

***Running Against Stereotype:
Race, Gender, Age and Politics 2008***

Featured Speakers:

- Nikol Alexander-Floyd, Women's and Gender Studies,
- David Greenberg, Journalism and Media Studies/History,
- Jane Junn, Political Science,
- Lee Jussim, Psychology
- Ruth Mandel, Director of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University

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"Why is Obama always a black candidate when he is in fact multiracial?" – Jane Junn

"Those who assumed that women would vote McCain because of Palin are uninformed about women's voting patterns. Like other groups, women vote according to issues and partisan preferences, not the gender of a candidate." – Ruth Mandel

"Candidates like Barack Obama need to relentlessly communicate stereotype-disconfirming individuating information in order to combat underground racial stereotypes." – Lee Jussim

"We [as a nation] are not accustomed to seeing black bodies or women's bodies entering institutional spaces on the national stage, so it creates cognitive dissonance. They're viewed as 'space invaders.'" – Nikol Alexander-Floyd

A panel of five Rutgers faculty members reflects on the role of stereotypes and identity in the 2008 election

One day after the first and only vice-presidential debate between Democratic candidate Senator Joe Biden and Republican candidate Governor Sarah Palin, a panel of five Rutgers faculty members reflected on the role of stereotypes and identity in the 2008 election. The lively and engaging discussion covered topics such as: the role of race and gender on the campaign trail, the institutional biases that affect voting, and the historical rise of female politicians. Cosponsored by the Eagleton Institute of Politics, the interdisciplinary roundtable presented varied perspectives and methodological approaches for understanding the 2008 presidential race.



A HISTORIC ELECTION

Historian David Greenberg observed that "the media used the word 'historic' to describe Barack Obama's run for the presidency more often than to describe Hillary Clinton's campaign." Greenberg said that while he does not think that sexism runs deeper than racism in American culture, he does think that a greater public constituency can be mobilized behind anti-racism than behind anti-sexism.

"By voting for Obama, people are able to say they are anti-racist," Greenberg explained. "For whites, in particular, Obama is affirmation and proof that America is moving on."

For Greenberg, the 1960 election offers a revealing historic comparison. "By voting for JFK, the first Catholic president, voters were able to say they were against religious bigotry and by voting for Obama people are able to say they are anti-racist." Greenberg contended that "both candidates turned their stigmatized identities into positive attributes." To read more about Professor Greenberg's take on the 2008 presidential campaign, go to his published editorial, "Playing the Tolerance Card," <http://www.slate.com/id/2164662/>.

PALIN & THE WOMEN'S VOTE

Politics professor Ruth Mandel contrasted the public images of female candidates in the 1970s with the public images of 2008. "In the 1970s, elected women resisted identifying themselves by gender and shied away from being perceived as ambitious for power," Mandel said. "In response to deeply rooted gender stereotypes about femininity and culturally sanctioned notions that women were biologically ill equipped to deal with competition and the pressures of leadership, political women struggled to appear

simultaneously soft and strong, non-threatening and tough, competent and caring. In 2008, VP candidate Sarah Palin burst onto the world stage embracing the remnants of these contradictions, almost daring anyone to define her one way or the other. Surrounded by her husband and five children, she introduced herself to the nation as Governor/Mother."

According to Mandel, Palin's multiple images present challenges for voters trying to grapple with how to read and place her complex self-representation ("maverick," reformer, mother, religious conservative, hunter, beauty contest queen). "The McCain campaign (and the media) made a mistake in expecting women to flock to the Republican ticket because of Palin's gender," she said. "Those who assumed that women would vote McCain because of Palin are uninformed about women's voting patterns. Like other groups, women vote according to issues and partisan preferences, not the gender of a candidate. After the Republican Convention, polls show the gender gap steadily widening in the direction of Obama." Data about women's voting patterns are available at the Center for American Women and Politics website: http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/voters/gender_gap.php.

Professor Greenberg suggested that Palin has successfully positioned herself

as an authentic American, despite such patently regional habits as eating mooseburgers and hunting wolverines. "Many Americans don't see their own lives as authentic so, paradoxically, they search for something different or 'exotic' to view as 'authentic,'" Greenberg argued.

