

# BLACK STUDIES

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

## **Chair**

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**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 Black 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 Black Studies and the joint department or program. An area of concentration in Black 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 Black Studies and one of the participating departments/programs listed above.

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

1. Students applying for transfer into the combined Ph.D. program must already have taken AFAM 5005 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 Black 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 Black 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 Black 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 Black 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 Black 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 Black studies, generally at least one course each term. Any variance in scheduling requires DGS approval. Core courses are (1) *Theorizing Racial Formations* (AFAM 5005), which is a required course for all first-year graduate students in the combined program and (2) *Dissertation Prospectus Workshop* (AFAM 8095 and AFAM 8096), 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 Black 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 Black 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 Black Studies must serve on the qualifying examination committee, and on the dissertation committee. Both the qualifying exams and the dissertation must have an Black 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; Black 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 Black Studies department and the participating department or program. A student who intends to apply for this combined Ph.D. in Black Studies and another department or program should consult the other department's or program's Ph.D. requirements and courses.

The faculty in Black 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 Black 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

**AFAM 5005a, Theorizing Racial Formations** Erica Edwards

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 5610a / AMST 6612a / ENGL 5761a / FREN 7610a, Caribbean Literary and Cultural Studies** Marlene Daut

This course examines eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writing (in translation, where applicable) by writers from the Anglophone, Francophone, and Hispanophone islands that make up the Caribbean. Haitian independence in 1804 ushered in a vibrant and diverse print culture that included poetry, plays, newspapers, and historical writing. From the pages of *La Gazette Royale d'Hayti* (1811–1820), to the poems of Jean-Baptiste Romane (1807–1858), to the historical writings of Louis-Félix Boissard-Tonnerre (1776–1806), to the operas of Juste Chanlatte (1766–1828), there arose a distinct nineteenth-century literary culture in Haiti. Beginning with national literary developments in Haiti, this course expands to consider writing from Barbados, Cuba, Trinidad, Jamaica, Antigua, and Bermuda. These writings, both fictional and non-fictional, help us to think about whether and/or how a coherent early Caribbean literary tradition developed across geographical, linguistic, national, and imperial lines.

**AFAM 6227a / ENGL 6847a, Black Environmental Thought** Jonathan Howard

What if the greatest threat to life on Earth is not humanity in general, but the specific practice of human being indexed by whiteness? Since the advent of the "modern world," race has been a defining, though often obscured, fault line along which the

human enterprise has unfolded. So what would a racial accounting of humanity's environmental harm entail? Who else are we as a species beyond the norms and aspirations enshrined by whiteness? And who must we become before Nature phases us out? If there is a future for humanity on Earth, it will not come apart from a serious reckoning with these questions. Guided by these questions, this course interrogates how the West has mutually imagined the category of the human as an aspiring independence from and dominion over Nature, on the one hand, and white, on the other. But beyond uncovering the unspoken whiteness of "the human" and its environmental harm, this course further takes up the alternative visions of human being and nature expressed within black nature writing. By undertaking a broad survey of this literary tradition, we consider the unique environmental perspectives of those, who, once considered no more than livestock, *were* the nature over which their masters ruled and consequently could not so easily imagine their humanity apart from it. Perhaps for this very reason, we may ultimately come to locate in black nature writing the resources for imagining a sustainable human life in nature, rather than apart from it.

**AFAM 7119b / HIST 8900b / HSHM 7710b, 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 7152b / AMST 8867b / HIST 8902b / HSHM 7610b, Researching and Writing Medicine, Health, and Empire** Carolyn Roberts

This small graduate seminar is for students currently engaged in research and writing projects that touch on issues related to health, medicine, science, or the body in the context of slavery, colonialism, or neocolonialism. Students will explore their relationship to the craft of writing, their identity as "authors," the politics of the archive, the methodological and evidentiary challenges in their work, and tools that will level up their research organization and management skills. The course provides graduate students with a balance of support and independence as they further their research and writing projects. Graduate students in any discipline are warmly invited to participate in a compassion-based research community that prioritizes values of deep listening, presence, and care

**AFAM 7196b / AMST 7796b / HIST 8130b, Slave Systems in World History** Edward Rugemer

Slavery has been a protean institution in world history, with pre-historic origins and nearly countless manifestations across time and place. This readings course explores the history of slavery over the *longue duree*, moving through time from the ancient world through the nineteenth century with readings on some of the major slave systems in world history. One goal of the course is to situate the well-known slave systems of the Americas within a broader historical context. Student writing includes a historiographical essay on one of the major slave systems discussed in the course.

**AFAM 7771a / AMST 7771a, Affect Theory** Tav Nyong'o

This graduate seminar traces the emergence of affect, sense, feeling, and mood as critical keywords in American studies. Particular attention is paid to the manner in which queer theorists such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Lauren Berlant, Ann Cvetkovich,

Heather Love, Jennifer Doyle, Jonathan Flatley, and José Esteban Muñoz developed the concept in what has been called “the affective turn” in queer and feminist aesthetics. The philosophical basis of affect theory in the writings of Spinoza, Heidegger, and Deleuze forms the core of the seminar. We also look to an alternate genealogy for affect politics in the writings of Bergson and Deleuze on fabulation. We consider the psychoanalytic take on affect, in particular, the object relations school of Klein and Winnicott, and we read critics who contrast affect theory with trauma theory. Marxist contributions to affect theory include readings from Virno (on humor), Hardt and Negri (on affective labor), and Ranciere (on the distribution of the sensible). The writings of Jasbir Puar and Brian Massumi on the affective politics of contemporary war, empire, and societies of control are also considered, as are writings by Fred Moten, Saidiya Hartman, and Frank Wilderson on optimism and pessimism as moods/modalities of black studies.

**AFAM 7973a / SOCY 6300a, 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 7978a / PSYC 7280a, 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 8095a, 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

**AFAM 8128b / HIST 7430b, Politics and Belonging in Post-Emancipation Americas** Anne Eller

This course examines literature about emancipation contests throughout the Americas, with a preponderance of texts about the Caribbean and the US South. The hemispheric approach seeks working peoples' negotiations within, outside, and across national frames. The course builds on decades of literature that dismantle old binaries between enslavement and “freedom,” considering contests from 1804 through World War I. The course ponders freedom's many meanings, from the intimate to the electoral. Land, gendered power and violence, state services, and state abuse are key themes. Finally, alternative political allegiances and local authorities, often outside the auspices of a formal state, will animate discussions.

**AFAM 8250a / AFST 9937a / ENGL 6137a, 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.