

PSYC 416-010
BAMS 416-010
Psychological Perspectives on Black Americans
Spring 2009
Professor J.M. Jones
061 McKinly
TR 2:00-3:15

Office: 224 Wolf Hall(PSYC)
417 Ewing Hall(BAMS)
Office Hours: TU 3:30 - 4:30
Other times by appointment
Ph: (302) 831-2897
email: jmjones@psych.udel.edu

I. TEXT and COURSE APPROACH

- Jones, J.M. (1997) *Prejudice and racism, second edition*. New York: McGraw-Hill. (P&R PDF files will be emailed to you for selected chapters)
- Belgrave, F.Z. & Allison, K.W. (2006) *African American Psychology: From Africa to America*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. (AAP)
- McCall, N. (1994) *Makes me wanna holler: A young black man in America*. New York: Random House. (Holler)
- Dickerson, D.J. (2000) *An American Story*. New York: Anchor Books(AS).
- Obama, B.H. (2004) *Dreams from my father: A story of race and inheritance*. New York: Three Rivers Press.(Dreams)

This course could be titled "Black Psychology." Since the founding of the Association of Black Psychologists in 1969, and the publication of the first edition of Black Psychology (R.L. Jones, 1972), there has been growing a body of thought regarding how psychology helps us to understand the behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, culture, social organization and capabilities of persons of African descent. There are multiple perspectives on Black Psychology including questions about the role of African origins, the applicability of "European Psychology", the relevance of the scientific method to issues of concern to African Americans, the problem of racism and how much of the phenomena it explains, and so on. More recently, the issues of Black Psychology are broadened by the concerns for "multiculturalism" or "cultural Diversity." How does the historical "Black-White" paradigm contribute to or change as a result of a growing emphasis on Multiculturalism?

The foundation of this course is psychology, which can be defined as the study of human behavior. Black psychology, then, is the study of the behavior of people of African descent. What do we mean by study? For psychology, study means the systematic, analytic approaches to understanding human(read African-American) behavior. This approach is often "scientific" but always analytical and systematic. So we will use the tools of psychological method, broadly defined, to understand the behavior of African-Americans.

Part One: Psychology of Racism

A critical aspect of the psychology of African Americans must necessarily involve "Racism." That is an important determinant of the behavior of African-Americans. But to address issues of racism, we must necessarily concern ourselves with the behavior of Whites (hence to some extent we will be concerned with "White Psychology.") and the interactions between Blacks and Whites. Racism is a loaded concept, and most people accused of it, deny it vehemently. Those who feel harassed or disadvantaged by it, find it a compelling explanation for many of their life experiences. However we may have diverse vantages on racism, the facts are that racist beliefs and actions are fundamental to America's history, and thus continues to influence contemporary events in subtle and not so subtle

ways. We will try to unravel some of these complexities in our readings and discussions.

In line with this aspect of the course, we are interested in making our discussions as relevant as possible to real world events. What is more “real world” than the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States? We will have plenty of opportunity to discuss this meaning in a variety of contexts. One of the debated questions concerns whether his election signals that we have entered a *Post-Racial* America. What does this mean for Blacks, America and the world? A day-long symposium on this subject has been organized by Black American Studies and will occur on Friday February 27th. You are all invited to attend all or as much of it as you can. A keynote address is being delivered by Jabari Asim, author of the new book *What Obama Means*. These matters can be addressed intellectually and should and will be. But there are reasons for us to also address the real world problems that surround us. Therefore, we will spend time in this class discussing issues of race relations generally, and as situations arise, race-related issues that evolve on the UD campus. Does racism exist on this campus? If so what is the “evidence?” We are an empirical science, so we want to evaluate the “data” and try to understand it and what it means. There are some very difficult issues associated with race and African-American experience and the psychological understanding and knowledge of all of this. My book is widely regarded as one of the major assessments of race and racism in America. So, we will spend time at the outset trying to understand racism.

We will also read selected chapters from *African American Psychology*. This is a basic text and covers in survey form, various topics of relevance to the course.

