AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

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

Chair
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Professors Elijah Anderson, David Blight, Daphne Brooks, Hazel Carby (Emerita), Roderick Ferguson, Jacqueline Goldsby, Emily Greenwood, Matthew Jacobson, Gerald Jaynes, Kobena Mercer, Christopher Miller, Tavia Nyong’o, Claudia Rankine, Robert Stepto (Emeritus), Michael Vcal

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

Assistant Professor Carolyn Roberts

Lecturers Aaron Carico, Thomas Allen Harris

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, 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/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 500a, Global Black Aesthetics  Tav Nyon’go
Given the planetary scope increasingly implicit in contemporary art practice and the art world, this course asks after the relationship between politics and aesthetics in the current moment of planetary crisis. Critical discussion of the relation between aesthetics and politics is often framed as solely a question of enhancing democratic participation and emancipating publics. However, this approach is limited and does not sufficiently account for colonial modernity’s role in the construction of the aesthetic, as well as its role in political delegitimizing and regulating populations as dispossessed and disenfranchised. Readings include contemporary black aesthetic theories of refusal, fabulation, and poetics and draw on readings from Denise Ferreira da Silva, Fred Moten, Tina Campt, Saidiya Hartman, Christina Sharpe, John Keene, Dionne Brand, Édouard Glissant, and Sylvia Wynter. Prerequisite: one other graduate African American Studies course, preferably AFAM 505.

AFAM 505a, Theorizing Racial Formations  Aimee Cox
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 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 626b / HIST 721b / RLST 626b, 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 played in 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 716a / AMST 910a / HIST 764a, Working Group on Latina/o Studies I  Stephen Pitti and Alicia Schmidt 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 763b / AMST 731b / HIST 747b, 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 realignment of “legitimate” scholarly topics, and hence a markedly different scholarly landscape, including some works that seek to trace 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 771b / AMST 830b / HIST 729b, The American Carceral State  Elizabeth Hinton
This readings course examines the historical development of the U.S. carceral state, focusing on policing practices, crime control policies, prison conditions, and the production of scientific knowledge. Key works are considered to understand the connections between race and the development of legal and penal systems over time, as well as how scholars have explained the causes and consequences of mass incarceration in America.

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 777b / AMST 707b / WGSS 741b, Race, Colorblindness, and the Academic Disciplines  Daniel HoSang
Examines the ways that academic disciplines in the social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences have developed in relation to white supremacy and colonialism, and their imbrication in theories of racial hierarchy and conquest. Foregrounds the racial histories and colorblind defenses of race neutrality in fields as diverse as social psychology, the law, musicology, literary studies, sociology, and gender studies to reveal the contradictory role of the academy in constructing, naturalizing, and reproducing frameworks of racial domination. Considers the ways that insurgent scholars and formations have contested these traditions to discredit these traditions and deploy disciplinary methods and theorizations toward emancipatory ends. Engages work by Kimberlé Crenshaw, George Lipsitz, Toni Morrison, Roderick Ferguson, and others.

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

AFAM 895a and AFAM 896b, Dissertation Prospectus Workshop  Daphne Brooks and Crystal Feimster
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