

The Wallis presents

**SOCIAL ACTIVISM AND THE ARTS:  
LESSONS FROM THE LEGACY OF DICK GREGORY**

**A Free Panel Discussion featuring Joe Morton, Tavis Smiley, Lula Washington,  
Shamell Bell and Tananarive Due on Monday, December 11 at 7:00pm**

(Beverly Hills, CA November 28) Wielding razor-sharp wit, comic genius **Dick Gregory**—subject of the play *Turn Me Loose* that explores the influential life of the 1960s activist and first black comedian to make white audiences laugh at the absurdity of bigotry, and that recently closed at the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts—hacked away at myths about race, poverty, war and politics, up until his passing in August 2017. The play revealed how the power of activism enticed Gregory from one of the most successful show business careers of the postwar era into a life of sacrifice alongside Martin Luther King, Medgar Evers and other civil rights leaders. Prophetic, committed, authentic, confrontational and hysterically funny, Mr. Gregory was one of the last living champions from a remarkable period of struggle for dignity and freedom. As a way of continuing the legacy of Mr. Gregory’s work, The Wallis presents a free panel discussion – **Social Activism and the Arts: Lessons from the Legacy of Dick Gregory** on **Monday, December 11 at 7:00pm** in the Lovelace Studio Theater.

The panel, comprised of individuals who have shown support of activism through the arts, includes Emmy Award and multiple NAACP Image Award-winning film, television and stage veteran **Joe Morton**, who portrayed Gregory in *Turn Me Loose*; broadcaster, author, publisher, advocate, and philanthropist **Tavis Smiley**; dancer and original member of Black Lives Matter **Shamell Bell** and Los Angeles-based choreographer **Lula Washington**, Founder and Artistic Director of the Lula Washington Dance Theatre. The conversation will be moderated by **Tananarive Due**, author, activist, and professor of Afrofuturism and Black Horror at UCLA. The production and panel is made possible in part by the generous support of The Sheri and Les Biller Family Foundation and continues The Wallis’ commitment to create, present and celebrate work that reflects the rich cultural diversity of our city.

“Alongside his comedy career, Dick Gregory dedicated his life to social justice and the civil rights movement,” said Paul Crewes, The Wallis’ Artistic Director. “The Wallis presented *Turn Me Loose* as a way to share Mr. Gregory’s story and honor his legacy. We are now thrilled to have Joe, Tavis, Shamell, Lula and Tananarive together on our stage to discuss not only the lasting contributions of Mr. Gregory, but also what the next generation of artists and activists can do to further the conversation surrounding racism and social justice.”

Complimentary general admission tickets are now available for reservation by visiting [TheWallis.org/SocialActivism](http://TheWallis.org/SocialActivism), by emailing [Tickets@TheWallis.org](mailto:Tickets@TheWallis.org), calling 310.746.4000, stopping by in person at the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts Ticket Services located at 9390 N. Santa Monica Blvd., Beverly Hills, CA 90210, or joining the Facebook event at: <http://bit.ly/2icUQng>.

### **About the Panelists:**

**Shamell Bell** is a mother, community organizer and choreographer. She is an original member of the #blacklivesmatter movement, beginning as a core organizer with Justice 4 Trayvon Martin Los Angeles (J4TMLA)/Black Lives Matter Los Angeles to what she now describes as an Arts & Culture liaison between several organizations such as the BLM network and Blackout For Human Rights, among others. Her work on "street dance activism" situates dance as grassroots political action from her perspectives as a scholar, dancer and choreographer. Shamell's street dance experience includes featured roles in music videos, award shows and tours with artists such as Will Smith, Christina Aguilera and Ludacris, and in David LaChapelle's acclaimed documentary *Rize* which features Miss Prissy, "The Queen of Krump." Building on her senior thesis at the University of Southern California, an ethnographic exploration of the Ranger\$, a well-known dance crew in LA's Jerkin' movement, Shamell's research at UCLA examines street dance movements in South Central Los Angeles through an ethnographic and performance studies lens. Motivated by her passion for justice, Shamell aims to create an ongoing dialogue between street dance, activist and academic communities, highlighting the street dancer's actual presence at academic institutions in the form of dancing, speaking, teaching and writing. When she is not occupying the police station or leading chants at demonstrations with BLMLA, Shamell can be found playing with her son, Seijani aka "Johnnie," and even including him in peaceful demonstrations.

**Joe Morton** is an Emmy Award and multiple NAACP Image Award-winning film, television and stage veteran. Most recently, Morton received the Lucille Lortel Award and the Off-Broadway Alliance Award for outstanding lead actor in play, for his portrayal of Dick Gregory in New York. Morton made his Broadway debut in Tony Award-winning *Hair* and garnered a Tony nomination for his performance in *Raisin*. He also performed in *Art* on Broadway (and in London's West End) with Judd Hirsch and George Wendt, as well as David Hare's *Stuff Happens* at the National Theatre in London as 'Colin Powell.' Morton is widely known in film for playing the title character in the sci-fi film *The Brother From Another Planet*, the ill-fated scientist Miles Dyson in *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* and Captain McMahon in *Speed*. The Broadway trained, decorated actor has over 40 years of experience in theater, television and film, and is best known for his dynamic Emmy-winning role as Rowan/Eli Pope in the groundbreaking series "Scandal" on ABC.

