American Studies

The American Studies Department at Macalester College serves as the academic focal point for the study of race and ethnicity in a national and transnational frame. The department provides an interdisciplinary approach to the study of racial categories and racialized experiences in the United States by encouraging close and systematic examination of a wide range of cultural and political narratives, and by creating structured opportunities to apply theoretical concepts in concrete settings of civic engagement. American Studies is dedicated to incorporating various intellectual traditions and histories in a race-cognizant and interdisciplinary curriculum that is tuned in to the specific and concrete practices of everyday life. Students may major or minor in American Studies.

Faculty

Karín Aguilar-San Juan, professor and chair, holds a PhD in urban sociology from Brown University. She was a Next Generation Fellow (Rockefeller Foundation) and received a Rockefeller Foundation Humanities Fellowship and a Woodrow Wilson National Foundation Fellowship. Her writing and research focuses on Asian American communities and the aftermath of the Vietnam War, including the monograph Little Saigons: Staying Vietnamese in America (University of Minnesota Press, 2009) and The People Make the Peace: Lessons from the Vietnam Antiwar Movement, a book co-edited with Frank Joyce (Just World Books, 2015). She interviewed Grace Lee Boggs, the legendary activist/philosopher for Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies (2015). In the mid-1990s, she edited and introduced The State of Asian America: Activism and Resistance in the 1990s (South End Press, 1994). Aguilar-San Juan is a former writer/editor for Dollars and Sense magazine and former editor/publisher of South End Press. She appears in Manufacturing Consent, a documentary film about Noam Chomsky (1994).

Lizeth Gutierrez is the Consortium for Faculty Diversity Postdoctoral Fellow in American Studies. She earned her PhD in American studies from Washington State University in 2017. Her dissertation queers chisme as a spatial practice that harvests homosocial bonds between undocumented Mexican women to examine how Mexican women negotiate the global economy.

Duchess Harris, professor, is a scholar of contemporary African American history and political theory. Her academic books include Racially Writing the Republic: Racists, Race Rebels, and Transformations of American Identity (2009), Black Feminist Politics from Kennedy to Clinton (2009), Black Feminist Politics from Kennedy to Obama (2011), and Black Feminist Politics from Kennedy to Trump, which will be released fall 2018.

Required Courses

AMST 101 Explorations of Race and Racism or AMST 103 The Problems of Race in U.S. Social Thought and Policy
AMST 200 Critical Methods in American Studies Research
AMST 300 Junior Civic Engagement Seminar: Where Theory Meets Practice
AMST 400 Senior Seminar

A credit-bearing internship of 2–4 credits

Sample Topics Courses

Bruce Lee, His Life and Legacy
Critical Prison Studies
Culture and Theory of Women of Color Feminisms
Native American Cultural Revitalization
Race and the Law
Race, Cultural Politics and Social Movements
U.S. Imperialism: From the Philippines to Viet Nam

Sample Cross-Listed Courses

As an interdisciplinary department, American Studies draws from many other departments.

Art and Art History: Race, Class and Gender in American Photography
Asian Languages and Cultures: Race and Ethnicity in Japan
Educational Studies: Re-envisioning Education and Democracy; Race, Culture and Ethnicity in Education
English: Topics in 20th-Century African American Literature; African American Literature 1900 to Present; Asian American Poetry
Environmental Studies: Environmental Justice
Geography: Urban Social Geography
History: Native American History; Race, Gender, and Science; Transgender History; The U.S.–Mexico Borderlands; Transatlantic Slave Trade
Latin American Studies: Introduction to U.S. Latino Studies
Media and Cultural Studies: Cultural Studies and the Media; Blackness and the Media
Music: American Pop, Rockabilly and Soul
Political Science: Politics and Inequality
Psychology: Understanding and Confronting Racism
Religious Studies: Martin and Malcolm
Theatre and Dance: Community-based Theater; Feminist Theater; Hip Hop Performance
Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies: Race, Sex and Work in the Global Economy; Sexuality, Race and Nation
Honors Projects

Luke Mielse '16 (Falcom Heights, Minn.), “Racial Uplift in a Jim Crow Local: Black Union Organizing in Minneapolis Hotels 1930–1940”

Kathryn Anastasi '15 (Rockville, Md.), “Ways We Remember: Rethinking Symbols of Italian American History and Imagining Alternative Narratives”

Abakı Beck '15 (Missoula, Mont.), “Decolonizing Healing, Decolonizing Mental Health: The Impacts of Settler-Colonialism on Blackfeet Youth Suicide”


