

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND WOMEN'S STUDIES
GSWS 2412G: Black Geographies
Winter 2025

Instructor: Cornel Grey

Class Time: Wednesdays, 10:30 am-1:30 pm

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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

This course provides an introduction to the interdisciplinary field of Black geographies. Drawing on scholarship from Black Studies, Geography, History, Literature and Criminology, this seminar will examine how the (re)production of race creates different worlds for people marked as 'black.' We will think consciously about how Black life troubles our understanding of, and relationship to, terms such as land, property, nature, home, citizen, and borders. At the same time, we will take note of the various ways black folks assert what Katherine McKittrick describes as a 'black sense of place.'¹ Possible topics include migration, environmental racism, incarceration, and gentrification.

Course Objectives:

- Introduce students to the foundational theories and concepts that define Black Geographies as a field of study.
- Facilitate an understanding of how spatial practices are influenced by structures of racialization, colonialism, and state power, and how these processes shape lived experiences.
- Explore case studies and examples of Black placemaking, community building, and spatial resistance, with a global and comparative lens.
- Equip students with the analytical tools necessary to examine place, space, and geography through an anti-racist, decolonial, and intersectional lens.

Learning Outcomes:

- Explain key concepts and theoretical approaches within Black geographies, including their relationship to broader fields of human geography, Black studies, and critical theory.
- Analyze historical and contemporary spatial dynamics of race, place, and power as they pertain to Black communities across different geographies.
- Identify and critique the legacies of colonialism, slavery, segregation, and racial capitalism as they impact Black spatial realities globally.
- Engage with and evaluate scholarly texts, case studies, and narratives that illuminate Black spatial practices and resistance.
- Explore the intersections of gender, class, sexuality, and other social identities within the production and contestation of Black geographies.

¹ See Katherine McKittrick: (2011) "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place." *Social & Cultural Geography* 12 (8): 947–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2011.624280>.

REQUIRED TEXTS

There is only one required text for this course. All other readings will be available via the Course Readings webpage.

Martis, Eternity. 2020. *They Said This Would Be Fun: Race, Campus Life, and Growing Up*. Hardcover edition. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart. (available for \$19.95 at the Dellelce Family Bookstore).

Western Libraries also has print copies and an e-book copy available.

ASSESSMENTS

Discussion Posts, ongoing (20%)

Over the course of the term, you will complete four discussion posts, each worth 5%, that reflect on how our class discussions have deepened your understanding of that week's topic. Your posts should critically engage with key themes, debates, and materials covered during our sessions, connecting them to broader concepts and issues within Black geographies. You are encouraged to draw upon readings, multimedia, guest lectures (if applicable), and class discussions. Your submission should be approximately 250-300 words each and must be submitted by Friday night following that week's class. For example, if you choose to submit a post on "Local Histories" (scheduled for January 22), your discussion post would be due Friday, January 24.

Critical Reflection, due February 12 (25%)

In this critical reflection, you will document a day in your life and examine your experiences through the lens of Black geographies. You are expected to focus on the racialization of space and reflect on themes such as the politics of gathering, occupation, surveillance, racial exclusion, gender segregation, and/or other spatial power dynamics. Your reflection should critically engage with how these spaces are constructed, contested, or maintained and consider how race, class, gender, sexuality, or other social identities may impact your navigation and experience of these spaces. Note, your analysis must attend to the structural conditions that shape your everyday experiences. To support your reflection, draw on at least two scholarly readings from the course or other relevant academic sources, using a citation style of your choice. Your assignment should be approximately 1,000 words.

Investigative Journalism Assignment, March 12 (25%)

For this assignment, you will use Weldon Library's archives to find evidence of Black presence (e.g., Black-owned businesses, neighbourhoods, churches, protests, or other forms of community life) in London, Ontario. Using provided archival material, you will research and document examples of Black life at your chosen site as represented in newspapers published before the 1980s. After analyzing these historical materials, examine the present-day visibility or invisibility of Black presence at the site. For example, does that landmark (e.g., business, church, statue, etc.) still exist? How has Black life been made more or less visible at that site? How has the environment around that event/landmark shifted over time? Explain why. Depending on the topic you have chosen, you may be required to discuss migration trends, government dis/investment in racialized neighbourhoods, public education, etc. You are encouraged to visit your selected site in person, where possible. Your final submission will be a media submission (video, photo gallery, podcast episode) that introduces your chosen site and its historical significance. As part of your assignment, you should

explain how engagement with this moment in history might add value to contemporary debates about Black life in London, Ontario. You should also consider how we might acknowledge Black presence at that site today. What might that look like? You must draw on at least three scholarly sources for your analysis. A bibliography must be provided regardless of submission format (e.g., video, audio, etc).

Freedom Showcase, April 2 (30%)

You will create and deliver an oral presentation exploring what freedom means to you, using a specific concept or framework from scholars in Black Studies to anchor your analysis. Examples include bell hooks' "**homeplace**," Julia Sudbury's vision of "**a world without prisons**," Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's "**The Undercommons**," Harriet Jacobs' "**loophole of retreat**," June Jordan's "**living room**," or Sarah Jane Cervenak's articulation of the "**Black Outdoors**." THIS LIST IS NOT EXHAUSTIVE. Start by thoroughly researching and contextualizing your chosen concept to understand its historical, theoretical, and practical implications. Using this framework, develop your vision of freedom, drawing on relevant historical and/or contemporary examples to illustrate your argument. Feel free to include visual and auditory aids. Cite all sources accurately using a citation style of your choice.

