AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

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M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

Chair
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Lecturers Aaron Carico, Heather Vermeulen

FIELDS OF STUDY

The Department of African American Studies offers a combined Ph.D. in conjunction with several other departments and programs: currently, American Studies, Anthropology, English, Film and Media Studies, French, History, History of Art, Political Science, Psychology, Religious Studies, Sociology, and Spanish and Portuguese. Within the field of study, the student will select an area of concentration in consultation with the directors of graduate studies (DGS) of African American Studies and the joint department or program. An area of concentration in African American Studies may take the form of a single area study or a comparative area study: e.g., Caribbean or African American literature, a comparison of African American literature in a combined degree with the Department of English; an investigation of the significance of the presence of African cultures in the New World, either in the Caribbean or in Latin and/or South America in a combined degree with the Spanish and Portuguese department. An area of concentration may also follow the fields of study already established within a single discipline: e.g., race/minority/ethnic studies in a combined degree with Sociology. An area of concentration must either be a field of study offered by a department or fall within the rubric of such a field. Please refer to the description of fields of study of the prospective joint department or program.

SPECIAL ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS

Strong undergraduate preparation in a discipline related to African American studies; writing sample; description of the fields of interest to be pursued in a combined degree. This is a combined degree program. To be considered for admission to this program you must indicate both African American Studies and one of the participating departments/programs listed above. Additionally, please indicate both departments on all supporting documents (personal statement, letters of recommendation, transcripts, etc.).

REQUIREMENTS FOR TRANSFER INTO THE AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES COMBINED PH.D. PROGRAM

A student currently enrolled in one of the departments or programs participating in the combined Ph.D. in African American Studies who desires to transfer into the combined Ph.D. program may do so after:

1. Providing the DGS of African American Studies with a written statement of interest detailing the reasons for the transfer;
2. Providing the DGS with a letter of support from an African American Studies faculty member agreeing to serve as the student’s adviser;
3. A vote by the African American Studies faculty approving the transfer, with such vote held at a department meeting no earlier than the spring term of the student’s first year as a graduate student at Yale.

SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PH.D. DEGREE

Students will be subject to the combined Ph.D. supervision of the African American Studies department and the relevant participating department or program. The student’s academic program will be decided in consultation with an adviser, the DGS of African American Studies, and the DGS of the participating department or program and must be approved by all three. Students are required to take five courses in African American Studies, generally at least one course each term. Any variance in scheduling requires DGS approval. Core courses are (1) Theorizing Racial Formations (AFAM 505/AMST 643), which is a required course for all first-year graduate students in the combined program, and (2) Dissertation Prospectus Workshop (AFAM 895 and AFAM 896), a two-term course, which graduate students in their third year of study must satisfactorily complete. This workshop is intended to support preparation of the dissertation proposal; each student will be required to present the dissertation prospectus orally to the faculty and to turn in a written prospectus draft by the end of spring term. Three other graduate-level African American Studies courses are required: (1) a history course, (2) a social science course, and (3) a course in literature or culture.
Qualifying examinations and the dissertation proposal will be administered jointly by the African American Studies department and the participating department or program and must be passed within the time required by the participating department or program. A current tenured or ladder faculty member in African American Studies must serve on the dissertation committee, and the dissertation must have an African American Studies component. The total number of courses required will adhere to the requirements of the participating department or program. Each student must complete the minimum number of courses required by the participating department or program; African American Studies courses (excepting the Dissertation Prospectus Workshop) count toward the participating department’s or program’s total. For details of these requirements, see the special requirements of the combined Ph.D. for the particular department or program in this bulletin. Students will be required to meet the foreign language requirements of the participating department or program (see Degree Requirements under Policies and Regulations). Students will not be admitted to candidacy until all requirements, including the dissertation prospectus, have been met and approved by the Graduate Studies Executive Committee of the African American Studies department and the participating department or program. A student who intends to apply for this combined Ph.D. in African American Studies and another department or program should consult the other department’s or program’s Ph.D. requirements and courses.

The faculty in African American Studies consider teaching to be an essential component of graduate education, and students therefore will teach, under the supervision of departmental professors, in their third and fourth years.

MASTER’S DEGREES

M.Phil. See Degree Requirements under Policies and Regulations.

M.A. (en route to the combined Ph.D.) Students will be awarded a combined M.A. degree in African American Studies and the relevant participating department or program upon successful completion of all course work except the Dissertation Prospectus Workshop, which is taken in the student’s third year of study. See also Degree Requirements under Policies and Regulations.

