AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

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FACULTY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES


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The African American Studies major examines, from numerous disciplinary perspectives, the experiences of people of African descent in Black Atlantic societies including the United States, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Students in the department explore the historical, cultural, political, economic, and social development of Black Atlantic societies. The major demands that students acquire both an analytic ability rooted in a traditional discipline and interdisciplinary skills of investigation and research.

African American Studies offers training of special interest to those considering admission to graduate or professional schools and careers in education, journalism, law, business management, city planning, international relations, politics, psychology, publishing, public health, or social work. The interdisciplinary structure of the department offers students an opportunity to satisfy the increasingly rigorous expectations of admissions committees and prospective employers for a broad liberal arts perspective that complements specialized knowledge of a field.

African American Studies can be taken either as a stand-alone major or as one of two majors in consultation with the director of undergraduate studies. Pertinent regulations can be found under "Two Majors" in the Academic Regulations.

Requirements of the major The major in African American Studies requires twelve term courses including a yearlong history sequence (AFAM 160, 162), one course in the humanities relevant to African American studies, one course in the social sciences relevant to African American studies, the junior seminar (AFAM 410), the senior colloquium (AFAM 480), and the senior essay (AFAM 491). AFAM 160 will not be offered in 2013–2014; students who need to fulfill the history requirement in this academic year should enroll in AFST 471, Independent Study, in consultation with the director of undergraduate studies.

The courses in the major examine ideas and problems that may originate in many fields but that have a common concern—the black experience. The distribution of requirements is intended to provide students with a broad interdisciplinary experience. Students are strongly encouraged to complete the history sequence early in their course of study.

Area of concentration Students majoring in African American Studies are required to choose an area of concentration comprising five courses. This cluster of interrelated courses is intended to ground the student’s learning experience in one area of investigation. Often students will choose an area of concentration in a traditional discipline such as political science, economics, sociology, American studies, history, or English language and literature. (This strategy is especially helpful for students planning to fulfill the requirements of two majors.) Students can also construct interdisciplinary areas of concentration that span traditional departments and encompass broader theoretical frameworks such as race and ethnicity, cultural studies, or feminism and gender studies. All majors are encouraged to take upper-level courses as part of their concentration, especially those courses centering on research and methodology. None of the seven required courses in African American Studies may be counted among the five electives in the area of concentration.

Junior seminar In their junior year students must take the junior seminar (AFAM 410, Interdisciplinary Approaches to African American Studies). This course provides majors with theoretical and methodological bases for the work they will do during their research-oriented senior year.

Senior requirement Senior majors participate in a colloquium (AFAM 480) that gives them an opportunity to exchange ideas with each other and with more advanced scholars; students submit a prospectus, compile a working bibliography, begin or continue research, and write the first twenty pages of the senior essay. After completing the colloquium, each student carries out the remaining research and writing of a senior essay (AFAM 491) under the guidance of a faculty member in the chosen discipline or area of concentration.

Students are strongly encouraged to use the summer between the junior and senior years for research directly related to the senior essay. For example, field or documentary research might be undertaken in urban or rural communities throughout the Black Atlantic diaspora. The particular research problem and design are to be worked out in each case with a faculty adviser.

Procedures Students considering a program of study in African American Studies should consult the director of undergraduate studies as early as possible. Areas of concentration and schedules for majors must be approved by the director of undergraduate studies.
REQUIREMENTS OF THE MAJOR

Prerequisites None

Number of courses 12 term courses (incl senior req)

Specific courses required AFAM 160, 162, AFAM 410

Distribution of courses 1 relevant humanities course and 1 relevant social science course, both approved by DUS; 5 courses in area of concentration

Substitution permitted AFST 471 for AFST 160

Senior requirement Senior colloq (AFAM 480) and senior essay (AFAM 491)

Courses

*AFAM 006a / HSAR 006a, Identities in Contemporary Art  Kobena Mercer
Introduction to changing conceptions of selfhood in art since 1960. Portraiture and images of the body in painting, sculpture, performance, and film; relations between the formal qualities of art and social contexts in which distinctions of race, gender, and nationality have undergone global transformation over the past fifty years; contributions made by art to changing perceptions of both individual and collective identity. Enrollment limited to freshmen. Preregistration required; see under Freshman Seminar Program.  HU

