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## Upcoming Events at the CRE

***CRE Hosts Events for Student Audiences***

The Center for Race and Ethnicity's mission includes a commitment to fostering dialogues about race and ethnicity among Rutgers' undergraduates and graduate students. With that end in view, in February, the CRE hosted two student-centered events that engaged members of both groups.

**THE 6<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL GRADUATE FORUM**

This year's Graduate Forum on Race and Ethnicity, which took place on February 17, attracted twenty presenters, who shared their ongoing work on issues critically engaging with race and ethnicity. The Forum's participants hailed from a wide variety of different departments, so their topics, questions and methodologies varied greatly. But as a group they exhibited a common inclination towards creative and innovative approaches to the study of race and ethnicity.



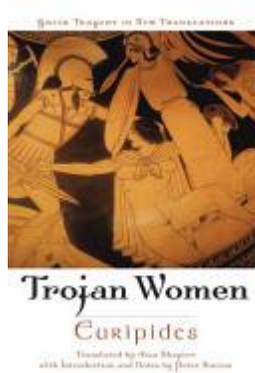
*A full house during the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Graduate Forum on Race and Ethnicity, held in February.*

Examples of this trend could be seen through the day. The opening panel, for instance, included a presentation by Catherine Boland (Art History) who explores racism and nativism by examining how the architecture of the immigration depot Angel Island was influenced by policies aimed at restricting the entry of Asian immigrants into the United States. Located in the San Francisco Bay, the Island processed approximately one million Asian immigrants between 1910 and 1940, a period when the Chinese Exclusion Act, first passed in 1882, was still in effect. The strict immigration restrictions imposed by the Exclusion Act limited entry largely to individuals who already had relatives in the United States, and even those potential immigrants were detained and interrogated on the island for many months as they awaited permission to enter the country. Confined to comfortless barracks, they were subject to a form of what Boland called "quarantine focused on preventing family and friends already in the country from coaching the new arrivals through the entry process."

Other participants at the Forum illuminated their common interests while also underscoring the original and distinctive approaches to their work. A number of presenters found that their work revolved around similar foundational concepts which they typically engaged in notably divergent ways. For example, Marian Stewart-Titus (SCI) and Nimanthi Rajasingham (English) both think about space, but in very different contexts. Titus examines virtual space and the in-between spaces created by mobile communications, while Rajasingham examines how spaces used for the performance of plays can become venues for personal testimony from voices that are otherwise marginalized.

Titus maintains that the emergence of virtual space has contributed to the deterritorialization of the nation-state. In particular, she contends that “intense reconstruction of place” occurs when Jamaicans and Jamaican-Americans use mobile communication technologies to maintain and create connections as they move between Jamaica and the United States.

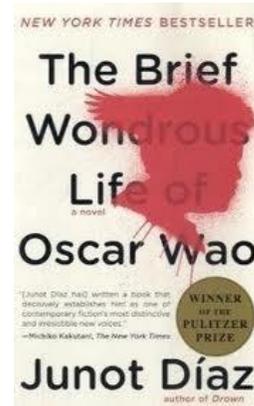
Rajasingham’s work by contrast underscores the multiple uses of real life performance spaces. Focused on the activities of Sri Lankan women, her work explores how staging the Greek play *Trojan Women* in Sri Lanka creates a space for the actresses on stage to voice what women there have witnessed during the 26-year-long conflict between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers. Their dramaturgy challenges the logic of the dominant neo-liberal human



rights paradigm, in which the absence of United Nations representatives or foreign aid workers or foreign journalists makes Sri Lanka’s civil war invisible. Articulating the devastation of war by acting out the play gives voice to witnesses who are otherwise erased and go unheard.

Witnessing is also a significant theme in Enmanuel Martinez’s (Comparative Literature) analysis of *The Brief Wonderful Life of Oscar Wao*, by Junot Diaz. In contrast to Rajasingham and Titus, however, Martinez focuses on space within a text. In particular, his work explores the ways in which Diaz’s novel blurs historical and fictional narratives through its use of footnotes, contending that Diaz uses this technique to think about “the difficult relationship between the history (and legacy) of colonial trauma and post-colonial testimony in the Americas.” This legacy creates the necessity for new forms of witnessing, including a blurring of the lines between fiction and biography.

Yet the complexity of colonial and post-colonial contexts force us to consider these alternative forms of witnessing as credible accounts of the experiences of those who lived these historical realities.



