

AFST B101: Introduction to Black Studies

Bryn Mawr College | The Program in Africana Studies | Fall 2026

Mon & Wed 10:10-11:30 a.m. | Dalton Hall 1 | Professor Trish Whitfield

Office Hours: Thursdays 10am-12pm or by appointment | twhitfield@brynmawr.edu

Course description: This interdisciplinary course situates the study of Black lives, known interchangeably as African American Studies, Black Studies, Africana Studies, or African Diaspora Studies, within the context of ongoing struggles against anti-Black racism. We will explore the founding principles and purposes of the field, the evolution of its imperatives, its key debates, and the lives and missions of its progenitors and practitioners. In doing so we will survey, broadly and deeply, the diverse historical, political, social, cultural, religious/spiritual, and economic experiences and expressions of the African Diaspora in the Americas and beyond.

Course learning objectives:

1. You will develop an understanding of Black Studies as an **interdisciplinary approach**, that spans the social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences, in conceptualizing and investigating the impact and meanings of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, culture, politics, nation, diaspora, philosophy and religion (etc.) in the experiences and societies of different Black communities.
2. You will acquire breadth of knowledge through this course and will develop an **introductory understanding of Black movements (locally and globally)**, identities, politics, arts and popular cultures, and interrelationships of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation/nationalism/nation-state, imperial borders, and religion/spirituality in Black social/political life.
3. You will acquire skills in **critical thinking, research, and written and oral communication**. These skills developed from the inter-discipline of Black Studies will be widely applicable in other fields of study. Upon completion of this course, you will be able to critically evaluate information, positions, and arguments, and formulate strong arguments supported by evidence.

Course Assignments & Grading Policy: The world is an overwhelming place right now. We're all doing our best to carve out joy, purpose, and rest when we can. My goal is to present you with a deeper understanding of different thinkers and see you critically engaged with those perspectives. This course will not have a midterm or final exam, but analytical writing assignments based on the reading/content materials assigned.

- **Honor Code:** Per the BMC Honor Code: "Each student is responsible for the integrity of their own academic work...in reports and other written work, sources of information and of ideas and opinions, not the students' own must be clearly indicated; the source of direct quotations must be acknowledged. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism."

AI Policy: As an Afrofuturist, I will not deny the use of technology as tool of empowerment and reimagining new futures for Black lives. However, I am a firm believer that AI is simply a tool. AI cannot think for you, it cannot comprehend for you; it is humanity's *collaboration* with technology that builds new futures, not our dependence on it. AI use is permitted as a scaffolding tool (outlining, organizing information, APA formatting, proofreading for writing mechanics) but should not be used for critical analysis (generating arguments, claims, or thesis statements). AI should also not be used to rewrite your original thoughts. I want to hear what *you* think in your own style of voice because critical analysis and authenticity are essential to doing Black Studies.

Theoretical Anchor Papers: (50% of your final grade): One of the most foundational Black Studies pedagogical practices is to have students critically engage, debate, discuss, and dialogue about theoretical and methodological frameworks on Black lives across nation-state borders within a global and local context. You will be writing (3) theoretical framework papers at the end of every 4-5 weeks, due dates are clearly noted below, please plan accordingly. **I do not accept late work at all.** These text-based papers will be anchored on your critical engagement of the week's readings. These are not summary or journal entries; **they are expected to be 2-4 full-pages, doubled-spaced, 12pt New Times Roman font of critical analysis in APA format.** Your sources/evidence are the course readings below. You have the option of getting your lowest grades dropped or re-submission for an entirely new grade, only if you submit the assigned tasks on time. **You cannot drop your lowest grade if you do not submit an assignment for your lowest grade.**

You will receive a thoroughly detailed guideline/writing prompt a week prior to due date.

Due dates are as follows:

Due Sunday, October 4, 2026, by 11:59pm (EST) on Moodle

Due Sunday, November 15, 2026, by 11:59pm (EST) on Moodle.

Due Sunday, December 13, 2026, by 11:59pm (EST) on Moodle.

Class Facilitation: (25% of your final grade): Facilitating discussions gives all of us an opportunity to think aloud with each other in ways that can productively generate discussion, debate, and new forms of knowledge in the community of this course. Starting Week Three of the course, students will, in groups of 2 to 4, facilitate a conversation on the readings assigned for the day. What exactly does this look like:

- This should not be a lengthy summary of the text, but rather a more nuanced presentation to build a dialogue on the readings.
- Please prepare engaging class facilitations with an interactive PowerPoint or any other visual aid medium, be creative (out of the box) in your approach and always keep in mind the multiple forms of learners in space: visual, audio, artistic, etc.
- **Please prepare to facilitate class discussion on the assigned readings of the session for 30-45 minutes.**

The final date to submit all of your class facilitation materials on Moodle by Sunday, December 13, 2026, at 11:59p.m. (EST).

