

Department of Political Science
POL 484 H S
Topics in Political Thought I: Black Political Thought
Thursday 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM
Professor: Dr. Derefe Kimarley Chevannes
University of Toronto (Winter 2026)

Office: Sidney Smith Hall, Room 3119
Office Hours: Thursday, 1:30 – 2:30 pm or by appointment.
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Please read this syllabus carefully. You are responsible for all of the information contained herein.

Course Overview

This reading-intensive seminar explores political theories produced in the “Global South” with a concentrated emphasis on Africana knowledge production. Taking both recent and historical works as our starting point, students will explore central themes (anti-black racism, decolonization, freedom, subjectivity, Africana feminism, subjugation, amongst others) from the perspectives of scholars who labor to “shift the geography of reason.” Students will explore Black subjectivity from varying vantage points: be they cultural, gendered, classed or otherwise. A primary aim of this course is to trouble the conceptual bounds of what qualifies as being *political*—or for that matter, *human*—and how peoples from the Global South have taken such demarcations as a call to complicate, negotiate and/or expand the borders of political norms. Necessarily, this course explores varying methods of liberation for the colonized.

Black Political Theory explores knowledge from “below,” offering an alternative to and from the hegemonic Eurocentric view. It is an attempt to politicize and theorize the world from the perspective of the Africana subject. This course offers an alternative vision, imaginary and conception of the political with an intent of transforming normative political life, wherein freedom becomes the basis of the lived experience for the colonized. From this vantage, this course is ineluctably transdisciplinary; we will read and engage texts across academic disciplines, including but not limited to: philosophy, anthropology, history, sociology, Africana Studies and Caribbean Studies in order to make some sense of Africana political theory.

Finally, because the course confronts both historical and contemporary issues surrounding the racialization of Blackness and explores Afro-racial formations, this course intends to examine the work of those who are of African origins, including, of course, Afro-Caribbeans, African-Americans, Africans, Afro-Latinx people, Afro-Europeans, the Afro-Diasporic, *et al.* In the end, this course is interested in a foundational question: Can we discern a decolonial method in canonical texts in black political writings across epochs and domains in the Global South.

Course Objectives

Our primary objective is to develop critical interpretations of numerous political theorists based on their particular (and sometimes, intersected) political worldview. We will develop critical competencies, allowing for incisive commentary and penetrating interpretations. These interpretations will recognize the distinctive contributions of African political theorists to contemporary racial discourse and studies. Our second objective is to assess the limits (and generative contribution) of each theorist's perspectives and the cogency of their arguments.

Campus & Class Policies

Do not cheat. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense. It is critical that you learn practices of intellectual honesty and academic integrity. Your assignments must reflect your own effort (or a group effort for team assignments). In situations where external sources are used, you must acknowledge your sources and add your own analysis. Otherwise, it will count as plagiarism. If you plagiarize or cheat, the minimum penalty is an F on the assignment; other penalties could include an F for the course and/or suspension. All instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the relevant adjudicating office. Expectations for academic integrity and student conduct are described in detail here:

<https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2025>

Moreover, please be respectful of others (especially when you disagree with them!) and please let me know what I can do to make this class a more pleasant experience. Also, please note, there will be no extra credit assigned for this course, nor will there be any opportunities for resubmitting an already graded assignment. Lastly, I reserve the right to make changes to this syllabus, as necessary. Therefore, students are advised to refer to the syllabus posted on Quercus for the most updated version.

Students with Additional Needs: The Political Science Department at the University of Toronto is committed to making educational opportunities available for all students. In order for its faculty members to adequately address the needs of students who have disabilities, it is necessary that those students approach their instructors as soon as the semester starts, preferably on the first day of class. For further information about how the University will meet your specific needs, please visit: <https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/service/accessibility-services-registration-and-documentation-requirements/>

Late Penalty: Students are strongly encouraged to submit assignment(s) on time. Any late assignment will result in 5% deduction for every 24 hours an assignment is late, with the exception of the weekly seminar questions, where late submission will not be accepted. Late penalty may be avoided for medical reasons, but documentation (e.g., doctor's note) is required.

Course Assignments & Student Evaluation

N.B.: All papers will be returned within 2 weeks of submission.

The composition of course grades is as follows:

Participation (20%) Students are expected to participate in this seminar. The participation grade will be based on the quality of engagement in class, including peer engagement and engagement with the professor.

