AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

Director of undergraduate studies: Aimee Cox (aimee.cox@yale.edu), Rm. 302, 81 Wall St., 432-7758; afamstudies.yale.edu

The African American Studies major examines, from numerous disciplinary perspectives, questions of race, culture, and modern struggles for equality centering on the experiences of people of African descent in Black Atlantic societies including the United States, the Caribbean, Latin America, Europe, and Africa, including the global impact of those experiences. Students in the department explore the historical, cultural, political, economic, and social development of Black Atlantic societies. Majors work to become informed thinkers who are intellectually prepared to offer clarity and insight to ongoing academic and public debates centered in questions concerning race and inequality.

African American Studies majors become knowledgeable about the history, primary methodologies, and interdisciplinary breadth of the field. Students learn to critique, articulate, analyze, and interpret universal themes concerning both individuals in society and group interactions as they relate to the work of scholars, scientists, writers, artists, musicians, economists, and entrepreneurs.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE MAJOR

African American Studies can be taken either as a stand-alone major or as one of two majors in consultation with the director of undergraduate studies (DUS). Pertinent regulations can be found in Academic Regulations, section K, Two Majors.

The major in African American Studies requires twelve term courses, including seven core courses and five electives in an area of concentration. The seven core courses include the African American history sequence AFAM 160 and AFAM 162, which can be taken in either order; one humanities course in African American literature; one course in the social sciences relevant to African American studies; the junior seminar (AFAM 410); the senior colloquium (AFAM 480) and senior essay (AFAM 491).

Area of concentration Students majoring in African American Studies are required to choose an area of concentration comprised of five courses. This cluster of interrelated courses is intended to ground the student’s learning experience in one area of investigation. Often students will choose an area of concentration in a traditional discipline such as political science, art history, economics, sociology, American studies, history, or English language and literature. Students can also construct interdisciplinary areas of concentration that span traditional departments and encompass broader theoretical frameworks such as race and ethnicity, cultural studies, black arts, or feminism and gender studies. All majors are encouraged to take upper-level courses as part of their concentration, especially those courses centering on research and methodology. None of the seven core courses may be counted among the required electives in the area of concentration.

Junior seminar In their junior year students must take the junior seminar, AFAM 410. This course provides majors with theoretical and methodological bases for the work they will do during their research-oriented senior year.

Credit/D/Fail No more than one course taken Credit/D/Fail may be counted toward the major.

SENIOR REQUIREMENT

Senior majors participate in a colloquium in AFAM 480 that gives them an opportunity to exchange ideas with each other and with more advanced scholars. Students in AFAM 480 submit a prospectus, compile a working bibliography, begin or continue research, and write the first twenty pages of the senior essay. After completing the colloquium, each student carries out the remaining research and writing of a senior essay in AFAM 491 under the guidance of a faculty member in the chosen discipline or area of concentration.

Students are strongly encouraged to use the summer between the junior and senior years for research directly related to the senior essay. For example, field or documentary research might be undertaken in urban or rural communities in America and throughout the diaspora. The particular research topic and design are to be worked out in each case with a faculty adviser.

ADVISING

Students considering a program of study in African American Studies should consult the DUS as early as possible. Areas of concentration and schedules for majors must be approved by the DUS.

Graduate work African American Studies offers training of special interest to those considering admission to graduate or professional schools and careers in education, journalism, law, the arts, business management, city planning, international relations, politics, psychology, publishing, public health, or social work. The interdisciplinary structure of the department offers students an opportunity to satisfy the increasingly rigorous expectations of admissions committees and prospective employers.

STUDY ABROAD

A limited number of courses taken during sophomore or junior semesters abroad can be counted toward the major with DUS approval.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE MAJOR

Prerequisites None

Number of courses 12 term courses (incl sen req)

Specific courses required AFAM 160, 162, 410
African American Studies is an interdisciplinary major that examines race, culture, and struggles for equality rooted in the experiences of people of African descent in Black Atlantic societies including the United States, the Caribbean, Latin America, Europe, and Africa. The program offers courses of study that intersect with a broad range of disciplines including history, literature, politics, economics, art history, music, theater studies, anthropology, African studies, film studies, modern languages, and ethnicity, race, and migration.

