

# MAKE YOUR OWN HISTORY

## CIVICS LESSON

### Thomas Wiggins/Alvin Ailey

#### Artistic Innovation

Thomas Wiggins brought his artistic innovation into his concert performances: he dueled audience members by inviting them to the stage to play the piano, then immediately reproducing whatever they played!



About a century later, Alvin Ailey was a groundbreaking innovator in the art form of dance. Ailey had been studying and performing in Los Angeles during the 1950's, when he was recruited to join the Broadway show "House of Flowers". He then founded the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater to present his vision of enriching the American modern dance through Black culture. The company's debut performance at the 92nd Street Y featured Ailey's first masterpiece "Blues Suite": a dance to blues music punctuated by church bells.

In 1960 Ailey premiered "Revelations", a dance of critical acclaim and enduring popularity. Ailey again combined different elements of Black culture in the ballet:

dances choreographed in the Southern milieu to spirituals and blues with the inspirational finale, “Rocka My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham.”

Ailey not only carried Wiggins’ example of artistically innovative performances; he was also a trailblazer in educational programming in the arts through the establishment of The Ailey School in 1969. Over the course of its half-century of performances, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater performed on six continents in 71 countries as well as throughout the U.S. to 25 million people in 48 states.

In recognition of his pioneering contributions to American arts and culture, Ailey was posthumously honored in 2014 with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the country’s highest civilian honor.

Like Wiggins and Ailey, be an artistic innovator by making the most out of your abilities!