AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

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M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

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

Associate Professors Aimee Cox, Crystal Feimster, Edward Rugemer

Assistant Professors Rizvana Bradley, 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/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
Scores from the General Test of the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE); 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, applicants 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
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
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.

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**  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 508b / HSAR 524b, Blackness in Abstraction**  Kobena Mercer
Examines Black Atlantic artists from 1945 to the present, including Norman Lewis, Aubrey Williams, Frank Bowling, Howardena Pindell, Mel Edwards, Jack Whitten, and Alma Thomas. The focus is on frameworks that challenged modernist criticism, institutional contexts of exhibition and reception from the 1960s to the present, and intersections with debates on black as color from Malevich and Barnett Newman to Richard Serra, coming up-to-date with contemporary practices including Ellen Gallagher, Mark Bradford, and Julie Mehretu. Preference given to students who have already taken modern and contemporary art history classes.

**AFAM 670a / AMST 675a / HIST 718a, Research in African American History since 1865**  Crystal Feimster
Project chosen from the post-Civil War period, with an emphasis on twentieth-century African American social and political history, broadly defined. Research seminar. Prerequisite: AFAM 505/AMST 643.

**AFAM 687a / AMST 701a / HIST 751a, “Race” and “Races” 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 oppressions 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 scholars like 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.

**AFAM 752b / HIST 937b / HSHM 761b, 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 775b / AMST 722b / HIST 722b, Research Seminar in Nineteenth-Century U.S. History  David Blight
Some class sessions focus on matters of craft: research techniques, styles of writing narrative and analysis; judging scholarly work; and philosophical dimensions of doing history in the early twenty-first century. The primary focus of the course is for each student to complete their own major research paper. Students in any field of American history are welcome.

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 75a / AMST 771a / ENGL 981a, Affect Theory  Tavia 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 form the core of the seminar. 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 writings 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, Saidiya Hartman, and Frank Wilderson on optimism and pessimism as moods/modalities of black studies.

AFAM 796b / AMST 796b, Slave Systems in World History  Edward Rugemer
In the English language there is only one word – "slave," or its verbal form, "to enslave" – to describe the remarkable variety of conditions that range from the sale of prisoners of war to compelled domestic or agricultural service in ancient Greece and Rome; elite soldiers in early modern Africa, or in the Ottoman Empire; skilled sugar workers in the early modern Caribbean; the serfs of eighteenth-century Russia; plantation slaves of the U.S. South, or Brazil; as well as the range of forced labor that persists today as human trafficking. Slavery has been a prototypical institution in world history, with ancient origins and nearly countless manifestations. This readings course explores the history of slavery over the *longue durée*, moving through time from the ancient world to today with weekly readings on the major slave systems in world history. Student writing includes a historiographical essay on one of the major slave systems discussed in the course.

AFAM 832a or b, Workshop on Race and Ethnicity in the Social Sciences  Gerald Jaynes
This workshop is devoted to in-depth exploration of new, cutting-edge research in the social sciences treating the interaction of race, ethnicity, gender, and class. The workshop focuses on methods of analysis ranging from ethnography to quantitative approaches as utilized in the disciplines of anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, sociology, and interdisciplinary fields utilizing any combination of these disciplines. We intend to address new approaches to classic issues and contemporary questions of interest to social scientists and policy makers such as (but not limited to): race relations; inequality; racial and class formation; criminal justice; politics; and education and social mobility. Graduate students taking the workshop for course credit must attend consistently and write an end-of-term paper. This course satisfies the social science requirement in African American Studies.

AFAM 849a / AMST 844a / ENGL 946a, Mid-Century African American Literature: New Approaches  Jacqueline Goldsbey
After WWII but before the Civil Rights and Black Arts movements of the later 1960s, an extraordinary group of African American writers came of literary age together. Russell Atkins and Bob Kaufman helped cast the shape of concrete poetry. Ralph Ellison and Adrienne Kennedy infused prose fiction and drama with surrealist aesthetics. Gwendolyn Brooks and Margaret Walker reanimated the sonnet, while Robert Hayden and Melvin Tolson reclaimed the epic poem. Chester Himes, Willard Motley, and Ann Petry unabashedly embraced naturalism's pulp potential. James Baldwin, Marita Bonner, Lorraine Hansberry, and Richard Wright pushed literary language to its limits to render the existential precarity—and possibilities—faced by African Americans in the postwar/atomic age/decolonizing world. Nonetheless, the achievements of this group—which remain considerable and were unprecedented at that time—are understudied in African American and American literary history precisely because these writers are rarely regarded as a cohort (à la the Black Mountain Poets or the Beats). These authors, their aesthetic innovations, and the cultural shifts that made their ascendance possible—the Communist Party's drive to consolidate its Popular Front; the energies unleashed by middlebrow culture; the rise of decolonization and comparable literary movements in Africa and the Caribbean; the emergence of a more thoroughly capitalized black press and literate black readerships; the rights-depriving politics endemic to Jim Crow segregation and the Cold War's Red Scares; the ascendancy of jazz as America's “classical” music—are focal points of this course. We consider how this generation's writing evolved the terms and stakes by which African American (and, indeed, American) literature might be understood as “modern” or, in the parlance of post-WWII America, “cool.” Historicized in these ways, we debate (by way of Bourdieu, Jackson, Moten, Edwards, and Sharpe) approaches to naming and periodizing this generation's place in African American and U.S. literary history.

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)