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Gregory Goes the Distance

Three times recently comedian and social activist Dick Gregory protested too close to the South African embassy in Washington, three times he was arrested, and three times the charges against him were dropped. Which is frustrating for someone trying to garner publicity about the treatment of blacks in South Africa by forcing a court test of the law requiring protestors to stay 500 feet from an embassy.

"I'll be back," says Gregory, who knows how embarrassing a trial could be to both the U. S. and South African governments. It could also be futile; he notes slyly that among the character witnesses he'd call are Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye and Muhammad Ali.

For Gregory, protesting has become a way of life since his rise to stardom as a comedian and civil rights activist in the 1960s. Now 45 and the father of ten children, he incorporates his politics with his work. He is a vegetarian who shuns most cooked foods as well as alcohol. So when he appeared

last month at Los Angeles' popular nightspot, the Comedy Store, no liquor was served during his two-week, standing-room-only engagement. His routines are reminiscent of the late Lenny Bruce.

"I do a bit about the airlines—I think they get away with murder," Gregory says. "But because we want to believe the jet age is a new thing we tolerate things we'd never put up with from, say, the bus companies. What if Greyhound made you walk as far to your bus as the airlines do? Course, maybe if people went on Sunday with their families and watched the busses arrive and depart from the station . . . And you hear about those black boxes after a crash? I want to know what they put around that black box so it won't burn that they can't put around my seat."

For weeks now Gregory has been fasting, living on lemonade and maple syrup in protest of South Africa's apartheid policies. He spent part of that time between college appearances last month in Nassau with born-again Hustler magazine founder Larry Flynt, who conducted his own prayer-fast for cancer-stricken Hubert Humphrey. Both

men share a fascination with the assassination of John Kennedy, which Gregory thinks the CIA knows a lot more about than the spy agency has revealed.

Gregory has other theories about what's going on behind Washington's closed doors: he suspects the Korean influence-peddling investigation in the House might be the mechanism the CIA uses to dilute the House assassination probe, withholding evidence that could lead to wholesale indictments of congressmen in exchange for a reaffirmation of the Warren Commission report.

But any political stridency is camouflaged with much good humor; Gregory disagrees with some comedians who find the Carter administration provides a shortage of laughs.

"You know the East Coast establishment hates Southern white folks," Gregory cracks. "They proved it when they took away Carter's car at his inauguration, made him and his family walk up Pennsylvania Avenue. It's true, they took it away—you haven't heard of him walking anywhere else, have you? And Mondale, he rode."

