

## **Free Southern Theater remembered with exhibit**

January 28, 2014 8:45 AM Greg Thomson

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An exhibit honoring the 50th anniversary of the Free Southern Theater and Black Arts Movement in the South is currently on display at the Amistad Research Center on the Tulane University uptown campus. The exhibition continues through April 25.



John O'Neal and Denise Nicholas in a 1965 Free Southern Theater production of Ossie Davis' play "Purlie Victorious". (Photo by Tom Wakayama)

John O'Neal, Doris Derby and Gilbert Moses founded the Free Southern Theater in 1963 at Tougaloo College in Mississippi. When it ended in 1980, the theater had provided communities in the South with a platform for cultural production at no charge and also served as a voice of reform for African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement.

The exhibition features several press releases, typescripts, brochures and photographs. One document discusses the integrated troupe's need for protection while traveling together throughout the rural South during the Jim Crow era. Also on display are letters conveying audience members' reactions about the performances.

"We want to tell the story of the FST, its development and what it contributed to the Civil Rights Movement and beyond because it does have a legacy that continues today," says Chris Harter, director of library and reference services at the Amistad

Research Center.

According to Harter, there is a close connection between Tulane and the development of the theater group. When the founders of the theater made efforts to seek financial support from other venues in New York, Tulane theater professor Richard Schechner served as an adviser and assisted in the outreach process.

Harter plans to turn the display into an online exhibition so that it will be available throughout the year.

Harter says, "A digital exhibition allows individuals who can't come to New Orleans or come to the center the opportunity to still learn about the FST and the Black Arts Movement."

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