Part Two: Psychological Concepts and Principles

Research in Black psychology considers many different concepts that describe the psycho-social challenges faced by black people in America and around the world. The challenge stems directly and indirectly from racism and oppression and racial discrimination. That is not, however, the entire story. There are important cultural considerations that emerge from aspects of African origins, as well; as the cultural evolution of blacks over the past several centuries. This section of the course will examine specific concepts discussed in the scientific literature, and the research and theorizing that has been done to demonstrate their relevance to black lives and culture. Several of the concepts we will examine in no particular order are: Racism, Racial sensitivity, Racelessness, Coping and Adaptation, Stereotype threat, Double-consciousness, Racial Identity, perceived discrimination, well-being and mental health, Cultural identity and Group solidarity, attributional ambiguity, self-esteem, authenticity standards for blackness, Out-group comfort, cultural mistrust and so on.

Part Three: Applying Psychological Principles in Black Lives: Psychology of choice, coping and adaptation

Psychological science deals with statistical averages and probability. Sometimes, we have to step back from the extrapolations of empirical science and ask, what is going in people's minds? Why do they behave as they do? We may form hypotheses from these observations and try to test them later in a scientific way. This part of the course will step outside the laboratory and ask some basic questions of the lives of some individual black people, and specifically, to what extent and how do the psychological concepts we examine in Part Two apply to individual black lives? What are the challenges in their lives and why do they behave as they do? Three books guide us in this analysis. The first, *Dreams from my father*, chronicles the evolution of racial identity, challenges of being an African (father Obama was a Muslim from Kenya) and American (mother Obama was a white woman who grew up in Kansas). We are afforded the amazing historic opportunity to witness the first African American president of the United States of America. The second is an autobiographical account by Nathan McCall of growing up black and male in Virginia c. 1975, *Makes me wanna holler*. Nathan is a journalist and writer, who takes us through his adolescent life in urban Virginia and through his young adulthood in Norfolk and, Atlanta and finally in Washington DC. His life is one of choices (some good and some bad), difficult challenges and his struggle to adapt and adjust and carve out a viable and honorable life. The third is an autobiographical account of a black female growing up in East St. Louis c. 1980, *An American Story*. Debra is also a journalist and writer, and also holds a J.D. from Harvard Law School (like Obama). She describes growing up very poor in St. Louis, and how she acquired her strong conservatism and at times anti-black racism. She grew up aware of racism, but did not see it as the focal point or an obstacle in her life. She was highly successful and struggled mightily with gender and class issues. All three come out in very different places, though all are successful. We will compare and contrast their experiences and try to understand their psychological reactions, the foundation for their choices, and the major influences in their lives,

using the psychological principles and concepts discussed in section two and others that might seem applicable. We thus expand on our understanding of the psychological perspectives on African Americans.

Part Three: Class Presentations

I believe it is important for you to invest some personal capital (time, energy, emotion) in some aspect of the content of this course, and to share that investment with the class. So, in teams of three (3) you will organize and present a project to the class. These presentations will cover **the entire class period** and thus should be informative, well organized and presented (PowerPoint should be used for any visual material), and interactive as appropriate and necessary. A list of potential topics will be provided, but you may develop one on your own.

Finally, we will undertake a variety of exercises in writing and analysis, as well as discussion and problem solving. The course is a seminar on a very important topic. Therefore, we will combine readings, discussions, presentations and writing in an interactive way. Each member of the class is expected to participate in this process and contribute knowledge, perspective and ideas. Each member of the class will evaluate the presentations and each member of the presentation group will evaluate each other group member.

Learning Goals:

1. How to analyze the complexity of black psychology in achieving psychological well being in a racialized society.
2. Through class discussions, learning about how people from different ethnic/racial/cultural and gender groups think about relationships with blacks, and how Blacks think about other groups.
3. Learn how to apply psychological theories to black cognitive emotional and behavioral processes.
4. Read autobiographical accounts of Black men and women to understand how life decisions are made and what environmental effects shape them.
5. Self-reflection about the significance of race through keeping daily diary and writing a paper based on diary entries.
6. Develop oral presentation skills through group presentations.

Class Assignments

Reaction/Analysis Papers [Total of 5—maximum of 75 points]

A reaction paper is a short essay of no **more than three pages** in which you respond critically and thoughtfully to the assigned readings. Each thought paper identifies the readings to be addressed and the set of issues or perspectives that your essay should touch on. You are free to develop your papers as you see fit and are not expected to simply summarize the readings. Rather, I want you to offer some critical analysis or interpretations of the material (you can bring class discussions and any other material in as well, including personal experience). A reaction paper is **NOT** a summary of the readings. I am interested in your **critical** judgments and **evaluations** particularly any **extrapolation of psychological principles**, processes or consequences. You may use personal experience or current events to **illustrate** your points or establish a premise you wish to explore. You may wish to criticize or object to an argument, or embrace or amplify on it. It is really up to you. All papers must be typed, and include references as appropriate. They are due as noted on the attached class activities sheet. Each paper should have Cover page with:

Your name:

Reaction Paper #

Date:

Title:

The paper begins on the next page. Cover page is not included in page count

Number the pages!!!!

