

# AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

81 Wall Street, 203.432.1170  
<http://afamstudies.yale.edu>  
M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

## **Chair**

Phillip Atiba Goff

## **Interim Director of Graduate Studies**

Jonathan Howard

**Professors** Nana Adusei-Poku, Elijah Anderson, David Blight, Daphne Brooks, Marlene Daut, Erica Edwards, Roderick Ferguson, Kaiama Glover, Jacqueline Goldsby, Allison Harris, Elizabeth Hinton, Matthew Jacobson, Gerald Jaynes, Tavia Nyong'o, Edward Rugemer, Phillip Atiba Solomon, Michael Veal, Shane Vogel

**Associate Professors** Crystal Feimster

**Assistant Professors** Na Na Adusei-Poku, Allison Harris, Jonathan Howard, Elleza Kelley, Ernest Mitchell, Carolyn Roberts

**Lecturers** Thomas Allen Harris, Tasha Hawthorne, Ferentz Lafargue, Sarah Mahurin

## **FIELDS OF STUDY**

The Department of African American Studies offers a combined Ph.D. in conjunction with several other departments and programs: currently, American studies; anthropology; English; film and media studies; French; history; history of art; music; political science; psychology; religious studies; sociology; Spanish and Portuguese; and women's, gender, and sexuality studies. Within the field of study, the student will select an area of concentration in consultation with the directors of graduate studies (DGS) of African American studies and the joint department or program. An area of concentration in African American studies may take the form of a single area study or a comparative area study. Students may focus on the history or artistic productions of any region within the African diaspora. Students are encouraged to draw from multiple disciplines in their intellectual pursuits, both in preparation for their qualifying examinations and in their dissertation research and writing. An area of concentration may also follow the fields of study already established within a single discipline, for example, race/minority/ethnic studies in a combined degree with sociology; the study of Black political thought, or voting patterns, in a combined degree with political science; a study of racial bias in a combined degree with psychology; or an ethnography in a combined degree with either anthropology, or sociology. An area of concentration must either be a field of study offered by the joint department or fall within the rubric of such a field. Please refer to the description of fields of study of the prospective joint department or program.

This is a combined degree program. To be considered for admission to this program, applicants must indicate both African American studies and one of the participating departments/programs listed above.

## REQUIREMENTS FOR TRANSFER INTO THE AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES COMBINED PH.D. PROGRAM

1. Students applying for transfer into the combined Ph.D. program must already have taken AFAM 505 or be taking it in the term of application; must provide a plan outlining the AFAM courses already taken and those they will take; and must submit a research statement that explains how the combined Ph.D. will advance their research interests.
2. Students must provide two letters of recommendation: one from their adviser in the joint department or program, unless that adviser is jointly appointed with African American studies, in which case a letter from the student's DGS in the joint department or program is required; *and* a second letter from a faculty member in African American studies who commits to being the student's adviser throughout the completion of the dissertation.
3. Students cannot apply sooner than the second term of the first year and must apply by January 3, which is the deadline for African American studies' annual admissions cycle. Preference will be given to students in the second year of their Ph.D. program. Applications will receive a faculty vote early in the spring term to approve or reject, and results will be communicated to the student no later than spring break.

## SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PH.D. DEGREE

Students will be subject to the combined Ph.D. supervision of the African American Studies department and the relevant participating department or program. The student's academic program will be decided in consultation with an adviser, the DGS of African American Studies, and the DGS of the participating department or program and must be approved by all three. Students are required to take five courses in African American studies, generally at least one course each term. Any variance in scheduling requires DGS approval. Core courses are (1) *Theorizing Racial Formations* (AFAM 505), which is a required course for all first-year graduate students in the combined program and (2) *Dissertation Prospectus Workshop* (AFAM 895 and AFAM 896), a two-term course, which graduate students in their third year of study must satisfactorily complete. This workshop is intended to support preparation of the dissertation proposal; each student will be required to present the dissertation prospectus orally to the faculty and to turn in a written prospectus draft by the end of spring term. Three other graduate-level African American studies courses are required: (1) a history course, (2) a social science course, and (3) a course in literature or culture.

