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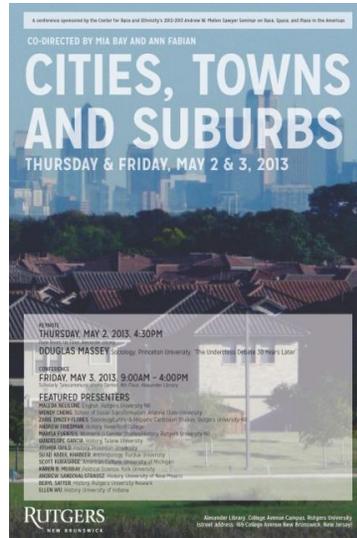
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Fourth Sawyer Conference Explores Issues of Race in Cities, Towns, and Suburbs

The Center for Race and Ethnicity finished off its year-long program on “Race, Place, and Space in the Americas” with a conference titled *Cities, Towns, and Suburbs*. Designed to explore the origins and social, cultural, and economic impact of the ethnic and racial divisions within urban areas, the conference was one of four CRE conferences funded by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation’s John Sawyer Seminar on the Comparative Study of Cultures Program. The seminar series also featured an interdisciplinary works-in-progress group made up of Rutgers faculty, graduate students and postdoctoral fellows, which met bi-

weekly throughout the academic year. (The full conference and seminar schedule is available on the raceethnicity.rutgers.edu website).

DOUGLAS MASSEY GIVES KEYNOTE ADDRESS

The conference began with a keynote by Douglas Massey, who is the Henry G. Bryant Professor of Sociology at Princeton University’s Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. Massey is a leading expert on social and economic effects of residential segregation in the United States.

His talk, “The Underclass Debate 30 Years Later,” focused on the recent history of public discourse about poverty, traced a history of explanations for urban poverty, and highlighted the successful anti-poverty initiative chronicled in his new book *Climbing Mount Laurel: The Struggle for Affordable Housing and Social Mobility in an American Suburb* (Princeton University Press, 2013), which he co-authored with Len Albright, Rebecca Casciano, Elizabeth Derickson and David N. Kinsey.

The “underclass debate” began in the 1980s after New Yorker writer, Ken Auletta, used the term “underclass” to describe the residents of urban communities marked by persistent poverty and high crime rates. Auletta’s term resonated with scholars and policy makers seeking explanations for the





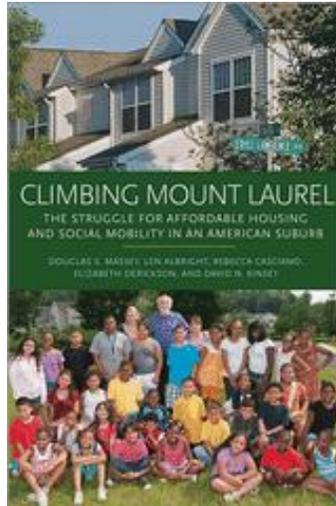
Douglas Massey, Henry G. Bryant Professor of Sociology, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University keynote speaker, *Cities, Towns, and Suburbs Conference*, May 2, 2013.

seemingly intractable poverty and social disorder in many of America's inner city neighborhoods.

As Massey noted, the notion of an underclass was especially appealing to conservatives who thought that the U.S. welfare system was too generous. Writers such as political scientist Lawrence M. Mead, the author of several books about the "nonworking poor," argued that the welfare system had created the underclass, discouraging a generation from actively seeking work. Likewise, the idea of an underclass meshed well with the sociobiological approach taken by Charles Murray and Richard J. Herrnstein, whose book *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (1994) associated poverty with a low IQ and attributed emergence of an underclass to the "genetic inferiority" of people of color.

However, other influential scholars rejected behavioral and biological explanations for America's "urban crisis." In *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1990), University of Chicago sociologist William Julius Wilson noted that the welfare system has been around for a long time and had not changed in its essential aspects. What

had changed, his research suggested, was the economic possibilities open to the working class and the lower middle class, many of whom became mired in poverty as a result of the deindustrialization of U.S. economy.



