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Comedian, Activist Dick Gregory to Speak at Soul Food Dinner

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. - Join Illinois Wesleyan University in welcoming the multi-talented Dick Gregory to the annual Soul Food Dinner on Sunday, Feb. 15.

The dinner will be held at center court in the Hansen Student Center (300 E. Beecher St., Bloomington) at 5:30 p.m. At 6:30 p.m., Gregory will deliver his speech, "The World According to Dick Gregory: An Evening of Humor and Humanity."

Press availability with Gregory is scheduled at 4:30 p.m. in the Student Senate meeting room on the second floor of the Hansen Student Center.

Tickets for the dinner are \$10, and IWU students can use their meal exchange privileges. Sponsored by the IWU Student Senate, the keynote speech is free and open to the public.

Throughout his life, Gregory has taken on many titles: comedian, civil rights activist, author, philosopher, actor, nutritionist, recording artist, anti-drug advocate and cancer survivor. However, he is best known for his social satire and comedy, which he first performed while serving in the army in the 1950s. Upon moving to Chicago to pursue a professional career in comedy, Gregory and contemporaries such as Bill Cosby, Godfrey Cambridge and Nipsey Russell avoided performing minstrel comedy, which pokes fun at stereotypes of African Americans. Their redirection of the comedy scene left white audiences with a new perception of African-American comedians.

As an activist during the Civil Rights Movement, Gregory used his public image to bring awareness to social issues like segregation and disfranchisement by participating in sit-ins and promoting voter registration in African-American communities. Gregory's status and activism placed him among the ranks of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X and Medgar Evers. His nonviolent commitment to the causes of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) often landed him in jail.

Since that time, Gregory has worked to end such issues as world hunger, drug abuse, crime and war. His support and participation have taken the forms of marches, parades and over 100 spells of fasting.

Additionally, Gregory has created several organizations dedicated to

improving his biggest social concerns. In 1984, Gregory founded Health Enterprises, Inc., which distributed weight-loss products, and three years later he developed the Slim-Safe Bahamian Diet. In 1992, Gregory launched the "Campaign for Human Dignity," which is a program that seeks to fight crime in his hometown of St. Louis.

The recipient of numerous awards, Gregory was honored for service to the community and world at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in 2000 before host Bill Cosby and guests Coretta Scott King, Stevie Wonder, Les Brown and others. Gregory's other accomplishments include selling over seven million copies of his 1963 autobiography and seeing its sequel become a best-seller shortly after its release. His one-man comedy show "Dick Gregory Live!" began in 1996 and was welcomed with high praise on Broadway.

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