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 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 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. Pertinent regulations can be found under Two Majors in section K of the Academic Regulations.

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 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). AFAM 162 will not be offered during the 2017–2018 academic year; students who need to fulfill the history requirement during this academic year should enroll in AFAM 125 during the fall term.

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

Application to the major  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.

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 and or junior semesters abroad can be counted toward the major in consultation with, and the approval of the director of undergraduate studies (DUS).
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)

FACULTY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

Associate Professors  Aimee Cox, Crystal Feimster, Anthony Reed, Edward Rugemer  
Assistant Professors  Rizvana Bradley  
Lecturers  Aaron Carico, Heather Vermeulen

Courses

* AFAM 015a / ANTH 015a, Black Girls in the American City  Aimee Cox
  Exploration of the various ways 'Black Girlhood' has been presented in the realms of popular culture, political discourse, and literature in comparison to the ways in which Black girls represent themselves and their lived experiences. The time period covers from the Great Migration to the present.  
* AFAM 055a / AMST 026a / THST 096a, Protest Music in America and the Black Freedom Struggle  Daphne Brooks
  Exploration of the history, politics, and cultures of protest music across three centuries, including the multiple genres, aesthetics, and performance strategies innovated as forms of black liberation. Topics include uniquely subversive vocal strategies, lyrical tropes, and instrumental disturbances, as well as African American literature that interrogates the radical dimensions of black music in the context of captivity, the post-Reconstruction era, the Jim Crow era, the long Civil Rights, and Black Power movements. Enrollment limited to freshmen. Preregistration required; see under Freshman Seminar Program.  
* 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.  
* AFAM 125a / AMST 125a / EDST 130a / HIST 136a, The Long Civil Rights Movement  Crystal Feimster
  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.  
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.  
AFAM 179a / FILM 387a, The Wire  Rizvana Bradley
  Examination of the journalistic, novelistic, and dramatic roots of the HBO series, The Wire. Treating the entire series as the core text, students review the structure of serial television and draw on interdisciplinary perspectives for thinking about race, class, and criminality.  
AFAM 193a / MUSI 278a, Dub and Hip-Hop, Musical Technologies of the Black Atlantic  Michael Veal and John Klaess
  Historical and music-analytical survey of the history of two genres that transformed the sound and structure of global popular music in the 1970s and beyond: Jamaican dub music and African-American hip-hop music. Narrative focuses on specific recording studios, producers and engineers, and successive forms of music production technology.  
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.
AFAM 197a / AMST 219a / ER&M 246a / HIST 326a / WGSS 346a, Race, Empire, and Atlantic Modernities  Anne Eller and Dixa Ramirez
Interdisciplinary examination of the colonial modernities of the Atlantic world, with focus on the production of racism and colonial difference, as well as popular responses to those discourses.  HU

AFAM 198b / CGSC 277b / EDST 177b / EPRE 494b / PHIL 177b, Propaganda, Ideology, and Democracy  Jason Stanley
Historical, philosophical, psychological, and linguistic introduction to the issues and challenges that propaganda raises for liberal democracy. How propaganda can work to undermine democracy; ways in which schools and the press are implicated; the use of propaganda by social movements to address democracy’s deficiencies; the legitimacy of propaganda in cases of political crisis.  HU

* 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 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 208a / THST 208a, African American Theater and Drama  Tina Post
An introduction to the works of African American dramatists and theater makers from a literary and theatrical-historical perspective. Consideration of how themes of African American theater have changed or remained static over time and how theatrical concerns track with or against African American social movements.  HU

* AFAM 212a / ENGL 221a, 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 ephemera. Readings include Lorraine Hansberry, Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, Jean Toomer, and Richard Wright.  HU

* AFAM 230a / AFST 239a / CLCV 239a / LITR 315a, Conversations between Ancient Greece, Africa, and the Black Diaspora  Emily Greenwood and Sarah Derbew
Investigation of the ways that black diasporic artists have engaged with, revised, and re-imagined Greco-Roman Classics, in order to both expose and critique discourses of racism, imperialism, and colonialism, and as a fertile source of mythological material. Students engage with a diverse array of materials, including collage, graphic novels, novels, oral literature, poetry, and film.  HU

* AFAM 232b / ENGL 233b, Constructions of Whiteness  Claudia Rankine
An interdisciplinary approach to the understanding of whiteness. Discussion of whiteness as a culturally constructed and economic incorporated entity, which touches upon and assigns value to nearly every aspect of American life and culture.  HU

