AMERICAN STUDIES

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

Chair
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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 Tavia Nyong'o

“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 622a / 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 623b / CPLT 822b, 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 643b / AFAM 505b, 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.
AMST 645b / AFAM 723b / CPLT 949b / WGSS 645b, Caribbean Diasporic Intellectuals  Hazel Carby
This course examines work by artists and writers of Caribbean descent from different regions of the transatlantic world. In response to contemporary interest in issues of globalization, the premise of the course is that in the world maps of these black intellectuals we can see the intertwined and interdependent histories and relations of the Americas, Europe, and Africa. Thinking globally is not a new experience for black peoples, and we need to understand that what is represented as “Caribbeanness” is a condition of movement. Literature and art are most frequently taught within the boundaries of a particular nation, but this course focuses on the work of writers and artists who shape the Caribbean identities of their characters as traveling black subjects and refuse to restrain their work within the limits of any one national identity. We practice a new and global type of cognitive mapping as we read and explore the meanings of terms like black transnationalism, migrancy, globalization, and empire. Diasporic practice embraces and represents the geopolitical realities of the modern, modernizing, and postmodern worlds in which multiple racialized histories are inscribed on modern bodies.

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 705b / HIST 582b / RLST 705b, Readings in Religion in American Society, 1600–2018  Tisa Wenger
This seminar explores intersections of religion and society in American history from the colonial period to the present as well as methodological problems important to their study. It is designed to give graduate students a working knowledge of the field, ranging from major recent studies to bibliographical tools. In short, the seminar is a broad readings course surveying religion in American history from colonization to the present. It is not a specialized research seminar, but it does require a basic understanding of historiography.

AMST 706a / AFAM 738a / HIST 711a / WGSS 716a, Readings in African American Women’s History  Crystal Feimster
The diversity of African American women’s lives from the colonial era through the late twentieth century. Using primary and secondary sources we explore the social, political, cultural, and economic factors that produced change and transformation in the lives of African American women. Through history, fiction, autobiography, art, religion, film, music, and cultural criticism we discuss and explore the construction of African American women’s activism and feminism; the racial politics of the body, beauty, and complexion; hetero- and same-sex sexualities; intraracial class relations; and the politics of identity, family, and work.

AMST 710b / AFAM 588b / ENGL 948b, Autobiography in America  Robert Stepto
A study of autobiographical writings from Mary Rowlandson’s Indian captivity narrative (1682) to the present. Classic forms such as immigrant, education, and cause narratives; prevailing autobiographical strategies involving place, work, and photographs. Authors include Franklin, Douglass, Jacobs, Antin, Kingston, Uchida, Balakian, Als, and Karr.

AMST 715a / AFAM 764a / HIST 715a, 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.

AMST 719a / RLST 703a, Interrogating the Crisis of Islam  Zareena Grewal
In official and unofficial discourses in the United States, diagnoses of Islam’s various “crises” are ubiquitous, and Muslim “hearts and minds” are viewed as the “other” front in the War on Terror. Since 9/11, the U.S. State Department has made the reform of Islam an explicit national interest, pouring billions of dollars into USAID projects in Muslim-majority countries, initiating curriculum development programs for madrasas in South Asia, and establishing the Arabic Radio Sawa and the satellite TV station Al-Hurra to propagate the U.S. administration’s political views as well as what it terms a “liberal” strain of Islam. Muslim Americans are also consumed by debates about the “crisis” of Islam, a crisis of religious authority in which the nature and rapidity of change in the measures of authority are felt to be too difficult to assimilate. This course maps out the various and deeply politically charged contemporary debates about the “crisis of Islam” and the question of Islamic reform through an examination of official U.S. policy, transnational pulp Islamic literature, fatwas and essays authored by internationally renowned Muslim jurists and scholars, and historical and ethnographic works that take up the category of crisis as an interpretive device.

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 731a / AFAM 763a / 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.

**AMST 741b / HIST 752b, Indians and Empires**  Ned Blackhawk
This course explores recent scholarship on Indian-imperial relations throughout North American colonial spheres from roughly 1500 to 1900. It examines indigenous responses to Spanish, Dutch, French, English, and lastly American and Canadian colonialism and interrogates commonplace periodization and geographic and conceptual approaches to American historiography. It concludes with an examination of American Indian political history, contextualizing it within larger assessments of Indian-imperial and Indian-state relations.

