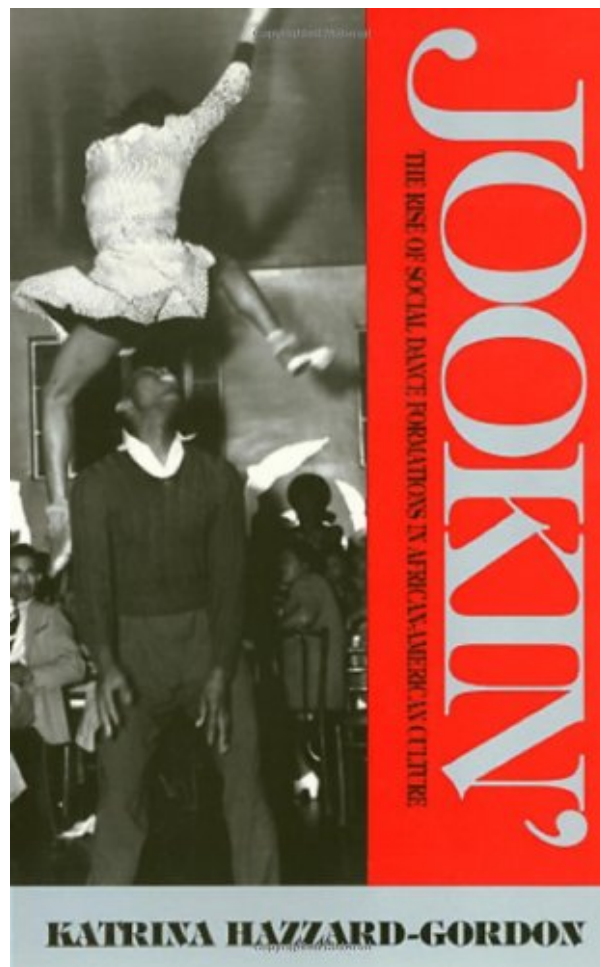
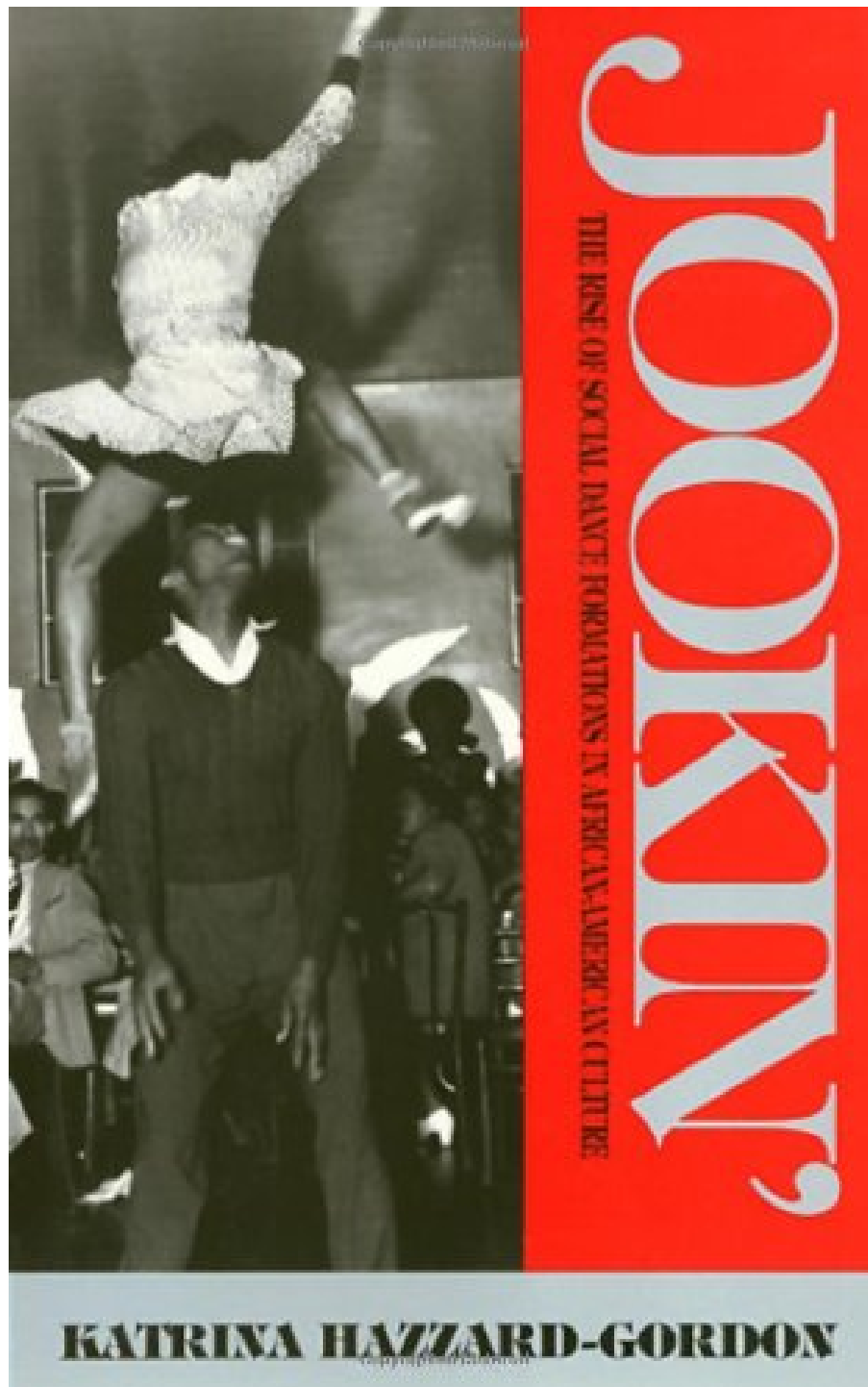