* AFAM 234a / MUSI 234a / RLST 348, Gospel Music in the Church and World  Charrise Barron
Analysis of contemporary African American gospel music, including key musical and lyrical characteristics, as it is currently implemented for liturgical, evangelic, and popular consumption. Attention to the religious and sociocultural contexts that inform gospel composition and performance. Previous course work in African American history or American religious history is helpful but not required.  HU

* AFAM 251b / AMST 397b, Critical Race Theory  Crystal Feinster
Introduction to critical race theory, a radical critique of relations among race, law, and power in U.S. politics and society. Intellectual foundations of the field, with emphasis on African American perspectives; key juridical acts. The centrality of U.S. law in producing social hierarchies of race and racial difference, gender, sexuality, and class. The extension of critical race theory to global analysis of race, immigration, and cultural difference.  HU

* AFAM 252a or b / FILM 272a or b, Cinema of the Black Diaspora  Staff
The politics, aesthetics, and social conditions that inform film movements across the black diaspora, including Caribbean, African, and especially black British cinema. Students consider the visualization of desire, sexuality, and erotic identification, and the political implications of exploring these themes with respect to black embodiment onscreen; and how this knowledge can be brought to bear on the aesthetic significance and cultural growth and development of a black diasporic film tradition. Prerequisite: One AFAM course, or a course on race, gender, sexuality, or instructor permission.  HU

* AFAM 258a / WGSS 255a, Black Speculative Fictions  Heather Vermeulen
Study of black speculative fictions in literature, music, and visual culture. Consideration of how these works investigate the past, critique the present, and imagine other futures. Close analysis of race, gender, sexuality, class, disability, and empire.  HU

* AFAM 270b / PLSC 280b, Poverty, Politics, and Policy in the American City  Cynthia Horan
Examination of how politics 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.  SO
* AFAM 278a / SOCY 360a, Black Urban America As Sociological Memoir  Gerald Jaynes
This interdisciplinary course traces formation of contemporary African American class and family structures through investigation of how evolving racialized class-gender relations shaped twenty-first-century populations of poor and affluent blacks. Sources drawn from social sciences, history, literature to explore relationships between social behavior (agency) and blocked opportunity (structure).  SO

* AFAM 279a / AMST 273a / ENGL 298a / WGSS 342a, Black Women’s Literature  Jacqueline Goldsby
Examination of black women’s literary texts, with a focus on the post–civil rights era. Exploration of the ways writers construct and contest the cultural, ideological, and political parameters of black womanhood. Topics include narrative strategy, modes of representation, and textual depictions of the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, color, ethnicity, nationality, class, and generation. Texts placed within the context of black women’s literary legacies.  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 338a / ENGL 335a / LITR 280a, Caribbean Poetry  Anthony Reed
Survey of major twentieth-century Caribbean poets such as Derek Walcott, Kamau Brathwaite, and Aimé Césaire.  WR, HU

* AFAM 340b / AMST 303b / ER&M 320b / LAST 320b / LITR 332b, Narratives of Blackness in Latino and Latin America  Dixa Ramirez
Focus on the cultural and literary treatments of Afro-Latin American and Afro-Latina/o subjectivity in Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking Latin America and in the United States through the study of literature, historical first-hand accounts, film, and scholarship produced from the 16th century to the present. Themes include slave insurrections, the plantation system, piracy and buccaneering, the black roots of several Latin American musical genres, miscegenation, and the central role of sexuality in race-based social hierarchies.  HU

* AFAM 349b / AMST 326b / HIST 115b / WGSS 388b, Civil Rights and Women’s Liberation  Staff
The dynamic relationship between the civil rights movement and the women’s liberation movement from 1940 to the present. When and how the two movements overlapped, intersected, and diverged. The variety of ways in which African Americans and women campaigned for equal rights. Topics include World War II, freedom summer, black power, the Equal Rights Amendment, feminism, abortion, affirmative action, and gay rights.  HU

* AFAM 385a / ER&M 375a, Plantation, Prison, and Ghetto in the United States  Aaron Carico
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.  HU

* AFAM 390a / ER&M 410a / 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 391b / AMST 309b / ER&M 310b / LITR 333b / WGSS 310b, Zombies, Pirates, Ghosts, and Witches  Dixa Ramirez
Study of the literature and history of the Atlantic Caribbean region (including the U.S. Northeast and Deep South) through its most subservive and disturbing icons—zombies, pirates, ghosts, vampires, and witches. Texts include Francis Drake on piracy, Katherine Dunham on zombies, Lauren Derby on vampires (chupacabras), Maryse Condé and Sandra Cisneros on witchcraft, and Toni Morrison and William Faulkner on ghosts. Films include documentaries and several horror classics, including White Zombie (1932), I Walked with a Zombie (1943), The Serpent and the Rainbow (1988), The Witch (2015), and Get Out (2017).  WR, HU

