

Department of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies Western University
1030F/G -Introduction to Black Studies
January – April 2026

Instructor: Erica S. Lawson

Class Times: Wednesdays 1:30 -3:30 pm

Office Hours: TBA

Location: TBA

****Previous Outline****

Course Description: Black Studies is comprised of the knowledge production practices and worldviews among African and African descendant peoples across the globe. Central to world-making, Black Studies is rooted in rich histories, cultures, and philosophies that have given rise to anti-colonial, anti-racist, Pan-African, and civil rights movements, including #BlackLivesMatter. This survey course introduces students to some of the foundational debates, ideas, and practices in the Black intellectual-activist tradition. We will locate a diversity of topics (e.g., liberation movements, racial capitalism, aesthetics, Afrofuturism, popular culture, etc.) in historical frameworks - with a focus on resistance, resilience, and freedom.

Learning Objectives

- Explore issues of relevance to Black studies
- Address key terminologies in the discipline
- Discuss how resilience and resistance are central to Black life
- Understand key aspects of the Black intellectual-activist tradition
- Examine how historical experiences shape contemporary realities in Black life.

Learning Outcomes

- Familiarity with debates in the Black intellectual tradition
- Improved knowledge about Black histories
- Identify connections between historical experiences and contemporary events
- Improved research and writing skills
- Critical evaluation and analytical skills
- Application of theory/analysis to issues and events

Assignments (Instructions & due dates will be posted in OWL Brightspace). Please submit all written assignments in word (Not PDF) format and upload them to Brightspace.

- Attendance & Participation - 15%
- Documentary analysis – 15%
- Annotated Bibliography – 15%
- Creative essay-style assignment – 20%
- Final exam 35% (date and time TBA)

*Assignments to be finalized. What's listed here is subject to change. * Course readings will be available in Brightspace.

GSWS1030G – Instructions & Evaluation

Please Read Carefully with Attention to the Due Dates

Note: If you are struggling to complete assignments, please do not wait until the semester is almost over to address these challenges. GSWS faculty members and administrative staff are here to your academic success. As well, Western University has several services (e.g. academic counselling, mental health supports, writing services, etc.). As you will see below, I have built-in extended deadlines for some assignments if you need a few extra days to complete the work.

(1) Attendance & Participation (A & P) 10%:

1. Attend each class and **stay** for the full two hours.
2. Complete all assigned readings prior to each class.
3. Come prepared to make informed contributions to class discussions.
4. Do not use your cell phone during lectures and class discussions. This is both distracting and disrespectful. If you are expecting an important phone call, keep your phone on vibrate and take the call outside.
5. Use your computer appropriately (browsing and shopping are inappropriate and distracting to other students).

If attending all classes or completing readings is challenging at times, I am open to alternatives such as: submitting a two-page (double-spaced) critical commentary on three course readings during the semester (I won't read more than three). These submissions will be taken into consideration when I assess A & P at the end of the semester; they are not meant to replace your attendance. Please ensure that these submissions are uploaded to OWL Brightspace before we meet in class.

Due date: Select your readings and submit your analysis between weeks **xxxx** and **xxxx**. I am not inclined to accept papers outside of these dates.

(2) Commentary on One Guest Lecture – 15%

There are three guest lectures for the semester:

- Dr. Greg Beckett (February 3rd, 2024) – Due date February 7 @ 11:59 pm
- Dr. Cornel Grey (March 3rd, 2024) – Due date March 7 @ 11:59 pm
- Dr. Katrina Younes (March 24th, 2024) – Due date March 28 @ 11:59 pm

Write a two-page, double-spaced commentary on one of the guest lectures. Questions to consider include: **a)** what was the focus of the talk? **b)** how did the talk reflect a theme(s) from one of the readings listed for the week? And **c)** what is one important thing that you learned (or took away) from the talk?

(3) Documentary Analysis 20%:

We will begin the work for this assignment in our class for February 24th. In this class, we will watch and discuss a 30-minute documentary about reparations for the descendants of enslaved African people with a focus on Barbados. You are expected to write a 1000-1200-word assessment of the documentary in conversation with our discussion about racial capitalism. The central question to be addressed is: *How should we critically assess the call for reparations in light of our knowledge about racial capitalism?*

The guiding questions for the documentary analysis include the following (you're welcome to explore other questions based on what resonates for you):

- How does the documentary grapple with 'reparations?'
- What are the economic and historical factors that shape Barbadian's demands for reparations?
- How do you understand the connections between reparations and racial capitalism?
- How did the documentary enrich your knowledge about reparations and racial capitalism?

