

CCHR: Psychiatrist's Racist Tweet About Model Nyakim Gatwech Gets Scathing Rebuke

Mental Health Watchdog's Task Force Against Racism joins others in condemning racial comments from a leading U.S. psychiatrist, which forced his resignation

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Rev. Frederick Shaw, president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Inglewood South Bay branch, and founder of CCHR's [Task Force Against Racism and Modern-Day Eugenics](#) joined in the national outrage over a prominent New York psychiatrist's racial comments about the dark skin color of Ms. Nyakim

Gatwech, an American model of South Sudanese descent. The psychiatrist had said her color was possibly a "freak of nature," resulting in psychiatric hospitals and colleges with whom he works suspending him or asking for his resignation.[1]

Rev. Shaw, who has advocated for human rights in the mental health industry for some 30 years, said the subsequent apology the psychiatrist gave for the offensive tweet, was grossly inadequate for someone of his stature in psychiatry. He called for a resignation from all executive and advisory positions the psychiatrist holds internationally, including with any pharmaceutical companies—from the U.S. to Spain.

In an email to his colleagues before he was suspended, the psychiatrist apologized for the post, describing it as "racist and sexist." He added that he was "deeply ashamed" of his "prejudices and stereotypical assumptions." [2]

Dr. Elle Lett, a postdoctoral fellow in medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, told The New York Times, "To not understand how racist language like that is harmful when your profession is



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supposed to care for the mental health of people makes you unqualified to be a psychiatrist at all, let alone the chief of the top program.”[3]

But Rev. Shaw called the apology canned public relations rhetoric, especially in light of the fact that in 2021, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) publicly apologized for American psychiatry’s long-term “role in perpetrating structural racism” and its “history of actions...that hurt Black, Indigenous, and People of Color” (BIPOC).[4]

Also a spokesperson for the mental health industry watchdog Citizens Commission on Human Rights International, which helped found the Task Force against racism, Rev. Shaw noted historical examples of psychiatric racism:

- In 1792 Benjamin Rush, the “father of American psychiatry,” declared that African American’s skin color derived from a “disease” called Negritude, which he theorized was a form of leprosy. The “cure” was when their skin turned “white.”[5]

- In the 1950s U.S. psychiatrist J.C. Carothers argued that in many ways the African resembles a European 8- or 9-year-old child in his reaction to the environment. He compared Africans to a “leucotomized European.”[6]

- In 1960s: Psychiatrists claimed civil rights protests caused violent “schizophrenic” symptoms in African Americans, labeled as “protest psychosis.” African American men were said to have developed “hostile and aggressive feelings” and “delusional anti-whiteness after listening to civil rights leaders.” Ads for antipsychotics used African symbols to reflect so-called “violent traits” in minorities.[7]

- In the 1990s, the psychiatric head of the National Institute for Mental Health compared Black youth to “hyperaggressive” and “hypersexual” monkeys in a jungle who only want to kill one another, have sex and reproduce. He was forced to resign. He helped developed a “Violence Initiative” program to look for a “violent” gene in African Americans and Hispanics that could be controlled by psychiatric drugs, including the antidepressant Prozac—known to cause violent and suicidal behavior.[8]

Rev Shaw said that it is because of this known history—acknowledged by the APA—that the comments made about Ms. Gatwech are all the more disturbing. “As an African American and human rights advocate, I am appalled that Ms. Gatwech was subject to this racial abuse,” he said.

Comments from others included psychiatrist Dr. Daniel Block, who said: “It’s unconscionable that anyone would post that anywhere—it is nothing but hurtful and propagates racism,” and “That it was a psychiatrist in such a position of power and authority makes it that much worse. An apology is no longer enough—that is just words.”[9]

Thomas Smith, the acting director of the New York Psychiatric Institute, said: “We condemn the racism and sexism” that was reflected in in the tweet and “acknowledge and share the hurt, sadness, confusion, and distressing emotions” that may be felt.[10]

Rev Shaw’s Task Force Against Racism and Modern-Day Eugenics comprises over 100 African American community members that want to see racism eliminated from the mental health field and for greater accountability to be embraced in the psychiatric industry in which racist and harmful treatment of minorities is prevalent, even today.

[Read the full article here.](#)

[1] Lola Fadulu, “Columbia Psychiatry Chair Suspended After Tweet About Dark-Skinned Model: The post from Jeffrey Lieberman, which described the model as possibly a ‘freak of nature,’ drew negative attention from medical professionals,” The New York Times, 23 Feb 2022, Updated 24 Feb 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/23/nyregion/columbia-jeffrey-lieberman.html>

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] <https://www.cchrnt.org/2021/01/26/american-psychiatric-associations-apology-for-harming-african-americans-rejected/> citing Megan Brooks, “APA Apologizes for Past Support of Racism in Psychiatry,” Medscape, 19 Jan 2019, https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/944352?src=wnl_edit_tpal&uac=345404PY&impID=3143084&faf=1

[5] <https://www.cchrnt.org/2021/01/26/american-psychiatric-associations-apology-for-harming-african-americans-rejected/>, citing: Prof. Thomas Szasz, M.D., The Manufacture of Madness: A Comparative Study of the Inquisition and the Mental Health Movement, Jan. 1970, p. 154

[6] <https://www.cchrtaskforce.org/articles/mental-health-racism>

[7] <https://www.cchrnt.org/2019/07/17/minority-mental-health-month-may-spell-mental-health-slavery/> citing Jonathan M. Metz, The Protest Psychosis, How Schizophrenia became a Black Disease, (Beacon Press, Boston, 2009), pp. xii, xiv, p. 101

[8] <https://www.cchrnt.org/2020/06/16/naacp-inglewood-executive-educates-about-psychiatric-racism/> citing “U.S. Hasn’t Given Up Linking Genes to Crime,” The New York Times, 18 Sept. 1992, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/09/18/opinion/l-us-hasn-t-given-up-linking-genes-to-crime-153192.html>

[9] Ronny Reyes, “Columbia University psychiatry department chair is suspended after referring to a dark-skinned model as ‘a freak of nature’” Daily Mail, 24 Feb 2022,

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10548689/Columbia-University-prof-suspended-referring-dark-skinned-model-freak-nature.html>

[10] Op. cit., The New York Times

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