Climbing Mount Laurel: The Struggle for Affordable Housing and Social Mobility in an American Suburb (Princeton University Press, 2013), by Douglas S. Massey, Len Albright, Rebecca Casciano, Elizabeth Derickson & David N. Kinsey

Meanwhile, Murray and Herrnstein's thesis was still more widely disputed. Writing in *Inequality by Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth* (1996), Claude S. Fischer, Michael Hout, Martín Sánchez Jankowski, Samuel R. Lucas, Ann Swidler, & Kim Vos challenged the credibility of Murray's analysis of Armed Forces Entry Test data, which failed to take account of one fundamental variable – education. Scholarly discussions of the underclass became less common, but the concentration of poverty has persisted.

Questions about how to address poverty remain a central concern for Professor Massey, who joined first the underclass debate with *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Harvard University Press, 1993)--a book he co-authored with Nancy Denton. In *American Apartheid* and subsequent works, Massey has presented research findings that emphasize the links between racial and economic stratification and poverty. Whereas Wilson's influential work had emphasized national economic trends, Massey's work has focused on concentration of poverty within particular neighborhoods, which he links to America's history of racial segregation. Massey describes segregation as the result of long standing and highly discriminatory federal, municipal and state policies, which have produced racially divided neighborhood in which "the most disadvantage whites will ever experience is among the lowest levels of disadvantage that blacks will commonly experience" in the U.S.

"Neighborhoods themselves can shape the trajectories of their inhabitants," he argues. "Whatever disadvantages individuals might experience by virtue of growing up and living in a poor family, they incurred additional penalties for growing up and living in a poor neighborhood." To demonstrate this point, Massey and his co-authors researched the experiences of families who moved from low-income urban neighborhoods in Camden to the Ethel R. Lawrence Homes, a housing project for low-income residents located in the affluent white-majority suburb of Mount Laurel, New Jersey. Conducted between 2009 and 2010, their study followed

both the residents of this new housing project, which opened in 2000, and a control group of Camden residents who applied to live in the same development but could not be accommodated, comparing the fate of those who relocated to Mount Laurel with those who stayed behind.

Their study found that families who moved to Mount Laurel benefitted enormously from their move to a more affluent neighborhood. Ethel R. Lawrence Homes' residents "evinced better mental health and achieved higher rates of employment, more abundant earnings, and greater economic independence than they would otherwise have achieved." Moreover, the positive effects compounded over time. The longer families lived in the Lawrence Homes, the greater the improvements in employment, income, and mental health. The positive effects among their children were especially notable. Not only did children who lived in Lawrence Homes get to attend better quality schools than those who remained in Camden, the number of hours per week they spent studying increased, as did levels of parental involvement in their education. The long-term educational outcomes were measureable and included improvements in SAT scores and

attendance, as well as higher GPAs, and better graduation rates. The study also suggested that these benefits came largely without social costs, such as familial isolation. "People saw their families as frequently as before the move," says Massey, and residents actually experienced decreased social isolation. As a result of their move to a lower crime neighborhoods, residents of the Lawrence homes interacted with their neighbors more than they had in Camden. Not surprisingly, the move also reduced residents' exposure to violence and disorder, especially for the young, who reported a decline in negative life events, another factor that helps explain their educational success.

Massey also stressed that Mount Laurel experiment was equally successful for long-term residents of Mount Laurel, who initially feared that the low-income housing project might have a negative effect on their own quality of life. Massey and his colleagues found no negative effect on property values, crime, and taxes in Mt. Laurel as a result of building affordable housing.

"Neighborhoods do indeed

matter," Massey concluded. The data from Mount Laurel, he maintains, locates the persistence of poverty in the social and economic disadvantages experienced by residents of poor neighborhoods. More importantly, it also suggests that innovative low income housing policies can help break this cycle.

NEIGHBORHOODS

Participants in "Neighborhoods," the conference's first panel, offered a variety of different perspectives on "neighborhood effects," many of which complicate the black inner city vs. white suburbs case study offered by Massey. In a paper on "Regional Racial Formation in Suburban California" Wendy Cheng (Assistant Professor of Justice and Social Inquiry, Arizona State University) outlined the development of a multi-racial "nonwhite identity" in the West San Gabriel Valley--a suburban area of Los Angeles populated mainly by Asian Americans and Latinos. Cheng argued that Asian and Latino suburban residents of the San Gabriel Valley express a sense of themselves distinct from their white counterparts, unsettling "the United States' long-held image of itself as a white suburban nation."

