



IBEI RESEARCH SEMINAR

29 May 2015, 2pm
Room 24.023 – IBEI (Ground Floor)

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Racist Democracies: Ethnic Selection in the Immigration Laws of the Americas

The relationship between ideologies of racial difference and of rule by the people has been extremely complex. In its classical liberal guise, social analysts from Alexis de Tocqueville to Frances Fukuyama have considered democracy as incompatible with racism. From this perspective, racism and discriminatory practices are foreign elements to be worked out of the liberal body politic. Scholars have argued that the incompatibility between liberal democracy and racism extends to the selection of immigrants. U.S. based critical race theorists counter that democracy in its liberal variant, and racism are inherently connected in political philosophy and the practice of democracies. A third perspective shows that democracy and racism are distinct, co-existing traditions, but does not specify the conditions under which a particular tradition is more consequential. In its populist variant, democracy has also been difficult to explain. What, then, is the relationship between relationship of rule by the many and racism? Drawing on a study of immigration laws in 22 countries of the Americas from 1790 to 2010, this paper argues there is a historically persistent, but contingent relationship between racial selection of immigrants and political systems based on liberal-democracy or populism. While a return to legal ethnic selectivity is possible under circumstances that we identify, it is unlikely because of governments' embeddedness in an international system of sovereign nation-states that seek to avoid the humiliation of co-ethnics on a world stage.

Prof. David Cook

David Cook-Martín is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Grinnell College and director of its Center for International Studies. His work as a political sociologist focuses on understanding migration, race, ethnicity, law, and citizenship in an international field of power. He holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from UCLA, an MA in Sociology from the University of Houston, and B.A. from Wheaton College. He has also worked in the child welfare field as director of a multi-disciplinary nonprofit. David is a former Andrew W. Mellon Fellow in Latin American Sociology (UCLA), and a National Science Foundation postdoctoral fellow (UC Irvine). David is a member of the Scholars Strategy Network, an organization that disseminates research to improve policy and enhance democracy. During the academic year 2014-15 he is on research leave at the CSIC, Madrid.

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