You should provide specific examples from the documentary to support your analysis; and to reiterate, you're expected to draw on the themes for this week (i.e. racial capitalism) as part of your response. The assignment must be written in an essay/analytical style. In other words, do not take a point-by-point approach to answering the guiding questions.

Due date: Friday February 28th @ 11:59 pm; extended deadline: March 3rd @ 11:59 pm

(4) Creative Assignment (Essay style) – 20%

The purpose of this assignment is to demonstrate your knowledge of Black Studies through a creative lens. Select a concept, theory, or central argument from course readings and apply it to an analysis of your topic. Some choices could include **a)** Assessing a poem, song, film, or documentary that addresses racial/social justice in Black life; or **b)** Analysing the politics, controversies, and tensions surrounding a museum that houses stolen artifacts from African people. This could involve examining a museum currently engaged in returning stolen artifacts and exploring the conversations (taking place between the interested parties) on justice and restoration; **OR c)** you can write your own poem or create your own artwork drawing on course readings or themes – this will also require a written explanation based on the instructions outlined in the first sentence of this paragraph.

****I recommend that you discuss your assignment idea/topic with me (or your TA if one is assigned to us) before you begin the work**.**

Guidelines: Write a 5–6-page critical argument/explanation/analysis of your topic (poem, film, documentary, etc.,) addressing how it is informed by a concept, theory, or argument discussed in the discipline. Explain how the principles, theories, etc., from the Black intellectual tradition

apply to your analytical engagement. In addition to one relevant course reading, you can use additional (credible) sources to support your assessment. Credible sources are: **1)** two additional peer-reviewed sources, **2)** one book chapter, and **4)** one online source of your choice. Ensure your assignment includes a bibliography page and adheres to appropriate referencing styles: MLA or APA. I require a link to the object of your analysis.

Due Date: March 21st @ 11:59 pm; extended deadline March 24th @ 11:59 pm

A Note about Deadlines: You will notice that OWL is set with the deadline for each assignment. However, I have included an extended deadline for two assignments: Documentary Analysis and the Creative Assignment. I encourage you to meet the first deadline as outlined for each assignment listed above and only use the extended deadline if necessary. Although your assignment will be registered as *late* after the first deadline, I will not consider it late if you meet the second, extended deadline. If you require more time, please make arrangements with your academic counselor. I am not inclined to accept late assignments without previous arrangements with your counselor.

(5) Final Exam 35%:

Date TBD – I will provide more information about the exam expectations as the semester unfolds, and you will receive a format by the last class.

Preparing for the final exam

The final exam is divided into two parts. Part I is a short answer section. You are required to address course theories, concepts, or short quotes. These will reflect the ‘big ideas’ addressed in the course so they should be familiar to you if you keep up with the readings. Part II is an essay question. You will be provided with the exam format and instructions, including the full list of all course materials for each lecture before we meet for the last class. You will also be given ‘practice’ questions to answer as part of the review process (also in the last class).

Assessment Criteria: It is difficult to provide a ‘checklist’ for grading criteria, but these are my considerations when I mark assignments:

- Clear thesis/focus.
- Arguments are supported by credible sources (e.g., course materials, peer-reviewed articles).
- Assignment instructions are followed.
- Assignment reflects course arguments, concepts, or theories.
- Demonstration of an analytical approach showcasing engagement and understanding of the materials/topic.
- Assignment is organized and edited for correct sentence structure and grammatical accuracy.
- Assignment includes a clear reference style (MLA, APA, Chicago). **Do not** use footnotes for your references; be sure to include in-text citations for direct quotes or borrowed ideas. Instruction about each of these referencing styles are available online.

Here are examples for correct referencing:

Lawson, E. S. (2018). Bereaved Black mothers and maternal activism in the racial state. *Feminist Studies*, 44(3), 713-735. (APA)

Lawson, Erica S. "Bereaved Black mothers and maternal activism in the racial state." *Feminist Studies* 44.3 (2018): 713-735. (MLA)

Additional Instructions for Written Assignments:

- Submit all written assignments to **Turnitin in Brightspace** by the deadline.
- Submit your work in Word format (not PDF); times new roman, 12-point font, double-spaced pages.

GSWS Grading Criteria (see GSWS Handbook for details):

Grade	Percentage
A+	90-100% (One could scarcely expect better from a student at this level)
A	80-89% (Superior work which is clearly above average)
B	70-79% (Good work, meeting all requirements, and eminently satisfactory)
C	60-69% (Competent work, meeting requirements)
D	50-59% (Fair work, minimally acceptable)
F	Below 50% or assigned when course is dropped with academic penalty.