AMERICAN STUDIES

Arnold Hall, 304 Elm Street, 203.432.1186
http://americanstudies.yale.edu
M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

Chair
Matthew Jacobson (A25 Arnold Hall, 203.432.1186)

Director of Graduate Studies
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Associate Professors Rene Almeling, Laura Barraclough, Crystal Feimster, Zareena Grewal, Daniel HoSang, Elihu Rubin, Tisa Wenger

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Lecturer James Berger

FIELDS OF STUDY
Fields include American literature, history, the arts and material culture, philosophy, cultural theory, and the social sciences.

SPECIAL ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENT
A twenty-page writing sample is required with the application.

SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PH.D. DEGREE
During the first two years of study students are required to take twelve term courses; at least half of these courses must be in American Studies. First-year students are also required to take AMST 600, American Scholars (graded Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory). The student’s program will be decided in consultation with the adviser and the director of graduate studies (DGS). In each of the two years, the student should take at least one seminar devoted to research or requiring a substantial original paper, and must achieve two grades of Honors, with an average overall of High Pass.

Students are required to show proficiency in a language other than English; they may fulfill this requirement by (1) conducting substantial research in the chosen language as part of the course requirements for one of the twelve required seminars, (2) passing a translation test, offered each term by various language departments, or (3) receiving a grade of B or higher in a Yale College intermediate- or advanced-level language course or in a Yale language-for-reading course, such as French for Reading or German for Reading.

Upon completion of course work, students in their third year of study are required to participate in at least one term of a monthly prospectus workshop (AMST 902). Intended to complement the work of the prospectus committee, the workshop is designed as a professionalization experience that culminates in students’ presentation of the dissertation prospectus at their prospectus colloquium.

Students should schedule the oral qualifying examinations in four fields, in the fifth term of study. Preparation, submission, and approval of the dissertation prospectus should be completed by the end of the sixth term, with a final deadline at the end of the seventh term with permission from the DGS. Students are admitted to candidacy for the Ph.D. upon completion of all predissertation requirements, including the prospectus. The faculty in American Studies considers training in teaching to be an important part of the program. Students in American Studies normally teach in years three and four.

COMBINED PH.D. PROGRAMS

American Studies and African American Studies

The American Studies Program also offers, in conjunction with the Department of African American Studies, a combined Ph.D. in American Studies and African American Studies. This combined degree is most appropriate for students who intend to concentrate in and write a dissertation on any aspect of African American history, literature, or culture in the United States and other parts of the Americas. Applicants to the combined program must indicate on their application that they are applying both to American Studies and to African American Studies. All documentation within the application should include this information.

American Studies and Film and Media Studies

The American Studies Program also offers, in conjunction with the Film and Media Studies Program, a combined Ph.D. in American Studies and Film and Media Studies. For further details, see Film and Media Studies. Applicants to the combined program must indicate
on their application that they are applying both to American Studies and to Film and Media Studies. All documentation within the application should include this information.

**MASTER’S DEGREES**

**M.Phil.** See Degree Requirements under Policies and Regulations.

**M.A. (en route to the Ph.D.)** The M.A. is granted upon the completion of seven term courses (two grades must be Honors and the other five grades must average High Pass), and the successful completion of the language requirement. It can be petitioned for in the term following completion of the requirements. Candidates in combined programs will be awarded the master’s degree only when the master’s requirements for both programs have been met.

**Public Humanities Concentration** The M.A. with a concentration in Public Humanities is granted upon the completion of all requirements for the en route M.A. Of the seven term courses required, students must take four Public Humanities courses, including AMST 903, AMST 904, AMST 905.

**Terminal Master’s Degree Program** The basic requirements for this terminal degree are seven term courses, including a special writing project, and the successful completion of the language requirement. The project involves the submission of substantial written work either in conjunction with one course or as a tutorial that substitutes for one course. Students must earn a grade of Honors in two of their courses and an average grade of High Pass in the others.

More information is available on the department’s website, http://americanstudies.yale.edu.

