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***CRE Hosts Spring Semester Roundtable Discussions***

March was a busy month at the Center for Race and Ethnicity, featuring two roundtable discussions on topics that loom large in America’s past and present. On March 1, we welcomed the return of scholars who had previously gathered to speak about the role of race and gender in the upcoming presidential election, and on March 25, four eminent scholars joined us to speak about their work on the history of slavery in the U.S. Both conversations drew interested audiences and varied presentations.

RACE, GENDER, AND THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Following on our successful Fall 2015 roundtable discussion on this topic, we were pleased to welcome back to the CRE panelists Kelly Dittmar (Assistant Professor of Political Science, RU-Camden, and Scholar at the Center for American Women and Politics at the Eagleton Institute of Politics); Louis Prisco (Assistant Professor of Africana Studies and American Studies, RU-NB); and Melanye Price (Assistant Professor of Africana Studies and Political Science, and Associate Director of the CRE, RU-NB) who also moderated the event.

Professor Dittmar started the discussion by focusing on changes in the presidential election campaigns that have occurred since the last roundtable. On the Republican side, she argued that gendered rhetoric has become increasingly explicit. While Donald Trump denigrates the masculinity of other candidates by talking about how everybody is “weak,” Marco Rubio attacks Trump’s manhood by saying “you know what they say about men with small hands.” Meanwhile, a large majority of republican women (87 percent) say the country is going in the wrong direction, which might account for their support of Trump’s rhetoric. Dittmar expands on these insights in an essay entitled “The GOP’s Politics of Emasculation,” which appears in the recently launched website, “[Presidential Gender Watch 2016](#).” In this piece, she shows how GOP primary front runners, such as Donald Trump and Marco Rubio, try to dismiss each other as “girly men,” whether in “traits, behavior, or appearance,” questioning each other’s masculinity for eligibility to be president.



Panelists at Race, Gender and the 2016 Election Roundtable (l-r): Louis Prisco (Africana Studies, RU-NB); Kelly Dittmar (Political Science, RU-Camden); Melanye Price (Africana Studies/Political Science, RU-NB)

“A Firewall of Loyal Black Women”

Analyzing the tactics of the Democrats, Dittmar emphasized that the diversity among Hillary Clinton’s supporters have given her strength. In particular, she has a “firewall” of loyal black women. Yet the Democratic primaries have not attracted a large turnout. This suggests that neither Sanders nor Clinton are garnering enthusiasm for their campaigns. Dittmar also raised a question of whether Hillary Clinton can get white men, who have been trending for Sanders, to vote for her. Dittmar also touched upon the issue of generational differences in women’s perspectives on democratic candidates.

Professor Price, who will also be writing for the “Presidential Gender Watch 2016” blog, discussed race and gender in South Carolina’s Democratic primary. For the last few elections, South Carolina has been the first primary with a significant black population, which is largely composed of black women. Price found it very interesting to see strong support for Hillary Clinton there, given the fact that she is under heavy attack by some black intellectuals, including some heavy hitters like Michelle Alexander. In Price’s view, Clinton is handling the race issue well. She avoids missteps when speaking on racial issues by reading well-prepared speeches written by others—although this approach does cause some people to doubt her sincerity.

The Role of Latino Identity

There was also some discussion about

the role of Latino identity in the election. Cruz and Rubio are both children of Cuban immigrants who have taken very conservative stances on immigration. As a result, it has not been clear whether Latino voters would see them as an authentic choice or outside of their community. Pointing to the debate between Cruz and Rubio, Price drew attention to the fact that the candidates were questioning each other’s ability to speak Spanish and what that says about their Latino authenticity. Many Latinos see language fluency as a key cultural marker.

Price also thinks that these elections are characterized by a unique feature “where competency is going out the window on both sides.” Both the Republicans and the Democrats talk about electing someone who is “not a politician,” which is alarming.

Professor Prisock began his talk by giving his analysis of Clinton’s big win in South Carolina. On the one hand, he said, the Sanders campaign really did not do enough there to win African American voters, and on the other, Clinton has gotten savvy in her handling of race. Not only did she speak well on the subject, she also reached out to several black mothers who lost children to police violence.

Still, Prisock thinks that Hillary Clinton might face some

challenges. Despite the short memory of the American public in general and African Americans in particular, he maintained Clinton’s remarks from 20 years ago about the idea of “superpredators” may still come back “to bite her now in this campaign.” These comments have already resurfaced in anti-Clinton viral videos and internet memes.

