

Philosophy and Race			
Days	Time	Location	Date Range
TR	12:00pm - 1:50pm	Lillis Hall 111	Sep 30, 2013 - Dec 08, 2013

CRN-16939, PHIL 452, Prof. N. Zack, nzack@uoregon.edu
Office Hrs – TR 11-12. 239 Susan Campbell Hall, 541-346-1547

SYLLABUS

The course will focus on the history of African-American experience in the 20th and 21st century, the idea of race as a driving force behind that history, and the biological aspect of what people think of as race. Work will consist of reading, class participation, and three papers of 1500 words each (4-5) pages.

GRADE COMPONENTS

Participation and attendance - 40%
3 papers at 20% each - 60% (please see paper writing guidelines in the appendix to the syllabus)
(UO Letter grading based on total up to 100, e.g. 80-82> B-, 83-86>B, 87-89>B+)

See appendix for further information on paper writing, grading, UO policies.

Schedule of Readings

All readings are to be done before the date for which they are assigned. All papers are to be submitted electronically, by email (nzack@uoregon.edu) by 11AM on the day of the class when they are due.

Required Readings

POSTED ON BB

C. Jeffers, The Cultural Theory of Race: Yet Another Look at Du Bois's "The Conservation of Races."

Reese and Zeckhauser, "Racial Profiling."

R.G. Rumbaut, "Pigments of Our Imagination: The Racialization of the Hispanic-Latino Category"

Falguni Sheth, "Muslim Immigrants in Post 9-11 American Politics."

Naomi Zack, "Race and Geography"

Naomi Zack, *Thinking About Race*

Naomi Zack, "Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman.

Duckstore and Reserve at Knight Library

Kuklick, Bruce, *Black Philosopher, White academy : the Career of William Fontaine*

Sowell, Thomas, *Civil rights : Rhetoric or Reality?*

Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, ed. *Race and the Enlightenment : a reader*

Jablonski, Nina G, *Living color : the Biological and Social Meaning of Skin Color*

Charles Ogletree, *The Presumption of Guilt: The Arrest of Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Race, Class, and Crime in America.*

I. Lived Experience, Civil Rights, Racial Profiling

WEEKS

I Sept 30 – Introduction (assignment of student presentations for Kuklick)

Oct. 3. Kuklick

II Oct 8. Kuklick

Oct. 10. Kuklick (assignment of student research on Sowell)

III. Paper no. 1. Write an essay analyzing Fontaine's professional experiences in the field of academic philosophy, in terms of how his career may have different had he been white.

Oct. 15. Sowell, Oct. 17. Sowell

IV. Oct 22. Sowell

Oct. 24. BB. Summary of Gratz and Grutter cases, in Zack, *Thinking about Race*, pp. 54-64. Discussion of Affirmative Action issues.

V. Oct. 29. Ogletree, pp. 9-64. Oct. 31. Pp. 65-129. (assignment of presentations for Nov. 5)

VI Nov. 5 and Nov. 7. – Naomi Zack, "Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman, Resse and Zeckhauser, "Racial Profiling," and student readings on Ogletree's Afterward and Epilogue.

II. Ideas about race, the biological basis of race and the social construction of race

VII. Paper no. 2. Write an essay discussing arguments against Affirmative Action and issues of racial profiling. Make clear how you think arguments about Affirmative Action are, or are not related to police profiling.

Nov. 12, 14, Jablonski, *Living Color*

VIII – Nov. 19, Jablonski, *Living Color*

Nov 21. From Eze, Hume and Kant (first part)

IX . Nov. 26. From Eze, Kant and Hegel.

X. Dec. 3. Sheth and Rumbaut; Zack, Race and Geography.

Dec. 5. C. Jeffers, “The Cultural Theory of Race.”

Final Paper.

Due, 11AM, Dec. 10. by email attachment. Paper no. 3. Drawing on Jablonsi’s *Living Color*, explain the clash between what is now known about the biology involved in racial categories, and Hume’s, Kant’s, and Hegel’s ideas about race. On that basis, assess Jeffers’s arguments in terms of what Sheth and Rumbaut write about the ongoing construction of racial categories.

