

# **Cultural Diplomacy And The Cold War: Unveiling Dance's Historical Significance**

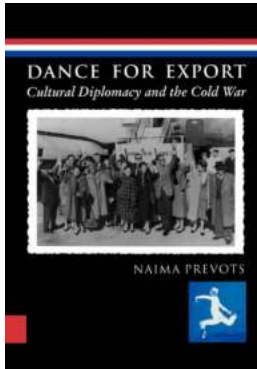
The Cold War era witnessed not only an intense political rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, but it also brought about a clash of ideologies and cultural expressions. Dance, often seen as an art form that transcends borders, played a significant role in shaping cultural diplomacy during this period. From ballet to folk dances, the performances became vehicles of propaganda, ideological expression, and diplomacy. In this article, we will delve into the rich history of dance during the Cold War, exploring its influence on cultural exchange and the diplomatic efforts between nations.

## **Unmasking Cold War Diplomacy**

Dance, with its ability to convey emotion and tell stories without words, transcends language barriers. This characteristic made it the perfect tool for cultural diplomacy during the Cold War, where both the US and the Soviet Union sought to present their respective ideologies in a positive light to the world.

While ballet, particularly Russian ballet, had established itself as a prominent art form long before the Cold War, it gained renewed significance during this period. The Soviet Union, recognizing the global appeal of ballet, actively promoted its dance companies and individual dancers as cultural ambassadors. These dancers became instrumental in showcasing the superiority of Soviet art and culture, often spreading the message that communism fostered creativity and excellence.

**Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War (Studies in Dance History)**



by Naima Prevots (Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.2 out of 5

Language : English  
File size : 2126 KB  
Text-to-Speech : Enabled  
Screen Reader : Supported  
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled  
Word Wise : Enabled  
Print length : 191 pages



The United States responded by promoting its own dance companies, such as the American Ballet Theatre and Martha Graham Dance Company, as representatives of freedom, democracy, and individual expression. These companies toured extensively around the world, showcasing American choreography and dance techniques to win over hearts and minds.

## **The Global Stage: How Dance Transcended Borders**

Both the US and the Soviet Union utilized dance as a soft power tool to gain influence and strengthen diplomatic ties with other nations. One example of this is the touring of ballet companies. The Bolshoi Ballet, for instance, embarked on a series of tours during the Cold War, captivating audiences worldwide with their performances and leaving a lasting impact on the perception of Soviet culture.

Similarly, American dance companies embarked on global tours, enthraling audiences with their unique fusion of dance styles and innovative choreography. This exchange of cultural performances fostered understanding and appreciation between nations, contributing to their diplomatic efforts.

Dance festivals and competitions became battlegrounds for cultural diplomacy. The International Ballet Competitions held in Moscow and Varna attracted dancers from around the world, providing a platform for international interaction and recognition. These events allowed countries to showcase their talents, cultural diversity, and artistic prowess, furthering their diplomatic objectives.

## **Propaganda and Ideological Expression**

Dance, being a form of artistic expression, often became a tool for propaganda during the Cold War. Both the US and the Soviet Union used dance performances to project their ideologies and influence global perceptions.

In the Soviet Union, ballets like "The Nutcracker" and "Swan Lake" were carefully crafted to emphasize themes of unity, patriotism, and the beauty of communist society. Similarly, the United States emphasized individualism and freedom in their dance pieces, championing those values in opposition to the collective nature of communism.

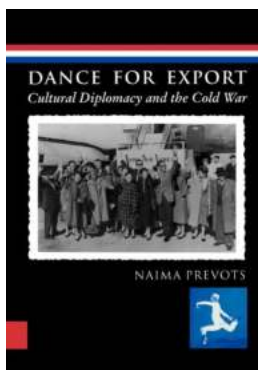
Through dance, both nations aimed to validate their political systems and convince the international audience that their ideologies were more desirable and successful in fostering cultural expression and creativity.

