

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND WOMEN'S STUDIES
BLST 2230F: Introduction to Black/African Diaspora
Fall 2026

(Preliminary Outline, subject to change)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course offers an interdisciplinary exploration of the Black/African Diaspora, examining how histories of slavery, colonialism, migration, and resistance have shaped Black life across the globe. Through the lenses of Black Studies, History, Geography, and Cultural Studies, we trace the global routes and local roots of diasporic experience from the transatlantic slave trade to contemporary movements for justice. Students will investigate how Black communities have navigated displacement and forged modes of survival, belonging, and cultural expression. Topics include the global economy of slavery, Black life in Canada, Afro-Indigenous relations, spiritual and artistic practices, and ongoing struggles for liberation. Readings will be paired with films, music, and visual materials that bring the complexity and richness of Black diasporic life into focus.

Course Objectives:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Understand key theoretical concepts in Black/African Diaspora Studies.
- Analyze the historical processes that shaped the Black/African Diaspora.
- Examine Black cultural and political formations across various diasporic sites (including North America, the Caribbean, Latin America, and Africa).
- Interrogate the relationships between Blackness, Indigeneity, and settler colonialism in Canada and beyond.
- Engage with a range of interdisciplinary texts to explore how Black diasporic subjects navigate place, memory, and identity.
- Critically assess the role of visual and sonic cultures in shaping Black diasporic expression and resistance.
- Reflect on contemporary issues affecting Black communities globally.

Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of key theoretical frameworks for studying the Black/African diaspora.
- Critically analyze key texts and media related to the histories and lived experiences of Black diasporic communities.
- Demonstrate awareness of the complexities of Black identity formation across different temporal and geographic contexts.
- Compare and contrast the experiences of Black communities in Canada, the Caribbean, Latin America, and Africa.
- Apply interdisciplinary methodologies to examine diasporic cultural practices.
- Synthesize historical and contemporary debates about Black migration, citizenship, and belonging.
- Engage in informed discussions on Black cultural production, including literature, film, photography, music, and oral histories.
- Conduct independent research and present findings in clear, well-argued written and oral formats.

REQUIRED TEXTS AND OFF-CAMPUS VISITS

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

ASSESSMENTS

1. **Participation — 10%**

Students are expected to engage consistently and thoughtfully with course materials, class discussions, guest speakers, in-class activities, and group work. Engagement may include contributing to discussion, asking questions, participating in small groups, listening attentively, building on peers' ideas, and making connections between readings, lectures, films, archives, and everyday examples.

2. **Discussion Posts — 5% x 5 posts**

Students will complete five discussion posts throughout the term. This assignment is designed to support regular attendance, preparation, and engagement with guest presentations, course readings, and key concepts. These responses are opportunities to demonstrate engagement with the material and to practise making connections across readings, lectures, media, and discussion.

3. **The City as Syllabus — 25%**

Students will complete an experiential learning project that considers the city, the archive, and everyday life as sites of Black diasporic memory, creativity, resistance, and community. Students will complete three to five engagements connected to Black diasporic life, memory, or culture. These may include visits to local sites, cultural spaces, Black-owned businesses, exhibitions, community organizations, public artworks, historical landmarks, relevant events, digital archives, online maps, museum collections, oral histories, photographs, music, food spaces, or other approved materials.

4. **Film Response — 20%**

Students will write a 1,000-to-1,200-word essay responding to one of the assigned films. Analyses should draw on at least three scholarly sources (i.e., journal articles, peer-reviewed book chapters, academic monographs) not listed on the syllabus.

5. **Final Podcast— 20%**

Students will work in groups of two to four to create a 12–15-minute podcast episode on a focused topic related to Black diaspora. The project should have a clear central question or argument and should combine research, analysis, and accessible storytelling. Students are encouraged to use narration, interviews, music clips, archival materials, ambient sound, images, or other media where appropriate.

WEEKLY BREAKDOWN

Week 1, Mapping the Diaspora

Week 7, Diasporic Frequencies

Week 2, The Afterlife of Slavery

Week 8, Black Queer Routes

Week 3, Shared Ground

Week 9, Afro-Latinidades

Week 4, A Black Sense of Place

Week 10, Unearthing Empire

Week 5, Archiving the Diaspora

Week 11, Weathering Diaspora

Week 6, Breaking Bread

Week 12, The Living Revolution