AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

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The African American Studies major examines, from numerous disciplinary perspectives, questions of race, culture, and modern struggles for equality centering on the experiences of people of African descent in Black Atlantic societies such as the United States, the Caribbean, Latin America, Europe, and Africa, including the global impact of those experiences. Students in the department explore the historical, cultural, political, economic, and social development of Black Atlantic societies. Majors work to become informed thinkers who are intellectually prepared to offer clarity and insight to ongoing academic and public debates centered in questions concerning race and inequality.

African American Studies majors become knowledgeable about the history, primary methodologies, and interdisciplinary breadth of the field. Students learn to critique, articulate, analyze, and interpret universal themes concerning both individuals in society and group interactions as they relate to the work of scholars, scientists, writers, artists, musicians, economists, and entrepreneurs.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE MAJOR

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 (DUS). Pertinent regulations can be found under Two Majors in section K of the Academic Regulations.

The major in African American Studies requires twelve term courses, including seven core courses and five electives in an area of concentration. The seven core courses include the African American history sequence AFAM 160 and AFAM 162, which can be taken in either order; one humanities course in African American literature; one course in the social sciences relevant to African American studies; the junior seminar (AFAM 410); the senior colloquium (AFAM 480) and senior essay (AFAM 491).

Area of concentration Students majoring in African American Studies are required to choose an area of concentration comprised of 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, art history, economics, sociology, American studies, history, or English language and literature. Students can also construct interdisciplinary areas of concentration that span traditional departments and encompass broader theoretical frameworks such as race and ethnicity, cultural studies, black arts, 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 core courses may be counted among the required electives in the area of concentration.

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

Credit/D/Fail No more than one course taken Credit/D/Fail may be counted toward the major.

SENIOR REQUIREMENT

Senior majors participate in a colloquium in AFAM 480 that gives them an opportunity to exchange ideas with each other and with more advanced scholars. Students in AFAM 480 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 in 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 in America and throughout the diaspora. The particular research topic and design are to be worked out in each case with a faculty adviser.

ADVISING

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

Graduate work African American Studies offers training of special interest to those considering admission to graduate or professional schools and careers in education, journalism, law, the arts, 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.

STUDY ABROAD

A limited number of courses taken during sophomore or junior semesters abroad can be counted toward the major with DUS approval.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE MAJOR

Prerequisites None
Number of courses 12 term courses (incl sen req)
Specific courses required AFAM 160, 162, 410
AFAM 15a / WGSS 15a, “We Interrupt this Program: The Multidimensional Histories of Queer and Trans Politics”  Roderick Ferguson

In 1991, the arts organizations Visual AIDS and The Kitchen collaborated with video artist and filmmaker Charles Atlas to produce the live television broadcast "We Interrupt this Program." Part educational presentation, part performance piece, the show was aired in millions of homes across the nation. The program, in The Kitchen's words, "sought to feature voices that had often been marginalized within many discussions of AIDS, in particular people of color and women." This course builds upon and is inspired by this aspect of Atlas's visionary presentation, an aspect that used the show to produce a critically multicultural platform that could activate cultural histories and critical traditions from various communities. In effect, the course uses this aspect as a metonym for the racial, gender, sexual, and class heterogeneity of queer art and organizing. It conducts its investigation by looking at a variety of primary materials that illustrate the heterogeneous makeup of queer and trans politics. The course also draws on more recent texts and visual works that arose from the earlier contexts that the primary texts helped to illuminate and shape.  

AFAM 146b / ECON 171b / EDST 271b, Urban Inequalities and Educational Inequality  Gerald Jaynes

Analysis of contemporary policy problems related to academic underperformance in lower income urban schools and the concomitant achievement gaps among various racial and ethnic groups in United States K-12 education. Historical review of opportunity inequalities and policy solutions proposed to ameliorate differences in achievement and job readiness. Students benefit from practical experience and interdisciplinary methods, including a lab component with time spent in a New Haven high school. Prerequisites: Any course offered by Education Studies, or one course in history or any social science, either: Anthropology, Economics, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology. EDST 110 is preferred, although not required.  

AFAM 160a / AFST 184a / AMST 160a / HIST 184a, The Rise and Fall of Atlantic Slavery  Edward Rugemer

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.  

AFAM 170a / HIST 479a / HSHM 241a / WGSS 270a, Sickness and Health in African American History  Carolyn Roberts

A history of American medicine through the African American experience covering the period of slavery through #BlackLivesMatter. Oriented around the complex dynamics of medical abuse and medical resistance, key themes include medicine and slavery; gender and reproduction; medical experimentation and ethics; the rise of racial science; lynching and vigilante violence; segregation and public health; African-descended approaches to health and healing; the rise of the African American medical profession; and black health activism from slavery to #BlackLivesMatter.  