## **Legacy and Contemporary Understanding**

The impact of cultural diplomacy through dance during the Cold War persists in the contemporary world. It laid the foundation for the recognition and appreciation of diverse dance forms globally. It also paved the way for international collaborations and exchange programs, which continue to foster cross-cultural understanding and promote diplomacy through the arts.

Moreover, the Cold War era in dance history serves as a reminder of the power of the arts as a means of communication and influence. It showcases how an art form as seemingly apolitical as dance can be manipulated and used as a tool to further political agendas.

Dance served as an effective medium for cultural diplomacy during the Cold War. It facilitated international exchange, showcased ideologies, and became a tool for propaganda. The influence of this era can still be seen today, with dance playing a pivotal role in diplomatic efforts and fostering cross-cultural understanding. As we appreciate the beauty and grace of dance, it is important to remember its historical significance and the role it played in the complex dance of politics during the Cold War.



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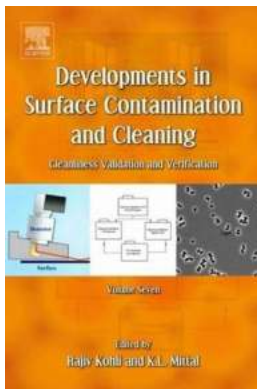


<P>At the height of the Cold War in 1954, President Eisenhower inaugurated a program of cultural exchange that sent American dancers and other artists to political "hot spots" overseas. This peacetime gambit by a warrior hero was a resounding success.</P><P>Among the artists chosen for international duty were

José Limón, who led his company on the first government-sponsored tour of South America; Martha Graham, whose famed ensemble crisscrossed southeast Asia; Alvin Ailey, whose company brought audiences to their feet throughout the South Pacific; and George Balanchine, whose New York City Ballet crowned its triumphant visits to Western Europe and Japan with an epoch-making tour of the Soviet Union in 1962. The success of Eisenhower's program of cultural export led directly to the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts and Washington's Kennedy Center.

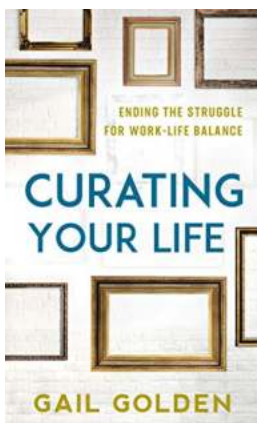
Naima Prevots draws on an array of previously unexamined sources, including formerly classified State Department documents, congressional committee hearings, and the minutes of the Dance Panel, to reveal the inner workings of "Eisenhower's Program," the complex set of political, fiscal, and artistic interests that shaped it, and the ever-uneasy relationship between government and the arts in the US.

CONTRIBUTORS: Eric Foner.



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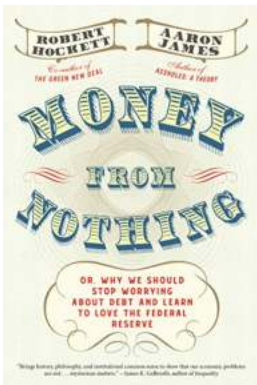
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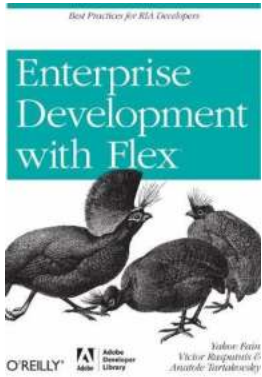
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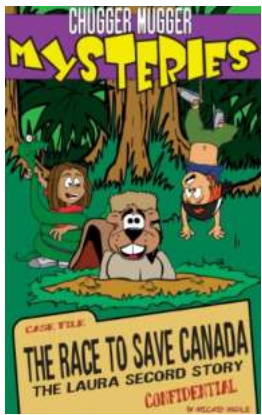
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