According to Cheng, San Gabriel Valley demographics reveal that patterns of suburbanization may differ among non-whites. Whereas whites fled in the face of the influx of Asian immigrants who arrived in the Valley in the beginning of the 1970s, Latino residents chose to stay. In interviews with residents old and new, Cheng found that their choices were quite deliberate. "Through everyday



The Ethel R. Lawrence Homes, Mount Laurel, NJ



Wendy Cheng, Assistant Professor, Justice and Social Inquiry, School of Social Transformation, Arizona State University

interactions the people of the San Gabriel Valley have built a sophisticated knowledge of race and space,” she explained. Not only do residents express a deep feeling of rootedness in the area, for them the San Gabriel Valley is a place of racial inclusivity. Therefore, Cheng argued, “the voices and landscapes of the San Gabriel Valley challenge mainstream assumptions that suburbanization and upward economic mobility necessarily signify an absorption into hegemonic white middle-class norms.”

Andrew Friedman (assistant professor of History, Haverford College) also finds associations between suburban spaces and white middle class norms in his paper “Persian Aryanism, Suburban Orientalism and the Co-constituted Landscapes of U.S. Imperial Tehran and the Suburbs of Northern Virginia.” Beginning in the 1940s, he explained, key U.S. figures involved in diplomacy in Tehran were also instrumental in bringing the headquarters of the Central Intelligence Agency to Langley, Virginia, and in developing nearby residential suburbs such as McLean. Equally at home in the landscape of

Tehran, they exerted American influence on the built environment there as well, forging connections between both landscapes that belie any easy division between foreign and domestic space.

But within the United States, such connections have remained largely invisible, argues Friedman. U.S. political agents and military men used a “domestic suburban cover story and its attachment to the veneer of whiteness” to obscure the deeply political character of those Virginian suburbs and disavow the existence of US imperialism at home. The association of an apolitical domesticity and inherent whiteness within American suburbia helps obscure “the degree to which the things that happened there have mattered deeply, and sometimes mattered most, in landscapes far removed from Virginia.”

In his presentation, “Latino Landscapes: Transnational Neighborhoods in Chicago and Dallas and the Next Urban History,” Andrew Sandoval-Strausz (Associate professor of U.S. History, University of New Mexico) also urged us to rethink the divisions between foreign and domestic space and view the field of U.S. urban history from a transnational perspective. Such a perspective is necessary to fully comprehend the impact of Latino migration to U.S. cities. Nearly 25 million Latinos have migrated



(L-R): Andrew Friedman, Assistant Professor, History, Haverford College; Andrew Sandoval-Strausz, Associate Professor, U.S. History, University of New Mexico

to US cities since 1950, bringing with them distinct and transnational practices of urbanism that are slowly reshaping daily life in many American cities. Latino city dwellers often “occupy and produce urban space in culturally specific ways,” Sandoval-Strausz contends. “Their everyday behaviors, residential practices, ownership and patronage of businesses” are marked by “traditions of publicness.” Moreover, even as Latino “border crossers” import forms of Latin American urbanity into the US, they also use remittances to pave roads and build houses in their home communities—reshaping urban landscapes at home. Much like the communities Friedman described in Tehran and Virginia, Sandoval-Strausz maintains “the urban landscapes of the U.S. and Latin America are co-constituted.”

The field of urban history, Sandoval-Strausz further observed, has been slow to come to terms with the new transnational geography of U.S. urbanism. It has long focused primarily on dissecting the “urban crisis” caused by the postwar depopulation and concentration of poverty and crime in U.S. cities. Sandoval-Strausz hopes to see future urban historians adopt a more transnational perspective that looks past

the idea of a “crisis” toward the new and changing realities of U.S. urbanity.

Ellen Wu (Assistant professor of History, Indiana University-Bloomington) took up Sandoval-Strausz’s challenge. The last presentation in the panel, Wu’s “Deghettoizing Chinatown: Race and Space in Post-War America” explored the post-World War II transformation of the idea of Chinatown. Whereas before the 1950s Asian enclaves in US cities were often considered dirty and depraved spaces, Wu explained, in the post war period, Asian community leaders waged a successful campaign to reframe Chinatowns into benign non-white ethnic enclaves. Anxious to distance themselves from Communist China, Chinese leaders promoted an understanding of “Asian Americans as model non-whites,” by promoting their communities’ patriotism and “Sinicizing” their neighborhoods. They erected arches to mark Chinatowns as places apart from deteriorating and, by the 1960s, militant black ghettos. The contrast between successful Asians and failing blacks was then further reified by social scientists studying the “urban crisis.” In the estimation of such scientists, the distance between Chinatowns and black ghettos was profound. For them, “Chinatown, in short, was not Watts.”