"But who constitutes the 'we' in this search for authenticity?" asked Political Science professor Jane Junn. She and fellow Political Science professor Nikol Alexander-Floyd encouraged the panel to consider categories as intersections, both in terms of the assumptions that inform their research and in terms of their research subjects. Alexander-Floyd added that the "we" of American politics is racialized. "Part of Palin's attractiveness for the Republican base is that she fits stereotypes of the neo-Confederate white woman."

IS OBAMA BLACK?

Engaging the audience directly, Jane Junn opened her talk by questioning categories. "There are political and hierarchal imperatives to the categories of race and ethnicity," she stated. "After all, why is Obama always a black candidate when he is in fact multiracial?" To answer this question, Junn urged the audience to examine the political use of racial categories.

"In contemporary America, we use race categories to help enforce civil rights issues," said Junn, "but the counting and creating of race categories stems from the 3/5 Compromise." Junn argued that our reliance on institutionalized categories dating back to this country's inception reifies founding racial hierarchies—with the U.S. Census presenting a

primary example of quantifying race categories.

TRADING ON STEREOTYPES OF RACE, AGE, AND GENDER

As Psychology professor Lee Jussim commented, "Candidates like Barack Obama need to relentlessly communicate stereotype-disconfirming individuating information in order to combat underground racial stereotypes."



But "Obama also trades on racial stereotypes" asserted Nikol Alexander-Floyd. "Obama has to negotiate the stereotype of the angry black man; this is why he keeps such a cool demeanor. But he also mobilizes implicit stereotypes, like those of the irresponsible Black female head of household and the endangered (irresponsible) Black male in his father's day speech."

Obama's wife, Michelle, must also navigate stereotypes about both race and gender. "In her Democratic National Convention speech Michelle Obama deemphasized her professional affiliations for relational ones like mother and daughter to show that 'I am just like you (white America),' " noted Alexander-Floyd.

"John McCain is in a bind similar to the one Obama finds himself in because his age comes with stereotype challenges," offered Keith Wailoo. "He has been working hard to make his seniority signify experience and wisdom, but others have worked just as hard to link it to infirmity, confusion, loss of memory and to mobilize other images of advanced age." We are in a unique situation, Wailoo suggested. Many of the candidates this year (Clinton,

Obama, Palin, and McCain) are "running not just against stereotypes, but also—perhaps more importantly— managing them in a very deliberate way."

Jussim also discussed how candidates make indirect use of race, age, and gender bias, pointing out examples of Fox news' attempt to associate Barack Obama with popular rap artist Ludacris, and the subtle ways in which Obama might highlight McCain's age by discussing healthcare for seniors while emphasizing the health risks of individuals over the age of seventy.

DO POLLS TELL THE TRUTH?

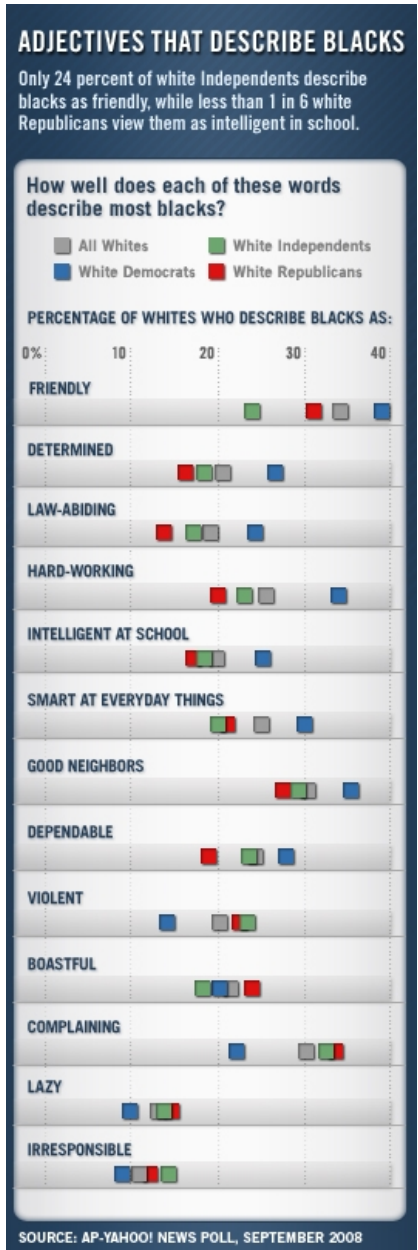
Keith Wailoo reminded the panel and audience that "the so-called 'Bradley Effect', the phenomena of black candidates polling better than they perform, hangs over the possible election of the first black president" Panelists were uncertain about the role of the Bradley effect in previous elections and particularly today, but noted that racism will certainly play a role in the election.