Quiz 1 (25%) This will be an in-class quiz administered on February 5, 2026. The quiz is worth 25% of your final grade. You are required to answer a short prompt to be handwritten in class and submitted. You will have 1 hour to complete the prompt. The quiz is designed to evaluate student comprehension of the readings and the ability to synthesize core details.

Quiz 2 (30%) There will be one in-class quiz administered on March 5, 2026. The quiz is worth 30% of your final grade. You are required to answer a short prompt to be handwritten in class and submitted. You will have 1 hour to complete the prompt. The quiz is designed to evaluate student comprehension of the readings and the ability to synthesize core details.

Reaction Paper (25%) This will be an in-class critical reaction paper on March 26, 2026. Students will be allotted 1 hour to complete the critical reflection.

Please note: Attendance is mandatory.

**Grading Scale (Faculty of
Arts & Science)**

Excellent

A+: 90–100% (4.0)

A: 85–89% (4.0)

A–: 80–84% (3.7)

Good

B+: 77–79% (3.3)

B: 73–76% (3.0)

B–: 70–72% (2.7)

Adequate

C+: (2.3)

C: (2.0)

C–: (1.7)

Marginal

D+: (1.3)

D: (1.0)

D–: (0.7)

Inadequate

FZ: (0.0)

Course Schedule

Week 1 — January 8

Introduction: What Is Black Political Thought?

In-Class Focus

- Black political thought as tradition, critique, and method
- Region, empire, and the limits of Western political theory
- Slavery and colonialism as constitutive of modern politics

Readings

- None

PART I — CARIBBEAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

Week 2 — January 15

Colonialism, Civilization, and Western Political Order

Required

- **Discourse on Colonialism**, Aimé Césaire
 - Entire text

Week 3 — January 22

Being, Knowledge, and the Colonial Episteme

Required

- **Sylvia Wynter**,
“On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being” (2006)

Week 4 — January 29

Colonial Subjectivity and Political Alienation

Required

- **Black Skin, White Masks**, Frantz Fanon
 - Chapter 1: *The Negro and Language*
 - Chapter 5: *The Lived Experience of the Black Man*
 - Chapter 8: *By Way of Conclusion*

Week 5 — February 5

Colonial Capitalism and Underdevelopment

(Caribbean Political Economy)

Required

- **How Europe Underdeveloped Africa**, Walter Rodney
 - Chapter 1: *Some Questions on Development*
 - Chapter 6: *Colonialism as a System for Underdeveloping Africa*
 - Chapter 7: *Africa's Contribution to European Capitalist Development*

PART II — NORTH AMERICAN BLACK POLITICAL THOUGHT

Week 6 — February 12

Slavery, Violence, and Political Subject Formation

Required

- **My Bondage and My Freedom**, Frederick Douglass
 - Chapter I: *Childhood*
 - Chapter XVI: *Covey, the Negro Breaker*
 - Chapter XVII: *The Last Flogging*

Week 7 — February 19

NO CLASS — READING WEEK

Week 8 — February 26

Gender, Race, and Political Voice

Required

- **A Voice from the South**, Anna Julia Cooper
 - *“Womanhood: A Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of a Race”*
 - *“The Higher Education of Women”*
 - *“Has America a Race Problem?”*

Week 9 — March 5

Double Consciousness and Democratic Critique

Required

- **The Souls of Black Folk**, W. E. B. Du Bois
 - Chapter I: *Of Our Spiritual Strivings*
 - Chapter III: *Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others*
 - Chapter XIV: *The Sorrow Songs*
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PART III — AFRICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

Week 10 — March 12

Black Consciousness and Political Awakening

Required

- **I Write What I Like**, Steve Biko
 - “*Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity*”
 - “*The Definition of Black Consciousness*”
 - “*White Racism and Black Consciousness*”

Week 11 — March 19

Gender, Ontology, and the Limits of Western Political Categories

Required

- **The Invention of Women**, Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí
 - Introduction
 - Chapter 1: *Visualizing the Body*
 - Chapter 2: *Conceptualizing Gender*

Week 12 — March 26

Course Review and In-Class Reaction Paper

In-Class Focus

- Caribbean, North American, and African traditions in conversation
 - Synthesis and review
 - **In-class reaction paper (25%)**