

Western University
London, Ontario, Canada
Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies
Winter 2025

GSWS 2168B: Black Popular Culture Today

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

Instructor: Anmol Dutta (she/her)

Course Description

Black popular culture is concerned with pleasure, enjoyment, and amusement and is expressed through aesthetic codes and genres. Drawing on literature, film, television, and music, this course examines examples of popular culture created by and for Black individuals to consider Black cultural values, beliefs, experiences, and social institutions. This course aims to explore Black narratives in Popular Culture that dismantle, interrogate, and re-write normative representations. We will explore the intersectional ways in which these narratives skewer white privilege and re-write the Black experience.

Learning Outcomes:

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

- Improve critical thinking, writing, and analytical skills.
- Have an overall understanding of the socio-cultural and political impact that specifically Black popular culture can have.
- Learn how engaging divergent perspectives of the gendered Black experience is a way of remembering the past, and of creating new ways of re-imagining the future.

Teaching Assistants

	Name	Email	Office Hours
1.	Victoria Ocran (she/her)		TBD
2.	Shambhavi Siddhi (she/her)		TBD
3.	Mehnaz Tabassum (she/her)		TBD

Required Texts

There are no required texts students that need to purchase for the course. All course readings will be provided via the course website on OWL Brightspace under the “**Content**” tab. Click on the "Weekly

Classes" tab to see the specific readings assigned for that week. The [links to the viewings are posted on the syllabus and course outline as well.](#)

Readings and Asynchronous Learning

This course will be taught asynchronously. Asynchronous learning is independent and relies on the student directly their own schedule. All materials will be provided on the course website on OWL via the Readings tab under “Resources.” This does not mean that you have access to the entire course. Readings and lectures will be posted weekly. Completing the course requirements, listening to lectures, etc. are the responsibility of the student. Please ensure that you plan your time accordingly.

Technical Requirements: a.) Laptop b.) Stable Internet Connection

EVALUATIONS

Assignment	Description	Points	Deadline
Syllabus Quiz	Open-book quiz about the syllabus	5%	No later than Jan 19, 2025
Midterm Exam	Multiple Choice and True/False Questions	25%	Feb 13–18
Short Analysis			
Short Analysis 1: 400-500 analysis WEEK 2-5	500–600-word close reading analysis of an image, scene, or a quote from your critical readings from the syllabus.	20%	DUE on Feb 10
Short Analysis 2: 400-500 analysis WEEK 8-11	500-600-word close reading analysis of an image, scene, or a quote from your critical readings from the syllabus.	20%	DUE on March 24
Final Exam	Reflection-based responses about your learnings, and takeaways from the course. (Divided in three parts and will have internal options).	30%	DUE in April TBD

Grading Criteria (further details posted under the “Assignments” tab on OWL):

- A+ (90 to 100) – Excellent work
- A (80 and up) - Superior work
- B (70 to 79) Good work, meeting all requirements, and eminently satisfactory
- C (60 and up) – Competent work, meeting requirements
- D (50 to 59) – Fair work, minimally acceptable
- F (49 and down) – Assignment does not apply to course; basic requirements are unmet; plagiarism).

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

**** Additional information about assignments will be posted soon at: Resources → Assignment Guidelines****

Syllabus Quiz – 5%

Students will complete an open book quiz on OWL by the end of Week 2 Sunday, Jan 19 at 11:55pm. The Syllabus Quiz can be found through the “Tests and Quizzes” tab of the Course OWL site. The quiz will be made available to students on Tuesday, January 9 at 9am. The quiz will automatically close at 11:55 pm on Sunday, Jan 19, even if you have not finished the quiz. Questions will all be based entirely on the information provided on the Course Outline doc and the Introductory Video.

All 20 questions will be multiple choice or True/False. Students will have 20 minutes to complete the quiz from the moment it is opened on OWL. Grades will be returned on January 24.

NOTE: No extensions will be granted for this assignment. No re-does or remakes will be granted. Students with accommodation will have the allotted extra time provided for their quiz.

Short Analysis Assignments (2) x 20% = 40%

Students will select (2) weeks: 1 week from Week 2 and 5, and 1 week from Week 8 and 11 of the course to write a 500-600 word analysis on that week’s topic/themes. Short Analysis (SA) #1 must be completed between Weeks 2 and 5 and is due by 11.55 pm, Feb 10. SA #2 must be completed between Weeks 8 and 11 and is due by 11.55 pm, March 24. Once they have already chosen the week, students are strongly encouraged to submit the assignment before the due date.

