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***CRE Hosts 10th Annual Faculty Forum on Race and Ethnicity***

The Center for Race and Ethnicity kicked off the academic year on October 30 with its 10th Annual Faculty Forum, inviting faculty from all three Rutgers campuses, and other area universities to share their work with an interdisciplinary crowd. This year's forum featured twelve panelists from tri-state area universities who delivered presentations to a full house. Faculty presenters brought a range of academic experience, from newly minted Ph.Ds. to full professors. They brought together work in a variety of fields, bringing up themes of state sanctioned harm to youth, race and urban institutions, re-visiting narratives of blackness in the antebellum south, gender and public life, and post-colonial violence.

STATE SANCTIONED VIOLENCE AND YOUTH VULNERABILITY

The first two presentations of the day were given by Dr. LeConté Dill, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Community Health Sciences in the School of Public Health at SUNY Downstate Medical Center, and Dr. Jessica Lavariega Monforti, a professor and Chair of the political science department at Pace University, and the former Associate Dean and Associate Professor of Political Science at Texas-Pan American.



(L-R: Dr. Jessica Lavariega Monforti, Dr. LeConté Dill)

Both scholars' presentations focused on youth vulnerability to violence, particularly violence committed or created by the state. These scholars invoked both the strong arm and the blind eye of the state, discussing state overreach in surveillance and policing, and the simultaneous state neglect of communities.

Dill gave a thought provoking presentation entitled "Mapping Narratives of Risk and Strategies of Resilience among Urban Youth of Color," which described her recent investigation into how young people navigate distressed neighborhoods. She began with a provoking question: What does a safe route for young people look like in deindustrialized neighborhoods? Focusing on her work in an Atlanta neighborhood with high rates of home and church foreclosures, Dill asserted that young people there have developed strategies to

manage violence and safely navigate their neighborhoods. Neighborhood youth draw from their own experiences and family narratives to avoid unsafe spaces and people. Dill discussed the intersections of race, age, and gender in shaping these strategies. While boys by the age of 12 are confronted with gang recruitment and police harassment, girls of the same age are more likely to face threats of sexual violence and street harassment. Dill is continuing to explore the notion of gendered experiences of violence and violence management, focusing on Black girls in Brooklyn.

Dr. Lavariega Monforti's work builds on her personal experience of spending the last decade in the Rio Grande Valley, located on the border of Mexico and Texas. In her presentation entitled "LIVING the DREAM: New Immigration Policies and the Lives of Undocumented Latino Youth," Lavariega Monforti discussed her book project by the same name, co-authored with Maria Chávez and Melissa Michaelson. This work investigates how young undocumented migrants are affected by the proliferation of border state checkpoints and other forms of state surveillance attempting to address the influx of undocumented immigrants. In the Rio Grande Valley, the increasing number of checkpoints on the US side of the border keeps undocumented people from traveling anywhere north of the Valley. Crossing the border into the United States may cost around \$300, but moving beyond the U.S. Border Patrol's internal checkpoints, which are located between 25 and 75 miles away

from the U.S./Mexico border along major highways, may cost ten times more.

Lavariega Monforti and her co-authors also assess the impact of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) adopted by the Obama administration. Her research indicated that many young individuals did not know about their own undocumented status until they began navigating adult institutions—seeking college admission, funding, or drivers licenses. While many progressives viewed DACA as a victory, many undocumented people in the Valley had a more cautious response. They felt that a conditional two-year compromise on their status was too risky—signing up may come back to bite them if DACA is not renewed.

RACING URBAN POLICIES AND INSTITUTIONS

Our next round of presentations addressed race in city institutions, including public policy and private institutional practices. Scholars discussed overt and implicit racism and the dramatic impact of seemingly race-neutral social policies on the lives of marginalized people in a variety of different settings, from prison, to housing, employment, and politics.

Diana Hernandez, an Assistant Professor at the Columbia University Mailman School of



Diana Hernandez

Public Health focused on the intersection between energy and health in low-income neighborhoods. She began by introducing the concept of energy insecurity, which can have a negative effect on both buildings and their occupants. Energy insecurity is defined as the inability to adequately meet the household energy needs, and is analogous to the more widely discussed food or housing insecurity. Energy insecurity is caused by a number of factors, including public policy and economic inequality. Hernandez asserts that energy insecurity poses a host of tangible risks, including physical injury and illness, mental health problems, and even death. Such was the case in a story Hernandez shared on a multiple-fatality house fire caused by attempts to generate light with candles after the utilities had been shut off. Hernandez stated that 16 million people are estimated to be dealing with energy insecurity. As such, Hernandez proposes the concept of energy justice to help redefine the ways we think about energy needs—energy as a human right, not as a privilege.

