African American Studies

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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, Special Arrangements, "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 the 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)
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, Phillip Goff, Jacqueline Goldsby, Emily Greenwood, Matthew Jacobson, Gerald Jaynes, Christopher Miller (Emeritus), Robert Stepto (Emeritus), Michael Veal, Shane Vogel

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

Assistant Professors Ernest J. Mitchell, Carolyn Roberts

Lecturers Aaron Carico, Nicholas Forster, Thomas Allen Harris, Elleza Kelley

View Courses

Courses

* AFAM 013b / ENGL 005, Counterarchives: Black Historical Fictions  Staff
While historical records have long been the source from which we draw our picture of the past, it is with literature and art that we attempt to speculatively work out that which falls between the cracks of conventional archival documentation, that which cannot be contained by historical record – emotion, gesture, the sensory, the sonic, the inner life, the afterlife, the neglected and erased. This course examines how contemporary black writers have imagined and attempted to represent black life from the late 17th to the early 20th centuries, asking what fiction can tell us about history. Reading these works as alternative archives, or “counterarchives,” which index the excess and fugitive material of black histories in the Americas, we probe the uses, limits, and revelations of historical fictions, from the experimental and realist novel, to works of poetry and drama. Drawing on the work of various interdisciplinary scholars, we use these historical fictions to explore and enter into urgent and ongoing conversations around black life & death, African-American history & memory, black aesthetics, and the problem of “The Archive.” Enrollment limited to first-year students. Preregistration required; see under First-Year Seminar Program.  HU

* AFAM 016b / AFST 015b / ENGL 015b, 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 017a / ENGL 006a, Black Nature: African American Nature Writing  Staff
What stories do we tell about nature? How are the stories we are able to tell about nature informed by race? And how do these stories shape our understanding of what it means to be human? In contrast to a largely white tradition of nature writing that assumes a superior position outside of Nature, this course undertakes a broad survey of African American nature writing. Over the course of the semester, we read broadly across several genres of African American literature, including: slave narrative, fiction, poetry, drama and memoir. In this way, we center the unique environmental perspectives of those, who, once considered no more than livestock, were the nature over which their white masters ruled. Indeed, as those who were drowned in the ocean during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, forced to cultivate the soil on slave plantations, and hung from trees across the Jim Crow South, black Americans are bound up and entangled in nature in incredibly complex and precarious ways. Perhaps for this very reason, however, we may ultimately come to find in these black nature stories the resources for reclaiming a proper relationship to the Earth, and for imagining a sustainable human life in nature, rather than apart from it. Enrollment limited to first-year students. Preregistration required; see under First-Year Seminar Program.  HU

AFAM 114a / CLCV 114a / HUMS 114a / LITR 155a, Rhetoric, A User’s Guide (from Ancient Greece to the American Present)  Emily Greenwood Milne
This course explores the classical rhetorical tradition and the various ways in which it has been adapted in modern American rhetoric up to the present. We analyze rhetorical theory and practice in ancient Greece and Rome, using classical rhetoric as a lens through which to
explore the craft of speech in American history, and vice versa. Students emerge from this course able to tell *apologia* from *praeterea*, but rather than dry lectures on the history of rhetoric, the approach in lectures and section discussions is comparative through and through, staging curious conversations between ancient and modern as we examine the paths of words through history. We consider what makes individual speeches noteworthy in their local, historical contexts, as well as within a wider rhetorical tradition, and we analyze the role of ideologies of gender, race, class, education, nationality, religion, and sexuality in the construction of the rhetorical subject. In addition, the classical rhetorical tradition of Greece and Rome is compared and contrasted with parallel traditions of classical rhetoric in ancient China and India. Due attention is paid to methodological problems in the history of rhetoric and debates in rhetorical theory. WR, HU

**AFAM 115b / WGSS 125b, “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. HU, RP

**AFAM 118a / ER&M 249a / PSYC 336a / SOCY 153a, Is That Racist?: Theory and Methods for Diagnosing and Demonstrating Racism** Phillip Atiba Goff

How do we know when something is racist? And how do we prove it to those who are skeptical? This course is designed to allow students to go beyond armchair pontificating about racism by exploring a broad range of ways social theorists have defined the term and methods they have used to demonstrate it. Together, we have the opportunity to read, critique, and synthesize scholarship from across disciplines, with the goal of refining our own definition of the term. To accomplish this, we examine the stakes of calling something racist, who benefits and who suffers from a given definition, and how racism functions across contexts (mostly) within the United States. We also learn about popular methods for demonstrating that an idea, feeling, behavior, person, or institution is racist and evaluate how evidence about racism (or lack thereof) can obscure a diagnosis of racism—or lead to an erroneous one. Throughout the course, we take opportunities to translate the theoretical and methodological lessons we learn to the world we live in today, from popular culture to dinner table conversations. While there are no statistical prerequisites, students will be asked to think about the logic of statistical analysis and should be comfortable reasoning about numbers. HU, SO