	Week	Topic	Dates (Mon-Sun)
Short Analysis 1: 500-600 words (DUE: 11.55 pm, Feb 10)	2	“Black Looks” in Popular Culture	Jan 13-19
	3	Performance and Blackness: Rap & Hip Hop	Jan 20-26
	4	Performance and Blackness: Stand-Up Comedy	Jan 27- Feb 2
	5	Belonging and Visibility: Racialization of Black Hair	Feb 3-9
	6	MIDTERM EXAM	Feb 13 - 18
	7	READING WEEK	Feb 15 - 23
Short Analysis 2:	8	Belonging and Visibility: <i>Moonlight</i> and Queer, Black Masculinities	Feb 24- March 2

500-600 words (DUE: 11.55 pm, Mar 24)	9	Belonging and Visibility: Beyonce and Black Motherhood	March 3 – 9
	10	Re-Making Blackness: Horror and the Black Body in <i>Get Out</i>	March 10 – 16
	11	Re-Making Blackness: Afro- futurism and <i>Black Panther</i>	March 17 - 23

Each SA must include an analysis of the relevance to the week’s topic by offering a close reading analysis of an image, or a scene, or a quote from your critical readings of that week, and discuss its relevance to the theme of the week.

For example, if you choose to analyze a scene from Childish Gambino’s “This is America” from Week 3, you must critically analyze the scene in relation to the ideas discussed in the readings and lectures of that week’s theme of Performance and Blackness.

You could also, for example, choose an image that highlights the discussion of the politics of hair and belonging in Week 5. You will have to do a close reading of the image, and write your analysis based on the ideas discussed in the readings and lectures of that week’s theme.

If you choose to analyze a quote from a reading that spoke to you, you will first discuss your understanding of that quote, and then tie it with the topics discussed that week.

Midterm Exam – 25%

Students will complete a midterm exam on OWL. Students can complete the exam any time between February 13 and February 18. Once the midterm exam is opened, OWL will begin a timer (2 hours) and students will have the allotted time to complete the exam. The exam will automatically close and be submitted at the end of the time limit and/or at 11:55pm on Tuesday, February 18. Midterm exam questions will be multiple choice and true/false. More details will be provided leading up to the midterm exam.

Please note that exams are due absolutely no later than 11:55pm on Tuesday, February 18. Please be sure that you begin the exam ensuring you provide yourself enough time to complete the exam.

NOTE: Since there is a six-day period to take this exam, **no extensions will be provided for this exam.**

No late exams will be accepted. Students with accommodations will have the allotted extra time provided for their exam.

Final Exam – 30%

Students will complete a take-home exam that will be scheduled during the regular exam period. The exam format will include short reflection-based responses about your learnings, and takeaways from the course. The exam will be divided in three parts: Part A, Part B, and Part C. You will answer **2/4** prompts in **Part A and B respectively**. In **Part C**, you will answer **1/3** prompts. The exam will be released 24 hours prior to the due date.

The exam due date will be determined by the official university exam schedule. More details regarding the final exam will be made available at the end of term.

No late exams will be accepted. Students with accommodations will have the allotted extra time provided for their exam.

COURSE POLICIES

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence

In this course, the use of AI (automatic translation tools, ChatGPT...) is strictly prohibited. If AI use is suspected, the instructor will ask for research notes, rough drafts, essay outlines, and other materials used in preparing assignments. Students are expected to retain these materials until after final grades have been entered. In the unlikely event of concerns being raised about the authenticity of any assignment, students may be asked to produce these materials; an inability to do so may weigh heavily against them.

Email Response Time

Please note that emails/OWL messages to the instructor and TAs will be responded to within 48 hours during regular working hours on Mon – Fri from 9-5pm. Please ensure to respect these working hours. When contacting the instructor or TAs via email, students *must* include the course code (GSWS 2168B) in the subject line and use their official UWO email account to send the email. Emails without the course code and/or not sent from a UWO email are subject to be overlooked and not be responded to in time. Students are reminded that OWL and their UWO emails are the primary methods of communication at the university and should check their accounts regularly (i.e., daily).

Please also note that students are fully responsible for looking at and being familiar with the information posted on the department website at: <https://www.uwo.ca/gsws//undergraduate/index.html>.

Essay Policy

All short-analysis essay submissions **MUST** be on works studied in this course. They must follow current MLA format (MLA 9) and must include a list of Works Cited at the end (see *MLA formatting* under Resources on OWL for details). There is a helpful online version of the guide here: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/index.html

Late Policy

Please note that all overdue essays will receive a penalty of **3% per day late**, including weekends and holidays. Students should not contact the instructor with requests for extensions or any kind of academic accommodation for assignments worth more than 10% of the final grade. They should be directed to their academic counselor. Once the instructor has received a recommendation for accommodation or consideration, then you can discuss the new due date, but not before. Accommodations for medical reasons cannot be given by the instructor, students must go through the proper channels to receive the medical accommodations (see below).