The major has five required courses and seven electives, the bulk of which comprise the concentration. Majors have considerable freedom in their course choices and are encouraged to take classes across the humanities and social sciences. An area of concentration, selected by the student, may be rooted in a single discipline with courses in other departments such as American Studies, Ethnicity, Race, and Migration, Anthropology, Political Science, or English, or may encompass broader thematic and or theoretical frameworks such as critical race theory; Black Atlantic art and visual culture; race, gender, and public policy; and African-American literary arts.

African American Studies emphasizes innovative teaching, focused mentorship, and excellent scholarship as it prepares students for brilliant futures.

FACULTY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

Professors  Elijah Anderson, David Blight, Daphne Brooks, Hazel Carby (Emeritus), Roderick Ferguson, Phillipp Goff, Jacqueline Goldsby, Emily Greenwood, Matthew Jacobson, Gerald Jaynes, Kobena Mercer, Christopher Miller, Claudia Rankine, Robert Stepto (Emeritus), Michael Veal

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

Assistant Professors  Carolyn Roberts

Lecturers  Aaron Carico, Thomas Allen Harris

View Courses

Courses

* AFAM 011a / ENGL 007a, Literature of the Black South  Sarah Mahurin
This course examines the enduring and often unanticipated connections between African American and Southern literature, and considers the ways in which the American South remains a space that simultaneously represents and repels an African American ethos. Through topics and lenses as varied as the Black church, the Great Migration, the Civil Rights Movement, and the rural/urban divide, we consider the ways in which Black culture and Southern culture continue to intersect and interact — even when the natal (Southern) place has ostensibly been rejected or abandoned.  HU

* AFAM 016a / AFST 015a / ENGL 015a, South African Writing after Apartheid  Stephanie Newell
An introduction to creative writing published in South Africa from the end of Apartheid in 1994 to the present. Close readings of contemporary fiction with additional material drawn from popular culture, including films, magazines, and music. Enrollment limited to first-year students. Preregistration required; see under First-Year Seminar Program.  WR, HU

* AFAM 060a / AMST 060a / HIST 016a, Significance of American Slavery  Edward Rugemer
This first-year seminar explores the significance of racial slavery in the history of the Americas during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. We read the work of historians and we explore archival approaches to the study of history. Taught in the Beinecke Library with the assistance of curators and librarians, each week is organized around an archival collection that sheds light on the history of slavery. The course also includes visits to the Department of Manuscripts and Archives in the Sterling Library, the British Art Center, and the Yale University Art Gallery. Each student writes a research paper grounded in archival research in one of the Yale Libraries. Topics include slavery and slaveholding, the transatlantic slave trade, resistance to slavery, the abolitionist movement, the coming of the American Civil War, the process of emancipation, and post-emancipation experiences. Enrollment limited to first-year students. Preregistration required; see under First-Year Seminar Program.  WR, HU

* AFAM 090a / AMST 035 / ER&M 090 / THST 090a, Afrofuturism  Tav Nyong’o
Black people have long responded to racism and structural inequality by imagining other realities: utopian, dystopian, or just plain surreal. Art, literature, music, and performance have long been central to these radical exercises in black speculation. This first-year seminar will introduce classic and contemporary afrofuturist texts, media, and cultural criticism. Particular attention will be paid to science fiction, speculative fiction and fantasy as sites for the intersectional critique and displacement of norms of race, gender, sexuality, and even species. Interested students should write to the instructor to express their interest in the class. Enrollment limited to first-year students. Preregistration required; see under First-Year Seminar Program.  HU

AFAM 115a / WGSS 125a, “We Interrupt this Program: The Multidimensional Histories of Queer and Trans Politics”  Roderick Ferguson
In 1991, the arts organizations Visual AIDS and The Kitchen collaborated with video artist and filmmaker Charles Atlas to produce the live television broadcast ‘We Interrupt this Program.’ Part educational presentation, part performance piece, the show was aired in millions of homes across the nation. The program, in The Kitchen’s words, “sought to feature voices that had often been marginalized...
within many discussions of AIDS, in particular people of color and women.” This course builds upon and is inspired by this aspect of Atlas’s visionary presentation, an aspect that used the show to produce a critically multicultural platform that could activate cultural histories and critical traditions from various communities. In effect, the course uses this aspect as a metonym for the racial, gender, sexual, and class heterogeneity of queer art and organizing. It conducts its investigation by looking at a variety of primary materials that illustrate the heterogeneous makeup of queer and trans politics. The course also draws on more recent texts and visual works that arose from the earlier contexts that the primary texts helped to illuminate and shape.