A Return of the “Goldwater Syndrome?”

Looking at the Republicans, Prisock argued that Donald Trump is taking advantage of something that might be called the “Goldwater syndrome.” Harkening back to the 1964 GOP candidate, Trump is tapping into the sense of loss and frustration that white people may be feeling related to their loss of power in politics and in this country over the past several years.



1964 Campaign Poster for Barry Goldwater (image courtesy of Historical Images: Images for Teaching, available at <https://historicalimages.wordpress.com/2012/10/17/goldwater-s-racism/>)

Prior to opening the panel for questions and comments, Price asked about New Jersey Governor Chris Christie's place in the election. Dittmar replied that Christie is not positioned to become a vice presidential candidate. She argued that his decision to back Donald Trump and Trump's public humiliation of Christie made it unlikely that he would get the nomination. In the aftermath of Christie's endorsement of Trump, he has become increasingly unpopular in his own state.



Audience member Nancy DiTomaso (Rutgers Business School, New Brunswick and Newark) asks a question as other audience members look on.

The audience asked a number of thought-provoking questions. One participant asked about whether the Republican Party can attract black conservatives. Prisock responded affirmatively, and added that the GOP will always attract some black conservatives, but not enough to help them to win elections. "It's not that black people are inherently liberal, they are not. But the GOP has not been effective in convincing even black conservatives that they will care about black people and won't engage in racially divisive politics." This response was followed by a comment from an audience member, who said that "the Republicans don't need the black vote, they just need to keep black people from voting, get them to stay home, be disillusioned." Price agreed, but noted that while the GOP doesn't need the

black vote and hasn't needed it in decades, "what they do need is to not look racist."

Another question from the audience was about the role of advisors these candidates surround themselves with. The panelists agreed unanimously that advisors matter. Since almost all candidates seem to be making various flubs on race issues, the question of who is advising them is important.

Black Lives Matter

Audience members also asked about whether the Democratic Party's nominee will have to deal with the Black Lives Matter movement in the general election. Price replied by saying the movement was likely to force every candidate to take up its issues. "Black Lives Matter movement activists are very good at what they do. Democratic and Republican candidates will have no choice but to deal with them, because the activists leave them no choice, they are successfully pushing the issue and making the candidates address their issues."

All the panelists agreed that this election has been very unpredictable so far. Dittmar's earlier prediction of a Bush-Clinton race had already been proven wrong by the time of the roundtable, while Prisock's and Price's predictions still held. Price predicted a Kasich-Clinton race and Prisock predicted a Rubio-

Clinton race. Now both are in doubt. Since the panel, Rubio has suspended his campaign, and Kasich trails far behind both Trump and Cruz.

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE HISTORY OF SLAVERY

With the appearance of so much cutting-edge scholarship on the history of slavery here at Rutgers, the CRE was eager to bring together four scholars who are each looking at different aspects of the diasporic experiences of enslaved Africans. The result was a panel featuring Walter Rucker (Associate Professor of History, RU-NB); Marisa Fuentes (Associate Professor of History and Women's & Gender Studies, RU-NB); Keith M. Green (Associate Professor of English and African Studies, RU-Camden); and Mekala Audain (Assistant Professor of History, The College of New Jersey, and RU-NB Ph.D., 2014).

Creation of New World Ethnic Identities

Dr. Rucker began with an introduction to his recently published book *Gold Coast Diasporas: Identity, Culture, and Power* (Indiana University Press, 2015). The book explores the cultural, social, and political dynamics of a set of enslaved peoples who came from the 17th and 18th century African Gold Coast (modern day Ghana). These groups would come to be known in the Americas as the "Coromantee" and "Mina," and Rucker's work analyzes the origin and reinvention of these New World ethnic identities. Rucker explained that Coromantee and Mina represented a

“multilingual conglomerate of people who refashioned themselves actively within the crucible of circum-Caribbean plantation society.”

The terms Coromantee and Mina are both artifacts of the slave trade. Derived from the names of the Dutch slave fort Kormantine and the Portuguese slave fort El Amina, these terms divided the slaves into “prepackaged African ethnic groups,” whose lineage was determined not by where they came from in Africa, but by where they entered the transatlantic slave trade. Once in the Americas, many slaves began to term themselves Coromantee or Mina. Rucker argues that “these ethnic labels, however problematic or ahistorical, held meaning for those who identified with them and who actively redefined them over time.” Rucker’s analysis also attends to the political and class dimensions in the creation of these new ethnic identities: he tracks the evolution of an abolitionist consciousness among these groups.



