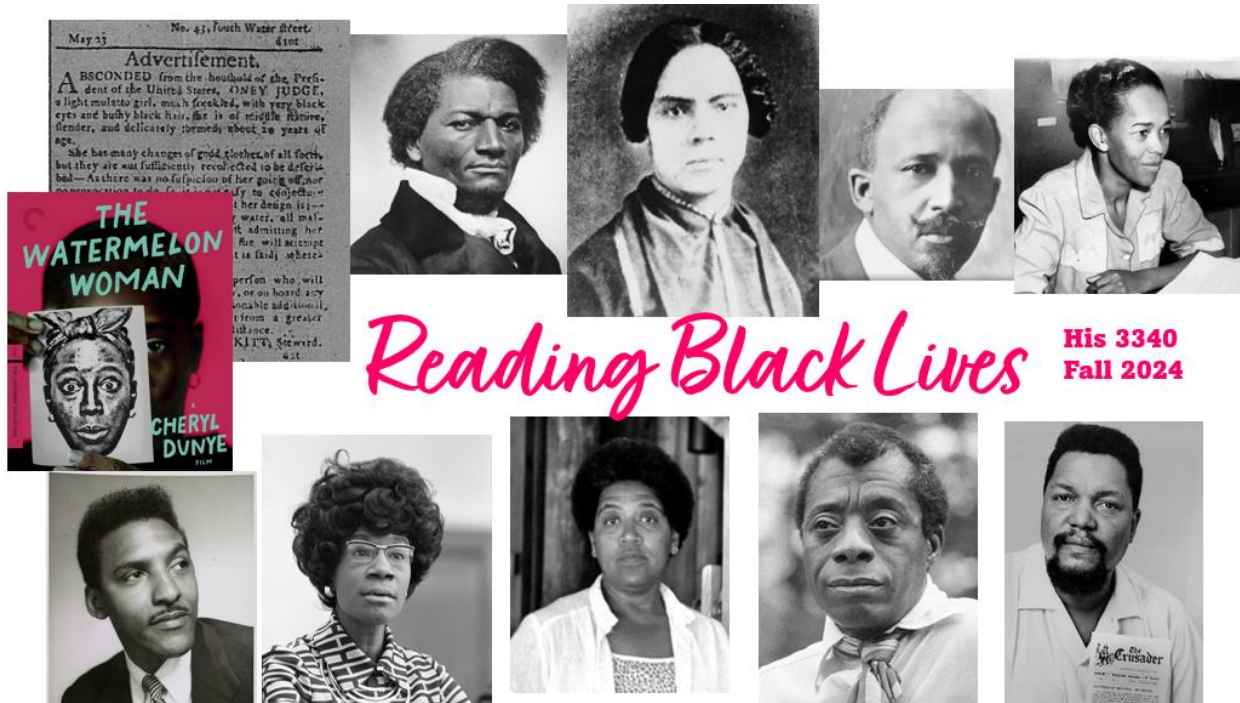


HIS/GSWS 3340: Reading Black Lives



Fall 2024

Instructor: Laurel Clark Shire, Associate Professor

Email: Ishire@uwo.ca

Office: Lawson Hall 3rd floor in GSWS

Office Hours: TBA and by appointment

This is a **draft** outline. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for a final version.

Course Description

This course examines the history of peoples of African descent in the US through the life stories of ten individuals, some male-identified, others female-identified, and some whom we might today classify as non-binary, genderqueer, or otherwise outside of the gender binary. Some were famous, others most people have never heard of. Some were educated or wealthy, others were not. These people lived from the earliest days of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade to the present. Throughout our reading of their lives, we will explore themes important in the history of people of African heritage in North America, such as agency, resistance, intersectionality and identity, freedom, and creativity. These biographies and autobiographies will be our window onto the political, economic, social and cultural context in which each of these people lived.

This is a draft outline. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for a final version.

