

A Common Fund Proposal for the  
Center for the Study of Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Social Sciences  
(REGSS)

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This Common Fund proposal requests support for several activities of the Center for the Study of Race, Ethnicity and Gender in the Social Sciences (REGGS). The first part of the proposal outlines the current and planned activities of REGGS. The second part discusses the specific activities for which we seek support.

### Overview of REGSS

The Center for the Study of Race, Ethnicity and Gender in the Social Sciences (REGSS), established July 1, 2004, is an interdisciplinary center within the social sciences where scholars engaged in research in these areas can come together and engage each other through collaborative research, lectures, outside speakers, graduate student fellows, and visiting scholars. REGSS is crucial to the success of the Social Science Research Institute as these constructs—race, ethnicity, and gender—are constitutive to the social and political fabric of the United States as well as many other countries. As such, research in these areas needs to be encouraged and supported in the social sciences at Duke University.

In the United States, the salience of race, developed through the historically central white/black dichotomy, is manifest in all aspects of social life and political institutions. Yet, the changing context of the United States requires that we move beyond the historical understanding of race as one dominated by seeing the world solely in "black and white" terms. Latinos, Asians, American Indians, and other populations of color are now part of the construction of race in America and thus are increasingly an important topic of study in the social sciences.

A comparable dynamic is driving citizens in other parts of the world to see their nations in multi-racial terms. Countries that conceived of themselves as racially homogenous, whether correctly or not, increasingly perceive themselves as racially diverse. Concomitantly, many are experiencing increasing racism, racist activism, extremism, and violence. Northern Ireland, still struggling to contain sectarian violence, is seeing the emergence of racism and racist incidents toward the growing Indian, Pakistani, and Chinese populations (Hainsworth 1998). These centrifugal forces are increasingly familiar in other western and eastern European countries, Africa, Latin America, and Australia, to name a few.

Race, we recognize, is a socially constructed category that is drawn from the social, political, and cultural values of a particular context that is not static and is essentially dynamic. Race was constructed in the United States from its roots in slavery, transformed through a separate system of laws, and perpetuated most clearly through continued inequality. This American construction of race differs from its social construction in, to name but a few, Brazil, Ireland, South Africa, Australia, and, indeed, all other parts of the world. Each such construction generates different responses to common questions about race from social relations in general and political institutions in particular. In many cases, not the least of which is the U.S., the particular political institutions and the more general social relations are, in turn, altered by that construction of race.

Ethnicity is central to our vision of race in this contemporary, multi-racial, and comparative context. Like race, ethnicity is a complex concept. In most of the social science literature, "ethnicity" is not a synonym for "race." These two concepts are distinct, and their study has been rooted in different traditions. The study of ethnicity in a great deal of the social science literature is associated with white ethnic immigrants, pluralism, and assimilation. These concepts do not transfer easily to the study of race in America. The contemporary American context has moved beyond the melting pot to confront new combinations of both race and ethnicity. REGSS is concerned with ethnicity within racial minority groups, e.g., Mexican Americans as distinct from Cuban Americans, and the difference that ethnicity makes for a range of social science questions.

Once one moves beyond the American context, ethnicity becomes a much more potent concept. We define an ethnic group as one whose members *presume* common descent on the basis of language, religion, custom or physical similarity. Many countries experience ethnic tensions, which can lead to violence, e.g., Britain, India, Rwanda, Bosnia, Ireland, to name but a few. The American consideration of race, rather than ethnic politics of the cultural pluralism sort, is more similar to the study of ethnicity in its comparative context. But, of course, the

comparative study of ethnicity adds new questions and dimensions to reflect back on racial issues in America and vice versa.

Our view of gender is tied to the intersection and interaction with race and ethnicity. We are concerned with the lack of empirical attention given research on women of color in several of the social science disciplines. Some of the social sciences, such as psychology and those social scientists who study marriage and family, are more advanced in the empirical study of women of color than are others, such as political science, and, to a lesser degree sociology and economics. But even in the latter disciplines, the literature is not extensive. Most of the limited studies are on black women, but work on Latinas (eight references in JSTOR), Asian American women (1 reference in JSTOR), and American Indian Women (one article in a social science journal in JSTOR) is virtually nonexistent. In recent years, much attention has been given to the writings of black feminist scholars who use a phenomenological or literary criticism approach, and the declarations from these works have been taken, by some, as representing empirical realities. Despite the significance of these works, they should not be accepted as works of social science. REGSS plans to highlight the intersection and interaction of race and ethnicity with gender as an important area of research.

