"Beats, Rhymes and Bottomlines: The Seduction of Black Girls Who Twerk on YouTube"
Dr. Kyra Gaunt, Associate Professor of Music and Anthropology, Baruch College-CUNY | Thomas P. Johnson Visiting Scholar

Based on a digital ethnography of adolescent and teen black girls who twerk from their bedroom, Dr. Gaunt shares what she learned from a collaborative study with undergraduates and why you should care even if you are not a black girl. Her work speaks to the forces we take for granted when we watch popular music videos especially in hip-hop on YouTube. Learn More

“What is African? The Fashion of Kanga Textiles: A Synthesis of European manufacturing, Indian design, and East African women’s consumption”
Dr. Mackenzie Ryan, Department of Art and Art History

Often art and fashion outside the Euro-American tradition are assumed to be authentically ‘other’ and unchanging; this is especially true of African traditions. By looking to the complex history of kanga textiles, this talk will argue that describing an artistic tradition as either African or not misses the point entirely. It will do so by exploring the global forces and a variety of players involved in the creation, design, and manufacture of kanga textiles, at once an artistic tradition, a fashionable garment, a utilitarian commodity, and a cultural heirloom. This talk will show that kanga textiles are the product of interactions between global networks of players that converged in East Africa in the late nineteenth century; they continue to flourish and change today—making kanga decidedly African. It is our assumptions of what is African that need to shift to accommodate a more dynamic and complex definition of the continent both historically and today.

"War Machine and the Racial Fantasy/ Fetish Dynamic in Superhero Comics"
Dr. Julian C. Chambliss, Department of History

Since his debut in Iron Man #118 (1979) James “Jim” Rupert Rhodes has served multiple roles in the armored hero’s adventures. Employee, confidant, protégé, and successor to Tony Stark, Rhodes has evolved from a supporting character to an armored hero called War Machine. As the appointed/anointed proxy for Iron Man, Rhodes’ status has been elevated, his principles lauded and his body transformed for decades. Throughout this process, creators have defined Rhodes by his ability and utility. As such, the character’s narrative journey reflects the African-American experience since the 1960s. As a hero, Rhodes’ adventures challenge and affirm broader assumptions about race in the United States. This paper explores the intersection of race, power, and identity shaping the presentation of James Rhodes in Marvel Comics from his publishing debut to his cinematic present.