African American Studies

Chair
Venise T. Berry

Undergraduate major: African American studies (B.A.)
Undergraduate minor: African American studies
Graduate degree: M.A. in African American world studies
Graduate certificate: African American studies
Faculty: https://clas.uiowa.edu/afam/people/faculty
Website: https://clas.uiowa.edu/afam/

African American studies (AAS) examines the unique experiences of African-descended people throughout the diaspora. Drawing on a rich tradition of civic engagement, scholarship, and teaching, the faculty introduce students to the foundations of African American studies and collaborate with them to develop projects that lead to new intellectual perspectives. Courses and research revolve around three core areas of study: history, religion and the diaspora; literature and performing arts; and media, politics, and society. Within these areas, students carefully consider the construction of race, ethnicity, and identity and the performance of class, gender, and sexuality. Students who take courses in African American studies acquire a special skill set that enables them to critically interrogate their culture and the world around them.

Cocurricular Activities

African American Cultural Center
African American studies encourages students to use the African American Cultural Center (Afro-House). The center serves as a museum and library housing educational artifacts. Offering enrichment for the University of Iowa and promoting diversity among all members of the Iowa City community, the center also provides a cultural hub for African American students.

African American Studies Student Association
The African American Studies Student Association aims to promote knowledge about black life in the United States by hosting speakers, publicizing artistic performances, and sponsoring relevant programs with various campus collaborators. The association is primarily designed for AAS majors and minors; however, any University of Iowa student interested in African American studies is eligible to become a member.

Seminar and Lecture Series
The African American Studies Seminar Series and the Darwin Turner Lecture bring important scholars and creative artists to the University of Iowa campus. Guests of the lecture and seminar series have included Amiri Baraka, Trudier Harris, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Michelle Wallace, Mary Patillo, J. Lorand Matory, Portia Maultsby, Paul Butler, Gabrielle Forman, and Valerie Smith.

Graduate Seminar
Graduate students from a range of disciplines in the Colleges of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Law, Public Health, and Education, and the Tippie School of Business, as well as elsewhere are encouraged to participate in the program's interdisciplinary graduate seminar, which is dedicated to research methods and advanced readings in African American studies.

African American Studies Annual Awards Program
Each spring, the African American studies program honors AAS majors and minors, along with exceptional University of Iowa students and organizations. Scholarships are awarded by the Marie Nesbitt Foundation, the African American Studies Program, the National Association of Black Journalists, and the Iowa Black Alumni Association. Awards are offered that recognize student efforts in community service, leadership, creative arts, graduate research, cultural appreciation, and academic achievement.

Graduate Student Mentoring and Advising
The African American Studies Program sponsors several intellectual and social gatherings for graduate students across multiple disciplines. During these events, students connect with others interested in African American studies and receive advice about becoming faculty members, being productive members of the academic profession, and career options outside of academia.

Iowa Black Alumni Association
The Iowa Black Alumni Association (IBAA) promotes the general mission of the University of Iowa. The group enhances the career prospects of prospective, current, and former black University of Iowa students. It also recognizes these individuals for their service.

Programs

Undergraduate Programs of Study
Major
• Major in African American Studies (Bachelor of Arts)
Minor
• Minor in African American Studies

Graduate Programs of Study
Major
• Master of Arts in African American World Studies
The African American Studies Program is not accepting graduate students at this time.

Certificate
• Certificate in African American Studies

Courses

African American Studies Courses
AFAM:1000 First-Year Seminar 1 s.h.
Small discussion class; topics chosen by instructor. Requirements: first-year standing.
AFAM:1020 Introduction to African American Culture 3 s.h.
Examination of black cultural experiences in the United States and the African diaspora; focus on literature, music, film, comics, anime, popular culture, and visual/performing arts.
GE: Values and Culture. Same as AMST:1030.

AFAM:1030 Introduction to African American Society 3 s.h.
Examination of black social and historical institutions in the United States and the African diaspora; focus on education, sports, political science, religion, health, criminal justice, history, sociology, and other disciplines. GE: Social Sciences; Values and Culture.