**AMST 752a / PLSC 812a, Progressivism: Theory and Practice**  Stephen Skowronek
The progressive reform tradition in American politics. The tradition’s conceptual underpinnings, social supports, practical manifestations in policy and in new governmental arrangements, and conservative criticisms. Emphasis on the origins of progressivism in the early decades of the twentieth century, with attention to latter-day manifestations and to changes in the progressive impulse over time.

**AMST 768b / HIST 768b, Asian American History and Historiography**  Mary Lui
This reading and discussion seminar examines Asian American history through a selection of recently published texts and established works that have significantly shaped the field. Major topics include the racial formation of Asian Americans in U.S. culture, politics, and law; U.S. imperialism; U.S. capitalist development and Asian labor migration; and transnational and local ethnic community formations. The class considers both the political and academic roots of the field as well as its evolving relationship to “mainstream” American history.

**AMST 773b / 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 803a / HIST 703a, Research in Early National America**  Joanne Freeman
A research seminar focused on the early national period of American history, broadly defined. Early weeks familiarize students with sources from the period and discuss research and writing strategies. Students produce a publishable article grounded in primary materials.

**AMST 814a / FILM 603a, Historical Methods in Film Study**  Charles Musser
A range of historiographic issues in film studies, including the roles of technology, exhibition, and spectatorship. Topics include intermediality and intertextuality. Consideration of a range of methodological approaches through a focus on international early cinema and American race cinema of the silent period. Particular attention to the interaction between scholars and archives.

**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 838a / HIST 749a / HSHM 753a, Research in Twentieth-Century United States Environmental History**  Paul Sabin
Students conduct advanced research in primary sources and write original essays over the course of the term. Topics are particularly encouraged in twentieth-century environmental history (broadly defined, no specified geography) as well as in U.S. history, with a focus on politics, law, and economic development. Readings and library activities inform students’ research projects. Interested graduate students should contact the instructor with proposed research topics.

**AMST 840a / ENGL 976a, Asian Inhumanities**  Sunny Xiang
What might it mean to think from a position other to the “Western humanities”? This course takes the “Asian inhumanities” as neither a direct opposite nor even a direct challenge to the “Western humanities,” but as a heuristic device for self-conscious reflection about critical method, racial formation, knowledge production, and political action. The aim is not necessarily to decenter the human or the humanities – I suspect that we will talk a good deal about both. Rather, we juxtapose “Asia” to “human” with an openness to contemplating the idiosyncrasies that each reveals about the other. We start by surveying how scholars have posited “Asia as method” (to borrow Kuan-Hsing Chen’s formulation). From there, we pursue the “Asian inhumanities” in two movements. The first examines historically specific “inhuman” typologies (that is, stereotypes) arising from U.S.-Asian encounters: the yellow peril during the era of Asian exclusion, the model minority during the era of Asian inclusion, and the flexible citizen during the era of Asian globalization. The second tracks the relation between “Asian” and “human” at especially fraught scenes of contact: law, war, gender, biology, and technology. Finally, we approach the “Asian inhumanities” as a question of race-based politics, both within and beyond the university. What is at stake in taking the human as a political, ethical, and literary reference point – for example, in desiring well developed and emotionally nuanced characters or even in reading for character at all? How does race figure into alternative critical approaches circulating within the humanities –
for example, surface reading, distant reading, new formalism, and weak theory? How does an attention to what is “Asian” impact our received critical frameworks for analyzing race?

AMST 848b / ENGL 832b, Inventing the Environment in the Anthropocene  Michael Warner
Although the concept of the Anthropocene can be dated in various ways, two of the most important benchmarks seem to be the beginning of industrial production in the late eighteenth century and the uptick in carbon dioxide emissions from the mid-nineteenth century (petroleum came into use during the Civil War). The period between these two moments is also that in which the modern language of the environment took shape, from Cuvier’s discovery of extinction and Humboldt’s holistic earth science to the transformative work of Thoreau and George P. Marsh. This course shuttles between the contemporary debate about the significance and consequences of the Anthropocene and a reexamination of that environmental legacy. We look at the complexity of “nature,” beginning with the Bartrams, Jefferson, Cuvier, and the transatlantic literatures of natural history; georgics and other genres of nature writing; natural theology; ambiguities of pastoral in American romantic writing (Bryant, mainly); the impact of Humboldt (Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman); westward expansion and Native American writing about land; Hudson School painting and landscape architecture. We also think about the country/city polarity and the development of “grid” consciousness in places like New York City. One aim is to assess the formation and legacy of key ideas in environmentalism, some of which may now be a hindrance as much as a foundation. Secondary readings from Leo Marx, Henry Nash Smith, and William Cronon, as well as more recent attempts to reconceive environmental history (Joachim Radkau), ecocriticism (Lawrence Buell), and related fields, as well as science journalism (Elizabeth Kolbert). Students are invited to explore a wide range of research projects; and one assignment is to devise a teaching unit for an undergraduate class on the same topic.

