

**I, TOO, SING AMERICA:
Talking about Racism and Other Difficult Topics
CAAS 103-002 and Psych 120-001**

**Winter 2007, Couzens Hall, T - Th 1:10-2:30 p.m.
Charles Behling (please, let's get together: cbehling@umich.edu)
Class E-Mail Address: itoosingamericawinter2007**

Taking its title from the Langston Hughes poem, this seminar will explore the psychology of cultural differences and intergroup relations in the United States. Why do we often have difficulty in talking openly about racism and other social problems? How can we create communities of diverse people joined together in justice, joy, and democracy? What are some of the opportunities and obstacles for all of us in joining with Hughes in affirming, "They'll see how beautiful I am... I, too, am America"?

Examples of topics include intergroup stereotyping, cooperation, conflict, privilege, and discrimination. In addition to an examination of racial interactions in the United States, we will also focus on gender, religion, sexual orientation, ability, ethnicity, class, and other sources of cultural identity. Psychological theories (including the important concept called "aversive -isms") will be emphasized, and the seminar will draw heavily on interdisciplinary perspectives. Diversity in the seminar participants themselves--teachers, students, and guests--will be an important resource for the seminar.

- What are psychological theories about how individuals and groups might most benefit from life in pluralistic societies?
- What are some psychological dynamics of prejudice and discrimination? What are possible connections between various forms of discrimination (for example, racism, anti-Semitism, anti-Islamism, sexism, and heterosexism)?
- Could one be relatively "unprejudiced," yet nevertheless act in "discriminatory" ways?
- What psychological strategies seem most effective in the creation and maintenance of positive multicultural communities?
- And, most importantly, what are YOUR questions, goals, insights, and concerns?

In exploring these issues, we will emphasize the Intergroup Relations technique called "Dialogue." As we will use the term, "Dialogue" is a technical concept, and it is dramatically different from mere "conversation." It accepts conflict as a learning opportunity, and it welcomes interpersonal and intergroup diversity in different and perhaps more productive ways than do the methods of "debate" or "argument."

The structure of the seminar, the topics we discuss, and any assignments should be based primarily on the needs, goals, and concerns of the group and its individual members. Please consider this syllabus as tentative, subject to change, and in need of your suggestions. How well do the proposed activities meet your needs? What would you like to add, omit, or change?

PLEASE VISIT CHARLES!

Let's get together! I very much want to meet with you often and to get to know you well. I would enjoy talking about the course, and I would also appreciate the chance just to chat (even if there is no course business to discuss). Want to have lunch together in Couzens before class, or want to hang around after class to talk? If so, just let me know! And, please also choose other times for us to meet; just give me a call or email to set up an appointment. My office is Michigan Union 3000; phone 936-1875; e-mail cbehling@umich.edu.

TEXTS

You'll need these texts, available at Michigan Union, Ulrich's, and Michigan Book and Supply:

Scott Plous. Understanding Prejudice and Discrimination. McGraw-Hill, 2003. (ISBN 0-07-255443-6). Approximately \$50.70 new or \$38.05 used.

Whitley, Bernard E. Jr. and Kite, Mary E. The Psychology of Prejudice and Discrimination. Thompson Wadsworth, 2006. (ISBN 0-534-64271-3). Approximately \$62.70 new or \$47.05 used.

Want to check out who these authors are, and what their backgrounds are like? If so, here are some web sources: For Scott Plous: <http://www.socialpsychology.org/plous.htm>

For Bernard Whitley: <http://www.bsu.edu/web/00bewhitley/>

For Mary Kite: <http://www.bsu.edu/web/mkite/>

THIS IS IMPORTANT:

The readings, of course, will have points of view. So will Charles in his comments and lectures. So will your friends in their class discussions and exercises. But none of these need be **YOUR** point of view. **You owe it to yourself and to the other members of the seminar to be as honest and open as you can: when you disagree with the ideas of readings, instructors, or colleagues, please express yourself!** We should try to respect and listen to each other, but we are not obligated to agree with each other. In fact, learning and growth are most likely to occur when there is a diversity of ideas, openly shared. Yes?

COMMUNITY AND INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

Cultural and religious observations: If the dates of any class or assignment conflict with your cultural or religious observations, please let Charles know NO LATER THAN JAN. 16. I strongly encourage you to participate in cultural and religious observations, and I will make sure that you are not penalized or inconvenienced in this course for doing so. Please remember that we are eager to accommodate both observations that occur on class days and also those that occur on non-class days, but nonetheless conflict with “home” preparations for class.

