

PROMOTION RECOMMENDATION  
The University of Michigan  
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

LaKisha M. Simmons, assistant professor of women's studies and assistant professor of history, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, is recommended for promotion to associate professor of women's studies, with tenure, and associate professor of history, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.

Academic Degrees:

Ph.D.	2009	University of Michigan
B.A.	2003	University of Virginia, Charlottesville

Professional Record:

2017 – present	Assistant Professor, Department of Women's Studies and Department of History, University of Michigan
2011 – 2016	Assistant Professor of Global Gender and Sexuality Studies, College of Arts and Sciences, University at Buffalo, SUNY
2009 – 2011	Mellon Post-doctoral Fellow, Department of History, Davidson College, North Carolina

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching – Professor Simmons is a dedicated, innovative, and successful teacher who has made vital curricular contributions to both of her departments at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Her courses focus on gender, race, sexuality, medicine, the body, and girlhood through comparative and historical lenses, and include both large lecture formats and smaller seminars. In almost all of her courses, Professor Simmons incorporates imaginative exercises designed to help her students think about the public face of history and the ways in which it can speak to contemporary issues and problems. In addition to chairing one dissertation committee and serving as a committee member for four graduate students, she has also served as an advisor for one undergraduate honors thesis in Women's Studies and as a second reader for two others. Her mentorship of undergraduate students extends beyond the classroom and to her participation in the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP) and in the Institute for the Recruitment of Teachers.

Research – Professor Simmons is a historian of race and gender whose work has been crucial in establishing the field of black girlhood studies. Her award-winning monograph, Crescent City Girls, explores how segregation shaped the everyday lives of black girls in New Orleans. It offers groundbreaking analyses of the geography of urban segregation, the sociological and psychological impact of epidemic levels of white male sexual violence directed towards black women and girls, and “respectability” politics as it both constrained black girls and was strategically utilized by them for protective purposes. Her current work on black girlhood, which situates the subject within a global framework, confirms that she will continue her leadership role in shaping the field. Her ongoing research encompasses the development of a historically informed mode of criticism to explicate contemporary forms of popular culture (e.g., Beyoncé's visual album *Lemonade*) and a multi-faceted exploration of black women's reproductive labor

that includes a focus on segregated motherhood and experiences of infant loss and grief. Across all of her work, Professor Simmons' deployment of a rigorously interdisciplinary approach that draws from African American studies, gender studies, Black feminist theory, and critical geography has propelled her into the ranks of the most insightful, innovative, and compelling historians of race and gender of her generation.

Recent and Significant Publications:

“Geographies of pain, geographies of pleasure: Black women in Jim Crow New Orleans,” in Walking Raddy: The Baby Dolls of New Orleans, K. M. Vaz (ed.), University of Mississippi Press, 2018, pp. 31-43.

“The poetry of Vesta Stephens: In search of Black Girls' gardens,” *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 36(2), 2017, pp. 449-461.

Crescent City Girls: The Lives of Young Black Women in Segregated New Orleans, University of North Carolina Press, 2015.

“‘To lay aside all morals:’ Respectability, sexuality and Black college students in the 1930s,” *Gender & History*, 24(2), 2012, pp. 431-455.

Service – Professor Simmons has provided stellar service to both of her departments. She was elected to the Department of Women's Studies Executive Committee and served on its Doctoral Programs Committee. She made important contributions to the Department of History's Public History Taskforce, and she chaired the joint History and Women's Studies Ph.D. Program Admissions Committee. She also spearheaded efforts to craft a successful Rackham Diversity Ally Grant to support students in that joint program as well as students of gender and sexuality located in History. Her directorship of the Michigan in the World program at the Bentley Library last spring enabled a diverse group of undergraduate students to participate in archival research, while her national service includes co-organizing the Global History of Black Girlhood conference at the University of Virginia in 2017.

External Reviews:

Reviewer (A)

“Across all of Professor Simmons' work, what one finds is a scholar who is deeply committed to rigorous and nuanced archival research that focuses on tending to the opacities of black women's history and especially the oft-undertheorized and neglected questions regarding their affective lifeworlds, their desires, anxieties, aspirations, and fantasies from girlhood through womanhood.”

Reviewer (B)

“She marshals methods designed to override the limitations of conventional historiography, producing a book that is revealing for its empirical content and sophisticated in its methods. There is little wonder why her book has already garnered her audiences in history, sociology, American Studies, gender studies, and Black Studies.”

Reviewer (C)

“...she is a scholar of great promise and potential, who has already made a quite significant contribution to our understanding of American history and the ways that race, gender, and class continue to matter. ... The essays and articles included in her dossier provide evidence of her

intellectual range, always the historian, but capable of rich cultural analysis and theoretical insight. I recommend her promotion and I look forward to following what I am certain will be an extraordinary career.”

Reviewer (D)

“...Simmons’s book strikes out as truly unique in the depth of its forays into black girls’ emotional and social subjectivity. Readers are given an unflinching look at the horror and hardships of their lives under Jim Crow—and their vulnerability is truly terrifying. Yet black girls come into full view, as multilayered, multidimensional human beings. Crescent City Girls is unsettling and unforgettable, insightful and evocative. It’s a model for future scholarship and it places Simmons as a leader in this burgeoning field.”

Reviewer (E)

“She has created a subfield of black girls’ studies, with intellectual rigor, extensive archival research, and interdisciplinary significance. Simmons’ current work shows that she will continue as a leading scholar in her field.”

Reviewer (F)

“Her entire body of work demonstrates how an interdisciplinary approach to the archive enabled her to assemble fragmented and distorted sources in order to unveil untold stories and experiences of the most marginalized segment of society in the Jim Crow South. And her forthcoming anthology, co-edited with Corinne T. Field, The Global History of Black Girlhood, further establishes her place as a leader in this burgeoning field. ... in LaKisha Simmons you have a real jewel... she has already achieved star status with her first book.”

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Simmons is an exceptionally talented scholar who has made invaluable contributions to the research and teaching missions of the Departments of Women’s Studies and History, and whose leadership contributions at Michigan and on the national level have been exemplary. The Executive Committee of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and I recommend that Assistant Professor LaKisha M. Simmons be promoted to the rank of associate professor of women’s studies, with tenure, and associate professor of history, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.



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Elizabeth R. Cole, Interim Dean  
Professor of Women’s Studies, Psychology,  
and Afroamerican and African Studies  
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

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