

## History of Psychology: Racism and Colonial Power

PSYC 115/HIST 419/HSBM 287

Spring 2025

### Meeting Information

MW 2:30-3:45pm

Location: WALL53 AUD - 53 Wall Street AUD

### Instructor

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### Course Description

This course examines the history of psychology with a focus on racism and colonial power embedded in the “mind sciences.” Students will grapple with readings which prompt them to think critically about the past and present of psychology and the ways in which systems of empire, race, gender, and class inequality interact with major institutions, systems, and their own research practices. Students will study the historical relationship between the “mind sciences” and the intertwined systems/institutions of white supremacy/racial hierarchy, cisheteropatriarchy, capitalism, empire, and colonialism from the 17th century to the present. Students will also examine the role some psychologists and related scientists and scholars have played in challenging and resisting those same intertwined systems and institutions. This course is interdisciplinary in that, in addition to studying works by psychologists, students will study, analyze, and critique works in other fields – such as history, Indigenous studies, anthropology, Black studies, sociology, ethnic studies, postcolonial studies, etc. – which are relevant to understanding the historical development of the psychological sciences.

### Learning Objectives

- Gain a deeper understanding of the historical context in which the psychological sciences developed, and the relevance of that context to present-day institutions and policies.
- Increase historical consciousness toward 1) more effectively confronting the injustices and inequalities embedded in the sciences, and 2) developing research practices which challenge rather than reinforce or replicate systemic inequalities.
- Develop a greater understanding of diverse points of view on the role of the psychological sciences in society that run counter to pervasive institutional narratives and carceral logics.
- Sharpen skills in reading, interpretation, research, critical thinking, and communication.

## Required Materials

Students are not required to purchase any texts for this course. Texts are either provided on Canvas, as links in the syllabus, or through the Yale library website as directed in the syllabus.

## Grading

Participation: 20%

Reading & Reading Responses: 55%

In-class Assignments: 25%

**Participation** partly means being in attendance. If you are not in class, you are not participating. I understand that life happens, so I allow up to two unexcused absences without it hurting your participation grade. Beyond that, unexcused absences will decrease your participation grade. Second, it means being actively engaged in class by showing up prepared and having done the reading, paying attention during lectures, and participating in classroom discussions and activities when relevant. Students who consistently show up for class, keep up with the reading/reading responses, and are engaged in class tend to do well overall. Those three activities – being engaged in class, reading thoughtfully, and keeping up with the reading responses – are where most of the learning happens and tend to shape how much students get out of the class.

### **Reading/Reading Responses:**

Beginning in **week 3**, you will submit one-paragraph reflections for each of the week's readings. This is due on Canvas **every Tuesday by 11:59pm**. I will explain more about this assignment in class.

You will notice that this is the largest chunk of your grade. This is where a lot of the intellectual work happens. By design, it is not overly time-consuming, stressful, or difficult, but it does require consistency and thoughtful attention. If you give this part of the course consistent, thoughtful attention – combined with good attendance and participation – you will learn A LOT this semester.

## Technology Policy

Checking social media, taking phone calls, texting, and other distracting uses of computer technology during class is strictly prohibited. Cellphones will be silenced during class. Smartphones, tablets, and laptops are only allowed for bringing up readings that are being discussed in class, note-taking, and other relevant classroom activities. Unless you have received clear permission from the instructor beforehand, **audio and/or video recording in class is strictly prohibited**. This is to maintain a classroom atmosphere conducive to teaching, learning, and discussion. Recording your instructors, TAs, and/or fellow students during class without their consent or knowledge is a serious violation and will be treated as such.

## Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty and plagiarism will not be tolerated. They can easily result in an automatic failing grade and even dismissal from the university. Presenting other people's work, words, and ideas as your own, not crediting your sources, cheating, fabricating data, dishonestly using AI for writing assignments, knowingly spreading false information, altering evidence, and other forms of academic dishonesty erode your moral integrity and intellectual credibility. In this age in which entire industries and political careers are built on the peddling of misinformation and conspiracy theories which corrupt and cheapen the public sphere, asserting the values of honesty, integrity and transparency is urgent.

## Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging

This class consists of students from a wide diversity of backgrounds and experiences. Behaviors or remarks that disparage or target another student's race, disability, gender, age, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, immigration status, or religious identity will not be tolerated. Targeting and harassment of any form against other students, the teaching fellow, guest presenters, or the instructor will not be tolerated. This classroom will not be a hostile learning environment. Students who cannot respect this policy will be ejected from this course. There are also campus resources that facilitate and support diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, such as [Yale's Office of Diversity and Inclusion](#), [Belonging at Yale](#) Initiative, [Office of Institutional Equity & Accessibility](#), and [Cultural Centers](#).