*AFAM 023a / AMST 008a, Slavery in American Memory  Edward Ball
The conflict over the story of American slavery as it has been told since the Civil War. Film, family history, fiction, and the competing tales of historians that make up the collective memory of the slave past.  WR, HU

*AFAM 030b / AMST 011b / HIST 023b, War and Rebellion in Early America  Alejandra Dubcowsky
The role of war and rebellion in early American history, from precontact to the War of 1812. Changing roles and meanings of war and rebellion; the impact of these violent events on European, Indian, and African populations; implications of using war and rebellion as historical categories.  WR, HU

AFAM 112a / HSAR 370a, New York Mambo: Microcosm of Black Creativity  Robert Thompson
The rise, development, and philosophic achievement of the world of New York mambo and salsa. Emphasis on Palmieri, Cortijo, Roena, Harlow, and Colón. Examination of parallel traditions, e.g., New York Haitian art, Dominican merengue, reggae and rastas of Jamaican Brooklyn, and the New York school of Brazilian capoeira.  HU

AFAM 140b / AMST 211b / ENGL 293b / ER&M 210b / WGSS 211b, Race and Gender in American Literature  Birgit Brander Rasmussen
The role of literature in constructing representations of America as an idea, a nation, a colonial settlement, and a participant in world affairs. What kind of place America is and who belongs there; the consequences of America’s history for its national literature. Emphasis on the ways texts represent and contest social concepts of race and gender difference.  WR, HU

AFAM 160a / AMST 160a / HIST 184a, Slavery and Abolition in Atlantic History, 1500–1888  Laurie Woodard
The history of peoples of African descent throughout the Americas, from the first African American societies of the sixteenth century through the century-long process of emancipation.  HU

AFAM 162b / AMST 162b / HIST 187b, African American History from Emancipation to the Present  Jonathan Holloway
An examination of the African American experience since 1861. Meanings of freedom and citizenship are distilled through appraisal of race and class formations, the processes and effects of cultural consumption, and the grand narrative of the civil rights movement.  HU

*AFAM 191a / AFST 330a / FREN 230a / LITR 266a, Introduction to Francophone African and Caribbean Literature  Christopher L. Miller
A comprehensive survey of literature written in French from sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean. The context of French colonialism and its institutions; the rise of Negritude and nationalism; independence and the postcolonial era. Authors include Senghor, Césaire, Sembène (including film), Kourouma, Bâ, Belaya, Condé, and Lopes.  1.5, HU

*AFAM 210b / AMST 445b / HIST 148jb, Politics and Culture of the U.S. Color Line  Matthew Jacobson
The significance of race in U.S. political culture, from the "separate but equal" doctrine of Plessy v. Ferguson to the election of an African American president. Race as a central organizer of American political and social life.  HU, RP

AFAM 215b / HSAR 373b, African American Art, 1963 to the Present  Erica James
Modern African American artistic production explored in the context of American art and social history. Critical race theory and artistic discourse from the Spiral group in 1963, to the Black Arts Movement and the culture wars, to current readings in American and postblack art. The complicated relations between African American art and politics. Use of art objects from the Yale University Art Gallery.  HU

*AFAM 219a / HSAR 473a, Historicizing Caribbean Art: Haiti  Erica James
Analysis of art and visual culture in the Republic of Haiti. The transatlantic formation and global relations of Haitian artistic practices and philosophies. Use of archival resources and art collections in the Yale University Art Gallery, the Peabody Museum, and other institutions in the region.  HU
AFAM 226b, Race and Imperialism in the Early Twentieth Century
Adom Getachew
The global expansion of racial imperialism from the turn of the twentieth century to the Second World War. Focus on ideologies of race that justified imperial rule and on crises that resulted from imperial expansion. Readings include works by Woodrow Wilson, Jan Smuts, W. E. B. Du Bois, and George Padmore.  SO

AFAM 233a / AFST 105a / HIST 105Ja, America and Africa, 1492 to the Present
Joseph Yannielli
The complex relationship between Africa and America, from the Columbian era through the recent invasion of Libya. Topics include the rise and demise of the transatlantic slave trade, piracy, zombies, religious missions, colonialism, resistance movements, and humanitarian and military interventions. Sources from film, images, letters, newspaper articles, novels, pamphlets, and travelogues.  HU

AFAM 253b / MUSI 265b, Jazz in Transition, 1960–1980
Michael Veal
Stylistic currents in jazz that evolved during the 1960s and 1970s as jazz was influenced by various popular, experimental, and world musics. Focus on the work of Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, and Sun Ra.  RA

