

Convocation of Dean Celine Parreñas Shimizu

Wednesday, September 23, 2026

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Nicole R. Fleetwood

MacArthur Fellow, winner of the National Book Critics Award

Paulette Goddard Professor in the Department of Media, Culture, and Communication (NYU Steinhardt) and the Department of Social and Cultural Analysis (NYU College of Arts and Science).

Good afternoon. I am overjoyed and humbled to be with you today to celebrate your fall convocation; and to introduce my dear, beloved, one-of-one friend, distinguished professor, award winning filmmaker, trailblazing leader in university education-- your Dean, Dr Celine Parreñas Shimizu, affectionately known as Dean Celine, as your fabulous artist-in-residence Keke Palmer recently shouted her out on a late night talk show.

This is my first time on UCLA's campus and what an absolute treasure of a public university. Being here with you today to open up your new academic year, grounds me in our mandate: we must protect public education from all forces that attempt to destroy it or render it inaccessible to some. We must uphold the university as a space of public debate, knowledge production, and personal and collective growth, a space that millions have

fought to make accessible to those who have been excluded, like those who fought and continue to fight to diversify the UCLA School of Theater, Film, and Television.

But before I say more about the sacredness of access to education. Let me pause to take in this moment. To really soak it up. Well, Dean Celine. Here we are. It's been 30 years, since we met in a seminar room on the campus of Stanford University on a September afternoon much like today. We were in our first day of our first year of the PhD program in Modern Thought and Literature, when we smiled at each other and became fast friends. And look at us now, looking only a wee bit older than we did "back in the 1900s," as the young folks call it. And what has been enduring is friendship; the power of imagination and creativity, and the richness of intellectual community to build the worlds we want to inhabit and foster.

Something else your dean and I share are our beliefs that public education provides unique and vital opportunities for a Filipina child of refugees and a black working-poor child who is a descendant of US slavery to find each other, grow and learn together, and become lifelong friends.

Your dean believes deeply in the necessity of public

education and the importance of continuing to expand the curricula of what we consider knowledge and scholarship. Commitments dear to her since she stepped onto the campus of UC Berkeley as an undergraduate student of ethnic studies and feminist theory—two fields that have been under attack since their inception—and she continued that fight in community with other marginalized scholars and artists as a graduate student here in this school, and later as doctoral student at Stanford.

Bold thinking and bold action. Informed and collective. Grounded in the present and envisioning a more just, more fabulous, more sustainable future. Where is there a better place to do this work than this preeminent UCLA TFT and with a dean who has lived these principles for as long as I have known her.

I learned early in graduate school that Dean Celine is a fearless advocate who finds the courage and ground to speak for others and to bring people in, to grow community. In our first graduate seminar, I was targeted by the professor who told me that I didn't belong, that I was not prepared for the rigor of Stanford. Graduate student Celine, stood up and stood beside me, at my most vulnerable moment. She told him in front of the class that he was wrong. And she did all of this wearing some fabulous outfit.

And yes her bold style was the talk of campus but the substance of her style, and her bold intellect, and bold creative projects even more conversation-shifting.

Her boldness, brilliance, and absolute commitment to bringing others into artistic, intellectual, and democratic communities is what has landed her here—in a position that is a perfect match for her skills and personality. Her hats are bold. Her shoes are bold. Her eyeglasses are fabulous. Her actions thoughtful, informed, with an eye toward the future and a commitment to preserving all that has made this school and this university a beacon in public education.

Dean Celine has chosen, and continues to choose on a daily basis to live, love, and lead boldly, especially now in a time when many appointed leaders are shrinking or silencing themselves out of fear. Where entire populations are told to disappear, where families are afraid to take their children to school or go to the grocery store. Those of us who can must stand big and bold and fearlessly. We must stand next to and up for those who are forced into captivity, removed from public life, and silenced. This is collective work. I am not asking you to sacrifice yourself for a cause, for any cause. We need you alive and vibrant and creatively engaged. I am asking you to realize your

power and your voice in community. You are in a school that fosters collaboration—TV, theater, film are wonderfully collaborative art forms. They can be practices we must take into other areas of our lives and into the world we hope to transform.

Thank you, UCLA, School of Theater, Film, and Television, and to my forever friend, Dean Celine.
Welcome Fall!