The Castle Cormantine. Additional title: *Kasteel van Cormantin.* The New York Public Library Digital Collections.
<http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e1-4024-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

Urban Slavery in the Caribbean

Dr. Fuentes briefly spoke about her first book *Dispossessed Lives*:

Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), scheduled to be published this June. Fuentes’ book investigates urban Caribbean slavery—a demographically distinct form of slavery that has received far less attention than the systems of bondage that prevailed on the region’s sugar plantations. Focusing on the British colonial town of Bridgetown, Barbados, the book explores intra-gender relationships in an urban slave society where white women were the predominant slaveholders and owned mostly women.



Panelists for New Perspectives on the History of Slavery (l-r): Walter Rucker (History, RU-NB); Marisa Fuentes (History/W&GS, RU-NB); Keith M. Green (English/African American Studies, RU-Camden) and Mekala Audain (History, The College of New Jersey)

Fuentes then introduced her budding book project that investigates the category of so-called “refuse slaves” in the early capitalist economy of the Atlantic slave trade. “The term *refuse* connotes both waste and refusal,” explained Fuentes. The “refuse slaves” were the women, infants, children, and men who were “refused by the slave traders as not profitable based on their emaciation, illness, debility, or mental state.” Some died before they boarded ships on the West African coast, and others

linguished in the ports of the Atlantic world. Fuentes shared some of her archival findings—harrowing stories of enslaved children killed or deliberately left to die by starvation because slave traders who had invested capital in these children no longer considered them “useful” or sellable. Questions that animate Fuentes’s new project consider the production of the non-human: How can we understand the production of humans as both commodity and waste? How did the regime of American slavery shape the politics of black life, death, and the condition of disposability?

African American Captivity Narratives

Forms of black captivity that existed within and alongside slavery were the focus of discussion by Dr. Keith Green. In his book *Bound to Respect: Antebellum Narratives of African American Imprisonment, Servitude, and Bondage, 1816-1861* (University of Alabama Press, 2015), Green draws on a variety of different black captivity narratives to explore the bondage of African Americans inside penal institutions where whites were also held captive.

His work revises two previously prevailing ideas on black imprisonment:



Fuentes interacts with Green and Audain

1) the idea that black imprisonment only came after the Civil War when slavery ended; 2) the idea that slavery and imprisonment are related only on a metaphorical level. Green argues that his work de-centers slavery as the privileged site of African American bondage and situates it “within and alongside a host of unfree systems and practices.”

Neglected History of the Fugitive Slaves

Dr. Mekala Audain discussed her current book project, *Mexican Canaan: The Southern Underground Railroad to Spanish Texas and Northeastern Mexico, 1804-1867*, which first began as a dissertation completed here at Rutgers, in the history department. Audain has also served as Graduate Assistant at CRE, and we were thrilled to have her back in the room and to hear that things are going very well for her as an Assistant Professor at TCNJ.

Focused on fugitive slaves who traveled south to Mexico to escape, Audain’s work challenges traditional understanding of the runaway slave experience as involving escapes to the northern United States or Canada. Her study reveals the existence of a Southern Underground Railroad in which slaves escaped first to Spanish Texas, and later to Mexico—after U.S. slaveholders immigrated to Texas beginning in the 1820’s. Her talk explained the origins of the Southern Underground Railroad to Spanish Texas in the early nineteenth century. She argues that while the direction of escape was different, the preparation for the journey to Spanish Texas was



Mekala Audain makes a point during her presentation.

similar to the experiences of runaways escaping north: learning about freedom, collecting useful information, gathering supplies, absconding, and receiving assistance when they reached free territory. By bringing this history to light, Audain challenges one of the most common myths of the Underground Railroad: the idea that runaways received significant assistance throughout their escapes. Audain’s work highlights the efforts of the enslaved to self-emancipate.

A lively Q & A session took place after the presentations. Rucker’s talk prompted questions from the audience about slave resistance and how the Coromantee and Mina articulated abolition, as well as curiosity about whether these ethnic identities got passed down through generations. Rucker explained that while these New World ethnic identities were passed on to children, the cultural practices associated with these identities were constantly changing and evolving. In discussing the forms of resistance that the Coromantee and Mina

embraced, Rucker stressed that their concepts of freedom, autonomy, and egalitarianism did not emerge out of early modern European intellectual trends or political movements. Rather, they drew upon memories of Atlantic Africa to confront the suffocating realities of Western hemisphere slavery.