General Bibliography for Race (very abbreviated – please see me for additional sources)

African American Philosophy – classic

Crummell, Alexander. *Destiny and Race: Selected Writings, 1840-1898*. Wilson Jeremiah Moses, ed. University of Mass Press, 1992.

Douglass, Frederick. *A Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an America Slave*. Penguin Classics, 1982.

DuBois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Signet Classic, 1995.

King, Jr., Martin Luther. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Macmillan, 2002.

Locke, Alain. *The New Negro*. Johnson Reprint Corp., 1998.

Washington, Booker T. *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography*. Reed Books, 2006.

African American Philosophy - contemporary

Allen, Anita. *Uneasy Access: Privacy for Women in a Free Society*. Rowman and Littlefield, 1988.

Appiah, Kwame Anthony and Amy Gutmann. *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race*. Princeton University Press, 1996.

Boxill, Bernard. *Blacks and Social Justice*. Rowman and Littlefield, 1992.

Davis, Angela. *Women, Race, and Class*. Random House, 1983.

Gordon, Lewis R. *Bad Faith and Antiracist Racism*. Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1995.

Grant, Jacquelyn Jacquelyn. *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus*. Scholars Press, 1989.

Harris, Leonard, ed. *Philosophy Born of Struggle: Anthology of Afro-American Philosophy from 1917*. Kendall Hunt Publishing Co., 1983.

Lawson, Bill E., ed. *The Underclass Question*. Temple University Press, 1992.

Lott, Tommy L. ed. *Subjugation and Bondage*. Rowman and Littlefield, 1998.

McGary, Howard. *Race and Social Justice*. Blackwell, 1998.

- Mills, Charles W. *The Racial Contract*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997.
- Moody-Adams, Michele M. *Morality, Culture and Philosophy: Fieldwork in Familiar Places*. Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Moses, Greg. *Revolution of Conscience: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Philosophy of Nonviolence*. Guilford Publications, 1998.
- Mosley, Albert. *Affirmative Action: Social Justice or Unfair Preference?* Rowman and Littlefield, 1996.
- Outlaw, Lucius. *On Race and Philosophy*. Routledge, 1996.
- Roberts, Rodney C., ed. *Injustice and Rectification*. Peter Lang Publishers, 2002.
- Thomas, Laurence. *Vessels of Evil: American Slavery and the Holocaust*. Temple University Press, 1993.
- West, Cornel. *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*. Westminster: John Knox Press, 1982.
- Yancy, George, ed. *African-American Philosophers, 17 Conversations*. Routledge, 1998.
- Zack, Naomi. *Thinking About Race*. Thomson Wadsworth, 2006.
- _____ *The Ethics and Mores of Race: Equality after the History of Philosophy* (2011)

Contemporary Native American Philosophy

- Allen, Paula Gunn. *The Sacred Hoop*. Beacon Press, 1992.
- Cordova, V.F. *How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of V. F. Cordova*. Linda Hogan, Kathleen Dean Moore, Kurt Peters, and Ted Jojoba, eds. University of Arizona Press, 2007.
- Cotton, Angela L. and Christa Acampora Crista Davis eds. *Cultural Sites of Critical Insight: Philosophy, Aesthetics, and African American and Native American Women's Writings*. SUNY Press, 2007.
- Waters, Anne. *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*. Blackwell Publishing, 2003.
- Weaver, Jace. *Defending Mother Earth: Native American Perspectives on Environmental Justice*. Orbis Books, 1996.

Contemporary Latin American Philosophy

- Alcoff, Linda and Eduardo Mendieta. *Thinking from the Underside of History: Enrique Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation*. Roman and Littlefield, 2000.
- Gracia, Jorge J. E. and Elizabeth Millan-Zaibert, eds. *Latin American Philosophy for the 21st Century: The Human Condition, Values, and the Search for Identity*. Prometheus Books, 2003.
- Mendieta, Eduardo. *Global Fragments: Critical Theory, Latin America and Globalizations*. SUNY Press, 2007.
- Nuccetelli, Susana. *Latin American Thought: Philosophical Problems and Arguments*. Westview Press, 2002.