AFAM 172b / HIST 119b, The Civil War and Reconstruction Era, 1845–1877  David Blight

The causes, course, and consequences of the American Civil War. A search for the multiple meanings of a transformative event, including national, sectional, racial, constitutional, social, gender, intellectual, and individual dimensions.  

AFAM 180a / LAST 398a / LITR 329a / SPAN 398a, Caribbean Baseball: A Cultural History  Roberto González Echevarría

A study of the origins and evolution of baseball in the Caribbean (Cuba, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico) in the context of the region's political and cultural history and its relationship with the United States. The course begins with a consideration of the nature of games and the development and dissemination of sports by imperial powers since the nineteenth century: soccer, rugby, and tennis by the UK and basketball and baseball by the U.S. Topics to be considered: nationalism, the role of race, popular culture, the development of the
media, the rise of stars and famous teams, the importance of the Negro Leagues, access of Caribbean players to the Major Leagues, the situation in the present.  WR, HU

AFAM 183a / HSAR 375a, Afro-Modernism in the Twentieth Century  Kobena Mercer
Introductory survey of African American, Caribbean, and black British artists in the context of modernism and postmodernism. Cross-cultural dynamics in the aesthetics and politics of race and representation.  HU

AFAM 184b / AFST 208b / HSAR 208b, African Arts and Expressive Cultures  Cecile Fromont
This course is an introduction to the arts and expressive cultures of a selection of regions from the African continent, and the Americas. Lectures, readings, and discussions explore the relationship between art and leadership, religion, society, and history on the continent and within African diasporic communities in the Americas. Class meetings and assignments make use of the distinguished collection of African objects at the Yale University Art Gallery.  HU

AFAM 192a / AFST 238a / AMST 238a / ER&M 238a, Third World Studies  Gary Okihiro
Introduction to the historical and contemporary theories and articulations of Third World studies (comparative ethnic studies) as an academic field and practice. Consideration of subject matters; methodologies and theories; literatures; and practitioners and institutional arrangements.  so

AFAM 198b / CGSC 277b / EDST 177b / EP&E 494b / PHIL 177b, Propaganda, Ideology, and Democracy  Jason Stanley
Historical, philosophical, psychological, and linguistic introduction to the issues and challenges that propaganda raises for liberal democracy. How propaganda can work to undermine democracy; ways in which schools and the press are implicated; the use of propaganda by social movements to address democracy’s deficiencies; the legitimacy of propaganda in cases of political crisis.  HU

* AFAM 202a / HIST 103Ja, Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass  David Blight
The life, times, and works of Frederick Douglass, African American abolitionist and leader of the nineteenth century. Douglass’s writings, including autobiographies, oratory, and editorials, and his role as a historical actor in the antislavery and early civil rights movements. Deep inquiry into the craft of biography.  WR, HU

AFAM 203a / MUSI 177a, Coltrane and Hendrix  Michael Veal
The parallel careers of John Coltrane and Jimi Hendrix in different genres of black music explored through biographical, music-analytical, and sociocontextual approaches. The stylistic evolutions in each musician’s work; the music of Coltrane and Hendrix as emblems of, and reactions to, the dominant musical and social issues of the 1960s.  HU

* AFAM 206b / ENGL 234b, Literature of the Black South  Sarah Mahurin
Examination of the intersections between African American and Southern literatures, with consideration of the ways in which the American South remains a space that simultaneously represents and repels an African American ethos.  HU

* AFAM 212b / ENGL 221b, African American Literature in the Archives  Melissa Barton
Examination of African American literary texts within their archival context; how texts were planned, composed, revised, and received in their time. Students pair texts with archival materials from Beinecke Library, including manuscripts, correspondence, photographs, and ephemera. Readings include Lorraine Hansberry, Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, August Wilson, and Richard Wright.  HU

* AFAM 213a / AFST 383a / HSHM 483a, Medicine and Race in the Slave Trade  Carolyn Roberts
Examination of the interconnected histories of medicine and race in the slave trade. Topics include the medical geography of the slave trade from slave prisons in West Africa to slave ships; slave trade drugs and forced drug consumption; mental and physical illnesses and their treatments; gender and the body; British and West African medicine and medical knowledge in the slave trade; eighteenth-century theories of racial difference and disease; medical violence and medical ethics.  WR, HU