Students who have already taken an introductory course in African-American or African-Canadian History are encouraged to enroll, but there is no prerequisite for this course.

Antirequisite(s): **HIS/GSWS 3340 (cross-listed versions of this course)**

Students should be mindful that biographies and autobiographies tend to be lengthy, and we will be reading one book-length life story OR watching a 90-120 minute documentary or film every week. We will discuss strategies for skimming and reading for argument, but you should be prepared to spend time (about 5 hours each week) reading each book or watching each video before our class meets. I recommend that you start early and plan to spend several chunks of time reading/watching in order to be prepared.

Course Syllabus

Learning Objectives

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

- Describe, compare, and contrast the life stories of the 10 people we will learn about in this course
- Put those life stories into the broader historical narrative of North America, particularly the major events in the history of colonialism, slavery, segregation, the struggle for freedom for all Black people, Black Power, and the era of mass incarceration
- Formulate intersectional arguments about the ways that each person experienced life in a body that was also understood through hierarchies of gender, class, sexuality, age, dis/ability or other social relations
- Identify and assess the thesis argument of a book or film, and the major kinds of evidence used to support that argument
- Write a brief summary of the argument and evidence for each chapter or section of any (auto)biographical book/film

Methods of Evaluation

Weekly participation in seminar:	20%
Weekly notes/"reverse outlines" (7 total out of 10)	40%
- due the weeks you are assigned them (see small groups)	
Discussion leadership (1 time)	10%
Final exam:	30%

Attendance and Participation: Students are expected to be prepared to discuss the readings assigned for each seminar meeting, and each will also lead our discussion as part of a small group once during the semester. There may be discussion questions, pop quizzes, or other weekly assessments in class, which will be marked as part of your participation grade. Our discussions will be as good, or as bad, as you make them. The tenor, value, and engagement of each seminar depends entirely on the preparation, attitudes, and generosity of each of you. Students are required to attend class each week, to be on time and to leave when class ends. If you are unable to attend, or if you must be late or leave early, email the professor ahead of time (I will not ask you for explanations, you must initiate this). Every absence will affect your ability to be successful in this course.

We will meet 11 times, so each class meeting will be an opportunity for you to earn up to 1.8% of your 20% participation mark, or 9.09% out of 100%. You will earn all 9.09 points by attending on time, leaving on time, and **listening** and **participating** actively and respectfully in the discussion, being mindful not to dominate or derail it. I will take note each week of who is listening actively to your peers, who has useful and relevant things to contribute, who is distracted by their devices, and who is just taking up space. You will be marked accordingly: each week, half your participation mark is attendance, and the other half is how well you listened, contributed, and engaged. If you feel anxiety about speaking in class, please discuss your options with me as soon as you enroll in the course. I have many strategies that I have used in the past to help shy or anxious students earn their full participation marks, and I will be very happy to work with you.

Please note that missing one class will result in a 0% for participation that week - and thus will reduce your best possible total participation mark to 90.9%, even if you are engaged at every other meeting. Missing two will reduce that best possible participation mark to 81.82%, missing 3 classes will reduce it to 72.73%, and so on. Please understand how this math works before you skip class. An excused absence will not affect your grade, but it will change the way your other weekly participation scores are calculated (rather than 11 weeks to earn 100 points, you will only have 10 after 1 excused absence, for example, making each week worth more - 10 points rather than 9.09 thereafter).

If you are ill, please do not come to class. If you have a cold, please wear a mask if you are able to do so, and I will do the same. **If you wish to be excused from class**, you must provide evidence to the Academic Counseling office in your home faculty that you were ill, or attending a medical appointment or participating in a University athletics match, or unable to attend due to a personal emergency. Unexcused absences, as well as frequent tardiness, will harm your participation grade and will hamper your ability to be successful in the course. It is up to you to provide explanations and supporting documentation to Academic Counseling, I will not remind you to provide them and I cannot accept them from you directly (to ensure

privacy, confidentiality, and equity). Academic counseling will grant you up to 1 one accommodated absence per course per term without documentation.

