The University of Western Ontario

GSWS9576 & TheoCrit9551: "Emancipation" and the Afterlife of Slavery" (January to April 2026)

Instructor: Erica S. Lawson
Location: UC1105
Office Hours: Wednesdays 11:30 am – 12:30 pm (or appt. on zoom); LwH 3rd Floor

Mondays: 10:30 am – 1:30 pm
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This essay- and presentation-style graduate seminar examines what Rinaldo Walcott describes as "the long emancipation" signaling the unfulfilled promise of freedom despite the legal end to Black people's enslavement. It engages provocations and disruptions to challenge complacent readings of democratic liberalism – or what Charles Mills describes as "racial liberalism."[1] The seminar is informed by the structural violence of the transatlantic slave trade and its manifestations in what Saidiya Hartman signals as the afterlife of slavery - that is, skewed life chances for African descendants in the Black diaspora. We will examine contested ideas and arguments about freedom, rights, racial progress, and reparations, drawing on theoretical critiques from Black Studies. The seminar is divided into four interconnected modules listed below; its central goal is to create a conversational space to grapple with ideas/readings in the Black intellectual tradition.

***Self Care and Well Being*:** Please note that scholarship pertaining to enslavement (and documentaries/images that we may view and discuss from time to time) may be emotionally unsettling. I encourage all of us to take care of ourselves as needed in these moments.

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that Western University is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Attawandaron peoples, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. With this, we respect the longstanding relationships that Indigenous Nations have to this land, as they are the original caretakers. We acknowledge historical and ongoing injustices that Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) endure in Canada, and we accept responsibility as a public institution to contribute toward revealing and correcting miseducation as well as renewing respectful relationships with Indigenous communities through our teaching, research and community service.

[1] Mills, C.W. (2008). "Racial Liberalism." *PMLA*, 123(5): 1380-1397. (By which he means that, "conceptions of personhood and resulting schedules of rights, duties, and government responsibilities have all been racialized).

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

- Understand the history and politics of emancipation in Black scholarship.
- Examine struggles for emancipation in Black life.
- Address the meaning(s) of the afterlife of slavery and its manifestations.
- Examine how (democratic) liberalism thwarts desire for Black freedom.
- Understand the ramifications of slavery through archival research.
- Address how Black scholars and activists re-imagine possibilities for rights and freedom beyond idealized liberal notions.

Learning Objectives:
Students will develop their written, presentation, and research skills in these ways:

- Participating weekly in class discussions to become confident speakers.
- Organizing and delivering concise and thoughtful presentations based on readings.
- Through written assignments, students will sharpen their skills of exposition, thesis development and defense, critical writing, and consideration of multiple perspectives.
- Assessing and choosing appropriate materials for written projects.

Assignment Instructions and Evaluation: These assignment and evaluation tools are designed to fulfil the course and learning objectives outlined above:

(1) Attendance and participation – 10%
This involves attending each class and contributing questions to a seminar-style discussion.

(2) Weekly presentation/written analysis of one course reading – 30%; written paper (20%); presentation and discussion questions (10%).

Weekly class format is as follows: **1)** a general summary of the themes in the readings, and **2)** at least one question from each student for discussion. **3)** a presentation by one student based on a reading for the week. This means that each person must sign up to lead a conversation based on a course reading. This is a two-step process. **First,** write a critical analysis of your chosen article in consideration of (guiding) questions such as: what are its core arguments and theories? How are the arguments supported? Do you have points of disagreements with the article? How does it dialogue with other course materials? (8-10 double-spaced pages). **Second,** present this paper to the class in oral form (i.e. read your paper and pose at least two important questions at the end for group discussion and reflection). The presentation should take 15-20 minutes followed by approximately 10 minutes of discussion. Please give me a hard copy of your paper at the start of the class. This is an analytical rather than descriptive assignment. Do not use the limited time to summarize the article.

(3) Archival-based research project and presentation – 35% (research and presentation – 20%; written portion – 15%).
The purpose of this assignment is to introduce students to archival research methods and consider the ethical implications of studying slavery. Locate and analyse digitized archival

materials (e.g., slave ship logs, runaway advertisements, court cases, or abolitionist pamphlets) related to slavery. Prepare a 10-minute presentation on: **a)** how you went about researching your topic, **b)** what you found, and **c)** what you learned. The purpose of the presentation is, in part, to receive constructive feedback from the audience. This will assist you in thinking about how to complete the final portion of the assignment, which is to write a 3000-word report on how these documents illuminate the institutionalization of slavery and its lingering effects. Please include a reflection on the ethical considerations of working with such materials. More detailed explanation of the assignment will follow in conversation with a guest speaker, Dr. Ola Osman, scheduled for January 19th. Depending on how many students are enrolled, this could be undertaken as a group assignment.

