

3rd Annual Faculty Forum on Race and Ethnicity

Featured Speakers:

- Mia Bay, History-NB
- Daniel Chatman, Bloustein School for Planning and Public Policy-NB
- Sheila Cosminsky, Anthropology/Center for Childhood Research-Camden
- Deborah Carr, Sociology-NB
- Tetsuji Yamada, Economics/Center for Childhood Research-Camden
- Regina Marchi, School of Communication, Information and Library Sciences-NB
- Dennis Kim-Prieto, Law School-Newark
- David Hughes, Human Ecology/Anthropology-NB
- Yolanda Martinez-San Miguel, Latino Studies/Comparative Literature-NB
- Allan Isaac, English/American Studies-NB
- J.C. Lore, Law School-Camden
- Don Roden, History-NB
- Paul Hirschfield, Sociology-NB

Faculty from across disciplines in Newark, Camden and New Brunswick discuss transportation, obesity, new media and community activism, citizenship, and juveniles in the criminal justice system

The CRE's 3rd Annual Faculty Forum, gathered members of departments across all Rutgers' campuses to share a broad spectrum of work concerned with issues of race and ethnicity. The Forum brought together faculty who would not otherwise be known to one another into conversation, creating a venue ripe for intellectual exchange. For some presenters the Forum was an opportunity to offer new ideas for projects at the inception stage while others presented on-going and completed projects. On this day the range of topics tackled included historical and contemporary assessments of public and private modes of transportation, perceptions of obesity among various populations, new uses of media in community activism and for translation, questions of citizenship and identity, and juvenile involvement in the criminal justice system.

CULTURES OF TRANSIT



While Daniel Chatman (Bloustein School for Planning and Public Policy-NB)

alluded to tensions between the public policy goal of sustaining public transportation with immigrant ridership, Mia Bay (History-NB) attuned us to the possibilities of "transportation discrimination" through her work on the social history of segregated travel from the Jim Crow era to

today. Chatman discussed his work on understanding immigrant travel patterns in New Jersey, where half of public transportation users are immigrants. He noted, "New immigrant populations offer an opportunity to sustain public transportation ridership, which is deemed more environmentally sustainable." Given this policy push, Chatman wants to consider factors like limited credit availability for (new) immigrants and why new immigrants purchase cars as soon as they are financially able to do so.

Mia Bay's new book project tentatively titled, *Traveling Black*, examines the ways in which transportation discrimination has shaped African Americans' perceptions of both themselves and white America. Major automobile manufacturers, building on the American symbol of the highway as an open, free road, marketed the automobile to blacks as an escape from racial discrimination and segregation experienced on trains, buses, and in airports. However, her research reveals that "racial identifications and misidentifications" on the purportedly open road continue with current policing practices like "driving while black."

OBESITY: ITS ORIGINS AND ITS EFFECTS

The diverse research locations, subjects, and questions addressed by the panels reveal no simple conclusions about the origins and effects of obesity; rather,

obesity evokes different types of stigma for different people. Additionally, the studies represented in this panel remind us how the processes of research can unearth unexpected findings, thereby inviting new research directions.



Sheila Cosminsky (Sociology-Camden) originally focused her research on stunting amongst

Mexican migrant farm workers' children in South Jersey, but home visits to these communities uncovered abnormally high levels of obesity among the children, particularly those aged two to five years. "It is easy to fall into the trap of citing just poor diet and lack of exercise;" rather, the source of their obesity has much to do with structural and cultural barriers. Cosminsky stated that many of the migrant families that worked on farms did not have access to the fresh foods they were picking; "yet, when they did have access -- the families did not know how to prepare many of these unfamiliar foods or have access to proper cooking or storage facilities."