AFAM 124b / AMST 124a / EDST 130a / HIST 136a, The Long Civil Rights Movement Crystal Feinster
Political, social, and artistic aspects of the U.S. civil rights movement from the 1920s through the 1980s explored in the context of other organized efforts for social change. Focus on relations between the African American freedom movement and debates about gender, labor, sexuality, and foreign policy. Changing representations of social movements in twentieth-century American culture; the politics of historical analysis. HU

AFAM 146b / ECON 171b / EDST 271b, Urban Inequalities and Educational Inequality Gerald Jaynes
Analysis of contemporary policy problems related to academic underperformance in lower income urban schools and the concomitant achievement gaps among various racial and ethnic groups in United States K-12 education. Historical review of opportunity inequalities and policy solutions proposed to ameliorate differences in achievement and job readiness. Students benefit from practical experience and interdisciplinary methods, including a lab component with time spent in a New Haven high school. Prerequisites: Any course offered by Education Studies, or one course in history or any social science, either: Anthropology, Economics, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology. EDST 110 is preferred, although not required. SO

AFAM 160a / AFST 184a / AMST 160a / HIST 184a, The Rise and Fall of Atlantic Slavery Edward Rugemer
The history of peoples of African descent throughout the Americas, from the first African American societies of the sixteenth century through the century-long process of emancipation. WR, HU

AFAM 172b / HIST 119b, The Civil War and Reconstruction Era, 1845–1877 Staff
The causes, course, and consequences of the American Civil War. A search for the multiple meanings of a transformative event, including national, sectional, racial, constitutional, social, gender, intellectual, and individual dimensions. HU

AFAM 190a / AMST 204a, Protest Music & the Black Radical Tradition Daphne Brooks
This interdisciplinary lecture course charts the evolution of protest music in America as it was originally designed and bravely imagined and deployed by captive peoples of African descent throughout our present day. The course will emphasize an examination of black radical aesthetics in sound alongside key literary and performance texts that dialectically resonate with the resistant musical innovations of a range of black culture workers from the antebellum era through our current 2020 moment of peril and possibility. The course explores the history, politics, and cultures of U.S. protest music across three centuries as it was radically shaped by dispossessed peoples who invented their own world-making sonic lexicon in a bid to transform the nation as well as their own very conditions of being. Throughout the semester, we’ll explore, among other things, uniquely subversive vocal strategies, lyrical tropes, and instrumental disturbances that generate social justice critical commentary, philosophies and racial, gender, class, sexual identity, and human rights politics. The course will likewise examine key works of African American literature that explore the radical dimensions of black music in the context of captivity (slave narratives, oratory, sacred radical music), the post-Reconstruction era (classic essays, political tracts and fiction), the Jim Crow era (Harlem Renaissance poetry and theater, the experimental novel), the long Civil Rights and Black Power movements (spoken word, drama, oratory) as well as the landmark protest movements emerging across the 20th and 21st centuries led by black feminist, anti-war, and queer liberation agitators. We’ll round out the term by turning our attention in full to the music, literature, and performances of the Black Lives Matter movement. This course will draw on secondary scholarship in black radical tradition theory, history, sound studies, performance studies, women, gender and sexuality studies, queer theory, critical theory, visual culture studies, and American Studies. HU

* AFAM 201a / RLST 101a, Politics of Black Religion Nicole Turner
This course explores black religions as sites of political engagement and as the object of political concern in the context of national formation. In particular, the course explores how Africans kidnapped into the transatlantic slave trade, Africans enslaved in the Americas, and their emancipated descendants used religions to resist dehumanization of enslavement and to foster communities of hope and love. Further, this course explores the complications of forming religious community within the confines of race, slavery, colonialism, and freedom including gender, class, and social conflicts. Finally, the course explores how scholars in various disciplines have created black religions as objects of study. Course materials include biographies, autobiographies, primary accounts of religious life and records of religious organizations. Students come away from the course with an enhanced sense of the complexities of black religious life and the evolution of black religions as central social and political agents in black life and the black freedom struggle. Class discussions and analyses will fill your toolbox with both methodological approaches to primary sources and technical tools for writing.

