



# Nothing is Wrong!

Misconceptions of African Americans and the  
Mental Health and IDD System

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# Why This Topic

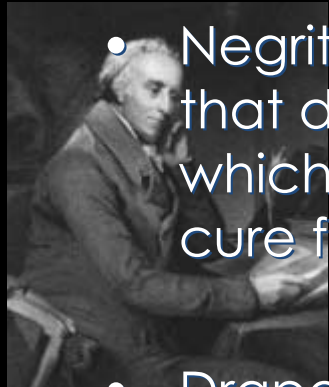
33.9 million people identify themselves as being African American. Research does not exactly suggest that African Americans are more likely to suffer from a mental incapacity more than other ethnicities; however, the research indicates that African Americans are overrepresented in many high need populations.

1. African Americans represent 40 % of the homeless population
2. Nearly half of the people incarcerated are African American
3. High number of children in the child welfare system
4. More likely to be exposed to violence

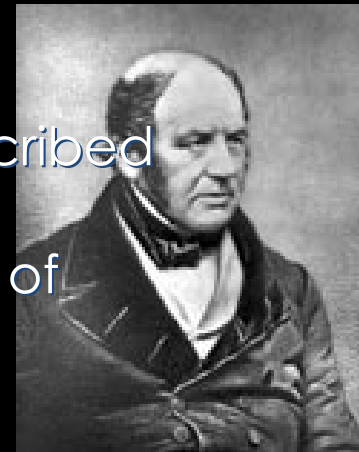
# Objective

To increase awareness about the misconceptions that have imbued the African American culture and how these misconceptions contribute to the lack of mental health services.

# Historical Overview of the Development of Misconceptions of African Americans



- Negritude-in 1787 Dr. Benjamin Rush conducted a study that determined that Negroes suffered from an affliction which was thought to be a mild form of leprosy. The only cure for this diagnosis was to become White.
- Drapetomania-in 1851 Dr. Samuel Cartwright determined that this disease caused Negroes to run away. The therapeutic intervention for Drapetomania was to whip slaves and they would regain their sanity.
- Dysaetheisa Aethiopica-Dr. Samuel Cartwright described this diagnosis as a mental lethargy of the mind and insensitivity of the body. It differed from other forms of mental incapacities because lesions were present.



# Historical Overview of the Development of Misconceptions of African Americans

- In 1895 Dr. T. O. Powell noted that between 1860 to 1890 the number of insane Negroes had increased from 1 in 10,584 to 1 in 943. He felt that freedom made Negroes 'nuts' and they could not handle it.
- In 1905 Dr. Alfred Binet created the IQ Test that quantified intellectual deficits. In 1959, the American Association on Mental Deficiency (AAMD) set the IQ threshold as <85. Essentially, half of the African American population fell below <85.
- Brain Dysfunction-In the 1960's Vernon Mark, Williams Sweet and Frank Ervin suggested that urban violence was a cause of the malfunctioning of the brain, but the use of psychosurgery could prevent outbreaks of violence.

# History of Institutionalization of African Americans

- The Georgia Lunatic Asylum was known as the worlds largest asylum that was operated by slave labor.
- In 1869 the Central Lunatic Asylum for the “colored insane” was established in Virginia.
- In 1919 Rusk State Hospital opened and provided services to the “colored insane.” Received notoriety in 1955 when African American prisoners took over the hospital for five hours.
- In 1925 Junius Wilson who was deaf and mute was accused of raping a relative. He was castrated and incarcerated at the Goldsboro Psychiatric Hospital. The charges were dropped in 1970 when they realized he was simply hearing impaired.



# Misconceptions of African Americans

- They can't help me; I can solve my own problems.
- As long as I don't feel physically tired, I'm okay.
- I'm not crazy. Why would I need their services?
- I don't trust those people or their services; they only want to put me on medication.
- I will pray for strength to help me overcome the way I am feeling.

# Overcoming Barriers & Providing Effective Outreach

# Jeanette Michelle Hawes



# Cultural Competence

## What is it and why is it important?

- Is a process
- Is not stereotyping
- Attention to cultural details helps facilitate engagement and retention of clients and their families.

# Cultural Competence

## A Few Practical Steps:

- Identify and confront one's own biases and prejudices.
  - Our expectations and opinions (conscious and unconscious) can directly affect the client outcomes and performance.
- Identify and utilize appropriate cultural informants.
- Realize your limitations and do not try and be someone you are not.
  - Be willing to incorporate other people/professionals from the client's ethnic culture.
- Be mindful of cultural somatization.
  - 15% among African Americans
  - 9% among White Americans

# Cultural Competence

## A Few Practical Steps:

- Be mindful of complimentary therapies.

### Case Study:

A 50 year old, dually diagnosed African American woman, "Joan," was hospitalized following a suicide attempt. She stabilized after taking antidepressant medication.

Joan discontinued her psychiatric medication after responding to a letter from a traveling minister, who administered holy oil in exchange for payment and told her she was cured.

# Effective Outreach

- **Reach consensus**

- Consensus vs. Approval
- Board/staff

- **Identify the target group**

- Who is most at risk? Start there first

- **Study the community you want to reach**

- Immersion

- **Identify key community leaders**

- Respected & age appropriate

- **Implementation & constant evaluation**

# Effective Outreach

- **Religion**

- Educate religious leaders
- Advertise in church bulletins
- Conduct workshops
- Utilize families

- **Collaborate with educational systems to facilitate a safety net of African American mental health professionals**

- Build partnerships with districts and target schools within the African American community
- Establish volunteer/internship opportunities (high school and college level – target HBCUs)
- Work with local physicians

- **Involve clients (and family) in their own care**

# Effective Outreach

- **Create and maintain a strong presence in the African American community.**

- Public Service Announcement
- Local community programs targeting African Americans
- Service locations with African American community
- Single door of entry
- Viral marketing

- **Money**

- Use current resources
- Foundations
- Commit a portion of operating budget
- Use community resources (support groups/community centers)
- Use existing church groups
- Grants
- Local donations
- Television/radio

Although Dr. Wesley and I are  
beautiful and intelligent...

We do not possess all the  
answers.

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