AFAM:1240 The Art of Listening to Jazz 3 s.h.
What is jazz and its importance; guided introduction to jazz music, anatomy of jazz music, cultural context; development of skills to become an informed listener; process of performing jazz music, its connection with black culture; focused listening/analysis of prominent jazz artists’ work from past and present, including intersection between jazz and hip hop; formal music experience or training not required.

AFAM:1241 The Soundtrack of Black America 3 s.h.
Linkage of African American culture and music; black musical innovations that shaped mainstream American musical tastes over the last century; exploration of relationship between black music and culture; examples of blues, jazz, gospel, hip hop; artists including Bessie Smith (blues), Mahalia Jackson (gospel), Miles Davis (jazz), Nas and Talib Kweli (hip hop).

AFAM:1250 Introduction to African American Religions 3 s.h.
GE: Values and Culture. Same as RELS:1350.

AFAM:1275 Black Chicago: The Past, Present, and Future of an American Community 3 s.h.
Students explore the history of Chicago’s black communities; modern issues impacting Chicago’s black neighborhoods; cultural, social, and political contributions of black Chicagoans to city and nation; consideration of what strategies might be deployed to shape a better future for black Chicago. Same as HIST:1275.

AFAM:1820 Everybody is a Star: Black Celebrity Since 1968 3 s.h.
How shifts in social access after 1968 meant that renowned blacks no longer automatically saw themselves as freedom fighters; effects of change shown in Michael Jackson’s career, Barack Obama's election, and fame of Beyonce, Lil’ Wayne, and Oprah; analysis of black celebrity from 1968 to 2012 with focus on Muhammad Ali, Dianna Ross, Whitney Houston, Denzel Washington, Michael Jordon, Stevie Wonder, T.D. Jakes, Condoleezza Rice, Jay Z, LeBrón James; black celebrity influence on post-civil rights understandings of gender, class, sexuality, politics; biographies, cultural criticism, music videos, movies, documents.

AFAM:1830 Music of the African American Diaspora 3 s.h.
History and characteristics of music styles emerging from African American culture from time of slavery to present; beginning with Negro spiritual, exploration of origins and musical anatomy of relevant music styles (blues, gospel, jazz, rhythm and blues, funk); ubiquitous role music plays in civil, cultural, and political unrest amongst African American community throughout 20th century.

AFAM:2014 Giants of Jazz: Miles, Trane, and Duke 3 s.h.
Miles Davis, John Coltrane and Duke Ellington as figureheads of the Jazz music style; how they changed the trajectory of modern music along with sidemen (B. Strayhorn and H. Hancock); Ellington’s resolute defiance of stereotypical views of African Americans; Miles’ brazen protests against civil injustices; how these icons are much more than mere musicians; cultural impact of landmark albums including “Kind of Blue,” “A Love Supreme,” and “The Birth of the Cool”; focus on their life, music and sociopolitical impact. Same as MUS:2014.

AFAM:2055 The Look of Blackness: African American Literature and Visual Art 3 s.h.
Examination of African American literature over a 200-year span; how preoccupation with blackness as a visual marker of difference impacts formation of written works; how black writers wield, emphasize, and manipulate visuality; blackness foregrounded as if literary texts operate in league with, or in defiance of, visual images circulating throughout American culture, from late 18th-century poetry to mid 20th-century novels; primary texts placed alongside high art and popular visual forms of distinct historical moments to explore how black American writers deploy visual art forms in narrative conceptions of black identity. Same as ENGL:2462.
AFAM:2267 African American History to 1877: From Slave Cabin to Senate Floor

Experiences of African and African American people in the American colonies and the states of the new nation; history of Africans and African Americans as early settlers, enslaved and free, in places such as Detroit, Chicago, New York, and New Orleans; interactions with indigenous people; role in the war for American independence; long history of resistance to slavery and racial discrimination; exploration of the rich history of community building, creation of significant black social and cultural institutions, and formation of black political thought and political activism. GE: Diversity and Inclusion. Same as HIST:2267.

AFAM:2268 African American History Since the Civil War

Exploration of racial oppression of African Americans and multiracial struggles against that oppression since the Civil War era; students examine the history of racism at individualized and systematic levels; historical efforts made by individuals and collective movements in service of the long black freedom struggle; and the ways these twinned histories have shaped modern America. GE: Diversity and Inclusion. Same as HIST:2268.

