

American White Supremacy, its History and Spreading Threat

Wednesday, January 10 to March 13, 2024, 10am to 12 noon
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Presenter: Robert Douglas MA

Course Overview: What does the history of racial superiority, including the attempt to rewrite part of that history, tell us about the resilience and creativity of Blacks and other non-whites who resisted the assumptions underpinning white superiority and the horrific conditions they endured? To what extent did that struggle affect the development of Canadian history? How did that legacy in America morph into the Big Lie of our own times and pose threats to democracy, threats that could spill across the border into Canada?

Wednesday, January 10: Expressions of White Supremacy: An Overview

Manifestations of white supremacy, not only in the most overt forms of control and terror, but in its more subtle and myriad expressions, are pivotal in understanding the American experience. Beyond power politics or issues of war and peace, the corrosion of racism can be a central lens through which to view American history and its Canadian reverberations.

Wednesday, January 17: Free and Enslaved Blacks Challenge White Supremacy during Slavery and the Civil War

White Supremacy enabled exploitative enslaved labour to enrich Southern planters and Northern financial interests. Despite the exercise of raw power, Blacks demonstrated courage and resiliency through different forms of resistance to challenge the assumption of Black inferiority.

Wednesday, January 24: Reconstruction: A Multiracial Democracy Thwarted by the Re-emergence of the forces of White Supremacy

The end of the Civil War heralded the possibility of a biracial democracy but after a dozen years, that dream was eclipsed by white supremacists who instituted racial terror, economic control through sharecropping and disenfranchisement of black males, conditions that the nation accepted to promote national unity.

Wednesday, January 31: A Big Lie: Whitewashing the Narrative about Slavery, the Civil War and Reconstruction

The narrative of the Lost Cause and its persistent power will be critiqued to demonstrate how it influenced historiography, education, memorial sites, and popular culture, notably films like *Birth of a Nation* and *Gone with the Wind*.

Wednesday, February 7: Responses to the Nightmare of Jim Crow: The Great Migration, and the Birth of the Civil Rights Movement

From the 1890s to the 1950s, the South exercised a power that came close to recreating chattel slavery in which Blacks were subjected to police and vigilante violence supported by lawmakers and the courts. The Great Migration led to a demographic shift and the emergence of Black intellectual and cultural communities and white resistance. Grassroot activists in both the North and the South laid the foundation for the emergence of the civil rights movement.

Wednesday, February 14: Responses to the Civil Rights Gains: The Reframing of White Supremacy

The efforts of activists brought an end to legal segregation in 1965, but for over half a century since, explicit and covert racism was adopted by Republican and Democratic administrations and upheld by Supreme Court decisions. They weaponized racial justice notably through mass Black incarceration, dog whistle politics and policies that supported systemic racism.

Wednesday, February 21: The Consequences of Trump's Gaslighting of America

Racism became more overt after the election of Barack Obama (2008) and contributed to the rise and power of Donald Trump. The latter's incendiary rhetoric, his racist policies at American borders, his willingness to scapegoat others during the pandemic and inability to tell the truth, notably about the 2020 election and its violent aftermath, have resulted in an illiberal cult-like Republican Party. Trump's authoritarianism and illiberalism have cast a dark shadow over Canadian life and politics.

Wednesday, February 28: Attempts at Racial Reckoning: An Assessment

The widely publicized killings of Blacks, having spiked a national conversation about race ignited multiple controversies: the disproportionate continuing police violence against Blacks, the call for reparations, the efforts to address medical abuse, the efforts to demythologize Confederate heroes and the removal of historical symbols. Despite the efforts of some whites to address their own racism, how much has changed?

Wednesday, March 6: The Racial and Cultural Divide in Contemporary America

While Blacks fear physical assault and experience systemic racism, whites, fueled by far-right disinformation, fear replacement and an honest exploration of their history. These challenges are illustrated by the inequities and mistreatment in the prison systems, controversies about what can be taught in schools, the banning of books, and the inability of MAGA supporters to accept reality. To what extent are these divisions present in Canada.

Wednesday, March 13: The Potential of the Arts to Challenge White Supremacy and Systemic Racism

Whether the arts – film, television, fiction, poetry, the visual arts, music – can challenge assumptions about White Supremacy depends on the courage of the artist to avoid sentimentality and sanitizing historical and contemporary realities by offering honest, uncomfortable truths.

Lecturer: Bob Douglas

Bob earned a BA and an MA from the University of Toronto and taught secondary-school history and social sciences. He is the author of the two volumes of *That Line of Darkness: The Shadow of Dracula and the Great War* (2011) revised in 2012 as well as *The Gothic from Lenin to bin Laden* (2013) published by Encompass Editions. He has taught numerous courses for Later Life Learning at Ryerson University, Innis College and at Learning Unlimited Etobicoke and delivered multiple presentations to the Arts and Letters Club of Toronto. Bob has also been a longtime reviewer for the online “Critics at Large”.

In preparation for this series, **Bob** travelled twice to the American south to further gain an appreciation of its racial history.