**COURSES**

**AMST 600a, American Scholars** Zareena Grewal

“What would we really know the meaning of? The meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan; the ballad in the street; the news of the boat; the glance of the eye; the form and the gait of the body. The literature of the poor, the feelings of the child, the philosophy of the street, the meaning of household life, are the topics of the time.” — Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The American Scholar*, 1837. A half-century ago American studies was a movement; now it is an institution. But it remains an anomaly in the academy, with neither method nor discipline: a modest program, not a department, that immodestly claims the space between disciplines, beyond disciplines, and perhaps encompassing disciplines. In the early days, American studies was imagined as a home for Emerson's American scholar; these days Emerson's scholar is apt to be eyed more skeptically. Nevertheless the philosophy of the street and the meaning of household life continue to be the topics of the time, and American studies remains an oddly Emersonian place for nurturing intellectuals. To explore the various kinds of American scholars and American studies, the American Scholars colloquium meets weekly. Each week, we ask a member of the American Studies faculty: What are the key works that shape your intellectual project? What works pose the crucial issues? What works engage what you would really know the meaning of? Each speaks briefly and leads a discussion of the works chosen. There is no writing assignment, and students receive a credit for participating. This course is mandatory for first-year American Studies graduate students.

**AMST 601b, Interdisciplinary Research in American Studies** Laura Barraclough and Greta LaFleur

A practical forum on incorporating interdisciplinary methods and modes of analysis into research in American studies. Students develop article-length projects of their own design.

**AMST 622a and AMST 623b / CPLT 622a, Working Group on Globalization and Culture** Michael Denning

A continuing yearlong collective research project, a cultural studies “laboratory.” The group, drawing on several disciplines, meets regularly to discuss common readings, develop collective and individual research projects, and present that research publicly. The general theme for the working group is globalization and culture, with three principal aspects: (1) the globalization of cultural industries and goods, and its consequences for patterns of everyday life as well as for forms of fiction, film, broadcasting, and music; (2) the trajectories of social movements and their relation to patterns of migration, the rise of global cities, the transformation of labor processes, and forms of ethnic, class, and gender conflict; (3) the emergence of and debates within transnational social and cultural theory. The specific focus, projects, and directions of the working group are determined by the interests, expertise, and ambitions of the members of the group, and change as its members change. There are a small number of openings for second-year graduate students. Students interested in participating should contact michael.denning@yale.edu.

**AMST 643a / 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.

**AMST 650a / HIST 807a, Resistance, Rebellion, and Survival Strategies in Modern Latin America** Gilbert Joseph

An interdisciplinary examination of new conceptual and methodological approaches to such phenomena as peasants in revolution, millenarianism, “banditry,” refugee movements, and transnational migration.

**AMST 651b / AFAM 563b / ENGL 951b, Ralph Ellison in Context** Robert Stepno

This seminar pursues close readings of Ralph Ellison’s essays, short fiction, and novels. The “in context” component of the seminar involves working from the Benston and Sundquist volumes on Ellison to discern a portrait of the modernist African America Ellison investigated, with at least Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Romare Bearden also in view. Texts include Ellison’s *Collected Essays,*
Flying Home and Other Stories, Invisible Man, and Juneteenth; K. Benston, Speaking for You; E. Sundquist, Cultural Contexts for Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man; and A. Nadel, Invisible Criticism: Ralph Ellison and the American Canon.

AMST 654b / AFAM 743b / ENGL 952b, American Artists and the African American Book  Robert Stepno
Visual art in African American books since 1900. Artists include Winold Reiss, Aaron Douglas, E.S. Campbell, Tom Feelings, and the FSA photographers of the 1930s and ’40s. Topics include Harlem Renaissance book art, photography and literature, and children’s books. Research in collections of the Beinecke Library and the Yale Art Gallery is encouraged.

AMST 667b, Critical Human Geography  Laura Barracough
This readings courses immerses students in the critical/radical tradition of human geography, which investigates how power relations and structural inequalities are spatially produced, contested, and transformed. Topics include the relationship between geography’s development as a discipline and histories of imperialism; indigenous geographies and spatial persistence; spatial theories of capitalism and uneven development; feminist and queer geographies; geographies of blackness, white supremacy, and settler colonialism; gentrification and urban change; critical geographic information science and counter-mapping; and new approaches to landscape and region.

AMST 686b / AFAM 605b / HIST 769b, Introduction to Documentary Studies  Matthew Jacobson and Anna Duensing
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.

AMST 701a, "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 ideology 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.

AMST 723a / ENGL 833a, The Nonhuman in Literature and Culture since 1800  Wai Chee Dimock
Nonhuman life forms in fiction and poetry from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first, including plants and animals, "legal persons" such as corporations, large-scale phenomena such as the market and the Internet, war and environmental catastrophes, as well as intelligent machines and extraterrestrial aliens. Authors include Herman Melville, Emily Dickinson, Upton Sinclair, Elizabeth Bishop, Louise Erdrich, Richard Powers, Don DeLillo, Cormac McCarthy, Philip K. Dick, Ursula Le Guin, Octavia Butler, Dave Eggers. Theorists include Giorgio Agamben, Jane Bennett, Jacques Derrida, Donna Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, Fredric Jameson, Brian Massumi, Timothy Morton.