Schutte, Ofelia. *Cultural Identity and Social Liberation in Latin American Thought*. SUNY Press, 1993.

Also

Afro-centric Thought

Bernal, Martin. *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*. Rutgers University Press, 3 vols, 1987-2006.

Asante, Molefi. *The Afrocentric Idea*. Temple University Press, 1998.

Gordon, Lewis R. *Her Majesty's Other Children: Sketches of Racism from a Neocolonial Age*. Rowman and Littlefield, 1997.

African Philosophy

Appiah, K. Anthony. *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. Oxford University Press, 1992.

Gyeke, Kwame. *Tradition and Modernity*. Oxford University Press, 1997.

Eze, Emmanuel, ed. *Postcolonial African Philosophy*. Blackwell, 1997.

Hountondji, Paulin J. *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*. Indiana University Press, 1996.

Mbiti, John. *African Religions and Philosophy*. Doubleday, 1970.

APPENDIX, A-D

A. Disability

Philosophy Department faculty and instructors do their best to comply with Disability Services policy and instructions, as follows. Please see no. 4 in particular.

At a minimum, Instructors have the responsibility to ensure Full access for students with disabilities by responding to a student's need or request for accommodations as outlined below.

1. **If a student presents you with a notification letter from DS:**
2. You have the responsibility to cooperate with DS in providing authorized accommodations in a reasonable and timely manner. The specific accommodation determines the amount of involvement required. Refer to the section below entitled "Examples of Shared Responsibility" for a description of your involvement in providing the most common accommodations.
3. **If a student does not present you with a notification letter from DS:**
4. If a student requests an accommodation without having presented you with the notification letter from DS, please refer the student to DS. If the student is already on file with DS, a request form just needs to be filled out. If the student is new to DS, the process to review documentation and meet with the student may take some time. If the disability is obvious and the accommodation appears appropriate, you may need to provide the accommodation while awaiting official notification. If you are unsure, please call DS for assistance.
5. **If a student discloses a disability to you:**
6. Ask to see the notification letter from DS. This letter describes the accommodations that the institution is legally mandated to provide. During an office hour or at another convenient time, discuss the letter and the accommodations with the student. Students MUST present a notification letter from DS to receive testing accommodations. If the student does not have a letter, please refer the student to DS. Appropriate accommodations will be determined after reviewing documentation of the disability and the student will be issued the notification letter.

7. **If you have a question about the appropriateness of an accommodation:**
8. Questions about the appropriateness of certain accommodations should be directed to the Director of DS.
9. *If a disability is suspected:*
10. Share your concerns with the student regarding his or her performance. If the concern seems disability-related, ask if he or she has ever received assistance for a disability. If it seems appropriate, refer the student to DS for further discussion and guidance. It is the student's decision whether or not to self-identify to DS; however, to receive accommodations, disclosure to DS with proper documentation is required.

B. GRADES : U of O Philosophy Department Policy

What kind of paper deserves an "A," "B," etc.? The following reflects the general standards of the Philosophy Department at the University of Oregon.

A = excellent. No mistakes, well-written, and distinctive in some way or other.

B = good. No significant mistakes, well-written, but not distinctive in any way.

C = OK. Some errors, but a basic grasp of the material.

D = poor. Several errors. A tenuous grasp of the material.

F = failing. Problematic on all fronts indicating either no real grasp of the material or a complete lack of effort.

Please note: what counts as "excellent" or "OK," for example, depends in part upon the nature and level of the class in question.

Discussion forms an integral part of the course, and your performance will be graded on the basis of the quantity and quality of your participation. You should arrive prepared to discuss the material and course assignments.

C. Academic Honesty

The stiffest punishments possible will be sought for those who plagiarize, fabricate, or cheat. (The usual punishment is an "F" for the course.) The following offers examples of academic dishonesty.

Plagiarism Plagiarism is the inclusion of someone else's product, words, ideas, or data as one's own work. When a student submits work for credit that includes the product, words, ideas, or data of others, the source must be acknowledged by the use of complete, accurate, and specific references, such as footnotes. Expectations may vary slightly among disciplines. By placing one's name on work submitted for credit, the student certifies the originality of all work not otherwise identified by appropriate acknowledgements. On written assignments, if verbatim statements are included, the statements must be enclosed by quotation marks or set off from regular text as indented extracts.

