



Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies GSWS 2231F – Black Feminist Thought: Principles, Debates, Social Transformation

Time: see timetable

Instructor: Prof. Erica S. Lawson

Office: Lawson Hall

Location: TBA

Email: elawso3@uwo.ca

Office Hrs: Weds: 2 -3 pm

(or by appt. on zoom) ****Previous Outline****

Course Description:

This course introduces students to the foundational principles, debates, and concepts in Black feminisms in the African diaspora. It asks: How does Black feminism engage knowledges across disciplines? How is it located in the Black liberation tradition? What preoccupies Black feminist scholar-activists at this historical moment? And what kinds of futures do Black feminists imagine and strive for? In addition to readings, course materials will include documentaries, poetry, and online talks by Black feminists. These selections are meant to encourage students to find their own entry points into understanding and applying key concepts in Black feminist thought to course assignments.

Learning Objectives

- Familiarity with Black feminist principles and debates
- Discuss how resilience and resistance are central to Black feminisms
- Examine Black feminist thought from historical and contemporary perspectives

Learning Outcomes

- Improved knowledge about Black feminisms
- Improved research and writing skills
- Critical evaluation and analytical skills
- Application of theory/analysis to issues and events

List of Prerequisites: Pre or Corequisites: GSWS 1030F/G and 0.50 course from GSWS 1021F/G, GSWS 1022F/G, GSWS 1023F/G, GSWS 1024F/G, or 0.50 of any first-year essay course in Arts and Humanities, Social Science, or Media, Information, and Technoculture. Students can request special permission from the department to enroll in this course without the prerequisites! Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Students must use their Western (@uwo.ca) email addresses when contacting their instructors.

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Assignments, Instructions, and Due Dates:

This is a research and writing-focused course with a final written exam. The assignments are designed to help you achieve the learning objectives and outcomes outlined in the syllabi. In the interest of flexibility, extended deadlines are built into some of assignments.

Course assignments and evaluation are as follows:

- Attendance and Participation –15%
- Analysis of a course reading – 15%
- Analysis of a documentary 15%
- Essay - Profile of a Black feminist – 20%
- Final Exam – 35%

(1) Attendance and Participation: 15% (weekly)

Attend class regularly and come prepared to participate in class discussions informed by the readings. If you're uncomfortable or anxious about speaking publicly, you have the option of submitting a single-spaced one-page synopsis of a reading before we meet (minimum of three readings during the semester) to improve your participation grade. Please send this to me by email attachment before class. I will not accept a synopsis of a reading outside of the day that it's scheduled for class discussion. Here are some questions to consider addressing after the synopsis: (a) what questions did the reading spark for you (b) what did you learn that you didn't know before? Do the ideas/arguments dialogue with other course readings?

(2) Analysis of a Course Reading: 15% (4-5 pages) Choose any one of the two readings listed in the week of September 26th or October 10th. Engage a thoughtful reflection and discussion of it. Please do not use limited space to summarize the reading – a short overview will suffice. The point of the assignment is to demonstrate an analytical understanding of the reading. To guide your reflection, consider questions such as:

- 1) What are the main arguments that the author(s) are engaging with?
- 2) What theoretical frameworks or concepts does the article employ?
- 3) How does this reading relate to other materials or discussions from the course?
- 4) (How) is it relevant to (or reflective of) external events or contemporary, topical issues?
- 5) And do you have points of disagreement with it?

(3) Analysis of a Documentary: 15% (4-5 pages)

Titled, “The Myth of the Black Woman,” we will watch this documentary in class as a group on October 31st followed by a discussion. Based on the viewing and discussion, write a short analysis of the documentary informed by your insights. I suggest that you focus on one aspect of the documentary that piques your interest. Questions to consider include:

1. What aspect(s) of the documentary sparked your interest?
2. How does it relate to, or comment on ideas/arguments/theories raised in the course?
3. Other questions that came up for you?

(4) Essay - Profile of a Black Feminist (20%): (6-7 pages, including a reference list): I am offering two deadlines here in the interest of flexibility.

Choose a person whose life/work/activism/scholarship engenders Black feminist praxis and conduct research on this individual. This is a research-based and essay format assignment. Guiding questions include: Who are they? What have they done? What makes their work important in the social, political, and economic context of their time? What impact did they have on the tradition of black feminist thought and/or the black liberation movement? Why did you choose this person? What did you learn that you didn’t already know? Other questions that you can think of? Include a bibliography of at least six (no more than eight) credible sources (book chapter, peer-reviewed articles, magazines, or newspapers such as the Toronto Star, New York Times, New Yorker) to present a full picture of this person. In other words, do not rely on obscure internet sources to support your arguments. Try to think “outside the box.” By this I mean that we tend to focus on famous people in Black history (e.g. Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth). Of course, the lives and work of these people remain extremely relevant. However, are there others who also did amazing things but are not typically recognized? For example, are there African Canadian women whose lives exemplify Black feminist practice but who are often overlooked? The essay should be 6-7 pages, 12 pt. font and include a cover page and a bibliography.

(5) Final Exam: 35% - The exam will consist of three short responses (5% each = 15%) to a concept or quote out of four choices; and one of two essay questions (20%). Questions will be taken from any of the readings from October 24th to December 5th. You will be provided with an exam format towards the end of the course to help you prepare. I’m happy to lead a short review session in the final class. This means that you must be prepared to provide concepts, theories, ideas that you would like to discuss for clarification.

Deadline Flexibility Statement

Because the submission deadline for writing assessments already includes flexibility in the form of two submission options, the instructor reserves the right to deny academic consideration for assignments which are submitted following the end of the period of flexibility.