* AFAM 202a / HIST 103Ja, Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass David Blight
The life, times, and works of Frederick Douglass, African American abolitionist and leader of the nineteenth century. Douglass’s writings, including autobiographies, oratory, and editorials, and his role as a historical actor in the antislavery and early civil rights movements. Deep inquiry into the craft of biography. WR, HU

* AFAM 212b / ENGL 221b, African American Literature in the Archives Melissa Barton
Examination of African American literary texts within their archival context; how texts were planned, composed, revised, and received in their time. Students pair texts with archival materials from Beinecke Library, including manuscripts, correspondence, photographs, and
This course focuses on personal films by filmmakers who consider themselves artists, activists, or agents of change but are united in their use of the nonfiction format to speak truth to power. In different ways, these films use media to build community and build family and ultimately, to build family albums and archives that future generations can use to build their own practices. Just as the family album seeks to unite people across time, space, and difference, the films and texts explored in this course are also journeys that culminate in linkages, helping us understand nuances of identity while illuminating personal relationships to larger cultural, social, and historical movements.

* AFAM 216a / FILM 433a, Family Narratives/Cultural Shifts  Thomas Harris
This course looks at films that are redefining ideas around family and family narratives in relation to larger social movements. We focus on personal films by filmmakers who consider themselves artists, activists, or agents of change but are united in their use of the nonfiction format to speak truth to power. In different ways, these films use media to build community and build family and ultimately, to build family albums and archives that future generations can use to build their own practices. Just as the family album seeks to unite people across time, space, and difference, the films and texts explored in this course are also journeys that culminate in linkages, helping us understand nuances of identity while illuminating personal relationships to larger cultural, social, and historical movements.

* AFAM 220b / FILM 434b, Archive Aesthetics and Community Storytelling  Thomas Harris
This production course explores strategies of archive aesthetics and community storytelling in film and media. It allows students to create projects that draw from archives—including news sources, personal narratives, and found archives—to produce collaborative community storytelling. Conducted as a production workshop, the course explores the use of archives in constructing real and fictive narratives across a variety of disciplines, such as—participants create and develop autobiographies, biographies, or fiction-based projects, tailored to their own work in film/new media around Natalie Goldberg's concept that "our lives are at once ordinary and mythical."

* AFAM 227a / AMST 227a / ER&M 349a / HIST 137a, From the Voting Rights Act to #blacklivesmatter  Ferentz Lafargue
This course explores the period beginning from 1964 through the emergence of the #blacklivesmatter movement in 2013. Key concepts covered in this course include the Black Panther Party and rise of the Black Power movement; political campaigns of Shirley Chisholm, Jesse Jackson, and Barack Obama. The seminar concludes with an examination of the #blacklivesmatter movement and broader efforts addressing mass incarceration, poverty, and opportunity gaps in education.

* AFAM 228a / AMST 385a / ENGL 265a / HUMS 241a, James Baldwin's American Scene  Jacqueline Goldsby
In-depth examination of James Baldwin's canon, tracking his work as an American artist, citizen, and witness to United States society, politics, and culture during the Cold War, the Civil Rights era, and the Black Arts Movement.

* AFAM 239a / AMST 461a / EDST 209a / ER&M 292a / WGSS 202a, Identity, Diversity, and Policy in U.S. Education  Andrew Dowe and Craig Canfield
Introduction to critical theory (feminism, queer theory, critical race theory, disability studies, trans studies, indigenous studies) as a fundamental tool for understanding and critiquing identity, diversity, and policy in U.S. education. Exploration of identity politics and theory, as they figure in education policy. Methods for applying theory and interventions to interrogate issues in education. Application of theory and interventions to policy creation and reform.

* AFAM 246a / FILM 446a, Introduction to African American Cinema  Nicholas Forster
This course examines the history of African American cinema from the turn of the twentieth century through the present. In recent years, there has been a growing sense that, after decades of unequal hiring practices, black filmmakers have carved a space for artistic creation within Hollywood. This feeling was emboldened when Ryan Coogler’s Black Panther became the highest grossing film of the 2018, seemingly heralding a new age of black-authored and black-focused cinema. This course examines the long history of black cinema that led to the financial and critical success of filmmakers like Coogler, Ava DuVernay, and Jordan Peele. In this course, we survey the expansive work of black American cinema and ask: is there such a category as black film/cinema? If so, is that category based on the director, the actor, the subject matter or ideology of the film? What political, aesthetic, social, and personal value does the category of black film/cinema offer? Some of the filmmakers include Barry Jenkins, Kathleen Collins, Spike Lee, Julie Dash, , Oscar Micheaux, Ava Duvernay, and Charles Burnett.

