

POL 485— Topics in Political Thought II

The Black Radical Tradition

Monday 6–8 PM

Professor: Dr. Derefe Kimarley Chevannes

Winter 2026

Course Overview

This course offers an intensive and critical introduction to the Black Radical Tradition as a global intellectual, political and historical formation. Rather than treating Black radicalism as a discrete ideology or a unified movement, the course interrogates the very meaning of “radicalism” and asks a foundational question: what, if anything, is endemic to Black historical experience that gives rise to a distinct radical tradition?

Taking this question seriously requires moving beyond conventional accounts of radical politics that center class struggle, liberal reform, or state recognition alone. Accordingly, the course examines the Black Radical Tradition at multiple thresholds of analysis: the political, the economic, the epistemic, and the ontological. We will explore how Black radical thinkers have not only contested anti-Black racism in its institutional and juridical forms but have also challenged the deeper structures of anti-Blackness that organize Western modernity, liberal democracy, and dominant conceptions of the human.

The course is necessarily transdisciplinary. Readings draw from political theory, Black studies, Caribbean and African diasporic thought, gender and feminist theory, and decolonial critique. Across these traditions, we will examine how Black radical thinkers have theorized domination, resistance, liberation, and freedom under conditions shaped by slavery, colonialism, racial capitalism and state violence. Particular attention will be paid to the methods and modalities of struggle articulated within the tradition, including revolution, cultural transformation, gendered critique, abolition and morality.

A central aim of the course is to analyze both the continuities and tensions within the Black Radical Tradition across time and space. Rather than assuming coherence or consensus, we will examine points of convergence and rupture across historical periods, national contexts and theoretical frameworks. In doing so, the course foregrounds sustained critique of the normative assumptions underpinning Western political thought and democratic theory, especially as they relate to freedom, sovereignty, citizenship, governance and violence. Ultimately, this course invites students to treat the Black Radical Tradition not simply as an object of study, but as a critical method for rethinking politics, power, and liberation in the modern world.

Learning Objectives & Core Competencies

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

1. Articulate the historical foundations and theoretical contours of the Black Radical Tradition across multiple intellectual and political contexts.

2. Analyze primary texts in relation to their political, cultural, and historical conditions of emergence.
3. Evaluate key debates within the tradition concerning race, gender, state power, violence, and abolition.
4. Produce clear and critical written work that synthesizes conceptual arguments with historical analysis.

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 not be accepted, with the exception of a medical emergency, where documentation is required.

Course Assignments & Student Evaluation

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 2, 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 9, 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 30, 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+: 67–69% (2.3)

C: 63–66% (2.0)

C–: 60–62% (1.7)

Marginal

D+: 57–59% (1.3)

D: 53–56% (1.0)

D–: 50–52% (0.7)

Inadequate

FZ: 0–49% (0.0)

Course Schedule

Week 1 — January 5

Course Introduction

What Is the Black Radical Tradition? (Conceptual Overview)

In-Class Focus

- Course structure, expectations, assignments
- What do we mean by “Black,” “Radical,” and “Tradition”?
- Framing questions for the term

Readings

- No required readings
- Short excerpts from Robinson provided in class or on Quercus

Week 2 — January 12

The Black Radical Tradition: Origins and Foundations

Required

- **Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition**, Cedric Robinson
 - Chapter 6: *The Historical Archeology of the Black Radical Tradition*
 - Chapter 7: *The Nature of the Black Radical Tradition*
- **Terms of Order**, Cedric Robinson
 - *Chapter 1: Terms of Politicality*

Recommended

- Cedric Robinson, “Black Marxism Revisited”
- Cedric Robinson, “The Appropriation of Frantz Fanon”

Week 3 — January 19

The Map Is Not the Territory: Being, Knowledge, and Colonial Order

Required

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

Recommended

- Sylvia Wynter, “No Humans Involved”
- Sylvia Wynter, *On Being Human as Praxis* (selections)

Week 4 — January 26

Slavery, Revolt, and Political Consciousness

Required

- **Black Reconstruction in America**, W. E. B. Du Bois
 - Chapter 1: *The Black Worker*
 - Chapter 17: *The Propaganda of History*

Recommended

- W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Chapter 1
- W. E. B. Du Bois, “The General Strike”

Week 5 — February 2

Revolution and Caribbean Anticolonialism

Required

- **Discourse on Colonialism**, Aimé Césaire

Recommended

- C. L. R. James, “Black Jacobins”
- Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* (selections)

This week explicitly situates the Caribbean as a crucible of Black radical modernity.

Week 6 — February 9

Colonialism and Revolutionary Violence

Required

- **Frantz Fanon,**
The Wretched of the Earth
 - Chapter 1: *On Violence*
- **Amílcar Cabral,**
Resistance & Decolonization
 - Chapter 6: *Armed Resistance*

Recommended

- Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Chapter 5
- Nigel Gibson, *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination*

Week 7 — February 16

NO CLASS — READING WEEK

Week 8 — February 23

Black Feminism and Radicalism

An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman

Required

- **Claudia Jones,**
“An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman”
- **Women, Race, and Class,** Angela Davis
 - Chapters 1 and 10

Recommended

- Angela Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*

Week 9 — March 2

Black Power and Revolutionary Praxis

Required

- **Black Power: The Politics of Liberation,**
Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton
 - Chapters 1, 2 and 3
- **Revolutionary Suicide,** Huey P. Newton
 - Manifesto: The Way of Liberation pg 3-7.

Recommended

- Stokely Carmichael, *Ready for Revolution* (selections)
- Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power*

Week 10 — March 9

Morality, Rage and Radical Critique

Required

- **James Baldwin,**
A Report from Occupied Territory (Collected Essays) – Pg 728.
On Being “White” & Other Lies (PDF Quercus)

Recommended

- James Baldwin, “Down to the Cross”
- James Baldwin, “Many Thousands Gone”

Week 11 — March 16

Captivity, Carcerality and Abolition

Required

- Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Abolition Geography*
 - Chapter 8: *Race, Prisons and War: Scenes from the History of US Violence*
 - Chapter 20: *Abolition Geography & the Problem of Innocence*

Recommended

- Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*
- Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*

Week 12 — March 23

Ontology, Antagonism, and Afro-Pessimism

Required

- **Afropessimism,** Frank B. Wilderson III
 - Introduction
- **Red, White & Black,** Frank B. Wilderson III

- Chapter 1: “The Ruse of Analogy”
- **Lewis R. Gordon**, Freedom, Justice & Decolonization
Chapter 5: “Thoughts on Afropessimism”

Recommended

- Frank B. Wilderson III, “Gramsci’s Black Marx”
- Jared Sexton, “The Social Life of Social Death”

Week 13 — March 30

Semester Review

Required Texts

All texts for the course will be provided on Quercus. Please see PDFs online.