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CRE Holds 9th Faculty Forum and Film Screening

On Friday, October 31, the Center for Race and Ethnicity hosted its ninth annual Faculty Forum. Faculty from Political Science, History, Sociology, and Women's and Gender Studies presented their work and brought the audience into thought provoking conversations about "Crossings" and "American Inequalities."

CROSSINGS

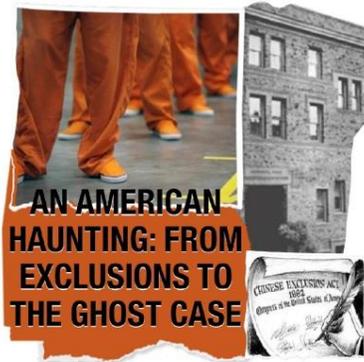
Annie Isabel Fukushima, the Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Associate in Women's and Gender Studies, spoke on "Migrant Crossings: Unsettling Witnessing of Asians and Latinas/os in the United States," describing her work on the troubled terms of visibility for "trafficked subjects." She began with a close look at a trial of immigrant Chinese women accused of committing a "blessing scam" in San Francisco's Chinatown. Suspects were accused of stealing money and jewelry from elderly Chinese American women by promising to free their valuables from unlucky curses. Dr. Fukushima had served as an expert witness in this "Ghost Case" and drew on her experience to explore the sensationalist media coverage that painted the accused as hardened scam artists by highlighting the vulnerability of elderly women they had defrauded. The accused were convicted and ultimately deported, over protests that they, too, were victims, caught in scams that ran all the way back to their home villages in China.

Dr. Fukushima uses such cases to consider the multiple victimizations of trafficked subjects who are indebted, exploited, and coerced into shady schemes and shadow economies by transnational crime rings, and then further abused by American media and by legal and security apparatuses that fail to recognize their vulnerability. Her interdisciplinary research incorporates media, legal, and sociological analysis to allow these trafficked persons to "cross into visibility," as she puts it, as subjects with positions more salient than invisible victims and more nuanced than criminal aliens. In so doing, she calls for a more capacious

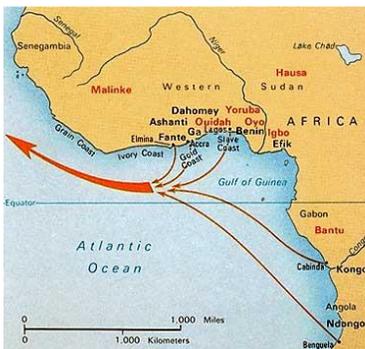


Panel 1, "Crossings" (l-r): Bayo Holsey (RU-NB, History), Annie Isabel Fukushima (RU-NB American Studies), Walter Rucker (RU-NB History)

legal category of “victim” to protect racialized non-citizens entangled in transnational systems of violence and coercion.



The next two presentations asked the audience to rethink conventional images of the continent of Africa. Professor Walter Rucker, who joined the Department of History in New Brunswick in fall 2014, discussed his forthcoming book that explores the cultural and political dynamics of people known as the Coromantees and Mina. He writes of people who were captured on the African Gold Coast, in present day Ghana, and sold into slavery in the United States. They were not “prepackaged African ethnic groups,” Rucker argues, but rather an ethnic conglomerate of people, a new world ethnic formation at the end result of long process of ethnogenesis.



Professor Rucker’s work on African survival strategies and new world slave revolts picks up several threads in the scholarship on the African diaspora. He outlines patterns in Coromantee and Mina identity and emphasizes their particular concepts of freedom, autonomy, and egalitarianism. He reminded us that these concepts are often erroneously associated with European intellectual movements, the American Revolution and the French Revolution, but are in fact integral to the cultural world of the Black Atlantic.

