

Poet Who Pushed the Cause of Black Women and Sexuality to be Focus of Reading Circle at UCSD

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Poet and author Audre Geraldine Lorde (1934-1992) was described as one who "derives the impetus of her poetry's force, tone, and vision from her identity as a black woman who is both a radical feminist and an outspoken lesbian, and as a visionary of a better world."

The words are those of the late African American literary critic Claudia Tate.

Audre Lorde Reading Circle: Intersections of Race, Gender, and Sexuality will be presented at noon Feb. 3, 19, and 25 at the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender Resource Center, the Women's Center, and the Cross-Cultural Center, respectively, at the University of California, San Diego. The event is part of UC San Diego's Black History Month Celebration during February. It is free and open to the public.

Lorde described herself as "black lesbian feminist mother lover poet" and was a novelist, essayist, and poet laureate of New York state in 1991-1992. She wrote 12 books of poetry and four works of nonfiction.

"Each of us lives at the cross-roads of intersections - race, class, gender, and sexuality - that make up the very fabric of our lives," says Edwina Welch, director of the UC San Diego Cross-Cultural Center. "Audre Lorde was an activist, scholar, and mother who challenged us to bring these intersections to life."

Welch says her favorite quote from Lorde embodies the power of knowing ourselves to be capable to change the world. "We have no patterns of relating to each other as equals. As a result these differences have been misnamed and misused in the service of separation and confusion.' This dialogue across the campus community centers aims to, in a small way, increase our ability to relate across our intersections."

A feminist poet who challenged racial and sexual stereotypes, Lorde was born in Harlem in 1934 to West Indian immigrants. As a child she memorized poetry, and when this no longer spoke as her voice, she began writing poetry at age 12, and published her first poem at age 15 in *Seventeen* magazine.

Lorde received a bachelor's degree in English literature from Hunter College in New York in 1959 and a master's in library science from Columbia University in 1961. She published her first book of poems, *The First Cities*, in 1968, and most recently *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde* was published in 1997.

In her poem, *For Each of You*, a message to African-American people, concluded:

"Speak proudly to your children Wherever you may find them. Tell them You are the offspring of slaves And your mother was a princess in darkness."

Though Lorde was married for eight years to a white attorney, Edwin Rollins, and had two children, she divorced him. While working as a poet-in-residence at Tougaloo College in Mississippi, she met Frances Clayton, a white woman who later became her live-in lover.

In addition to her poetry reflecting the contradictions in her life, she worked as a librarian in New York. The majority of her poems dealt with subtle and fierce emotions, relationships between lovers, children, parents and friends.

She was acutely conscious of the oppressive conditions of American Contemporary society and particularly wrote for black women because she felt there were far too few voices for the black woman. In one of her biographies, it stated that she felt it was her responsibility to speak the truth with as much beauty and precision as possible.

Lorde died of cancer at age 58.

For further information on the *Audre Lorde Reading Circle* contact Welch at the Cross-Cultural Center at (858) 534-9689, or ewelch@ucsd.edu.

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