

HIS 396.03
Dancing Through American History

Satisfies: SBS+ [DEC: K & 4]

Thematic Categories: "Arts, Ideas & Culture,"
"Race, Religion, Gender & Sexualities"

MW 2:30-3:50pm

Professor April Masten

This thematic course begins with the premise that history is embodied in movement. That the way people danced can offer a prism through which to view the central tensions of their society. But because dancing is a physical activity, its meaning and value cannot be fully comprehended unless we dance the dances. Similarly, it is impossible to understand the significance of a dance unless we know the historical context – social, economic, political, and cultural – in which it was performed. This is not a history of dance class. Rather, students learn to ring shout, jig, waltz, swing, salsa, and other dances to add kinesthetic experience to the knowledge they gain from reading and writing about the people, places, and periods that produced these dances.

Dancing is mandatory, but no experience is necessary. The course meets two times per week. Both classes must be attended for credit. We will dedicate one of those meetings to discussing in seminar style the week's readings (primary and secondary documents) and your written responses to them. In the other, I will teach you a dance and we will dance it together, stopping just before the end of the class to share any connections or historical insights into the readings that the experience of dancing has given us. Assessment will be based on your participation in both weekly classes, a weekly response paper or quiz, a weekly journal entry on the insights you gained from dancing, and an oral presentation (based on a 5-7 page paper) that makes an argument about one of the dances presented in class.