AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

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http://afamstudies.yale.edu
M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

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Lecturers Aaron Carico, Nicholas Forster, 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, 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 Erica Edwards
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 530a / ENGL 913a, Black Elsewhere(s): Race and Space Jonathan Howard
The spatial resume of blackness is extensive, spanning land, sea, and outer space. Yet for every where the African Diaspora has been, the stunning witness of an important thread of black study argues that blackness is nowhere at all, defined most unflinchingly as a fundamental exclusion from the world. But where else, if not “the world,” is blackness? Are such black elsewhere(s) livable? And, given environmentalism’s increasingly apocalyptic forecasts about “the world,” how might the careful study of the life of blackness elsewhere yield a viable way out? Guided by these questions, this course takes up the precarious spatial resume of blackness as an opportunity to think about and through long held questions around space: What is space? What is its relation to place? And to what extent are either given or constructed? Along with these questions, we also consider how our experience of space is further informed by race. In three units centered on the ocean, land, and outer space, respectively, we trace a genealogy of black spatiality as that spatial practice comes to be elaborated in literature, theory, and history. Ultimately, through our exploration of black elsewhere(s), we will
weigh whether the space and place of blackness, if excluded from the world, discloses a more robust and ecological vision of what we might alternatively call the Earth.

**AFAM 561a / AMST 612a / ENGL 761a / FREN 561a, Caribbean Literary and Cultural Studies**  
Marlene Daut

This course examines eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writing (in translation, where applicable) by writers from the Anglophone, Francophone, and Hispanophone islands that make up the Caribbean. Haitian independence in 1804 ushered in a vibrant and diverse print culture that included poetry, plays, newspapers, and historical writing. From the pages of *La Gazette Royale d’Hayti* (1811–1820), to the poems of Jean-Baptiste Romane (1807–1858), to the historical writings of Louis-Félix Boisrond-Tonnerre (1776–1806), to the operas of Juste Chanlatte (1766–1828), there arose a distinct nineteenth-century literary culture in Haiti. Beginning with national literary developments in Haiti, this course expands to consider writing from Barbados, Cuba, Trinidad, Jamaica, Antigua, and Bermuda. These writings, both fictional and non-fictional, help us to think about whether and/or how a coherent early Caribbean literary tradition developed across geographical, linguistic, national, and imperial lines.

**AFAM 701a / ENGL 720a / 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 Jeanette Winterson’s *Frankissstein: A Love Story* (2019).

**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 764b / AMST 715b / HIST 715b, 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 778a or b / PSYC 728a or b, Research Topics in Racial Justice in Public Safety
Phillip Atiba Goff
In this seminar, graduate students and postdoctoral fellows have a chance to present their research, and undergraduate research assistants learn about how to conduct interdisciplinary quantitative social science research on racial justice in public safety. The course consists of weekly presentations by members and occasional discussions of readings that are handed out in advance. The course is designed to be entirely synchronous. Presenters may request a video recording if they can benefit from seeing themselves present (e.g., for a practice talk). This course is intended for graduate students, postdocs, and undergraduates interested in conducting original quantitative social science research about race and public safety. Permission of the instructor is required.

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 800a / HIST 811a / PORT 811a, Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition in Brazil
Stuart Schwartz and Junia Furtado
This course examines the cultural, social, and economic aspects of slavery in Brazil from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century in an Atlantic perspective connecting Brazil to Africa. Although recognizing the enslavement of indigenous peoples, it focuses on African and Afro-Brazilian slavery. The course compares slavery in rural areas, especially on sugar and coffee plantations and in towns and cities, especially in the gold and diamond mining areas where society presented much greater diversity and miscegenation than in the enslaved-based societies of the Brazilian coast, the Caribbean, or the southern United States. In rural areas, the spread of a plantation economy
accentuated the distance between the world of the free, dominated by whites, and that of the slaves, composed primarily of people born in Africa. In urban areas, a growing class of freed mulattos and blacks appeared. Urban areas were characterized by several kinds of slaves who worked by themselves as porters, female street vendors, artisans, etc. Many of these people managed to find mechanisms for reducing the weight of slavery, or even to obtain freedom. We also explore the social universe of freed blacks and mulattos.

**AFAM 867a / CPLT 958a / EMST 667a / SPAN 867a, Black Iberia: Then and Now**

Nicholas Jones

This graduate seminar examines the variety of artistic, cultural, historical, and literary representations of black Africans and their descendants—both enslaved and free—across the vast stretches of the Luso-Hispanic world and the United States. Taking a chronological frame, the course begins its study of Blackness in medieval and early modern Iberia and its colonial kingdoms. From there, we examine the status of Blackness conceptually and ideologically in Asia, the Caribbean, Mexico, and South America. Toward the end of the semester, we concentrate on black Africans by focusing on Equatorial Guinea, sub-Saharan African immigration in present-day Portugal and Spain, and the politics of Afro-Latinx culture and its identity politics in the United States. Throughout the term, we interrogate the following topics in order to guide our class discussions and readings: bondage and enslavement, fugitivity and maroonage, animal imageries and human-animal studies, geography and maps, Black Feminism and Black Queer Studies, material and visual cultures (e.g., beauty ads, clothing, cosmetics, food, Blackface performance, royal portraiture, reality TV, and music videos), the Inquisition and African diasporic religions, and dispossession and immigration. Our challenging task remains the following: to see how Blackness conceptually and experientially is subversively fluid and performative, yet deceptive and paradoxical. This course will be taught in English, with all materials available in the original (English, Portuguese, Spanish) and in English translation.

**AFAM 880a or b, Directed Reading**  
Staff

By arrangement with faculty.

**AFAM 895a and AFAM 896b, Dissertation Prospectus Workshop**  
Staff

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