More information is available on the department’s website, http://afamstudies.yale.edu.

COURSES

For course offerings in African languages, see African Studies.

AFAM 505a / AMST 643a, Theorizing Racial Formations  Daphne Brooks
A required course for all first-year students in the combined Ph.D. program in African American Studies; also open to students in American Studies. This interdisciplinary reading seminar focuses on new work that is challenging the temporal, theoretical, and spatial boundaries of the field.

AFAM 550b / FILM 714b, Race, Affect, and Cinema  Rizvana Bradley
This seminar draws out the importance of the recent "affective turn" in emergent theoretical discourses, in order to think about the organization of emotion and feeling within cinema, particularly cinema that foregrounds questions of race and racial intimacy. We are especially interested in thinking about the relationship between race and feeling, as well as the development of minor feelings, racial affect, and black affect. Course readings take up many of the key texts within affect theory, but we try to make explicit connections to the examples of racial affect we see emerging within cinema.

AFAM 563b / AMST 651b / ENGL 951b, Ralph Ellison in Context  Robert Stepto
This seminar pursues close readings of Ralph Ellison’s essays, short fiction, and novels. The "in context" component of the seminar involves working from the Benston and Sundquist volumes on Ellison to discern a portrait of the modernist African America Ellison investigated, with at least Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Romare Bearden also in view. Texts include Ellison’s Collected Essays, Flying Home and Other Stories, Invisible Man, and Juneteenth; K. Benston, Speaking for You; E. Sundquist, Cultural Contexts for Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man; and A. Nadel, Invisible Criticism: Ralph Ellison and the American Canon.

AFAM 584b / SOCY 584b, Inequality, Race, and the City  Elijah Anderson
Urban inequality in America. The racial iconography of the city is explored and represented, and the dominant cultural narrative of civic pluralism is considered. Topics of concern include urban poverty, race relations, ethnicity, class, privilege, education, social networks, social deviance, and crime.

AFAM 605b / AMST 686b / HIST 760b, Introduction to Documentary Studies  Matthew Jacobson and Anna Duensing
This mixed graduate/undergraduate seminar surveys documentary work in three media—film, photography, and sound—since the 1930s, focusing on the documentary both as a cultural form with a history of its own and as a parcel of skill sets and storytelling and production practices to be studied and mastered. Readings and discussions cover important scholarly approaches to documentary as a genre, as well as close readings of documentaries themselves and practitioners’ guides to various aspects of documentary work. Topics include major trends in documentary practice across the three media, documentary ethics, aesthetics and truth-claims, documentary’s relationship to the scholarly disciplines and to journalism, and documentary work as political activism. Class meetings include screenings/viewings/soundings of documentary works, and practitioners’ panels and workshops with Yale documentarians (including Charles Musser, Zareena Grewal, Elihu Rubin, Gretchen Berland, and Laura Wexler) and local New Haven documentarians such as Jake Halpern (Yale ’97, This American Life). Students’ final projects may take the form of a traditional scholarly paper on some aspect of documentary history.
or a particular documentary producer, or an actual piece of documentary work—a film treatment, a brief video, a set of photographs, a sound documentary, or script.

AFAM 650a / ENGL 949a, Afro-Modernisms Anthony Reed
This course considers key debates, texts, and institutions that have shaped African American culture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Possible topics include the New Negro movement, the Black Arts movement, black internationalism, canon formation, and Afro-futurism.

AFAM 687a / AMST 701a / HIST 751a, “Race” and “Races” in American Studies Matthew Jacobson
This reading-intensive seminar examines influential scholarship across disciplines on “the race concept” and racialized relations in American culture and society. Major topics include the cultural construction of race; race as both an instrument of oppressions and an idiom of resistance in American politics; the centrality of race in literary, anthropological, and legal discourse; the racialization of U.S. foreign policy; “race mixing” and “passing,” vicissitudes of “whiteness” in American politics; the centrality of race in American political culture; and “race” in the realm of popular cultural representation. Writings under investigation include classic formulations by scholars like Lawrence Levine and Ronald Takaki, as well as more recent work by Saidiya Hartman, Robin Kelley, and Ann Fabian. Seminar papers give students an opportunity to explore in depth the themes, periods, and methods that most interest them.