* AFAM 399a / AMST 341a / ER&M 407a, Race and Capitalism  Aaron Carico
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.  SO

* AFAM 401b / AMST 411b / FILM 453b, Introduction to Documentary Studies  Matthew Jacobson and Anna Duensing
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.  HU RP

* AFAM 410b / AMST 310b / WGSS 410b, Interdisciplinary Approaches to African American Studies  Anthony Reed
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 420a / FREN 417a / MMES 349a, Postcolonial Cities  Christopher Miller and Jill Jarvis
Critical study of literature and film that charts urban spaces in the French colonial empire and the Francophone postcolonial world. Readings and topics include: Paris as imperial capital and site of anti-imperial movements; Dakar, Senegal in Sembene Ousmane’s “Black Girl” (novel and film); Fort-de-France, Martinique in Césaire’s Notebook and Chamoiseau’s Solibo magnifique; Algiers in Assia Djebar’s
Women of Algiers and Samir Toumi’s Alger le cri; Tunis in Abdelwahab Meddeb’s Talismano; Casablanca in Mahi Binebine’s Les étoiles de Sidi Moumen; and Abderrahmane Sissako’s film Timbuktu. Reading knowledge of French required (FREN 160 or above).  

* AFAM 43b / AMST 34b / ENGL 36b, American Artists and the African American Book  
Robert Steppe
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 42a / AMST 45a / ENGL 42a / THST 417a, Literature and Performance in New Orleans  
Joseph Roach
Through perspectives and approaches of English literature, American studies, African-American studies, comparative literature, and theater and performance studies, students explore the sources of creative inspiration that writers and performers find in NOLA, including its cultural mystique, its colonial history, its troubled assimilation into Anglo-North America, its tortured racial politics, its natural and built environment, its spirit-world practices, its raucous festive life, its eccentric characters, its food, its music, its predisposition to catastrophe, and its capacity for re-invention and survival.  

* AFAM 42b / THST 406a, Dance and Black Popular Culture  
Brian Seibert
Examination of dance in black popular culture and of black dance in American popular culture, more generally, from 19th-century slave dances and blackface minstrelsy through MTV and Beyoncé’s Lemonade. Course materials include primary source documents from the white and black press, theoretical and historical essays, and film.  

* AFAM 43b / AMST 420b / ENGL 445b, Ralph Ellison in Context  
Robert Steppe
The complete works of Ralph Ellison and related works (in various art forms) of his contemporaries, including Wright, Baldwin, Bearden, and Louis Armstrong.  

* AFAM 44b / FREN 421b, Intercultural Literary Hoaxes  
Christopher Miller
Study of literary works that test the bounds of propriety by borrowing or stealing an alien identity and passing the imposture off as authentic. Cases in Anglo-American and French-Francophone literature, ranging from the hilarious to the reprehensible. Attention to issues in the ethics of representation. Works include Diderot, Mérimée, George Eliot, pseudo-slave narratives, Camara Laye, Romain Gary, Forrest Carter, JT LeRoy, Paul Smail, Margaret B. Jones, Misha Defonseca. Prerequisite: Reading knowledge of French at the L4 level.  

* AFAM 44b / ANTH 442a, Theory and Methods of Performance Ethnography  
Aimee Cox
Study of the theoretical framework that defines performance ethnography; the methodologies developed and utilized by research practitioners; the similarities and distinctions between ethnography and performance ethnography; and the innovations made in performance ethnography that impact social justice and community-building initiatives in various parts of the world.  

* AFAM 446a / AFST 424a / ENGL 424a, African Urban Cultures and Literatures of the City  
Stephanie Newell
The study of African cities and urbanization through the medium of diverse texts, including fiction, non-fiction, popular culture, film, and the arts, as well as scholarly work on African cities.  

* AFAM 450b / HUMS 460b / WGSS 468b, New Orleans in the American Imaginary  
Joseph Fischel and Crystal Feimster
Exploration of historical and contemporary New Orleans through the city’s literature, scholarship, theater, music, and food. New Orleans as both outlier and representative case of United States neoliberal economic reforms, racialized policing, casino capitalism, and hedonism.  

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. 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.  

* AFAM 471a and AFAM 472b, Independent Study: African American Studies  
Anthony Reed
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  
Crystal Feimster
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  Anthony Reed

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.