

Questions for *Skin Colored Pointes: Interviews with Women of Color in Ballet*

Created by Robin Prichard in consolation with the author (2024)

Graduate Student questions:

- In the interviews, Dr. McCarthy-Brown deliberately withheld questions about race until the end of the interviews. What benefit does this strategy have within oral history methods? What costs does this strategy bear?
- Dr. McCarthy-Brown states that part of her motivation to write the book was to inspire her students. What kinds of narratives is this approach likely to produce? What narratives is it likely to leave out? What are both the costs and benefits of producing a text where the stated intention is to inspire students?
- Critical Race Theory (CRT) has been in the news frequently, and it has become a flashpoint for politics and education. How does Dr. McCarthy-Brown define critical race theory, and who are her sources? How does this definition differ from the characterizations of CRT in various news stories and media? How might you explain CRT to a person with a different understanding? How might you explain the benefits of a CRT perspective, such as the one contained in this book?
- Dr. McCarthy-Brown discusses the importance of in-group messaging (page 15). What are some in-group messages that you see in your own education? Can you identify an in-group message that has impacted the trajectory of your own life?
- Dr. McCarthy-Brown reveals the current lack of Native American ballet dancers, despite the rich historical representation of Native Americans in the middle of the 20th century (the Five Moons – Marjorie Tallchief, Maria Tallchief, Moscelyn Larkin, Rosella Hightower, Yvonne Chateau). What factors do you think might have affected this lack of current representation? Are there intersectional factors that might determine the current lack of representation (class, economics, geography, etc.)? Why do you think that Native American participation in ballet companies was high in the 1940s-1950s but has not continued? Why has it been different for Black Americans?
- Dr. McCarthy-Brown states that in interviews, she read lack of interest in racial barriers in dance from interviewees as a coping mechanism. What type of stance does this interpretation reflect? What other interpretations are available around dismissive or lack of interest in discussing racial barriers? What challenges does this indicate in terms of oral history as a method?
- Dr. McCarthy-Brown talks about the value of emotional storytelling. Yet, in an academic setting, emotional storytelling often has a negative value. What does this reveal about the normative value of oral history in higher education? Are there ways that oral histories can work against this negative valuing?

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- In the introduction (page 9), Dr. McCarthy-Brown states that she works against essentialism. What does it mean to work against essentialism, and what places in the text do you see Dr. McCarthy-Brown working about essentialism? Is it possible to draw conclusions from works such as this one without an element of essentialism in the act of interpretation? Could there be a place in scholarship in which essentialism is necessary, such as *strategic essentialism*, a term by postcolonial scholar Gayatri Spivak?
- Dr. McCarthy-Brown states in the introduction that interviewees with current positions have more official, more positive, and less open responses in their interviews. Can you see examples of that in the text?
- Do you think that ultimately McCarthy-Brown is making the argument through this book that ballet is White? Not White? Ethnocentric? Not Ethnocentric?
- Lourdes Lopez talks about the immense influence her mother had as a fierce advocate for her (page 55-57). What would you attempt if you had an advocate like that?

How can you be your own fierce advocate?