

## News Release

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### **Anna Deavere Smith to give Frank Porter Graham Lecture at N.C. Literary Festival**

CHAPEL HILL – Actress, playwright and author Anna Deavere Smith will present the annual Frank Porter Graham Lecture as part of the N.C. Literary Festival at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Her presentation, “Finding Grace and Kindness in a Winner-Take-All Society,” will be free to the public on Sept. 11 at 7:30 p.m. in Memorial Hall on Cameron Avenue.

“Inspired by Walt Whitman’s idea to ‘absorb America,’ Anna Deavere Smith honestly and gracefully brings to life the spirit of each individual she represents on stage,” said Amy Baldwin, director of the N.C. Literary Festival. The 5<sup>th</sup> biennial festival, which will include readings and discussions by more than 100 authors, is set for Sept. 10-13 at UNC.

The lecture series, sponsored by the James M. Johnston Center for Undergraduate Excellence in UNC’s College of Arts and Sciences, is named for the late Frank Porter Graham, who was UNC President (1930-40) and a U.S. Senator (1949-50).

“The Frank Porter Graham Lectures bring to campus a variety of viewpoints on the problem of poverty,” said Randi Davenport, executive director of the Johnston Center. “Anna Deavere Smith’s presentation will broaden campus conversations about the place of the arts in addressing social justice.”

Smith has performed for film, television and theater. She played the role of Nancy McNally, the fictional National Security Advisor on NBC’s hit series “The West Wing” and she recently appeared in the Jonathan Demme movie “Rachel Getting Married.”

Smith’s theatrical performance pieces explore complex issues through multiple points of view. She conducts hundreds of interviews for each play and has portrayed the stories of as many as 46 people in the course of one performance.

Her Broadway show, “Twilight: Los Angeles,” about the 1992 riots around the Rodney King case, received two Tony nominations, an Obie, a Drama Desk Award, a New York Drama Critics Special Citation and other honors. In reviewing the show, a New York Times critic called Smith “the ultimate impressionist: she does people’s souls.”

Her most recent plays are “The Arizona Project,” exploring women’s relationships to justice and the law, and, “Let Me Down Easy,” about the vulnerability and resilience of the human body.

Smith has been featured in several other films and television series, including “The American President,” “The Human Stain,” “Dave,” “Rent,” “Presidio Med” and “The Practice.” She co-starred in HBO’s 2007 film “Life Support” and will appear in the upcoming Showtime dark comedy series “Nurse Jackie.”

She also wrote the books “Talk to Me: Travels in Media and Politics” and “Letters to a Young Artist: Straight-up Advice on Making a Life in the Arts for Actors, Performers, Writers, and Artists of Every Kind.”

The Frank Porter Graham Lecture series is supported by a gift from UNC alumnus Taylor McMillan, who graduated in 1960. Additional UNC sponsorship for Smith’s presentation is provided by the Office of the Executive Director for the Arts, Carolina Women’s Center, PlayMakers Repertory Company and Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History.

The N.C. Literary Festival, supported by private gifts and grants, is sponsored by the libraries of UNC-Chapel Hill, N.C. State and Duke universities and is held every two years on one of the three campuses. The festival also receives support from N.C. Central University.

For more about the N.C. Literary Festival, visit <http://www.NCLiteraryFestival.org>. For more about the Frank Porter Graham Lecture, visit the Johnston Center Web site at <http://www.johnstoncenter.unc.edu/>.

**Photo of**

**Smith:** <http://uncnews.unc.edu/images/stories/news/humanities/2009/anna%20deavere%20smith%20photo.jpg>

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