Reading Notes/Outlines: Each week, you are expected to **read and take notes** on the book or film we are studying together. You will save those notes in a document and **turn them in** for a grade before class. We will discuss how to skim scholarly books, how to take notes on a film, and how sometimes you may need to use a different approach with a biography or life narrative. What you turn in for this assignment should identify a) the overall thesis of the book or film and b) the thesis of each chapter OR each section of the film. In addition, a summary of what happened over time (what changed, what didn't? Major events that shaped the subject's life, major historical events, etc) for each chapter should be included. At the MOST each chapter or section should get 1 page of outline notes. **At the end of your reading notes/outline, you should also offer your own personal reflection**, an informal space where you can talk about what engaged, outraged, surprised, or otherwise effected you as you watched this film and/or read this book. You are required to turn in 7 of these reading notes/outlines with a reflection at the end. So of the 10 weeks when we are reading/watching narratives, there are 7 when you are required to turn in your notes (but you should take good notes each week so you can bring them into the final exam). Everyone is required to do this in the first three weeks, so you can learn how to do it and get some feedback from me early in the course. You will be able to bring these notes into the final exam, so think about that as you create them. These should be turned in by sending them to lshire@uwo.ca before class begins each Monday. **I will accept two sets of notes up to one week late.** After that, you will get a zero for any week when you did not turn them in before class. This flexibility in only requiring 7/10 and accepting 2/7 late means that you need not ask for academic accommodation through academic counseling.

Small Group Schedule for Turning in Your Notes/Outlines

The students in each of these groups is required to turn in their notes in these 7 weeks:

Small Group 1: weeks 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 12

Small Group 2: weeks 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13

Small Group 3: weeks 2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 11, 12

Small Group 4: weeks 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13

Discussion Lead: Once during the semester, you will lead our discussion for the first 30 minutes of class, probably in a pair or small group (depending on how many students are in the course). Please bring some discussion questions to get your peers thinking and talking about the reading. This is very open-ended and you are free to be creative, and/or to share short videos, memes or other relevant material. But please be sure that your discussion starters are ON TOPIC. This is worth 10% of your mark. If you are absent for an excusable reason on the date when you are assigned to

lead discussion, you will be given one opportunity to make it up. If not, you will earn 0%. If you need to switch dates for this assignment, please contact me as soon as possible.

The **final exam** will be scheduled during the exam period in December. It will consist of identifications, timelines or chronologies, short answer questions, and one essay question. A study guide will be circulated before the exam and will be available for discussion in the last class meeting. It will be open book and open note, but no access to the internet will be allowed (so bring print copies).

Make-up tests, midterms, and exams can only be approved by Academic Counselling. Please see

https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for department procedures and requirements involving make-up tests and exams.

Course Materials

All these are available via Western Libraries, online, and/or for sale at the bookstore. These are listed in the order in which we will study them, the chronological order of these 10 individuals' lives.

By way of introduction (we will watch clips in our first class): Dunye, Cheryl. "The Watermelon Woman," 1996 film. This is available free online via Western Libraries in the Kanopy collection. <https://www.kanopy.com/en/uwo/video/110276>

Ona Judge, ~1773-1848. Dunbar, Erica Armstrong, *Never Caught: The Washingtons' Relentless Pursuit of Their Runaway Slave, Ona Judge*. New York: 37 Ink/Atria, 2017. If you purchase this title be sure you buy the full version and not the shortened version intended for children. **9781501126390**

Frederick Douglass, ~1818-1895. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself* available online; "Becoming Frederick Douglass" (2022) and "Frederick Douglass: In Five Speeches" (2022) both available on Kanopy via Weldon Library

Mary Ann Shadd Cary, 1823-1893. Read the Introduction, "We Should Do More, and Talk Less" (pp. 1-24) to this book: Cary, Mary Ann Shadd. 2023. *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: Essential Writings of a Nineteenth-Century Black Radical Feminist*. Edited by Nneka D. Dennie. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197609460.001.0001>. Available online via Weldon Library.

