

# news

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## **Pioneering Actress Nichelle Nichols to Receive ACLU/SC Liberty and Justice Award at Outfest 2008**

LOS ANGELES, Calif. – Pioneering actress Nichelle Nichols, who played Lt. Uhura on the original “Star Trek” television series, will receive the Liberty and Justice Award from the ACLU of Southern California Foundation on the closing night of this year’s Outfest 2008: the 26th Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Film Festival on Monday, July 21, 2008.

The award, in recognition of Ms. Nichols’ contributions to the fight for civil rights and social justice, will be presented at the closing night gala screening of “Tru Loved” at 8 p.m. at the Orpheum Theatre, 842 South Broadway, in downtown Los Angeles. Ms. Nichols is one of the stars of the film.

As Lt. Uhura, Ms. Nichols was the first African American actor to have a recurring, non-stereotypical role on a network television series. The series was broadcast from 1966 to 1969 and before that time, most black actors on television portrayed servants. Even though the role was groundbreaking, she felt it was not substantial and was tempted to quit the show. But Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. convinced her to stay with the series because Lt. Uhura was an important role model for black children.

“Ms. Nichols’ trail-blazing role on ‘Star Trek’ allowed her to portray racial equality in our nation’s future, which brought us closer to full equality in our present,” said Ramona Ripston, executive director of the ACLU/SC, in announcing the award. “She also worked to expand opportunities for women at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).”

After the series ended, Ms. Nichols worked as volunteer for NASA on a special project to recruit women and minorities to the space program. Among those recruited by that project were Dr. Sally Ride, the first American female astronaut, and U.S. Air Force Col. Guion Bluford Jr., the first African American astronaut. Dr. Mae Jemison, a former astronaut who is African American, said seeing Ms. Nichols on “Star Trek” inspired her to become a physician and astronaut.

Ms. Nichols co-stars in the film “Tru Loved.” She plays the smart and sassy grandmother of a closeted high school football player, a role that has been earning her buzz on the festival circuit as the movie continues to wend its way around the country.

“We are so honored to have the wonderful Nichelle Nichols in our film,” said the film’s producer Antonio Brown of BrownBag Productions. “And that our friends at the ACLU/SC are eager to recognize her work on screen and off makes our screening at Outfest even that more exciting.”

The ACLU/SC Foundation Liberty and Justice Award will be presented to Ms. Nichols by her friend and fellow “Star Trek” actor George Takei, who played Mr. Sulu on the series.

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