A student will avoid being charged with plagiarism if there is an acknowledgement of indebtedness. Indebtedness must be acknowledged whenever:

1. one quotes another person's actual words or replicates all or part of another's product;
2. one uses another person's ideas, opinions, work, data, or theories, even if they are completely paraphrased in one's own words;
3. one borrows facts, statistics, or other illustrative materials--unless the information is common knowledge.

Unauthorized collaboration with others on papers or projects can inadvertently lead to a charge of plagiarism. If in doubt, consult the instructor or seek assistance from the staff of Academic Learning Services (68 PLC, 346-3226). In addition, it is plagiarism to submit as your own any academic exercise (for example, written work, printing, computer program, art or design work, musical composition, and choreography) prepared totally or in part by another.

Plagiarism also includes submitting work in which portions were substantially produced by someone acting as a tutor or editor.

Fabrication

Fabrication is the intentional use of information that the author has invented when he or she states or implies otherwise, or the falsification of research or other findings with the intent to deceive.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

1. citing information not taken from the source indicated;
2. listing sources in a reference not used in the academic exercise;
3. inventing data or source information for research or other academic exercises.

Cheating

Cheating is an act of deception by which a student misrepresents or misleadingly demonstrates that he or she has mastered information on an academic exercise that he or she has not mastered, including the giving or receiving of unauthorized help in an academic exercise.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

1. copying from another student's paper, computer program, project, product, or performance;
2. collaborating without authority or allowing another student to copy one's work in a test situation;
3. resubmitting substantially the same work that was produced for another assignment without the knowledge and permission of the instructor;
4. writing a paper for someone else or permitting someone else to take a test for you.

E. HOW TO WRITE GOOD PHILOSOPHY PAPERS

Note: When you get your papers back, there will be comments. The letters in parentheses indicate what aspect of your writing might need improvement and you may see them the second or third time this aspect still needs work.

1. **CLARITY (CL)** Since this is a philosophy paper, make sure that you define your terms and give reasons for claims. All of your ideas should be explicitly stated and not left to the reader to infer. One difference between philosophy and literature is that philosophers spell everything out, while creative writers depend on the imagination of the reader.

2. **PRECISION (P)** Try not to make vague claims or general statements about the ideas in the readings. Be accurate in reporting the views of others and exact in stating your own.

3. **ORGANIZATION (O)** Organize the ideas in the paper into a few coherent paragraphs. Summarize the main claims of your paper in 2 or 3 sentences that you write *after* you write the paper, but put at the very beginning of the paper. This is an appropriate introductory paragraph for a philosophy paper, not a filler or a fluffy beginning.

3. **WRITING MECHANICS (WR)** The mechanics include spelling, punctuation, syntax and complete sentence structure. Make sure that you already have these down or consult a source if you don't. Highly recommended is Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*. This is available on line at www.bartleby.com/141/

4. **ANALYSIS (A)** Analyze claims. This means breaking your ideas down into their simpler components, and defining them. Do not start with or rely on dictionary definitions, but use your own words and cite the dictionary only if necessary. Dictionary definitions report usage, whereas a philosophical definition may be critical of current usage or find it vague. Examine the logical consequences of your claims and the claims of others.