AMST 852b / ANTH 852b / WGSS 852b, Reading the Americas, Reading Ethnography  Ana Ramos-Zayas
The course uses ethnographic approaches to understand “America” as a hemispheric formation, while simultaneously examining “ethnography” as methodological, epistemological, and representational craft. Complemented by critical readings and seminar discussions about some of the trademarks of ethnographic research—e.g., participant observation, life history, field notes, and field sites—the course is designed to encourage students to interrogate the theoretical and methodological models that have been used in the production of knowledge about the Americas. Emphasizing ethnography’s concern with everyday life, practices, routines, and relationships, it analyzes how micro-processes and manifestations of race, sexuality, class, and gender entwine with macro-processes of empire and nation-state building, globalization, neoliberalism, transnationalism, urbanism, and social inequality in the United States, Latin America, and parts of the Caribbean. While this is not a “how to” course on ethnographic research, we use classic and contemporary ethnography to understand the region and gain greater knowledge about the process, epistemology, and politics of fieldwork. We analyze a number of aspects and approaches to doing and writing ethnography, including the challenges of entering, being in, and leaving the field; and as we build familiarity with the components of ethnography, we consider its applicability to an array of topics, settings, objects, cultural dynamics, and relationships.

AMST 853a, Archives: Imperial and Non-Imperial Histories, Practices, and Theories  Laura Wexler
In this seminar we explore theoretical, historical, material, practical, methodological, and curatorial questions related to archives. Students work in archives and experiment with creating archives. We read texts by Achille Mbembe, Okwui Enwezor, Ann L. Stoler, Saidiya Hartman, Avery Gordon, Tina Campt, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Jacques Derrida, Carolyn Kay Steedman, and others. Several Brown/Yale faculty present their engagement with archives. The seminar takes place in the Beinecke Library, with field trips to other archives and to Brown University.

AMST 878a / HIST 930a / HSHM 701a, Problems in the History of Medicine and Public Health  John Warner
An examination of the variety of approaches to the social, cultural, and intellectual history of medicine, focusing on the United States. Reading and discussion of the recent scholarly literature on medical cultures, public health, and illness experiences from the early national period through the present. Topics include the role of gender, class, ethnicity, race, religion, and region in the experience of health care and sickness and in the construction of medical knowledge; the interplay between vernacular and professional understandings of the body; the role of the marketplace in shaping professional identities and patient expectations; health activism and social justice; citizenship, nationalism, and imperialism; and the visual cultures of medicine.

AMST 888b / ENGL 832, Food in Literature, Culture, and Science  Wai Chee Dimock
From the global histories of sugar and salt to the latest research on chicken and antibiotics, this course explores some key texts—by Gabriel García Márquez, Sinclair Lewis, Ruth Ozeki, Monique Truong, Jonathan Safran Foer, Octavia Butler, and Margaret Atwood—both as works of luminous imagination and as entry points to deeper scientific knowledge, encouraging cross-pollination among disciplines.

AMST 900a, Independent Research  Staff
AMST 901a, Directed Reading  Staff
AMST 902a, Prospectus Workshop  Tavia Nyong’o
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 / HIST 746a, Introduction to Public Humanities  Staff
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
American Studies 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, Practicum in Public Humanities**  Staff

**AMST 905a, Master’s Project in Public Humanities**  Staff

Required for the M.A. with a concentration in Public Humanities.

**AMST 917a, American Studies Professionalization Workshop**  Greta LaFleur

This seminar is designed for advanced Ph.D. candidates who are going on the job market. Students draft and revise three full rounds of the five standard genres of job market materials: job letter, CV, dissertation abstract, teaching portfolio, and diversity statement. Students also participate in mock interviewing skills, developing a job talk, and preparing applications for postdoctoral fellowships. Graded Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory.

**AMST 920a / HIST 701a, Writing Workshop in U.S. History**  Joanne Meyerowitz

For advanced graduate students in History, American Studies, and related fields. Students share and comment on draft dissertation chapters, article manuscripts, and conference papers.