AFAM:2465 Selected African American Authors

English majors and English and Creative Writing majors may apply this course to the following area and/or period requirement. AREA: American Literature and Culture. PERIOD: 20th/21st-Century Literature. English and Creative Writing majors may apply this course to the Multiethnic American Literature and Culture requirement. Same as ENGL:2465.

AFAM:2500 Black Culture and Experience: Contemporary Issues

Exploration of various contemporary social topics (e.g., education, religion, literature, theater, media, politics, sports, criminal justice, health, economics); use of readings, interactive experiences, course assignments (reading essays, interview/profile, observation analysis, case study, final paper), and unit quizzes to understand black life in the 21st century. GE: Diversity and Inclusion.

AFAM:2700 The Black Image in Sequential Art: Comics, Graphic Novels, and Anime

Provides a foundation to critically interpret the representation of people of African descent in sequential art; primary focus on serial comic strips, gags, comic books, graphic novels, video games, animation, anime, Manga, film, zines, and televisual examples of blackness; emphasis of readings and viewing materials on gender, sexualities, economics, ethnicity, the transnational circulation and commodification of the black image, fandom communities, independent and mainstream sequential art producers. Same as RELS:2700.

AFAM:2730 African American Islam

Same as RELS:2730.

AFAM:2800 African American Women, Health, Hair, and Sexuality

From the exotic to the erotic, African American women’s bodies have been constructed to fulfill a variety of personal and cultural fantasies as well as social functions that are “killing us softly”; how cultural icons and myths of black women—Jezebel, Mammy, Tragic Mulatto, Aunt Jemima, Sapphire, Matriarch, Welfare Queen, and more recently, the overarching black woman—shape and create restrictions and visions of the self that contribute to health disparities; engaging black feminist/womanist theory to explore how larger images influence everyday acts of self-care and pleasure, such as hair and sexuality, on the health of African American women. Same as GWSS:2800.

AFAM:2805 The Civil Rights Movement


AFAM:3130 Black American Cinema

Major historical and cultural movements in black cinema; independent and early Hollywood films, animation, blaxploitation, the black renaissance, black auteurs (e.g., Spike Lee, Julie Dash), hip hop cinema, womanist films, 21st-century developments in film (e.g., theatre to film adaptions of Tyler Perry), new media’s effect on film and cinema; particular attention given to gender, sexualities, region, ethnicity, and class. Same as AMST:3130.

AFAM:3245 Twentieth-Century African American Religion: Civil Rights to Hip Hop

Twentieth-century African American religious history; major political and cultural movements, such as civil rights, black power, black feminism/womanism, hip hop. Same as RELS:3745.

AFAM:3275 History of Slavery in the U.S.A.

Beginning, expansion, and ending of American slavery; how our national memory of slavery in popular culture (in high school history, in historical landmarks and museums) helps or hinders our understanding of history of slavery in the U.S. Same as HIST:3275.

AFAM:3459 African American Literature Before 1900

English majors and English and Creative Writing majors may apply this course to the following area and/or period requirement. AREA: American Literature and Culture. PERIOD: 18th/19th-Century Literature. English and Creative Writing majors may apply this course to the Multiethnic American Literature and Culture requirement. Same as ENGL:3459.

AFAM:3460 African American Literature After 1900

English majors and English and Creative Writing majors may apply this course to the following area and/or period requirement. AREA: American Literature and Culture. PERIOD: 20th/21st-Century Literature. English majors may apply this course to the Multiethnic American Literature and Culture requirement. Same as ENGL:3460.

AFAM:3462 African American Drama

English majors and English and Creative Writing majors may apply this course to the following area and/or period requirement. AREA: American Literature and Culture. PERIOD: Varies by semester. English and Creative Writing majors may apply this course to the Multiethnic American Literature and Culture requirement. Same as ENGL:3462, THTR:3462.
AFAM:3465 African American Autobiography 3 s.h.
English majors and English and Creative Writing majors may apply this course to the following area and/or period requirement. AREA: American Literature and Culture. PERIOD: 20th/21st-Century Literature. English and Creative Writing majors may apply this course to the Multiethnic American Literature and Culture requirement. Same as ENGL:3465.