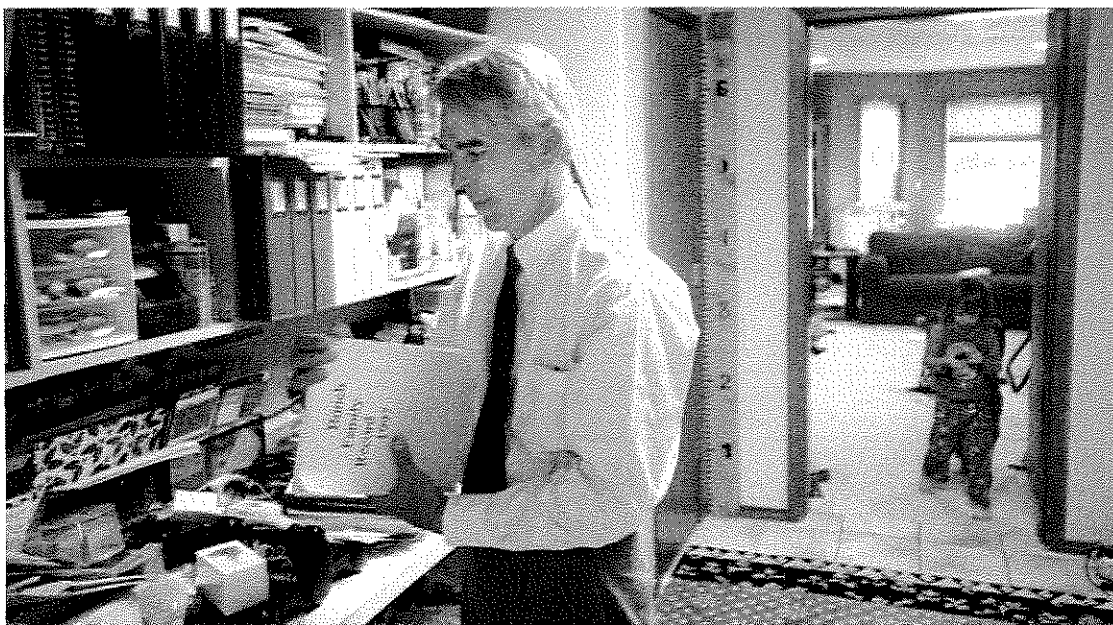
5. **CITATION (C)** Cite the required readings this way in your text: (author's last name, page no.) As well, provide a list of citations at the end of the paper. It is important to do this to show

you have done the required reading and are not just recycling notes from class or discussion group lectures. If you do use material from lecture, please make sure to cite that as well.

6. **QUOTATIONS (Q)** Quotations should be used to illustrate a claim that you are making about an author. They are not a substitute for explaining the author's thought in your own words. A good strategy is to state the author's ideas in your own words first and then "prove" your interpretation with a short quote.

7. **DIRECT (D)** Be direct. Make sure that you give a direct and focused answer to the question for the paper. This is the most important requirement for papers to reach the B and A range.

Obama Has Ties to Slavery Not by His Father but His Mother, Research Suggests



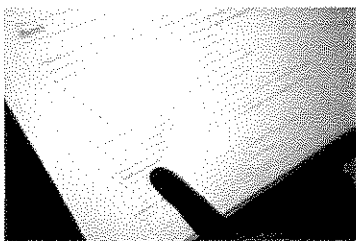
Rajah Bose for The New York Times

Mark Bunch, who directs his family's online lineage project, said of President Obama, "I'm his fifth cousin twice removed."

By SHERYL GAY STOLBERG Published: July 30, 2012 A version of this article appeared in print on July 30, 2012, on page A9 of the New York edition with the headline: Obama Has Ties to Slavery Not by His Father but His Mother, Research Suggests.

WASHINGTON — President Obama's biography — son of a black father from Kenya and a white mother from Kansas — has long suggested that unlike most African-Americans, his roots did not include slavery.

* Graphic: The President's Family Tree



Rajah Bose for The New York Times

One tool used by a team of genealogists over the course of two years was an online database maintained by the Bunch family.

Now a team of genealogists is upending that thinking, saying that Mr. Obama's mother had, in addition to her European ancestors, at least one African forebear and that the president is most likely descended from one of the first documented African slaves in the United States.

The findings are scheduled to be announced on Monday by Ancestry.com, a genealogy company based in Provo, Utah. Its team, while lacking definitive proof, said it had evidence that "strongly suggests" Mr. Obama's family tree — on his mother's side — stretches back nearly four centuries to a slave in colonial Virginia named John Punch.

In 1640, Mr. Punch, then an indentured servant, escaped from Virginia and went to Maryland. He was captured there and, along with two white servants who had also escaped, was put on trial. His punishment — servitude for life — was harsher than what the white servants received, and it has led some historians to regard him as the first African to be legally sanctioned as a slave, years before Virginia adopted laws allowing slavery.