Dr. Brandi Blessett, an assistant professor in the Department of Public Policy and Administration at Rutgers University-Camden, discussed her new

research project, serving as a program evaluator for a prisoner reentry program in Camden. Modeled after similar programs in Philadelphia and Newark, Blessett’s program is an investment in creating a social support system to help formerly incarcerated persons reintegrate upon their release. Program participants agree to a year of intense supervision, with bimonthly meetings to discuss their legal, educational, and employment needs. Blessett argued that more proactive support systems, rather than reactive punitive systems, will not only reduce recidivism, but will reduce incarceration in general.

Blessett also discussed her work on felon disenfranchisement and employment issues in Orlando, Florida, where 1.5 million people have irrevocably lost their right to vote. Of these, 23 percent are people of color, demonstrating the disparate racial impact of incarceration on black communities and formal political participation. Additionally, Blessett discussed the movement to “Ban the Box” on job applications that indicates a history of incarceration—often resulting in lost employment opportunities for the formerly incarcerated.

Blessett’s work illuminates the role that formal institutional structures and administrative discretion play in disenfranchising communities of color—how stigma and bad policies prevent success.

Dr. Oscar Holmes IV, an Assistant Professor of Management at Rutgers University School of Business, began

his presentation by asking audience members to raise their hands if they thought their own work performance might influence future opportunities



(L-R): Dr. Brandi Blessett; Dr. Oscar Holmes IV

for people like themselves. The hands of some white women and many people of color shot up. Holmes attempts to explain this phenomenon in his current project on what he calls “stereotype spillover effect”—the tendency to let social identity stereotypes influence, among other things, hiring decisions. Holmes maintains that the last few decades have seen a shift from overt racism and sexism, which are no longer publicly acceptable, to more subtle forms of racism and sexism. In the interest of preserving an egalitarian understanding of their own actions, management personnel in charge of making hiring decisions are now more likely to find some reason other than race or gender to avoid hiring women and racial minorities. For example: presented with two job applications, one a woman with more work experience, and another a man with more formal education, employers will base

their decision on formal education, “incidentally” choosing the man over the woman. But if the gender on those applications is swapped, the employer would instead prioritize work experience, “incidentally” choosing the man once again. These subtle forms of discrimination have a profound impact on people’s livelihoods—their ability to secure good employment and their overall lifetime earnings.

Dr. Nyron Crawford, from the Department of Political Science at Temple University, presented his piece “It’s ‘a Racist Plot:’ The Effectiveness of Racial Defenses in the Scandal Context.” Crawford began by noting that his presentation would have nothing to do with the popular television show *Scandal*. Rather, he is interested in scandals involving black elected officials. The literature on political scandals has not addressed the role of race. Crawford endeavors to fill this analytic gap by exploring the efficacy of racial defenses—often decried as “playing the race card.” By way of example, Crawford discussed the scandal involving Marion Barry, the one-time mayor of Washington D.C. Indicted on drug charges in 1990, Barry asserted that, as mayor of a predominantly black city, he was being targeted by law enforcement *because* of his race. Crawford employed racial defense theory to explain racial appeals made by political officials in order to cue a racial defense—encouraging the black community to coalesce in their defense. Interestingly, Crawford’s research, including survey research and experiments, found that racial defense is generally ineffective, especially when

employed by black democrats! Crawford reasoned that this is because the racial defense offers no new information to progressive whites and racial minorities—African American audiences are *already* more likely to believe in institutional racism and racial targeting.

For black elected officials on the left, outright denial is generally just as effective as racial defense. Meanwhile, black Republicans, reaching out to their more conservative white constituencies, do stand to make some political gains by “playing the race card.”