Then watch these videos:

- "From Grit to Glory: Mary Ann Shadd Cary"

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXW-d3wIQJg>) (23 minutes);

- "Mary Ann Shadd: Journalism, Activism, and the Power of Words" Historica Canada series "Strong and Free," Episode 4. (33 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JmXYa3YdpKU>;

- "Mary Ann Shadd Revisited: Echoes from an Old House," a film by Allison Smith (27 minutes) <https://activehistory.ca/blog/2016/03/08/film-mary-ann-shadd-revisited-echoes-from-an-old-house/>

W. E. B. Du Bois, 1868-1963. "W. E. B. Du Bois: A Biography in Four Voices," dir. By Louis Massiah, California Newsreel, 1996. On Kanopy. 95 minutes. We will also read excerpts from two of Du Bois' books, *The Souls of Black Folk* and *Black Reconstruction*.

Ella J. Baker, 1903-1986. Read: Barbara Ransby, "Chapter 3. Behind-the-Scenes View of a Behind-the-Scenes Organizer: The Roots of Ella Baker's Political Passions". *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, edited by Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin, New York, USA: New York University Press, 2001, pp. 42-58. On OWL.

Then watch "Fundis: The Story of Ella Baker," dir. Joanne Grant, Icarus Films, 1981 - find via Weldon Library Docuseek collection.

Bayard Rustin, 1912-1987. "Brother/Outsider: The Life of Freedom Fighter Bayard Rustin" free on Kanopy through lib.uwo.ca <https://www.kanopy.com/en/uwo/video/139631> (you might also enjoy watching "Rustin" on Netflix, but it is not as good as this documentary at telling his life story).

Shirley Chisholm, 1924-2005. "Shirley," directed by John Ridley, Netflix, 2024 - the story of Shirley Chisholm. If you've already seen this or you don't have Netflix, watch "Chisholm '72: Unbought and Unbossed" on Kanopy.

James Baldwin, 1924-1987. "James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket," directed by Karen Thorsen, 1990, available on Kanopy via Weldon library. I also highly recommend Raoul Peck's film on Baldwin, "I am not your Negro" (2016) and David Leeming's biography of James Baldwin, *James Baldwin: A Biography*. We will also read 1 essay and 1 short story by Baldwin, links on OWL.

Robert F. Williams, 1925-1996. "Negroes with Guns: Robert Williams and Black Power" (53 minutes), dir. Sandra Dickson, Churchill Roberts, Cindy Hill, Cara Pilson, California Newsreel, 2005 on Kanopy.

Audre Lorde, 1934-1992. "The Edge of Each Other's Battles: the Vision of Audre Lorde" (2002) - Kanopy. We will also read *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*,

the biomythography that Audre Lorde published in 1982. 9780895941220 We will also read 2 essay and 2 poems by Lorde.

Course Schedule and Readings

September 9. Week 1. Welcome & Introductions

What is Black history? Black biography? What do you already know? What can you expect to learn in this class?

By way of introduction: "The Watermelon Woman," dir. Cheryl Dunye, 1996.

Expectations and how to succeed. How to read, watch, take notes, and write a stellar reflection.

September 16. Week 2. Slavery and Freedom in Early America

What happened when an enslaved women ran away from George and Martha Washington?

Ona Judge, ~1773-1848. Dunbar, Erica Armstrong, *Never Caught: The Washingtons' Relentless Pursuit of Their Runaway Slave, Ona Judge*. New York: 37 Ink/Atria, 2017. 1501126393, 9781501126390.

Due from ALL STUDENTS: reading notes/reverse outline

Discussion leaders:

September 23. Week 3. Slavery and Abolition in the Early Republic.