Historians say there was a trade in human labor, of both whites and blacks, during this period in American history. There were also some free African-Americans. Beginning around 1617, indentured servants were bought and sold, as were debtors, in the Chesapeake Bay region, said Ira Berlin, a University of Maryland professor and expert in the history of slavery. But while those people were in an "unfree condition," he said, historians cannot pinpoint a date for the beginning of the slave trade.

"What makes the John Punch case interesting is here is a guy who is definitely a slave," said Professor Berlin, who did not participate in the examination of the president's ancestors.

The Ancestry.com team used DNA analysis to make the connection, and it also combed through marriage and property records to trace Mr. Obama's maternal ancestry to the time and place where Mr. Punch lived. The company said records suggested that Mr. Punch fathered children with a white woman, who passed her free status on to those children, giving rise to a family of a slightly different

name, the Bunches, that ultimately spawned Mr. Obama's mother, Stanley Ann Dunham.

The findings come as more and more Americans are discovering their own mixed-race heritage. Elizabeth Shown Mills, a former president of the American Society of Genealogists, said the Internet, coupled with the ease of DNA testing and heightened interest among both amateur and professional genealogists, was helping to reveal the extent of racial intermingling over the centuries.

"It is becoming increasingly common now because people are discovering it," Ms. Mills said. "In the past, very few records were available. Very few people made the effort to do the research."

The Ancestry.com team spent two years examining Mr. Obama's mother's past, focusing on the mixed-race Bunch line. The researchers said that over time, as the Bunches continued to intermarry, they became prominent landowners in colonial Virginia and were known as white.

"We sort of stumbled across it," said Anastasia Harman, the lead researcher. "We were just doing general research into the president's family tree, and as we started digging back in time, we realized that the Bunch family were African-American."

There is no evidence that Ms. Dunham had any inkling that she might have had African-American ancestry, said Janny Scott, her biographer. By the mid-1800s, according to a 2007 article in The Chicago Sun-Times, one of Ms. Dunham's Bunch ancestors had a son who fought for the Confederacy in the Civil War.

The Ancestry.com group traced two major Bunch family branches, one that lived as white and stayed in Virginia for generations and another that left for the Carolinas. In North Carolina, the Bunches were recorded as "mulatto" in early records, and their descendants are also the president's cousins.

Mr. Obama descends from the Virginia branch, which eventually migrated to Tennessee, where his great-great-great-great-grandmother Anna Bunch was born. Her daughter Frances Allred, who was born in 1834, moved to Kansas. Four generations later, in 1942, with the family still in Kansas, Mr. Obama's mother was born.

But the research left open a question: Was John Punch, the slave, a Bunch ancestor? Because records have been destroyed, there is no definitive proof.

Still, some factors led Ms. Harman and her group to a conclusion. The surnames were similar. There was DNA evidence showing that the Bunches had sub-Saharan African heritage. And a very small number of Africans were living in

Virginia in the mid-1600s. All that convinced the team that the nation's first black president was descended from Mr. Punch.

"The odds, based on what does actually survive, strongly suggest that President Barack Obama is a descendant (he would be the 11th great-grandson) of the first enslaved African in America." Ms. Harman and her team wrote in a research paper that Ancestry.com intended to release on its Web site on Monday.

The team shared its findings with The New York Times, which consulted two independent genealogists — Ms. Mills, who specializes in Southern genealogy, and Johni Cerny, who specializes in black ancestry — about the findings. Both said there was no way to be certain of the Punch-Bunch connection. But both also said the Ancestry.com team made a solid case. "The research, I am convinced, is sound," said Ms. Mills, who also reviewed the findings at Ancestry.com's request. "The P and the B are virtually meaningless in historical context. What matters is the historical evidence that can be mustered to place the same people in the same area."

Ms. Cerny was more skeptical but said the research team's careful wording was appropriate. "I'm sure people will be tantalized and try to prove or disprove it," she said. "But what they're saying is very safe and appropriate. I would be tempted myself to try to make that connection."

