AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

Director of undergraduate studies: Anthony Reed, Rm. 202, 81 Wall St., 436-3556; anthony.reed@yale.edu; 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 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).

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

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

Associate Professors  Simone Browne (Visiting), Aimee Cox, Crystal Feimster, Anthony Reed, Edward Rugemer

Assistant Professors  Rizvana Bradley, Carolyn Roberts

Lecturers  Aaron Carico, Thomas Allen Harris, Lauren Meyer

Courses

* 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 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.  HU

AFAM 170a / HIST 479a / HSHM 241a, Sickness and Health in African American History  Carolyn Roberts

A history of American medicine through the African American experience covering the period of slavery through #BlackLivesMatter. Oriented around the complex dynamics of medical abuse and medical resistance, key themes include medicine and slavery; gender and reproduction; medical experimentation and ethics; the rise of racial science; lynching and vigilante violence; segregation and public health; African-descended approaches to health and healing; the rise of the African American medical profession; and black health activism from slavery to #BlackLivesMatter.  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 185b / ENGL 193b, The Harlem Renaissance  Anthony Reed

Study of the social, political, and aesthetic circumstances of the Harlem Renaissance, one of the most important periods in African American life. Focus on constitutive debates and key texts to better understand the origins and aims of the movement and its connection to formal politics and activism. Frequent use of relevant materials in Beinecke Library.  WR, HU

AFAM 186b / LAST 214b / PLSC 378b / SOCY 170b, Contesting Injustice  Elisabeth Wood

Exploration of why, when, and how people organize collectively to challenge political, social, and economic inequality. 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 193b / PLSC 424b / SAST 440b, 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 198b / CGSC 277b / EDST 177b / EP&E 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 206b / ENGL 234b, 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 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 ephemera. Readings include Lorraine Hansberry, Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, August Wilson, and Richard Wright.  HU

* AFAM 213a / HIST 383ja / 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.  

* 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.  

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 231a / ANTH 211a / WGSS 436a, Sex and Gender in the Black Diaspora  
Riché Barnes  

SO

* AFAM 237b, Contemporary Black American Women Poets Experiments in the Lyric  
Claudia Rankine  
This course surveys experimental writing by Black American women poets in the 21st century. Contextualized in the work of black women writers and theorists before them, we foreground attentiveness to experimentaton in relation to language, identity, and the societal pressures that shape them. Augmenting the attention to race with gender, we follow a question posed by poets Evie Shockley and Terrance Hayes: “Does it take something more or different for Black poets to be understood as experimental poets?” The class begins with an overview of poets from Phyllis Wheatley to Audre Lorde in order to understand the literary landscape from which these poets emerge and continues with the work of living writers ranging from M. NourbeSe Philip and Harryette Mullen to Evie Shockley and Simone White, and others in between, as they engage with the lyric across poetic mediums including the poetry collection, the essay, sound and performance, and narrative prose. Devoting two weeks to each poet or poetic pairing, we spend in-depth time with their works, their influences, relevant theoretical writings and criticism, and in many instances, the poets’ own critical writings. Many (if not all) of these writers may visit for in-class discussion and a series of public readings. Prerequisite: introductory level ENGL or AFAM course.  

HU

AFAM 241a / AFST 262a / MUSI 276a, Traditional and Contemporary Musics of Sub-Saharan Africa  
Michael Veal  
A survey of the traditional and popular musics of black Africa, organized both by nation, such as Ghana, and by region, such as Senegambia. Introduction to the fundamental musical principles, materials, and performance contexts of African music.  

WR

* AFAM 256b / FILM 399b / HSAR 320b, The Migrant Image  
Rizvana Bradley  
Cinematic as well as post-cinematic representation of both the migrant and the immigrant body; authorship of the anticolonial struggle. Focus on migrants, refugees, and immigrants, and the emergence of the "global citizen" with respect to digital artistic practices. Prerequisites: FILM 150 or 160; or permission of instructor.  

HU

* AFAM 286a / FILM 275a, Atlanta: Black Media and Poetics  
Rizvana Bradley  
This course takes four modes of black cultural production as its object of inquiry: television, contemporary art, literature, and poetry. Specific focus is on 20th century black cultural production, making use of archives relevant to this historical period. The course begins with a critical viewing and analysis of the acclaimed television show, Atlanta. We spend the first month viewing the show (which will have moved through at most, three seasons), during which students are introduced to key introductory texts on black culture and learn how to read and think about black cultural forms. This unit includes readings by Stuart Hall, James Baldwin, Richard Iton, Brent Hayes Edwards, Daphne Brooks, Tavia Nyong’o, Fred Moten, Paul Gilroy, and others. The course then turn its focus toward the literary and poetic traditions that inform the distinctly southern black vernacular history and aesthetic Atlanta draws from, and has envisioned and crafted for its televisual form. Readings include literary texts and critical prose by: Richard Wright, Zora Neale Hurston, and James Baldwin, as well as from contemporary poets and writers: Claudia Rankine, Fred Moten, Natasha Tretheway, Terrance Hayes, Simone White, Nicole Sealy, Kevin Young, Jericho Brown.  

