

RACE AND...Dance**By Alexandra Ripp, Five College Dance Director****Excerpted from the forthcoming FCD annual newsletter**

After the killing of George Floyd, Five College Dance Joint Lecturer of African Diasporic Dance Shakia Barron quickly mobilized to support her students. Although the school year was wrapping up, she created an online healing circle for her dance students of color. This informal gathering turned into a weekly series, BLACK BEAUTY DANCE, that she organized, curated, and hosted. Raising funds from crowdsourcing, Barron brought in prominent Black dance artists, to teach their craft and share their cultural, historical, artistic, and professional knowledge. Above all, these classes emphasized the centrality of Black culture, history, and identity in the U.S., and allowed a safe space for discussion and processing in a time of trauma.

For Fall 2021, Barron and FCD Director Alexandra Ripp worked with Mount Holyoke Assistant Dean of Student Life Latrina Denson to produce a related but new series for the whole Five College community that explored the intersection of race and dance. Denson was already hosting a RACE AND...series at Mount Holyoke that connected with the college's Common Read, *The 1619 Project*; Barron's work naturally fit in her programming. Through her series RACE AND...Dance, Barron wanted to allow the Five College community, regardless of their dance experience or training, a creative mode to learn about and appreciate African diasporic cultures, whose contributions to contemporary dance are often underexplored. In a time when race occupied the forefront of national conversations, she wanted to offer embodiment as a unique entrypoint for understanding and appreciating Black identity.

With sponsorship of all five dance departments and Mount Holyoke's Office of Student Life, its Cultural Centers, and its Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (and the crucial support of FCD Program Coordinator Martha Potyrala and MHC Graduate Assistant Ysabel Garcia), Barron curated a six-session Zoom series taught by different guest teachers. Focusing on a different African Diasporic form, each teacher offered a combination of lecture, discussion, and movement training.

Every session gathered past and present students, faculty, and staff from the colleges, as well as friends of FCD. With funding from the South Hadley Cultural Council, RACE AND...Dance will be programmed again in fall 2021 and opened more deliberately to the general public. We welcome all Five College Dance community past and present to join us via Zoom to dance and learn!

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