

Carleton University
Winter 2026 Preliminary Course Outline
Department of English

ENGL 3972A: Studies in Postcolonial Literature
Caribbean Postslavery Literature

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***** This is a preliminary syllabus only—texts and assignments are subject to change.
A complete version will be available closer to the start of the term. *****

“History is an injury that has yet to cease happening.”
Saidiya Hartman, "The Time of Slavery"

Course description:

The Caribbean is often imagined as a carefree zone of sun, sand and sea. Behind the tourist's fantasy, however, lies the far more complex and traumatic history of colonialism, plantation agriculture, slavery and indentureship that produced the modern Caribbean. In this course, we will examine this difficult history through the lens of the rich literary tradition of the Caribbean and its diasporas. In particular, we will consider how contemporary Caribbean writers engage with the legacies of slavery that haunt the region, imaginatively reconstructing the untold stories of enslaved people and addressing gaps in the colonial archive in order to envision alternative futures.

While our primary focus will be on 20th and 21st-century Caribbean writers, our syllabus will also draw on a series of 18th and 19th-century works that inspired these writers to revisit the slavery past. Each session of the course will pair a contemporary work of fiction or poetry with a historical text or artwork that it invokes. Class discussion will consider such themes as: the archive, the presence of the past, memory and forgetting, return and repair, distorted genealogies, gendered and creolized identities, and the (un)making of literary forms.

Tentative List of Texts:

- Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Penguin, 2000.
- Caryl Phillips, *Cambridge*. Vintage, 1993.
- Andrea Levy, *The Long Song*. Hamish Hamilton, 2011.
- David Dabydeen, *Turner: New and Selected Poems*. Peepal Tree Press, 2010.
- M. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong!* Wesleyan University Press, 2008.

In addition to the major literary texts, short literary, historical and theoretical readings and audiovisual materials will be made available electronically. These will include excerpts from: the

Code Noir (1685), Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* (1789), Mary Prince's *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave* (1831), and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). We will also consider visual intertexts such as J.M.W. Turner's painting *Slave Ship* (1840).

Evaluation:

Attendance and participation (15%)

In-class writing exercises (40%)

Essay proposal (5%)

Essay (40%)