Qualifying examinations and the dissertation proposal will be administered jointly by the African American studies department and the participating department or program and must be passed within the time required by the participating department or program. A current tenured or ladder faculty member in African American studies must serve on the qualifying examination committee, and on the dissertation committee. Both the qualifying exams and the dissertation must have an African American studies component. The total number of courses required will adhere to the requirements of the participating department or program. Each student must complete the minimum number of courses required by the participating department or program; African American studies courses (excepting the *Dissertation Prospectus Workshop*) count toward the participating department's or program's total. The number of courses

that will count depends on the joint department or program. For details of these requirements, see the special requirements of the combined Ph.D. for the particular department or program in this bulletin. Students will be required to meet the foreign language requirements of the participating department or program. (See Degree Requirements under Policies and Regulations.) Students will not be admitted to candidacy until all requirements, including the dissertation prospectus, have been met and approved by the Graduate Studies Executive Committee of the African American Studies department and the participating department or program. A student who intends to apply for this combined Ph.D. in African American Studies and another department or program should consult the other department's or program's Ph.D. requirements and courses.

The faculty in African American Studies consider teaching to be an essential component of graduate education, and students therefore will teach, under the supervision of departmental professors, in their third and fourth years.

## MASTER'S DEGREES

**M.Phil.** See Degree Requirements under Policies and Regulations.

**M.A. (en route to the combined Ph.D.)** Students will be awarded a combined M.A. degree in African American studies and the relevant participating department or program upon successful completion of all course work except the Dissertation Prospectus Workshop, which is taken in the student's third year of study. See also Degree Requirements under Policies and Regulations.

More information is available on the department's website, <http://afamstudies.yale.edu>.

## COURSES

For course offerings in African languages, see African Studies.

### **AFAM 505a, Theorizing Racial Formations** Staff

A required course for all first-year students in the combined Ph.D. program in African American Studies; also open to students in American Studies. This interdisciplinary reading seminar focuses on new work that is challenging the temporal, theoretical, and spatial boundaries of the field.

### **AFAM 510a / ENGL 938a, Black Geographic Thought** Elleza Kelley

This seminar focuses on classic and recent scholarship that constitute the interdisciplinary subfield of "black geographies." Bearing in mind that black studies is not merely the study of black people but, as Alexander Weheliye puts it, "a substantial critique of Western modernity and a sizable archive of social, political, and cultural alternatives," this seminar explores the critiques and alternatives that black studies brings to bear on the feeling, knowledge, representation, and politics of space and place. While we study scholarship across discipline (by geographers, architectural theorists, historians, etc.), we pay particular attention to how cultural production, like literature and visual art, articulates black geographic and spatial thought and how it might engage with, challenge, and enrich the fields of critical and literary geographies. Along the way, our study of literature is transformed by careful attention to the geographic, architectural, and ecological. We read the work of scholars like Katherine McKittrick, Clyde Woods, and AbdouMaliq Simone alongside creative works by poets,

novelists, artists, filmmakers, architects, and more, from Toni Morrison and Dionne Brand to Torkwase Dyson and Mati Diop.

**AFAM 522a / AMST 721a / ENGL 935a, The Beautiful Struggle: Blackness, the Archive, and the Speculative** Daphne Brooks

This seminar takes its inspiration from concepts and questions centering theories that engage experimental methodological approaches to navigating the opacities of the archive: presumptively “lost” narratives of black life, obscure(d) histories, compromised voices and testimonials, contested (auto)biographies, anonymous testimonies, textual aporias, fabulist documents, confounding marginalia. The scholarly and aesthetic modes by which a range of critics and poets, novelists, dramatists, and historians have grappled with such material have given birth to new analytic lexicons – from Saidiya Hartman’s “critical fabulation” to José Estaban Muñoz’s “ephemera as evidence” to Tavia Nyong’o’s “Afrofabulation.” Such strategies affirm the centrality of speculative thought and invention as vital and urgent forms of epistemic intervention in the hegemony of the archive and open new lines of inquiry in black studies. Our class explores a variety of texts that showcase these new queries and innovations, and we also actively center our efforts from within the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, where a number of sessions are held and where we focus on Beinecke holdings that resonate with units of the course. Various sessions also feature distinguished guest interlocutors via Zoom, who are on hand to discuss the specifics of their research methods and improvisational experimentations in both archival exploration and approaches to their prose and poetic projects.

