AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

81 Wall Street, 203.432.1170
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M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

Chair
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Professors Elijah Anderson, David Blight, Daphne Brooks, Hazel Carby (Emerita), Roderick Ferguson, Phillipp Atiba Goff, Jacqueline Goldsby, Emily Greenwood, Matthew Jacobson, Gerald Jaynes, Christopher Miller (Emeritus), Tavia Nyong’o, Robert Stepto (Emeritus), Michael Veal, Shane Vogel

Associate Professors Aimee Cox, Crystal Feimster, Elizabeth Hinton, Edward Rugemer

Assistant Professors Jonathan Howard, Ernest Mitchell, Carolyn Roberts

Lecturers Aaron Carico, Nicholas Forster, Thomas Allen Harris, Elleza Kelley

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, History of Science and Medicine, Music, Political Science, Psychology, Religious Studies, Sociology, Spanish and Portuguese, and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. 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.

This is a combined degree program. To be considered for admission to this program, applicants must indicate both African American Studies and one of the participating departments/programs listed above.

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

1. Students applying for transfer into the combined Ph.D. program must already have taken AFAM 505 or be taking it in the term of application; must provide a plan outlining the AFAM courses already taken and those they will take; and must submit a research statement that explains how the combined Ph.D. will advance their research interests.

2. Students must provide two letters of recommendation: one from their adviser in the joint department or program, unless that adviser is jointly appointed with African American Studies, in which case a letter from the student’s DGS in the joint department or program is required; and a second letter from a faculty member in African American Studies who commits to being the student’s adviser throughout the completion of the dissertation.

3. Students cannot apply sooner than the second term of the first year and must apply by January 3, which is the deadline for African American Studies’ annual admissions cycle. Preference will be given to students in the second year of their Ph.D. program.

Applications will receive a faculty vote early in the spring term to approve or reject, and results will be communicated to the student no later than spring break.

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), 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. The number of courses that will count depends on the joint department or program. 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, 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 518a / PSYC 536a / SOCY 539a, Is That Racist? Theory and Methods for Diagnosing and Demonstrating Racism  Phillip Atiba Goff
How do we know when something is racist? And how do we prove it to those who are skeptical? This course is designed to allow students to go beyond armchair pontificating about racism by exploring a broad range of ways social theorists have defined the term and methods they have used to demonstrate it. Together, we read, critique, and synthesize scholarship from across disciplines, with the goal of refining our own definition of the term. To accomplish this, we examine the stakes of calling something racist, who benefits and who suffers from a given definition, and how racism functions across contexts (mostly) within the United States. We also learn about popular methods for demonstrating that an idea, feeling, behavior, person, or institution is racist and evaluate how evidence about racism (or lack thereof) can obscure a diagnosis of racism—or lead to an erroneous one. Throughout the course, we take opportunities to translate the theoretical and methodological lessons we learn to the world we live in today, from popular culture to dinner table conversations. This course is designed to be mostly synchronous, with synchronous sections accompanying lectures. Videos are made available for students who are not able to attend lectures or sections, but taking the course asynchronously is discouraged. Prerequisite: students should be comfortable reading journal articles and thinking critically about contentious social/political topics. Readings and other course materials span a wide range of disciplines. While there are no statistical prerequisites, students are asked to think about the logic of statistical analysis and should be comfortable reasoning about numbers.

AFAM 522a / AMST 721a / ENGL 935a, The Beautiful Struggle: Blackness, the Archive, and the Speculative  Daphne Brooks
This seminar takes its inspiration from concepts and questions centering theories that engage experimental methodological approaches to navigating the opacities of the archive: presumptively “lost” narratives of black life, obscure(d) histories, compromised voices and testimonials, contested (auto)biographies, anonymous testimonies, textual aporias, fabulist documents, confounding marginalia. The scholarly and aesthetic modes by which a range of critics and poets, novelists, dramatists, and historians have grappled with such material have given birth to new analytic lexicons—from Saidiya Hartman’s “critical fabulation” to José Estaban Muñoz’s “ephemera as evidence” to Tavia Nyong’o’s “Afrofabulation.” Such strategies affirm the centrality of speculative thought and invention as vital and urgent forms of epistemic intervention in the hegemony of the archive and open new lines of inquiry in black studies. Our class explores a variety of texts that showcase these new queries and innovations, and we also actively center our efforts from within the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, where a number of sessions are held and where we focus on Beinecke holdings that resonate with units of the
course. Various sessions also feature distinguished guest interlocutors via Zoom, who are on hand to discuss the specifics of their research methods and improvisational experimentations in both archival exploration and approaches to their prose and poetic projects.