Historian Alix Genter tackles space in yet another context. In her project, Genter reconfigures the historical mapping of lesbian women’s experiences in New York City in the twentieth century. She argues the current mapping obfuscates the experiences of queer women of color in this period by focusing almost exclusively on the social spaces of white lesbians. By shifting the focus of queer social life from the Village to Harlem and from clubs to personal living spaces, Genter broadens and complicates our understanding of the ways in which queer communities, and their politics, were formed in and informed by urban spaces.

In addition to engaging in various forms of spatial analysis, the emerging scholars who participated in the Forum are engaged in research projects that explore the ambiguities and complexities which inevitably arise in the study of race and ethnicity.

Crystal Bedley's (Sociology) analysis of the General Social Survey, a nationally representative public opinion survey, explores multiracial identification and racial attitudes since 2002. Her work compares groups who identify with one race to those who identify with multiple races. Bedley asks: why do certain multiracial identifications, such as Black and Native American, enjoy surges of popularity at different moments? And, who is more likely to identify monoracially and multiracially? Her preliminary findings suggest an emerging "tri-racial hierarchy," in which many multiracial people identify as such. Bedley acknowledges that this development is a marked departure from the Black/White divide that has traditionally prevailed in the U.S. This change, she suggests, may reflect the impact of the nation's growing population of Hispanic immigrants—or a "Latin Americanization of United States race relations."

Donavan Ramon of the English Department also complicates the black/white binary in his work on the ambiguous nature of the deaths of literary figures that passed as white while alive. The ambiguity of these deaths, Ramon argues, speaks to the anonymous mystery of these characters' lives. The trope Ramon associates with these characters, who consciously obscured their true racial identity, is "live ambiguously, die anonymously." Ramon seeks to understand the implications of this recurring literary trope. Ellen Alford, a History student from the Camden campus, is also interested in ambiguous

literary and historical tropes. Her work focuses on discussions of slavery, examining the impact of nostalgia and mythologies of Southern life.

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*In thinking about citizenship, [U.S. Virgin] islanders tend to emphasize notions of cultural belonging and citizenship over legal and political forms of citizenship.*

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The Forum also attracted students whose work focuses directly on racial formations in the Caribbean and Latin America. Anthropologist Edith Laurencin's work focuses on St. Croix, one of the U.S. Virgin Islands, examining how notions of nativism, locality, and identity, are shaped by the island's tourist economy and colonial past. Laurencin directs us to social tensions that flared in St Croix during 1960s and 1980s, as a result of an influx of "down islanders" from other Islands in the British Caribbean, who came to work in St Croix's prosperous tourist sector and oil refining industry. Her initial findings suggest that in thinking about citizenship, islanders tend to emphasize notions of cultural belonging and citizenship over legal and political forms of citizenship.

Mekala Audain (History) focuses on an overlooked moment in the history of U.S. slavery by examining the communications between U.S. and Spanish officials in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century regarding escaped slaves who found refuge in the Spanish borderlands. Escaped slaves exploited the ambiguities in Spanish policy, and the slowness of communication between U.S. and Spanish officials, to find freedom in colonial Mexico

For many of the graduate students, the research they undertake is itself a byproduct of their own experiences, personal histories and identifications. Nadia Riley's Media Studies project compares Bahamian and U.S. news accounts of the Haitian earthquake and its aftermath; Riley's interest in foregrounding non-First World accounts of the natural disaster is informed by the fact that she is herself Bahamian. In her presentation on Afro-German youth and identity development, Rosemarie Peña (Childhood Studies) likewise noted that she has a very personal interest in the stories of children born to white German women and African American U.S. soldiers who were forcibly placed in orphanages in the United States post World War II. Peña ended her presentation by sharing, "I was one of those adopted children."

And finally, Library and Information Sciences' Nicole Cooke used her own experience as the recipient of a fellowship designed to assist underrepresented populations in academia to develop a project that traces the experiences of the recipients of the fellowship. Cooke was surprised by the

unwillingness of some of the recipients to share their experiences publicly, for fear of how being “outed” as a recipient of this kind of initiative may impact perception of their merit as scholars.

Graduate School of Education students Luis Leyva and Yi-Jung (Shelley) Wu offered still other ways of examining institutional and social support of minority groups in the United States. Both these scholars are investigating the resources these communities have access to, while also identifying the resources that such communities may still lack.

Leyva analyzes the support program for minority mathematics students at the high school level, to determine if alternative, community-based, de-centered models of mentoring may prove to be more effective in keeping minority students engaged with mathematics.