* AFAM 216a / FILM 433a, Family Narratives/Cultural Shifts  Thomas Allen Harris
This course looks at films that are redefining ideas around family and family narratives in relation to larger social movements. We focus on personal films by filmmakers who consider themselves artists, activists, or agents of change but are united in their use of the nonfiction format to speak truth to power. In different ways, these films use media to build community and build family and ultimately, to build family archives and archives that future generations can use to build their own practices. Just as the family album seeks to unite people across time, space, and difference, the films and texts explored in this course are also journeys that culminate in linkages, helping us understand nuances of identity while illuminating personal relationships to larger cultural, social, and historical movements.  HU

* AFAM 216b / FILM 434b, Archive Aesthetics and Community Storytelling  Thomas Allen Harris
This production course explores strategies of archive aesthetics and community storytelling in film and media. It allows students to create projects that draw from archives—including news sources, personal narratives, and found archives—to produce collaborative community storytelling. Conducted as a production workshop, the course explores the use of archives in constructing real and fictive narratives across a variety of disciplines, such as—participants create and develop autobiographies, biographies, or fiction-based projects, tailored to their own work in film/new media around Natalie Goldberg’s concept that “our lives are at once ordinary and mythical.”  HU

* AFAM 227a / AMST 227a / ER&M 349a / HIST 137Ja, From the Voting Rights Act to #blacklivesmatter  Ferentz Lafargue
This course explores the period beginning from 1964 through the emergence of the #blacklivesmatter movement in 2013. Key concepts covered in this course include the Black Panther Party and rise of the Black Power movement; political campaigns of Shirley Chisholm, Jesse Jackson, and Barack Obama. The seminar concludes with an examination of the #blacklivesmatter movement and broader efforts addressing mass incarceration, poverty, and opportunity gaps in education.  HU
AFAM 231a / AFST 231a / ANTH 211a / WGSS 219a / WGSS 436, Sex and Gender in the Black Diaspora  Riché Barnes

* AFAM 244a / PLSC 200a, The Politics of Crime and Punishment in American Cities  Allison Harris
This course explores the relationships between politics and crime and punishment. We review literature focused on political behavior and political institutions to better understand the phenomena we hear about in the news from sentencing algorithms, to felon (dis)enfranchisement, to stop-and-frisk, and police use of force.  

* AFAM 246a / FILM 246a, Introduction to African American Cinema  Nicholas Forster
This course examines the history of African American cinema from the turn of the twentieth century through the present. In recent years, there has been a growing sense that, after decades of unequal hiring practices, black filmmakers have carved a space for artistic creation within Hollywood. This feeling was emboldened when Ryan Coogler's *Black Panther* became the highest grossing film of the 2018, seemingly heralding a new age of black-authored and black-focused cinema. This course examines the long history of black cinema that led to the financial and critical success of filmmakers like Coogler, Ava DuVernay, and Jordan Peele. In this course, we survey the expansive work of black American cinema and ask: is there such a category as black film/cinema? If so, is that category based on the director, the actor, the subject matter or ideology of the film? What political, aesthetic, social, and personal value does the category of black film/cinema offer? Some of the filmmakers include Barry Jenkins, Kathleen Collins, Spike Lee, Julie Dash,, Oscar Micheaux, Ava DuVernay, and Charles Burnett.  

* AFAM 248a / FILM 430a, Golden Age of Television  Nicholas Forster
Less than a century old, television is one of the youngest but most influential mediums to shape politics, pop culture, and American society. For years, scholars, critics, and fans looked back at the sitcoms and dramas made between 1947-1960 as representative of a “Golden Age of Television” that engaged with a changing society that followed the trauma of World War II. Decades later, in the early 2000s, premium cable shows like *The Sopranos, The Wire, Breaking Bad*, and *Oz* suggested that a new Golden Age of Television had arrived. This course pairs these two eras of television to ask: Are there similarities between these two eras of television? How do these stories, represented visually on television, relate to the world outside of the screen? How has the rise of streaming reconfigured our viewing habits and the ways that we understand the world? By looking at two eras of television we work to see what some of the major tropes or threads are, and understand how certain shows that are considered a part of either “Golden Age of Television” create meaning and interest in viewers. Programs include: *I Love Lucy, Roots, The Twilight Zone, The Wire, Deadwood,* and *How to Get Away with Murder.*  

* AFAM 253a / MUSI 381a, Jazz in Transition, 1960–2000  Michael Veal
A survey of musicians, stylistic currents, and critical issues relevant to the evolution of jazz between 1960 and 2000. Topics include Third Stream, free jazz, jazz-rock fusion, the influence of world music, neo-classicism, jazz and hip-hop, and others.  