AFAM 716a / AMST 910a / HIST 764a, Working Group on Latina/o Studies I Stephen Pitti and Alicia Camacho
A continuous workshop for graduate students in American Studies, History, African American Studies, and related fields. This group devotes the fall term to intensive reading and discussion of important interdisciplinary texts in Latina/o studies. Students interested in participating should contact stephen.pitti@yale.edu.

AFAM 718b / AMST 911b / HIST 765b, Working Group on Latina/o Studies II Stephen Pitti and Alicia Camacho
A continuous workshop for graduate students in American Studies, History, African American Studies, and related fields. The spring term focuses on the development of individual research projects and on public history work with the Smithsonian Museums and organizations in New Haven. Students interested in participating should contact stephen.pitti@yale.edu.

AFAM 743b / AMST 645b / ENGL 952b, 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 1930s and ‘40s. 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.

AFAM 773a / SOCY 630a, Workshop in Urban Ethnography Elijah Anderson
The ethnographic interpretation of urban life and culture. Conceptual and methodological issues are discussed. Ongoing projects of participants are presented in a workshop format, thus providing participants with critical feedback as well as the opportunity to learn from and contribute to ethnographic work in progress. Selected ethnographic works are read and assessed.

AFAM 813b / AMST 875b / MUSI 811b, Critical Approaches to Popular Music Michael Veal
This seminar applies the different themes and discourses relevant to the study of popular music, including cultural studies, ethnomusicology, media, technology, music theory, gender studies, art history, and music history. The seminar is organized in workshop fashion, with student discussants drawing on the various discourses to contextualize specific album-length recordings assigned each week. The seminar is designed to help students master the variety of theoretical approaches that render popular music comprehensible.

AFAM 817b / HIST 741b, Slavery and Abolition in the Atlantic World Edward Rugemer
An introduction to the central themes of the historiography on slavery in the Americas during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Readings include books and articles that have an explicitly comparative focus, as well as single-region studies. Themes include master/slave relations, African American cultures, resistance and rebellion, economic life, and the politics of slavery.

AFAM 822b / AFST 651b / FREN 951b, The Francophone African Novel Christopher Miller
A comprehensive study of the novel—its discourse, aesthetics, and history—in colonial and postcolonial francophone Africa. Authors include Lamine Senghor, Ousmane Sembè, Ferdinand Oyono, Ahmadou Kourouma, Yambo Oulougouem, Mariama Bâ, Aminata Sow Fall, Fatou Diome, Calixthe Beyala, Alain Mabanckou. Readings in French; course conducted in English.

AFAM 825a / SOCY 660a, Black Urban America As Sociological Memoir Gerald Jaynes
This interdisciplinary course traces formation of contemporary African American class and family structures through investigation of how evolving racialized class-gender relations shaped twenty-first-century populations of poor and affluent blacks. Sources drawn from social sciences, history, literature to explore relationships between social behavior (agency) and blocked opportunity (structure).

AFAM 839b / HSAR 785b, Cross-Cultural Issues: From Modern to Contemporary Kobena Mercer
Examines the changing vocabulary in which cross-cultural aesthetics have been discussed in the twentieth-century shift from “modern” to “contemporary” art. Concepts of creolization, hybridity, syncretism, and transculturation are examined in their disciplinary sources and as taken up in art criticism, against the background of modernist paradigms of primitivism, internationalism, and universalism. More so than artists or artworks, the basic unit of analysis is the art exhibition, from the national pavilions of the first Venice Biennale in 1895 to such curatorial initiatives as Jean Hubert Martin’s Magiciens de la terre and Okwui Enwezor’s The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945–1994.
AFAM 846a / AFST 747a / CPLT 725a / FREN 946a, Postcolonial Theory and Its Literature  Christopher Miller
A survey of theories relevant to colonial and postcolonial literature and culture. The course focuses on theoretical models (Orientalism, hybridity, métissage, créolité, “minor literature”), but also gives attention to the literary texts from which they are derived (francophone and anglophone). Readings from Said, Bhabha, Spivak, Mbembe, Amselle, Glissant, Deleuze, Guattari. Conducted in English.

AFAM 880a or b, Directed Reading  Staff
By arrangement with faculty.

AFAM 895a and AFAM 896b, Dissertation Prospectus Workshop  Daphne Brooks
A noncredit, two-term course, which graduate students in their third year of study must satisfactorily complete. This workshop is intended to support preparation of the dissertation proposal.  0 Course cr per term