Ability Concerns: If you wish an accommodation for a disability, please let Charles know BY JAN. 16. I will be pleased to modify assignments, in-class activities, or the way I teach in order to facilitate your participation and progress. Of course, any information about your disability that you wish to remain confidential will be treated with absolute discretion.

Are there other individual or community needs that you wish to raise? If so, we are very eager to hear them and to accommodate them! Again, please let Charles know BY JAN 16.

THE PROGRAM ON INTERGROUP RELATIONS and THE FIGS PROJECT

Our seminar is part of an innovative curricular group, organized by The Program on Intergroup Relations Program, called “**The FIGS Project.**” “FIGS” is an acronym for “First-year Interest GroupS.” The FIGS Project supports a cluster of courses, from a variety of academic disciplines, all dealing with cultural diversity.

The Program on Intergroup Relations is a nationally-recognized program whose mission is “to promote social justice through education.” It’s a great program (ok, full disclosure: Charles works for the program, and he loves it a lot!). Please visit IGR’s website: www.igr.umich.edu, and please drop by the office (3000 Michigan Union, 936-1875) to hang out with Charles, to meet the other staff, and to use IGR’s library (which is an excellent resource for materials about diversity and justice). Please consider joining IGR!!

THE MICHIGAN COMMUNITY SCHOLARS PROGRAM

We are also fortunate to be a part of the Michigan Community Scholars Program. Several members of our class are full-time students in the program, and they are our hosts in Couzens Residence

Hall. MCSP has as its focus issues of community, diversity, identity, social justice, and democratic engagement, just as does our seminar. We will take seriously the opportunities for community that are offered by our membership in MCSP.

THE LSA THEME YEAR

LSA has a special focus this academic year on the study of “The Theory and Practice of Citizenship: From the Local to the Global.” We are privileged that our course is part of this theme year. I encourage you to take opportunity of the many resources and activities that will be available to us. Information about programs and activities may be found at www.lsa.umich.edu/citizenship.

SOME COURSE EXPECTATIONS

My primary expectation about your work in this course is that you will actively help create a community among our seminar participants, and that, once created, you will contribute deeply, generously, and honestly to that community. I hope you will expect the same of me. To those ends, here are some proposed tasks for our work together this semester. See how this system sounds to you.

- 1. PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE.** Every day. On time. With full and deep engagement, and active and generous participation.

Our goal is to learn from each other, and to do that, the rest of us need YOU! We want you to teach us, and we want to know your insights and experiences.

If we are to learn from you, we need your active and generous participation. Of course, “active and generous participation” is best offered in different ways by different people, and we welcome whatever is your style of contributing. For example, some individuals may not like to talk a lot in groups, and may prefer to contribute their insights in other ways. Also, members of different cultures have different norms for classroom discussion, and we will learn from all those differences. “Participation” does not mean that anyone should violate their personal or cultural styles. Yes?

- 2. READING AND EXPERIENTIAL PROJECTS.** All of them. On time. With serious and deep engagement. Sharing, where appropriate, one’s responses to these readings and projects with others.

In addition to the readings and exercises that I will suggest, what do YOU want to suggest to the group? What do you think we would benefit from reading, doing, visiting, watching, hearing, discussing...?

- 3. JOURNALING.** A journal/diary, drawing from both your personal life and our class, exploring your ideas, experiences, wisdoms, confusions, insights.

A proposal about journals follows on the next page..

ABOUT GRADES AND GRADING

Let me be frank about my opinions about grading: After many years of teaching, I am increasingly convinced that our traditional grading system is often counterproductive to genuine learning and sharing. I think the system too often leads persons to lose intrinsic motivation, and to compete with others, rather than to join together in supporting each other. At the same time, because of the extensive socialization that many of us have experienced around grades, I find that simply abandoning the system creates its own problems and confusions (unless it happens very early in one’s academic career). Let’s talk more about this, if you’d like.

