

**Debating the Role of Race in
Displacement and Opportunity**

Rutgers Students and Community Members Screen the
Award Winning Documentary *Uprooted*

“As a new instructor and scholar of race in Latin America, I searched for ways to unsettle students’ common-sense ideas of race and blackness learned in a US context, and encountered a number of pedagogical questions like ‘how do I bring home these topics when the sites and subjects of our course materials are not immediately accessible for students to observe’ and ‘how might I foster students’ critical thinking about and engagement with these topics.’” -

Fatimah Williams-Castro,
Graduate Assistant, Center for Race and Ethnicity; Doctoral Candidate, Dept. of Anthropology



Uprooted
a film by Juan Mejia Botero

This semester students of my Afro-Latin American Experience course (590:367) have been grappling with the complexities of racial formation, citizenship, and social inclusion across Central and South America. I challenged them not to think of race and blackness in particular, as fixed, but to consider the social, cultural, economic, political, and historical processes by which they are constituted according to local, national, and transnational influences. As a new instructor and scholar of race in Latin America, I searched for ways to unsettle students’ common-sense ideas of race and blackness learned in a US context, and encountered a number of pedagogical questions like ‘how do I bring home these topics when the sites and subjects of our course materials are not immediately accessible for students to

observe’ and ‘how might I foster students’ critical thinking about and engagement with these topics.’ Partnering with the Center for Race and Ethnicity, I organized a film viewing and discussion of *Uprooted* (2007), an award winning documentary that follows Noris Mosquera, one of the nearly 4 million Afro-Colombians violently displaced since 1990 because they live in an area prized for its natural resources and development opportunities, as she helps her son leave their refugee shelter for a soccer academy in the capital city of Bogotá.

**UNDERGRADUATE
EDUCATION AND
COMMUNITY
INVOLVEMENT**

On April 2, undergraduate and graduate students, faculty and staff, and community members, some from

Colombia and other Latin American countries, filled the CRE and participated in a lively and sometimes heated debate. One audience member, drawing on her understanding as a Colombian national, argued that displacement needn’t be studied through an ethnic or racial lens since forced displacement and political violence impact all Colombians. Several students, on the other hand, defended the idea that vulnerability, displacement, and the possibilities/ opportunities to rebuild life after displacement are highly racialized experiences, and therefore an attention to racial difference, and blackness in particular, is imperative. Similarly, the students took a critical look at some of the depictions of Afro-Colombians as uncultivated bodies with physiques “naturally” suited to play soccer and other sports

They were able to see how “polite racism” operates in subtle ways that simultaneously question and praise blacks’ abilities and talents. One student insisted that these forms of differentiation are as important to reproducing racist sentiments as more overt forms of racism.

Students, faculty, staff, and community members participated in a lively and sometimes heated debate

Just as this Spanish language film with English subtitles demonstrates how dialogues can occur across languages, our post-viewing discussion, which was translated between English and Spanish, is a model of how through translation we can share ideas across languages, cultures, and experiences.

This ethnographic documentary film gave students the opportunity to “hear” first hand from Afro-Colombians how they understand and navigate experiences of race, exclusion, insecurity, and opportunity. It also raised questions about the impact of

the filmmaker’s positionality on the research and how cinematographic techniques (camera angles, fonts, montages) influence the communication and reception of the story being told. As the course instructor and a graduate assistant at the CRE, I am pleased that this small film event became a unique educational and pedagogical tool for students to exercise their knowledge while supporting their opinions in a healthy debate and to think beyond their immediate national context to consider questions of race and ethnicity more broadly.



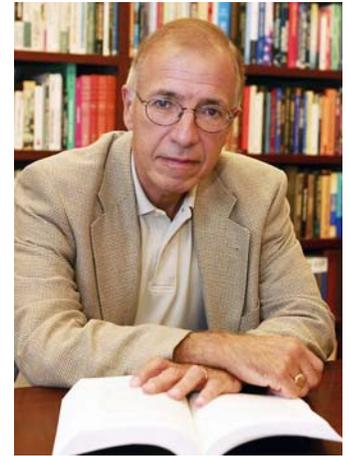
Fatimah Williams-Castro



RECENT CENTER EVENTS

On April 14, the Center for Race and Ethnicity hosted “Life on the Edge: Immigrants Confront the American Health System,” a lecture by esteemed Princeton sociologist Alejandro Portes. Portes’ latest research examines how well health care organizations are meeting the needs of immigrant populations in three areas of the U.S.: San Diego, California; Miami, Florida; and what he terms the Trenton-Newark corridor in New Jersey. With approximately one in nine U.S. residents now being foreign-born, Portes’ work is timely. In his lecture, he addressed questions about the challenges health care facilities face in treating rapidly growing numbers of diverse immigrant patients who might be poor, uninsured, or non-English speakers. This lecture was co-sponsored by the Institute for Health, Health Care Policy and Aging Research; the Center for State Health Policy; and the

Departments of Sociology and Latino, Hispanic and Caribbean Studies.



Alejandro Portes, Howard Harrison and Gabrielle Snyder Beck Professor of Sociology, Princeton University

Address: Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 191 College Avenue, 1st Floor, New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Phone: (732) 932-2181
Fax: (732) 932-2198
E-mail: raceethnicity@sas.rutgers.edu
Website: <http://raceethnicity.rutgers.edu>

Director: Keith Wailoo, History/Institute for Health.
Associate Director: Mia Bay, History.

Senior Program Coordinator: Mia Kissil

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.