

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the First Lady

September 7, 2010

**REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY
AT JUDITH JAMISON DANCE CELEBRATION**

East Room, 5:10 P.M. EDT

MRS. OBAMA: Thank you, everyone. (Applause.) Please, sit, relax.

Welcome to my home. Welcome to the White House. (Laughter.) And thank you, Damian, for that wonderful introduction. Damian has made so many outstanding contributions in the arts, from his time as a world-renowned dancer to the work as Artistic Director of the Vail International Dance Festival to his service as a member of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities today. So I thank you for your pirouettes -- (laughter) -- but for all that you've done for the arts and for all of the hard work that you've put in to pulling together today's program.

I'd like to just take a few moments and recognize some people -- first of all, the co-chairs of the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities: Margo Lion and George Stevens, Jr. I want to thank them and all of the members of the committee for their work on behalf of the arts and the humanities. I want to recognize Representative Chaka Fattah and his wife Renee, who are here, as well. It's good to have you both.

And of course I want to give a warm welcome to all the young dancers who are here today. Let's give them a round of applause. (Applause.) So, we could hear you a little bit upstairs. (Laughter.) Did you all have fun this afternoon?

DANCERS: Yes!

MRS. OBAMA: Did you work up a good sweat?

DANCERS: Yes!

MRS. OBAMA: Well, good. That's a good thing. I'm also doing "Let's Move," so that's good -- moving, dancing, all that stuff.

These young men and women are from Michigan, and New York, Philadelphia, Delaware, Chicago -- South Side! -- (laughter) -- and right here in Washington, and they just finished, as Damian mentioned, an hour-and-a-half workshop with some of the most distinguished dance companies in our country. And I am so thrilled that they could all be here today as we kick off our new White House Dance Series.

Now, this is something that we've been thinking about and talking about doing for awhile. And you probably already heard a little bit about our music series where we showcase a whole range of different genres of music -- from classical to country, to the music of the Civil Rights movement.

But we're pivoting off that theme today, but instead of hearing the beauty of song, we'll witness the glory of movement. It's a good thing. (Applause.) And we've got a little something for everyone. The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is here. (Applause.) "Billy Elliott the Musical," they're here. (Applause.) The New York City Ballet. (Applause.) Paul Taylor Dance Company. (Applause.) Super Cr3w. (Applause.) And the

Washington Ballet. (Applause.) They're all here today. It's very exciting. (Applause.) So from ballet to Broadway to hip-hop, today is a celebration of some of the most beautiful, powerful, and emotional aspects of American dance.

But today isn't simply about these performances or the new dance series or even these talented, young dancers. What brings us together today is the extraordinary career of an amazing, phenomenal, fly woman -- (laughter) -- the renowned dancer, choreographer, and artistic director Judith Jamison. (Applause.)

So let's embarrass Judith a bit. Would you please stand, my dear -- I know, I know, it's the lights. (Applause.) Thank you, Judith. Thank you so much. (Applause.) This amazing woman, born in Philadelphia, she was onstage in New York with the American Ballet Theater by her early 20s. Ten years ago, right? (Laughter.) After just one year, she joined the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, where her shooting star connected with Alvin's.

And their artistry continues to shine brightly to this very day. Judith, as we all know, was Alvin Ailey's muse. He crafted pieces just for her, including "Cry," which we all know is a 15-minute solo work, and we're going to see a portion of that piece in just a moment. It's a good thing. (Applause.) After 15 years as lead dancer, she branched off from Alvin Ailey's company in 1980 to perform and choreograph on her own. But in 1989, in failing health, Alvin named Judith as his successor.

In the years since, she has earned the National Medal of the Arts and an Emmy. She has become a Kennedy Center Honoree. And she has distinguished herself as a true visionary in the world of dance.

Her work has been an inspiration to me personally and to the President. Let me tell you, your picture in "Cry" was the only piece of art we had in our house. (Laughter.) And the girls remember it. They're like, is that the lady in the picture? (Laughter.) That's her.

So we're thrilled to host her here at the White House in our home. After my husband's inauguration, our family's very first trip to the Kennedy Center was for the Alvin Ailey 50th anniversary performance. That was great.

And for years I have gone to watch Judith's company whenever and wherever I can. And I always try to bring these two little women with me because I want them to see Judith's gifts on display, because I want them to witness the grace and the beauty that stirs our souls and connects us to each other like nothing else can.

And in her biography, entitled "Dancing Spirit," Judith wrote -- these are her words: "Dancing is bigger than the physical body. Think bigger than that," she said. "When you extend your arm, it doesn't stop at the end of your fingers, because you're dancing bigger than that. You're dancing spirit."

In so many ways, Judith Jamison embodies that spirit -- a spirit that is alive in all the dancers she's inspired, in all the pieces she's perfected, in all the audiences she has moved and uplifted.

And today, we honor Judith for all she has achieved and all she has contributed not just to our country but to the world.

And now, I can think of no better way to begin the White House Dance Series than with an excerpt from "Cry" by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. It was a gift from Alvin to his mother, and Judith made it famous. Now, it is a gift from us to her. So enjoy. And thank you all for being here. (Applause.)

END, 5:18 P.M. EDT

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA ANNOUNCES WHITE HOUSE DANCE SERIES BEGINNING WITH TRIBUTE TO JUDITH JAMISON

First Lady's September 7th White House Event Will Celebrate Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater Artistic Director, Judith Jamison

On September 7th, First Lady Michelle Obama will invite world renowned dance companies to perform at the Administration's first event celebrating dance. The White House Dance Series: A Tribute to Judith Jamison will honor Jamison for her outstanding career as an American dancer, choreographer, and Artistic Director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater for the past 20 years. The event, featuring American dance from ballet, modern and contemporary dance, hip hop and Broadway will be held in the White House's East Room at 5:00 PM and will be pooled press. The early evening event will feature performers from the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Paul Taylor Dance Company, Billy from Billy Elliot the Musical, The Washington Ballet, Super Cr3w, and New York City Ballet. It will be directed by Damian Woetzel, former principal dancer at the New York City Ballet and member of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities.

In continuing the Administration's focus on supporting the arts and arts education, a dance workshop will be held in the White House East Room on September 7th at 3:00 PM. Dance companies will lead a segment of the workshop focusing on their genre. Students from the Alvin Ailey School, Ballet Hispanico, Cab Calloway School of the Arts (CCSA), Dance Theatre of Harlem, Interlochen Center for the Arts, The Washington School of Ballet, the National Dance Institute's New York, Colorado and New Mexico affiliates, the Chicago Multicultural Dance Center and the Philadelphia High School for Creative and Performing Arts will participate in this 90 minute workshop and then attend the early evening performance as guests. The start of this event will be open press. Please RSVP to firstladypress@who.eop.gov, indicate if you have a White House Hard Pass or send your vitals by Friday, September 3rd at 10:00 AM.

Judith Jamison has been artistic director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater for two decades. One of the most renowned figures in modern dance, she was Mr. Ailey's muse for whom he created the tour-de-force solo *Cry* and other enduring roles. As a highly regarded choreographer, Ms. Jamison has created works for many different companies. She is also an author, whose autobiography was edited by Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. Ms. Jamison is the recipient of a primetime Emmy Award, the Kennedy Center Honors, and the National Medal of Arts, and she was named in *TIME*'s 2009 list of the world's 100 most influential people.

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