AFAM 265b / FILM 423b, Black Horror Films
Jamilia Lackey
Blackness as the subject and subtext of American horror cinema from 1915 to the present. Introduction to major periods, genres, and themes in African American cinema. Race as constitutive of the emergence, persistence, and appeal of horror as a cinematic genre. Study of film history supplemented with interdisciplirary readings on race and gender.  HU

AFAM 268a / PLSC 245a, Urban Politics and Policy
Cynthia Horan
Approaches to urban politics and political economy. Application of theories to contemporary policy issues such as policing, metropolitan disparities, and inner-city revitalization.  SO

AFAM 269b / EP&E 438b / PHIL 461b / PLSC 315b, Egalitarianism
Christopher Lebron
The concept of equality in normative political theory explored through contemporary philosophical texts. Reasons why oppressed, marginalized, and systematically disadvantaged groups express their claims in terms of equality; racial inequality as a case study.  SO

AFAM 270b / PLSC 280b, Poverty, Politics, and Policy in the American City
Cynthia Horan
Examination of how politics informs the formulation and implementation of policies to address urban poverty. Consideration of alternative explanations for poverty and alternative government strategies. Focus on efforts by local organizations and communities to improve their situations within the context of government actions.  SO

AFAM 272a / AMST 408a / ER&M 408a, Race and Comedy
Albert Laguna
Introduction to theories of the ludic and to critical race theory. Ways in which comic modes have been utilized by racialized subjects to represent and issue critiques of the dominant culture. Analysis of stand-up comedy, film, television, and novels.  HU

AFAM 273a / SOCY 314a, Inequality in America
Vida Maralani
Empirical, theoretical, and methodological issues involved in the study of inequalities in occupation, income, wealth, education, health, and neighborhoods. Intergenerational mobility, marriage and family processes, and inequalities of race, ethnicity, and gender. Questions include whether the United States is a land of opportunity and how different social groups fare and why.  WR, SO

AFAM 282a / ECON 280a, Poverty under Postindustrial Capitalism
Gerald Jaynes
Political economy of contemporary social welfare policy as it has been affected by economic restructuring, the development of the underclass, and the effects of immigration on the economy and its social structure. Prerequisite: introductory microeconomics.  SO

AFAM 324a / AMST 373a / ER&M 314a, Urban Latina/o Literature
Dixa Ramirez
Latina/o literature and the urban experience. Focus on works from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with background on the roots of Latina/o experience in the late nineteenth century. Some attention to film and the visual arts.  HU

AFAM 336b / AMST 336b / ER&M 335b, Literature and Culture of Hispaniola and Its Diaspora
Dixa Ramirez
The literature and culture of Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and their diasporas in the United States and Canada since 1804. Focus on texts that explore relations between the two nations, with some attention to each country's individual literary and cultural traditions. Conventional literary texts such as novels and poetry, as well as political documents, orally transmitted texts, and imagery.  HU

AFAM 350a / AMST 316a / ER&M 405a, Exile and Migration in Caribbean Literature and Culture
Dixa Ramirez
Forms of geographic displacement in Caribbean literature and culture from the early nineteenth century to the present. National independence movements, the negritude and Pan-Africanist movements, and recent emigration to the United States and Canada. Connections between gender, class, race, and specific national ideals, and their effects on the displacement experience.  HU

AFAM 352b / AMST 438b / ER&M 291b / LITR 295b / WGSS 343b, Caribbean Diasporic Literature
Hazel Carby
An examination of contemporary literature written by Caribbean writers who have migrated to, or who journey between, different countries around the Atlantic rim. Focus on literature written in English in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, both fiction and nonfiction. Writers include Caryl Phillips, Nalo Hopkinson, and Jamaica Kincaid.  HU

AFAM 353a / SOCY 334a, Punishment and Inequality
Christopher Wildeman
Massive increases in the American imprisonment rate since the mid-1970s that have rendered contact with the criminal justice system a common event for marginalized Americans. Effects of these increases on inequality in the labor market, family life, politics, and health.  SO
*AFAM 335b / THST 349b, African American Humor and Its Social Contexts  LaMarr Bruce
The formal, aesthetic, philosophical, and political dimensions of African American humor. The uses of humor within practices of self-making, community building, cultural critique, protest, and healing. Sources include black vernacular practices such as toasting, signifying, and the dozens; black folklore; and written and performed comedy.  HU

