

**Western University
London, Ontario, Canada
Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies
Winter 2026**

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: Prof. Anmol Dutta
Email: adutta24@uwo.ca

Office: UC 1424
Office Hours: Thursdays: 11 am to 1 pm.
In-person and on Zoom (Zoom info on OWL)

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

Groups	Name	Email
1.	TBA	N/A
2.	TBA	N/A
3.	TBA	N/A

NOTE: **TA office hours will be posted on OWL**

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

Required Texts

There are no required texts that students need to purchase for the course. All readings can be accessed via the Course Readings tab on OWL. *****ALL readings can be accessed via Course Readings on Brightspace. ALL viewings can be accessed via links on the Syllabus/ Course Outline document*****

OWL Brightspace

All course materials, including links to video clips, will be posted on OWL Brightspace. Students are responsible for checking the course OWL site (<https://westernu.brightspace.com/>) regularly for news and updates. This is the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students in the class. If students need assistance with the course OWL site, they can seek support on the [OWL Brightspace Help](#) page. Alternatively, they can contact the Western Technology Services Helpdesk. They can be contacted by phone at 519-661-3800 or ext. 83800.

Asynchronous Learning

This course will be taught asynchronously. Asynchronous learning is independent and relies on the student directly their own schedule. This does not mean that you have access to the entire course. Readings/viewings and lectures will be posted weekly, every Wednesday. Completing the course requirements, listening to lectures, etc. are the responsibility of the student. Please ensure that you plan your time accordingly.

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence

In this course, the use of AI (automatic translation tools, grammar checkers, ChatGPT...) is prohibited. If AI use is suspected in any written work, 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.

By adhering to these guidelines, students contribute to a responsible and ethical learning environment that promotes critical thinking, independent inquiry and allows them to produce original written contributions.

Methods of Evaluation

Assignment	Description	Points	Deadline
Syllabus Quiz	Open-book quiz about the syllabus	5%	No later than Jan 13, 2026
Midterm Exam	Multiple Choice and True/False Questions	25%	Feb 9-13, 2026
Short Analyses			
Short Analysis 1: 500-600 analysis WEEK 2-5	500–600-word close reading analysis of a scene/clip OR a quote from your critical readings from the syllabus.	20%	DUE on Feb 9
Short Analysis 2: 500-600 analysis WEEK 8-11	500-600-word close reading analysis of a scene/clip OR a quote from your critical readings from the syllabus.	20%	DUE on March 22
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

Prof. Dutta will be grading the Syllabus Quiz and Midterms. Your Short Analysis (both) and the Final exam will be graded by your designated Group Leader.

Assignment Descriptions

**** Additional information about assessments will be posted under “Content” tab in OWL Brightspace under “Exams and Assignment Guidelines” ****

- **Syllabus Quiz – 5%**

Students will complete an open book quiz on OWL by **Tuesday, Jan 13 at 11:59 pm**. 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 5 at 9 am**. The quiz will automatically close at 11:59 pm on Tuesday, Jan 13, even if you have not finished the quiz.

Questions will all be based entirely on the information provided on the Course Outline as well as the Introduction Lecture. 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 by them on OWL. Grades will be returned by 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%**

**** You will find detailed guidelines about the Short Analysis under the “Exams and Assignment Guidelines” tab ****

Students will write a 500-600 word analysis on that week’s topic. Students’ SA must include a close reading analysis of either: **a scene/clip from one of the viewings OR a quote from one of the critical readings of that week**, and discuss its relevance to the theme of the week.