This conceptualization of race, ethnicity and gender implies that all of the social sciences at Duke have an important role to play in REGSS. We want to draw faculty associates, research fellows (graduate students) and post-docs from political science, sociology, economics, psychology, history, and public policy at Duke. REGSS' focus is on interdisciplinary work within the social sciences.

### **Activities of the Center for the Study of Race, Ethnicity and Gender in the Social Sciences**

We have an ambitious plan for REGSS, which may take several years to achieve fully. Components of REGSS include: 1) a speaker series; 2) Faculty Associates; 2) Graduate Fellows; 4) Undergraduate Fellows 5) research colloquia for graduate fellows and faculty associates; 6) one post-doctoral fellow per year; 7) faculty research grants that would be submitted jointly through the faculty person's department and REGSS; 8) linking REGSS to the Race, Ethnicity and Politics graduate concentration in political science; 9) REGSS Working Paper Series; and 10) a major conference on race, ethnicity and gender. Our intention is to make REGSS one of the premier centers of this type in the country.

1. Speaker series. We have initiated a REGSS Speaker Series. We intend to bring in a prominent scholar in the area of race, ethnicity and/or gender to REGSS in the fall and spring of each year. Our inaugural lecture in fall 2004 was given by sociologist Dr. Lawrence Bobo, formerly of Harvard University, now at Stanford. Bobo's talk was titled "Re-fashioning the Racial Divide." His lecture and visit overall was an overwhelming success. He drew faculty and graduate students from across the social sciences at Duke, but also drew faculty and graduate students from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The REGSS speaker for spring 2005 is sociologist Dr. Troy Duster of New York University and the University of California, Berkeley. Duster will speak on "'Buried Alive: The Concept of Race in the BioSciences, Clinical Medicine, and Forensics.'" His visit (March 3-4, 2005) is generating interest beyond the social sciences as many scholars in the Medical Center have expressed an interest in hearing him.

Our goal of the Speaker Series is to provide a forum in which REGSS scholars can interact with prominent scholars elsewhere working on similar questions. Our intent is to provide REGSS faculty and students with opportunities for serious intellectual exchanges with the best minds working in the areas of race, ethnicity and gender. While REGSS participants will be the primary audience, these lectures are open to the general university population as well faculty and students at other area universities.

2. Faculty Associates. Faculty within the social sciences whose work falls within these areas could apply to become Faculty Associates of REGSS. Our aim is to increase the interaction among faculty in the social sciences

interested is race, ethnicity and gender with the goal of creating collaborative research relationships. Duke University has a vibrant set of faculty working in these areas, but few know each other, and even fewer still have been able to develop a research relationship. Faculty Associates would receive research funds, office space (if needed), and the ability to use REGSS office space to house research teams for current projects. Professor Sherman James of the Sanford Institute of Public Policy is the first REGSS Faculty Associate. Our goal is to have between ten and twelve Faculty Associates initially with the hopes of adding more as REGSS secures additional funding.

3. Graduate Research Fellows. We envision REGSS as not only providing an opportunity for Duke social science graduate students to have a place to work, discuss their research interests, and to work on REGSS faculty research projects, but to use REGSS as a recruitment tool for graduate students of color in the social sciences. REGSS would like to be able to offer additional incentives to students of color interested in studying these areas with the hope that they will choose Duke for graduate training. We envision REGSS becoming an attractive addition for students interested in studying in these areas. Graduate Fellows would receive work space, e.g., shared office space, computer, telephone, and research funds for their projects.

We currently have three REGSS Graduate Fellows. At present, we have no money to provide research funds, but we have been able to provide them with work space. The Fellows are actively involved in the research of the Co-Directors and the Faculty Associate and participate in the programs of the Social Science Research Institute in general.

