

The Scholars Lecture Series is designed to encourage and promote the exchange of ideas among our faculty and students in the College of Arts and Science. The lecture series enhances the intellectual experience and social consciousness of the NYU community.

2018-2019

College of Arts and Science

SCHOLARS LECTURE SERIES



Irving H. Jurow Lecture Hall, Silver Center for Arts and Science
31 Washington Place

All lectures are scheduled from 5:00-6:00 pm

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25

“Don’t Worry Pop, Someday She’ll Open an Anthropology Store”: Adventures on the Road Less-Academically Traveled

Rayna Rapp, Professor of Anthropology

As a first-year college student, Professor Rapp was closed out of her first choice social science courses and ended up in an anthropology class instead. More than a half-century later, she reflects on the personal and professional consequences of choosing a “small” major that took her on big journeys. Professor Rapp relates the privilege of participating in village life in southern France, in international reproductive rights projects, in American genetics and neuroscience labs, and in the expanding world of disability studies. This lecture highlights these research and advocacy projects as they have informed her life as an anthropologist.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 4

The Role of Food Advertising and Social Media in Obesity and Health Disparities

Marie A. Bragg, Assistant Professor of Public Health Nutrition, NYU College of Global Public Health

Children and adolescents see thousands of TV ads for unhealthy food and beverages each year. Food companies disproportionately target Black and Latino youth with their least healthy products and harness the power of celebrities and athletes to promote their products. Social media-based food marketing is a multi-billion dollar advertising tool providing companies with unprecedented capacity to interact with users and nimbly adapt to ever-changing culture trends. This lecture explores how society generated such an unhealthy food environment, how food marketing contributes to health disparities, and how public health can address these issues.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 18

Tumor Inequality: Competition and Cooperation among Malignant Cells

Carlos Carmona-Fontaine, Assistant Professor of Biology

Tumors have regions with extremely unequal access to vital resources such as oxygen, glucose, and amino acids. While cells close to the vasculature are well nurtured, distant regions are deprived of nutrients and they accumulate toxic waste products. Professor Carmona-Fontaine presents an overview of how the causes and consequences of this inequality are studied and how it affects interactions among tumor cells.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 24

Changing our Minds: Decision-Making across Development

Catherine Hartley, Assistant Professor of Psychology

How do we learn to make good things happen and avoid bad things? Discovering which actions are beneficial and which are not is equally important for a child as for an adult. However, over the course of development, we accomplish these goals by different means. Professor Hartley presents findings illustrating developmental changes in the learning processes that guide motivated behavior. She discusses the underlying changes in the brain that give rise to these changes and argues that differences in learning reflect adaptations to an individual’s particular developmental stage.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 1

Anti-Immigrant Rage and the Shifting Politics of White Identity in the Era of Trump

Cristina Beltrán, Associate Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis

Even though immigrants and immigration are generally viewed positively and the issue ranks low as a priority for most, for a specific segment of Republicans, immigration (particularly unauthorized or “illegal” immigration) has emerged as one of the most vexing and emotionally charged issues our time. Professor Beltrán focuses on works of political theory, cultural studies, recent polling by political scientists, writing and speeches by nativist conservatives, and scholarship in Latino and whiteness studies to explain why immigration, particularly from Mexico and Latin America, has become such a potent and emotionally galvanizing issue for the American right.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 13

What Do We really Know about the Batteries That Power our Phones and Electric Vehicles?

Alexej Jerschow, Professor of Chemistry

When and why do batteries fail? This is a surprisingly difficult question to answer. High-profile disasters such as Samsung phone battery failures highlight the fact that technological advances critically depend on the availability of reliable electrical power storage. One problem is the lack of good and detailed nondestructive diagnostic tools for determining the health of a battery. Professor Jerschow outlines his vision for a new, nondestructive diagnostic based on magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) that can be fast, reliable, and provide information currently unavailable. This technique could help increase battery safety, lifetime prediction, and ultimately enable the development of next-generation energy storage devices.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 29

The Meaning of Counterfactual Sentences

Lucas Champollion, Associate Professor of Linguistics

Imagine a light bulb connected to two switches, A and B. The light is on whenever both switches are in the same position (both up or both down); otherwise it is off. Right now the two switches are up and the light is on. Do you agree with the following sentences? (1) If switch A or switch B was down, the light would be off. (2) If switch A and switch B were not both up, the light would be off. More people agree with (1). This is surprising: isn’t saying two switches are down the same as saying they are not both up? From such examples, Professor Champollion explores how we can learn about the underlying logic of language as used by ordinary speakers, and about how the mind works as it considers counterfactual sentences.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 4