**AFAM 695b / MUSI 695b, The Study of African American Music** Braxton Shelley

This seminar explores the musical objects, critical debates, and scholarly methodologies that have shaped the study of African American music. How do artists, critics, and theorists differently define “Black music”? How do competing conceptions of Black musical traditions reflect and resist commercial and academic modes of categorization? In this course, we attend to the intersections and divergences that emerge from myriad attempts to define and discipline the musical products of black experience, converting Blues, Funk, Gospel, Hip-Hop, House, Jazz, Reggae, R&B, Soca, Soul, the Spiritual, and many other idioms, into a single knowledge-object. We investigate the intellectual genealogies and scholarly disagreements that arise from the interdisciplinary scope of Black music studies, including: cultural history, cultural studies, ethnomusicology, literary studies, historical musicology, music theory, sociology, and theology. Required for students in the Joint Ph.D. Program in Music and African American Studies, this reading-intensive graduate course brings together texts that have defined the interdisciplinary study of Black music and new work that is remaking the field.

**AFAM 707b / CPLT 707b / MHHR 707b, What Is An Archive?** Melissa Barton

This graduate seminar seeks to answer the question in the course’s title by looking closely at professional archival descriptive practices and broader, looser uses of the term in cultural and literary studies, art history, history, and beyond. By looking at these distinct but curiously, even suspiciously, concurrent genealogies, we seek to explain why the term “archive” has become so demonstrably popular, in multiple senses of the word, even as archival practice has become more professionalized and specialized. Put differently, many humanistic fields have undergone “archival turns” in recent decades, and many cultural and performance theorists, critics, and historians have advanced arguments about “the archive” as a monolithic concept, perhaps “the archives” as

an abstract location where the work begins (e.g., “I’ve been in the archives”), or perhaps “my archive” as the group of texts I interpret and cite. Meanwhile, professional archivists regularly publish tweets, articles, and blog posts asking them to stop it. This course hopes to ponder and maybe even find a way toward an answer to the question: What is up with this? We explore archives in theory and practice, as both figurative and literal, both concrete and abstract, repositories for “primary” inquiry into the past. We consider theories of archives from humanities fields and the archival profession (including the emerging subfield “critical archival studies”), and we discuss how archives are made, how they are used, how they are made usable, what may be assumed or elided in the making and use of archives, and the popularity of, and tensions around, “the archive” as a concept. Topics and keywords include: what is primary or original? What is order or process? What is a trace, and how is it made distinct from the great mass of human traces? What does it mean to collect, to curate? What is an archival silence, and what might be comparable notions of archival noise? What does it mean to recover or discover? In addition to readings, students complete two assignments: a provenance research assignment and a descriptive project in the form of a survey of an existing collection at Yale or a subject guide to a collection or group of collections.

**AFAM 709a / HIST 709a / HSHM 763a, Readings in Race and Racism in Medicine, Science, and Healthcare** Carolyn Roberts

This graduate reading seminar invites students to study historical and contemporary texts related to race and racism in medicine, science, and healthcare. Our primary focus is anti-Black racism, and we study connections between the period of slavery and present-day issues in healthcare, biomedical research, reproductive justice, and medical and nursing education and practice. Students from any department and discipline are welcome to join this small seminar, which privileges deep listening, close reading, community, and care.

**AFAM 719a / HIST 945a / HSHM 771a, Researching and Writing Histories of Health, Medicine, and Science** Carolyn Roberts

This small graduate seminar is for students currently researching and writing histories of health, science, and medicine. Students learn about slow scholarship, the politics of the archive, and research organization and management and explore the craft of writing. Preference is given to graduate students in history, the history of science and medicine, and African American studies.

