Spring 2013 Colloquium Series

The UCSB Center for New Racial Studies is sponsoring an informal series of talks to facilitate productive scholarly relationships between UCSB faculty, policymakers, community members, and students interested in research and teaching on race and ethnicity. The series features scholarship from an array of methodological and epistemological traditions to provide a diverse perspective and encourage lively discussions, as well as interdisciplinary and collaborative work.

Thursday, April 18th, 1-2pm
North Hall 2206, Pellish Conference Room

Afro-Cuban Counterpoint: Race, Representation and Resistance in the Cuban Underground Hip-Hop Movement
Kiley Guyton Acosta, Ph.D. Candidate in Caribbean and Brazilian Literature at the University of New Mexico

Cuba has remained shrouded in mystery in the North American imaginary since Fidel Castro’s rise to power in 1959. Afro-Cuban Counterpoint: Race, Representation and Resistance in the Cuban Underground Hip-Hop Movement looks beyond picturesque images of colonial architecture in decadence, antique automobiles and the nostalgic sounds of son music to offer a glimpse of Afro-Cuban cultural resistance in the aftermath of Cuba’s economic crisis of the 1990s, deemed the “special period.” The dissolution of egalitarianism during the special period exacerbated socio-economic divisions along color lines and reawakened racial dynamics on the island reminiscent of the Batista era. Given the permanent prioritizing of the Marxist agenda, Afro-Cubans lack the political organization tools and discursive space to combat their marginalization. However in the late nineties, beneath the shadow of Che Guevara’s iconic portrait, teenage residents of Havana’s crumbling solares (housing projects) started an underground hip-hop revolution within the Cuban Revolution. In the face of state censorship, rap represents a powerful mouthpiece for Afro-Cuban youth to articulate the reality of discrimination within the totalitarian regime, describe the enduring impact of the U.S-imposed economic trade embargo on their everyday struggles, and share their tenuous dreams for the future with international audiences. This presentation focuses specifically on the deployment of resistance discourse in underground hip-hop as a strategy for critiquing racial (mis)representation in the cultural imaginary and for acknowledging the shared African heritage of Cuba and other former slave societies.

Wednesday, April 24th, 1-2pm
North Hall 2206, Pellish Conference Room

Conflicting Commitments: The Politics of Enforcing Immigrant Worker Rights in San Jose and Houston
Shannon Gleeson, Associate Professor of Latin American and Latino Studies (with an affiliation in Sociology), University of California-Santa Cruz

In this talk I examine how advocates are working to enforce the rights of Latino immigrant workers. Much of the research on rights implementation tends to focus on the role of state actors and the importance of bureaucratic discretion in activating formal rights. However, rather than view rights as self-propelled imperatives pre-determined solely by the law, my analysis highlights the complexity of the enforcement process and the variety of actors implicated in struggles for immigrant workers’ rights. My work hones in on the relationship between the federal and state labor standards enforcement apparatus, as well as local government actors, civic groups, and even consular representatives who play an especially important role in enforcing the rights of foreign nationals. I draw on the experience of advocates in San Jose, CA and Houston, TX, two traditional immigrant destinations with radically different policy structures and political cultures for enforcing immigrant worker rights. In particular, I emphasize the importance of strategic alliances in contexts where the usual suspects are absent or weak, and where alternative solutions become vital.