One reason the Ancestry.com team could make the connection was the Bunch family itself. The extended family maintains an online database that traces the family tree. It is supplemented by DNA testing showing that the men in the family have genetic markers consistent with sub-Saharan African descent. The Ancestry.com paper said the Bunches' particular DNA profile was common in Cameroon.

"I consider myself Caucasian, but I find that my mixed-race roots go way back," said Mark Bunch, who administers the Bunch family project. Mr. Bunch, 53, the finance director for a community hospital in the agricultural town of Othello, in eastern Washington State, learned of the project several years ago from a cousin. He bought a home DNA test kit, swabbed the inside of his cheek three times and sent it off for analysis. What came back — a genetic blueprint that included sub-Saharan African roots — surprised Mr. Bunch. Then came another surprise: President Obama was a distant cousin. "I'm his fifth cousin twice removed," Mr. Bunch said. "Of more surprise was the African Y chromosome. The relationship to President Obama was kind of the icing on the cake after that."

Questions raised.

1. What notion of race is the NYTimes and the genealogical scientists assuming.
2. Is there a "one-drop" rule for slavery?

3. If African-American identity rests on slave ancestry, does the person who is African American have to know that he or she has slave ancestry?
4. What was the political value of this research in an election year? What assumptions does that value(s) rest on?
5. Does research like this reinforce or destabilize received ideas about race? Why?

“How Well You Sleep May Hinge on Race”



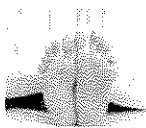
Benjamin Norman for The New York Times

BROOKLYN Moleendo Stewart sees inequality as playing a role in his sleep problems.

By DOUGLAS QUENQUA

Published: August 20, 2012

Moleendo Stewart can't say for sure what's caused his lifelong sleeping problems. But he has his suspicions.



[The Well Sleep Quiz](#)

How does sleep affect health, relationships and well-being? Take this sleep quiz to learn more about the fascinating and sometimes strange world of sleep.

There's the childhood spent in loud, restless neighborhoods in Miami. "You hear people shooting guns all night, dealing drugs," said Mr. Stewart, 41, who lives in the East Flatbush section of Brooklyn. He also cites his weight, 260 pounds, down from a peak of 310.

Sleep experts would point to another factor working against Mr. Stewart: He is a black man.

The idea that race or ethnicity might help determine how well people sleep is relatively new among sleep researchers. But in the few short years that epidemiologists, demographers and psychologists have been studying the link, they have repeatedly come to the same conclusion: In the United States, at least, sleep is not colorblind. Non-Hispanic whites get more and better-quality sleep than people of other races, studies repeatedly show. Blacks are the most likely to get shorter, more restless sleep.

What researchers don't yet know is why.

"We're not at a point where we can say for certain is it nature versus nurture, is it race or is it socioeconomics," said Dr. Michael A. Grandner, a research associate with the Center for Sleep and Neurobiology at the University of Pennsylvania. But when it comes to sleep, "there is a unique factor of race we're still trying to understand."

Whatever the cause, doctors say that unlocking the secret to racial sleep disparities could yield insights into why people in some minority groups experience higher rates of high blood pressure, obesity and diabetes. Helping poor or immigrant populations to get more solid sleep, they say, could also help break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage.

"When people aren't sleeping as well during the night, they aren't as productive during the day, and they're not as healthy," said Dr. Mercedes R. Carnethon, associate professor of preventive medicine at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. "It's a self-perpetuating cycle."

The latest evidence that race and ethnicity can affect sleep came in June at the annual meeting of the Associated Professional Sleep Societies, held in Boston. In one of two studies on the topic presented there, white participants from the Chicago area were found to get an average of 7.4 hours of sleep per night; Hispanics and Asians averaged 6.9 hours and blacks 6.8 hours. Sleep quality — defined as ease in falling asleep and length of uninterrupted sleep — was also higher for whites than for blacks.

While those findings are consistent with earlier studies, this one, led by Dr. Carnethon, adjusted for risk factors like cardiovascular disease, sleep apnea and obesity. Even so, blacks and members of other minorities, who are statistically more prone to experience such problems, still got less and more disruptive sleep than whites.