Professor Bayo Holsey also joined the Rutgers New Brunswick Department of History this fall. She described her new work on late capitalism in modern Ghana. Her presentation, “Tyrannies of Freedom: Race, Power, and the Fictions of Late Capitalism,” began with a vivid description of a twenty-seven story luxury condominium that looms over Accra, indeed over West Africa, since it is the region’s tallest building. Equipped with a fitness center, 24-hour security, and a swimming pool, the high rise compares to the luxury condos found in New York City, San Francisco, and London. While touted as developments of a new Africa, in actuality such residences are owned and rented primarily by foreigners and absentee owners. They have an African flavor, but they are beyond the reach of most Ghanaians.

Professor Holsey explored some of the contradictions of late capitalism, looking, for example, at the deployment of a discourse of freedom, in which a development like the condominium tower appears not just “economically sound but represents a social good.” In her work, Ghana emerges as a prime example of neoliberal reform. Ghana is no longer a postcolonial nation but belongs among “late capitalist” countries, telling stories about development, freedom, and free choice. She gave us a brief glimpse of a larger project that examines the neoliberal narratives about Ghana from gold mining to child trafficking.

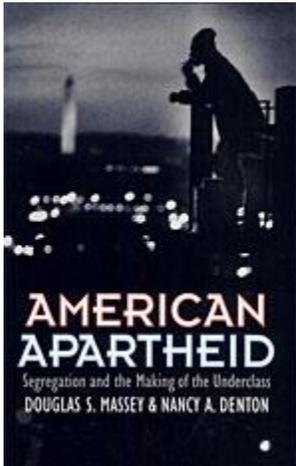


Panelists talk informally during a break in the event

AMERICAN INEQUALITIES

Professor Lauren Krivo, of the Sociology Department in New Brunswick, opened a second group of presentations on “American Inequalities.” Professor Krivo noted, that “residential segregation is a powerful and enduring feature of the life in the United States” and referred to what scholars Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton have described as “American Apartheid,” to characterize the persistence of deep racial divides in

the America's residential neighborhoods. Residential segregation has also been increasing by income with a deep divide separating the wealthy from those with lower incomes.



American Apartheid, by Douglass Massey and Nancy Denton, Harvard University Press, 1998

Professor Krivo discussed quantitative data comparing the income distribution in ninety-one large cities. Twenty-five percent of white neighborhoods were at the most extreme end of advantage. For African Americans, the exact opposite was true. A similar but less extreme V-shaped pattern emerges in comparisons of Latino and white neighborhoods. The first implication of her research is that being closely located to highly disadvantaged neighborhoods increases crime rates, whereas proximity to advantaged neighborhoods lowers crime rates.

Moreover, preliminary findings of her research on migration show that extant inequalities continue when black residents move to new areas.

Professor Lisa Miller, of the Political

Science Department in New Brunswick, described her work on “Mass Incarceration as a Racialized State Failure.” Miller’s work explores the ways political institutions shape policy for marginalized populations. Her current work is a comparative analysis of when and why crime becomes politically salient; in other words when do people start paying attention to crime in the political and public arenas. She has drawn comparative data from a range of countries, such as the United States, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and seven others. According to Miller, freedom from violence is an essential public good. She has found that the ability of democratic states to curb levels of violence varies significantly from country to country. Of all developed democracies, the United States holds the dubious distinction of the highest rates of violent crime. Miller presented statistics demonstrating that the lowest rate of homicide over the last forty years in America (4.7 per 100,000 population in 2013) is equivalent to the highest homicide rate during the same time period among developed nations. With regard to violent crime, the U.S. is in a league of its own.

Professor Miller also reminded us that though we often hear about the racial divide in the U.S. system of mass incarceration, the racial



Panel 2, “American Inequalities” (l-r): D’Weston Haywood (RU-NB, History); Lisa L. Miller (RU-NB, Political Science); Lauren Krivo (RU-NB, Sociology)

divide in crime victimization is less often discussed. African Americans are five to seven times more likely to be victims of violent crime than whites and African American women have higher rates of homicide than white men, but none of these statistics are highly publicized.

