

New Jersey's history community is like the Republican Party.  
I don't recall now the exact moment the parallel struck me—and, no, I am not trying to start an argument. Well, at least not one about politics anyway.

# My History Too

GSL Explores the  
Intersection of Race,  
Gender, and Ethnicity  
with the New Jersey  
History Community.

Introduction  
by Gordon Bond

But the popular perception of the Grand Old Party is of being primarily comprised of rich old white men. Argue the point all you want, but a preponderance of pundits agree that it was an inability to connect with non-white Americans—especially the growing Hispanic community—that cost Mitt Romney, at least in some measure, his presidential bid in 2012.

Granted, the similarities falter quite a bit on the first and last adjectives and perhaps a bit on the second. Most of us will never be described as “rich”—at least not from working in a history profession. And we are much more ecumenical than we used to be when it comes to gender. While the average age of a room full of historians still tends to fall somewhere into the proverbial autumnal to winter range, there are certainly younger history geeks too.

All this got me thinking—assuming the trend continues, what will the strengthening influence and possible dominance of Hispanics in New Jersey mean for the history community?

So that leaves us with “white.”

I have attended enough history conventions and looked out into the faces of audiences at my talks to feel reasonably comfortable declaring that we are, on average, of the Caucasian persuasion.

What helped to trip up the GOP was the perceived homogeneity of its members in the face of a Hispanic community growing by leaps and bounds—and poised, by some estimations, to become a majority in America within a couple generations. Seeing the party flailing to find relevance in this new demography, it struck me that the history world sits in not all that dissimilar a spot.

Broadly speaking, both popular and academic history has been Eurocentric-leaning. It can feel as if New Jersey history—and American history in general—didn’t *really* start until Europeans discovered the place even existed. (The cursory introductory references to the Lenape notwithstanding.) Yet even within that conceit may be found striking variety. Travel around 18<sup>th</sup> century North America’s eastern seaboard and you’d be just as likely to hear French, German, Spanish, Dutch, Swedish, and other such tongues, as English. Relatively speaking, we’ve only just begun to include the African-American experience or pay heed to Native-American’s take on someone like Christopher Columbus’s *real* legacy.

All this got me thinking—assuming the trend continues, what will the strengthening influence and possible dominance of Hispanics in New Jersey mean for the history community? For someone recently arrived from, say Honduras, does U.S. history, let alone local, have relevance to them compared to that of their land of birth? What about their kids who are born here? What relationship does U.S. history have with their sense of national and cultural identities?

Not that this is a unique situation, of course. Immigrants have been coming here for over two centuries. New Jersey encompasses some sizeable East Indian populations, for example. Yet there is something unique about this particular wave. Demographers studying the latest U.S. Census data predict that if trends continue, “white” Americans will be a minority by 2050, with the Hispanic population seeing the greatest growth. This is the first time any group has been projected to challenge white cultural dominance.

The closest similar shift was the emergence of an increasingly empowered African-American demographic. A positive consequence of this on the history world has been an expansion of American history to include a deeper and more textured accounting of racial dynamics. African-American history is now a legitimate and distinct discipline. There are university departments and Barnes & Noble shelves dedicated to it. Women’s history too.

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But is this a good thing?

On the one hand, the history of groups previously ignored by the traditional hegemony are at last being included, forming a more complete and accurate narrative. On the other, some argue, by parsing out “black history” or “women’s history” we are ultimately just reinforcing the divisions of an unhealthy ‘us-and-them’ mindset. Does it make history more inclusive or more divisive?

And while we’re at it, another group to get their own university study departments and bookstore sections is the LGBT community. Is there such a thing as “gay history”? Or is it history made by people who happen to be homosexual?

These are complex and potentially controversial subjects. Over the next couple issues of Garden State Legacy, however, I propose to tackle them in a series of articles. This brief introduction piece is simply to whet appetites and get people thinking. If you would like to weigh in, please email me ([gordon@gardenstatelegacy.com](mailto:gordon@gardenstatelegacy.com)) and use the word “Inclusion” in the subject line. Let me know if I have permission to quote you and if there are any affiliations I should include when citing you.

Let the dialogs begin!

