

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND WOMEN'S STUDIES

BLST2410F: Youth and Black Girlhood Between Crisis and Refusal

Fall 2026

Preliminary outline - subject to change

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The department would like to recognize that we are located on the traditional land of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lenape and Attawandaron peoples.

Course Description:

Who gets to be a child? What is youth? Who is protected by these designations and who is denied it? These are not abstract questions. Shaped by race and gender, these questions have determined where young people go to school, how they are treated when they enter a classroom or courtroom, what stories get told about them, and which of their own stories get heard. This course takes Black girlhood as its central lens for approaching these questions. Black girlhood in this course is not as a fixed identity to be catalogued, but as a site of inquiry from which we can examine how race, gender, class, and age work together to organize power, define personhood, and produce both harm and possibility.

We begin with a foundational question of the field: what does it mean to center Black girls? Black girlhood studies, which draws on Black feminist thought, queer theory, Black studies, and youth studies, insists that this question is a methodological and political one as much as it is a scholarly one. Black girls have long been subjected to narratives built by others that position them primarily within narratives of crisis, danger, premature adulthood, and deficiency. This course teaches students to read those narratives critically to ask who produces them, what purposes they serve, and what they erase. This course also insists that Black girls have always produced counter-narratives of their own in the form of creative expression, collective refusal, intellectual traditions, digital media, and everyday life. In this course, students will explore these questions and tensions through academic scholarship, memoir, poetry, music, film, and other cultural texts in order to understand how the lives of Black girls offer an important window into some of the most urgent questions of our time about the state, representation, gendered and racial violence, and the terms on which young people are allowed to exist.

Course Learning Outcomes:

- Explain how childhood and youth are socially constructed categories, and identify how race, gender, and class shape what "girlhood" means in different contexts;
- Compare Black girls' lived experiences to cultural representations of Black girlhood, and track how these have changed over time;

- Use frameworks from Black feminist thought, intersectionality, and girlhood studies to analyze texts, images, and media;
- Identify how narratives of crisis, agency, and belonging are built around Black girls, and recognize how Black girls push back on, negotiate, or refuse those narratives;
- Distinguish between different research methods used to study young people, including ethnographic, representational, and archival approaches;
- Communicate ideas and analysis clearly in writing and in other formats
- Describe the key ideas, debates, and methods that define Black girlhood studies as a field, and explain how it relates to youth studies more broadly;

Required Texts:

Students are not required to purchase any texts for this course. All readings will be available on Western's Course Readings platform.

Evaluation:

- Attendance and Participation- 10%
- Reflection Activity Portfolio- 20%
 - include short activities or short handwritten reflections (50-100 words) responding to a prompt, a song, poem, short film or other media to think alongside the readings distributed throughout the term. Should be submitted as a portfolio at the end of the term.
- Midterm Exam (Mixed Format)- 20%
- Analytical Essay (1200 words)- 25%
- Final Group Multimodal Project and In-Class Presentation- 25%

Course Website:

All course information, including assignments, will be posted on the course website. Go to <https://owl.uwo.ca/portal>.