Jussim elaborated, "Several studies conclude that Barack Obama loses approximately 6 percent in the polls as a result of racial bias against blacks. Put another way, 94 percent of people will not change their votes based on Obama's blackness. However, in a close election 6 percent is an influential number."

In the end, panelists agreed that we may not know the full role of race in the election until after it is over.

2008 AND BEYOND

One of the many hurdles to Obama's (and many other minority candidates)



candidate, argued Alexander-Floyd, is that, "We [as a nation] are not accustomed to seeing black bodies or women's bodies entering institutional spaces on the national stage, so it creates cognitive dissonance. They're viewed as what Nirmal Puwar calls 'space invaders.' The hysterical racist and sexist reactions that result show that the triumphant perspective of the post-Civil Rights, post-feminist era is premature, at best."

Ruth Mandel agreed that "While conventional gender images have been tested, disrupted, perhaps rearranged during the primary and general election campaigns, familiar stereotypes and sexist attitudes have not disappeared. It will take quite

some time for us to sort out and gain perspective on the ways in which race, gender and age shaped the experience of the 2008 national elections, and whether enduring cultural shifts will result, leaving us with new attitudes and ways of seeing these core dimensions of identity." She added, "As for the study of women and politics, after November 4th the challenge will be to formulate relevant new questions for the future."

UPCOMING EVENTS

Please save the date for the following events, which represent a highlighted selection of roundtables and forums from our Fall programming calendar:

- **Between Privilege and Poverty: Perspectives on New Jersey Disparities**

Friday, October 24, 8:30 am – 3:30 pm, Multipurpose Room, Rutgers Student Center, College Avenue Campus.

Invited participants in this one-day conference include:

Joel Cantor, Center for State Health Policy/ Bloustein School for Planning and Public Policy)
Nancy DiTomaso, Rutgers Business School
Howard Gillette, RU-Camden, Departments of History/ Mid-Atlantic Regional Center for the Humanities
Peter Guarnaccia, Institute for Health, Health Policy and Aging Research
Wolfram Hofer, Department of Landscape Architecture, SEBS
Robin Leichenko, Department of Geography
Lisa Miller, Department of Political Science
Kathe Newman, Bloustein School for Planning and Public Policy
Nora Hyland, Graduate School of Education
David Troutt, School of Law, Rutgers-Newark



- **New Directions in Caribbean Studies**

Friday, November 14, 8:30 am – 5:00 pm, Plangere Writing Center, College Avenue Campus.

Part of an interdisciplinary initiative led by the CRE (in coordination with departments of History, English, American Studies, and Latino and Hispanic Caribbean Studies), this meeting brings together leading scholars from Rutgers and beyond to bridge disciplinary, linguistic and national divisions that often fragment our understanding of race and ethnicity, and offers a forum for new cross-disciplinary collaborations, comparative work, and cross-cultural scholarship on the Caribbean.

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Graduate Assistants/Editors: Isra Ali, Dana Brown, Jeffrey Dowd, Bridget Gurtler, Shakti Jaising, Anantha Sudhakar, Dora Vargha, Fatimah Williams-Castro

- Facilitating research and enriching education on matters of race and ethnicity in contemporary life in America, in New Jersey, and the world
- Promoting collaborations and fostering cross-disciplinary seminars and discussions on topics from immigration and work, to ethnic politics and racial classification, from preservation of cultural identity to its transformation, and including questions of poverty, discrimination, advancement, integration, and privilege
- Identifying critical areas for future research and supporting race and ethnicity research and policy development.

- **Fall 2008 Graduate Forum**

Saturday, November 22, Graduate Lounge, College Avenue Campus

Enjoy the rare opportunity to meet Rutgers graduate students across campuses and disciplines, and discuss works-in-progress on race and ethnicity in an informal and supportive environment. You will also benefit from job market insights from faculty and advanced graduate students. Lunch, refreshments and a casual dinner and wine reception will be provided to all attendees.

No registration fee required. To RSVP, or for more information, contact

CREgradforum@gmail.com.