BPA News

Black Psychiatrists of America, Inc.

2026 Transcultural Conference

From Roots to Restoration

Mental Health, Heritage, and Collective Healing

November 12–15, 2026 | Accra, Ghana

BPA is proud to partner with the Psychiatric Association of Ghana for this year's Transcultural Conference. Our Ghanaian colleagues look forward to welcoming us to Accra.



BPA Executive Director, Dr. Napoleon Higgins

Conference Focus

The conference advances the transcultural exchange of information, knowledge, and support between the United States and the African diaspora, including Africa, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and anywhere communities need mental health care. It offers a depth of scientific content on psychiatric needs and treatment that you will find nowhere else.

Program Schedule

Pre-Conference (Nov 10–12), Ashanti Region: Traditional naming ceremony, cultural tours, and a visit to a local psychiatric hospital. *Sold out.*

The 2027 Spring Conference will be held in Houston, TX from April 1–4, 2027.

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BPA NEWS, DELIVERED

Updates and announcements sent directly to your inbox.

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2026 Transcultural Conference, *cont.*

- *Main Conference (Nov 12–15), Accra*: Space remains for all who wish to attend.
  - *Sunday, Nov 15*: Travel to Cape Coast Castle for a guided historical tour and reflection, with lunch and CME presentations.
- *Post-Conference (Nov 16–18), Volta Region*: Excursions and visits to psychiatric facilities. *Sold out.*

We expect approximately 100 participants. Because of strong interest, both the pre- and post-conference programs have sold out.

Travel Support
Please contact us with any questions about travel, accommodations, passports, visas, or general preparation for travel to Ghana.

Stay Connected
Visit our website for updates. We strongly encourage all attendees to download WhatsApp, where we will share live, real-time information throughout the conference.

We look forward to seeing you in Ghana. As always, we expect a rewarding and memorable gathering.



Dual Citizenship and Real Estate Opportunities in Ghana, West Africa

By Napoleon Higgins, MD

Colleagues, we are eagerly anticipating the 2026 Transcultural Conference in Ghana, West Africa. The pre- and post-conference programs are sold out, but the main conference is not, and there is still plenty of room. Please book your tickets now.

Friday Night Session: Opportunities Abroad
A highlight of the conference will be a full Friday evening session on:

- Dual citizenship pathways
- Broader economic opportunities in Ghana
- Real estate, both individual and commercial

We will look at individual investment opportunities. We will also explore what BPA can do as an organization, including options available to a nonprofit operating overseas. Consider bringing a friend or colleague with an interest in property. Individuals, groups, and teams can pool ideas and invest together.

Living Between Two Nations
Participants will share what it has been like to live in both the U.S. and abroad. In this season of change at home, we are weighing opportunities elsewhere, whether temporary, permanent, or a combination, all while remaining U.S. citizens. Ghana has opened its doors wide to those who are interested, and it is worth a serious look. Whether or not you attend, we will share this information with the full BPA membership.

Travel and What's Next
Please follow all travel information and recommendations so we can have a wonderful time together. If we don't see you in Ghana, we will see you at our Spring Meeting in Houston, Texas, April 1–4, 2027. Details are coming soon.

We look forward to seeing you in Ghana.



We want to feature **YOU** in our next newsletter! Share your wins so we can celebrate you. Submit your highlight or article by January 2, 2027.

Widening the Doorway: Dr. Shirley F. Marks

By Napoleon Higgins, MD

In 1969, Shirley Marks entered Harvard Medical School as one of 16 Black students and the only Black woman among them. Decades later, she described the experience in two words: "Really isolated."

Born in Tyler, Texas, in 1946, to two educators, she graduated as high school valedictorian and studied biology at Spelman College, including a year in Vienna on a Merrill Scholarship. In 1973, she became the first Spelman alumna to graduate from Harvard Medical School and only the second Black woman to do so, twenty-three years after the first.

After residency at McLean Hospital and a Master of Public Health from Harvard, Dr. Marks returned to Texas. She joined the Baylor College of Medicine faculty, directed the outpatient drug treatment program at the Houston VA Medical Center, and from 1981 to 1990 served as weekly psychiatric consultant on KTRK's Good Morning Houston, speaking openly about eating disorders, domestic violence, and trauma when stigma kept them hidden.

