

UC San Diego

# UC San Diego News Center

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By Erika Johnson      Feb 19, 2015



*Photos by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego Publications*

## UC San Diego Unveils New Black Legacy Mural

From Harriet Tubman to Nelson Mandela and Angela Davis, UC San Diego's newest public artwork portrays more than two dozen historical figures and national leaders, as well as several UC San Diego alumni and professors. Unveiled at the Price Center on Feb. 11, the Black Legacy Mural was created by San Diego artist Andrea Rushing to honor the contributions of black leaders throughout history and promote a sense of belonging among current and future students.

"I want UC San Diego to showcase art that reflects the diversity of our community—a place where you see a representation of justice, a yearning for equality," said Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla during the reception. "The Black Legacy Mural is an important step forward in honoring past leaders and providing great hope for the future."

There was standing room only as more than 150 people arrived at Price Center East to get their first glimpse of the artwork—located at the first floor seating area just below The Loft—and hear from those involved in the years-long project. The mural is a result of student advocacy for more visual representation of underrepresented students at UC San Diego—both current and prospective.



“The new Black Legacy Mural helps to promote a sense of belonging and validates the black community’s presence and contributions to UC San Diego, the nation and the world,” said Stacia Smith Solomon, director of the UC San Diego Black Resource Center. “The figures represented in the mural remind us of the richness in our past, the promise of our present and provide inspiration for the future.”



The 17-by-40-foot mural depicts 24 individuals and groups who hold a significant place in national, international or local black history. Those represented in the mural include influential activists such as Malcolm X; innovative musicians, authors and singers such as Mahalia Jackson and Maya Angelou; those who broke down boundaries, like Mae Jemison, the first black female astronaut to enter space;

as well as those whose impact is felt on campus, including UC San Diego alumnus and professor Vincent Brown.

The figures stand on a stage—the stage of history—and look outward at the viewer, their smiling faces at once an affirmation and silent encouragement to all who pass by. A spotlight shines down upon the artist’s grandchildren, who represent the next generation who will carry the legacy onward.

“I wanted to paint a forward-looking mural,” said Rushing. “I feel as a culture we should start looking ahead. It is impossible to discuss such things without a glance back at the accomplishments and sacrifices of those who have come before. I hope the mural touches those who view it as much as it has touched me to paint it.”

The mural is accompanied by a set of custom tabletops designed to engage those who are seated near the mural in learning more about the individuals depicted. Each of the 23 tables has a portrait and short biography that features information about the impact of each



person's contributions. The tabletops were conceived by Gary Ratcliff, assistant vice chancellor for student life, who developed the project with writer Alexis Hithe, UC San Diego Black Student Union publicity co-chair, and designer Armando Abundis, UC San Diego University Centers staff member.

The mural reception included reflections from those involved, including Fnann Keflezighi, who was instrumental in the initial advocacy of the work as co-chair of the UC San Diego Black Student Union from 2009-2011, as well as current Black Student Union Chair Jazzalyn Livingston. Alumna and Assistant Director for the UC San Diego Center for Student Involvement Marcia Strong led those in attendance in "Lift Every Voice and Sing" by James Weldon Johnson during the event commencement while Hithe shared a poem by Latorial Faison, "What is Black History?" at the reception's closing.



"We as a community must find ways to preserve our history so that we can keep the hopes and dreams of those before us alive today," said Livingston during the reception. "I am a strong believer that in order to reach greater heights in the future, we must use the past as a foundation on which we build. We owe it to ourselves and those who will follow in our footsteps to learn about those black Americans who made history, who fought against the odds and who laid the foundation for us to have a better tomorrow."

The Black Legacy Mural joins a collection of several public artworks on campus dedicated to the celebration of diversity and activism, including one that was recently dedicated—Sojourner Truth—as well as the Martin Luther King & 37th Street mural at Marshall College and the Chicano Legacy 40 Años mosaic on Peterson Hall. The project was made possible by the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, Vice Chancellor Student Affairs, Black Student Union, Black Resource Center, Student Life and University Centers.

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