*AFAM 369a / AMST 378a / ENGL 364a / LITR 271a / THST 369a, African American Theater  Staff
African American dramatic literature and theater history from the nineteenth century to the present. Key events in black theater history, including the emergence of black musical comedy, the Federal Theatre Project, and the Black Arts movement. Plays by Langston Hughes, Lorraine Hansberry, Adrienne Kennedy, August Wilson, Amiri Baraka, and others. Open to junior and senior Theater Studies majors, and to nonmajors with permission of the instructor. Students must preregister during the reading period of the preceding term.  WR, HU

*AFAM 372b / AMST 362b / ER&M 406b / WGSS 406b, Gender in Caribbean Women's and Latina Literature  Dixa Ramirez
Gender in the Caribbean and its diaspora explored through women’s literature and other cultural production. Ways in which gender has overlapped with other categories such as race and class; its effects on narratives of colonialism, imperialism, travel, and migration. The marginalization of Caribbean women’s cultural labor.  HU

*AFAM 406b  / AMST 405b / ENGL 405b, Autobiography in America  Robert Stepto
A study of autobiographical writings from Mary Rowlandson’s Indian captivity narrative (1682) to the present. Classic forms such as immigrant, education, and cause narratives; prevailing autobiographical strategies involving place, work, and photographs. Authors include Franklin, Douglass, Jacobs, Antin, Kingston, Uchida, Balakian, Rodriguez, and Bechdel.  MR, HU

*AFAM 408a / AMST 460a / ENGL 443a, African American Poets of the Modern Era  Robert Stepto
The African American practice of poetry between 1900 and 1960, especially of sonnets, ballads, sermonic, and blues poems. Poets include Paul Laurence Dunbar, Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, Gwendolyn Brooks, Margaret Walker, and Robert Hayden. Class sessions at the Beinecke Library for inspection and discussion of original editions, manuscripts, letters, and other archival material.  HU

*AFAM 411a / AMST 426a / ER&M 413a / WGSS 411a, The Fiction of Imaginary or Imminent Futures  Hazel Carby
Consideration of the nature of utopian and dystopian ideas and the relation between early science fiction and the political project of colonization. Readings of speculative fiction and critical essays from the middle of the twentieth century to the present, including a survey of writing by African American authors.  HU

*AFAM 414b / WGSS 438b, Women, Law, and the Black Freedom Movement  Kathleen Cleaver
Writings and scholarship of women are used to examine struggles against slavery, racial segregation, economic exploitation, and gender discrimination in the United States. Focus on women who were abolitionists, civil rights leaders, and freedom fighters.  SO

*AFAM 425b  / AMST 384b / ENGL 306b, American Artists and the African American Book  Robert Stepto
Visual art in African American books since 1900. Artists include Winold Reiss, Aaron Douglas, E. S. Campbell, Tom Feelings, and the FSA photographers of the 1940s. Topics include Harlem Renaissance book art, photography and literature, and children’s books. Research in collections of the Beinecke Library and the Yale Art Gallery is encouraged.  HU

*AFAM 471a and AFAM 472b, Independent Study: African American Studies  Erica James
Independent research under the direction of a member of the department on a special topic in African American studies not covered in other courses. Permission of the director of undergraduate studies and of the instructor directing the research is required. A proposal signed by the instructor must be submitted to the director of undergraduate studies by the end of the second week of classes. The instructor meets with the student regularly, typically for an hour a week, and the student writes a final paper or a series of short essays. May be elected for one or two terms.

*AFAM 480a, Senior Colloquium: African American Studies  Laurie Woodard
A seminar on issues and approaches in African American studies. The colloquium offers students practical help in refining their senior essay topics and developing research strategies. Students discuss assigned readings and share their research experiences and findings. During the term, students are expected to make substantial progress on their senior essays; they are required to submit a prospectus, an annotated bibliography, and a draft of one-quarter of the essay.

*AFAM 491a or b, The Senior Essay  Erica James
Independent research on the senior essay. The senior essay form must be submitted to the director of undergraduate studies by the end of the second week of classes. The senior essay should be completed according to the following schedule: (1) end of the sixth week of classes: a rough draft of the entire essay; (2) end of the last week of classes (fall term) or three weeks before the end of classes (spring term): two copies of the final version of the essay.