AMST 726b / HIST 714b, Studying Race Relationally  Daniel HoSang
A research-intensive seminar organized around relational and comparative scholarship on racial formation and racialization. The first half surveys recent work in American studies, history, ethnic studies, and the humanistic social sciences, examining dynamics of black/brown racialization at the urban scale, indigeneity and racialization, and comparative diasporic and transnational racial formation. Seminar meetings in the second half of the course are organized around workshops of student writing and research.

AMST 729b / FILM 810b / WGSS 746b, Visual Kinship, Families, and Photography  Laura Wexler
Exploration of the history and practice of family photography from an interdisciplinary perspective. Study of family photographs from the analog to the digital era, from snapshots to portraits, and from instrumental images to art exhibitions. Particular attention to the ways in which family photographs have helped establish gendered and racial hierarchies and examination of recent ways of reconceiving these images.

AMST 751a / ANTH 652a, American Precarity  Kathryn Dudley
The 2016 election cast a spotlight on the political discontent of millions of Americans, a broad segment of whom are white, working-class, and residing in regions of the country marked by unprecedented precarity, an ongoing condition of economic dislocation and social insecurity. This course traces the histories of the present that have produced cross-cutting zones of abandonment and social trauma not easily pigeonholed by concepts of race, class, gender, and citizenship.

AMST 761b / ANTH 761b / WGSS 761b, Race and Affect in the Americas  Ana Ramos-Zayas
The course explores how Latinx and Latin American/Caribbean populations have been historically imagined and racialized affectively—usually as being “hyper” emotional (but more recently as lacking any affect at all)—and the impact of this characterization on issues of
power, inequality, and personhood, particularly under neoliberalism. The course examines the ways in which Latinx and Latin American populations have been produced affectively in medicine/mental health, corporate and media images, U.S. foreign policy, education, and urbanism. We analyze psychological and public health literature and consider a variety of pathological claims about Latinos’ physical and mental states and disorders; in particular, we consider concepts like “ataque de nervios” (Guarnaccia), fatalism; hysteria and the “Puerto Rican Syndrome”; and disordered eating (obesity, body image, diabetes). We explore how concepts from the sociology and anthropology of emotion (Illouz’s emotional capitalism, Berlant’s lateral agency, Stewart’s ordinary affects, Hochschild’s emotional labor/feeling rules) operate in the case of Latinx and Latin American populations, as well as alternative ways of understanding affect in terms of racialization theories. We draw from the works of feminist/queer/critical race theorists, including bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, and others.

AMST 767b / HIST 724b, Research Seminar in U.S. Urban History  Mary Lui
Students conduct archival research to write an original, article-length essay on any aspect of U.S. urban history in any century. The first half of the seminar consists of weekly readings and discussions while the latter half consists of article workshop meetings focused on student writing.

AMST 775b / ENGL 838b, Performing American Literature  Wai Chee Dimock
A broad selection of short stories, poems, and novels, accompanied by class performances, culminating in a term project with a significant writing component. “Performance” includes a wide range of activities including: staging; making digital films and videos; building websites; game design; and creative use of social media. Readings include poetry by Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Yusef Komunyakaa, and Claudia Rankine; fiction by Herman Melville, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Junot Díaz.

AMST 780b / HIST 734b, Class and Capitalism in Twentieth-Century United States  Jennifer Klein
Reading course on class formation, labor, and political economy in the twentieth-century United States; how regionalism, race, and class power shaped development of American capitalism. The course reconsiders the relationships between economic structure and American politics and political ideologies, and between global and domestic political economy. Readings include primary texts and secondary literature (social, intellectual, and political history; geography).

AMST 800a / HIST 733a, The United States in the Twentieth Century  Beverly Gage
An introduction to the historiography of the United States in the twentieth century. Emphasis on methodology and major interpretive problems. Readings include “classics” as well as exemplary recent works.

AMST 832a and AMST 833b / FILM 735a and FILM 736b, Documentary Film Workshop  Charles Musser
This workshop in audiovisual scholarship explores ways to present research through the moving image. Students work within a Public Humanities framework to make a documentary that draws on their disciplinary fields of study. Designed to fulfill requirements for the M.A. with a concentration in Public Humanities.