**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 605a / AMST 686a / HIST 769a / PHUM 686a, Introduction to Documentary Studies**  
**Matthew Jacobson**

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/viewsings/ 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 626a / HIST 721a / RLST 626a, African American Religious History**  
**Nicole Turner**

African American religions have been central to the African American experience since Africans arrived in North America. An amalgam of traditional African religions, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and African American ingenuity, African American religions are dynamic and multifaceted. Although they are often depicted as sources of black resilience and emblems of black resistance, they have also been critiqued for marginalizing and racializing black people, as well as encoding archaic gender paradigms and reinforcing class divisions. This course explores the ways histories of African American religions have produced these various interpretive frames. Questions that animate the course include: What role have African American religions and topos of African American life? How have scholars studied the history of African American religions and ultimately shaped the discourse about African American religious life, and by extension African American history? The course engages foundational works, such as Albert Raboteau’s *Slave Religion* and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham’s *Righteous Discontent*, as well as newer works like Judith Weisenfeld’s *New World A-Coming* and Matthew Harper’s *The End of Days*.

**AFAM 687a / AMST 701a / HIST 751a, Race 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 oppression 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 such scholars as 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. Permission of the instructor required.

**AFAM 701a / WGSS 720a, Race, Gender, and AI**  
**Fatima El-Tayeb**

This course explores the idea of artificial life in art and science. We address the tension between visions of minds without body and bodies without mind, their relation to the quest to identify what makes us human, and the role gender and race have played in this. We look at dominant (scientific, political, economic) models and at their critiques, in particular those from marginalized perspectives, and we explore alternative forms of engaging with new technologies. The course’s main texts are Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*; or, *The Modern Prometheus* (1818) and Jeannette Winterson’s *Frankissstein: A Love Story* (2019).

**AFAM 702a / HSAR 760a, Now: A Research Colloquium on the Legacy of African American Arts**  
**Andrianna Campbell**

This research colloquium is an attempt to bring graduate students—who are often tasked with researching, writing, and thinking in isolation—together. We explore grants, research methods, archival access, and writing about the arts of African American artists and the black diaspora. The aim of this course is to explore the methodological, procedural, and historical foundations for writing the dissertation. Enrollment limited to sixteen. Students should be ABD, although those at other levels are welcome with prior permission of the instructor.

**AFAM 724b / AMST 732b / FILM 693b / HSAR 759b / WGSS 693b, Imaging War, Imagining Peace: Memory, Justice, and Repair**  
**Laura Wexler**

This course explores the ways in which both war and peace have been imagined and represented, and how those visual practices might be unlearned and reimagined. What do images and imaginings of war and peace leave out of view, and how can we bring both underlying social vulnerability and extant networks of protest and resistance into greater visibility? How might we avoid automatized reiterations of well-worn locations and scenarios of violence, for example in constructions of “the enemy,” and develop new approaches to the nationalist, racialized, and gendered stakes of conflict? What alternative acts of intervention, witnessing, and reparation might we create so as to see emergencies more freshly—at a time of conflict, as well as in anticipation and in retrospect? Can the visual archives of
violence be reframed and recirculated to shape more firmly the potential of justice, cohabitation, and peace? How can visualizations of antiracist movements and peace actions be mobilized more effectively? This team-taught course is inspired by the documentary work of Susan Meiselas. Her distinctive photographic practice with communities in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chile, Kurdistan, and elsewhere, her repeated return to sites of conflict over time, and her collaboration with the subjects of her images, as well as her extensive and innovative archival work, serve as one model for the kinds of approaches we want to explore and foster. In addition, our work is guided by close study of authors such as Leni Riefenstahl, Virginia Woolf, Alain Resnais, Susan Sontag, Sigmund Freud, Errol Morris, Judith Butler, Ariella Azoulay, Diana Taylor, Thy Phu, David Shneer, Amitav Ghosh, Anne McClintock, Grace Paley, Maaza Mengiste, Viet Thanh Nguyen, Karla Cornejo Villavicencio, Jenny Holzer, Walid Raad, Harun Farocki, Sam Durant, Sim Chi Yin, and more.