Wu also examines influences on the academic achievements of Asian-American immigrants and their children beyond the school environment. Wu argues that a

primary indicator of success and high achievement is the influence of parents, both in terms of parenting styles and pre-immigration socio-economic status. The perception of the cultural values of these populations as static however, tends to oversimplify the view of high achieving Asian immigrants. Wu calls for a more comprehensive approach that accounts for the agency of Asian immigrants and their children, whose sphere of cultural influences shift over time.

The last panel of the day included Tasia Milton of the English Department who looks to aurality to think about how the collective Other speaks in Gayl Jones’ *Corregidora*. Examining the traumatic disruptions and modes of avoidance and distraction in Jones’ work leads her to draw on contemporary culture and the concept of remixing to think about the act of storytelling as a changing practice.

In addition to offering Rutgers Graduate student opportunities to share and discuss research, the Graduate Forum typically aims to provide professional enrichment to the students who attend. This year, this enrichment took the form of a special lunchtime panel consisting of several of the highly accomplished postdoctoral scholars currently in residence at Rutgers. The postdocs were invited to speak to students about the transition from graduate school to the realm of professional academia and included: Yveline Alexis (Presidential Post-doctoral Fellow, Africana Studies), Kathleen Belew (Mellon Post-doctoral Fellow, American Studies), Jefferson Decker (ACLS/Mellon New Faculty Fellow), Patricia Lespinasse (Post-doctoral Fellow), Tami Navarro (Presidential Postdoctoral Fellow), Andy Urban (ACLS/ Mellon New Faculty Fellow) and the CRE’s own Brittney Cooper (Ford Foundation Post-doctoral Fellow).

The panelists provided insight and practical advice on topics ranging from developing good writing habits and getting the dissertation done, to



Members of the Post-Doctoral Lunchtime Panel (l-r): Patricia Lespinasse, Kathleen Belew, Brittney Cooper, Andy Urban, Tami Navarro, Jeff Decker. Not pictured: Yveline Alexis

navigating interpersonal relationships with colleagues during the job search, as well as present and future trends in the academic job market. This frank, fruitful conversation reinforces the importance of and necessity for creating spaces on campus where graduate students can talk to one another, and recently graduated scholars.



The 2011-2012 cohort of Graduate Assistants at the CRE, who produced and facilitated the 6<sup>th</sup> annual Graduate Forum on Race and Ethnicity (l-r): Isra Ali, Chris Hayes, Jahaira Arias, Shatima Jones, Wendy Wright

## WATCHING THE NEO AFRICAN AMERICANS

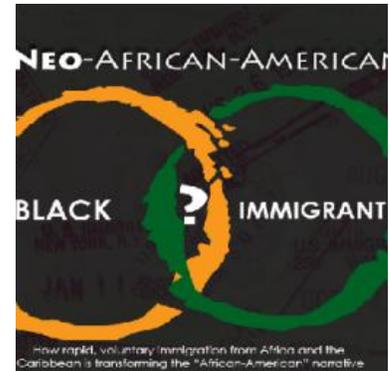
On February 15, 2012 the CRE showed the film *The Neo African Americans*, a documentary that discusses the increasing ethnicization of the black population in the US through immigration. Although the vast majority of the black population in the United States are native-born Americans whose roots trace back to the transatlantic slave trade, throughout the twentieth century, increasing numbers of voluntary migrants from the Caribbean and Africa have been making their presence felt in metropolitan areas like New York, Washington D.C. and Miami. As these black immigrant

populations grow, the definition of what it means to be “black” becomes more complicated for native-born blacks and black immigrants in America. Though black natives and immigrants share a somewhat similar “black experience” in terms of how people may perceive them based on skin color alone, black immigrants in the film describe the ways they differ from natives and identify points of contention between the two groups.

The film opens its exploration of these issues by juxtaposing the many different labels that a diverse group of black Americans use to identify themselves. The almost dizzying array of labels ranged from a woman whose family had deep roots in the American south, who identified as African American, to that of a woman who is a naturalized citizen of the United States but born in the West Indies who identified as West Indian American. The film also featured a Spanish speaking immigrant who identified as Afro-Latino American, and a woman who described herself as a “true” African American because her parents immigrated from Africa though she herself was born in the United States.

What becomes clear as the film introduces such individuals is that the project of self-identification was a fraught one for immigrants who are, based on appearance,

often assumed to form a part of the native-born black American community. For black immigrants who arrive in the United States unused to a social structure in which race is the primary category of identification, part of the experience of adjusting to US culture involves the shock of being thought of as black in a way that supersedes national and ethnic affiliations—being seen as black first, and only secondarily as Ghanaian, Jamaican, Hispanic, or Ibo, to give just a few examples.



