

Acclaimed poet and essayist Claudia Rankine to speak about her new book and America's struggle with race

Claudia Rankine, recipient of a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award and finalist for the National Book Award, will read from and discuss her new book, *Just Us: An American Conversation*, at UC Davis on Nov. 4, 2020.

Published this month, *Just Us* combines poetry, essays, photographs, art, scholarship, analysis, invective and argument into a passionate and persuasive case about the complex mechanics of race in this country. The book is already being hailed as a must-read, and a recent review from [arts website 4Columns](#) described *Just Us* as Rankine's "magnum opus."

The 4 p.m. online reading and discussion is organized by Professor Allison Coudert, Paul A. and Marie Castelfranco Chair in the History of Religion; Professor Katie Peterson, director of the Creative Writing Program; and the Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem Museum. ([Register here](#) or at [manettishrem.org](#).)

"Claudia's new book, like much of her work, concentrates on the issue of 'whiteness' and race in the U.S. and globally," said Coudert, a professor in the Department of Religious Studies who has known Rankine since the 1980s when Rankine was Coudert's daughter's college roommate. "Since this has become such a major issue over the past years and affects all aspects of daily life, activity and thought, I thought we would find a great deal of support and interest, which we have." Rankine's visit is co-sponsored by 23 UC Davis departments, programs, centers and other campus entities.

"We are thrilled to collaborate with partners from across the university to host this special appearance by Claudia Rankine," said Manetti Shrem Museum Founding Director Rachel Teagle. "Coming the day after the U.S. presidential election, this virtual event promises to bring us into an important conversation — and invite our community into that conversation, regardless of location."

Just Us is a genre-defying work composed of poems, essays, artworks, photographs, graphs and charts, screen shots of text messages and tweets, and extensive research notes that are integrated into the main text.

"The book describes the ways that racism pervades personal lives and social reality, juxtaposing intimate scenes with images from popular culture and stories straight from the news," said Katie Peterson, a professor in the Department of English. "There will be no other book this year that so eloquently holds us to account, or asks so much of us—or that brings us as close to reality, and our own humanity."

Rankine, a professor of poetry in the Yale University departments of English and African American studies, gave a lecture at UC Davis in 2016 in conjunction with her book-length poem *Citizen: An American Lyric*. That work received the Los Angeles Times Book Award, the National Book Critics Circle Award in Poetry, the NAACP Image Award in poetry, the PEN Open Book Award, the PEN American Center USA Literary Award, and was also a finalist for the National Book Award.

“*Citizen* might be the most influential book of our times,” Peterson said. “Not only is it beloved of writers, it's been taught widely in high schools and colleges.”

Just Us will be included in the curriculum for all UC Davis introductory creative writing courses in fiction, nonfiction and poetry during the 2020-21 academic year, which approximately 250 students from all disciplines take. Ahead of her public lecture, Rankine will hold a reading of *Just Us* for those students.

UC Davis campus co-sponsors:

Campus Community Relations (Campus Community Book Project and Diversity and Inclusion Education Program)

Campus Council on Community and Diversity (CCC&D)

Center for African Diaspora Student Success (CADSS)

Center for the Advancement of Multicultural Perspective on Social Science, Arts, and Humanities (CAMPSSAH)

Creative Writing Program, Department of English

Cultural Studies Graduate Group

Department of African American and African Studies

Department of American Studies

Department of Art and Art History

Department of Comparative Literature

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