Clinch Fuentes

UCLA TFT Executive Board Member

**Founder, President, and Chairman of the Board for
Chance to Excel**

Co-Founder and Vice President of Northwest Vocal Arts

My name is Clinch Fuentes, and I am on the TFT Executive Board. I am also the President and Chairperson of the Board for Chance to Excel. We were a proud supporter of the TFT Wellness Program last year.

When Celine first asked me to do a personal introduction for today, I immediately hand wrote my first draft like most people that graduated with a Biology Degree from UCLA in the 1990's. I thought that the best way to honor her was to show the impact she has had on my life. I was pretty happy with the draft. I put it away and went to an amazing wedding. I heard speeches from the wedding party that were truly amazing. When my nephews gave their speeches, I immediately started to weep like a baby. I thanked my nephews and talked to them about it wondering why I cried for their speeches and not that of the other ones. We determined pretty quickly that the others used AI and they had not. I knew I was on the right

track with this speech. When I returned from the wedding to review this speech, I realized that I forgot how to read my own handwriting! I then remembered what Celine has said “AI is a tool, we are the authors”. I scanned my speech in and AI did a great job at deciphering the code. So yes, this speech was written by AI- Sort of....

I want to talk about the first time I met Dean Celine. Before that I want to tell you a story that I was told by my father in-law Bob Barbara

He was a San Francisco Firefighter. He was also in charge of the “Toys for Tots” organization that provided toys for kids during the Holidays. We were talking one time and I asked him about the program. He told me that at one point in his career they had a nice warehouse in San Francisco. He was told that some organization wanted to use 1/2 of the warehouse for their cause. He told me that when he was told who he was meeting and what they wanted, he was certainly going to say no.

He walked into the meeting fully knowing that he was meeting with Mother Teresa.

As he continued the story, he told me how she said “Hello” and they did a tour of the facilities. She then told

him how she loved the building and it was perfect for what she wanted to do “ A soup kitchen” She also told him that she would like the entire building. He said that the only word he would muster was “Yes”.

That was it, that was the entire conversation. He handed her the keys and she gave him a prayer medallion that my lovely wife Cassandra carries to this day.

I was in awe about that story. How could you meet someone that is so self-less that you would want to literally give her everything she asked for and more.

Well now you know where I am going with this story. I met Celine while she was the Dean of Arts at Santa Cruz. A mutual friend made the virtual introduction. We met in person and made that instant connection. She used words and put them together so poetically that I was willing to hear anything she had to say.

She then brought up a program called ArtsBridge. It is a program where Undergrad and Graduate students go back and teach k-12 graders in the local “rural” communities.

She piqued my interest because our foundation has

funded entire schools with Art programs in our local area.

This just brought what I was trying to achieve to full circle.

How brilliant! I thought, how could she have known that this is what I was looking for without me even looking for it? I remember casually asking how much it costs to run the program and she provided me a number.

When I came home and talked to my Vice President or wife as I call her, I told her that we should give them 4X what they needed to run the program so it could expand even further.

I told my wife about Celine and she said she needed to meet this person that had such an impact on me. Well, she had a major impact on her as well. So much so that she probably would have given her the prayer coin that she carries from her father from Mother Teresa.

Celine is truly an amazing person and more importantly, a leader. A leader is someone that you will follow because you know that you will go further and faster than you could alone.

We recently went on a trip with Professor Joseph Erb to

the Cherokee National Holiday...

During that trip with Celine, her husband Dan and her son Bayan I felt a profound connection with the people of the Cherokee nation, their struggles and their perseverance. They have completed a state-of-the-art Hospital, founded a TV station and are working hard to preserve their culture and their language.

Professor Erb told me how when he was at UC Santa Cruz, Celine went above and beyond to help him out and make sure that he was able to spend part of his time at his home on the reservation in Oklahoma. When they had a going away party for her move to UCLA, Professor Erb told me that he thought he was just special in the way he was treated. It turns out that everyone has the same type of story about Celine. She makes you feel special; she makes you feel important. She truly treats people the way she wants to be treated and she goes way above and beyond to support the people she encounters.

Since the time I met Celine, we have become close partners and more importantly friends.

I truly do hope that everyone in this room has an opportunity to have that Mother Teresa moment. I never

thought it would happen to me and it did, and I'm forever grateful.

And No need to ask Celine, we will be supporting the TFT Wellness Program again.

Thank you, Celine for everything you do and more importantly, how you do it.