* AFAM 259a / AMST 309a / EDST 255a, Education and Empire  Talya Zemach-Bersin
This course offers an introduction to the transnational history of education in relation to the historical development of the U.S. empire both at home and abroad. By bringing together topics often approached separately—immigration, education, race, colonialism, and the history of U.S. empire—we interrogate the ways that education has been mobilized to deploy power: controlling knowledge, categorizing and policing differences, administering unequal paths to citizenship/belonging, forcing assimilation, promoting socio-economic divides, and asserting discipline and control. EDST 110 recommended.  

* AFAM 305a, African American Autobiography  Sarah Mahurin
Examination of African American autobiography, from slave narratives to contemporary memoirs, and how the genre approaches the project (and problem) of knowing, through reading, the relationships of fellow humans. Chronological consideration of a range of narratives and their representations of race, of space, of migration, of violence, of self, and of other, as well as the historical circumstances that inform these representations. Prerequisite: one college-level literature course.  

* AFAM 312a / THST 319a, Embodying Story  Renee Robinson
The intersection of storytelling and movement as seen through historical case studies, cross-disciplinary inquiry, and studio practice. Drawing on eclectic source materials from different artistic disciplines, ranging from the repertory of Alvin Ailey to journalism, architectural studies, cartoon animation, and creative processes, students develop the critical, creative, and technical skills through which to tell their own stories in movement. No prior dance experience necessary.  

* AFAM 315a / WGSS 305a, Black Feminist Theory  Roderick Ferguson
This course is designed to introduce you to some of the major themes in black feminist theory. The course does so by presenting classic texts with more recent ones to give you a sense of the vibrancy of black feminist theory for addressing past and present concerns. Rather than interpret black feminist theory as a critical formation that simply puts race, gender, sexuality, and class into conversation with one another, the course apprehends that formation as one that produced epistemic shifts in how we understand politics, empire, history, the law, and literature. This is by no means an exhaustive list of the areas into which black feminism intervened. It is merely a sample of some of the most vibrant ideological and discursive contexts in which black feminism caused certain epistemic transformations.  

The course explores Baldwin’s oeuvre since 1964 until his death in 1987. As critics have noted, there has been a renaissance regarding the work of James Baldwin since 1999, with scholarly publications devoted to his work, public tributes, films, and publications of previously
uncollected or out of print works. Critics had hailed Baldwin's earlier works—Go Tell It on the Mountain, Giovanni's Room, Notes of a Native Son—as his greatest literary accomplishments. After Baldwin's most celebrated work—The Fire Next Time—he appeared on the cover of Time magazine in 1963, under the heading “Birmingham and Beyond: The Negro's Push for Equality.” In this moment, Baldwin became a celebrated public figure in the U.S. and beyond. Our class investigates the period after this height of celebrity, when critics lambasted him for being too political, too angry, too bitter, and losing narrative control and rigor. This two-decade span is significant because Baldwin was witness to the deaths and incarceration of Civil Rights leaders (whom he mourned as friends), the increased surveillance and incarceration of black activists, the Vietnam war, the emergence of Black Power, feminist movements, and gay and queer liberations. During this time, Baldwin lived primarily in Turkey and France, and continued to travel globally. Baldwin's essays, novels, speeches, and poetry wrestled with how to formally capture and witness the violences of imperialism, homophobia, and racism. Since his death, Baldwin's work has continued to influence and inform theoretical insights in American studies, literary studies, Black studies, and queer studies. Our class engages with Baldwin's formal practices, political contexts, and critical interpretations across these fields. Preference given to students with a background in African American Studies, WGSS, ERM, and American Studies. Previous readings of James Baldwin’s works recommended but not required.  

* AFAM 349b / AMST 326b / HIST 115b / WGSS 388b, Civil Rights and Women's Liberation  
Lauren Meyer
The dynamic relationship between the civil rights movement and the women’s liberation movement from 1940 to the present. When and how the two movements overlapped, intersected, and diverged. The variety of ways in which African Americans and women campaigned for equal rights. Topics include World War II, freedom summer, black power, the Equal Rights Amendment, feminism, abortion, affirmative action, and gay rights.  

