AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

81 Wall Street, 203.432.1170
http://afamstudies.yale.edu
M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.
Chair
Jacqueline Goldsby

Acting Chair (2018–2019)
Gerald Jaynes (81 Wall St., gerald.jaynes@yale.edu)

Director of Graduate Studies
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Professors Elijah Anderson, David Blight, Daphne Brooks, Hazel Carby, Jacqueline Goldsby, Emily Greenwood, Matthew Jacobson, Gerald Jaynes, Kobena Mercer, Christopher Miller, Tavia Nyong’o, Claudia Rankine, Robert Stepto, Michael Veal

Associate Professors Simone Browne (Visiting), Aimee Cox, Crystal Feimster, Anthony Reed, Edward Rugemer

Assistant Professors Rizvana Bradley, Carolyn Roberts

Lecturers Aaron Carico, Thomas Allen Harris, Lauren Meyer

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 505b / AMST 643b, Theorizing Racial Formations Kobena Mercer
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 537b / FILM 710b, Contemporary Art, Race, and the Philosophy of Media Rizvana Bradley
This course draws from a diverse range of writing in philosophy (especially the philosophy of media), contemporary critical theory (phenomenology, new materialism), contemporary feminist thought, queer theory, and black studies in order to question underlying assumptions about the body and embodied spaces in contemporary art and culture. Drawing from film, literature, performance, and contemporary art, students think about a range of philosophical and critical themes, including the role of the body, the virtual construction of time and space, questions of affect, and sensation, all of which inform concerns over representation, embodiment, and materiality.

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 588b / AMST 710b / ENGL 948b, 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, Als, and Karr.

AFAM 624a / FREN 624a, Slavery and Its Aftermath in French and Francophone Literature Christopher Miller
The practices, effects, and culture of both slavery and emancipation in the French empire and the postcolonial francophone world, as seen through literary writings. Readings on New France, the Code Noir, the Encyclopédie, the Haitian Revolution. Literary authors include Olympe de Gouges, Claire de Duras, Victor Séjour, Alfred Mercier, Aimé and Suzanne Césaire, Edouard Glissant, Maryse Condé, Ousmane Sembène, Gisèle Pineau.

AFAM 716a / AMST 910a / HIST 764a, Working Group on Latina/o Studies I Alicia Camacho and Stephen Pitti
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
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 723b / AMST 645b / CPLT 949b / WGSS 645b, Caribbean Diasporic Intellectuals  Hazel Carby
This course examines work by artists and writers of Caribbean descent from different regions of the transatlantic world. In response to contemporary interest in issues of globalization, the premise of the course is that in the world maps of these black intellectuals we can see the intertwined and interdependent histories and relations of the Americas, Europe, and Africa. Thinking globally is not a new experience for black peoples, and we need to understand that what is represented as “Caribbeanness” is a condition of movement. Literature and art are most frequently taught within the boundaries of a particular nation, but this course focuses on the work of writers and artists who shape the Caribbean identities of their characters as traveling black subjects and refuse to restrain their work within the limits of any one national identity. We practice a new and global type of cognitive mapping as we read and explore the meanings of terms like black transnationalism, migrancy, globalization, and empire. Diasporic practice embraces and represents the geopolitical realities of the modern, modernizing, and postmodern worlds in which multiple racialized histories are inscribed on modern bodies.

AFAM 738a / AMST 706a / HIST 711a / WGSS 716a, Readings in African American Women’s History  Crystal Feimster
The diversity of African American women’s lives from the colonial era through the late twentieth century. Using primary and secondary sources we explore the social, political, cultural, and economic factors that produced change and transformation in the lives of African American women. Through history, fiction, autobiography, art, religion, film, music, and cultural criticism we discuss and explore the construction of African American women’s activism and feminism; the racial politics of the body, beauty, and complexion; hetero- and same-sex sexualities; intraracial class relations; and the politics of identity, family, and work.

AFAM 745a / HSAR 786a, Black Atlantic Visual Arts since 1980  Kobena Mercer
This seminar surveys black diaspora practices in late-twentieth- and early twenty-first-century art while questioning the survey genre as such. Examining contributions of black artists to paradigm shifts that have interrogated the identity of art over the past thirty years, we review the demands that issues of race and ethnicity place on interpretive models in the historiography of art. Considering thematic categories in which to understand what is distinctive to the diasporic conditions of Black Atlantic practitioners, while consistently relating their concerns to broad patterns in art practice as a whole in an era of globalization, the aim is to identify critical terms that best narrate the transformations black diaspora artists have introduced to a period characterized by the shift from modern to postmodern to contemporary.

AFAM 763a / AMST 731a / HIST 747a, Methods and Practices in U.S. Cultural History  Matthew Jacobson
This sampling of U.S. cultural history from the early national period to the present is designed to unfold on two distinct planes. The first is a rendering of U.S. culture itself—a survey, however imperfect, of the major currents, themes, and textures of U.S. culture over time, including its contested ideologies of race and gender, its organization of productivity and pleasure, its media and culture industries, its modes of creating and disseminating “information” and “knowledge,” its resilient subcultures, and its reigning nationalist iconographies and narratives. The second is a sampling of scholarly methods and approaches, a meta-history of “the culture concept” as it has informed historical scholarship in the past few decades. The cultural turn in historiography since the 1980s has resulted in a dramatic reordering of “legitimate” scholarly topics, and hence a markedly different scholarly landscape, including some works that seek to narrate the history of the culture in its own right (Kasson’s history of the amusement park, for instance), and others that resort to cultural forms and artifacts to answer questions regarding politics, nationalism, and power relations (Melani McAlister’s Epic Encounters). In addition to providing a background in U.S. culture, then, this seminar seeks to trace these developments within the discipline, to understand their basis, to sample the means and methods of “the cultural turn,” and to assess the strengths and shortcomings of culture-based historiography as it is now constituted.

AFAM 764a / AMST 715a / HIST 715a, Readings in Nineteenth-Century America  David Blight
The course explores recent trends and historiography on several problems through the middle of the nineteenth century: sectionalism, expansion; slavery and the Old South; northern society and reform movements; Civil War causation; the meaning of the Confederacy; why the North won the Civil War; the political, constitutional, and social meanings of emancipation and Reconstruction; violence in Reconstruction society; the relationships between social/cultural and military/political history; problems in historical memory; the tension between narrative and analytical history writing; and the ways in which race and gender have reshaped research and interpretive agendas.

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 805b, Novel, Film, and History in French Africa  Christopher Miller
African history as represented in historiography, novels, and films. Limited to French and Francophone Africa. Themes include empire and epic; orality and literacy; the slave trade; contact, conquest, and resistance; the Congo Free State; the role of colonial intermediaries; the two world wars; decolonization and neocolonialism; and the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

AFAM 880a or b, Directed Reading  Staff
By arrangement with faculty.
AFAM 895a and AFAM 896b, Dissertation Prospectus Workshop  Gerald Jaynes
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