

Free Southern Theater celebrates 50th anniversary

October 16, 2013 11:00 AM Ryan Rivet
rrivet@tulane.edu

In October 1963, the Free Southern Theater was created as a cultural and educational extension of the civil rights movement to promote and further the movement's political objectives. On Friday (Oct. 18) a full-day conference will be held at Tulane University as part of "Talkin' Revolution," a four-day gathering to celebrate the founding of the FST half a century ago.



Denise Nicholas performs at the Free Southern Theater's "Ghetto of Desire" T.V. poetry show in New Orleans in 1966. (Photo from Junebug Productions)

"In the beginning FST travelled with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee wherever they would go," says Catherine Michna, a Mellon postdoctoral fellow in the Tulane Department of English who is panel coordinator for Friday's event. "Wherever SNCC was holding voter registration drives or a freedom school, they would perform a play that sought to inspire a dialogue between people."

Shortly after its inception, the FST moved to New Orleans and continued to be an important part of the black arts movement that drew African American artists from

around the country.

“It was a real scene in the Ninth Ward during the '60s and Central City during the '70s,” Michna says. “People like James Baldwin, Amari Baraka, Toni Morrison, Toni Cade Bombara and Alice Walker, these were the kinds of people who came to visit New Orleans to be part of the Free Southern Theater's events.”

The conference, which is being sponsored by the [New Orleans Center for the Gulf South](#) at Tulane University, will feature panel discussions, presentations and performances that will reflect on the history and legacy of the FST carried on by founding member John O'Neal in the form of Junebug Productions. The full day's events are free with a Tulane ID, but space is limited and registration is suggested. For more information, email [Michna](#).