

Title: “The Tension That Divides Us and How to Overcome It”

Speaker: Claude Steele, Stanford University

Abstract

In this presentation, Professor Claude M. Steele, renowned social psychologist and Stanford University emeritus faculty member, explores the central themes from his latest book, “Churn: The Tension That Divides Us and How to Overcome It”. Merging insights from decades of groundbreaking research with practical case histories, Professor Steele shares how cycles of internal rumination—what he calls “churn”—can create powerful barriers to personal growth and community well-being.

As our campuses and organizations become more diverse, Professor Steele notes that we are all brought together into states of “churn.” He uses this term to describe the mental and physical stress people may feel when they fear being seen and treated in terms of negative stereotypes about their group—whether that group is defined by race, religion, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or any category that shapes interpersonal dynamics. “Churn” captures what makes navigating diversity uncomfortable: a state of suspended trust, where individuals wonder, “Given my identity, how will I fare in this situation? Will I be valued? Treated fairly? Do I have a chance here?”

Bringing academic rigor and inspiring storytelling, Professor Steele offers evidence-based strategies for disrupting churn and moving forward. He shares guidance on developing self-compassion, resilience, and mindful awareness—helping audiences understand how to move from mental rumination and distrust to genuine engagement and personal growth. As he connects his research from “Whistling Vivaldi” and beyond, Steele’s talk provides both insight and practical tools for individuals and institutions striving to create thriving, diverse, and supportive communities.

Audiences praise Professor Steele’s accessible, compassionate style and his ability to demystify social psychology, making the challenges and solutions surrounding diversity, inclusion, and mental well-being relatable and actionable for all.

Bio

Claude M. Steele is an American social psychologist and a Professor of Psychology at Stanford University.

He is best known for his work on stereotype threat and its application to minority student academic performance. His earlier work dealt with research on the self (e.g., self-image, self-affirmation) as well as the role of self-regulation in addictive behaviors. In 2010, he released his book, *Whistling Vivaldi and Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us*, summarizing years of

research on stereotype threat and the underperformance of minority students in higher education.

He holds B.A. in Psychology from Hiram College, an M.A. in Social Psychology from Ohio State University, and a Ph.D. in Social Psychology and Statistical Psychology from Ohio State University.

He is elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the National Academy of Sciences, the National Science Board, the National Academy of Education, and the American Philosophical Society.

He currently serves as a trustee of the Russell Sage Foundation and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and as a Fellow for both the American Institutes for Research and the American Academy of Political and Social Science.

He has served in several major academic leadership positions as the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost at UC Berkeley, the I. James Quillen Dean for the School of Education at Stanford University, and as the 21st Provost of Columbia University. Past roles also include serving as the President of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, as the President of the Western Psychological Association, and as a member of the Board of Directors of the American Psychological Society.

Professor Steele holds Honorary Doctorates from Yale University, Northwestern University, University of Chicago, University of Michigan, DePaul University and Claremont Graduate University.