* AFAM 248b / FILM 430b, Golden Age of Television  Nicholas Forster
Less than a century old, television is one of the youngest but most influential mediums to shape politics, pop culture, and American society. For years, scholars, critics, and fans looked back at the sitcoms and dramas made between 1947-1960 as representative of a “Golden Age of Television” that engaged with a changing society that followed the trauma of World War II. Decades later, in the early 2000s, premium cable shows like The Sopranos, The Wire, Breaking Bad, and Oz suggested that a new Golden Age of Television had arrived. This course pairs these two eras of television to ask: Are there similarities between these two eras of television? How do these stories, represented visually on television, relate to the world outside of the screen? How has the rise of streaming reconfigured our viewing habits and the ways that we understand the world? By looking at two eras of television we work to see what some of the major tropes or threads are, and understand how certain shows that are considered a part of either “Golden Age of Television” create meaning and interest in viewers. Programs include: I Love Lucy, Roots, The Twilight Zone, The Wire, Deadwood, and How to Get Away With Murder.

* AFAM 259a / AMST 309a / EDST 255a, Education and Empire  Talaya Zemach-Bersin
This course offers an introduction to the transnational history of education in relation to the historical development of the U.S. empire both at home and abroad. By bringing together topics often approached separately—immigration, education, race, colonialism, and the history of U.S. empire—we interrogate the ways that education has been mobilized to deploy power: controlling knowledge, categorizing and policing differences, administering unequal paths to citizenship/belonging, forcing assimilation, promoting socio-economic divides, and asserting discipline and control. EDST 110 recommended.
This course investigates the constructive role that cultural memory plays in the shaping of religious identity and practice. In addition to the study of cognitive, sociological, and political theories and their application, students explore topics from the ancient Greco-Roman world and the New Testament to contemporary history, politics, and media culture. By the end of the semester, students are equipped to think in multilateral ways about how transpersonal forms of memory and memory practices have shaped cultural and religious identity from antiquity to the present day. HU

* AFAM 287b / AFST 422b / AMST 465b / FREN 412b / LITR 250b, Postcolonial Theory and Literature  
  Fadila Habchi
  A survey of the principal modes of thought that have animated decolonization and life after colonialism, as seen in both theoretical and literary texts. Concentration on the British and French imperial and postcolonial contexts. Readings in negritude, orientalism, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and novels. Lectures in English; readings available both in French and in English translation. HU RP

* AFAM 291b / HSAR 470b, Pop Art and Black Culture  
  Kobena Mercer
  Pop art strategies among African American artists who contributed a critique of the modernist canon from the 1950s to present. Critical uses of vernacular materials are studied in view of postmodern theories of art and popular culture. HU

* AFAM 297b / HIST 162Jb, Urban Inequality after Civil Rights  
  Elizabeth Hinton
  By examining the impact of social, political, and economic changes in the decades after the civil rights movement, this course addresses historical developments that functioned to increase segregation and income stratification in the United States as a whole, and in African American communities in particular. Topics include radical social movements and urban unrest, the rise of black mayors, the critical withdrawal of federal resources and public services in cities, and mass criminalization. HU

* AFAM 306a / HIST 175Ja, Movements for Black Freedom in the Nineteenth-Century Americas  
  Bianca Dang
  This seminar examines Black freedom in the Americas both as a lived experience and as an idea that moved throughout the region during the long nineteenth century. This course explores the hemispheric impacts and reverberations of multiple, yet connected, movements for Black freedom in the nineteenth-century Americas. It begins with the Haitian Revolution, a revolution enacted and won by enslaved African and Afro-descended people that fundamentally transformed the hemisphere. It concludes with Black people’s resistance to Jim Crow policies in the post-American Civil War era, emphasizing the enduring strength of Black freedom movements. Organized in a series of themes, such as the Law, the Environment, and Indigeneity and Blackness, this seminar highlights the transnational dimensions of movements for Black freedom in the nineteenth century. At the same time, it traces the distinctiveness of each of these movements to provide a broad, yet nuanced, account of the hemispheric and global dynamics of slavery, freedom, race, and gender from the Age of Revolutions to the turn of the twentieth century. WR, HU