4. Undergraduate Fellows. We would eventually like to provide research opportunities and experiences for Duke Undergraduates. The REGSS Undergraduate Fellows Program would encourage and support original independent undergraduate research projects, as well as the active involvement of Duke Undergraduates in the research activities of REGSS Faculty Fellows. Undergraduate Fellows would be eligible to receive travel funds for attending a professional scholarly conference, manuscript preparation support, and a stipend in an amount consistent with university norms. In addition to research experience, we hope to encourage REGSS Undergraduate Fellows to consider graduate study in one of the social science which will increase the pool of graduate students and scholars interested in the study of race, ethnicity and gender.

5. Research Colloquia. We want to develop a regular lunch-time or late-afternoon/early evening research colloquia for Graduate Fellows and Faculty Associates. At present, REGSS faculty and graduate students participate in the Social Science Research Institute's lunchtime colloquia series and all three have presented their work.

6. REGSS Post-doctoral fellow. In order for REGSS to gain national prominence, we feel it is essential to bring in outside scholars to be a part of the Center. Our goal is to be able to have the resources to support a post-doctoral fellow in the next several years. Advertising the post-doctoral fellowship nationally will help us achieve that prominence. While Duke graduates would not be precluded from applying for the post-doc, our preference will be to bring in scholars trained at other institutions to spend a year at Duke and interact with the faculty in REGSS. Our thinking is that a post-doc will not only provide additional training for the individual, but would also contribute to the recruitment of potential faculty to Duke interested in these areas from across the social sciences. Spending a year as a post-doc might either convince someone to take an appointment at Duke, or might provide an opportunity for one of our social science departments to take a "look-see" at a promising scholar before making an offer. We believe that a REGSS post-doctoral fellowship will be beneficial to the social sciences in particular, and Duke University in general.

7. Faculty research grant. While REGSS would not give research grants per se, we eventually hope that REGSS faculty will submit grant proposals to outside agencies through REGSS as well as their home departments, as was recently done by Professor Sherman James, our first Faculty Associate. If REGSS can provide office space and support for research projects, we will be in a position to share in the overhead that comes back to the university. Our aim is to make REGSS a supportive research environment for social science faculty working in these areas and to generate some overhead in the process.

8. Linking REGSS to Race, Ethnicity and Politics Concentration. At the moment, political science is the only social science department at Duke with a graduate concentration in Race, Ethnicity and Politics. Our immediate goal is to link REGSS closely with students in this concentration through the research colloquia, outside speakers, and Graduate Fellows program. Our long-term goal is to increase the interdisciplinary aspect of the concentration to pull in more of the social science departments

9. REGSS Working Paper Series. We would like to start a REGSS Working Paper Series from the work of REGSS Faculty Associates and Graduate and Post-Doctoral Fellows. With this series, works in progress and other preliminary materials produced under the auspices of REGSS will be circulated and presented to stimulate discussion and critical comment. The ultimate goal is for these papers to be the basis of presentations at professional conferences and published studies in edited volumes or refereed scholarly journals.

10. Major conference on race, ethnicity and gender. We would like to organize a major conference on race, ethnicity and gender at Duke along the lines of the Stanford Conference on Race in 1999 and the Harvard ColorLines Conference in 2003. Participants would be drawn from across the country and would be interdisciplinary. A conference of this magnitude would be a major accomplishment for REGSS and cement our prominence as a major research center.

REGSS is interested in a full-range of questions, studied from a social science prospective, on the concepts of race, ethnicity and the intersection and interaction of race, ethnicity and gender.

### **Common Fund Proposal Request**

We have an ambitious plan for the Center for the Study of Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in the Social Sciences and we are off to a very good start. Our request of the Common Fund is to provide funding for four of the initiatives for the 2005-2006 academic year, with the possibility of renewal if we are successful —recruitment of Faculty Associates, research colloquia, continuation of the Speaker Series, and a major conference in Spring 2006.

