UC SANTA BARBARA

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Shelly Leachman

Prescient and Powerful

Patrisse Cullors is co-founder of Black Lives Matter. The backstory of how that movement came to be is depicted in her memoir, “When They Call You a Terrorist,” which demonstrates the connection between history, lived experience and the necessity for present-day activism.

Cullors’ book is the 2021 selection for UC Santa Barbara’s campus- and community-wide reading program UCSB Reads, which will culminate Wednesday, May 12, with her live, virtual public talk. The Q&A will be moderated by Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley, a professor of Black studies. The event is free and open to the public; register at https://artsandlectures.ucsb.edu/Details.aspx?PerfNum=4585.

“Even if something isn’t good for us and we’ve been doing it for a long time we’ll keep doing it anyways. That’s how we’re wired as human beings,” Cullors said in advance of her appearance. “We have 400 years of being used to white supremacy violence, 400 years of racism and homophobia and sexism and patriarchy and capitalism, so to undo that in our bodies and institutions is very hard. What I do believe is that it will change, it can change, and it must change, for us, for the livelihood and for the survival of humanity. This fight, when we say Black Lives Matter, it’s not just a fight for Black people, it’s a planet fight, a fight for every human being that exists.”

Written in collaboration with asha bandele, “When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir” describes Cullors’ experience as a Black, queer woman in the U.S., raised in Los Angeles by a single mother. It also recounts her own experiences

with racism in the criminal justice system, as well as the origins of the movement for racial justice that inspired an unprecedented number of protests across the country after the death of George Floyd.

Now in its 15th year, UCSB Reads aims to bring the campus and Santa Barbara communities together to read a common book that explores compelling issues of our time. It was initiated and is led by UCSB Library, which recently launched a Black Lives Matter Community Archives project — timed to programming around Cullors' book — to document the BLM movement locally. (More information can be found at https://www.library.ucsb.edu/santa-barbara-black-lives-matter-community-archives-project.)

Alex Regan, events and exhibitions librarian at UCSB Library, characterized Cullors' talk as "coming at a pivotal moment for all Americans."

"The UCSB Reads 2021 Advisory Committee selected Cullors' book during the COVID-19 pandemic and shortly after our country watched George Floyd die at the hands of a white police officer. Almost 12 months later, we have seen this officer convicted of Floyd's murder," Regan said. "While racism is still very much alive, our country appears more open to confronting its truths, which is why we wanted to create a space for the campus and community to engage with these difficult conversations."

Cullors, an artist, organizer, educator and popular public speaker, is also co-founder and executive director of the Black Lives Matter Global Network, as well as founder of Los Angeles-based grassroots organization Dignity and Power Now. As the UCSB Reads selection, her book has been the focus of multiple events — panel discussions, lectures, screenings, readings and more — as well as course curriculum, throughout the winter and spring academic quarters.

"UCSB Reads has never chosen a book by a Black queer woman and the committee felt we needed to hear from diverse perspectives," Regan noted. "The book's intersectional analysis of the Black Lives Matter movement is especially relevant today, and the author's connection to Los Angeles provides some relatable context for local readers."

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.