## Accessibility

I am committed to creating a course that is inclusive in its design. If you encounter barriers, please let me know immediately so that we can determine if there is a design adjustment that can be made or if an accommodation might be needed to overcome the limitations of the design. I am always happy to consider creative solutions as long as they do not compromise the intent of the assessment or learning activity. You are also welcome to contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) to begin this conversation or to establish accommodations for this or other courses. I welcome feedback that will assist me in improving the usability and experience for all students.

## Student Financial Support for Classroom or Other Essential Items

The Yale College Dean's Office provides [support for First-Generation Low-Income \(FGLI\) students](#) in need of laptops, winter coats and other essentials. Additionally, Yale provides a funding portal, [Safety Net](#), for emergencies and unexpected expenses. Yale supports undocumented students on campus and [more information can be found here](#).

## Writing Support

The Yale College [Writing Center](#) offers a variety of resources, including writing tutoring services, available to all students looking for support as they complete writing tasks during their time at Yale. If you are struggling with writing assignments, or simply want to improve your writing, please take advantage of the Writing Center's resources.

## Yale Mental Health and Counseling

Yale Mental Health and Counseling offers treatment to students who would like to pursue formal therapy in a clinical setting. Students can always call (203) 432-0290 during regular business hours to schedule appointments. They can also call that same number any time, day or night, to speak to a clinician immediately.

## Yale College Community Wellness Specialists

Community Wellness Specialists are available to meet in the residential colleges with students who want to work on practical strategies for overall well-being such as developing a good sleep schedule, healthy eating and exercise, holistic time management, goal setting, and finding balance. They are part of Yale College's Student Affairs Office and work together with heads, deans, first-year counselors, and peer liaisons as members of the residential college's support team. The tools and approaches they offer can be used alongside therapy or on their own. The YC<sup>3</sup> specialists can also connect students to other resources throughout the university. They can be reached through this email:

[community.wellness.specialists@yale.edu](mailto:community.wellness.specialists@yale.edu)

## Trans & Nonbinary Resources

This page provides an [overview of resources and services](#) available to transgender, gender nonconforming and gender questioning undergraduate, graduate, and professional students at Yale University. And this link is for [on-campus and local organizations and resources](#) for transgender and nonbinary students. You can filter by audience and resource type. Any user with a NetID can suggest updates to an existing resource via the links on the resource's page or recommend a resource be added to the directory!

## Land Acknowledgement

The following statement is approved Yale University language for documents that include a land acknowledgement statement. In addition to paying attention to what this statement rightly acknowledges, I encourage students to think about what important points might be missing from this statement, and why certain points may not be included in university approved language.

Yale University acknowledges that indigenous peoples and nations, including Mohegan, Mashantucket Pequot, Eastern Pequot, Schaghticoke, Golden Hill Paugussett, Niantic, and the Quinnipiac and other Algonquian speaking peoples, have stewarded through generations the lands and waterways of what is now the state of Connecticut. We honor and respect the enduring relationship that exists between these peoples and nations and this land.

## Extra Credit Opportunities

Students may earn extra credit equal to one reading response assignment by attending talks, presentations, or other extracurricular events and activities that are relevant to the course material, writing up a one-page reflection on the event or activity, and reporting back to the class about it. Most PSYC department and HIST talks and events are fair game. Other departments and programs – such as WGSS, ER&M, African American Studies, etc. – and several student organizations (some of which you may be a member of) also often sponsor talks and events that are fair game. There are also often events in the wider community, off campus, that are fair game. When in doubt about if a talk, presentation, event, or activity might count for an extra credit opportunity, just ask. Part of the purpose of offering this extra credit opportunity is to encourage students to participate in the intellectual and cultural life of the University and wider community. Community participation is something that will enhance your life, help you develop into better scholars and thinkers, and become better members of society with a larger understanding of the world!

## Course Schedule

### Week 1

JAN 13: Introduction

**“In-class” assignment** (due Monday, Jan 22): You will have to do a little bit of digging on your own for this. I will give you each a notecard to use for this. Write down one *specific* example (there are many possible examples) of how Yale University has directly benefited from – or was directly intertwined with – slavery, racism, and/or colonialism. We will discuss your findings on Monday, Jan 22. I will explain this more in class.

