

Trans advocate and author discuss identity issues

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newwave@tulane.edu



Preparing to speak at Tuesday's (Feb. 16) "Conversations in Color" event on the Tulane uptown campus are transgender activist and MSNBC talk show host Janet Mock, left, and award-winning author Alexis De Veaux, next to Mock. (Photo by Cheryl Gerber)

Two dynamic speakers took on the topic of sexuality and identity for the [Amistad Research Center's](#) new series, "Conversations in Color," at Tulane University on Tuesday (Feb. 16). The collaborative discussion featured Janet Mock, host of MSNBC's "So Popular," and Alexis De Veaux, recipient of the 2015 Lambda Literary Best Lesbian Fiction award.

Together, the speakers sought to explore the representation of sexuality and identity within their books — Mock's *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More* and De Veaux's *Yabo* — as they addressed an uptown campus audience in the Kendall Cram Lecture Hall at the Lavin-Bernick Center.

Both Mock and De Veaux argued that all members of society should work to fight problematic binary identifications. "Let's struggle for more respectful, thoughtful language around who we really are," De Veaux said.

The pair also discussed the connection between literature and identity formation.

[Mock](#) noted that she found inspiration in her predecessors. “Seeing these black women writing themselves into existence gave me the audacity to say that my poor, black, trans womanhood is worthy of being recorded,” Mock said.

[De Veaux](#) agreed, explaining that marginalized people must rewrite dominant scripts to reflect their own experiences.

Mock explained that history offers models for those who face discrimination due to some facet of their identity. “There were black women who were told that they didn’t belong in the feminist movement,” Mock said. Like these women, she fights for her freedom and that of the next generation.

“We are living in a time in history when everything is up for challenge, even life and death,” De Veaux said. She believes that the world will become a better place when the disadvantaged begin to thrive.

The event was held in conjunction with Audre Lorde Days on campus, in honor of the late civil rights activist. Other event sponsors included Tulane University Campus Programming, the Gender Exploration Society, the Tulane Society for Sexuality, Health and Gender, the Office for Gender and Sexual Diversity and the Tulane University Queer Student Alliance.

Jamie Logan is a junior majoring in English and classical studies with a minor in psychology at Tulane University.

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Alexis De Veaux