Why was FD the most photographed man in 19th century America?

Frederick Douglass, ~1818-1895. If you have never read his first autobiography, go and read the "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself," available for free online

<https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/douglass.html>. Then watch:

"Becoming Frederick Douglass" (2022) and "Frederick Douglass: In Five Speeches" (2022) both available on Kanopy via Weldon Library

Due from ALL STUDENTS: reading notes/reverse outline

Discussion leaders:

September 30. Week 4. (no class) - National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

October 7, Week 5. Crossing the Border: A Radical Female Abolitionist Arrives in Canada

Why do Canadians remember Mary Ann Shadd Cary more often than Americans do?

Mary Ann Shadd Cary, 1823-1893. Read the Introduction -"We Should Do More, and Talk Less" (pp. 1-24)- to this book: Cary, Mary Ann Shadd. 2023. *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: Essential Writings of a Nineteenth-Century Black Radical Feminist*. Edited by Nneka D. Dennie. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197609460.001.0001>. Available online via Weldon Library.

Then watch these videos:

- "From Grit to Glory: Mary Ann Shadd Cary"

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXW-d3wlQJg>) (23 minutes);

- "Mary Ann Shadd: Journalism, Activism, and the Power of Words" Historica Canada series "Strong and Free," Episode 4. (33 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JmXYa3YdpKU>;

- "Mary Ann Shadd Revisited: Echoes from an Old House," a film by Allison Smith (27 minutes) <https://activehistory.ca/blog/2016/03/08/film-mary-ann-shadd-revisited-echoes-from-an-old-house/>

Due from ALL STUDENTS: reading notes/reverse outline

Discussion leaders:

October 14. Week 6. No class, Fall Break.

October 21. Week 7. W. E. B. Du Bois and the history of Black History

What is "double consciousness"?

W. E. B. Du Bois, 1868-1963.

Read : The "Forethought" and Chapter 1 "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," from *The Souls of Black Folk*, available here: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/408/408-h/408-h.htm> AND

"To the Reader" and Chapter 1 "The Black Worker" from *Black Reconstruction* (1935) available here: <https://cominsitu.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/w-e-b-du-bois-black-reconstruction-an-essay-toward-a-history-of-the-part-which-black-folk-played-in-the-attempt-to-reconstruct-democracy-2.pdf>

Watch: "W. E. B. Du Bois: A Biography in Four Voices," dir. By Louis Massiah, California Newsreel, 1996. On Kanopy. 95 minutes.

Due from Small Groups 2 and 4: reading notes/reverse outline of the film, include the readings in your reflection but not in the outline

Discussion leaders:

October 28. Week 8. The Mother of the Civil Rights Movement

Would there have been a movement without women?

Ella J. Baker, 1903-1986.

Read: Barbara Ransby, "Chapter 3. Behind-the-Scenes View of a Behind-the-Scenes Organizer: The Roots of Ella Baker's Political Passions" in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, edited by Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin, New York, USA: New York University Press, 2001, pp. 42-58. On OWL.

Watch "Fundi: The Story of Ella Baker," dir. Joanne Grant, Icarus Films, 1981 - find via Weldon Library Docuseek collection.

Due from Small Groups 1 and 3: reading notes/reverse outline of the film, include the reading in your reflection but not in the outline

Discussion leaders:

November 4. Week 9. Lost Prophet.

How did queer folks contribute to the long struggle for Black freedom?

Bayard Rustin, 1912-1987.

Watch: "Brother/Outsider: The Life of Freedom Fighter Bayard Rustin" free on Kanopy through lib.uwo.ca <https://www.kanopy.com/en/uwo/video/139631> (you might also enjoy watching "Rustin" on Netflix, but it is not as good as this documentary at telling his life story).

Due from Small Groups 1, 2 and 4: reading notes/reverse outline of the film

Discussion leaders:

November 11 (Remembrance Day). Week 10. The First Black Female Candidate for President. *we will take a moment of silence at 11am.