Dean Celine Parreñas Shimizu - UCLA TFT

Dean's Vision

Convocation – September 23, 2026

Medicine keeps the heart beating. Art makes life worth living.

Yesterday at orientation, a new student came up to me and said, "I did not realize I am going to a place where I can be me. Now I look forward to contributing to this historic place."

You may recall what I said last year: I am going to be me so you can be you. I choose audacity to expand the acceptable, because when I take up space fearlessly, I make room for you. This year, you are already saying it back to me! In being ourselves, we tap the lifelong wellspring of our creativity. Showing up as yourself is where the work begins. The work is making people feel, so that we dislodge misnaming and understand ourselves better. Representations build better realities.

Every person in this room will make something this year, because we value each of us as an author. Last year you saw the signs on the doors and at the registration table: the dean is making a documentary. That film is finished and now submitting to festivals. At TFT we have ideas, and we finish things. We are the crown jewel of UCLA, the best public university in the world, with the greatest faculty, the most devoted staff, and talented classmates

and alumni all around you. Plus, a doggedly determined dean who believes the future of creativity is higher education, and the future of higher education is democracy.

Last week at the Stanford Hospital Gala, I heard about research to prevent myocarditis caused by certain cancer drugs. Myocarditis suddenly took my son Lakas from us, when a common virus attacked the boy with the kindest heart. Lakas would be 21 this month, a junior now, likely in Musical Theater or Acting. He is alive in me every day, and in three of his best friends who are students at UCLA, like Vosse, who is here. Lakas is love, who informs how I take care of your generation as his.

I carry Lakas into every room, and I say his name because he is why I know what our work does. At that gala, I heard how medicine will protect the next child's heart. Stories hold me as I grieve Lakas: the films and plays I sit with, and the people who sit with me and know his name. Lakas. Say it, it's easy, he would say. Medicine keeps the heart beating. Stories make every beat of my life testify to his. Through storytelling we explain ourselves to ourselves. Through storytelling we recover, repair, and find the thread that connects us to each other, and indeed to my son, across time and space.

Let me quote a major donor I met with this afternoon: let us make films and theater as if we will die tomorrow, and live forever in what we leave, the movies, plays, books, and performances that will last long after us.

Convocation aligns us in a shared mission, said out loud so that it happens. That mission is four words long. When one person makes a work, they contribute to what we know together about ourselves and each other. Your voice enters our collective story. Say it with me, with feeling:

Your voice. Our story.

Again, the whole room. Snap, everyone. Take it in.

YOUR VOICE. OUR STORY.

FROM WHERE I SPEAK

I grew up in the Philippines under martial law, when a dictatorship controlled the media and determined our ability to move, to speak, and to live. Our movies carried American colonialism, what has been called three hundred years in the Spanish convent and fifty years in Hollywood. A narrow demographic of Western authors taught us history, relationships, and the range of human emotion. Their specificity dictated universality, so we preferred white skin and snowy climates over brown skin and tropical weather. Our own filmmakers answered in our drama, our humor, our language, and they helped ignite the People Power Revolution.

So, I know the power of cinema deeply, and the power of theater intimately. My father was a theater director who taught me how to stand up and make you feel. I have been winning elocution contests since I was 8.

At 14, I came to the United States with my family as

political refugees and grew up in the projects during the AIDS and crack epidemics, with a father who vowed not to pay a cent of my education. I earned my MFA here in 1996, then my PhD. I went all the way. This is where I realized my stories deserved a place among universal stories, that I deserved to be understood. Thirty years later, I lead the school that formed me. That realization is available to every student in this room, and this school exists to make your dreams possible. Our students, staff, and faculty move me, change me, save me. They carry the spirit of rebellion.

CLAIMING OUR INHERITANCE

The LA Rebellion was born at UCLA. Through the Ethno-Communications Program, a movement remade American cinema: Charles Burnett, Julie Dash, Haile Gerima, Billy Woodberry, Larry Clark, Zeinabu irene Davis, Robert Nakamura, Duane Kubo, David García, Sylvia Morales, Moctesuma Esparza.

Their films sit in the National Film Registry. Killer of Sheep. To Sleep with Anger. Daughters of the Dust. Illusions. Bush Mama. Bless Their Little Hearts. Passing Through. Compensation. Manzanar. Cruisin' J-Town. Requiem-29. Chicana. As Prince says, too many hits! UCLA has more films in the National Film Registry than any school, by any students, confirmed yesterday by Director May Hong HaDuong of the UCLA Film & Television Archive. We are not stopping. This room of 550 is full of rebels.