Miller’s scholarly research on perceptions of crime and violence in high crime neighborhoods indicates that neighborhood residents are more eager to discuss the threat of violent crime than incarceration rates. Miller’s work suggests that scholars of race and crime might focus more of their attention on violence in marginalized communities.

“American Inequalities” concluded with a presentation by Dr. D’Weston Haywood, a Postdoctoral Fellow in Race and Gender in the History Department at New Brunswick. In “‘Garvey Must Go’: Black Masculinity, the Black Press, and the Making and Unmaking of Black Leadership,” Dr. Haywood described his work on the construction of masculinity in black newspapers between 1915-1975. Competing ideas about masculinity shaped the rhetoric and protest strategies of racial advancement, he argues. Rather than examining the black press as a response to racial inequalities, he describes it as a tool for black male leadership. Black leaders turned to a language of masculinity and took to the

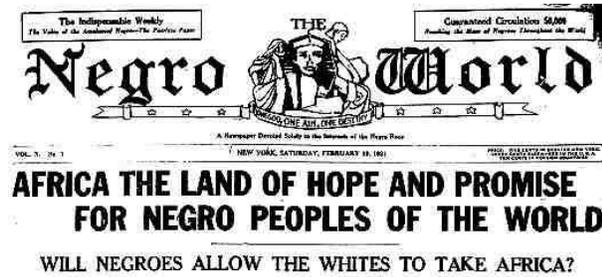
press to air differing ideas and competing strategies. While agreeing, that “black manhood should stand up,” they did not always agree on what that manhood should look like.



Marcus Garvey in 1924 (image from Wikipedia)

Dr. Haywood focused on Marcus Garvey’s first years in Harlem, exploring the competition that emerged between Garvey and W.E.B. DuBois. Newspapers were crucial to Garvey’s movement, but the publicity that had helped build his movement also helped destroy it. DuBois labeled Garvey a domineering leader of the masses. Garvey shot back, “A brilliant student of sociology, literary a genius, Doctor DuBois can grace a chair in any university in the world, but when it comes to mingling with men, he sometimes strikes the wrong note.”

According to Garvey, DuBois’ intellect and elitist behavior made him less than ideal as a race leader. Their differences spilled onto pages of the Black press. Opponents questioned the efficacy of



Negro World masthead and headline. (Online Photo Source: <http://www.isop.ucla.edu/mgpp/photo03.htm>)

Garvey’s newspaper, “The Negro World,” and followed up by waging the “Garvey Must Go” campaign.

All five panelists challenged us to think critically about the workings and reworking of race and asked us to consider complex racial subjects in multidimensional and interdisciplinary ways. Dr. Fukushima asked us to remember histories of racial exclusion that can make it hard to see trafficked subjects as victims. Professor Rucker pushed us to consider how the long African diaspora has played through ethnic formations and to try to imagine the political universe of a community of enslaved subjects. Professor Holsey destabilized the neoliberal teleology of “postcolonial” success, pointing to the peculiar investments and privileged migrations that have reshaped Ghana’s capital. Professor Krivo described the material implications for space and safety in a nation where race and resources remain tightly coupled, mapping disparities that, whether framed as racial or economic,

produce the same outcomes of inequality. Professor Miller proposed victimhood and safety as crucial aspects of citizenship, repurposing the discourse of security to privilege subjects desperately underserved by the state. Dr. Haywood read class, color, and non-citizenship into the historical trajectory of an icon of black liberation, centering Marcus Garvey in a masculinist political and rhetorical arena that scripted modern freedom struggles.

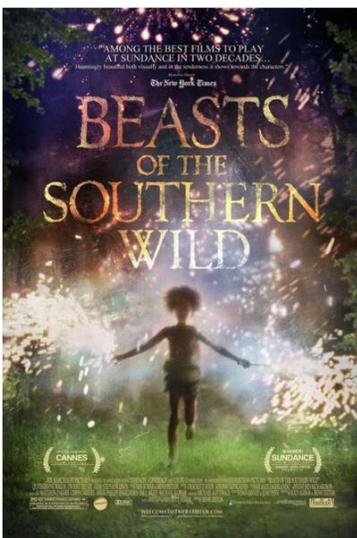
We learned from the presentations that race is more than an area of visible difference; racial distinctions and the forms of power those distinctions enact cross space, systems, nations and neighborhoods. Scholars at the Faculty Forum challenged us to better understand the inventions and reinventions of racial categories and to pay attention to the ways they shape decisions about the allocation of rights and resources.