* AFAM 313a / THST 319a, Embodying Story  
  Renee Robinson
  The intersection of storytelling and movement as seen through historical case studies, cross-disciplinary inquiry, and studio practice. Drawing on eclectic source materials from different artistic disciplines, ranging from the repertory of Alvin Ailey to journalism, architectural studies, cartoon animation, and creative processes, students develop the critical, creative, and technical skills through which to tell their own stories in movement. No prior dance experience necessary. HU

* AFAM 315a / WGSS 305a, Black Feminist Theory  
  Roderick Ferguson
  This course is designed to introduce you to some of the major themes in black feminist theory. The course does so by presenting classic texts with more recent ones to give you a sense of the vibrancy of black feminist theory for addressing past and present concerns. Rather than interpret black feminist theory as a critical formation that simply puts race, gender, sexuality, and class into conversation with one another, the course apprehends that formation as one that produced epistemic shifts in how we understand politics, empire, history, the law, and literature. This is by no means an exhaustive list of the areas into which black feminism intervened. It is merely a sample of some of the most vibrant ideological and discursive contexts in which black feminism caused certain epistemic transformations. SO

* AFAM 320a / CLCV 338a / LITR 153a, Classics in Africa and the Black Diaspora  
  Emily Greenwood Milne
  The reception and appropriation of Greco-Roman classics in Africa and the black diaspora during the twentieth century. The same classical canon that had been used to furnish arguments for colonialism, imperialism, and racism read by black writers and artists in ways that subverted those arguments. Works include drama from Nigeria and South Africa, Caribbean poetry and autobiography, novels by Ralph Ellison and Toni Morrison, and the Odysseus collages of Romare Bearden. WR, HU

* AFAM 326a / AMST 312a / ER&M 310a / WGSS 298a, Postcolonial Cities of the West  
  Fadila Habchi
  Examination of various texts and films pertaining to the representation of postcolonial cities in the global north and a range of social, political, and cultural issues that concern those who inhabit these spaces. HU

* AFAM 335a / FILM 335a, Black Experimental and Independent Film  
  Nicholas Forster
  Since the birth of cinema over a century ago, black filmmakers have carved out alternative spaces for the production and distribution of cinema. This seminar examines the radical and experimental visions of post war black directors who have queered the screen, developed new modes of representation, and repeatedly challenged the accepted conventions of Hollywood. Frequently weaving documentary with the fictional, the films selected develop a new language of cinema. The seminar begins with William Greaves’ 1968 psychodrama Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One, a personal film that unsettles as it refuses to clarify whether what we are watching is real or a performance. Together, we examine Melvin Van Peebles Sweet Sweetback’s Baadassss Song (1971), which revolutionized independent cinema and made an explicit political call for action. The black feminist visions of Madeline Anderson, a documentarian, and Jessie Maple, the first black woman in the cinematographer's union guide us, before we turn to the work of the L.A. Rebellion. The course finishes in dialogue with the interconnected zones between Hollywood and independent film, focusing on work like Love and Basketball (Gina
Prince-Bythewood, 2000), *Pariah* (Dee Rees, 2011), and *An Oversimplification of Her Beauty* (Terrence Nance, 2012). Though most films are feature length works, we also turn to shorts and excerpts from television. Inhabiting his cinematic space of the undercommons, where artists have forged new visions of the world, we ask: what makes a work independent? What are the terms of experimental film? How can cinema create the cultural and political conditions for change? How have directors rewritten the possibilities of what it means to be, see, and feel in the world? WR, HU

* AFAM 348a / AMST 388a / ER&M 339a / WGSS 332a, James Baldwin 1964-1987: Transnationalism, Exile & Intimacy Leah Mirakhor

