The election of Barack Obama in 2008 raised hopes that we were entering a post-racial moment, that the legacies of colonialism and slavery were overcome, both in the United States and the world. The same period, however, brought crises of authority caused by neo-liberal states, police violence, and mass (and racialized) incarceration that have emphatically burst the bubble of progress that Obama’s presidency seemed to inaugurate. Far from being post-racial and post-imperial, we are in a racial and postcolonial crisis, the repercussions of which have been felt on a daily basis since the killings of Eric Garner in New York and Michael Brown in Ferguson in the summer of 2014.

HISB’s programming this year will examine the historical roots, dispersed locations, and present-day consequences of ‘race’ as an explanatory category of human difference, foundational apparatus of western citizenship, and intrinsic component of state power. We will examine race through the work of scholars, performers, and activists who are creating alternative forms and sites of politics, and striving to keep the remedies to structural and historical inequities from becoming cultural weapons in a war against democracy. The diversity of our student body and region requires an investigation into the fraught condition and historical antecedents of race relations in New York, the United States, and the world.

Topics will include: the black experience in post-1945 Britain, particularly the intellectual models distilled by the late Stuart Hall; the meaning of ‘blackness’ across space and time; the rise of the carceral state and ‘the new Jim Crow;’ and the challenges to colonial politics of recognition posed by Indigenous and First Nation Studies and queer communities of color. Visiting speakers will include: Dennis Dworkin (Uof Nevada Reno), Catherine Hall (UCL), David Scott (Columbia), James Sweet (U f Wis Madison), James Sidbury (Rice), Ashlen Cohen (Georgetown), Urvashi Chakravarty (George Mason), and Kendra Fields (Tufts).