ROADS TO FREEDOM

Our third panel of the day, “Roads to Freedom,” was a rich discussion about African American history and literature rooted in the antebellum era. Dr. Christopher Brown of Princeton University gave a presentation titled, “‘And There See Justice Done:’ The Problem of Law in the African-American Literary Traditions.” An English professor with a background in law, Dr. Brown synthesized these two disparate fields to critically analyze the competing logics of race in law. In particular, he asked “How does 18th century African American literature texture how we read African American literature today?” Brown argued that black conceptions of liberty, equality, and justice are often incommensurable with competing legal articulations. Furthermore, he argued that this particular incommensurability reappears, time and time again, in African American literature, where it is highlighted by storylines involving

madness and treason, satirical discussion of the color line, critiques of color blindness, and the absurd.

Keith Green, an Associate Professor of English and Director of Africana Studies at Rutgers University-Camden, gave a presentation titled “Rethinking Black Bondage in Antebellum America.” Dr. Green’s work engages black captivity narratives in the antebellum era, interrogating the definition of black captivity, both in and out of slavery. Tracing his project to a



Dr. Keith Green

particular thought experiment, Dr. Green challenged the audience to attempt to frame the African American experience in a new light. He asked, “If we were denied the word slavery, how would we describe what was happening?” Using the example of Britton Hammon, as told in *Narrative of Uncommon Sufferings*, Dr. Green suggested that the term “slave narrative” was simply inadequate to encompass texts that describe complex experiences of repeated bondage, unfreedom,

confinement, imprisonment, and immense suffering.

CITIES AS SITES OF OPPRESSION

Modern day cities often figure as sites for work, home, entertainment, and leisure. But cities can also be experienced as sites of erasure, violence and oppression. These urban experiences were the subject of a panel featuring Elizabeth Saylor, a Visiting Assistant Professor of Arabic at Bard University, Shatema Threadcraft, an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Rutgers University-NB, and Alexandra Moffet-Bateau, an Assistant Professor of Political Science at John Jay College of Criminal Justice-CUNY.

At the turn of the twentieth century, a group of primarily Christian immigrants from Lebanon and Syria settled in an area of lower Manhattan that came to be known as “Little Syria.” Little Syria was what Saylor described as a “hotbed of creativity,” where Arabic-speaking artists, writers, and journalists formed important literary societies and cultural organizations. Among the Arab writers in the diaspora, or the mahjar, only one woman rose to prominence, the Lebanese immigrant novelist, journalist, and translator, ‘Afifa Karam (1883-1924). Karam’s three Arabic novels – which are some of the earliest Arabic novels in existence – were published in Little Syria between 1906 and 1910. An early feminist, Karam’s novels examine issues impacting the lives of Syrian women – such as the right to marriage, work, and self-expression – in both Lebanon and America. Saylor suggested that knowledge of Karam’s life and work

could complicate the hegemonic “post-9/11, negative image of the Arab” that is so prevalent in the United States. Further, by acknowledging the legacy of Little Syria – located adjacent to “one of the most politicized sites in American history, Ground Zero” – her research reinserts the “Arab” back into the wider fabric of American history.

Lastly, Saylor reminded us that Karam and Little Syria’s historical marginalization demonstrate the power of erasure in the United States through “the power of narrative,” which determines “why certain stories are erased and [why] others are brought to light.”

Black feminist theorist Shatema Threadcraft explored the ways in which cities can enact anti-black, necropolitical violence without compunction. Her research draws on post-colonist theorist Achille Mbembe’s theory of necropolitics, which focuses on how sovereign powers are used to justify who lives and dies. But his ideas can also be applied to the urban ghetto, maintains Threadcraft, explaining that they help illuminate how the stoop, the porch, and other spaces of black leisure are turned into spaces of surveillance and even sites of black death. “In an era when you do not need external force to induce the docile subject,” cities disparately expose black residents in urban ghettos to technologies of death, she explained.

Alexandra Moffett-Bateau argued that cities have an impact on political identities and political behavior. But complexities of urban politics have

largely eluded political scientists, she contends, because their “definition of politics affirms the heterosexual, middle class man” and obscures the political practices of marginalized people, particularly low-income black women. Moffett-Bateau believes that politics are about change, so her matrix-based definition of politics measures residents’ political imagination and sense of belonging. She defined political imagination as “the capacity to enact change whether in your home or community” and sense of belonging as a measure of the extent to which residents found their neighborhoods comfortably and appealing places in which to live. After inter-viewing 31 women living in Altgeld public housing projects located in South Side Chicago, she determined proximity to violence and residential segregation have detrimental effects on black women’s political identity formation. She expressed her hope that her research will inspire political scientists to create more complex quantitative and qualitative tools to enrich their studies of the “development of a possible black political self.”