JAN 15: Introduction continued

## Week 2

JAN 22: What do racism and colonial power have to do with Yale?

**"In-class" assignment discussion:** We will have an in-class discussion about the examples you wrote on your notecards

JAN 24: Present-day issues of racial diversity in psychology

**Reading:** Steven O. Roberts, "[Dealing with Diversity in Psychology: Science and Ideology](#)," (Dec. 2, 2022) 1-23. Use the link or access the pdf on Canvas.

## Week 3

JAN 27: Ignacio Martín-Baró and Liberation Psychology

**Reading:** Ignacio Martín-Baró, "Toward a Liberation Psychology," in *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, pp. 17-32. Pdf on Canvas.

JAN 29: Psychology, the State, and Empire in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Focus: Torture and the "War on Terror"

**Reading:**

1. Infographic, [The Torture Architects](#). Pay special attention to the "CIA Contract Psychologists" section.
2. "[Open Letter to the American Psychological Association & the Psychological Community by the American Middle Eastern/North African \(MENA\) Psychological Network](#)." Use the link or access the pdf on Canvas.
3. Browse "[Timeline of APA Policies & Actions Related to Detainee Welfare and Professional Ethics in the Context of Interrogation and National Security](#)". Note I wrote "browse" this. You do not need to read it in its entirety, as, with all the links it includes, it is a ton of information. Browse it to get a sense of what it covers.
4. **Not required reading**, but I'm including it here FYI because it is cited in the other readings: the "[Hoffman Report](#)." Use the link or access the pdf on Canvas.

## Week 4

FEB 3: What is race and how did the concept of race as we know it develop?

**Reading:**

1. Tukufu Zuberi, *Thicker Than Blood: How Racial Statistics Lie*. Read from the introduction to the end of Part I: pp. xv-26. Pdf on Canvas.
2. Mackenzie Coolie, [For Derby Day, a Note of Caution About Horses and "Races"](#).

FEB 5: *limpieza de sangre*

**Reading:** Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, chapter 2: "Culture of Conquest." PDF on Canvas

## Week 5

FEB 10: Settler Colonialism

**Reading:** Dunbar-Ortiz, chapter 3: "Cult of the Covenant"

FEB 12: Settler Colonialism

**Reading:** Dunbar-Ortiz, chapter 8: "Indian Country"

## Week 6

FEB 17: Settler Colonialism

**Reading:** Dunbar-Ortiz, chapter 11: “The Doctrine of Discovery”

FEB 19: Settler Colonialism

**Reading:**

1. Patrick Wolfe (2006) “Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native,” *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8:4, 387-409. Access this article through the Yale library website.
2. Steven Salaita, [“Playing Indian” and the US Colonial Imagination](#), University of Minnesota Press Blog, March 16, 2017.
3. **Optional Reading:** Not required, but if you have the time and the interest, listen to the *Red Nation Podcast* episode [“What Oppenheimer left out w/ Beata Tsosie-Peña and Tina Cordova.”](#) It is about an hour and a half long.

### Week 7

FEB 24: Colonial Trauma

**Reading:**

1. Mitchell, T., Arseneau, C., & Lecturer, D. T. (2019). Colonial Trauma: Complex, continuous, collective, cumulative and compounding effects on the health of Indigenous peoples in Canada and beyond. *International Journal of Indigenous Health*, 14(2), 74-94. Access this article through the Yale library website.
2. Fryberg, S. A., & Eason, A. E. (2017), “Making the Invisible Visible: Acts of Commission and Omission,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 26(6), 554–559. Access this article through the Yale library website.
3. Zack Stanton Q&A with psychologist Stephanie Fryberg, [How Native American Team Names Distort Your Psychology](#), Politico, July 16, 2020.
4. Fryberg, S., Markus, H., Oyserman, D., & Stone, J. (2008). Of Warrior Chiefs and Indian Princesses: The Psychological Consequences of American Indian Mascots. *Basic & Applied Social Psychology*, 30(3), 208–218. Access this article through the Yale library website.

FEB 26: In-class film viewing: *In Whose Honor?*

**Reading:**

1. Zack Stanton Q&A with psychologist Stephanie Fryberg, [How Native American Team Names Distort Your Psychology](#), Politico, July 16, 2020.
2. Fryberg, S., Markus, H., Oyserman, D., & Stone, J. (2008). Of Warrior Chiefs and Indian Princesses: The Psychological Consequences of American Indian Mascots. *Basic & Applied Social Psychology*, 30(3), 208–218. Access this article through the Yale library website.