**AFAM 146b / ECON 171b / EDST 271b, Urban Inequalities and Educational Inequality** Gerald Jaynes

Analysis of contemporary policy problems related to academic under performance 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 162b / AMST 162b / HIST 187b, African American History from Emancipation to the Present** Elizabeth Hinton

An examination of the African American experience since 1861. Meanings of freedom and citizenship are distilled through appraisal of race and class formations, the processes and effects of cultural consumption, and the grand narrative of the civil rights movement. WR, HU

**AFAM 164b / PLSC 263b / URBN 304b, The Politics of "The Wire": HBO's Portrayal of the American City** Allison Harris

This class uses HBO's groundbreaking series “The Wire” to investigate cities, their problems, and their politics. We watch all five seasons of the show as social scientists and use it to learn about important social scientific concepts and theories, and apply those theories to such phenomena as the politics of crime, policing, and local elections. Each week, the assigned readings—articles and book excerpts from political science as well as other social sciences—highlight the social scientific concepts displayed in the assigned episodes and provide context for lectures. All of the assignments work together to expose students to social science, how social science is conducted, and how political science can help us better understand the world around us. SO

**AFAM 166b / AMST 299b / ER&M 299b / HIST 166b, The History of Right Now** Matthew Jacobson

Historiographic narrative of United States history over the past century and critical/methodological practices of thinking historically and of identifying ways in which our present has been conditioned by historical legacies, both momentous and subtle. Topics include the New Deal, WWII, the arms race, Reaganomics, and 9/11 in terms of their lasting influence on American conditions in the present. HU, RP

* AFAM 182b / AMST 286b / ENGL 182b / HUMS 241b, 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. HU
AFAM 186a / LAST 214a / PLSC 378a / SOCY 170a, Contesting Injustice  Elisabeth Wood
Exploration of why, when, and how people organize collectively to challenge political, social, and economic injustice. Cross-national comparison of the extent, causes, and consequences of inequality. Analysis of mobilizations for social justice in both U.S. and international settings. Intended primarily for freshmen and sophomores.  SO

AFAM 192a / AFST 238a / AMST 238a / ER&M 238a, Third World Studies  Gary Okihiro
Introduction to the historical and contemporary theories and articulations of Third World studies (comparative ethnic studies) as an academic field and practice. Consideration of subject matters; methodologies and theories; literatures; and practitioners and institutional arrangements.  SO

AFAM 196a / AMST 196a / ER&M 226a / EVST 196a / SOCY 190a, Race, Class, and Gender in American Cities  Laura Barraclough
Examination of how racial, gender, and class inequalities have been built, sustained, and challenged in American cities. Focus on the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Topics include industrialization and deindustrialization, segregation, gendered public/private split, gentrification, transit equity, environmental justice, food access, and the relationships between public space, democracy, and community wellbeing. Includes field projects in New Haven.  SO

* AFAM 206a / ENGL 234a, Literature of the Black South  Sarah Mahurin
Examination of the intersections between African American and Southern literatures, with consideration of the ways in which the American South remains a space that simultaneously represents and repels an African American ethos.  HU

* AFAM 210b / AMST 445b / HIST 148b, Politics and Culture of the U.S. Color Line  Matthew Jacobson
The significance of race in U.S. political culture, from the “separate but equal” doctrine of Plessy v. Ferguson to the election of an African American president. Race as a central organizer of American political and social life.  HU  RP

* AFAM 213a / AFST 481a / HIST 383a / HSHM 481a, Medicine and Race in the Slave Trade  Carolyn Roberts
Examination of the interconnected histories of medicine and race in the slave trade. Topics include the medical geography of the slave trade from slave prisons in West Africa to slave ships; slave trade drugs and forced drug consumption; mental and physical illnesses and their treatments; gender and the body; British and West African medicine and medical knowledge in the slave trade; eighteenth-century theories of racial difference and disease; medical violence and medical ethics.  WR, HU

* 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 archives 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.  HU

* 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.”  HU

* AFAM 227a / AMST 227a / ER&M 349a / HIST 137a, From the Voting Rights Act to #blacklivesmatter  Ferenz 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.  HU