SPACE AND POWER

The second panel of the day, organized around the theme, “Space and Power, started off with a paper which explored the lives of Bridgetown’s enslaved

women. Entitled “Mapping Gender: Urban Slavery, Space and Fugitivity in Colonial Bridgetown,” Marisa Fuentes (Assistant Professor, Women’s & Gender Studies/History, Rutgers-NB) began her talk with an advertisement seeking the return of an enslaved woman named “Jane,” whose body was marked by scars. Jane appears only fleetingly in the archives, but Fuentes’ paper recovers some of her history by following her possible paths through Bridgetown and its spaces of slavery and confinement. Jane’s story illuminates the ways “colonial authorities used conspicuous displaces of power” to enact terror on both the escaped and the enslaved.

Bridgetown attracted slave fugitives, Fuentes explained, because Barbados was a small island with no remote or unsettled regions where fugitives could take refuge. Instead, slaves who fled the island’s sugar plantations had to hide in plain sight in Bridgetown—a city in which enslaved people were in constant and close contact with their oppressors. There, they traversed a “symbolic geography of terror” that constantly reminded them of them of the many dangers they faced. Public executions and brutal physical punishments were conducted in several places throughout the city. It was not uncommon for a captured runaway slave to be repeatedly

punished in various places, so that the consequences of such resistance would be clear to everyone on the island. Fuentes’ reflection on the terrors of Bridgetown challenges any understanding of urban slavery as a more benign institution than plantation slavery. “Where and when” she asked, “was it ever easier to be an enslaved person?”



Marisa Fuentes, Assistant Professor, Women’s and Gender Studies/History, Rutgers University-NB

In “Beyond the Walled City: Race and Exclusion in Colonial Havana,” Guadalupe Garcia (Assistant Professor of History, Tulane University) also mapped a geography of power. Her work explores the ways race was constructed in the particular space of colonial Havana. Garcia’s project first took shape during her dissertation fieldwork when she discovered that certain racialized/classed communities in Havana are referred to as *extramuros* or *intramuros*, even though the walls that once enclosed colonial Havana are long gone. This language remains, she contends, because it is used to demarcate race and class in ways that echo the imperial history of the city.

The walls in question were erected in the

early 1600s to protect the Spanish colony from the sea—from the threats of pirates, corsairs, and foreign armies. In Garcia’s account, by the mid-19th century, threats from the sea did not matter and the walls moved to the center of a political controversy in which some residents wished to use walls to protect the city from “undesirable” classes, who lived outside Havana’s colonial borders. That older order still haunts contemporary Havana. Just as the walls once demarcated the space of colonial civilization from a “wholly uncivilized” space, the idea of the wall continues to represent an important sociopolitical division.

Beryl Satter (Professor of History, Rutgers-Newark) relocated the discussion of urban power to the 20th-century in her paper, “Panther Cops: The Afro-American Patrolmen’s League and Black Power Politics in 1960s Chicago.” Satter recovered the history of Chicago’s Afro-American Patrolmen’s League (AAPL), a professional organization of black police officers who sought to confront the routine brutality that characterized their white fellow officers’ interactions Chicago’s black community. The white police made few distinctions between members of black street gangs, Black Panthers, and black people in general. Instead, they tended to brand all black

people as criminals. The Afro-American Patrolmen’s League led a broad popular movement against police brutality, and also successfully challenged the Chicago Police Department’s local “Red Squad,” which one AAPL attorney described as a “vast, complex spy network,” covering “people and organizations all over Chicago – left wing, right wing, neutral.” In doing so, the organization also helped to lay the political groundwork for the 1983 election of Howard Washington, Chicago’s only black mayor.

Satter contends that both the daily power struggles that took place on the streets of Chicago in the 1960s and AAPL’s history have been neglected by scholars of black Chicago’s radical movements, who have tended to focus on the Black Panthers, or even black gangs members—as the city’s true militants. But members of the AAPL, who were derided by their white fellow officers as “Panther cops,” did far more to challenge police brutality and surveillance in Chicago than any other group.