She devoted her career to patients whose pain was easiest to overlook, including trauma survivors and incarcerated women, and retired from Texas Tech's Correctional Managed Care system in 2022.

As president of the Black Psychiatrists of America, Dr. Marks helped expand the educational grant fund and advanced culturally informed care for African American patients.

Her honors include the NMA Council on Concerns of Women Physicians Service Award (2000), an honorary Doctor of Science from Spelman College (2002), and Harvard's Howard, Dorsey, Still Lecture (2023), delivered fifty years after her graduation.

Yet asked about her greatest achievement, she pointed to the one-on-one work: helping a person improve and knowing a family had come back grateful.

JOIN OUR LISTSERV

Sign up for our private listserv today for real-time conversation and up-to-the-minute content. Visit https://www.blackpsychiatrists.org/listserv

Widening the Doorway: Dr. Shirley F. Marks, *cont.*

By Napoleon Higgins, MD

Dr. Marks crossed a lonely threshold and spent a lifetime widening the doorway behind her. For BPA members, her example endures: barriers are broken so they can be opened for others.

Adapted from original article on Facebook



Congratulations!

Congratulations to Dr. Tiffani Bell Washington and Dr. Ja'Nelle Blocker on being among the 31 recipients of the American Medical Women's Association (AMWA) INSPIRE Award.

The INSPIRE Award, announced by the AMWA Leadership Council, champions women physicians who personally and/or professionally provide inspiration to women in medicine through expert and compassionate patient-centered medical care, through mentorship, and/or service to the community.

Join us as we celebrate the 2026 AMWA INSPIRE Award recipients for their exceptional leadership, mentorship, and unwavering dedication to transforming the medical culture.





You Can't Be the Best-Kept Secret: Let's Spotlight You

By Ifeanyi Olele, MD



Dr. Ifeanyi Olele
BPA Communications & Social Media Committee Chair

The Black Psychiatrists of America is filled with physicians doing incredible work across psychiatry, academics, advocacy, research, leadership, private practice, community service, and beyond. But here is the problem: too many of our members are doing great work quietly.

You can't be the best-kept secret.

One of the goals of BPA's social media presence is to highlight the people who make our organization what it is. We want our members, trainees, colleagues, and the broader community to see the diversity of careers, accomplishments, interests, and stories represented within BPA. That means we need to hear from you.

BPA currently has two opportunities for members to be featured on our social media platforms:

New Resident/Attending on the Block

Are you a psychiatry resident or a newer attending physician? This feature gives us an opportunity to introduce you to the BPA community, celebrate the next stage of your career, and help members get to know the people shaping the future of psychiatry.

Complete the form here

Meet the Psychiatrist

Every psychiatrist has a story. Where you practice, what you specialize in, the communities you serve, the work you are passionate about, and even the path that brought you into psychiatry can inspire another member.

The Meet the Psychiatrist series allows us to highlight BPA members and showcase the many different ways Black psychiatrists are making an impact.

Complete the form here by clicking here

You Can't Be the Best-Kept Secret: Let's Spotlight You, *cont.*

By Ifeanyi Olele, MD

Submitting your information is simple, but its impact can extend far beyond a single social media post. Your story may introduce you to a future collaborator, mentor, mentee, colleague, referral partner, or friend. Just as importantly, someone earlier in their career may see your journey and realize that a similar path is possible for them.

BPA has an incredible membership. Our social media platforms should reflect that.

So tell us who you are. Tell us what you are doing. Let us celebrate your work.

Don't be the best-kept secret. Let BPA spotlight you.



Stand Your Ground Demands a Diminished-Capacity Examination: Forensic Psychiatric Considerations and Disparate Outcomes

By Rahn K. Bailey, MD, DFAPA & William D. Richie, MD, DFAPA

Abstract

In a similar vein to the Black Psychiatrists of America's (BPA) October 15, 2026, "Call For Investigation into Alarming Deaths of African Americans by Hanging", this article advocates for legislative, judicial, and plebiscitary reforms insisting upon a mental state examination of the accused. It examines the complex relationship between stand-your-ground laws, criminal intent, and psychiatric evidence, with particular attention to potential racial disparities in the application of self-defense doctrines.

