

# Center for Race and Ethnicity

## Hispanic Identities in the New Millennium

*A conversation on the changing demographics of the Latino populations, the sub-group complexities of Hispanic identity, stereotypes about Latino sexuality and health behavior, and how funding pressures and social science paradigms reinforce and challenge categories of identity. (September 24, 2007, held at CRE)*

• **In this Issue:**

- **Making Sense of Hispanic Diversity**
- **How Research Funding Shapes Ethnic Representation**
- **NJ and Regional Trends**
- 

• “When I think about the number of people in the younger generation who may have one parent that is Puerto Rican and another Ecuadorian, or one parent who is Colombian and another African American, or individuals who are Peruvian and Japanese, it strikes me that just as many Americans are realizing that terms like Hispanic and Latino gloss over the incredible diversity of important sub-groups in the population (like Cubans or Dominicans, who are often labeled as black and Latino), these sub-groups are also rapidly breaking down in the “new millenium”. – Peter Guarnaccia

Panelists: **Peter Guarnaccia** (Human Ecology/Institute for Health, Health Care Policy, and Aging Research), **Carlos Decena** (Women’s and Gender Studies/Latino and Hispanic Caribbean Studies Department), and **Claudia Moreno** (School of Social Work)

**MAKING SENSE OF HISPANIC DIVERSITY**

Peter Guarnaccia’s presentation, based in part on data from the National Latino and Asian American Mental Health Survey, revealed the diversity of Latino sub-groups as well as the distinctive regional demographics among Latino groups across the nation.

“The diversity of the Hispanic population nationally does not map onto the diversity of the Hispanic population in our region. Whereas nationally, Mexican Americans are 56% of the Latino population (and, by the way, 60% of them are citizens), and only 10% are Puerto Rican; in New Jersey, the largest group by far are Puerto Ricans (who have a complex relationship to the U.S. as citizens-yet-noncitizens), with Dominicans second. The national discussion on Hispanics and immigration, then, doesn’t quite mesh

with our regional realities.” – Peter Guarnaccia

Claudia Moreno’s comparative study of Puerto Rican and Dominican women and HIV identified crucial differences among “Hispanic” groups in attitudes about HIV, AIDS, and risk – and raises broader questions about how perceived and actual “risk” is structured for these two groups of women.

“In a recent study we found that HIV positive Dominican women and Puerto Rican women had different views, in general, about sexual risk. Both groups of Latinas exhibited low condom use with main and other sexual partners, perceiving their own and their partners’ risk as low. Puerto Ricans were more heterosexually active, had more sexual partners, had higher incidence of STI and HIV than Dominicans. However, Puerto Rican women were more likely to use condoms with a sexual

partner.” – Claudia Moreno  
<http://hjb.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/29/3/336.pdf>

Such findings raised important questions for the audience – about sub-group differences and perceptions, about questions of sexuality as they intersect with health and ethnicity, and about how social scientists understand and study “risk.”



Peter Guarnaccia, Human Ecology/Institute for Health, Health Care Policy, and Aging Research



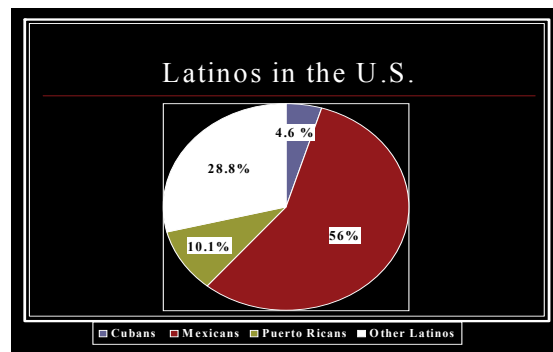
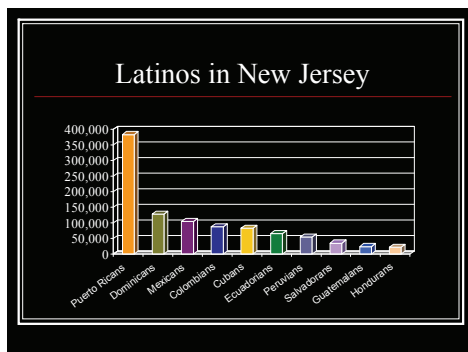
Claudia Moreno, School of Social Work