The course explores Baldwin’s oeuvre since 1964 until his death in 1987. As critics have noted, there has been a renaissance regarding the work of James Baldwin since 1999, with scholarly publications devoted to his work, public tributes, films, and publications of previously uncollected or out of print works. Critics had hailed Baldwin’s earlier works— *Go Tell It on the Mountain, Giovanni’s Room, Notes of a Native Son* — as his greatest literary accomplishments. After Baldwin’s most celebrated work — *The Fire Next Time* — Baldwin appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1963, under the heading “Birmingham and Beyond: The Negro's Push for Equality.” In this moment, Baldwin became a celebrated public figure in the U.S. and beyond. Our class investigates the period after this height of celebrity, when critics lambasted him for being too political, too angry, too bitter, and losing narrative control and rigor. This two-decade span is significant because Baldwin was witness to the deaths and incarceration of Civil Rights leaders (whom he mourned as friends), the increased surveillance and incarceration of black activists, the Vietnam war, the emergence of Black Power, feminist movements, and gay and queer liberations. During this time, Baldwin lived primarily in Turkey and France, and continued to travel globally. Baldwin’s essays, novels, speeches, and poetry wrestled with how to formally capture and witness the violences of imperialism, homophobia, and racism. Since his death, Baldwin’s work has continued to influence and inform theoretical insights in American studies, literary studies, Black studies, and queer studies. Our class engages with Baldwin’s formal practices, political contexts, and critical interpretations across these fields. Preference given to students with a background in African American Studies, WGGS, ERM, and American Studies. Previous readings of James Baldwin’s works recommended but not required. HU

* AFAM 352a / AMST 438a / ER&M 391a / LITR 295a / WGSS 343a, Caribbean Diasporic Literature Fadila Habchi

An examination of contemporary literature written by Caribbean writers who have migrated to, or who journey between, different countries around the Atlantic rim. Focus on literature written in English in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, both fiction and nonfiction. Writers include Caryl Phillips, Nalo Hopkinson, and Jamaica Kincaid. HU

* AFAM 361b / THST 360b / WGSS 341b, Black Queer Performance Studies Tav Nyong’o

How do race, gender, and sexuality intersect in performance? How have gender nonconformity and sexual dissidence been enacted in African American and black diasporic aesthetic forms? What theories and methods have been developed within black studies, queer studies, and performance studies for approaching these questions politically, historically, and artistically? This course draws primarily on post-1945 American and British theater and performance history. HU

* AFAM 390a / ER&M 419a / SOCY 319a, Ethnography of the African American Community Elijah Anderson

An ethnographic study of the African American community. Analysis of ethnographic and historical literature, with attention to substantive, conceptual, and methodological issues. Topics include the significance of slavery, the racial ghetto, structural poverty, the middle class, the color line, racial etiquette, and social identity. SO

* AFAM 395b / ENGL 296b / ER&M 294b, Auto-Criticism: Writing the Self in the World Claudia Rankine

This course brings together a group of contemporary cultural critics who examine the intersections of aesthetics and politics across visual and literary forms. Our discussions focus on the different formal techniques and practices regarding archive driven scholarly works, public essays, memoirs, and reviews. We discuss different approaches toward interdisciplinary writing and criticism, the public humanities, and engaging scholarly expertise with a broader audience. In preparation for meetings, participants read selections of works from guest scholars and cultural critics. Our hope is to build a discussion about writing across different disciplinary background and domains and engage with how these practices might contribute to our works as scholars, writers, and activists. Workshops with critics are twice a month. WR, HU

* AFAM 396a / AMST 324a / ER&M 363a, Ethnic Studies and the Social Imagination Maryam Parhizkar

Centering the social function of the imagination and its relation to power and culture, this seminar traces poetic creativity as a mode of engaging the political and intellectual labors of ethnic studies. Students are introduced to the creative strategies that scholars, poets, performers, filmmakers, actors, and activists have used to interrogate histories of race, diaspora and dispossession, build collectivity, and re-envision the future. Emphasis on writing, media and performance from the U.S. in the last decade, with transhistorical and transnational links to writings and histories from the twentieth century including: Third World/women of color feminisms, the Black Radical Tradition and abolitionist thought, Caribbean thought, documentary poetics, and queer of color critique. Students study, practice, and apply methods to their own research projects through in-class discussion and writing exercises, reading responses, and assignments that build toward a final project or paper. Prerequisite: ER&M 200, prior course in AFAM, or permission from the instructor. HU

* AFAM 408b / AMST 460b / ENGL 343b, African American Poets of the Modern Era Robert Stepto

The African American practice of poetry between 1900 and 1960, especially of sonnets, ballads, sermonic, and blues poems. Poets include Paul Laurence Dunbar, Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, Gwendolyn Brooks, Margaret Walker, and Robert Hayden. Class sessions at the Beinecke Library for inspection and discussion of original editions, manuscripts, letters, and other archival material. HU
African American Studies

