The Meaning of the Circle

Cultural and Historical Meaning

In African and African-American culture, the circle is a very important symbol. The circle of the community surrounds the individual and supports him or her in dance—and in successes and failures in life.

It is important to note the contributions of African Americans to Appalachian culture, beginning in Colonial times. “Square dances” in the Appalachian region and elsewhere in the Southeastern United States are actually usually danced in a circle, which probably has a connection to the African and African-American supportive community circle. The practice of rhymed calling for square dances probably also has some roots in African-American dances such as “Little Johnny Brown,” in which the lyrics tell dancers what movements to do.