Abena Busia (RU-NB, Women’s & Gender Studies) and Ann Fabian (RU-NB, CRE Acting Director/History) exchange ideas at the 9th Faculty Forum on Race and Ethnicity

BEASTS OF THE SOUTHERN WILD

On November 13th, the Center for Race and Ethnicity inaugurated our “Growing Up Raced” film series with a screening of “Beasts of the Southern Wild” (2012), Benh Zeitlin’s magical realist narrative of survival and neglect on the margins of America. Set in the fictional community of the “Bathtub,” a swampy archipelago cut off from the mainland by a levy, the film begins with the threat of a coming storm. Among the motley residents who choose to stay are a young black girl named Hushpuppy, played to great acclaim by Quvenzhané Wallis, and her father, Winks. Their relationship, at once tender and tumultuous, drives the narrative and refracts the film’s larger themes of belonging and survival, autonomy and neglect, and community and marginality. It echoes the tense relationship of the Bathtub to the mainland, and captures the feel of the marooned community in the midst of mighty nature.



Throughout the film, a mysteriously ill and rapidly deteriorating Winks struggles to impart his knowledge of survival and self-sufficiency to the daughter he will leave an orphan. Hushpuppy in turn demands care and affection from a father whose disappearance she cannot comprehend, turning to nature—captured in wondrous panoramas of marshlands and meticulously curated close-ups of marine creatures—for a sense of place and belonging. The trials, eruptions, and rejections of the natural world, the home that sustains and threatens, feeds and floods, become familiar to her. Against the fragile organic bonds that tie Hushpuppy to Winks and the Bathtub to nature, Zeitlin sets the ambivalent embrace of the state, characterized by its cruel necropolitics and sterile paternalism. Only when the survivors bomb the levy do agents arrive to “rescue” them, mirroring the evacuations that led to multiple strandings in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. For the Bathtub residents, this means being taken to a hospital where the sick are “plugged into walls” and immobilized by concentric rings of orderlies and security guards. Ultimately, they breach the building and return to their home, eager to reclaim their humbled autonomy through habitation of a world where connective ecology is sovereign and collective survival supreme.

Following the screening, Grace Howard, a CRE graduate assistant and doctoral candidate in Political Science, facilitated a discussion on the themes and aesthetics of the film. She began by asking why the character of Hushpuppy was written as a black girl for the movie, when its original incarnation as a play featured a white boy and his father. What work, in other words, was race doing in the film? Was it rendering legible the predicament of marginal citizens subject to a state that both grievously neglects and aggressively intervenes in their lives and communities? Was it masculinizing a feminine character to make her survivalist rearing more credible? The audience pursued this ambivalence through a series of follow up questions that addressed the vexing relationship between father and daughter, and historical (mis)treatments of black characters in American cinema. We mined the portrayal of nature, and its various operations throughout the film—from the semi-engineered deluge to the primordial beasts that stalk the survivors—to understand the movie’s intervention into contemporary discussions of the environment and ecology, the state and sustainability, and racialized and classed relationships to nature.

After generating much productive criticism, we concluded that this was a valuable text that poignantly considers the liabilities and liberations of race, class, and distance without offering dogmatic answers. The marginality of the characters enables their enlightened

understanding of ecology at the same time that it condemns them to vulnerability; the distance of the Bathtub from the mainland fosters a defiant autonomy even as it reproduces the community's desertion by the state. We are inspired by the bold choice of the film to engage these questions from a localized, interstitial perspective, critiquing the mainland from the marshlands.

The Center for Race and Ethnicity

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