Carlos Decena, Women’s and Gender Studies/Latino and Hispanic Caribbean Studies

**Selected Events – Center for Race and Ethnicity – 191 College Ave**

- |   |               |
|---|---------------|
| Faculty Forum: Race and Ethnicity                             | Friday Oct 5  |
| Criminal Differences: Race and Ethnicity and American Justice | Friday Oct 26 |
| Film Screening and Discussion: Mississippi Masala             | Thurs Nov 15  |
| Film Screening and Discussion: Greetings from Asbury Park     | Mon Dec 3     |
| Ethnic Conflict in Comparative Perspective                    | Friday Dec 7  |
| Between Privilege and Poverty: Perspectives on NJ Disparities | Friday Feb 22 |
| Beyond the Digital Divide: Race, Ethnicity, and New Media     | TBA           |



## Hispanic Identities in the New Millennium

### HOW RESEARCH FUNDING SHAPES ETHNIC REPRESENTATIONS

Carlos Decena's discussion identified elisions in current public health literature on Latino/a sexualities. While Latino gay sexual practices are a strong focus for researchers, Latino/a heterosexualities and Latina lesbians remain under-represented in research, because these groups are perceived to be "low-risk" for contracting HIV and other sexually-transmitted diseases. This under-representation Decena argued, functions as the consequence of an interrelated set of discourses among funders, researchers and research subjects.

*"Representation matters. Representations have their own institutional life. The processes by which categories come into existence and are replicated and the role of funders of scholarship (foundations, government grants, and so on) in reinforcing standard and accepted labels need to be looked at closely. These constraints inhibit a productive dialogue about the diversity of Latino culture, particularly in relation to my area of research – which is sex and sexuality."* – Carlos Decena

In addition, Decena who teaches an undergraduate course on *The Racial Politics of the AIDS Crisis*, argued that researchers' tendency to focus on cultural identity and practices at the expense of racialization needs to be rethought, given the way Latino/a sexualities strongly intersect with racial and ethnic categorization. For as Decena's and Morena's talks crucially suggested, public health discourse bear the potential to not only misinterpret, but at times even reshape, the ways in which ethnicity is perceived and deployed within Latino/a communities.

### FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Can the terms of Latino culture invented by social scientists be useful in describing the diversity and complexity of the "Latino" experience?
- Variations in America's Latino and Hispanic populations show economic differences, subgroup differences; racial/skin color differences; as well as the subgroup demographic differences and regional differences.
- How to embrace a pan-Hispanic or "hybridity" oriented approach to identity and representation, while still holding to the traditional tropes (Latino/

Hispanic) that mean so much in terms of representation and in mainstream academia and the shaping, for example, of health policies?

- Such diversity raises obvious challenges for health care providers/administrators and also for academics working in Latino communities around issues of sexuality
- How – given the constraints of funders – can we encourage and develop the often-hidden scholarship and discourse on Latino sexualities?
- In what other ways do Latino populations and cultural dynamics in NJ differ from national trends?
- How should the altering self-identification of younger generations be taken into account when grappling with the complexity of Latino populations?

*"The terms and stereotypes we use to characterize Latino culture ("machismo" and "marianismo" [machismo's supposed female counterpart]) were created by researchers, not originally part of the Latino cultures. These terms are a production of social science. When we use these cultural categories, we need to understand how they do and do not describe the diversity and complexity of the "Latino" experience."*  
– Peter Guarnaccia

## Rutgers Center for Race and Ethnicity

<http://raceethnicity.rutgers.edu/>



**Address:** 191 College Avenue

**Phone:** (732) 932-2181

**Email:** [raceethnicity@sas.rutgers.edu](mailto:raceethnicity@sas.rutgers.edu)

**Director:** Keith Wailoo, History/Institute for Health

**Executive Director:** Roland Anglin, Bloustein School for Planning and Public Policy

**Associate Director:** Mia Bay, History

**Graduate Assistants/Editors:** Nadia Brown, Jeffrey Dowd, Melissa Stein, Anantha Sudhakar, Dora Vargha

GENERAL INFORMATION about the Center for Race and Ethnicity, and its activities:

<http://raceethnicity.rutgers.edu/RecentEvents.html>

**Teaching Race and Ethnicity across Disciplines** (syllabus exchange):

<http://raceethnicity.rutgers.edu/TeachingRaceAndEthnicity.html>

**Katrina conference** and forthcoming volume:

<http://raceethnicity.rutgers.edu/KatrinaAuthorMeeting.html>

**Other Roundtable Discussions:**

<http://raceethnicity.rutgers.edu/TeachingUnimaginableExperiencesSummary.htm>

- Facilitating research and enriching education on matters of race and ethnicity in contemporary life in America, in New Jersey, and the world.
- Promoting collaborations and fostering cross-disciplinary seminars and discussions on topics from immigration and work, to ethnic politics and racial classification, from preservation of cultural identity to its transformation, and including questions of poverty, discrimination, advancement, integration, and privilege.
- Identifying critical areas for future research and supporting race and ethnicity research and policy development.