

**Stony Brook University
The Graduate School**

Doctoral Defense Announcement

Abstract

Choreographing Race: An Analysis of Black Performance and White Audience

By

Katrina D. Thompson

(Abstract of 350 words or less, or recital program)

This dissertation is centered on the theme of blacks dancing and singing for white audiences from the sixteenth century, with the entrance of Europeans and later North Americans in West Africa through the postbellum period, with an emphasis on the cultural exchange and misrepresentations that contributed to the racial order of North America. This study focuses specifically on the pressure placed on blacks to sing and dance for whites and how this racial hegemony contributed to the subjugated image of blackness, while simultaneously reinforcing whiteness in the public sphere. Slave narratives, travel journals, popular literature and theater performances are utilized to reveal how racial stereotypes in the United States were given legitimacy and perpetuated through the performing arts. It examines the control whites had on black cultural development and the public images of blackness created through the coercion of music and dance. Ultimately, the work reveals that the depiction of black performers for white audiences not only assisted with the formation of stereotypes but also worked to perpetuate these stereotypes. Blacks continued to exhibit their West African culture in the lyrical and dance expression; however, whites distorted black performances by forcing blacks to produce images that reinforced their racial fantasy of black depravity to justify their enslavement, subjugation and otherness, thereby creating an enduring dynamic of domination and agency that constructed American entertainment culture.

Date: September 17, 2007

Program: History

Time: 1:00-4:00-pm

Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Floris B. Cash

Place: Javits Center Lecture Hall, Room 223