Drawing on a 2019 presentation to the BPA, this article contrasts the insanity defense with diminished-capacity arguments, considering how each interacts with the prosecution's obligation to establish the mental elements of an offense. It then reviews the general development of stand-your-ground laws, selected case examples from the presentation, and persistent concerns regarding legal immunity, investigative rigor, and unequal judicial outcomes.

Notably, historical figures cited in the original presentation suggested that defendants who killed Black victims faced lower penalties than those who killed white victims; these figures are reproduced here strictly as claims reported in the source material, rather than independently verified current estimates. The article concludes that transparent investigations, careful jury instructions, consistent evidence collection, and explicit examinations of a defendant's mental state are vital legal safeguards. Because self-defense statutes and diminished-capacity doctrines vary significantly by jurisdiction, this analysis must be tailored to controlling local law and should not be construed as formal legal advice.

Keywords

stand-your-ground laws; diminished capacity; mens rea; forensic psychiatry; insanity defense; racial disparities; self-defense

Introduction

Criminal responsibility depends not only on whether a prohibited act occurred, but also on the mental state required by the offense and the applicable rules of criminal law. The presentation "Stand Your Ground as a Diminished Capacity 'Defense'," delivered at the Black Psychiatrists of America's 50th Anniversary Psychiatry Conference on April 12, 2019, raised a central concern: in some self-defense

Stand Your Ground Demands a Diminished-Capacity Examination: Forensic Psychiatric Considerations and Disparate Outcomes, *cont.*

By Rahn K. Bailey, MD, DFAPA & William D. Richie, MD, DFAPA

proceedings, a defendant's account of fear and perceived danger may be accepted without a sufficiently explicit examination of the mental state relevant to the claim.

The Article placed this concern in the context of racial disparities in criminal justice outcomes affecting African Americans. It aimed to review trial stages, mental-state examinations, burdens of proof, and points at which disparities may influence outcomes. This article condenses that presentation into a framework for discussion among forensic psychiatrists, legal professionals, researchers, and policymakers.

Mens Rea, Actus Reus, and Psychiatric Evidence

This article distinguishes actus reus—the prohibited act—from mens rea, the mental state required for a particular offense. The prosecution generally must establish the elements of the charged crime beyond a reasonable doubt. When an offense requires a specific intent, evidence about the defendant's mental state may be relevant to whether that element has been proved.

Forensic psychiatric evidence can assist the court by describing symptoms, cognitive functioning, emotional state, and other clinically relevant findings at the time of the alleged offense. Clinical diagnoses do not, by themselves, determine legal responsibility. The expert's role is to explain the evidence and its limitations; the legal standard and ultimate decision belong to the court or factfinder under the jurisdiction's rules.

Insanity and Diminished Capacity: Distinct Legal Concepts

This article reviews the historical development of the insanity defense, including the M'Naghten rule, the irresistible-impulse test, the Durham or "product" test, and the American Law Institute's Model Penal Code approach. These standards differ in how they address a defendant's ability to understand the nature or wrongfulness of conduct and, in some jurisdictions, the ability to conform conduct to law. The presentation also notes reforms following the trial of John W. Hinckley Jr., including federal changes that narrowed the insanity defense.

Insanity and diminished capacity should not be treated as interchangeable. An insanity defense, where

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available and established under local law, concerns whether a defendant meets the jurisdiction's criteria for legal nonresponsibility. A diminished-capacity argument, where recognized, typically concerns whether evidence of mental disorder or another specified condition undermines proof of a required mental element. Its availability, scope, and procedural treatment vary substantially by jurisdiction; it is not a universal, standalone defense.

This article uses the Dan White case and the press label "Twinkie defense" to illustrate public misunderstanding and controversy surrounding diminished-capacity arguments. The broader point is that psychiatric evidence must be connected carefully to the specific legal question, rather than being used as a general explanation or excuse for criminal conduct.