Lucy Short '15 (St. Louis), “Haunted: Three Generations of Black Feminism(s)”

Gabriella Deal-Márquez '12 (Veracruz, Mexico, and Milwaukee), “Trans(nacional) Bodies in Motion: Reframing Violence and Resistance in Mexicana Performance and Chicana Theater”

Caroline Karanja '12 (Nairobi, Kenya, and Madison, Wis.), “The RED Revolution from the Perspective of Visual Cultural Studies: A New Chapter in Art, Commerce, and Corporate Social Responsibility”

Sample Study Abroad Opportunities

Ngan Nguyen ’17 (St. Paul), Seoul, South Korea: CIEE (Council on International Educational Exchange): Arts & Sciences in Seoul

Isaac Stewart–Silver ’15 (Charlottesville, Va.), Chicago, Ill.: ACM (Associated Colleges of the Midwest), Chicago Program: Arts, Entrepreneurship, and Urban Studies

Wayne Lee ’14 (San Francisco), Cuba: Sarah Lawrence College, SLC in Havana, University of Havana


Kiah Zellner-Smith ’14 (Minneapolis), IES (Institute for International Education of Students) Abroad: Rio de Janeiro

Katie Hinkfuss ’13 (Milwaukee), Guanajuato, Mexico: CIEE (Council on International Educational Exchange): Liberal Arts

Emily Vollbrecht ’13 (White Bear Lake, Minn.), South Africa: Community Health and Social Policy, Durban

Internships

Grace Clark ’20 (St. Paul), International Institute of Minnesota, immigration service intern

Sophie Nadler ’19 (Piedmont, Calif.), Project for Pride in Living Inc., tutor/mentor

Dylan Bontrager ’18 (Harrisonburg, Va.), NAACP Minneapolis, research and organizing intern

Ryan Harris ’17 (Philadelphia), Minnesota Voice, voter engagement intern

Samuel Doten ’16 (Forest Lake, Minn.), Minnesota Legislature, Office on the Economic Status of Women, legislative intern

Ariana Feldman ’16 (Arezzo, Italy), United Students Against Sweatshops, Washington, regional organizer

Grace Newton ’16 (Middleton, Wis.), Cretin Durham Hall High School, National History Day youth mentor

Sara Pruitt ’16 (Durham, N.C.), Young Playwrights’ Theater in Washington, production intern

Cyrus Hair ’15 (Savannah, Ga.), Minnesota Historical Society, ACTC (Associated Colleges of the Twin Cities) museum fellow and History Day mentor

Molly Sir ’15 (Nashville, Tenn.), Lawyers for Children in New York City, social work intern

After Macalester

Dylan Martin Bontrager ’18 (Harrisonburg, Va.) is the operations manager in Campus Activities and Operations at Macalester.

Ngan Le-Thuy Nguyen ’17 (Bloomington, Minn.) is pursuing a master’s in teaching at Brown University.

Julia Gay ’16 (Cleveland Heights, Ohio) is an apprentice at Ananya Dance Theatre in Minneapolis.

Grace Newton ’16 (Middleton, Wis.) is a member service clerk at WEA Member Benefits (Retirement and Insurance Programs for Wisconsin Public School Employees) in Madison, Wis.

Cárol Mejía ’15 (Los Angeles) is the program coordinator for Student Success in the Department of Multicultural Life at Macalester.

Christine Ohenewah ’15 (Mankato, Minn.) has received two master’s degrees: one from Columbia University in medical sociology and the other in international relations from the University of Chicago.

Ryan Brownlow ’14 (Fort Worth, Texas) is a Makery Fellow at Kidzu Children’s Museum in Chapel Hill, N.C.

Ricardo Millhouse ’13 (Mobile, Ala.) received a master’s in geography from Syracuse University and is a counselor in academic services there.

Jade Johnson ’12 (Brooklyn, N.Y.) is a psychotherapist at Park Slope Center for Mental Health in Brooklyn, N.Y., having received a master of education and a master of arts in counseling psychology from Teachers College of Columbia University in New York.

Kyera Singleton ’11 (Clementon, N.J.) is pursuing a PhD at the University of Michigan.

Jeffrey Yamashita ’11 (Honolulu) is pursuing a PhD in ethnic studies at the University of California–Berkeley.

Brittany Lewis ’09 (Minneapolis) is a senior research associate at the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs in Minneapolis having received a PhD in philosophy, urban studies/affairs; gender studies from the University of Minnesota.

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macalester.edu/americanstudies