Due date: March 30th - students will present their findings in class, but the written portion of the assignment is due on April 6th @ 11:59 pm. We will not meet on this day. Please use this time to complete the written assignment for submission.

(4) Final 12- 15-page essay – 25%

You have two options for this assignment. The first is an engagement with a talk by Dr. Robin Kelley that we will watch/listen to on **February 23rd**; and the second is a talk by Dr. Jovan Lewis that we will watch/listen to on **March 2nd**. As you watch both talks, take careful notes and jot down questions and ideas as they come to mind. These will help you to decide on a topic/thesis for the assignment. Here are the instructions:

Option 1

This essay-style paper is based on the talk that we will watch and listen to on February 23rd by Dr. Robin Kelley who presents a comprehensive and thematic discussion about racial capitalism – which is the topic of focus for this week. Our discussion will focus on the main ideas, themes, theories and concepts raised by the speaker. Students are required to choose an idea, theme, or concept from the talk and develop this into a paper using additional course and external sources. These sources must include at least one relevant course reading with substantive argumentative or theoretical frameworks that can be applied to an analysis of your topic; three additional (external, scholarly) peer-reviewed journal articles, two book chapters, and additional, online sources (magazine or news article) to support your arguments.

Due Date: Friday March 6th @ 11:59 pm

Option 2

The second option is a talk by Dr. Jovan Scott Lewis that we will watch and listen to on March 2nd. This talk interrogates the connections between Black repair, racial (global) capitalism, and organized scamming among a group of impoverished young men in Jamaica. The talk/book raises significant questions about anti-black violence in the form of capitalist exploitation and how Black people respond to this. The instructions are the same as outlined in option 1.

Due date: Friday March 13th @ 11:59 pm.

Weekly themes and readings

January 5th, 2026: Introductions, course assignments and expectations; course readings are available in OWL Brightspace; all should be available through Weldon library.

MODULE ONE: Enslavement, Emancipation, Surveillance

January 12th, 2026

Araujo, A.L. (2017). "Greatest Riches in All America Have Arisen from Our Blood and Tears." *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade: a transnational and comparative history.* New York: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 11-43.

Walcott, R. (2021). *The Long Emancipation: Moving Toward Black Freedom.* Duke University Press. (**Read:** Chapters 1 & 2). Please note that we will read chapters from this book on a weekly basis – each chapter is quite short.

Rinaldo Walcott & Canisia Lubrin discuss On Property: Policing, Prisons, and the Call for Abolition https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYcRLG_-gUw

January 19th, 2026

Hartman, S. (1997). *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press (**Read:** "Introduction," pp. 3 - 14)

Browne, S. (2015). *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*, Duke University Press. (Read: "Introduction, and Other Dark Matters," pp. 1-30).

Walcott **(Read:** Chapters 3 & 4**).**

Brown, V**.** (2015). "Mapping a Slave Revolt Visualizing Spatial History through the Archives of Slavery." *Social Text,* 33(4): 134-141.

Today, we will spend approximately 30-45 minutes with Dr. Ola Osman, Assistant Professor, Department of Politics and international Studies (POLIS), at the University of Cambridge who will discuss her experience with using the archives for her research. This is an opportunity for you to ask questions as you prepare for your own archival research for your assignment. https://www.polis.cam.ac.uk/staff/dr-ola-osman

January 26th, 2026

Hartman, S. (1997). *Scenes of Subjection* (**Read:** "Innocent Amusements: The Stage of Sufferance," pp. 17-48).

Browne, S. (2015). *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*, Duke University Press. (**Read: "**Notes on Surveillance Studies: Through the Door of No Return," pp. 31-62).

Sharpe, C. (2016). *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Duke University Press (**Read:** The Wake, pp. 1-24; and "The Ship," pp. 25-67).

Walcott (**Read**: Chapters 5, 6, 7)

MODULE TWO: Racial (Neo)Liberalism

February 2nd, 2026

Mills, C. (2017). *Black Rights/White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism*. Oxford University Press. **(Read**: "Racial Liberalism," pp. 28-48).

Goldberg, D. (2009). *Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism.* Wiley. (**Read**: "Buried, Alive," pp. 1-31).

Issar, S. (2025). "Contesting the Racial Contract: Liberalism, Property, and Abolition." *Political Theory,* 53(1): 34-61.

Lawson, E. S. (2024) "Black Maternal Grief and Grievance against the Liberal State." In M. Caputi and P. Moynagh (eds). *Research Handbook on Feminist Political Thought*. Elgar Edward Press, pp. 284-303.

Walcott (**Read:** Chapters 8, 9, 10).