#### 1. Recruitment and Support of Faculty Associates

In 2005-2006, we would like to issue a general call to social science faculty at Duke writ large to become Faculty Associates of REGSS. The notice will be sent to the general university community so that social scientists interested in issues of race, ethnicity and gender in Trinity College, the Nicholas School, Fuqua, Divinity, the Law School, and the Medical Center will be aware that they are welcome to participate in REGSS. While the selection process has not been finalized, we would ask interested faculty to write a short statement of how their work fits within the broad scope of REGSS, and how affiliation with scholars at REGSS will enhance the intellectual quality of their research. REGSS Faculty Associates would be given research funds to help facilitate their research.

We would also like to encourage REGSS Faculty Associates to locate their research projects and research teams in REGSS space. We want to create an environment where diverse scholars and their graduate students working on issues of race, gender and ethnicity in the social sciences will be able to interact on an ongoing basis. Moreover, we hope to foster interdisciplinary collaborative research activities.

#### 2. Research Colloquia

Once we have the Faculty Associates in place, we will be able to launch our monthly lunch time or late afternoon research colloquia. We hope the Faculty Associates will also bring their graduate students to REGSS, so the audience for the colloquia will extend beyond the Faculty Associates.

### 3. Continuation of Speaker Series

We plan to continue bringing in prominent figures in the study of race, ethnicity and gender in fall and spring. We will aim for speakers of the caliber of Lawrence Bobo and Troy Duster. On the top of our list is Dr. Claude Steele, a psychologist from Stanford University for either Fall 2005 or Spring 2006. Professor James is friends with Professor Steele and will help us in getting him to come to speak at REGSS. Others on our list include Professor James Sidanius, psychologist at UCLA, Professor Michael Dawson, political scientist of Harvard University, Professor Jennifer Hochschild, political scientist of Harvard University.

### 4. Voting Rights Conference, Spring 2006

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA) is up for reauthorization in 2007. In previous reauthorization debates (1970, 1972 and 1982) numerous questions are raised about the utility and feasibility of the VRA. For example, now that everyone has the right to vote, is the VRA still necessary? Or, should not the Southern jurisdictions be released from Section 5 preclearance? The debate on the reauthorization will take place in a Congress that is almost surely to be controlled by the Republican Party in 2007 with a Republican president, George W. Bush, in the White House, and the historical legacy of race in the United States will be front and center. It is not beyond the realm of imagination that the VRA might not be reauthorized. If this were to happen, what would this mean for democracy in general and citizens-of-color in particular?

Given the significance of the reauthorization, we would like REGSS to host a conference on the VRA and the implications for the nation of it is not renewed, as well as the compromises that might have to be made in order for it to be reauthorized. Scholars who work in the area of voting rights are drawn from a number of social science disciplines, e.g., sociology (Chandler Davidson, Rice University), history (Morgan Kousser, Cal Tech and Alexander Keyssar, Harvard University, formerly of Duke), political science (David Lublin, American University, Richard Niemi, University of Rochester, Bernard Grofman, UC, Irvine; Katherine Tate, UC, Irvine), law (Pamela Karlan, Stanford University, Jefferson Powell, Duke University), and several other disciplines.

Our tentative plans are to bring a dozen prominent scholars to campus to present papers and participate in roundtable discussions, but we also plan to issue an open solicitation to others to submit paper and panel proposals. The final product would be an edited volume on the VRA. Paula McClain along with Luis Fraga at Stanford University edit a book series on Race, Ethnicity and Politics for the University of Virginia Press and the acquisitions editor has expressed a strong interest in reviewing the volume that would result from the conference.

### Prospects for Future Funding

We intend to work the administrative staff in the Social Science Research Institute to identify potential foundation and federal agencies that might provide long-term funding for the Center for the Study of Race, Ethnicity and Gender in the Social Sciences. It might take us some time to obtain a permanent funding source, but we are determined to do so, as REGSS is an important component of the Social Science Research Institute, and an essential part of Duke University's ongoing intellectual interest in the study of race, ethnicity and gender.

### Reference

Paul Hainsworth (ed), *Divided Society: Ethnic Minorities and Racism in Northern Ireland*. (London: Pluto Press, 1998).