“Land of the Blacks”: When Washington Square Was Congolese Farmland

Robyn d’Avignon, Assistant Professor of History

By 1643, the land upon which Washington Square Park is situated was known as the “Land of the Blacks.” Initially comprised of land grants given to black militia members, over the course of the 17th century African descended people converted swampland to the north of New Amsterdam into farms spanning present-day Chinatown, Little Italy, SoHo, and Greenwich Village. Professor d’Avignon examines what is known about this African-owned farmland, including evidence many of its residents were born in the Central African Kingdom of Kongo. Why has the memory of African-owned spaces been largely erased from the public sphere? And, how should we memorialize the “Land of the Blacks” in NYC today?

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 12

Nitrogen: A Climate Strategy for a Post-Trump World

David Kanter, Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies

The planet is nowhere close to avoiding dangerous climate tipping points, a fact not helped by President Trump’s decision to rollback several key climate policies. To keep momentum in such a political environment, we need to find climate actions that deliver local benefits greater than the international benefits. Enter nitrogen—a key contributor to climate change, but an even greater cause of air and water pollution. Professor Kanter’s lecture makes the case for nitrogen as a building block of national and international climate policy, while highlighting the challenges and opportunities of a more focused approach to this increasingly important issue.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 20

Labelle’s Rock and Soul Revolution: A Case Study of Gender, Race, and Musical Genre

Maureen Mahon, Associate Professor of Music

The group Labelle, best known for their number one hit “Lady Marmalade,” presented a cocktail of gospel’s vocal intensity, rock’s volume, and funk’s grooves, as well as social commentary and a high degree of theatricality. Professor Mahon explores Labelle’s innovative musical package to consider how the intersection of race, gender, and musical genre culture shaped the experiences of African American women working in popular music in the 1970s, a time when boundaries between “white rock” and “black soul” were being solidified. Professor Mahon also discusses how members of Labelle followed a unique creative vision and brought a black feminist practice to popular music by consciously engaging the connections and boundaries between rock and soul.

TUESDAY, MARCH 5

Consuming Skin: Race, Beauty, and War

Thuy Linh Tu, Associate Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis

The growth of luxury markets is often explained by the spread of capitalism, which can at once circulate goods, increase people’s purchasing power, and drive consumer desires. Examining the consumption of cosmetics in the U.S. and Vietnam, Professor Tu highlights another engine of growth: damage caused by war. Placing contemporary consumer practices in the context of the Vietnam War, she shows how the U.S. military’s war efforts and the beauty industry’s efforts to expand its markets produced skin as both a military and commercial problem in the late 20th century—and shifted the ways we came to see race and practice beauty.

THURSDAY, MARCH 28

Markets without Money

Konrad Menzel, Associate Professor of Economics

Money plays a central role in allowing modern economies to function. However, there are many important situations in which monetary payments are impractical, unethical, or prohibited. Important examples include allocation of students to public schools, marriage, or organ donations. Professor Menzel will discuss recent research on matching markets and economic networks that attempts to understand how to make these markets work efficiently, and what types of economic outcomes we should expect.

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LECTURERS 2018-2019

Rayna Rapp is Professor of Anthropology. She received her Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Michigan. She has published four books and over eighty articles on gender, the politics of reproduction, medical anthropology, and science studies as author, editor, or co-editor. Her book, *Testing Women, Testing the Fetus: The Social Impact of Amniocentesis in America* (Routledge, 1999), received multiple awards. She is presently completing a book with Faye Ginsburg entitled, *Disability Worlds: Creating the "New Normal" Since the Passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act*.

Marie A. Bragg is Assistant Professor of Public Health Nutrition at the NYU College of Global Public Health. She also holds a joint appointment at the NYU School of Medicine in the Department of Population Health. She received her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Yale University. Professor Bragg's research focuses on identifying and affecting environmental and social factors associated with obesity, food marketing, and health disparities. Her work is funded by the NIH Early Independence Award. She has also testified on various food policy proposals within the NYC Council, NY State Assembly, and NYC Department of Health. Her work has been covered by The Associated Press, NPR, the LA Times, USA Today, and Reuters.

Carlos Carmona-Fontaine is Assistant Professor of Biology and member of the Center for Genomics and Systems Biology. He received his Ph.D. in Cell and Developmental Biology from University College London, UK. The main focus of his lab is to understand how cells organize to form multicellular structures and to coordinate in collective processes. Prior to joining NYU, Professor Carmona-Fontaine was an independent research fellow at the Computational Biology Program at the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. He received a K99/R00 Pathway to Independence award during his postdoctoral research and was awarded the Beddington Medal for his doctoral studies.