AMST 834b / FILM 735b, Documentary and the Environment  Charles Musser
The environmental documentary has emerged as one of cinema’s most vital genres of the past ten years (in documentary, its only rivals are probably those concerned with the Second Gulf War). As the world’s environment faces a growing crisis, documentary has come to serve as a key means to draw public attention to specific issues. This course combines screenings with readings on documentary such as Bill Nichols’s important book Representing Reality. Often films have book tie-ins, and we consider how they complement each other and work together to maximize the impact of their message. Readings also focus on news items, debates, websites, and other media forms that are employed in conjunction with the films.

AMST 835b / HIST 731b, Research in Recent U.S. History  Joanne Meyerowitz
Students conduct research in primary sources and write original essays on post-1945 U.S. history. Readings include scholarly articles that might serve as models for students’ research projects.
AMST 843a / FILM 811a / WGSS 843a, Collaboration and the Event of Photography  Laura Wexler
This seminar questions the concept of “collaboration” through a variety of moments and projects of collaboration between photographers, photographed persons, and spectators that take place in different geopolitical contexts. Collaboration is a form of relation that may be idyllic or problematic, liberating or coercive, generating knowledge or disseminating ignorance, empowering or intimidating, involving assistance and solidarity as much as abuse; it may take place among friends or between enemies, and it may create friendship as much as it may complicate it. Reviewing this spectrum of possibilities, we ask how collaboration informs and transforms the event of photography.

AMST 875b / AFAM 813b, Critical Approaches to Popular Music  Michael Veal
This seminar applies the different themes and discourses relevant to the study of popular music, including cultural studies, ethnomusicology, media, technology, music theory, gender studies, art history, and music history. The seminar is organized in workshop fashion, with student discussants drawing on the various discourses to contextualize specific album-length recordings assigned each week. The seminar is designed to help students master the variety of theoretical approaches that render popular music comprehensible.

AMST 900a or b, Independent Research  Staff
AMST 901a or b, Directed Reading  Staff
AMST 902a or b, Prospectus Workshop  Staff
Upon completion of course work, students are required to participate in at least one term of the prospectus workshop, ideally the term before the prospectus colloquium is held. Open to all students in the program and joint departments, the workshop serves as a forum for discussing the selection of a dissertation topic, refining a project’s scope, organizing research materials, and evaluating work in progress. The workshop meets once a month.

AMST 903a, Introduction to Public Humanities  Ryan Brasseaux
What is the relationship between knowledge produced in the university and the circulation of ideas among a broader public, between academic expertise on the one hand and nonprofessionalized ways of knowing and thinking on the other? What is possible? This seminar provides an introduction to various institutional relations and to the modes of inquiry, interpretation, and presentation by which practitioners in the humanities seek to invigorate the flow of information and ideas among a public more broadly conceived than the academy, its classrooms, and its exclusive readership of specialists. Topics include public history, museum studies, oral and community history, public art, documentary film and photography, public writing and educational outreach, the socially conscious performing arts, and fundraising. In addition to core readings and discussions, the seminar includes presentations by several practitioners who are currently engaged in different aspects of the Public Humanities. With the help of Yale faculty and affiliated institutions, participants collaborate in developing and executing a Public Humanities project of their own definition and design. Possibilities might include, but are not limited to, an exhibit or installation, a documentary, a set of walking tours, a website, a documents collection for use in public schools. Required for the M.A. with a concentration in Public Humanities.

AMST 904a or b, Practicum in Public Humanities  Staff
AMST 905a or b, Master’s Project in Public Humanities  Staff
Required for the M.A. with a concentration in Public Humanities.

AMST 910a / AFAM 716a / HIST 764a, Working Group on Latina/o Studies I  Stephen Pitti and Alicia 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.

AMST 911b / AFAM 718b / HIST 765b, Working Group on Latina/o Studies II  Stephen Pitti and Alicia Camacho
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.

AMST 935a and AMST 936b, Working Group on Ethnography and Oral History I and II  Kathryn Dudley
A continuous workshop for advanced graduate students in Anthropology and American Studies. We discuss fieldwork experiences, analyze recordings of interviews, and share writing in progress to gather feedback and improve techniques. We attend to the methodological, representational, and ethical problems that arise in oral history and ethnography and examine critical theoretical frameworks for understanding our work as collaborative knowledge production. Since 2000, group members’ research has shared several themes: a commitment to experimental representational methods; the importance of space, affect, and materiality to ethnographic and historical analysis; and field sites that explore post-industrial economies in the United States and other areas of the world. Prerequisite: permission of the instructor. One-half credit per term; meets every other week. ½ Course cr per term