

**TAVIS SMILEY PRESENTS**

**NEWS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**TAVIS SMILEY ANNOUNCES END OF *STATE OF THE BLACK UNION* SERIES**

*Smiley to Focus on New Projects; Conversations Available on Collectors' DVD*

**LOS ANGELES (January 6, 2010)** — The State of the Black Union (SOBU) symposium has been one of the most anticipated events for millions of African Americans during the last decade, but after 10 years of conversations founder Tavis Smiley has announced the end of the series.

Smiley, the host of *Tavis Smiley* on PBS, said ending production of SOBU will allow him to concentrate on a new series of primetime television specials for 2010 on PBS as well as grow other divisions of his multimedia company, including the SmileyBooks imprint, his weekly public radio show, his non-profit youth foundation and the award-winning traveling museum exhibition America I AM: The African American Imprint.

For fans and collectors, the *State of the Black Union: 10-Year Conversation Box Set Collection*, which includes all 10 symposia on 23 separate discs on DVD, is now available. Each boxed set is numbered and personally autographed by Smiley.

Smiley moderated the first SOBU in 2000 on the eve of the Democratic Convention in Los Angeles. The series, always free and open to the public, then crisscrossed the country often serving as a pulse check on how African Americans were fairing economically, politically and socially. While tens of thousands attended the forums in person; millions more viewed the live broadcasts annually on C-SPAN. It returned to Los Angeles on February 28, 2009, marking its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

“This symposium represents one of the great joys of my life. I have thoroughly enjoyed raising awareness and moderating the dialogue between the panelists and our live audiences,” Smiley said. “I am grateful to the viewing audiences who have tuned in over the years.”

The DVD collection showcases some of the nation’s most influential and prolific thinkers, entertainers, politicians and social critics weighing in on a range of issues such as wealth-building, the Black church, family, justice, education and health.

Prominent speakers and panelists include President Barack Obama, Cornel West, Danny Glover, Nikki Giovanni, Na'im Akbar, Michael Eric Dyson, Lani Guinier, Jesse L. Jackson, Sr., Les Brown, Raymond A. Brown, Randall Robinson, Al Sharpton, Iyanla Vanzant, the late Johnnie L. Cochran, Jr., Maxine Waters, Earvin “Magic” Johnson, Harry Belafonte, Louis Farrakhan and Tom Joyner.

“When we started SOBU there was only one Black nationally-syndicated radio show and only one Black television network. Ten years ago, there were just a scant few African

Americans offering political commentary in mainstream media.

Over the years, the landscape has changed tremendously with multiple radio shows, television networks and the explosion of commentary in the blogosphere,” Smiley said.

“While I still think there is comparatively speaking a paucity of Black commentary in the mainstream, there are currently many more avenues available for discourse on issues impacting African Americans. Ten years later, Black folk no longer have to wait for SOBU in February to hear issues that matter to them being discussed by them.

I expect to continue conducting conversations wrestling with the contested humanity of too many Americans, but through diverse platforms including the PBS primetime specials and by publishing up-and-coming authors whose voices we have not yet heard.”

SOBU produced three *New York Times* bestselling books, including the #1 *New York Times* bestseller, *Covenant with Black America*, released in 2006. The book, a collection of essays highlighting the most pressing issues facing African Americans, was described by President Clinton as “the most comprehensive model for citizen service.”

THE COVENANT *In Action*, a toolkit for turning the *Covenant* into a movement, followed in 2007. In 2009, the third volume in the trilogy, *Accountable: Making America As Good As Its Promise*, offered a pragmatic model for holding political leaders accountable to their promises.

### **Chronology of the State of the Black Union**

The State of the Black Union has been held each February since 2000 during Black History Month, following the president’s annual State of the Union address to the nation in January. It has often paralleled significant events in American history.

- The 2001 forum took place in Washington, D.C. a few weeks after the controversial inauguration of President George W. Bush.
- The 2002 symposium in Philadelphia occurred five months after the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.
- President Bush outlined his case for invading Iraq just prior to the 2003 SOBU in Detroit.
- President Bush defended his case for the Iraq war in 2004 just before the symposium in Miami.
- The 2005 conversation in Atlanta followed Bush’s re-election to a second term.
- In Houston the 2006 conference focused on economic empowerment six months following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina.
- The 2007 SOBU symposium, in partnership with Jamestown 2007, commemorated the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first permanent English settlement in Jamestown, Virginia.
- The 2008 symposium in New Orleans engaged more than 1,000 volunteers to work in community service projects to help rebuild post-Katrina New Orleans.

- In 2009, President Obama introduced the final SOBU with his commitment to bring issues of importance to African Americans to the White House.

The State of the Black Union DVD collector's edition is a limited edition compilation numbered and personally signed by Tavis Smiley. Partial proceeds from the sale of each DVD collection will benefit the work of the Tavis Smiley Foundation. The *State of the Black Union: 10-Year Conversation Box Set Collection* is available online at [www.tavistalks.com](http://www.tavistalks.com) for \$150 plus shipping and handling.

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### **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 10 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. Smiley is the creator of the award-winning America I AM: *The African American Imprint* museum exhibition. He's the author/editor of 14 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 to youth ages 13-18. For more information, visit [www.tavistalks.com](http://www.tavistalks.com)

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