Those films were made, and those theater companies started, because a public university was affordable, admitted them, and handed them equipment funded by donors including the Ford Foundation. Ben Caldwell, who teaches screenwriting and production in Leimert Park today, speaks of being booed by professors and classmates when he showed his films here. He made the work anyway. As TFT Distinguished Alumna Cauleen Smith said at Orientation yesterday: no one is in your way. Make your work!

Last year we read Josslyn Lockett's *Towards a More Perfect Rebellion*, the beautifully written history of TFT and many of these alumni have come back to us at our many events.

On October 2 and 3, with the Documentary Film Legal Clinic at the School of Law, we convene a social impact summit here at TFT: Ripples of the LA Rebellion. We welcome rebel Charles Burnett, MacArthur Genius, Guggenheim Fellow, and Oscar winner, alongside Law School professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, founder of Critical Race Theory. And we install a permanent plaque: THE LA REBELLION WAS HERE. Claim your inheritance! That plaque was the students' idea, Amber Payne's in particular, Class of 2026. Students lead. We follow.

Next year the LA Rebellion film posters move to a permanent display at Melnitz, right on time as we renovate the Airport Lounge, and a mural follows by summer. Thank you to Professor Ellen Scott for advising the whole

initiative and leading the charge. Help is wanted if you want to join us in honoring the movement that changed American cinema!

Commemorating the LA Rebellion takes nothing away from our other alumni. Honor is like love. It is not a fixed quantity, and this movement has waited far too long for its share. The trailblazing filmmaker Julie Dash said in the late seventies that this is where she learned to speak and not be spoken for. That is what we owe every student. Remembering the LA Rebellion creates the conditions for belonging that unleash our greatest creativity.

THE CONDITIONS OF THIS YEAR

This month President Macron of France and President Lee of South Korea invited me to the Lumière Summit, 150 leaders from fifty countries gathered in Saint-Paul-de-Vence on the future of cinema. I told them what a public film school produces, what it costs, and what disappears when it is defunded. Most at risk is the work the market was never going to make possible. The room came with me, and we left with new relationships. Both presidents went home with jerseys from our national champion women's basketball team, the program's first NCAA title. We carry the UCLA name into every room we enter. We are one TFT. We are one UCLA as our chancellor says.

Yesterday the New York Times asked me whether *Moonlight*, ten years later, would be easier to make now. We have our own alumnus Steven Canals' *Pose* as its most prominent answer. Yet for fourteen years the

Hollywood Diversity Report led by Ana-Christina Ramon and Provost Darnell Hunt, now housed at TFT with Social Sciences, has found fewer women and fewer people of color in key creative roles. Fourteen years, the same finding. Who is listening? Talent is everywhere.

Opportunity is concentrated. We programmed the report's release and secured Disney's funding for it. Anyone else who wants to fund the HDR, we are right here!

Technology is cheap. Talent is expensive. Cultivating a filmmaker's confidence and readiness takes years, and that investment should not fall only on the school, the family, and the student.

BELOVED COMMUNITY

Beloved community is where every person feels their worth and moves toward belonging. This year we read Jennifer Hirsch and Shamus Khan's *Sexual Citizens* together as a school. The #MeToo movement continues. Sexism, assault, harassment, and discrimination have deprived the industry of women leaders, and what goes unaddressed becomes an obstacle to education. We all deserve equal access to opportunity and to what we know here: the pleasures of authorship and narrative sovereignty in how we get to say who we are.

Beloved community has guided my deanship from the start, and this year our Inclusive Excellence office launches it across campus. That is the collaboration we value, with my fellow leaders in the room: the Dean's Cabinet, the Senior Staff, Dean Abel Valenzuela, AVC

Steve Lurie, Dean Barbara Bates-Jensen, Dean Kite, former iDean Noriega, and more.

FIVE DECANAL COMMITMENTS

One. Creative Technologies. We refuse to stand outside new technology while it is dictated to us. In this monumental time of tech transition, we have convened eight AI summits at this school, and this year we focus on our students' creativity to understand the moment. Rick Carter puts it in terms we have adopted: AI will behave like a tool if you call it a tool. The Center for Creative Technologies unites creators, community organizations, industry, and labor, and seats creatives, humanists, and educators at the point of decision. Thank you to our faculty, Fabian Wagmister and Jeff Burke who lead REMAP and Gina Kim for her award-winning VR and AR work and our CMS Critical AI scholarship. Because of them, TFT leads every university in creative art technologies. No one does it like we do.

