

Department of English & Writing Studies

Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies 3451G
English and Writing Studies 3344G

Black Lives in the Eighteenth Century
Winter 2026

Instructor: Prof. Mary Helen McMurrin
Office Hours

Course Day/Time: Tues 3:30-4:30/Thurs 3:30-5:30

Prerequisites: English & Writing Students: At least 60% in 1.0 of English 1020-1999 or permission of the Department.

Course Description

The course explores male and female Black writers' narratives and imaginative writing about the Black experience. Focusing on personhood, we will investigate the mechanisms of oppression on enslaved Africans, expressions of their resistance to white power, but also the ways in which the Black experience encompasses an expansive range of personal and social feelings and thoughts. We will also consider some visual representations of Black people in the period, and investigate archival presences of Black life.

Objectives:

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

- Be able to speak and write critically
 - close textual analysis
 - interpreting the significance of narrative and discourse
 - writing reasoned arguments with a sophisticated use of evidence
- Gain familiarity with historical and literary context of Black writing in the 18th-century
- Become sensitive to and engage in civil discussions of racism, race, and racialization from a historical perspective
- Practice inclusiveness as a pedagogical model

Course Materials

REQUIRED TEXTS available at the Western Bookstore. You must purchase these texts and bring them to class as noted on the schedule.

Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, ed. Vincent Carretta
Penguin Classics \$20

Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, ed. Sara Salih
Penguin Classics \$15

Claire de Duras, *Ourika*, trans. John Fowles

MLA Texts and Translations \$15

Photocopies of other readings will be provided free of charge

Methods of Evaluation

The grade for the course will be based on the following assignments. Each assignment and its criteria will be discussed in class and information posted on OWL.

reading notes: due twice during the term 10%

in class writing (2) 20% total

midterm 25% **exempt from allowance of academic consideration**

online archive research assignment 25%

final assignment: collected reading notes, in-class writing with 5 page reflection 20%

Students are fully responsible for looking at and being familiar with the information posted on the department website at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/Student%20Information.html>.

Additional Information

No laptops in class; lots of discussion and participation. Bring notebook and pen/pencil for in-class writing and lecture notes.

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.

1. Requests for academic consideration are made to the Academic Advising office of the student's Faculty of Registration.
2. Requests for academic consideration include the following components:
 - a. Self-attestation signed by the student;
 - b. Indication of the course(s) and assessment(s) relevant to the request;
 - c. Supporting documentation as relevant.

Requests without supporting documentation are **limited to one per term per course**.

Instructors may designate one assignment or assessment as exempt from this allowance. In this course, requests for academic consideration pertaining to the MIDTERM **must** be accompanied by supporting documentation.

Assignments with flexible deadlines and any term work that does not count towards the course grade are not eligible for additional consideration. All assignments have 48- grace period before deductions of marks. After 48 hours the dedcutin is 5 points per 24 hours.

Documentation for medical illness, when required, includes the completion of a [Western Student Medical Certificate \(SMC\)](#) or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation, by a health care practitioner.

Requests linked to examinations scheduled by the Office of the Registrar during official examination periods as well as practice laboratory and performance tests typically scheduled in the last week of term

always require formal supporting documentation.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. Any more than 3 missed classes will negatively affect your final grade. In cases of excessive absenteeism (e.g. more than 9 unexcused hours for a half course), which are not accounted for by either academic consideration or accommodation, students who do not attend class will receive a grade that takes into account the effects of absences.

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence

Use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools/software/apps is **not** acceptable for the tasks in this course.

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 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.

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.

Schedule of Classes and Assignments

Jan 6

Introduction

Jan 8

Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative* chapters 1-2

Jan 13 & 15

Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, chapters 3-8

Jan 20 & 22

Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, chapters 9-12

in-class writing Jan 22 10%

Jan 27 & 29

Black Lives in Visual Art 1600-1800

Feb 3 & 5

Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts”

Midterm in class Feb 5

Feb 10 & 12

Hartman (continued)

Marisa Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*, Introduction

“Embedded Slave Narratives” in Early Caribbean Digital Archive

Submit reading notes on OWL

Feb 14-22 Winter Break

Feb 24 & 26

Discuss Database assignment for Early Caribbean Digital Archive

Selected poems of Phillis Wheatley

Honoree Jefferson on Wheatley

Mar 3 & 5

Claire de Duras, *Ourika*

In-class writing Mar 5 10%

***special event film screening* required TBA**

Mar 10 & 12

Claire de Duras, *Ourika*

Mar 17 & 19

The History of Mary Prince, Preface and History pp 3-38

Mar 24 & 26

The History of Mary Prince, supplement pp 39-65

Mar 31 & April 2

21stc poets Aja Monet and Rachel Eliza Griffiths

Submit reading notes on OWL

Apr 7 & 9

Conclusions:

Collected reading notes, in-class writing and 5 page reflection due April 9: Submit to OWL

Presentation of Written Work

Use MLA style first-page header with your name, etc.

Written work should be submitted double-spaced (including inset quotations), in 12-point font.

Use 1-inch margins for all four edges of the paper. Do not use justification on the right margin

Each page should be numbered consecutively in the top-right hand corner of the page next to your surname.

Use italics for the titles of works.

Use a "Works Cited" list or "Works Consulted" if you have used sources you do not cite.

General Marking Criteria:

80-100: An exceptional analysis of an issue or problem in one or more literary texts. The exceptional essay contains a complex main idea along with supporting evidence, i.e., it is not just an observation about the text. Its main idea uses some concept (agency, individuality, sensibility, etc.), which the student defines in his/her own terms, and then analyses. The exceptional essay breaks down its complex main idea into several parts in order to organize the paper. Each part includes some use of the text as evidence, but also forwards the main argument. It goes beyond merely giving evidence, and it goes beyond merely quoting the texts. Rather, the exceptional essay takes apart the quotations to reveal shades of meaning or ambiguities. An A essay must be very well written and show logic and coherence. It will not have awkward word usage or awkward sentence structures. It will follow MLA format perfectly.

70-80: A well-written, coherent essay with a main idea and evidence, but not exceptional. It may have too much plot summary for example, or not enough time and effort was spent in articulating a main idea. Or, it may not use the text well, missing the good quotations, or quoting without analyzing. It might have some awkwardness or lapses in logic, poor grammar, spelling errors, etc.

60-70 A response, but not very deeply considered or well written, or contains errors of comprehension.

50-60: No real main idea; not logically or smoothly written.

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.

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 intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) 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 (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.

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 Western Multicultural Calendar.

Support Services

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/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western:

<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.