Intellectual Property/Copyright

All instructor-written materials (e.g. PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students' personal use within the course, and remain the instructor's (Professor Dutta's)

intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without securing the consent of the copyright owner, Anmol Dutta, may be an infringement of copyright.

You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (both online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines.

NOTE: The instructor will pass the cases listed above on to the Western University Ombudsperson or the Department Chair as appropriate.

ACCOMMODATION POLICIES

Policy on Academic Consideration for Student Absences

Students should note that **individual instructors are *not* permitted to receive documentation directly from a student**, whether in support of an application for consideration on medical grounds, or for other reasons. All documentation must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's Home Faculty. For Western University policy on Consideration for Student Absence, see Policy on Academic Consideration for Student Absences - Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs and for the Student Medical Certificate (SMC), see:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf. Please see the following link for UWO's official [Policy on Academic Consideration for Student Absence](#).

Medical Accommodation

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. For UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness see the online Academic Calendar; information can also be found here:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_pdf and <https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm>

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the 2024 Diversity Calendar at <https://www.edi.uwo.ca/>.

Missed assignments and academic accommodation: Academic Accommodation must be requested within 28 days of the missed assignment.

Note for students with disabilities: Please contact ws-ugrad@uwo.ca if you require any information in plain text format, or if any other accommodation can make the course material and/or physical space

accessible to you. Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#).

Support Services: Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Wellness and Wellbeing at Western at: <https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html>. For other service, please connect with:

Registrarial Services: <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services: <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC: <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Academic Support & Engagement: <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

ACADEMIC OFFENCES

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Plagiarism:

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

Plagiarism Check:

The University of Western Ontario uses Turnitin software for plagiarism checking. All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com at <https://www.turnitin.com/>.

COURSE SCHEDULE AND SYLLABUS

Week		Topic	Dates (Mon-Sun)	
1	Short Analysis 1:	Introduction: Course Welcome	Jan 6-12	FINAL
2		“Black Looks” in Popular Culture	Jan 13-19	

3	500-600 words (DUE: Feb 10)	Performance and Blackness: Rap & Hip Hop	Jan 20-26	(DUE: April TBD)
4		Performance and Blackness: Stand-Up Comedy	Jan 27- Feb 2	
5		Belonging and Visibility: Racialization of Black Hair	Feb 3 - 9	
6		MIDTERM EXAM	Feb 13 - 18	
7		READING WEEK	Feb 15 - 23	
8	Short Analysis 2: 500-600 words (DUE: Mar 24)	Belonging and Visibility: <i>Moonlight</i> and Queer, Black Masculinities	Feb 24- March 2	
9		Belonging and Visibility: Beyonce and Black Motherhood	March 3 – 9	
10		Re-Making Blackness: Horror and the Black Body in <i>Get Out</i>	March 10 – 16	
11		Re-Making Blackness: Afro- futurism and <i>Black Panther</i>	March 17 - 23	
12		Black Futurisms: Where are we Headed?	March 24 – 30	
13		Catch Up Week	March 31 – April 6	

Week 1 - Jan 6 – Introduction: Welcome, Course Outline, and Expectations

Introductory Video explaining the Course Outline; Syllabus; and the Assignments.

Week 2 – Jan 13 – Understanding “Black Looks” in Popular Culture

****SYLLABUS QUIZ DUE ON JAN 19****

Readings:

- Stuart Hall, “What is ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?” in *Black Popular Culture*. Bay Press, 1992.
- bell hooks, “Loving Blackness as Political Resistance” in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Routledge, 2015.

Week 3 – Jan 20 – Performance and Blackness: The Resistance of Rap and Hip-Hop Feminism

Viewings:

- Childish Gambino, *This is America*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYOjWnS4cMY>
- U.N.I.T.Y. by Queen Latifah. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8cHxydDb7o>

Readings:

- Tricia Rose, “Prophets of Rage: Rap Music and the Politics of Black Cultural Expression” in *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*.
- Shanon Cochran, “Give me Body! Race, Gender, and Corpulence Identity in the artistry and Activism of Queen Latifah”

Week 4 – Jan 27 – Performance and Blackness: Resistance at the Intersections of Oppression in Stand-up Comedy

Viewings:

- “First Girl Crush,” Wanda Sykes: *I am an Entertainer*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KcHfWUwWlv0>
- “Being Gay is Harder than Being Black,” Wanda Sykes: *I’mma be Me*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xn-4CU6ifo8>
- “Biracial Girl’s Hair,” Wanda Sykes: *I’mma be Me*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2xwBJiKFygw>