Is the USA a democracy?

Shirley Chisholm, 1924-2005.

Watch: "Shirley," directed by John Ridley, Netflix, 2024 - the story of Shirley Chisholm. If you've already seen this or you don't have Netflix, watch "Chisholm '72: Unbought and Unbossed" on Kanopy.

Due from Small Groups 1 and 3: reading notes/reverse outline of the film

Discussion leaders:

November 18, Week 11. Bearing Witness.

How are witnesses important to a movement differently from activists?

James Baldwin, 1924-1987.

Watch: "James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket," directed by Karen Thorsen, 1990, available on Kanopy via Weldon library. I also highly recommend Raoul Peck's film on Baldwin, "I am not your Negro" (2016) We will also read 1 essay and 1 short story by Baldwin, pdfs on OWL.

Due from Small Groups 2, 3, and 4: reading notes/reverse outline of the film, include the readings in your reflection but not in the outline

Discussion leaders:

November 25. Week 12. Black Power.

Where did black self-defense really originate?

Robert F. Williams, 1925-1996.

Watch: "Negroes with Guns: Robert Williams and Black Power" (53 minutes), dir. Sandra Dickson, Churchill Roberts, Cindy Hill, Cara Pilson, California Newsreel, 2005 on Kanopy.

Due from Small Groups 1 and 3: reading notes/reverse outline of the film

Discussion leaders:

December 2. Week 13. Radical, Intersectional, Feminist, Visionary.

Can the master's tools dismantle the master's house?

Audre Lorde, 1934-1992.

Watch: "The Edge of Each Other's Battles: the Vision of Audre Lorde" (2002) - Kanopy.

Read *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, the biomythography that Audre Lorde published in 1982.

Due from Small Groups 2 and 4: reading notes/reverse outline of the book, include the film in your reflection but not in the outline

Discussion leaders:

Additional Statements

Communication policies: email is always the best way to reach me: lshire@uwo.ca. I typically respond within 24-48 hours during regular working hours. I hold weekly office hours in person in Lawson Hall (my office is currently on the 3rd floor of Lawson Hall in the Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies, where I also serve as the Graduate Chair). Office hours are when you can come and ask questions about course content, policies, expectations, ask about careers in History, American Studies or Women's Studies, request extensions or other forms of accommodation, or chat about other academic matters. If you prefer to email, that's fine. If you prefer to meet on Zoom, send me an email and we can set up a meeting.

Classroom comportment: Come to class on time and leave on time and do let me know if you will be late or need to leave early on a particular day. Silence or turn off your phones, and don't look at them during class. Please do not use class time to use social media, e-mail, surf the web or do anything else that distracts you. If you do these things during class you will get a ZERO (0) for participation that day. Feel free to snack as long as it is not disruptive to discussion and you clean up after yourself.

Use of electronic devices: Students will not be permitted to use electronic devices during tests and exams. Research studies show that taking notes by hand is better for retention and integration, so I recommend that you take notes with a pen and paper. If you must take notes on a device, please do not use the internet during class. If you

are off task and distracting others with your screen, you will lose attendance and participation points for that class. Students may not use audio or video recording devices in class without written permission of the instructor.

Use of generative artificial intelligence (AI): The use of generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, is permitted in this course for activities such as brainstorming and refining your ideas, drafting an outline to organize your thoughts, or checking grammar and style. Please note that anything an AI tool spits out should be checked for accuracy and that those tools cannot generate ideas on their own - you must still supply the argument and evidence, and if you do not, anything you turn in created by AI will not earn you a passing grade. Any use of such tools should be clearly acknowledged and explained. If in doubt, please ask me for clarification.

Please review the Department of History's shared policies and statements for all undergraduate courses at:

https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for important information regarding accessibility options, make-up exams, medical accommodations, health and wellness, academic integrity, plagiarism, and more.