

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND WOMEN'S STUDIES
GSWS 2230G: Introduction to Black/African Diaspora
Winter 2026

Instructor: Cornel Grey
Class Time:
Location:
Office:
Phone:
Email:
Office Hours:

We are here, because you were there.

-Ambalavaner Sivanandan

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 powerful 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.

REQUIRED TEXTS

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

ASSESSMENTS

¹Discussion Posts: 5% x 8 posts (ongoing)

Students are expected to submit eight short discussion posts (approximately 250 words) that respond critically to course readings, class discussions, and presentations by guest speakers. These posts are an opportunity to reflect on key themes in the study of the Black diaspora, such as displacement, memory, resistance, cultural production, identity, and belonging. Your reflections should engage deeply with the assigned materials, raising questions, drawing connections across weeks, and offering original insights rather than simply summarizing the

¹ Please note that because the submission deadline for this assessment already includes flexibility in the form of multiple options/deadlines, the instructor reserves the right to deny academic consideration for assignments which are submitted following the end of the period of flexibility.

content. You may submit up to ten posts in total; your eight four grades will count toward your final mark.

Black Diasporic Photo Exhibition: 20%

As part of Black History Month, students will contribute to a visual exhibition of photographs. This assignment invites you to engage with the politics of Black visual representation, specifically the historical and contemporary implications of photographing Black subjects. Drawing on course materials and independent research, you will submit an analytical report that critically examines the aesthetics, ethics, and politics of portraying Black bodies in photography. Your analysis should explore questions of race and portraiture, including how lighting, framing, and materials influence perception, visibility, and dignity. You are encouraged to consider the historical erasure or distortion of Black presence in visual archives, and how this exhibition might counter or complicate that legacy. Your report should demonstrate an understanding of how the visual medium can both affirm and constrain Black identity, and articulate the significance of exhibiting these images in a public space.

Diaspora Listening Lab: 20%

For this assignment, you will create a curated playlist that explores the soundscapes of the Black diaspora. Drawing on any genre or tradition that resonates with Black diasporic experiences (such as Afrobeat, jazz, hip hop, gospel, soca, R&B, blues, highlife, amapiano, etc.), your playlist should consist of 10 to 15 tracks connected by a theme, mood, or concept. Possible themes include, but are not limited to, sonic rebellion, queer diaspora joy, mourning and migration, or diaspora as a love letter. Alongside your playlist, you will record a 10–12 minute audio reflection that guides the listener through your selections. Think of this as a podcast episode or mixtape liner notes (part personal insight, part cultural critique, and part scholarly analysis). In your audio reflection, you should explain your theme, describe how you chose your tracks, and offer reflections on how rhythm, lyrics, or genre express diasporic histories and experiences. You are required to reference at least two scholarly sources from the course or beyond, incorporating them meaningfully into your audio narration. You are encouraged to experiment with sound (i.e., incorporating transitions, interview clips, field recordings, or ambient noise as you see fit). Optionally, you may draw from community archives or interview local artists, musicians, or elders to enrich your project with grounded or intergenerational perspectives. You must also submit a brief written document (maximum one page) that includes your playlist's title, track list, full citations of scholarly sources used, and any additional artist or location notes you wish to include.

²Podcast Recording: 20%

In this assignment, you will work in groups of 2 to 4 to produce a 15- to 20-minute podcast episode on a topic related to the Black diaspora. Your episode should demonstrate critical engagement with course themes and contribute to ongoing conversations or debates relevant to your chosen topic. Select a topic that connects meaningfully to issues explored in the course and addresses a current debate, controversy, or question within the study of the Black diaspora. Your topic should be focused enough to allow for in-depth analysis, while broad enough to consider multiple dimensions (e.g., historical background, cultural expression, political implications). All groups are required to consult with the instructor as they refine their topic. Your podcast should incorporate insights from course materials and external

² Please note that this assessment is central to the learning objectives for this course. Accordingly, students seeking academic consideration for this assessment will be required to provide formal supporting documentation. Students who are granted academic consideration for this assessment will be provided with the following opportunity to make up this work (alternate presentation format).

sources, including both scholarly and, where appropriate, journalistic or creative works. Make sure to provide relevant historical context and highlight contemporary developments or perspectives. Each group member must contribute meaningfully to the research and ensure a diversity of perspectives is reflected in your final product. Your podcast will be evaluated based on the clarity of your argument, depth of analysis, integration of sources, and overall production quality.

ASSIGNED READINGS

January 6, Orientations³

- Hall, Stuart. 1994. "**Cultural Identity and Diaspora**." In *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, 392–403. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hartman, Saidiya. 2007. "**Prologue: The Path of Strangers**." In *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, 3–18. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Nur, Suban Ahmed. 2022. "**On Being and Becoming Black in a Globally Dispersed Diaspora**." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 52 (3): 257–69.

January 13, Economy of Slavery

- Cooper, Afua. 2006. "**The Secret of Slavery in Canada**." In *The Hanging of Angélique: The Untold Story of Slavery and the Burning of Montréal*, 68–106. Toronto: HarperCollins.
- Smallwood, Stephanie E. 2007. "**Turning African Captives into Atlantic Commodities**." In *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*, 33–64. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

January 20, A New World⁴

- Amadahy, Zainab, and Bonita Lawrence. 2009. "**Indigenous Peoples and Black People in Canada: Settlers or Allies?**" In *Breaching the Colonial Contract: Anti-Colonialism in the US and Canada*, edited by Arlo Kempf, 105–36. Explorations of Educational Purpose. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.
- Davis, Andrea A. 2023. "**‘Our Home on Native Land’: Rethinking the Place of Black Research and Art in Canadian Studies**." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 57 (3): 299–302.

