

Katherine Dunham



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出版者:Univ of Illinois Pr

出版时间:2002-9

装帧:HRD

isbn:9780252027598

Throughout the better part of the twentieth century, and in performance halls, classrooms, and communities throughout the world, the wellspring of Katherine Dunham's remarkable career can be traced to the intersection of dance, culture, and society. More than a recounting of Dunham's accomplishments as a dancer and choreographer, this biography is the first to thoroughly examine her pioneering contributions to dance anthropology and her commitment to humanizing society through the arts. Founder of the first self-supporting African American dance company, Dunham relied on her fieldwork as an anthropologist to fundamentally change modern dance. She shaped new dance techniques and introduced other cultures to U.S. and European audiences by fusing Caribbean and African-based movement with ballet and modern dance. Her revolutionary approaches to dance and its greater connection to the world have influenced a generation of dancers, theatrical performers, and scholars. She believes that dance involves the development of an entire person and the rituals and traditions of dance are integral to the study of culture. Throughout her career she has been a living model of the socially responsible artist working to whet cultural appetites and combat social injustice. Joyce Aschenbrenner's multifaceted portrait blends personal observations based on her own interactions with Dunham, archival documents, and interviews with Dunham's colleagues, students, and

members of the Katherine Dunham Dance Company. Integrating these sources, Aschenbrenner characterizes the social, familial, and cultural environment of Dunham's upbringing and the intellectual and artistic community she embraced at the University of Chicago that laid the groundwork for her development as a dancer, anthropologist, and humanitarian. The book vividly depicts Dunham's and her dancers' touring experiences and includes detailed descriptions of her community cultural and educational programs in East St. Louis.

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