What I am proposing for us, therefore, is a hybrid system. In the proposed system, grades in the seminar are not very based on external judgments about your work; instead, grades are pretty much based on your doing your work, deeply and on time, with genuine courage in pushing your own “learning/comfort zones,” while sharing with and supporting others. I hope this will support you to be autonomous in your work—to set your own goals, not merely adopt mine. Moreover, I hope this will facilitate honest feedback between you, me, and the rest of the community. I hope we will focus honestly on helping to clarify and deepen each other’s ideas, and that we do not become diverted into arbitrary and judgmental manipulations about grades. Moreover, because the course inevitably involves opinions, including political ones, I hope

our grading plan will encourage us all to speak our minds, even when it involves disagreeing with Charles and with friends. Please don't hold back because of some fears about grades.

To summarize, let's take as our goal for everyone in the class to earn an "A," and let's support each other in doing that. Here's how to get the A:

- Do your work on time and deeply. Don't have more than two late or incomplete journals, activities, or projects (if more than two are late or incomplete, your grade will be lowered). Write your journals and projects courageously and vulnerably. Be willing to share your confusions as well as your clarities.
- Attend, on time, participate, question, explore, share. Don't have more than two unexcused absences, or days that you "zone out" (if more than two, your grade will be lowered). Give of yourself to the other members of our group.
- Throughout, push your learning edge and your comfort zone. Engage seriously with all our group members, and push yourself and others to grow. Disagree with Charles and with others when you feel like it, and share your unique perceptions and values with the rest of us. Take the task of defining personal goals that are serious and idealistic. Contribute to our group and to the world. Work for good, however you define that.

What do you think? Can this be our deal?

ABOUT JOURNALING

Here is a proposed system regarding journals. Developing an inviting and imaginative system for journaling is at the heart of our course. Therefore, please consider these proposals carefully, and help improve them. Do you have better ideas of how we can facilitate each others' learning, how we can push ourselves productively, and how we can collaborate more closely together?

In proposing improvements in the journal system, please think carefully about the goals that you have for the course and for the semester. In regard to my own values, here are some goals that have shaped my proposals:

- To access the diversity of our group (both our social identities and our personal experiences) as the keys to learning and growth.
- To apply the ideas from our class and our readings to our own lives, and to use them to confront issues that genuinely matter to us.
- To give our group the opportunity to share and support each other wholistically—that is, to draw not only on our intellectual ideas, but also on our social, emotional, spiritual, and other experiences and wisdoms.
- To build a trusting, non-hierarchical system in which we are all teachers and learners.

HERE'S MY SUGGESTED SYSTEM FOR JOURNALING:

1. Please journal very often—hopefully every day. Think of it as an informal diary, maybe?
 - *Some entries will be long, some short. Some will be formally written; others will be jotted notes and lists and stream of consciousness. That's fine. What is essential, however, is that the journals be BRAVE, HONEST, AND DEEP! The point is to push ourselves to write about beliefs, uncertainties, confusions, hopes, joys, anxieties—things that comfort us; things that challenge that comfort; things that help us grow and give to others. Make your journals matter to yourself and to others!!!*
2. At least each week, please deal with both "personal" and "academic" issues in your journals. For example:
 - i. *What's going on generally in your life? What's been happening this week?*
 - *What are your joys, frustrations, anxieties, hopes, fears? What are your goals, and your next steps toward achieving them? How are things going with your*

friends, family, and other relationships? How's your relationship with yourself?

- *What are your experiences regarding social identity and social diversity on campus and in your daily life? In regard to these issues, how can you push to the edge of your comfort zone and experience new learnings and new connections with others?*
- *What else do you wish to write about that is important to you personally?*
- *Please remember that your personal journey is the most important part of your journal!!*

ii. *What's going on for you in our class?*

- *What are your HONEST ideas, reactions, questions, opinions, disagreements, pinches, excitements, etc. regarding our readings and class meetings? Were you able to read all of the material, and participate in class, attentively and interactively? If not, what got in your way, and what help do you need?*
- *What was not clear and understandable? What questions or concerns do you wish to raise (e.g., wishes for explanations or additional information, information you know and would like to add, things you would like to share with the class, disagreements you wish to express, different ways of interacting you wish to propose, etc.)?*
- ***Most importantly, what are the MEANINGS of the readings and the class discussions to you? What do you think are the authors' or your friends' main points? What are your ideas, disagreements, agreements, thoughts, reactions about this? Why?***

