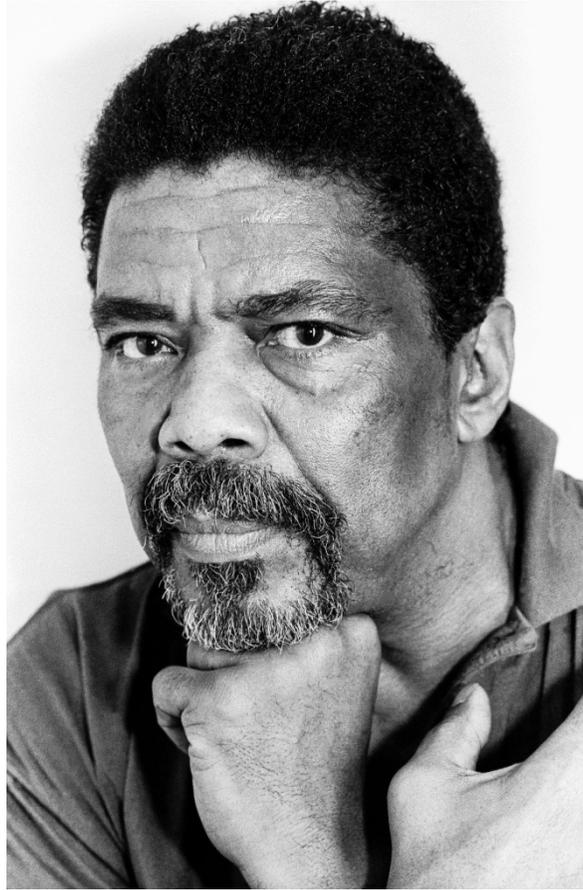


Alvin Ailey



Born on January 5th, 1931, in Rogers, Texas, Alvin Ailey grew up facing racism and segregation in the south. To make ends meet, he spent most of his childhood working as a domestic in white homes with his mother, experiencing traumatic events such as constant financial instability and even witnessing a white man rape his mother. Despite all of this, Ailey found comfort in the church. Watching the adults dance and be overcome by gospel music, Ailey wrote everything he observed down and was inspired by the passion and escape religion provided.

Eventually, he and his mother moved to Los Angeles, where he attended George Washington Carver Junior High School and Thomas Jefferson High School. During this time, he was first exposed to concert dance and introduced to individuals pursuing dance as a career. However, Ailey did not consider it until he enrolled in the Melrose Avenue studio of Lester Horton.

Horton, an incredible instructor, became a mentor to Ailey. Even though Ailey shared his time between his dance training and collegiate education, he eventually became a full-time dancer for Horton's dance company in 1953. Sadly, Horton died shortly after this, but the impact he made on Ailey was everlasting.

After spending several years as a dancer and performer, Ailey took on the role of choreographer. Following in Horton's footsteps, he founded the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1958 to honor the importance of dance in Black culture. He drew upon the

experiences of his youth in the church when creating his most critically-acclaimed work to date, *Revelations*.

This work, along with the others he created with AADT, earned Ailey much praise and recognition, including the Kennedy Center Honors and the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Even after his death, Alvin Ailey remains a pioneer in dance and choreography and an inspiration to all.