READING LIST

Week 1, Introductions (January 8)

Hawthorne, Camilla. 2019. "[Black Matters Are Spatial Matters: Black Geographies for the Twenty-first Century](#)." *Geography Compass* 13 (11): e12468.

Hudson, Peter James. 2014. "[The Geographies of Blackness and Anti-Blackness: An Interview with Katherine McKittrick](#)." *The CLR James Journal* 20 (1): 233–40.

Week 2, Theories and Methods (January 15)

Hawthorne, Camilla, and Jovan Scott Lewis. 2023. "[Black Geographies: Material Praxis of Black Life and Study](#)." In *The Black Geographic: Praxis, Resistance, Futurity*, edited by Camilla Hawthorne and Jovan Scott Lewis, 1–24. Durham: Duke University Press.

Lipsitz, George. 2007. "[The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race: Theorizing the Hidden Architecture of Landscape](#)." *Landscape Journal* 26 (1): 10–23.

*****Week 3, Local Histories (January 22)**

Henry, Natasha. 2022. '[We Were Here: Reclaiming African Canadian History Through Heritage Plaques](#)'. In *Harriet's Legacies: Race, Historical Memory, and Futures in Canada*, edited by Ronald Cummings and Natalee Caple, 1st ed., 245–55. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

McKittrick, Katherine. 2002. "'[Their Blood Is There, and They Can't Throw It Out:](#)' [Honouring Black Canadian Geographies](#)." *Topia: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 7: 27–37.

Moulton, Alex A. 2021. "[Black Monument Matters: Place-Based Commemoration and Abolitionist Memory Work](#)." *Sociology Compass* 15 (12): e12944.

*****Week 4, Gendered Geographies (January 29)**

Martis, Eternity. 2021. [They Said This Would Be Fun: Race, Campus Life, and Growing Up](#). Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.

*****Week 5, Queer Geographies (February 5)**

Bailey, Marlon M., and Rashad Shabazz. 2014. "[Gender and Sexual Geographies of Blackness: New Black Cartographies of Resistance and Survival \(Part 2\)](#)." *Gender, Place & Culture* 21 (4): 449–52.

Eaves, LaToya E. 2020. "[Interanimating Black Sexualities and the Geography Classroom](#)." *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 44 (2): 217–29.

Week 6, Journeys I (February 12)

Philip, M. NourbeSe. 2021. *Harriet's Daughter*. London: Hodder Education Group.

READING WEEK (February 19)

*****Week 7, Journeys II (February 26)**

Visit to D.B. Weldon Library/London Self-Guided Tour

Copies of *The Dawn of Tomorrow* will be available for viewing in the Reading Room of the Archives and Research Collections Centre (Weldon Library, Room 140) between February 24 and March 7. The Weldon Archives are open 10 am-4 pm, Monday to Friday. Student cards are required for viewing.

*****Week 8, Surveilling Black Life (March 5)**

Browne, Simone. 2015. "[What Did TSA Find in Solange's Fro'? Security Theater at the Airport](#)." In *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*, 131–59. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Cole, Desmond. 2015. '[The Skin I'm In: I've Been Interrogated by Police More than 50 Times—All Because I'm Black](#)'. *Toronto Life*. 21 April 2015.

Shabazz, Rashad. 2015. "[Policing Interracial Sex: Mapping Black Male Location in Chicago during the Progressive Era](#)." In *Spatializing Blackness: Architectures of Confinement and Black Masculinity in Chicago*, 11–30. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

*****Week 9, Black Gathering (March 12)**

Jordan-Miller Kenyatta, Matthew. 2023. "[Need Black Joy?': Mapping an Afrotechtonics of Gathering in Los Angeles](#)." In *The Black Geographic: Praxis, Resistance, Futurity*, edited by Camilla Hawthorne and Jovan Scott Lewis, 213–45. Durham: Duke University Press.

Joseph, Chante. 2020. "[What Black Joy Means – And Why It's More Important Than Ever](#)." *British Vogue*, July 29, 2020.

Martis, Eternity. 2016. "[The Politics of Being Black and Loud](#)." *The FADER*, June 28, 2016.

*****Week 10, Harvesting Liberation (March 19)**

Reese, Ashanté M., and Dara Cooper. 2023. "[Making Spaces Something Like Freedom: Black Feminist Praxis in the Re/Imagining of a Just Food System](#)." In *Beyond the Kitchen Table: Black Women and Global Food Systems*, edited by Priscilla McCutcheon, Latrice E. Best, and Theresa Ann Rajack-Talley, 92–105. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Reese, Ashanté M., and Joshua Sbicca. 2022. '[Food and Carcerality: From Confinement to Abolition](#)'. *Food and Foodways* 30 (1–2): 1–15.

Reese, Ashanté M. 2019. "[Introduction: Black Food, Black Space, Black Agency.](#)" In *Black Food Geographies: Race, Self-Reliance, and Food Access in Washington, D.C.*, 1–18. University of North Carolina Press.

Week 11, Geographies of Protest (March 26)

Austin, David. 2007. "[All Roads Led to Montreal: Black Power, the Caribbean, and the Black Radical Tradition in Canada.](#)" *The Journal of African American History* 92 (4): 516–39.

Douglas, Debbie. 2017. "[That Collective House on Dewson Street.](#)" In *Any Other Way: How Toronto Got Queer*, edited by Stephanie Chambers, Jane Farrow, and Maureen FitzGerald. Toronto: Coach House Books.

Pike, Phillip. 2020. *Our Dance of Revolution*. McIntyre Media. (FILM SCREENING)

Week 12, Liberation Landscapes (April 2)

FREEDOM SHOWCASE