* AFAM 410b, Interdisciplinary Approaches to African American Studies  Crystal Feimster

An interdisciplinary, thematic approach to the study of race, nation, and ethnicity in the African diaspora. Topics include class, gender, color, and sexuality; the dynamics of reform, Pan-Africanism, neocolonialism, and contemporary black nationalism. Use of a broad range of methodologies.  WR, HU, SO

* AFAM 412a / AMST 408a / ER&M 408a, Race and Comedy  Albert Laguna

Introduction to theories of the ludic and to critical race theory. Ways in which comic modes have been utilized by racialized subjects to represent and issue critiques of the dominant culture. Analysis of stand-up comedy, film, television, and novels.  HU

* AFAM 422b / HIST 132Jb, Plantation Societies in the Greater British Caribbean 1627-1761  Staff

This upper level writing and reading intensive seminar considers the development of 'slave societies' in the Greater British Caribbean region from 1627 to 1761. In this course, we explore the development and evolution of the plantation economies and societies of Barbados, Jamaica, and South Carolina, and the shift to a racialized form of slavery in America, first codified in the Barbados Slave Code of 1661. Drawing on a wide range of sources, we explore themes including: the Atlantic slave trade, the consolidation of African slavery in the Americas, divisions of labor on sugar and rice plantations, internal marketing economies, spiritual practices of the enslaved and slave resistance and revolt.  WR, HU

* AFAM 449a / AFST 449a / ENGL 378a, Challenges to Realism in Contemporary African Fiction  Stephanie Newell

Introduction to experimental African novels that challenge realist and documentary modes of representation. Topics include mythology, gender subversion, politics, the city, migration, and the self. Ways of reading African and postcolonial literature through the lenses of identity, history, and nation. Formerly ENGL 449.  WR, HU

* AFAM 451b / ANTH 445b / THST 450b / WGSS 442b, Black Women Moving and the Ethnography of Embodiment  Aimee Cox

In this course we explore the theory and methods employed by Black women ethnographers, artists, and activists invested in transforming the traditional norms of the academic disciplines and creative contexts in which they operate. These boundary erasing, rule breaking women challenge us to think expansively and act courageously in our efforts to not only dream a new world but bring that world into fruition. The life and work of anthropologist/dancer/choreographer/activist Katherine Dunham (1909–2006) provides the framework through which we think through the strategies contemporary scholar-artists employ in their social justice practices, while the concept of movement is our theoretical and methodological foundation for engaging with the work of historical and contemporary Black women change agents. We ask how movement functions in the work of Dunham and these contemporary scholar-artists in terms of: the moving and/or dancing body; movement and migration across geographic territories and imagined space; and participation in social movements. Inspired by the techniques these women have developed for re-imagining the possibilities for moving as an act of social change, we experiment with creating our own embodied artistic practices and research methods. Students should anticipate a holistic experience that requires an openness to physical activity and choreography (accessible to all) as one of our primary tools for both analyzing the multi-media course texts, as well as constructing our own boundary crossing projects.  SO

* AFAM 471a and AFAM 472b, Independent Study: African American Studies  Aimee Cox

Independent research under the direction of a member of the department on a special topic in African American studies not covered in other courses. Permission of the director of undergraduate studies and of the instructor directing the research is required. A proposal signed by the instructor must be submitted to the director of undergraduate studies by the end of the second week of classes. The instructor meets with the student regularly, typically for an hour a week, and the student writes a final paper or a series of short essays. May be elected for one or two terms.

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* AFAM 480a, Senior Colloquium: African American Studies  Aimee Cox

A seminar on issues and approaches in African American studies. The colloquium offers students practical help in refining their senior essay topics and developing research strategies. Students discuss assigned readings and share their research experiences and findings. During the term, students are expected to make substantial progress on their senior essays; they are required to submit a prospectus, an annotated bibliography, and a draft of one-quarter of the essay.

* AFAM 491b, The Senior Essay  Aimee Cox

Independent research on the senior essay. The senior essay form must be submitted to the director of undergraduate studies by the end of the second week of classes. The senior essay should be completed according to the following schedule: (1) end of the sixth week of classes: a rough draft of the entire essay; (2) end of the last week of classes (fall term) or three weeks before the end of classes (spring term): two copies of the final version of the essay.