The particulars of the American racial system sets the experience of black immigrants apart from that of white immigrants whose ethnic identities are not seen as conflicting with their racial category of white. To be black in the US, however, is to be black before and sometimes exclusive of all other qualifiers. This system can be particularly jarring for black immigrants coming from countries where the majority of the population is black. In such societies, ethnic, religious, and national qualifiers form a more central part than race and play a fundamental role shaping their citizens’ sense of themselves. However, once they arrive in the US, immigrants from black majority societies have to rethink themselves, and are required to

identify with the racial category black or African-American, despite their lack of any common history or deep ties to African Americans.

However, the transition is complicated, since more recent black immigrants are distinguished from American born black in some circumstances, but not in others. On the one hand, immigrants who come to the United States with black bodies are generally subject to the same kind of scrutiny and surveillance as black Americans, on the basis of color alone.

But, on the other, verbal interactions can change the way black immigrants are perceived. For example, one woman in the film who has lived in the US for fifteen years but is originally from South Africa commented that when people hear her pronounced British accent, they will sometimes say, “Oh, you’re black but you are not *that* kind of black.” The implication is that because she is not a native black American, she is somehow different and possibly better.

Distinctions in the reception of native versus immigrant blacks were highlighted in the film, which included a discussion of statistics that show a marked disparity in the economic achievement of native and immigrant blacks. Older studies typically attributed these disparities to questions of work ethic, experts consulted in the film noted, alleging that black immigrants did better economically because they were more motivated than native blacks. But in recent years, scholars have begun to acknowledge and examine the structural factors that

make it possible for immigrants to do better.

In discussing the film, attendees at the screening found the distinctions the filmmakers drew between immigrants and native born American both interesting and problematic. One attendee pointed out that perhaps the economic disparity between the two groups owed more to the quality of education immigrants are able to obtain in their native country, which often far surpasses the quality of education available to the majority of African Americans in the US.

Other attendees acknowledged that the film does take pains to point out that the level of education of West Indian and African immigrants surpasses even that of the general population, but still felt it was more sympathetic to immigrants.

Some viewers worried that the film’s presentation of immigrants as plucky go-getters, whose ambitions were nourished in majority black populations where they never felt that there were barriers to their achievement based on their race carried an implicit but powerful critique of native born black Americans. The film could be interpreted to incorrectly perpetuate the idea that, as members of a minority group, native-born black Americans were riddled by social insecurities that had a negative impact on their professional

ambitions and made them privilege social issues over individual advancement. But for black Americans, Graduate Assistant, Shatima Jones pointed out, individual and social concerns have never been mutually exclusive, and professional advancement has been a major goal. “Growing up,” offered Jones, “I was made aware that it would be harder for me to succeed being a black woman, but that it was indeed possible if I worked hard enough to reach my goal.”

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The film also suggested that tensions between the native and immigrant black communities can be exacerbated by the perception that immigrants are benefitting from the successes of the civil rights movement at the expense of the native black population. The percentage of immigrant blacks at the top universities in the country, for example, is disproportionately high. Could a perception of immigrant blacks as “not *that* kind of black” and therefore preferable to native African Americans be at play in the college admissions process? Should affirmative action programs be restricted to native blacks, particularly if they are resistant to identifying as African American? In both the film and the discussion that followed, it was clear that there were no easy answers.

One discussant proposed that black immigrants who chose not to identify as African American are not necessarily motivated by any concerns about associating themselves with the native-born black population often viewed in negative terms. She explained that for her, claiming a Nigerian-American identity was above all an effort to remember her parent's heritage and her Nigerian national pride, despite tremendous pressure on African immigrants and their children to shorten their names and otherwise blend in with the native black population. She also pointed out that African immigrants' experience with ethnic strife in their own homelands may contribute to their reluctance to be swept up into American racial politics and focus encourage them to primarily on getting a higher education and succeeding economically at any cost.

Overall, our audience enjoyed the film, but found that it lacked obvious structural explanations for perceived disparities between black natives and black immigrants in terms of social mobility. By overemphasizing individual motivation as opposed to quality of education or discriminative hiring practices, the filmmakers helped perpetuate false essential difference between black natives and black immigrants. Despite these limitations, however, the film managed to shed much needed light on complex relations between black immigrants and native-born black Americans, and illuminate the diversity of America's black populations.

