

## **“Emancipation” in/and the Afterlife of Slavery**

### **Course Proposal – Erica S. Lawson**

This essay- and presentation-based 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.”<sup>1</sup> 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 (extended to continental Africans). We will examine contested ideas and arguments about freedom, rights, and racial progress, drawing on theoretical critiques from Black Studies. The goal of the seminar is to create an intellectual and conversational space to grapple with ideas/readings in the Black intellectual tradition.

### **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.
- 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.
- Developing the confidence to make clear arguments and ask informed questions.
- Assessing and choosing appropriate materials for written projects.

### **Assignments and Evaluation: (To be confirmed)**

- Attendance and Participation
- Presentation(s) of course text(s) (with written component)
- Student led discussions
- Final Essay

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<sup>1</sup> 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).

**Here are some of the criteria that I use to assess written work:**

- Good grammar and sentence structure
- Clear and precise use of language (i.e. clear definitions of terms)
- Concise articulation of the issue or problem that the paper addresses
- Coherent development of arguments
- Arguments supported with clear evidence
- Close attention to proper citations
- An examination and interpretation of arguments in ways that illuminate hidden assumptions, meanings, contradictions, or inconsistency (in other words, an analytic rather than an overly descriptive assessment of the topic/issue).

**GSWS Grading Criteria** (see WSFR Handbook for details):

- A+ (90 to 100) – Excellent work
- A (80 and up) - Superior work
- B (70 to 79) Good work, meeting all requirements, and eminently satisfactory
- C (60 and up) – Competent work, meeting requirements
- D (50 to 59) – Fair work, minimally acceptable
- F (49 and down) – Assignment does not apply to course; basic requirements are unmet; plagiarism)

**Sample Reading List**

Brand, D. (2001). *A Map to the Door of No Return*. Vintage Canada

Benahene, P.A. (2013). “When Blackness Shows Up Uninvited: Examining the Murder of Trayvon Martin through Fanonian Racial Interpellation.” *Counterpoints*, 445, Contemporary Issues in the Sociology of Race and Ethnicity: A CRITICAL READER, pp. 25-41.

Farmer, P. (2001). “An Anthropology of Structural Violence.” *Current Anthropology*, 45(3): 305-325.

Goldberg, D.T. (2018). “The Reason of Unreason’: Achille Mbembe and David Theo Goldberg in conversation about Critique of Black Reason.” *Theory, Culture and Society*, 35(7-8): 205-277.

Hannah-Jones, N. (2021). *The 1619 Project*. One World (Random House).

Hartman, S.V. (1997). *Scenes of Subjection: Terror Slavery and the Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*. Oxford University Press.

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.

McKittrick, K. (2013). "Plantation Futures." *Small Axe*, 17(42): 1-15

Mills, C. (1997). *The Racial Contract*. Cornell University Press .

Osman, M. (2023). "Rethinking the Liberian Predicament in Anti-Black Terms: On Repatriation, Modernity, and the Ethno-Racial Choreographies of Civil War." In (P. Goulimari, ed.), *After Modernism*. London: Routledge.

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>

Robinson, C. (2000, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition). *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* University of North Carolina Press.

Rodney, W. (1972). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. London: Verso.

Scott Lewis, J. (2020). *Scammer's Yard: The Crime of Black Repair in Jamaica*. University of Minnesota Press.

Sharpe, C. (2016). *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Duke University Press.

Walcott, R. *The Long Emancipation: Moving Toward Black Freedom*. Duke University Press

Walcott, R. (2021). *On Property*. Biblioasis Press.