**Tavis Smiley** is currently host of the late night television show *Tavis Smiley* on PBS, now in its 14<sup>th</sup> season, as well as "The Tavis Smiley Show" from Public Radio International. He is the author or co-author of 21 books, and his non-profit Tavis Smiley Foundation is now in the midst of a \$3 million four-year campaign called "Ending Poverty: America's Silent Spaces" to help focus on alleviating endemic poverty in America. TIME magazine named Smiley to the TIME 100, a list of "The World's 100 Most Influential People."

**Lula Washington** grew up in the Nickerson Gardens Housing Projects in Watts, CA, and worked her way through UCLA, earning a Master's Degree in dance after initially being rejected by the school. Lula founded her own dance company in 1980. Now called the Lula Washington Dance Theatre, the company is admired across America. It has toured to Russia, China, Brazil, Kosovo, Mexico and Canada.

Lula's choreography has focused on the Rodney King beating; the unjust shootings of black boys by police; and about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr and the civil rights movement. Lula choreographed James Cameron's film *Avatar* and Disney's *The Little Mermaid*. Lula maintains a dance school in South Los Angeles that offers affordable training for inner-city youth. She earned the Minerva Award from Maria Shriver, the UCLA Chancellor's Award in Community Service and the National Education Association's Carter G. Woodson Civil Rights Award for her *Reflections In Black* educational school program.

### **About the Moderator:**

**Tananarive Due** is the former Distinguished Visiting Scholar in the Humanities at Spelman College (2012-2014). She teaches Afrofuturism and Black Horror at UCLA and in the creative writing and screenwriting MFA programs at Antioch University Los Angeles/Santa Barbara. The American Book Award winner and NAACP Image Award recipient is the author of seven solo novels, the co-author of six novels with her husband, Steven Barnes, and co-author of a civil rights memoir, *Freedom in the Family: A Mother-Daughter Memoir of the Fight for Civil Rights* (with her late mother, Patricia Stephens Due). In 2010, she was inducted into the Medill School of Journalism's Hall of Achievement at Northwestern University. She received a 2017 British Fantasy Award for her short story collection, *Ghost Summer*, and in 2013 she received a Lifetime Achievement Award in the Fine Arts from the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation. She was formerly a journalist for *The Miami Herald*. Her writing blog is at [www.tananarivedue.wordpress.com](http://www.tananarivedue.wordpress.com).

### **About The Wallis:**

Since opening its doors in October 2013, The Wallis has produced or presented more than 150 dance, theatre, opera, classical music and family programs to an ever-expanding audience. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Paul Crewes and Managing Director Rachel Fine, The Wallis brings audiences world-class theater, dance and music, performed by many of the world's most talented and sought-after artists. Featuring eclectic programming that mirrors the diverse landscape of Los Angeles and its notability as the entertainment capital of the world, The Wallis offers original and revered works from across the U.S. and around the globe.

The mission of The Wallis is to create, present and celebrate unique performing arts events and educational programs that reflect the rich cultural diversity of our community. Nominated for 47 Ovation Awards, four L.A. Drama Critic's Circle Awards and the recipient of six architectural awards, The Wallis is a breathtaking 70,000-square-foot venue that celebrates the classic and the modern and was designed by Zoltan E. Pali, FAIA of Studio Pali Fekete architects. The building features the restored, original 1933 Beverly Hills Post Office (on the National Register of Historic Places) that serves as the theater's dramatic yet welcoming lobby, and houses the 150-seat Lovelace Studio Theater, GRoW at The Wallis: A Space for Arts Education (a gift of Gregory Annenberg Weingarten and Family and the Annenberg Foundation) and the contemporary 500-seat, state-of-the-art Bram Goldsmith Theater. Together, these structures embrace the city's history and its future, creating a performing arts destination for L.A.-area visitors and residents alike.

For more information about The Wallis, please visit: [TheWallis.org](http://TheWallis.org).

For downloadable photos, please visit [TheWallis.org/Press](http://TheWallis.org/Press).

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**TICKET INFORMATION:**

**What:** **Social Activism and the Arts: Lessons from the Legacy of Dick Gregory**  
Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts  
Lovelace Studio Theater  
9390 N. Santa Monica Blvd, Beverly Hills, CA, 90210

**When:** Monday, December 11, 2017 at 7:00pm

**Tickets:** Admission is FREE, but reservations are appreciated.  
RSVP:  
Online – [TheWallis.org/SocialActivism](http://TheWallis.org/SocialActivism)  
Email – [tickets@thewallis.org](mailto:tickets@thewallis.org)  
Facebook – <http://bit.ly/2icUQng>  
By Phone – 310.746.4000  
Box Office – Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts Ticket Service  
9390 N. Santa Monica Blvd, Beverly Hills, CA, 90210

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