

ART IS JUSTICE

Michelle Dorrance on how tap represents social change

Tap dancer and choreographer Michelle Dorrance explains how tap dance reflects social movements within the United States. "To be a professional tap dancer is to be a historian. It's something that my generation, we, I think, hold very near and dear to who we are as practitioners of the form."

This video is part of the #ArtIsJustice series. Throughout U.S. history, artists and cultural leaders have been at the forefront of social change. Today, in the face of growing intolerance and widening inequality, artists stand up to these injustices, reminding us all that Art IS Justice.

Transcript begins.

[The words "Art Is" appear, followed by scrolling words...Empathy, Creativity, a Human Right, Change, Expression...it stops at Social Change. Art Is Social Change.]

[On a large stage, Michelle and dancers perform. Throughout the video, footage of tap dancers like Josephine Baker, Gregory Hines, the Syncopated Ladies, and Savion Glover is interspersed with Michelle's interview.]

Michelle Dorrance, tap dancer and choreographer: Art reflects our country's community. Tap dancing has always been sort of a bastard of the dance forms, and yet it is this incredibly sophisticated, incredibly exciting form, a very cutting-edge form, constantly reinventing itself—and also reflecting what is going on in American culture.

To tell the story of the history of tap dance is also to move through the history of the United States of America. Early tap dancers were catalysts for social change— from Bill "Bojangles" Robinson and Shirley Temple being the first black and white hand to be ever held on the silver screen... on through civil rights.

To be a professional tap dancer is to be a historian. It's something that my generation, we, I think, hold very near and dear to who we are as practitioners of the form. Every single time you have an opportunity to share it, we want to reference the past and yet show its possibilities moving forward.

[The words "Art Is" appear, followed by scrolling words...Social Change, Expression, Change, Creativity, Healing...it stops at Justice. Hashtag Art Is Justice. Agree? Share this video.]

[Ford Foundation logo: a globe made up of a series of small, varied circles.]

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Archival Courtesy of

Dorrance Dance

“The Blues Project,” created by Michelle Dorrance, Derrick K. Grant, Toshi Reagon,
and Dormeshia Sumbry-Edwards

“ETM: Double Down,” created by Michelle Dorrance and Nicholas Van Young

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The Syncopated Ladies

End of transcript.

accessible video transcript