REVISITING THE POST-COLONY

The last panel of the day generated a lively discussion on post-colonial understandings of racial and ethnic categories beyond the U.S. context. This

panel highlighted how nation-states are often created without regard to the ethnic make-up of the entire population within the national borders. How then do ethnically and racially marginalized groups negotiate national belonging? Sabine Cadeau, a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis, discussed her forthcoming manuscript on the history of the ethnic Haitian experience in the twentieth-century Dominican Republic. She spoke about the transformation of the legal status of ethnic Haitians who lived in the



Mia Bay, CRE Director asks a question at the Faculty Forum

Dominican border provinces. Through a series of laws and executive orders in the 1920s and 1930s, many Dominican citizens of Haitian descent were reclassified as foreigners and either forcibly deported or reduced to the status of temporary immigrants in their native land. Dr. Cadeau argues this denationalization and displacement served as a prelude to the 1937 genocidal massacre of 20,000 ethnic Haitians on the orders of the Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo. One audience member brought up the contemporary resettlement policy in the Dominican Republic—which forces ethnic Haitians who cannot prove their status as

Dominicans out of the country, resulting in the displacement of thousands of individuals and the creation of inadequate resettlement camps. Cadeau agreed that this new development is an eerie echo of past practices that led to the 1937 massacre.

Tanya Agathocleous, Associate Professor of English at Hunter College (and a Rutgers Ph.D. alum), talked about her new project that examines the relationship between press censorship and print culture in colonial India in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the 1870s, the Indian penal code made “disaffection” equivalent to seditious libel and punishable by censorship, fines, and imprisonment. Dr. Agathocleous’ project seeks to historicize how “disaffection” and negative emotions against the state were understood by contemporaries and encoded into law to criminalize Indian writing. By examining sedition law and censorship, this project also seeks to delineate the function and contours of the “imperial public sphere”—a term Dr. Agathocleous develops to analyze how English language periodicals spoke to each other across the multiple terrains of empire.

In his first presentation as a newly-minted PhD, Jarvis McNinn gave an overview of his book project, tentatively titled “Afterlives of the Plantation: Aesthetics, Labor, and Diaspora in the Global Black South.” Dr. McNinn is currently a Postdoctoral Research Associate in the Center for African American Studies at Princeton University. Drawing on Caribbean and



Jarvis McNinn

new Southern Studies, his work makes a critical

intervention in African American Studies, where the Southern plantation has been almost exclusively regarded as a metonym for slavery and anti-modernity.

Dr. McNinn asks us to reconsider the plantation as the crucible of black modernity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He examines how African American and Caribbean writers and intellectuals mobilized aesthetics—literature, music, photographs, and performance—to imagine alternative futures within and against the legacy of the plantation. In this way, he argues that the plantation is the key figural and literal organizing principle that tethers the U.S. South to a broader diasporic matrix that Dr. McNinn terms the “global black South.”

Chinyere Osuji, Assistant Professor of Sociology at Rutgers-Camden, delivered the final presentation at the forum. She spoke about a book manuscript in progress based on her qualitative research with interracial couples in Los Angeles and Rio de Janeiro. Comparing black-white couples in the U.S. and Brazil, Dr. Osuji asks what they can tell

us about how race relations and racial boundaries function in these two societies. For this presentation, she focused especially on her work with Brazilian black-white couples. While many scholars argue that racial boundaries are more fluid in Latin America than in the U.S., Dr. Osuji asks what that means for individuals and families who live in these places. Her project gets at the question of who can really access the supposed fluidity of racial boundaries in Brazil. Her research finds that white spouses in Brazil experience more porous and flexible boundaries than their black partners: it is considerably easier for white spouses to cross racial boundaries and to switch and flow into black identity. Furthermore, despite more porous and blurred racial boundaries in Brazil, Dr. Osuji found that racial hierarchies that privilege whiteness persist in Brazil and shape the way people think about family formation.



Chinyere Osuji

This year’s forum highlighted the exciting work of faculty from the Rutgers and beyond. The success of this year’s forum

showed us once again how privileged we are to be a part of a community of brilliant and innovative intellectuals, and the importance of continuing these rich conversations. We hope that the energy and enthusiasm at our kickoff event will carry on through the year.

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