Indeed, in its day, the organization’s achievements were recognized in a television show

called *Bird of the Iron Feather*, which was inspired by the Afro-American Patrolmen’s League. A cop show, it did not draw stark divisions between black radicals and the police—as are common in recent scholarship. Produced by a public television station, it instead sought to capture the complexities of black life on the South Side by retracing the life of militant black policeman who was killed in a riot in the first episode. Set in one of Chicago’s housing projects, it depicted often “invisible” lives of the city’s black working and middle classes, and complicated their experience of police and power.



A still from Bird of The Iron Feather
(<http://blogs.indiewire.com/shadowandact/bird-of-the-iron-feather-a-tv-show-way-too-hot-for-its-time>)

Maleda Belilgne (postdoctoral fellow, Department of English, Rutgers-NB) presented the final paper on the “Space and Power” panel. Belilgne’s paper “Harlem Noir: The Body and the City in Chester Himes’s Crime Fiction,” offered a discussion of race and space in the hardboiled detective series created by Chester Himes. Himes wrote nine detective novels, all of which presented Harlem as a “social and spatial apparatus that is designed to destroy black lives.” Himes’ Harlem is “grotesque,” it illustrates how space is not an empty



Audience at Cities, Towns, and Suburbs Conference, Rutgers University, May 2-3, 2013

container, but rather works on the subjects in it to deform and putrefy. At the same time, Belilgne argues that in the texts, one can also locate a generative resistance in Harlem as residents continue to insist on the importance of their own subjective experiences.

CHANGING CITYSCAPES

The final panel, “Changing Cityscapes,” sparked a discussion about the ways urban racial relations in North America extend beyond white/black interactions and actually transform urban space. In “Traveling Cities: Technicians of Space and Raced Constructions in Puerto Rico,” Zaire Dinzey-Flores (Associate professor of Sociology/Latino and Hispanic Caribbean Studies, Rutgers-NB), examined how Dominican engineers have reconfigured urban space in Puerto Rico. Dominicans form the largest ethnic minority in Puerto Rico, yet are “conspicuously invisible” in the built environment of the island.

Dinzey-Flores is particularly interested in the process by which Puerto Rican slums are raced, then replaced with U.S.-style housing, often built and designed by Dominican engineers. The invisibility of Dominican contributions to the Puerto Rican built urban environment contrasts with the conspicuous Dominican presence surrounding the proliferation of food trucks on the island. According to Dinzey-Flores, Dominican immigrants have been “engineers...of modernity.” Dinzey-Flores characterized her research agenda as outlining “how the

production of space, and particularly housing, uncovers new dimensions and relationships in inter-ethnic and racial dynamics.”

Joshua Guild (Assistant Professor of History/African American Studies, Princeton University) extended the discussion of migrant urban spaces to Brooklyn in “They Were Truly African People, Just from Different Parts of the Planet’: Black Migration and the Transformation of 20th Century Brooklyn.” Guild’s work aims to situate Brooklyn within the narrative of the Great Migration (of African-Americans from the U.S. Coastal South to the North in the 1920’s and 1930s) and “to remap the black geography of New York City away from Harlem.” Thus he analyzes Black Brooklyn through the contexts of transportation, emphasizing the importance of the “A” subway line in connecting Brooklyn to Lower Manhattan and Harlem, and “white flight,” as white Brooklynites left the brownstone neighborhoods of Northern Brooklyn for the more suburban southern part of the borough. As a result, neighborhoods like Bedford-Stuyvesant became predominantly black, with Southern African-American and West Indian migrants populating them. Guild invited the audience to think of Brooklyn as a “diasporic space,” and to rethink the narrative of conflict between West Indians and African-

Americans. Despite their cultural and often religious differences, both groups shared many common interests, he maintains. Both reveled in the success of African-American boxer Joe Louis and both lent support to Pan-Africanist movements like the one led by Marcus Garvey.



Joshua Guild, Assistant Professor, History/ African American Studies, Princeton University

From Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn, the conversation shifted across the continent to the East End of Vancouver with Karen B. Murray’s (Associate Professor, Political Science, York University) presentation, “The Human Development City and the Colonial Present.” According to Murray, “Images of Indigenous women... were integral to capitalist urbanization in Vancouver into the twenty-first century.” She characterized Vancouver as the center of the international human development-based economy.” The city’s human development programs are officially geared towards reducing “child vulnerability” rates, with the primary target being the East End, where a large proportion of Indigenous peoples reside.

According to Murray, these programs focus above all on Indigenous mothers, who are portrayed as transmitters of disorder and ‘disease,’ such as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.”