* AFAM 239a / AMST 461a / EDST 209a / ER&M 292a / WGSS 202a, Identity, Diversity, and Policy in U.S. Education  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.  WR, HU

* AFAM 246a / FILM 246a / THST 249a, 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.  HU
Son uncollected or out of print works. Critics had hailed Baldwin's earlier works—
work of James Baldwin since 1999, with scholarly publications devoted to his work, public tributes, films, and publications of previously
sexuality; inter- and intra-racial conflict; Black radical theatre in the New Deal; and institutional histories of key Black theatre companies.
the relationship between music, dance, spectacle, and drama; anti-lynching drama and folk drama; representations of class, gender, and
and collective acts of self-fashioning on and off the stage. Special attention is given to aesthetic experimentation and its relationship to
performances are possible and what new worlds can be created in those transitions?
mediums: cinema and the stage. The question of authorship in the move from stage to screen will be omnipresent as we ask what kinds of
between ideas of the universal and the specific, all the while attending to the complex and complicated possibilities across two different
and drama. We ask: how have black artists used these two mediums to articulate a political consciousness? How have black writers
of the twentieth century. While there has been a resurgence of interest in black theatre on and off Broadway in recent years, we look at
and asserting discipline and control. EDST 110 recommended. HU
* AFAM 305b / ENGL 258b, African American Autobiography Sarah Mahurin
Examination of African American autobiography, from slave narratives to contemporary memoirs, and how the genre approaches the
project (and problem) of knowing, through reading, the relationships of fellow humans. Chronological consideration of a range of
ranges of representations of race, of space, of migration, of violence, of self, and of other, as well as the historical circumstances
that inform these representations. Prerequisite: one college-level literature course. HU
* AFAM 313b / THST 319b, Embodying Story Staff
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,
aristocratic, cartoon animation, and creative processes, students develop the critical, creative, and technical skills through which
tell their own stories in movement. No prior dance experience necessary. HU
* AFAM 326a / AMST 312a / ER&M 310a / WGSS 298a, Postcolonial Cities of the West Fatida Habchi
Examination of various texts and films pertaining to the representation of postcolonial cities in the global north and a range of social,
and cultural issues that concern those who inhabit these spaces. HU
* AFAM 329a / SOCY 342a, Managing Blackness in a "White Space" Elijah Anderson
White space” is a perceptual category that assumes a particular space to be predominantly white, one where black people are typically
unprecedented, marginalized when present, and made to feel unwelcome—a space that blacks perceive to be informally “off-limits” to people
where on occasion they encounter racialized disrespect and other forms of resistance. This course explores the challenge
black people face when managing their lives in this white space. SO
* AFAM 331a / FILM 329a / THST 332a, Black Film and Theatre Nicholas Forster
This course examines the numerous connections, networks, and associations between black film and black theatre across the latter half
of the twentieth century. While there has been a resurgence of interest in black theatre on and off Broadway in recent years, we look at
critical works created by black writers who created spaces, slid into the cracks, and opened wide the chasms of possibility between cinema
and drama. We ask: how have black artists used these two mediums to articulate a political consciousness? How have black writers
built, ruptured, and amended the demands required by cultural institutions like Broadway and Hollywood? We investigate the tensions
between ideas of the universal and the specific, all the while attending to the complex and complicated possibilities across two different
medias: cinema and the stage. The question of authorship in the move from stage to screen will be omnipresent as we ask what kinds of
performances are possible and what new worlds can be created in those transitions? WR, HU
* AFAM 342a / ENGL 239a / THST 239a, African American Drama through 1959 Shane Vogel
This course surveys the formal development and major themes of African American drama from the antebellum period through 1959. We
examine how dramatists and performers reimagined the various meanings of Blackness in the U.S. public sphere, as well as individual
and collective acts of self-fashioning on and off the stage. Special attention is given to aesthetic experimentation and its relationship to
political theater; transformations of genre and form; Black dramatic theory; historical drama; diasporic connections and disconnections;
the relationship between music, dance, spectacle, and drama; anti-lynching drama and folk drama; representations of class, gender, and
sexuality; inter- and intra-racial conflict; Black radical theatre in the New Deal; and institutional histories of key Black theatre companies. HU
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
systems of racial oppression, including slavery, colonialism, imperialism, incarceration, and policing. This course explores the reception Karl Marx's writings on history, capitalism, and revolution have provided both vehicle and object of critique in their efforts to end
W.E.B. du Bois, C.L.R. James, Franz Fanon, Angela Davis, and Ruth Wilson Gilmore are just a few of the radical thinkers for whom
* AFAM 418a / GMAN 408a, Marx & Abolition Today

represent and issue critiques of the dominant culture. Analysis of stand-up comedy, film, television, and novels.