Participation/Contribution: (25% of your final grade): Your participation and scholarly engagement with the course materials are fundamental to your own development as a critical thinker and global

citizen. I will be taking attendance on a weekly basis; there will be a sign-in sheet provided for every class session. **Everyone has a maximum of two unexcused absences, use them up or not, you have them.** Once your absences go beyond the two unexcused absences, every other absence will go towards a grade deduction at the end of the semester for final grades. We have a finite number of class sessions together and we only meet twice a week, so please plan your schedule accordingly. Please keep in mind that this is a 100-level course that requires weekly close reading, critical thinking, and discussion-based lectures. I expect everyone to have read in advance and contribute to the intellectual community; we all are collectively building for the semester. I respect all diverse and inclusive modes of participation, not simply orally, written as well as small group conversations or just one-on-ones.

Black Studies Speaker Series: Throughout the semester, we will have 3 speakers coming to campus to discuss various topics in Black Studies. **These speaking engagements count toward your class participation grade.** The speaker series will take place in English House Lecture Hall from 12:30 – 2:00 PM on the following dates:

- Dr. Marisa Solomon: Friday, September 25, 2026
- Dr. Charisse Burden-Stelly: Friday, October 30, 2026
- Dr. Adam Bledsoe: Friday, November 13, 2026

A Note of Suggested Readings: Black Studies is a vastly transdisciplinary field that transcends normative modes and modalities of knowledge production and intersects with multiple fields of inquiry such as history, literature, philosophy, political science, anthropology, sociology, geography, urban studies, health studies, economics, and so many more fields. I provide you with suggested readings for all of our class sessions, not as an added pressure of requiring you to read more texts, but so that you may return to these suggested readings when you have the time, space, and bandwidth to engage with them in a deeper, more nuanced and critical ways without the parameters of the semester. Also, I wanted to showcase the theoretical and methodological richness of both the field of study, we call Black Studies, but the breadth of knowledge production on Black lives, not simply as footnotes in human history but the very cradle of human civilization.

Course Readings & Assignment Schedule

****Subject to change at the discretion of Professor Whitfield.***

Students will be notified 24 hours prior to any changes made to Moodle.

Week 1: Origins/New Beginnings/Our Why's?

Anchor Question:

How does Black Studies redefine the institutional purpose of higher education and challenge Western traditions of historical knowledge?

Monday, August 31, 2026

- Professor Whitfield's Teaching Philosophy: Black Feminist Scholar
- Course Overview: Weekly Close Readings, Analytical Writing, & Critical Thinking

In-Class Reading:

Taylor, K.-Y. (2023, February 3). The meaning of African American Studies. *The New Yorker*.

Kilson, M. (2000). Black Studies revisited. In H. A. Marable (Ed.), *Dispatches from the ebony tower: Intellectuals confront the African American experience* (pp. 162–170).

Columbia University Press.

Wednesday, September 02, 2026

In-Class Reading:

- Biondi, M. (2012). Introduction: The Black revolution on campus. In *The Black revolution on campus* (pp. 1–12).
- Karenga, M. (2000). Black Studies: A critical reassessment. In H. A. Marable (Ed.), *Dispatches from the ebony tower: Intellectuals confront the African American experience* (pp. 171–176).

Week 2: Knowledge-Making Marronage

Anchor Question:

How does Black Studies construct alternative ways of knowing/existing (“marronage”) that allow scholars and community members to reimagine human freedom beyond typical academic constraints?

Monday, September 07, 2026 (No Class in Session...*BUT STILL READ*)

Required Readings:

- Hine, D. C. (2014). A Black Studies manifesto: Characteristics of a Black Studies mind. *The Black Scholar*, 44(2), 11–15.
- Myers, J. (2023). Introduction: Living June Jordan. In *Of Black study* (pp. 1–13). Pluto Press.

Suggested Readings:

- Jordan, J. (1994). Black Studies: Bringing back the person. In *Moving towards home: Selected poems* (pp. 45–55).

Wednesday, September 09, 2026

Required Readings:

- Wynter, S. (2006). On how we mistook the map for the territory, and reimprisoned ourselves in our unbearable wrongness of being, of *desêtre*: Black Studies toward the human project. In L. R. Gordon & J. A. Gordon (Eds.), *Not only the master's tools: African American Studies in theory and practice* (pp. 107–132).

