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**Simon's Rock to Host Symposium Week on Social Justice and Inclusion
October 23 – 28, 2023 with Keynote Speaker Shanae Watkins**



GREAT BARRINGTON, MA—Simon's Rock will host the Symposium on Social Justice and Inclusion, which is an annual program sponsored by the [Council for Inclusive Community \(CIC\)](#). This Symposium provides designated time and space for the Simon's Rock community to deconstruct barriers to action on important social justice issues — in the classroom and in day-to-day life, using a theme. This year the theme is Collective Activism.

This year's keynote guest will be activist and author Shanae Watkins, speaking on Saturday, October 28 at 3 p.m. in the McConnell Theater at the Daniel Arts Center on campus.

The event can also be streamed virtually on Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85091130971>

Prior to the Keynote event, there will be a screening of the documentary on Watkins' early life, *Girlhood*, on Friday, October 27 at 6:30 p.m. in the Fisher Lecture Center. Both parts of this event are free and open to the public.

Dr. Sarah Porter-Liddell, Dean of Students and Equitable Community at Simon's Rock, describes this year's theme: "This year, for Symposium Week, we are focusing on Collective Activism. During a time when many of us felt hopeless and isolated, we began to fight back with ways to bond, grow, learn, and experience new things together. We transitioned into an understanding of what the world, and our country, would look like surviving with COVID, but now we face the uncertainties of war internationally and governmental challenges domestically. This wave of anxiety and fear has us scrambling to find a voice, to make change, and to find balance — a balance that Collective Activism will provide. As we gaze upon the many social issues around us,

we are choosing Collective Activism as our shield of strength to help give voices to those who have been silenced, bring awareness to issues that feel distant, and do our due diligence to bring hope to a changing society.

Collective Activism is action taken by a group of individuals who share a common goal for changing and enhancing conditions for others and themselves. The root word being Collective — meaning, a group of individuals who have decided that despite their differences, despite their backgrounds and access, that they will work together to achieve a goal and make things better. If 2023 is showing us anything, it is proving to us that now is the time to join in arms and push for change.”

Additional events for the Symposium on Social Justice and Inclusion will run throughout the week on the Simon’s Rock Campus. These events will be open to the Simon’s Rock community.

Shanae Watkins

Shane Watkins has reshaped the trajectory and ripped off each of the negative labels that society attempted to place on her. A failure. A reject. A violent criminal. All by the age of 11. While her painful but short past positioned her on a difficult, often solo course to navigate, the label that blared from headlines further pushed Shanae into a fight against odds that consumed her teen and young adult years. From one chaotic experience, being kidnapped, to another — a hit and an attempted run around the age of five — she evolved from a naturally curious, wise beyond her years, to a “runner,” leaving home for weeks at a time, unsure of her place anywhere so wanting to be everywhere. These choices, some hers and some made naively and more often predatorily for her, accelerated her from a little girl into a pre-teen who fell into misleading hands who took advantage of her desire to be free, that inevitably resulted in her freedom being taken away.

Healing through hardship as a single mom, rejection and abuse from the world she desired to feel safe in, as a woman she is one hundred percent invested in healing from what she now considers valuable lessons every single day.

First introduced internationally in the cable documentary, “Girlhood,” she has appeared on *Oprah*, *Geraldo*, *The Montel Williams Show*, and *MSNBC*, with regional appearances on panels speaking on the juvenile justice experience, and childhood and adult trauma.

Today, Shanae is the proud, doting mom of three children: one son and two daughters. A business owner; customer services professional and provider of services catering to femininity and adult health and wellness. Featured as a co-host to a podcast created to help women find clarity in love, life and spiritual healing, and a published author to the 2022 electronic and hard copy long-awaited release, *From Girlhood to Womanhood*. She is a flower of feminine, dynamic light, with an infectious spirit that captivates hearts of all she meets.

Despite her circumstances, and despite the inner voice that sometimes spoke in unison of naysayers, Shanae refused to answer to the name that those experiences and society tried to give her, no matter the experience that society wanted to use to define her. Twenty years later,

she is the rose that bloomed in darkness, and uses her own light in a frank, unapologetic, good girlfriend way. She tells her story, in her debut as an author in her book *From Girlhood to Womanhood*, through profoundly personal words.

About Simon's Rock

[Bard College at Simon's Rock](#) is the only college in the country specifically designed for highly motivated students ready to enter college after the 10th or 11th grade. Simon's Rock offers a challenging program in the liberal arts and sciences, taught exclusively in small seminars by supportive, highly trained faculty, who are leading scholars in their fields. The College grants degrees in more than 35 majors. The Princeton Review's *Best 380 Colleges* rates academics at Simon's Rock higher than Harvard and Princeton.

[Bard Academy at Simon's Rock](#) is the nation's first two-year boarding and day program designed to prepare 9th and 10th graders to start college early. A student entering Bard Academy as a high school freshman will earn an Associate of Arts degree from Bard College at Simon's Rock after only four years and a Bachelor of Arts degree after only six years. The Academy curriculum is designed and taught by students' future college professors who are leading scholars in their fields.

[The Bard Queer Leadership Project](#) (BQLP) is a revolutionary, new Bachelor of Arts degree program designed for, and by, LGBTQIA+ college students to elevate LGBTQIA+ students and college graduates into leadership roles in school and across the workforce while serving as a space for actualizing educational practices designed for students to thrive. The centerpiece of BQLP is a four year dual major B.A. degree combining Queer Leadership with a second academic field.

For more information, visit simons-rock.edu and bardacademy.simons-rock.edu

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