

The UCSC Education Department Colloquium Series

## "Why Can't We Learn African?": Anti-Racist Pedagogy and the Demands of Abolition



**Savannah Shange, Ph.D.**  
Associate Professor of Anthropology  
UC Santa Cruz

**Wednesday, May 15th**  
**12:15 pm – 1:45 pm**  
**McHenry 0266**

Drawing on a chapter from my forthcoming book, *Progressive Dystopia: Abolition, Antiracism & Schooling in San Francisco* (Duke 2019), I use a Beginning Spanish classroom as a lens into the “progressive” side of the paradox of what I call carceral progressivism. Across the US, austerity measures have dealt deadly blows to social services, particularly health care and education. In the midst of school closures in Black and Latinx neighborhoods and the aggressive rise of standardized tests as a coercive tool, Robeson’s social justice curriculum makes it an aberration in the state education system. By attending to the differential practice of form and content in Robeson’s classrooms, I conceptualize Robeson as both a *strategy* and a *site* of struggle. To illuminate the former, I discuss the practice of coalition pedagogy, where instructors successfully use examples of multiracial coalition to combat systemic anti-blackness. On the latter, I lift up moments where this sincerely anti-racist curricular content is challenged by Black students who critique the scope of its impact, revealing the antagonism between anti-racism and abolition.

Savannah Shange is a Black queer feminist scholar and community worker who works at the intersections of race, place, sexuality, and the state. She is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at UC Santa Cruz and her research interests include gentrification, multiracial coalition, ethnographic ethics, Black femme gender, and abolition. Her first book is due out from Duke University Press this fall -- *Progressive Dystopia: Abolition, Anti-Blackness and Schooling in San Francisco* -- and is an ethnography of the afterlife of slavery as lived in the Bay Area. She is an alumni member of BYP100, and is proud to serve on the advisory committee of the Black Brilliance Network, a new learning community for Black educators and scholars invested in transformative justice.