First paper due February 17th

Critical comparative analysis of *Dreams for my father*, *Makes me wanna holler* and *An American Story*—(85 points)

These autobiographical books offers several perspectives on psychological development, criminal justice, close relationships, racism, sexism (and their intersection) achievement motivation, beliefs and values, socialization, self-esteem and racial identity, among others. For this assignment, you are to develop one or more psychological themes that the books explore and write a **7-10-page paper** that illustrates the psychological issues, how they are manifested in the books (in Nathan's life) and what the effects are. What are the lessons learned regarding the psychological mechanisms that play a key role in African American experience? **Due April 14th**

Daily Diary Paper—120 points

Each student is required to keep a diary of events, observations that reflect some aspect of race relations that directly or indirectly involve African Americans. The entries are up to you, but should provide a running summary of your experiences of the relevance and nature of race. Of particular importance is observations that show the psychological effects that race can have in America. This diary **MUST** be kept throughout the course, but a paper based on your diary will be due **May 5th**. This paper will be a critical assessment of "psychological perspectives on Black Americans" as chronicled in your diary entries and as related to readings for the course. The paper must combine entries and readings to be successful. It should develop a "point of view" and hypothesis if you will, and analyze it by using the diary entries as data, and the class reading as theory. Papers should be 6-8 pages, and use APA style to the maximum extent possible (regarding, headings, format for references, etc.). The diaries **MUST** be handed in with the papers.

Class Presentation (100 points)

I will assign groups on March 26th. Each group will select a topic and submit a proposal for their presentation. These are due **April 9th**. The proposal should include a cover page that gives the title; the names of the group members and their email addresses. The text of the proposal follows (1 page) and includes a summary of the basic theme of the presentation, the points to be made and the conclusion you hope to draw. Finally, an annotated outline (1 page) of topics to be presented and a selective reading list that goes with each topic. I will meet with each group for 20 minutes to go over the presentation proposal and provide feedback on **April 14th**.

SOME POSSIBLE TOPICS:

Social/Community/Family Process

- ◆ Neighborhood/community influences on adolescent behavior
- ◆ Family dynamics and racial socialization
- ◆ Socio-economic class
- ◆ Acculturation

Psychological Process(any of the concepts from Part Two)

- ◆ Mechanisms of coping and Adaptation
- ◆ Racial identity
- ◆ Bi-racial influences(black + "x")
- ◆ Gender relationships
- ◆ Resilience, strengths in the face of adversity
- ◆ Achievement, what facilitates and what inhibits it?
- ◆ Self-esteem and its precursors and consequences

- ◆ Race and IQ

Cultural processes

- ◆ TRIOS
- ◆ Hip hop Culture and psychological effects

Health and behavior

- ◆ discrimination and diagnosis, treatment;
- ◆ cardiovascular consequences of racism
- ◆ Health and health disparities

Original Research project

- ◆ Racial attitudes
- ◆ Intergroup relations
- ◆ Self-enhancement and self-projection processes
- ◆ Self-esteem; resilience; coping

Above are several ideas you may consider in determining your group presentation topic. Your topics need to be developed so as to reflect a fundamentally psychological analysis. The core of your argument should be empirical (i.e., represent research published in scientific journals), but may be illustrated in a variety of ways from newspapers, video clips, surveys, class activities and so forth. Your presentation should be well structured and developed to make a point! Have a goal and try to reach it with analysis and illustration. Be bold, take a stand and try to back it up. *Ad hominem* arguments won't work though; they need to be substantive, logical, and supported with data where possible. You should plan your presentation around PowerPoint, and augment as needed with other means. Do NOT write something and READ it. You may write it but DON'T read it! At the time of presentations, the following should be handed in to Dr. J.