***Minor in Comparative and Critical Race and Ethnic Studies Now Available at Rutgers University***

If you are a Rutgers undergraduate who has an interest in race and ethnic studies, be sure to check out the new minor within SAS, Comparative and Critical Race and Ethnic Studies (CCRES). This minor course of study, which is offered through the American Studies Department, is designed to introduce students to the complexity of racial formation by bringing together courses from multiple departments engaged in the analysis, history, and political economy of race and migration.

The minor came about when several professors within the American Studies department realized that, despite the specialties of individual faculty members whose work looks at race and ethnicity, Rutgers lacked a centralized Ethnic Studies program. To attempt to remedy this, Professor Allan Punzalan Isaac convened a meeting with some 20 faculty who represented a broad cross-section of departments and units, including Women and Gender Studies, Latino & Hispanic Caribbean Studies, Sociology, Anthropology, Art History, the Center for Race and Ethnicity, and others. The

result was the minor course of study, which was recently approved by the SAS Curriculum Committee.

“The CCRES minor is a sustained study of race and ethnicity and their cultural and political expressions,” said Isaac. He went on to say that this minor course of study is valuable because “it gives the student the power to raise questions across racial categories...and discover experiences, histories, and politics which could not otherwise be articulated.”

For detailed requirements, see the website within American Studies <http://amerstudies.rutgers.edu/students/ccres-minor>.

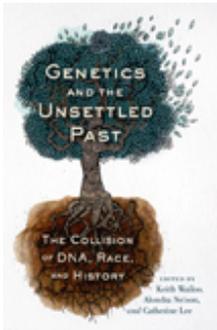
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***Genetics and The Unsettled Past Now Available from Rutgers University Press!***

The Center for Race and Ethnicity and Rutgers University Press are pleased to announce the availability of *Genetics and the Unsettled Past: The Collision of DNA, Race and History*. The second book in the Rutgers Studies in Race and Ethnicity series of books, this unique collection brings together scholars from a wide range of disciplines to explore the emerging and often contested connections among race, DNA, and history.

Written for a general audience, the book's essays touch upon a variety of topics, including the rise and implications of DNA in genealogy, law, and other fields; the cultural and political

uses and misuses of genetic information; the way in which DNA testing is reshaping understandings of group identity for French Canadians, Native Americans, South Africans, and many others within and across cultural and national boundaries; and the sweeping implications of genetics for society today.



The edited volume grew out of a conference by the same name which the CRE hosted in the Spring of 2008. Its editors are **Keith Wailoo**, former director of the CRE, and currently the Townsend Martin Professor of History and Public Affairs at Princeton University; **Alondra Nelson**, associate professor of sociology at Columbia University; and **Catherine Lee**, assistant professor of sociology and a faculty associate at the Institute for Health, Health Care Policy and Aging Research at Rutgers University.

For additional information and ordering instructions, please see the Rutgers University Press website at the following link: [http://rutgerspress.rutgers.edu/acatalog/genetics\\_and\\_the\\_unsettled\\_past.html](http://rutgerspress.rutgers.edu/acatalog/genetics_and_the_unsettled_past.html).

## *Upcoming Events at the CRE*

The CRE has a host of exciting events planned for the Spring Semester. Please check our website and mailing list for information about these and other events still in formation.

- **The Night Malcolm X Spoke at the Oxford Union: Racial Protest and the Subversive Special Relationship** – A lecture by Stephen Tuck, Oxford University. Thursday, April 12, 2012, 4:30 – 6:00 pm, Pane Room, Alexander Library, CAC.
- **The Help** – Film screening and discussion. Monday, April 16, 2012, 4:00 – 7:00 pm, Graduate Student Lounge, Rutgers Student Center, CAC.
- **Race and Retail: Consumer Culture, Economic Citizenship and Power** – A one day conference. Friday, May 4, 2012, Winants Hall Assembly Room, CAC.

### The Center for Race and Ethnicity

#### Mailing Address:

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey  
191 College Avenue, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor  
New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Telephone: 732/932-2181

Fax: 732/932-2198

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

Website: [raceethnicity.rutgers.edu](http://raceethnicity.rutgers.edu)

Director: Mia Bay (History)

Assoc. Director, Ann Fabian  
(American Studies/History)

Senior Program Coordinator: Mia Kissil

Graduate Assistants/Editors: Isra Ali  
(Journalism and Media Studies);  
Jahaira Arias (History); Christopher  
Hayes (History); Shatima Jones  
(Sociology); Wendy Wright (Political  
Science)