "highly essentialist portraits" of national identity, choreography and dancers' experiences point to the performances of national identity as "multilayered political and ethnographic statements."⁶⁶ Performances always exceed government guidelines and intentions, even as they also enact and sustain the nation.

The dance companies at the center of this book do not serve official government edicts nearly as closely as arts groups entirely funded by the government might. These companies, I argue, simultaneously maintain and contest the politics of the nation-state they represent. In the formal performances foregrounded in the Cold War era and in the more informal workshops foregrounded in DanceMotion, dance functions, as David Román has argued, as a "a form of counterpublicity to the dominant discourses of the nation-state, . . . put[ting] forward alternative viewpoints, showcase[ing] emerging perspectives, and allow[ing] for cultural dissent."⁶⁷ Performing official American identity on tour, dance companies *both* represent the nation *and* resist essentialist notions of "America."

Dance is the link between the dancers and the government in this project. The choreographic works considered at length in this book include George Balanchine's *Agon* (1957), *Serenade* (1934), and *Western Symphony* (1954); Jerome Robbins' *Interplay* (1945); Alvin Ailey's *Revelations* (1960); Martha Graham's *Diversion of Angels* (1948), *Night Journey* (1947), and *Phaedra* (1962); Jawole Willa Jo Zollar's *Walking with Pearl* (2005); Ronald K. Brown's *Ife/My Heart* (2005); Brenda Way's *24 Exposures* (2001); and Trey McIntyre's *The Unkindness of Ravens* (2012). Choreographic analysis helps me find evidence of the ways representation cohered on the tours and of the artistic loopholes in the official ideas of representation the dancers and choreographers exploited. Movement phrases and performance choices, as well as scenic, lighting, and musical contributions, built and displaced pictures of national identity.

Choreographic analysis is always, and certainly is in this project, an approximation of the performances that occurred onstage. I have drawn composite pictures of what a dance might have been through studying videos and from watching live performances of a piece years, sometimes decades, after the its premiere. The dances in chapters 1, 2, and 3 rely heavily on the available commercial videos, PBS documentaries, and the archives of the Jerome Robbins Dance Collection at the New York Public Library. When possible, I watched videos made as close to the date of the tours as possible, recognizing that dancers' technique and performance styles shift as companies' leadership and guiding ideologies change. Small shifts can easily transform a work's meaning. Watching portions of

Revelations recorded in the USIA film about Ailey that was screened during the company's 1967 tour, I was surprised to hear the musical accompaniment to the dance "Sinner Man" done with what sounds like banjos. Today, all the *Revelations'* music has a faster tempo and the orchestration for "Sinner Man" has a driving, electric sound—very different from the banjo twang in the 1960s. Only for chapter 5 was I able to see all the performances I describe live, since I followed the Trey McIntyre Project and the Korea National Contemporary Dance Company on their 2012 national tour. (Although even then, the line between live and recorded performance is murky, since I watched the New York performances with an online audience via a simulcast of the event.)

I enmesh my choreographic analysis in thick movement description because, as dance historian Thomas DeFrantz writes, detailed description allows a degree of accessibility to dances long gone, while also providing a sense of how the dances I studied resonate with me.⁶⁸ Movement description is not an objective practice, but rather must be understood as a subjective rendering of my experience of a dance. In all my writing about dance, I try to be aware of my own subjectivity and that of the dancers. The latter arises particularly in movement description as I try to capture movement in terms of people and not just bodies. For instance, a hip does not "jut forward" in McIntyre's *The Unkindness of Ravens*; instead dancer Lee So-jin juts her hip forward. Writing about dance should display people's agency over their bodies' movements, a key idea to understanding artists as active participants in cultural diplomacy. Both of these writing choices—acknowledging the subjectivity of movement description and the control dancers exercise over their bodies—stem from feminist imperatives, recognizing how personal choices about how we use our bodies resonate with and are influenced by larger cultural fields.