Readings:

- Katelyn Hale Wood, “Black Feminist Comedic Performance and Queer Temporalities in the Stand-up of Wanda Sykes” in *Departures of Critical Qualitative Research*.
- “Call out Dave Chapelle’s Transphobia, but don’t erase his critiques of LGBTQ racism” <https://www.sfchronicle.com/opinion/openforum/article/Call-out-Dave-Chappelle-s-transphobia-but-16590293.php>

Week 5 – Feb 3 – Belonging and Visibility: “Tangled Roots” and the Racialization of Black Hair

****SHORT ANALYSIS 1 DUE ON FEB 10 ****

Guest Lecture: Téa Mutonji

Viewings:

- Episode 2, “Issa Rae: Powerful Versatility,” *The Hair Tales*. Available on Disney+ (If you do not have/ want to buy subscription to Disney+, you can find other ways like watching clips on YouTube).

Readings:

- Téa Mutonji, “Texture Talk: Shaving My Head Helped Me Find the Power in My Hair”
- Audre Lorde, “Is Your Hair Political?” (1990) in *The Selected Works of Audre Lorde*.
- Fitsum Aregu, “The Black Man’s Sanctuary” in *Community Edition*.
- bell hooks, “Straightening our Hair” in *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*

Week 6 – Feb 13 – 18 – MIDTERM EXAM

Week 7 – NO CLASS – READING WEEK - No office hours will be held this week

Week 8 – Feb 24 – Belonging and Visibility: Black Masculinities and “Queer Vulnerability”

Viewings: *Moonlight*. Available on Criterion (Please sign in through your UWO library account).
<https://media3-criterionpic-com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/htbin/wwform/006?T=100084E>

Readings:

- Marlon M. Bailey, “The Queerness of Touch: Mutual Recognition and Deep Intimacy in *Moonlight*” in *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, Volume 9, Number 1, 2022. Ashon Crawley, “To be Held by Moonlight” in *The Root*.

Week 9 – March 3 – Belonging and Visibility: Beyoncé, “Motherwork” and Black Motherhood

Viewings:

- Beyoncé’s Live Performance at the Grammy’s (2017)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZhdTAwkDu1Q>
- Beyoncé, *Blue*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gSsMhQv6KZ8>

Reading:

- Christina Baad, “A Complicated Transformation: Beyoncé, “Blue”, and the Politics of Black Motherhood” in *Popular Music and Society*.

Recommended Reading:

- Juliet Winter, “The Politics of Beyoncé Pregnancy: Re-articulating Lemonade’s Agency through the Public Construction of Black Motherhood” in *Mai Feminism*.

Week 10 – March 10 – Re-Making Blackness: The Politics of Horror in *Get Out*

Guest Lecture: Amala Poli

Viewings: *Get Out*. Available on Audio Cine Films (Please sign in through your UWO library account).
<https://streaming-acf-film-com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/audiocine/grid>

Readings:

- Alison Landsberg, “Horror vérité: Politics and History in Jordan Peele’s *Get Out* (2017)” in *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*.
- Robin Means Coleman and Novotny Lawrence, “A Peaceful Place Denied: Horror Film’s ‘Whitopias’” in *Jordan Peele’s Get Out: a Political Horror*.

Week 11 – March 17 – Re-Making Blackness: Afro-futurism

****SHORT ANALYSIS 2 DUE ON MARCH 24****

Viewings: *Black Panther*. Available on Audio Cine Films (Please sign in through your UWO library account). <https://streaming-acf-film-com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/audiocine/play/6C46A9B4B0230>

Readings:

- Renee T. White, “Symposium on Afrofuturism in Black Panther: Gender, Identity, and the Remaking of Blackness” in *New Political Science*, Volume 44, Number 3. pp. 439-443.
- Lorraine Henry King, “Black Skin as Costume in Black Panther” in *Film, Fashion & Consumption*, Volume Vol. 10, April 2021. pp. 265-276.

Week 12 – March 24– Black Futurisms: Black Joy and its Resistance

Readings:

- Tracey M. Lewis-Giggetts, “Dancing in the Rain and the Power of Black Joy as Resistance” in *Black Joy: Stories of Resistance, Resilience, and Restoration*.
- Christopher P. Harris, “A Joyful Rebellion” in *To Build a Black Future: The Radical Politics of Joy, Pain, and Care*.

Week 13 – April 1 – Catch Up Week

BREATHE! This week will be for students to catch their breath before exams and final assignments. Please use this extra time to:

1. Complete the student evaluation of the course,
2. Get some rest before exams,
3. Prepare for the final exam