HU

* AFAM 305a, 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 narratives and their 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 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 346a / HSAR 471a, Black Atlantic Photography  Kobena Mercer
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.  HU

* AFAM 358b / ER&M 462b / SOCY 373b, Ethnography of Policing and Race  Kalfani Ture
Ethnography is the systematic study of culture and a method of knowledge production utilized by social scientists to apprehend, comprehend, and represent cultural groups and other social phenomena. This course explores the ethnographic representations of policing historically alongside the American construction of race. It explores the complex nature of policing in racially concentrated contexts. Additionally, it explores the warrants of ethnography as it relates to the study of policing and race. Students examine the tension between typical racial minorities and policing and the experiences of various other racialize groups that have appeared in and fallen out of focus as targets for racialize police contact.  SO

* AFAM 363a / RLST 352a, Blackness and Mysticism  Staff
The focus on Blackness and Mysticism is to consider the long history of western constructions of the human as an enduring project of racialization. This course considers the concepts of mystic, mysticism, mystical and how they announce the possibility for European personhood that is also modern global racialization. We also consider alternatives to the European thought process, a way to think blackness and its relation to, its disruption of, these concepts.  HU

* AFAM 379b / FREN 410b / LITR 299b, Colonial Narrative, Postcolonial Counternarrative  Christopher Miller
Readings of paradigmatic, colonial era texts that have provoked responses and rewritings from postcolonial writers and filmmakers. In some cases the rewriting is explicit and direct, in other cases the response is more oblique. Both profound differences of perspective and unexpected convergences will emerge. Readings may include: Aimé Césaire's A Tempest after Shakespeare's Tempest, Kamel Daoud's The Meursault Investigation after Camus's The Stranger, and Claire Denis's film Chocolat after Ferdinand Oyonno's Houseboy.  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 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 406b / AMST 405b / ENGL 405b, Autobiography in America  Robert Stepto
A study of autobiographical writings from Mary Rowlandson's Indian captivity narrative (1682) to the present. Classic forms such as immigrant, education, and cause narratives; prevailing autobiographical strategies involving place, work, and photographs. Authors include Franklin, Douglass, Jacobs, Antin, Kingston, Uchida, Balakian, Rodriguez, and Bechdel.  WR, HU

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

* AFAM 428a / 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.  WR, HU

* AFAM 440a / FREN 421a, 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 Säml, Margaret B. Jones, and Misha Defonseca. Prerequisite: Reading knowledge of French at the L4 level.  HU
* AFAM 447b / AMST 423b / HIST 199Jb, New Directions in Caribbean History  Edward Rugemer
An exploration of recent scholarship on the history of the Caribbean, a region defined by the islands of the Caribbean Sea, the Caribbean coastal region of Central America, and the northern littoral of the South American mainland north of Brazil. The course focuses on the establishment of European colonies in the 17th century through the emergence of independent states in the region today. Key themes include the operation of racial slavery; the abolition of slavery and the process of emancipation; the systems of forced labor that followed abolition; migration; and the persistence of race, religion, and imperialism in the formation of Caribbean societies. Enrollment priority given to upper-level students. WR, HU

* AFAM 449a / AFST 449a / ENGL 449a, 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. WR, HU

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. SO

* 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 476b / HUMS 448b / WGSS 480b, Race & Caste  Hazel Carby and Inderpal Grewal
The seminar, as an interdisciplinary course in cultural studies, puts into conversation the fields of African American studies; South Asian Studies; Ethnicity, Race & Migration Studies; and Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies. It draws from the social sciences, sciences, and humanities. Ideas of race and caste and the social practices that have evolved from these forms of differentiation are seen as disconnected, belonging to divergent spaces and times. This course examines how race and caste are intimately related and, indeed, co-constitutive within British colonial and imperial regimes of power. Drawing on examples from the Caribbean, India, North America, South Africa, and the UK, we examine the production of knowledge and systems of classification through political theory, political economy, representational practices, and the history of science. The course focuses on the consequences of economic, political, and social differentiation not only in terms of oppression and exploitation, but also through understanding how race and caste have been foundations for mobilizing and organizing for rights, resistance, and liberation. HU, SO

* 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 491b, The Senior Essay  Staff
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.