Short Analysis 1: Weeks 2-5. Due by 11.59 pm, Feb 9

Short Analysis 1: 500-600 words (DUE: 11.59 pm, Feb 11)	Week	Topic	Dates (Wed-Tue)
	2	“Black Looks” in Popular Culture	Jan 12
	3	Performance and Blackness: Rap & Hip Hop	Jan 19
	4	Performance and Blackness: Stand-Up Comedy	Jan 26
	5	Belonging and Visibility: Racialization of Black Hair	Feb 2

Short Analysis 2: Weeks 8-11. Due by 11.59 pm, March 22

Short Analysis 2: 500-600 words	Week	Topic	Dates (Wed-Tue)
	8	Belonging and Visibility: <i>Moonlight</i> and Queer, Black Masculinities	Feb 23
	9	Belonging and Visibility: Beyonce and Black Motherhood	March 2

(DUE: 11.59 pm, Mar 25)	10	Re-Making Blackness: Horror and the Black Body in <i>Get Out</i>	March 9
	11	Re-Making Blackness: Afro- futurism and <i>Black Panther</i>	March 16

****NOTE**:** Please note that whichever **scene/ quote you pick, MUST be from the assigned weeks, and CANNOT be from outside the Syllabus.** If students submit an analysis from outside the syllabus, the SA will be returned to them, with a **-10% applied on the resubmission.**

*****You are welcome to submit your SAs before their deadlines, during their respective weeks*****

Midterm Exam – 25%

Students will complete a midterm **exam** on OWL. Students can complete the exam any time between February 9 and February 13. 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 11:59 pm on Friday, February 13.

Midterm exam questions will be multiple choice and true/false based on Week 2-5.

Please note that exams are due absolutely no later than 11:59 pm on February 13. Please be sure that you begin the exam ensuring you provide yourself enough time to complete the exam.

NOTE: Since there is a five-day period to write this exam, **no extensions or make-ups 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.

Grading Standards and Final Grades

Grade	Percentage
A+	90-100% - One could hardly 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 & eminently satisfactory
C	60-69% - Competent work, meeting requirements
D	50-59% - Fair work, minimally acceptable
F	Below 50% - Missed assignment/ Below par work not meeting requirements/ Assignment submitted does not apply to course

Course Policies

Email Response Time

Please note that emails will be responded to within 48 hours during regular working hours on Mon – Fri from 9 am-5pm. Please ensure to respect these working hours. When contacting me via email, students *must* include the course code (GSWS 2168B) in the subject line and use your 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.

Essay Policy

The Reading analyses and Final essay must follow current MLA format (MLA 9) and must include a list of Works Cited at the end. 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

Please ensure that all your written work is **submitted as a Word attachment on OWL Brightspace**. The essays that are submitted in other formats will receive a grade, without any feedback.

Late Policy

Assignments that are submitted after the flexibility window i.e. there are two deadlines. Any submissions that surpass the second deadline will be considered overdue, and receive a penalty of **3% per day late**, including weekends and holidays. For any assignments more than 10% of the final grade, students must directly contact their academic counselor. Once I have received a recommendation for accommodation or consideration, then we 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).

Statements

Academic Consideration

Students may request academic consideration in cases of extenuating circumstances – that is, personal circumstances beyond the student's control that have a **substantial but temporary** impact on the student's ability to meet essential academic requirements. For procedures on how to submit Academic Consideration requests, please see the information posted on the Office of the Registrar's webpage:

<https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/academicconsiderations/>. Requests for Academic Consideration must be made within 48 hours after the assessment date or submission deadline.

All academic consideration requests must include supporting documentation; however, recognizing that formal documentation may not be available in some extenuating circumstances, the policy allows students to make **one** Academic Consideration request **without supporting documentation** in this course

In this course, requests for academic consideration pertaining to the Final Essay **must** be accompanied by supporting documentation.

Academic Accommodation

This course prioritizes accessible learning. [Academic Accommodation](http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessibleeducation/index.html) thus is “a means of adjusting the academic activities associated with a course or program of student in order to permit students with disabilities to participate in those activities at the University and to fulfill the essential requirements of a course or program.” Students with both, visible and invisible disabilities are encouraged to register with **Accessible Education** at the earliest opportunity.