AFAM 732a / HIST 937a / HSHM 761a, Medicine and Empire Carolyn Roberts
A reading course that explores medicine in the context of early modern empires with a focus on Africa, India, and the Americas. Topics include race, gender, and the body; medicine and the environment; itineraries of scientific knowledge; enslaved, indigenous, and creole medical and botanical knowledge and practice; colonial contests over medical authority and power; indigenous and enslaved epistemologies of the natural world; medicine and religion.

AFAM 764b / AMST 715b / HIST 715b, Readings in Nineteenth-Century America David Blight
This 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 775b / AMST 771b / ENGL 981b, Affect Theory Tav Nyong’o
This seminar traces the emergence of affect, sense, feeling, and mood as critical keywords in American studies. Particular attention is paid to the manner in which queer theorists such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Lauren Berlant, Ann Cvetkovich, Heather Love, Jennifer Doyle, Jonathan Flatley, and José Esteban Muñoz developed the concept in what has been called “the affective turn” in queer and feminist aesthetics. The philosophical basis of affect theory in the writings of Spinoza, Heidegger, and Deleuze. We also look to an alternate genealogy for affect politics in the writings of Bergson and Deleuze on fabulation. We consider the psychoanalytic take on affect, in particular the object relations school of Klein and Winnicott, and we read critics who contrast affect theory with trauma theory. Marxist contributions to affect theory include readings from Virno (on humor), Hardt and Negri (on affective labor), and Rancière (on the distribution of the sensible). The readings of Jasbir Puar and Brian Massumi on the affective politics of contemporary war, empire, and societies of control are also considered, as are writings by Fred Moten, S aidiya Hartman, and Frank Wilderson on optimism and pessimism as moods/modalities of black studies.

AFAM 790b, Research and Writing a Dissertation in African American History Crystal Feimster
This course is designed to enable graduate students to devote time to the craft of historical research and writing. The course presumes that students are ABD and have written their dissertation prospectus. It addresses a range of topics including how to apply for grants, how to plan a research trip, how to organize research notes, when to start writing, how to write a first chapter, how to balance teaching and writing, and when and how to go on the job market. Prerequisites: AFAM 505 and permission of the instructor.

AFAM 797b / AMST 797b / HIST 797b, Atlantic Abolitions Marcela Echeverri Munoz
This readings course explores the historiography on the century of abolition, when the new states of the Americas abolished racial slavery. Beginning with the first abolitions in the U.S. North during the 1780s, we consider the emergence and process of abolition throughout the Atlantic world, including the Caribbean, Spanish America, and Brazil, through the 1880s.

AFAM 858b / ENGL 943b, Hurston, Hughes, and Black Modernisms Shane Vogel
This course considers some of the key concepts and tensions in the development of black modernisms through a focus on two of its major innovators: Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes. We consider their work across the first half of the twentieth century and the scholarly debates and intellectual formations that developed in response to their work in the second half. We pay special attention to formal experimentation across genres and to the relationship between literature and performance. Topics include folklore and the folk; migration; memory; transnationalism; gender and sexuality; political writings; the question of archives; music; race; religion; the Federal Writers Project; and autobiography. While Hurston and Hughes serve as the focus of the course, the inquiry is a wide-ranging engagement with black modernisms, understood as an ongoing project.

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. Course cr per term.