



A Tribute to Dick Gregory

The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) deeply mourns the passing of our former client and board member Dick Gregory, who was one of the great satirists and civil rights champions of the last century. Gregory, who passed on August 19, 2017, will be dearly missed.

“Dick Gregory’s wit, wisdom, and tireless pursuit of justice made him iconic and iconoclastic. He didn’t simply breakdown racial barriers in show business, but his incisive satire and unrelenting activism challenged injustice throughout the country,” said [Sherrilyn Ifill](#), President and Director-Counsel of LDF. “We’re proud to have represented and worked with him in our shared pursuit of a more equitable and ethical America,” she added.



Dick Gregory as Presenter at the LDF 50th Anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education Gala in 2004.

Born Richard Claxton Gregory in St. Louis on Oct. 12, 1932, Gregory was the second of six children. Raised by his mother, Lucille, during the great depression, he was a track star at both Sumner High School in St. Louis, and Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. He left SIU twice: first for the army,

where he honed his comedy as part of the Special Services; and then he left for good after his service to pursue a career in show business in Chicago.

Gregory's unparalleled humor made him a trailblazer, allowing him to break through the color barrier and perform in clubs and on TV shows that had previously been the sole domain of white performers. Once he was in those spaces, he doubled down on his daring satire, making audiences double over as he took on the quintessential issues of the time, including racism, Jim Crow, and white supremacy. After receiving an invitation from Medgar Evers to speak at voter registration events in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1962, Gregory delved into the social justice work that would define his life.

"We tried to integrate a restaurant, and they said, 'We don't serve colored folk here,' and I said, 'Well, I don't eat colored folk nowhere. Bring me a whole fried chicken.'" – Dick Gregory

In 1966, LDF represented Gregory in *Dick Gregory v. Jos Meyes*, which challenged the Burger Boy Drive-In Restaurant's practice of denying service to Black patrons. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit [ruled in Gregory's favor](#), citing a Supreme Court of Georgia opinion in a similar case, which said, "As a public eating place, this drive-in's offer to serve everybody, without qualification or limitation, who desires to purchase food from it, except Negroes, is unquestionably the holding out of an offer by it to serve white interstate travelers."

Shortly afterwards in 1967, Gregory proceeded to run for Mayor of Chicago and then President of the United States, losing both bids but using the platform to discuss his fervent belief in equality and justice. From there, Gregory would go on to champion many causes and participate in countless hunger strikes to raise awareness about issues like the Vietnam War, South African apartheid, Native American rights, nuclear proliferation, police brutality, criminal justice and prison reform, and animal rights.

A true leader of the civil rights movement, Gregory participated in almost every major march, demonstration, and rally of the civil rights era. He was often jailed with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and he learned the philosophy of non-violence – a philosophy which he followed to the end of his life – from Dr. King himself. The list of his friends and associates reads like a pantheon of heroes from the 1960s, including Dr. King, Malcolm X, Medgar Evers, President John F. Kennedy, and Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy. Gregory delivered numerous speeches, registered countless voters, hosted many benefit shows for a wide range of organizations, and even served a brief stint on the LDF board in the early 1960s.

Gregory is survived by his wife, Lillian; three sons, Christian, Gregory and Yohance Maqubela; seven daughters, Ayanna, Lynne, Michele, Miss, Paula Cenac, Satori and Zenobia Chisholm; two brothers, Ron and Garland; two sisters, Pauline Hariston and Delores Hill; 16 grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren.

"Truth is the baby of the world. It never gets old."- Dick Gregory