<http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessibleeducation/index.html>

Intellectual Property/Copyright

All instructor-driven materials such as 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. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

Support Services Statements

Academic Advising

Your Home Faculty’s Academic Advising Office will support or refer whenever you have an issue that is affecting your studies, including information on adding/dropping courses, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic related matters. Do not hesitate to reach out to them if you are struggling and unsure where to go for help. The contact information for all Faculties is here: <https://registrar.uwo.ca/facultyacademiccounselling.html>

Gender-Based and Sexual Violence

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website:

https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Mental Health Support

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (<https://uwo.ca/health/>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Religious Accommodation

Students should review the [policy for Accommodation for Religious Holidays](#). Where a student will be unable to write examinations and term tests due to a conflicting religious holiday, they should inform their instructors as soon as possible but **not later than two weeks** prior to writing the examination/term test. In the case of conflict with a midterm test, students should inform their instructor as soon as possible but not later than one week prior to the midterm.

Learning Development and Success

Learning Development and Success Centre <https://learning.uwo.ca> is a fantastic resource to plan your studies. Counsellors at LDS are ready to help you improve your learning skills. Individual support is offered throughout the Fall/Winter terms in the drop-in Learning Help Centre, and year-round through individual counselling. They also offer presentations on strategies for improving time management, multiple-choice exam preparation/writing, textbook reading, and more.

USC

Additional student-run support services are offered by the USC, <https://westernusc.ca/services/>.

Additional Support Services

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

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

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

Plagiarism is a major academic offence. Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or quote or 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 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 <http://www.turnitin.com>.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

Course Syllabus

Week		Topic	Dates	
1		Introduction: Course Welcome	Jan 5	
2	Short Analysis 1: 500-600 words (DUE: Feb 8)	“Black Looks” in Popular Culture	Jan 12	FINAL EXAM
3		Performance and Blackness: Rap & Hip Hop	Jan 19	
4		Performance and Blackness: Stand-Up Comedy	Jan 26	
5		Belonging and Visibility: Racialization of Black Hair	Feb 2	
6		MIDTERM EXAM	Feb 9-13	
7		READING WEEK	Feb 16	
8	Short Analysis 2: 500-600 words (DUE: Mar 22)	Belonging and Visibility: <i>Moonlight</i> and Queer, Black Masculinities	Feb 23	
9		Belonging and Visibility: Beyonce and Black Motherhood	March 2	
10		Re-Making Blackness: Horror and the Black Body in <i>Get Out</i>	March 9	
11		Re-Making Blackness: Afro-futurism and <i>Black Panther</i>	March 16	
12		Black Futurisms: Black Joy and its Resistance	March 23	
13		Catch Up Week	March 30 – April 6	

Week 1 - Jan 5 – Introduction: Welcome, Course Outline, and Expectations

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

Week 2 – Jan 12 – Understanding “Black Looks” in Popular Culture

****SYLLABUS QUIZ DUE ON JAN 13****

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 19 – 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 26 – 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 Chappelle’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 2 – Belonging and Visibility: “Tangled Roots” and the Racialization of Black Hair

****SHORT ANALYSIS 1 DUE ON FEB 08 ****

Guest Lecture: Téa Mutonji

Viewing: 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 Areguy, “The Black Man’s Sanctuary” in *Community Edition*.
- bell hooks, “Straightening our Hair” in *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*

Week 6 – Feb 9–13 – MIDTERM EXAM

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

Week 8 – Feb 23 – Belonging and Visibility: Black Masculinities and “Queer Vulnerability”

Viewing: *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 2 – Belonging and Visibility: Beyoncé, “Motherwork” and Black Motherhood

Viewing:

- 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 9– Re-Making Blackness: The Politics of Horror in *Get Out*

Guest Lecture: Amala Poli

Viewing: *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 16 – Re-Making Blackness: Afro-futurism

****SHORT ANALYSIS 2 DUE ON MARCH 22****

Viewing: *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 23 – 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 – March 30 – 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