Suggested Readings:

- Wynter, S. (1994). "No Humans Involved": An open letter to my colleagues. *Forum N.H.I.: Knowledge for the 21st Century*, 1(1), 42–73.

Week 3: A Black Studies Origin Story

Anchor Question:

In what ways do origin stories, and historical revisions, reshape our understanding of what it means to practice Black Studies today?

Monday, September 14, 2026

Required Readings

- Hannah-Jones, N. (2021). Democracy. In N. Hannah-Jones, C. Roper, I. Silverman, & J. Silverstein (Eds.), *The 1619 Project: A new origin story* (pp. 7–38). One World.
- Dagbovie, P. G. (2010). Approaches to teaching and learning African American history. In *African American history reconsidered* (pp. 48–76). University of Illinois Press.

Wednesday, September 16, 2026

Required Readings

- Freeman Marshall, J. L. (2023). On firsts, foremothers, and the "Walker effect." In *Ain't I an anthropologist: Zora Neale Hurston beyond the literary icon* (pp. 29–49). University of Illinois Press.

Week 4: The Afterlives of Slavery and Colonialism

Anchor Question:

How do historical traumas of slavery and colonialism shape contemporary social structures? What are the limitations of how we understand these histories?

Monday, September 21, 2026

Required Readings:

- Césaire, A. (2000). *Discourse on colonialism* (J. Pinkham, Trans.) (pp. 31–46). Monthly Review Press. (Original work published 1955).
- Fanon, F. (2000). The fact of Blackness. In L. Back & J. Solomos (Eds.), *Theories of race and racism: A reader* (pp. 257–266). Routledge.

Suggested Readings:

- Du Bois, W. E. B. (1903). Of our spiritual strivings. In *The souls of Black folk* (pp. 7–14). A. C. McClurg & Co.

Wednesday, September 23, 2026

Required Readings:

- Hartman, S. V. (2008). Venus in two acts. *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, 12(2), 1–14.
- Cloete, K. (2018, September 21). *Dignifying Sarah Baartman*. UCT News.

Visual Archives:

- ["I've come to take you home" Tribute to Sarah Bartmann](#) - Diana Ferrus (1998)

Suggested Readings:

- Moten, F. (2018). Blackness. In E. R. Edwards, R. A. Ferguson, & J. O. G. Ogbar (Eds.), *Keywords for African American Studies* (pp. 27–28). New York University Press.

Week 5: Ungendering Blackness: The Sexual Violence of Gender

Anchor Question:

How did chattel slavery disrupt normative definitions of gender?

Monday, September 28, 2026

Required Readings:

- Douglass, P. D. (2025). Suspended absences and the substrates of naming the female slave. In *Engendering Blackness: Slavery and the ontology of sexual violence* (pp. 62–95). Stanford University Press.
- Davis, A. Y. (1971). Reflections on the Black woman's role in the community of slaves. *The Black Scholar*, 3(4), 81–100.

Visual Archive:

- Nicole London and Stanley Nelson, “[Harriet Tubman: Visions of Freedom](#),” (2022).

Wednesday, September 30, 2026

Required Readings:

- Hine, D. C. (1989). Rape and the inner lives of Black women in the Middle West: Preliminary thoughts on the culture of dissemblance. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 14(4), 912–920.
- S Haley, S., Roach, S., Owens, E., & Taylor, K.-Y. (2021). Confinement, interiority, Black feminist study: A forum on Davis’s “Reflections” at 50. *The Black Scholar*, 51(1), 3–19.

1st Theoretical Anchor Paper Due

Sunday, October 04, 2026, by 11:59pm (EST) on Moodle

No Late Papers will be accepted

Week 6: Black Matters are Spatial Matters

Anchor Question:

How do Black women creatively claim physical and social spaces when traditional maps try to exclude them?

Monday, October 05, 2026

Required Readings:

- McKittrick, K. (2006). The Last Place They Thought Of: Black Women’s Geographies. In *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (NED-New edition, pp. 37–64). University of Minnesota Press.

- Hawthorne, C., & Lewis, J. S. (2023). Introduction: Black geographies: Material praxis of Black life and study. In C. Hawthorne & J. S. Lewis (Eds.), *The Black geographic: Praxis, resistance, futurity* (pp. 1–26). Duke University Press.

