AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

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FACULTY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES


Associate Professors Jafari Allen, Crystal Feimster, Anthony Reed, Edward Rugemer, Vesla Weaver

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The African American Studies major examines, from numerous disciplinary perspectives, the experiences of people of African descent in Black Atlantic societies such as the United States, the Caribbean, and Latin America, 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 the discipline.

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.

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.

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. Pertinent regulations can be found under Two Majors (http://catalog.yale.edu/ycps/academic-regulations/special-arrangements/#twomajors) in section K of the Academic Regulations.

Requirements of the major 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 162, which can be taken in either order; one course in the humanities relevant to African American studies; 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). During the 2015–2016 academic year AFAM 162 will be offered in the fall and AFAM 160 will be offered in the spring, an inversion of the usual sequence.

Area of concentration Students majoring in African American Studies are required to choose an area of concentration comprising 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.

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 problem and design are to be worked out in each case with a faculty adviser.

Credit/D/Fail For the class of 2017 and subsequent classes, no more than one course taken Credit/D/Fail may be counted toward the major.
Procedures  Students considering a program of study in African American Studies should consult the director of undergraduate studies as early as possible. Areas of concentration and schedules for majors must be approved by the director of undergraduate studies.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE MAJOR

Prerequisites  None

Number of courses  12 term courses

Specific courses required  AFAM 160, 162, 410

Distribution of courses  1 relevant humanities course and 1 relevant social science course, both approved by DUS; 5 courses in area of concentration

Senior requirement  Senior colloquium (AFAM 480) and senior essay (AFAM 491)

Courses

*AFAM 060b / AMST 060b / HIST 016b, Significance of American Slavery  Edward Rugemer

The history of American slavery, its destruction during the nineteenth century, and its significance today. Topics include the origins of slavery, the development of racism, the transatlantic slave trade, the experience of enslavement, resistance to slavery, the abolitionist movement, the process of emancipation, and the perpetuation of slavery and other forms of unfree labor in the twenty-first century. Enrollment limited to freshmen. Preregistration required; see under Freshman Seminar Program.  WR, HU

AFAM 110a / AMST 161a / ANTH 108, Freedom and Identity in Black Cultures  Jafari Allen

Introduction to major themes and topics in African American experiences; basic methods of interdisciplinary analysis and interpretation in African American studies. Topics include black economic, political, and social institutions; self-identity and social status; literature, visual art, film, and music; and political and social issues and their relationship to changing social structures. None.  HU, SO

AFAM 120b, The Black South  Sarah Mahurin

Connections between African American and Southern literatures. Ways in which the American South remains a space that simultaneously represents and repels an African American ethos.  HU

AFAM 140b / AMST 211b / ENGL 293b / ER&M 210b / WGSS 211b, Race and Gender in American Literature  Birgit Rasmussen

The role of literature in constructing representations of America as an idea, a nation, a colonial settlement, and a participant in world affairs. What kind of place America is and who belongs there; the consequences of America’s history for its national literature. Emphasis on the ways texts represent and contest social concepts of race and gender difference.  WR, HU

AFAM 150b / HSAR 380b / WGSS 377b, The Body in Art since 1945  Kobena Mercer

The image of the body in art from 1945 to the present. Themes include identity and changing models of personhood; constructions of gender, race, and sexuality; embodied perception as it is mediated by technology and ecology; issues of medium and materials in painting, sculpture, performance, photography, film, and installation; and the corporeal dimensions of aesthetic experience.  HU

AFAM 160b / AMST 160b / HIST 184b, 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.  HU

AFAM 162a / AMST 162a / HIST 187a, African American History from Emancipation to the Present  Jonathan Holloway

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 172b / HIST 119b, The Civil War and Reconstruction Era, 1845–1877  David Blight

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 195a / PLSC 424a / SAST 440a, Gandhi, King, and the Politics of Nonviolence  Karuna Mantena

A study of the theory and practice of nonviolent political action, as proposed and practiced by M. K. Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. The origins of nonviolence in Gandhian politics and the Indian independence movement; Gandhian influences on the Civil Rights movement; King’s development of nonviolent politics; the legacies and lessons for nonviolent politics today.  SO

*AFAM 202b / HIST 103Jb, 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 210b / AMST 445b / HIST 148Jb, 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
A thematic approach to the history of the American South since Reconstruction. Focus on the political, social, and cultural history of a region that has undergone dramatic change. Topics include white supremacy and African American resistance, industrialization and labor activism, music and literature, the civil rights movement and the rise of the Republican South, and changing regional identity. 