My emphasis on choreography and dancers clearly situates me within the field of dance studies, but my work also operates in the realm of performance studies. I explore the dancers' full experience of touring, engaging with Richard Schechner's concept of a "whole performance sequence: training, workshop, rehearsal, warm-up, performance, cool-down, and aftermath."⁶⁹ Performance studies enables me to write about dancers' experience of the tours onstage and off, assessing the role of everything from their trips to dance clubs to formal dinners as part of the embodied experience of cultural diplomacy.

Examining choreography and the dancer interviews from a performance studies perspective also enables me to write an embodied history of the entirety of the tours, understanding how daily, often mundane, practices make up history, rather than seeing political events like the

Cuban missile crisis or American race riots as the dominant determining factors in people's daily lives. With a focus on everyday activities and individual actors, I have written a history in the manner described by theorist Michel de Certeau, as a story that "begins on [the] ground level, with footsteps. They are myriad, but do not compose a series. . . . [A] swarming mass is an innumerable collection of singularities."⁷⁰ Seeing the messiness of histories, and thus seeing the way individual stories do not add up to a single representative image or narrative, makes it easier to see how multiple agendas unfold at once.

IMAGINING A NATION, IMAGINING A WORLD

Dancers as Diplomats tells the story of the roles dance and dancers play as official representatives of the United States to consider how national identity is both embodied and performative. Performance theorist Elin Diamond defines "performance" as always a "doing" and a "thing done," a framing that can help us see how "America" is both a category with already attached meaning and cultural, military, economic, and political weight, as well as a category that is constantly being refashioned and redeployed.⁷¹ The dance-in-diplomacy programs constantly perform a hegemonic, state-sponsored version of "America," even as the individuals and communities involved in the programs critique and reimagine "America," too.

These constant reshapings of "nation" are particularly visible in the Cold War and the early decades of the so-called War on Terror, the two periods at the center of this book. Both periods share a heightened awareness of American identity as produced in relationship to a global sphere. Despite the many differences between post-World War II and post-9/11 United States, both eras functioned within a dominant narrative that painted the United States, to borrow theater historian Bruce McConachie's description of Cold War containment discourse, as a "virtuous 'us'" distinct from "an evil 'them' without ambiguity."⁷² This rhetoric's very force and repetition points to its constructed nature. Dancers traveling on the State Department tours danced and lived in the space between this forceful rhetoric of American exceptionalism and cultural hybridities produced by many forces, including migration, diaspora, and globalization.

Dancers as Diplomats first chapter focuses on New York City Ballet's tour of the Soviet Union in 1962 and its overlap with perhaps the most iconic US-Soviet standoff of the Cold War: the Cuban missile crisis. In the same months that the United States and USSR teetered on the brink of nuclear war, company dancers, led by NYCB founding choreographer and Russian

émigré George Balanchine, walked through the schools of the famous Russian ballet academies and saw Soviet dancers execute dance technique the Americans performed onstage as “American.” They heard Balanchine strategically describe his national identity, sometimes as American, sometimes as Georgian, claiming the identity that best suited his agenda in a given setting. The dancers also listened to American and Soviet officials argue over whether Balanchine should or even could be claimed as a Soviet. National identity reigned as the key identity marker on the tour, but that category only captured partial aspects of artists’ lives and techniques.

Chapters 2 and 3 place the State Department Cold War touring programs in a global context, expanding beyond the US-Soviet standoff. Both chapters consider how tours to Africa and Asia, sites chosen specifically because of the postcolonial movements in each region, impacted Cold War policy and history. The State Department and, indeed, everyone supporting the early dance-in-diplomacy tours also saw Latin America as a key site in the US-Soviet struggle to shape the future of newly decolonized countries—so much so that the President’s Special Emergency Fund sent the first dance tour, the tour of the Limón Company in 1954, to Latin America.⁷³

