

Katherine Dunham

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Group Website

Senior Division

We chose to research Katherine Dunham and her influence on modern dance. She helped recognize other cultural dances along with raising awareness in racial segregation. For example, she mentioned she would not perform in certain areas if they did not desegregate their theatres. We chose this topic because one of us had an interest in learning about individuals that influenced dance history and the other was interested in doing a topic involving African American rights. So, because this topic included both our interests, we decided to work together. We also thought it would be a good topic to choose because most people actually don't know much about Katherine Dunham if any at all. Choosing a less recognizable topic is cool because we are able to bring more awareness to Dunham's contributions and give her more recognition.

We found a lot of our information online from sources such as google and youtube, and school research databases on badgerlink. One of our most helpful sources was the videos "Mahi" and "Dunham Technique" which we accessed from "The Library of Congress." It had plenty of interviews of Katherine and authentic videos giving insight about her fieldwork. This was very helpful because it gives readers a direct and visual representation (her fieldwork) of the points we're trying to convey in the "Dance Influence" page, and provides insight into Katherine's perspective of her work and contributions.

Another very useful source was an interview on Dunham as a social activist, which we found on youtube. As well as being recognized for her dance contributions, moral character and social justice was also very important to her. Katherine wanted equality amongst all people and she was willing to sacrifice her personal image to do that which is not something everyone would do. This also inspired others to try and create a more equal society.

One difficult part of this project was trying to manage the website. It is hard going from other sources such as google docs and prezi, which we are used to using, where you can move a piece of text wherever you want, to the NHDWebCentral where it is hard to figure out how to place the text to the left, right, or in the middle. The instructions on the NHDWebCentral are also vague and hard to understand.

The theme "Breaking Barriers" can be applied to our topic in multiple ways. First and foremost, Katherine Dunham broke barriers in dance history by integrating various cultures into classical ballet, transforming it into something more lively and expressive that directly captured "the meaning and life of the people" that she wished to represent. But, along the way she also broke racial barriers, for African Americans especially, as she pushed and expanded the boundaries of what they had previously accomplished. For example, she was one of the first African Americans to receive a doctorate in anthropology. Additionally, she broke down social barriers as she resisted discrimination against women in the world of education and performing arts.