January 27, Black Life in Canada⁵

- McKittrick, Katherine. 2006. "**Nothing’s Shocking: Black Canada**." In *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, 91–119. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Walcott, Rinaldo. 2003. "**‘A Tough Geography’: Towards a Poetics of Black Space(s) in Canada**." In *Black Like Who?: Writing Black Canada*, 2nd rev. ed., 43–55. Toronto, Ontario: Insomniac Press.

February 3, Visual Cultures

³ If you enjoyed this week’s readings and discussion, you may be interested in GSWS 3324 (Contemporary Topics in Critical Race Studies).

⁴ If you enjoyed this week’s readings and discussion, you may be interested in GSWS 2290F (Indigenous Feminisms).

⁵ If you enjoyed this week’s readings and discussion, you may be interested in GSWS 3340F (Reading Black Lives) or GSWS 2412G (Black Geographies).

- Bernabei, Franca. 2022. "**Archiving Black Diasporas: Looking at Photographs with Saidiya Hartman, Myriam J. A. Chancy, and Dionne Brand.**" *CR: The New Centennial Review* 22 (3): 57–77.
- Campt, Tina M. 2012. "**Introduction: On Family Tales and Photographic Records.**" In *Image Matters: Archive, Photography, and the African Diaspora in Europe*, 1–20. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Lobo, Rachel. 2021. "**Resisting Erasure: Photographic Archives and Black History in Canada.**" *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 58 (April): 7–36.

February 10, Breaking Bread

- Gomes, Shelene. 2023. "**Tasting Freedom: The Rastafari Family Food Beit in Ethiopia.**" In *Beyond the Kitchen Table: Black Women and Global Food Systems*, edited by Priscilla McCutcheon, Latrice E. Best, and Theresa Ann Rajack-Talley, 186–205. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Walcott, Rinaldo. 2022. "**On Inheritance: Hospitality or Decolonial Eating.**" *The Puritan*. December 16, 2022.

READING WEEK (February 17)

February 24, Soul, Sound and Sensation

- Gilroy, Paul. 1991. "**Sounds Authentic: Black Music, Ethnicity, and the Challenge of a 'Changing' Same.**" *Black Music Research Journal* 11 (2): 111–36.
- McMillan, Michael. 2022. "**Who Feels It Knows It: Black Bodies and the Sensory Experience of the Dance-Hall.**" *The Senses and Society* 17 (2): 223–27.
- Peck, RaShelle R. 2025. "**Diaspora, Love, and Limits.**" In *Nairobi Hip Hop Flow: Diasporic Blackness and Embodied Performance in the Underground*, 93–127. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

March 3, FILM SCREENING⁶ Film TBA

March 10, Spirit Worlds

- Gusman, Alessandro. 2020. "**'Here, Here Is a Place Where I Can Cry': Religion in a Context of Displacement: Congolese Churches in Kampala.**" In *Affective Trajectories: Religion and Emotion in African Cityscapes*, edited by Hansjörg Dilger, Astrid Bochow, Marian Burchardt, and Matthew Wilhelm-Solomon, 22–42. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Jouili, Jeanette S. 2021. "**Embodying Black Islam: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Afro-Diasporic Muslim Hip-Hop in Britain.**" In *Embodying Black Religions in Africa and Its Diasporas*, edited by Yolanda Covington-Ward and Jeanette S. Jouili, 197–221. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

March 17, Shoreward⁷

- Hawthorne, Camilla A. 2022. "**Introduction: Contested Borders in the Time of Monsters.**" In *Contesting Race and Citizenship: Youth Politics in the Black Mediterranean*, 1–23. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

⁶ If you enjoyed this week's readings and discussion, you may be interested in GSWS 2231F (Black Feminist Thought).

⁷ If you enjoyed this week's readings and discussion, you may be interested in GSWS 1024F (Introduction to Equity, Diversity, and Human Rights) or GSWS 2412G (Black Geographies).

- Patterson, Roza E. 2019. "**Black Bodies Drowning in the Mediterranean Sea: Why Does the World Not Care.**" *UCLA Journal of International Law and Foreign Affairs* 23:183–219.
- Paynter, Eleanor. 2024. "**Epilogue: Mobility in an Age of Emergency, or, A Small and Stubborn Possibility.**" In *Emergency in Transit: Witnessing Migration in the Colonial Present*, 191–97. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

March 24, FILM SCREENING

Film TBA

March 31, Podcast Workshop

Class time will be used to carry out group work

April 7, The Living Revolution

- Casimir, Jean. 2009. "**From Saint-Domingue to Haiti: To Live Again or to Live at Last!**" In *The World of the Haitian Revolution*, edited by David Patrick Geggus and Norman Fiering, xi–xviii. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Danticat, Edwidge. 2024. "**The Haiti That Still Dreams.**" *The New Yorker*, April 23, 2024.
- Dubuisson, Darlène. 2022. "**Haiti: Black Utopia.**" *Society for Cultural Anthropology*. May 3, 2022.