

In Memoriam: Robyn McGee

A Fierce Advocate for Justice and Learning

The Department of Ethnic Studies at CSU East Bay mourns the loss of our beloved lecturer, Robyn McGee, whose passionate commitment to education and social justice left an indelible mark on our academic community and the countless students whose lives she touched.

Robyn brought impressive academic credentials to her teaching, having earned her M.A. in Humanities from California State University, Dominguez Hills. Her graduate thesis, "The Significance of Setting in the Novels of Science Fiction Writer Octavia Butler," reflected her deep engagement with African American literature and science fiction—interests that would later inform her innovative courses in Afrofuturism and Black cultural studies. She also held her B.A. in Journalism from San Jose State University and maintained teaching credentials in Social Science and English Language Learning.

Robyn was more than an educator—she was a scholar-activist who brought both intellectual rigor and genuine care to her teaching. Her research specializations in California African American Literature and Culture, African American Women Health and Wellness, the intersection of African American Women Race, Class and Gender, African American Science Fiction, and African Americans and Media Representation made her an invaluable member of our faculty. Before joining CSU East Bay, she dedicated nearly a decade to teaching at Compton Community College, where from 2014 onward she taught Introduction to Ethnic Studies, Introduction to Women's Studies, Humanities, and Journalism, consistently demonstrating her versatility and commitment to accessible, transformative education.

At CSU East Bay, her expertise found perfect expression in some of our most vital and transformative courses: *Black Feminisms*, *Malcolm X*, *Black Flix*, *Afrofuturism*, and *Enslavement and Resistance*. Through these courses, she guided students through critical examinations of Black history, culture, and resistance, helping them understand both historical struggles and contemporary movements for justice.

As an accomplished author and writer, Robyn brought real-world experience into the classroom. Her published works included *#Fierce Feminism: Women in the 21st Century: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (Kendall Hunt, 2018), a textbook that exemplified her commitment to inclusive scholarship, and *Hungry for More: A Keeping it Real Guide for Black Women on Weight and Body Image* (Seal Press, 2005), which addressed critical issues of health, wellness, and self-acceptance in Black women's lives. Her academic work centered the voices and experiences of women of color, immigrants, and other marginalized communities, while her journalism appeared in numerous publications, including *Seventeen Magazine*, *Truthout*, *Mental Floss*, *the Christian Science Monitor*, and *Bitch Media*, demonstrating her ability to communicate complex ideas to diverse audiences.

Students consistently praised Robyn for her engaging teaching style, her accessibility, and her genuine investment in their success. She created classroom environments where difficult conversations could happen with respect and intellectual honesty, where students felt both challenged and supported. Her courses were not just academic requirements but transformative experiences that opened students' minds to new perspectives and inspired them to become agents of change in their own communities.

Robyn understood that Ethnic Studies is not merely an academic discipline but a tool for liberation and social transformation. She embodied the field's commitment to community engagement and social justice, always connecting historical knowledge to contemporary struggles for equality and human dignity. Her intersectional approach to teaching helped students understand the complex ways that race, gender, class, and other identities shape lived experiences.

Robyn was also an active community educator and speaker, sharing her expertise at venues ranging from Loyola University New Orleans to St. Olaf College in Minnesota, where she led discussions on topics such as "Black Women and W.H.A.C: Weight, Hair, Attitude and Color" and "Can A Big Girl Get Some Love?" Her commitment to community extended beyond academia through her work as a convalescent care minister at Saint Matthew's Church and her long-standing career as a freelance writer specializing in cultural and media representations of African Americans.

In her personal life, Robyn was known for her warmth, her love of soul food cooking, her passion for travel, and her dedication to yoga and wellness. These interests reflected her holistic approach to life and learning—understanding that intellectual growth must be accompanied by personal well-being and community connection.

The Department of Ethnic Studies has lost not only a dedicated educator but a visionary who understood the transformative power of education. Robyn's legacy lives on in the students she inspired, the conversations she facilitated, and the more just world she helped us all imagine and work toward.

Her fierce commitment to feminism, her deep understanding of Black liberation movements, and her unwavering belief in the potential of every student made her an irreplaceable member of our academic family. While we grieve her passing, we celebrate the profound impact she made during her time with us.

Robyn McGee's life and work remind us that education at its best is an act of love—love for knowledge, love for students, and love for the ongoing struggle for justice. We are better for having known her, and we commit to carrying forward her vision of education as liberation.

The Department of Ethnic Studies
CSU East Bay