

Impact of black women writers on American literature, culture will be focus of conference to be held May 15-17 at UCSD

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IMPACT OF BLACK WOMEN WRITERS ON AMERICAN LITERATURE, CULTURE WILL BE FOCUS OF CONFERENCE TO BE HELD MAY 15-17 AT UC SAN DIEGO

The impact of black women writers, scholars and critics on American literature and culture is the focus of a conference, Black Women Writers and the 'High Art' of Afro-American Letters, to be held May 15-17 at the University of California, San Diego.

Approximately 24 African American writers, scholars and critics from throughout the country will participate. All events are free and open to the public.

Angela Davis, professor, History of Consciousness, UC Santa Cruz, will give the keynote address at 4 p.m. May 15 in the Price Center Theatre. Davis received her master's degree in philosophy from UCSD in 1968.

Black Women Writers and the 'High Art' of Afro-American Letters marks the 12th anniversary of the publication of UCSD literature professor Sherley Anne Williams' historical novel, *Dessa Rose*.

"We are taking this occasion to honor Sherley Anne Williams, to reflect in a more general way upon the contributions of black women writers, scholars and critics over the past 25 years and to look forward to the next millennium," said Ann duCille, UCSD literature professor and conference chair.

The conference title is derived from Williams' author's note from *Dessa Rose*: "Afro- Americans, having survived by word of mouth and made of that process a high art remain at the mercy of literature and writing; often these have betrayed us. I loved history as a child, until some clear-eyed young Negro pointed out, quite rightly, that there was no place in the American past I could go and be free."

Williams' novel is set in the time of slavery in America and tells of a young pregnant black woman, *Dessa Rose*, and through her experiences, of the relationship between black and white, master and slave, and a touching, often agonizing, building of interracial friendship and respect.

Williams will participate in the conference and UCSD theatre students will present a staged reading from *Dessa Rose*, directed by theatre professor Floyd Gaffney with commentary by visual arts professor Thomas Allen Harris. Other UCSD participants include literature professors Rosaura Sanchez, Quincy Troupe, Lisa Lowe, Marta Sanchez, Rosemary George and Michael Murashige; ethnic studies professors George Lipsitz, Jane Rhodes and Jonathan Holloway, and UCSD musicians and professors Cecil Lytle, Anthony Davis and George Lewis.

San Diego State University's Shirley Weber will take part in a roundtable discussion on future directions in feminist thought, art and activism.

Among other participants are Hazel Carby, professor and chair of African and African American Studies at Yale University, and Sylvia Wynter, professor emerita at Stanford University who has served as professor of African and African-American Studies there.

Panel discussions will include: "The Impact of Black Women on the Arts and Academia," "Meditations on History: Dessa Rose and Slavery Revisited," "High Art and Low Culture: Blurring the Boundaries," and "Gender, Genre, and Generational Shifts: Traveling Feminisms and the Mother/Daughter Metaphor."

Among other conference activities are a prose/poetry/music fest; a film screening, "Early African American Women Filmmakers," and workshops on teaching multi-ethnic texts in the high school classroom and publishing or perishing.

DuCille said an important issue of the conference is the future: What's next after affirmative action and feminism? and Where will we go in the next millenium?

The conference is sponsored by the UCSD Department of Literature with support from a number of other sources. Events will be held in the UCSD Price Center and Center Hall. For further information call Lucinda Rubio at 534-3216.

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