1. Cover page with title and names of presenters
2. Annotated outline of presentation that includes summaries of the main points in the outline.
3. A complete bibliography of all reference materials.
4. Any handouts from the presentation

Presentations will begin on **April 28th and continue through May 19th** (assumes 7 groups. Will start earlier or go longer if more groups)

Final word: All non-presenting class members will evaluate each presentation. A form for this process will be provided. You are still expected to attend class and participate in these presentations whether or not you are presenting that day.

Term Paper (75 points)

Term paper of 7-10 pages will be due Tuesday following the last week of classes (**May 26th**). This paper will be a systematic analysis of psychological concepts (e.g., **racial identity, racial socialization, adaptation and coping mechanisms or culture, and others we have discussed**) in Black Psychology. Your analysis may take two forms: (1) an analytical literature review in which you summarize several articles and draw conclusions about the psychological dynamics they entail, or 2) develop a research project that explores a specific topic in Black Psychology. This research project need not be actually carried out, but its main features should be developed, (hypotheses, methods, and expected results). In either case, a **minimum** of 12 references should be used.

- (1) **an analytical literature review in which you summarize several articles and draw conclusions about the psychological dynamics they entail**

The point of this paper is to select a topic, develop an idea that you would like to pursue, and write a review and analysis of it, weaving in the research literature, theory, and where applicable, public

policy and interventions. Many of you have proposed that problems of identity, education, social class, will only be alleviated if.... Now you have a chance to articulate what the “if...” is about. Develop an idea, flesh it out, search for supporting documentation from the research literature and make the case.

(2) Develop a research project that explores a specific topic in Black Psychology [the research is not actually done, but is developed and presented as if it had been].

Again, pick a topic and develop a specific hypothesis that can be tested by research. Your assignment is to develop the research protocol from beginning to end; beginning with a literature review that lays out the problem, what we know about it, what issues it raises and what research is needed. It should end with a statement of the research hypothesis you plan to test and the review should make it a reasonable thing to study. You then need to design the research project and spell it out in detail. This is done in the Methods section as you are familiar with from Psyc310; 312; 340 and 390 and other places. You then must provide statistical tests of the “results.” You do not have to actually conduct the study, but you will generate data of the sort you expect you would get if the hypotheses were true and the data supported it, OR, if the hypothesis was false and the data did not support it. Your results section should clearly evaluate the hypothesis given the data and illustrate the results with tables and/or charts. Finally in your discussion section, you will put it all in context, what did you find, what is its significance, what are some limitations, what is the next step? You must use APA Journal style in writing this and there is a book on reserve in Morris library under 416 that will help you. If you don’t use this book, it will hurt you, trust me.

NB: The APA style is also to be used for the first option, although you will not have a Method, Results and Discussion section. It will be a bit different and I suggest you look at any article in the Psychological Bulletin to get an idea of the ways in which headings are used.

The papers are due May 26th by noon to be handed in to Edie Havens in the Psychology office, or in my mailbox in 201 Wolf Hall.

Class Participation--(45 points)

All students are expected to participate in class discussion. All students are expected to attend each class. From time to time we will assign discussion leaders to help facilitate our discussion of the material, but all students are expected to have read the material and be engaged in discussing it. Two unexcused absences are all that are allowed. **Each unexcused** absence beyond two (2) **will reduce your final grade by one half grade.**

Extra Credit--(maximum of 30 points)

1. Jabari Asim -February 27, 12:00p. Location to be announced. Attend and write a 2-3 page summary **and analysis** of his lecture.(5 points) attend all-day symposium and include in paper additional 5 points
2. African American Art Exhibition: "Jacob Lawrence in Print 1963-2000" Mechanical Hall-- Attend and write a 2-3 page summary **and analysis** of the exhibition .(10 points)
3. Gwen Ifill, Author of *BreakThrough: Black Politics in the Age of Obama*, Thompson Hall, Roselle Center, Q&A 3:00; lecture 4:00. Attend and write a 2-3 page summary **and analysis** of her lecture.(10 points)

II. **GRADING (See Course Projects for details of these assignments.)**

Reaction papers-75 pts	
Class Participation--45 pts	
Critical comparative Analysis of McCall/Dickerson/Obama books	85
Daily Diary paper	120
Class Presentation	100
Term Paper	75
Total	500

Course grade = 500-450 = A/A-; 449-400 = B+/B/B-; 399-350 = C+/C/C-; 349- 300 = D; 250 and less = F.