Professor Tetsuji Yamada's (Economics-Camden) work which evaluates the effectiveness of

obesity-related state policies of New York on children and adolescents who are overweight (and at risk of being

overweight) also offered insights into structural constraints that impact the origins of obesity. Professor Yamada found that African American and Hispanic children exercise less, watch more hours of television, and are at a higher risk for obesity than their white peers. Analyzing these findings, Yamada argues that the geography of their neighborhoods has a profound effect: "African American and Latino children tend to reside in neighborhoods that are less safe, therefore they tend to stay inside and watch television rather than play outside." Professor Yamada also found that children's participation in afterschool/ weekend sports and access to health insurance help explain the disparities of obesity among African American, Latino, and white children.



Unlike the previous two panelists whose work unveiled structural discrimination,

Professor Deborah Carr's (Sociology-NB) work explored individual level discrimination. However, similar to Cosminsky's work, the research process itself helped expose new research directions. Professor Carr set out to find the impact of various levels of BMI (Body Mass Index) on experiences of perceived discrimination, yet her study unearthed provocative findings along racial lines on perceptions of discrimination. Counter to commonly held social assumptions, the stigma of being overweight is just as profound for black women as for white women. Obese white men, according to her study, report more frequent discrimination than obese black men. By contrast,

normal weight black men report more interpersonal discrimination than their heavier peers, and compared to white men of all sizes. She speculated as to what would explain these patterns, noting that the media often represents overweight black males as the friend and "good guy," as in *The Nutty Professor*. Audience members also speculated that perhaps middle-upper class social circles and workplace environments, where obese black men have historically been underrepresented, hold more stringent weight standards. Carr ended her talk by stating, "Race, gender, and class are cultural lenses that shape how we view weight." [Read Prof. Carr's article titled, "Perceived Interpersonal Mistreatment Among Obese Americans: Do Race, Class, and Gender Matter?" link:

http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~carrds/carr_etal_2008_obesity.pdf

ENFRANCHISED AND DISENFRANCHISED USES OF MEDIA

Shifts in political and social contexts have led to the creation of new uses and



new users of extant media. As panelist Dennis Kim-Prieto (Law Library-Newark) succinctly put it, "This panel represents media usage by both the disenfranchised, new and established immigrant groups, and perhaps the most enfranchised of all – lawyers." Drawing from his research on Spanish-English legal dictionaries, Kim-Prieto argues that the law is grounded in distinct assumptions according to jurisdiction, and that there is no single Latin American or

Spanish-speaking jurisdiction; hence, the current tools available to lawyers fail to translate legal terminology and concepts across jurisdiction. He brought to light the nuance of the term *derechos*, which is usually translated into English as "law," although the concept in Spanish most closely approximates the concept of "rights." Not simply a question of translation, the local meaning and use of legal terminology has real consequences for cross-jurisdictional understanding of these concepts deployed in legal texts, lawmaking, and rights making. Therefore, Kim-Prieto concludes that those lawyers with the capability to operate across legal jurisdictions without local mediators like informants are highly enfranchised and sought after.



Regina Marchi's research examines the intersections of politics, media, and culture, looking at how historically disenfranchised populations use traditional media, new media, and alternative media to communicate about political and social issues affecting them. In an overview of her research interests, she spoke about work she has done on the impact of new media technologies on the environmental justice struggles of working class and minority residents living next to Logan Airport; the connections between teen journalism training and youth civic engagement at a low power radio station in Boston; and Chicano activists' use of public art and ritual to counter racism. Dr. Marchi has recently written *Day of the Dead in the USA: The Migration and Transformation of a Cultural Phenomenon* (Rutgers Press in July 2009) about US Day of the Dead celebrations as vernacular media that communicate about Latino identity

and politics. Exploring the unexpected transformations that occur when this Latin American Indigenous practice is introduced to the US mainstream, the book examines the impact of the mass media, consumer culture, and globalization on the celebration, while providing insights into the power of public ritual and art as alternative media that help create community, transmit oppositional messages, and advance educational, political, and economic goals. This presentation led to a lively discussion on media use by historically enfranchised and disenfranchised populations.

