University of Nebraska - Lincoln
DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly | Great Plains Studies, Center for

1-1-2009

Review of *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing: Native American Modern Dance Histories* By Jacqueline Shea Murphy

Margaret Jacobs
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly

Part of the Other International and Area Studies Commons

Jacobs, Margaret, "Review of *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing: Native American Modern Dance Histories* By Jacqueline Shea Murphy" (2009). *Great Plains Quarterly.* Paper 1249.
http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/1249

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

The People Have Never Stopped Dancing: Native American Modern Dance Histories. By Jacqueline Shea Murphy. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. 320 pp. Photographs, notes, index. $75.00 cloth, $25.00 paper.

In this fascinating, ambitious, and well-researched book, dance scholar Jacqueline Shea Murphy analyzes three main topics. First she compares the history of U.S. and Canadian government attempts to suppress or transform Indigenous dance between the 1880s and the 1930s and charts the persistence of Native American dance in the face of such pressures. In the second section, she examines how modern dance pioneers such as Ted Shawn and Martha Graham infused modern dance with Indigenous themes. Although Shawn and Graham visited Indian peoples and observed their dance traditions, they ultimately made primitivist use of Indian materials for their own purposes and did not engage meaningfully with Indian worldviews, religions, or political concerns. This section also recovers early

Native American choreographers, including Jose Limón and Tom Two Arrows. In the final portion of the book, Murphy explores how Indigenous dance companies use contemporary modern dance as a "tool for spiritual and cultural resilience and self-determination."

Murphy's methodology is comprehensive and perhaps unique. She carries out careful archival research but also engages in significant participatory research. In her attempt to avoid the "troublesome dynamics" of the early modern dancers, she attends Indigenous dance workshops, productions, and events and interviews Indigenous dancers and choreographers. Her focus on restrictions on the Sun Dance as well as Plains Indian participation in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show will particularly interest readers of *Great Plains Quarterly*.

In most cases, Murphy offers ample support for her conclusions. For example, she provides strong evidence that even as U.S. and Canadian governments restricted ceremonial dance practices, they enabled stage representations of Indian dances. In a few instances, Murphy does not fully explore or support her insights. Her concept of dance as "a historical document of sorts" is intriguing but not well explained. Her linkage of antidance policies with Native American loss of land is similarly underdeveloped. A more troubling aspect of the book (one probably more due to the publisher than to the author) is its lack of a bibliography. There is no consistent system of citation—some footnoting, some parenthetical citation—making it sometimes difficult to locate the sources, particularly the primary sources, she identifies.

Still, despite these shortcomings, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing* is highly recommended for its exploration of the "interrelations between Native American dance and the history and development of modern dance in America."

MARGARET JACOBS
Department of History and Program
in Women's and Gender Studies
University of Nebraska–Lincoln