VITAL LINES: REVITALIZING THE CITY, THE UNIVERSITY, AND THE NATION-STATE THROUGH SKATEBOARDING CULTURE

Neftalie Williams

In this lecture, Dr. Neftalie Williams examines the academic study of skateboarding and action sports culture, highlighting their role in fostering inclusion, global citizenship, and social change. As director of the San Diego State University Center for Skateboarding, Action Sports, and Social Change, and with previous research affiliations at the University of Southern California and Yale University, Dr. Williams explores how skateboarding serves as a vehicle for civic engagement and cross-cultural dialogue.

He will discuss skateboarding's contributions to anti-racism, gender equity, and community-building, particularly in empowering women, young girls, and marginalized communities. Additionally, he will analyze its evolving presence in the Olympic movement, the impact of commercialization, and ongoing efforts to preserve skateboarding as a community-driven practice that supports a shared global identity.

Drawing on his experience as an envoy for the U.S. Department of State and his research within skateboarding communities across the U.S., the EU, Cuba, and the Global South, Dr. Williams will illustrate how skateboarding functions as a tool for cultural diplomacy, place-making, and social inclusion, reinforcing its broader significance in shaping contemporary civic and cultural landscapes and discourses.

Williams is featured in multiple media outlets and provides commentary on the intersection of skateboarding, community development, and sports diplomacy in interviews with the New York Times, CNN, ABC, and other outlets. His research on social cohesion, community building, and intergenerational learning with the 2019-2020 USC x Tony Hawk Foundation project was also featured in the New York Times. It was the first national study to assess the impact skateboarding has on young people and their educational and career trajectories.

The first 'Ambassador of Skateboarding,' and envoy for the US Department of State, he introduced the concept of skateboarding as a tool for cultural diplomacy in both theory and practice. Utilizing 'skate diplomacy,' he aided the US Embassy in the Netherlands in integrating young Syrian refugees into Holland. In Cambodia, his skate diplomacy efforts created new engagement between the U.S. embassy, Cambodian youth, and academic and cultural institutions. Former Chairman of Cuba Skate, Neftalie

DR. NEFTALIE WILLIAMS is a sociologist and assistant professor at San Diego State University (SDSU) and directs the new SDSU Center for Skateboarding, Action Sports & Social Change. His previous positions include USC Provost's Postdoctoral Scholar at the Annenberg School of Communication and Journalism and Yale Schwarzman Center Visiting Fellow. He investigates global issues of social cohesion, community building, diplomacy, and youth empowerment, using the lens of action sports culture. Williams holds a Ph.D. from the University of Waikato and has upcoming books with Hatchette Books and UC Press focused on skateboarding culture.

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and the Cuba Skate team created fruitful cultural exchanges between Cuban youth and American professionals in Havana.

Expanding the public dialogue around diversity and inclusion, Neftalie founded “The Nation Skate,” a series of public panels, lectures, skateboarding demonstrations, and media that explores the relationship between race, diversity, and diplomacy through skateboarding, academia, and popular culture. He co-founded the College Skateboarding Educational Foundation (CSEF), a non-profit dedicated to creating scholarships for young skateboarders to pursue higher education, and serves on the Boards for The Skatepark Project, formerly the Tony Hawk Foundation, Skateistan, McKinnon Center for Global Affairs, and USA Skateboarding.



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