AFAM:3500 Malcolm X, King, and Human Rights 3 s.h.
Religion and politics of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. in the context of U.S. civil rights and international human rights in West Africa and the Muslim world; emphasis on civil rights connections to Gandhi, the Nobel Peace prize, and other international experiences that have impacted Pan Africanists, such as Stokely Carmichael, who worked on human rights. Recommendations: international studies major or undergraduate standing. Same as RELS:3808.

AFAM:3550 African Literature 3 s.h.
English majors and English and Creative Writing majors may apply this course to the following area and/or period requirement. AREA: Transnational Literature and Postcolonial Studies. PERIOD: 20th/21st-Century Literature. Same as ENGL:3550.

AFAM:3555 Topics in African Cinema 3 s.h.
English majors and English and Creative Writing majors may apply this course to the following area and/or period requirement. AREA: Transnational Literature and Postcolonial Studies. PERIOD: 20th/21st-Century Literature. Same as ENGL:3555.

AFAM:3600 Digitizing Blackness 3 s.h.
Examination of black cultural experiences in digital spheres, including digital humanities and new information technologies; focus on Afrofuturism, gaming, augmented reality, digital mapping, podcasting, social media, and digital cultures; exposure to digital tools and methods. Same as AMST:3600.

AFAM:3758 The Ancient African Past 3 s.h.
Africa to 1880; oral tradition and other sources; political development, ecological change, slavery and slave trade. Same as HIST:3758.

AFAM:3760 The Making of Modern Africa 3 s.h.
Africa in colonial and postcolonial period; economics, political structures of colonialism; social change, political life in the 20th century. Same as HIST:3760.

AFAM:3900 Topics in African American Studies arr.
Different topic each semester.

AFAM:3925 African Americans and the Media 3 s.h.
Same as JMC:3165.

AFAM:4298 African American History 1865-Present 3 s.h.
African American history since Reconstruction; survey of African American politics and society from Reconstruction to present. Same as HIST:4296.

AFAM:4910 Special Topics 3 s.h.
Selected topics, issues, and debates about various components of African American culture including literature, sociology, psychology, media, history, rhetoric, theater, sports, health, and education.

AFAM:4980 Independent Study arr.
Topics vary.

AFAM:4990 Honors Project arr.
Independent research and writing on interdisciplinary topic.

AFAM:5900 Advanced Readings in African American Culture arr.
Textual, social, political analyses of works by black authors.

AFAM:6500 Critical Readings in Cultural Studies: Stuart Hall's Legacy and Influences 3 s.h.
Exploration of the scholarship of Stuart Hall along with theories, methods, and history of cultural studies; focus on major areas of Hall’s work including Marxist thought and the political economy, diasporas and globalization, cultural production and popular culture, film and cinema studies, race, ethnicity, identity, and difference; key theorists that influenced Stuart Hall (e.g., Marx, Foucault, Fanon, Gramsci, Althusser) and scholars in cultural studies that have made appropriate use of Hall’s writings and theories in their own work; role of theory in everyday life and the critical role of public intellectuals. Same as AMST:6500.

AFAM:6635 Crossing Borders Seminar 2-3 s.h.

AFAM:7130 Readings on Twentieth-Century Black Internationalism arr.
Complex dynamics of black internationalism during 20th century, focusing on the global visions, transnational activities, and transracial political alliances of people of African descent worldwide; readings will reflect geographical breadth of the African Diaspora including Africa, the Americas, and Europe. Same as HIST:7130.

AFAM:7205 Gender and Race in Nineteenth-Century U.S. arr.
Same as GWSS:7205, HIST:7205.

AFAM:7210 The Long Civil Rights Movement arr.
Exploration of the history and historiography of the modern black freedom struggle in the United States, with particular attention to how historians in recent years have reconsidered traditional framings of that struggle’s chronology, geography, gender politics, political aspirations, and achievements. Same as HIST:7210.

AFAM:7214 Readings: African American Women's History arr.
Same as GWSS:7214, HIST:7214.

Interpretations and methods applied by historians in various world regions to different forms of oral history, from oral traditions to contemporary autobiographical testimony. Same as HIST:7710.