Wednesday, October 07, 2026

Required Readings:

- Perry, K.-K. Y. (2016). Geographies of power: Black women mobilizing intersectionality in Brazil. *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, 14(1), 94–120.
- Reese, A. M. (2020). "D.C. is mambo sauce": Black cultural production in a gentrifying city. *Human Geography*, 13(3), 253–262.

Suggested Readings:

- Summers, B. T. (2022). Black insurgent aesthetics and the public imaginary. *Urban Geography*, 43(6), 837–847.

Week 7: Fall Break (No Class in Session)

Monday, October 12- Friday, October 16, 2026

- Do nothing. Touch grass. In a capitalist society, rest is subversive.

Week 8: Entangled Intersections of Blackness and Indigeneity

Anchor Question:

Where do the historical geographies and political struggles of Black and Indigenous peoples intersect and/or complicate one another? **When selecting which week you will lead the class discussion, please do not select this week.**

Monday, October 19, 2026 (No Class in Session...***BUT STILL READ***)

Required Readings:

- McInnis, J. C. (2025). Introduction: Regenerating Black life in plantation ruins. In *Afterlives of the plantation: Plotting agrarian futures in the global Black South* (pp. 1–40). Columbia University Press.
- King, T. L. (2019). At the pores of the plantation. In *The Black shoals: Offshore formations of Black and Native studies* (pp. 111–140). Duke University Press.

Visual Archive:

- Goldman Environmental Prize, "[Francia Márquez 2018 Acceptance Speech](#)," (May 2, 2018).

Suggested Readings:

- Jarvis C. McInnis, "Black Women's Geographies and the Afterlives of the Sugar Plantation," *American Literary History*, Vol. 31, No. 4, (Winter 2019): pp. 741-774.
- Mays, K. T. (2021). A provocation of the modes of Black Indigeneity: Culture, language, possibilities. *Ethnic Studies Review*, 44(2), 41–50.
- López Oro, P. J. (2021). Black Caribs/Garifuna: Maroon geographies of Indigenous Blackness. *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, 25(3), 134–146.

Wednesday, October 21, 2026

Required Readings:

- Lowery, M. M. (2010). Making home and making leaders. In *Lumbee Indians in the Jim Crow South: Race, identity, and the making of a nation* (pp. 55–79). University of North Carolina Press.

Visual Archive:

- UNC Pembroke, "[1958 Ku Klux Klan meeting in Maxton N.C. broken up by Native American community](#)," (June 18, 2021).

Suggested Readings:

- Wilkins, D. E. (1996). "Henry Berry Lowry: Champion of the Dispossessed," *Race, Gender & Class*, 3(2), 97–111.

Week 9: African Diaspora Theory

Anchor Question:

What shared political and cultural ties unite global Black populations and what keeps them distinct?

Monday, October 26, 2026

Required Readings:

- Butler, K. D. (2001). Defining diaspora, refining a discourse. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 10(2), 189–219.
- Patterson, T. R., & Kelley, R. D. G. (2000). Unfinished migrations: Reflections on the African diaspora and the making of the modern world. *African Studies Review*, 43(1), 11–45.

Wednesday, October 28, 2026

Required Readings:

- McKittrick, K. (2007). I entered the lists... diaspora catalogues: The list, the unbearable, and tormented chronologies—three narratives and a Weltanschauung. *XCP: Cross Cultural Poetics*, 17, 7–29.
- Rivera Lassén, A. I. (2016). Afrodescendant women: A race and gender intersectional spiderweb (M. Borzone & A. Ponomareff, Trans.). *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, 14(2), 56–70.

Week 10: Black Queer Feminisms & Inter-generational Intersectionalities

Anchor Question:

Why is an intersectional critique of hegemonic power necessary for any liberatory endeavor to succeed? What role does Black (Queer) Feminist Thought play in the pursuit of freedom?

Monday, November 02, 2026

Required Readings:

- The Combahee River Collective. (2019). A Black Feminist Statement. *Monthly Review*, 70, 29–36.

- Hammonds, E. (1994). Black (W)holes and the geometry of Black female sexuality. *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 6(2–3), 126–145.
- Lorde, A. (1984). Uses of the erotic: The erotic as power. In A. Lorde, *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches* (pp. 87-91). Crossing Press. (Original work published 1978)

Visual Archive:

- Shari Frilot, “[Black Nations/Queer Nations? Lesbian and Gay Sexualities in the African Diaspora](#),” (1995).

Suggested Readings:

- Tinsley, O. N. (2008). Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer imaginings of the Middle Passage. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 14(2–3), 191–215.