Two. Indigenous Language Preservation and Cultural Abundance. With the Cherokee Nation, we bring students and filmmakers together against the erasure of language, culture, and history, and we show Indigenous communities thriving now and into the future. Our students go to Oklahoma. Cherokee Nation students come to us. We learn from peoples who have been harmed, and we keep the terms of that learning in their hands. Thank you to Associate Professor Joseph Erb for hosting me and our Executive Board at the Cherokee National Holiday, where

Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. greenlit our collaboration with a half-million-dollar gift. Anyone who wants to help, Aaron is here to listen!

Three. The Sundance Institute Collaboration. Five years with Sundance, built around the hidden curriculum: everything this industry expects you to know and never teaches you. Everyone wants to know how the premier independent film organization and a school got together. Awardees Michelle Satter and Greg Sarris will tell you how we made it happen. Help us make this marriage last and last.

Four. Student Wellness, Career Readiness, and Professionalization. Loneliness afflicts half of the university body. Depression and anxiety affect three in ten. We recognize the pressures of being the best, and what it takes to get here. You are not alone. Our Wellness Center creates community as an antidote to loneliness. It runs on the principle that the wisdom is in the room, and Crew Call, our student leadership board, sets the programming. Career readiness follows from being well. A student who is not well does not finish the film, take the meeting, or build the career. We must cultivate a culture of care. Thank you to Anna Guzman, Sam Oharra, and our advisors for their brilliance, and to Clinch Fuentes for funding this effort through 2027! Any takers to sustain this visionary program for life?

Five. LA28: Athletes and Artists. The Games come to Los Angeles in 2028, and this generation's storytellers,

the TFT Olympian theater and filmmakers and scholars, will make the cinematic and performance portraits of Olympic and Paralympic achievement, including the communities and families behind every athlete in partnership with Athletics, Student Affairs and Alumni Relations. Our students will narrate what it takes to reach the pinnacle of success, and the truth that no one competes alone. Alumna Merry May Ma is completing the proof of concept with our partners across campus as well as our faculty.

We need advocates to make possible the dreams our talents demand. Our community is ready for your funding!

WHAT I ASK OF YOU

Students. Access yourself. Share your story. Listen beyond yourself, especially to your professors. Do your homework. Read. Go big. Choose audacity. Do not shrink, because we need you and your work. Help each other. Our artist-in-residence Lauren "Keke" Palmer says freedom actualizes in service of community. I agree. And do not forget to RSVP for her first visit on October 1.

Faculty. Ask the questions the world needs now about technology and human creativity: the risks, the contexts, and this moment in relation to our collective future. History, theory, and criticism work with practice as a research method. Keep doing the world-class work that makes our place in the world known in leading the thinking with your questions.

Staff. You make everyone's readiness possible. The equipment goes out, the venue opens, the payroll runs, the student gets through the door. You are experts, and your expertise and unflagging support strengthen this institution.

Families. You sent us people who intend to author. We will form them, protect them, and put them in front of the world. Help us do it together. The development team launches our Parent Council this fall guided by Rose Miranda. Join us!

Alumni, donors, and board members, our greatest ambassadors and champions. Support the archive as our collective knowledge. Fund infrastructure: faculty research and faculty lines, equipment, facilities, venues, capital projects, scholarships. Fund the care and professionalization that let a student climb. Seed the founders. Our students graduate able to build a company, a studio, a practice, or an institution, and they graduate without capital. Build the technology with us as partners. Protect the student. To our board, here tonight: we are everything we are because of you. In Tagalog, "because of you" is a deep phrase of gratitude, and the title of our most famous love song, "Dahil sa Iyo." I recognize you and thank you for your help in leading TFT.

Everyone. Measure your success by the opportunities you create for the next generation.

WHAT WE COMMIT

To communicate and collaborate across generations.

To value each other in beloved community.

To make, and to finish and to keep going.

To keep our rooms open, and defend the hours of talk that follow the film or the performance. To counter docility with attunement.

Let a thousand stories bloom to fill the crevices of what we do not know and need to learn.

Show up when it matters.

Your voice. Our story.