Stand-Your-Ground Laws and the Duty to Retreat

Stand-your-ground laws generally remove a legal duty to retreat before using otherwise legally justified force in circumstances specified by statute. They developed from, and differ in detail from, traditional self-defense rules and home-defense doctrines. The article identifies Florida's 2005 legislation and discusses provisions addressing the absence of a duty to retreat, presumptions concerning fear in specified home or vehicle intrusions, and immunity from criminal prosecution or civil action in qualifying cases.

The presentation also reviews variations among states, including Tennessee, Louisiana, Georgia, Texas, and jurisdictions that retain some form of duty to retreat. These examples demonstrate why broad national summaries can obscure meaningful differences in statutory language, case law, burden allocation, and the circumstances in which deadly force is justified.

This article's state-by-state descriptions reflect the material assembled in 2019 and should be checked against current statutes and controlling decisions before publication or legal use.

Case Examples and Procedural Questions

This article discusses several cases to illustrate how self-defense claims are assessed and how procedural decisions can shape outcomes. In the Marissa Alexander case, this article notes that an

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appellate court rejected her claim to stand-your-ground immunity but ordered a new trial because of erroneous jury instructions. It also references the deaths of Trayvon Martin and Daniel Adkins Jr., and cases involving Joe Horn and other defendants, as examples of the contested circumstances in which claims of defensive force arise.

These examples should not be treated as interchangeable: the facts, charges, procedural posture, legal standards, and eventual outcomes differ. Their value for forensic and policy discussion lies in the questions they raise about how evidence is gathered, how threats are characterized, how the defendant's perceptions are evaluated, and how legal instructions guide jurors. A case-specific analysis should rely on primary court opinions and verified records rather than summaries or media descriptions alone.

Racial Disparities and the Need for Reliable Data

This article argues that stand-your-ground outcomes may be affected by the race of the person killed. It cites figures stating that 73% of those who killed a Black person faced no penalty, compared with 59% of those who killed a white person. The slides do not provide enough methodological detail to establish the source population, time period, case-selection criteria, statistical adjustment, or causal interpretation of these figures. They should therefore be understood as statistics reported in the 2019 presentation, not as independently validated estimates.

A stronger evidence base would require transparent definitions of "no penalty" and "stand-your-ground case," consistent data on victim and defendant characteristics, details of the incident and weapon, prosecutorial decisions, charging outcomes, immunity hearings, jury verdicts, and appellate review. Analyses should distinguish correlation from causation and account for jurisdictional variation and case-level differences. Disaggregated, regularly reported data would help researchers assess whether legal protections are being applied consistently and equitably.

Recommendations for Practice and Policy

This article proposes maintaining legitimate self-defense protections while preventing immunity from becoming a substitute for a thorough investigation. Its recommendations include standardized

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investigation procedures; collection and annual reporting of data on justifiable uses of force; clearer jury instructions emphasizing imminence and the legal requirements for deadly force; and safeguards against immunity where the facts do not satisfy the governing law.

Forensic psychiatrists can contribute by clarifying the limits of retrospective mental-state opinions, separating clinical diagnosis from legal conclusions, and explaining how symptoms and context may or may not bear on the relevant legal elements. Attorneys and courts should ensure that expert testimony addresses the actual legal question in the jurisdiction. Policymakers should support consistent data collection, public reporting, and independent evaluation of outcomes across racial groups and jurisdictions.

Limitations

This article is a condensed synthesis of a conference presentation delivered in 2019, not a systematic review of the legal or empirical literature. This article's statistical claims and descriptions of state law have not been independently verified for this draft and may be incomplete or outdated. Before journal submission, each legal proposition should be checked against current statutory text and appellate decisions, and each empirical claim should be supported by an identifiable, methodologically sound source. The article does not offer jurisdiction-specific legal advice.

Conclusion

Stand-your-ground laws raise questions at the intersection of self-defense, criminal intent, forensic psychiatric evidence, and equal treatment under law. The insanity defense and diminished-capacity arguments address different legal questions, while stand-your-ground provisions govern when force may be justified and whether retreat is required. Keeping these concepts distinct is essential to sound analysis.

