

Susana Peña

"Obvious Gays" and the State Gaze: Gay Visibility and Immigration Policy during the 1980 Mariel Boatlift



Tuesday, February 21, 2006
1:30 p.m.

McMaster Room (308)

Bowen-Thompson Student Union

How was gay visibility or "obvious" homosexuality used by Cuban gay immigrants?

How were their sexual identities and gender performances linked to forms of official identification in Cuba and the U.S.?

How did official INS policy affect the actual processing procedures of homosexual immigrants?

During the 1980 Mariel Boatlift, approximately 125,000 Cubans entered the United States, including homosexual men who lived through a particularly repressive era in Cuba. The Mariel gay men entered the U.S. precisely as immigration policy towards homosexuals was changing. Between 1965 and 1979, homosexuals were classified as "sexual deviates" and barred from entry to the U.S. A brief hiatus from medical exclusion followed. However, in September of 1980, the INS reinstated exclusion for people who made an "unsolicited, unambiguous admission of homosexuality" to INS personnel. This talk draws on archival research and interviews with Cuban American gay men to analyze the experiences of those who entered the U.S. during this period.

Susana Peña is an Assistant Professor in the department of Ethnic Studies at BGSU. Her research and teaching focus on the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. Currently an ICS fellow, she is completing a manuscript entitled *Oye Loca: The Making of Cuban American Gay Miami*. This book, an ethnographic study of Cuban American gay male culture in Miami, examines how narratives of Cuba, masculinity, and gender transgression structure Cuban American gay men's lives. Professor Peña received a post-doctoral fellowship from the Social Science Research Council's Sexuality Research Fellowship Program.

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