Wednesday, November 04, 2026

Required Readings:

- Cohen, C. J. (1997). Punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens: The radical potential of queer politics. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 3(4), 437–465.
- Alexander-Floyd, N. G. (2012). Disappearing acts: Reclaiming intersectionality in the social sciences in a post-Black feminist era. *Feminist Formations*, 24(1), 1–25.

Suggested Readings:

Gumbs, A. P. (2016). How she spelled it. In *Spill: Scenes of Black feminist fugitivity* (pp. 17–30). Duke University Press.

Week 11: The Political Lives of Angela Davis, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (Flexner)

Thursday, November 12, 2026

Required Readings:

- TBA
- This is a required 3-hour Flexner led by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor. In lieu of a Monday (11/09) and Wednesday (11/11) class this week, we will only have 1 combined class from 2:40 PM – 5:40 PM on Thursday, 11/12. **When selecting which week you will lead the class discussion, please do not select this week.**

2nd Theoretical Anchor Paper Due

Sunday, November 15, 2026, by 11:59pm (EST) on Moodle

No Late Papers will be accepted

Week 12: The Body as Archive

Anchor Question:

In what ways can performance and/or physical expression serve as forms of embodied protest and freedom for Black communities?

Monday, November 16, 2026

Required Readings:

- Moten, F. (2003). Resistance of the object: Aunt Hester's scream. In *In the break: The aesthetics of the Black radical tradition* (pp. 1–24). University of Minnesota Press.
- Berry, M. J. (2024). Introduction. In *Defending Rumba in Havana: The sacred and the Black corporeal undercommons* (pp. 1–43). Duke University Press.

Suggested Readings:

- Brooks, D. A. (2006). Introduction: "The grandest theater of the world". In *Bodies in dissent: Spectacular performances of race and freedom, 1850–1910* (pp. 1–13). Duke University Press.

Wednesday, November 18, 2026

Required Readings:

- Shange, S. (2019). Black girl ordinary: Flesh, carcerality, and the refusal of ethnography. *Transforming Anthropology*, 27(1), 3–21.

Suggested Readings:

- Johnson, E. P. (2001). "Quare" studies, or (almost) everything I know about queer studies I learned from my grandmother. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 21(1), 1–25.

Week 13: Turkey/Tofu/Pernil Break (No Class in Session)

Monday, November 23, 2026 – Friday, November 27, 2026

- Rest, Recharge, & Repeat

Week 14: The Politics of Black World-Making

Anchor Question:

How do oral traditions and spiritual practices imagine new worlds for Black survival?

Monday, November 30, 2026

Required Readings:

- Morrison, T. (1995). The site of memory. In W. K. Zinsler (Ed.), *Inventing the truth: The art and craft of memoir* (2nd ed., pp. 83–102). Houghton Mifflin.
- Holloway, J. S. (2013). Introduction: The scars of memory; The Black body as archive of memory. In *Jim Crow wisdom: Memory and identity in Black America since 1940* (pp. 1–13, 67–101). University of North Carolina Press.

Visual Archive:

- Julie Dash, "[Daughters of the Dust](#)," (1991).

Wednesday, December 02, 2026

Required Readings:

- Manigault-Bryant, L. S. (2014). Introduction: Gullah/Geechee women. In *Talking to the dead: Religion, music, and lived memory among Gullah/Geechee women* (pp. 1–23). Duke University Press.
- Manigault-Bryant, J. A., & Manigault-Bryant, L. S. (2016). Conjuring pasts and ethnographic presents in Zora Neale Hurston’s modernity. *Journal of Africana Religions*, 4(2), 225–235.

Week 15: The Futures of Black Studies at Bryn Mawr and Beyond

Anchor Question:

What are the radical possibilities of Black Studies within contemporary universities and global communities?

Monday, December 07, 2026: Last day of class

Required Readings:

- Christian, M. (2006). Black Studies in the 21st century: Longevity has its place. *Journal of Black Studies*, 36(5), 698–719.
- Alkalimat, A. (2022). Epilogue. In *The future of Black Studies* (pp. 219–224). Pluto Press.
- Myers, J. (2023). Conclusion: Dreams (Toni Cade Bambara). In *Of Black study* (pp. 193–205). Pluto Press.

Visual Archive:

- Stephen Satterfield, “[High on the Hog: How African American Cuisine Transformed America](#),” (2021).

3rd Theoretical Anchor Paper Due

Sunday, December 13, 2026, by 11:59pm (EST) on Moodle

No Late Papers will be accepted