* AFAM 354a / ENGL 351a / HUMS 370a, Fictions of the Harlem Vogue: Novels, Short Stories, and Novellas of the “Harlem Renaissance”

In this seminar, we examine the major novels, short stories, and novellas of the Harlem Vogue (1923-1934), the first decade of the Negro Renaissance. Key texts by Jessie Fauset, Nella Larsen, Jean Toomer, and Eric Walrond are central, along with lesser-known works by Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes. We consider critical debates about these texts and their standard designation as part of the “Harlem Renaissance.” Careful close reading is emphasized throughout; students are guided through a process of archival research and sustained formal analysis to produce a polished critical essay.

* AFAM 352a / AMST 438a / ER&M 291a / LITR 295a / WGSS 334a, Caribbean Diasporic Literature

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.

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* AFAM 364b / ENGL 277b, Blackness and the Problem

In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), W.E.B. Du Bois famously theorizes blackness as a serial confrontation with a fundamental question: “How does it feel to be a problem?” This question is in many ways the organizing query of black studies and the devoted preoccupation of this class. Over the course of the semester, we undertake a sustained interrogation of the “problem” of being black, from the advent of racial slavery through to its manifold afterlives. Reading widely across a black literary and intellectual tradition spanning multiple centuries, genres, and disciplines, we explore how black writers not only bear witness to the evolution of the problem of being black over time, but also imagine its redress. Furthermore, we explore how blackness has been conceived as a problem not merely in the conventional sense of an unwelcome condition to be solved or overcome, but also a full and ethical way of dwelling in the world.

* AFAM 384a / HIST 141J, Slavery, Race, and Yale

Crystal Feimster and Edward Rugemer

History of the relationship between Yale University and the institution of racial slavery in the United States, beginning with the founding of the University in 1701, through the era of the American Civil War, up to the end of the 19th century. The course also considers the historical relationship between the University and the Black community of New Haven, including the living memory of enslavement.

* AFAM 401a / AMST 411a / ER&M 385a / FILM 453a, Introduction to Documentary Studies

Matthew Jacobson

An introduction to documentary film, photography, and radio for students interested in doing documentary work, as well as for those who simply wish to study the history of the documentary as a cultural form.

* AFAM 402a / RLST 435a, Black Religions in Slavery and Freedom

Nicole Turner

This course explores how enslaved and free black people created and sustained religious communities in the United States during the eras of slavery and freedom. It explores the resonances of African traditions, the role of conjure, Islam and Christianity in sustaining Black people through slavery and the transformations that developed after emancipation. The course challenges the paradigm of black religion as always pointing toward freedom while exploring how the transition in status from enslaved to free was reflected in and influenced by black religious practices and communities. This course explores the religious communities of the “slave quarters,” underground railroad, independent black churches on the political landscape of freedom through the end of the 19th century. This course aims to provide participants with a deeper exploration of the developments within the period from the 19th century through 1915 and the advent of Jim Crow and U.S. imperialism.

* 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.

* AFAM 412a / AMST 408a / ER&M 408a / THST 459a, 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.

* AFAM 418a / GMAN 408a, Marx & Abolition Today

Cecilia Sebastian

W.E.B. du Bois, C.L.R. James, Franz Fanon, Angela Davis, and Ruth Wilson Gilmore are just a few of the radical thinkers for whom Karl Marx’s writings on history, capitalism, and revolution have provided both vehicle and object of critique in their efforts to end systems of racial oppression, including slavery, colonialism, imperialism, incarceration, and policing. This course explores the reception
of Marx by abolitionist thinkers in combination with Marx’s own writings on anti-slavery and anti-colonial struggles. We ask: How have abolitionist movements historically informed, expanded, and challenged Marxian theory and its tactical playbook? How, in turn, have anticommunist, racist, and security–statist ideologies been mobilized to undermine and defeat transformative social movements? Finally, how do contemporary struggles against racial domination within capitalist societies inform our grasp of these archives? While this course focuses on movement-based thinkers, including those mentioned above, we also read critical interventions in the Marxist intellectual tradition by Theodor Adorno, Cedric Robinson, Barbara and Karen Fields, and others. *HU