**AFAM 255a / HIST 139Ja, The American South, 1870 to the Present** Glenda Gilmore

Analysis of competing approaches to urban politics and political economy with a focus on how scholars debate the study of power, race, and space. Application of theories to contemporary policy issues such as policing, metropolitan disparities, and inner-city revitalization.

**AFAM 268a / PLSC 245a, Urban Politics and Policy** Cynthia Horan

Examination of how policies informs the formulation and implementation of policies to address urban poverty. Consideration of alternative explanations for poverty and alternative government strategies. Focus on efforts by local organizations and communities to improve their situations within the context of government actions.

**AFAM 270b / PLSC 280b, Poverty, Politics, and Policy in the American City** Cynthia Horan

Examination of slavery in America after abolition and the arrival of freedom. Rather than presuming that slavery simply vanishes, consideration of whether slavery somehow remains, and if so, where its remnants are to be found in national life. Focus on boundary lines imagined to separate slavery and freedom and what might constitute a true state of freedom.

**AFAM 275b, The Afterlives of Slavery in the United States** Aaron Carico

Introduction to the current landscape of socioeconomic inequality in the U.S. Empirical, theoretical, and methodological facets of inequalities in education, occupation, income, wealth, health, neighborhoods, and intergenerational mobility; how these intersect with race and gender. Core questions include how different social groups fare and why, and what types of policies might address existing inequalities.

**AFAM 273a / EP&E 244a / SOCY 314a / WGSS 316a, Inequality in America** Vida Maralani

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.

**AFAM 287b / AFST 412b / FREN 412b / LITR 250b, Postcolonial Theory and Literature** Christopher Miller

Introduction to the social and artistic history of photography in Black Atlantic contexts from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. Uses of the photographic image in shaping understandings of race relations and black identities. Codes and conventions by which photographs are evaluated in terms of truth, reflection, testimony, expressivity, and construction.

**AFAM 346a / HSAR 471a, Black Atlantic Photography** Kobena Mercer

Survey of the plantation, ghetto, and prison. Three spatial forms as foundations for the American project, aligned with colonialism and domination. Theoretical and historical considerations of how production of space and racial differences have been articulated together in United States. Topics include political economy of slavery, ghetto origins, and prison abolition.

**AFAM 355a / AMST 432b / WGSS 436b, Representing Black Women through Image and Text** Hazel Carby

This interdisciplinary seminar explores, both theoretically and historically, how racial formations are bound to the formations of capitalism. Focus on the American scene, with sustained inquiry on slavery, its commodity logics, and their residues. Consideration of the effects of immigration and globalization.

**AFAM 377a / AMST 359a / FILM 424a, Urban Narratives of Injustice in The Wire** Hazel Carby

Archivally-driven exploration of the post-war downtown scene in New York City. Particular attention to the intersections of jazz, nightlife, avant-garde performance, literature, and visual art, within the context of social movements for black and brown power and women’s and gay liberation.

**AFAM 413b / AMST 448b / THST 420b / WGSS 415b, Race, Sex, and Gender in Downtown New York City 1945–1984** Tavia Nyong’o

Visual art in African American books since 1900. Artists include Winold Reiss, Aaron Douglas, E. S. Campbell, Tom Feelings, and the FSA photographers of the 1930s and 1940s. Topics include Harlem Renaissance book art, photography and literature, and children’s books. Research in collections of the Beinecke Library and the Yale Art Gallery is encouraged.

**AFAM 427b / AMST 420b / ENGL 445b, Ralph Ellison in Context** Robert Stepto

The complete works of Ralph Ellison and related works (in various art forms) of his contemporaries, including Wright, Baldwin, Bearden, and Louis Armstrong.

**AFAM 439a / AMST 441a / ER&M 407a, Race and Capitalism** Aaron Carico

Introduction to the current landscape of socioeconomic inequality in the U.S. Empirical, theoretical, and methodological facets of inequalities in education, occupation, income, wealth, health, neighborhoods, and intergenerational mobility; how these intersect with race and gender. Core questions include how different social groups fare and why, and what types of policies might address existing inequalities.

**AFAM 470a, Poverty, Politics, and Policy in the American City** Cynthia Horan

Examination of how policies informs the formulation and implementation of policies to address urban poverty. Consideration of alternative explanations for poverty and alternative government strategies. Focus on efforts by local organizations and communities to improve their situations within the context of government actions.
AFAM 469b / 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. 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 471a and AFAM 472b, Independent Study: African American Studies  Erica James
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  Vanessa Agard-Jones
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  Erica James
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.