3. To be valuable, it is essential that our journals be very personal, and that they be very honest. You should not censor yourself based on concerns about your privacy or the reactions of other people. Therefore, before you give your journal to other students or to Charles, please remove or delete any portions that you wish to keep private. There will be complete acceptance of these removals; no questions asked.
 - *Likewise, when you give feedback to other students about their journals, if there is any feedback you wish Charles not to see, please remove or delete it before Charles reads it.*
4. You will receive written feedback from other students and from Charles about your journals. Moreover, you will have the opportunity to give others written feedback about their journals.
 - *In giving feedback, please take very seriously your obligation to help others grow. Ask your feedback partner(s) questions to help them go deeper and become more probing. Share your own ideas and responses based on your experiences. The goal is neither to judge/criticize nor to provide superficial reassurances to your partners. Instead, the goal is to fully listen to them, engage with them, learn from them, question them, and support them to explore and deepen their own insights.*
5. Bring your new journals to class every Thursday. We'll organize a system in which you have journal partner(s), and a schedule in which, on most Thursdays, you loan your journals to your partner, and you receive a journal from them. On other weeks, you will be asked to loan your journal to Charles.
 - *You will give written feedback to your partner, and they to you, returning the journal and the feedback by the next class period. (When the schedule calls for you to loan your journal to Charles, please also include the feedback you have received from your partner.)*
 - *If you are absent from class for some reason, it is essential that you have a way to receive your partner's journal, and return their old journals. Please make a contingency plan with your partner in advance.*

A PROPOSED OUTLINE OF CLASS ACTIVITIES AND READINGS

Please remember that this outline is merely a proposal. The members of our group will undoubtedly lead the seminar in other and better directions. So let's not be rigid about the proposed schedule. We will surely rearrange, amend, eliminate, add, get ahead, and get behind. This is your course, and it should respond to your deepest needs and values!

Please read actively! Please don't just passively take in what these or any books say; question and argue with the authors; write comments in the margins; explore your own ideas, questions, and experiences. Imagine what it must feel like to be in the situations the texts describe. Read with both your mind and your heart!!!!

Important dates: To assist your planning, please note that some religious holidays are included in the calendar below. (What holidays did I overlook?) Please remember to let Charles know by Jan. 16 about any cultural or religious observations, or ability needs, or personal matters that would lead you to request individualized changes in our schedule or plans.

INTRODUCTION

Jan. 4 & INTRODUCTIONS: MEETING EACH OTHER, BECOMING A GROUP,

Jan. 9-11 DISCUSSING COGNITIVE THEORY AND OTHER BASIC CONCEPTS

Whitney & Kite, pp. xv-xvii and 1-31.

The Feast of the Epiphany is Jan. 6. Eastern Orthodox Christmas is Jan. 7. Sankranti is Jan. 14.

Please be sure to do the following things by Tuesday, Jan. 9:

- Please read our proposed syllabus and groundrules carefully and critically, and bring your ideas for improvement to class on Tuesday. Especially regarding groundrules, what do you need from our group in order to feel safe and supported enough to discuss personal experiences and opinions in class? Ask frankly for what you need!
- As part of your review of the syllabus, please note the topics and lengths of the various readings. It would be a good idea to work out a schedule for yourself—some weeks have more reading than others, so you might want to plan to get ahead before those weeks. Also, please consider assignments from other course syllabi, and special personal plans (trips, social events, birthdays, etc.). You may want to schedule your work schedule in our course so that you will have plenty of time for these other opportunities. Please ask for any help that Charles or others can give you in these regards.
- Importantly, please start journaling. Here are some questions you MIGHT want to consider as you begin your journal: Who are you? Please consider providing a brief but deep introduction to yourself, your life, your struggles and your values, as well as anything else you would like others to know about you. Also, talk about your transition to college. How did your first semester at Michigan go? What are your hopes and fears for your new semester? What thrills you, and what frightens you? How do you want to grow? How can the rest of us support you? What about issues of social diversity? With members of what social groups have you made friends? What groups are you nervous about? How diverse is your life at Michigan? Why? What parts of your own identity do others here seem to value, and what parts might they devalue? What sort of community do you want to create this semester?
- Since it will take a few days to organize a journal-partner system, please expect Charles to be the initial reader and responder to your first journals. However, when we begin the partner system, please also include your first journals for your partner also to read. Remember that not only will you share your journal with your partner, you will also be expected to read your partner's journal and provide honest, helpful feedback.

