

DANCE STYLE LOCATOR

North American: Hambone



Hambone was created by enslaved Africans in North America. Forbidden to use their drums, slaves found ways to make rhythms with tambourines, bones, and body music such as hand clapping, body and thigh slapping, also called “Pattin’ Juba.”

The name “hambone” refers to the daily activities of the early African American slave communities. In the days of slavery, families had to stretch the little food they were given, relying on their resourcefulness and creativity to survive under adverse conditions. The hambone (the bone of ham) was used to make a big pot of soup, which, with lots of water, and little scraps of vegetables and spices, was stretched to feed many families. That same hambone would be passed around and used repeatedly in different pots of soups, making something from nothing as a way of survival.

The word “hambone” was then adopted as the name of the system of improvised rhythmic body music, which arose because slaves were forbidden to have or use drums. Using the same resourcefulness to perpetuate their traditions, the dance and music style of “hambone” was created, allowing cultural, sacred, and historic rhythms to survive and evolve. The use of the word Hambone, and the practice itself, is therefore a metaphor, honoring the cultural memory of the determina-

tion and creativity of African Americans in the United States throughout their history.

Hambone rhyme/song

Hambone Hambone where you been?
Around the world and back again!

Thank you to Derique for his contribution to the content of this page.