### Week 8

MAR 3: Capitalism and slavery

**Reading:** Beckert and Rockman, *Slavery’s Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development*, “Introduction,” 1-27. PDF on Canvas.

MAR 5: Calibrated torture

**Reading:** *Slavery’s Capitalism*, chapter 1: “Toward a Political Economy of Slave Labor: Hands, Whipping-Machines, and Modern Power.” PDF on Canvas.

### Week 9

MAR 24: Psychopathologizing resistance

**Reading:** Bob Eberly Myers II, “Drapetomania,’: Rebellion, Defiance, and Free Black Insanity in the Antebellum United States.” Read the Abstract, p. ii-iii, and the preface “How Defiance Becomes Disease,” p. vii-xv. PDF on Canvas.

MAR 26: Robert Guthrie’s important contribution to the history of psychology

**Reading:** Robert Guthrie, *Even the Rat Was White: A Historical View of Psychology*, 2nd Edition (Boston: Pearson, 2004). Read the Preface to the Second Edition, p. xiii-xvii, and chapter 1: “‘The Noble Savage’ and Science.” PDF on Canvas.

### Week 10

MAR 31: Psychology and Racism

**Reading:** Guthrie, *Even the Rat Was White*, chapter 2: “Brass Instruments and Dark Skins.” PDF on Canvas.

APR 2: So-called “intelligence”

**Reading:** Jean-Claude Croizet, “The Racism of Intelligence: How Mental Testing Practices Have Constituted an Institutionalized Form of Group Domination.” PDF on Canvas

### Week 11

APR 7: Resistance to the notion of “intelligence”

**Reading:** W.E.B DuBois, “Race Intelligence,” and June Jordan, “A Poem About Intelligence for My Brothers and Sisters.” PDF on Canvas.

APR 9: “Intelligence,” and Eugenics

**Reading:**

1. John Jackson, “Arthur Jensen, evolutionary biology, and racism,” *History of Psychology*, July 28, 2022. There is a Pdf on Canvas, or you can access the article through the Yale library website.
2. **Optional Reading:** Not required, but if you have the time and interest, browse the Cummings Center for the History of Psychology’s collection, [Exploring Heredity: Race, Eugenics, and the History of Intelligence Testing](#).

### Week 12

APR 14: Eugenics and Yale

**Reading:**

1. Browse the [Eugenics and its Afterlives](#) website.
2. Neil Thomas Proto’s chapter, “The Darkest Aura and Its Reach,” from the book *Fearless: A. Bartlett Giamatti and the Battle for Fairness in America*. PDF on Canvas.

APR 16: Eugenics and Yale

**Reading:** John Doyle’s senior essay, “Measuring “Problems of Human Behavior”: The Eugenic Origins of Yale’s Institute of Psychology, 1921-1929.” PDF on Canvas.

### Week 13

APR 21: “Fathers” of psychology in the United States

**Reading:**

1. Deborah J. Coon, "'One Moment in the World's Salvation': Anarchism and the Radicalization of William James," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 83, No. 1 (Jun., 1996), pp. 70-99. Access this article through the Yale library website.
2. Guthrie, *Even the Rat Was White*, chapter 8, "Francis Cecil Sumner: Father of Black American Psychologists. Pdf on Canvas.

APR 23: Last Class: Hope for the Future of Psychology

**Reading:** Read at least 3 of the 5

1. Luhui Whitebear, "[Disrupting Systems of Oppression by Re-centering Indigenous Feminisms](#)"
2. GreyWolf & Ross, "Pathfinding to Social Justice: Interweaving our Personal Journeys as Indigenous Feminist Psychologists," *Women & Therapy*, 45:4, 289-303. Pdf on Canvas.
3. Vanessa Nicole Oliphant et al., "[Mental Health Strategies Informed by Black Feminist Thought](#)" *Open Cultural Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2022, pp. 137-146. There is a pdf on Canvas, or you can use the link.
4. Klukoff, H., Kanani, H., Gaglione, C., & Alexander, A. (2021). [Toward an Abolitionist Practice of Psychology: Reimagining Psychology's Relationship With the Criminal Justice System](#). *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 61(4), 451–469. If you have problems with the link, you can also access this article through the Yale library website.
5. John Robinson III, et al., "Racial Capitalism and Social Psychology: A Note for Future Research," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 86 (3): 399-411. PDF on Canvas.