



How Alvin Ailey ADT's 'theater of disruption' teaches about racism

By: Linda Schmidt

June 19, 2020



Watch here: <https://www.fox5ny.com/news/how-alvin-ailey-adts-theater-of-disruption-teaches-about-racism> (2 minutes)

Choreographer Donald Byrd uses what he calls "theater of disruption" in his productions. Creating works of dance or theater that "disrupts the thinking of people around the issue of race," he said.

And he is waking people up with his production Greenwood. In observance of Juneteenth, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is streaming the production online through Thursday, June 25.

Through dance, Greenwood tells the horrific story of the 1921 race massacre in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Greenwood was a section of Tulsa and one of the most affluent black communities in the country. It was known as Black Wall Street. But white residents, angered by black progress, burned down homes and businesses and killed as many as 300 black residents.

"The fact that the Greenwood section of Tulsa, the black community in Tulsa, was doing so well, was prosperous was threatening," Byrd said. "White supremacy depends on black people not doing well."

Black history is part of how white people understand history in America, he said, so telling this story is a way to disrupt that thinking.

"So part of the disruption is making people conscious and aware of something and acknowledging the horrific things that happened in the past," Byrd said.

Byrd grew up in Florida during Jim Crow and draws on his family's experiences.

"I was very conscious of lynching, that they happen," he said. "He had stories from my family about relatives that had barely escaped it."

His productions hope to inspire people to make positive change.

"How much energy and effort it took to keep segregation in place," Byrd said.