**AFAM 752b / AMST 937b / HIST 937b / HSHM 761b, Researching and Writing Medicine, Health, and Empire** Carolyn Roberts

This graduate research course is limited to a small number of graduate students who are currently involved in research projects that touch on any issues related to health, medicine, and the body in the context of slavery, colonialism, or neocolonialism. The course includes visits to diverse archives on campus, discussions of archival best practices, and digital organizational tools. The course provides graduate students with a balance of support and independence as they carry out their research. Graduate students in any discipline are warmly welcomed to participate in a compassion-based research community that prioritizes values of deep listening, presence, and care.

**AFAM 766b / AMST 691b / HIST 737b, Research Seminar in U.S. Political Economy**  
Jennifer Klein

Research seminar oriented around themes and issues in U.S. political economy from the late nineteenth century through the end of the twentieth. Readings in the first part of

the term look at various approaches to writing about political economy: for example, business history, intellectual history, labor history, biography, local monograph, or transnational history. Research projects explore new possibilities for writing about labor, business, the state, and capitalism.

**AFAM 773a / SOCY 630a, Workshop in Urban Ethnography** Elijah Anderson

The ethnographic interpretation of urban life and culture. Conceptual and methodological issues are discussed. Ongoing projects of participants are presented in a workshop format, thus providing participants with critical feedback as well as the opportunity to learn from and contribute to ethnographic work in progress. Selected ethnographic works are read and assessed.

**AFAM 778a / PSYC 728a, Research Topics in Racial Justice in Public Safety** Phillip Atiba Solomon

In this seminar, graduate students and postdoctoral fellows have a chance to present their research, and undergraduate research assistants learn about how to conduct interdisciplinary quantitative social science research on racial justice in public safety. The course consists of weekly presentations by members and occasional discussions of readings that are handed out in advance. The course is designed to be entirely *synchronous*. Presenters may request a video recording if they can benefit from seeing themselves present (e.g., for a practice talk). This course is intended for graduate students, postdocs, and undergraduates interested in conducting original quantitative social science research about race and public safety. Permission of the instructor is required.

**AFAM 797b / AMST 797b / HIST 797b, Atlantic Abolitions** Marcela Echeverri Munoz

This readings course explores the historiography on the century of abolition, when the new states of the Americas abolished racial slavery. Beginning with the first abolitions in the U.S. North during the 1780s, we consider the emergence and process of abolition throughout the Atlantic world, including the Caribbean, Spanish America, and Brazil, through the 1880s.

**AFAM 817a / HIST 741a, Research Seminar on the Early Atlantic World** Edward Rugemer

This research seminar explores various approaches to writing the history of the early Atlantic world, with particular emphasis on race and slavery, from 1500 to about 1850. Every student writes a publishable article based upon original research.

**AFAM 850b / AFST 937b / ENGL 6137b, African Urban Cultures: Mediations of the City** Stephanie Newell

This course approaches the study of African cities and urbanization through the medium of diverse texts, including fiction, nonfiction, popular culture, film, and the arts, as well as scholarly work on African cities. Through these cultural “texts,” attention is given to everyday conceptualizations of the body and the environment, as well as to theoretical engagements with the African city. We study urban relationships as depicted in literature and popular media in relation to Africa's long history of intercultural encounters, including materials dating back to the 1880s and the 1930s. Previously ENGL 937.

**AFAM 860b / ENGL 6157b / MHHR 708b, Ecologies of Black Print** Jacqueline Goldsby

A survey of history of the book scholarship germane to African American literature and the ecosystems that have sustained black print cultures over time. Secondary works consider eighteenth- to twenty-first-century black print culture practices, print object production, modes of circulation, consumption, and reception. Students write critical review essays, design research projects, and write fellowship proposals based on archival work at the Beinecke Library, Schomburg Center, and other regional sites (e.g., the Sterling A. Brown papers at Williams College). Previously ENGL 957.

**AFAM 895a, Dissertation Prospectus Workshop** Shane Vogel

A noncredit, two-term course, which graduate students in their third year of study must satisfactorily complete. This workshop is intended to support preparation of the dissertation proposal. o Course cr