One obvious remaining culprit, says Dr. Carnethon, is socioeconomic factors.

Because Chicago is still a fairly segregated city, “the blacks and Hispanics in our study were generally living in neighborhoods that are closer to freeways, so you have freeway noise, there’s more business noise at night, and there’s potentially more crime, which is stressful to people,” Dr. Carnethon said. People in lower-income neighborhoods are also more likely to have multiple jobs or to work odd hours, which can interfere with sleep.

The idea that differences in work and living conditions can explain the racial sleep disparities is a popular one among sleep experts. But studies that have accounted for those factors suggest a more complex reality.

One such study from 2005 — also taking place in Chicago — measured sleep among 669 participants while adjusting for education, income and employment status. In the end, black men on average still slept 82 minutes less per night than white women, who were found to sleep the best of anyone in the study.

Of course, isolating the real-life effects of social inequality can be tricky. “There are more subtle differences” among people than income and education, said Dr. Kristen Knutson, assistant professor of medicine at the University of Chicago and an author of the study. “We had no way to control for stress, and there are social stresses an African-American man might feel that a white man with the same income and education level wouldn’t.”

Mr. Stewart, the Brooklyn resident, said he did see discrimination as playing a role in his sleep problems.

“As a black person in America, even if you succeed in terms of education, you still have to deal with the inherent inequality of society,” said Mr. Stewart, an administrator for a program that exposes students in racial minorities to careers in science and math. “I don’t blame it on the majority — that’s just simplistic. But in general it’s not a fair thing, and you stress because of that.”

Sleep experts refer to this as the “autonomy” problem, and studies have shown it has an effect on sleep. “People who feel they have control over their lives were able to feel secure at night, go to sleep, sleep well, and wake up well in the morning and do it all over again,” said Dr. Lauren Hale, associate professor of preventive medicine at Stony Brook University on Long Island,

referring to a study she conducted in 2009. “That’s part of the cycle not just for blacks and minorities, but other disadvantaged populations.”

At least one study suggests that socioeconomic factors affecting sleep are highly specific to race and gender. For example, being divorced or widowed was particularly detrimental to the sleep of Hispanic men, while never being married was more likely to take a toll on the sleep of Asian men. Asian women lacking in education were more likely to report sleep problems than similarly educated white women. And men of all races who were in relationships slept better than single men, regardless of relationship quality; for women, the quality of the relationship was more likely to affect sleep.

“There’s an effect of socioeconomics,” said Dr. Grandner, a lead author of the study, “but it’s not really the economic. It’s more about the socio.”

It may also be the culture. Black and Hispanic children in America are far less likely to have regularly enforced bedtimes than white children, according to a 2010 study conducted by Dr. Hale for the National Institutes of Health. White children were also more likely to have “language-based” bedtime routines — those that involve reading or storytelling — both of which are associated with a wide range of cognitive and behavioral advantages.

These routines establish patterns that can last a lifetime, Dr. Hale said. “If routines are absent, especially these language-based routines, then children may be missing out on opportunities to develop and sleep optimally,” she said.

And some researchers aren’t ready to discount biology. In a forthcoming study, Dr. Grandner found that short sleepers are more likely to have elevated levels of C-reactive protein, but how much depended on race. C-reactive protein is produced by the body when inflammation is present and has previously been implicated in sleep problems.

The consequences of chronic sleep deprivation for all races include a higher risk of obesity, heart disease, kidney disease, stroke and high blood pressure. Other insidious threats — like depression, mood swings and decreased learning capacity — have all been linked to lack of sleep, both as consequences and causes. In order to break the cycle, researchers say, patients need to make sleep a priority.

“There’s this idea in this country that sleep might not be the most important thing, that we have to get things done and sleep can be de-prioritized,” said Dr. Grandner, comparing America with European countries that carve out midday periods for sleep. “We need to be thinking about sleep the same way we think about diet and exercise.”

Question:

What does the researcher mean that it is unknown how much is due to race and how much to socioeconomics? What do you think is meant by 'race' in this context?