Jan. 16-18 Plaus, pp.ix-xiii and 49-110. Check out Plaus' webpage (www.UnderstandingPrejudice.org) and see if it's useful to you. Remember the Jan. 16 date to request individualized changes in our course in order to accommodate your religious/cultural, ability, or other needs.

RACISM

Jan. 23-25 Plaus, pp. 111-164. (You might also want to get started on next week's somewhat longer reading.)

Jan. 30-Feb. 1 Whitley & Kite, pp. 73-160 (these concepts are relevant also to other -isms, of course), and start Plaus, pp. 165-212.

Feb. 6-8 Whitley & Kite, pp. 161-207, and complete Plaus, pp. 165-212.

PERSONALITY FACTORS, CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES, AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS

Feb. 13-15 Whitley & Kite, pp. 208-343
Chinese New Year and Tet is Feb. 18. Eastern Orthodox Lent begins Feb. 19.

SEXISM

Feb. 20-22 Plaus 213-272, and Whitley & Kite, pp. 344-363
Ash Wednesday is Feb. 21.

SPRING BREAK

Feb. 27-29. Best wishes for a good and re-centering break!!
A special salute to those going on Alternate Spring Break!!!

ANTI-SEMITISM, ANTI-ISLAMISM, AND OTHER -ISMS BASED ON RELIGION

Mar. 6-8 Plaus, pp. 273-326, and handouts (to be distributed in class)

HETEROSEXISM

Mar. 13-15 Whitley & Kite, pp. 364-373, and Plaus 375-424

FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION; GENOCIDE; EXPERIENCES OF TARGET PERSONS; AND AGEISM

Mar. 20-22 & Mar. 27-29 Plaus, pp. 327-374; Whitley and Kite, pp. 374-494.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Ap. 3-5 & Ap. 10-12 & 17 Plaus, pp. 425-506, and Whitley and Kite, pp. 495-554.
*Passover is Ap. 2-10. Good Friday and Eastern Orthodox Good Friday are Ap. 6. Baisakhi is Ap. 13.
Our last class is Ap. 17.*

***HOW DOES THIS OUTLINE LOOK TO YOU? WHAT ARE YOUR IDEAS, PREFERENCES, AND SUGGESTIONS?
I LOOK FORWARD TO GETTING TO KNOW YOU!!!!***

SAMPLE GROUND RULES FOR MULTICULTURAL CLASSES

Our former colleague in psychology and business at the University of Michigan, Dr. Ruby Beale (now at Hampton University) has devised the following "MULTICULTURAL GROUND RULES FOR DISCUSSION." She uses these ground rules to help her classes and workshops discuss issues of diversity and justice.

Would some ground rules help our own class establish a safe and productive space for our discussions? If so, please consider Dr. Beale's ground rules as a sample that may help us devise our own proposals for how we will interact with each other.

1. Our primary commitment is to learn from each other, from course materials and from our work. We acknowledge differences among us in backgrounds, skills, interests, values, scholarly orientations and experience.
2. We acknowledge that sexism, classism, racism, heterosexism, and other forms of discrimination (religion, age, ability, language, education, body size, geographic location etc.) exist and may surface from time to time.
3. We acknowledge that one of the meanings of sexism, classism, racism is that we have been systematically taught misinformation about our own group and members of devalued groups (this is true for both dominant and dominated group members). The same is true about elitism and other forms of prejudice or bias –we are taught misinformation about others and ourselves.
4. We will try not to blame people for the misinformation we have learned, but we hold each other responsible for repeating misinformation or offensive behavior after we have learned otherwise.
5. Victims should not be blamed for their oppression.
6. We will assume that people are always doing the best they can, both to learn the material and to behave in non-biased and multiculturally productive ways.
7. We will share information about our groups with other members of the class, and will not demean, devalue, or "put down" people for their experiences or lack of experiences.
8. We will actively pursue opportunities to learn about our own groups and those of other groups, yet not enter or invade others' privacy when unwanted.
9. We each have an obligation to actively combat the myths and stereotypes about our own groups and other groups so that we can break down the walls which prohibit individual development, group progress and cooperation and group gain.
10. We want to create a safe atmosphere for open discussion. Members of the class may wish to make a comment verbally or in an assignment that they do not want repeated outside the classroom. Therefore, the instructor and participants will agree not to repeat the remarks outside the session that links a person with his/her identity.
11. We will challenge the idea or the practice, but not the person.
12. We will speak our discomfort.