Fair and reliable outcomes depend on careful investigation, accurate application of jurisdiction-specific law, clear jury instructions, appropriately limited expert testimony, and data capable of revealing disparities. A transparent process that evaluates the relevant facts and legal elements consistently is necessary both to preserve legitimate self-defense rights and to maintain public confidence in the justice system.

Stand Your Ground Demands a Diminished-Capacity Examination: Forensic Psychiatric Considerations and Disparate Outcomes, *cont.*

By Rahn K. Bailey, MD, DFAPA & William D. Richie, MD, DFAPA

Selected References from the Presentation

American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law. (2011–2012). Practice guidelines for forensic psychiatric evaluation of defendants raising the insanity defense.

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M'Naghten's Case, 10 Cl. & Fin. 200, 8 Eng. Rep. 718 (H.L. 1843).

Parsons v. State, 81 Ala. 577 (1887).

Richie, W. D. (2019, April 12). Stand Your Ground as a Diminished Capacity "Defense" [Conference presentation]. Black Psychiatrists of America 50th Anniversary Psychiatry Conference.

The presentation also cited sources by P. J. Resnick on the insanity defense; Daniel P. Greenfield on criminal responsibility from a clinical perspective; John Rubin on diminished capacity; and case materials involving Marissa Alexander, George Zimmerman, and other self-defense proceedings. Full bibliographic details should be verified before submission.

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October 15, 2026

STATEMENT: Black Psychiatrists of America (BPA) Calls for Investigation into Alarming Deaths of African Americans by Hanging

Washington, D.C. — A number of recent hanging deaths involving African Americans has shaken our community. Several of these deaths have been classified locally as suicides, raising serious questions among African American psychiatrists about whether these cases have received the level of independent forensic scrutiny they warrant.

In response, Rahn Kennedy Bailey, MD, President of the BPA, issued the following statement:

> We are deeply alarmed by recent reports of multiple deaths by hanging involving African American individuals across the Southern United States. These events are a painful reminder of past atrocities against the African American community following Reconstruction, including the rise of the Ku Klux Klan and the Jim Crow era, when legal protections for African American citizens were absent or unenforced.
>
> Each of these recent hanging deaths must be investigated. Research consistently demonstrates that the overwhelming majority of suicides occur in familiar, private settings. Because most suicide deaths occur in private settings, deaths involving hanging in public, unfamiliar spaces warrant careful consideration of the circumstances surrounding the method of death. The reported circumstances in several of these cases raise significant concerns about whether local investigators exercised sufficient rigor.
>
> The African American community's concern surrounding these deaths is real and visceral. Our patients have expressed fears for their own safety and for the safety of their families, friends, neighbors, and communities. These concerns exist within the historical context of significant and sustained racial terror. History has shown that racial violence in the United States has been neither sufficiently investigated nor accurately classified.
>
> Today, we call for:
>
> - Independent investigation of each reported African American hanging death involving unusual circumstances.
> - Reopening and reviewing previously closed cases where suicide deaths were not afforded comprehensive forensic examination.
> - Appropriate state and federal oversight where warranted.
>
> Until these steps are taken, our patients will continue to carry deep-seated apprehension, ongoing fearfulness, and a sense of unease about whether they are safe. The lack of

independent investigation in these cases delivers the harrowing message that our lives are not valued equally under the law. These negative impacts contribute to diminished emotional stability and elevate the risk of psychiatric disorders within our communities.

As psychiatrists and members of the BPA, we advocate for the health, safety, and dignity of all persons, particularly African Americans who have historically been denied equitable access to adequate psychiatric care. Every unusual death that impacts the African American mental health community deserves thorough examination.

An annotated list of sources supporting the comments made in this statement is available at: https://blackpsychiatrists.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/10/Annotated-References_BPA-Calls-for-Investigation-into-Alarming-Deaths-of-Black-Americans-by-Hanging.pdf

For more information or to speak with an expert, contact BPA's Media Team at media@blackpsychs.org.