* AFAM 353b / HSAR 472b, Black British Art and Culture  
Kobena Mercer
Introduction to black British visual artists and cultural theorists, with a focus on those of African, Caribbean, and South Asian descent. Postcolonial perspectives on diaspora identities and cross-cultural aesthetics in art, film, and photography from 1945 to the present.  

* AFAM 373a / AMST 353a / ER&M 380a, White America  
Aaron Carico
Critical exploration of how the whiteness of the United States and its institutions has been developed and maintained from the nineteenth century into the present. Special attention paid to the intersection of race and class, particularly to the position of poor whites. Examination of the politics and culture of American whiteness, texts include histories, literary essays, fiction, and films.  

* AFAM 390a / ER&M 410a / SOCY 310a, Ethnography of the African American Community  
Elijah Anderson
An ethnographic study of the African American community. Analysis of ethnographic and historical literature, with attention to substantive, conceptual, and methodological issues. Topics include the significance of slavery, the racial ghetto, structural poverty, the middle class, the color line, racial etiquette, and social identity.  

* AFAM 399a / AMST 341a / ER&M 407a, Race and Capitalism  
Aaron Carico
This interdisciplinary seminar explores, both theoretically and historically, how racial formations are bound to the formations of capitalism. Focus on the American scene, with sustained inquiry on slavery, its commodity logics, and their residues. Consideration of the effects of immigration and globalization.  

* AFAM 401b / AMST 411b / ER&M 385b / FILM 453b, Introduction to Documentary Studies  
Zareena Grewal
An introduction to documentary film, photography, and radio for students interested in doing documentary work, as well as for those who simply wish to study the history of the documentary as a cultural form.  

* AFAM 406b / AMST 406b / ENGL 362b, 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. Formerly ENGL 405.  

* AFAM 410b / AMST 310b / WGSS 410b, Interdisciplinary Approaches to African American Studies  
Crystal Feimster
An interdisciplinary, thematic approach to the study of race, nation, and ethnicity in the African diaspora. Topics include class, gender, color, and sexuality; the dynamics of reform, Pan-Africanism, neocolonialism, and contemporary black nationalism. Use of a broad range of methodologies.  

* AFAM 426a / AMST 442a / ENGL 381a, Toni Morrison & the Matter of Black Life  
Daphne Brooks
This seminar examines key texts in the Toni Morrison canon that resonate as literary masterworks, innovative in narrative and aesthetic structure as well as content, and also as historical studies, expansive and probing in their interrogations of past struggles and future possibilities for African American communities and the American body politic more broadly. We consider how her novels explore the ongoing disasters that were and are settler colonialism, the Middle Passage and the Atlantic slave trade, the systemic violence of Jim Crow segregation, the violence of patriarchy, the traumas of war and American empire, and the insidious presence of misogyny in the everyday lives of her characters. But, we also look closely at the richness of love and intimacy, the radical roots of self-fashioning, and the insurgent potentiality of mobility and aesthetic creativity coursing through the lives of her protagonists who cut a fugitive path out of slavery, ride the waves of Reconstruction, the Great Migration, Civil Rights era hope and organizing, and post-Soul searching. We read key scholarship in direct conversation with Morrison's oeuvre, and we examine her robust and demanding critical essays on American literature, on contemporary events, and on the topic of writing.
* AFAM 451b / ANTH 445b / THST 450b / WGSS 442b, Black Women Moving and the Ethnography of Embodiment  Aimee Cox

In this course we explore the theory and methods employed by Black women ethnographers, artists, and activists invested in transforming the traditional norms of the academic disciplines and creative contexts in which they operate. These boundary erasing, rule breaking women challenge us to think expansively and act courageously in our efforts to not only dream a new world but bring that world into fruition. The life and work of anthropologist/dancer/choreographer/activist Katherine Dunham (1909–2006) provides the framework through which we think through the strategies contemporary scholar-artists employ in their social justice practices, while the concept of movement is our theoretical and methodological foundation for engaging with the work of historical and contemporary Black women change agents. We ask how movement functions in the work of Dunham and these contemporary scholar-artists in terms of: the moving and/or dancing body; movement and migration across geographic territories and imagined space; and participation in social movements. Inspired by the techniques these women have developed for re-imagining the possibilities for moving as an act of social change, we experiment with creating our own embodied artistic practices and research methods. Students should anticipate a holistic experience that requires an openness to physical activity and choreography (accessible to all) as one of our primary tools for both analyzing the multi-media course texts, as well as constructing our own boundary crossing projects.  

* AFAM 471a and AFAM 472b, Independent Study: African American Studies  Staff

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  Aimee Cox

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  Aimee Cox

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.