February 9th, 2026

Crenshaw, K.W. (2017). "Race Liberalism and the Deradicalization of Racial Reform." *Harvard Law Review,* 130(9): 2298-2319.

Sexton, G (2010). "People-of-Color Blindness: Notes on the After Life of Slavery." *Social Text*, 28(2): 31-56.

Walcott (**Read:** Chapters 11, 12, 13)

February 16th to 20th – Study Break

MODULE THREE: Racial Capitalism

February 23rd, 2026

Robin D. G. Kelley: What Is Racial Capitalism and Why Does It Matter?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REo_gHIpvJc

Assignment: This talk by Dr. Kelley presents a comprehensive history of racial capitalism with a focus on many different themes and historical moment. In conversation with the readings for today, choose a theme from the documentary for a critically, written analysis. This will involve taking this theme, question, or idea from the talk and using additional sources to develop this into a 12-15-page essay. As you watch both stalks, take careful note and jot down questions and ideas as they come to mind. These will help you to decide on a topic/thesis for the assignment. (Due: March 6th)

Robinson, C. (2020, third ed.) *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition.* (**Read**: Kelley, D.G – "Foreword: Why Black Marxism? Why Now?" pp. xi – xxxii; and Chapter 1: "Radical Capitalism: The Nonobjective Character of Capitalist Development," pp. 9-28)

Desmond, M. (2021). "Capitalism." In N. Hannah-Jones, C. Roper, I., I. Silverman, and J. Silverstein, eds. *The 1619 Project*. New York: One World, pp. 166-185.

White, H. (2020). "How is Capitalism Racial? Fanon, Critical Theory and the Fetish of Antiblackness. *Social Dynamics*, 46(1): 22-35.

Walcott (**Read:** Chapters 14, 15, 16).

March 2nd, 2026

Assignment: This talk by Dr. Jovan Scott Lewis interrogates the connections between Black repair, racial (global) capitalism, and organized scamming among a group of impoverished young men in Jamaica. The talk/book raises significant questions about anti-black violence in the form of capitalist exploitation and how Black people respond to this. In conversation with the readings for today, choose a theme from the talk for a critically written analysis. This will involve taking this theme, question, or idea from the talk and using additional sources to develop this into a 12 - 15-page essay. (Due: March 13th)

Lewis, J.S. (2020). *Scammer's Yard: The Crime of Black Repair in Jamaica*. University of Minnesota Press. (**Read**: "Introduction: To be Poor is a Crime," pp 1-23; and "The Plantation Remains: A History of Sufferation," pp. 25 – 58).

Authors Meet Critics: Scammer's Yard, The Crime of Black Repair in Jamaica
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lz-vgAz9bR8

Douglas, A.J., and Loggins, J. A. (2021). "The Trouble Is: On Critique and Tradition…" *Prophet of Discontent: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Critique of Racial Capitalism*. University of Georgia Press, pp. 1-16.

Walcott **(Read:** Chapters 17, 18).

March 9th, 2026

Chakravartty, P., and Ferreira da Silva, D. (2012). "Accumulation, Dispossession, and Debt: The Racial Logic of Global Capitalism—An Introduction." *American Quarterly*, 64(3): 361-385.

Weinbaum, A. E. "Introduction: Human Reproduction and the Slave Episteme." In *The Afterlife of Reproductive Slavery: Biocapitalism and Black Feminism's Philosophy of History.* Duke University Press, pp. 1-28.

Pierre, J. (2020). "The Racial Vernaculars of Development: A View from West Africa." *American Anthropologist*, 122: 86-98. https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13352

Walcott **(Read:** Chapters 19, 20**).**

MODULE FOUR: Reparations and Repair?

March 16th, 2026

Araujo, A.L. (2017). "What Else Will the Negro Expect?" *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade: a transnational and comparative history.* New York: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 121-152.

Rauhut, C. (2020). "Reassessing the Compensation Payments to British Slave Owners in Current Caribbean Claims to Reparations." *Sociolugus*, 70(2): 123-141.

Biwa, M., et. al. (2018). "Afterlives of Genocide: Return of Human Bodies from Berlin to Windhoek, 2011." In *Memory and Genocide: On What Remains and the Possibility of Representation*. Eds: Fazil Moradi, Ralph Buchenhorst, Maria Six-Hohenbalken. Routledge, pp. 91-106.

Before the Holocaust: Germany's genocide in Namibia | People & Power Documentary
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYh5PsxpoGg

March 23rd, 2026

Araujo, A.L. (2017). "It's Time for Us to Get Paid." *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade: a transnational and comparative history.* New York: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 153-178.