DISPLACEMENT AND BELONGING



The panel problematized issues of belonging and displacement with the discussion of the relationship between movement (of

bodies) and social, geographic space. Allan Isaac's (American Studies/ English-NB) reading of *Paper Dolls*, a documentary on Filipino transgender caregivers in Israel, considers how the caregivers support the Israeli and Filipino economies, but remain largely absent politically from both places. With the naturalization and feminization of care as commodity, the documentary underscores how not only gender is performed but also how affective labor becomes itself a national performance. Meanwhile, in a discussion of her new book project *Coloniality of Diasporas*, Yolanda Martinez-San Miguel (Latino & Hispanic Caribbean Studies/ Comparative Literature-NB), studies women and men expelled from a Caribbean community as a result of what the community defines as sexual misconduct. Dr. Martinez-San Miguel redefines "sexile," a term coined by scholar Manuel Guzmán, to mean more than emigration of sexual minorities to include this new meaning of expulsion of sexual excess. The expanded definition of exile can be a dangerous move, but it connects sexual minorities with

other forms of sexual misconduct that can be crucial in the definition of a national community. Introducing his new project titled "Planet of Vapors: Natural Gas, Atlantic Islands, and the Environmental Imagination," David Hughes (Human Ecology/ Anthropology-NB) asks, "How do the extraction of natural gas and the insular landform - both, again, globalized in different ways - shape environmental imagination in and of Trinidad?" Hughes plans to examine historical and emergent forms of environmental consciousness and activism within a highly "anti-local," profoundly cosmopolitan context. Thus, the concept of movement, like the transportation panel, was highly contested.

BLURRING THE LINES: STUDENT INMATES

Scholars grappled with education as both a tool and a barrier to assisting juvenile offenders after involvement in



the judicial system. In the final panel of the day, J.C. Lore (Law-Camden), Co-

Director of the Children's Justice Clinic began his talk by asking "Where are all the white children and why do they get treated differently?" With his most recent book project titled: *The End of Innocence: The Story of Children Growing Old in Jail*, Professor Lore explores the origins and effects of being placed in, or more importantly, not placed in the Family Crisis Unit (FCU) has on a child's journey through the judicial system.

Lore stated, "When a child is in crisis he/she can be placed in either the Family Crisis Unit (FCU), dependency court [sometimes referred to as abuse and neglect], or juvenile delinquency court. Of all three options, FCU is preferable, as it does not stigmatize the child." However, he has found there to be an overrepresentation of white children in FCU.

Professor Don Roden (History-NB) who began as a volunteer reading tutor for the Mountainview Correctional Facility later established an institutional partnership with Rutgers and Project Inside. Roden's efforts enable former inmates to obtain college degrees by building skills for academic, career, and interpersonal development. One of the undergraduate students involved in this program sparked an interesting debate around "education as a correction to jail."

Moving beyond flat assumptions that higher education produces socially responsible citizens, Hughes offered Bernie Madoff as a vivid example to question uneven criminalization of highly educated white collar offenders versus the delinquent poor.



Professor Hirschfield (Sociology-NB)'s research treats the disproportionate arrest and confinement of minority juveniles as an independent variable. He studies its effects on educational attainment and school systems more broadly. His study of Chicago area schools shows that returning juveniles are placed back into the public school system, which often lacks the necessary resources to aid in students' transition. They are also concentrated in particular schools, which are continually disrupted by children cycling between schools and the justice system. Such patterns reinforce racial disparities in both school and criminal justice outcomes.

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.

CONCLUSION

The Annual Faculty Forum is a great opportunity for faculty to share work across disciplines and at various stages. At the Forum, connections across schools and disciplines are made in an effort to build new relationships and develop a strong intellectual community for those whose work engages topics of race and ethnicity. The CRE welcomes faculty to submit ideas for future programming on issues of or relating to race and ethnicity; you may contact us at raceethnicity@sas.rutgers.edu.