Karen B. Murray, Associate Professor, Political Science, York University

She questions the governmental use of the Early Development Instrument (EDI), a research apparatus designed to map human development and locate “vulnerable” children. The maps created by the EDI, she claims, reinforce colonial discourses by portraying aboriginal peoples and the spaces they inhabit “as uncivilized and premodern.” Murray’s research focuses on a variety of texts associated with human development and reveals “how they hinge on a racialized and gendered idea of urban space as a problematized space.”

Su’ad Abdul Khabeer (Assistant Professor of Anthropology/African-American Studies, Purdue University) added music and religion to the discussion about transforming urban spaces in her presentation, entitled, “Place Matters: Race, Hip Hop and Muslim Space in Chicago.” Khabeer focused on the residential segregation within Chicago’s Muslim community, particularly among African-American, Palestinian-American, and Pakistani-American Muslim teenagers. She argued that non-black Chicago Muslims are increasingly looking toward the suburbs and away from urban blackness, and that their shift is indicative of the larger move away

from the orthodoxy of the Nation of Islam toward Sunni orthodoxy among U.S. Muslims.

This means, in her words, “that Muslim spaces can work with whiteness and white American spaces,” and “that the maintenance of cultural distinctiveness can maintain racial hierarchies.” However, she then employed the concept of “Muslim cool” to describe the work of Muslim hip-hop activists who “move toward the ‘hood and blackness, literally and conceptually, to expand locations of Muslim life in Chicagoland.” Abdul Khabeer’s work, then highlights, how mosques serve as spaces where U.S. Muslims can both recreate and challenge racial and power dynamics.

In the final presentation, “Bowling Together: Black and Japanese Americans in Crenshaw, Los Angeles,” Scott Kurashige (Professor of American Culture and Director of Asian Pacific Islander Studies Program, University of Michigan) explored the history of a Los Angeles bowling alley. Drawing from the research in his book, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multi-ethnic Los Angeles* (2008), Kurashige described the history of the Holiday Bowl, bowling lanes and a restaurant frequented by African-American and Japanese-Americans. He used the history of Holiday Bowl to

examine the relationship between the two groups in Post-World War II Los Angeles.

His research, much like Guild’s work on Brooklyn, finds a great deal of cooperation between two non-white ethnicities. Indeed, the neighborhood of Crenshaw became integrated through the efforts of “the most upwardly mobile and aspirational” African- and Japanese-Americans. According to Kurashige, “solidarity between the two communities was principally born of a common class struggle,” and was cultivated in spaces like the Hollywood Bowl.

In the 1990s, when developers threatened to demolish Holiday Bowl, a cross-ethnic and cross-class coalition formed to save the bowling alley. Although efforts to prevent the demolition ultimately failed, Kurashige argued that the solidarity between African- and Japanese-Americans was indicative of greater solidarity between the two groups nationally, particularly evidenced by the support Barack Obama received from Japanese-Americans and other Asian-Americans in his 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns.

The discussions following each session were lively and generated further insights into the themes of the Cities, Towns and Suburbs conference. Like the CRE’s previous Race, Place and Space conferences, the gathering was notably interdisciplinary. Participants hailed from the fields of History, Women’s and Gender Studies, English, Asian-Pacific American Studies, Sociology, Political Science, Latino and Hispanic Caribbean Studies, Anthropology, and American

Studies. Their wide-ranging presentations and discussions challenged notions of white suburban middle class normativity; highlighted the transnational dimensions of the urban and suburban U.S. experience; revisited hitherto ignored sites of interracial and interethnic collaboration among urban communities of color, and analyzed the spatial contours of power.

Framed by Douglas Massey's keynote, which suggested a possible new paradigm for thinking about solutions for spatial and racial concentration of poverty and crime, the conference brought the yearlong seminar on "Race, Space, and Place in the Americas" to a fitting conclusion.

The Center for Race and Ethnicity

Mailing Address:

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

Telephone: 848/932-2181

Fax: 732/932-2198

Email: raceethnicity@sas.rutgers.edu

Website: raceethnicity.rutgers.edu

Director: Mia Bay (History)

Assoc. Director, Ann Fabian (History)

Senior Program Coordinator: Mia Kissil

Graduate Assistants/Editors: Stephen Allen (History); Jahaira Arias (History); Ashley Glassburn Falzetti (Women's & Gender Studies); Kartikeya Saboo (Anthropology); Wendy Wright (Political Science).