Both chapters 2 and 3 also consider how American domestic events shaped international politics. Chapter 2 focuses on the relationship among American identity, race, and sexuality, primarily by examining performances by African American dancers: Arthur Mitchell of the New York City Ballet and the dancers of the predominantly African American Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. I focus on these dancers’ choices, onstage and offstage, building upon Penny Von Eschen’s important work on jazz music and American cultural diplomacy to consider how modernist aesthetics contained, obscured, and exported racialized meanings. For many artists on tour, their races and sexualities created a double-minoritarian status, which I consider in light of homophobic State Department policies, now known collectively as the Lavender Scare.⁷⁴

As artists of minoritarian status well knew, American ideals—freedom and individualism among them—so eagerly exported by the United States during the Cold War were not without limits. Chapter 3 considers how the rhetoric of “freedom” became a double-edged tool on the State Department tours, and argues that the Martha Graham Dance Company became one of the companies most frequently supported by the State Department, in part, because the company and its well-known, provocative female leader performed the possibilities of freedom for women, particularly sexual freedom, onstage and off. At the same time, however, Graham’s work rarely pushed boundaries too far by Cold War standards—as would have

been the case had the sexuality in question been male homosexuality. Graham represented the apex of American dance modernism and its claim to universal communication, especially to the ANTA panelists choosing artists for tours. She became the indomitable female choreographer of State Department tours because she, unlike her female contemporaries, the African American choreographers and anthropologists Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus, performed “American freedom” in the “correct” contexts.

This is not to say that Graham only benefited from the system. She also challenged the system, particularly through her use of the body in what I call a “diva stance.” With her body, she crossed the boundaries of what women could and should do in the public sphere at mid-century, navigating first a congressional scandal about her work in 1963 and the sensitive tour of war-torn Vietnam in 1974.

Chapters 4 and 5 examine dance-in-diplomacy programs in the early twenty-first century. By focusing primarily on DanceMotion USA, I track the shift from the Cold War export-based model of cultural diplomacy, bringing “America” to the world, to the partnership-based model of cultural diplomacy. DanceMotion tours supported American efforts to work with other nations, an outgrowth of a twenty-first-century globally networked world.

Chapter 4 discusses how DanceMotion emerged from a post-9/11, post-US-invasion-of-Iraq political landscape. Principally, the chapter considers how the program’s emphasis on American companies—Urban Bush Women, Ronald K. Brown’s Evidence, and ODC/Dance—working with foreign audiences and artists has shifted the focus away from theatrical presentations and toward community engagement, usually in the form of lecture-demonstrations and workshops. In the 2010 pilot program, DanceMotion’s embrace of partnership was extended to include the African diaspora as part of American culture, a diasporic formulation that was used but often backgrounded in the Cold War era.

Dancers as Diplomats concludes with a meditation on the concept of exchange with an ethnographic essay about my time following the Korean National Contemporary Dance Company and the Trey McIntyre Project on their US tour. In 2012 the State Department introduced a two-way exchange program into DanceMotion, bringing Americans abroad and, later, non-American dancers to the United States. Although “exchange” had been a fantasy of the dance programs since their inception, the State Department did not fully finance back-and-forth relationships until 2012. The Boise-based contemporary Trey McIntyre Project was one of four that traveled on the 2012 DanceMotion USA tour. Months later the Korea

National Contemporary Dance Company, with State Department support, came to Boise to make a work with the McIntyre group, and the two company then toured that work across the United States.

Chapter 5 presses against the assumption that two-way exchange is possible in relationships characterized by an immensely asymmetrical power imbalance, as is the case between the United States and virtually any other nation. How do asymmetrical power relationships curtail, but perhaps not entirely block, exchange? And, really, what is being exchanged? Money? An approach to movement? Dance itself? And finally, who or what is “changing” in the space of State Department-sponsored exchange, in the past and in the present?

Dancers as Diplomats argues that dance and dancers, in part because of their understanding of representation and social change as always embodied, have shaped and re-shaped American identity. It is clear to me, after living with this material for over a decade, that by thinking about performance—and specifically dance—much can be learned about how national identity is formed and reformed with and through bodies. When the State Department funded dance companies to travel around the world on behalf of the US, it funded footprints that left impressions on individual artists’ political consciousness, on other countries’ sense of the United States and themselves, and on domestic life in the United States.