JOOKIN': THE RISE OF SOCIAL DANCE FORMATIONS IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN CULTURE BY KATRINA HAZZARD-GORDON



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From Publishers Weekly

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Review

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Katrina Hazzard-Gordon offers the first analysis of the development of the jook—an underground cultural institution created by the black working class—together with other dance arenas in African-American culture. Beginning with the effects of African slaves' middle passage experience on their traditional dances, she traces the unique and virtually autonomous dance culture that developed in the rural South. Like the blues, these secular dance forms and institutions were brought north and urbanized by migrating blacks. In northern cities, some aspects of black dance became integrated into white culture and commercialized. Focusing on ten African-American dance arenas from the period of enslavement to the mid-twentieth century, this book explores the jooks, honky-tonks, rent parties, and after-hours joints as well as the licensed membership clubs, dance halls, cabarets, and the dances of the black elite.

Jook houses emerged during the Reconstruction era and can be viewed as a cultural response to freedom. In the jook, Hazzard-Gordon explains, an immeasurable amount of core black culture including food, language, community fellowship, mate selection, music, and dance found a sanctuary of expression when no other secular institution flourished among the folk. The jook and its various derivative forms have provided both entertainment and an economic alternative (such as illegal lotteries and numbers) to people excluded from the dominant economy. Dances like the Charleston, shimmy, snake hips, funky butt, twist, and slow drag originated in the jooks; some can be traced back to Africa.

Social dancing links black Americans to their African past more strongly than any other aspect of their culture. Citing the significance of dance in the African-American psyche, this study explores the establishments that nurtured ancestral as well as communal links for African-Americans, vividly describing black dances, formal rituals, such as debutante balls, and the influence of black dance on white culture.

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Features

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Most helpful customer reviews

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

A good book, but I want to know more about Jookin'

By Tony Thomas

Jookin' is a necessary book if you are on the trail of African American musical and dance culture. Its approach is the acceptance of the integral relationship between music and dance and life among the African peoples enslaved into the current US and its survival and continuation in Black popular dance.

There is much in her discussion of this in colonial times particularly that is useful, especially if read along with other more clearly documented texts like Emery's *_Black Dance 1619 to Today_*. Indeed, Hazzard-Gordon tend's to go back and forth in regard to what period she is talking about with an inconsistency that makes the historically oriented reader a bit confused and disappointed.

From the title we expect a full discussion, explanation of the life of the blues juke houses that reigned as centers of African American musical and dance creation and celebration from the post reconstruction period to the end of the agricultural Black belt south in the 1950s and 1960s.

Yet Hazzard-Gordon does not stop and dwell upon this phase, but moves forward to a concentration of popular African American entertainment venues in Cleveland, Ohio and their relationship with local politics. For those interested this is an interesting study and brings back aspects of African American life across the country that is rarely documented--urban black popular entertainment in the first half of the 20th century.

Whatever the exact differences between the story she tells of Cleveland and other cities, I am sure both in memory and need for study, this segment of the book will be interesting and rewarding to readers.

However, this segment reflects problems that the book has all along. Hazzard-Gordon feels the need to provide nearly complete explanations of political and economic factors that have impact on her subject. This is commendable. Yet, these explanations get so large that they sometimes overshadow what she really has to say about Black vernacular dance and entertainment, which is what the book is supposed to be about.

Nevertheless, this book is an important achievement as it attempts to capture the essentialness of popular dance and music to African American life and its popular outlets both underslavery and since. Unlike other authors who discuss popular and folk dance only until the development of professional Black entertainment in minstrel shows and the stage, and abandon that once art dancing emerges in the early 20th Century, her focus remains squarely on popular dance from the forced "dancing" on the slave ships to the "dancing in the street" of the urban block parties of the 1950s and 1960s.

While this reader might have wanted more about rural Juke Houses, and more about the experience of their urban descendants, her picture of the mixture of business and politics in the growth of urban clubs, bars, dance halls, after hours joints, and night clubs in Cleveland is quite useful to understand African American urban life in the first two thirds of the 20th Century.

For a broader picture of African American dance and popular music I recommend the aforementioned _Black Dance 1619 to Today_ and _Steppin' on the Blues: The Visible Rhythms of African American Dance_ by Jacqui Malone.

2 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Skip Jookin'

By Teareader

Jookin' featured shockingly poor organization, accompanied by shoddy writing that efficiently obscured meaning behind names and dates tossed out with abandon. Though ostensibly about social dance, the writing lacked movement. Hazzard-Gordon rarely got around to interpreting how the changing socio-cultural formations effected the physical movements. (For example: How did movements change to accommodate the smaller spaces of Rent Parties?) Though I slogged through it, I wouldn't recommend anyone e...more Jookin' featured shockingly poor organization, accompanied by shoddy writing that efficiently obscured meaning behind names and dates tossed out with abandon. Though ostensibly about social dance, the writing lacked movement. Hazzard-Gordon rarely got around to interpreting how the changing socio-cultural formations effected the physical movements. (For example: How did movements change to accommodate the smaller spaces of Rent Parties?) Though I slogged through it, I wouldn't recommend anyone else bother.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Wow'n!!!

By L.S.A.

I just cannot believe how cool this book is. The author is even cooler!!! Not only is the book unusual in its topic, its unusual in its scope! Hats off to Dr. Katrina for elevating dancing in general, and jook joints, house/block parties & nightclubs in particular.

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