Beauvois, Frederique. (2023). "Haiti and the burden of history." *University of Miami Inter-American Law Review,* 55(1), 122-132.

Lewis, J.S. (2023). "Fugitive Repair." *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies,* 22(5): 1388-1397.

California's Case for Reparations': An ABC7 Originals documentary
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oTLXrT_ncw8

Walcott **(Read:** Chapters 21, 22)

Due: March 30th, 2026: Archival Research Presentation

Due: April 6th, 2026: we will not meet for this final class, but the written portion of your presentation is due on this day @ 11:59 pm.

COURSE POLICIES
(*Please note that minor adjustments or changes can be made to the course outline at any time*)

Here is the link to information about Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies at Western:
https://grad.uwo.ca/about_us/policies_procedures_regulations/index.html

Correspondence Statement
The centrally administered e-mail account provided to students will be considered the individual's official university e-mail address. It is the responsibility of the account holder to ensure that e-mail received from the University at his/her official university address is attended to in a timely manner. You can read about the privacy and security of the UWO email accounts here.

Support Services:
"Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/ for a complete list of options about how to obtain help"
(http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/exam/courseoutlines.pdf). Remember that there is a lot of help/support here at Western; I can help you find/access it if you need.

Please also consider the Post-Secondary Student Helpline as a resource: 1-866-925-5454, or, if in immediate crisis, 911 (but please note: police may be first responders?) or Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000.

Graduate students should also know that, if they are employed at Western as GTAs, they are entitled to access services associated with Western's Employee Assistance Program ("Life Works").

Gender-Based and Sexual Violence Supports
If you have experienced, or are experiencing, GBSV: please know there is support at Western and in the wider London community (and very likely in your own home community). Western has prepared information about survivor support services at https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html; included there specifically is info for ANOVA (formerly the Sexual Assault Centre of London) which has a 24-hour crisis & support line: 519 642-3000. To connect with the GBSV case manager at Western/set up an appointment, email support@uwo.ca.
If you're feeling a bit at sea, please feel welcome to reach out to me. I am not a trained counselor, but I can help you access resources. Please know you're not alone.

Accessible Education: The Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies is "committed to accessible education as a matter of policy and as a social justice issue" (*Handbook for GSWS Instructors*) – and it's equally important to me that you feel both individually and

structurally supported. Please feel welcome to let me know if my teaching style or other conditions related to the course are posing unanticipated challenges. From SGPS: "Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program.

Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are strongly encouraged to register with Accessible Education Western (AEW), a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both AEW and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction" (https://grad.uwo.ca/resources/regulations/6.html). You may wish to connect with Accessible Education at 519-661-2147 or aew@uwo.ca and/or visit http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/academic_accomodation.html to find out the full range of services available.

You can also review the policy on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities at: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic Accommodation_disabilities.pdf

Submitting Assignments:
This course requires that you submit electronic copies of written work to Turnitin.com through the Owl Brightspace. (For this course: Here's the statement on use of Turnitin from the University:

"All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under licence to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted 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 and Turnitin.com (http://www.turnitin.com."
(http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/exam/courseoutlines.pdf)

Please note that **you cannot submit assignments in GSWS 9576 prepared for other courses or program milestones.** I'm happy to chat about appropriate overlap if you're unsure.

(Remote) Attendance in classes:
In graduate courses especially, students are expected to attend all classes (in-person or via zoom, as per course format under covid conditions), read assigned texts thoughtfully and critically, participate in discussions, present materials, ask questions, and be good listeners.
Please contact me if you miss more than one class. (This is not meant as surveillance but for us to stay connected; GSWS has a department policy such that, if more than two classes are missed, a student may be required to re-take the course.)

Scholastic 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 the following Web site: http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/2009/pg113.html."

And re: Plagiarism, especially:
"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 offense (see the 'Scholastic Offense Policy' in the Western Academic Calendar). Plagiarism checking: The University of Western Ontario uses software for plagiarism checking. Students may be required to submit their written work in electronic form for plagiarism checking.

UWO Statement on Plagiarism: https://www.uwo.ca/ombuds/pdf/scholastic_offences.pdf

Owl and Zoom:
Use of Owl Brightspace is required for this course. All course information, including the schedule of readings and assignments, is available there; please go to owl.uwo.ca.

My office hours are posted on page 1 of this syllabus. I'll try to respond promptly to your email but substantive inquiries should be reserved for office hours rather than via email.

Prerequisites
For graduate students in home units outside GSWS: you will need to have permission from me and from your home unit Grad Chair (or equivalent) to take this course. Special permission cannot be grounds for appeal.

GRADING SCHEME
Assignments will be graded according to the scheme provided by Western University. I have copied this table below for reference:

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.

See also: Code of Student Conduct