Catherine Hartley is Assistant Professor of Psychology. She received her Ph.D. in Psychology from NYU. Professor Hartley's research examines how learning and decision-making change as the brain develops from childhood to adulthood. Her research has been published in prestigious journals including *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *Nature Communications*, and *Psychological Science*. She is the recipient of the NSF CAREER Award, the Klingenstein-Simons Fellowship in Neuroscience, the Jacobs Foundation Early Career Fellowship, and the Association for Psychological Science Janet Taylor Spence Award.

Cristina Beltrán is Associate Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis and Director of Graduate Studies. She received her Ph.D. in Political Science from Rutgers University. Her research focuses on modern and contemporary political theory, Latino and U.S. ethnic/racial politics, and feminist and queer theory. She is author of *The Trouble with Unity: Latino Politics and the Creation of Identity* (Oxford University Press, 2010), which received numerous awards including the American Political Science Association's Ralph Bunche Award and Cuba's Casa de la Américas prize for the best book on Latinos in the United States. Her second book, *Presence, Loss, and Rage: Racial Desire in Perilous Times* is forthcoming in 2019.

Alexej Jerschow is Professor of Chemistry and Director of Undergraduate Studies. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Linz in Austria, and came to NYU after postdoctoral research at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, and UC Berkeley. His research focuses on the development of magnetic resonance methodology from medical to materials sciences applications. He has published numerous articles in prestigious journals and received the CAS Golden Dozen Teaching Award in 2018. Recently, Professor Jerschow has been awarded the Diamond Jubilee Visiting Fellowship at the University of Southampton in the UK.

Lucas Champollion is Associate Professor of Linguistics. He received his Ph.D. in Linguistics from the University of Pennsylvania. He teaches introductory undergraduate courses on linguistics, semantics, and natural language processing as well as graduate classes on semantics. His research focuses on the meaning of logical words like "and", "or", and "if" as they are used and understood by ordinary speakers of English. He uses techniques from semantics, philosophy, and computer science to study language. He is the author of *Parts of a Whole: Distributivity as a Bridge Between Aspect and Measurement* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

Robyn d'Avignon is Assistant Professor of History. She received her Ph.D. in Anthropology and History from the University of Michigan. An ethnographer and historian, Professor d'Avignon conducts research on conflicts over natural resources, scientific research, and state-formation in colonial and post-colonial Francophone West Africa. At NYU, she teaches courses on African history of all time periods, nature and technology in the modern world, and on the historic relationship between Africa and NYC. Her book project—*Shadow Geology: The Search for Subterranean Knowledge in West Africa*—explores the pre-colonial and colonial roots of ongoing debates over the rights of agrarian households to mine gold.

David Kanter is Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies. He received his Ph.D. in Science, Technology, and Environmental Policy from Princeton University. His research focuses on the interconnected challenges of nitrogen pollution, sustainable agriculture, and climate change. He has written numerous articles on the relationship between environmental and economic issues. Prior to NYU, Professor Kanter was a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

Maureen Mahon is Associate Professor of Music. She received her Ph.D. in Anthropology from NYU. Among other things, her research focuses on African American music and culture and the construction and performance of race and gender in music. She is the author of *Right To Rock: The Black Rock Coalition and the Cultural Politics of Race* (Duke University Press, 2004) and of several articles in journals such as *American Ethnologist*, *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture*, and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum website. She received a 2013-14 NEH Fellowship for her research on the contribution of African American women such as Big Mama Thornton, the Shirelles, and Tina Turner among others to rock. Her book on the subject, *Beyond Brown Sugar: Voices of African American Women in Rock and Roll, 1953-1984*, is under contract with Duke University Press.

Thuy Linh Tu is Associate Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis. She received her Ph.D. in American Studies from NYU. Her research focuses on the relationship between culture and economy, social networks, and immigration and labor studies. She is the author of *The Beautiful Generation: Asian Americans and the Cultural Economy of Fashion* (Duke University Press, 2011) and co-editor of both *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America* (Duke University Press, 2007) and *Technicolor: Race, Technology and Everyday Life* (NYU, 2001).

Konrad Menzel is Associate Professor of Economics. He received his Ph.D. in Economics from MIT. He teaches and works in the field of econometrics, where he studies how to learn about economic agents' motives in situations with strategic interaction. He has written numerous articles on game-theoretic models, matching markets, and economic networks. He has also been working on various statistical problems concerning, e.g., causality, data exhibiting non-standard forms of dependence, inference when it is impossible to learn about key aspects of a problem.