* AFAM 422b / HIST 132j, Plantation Societies in the Greater British Caribbean 1627-1761 Erin Trabcey
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 445b, Freedom(s) and Unfreedom(s): Slavery and Emancipation in the Atlantic World  Staff
This seminar explores slavery and emancipation over the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The system of racialized slavery prioritized white control. Sometimes this system allowed for the granting of privileges—to selected individuals—without jeopardizing white men’s and women’s control of Black people’s labor through violent force. This seminar recognizes the purpose of racial slavery but seeks to examine how African and Afro-descended people carved out spaces, times, and kinds of freedom before emancipation. Further, it seeks to understand the limitations of Black peoples’ visions of freedom when slavery was ended either by decree or force. This seminar disrupts a linear understanding of slavery and emancipation, that one day black people were enslaved and the next day they were not. We interrogate the meaning of freedom(s) and un-freedom(s) both before and after slavery was ended throughout the Americas. We read about Maroons, free people of color, enslaved people that worked in urban spaces and/or on plantations, and Black soldiers in order to better appreciate the ways in which these historical actors carved out spaces of freedom(s) during a time of almost universal unfreedom. WR, HU

* AFAM 449b / AFST 449b / ENGL 378b, 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 452b / HIST 145j, U.S. History Wars: Public History and the Battles Over the Past  Anna Duensing
This seminar introduces students to the theories and practices of public history in the U.S. context, exploring the possibilities and challenges of researching, crafting, and sharing historical narratives beyond the traditional confines of the classroom. Our focus lies in a series of charged topics and case studies—so called “battles over the past”—that shed light on contentious debates and ongoing problems in public history work. Students learn to think in greater depth about power and the production of history and the pitfalls produced by everyday peoples’ encounters with the past. In turn, they get a sense of how actors with a variety of overlapping and competing interests and investments—historians, educators, survivors, veterans, funders, descendants, activists, and organizers—have contributed to and significantly altered public engagement with the past. With a considerable focus on these last two groups, this course seeks to highlight the power of everyday people in addressing the long-term impact and erasures of anti-Black and racial–colonial violence in the United States and their grassroots efforts to expose the role of history itself in upholding white supremacy and the status quo. HU

* AFAM 453b / EDST 340b / ER&M 438b, Anti-Racist Curriculum and Pedagogy  Daniel HoSang
This seminar explores the pedagogical and conceptual tools, resources and frameworks used to teach about race and racism at the primary and secondary levels, across diverse disciplines and subject areas. Moving beyond the more limited paradigms of racial colorblindness and diversity, the seminar introduces curricular strategies for centering race and racism in ways that are accessible to students from a broad range of backgrounds, and that work to advance the overall goals of the curriculum. Prerequisite: ER&M 200 or an equivalent course addressing histories of race, ethnicity, and migration. SO

* AFAM 456a / AMST 457a / WGSS 386a, American Abolition: From Slavery to Mass Incarceration  Micah Khater
This seminar is an interdisciplinary, historically-grounded examination of Black abolitionism in the United States from the mid-nineteenth century to the twent-century. Students engage deeply with readings in Black Feminist Theory, social and cultural history, literature, Disability Studies, and queer theory in order to investigate how abolitionist frameworks changed over time and, sometimes, remained the same. While this course focuses explicitly on Black activists who espoused abolitionism; it is important to remember that abolition did not always figure into the Black Freedom Struggle. As we navigate the expansion and contraction of abolitionism, we also consider why criminal justice reform, rather than abolition, was a central demand of Black political organizing. In order to better understand the complicated history of twenty-first century abolitionism—including its epistemological ties to histories of slavery—we engage with major paradigms in Black history. AFAM 162 is highly encouraged. HU

* AFAM 459a / AMST 479a / ER&M 402a, The Displaced: Migrant and Refugee Narratives of the 20th and 21st Centuries  Leah Mirakhhor
This course examines a series of transnational literary texts and films that illuminate how the displaced—migrants, exiles, and refugees—remake home away from their native countries. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have produced massive displacements due to wars, genocides, racial, ethnic and religious conflicts, economic and climate change, among other factors. Our course focuses on
several texts that explore questions of home, nation, and self in the context of specific historical events such as the Holocaust, civil rights movements in the U.S., internment, the Indian partition, African decolonization, and Middle Eastern/Arab ethno-religious conflicts and wars. We examine these events alongside the shifting legal and political policies and categories related to asylum, humanitarian parole, refugee, and illegal alien status. Exploring themes such as nostalgia, longing, trauma, and memory, we look at the possibilities and limitations of creating, contesting, and imagining home in the diaspora. Our objective is to debate and develop the ethical, political, geographic, and imaginative articulations of home in an era of mass displacements and geo-political crises. We examine how notions of home are imagined alongside and against categories of race, gender, and sexuality.

* 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.

* AFAM 480a, Senior Colloquium: African American Studies  Staff

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 491a or b, 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.