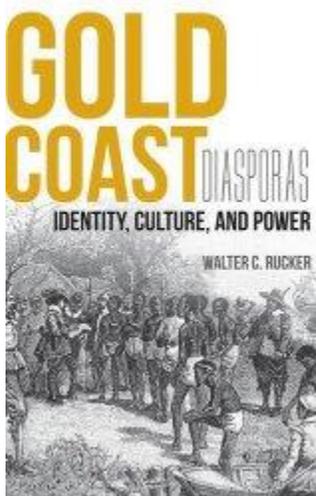
Meanwhile, audience members were fascinated by the idea of a Southern Underground Railroad and asked Audain about Mexican attitudes toward slavery, as well as posing questions about whether the fugitives who traveled South received any help from the Native American tribes. Audain explained that even after Mexico abolished slavery in 1829, Mexican officials often felt compelled to return fugitive slaves in order to avoid conflict with slave owners and state officials in Louisiana and Texas. Likewise, local Native Americans typically provided little support for the runaways. However, Comanche raids on the U.S.-Mexico border in the 1850’s created a unique way for runaway slaves to remain in Mexico; they helped defend their newly-adopted communities from hostile Indians.

Indeed, fear of Comanche violence shaped fugitive slave routes. While Comanches posed a threat to Mexicans who lived near them, this could work in favor of the runaways. Residents of communities who lived in fear of Comanche attacks needed manpower to help defend their settlements, and as such, therefore rarely turned away slave fugitives.

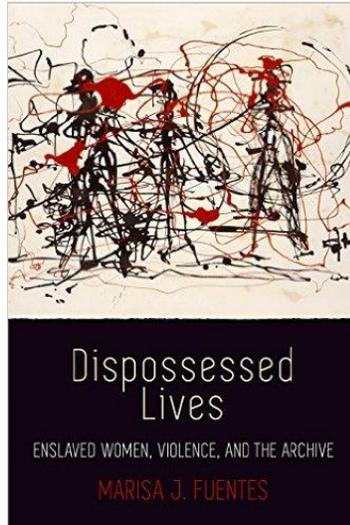
Asked about the historical sources she planned to use for her new project on

“refuse slaves,” Fuentes pointed to the late 18th century English debates on the status of the slave trade. She also discussed the fate of some of the enslaved Africans who arrived at New World ports in poor health. Sometimes traders hid sick Africans aboard slave ships and waited for them to die—usually because they feared that any word of sickness on the ship would bring down the average price of their human cargo. Other times, doctors in port might purchase “refuse slaves” very cheaply to use their bodies for medical experimentation.

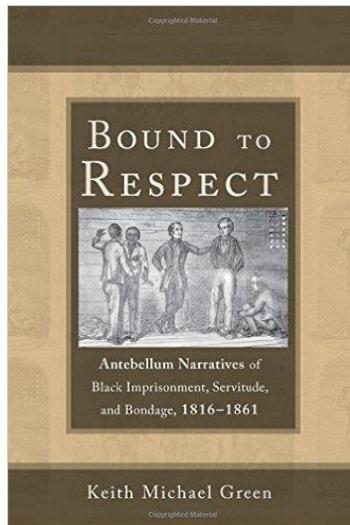
Audience members also questioned Fuentes about her suggestion that the production of “refuse slaves” should be understood as the production of the non-human subjects, suggesting that such slaves might be better understood as commodities. In response, Fuentes explained that she thought of them as both, and hoped to explore the ways in which human waste is one of the byproducts of capitalist accumulation.



Gold Coast Diasporas: Identity, Culture, and Power (Indiana University Press, 2015), by Dr. Walter Rucker



Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), by Dr. Marisa Fuentes



Bound to Respect: Antebellum Narratives of African American Imprisonment, Servitude, and Bondage, 1816-1861 (University of Alabama Press, 2015), by Dr. Keith M. Green. Winner of the Elizabeth Agee Prize in American Literature

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)

Associate Director: Naa Oyo A. Kwate
(Human Ecology/Africana Studies)

Associate Director: Melanye Price (Africana
Studies/Political Science)

Senior Program Coordinator: Mia Kissil

Graduate Assistants/Editors: Jesse Bayker
(History); Sally Bonet (Graduate School of
Education); Grace Howard (Political
Science); Rosemary Ndubizu (Women &
Gender Studies); Hakim Zainiddinov
(Sociology)