



NEWS RELEASE

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TAVIS SMILEY'S STATE OF THE BLACK UNION RETURNS HOME TO LOS ANGELES FOR 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF CONVERSATIONS

February 28, 2009 Event Focuses On "Making America As Good As Its Promise"

LOS ANGELES (OCT. 14, 2008) – Tavis Smiley's State of the Black Union (SOBU), one of the most anticipated annual events for millions of African Americans during the last decade, will return to Los Angeles—the site of the first symposium—in celebration of its 10th anniversary on February 28, 2009, at the Los Angeles Convention Center.

Under the theme, "Making America As Good As Its Promise," the symposium will capture the essence of what it has meant for African Americans to be enlightened, encouraged, and empowered by these solution-driven conversations over the years.

The symposium is free and open to the public. Advance registration is required online at www.tavistalks.com. Smiley and attorney Raymond Brown will moderate the discussion that will be broadcast live to millions of viewers on C-SPAN.

The 2009 symposium will feature two panel discussions from 8:00 AM – 11:30 AM and 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM Pacific Time. In addition, a series of conversations scheduled for Friday, Feb. 27, geared toward issues important to high school and college students will be held at the University of Southern California (USC) and selected high schools in Los Angeles.

The symposium sponsors include three-year title sponsor Wells Fargo, and national sponsors Nationwide Insurance, ExxonMobil, and SEIU ULTCW 6434. McDonald's has been a sponsor since 2005.

During the last decade, Americans have come to expect thoughtful, concrete discussions and debates from these signature symposiums, which have featured a diverse gathering of some of the nation's most influential thinkers, entertainers, and politicians. Leaders of color take center stage to express their thoughts about some of the most important issues of the day and to inspire solutions. Ironically, the first symposium held in 2000 in Los Angeles was conceived as a one-time event.

"We knew we had become the caretakers of something very special, of a movement that would greatly impact African Americans. We also knew that somehow the dialogue that had begun in 2000 *had* to continue," Smiley said. "We did not foresee a 10-year span, but we are humbled by the breadth and scope of the events and what they have meant to communities all over the country."

Each year SOBU draws diverse television viewing audiences that have included celebrities ranging from cellist Yo-Yo Ma to comedian Chris Rock, who has jokingly dubbed the event "The Black People Listen Summit!" Rock says, "It's the best show of the year. I watch it, and it's on for 12 hours. It's amazing!"

For the 2009 symposium, Tavis Smiley Presents has woven the past and present by inviting panelists from the original symposium which was held on the campus of USC. Those panelists include Danny Glover, Nikki Giovanni, Na'im Akbar, Michael Eric Dyson, Lani Guinier, Jesse L. Jackson, Sr., Danny Bakewell, Sr., Jawanza Kunjufu, Les Brown, Charles Ogletree, Randall Robinson,

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Al Sharpton, Iyanla Vanzant, Julianne Malveaux, Maxine Waters, Earvin “Magic” Johnson, and Cornel West.

Other participants in this year’s forum include—Arlene Holt Baker, Karen Bass, Peter Harvey, Van Jones, Erica Williams, Emilie Townes, and Marc Morial.

Given the current state of the economy, the fact that a new president will soon take residence in the White House, and the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Smiley thinks this may be the most urgent conversation of the last decade.

“No matter who is elected president, the state of the Black union will be monumentally affected,” he said. “Rather than sit back and let things happen, we have to continue to be active, rather than reactive, and to keep crucial issues such as education, healthcare, financial well-being, crime reduction, and the justice system on the front burner for African Americans.”

Not only has SOBU brought forth thoughtful discussions about key issues and solutions but attendees and viewers have often come away with platforms and real action plans. One such action initiative is *The Covenant* movement, which began with the 2006 publication of the *Covenant with Black America*, a collection of essays that plots a course for African Americans, evolving from six years worth of dynamic, intense, hopeful discussions at SOBU forums. *THE COVENANT In Action*, a toolkit for turning *The Covenant* book into a living, breathing movement, followed in 2007. Former President Bill Clinton called the *Covenant with Black America* “the most comprehensive model for citizen service.”

In conjunction with the anniversary symposium, Simon and Schuster (Atria) will release *Accountable: Making The Covenant Real*. This third volume in the *New York Times* bestselling *Covenant* trilogy offers a pragmatic model for holding the new president and political leaders accountable for what they have promised or avoided but now must deliver. It also holds individuals and communities accountable for actions or inactions in keeping *The Covenant* agenda on track.

Held each February since 2000 during Black History Month, SOBU symposiums have followed the president’s State of the Union address to the nation, and often touched upon specific issues and themes. The inaugural 2000 event occurred on the heels of President Bill Clinton’s final State of the Union address. The 2001 forum in Washington, D.C. took place a few weeks after George W. Bush had taken the reigns of the presidency. The 2002 symposium in Philadelphia occurred five months after the September 11, 2001 attacks. Just prior to the 2003 SOBU in Detroit, President Bush outlined his case for invading Iraq.

The 2004 symposium in Miami followed Bush’s State of the Union address defending the Iraq war. The 2005 conversation in Atlanta followed Bush’s re-election. The 2006 conference in Houston focused on economic empowerment six months following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina.

The 2007 SOBU convention in partnership with Jamestown 2007 commemorated the 400th anniversary of the first permanent English settlement in Jamestown, Virginia. The 2008 symposium in New Orleans solicited appearances from both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton (who attended) and engaged more than 1,000 volunteers to work in community service projects to help rebuild post-Katrina New Orleans.

STATE OF THE BLACK UNION A DECADE OF CONVERSATIONS

2000
Los Angeles
Advocacy in the Next Millennium: New Paradigms for Progress

2001
Washington, D.C.
It’s About Us!

2002
Philadelphia
*Where Do We Go From Here:
Chaos or Community?*

2003
Detroit
*The Black Church:
Relevant, Repressive, or Reborn?*

2004
Miami
*Strengthening the Black Family:
Preserving the African American Imprint on America*

2005
Atlanta
Defining the African American Agenda Pt. 1

2006
Houston
*Economic Empowerment:
Defining the African American Agenda Pt. 2*

2007
Jamestown
*America's 400th Anniversary:
The African American Imprint on America*

2008
New Orleans
*Reclaiming Our Democracy:
Recasting our Future*

2009
State of the Black Union
Making America As Good As Its Promise

About Tavis Smiley Presents

Tavis Smiley Presents is an event production company dedicated to bringing thought provoking discussions, engaging town hall meetings, and consumer expos to communities across the country. During the last nine years its programs have reached more than 500,000 conference attendees and attracted millions of television viewers nationwide. Tavis Smiley is the host of *Tavis Smiley* on PBS, a weeknight half-hour talk show, and the host of *The Tavis Smiley Show* from PRI, a two-hour news and opinion program featuring provocative commentary and exclusive interviews. He's the author of 12 books including his bestselling memoir, *What I Know for Sure: My Story of Growing Up in America*. He founded the Tavis Smiley Foundation to provide leadership training skills to youth ages 13—18. For more information, visit www.tavistalks.com

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