

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

Kira Thurman, assistant professor of Germanic languages and literatures, and assistant professor of history, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, is recommended for promotion to associate professor of Germanic languages and literatures, with tenure, and associate professor of history, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.

Academic Degrees:

Ph.D. 2013 University of Rochester
B.M. 2006 Baldwin-Wallace College

Professional Record:

2015-present Assistant Professor, Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures and
Department of History, University of Michigan
2013-2015 Assistant Professor, Department of History, University of Akron

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching: Professor Thurman is an outstanding classroom instructor whose courses generate a high level of student enthusiasm. Her courses feature extensive student engagement and a strong commitment to skill building. Most of her courses are cross-listed in German and History, collectively covering content on Germany, Europe, and the Black Diaspora, from the nineteenth century to the present. Professor Thurman's teaching shows a commitment to inclusive pedagogy and prioritizes writing over rote examination—including innovative assignments with applications beyond academia. She also does rigorous work to help students fulfill the R&E requirements in a thoughtful and reflective manner. Additionally, Professor Thurman is a highly sought-after mentor for graduate students in both her units, serving on two dissertation committees as the chair or co-chair. Her role as a faculty advisor for the Black Humanities Caucus represents critical mentoring of our graduate students, while also contributing to important DEI work.

Research: Professor Thurman has already achieved a high level of visibility through her journal articles and public scholarship, and her recently published monograph, Singing Like Germans: Black Musicians in the Land of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms, will cement her status as an important cultural historian and a leading voice on the topic of music and race. By uncovering the continuous and substantial involvement of Black musicians in German classical music culture from the Wilhelmine Empire to the 1960s, the book significantly contributes to a number of scholarly fields, including German history, African American studies, music history, musicology, and diaspora studies. The combination of both public and academic acclaim shows her to be a field builder, who is teaching both the academy and the wider world how topics such as classical music, its practices, and its participants, encode through their assumptions of normativity and racialized constructions. Professor Thurman consistently opens intellectual possibilities by identifying areas where essentialism and reductionism have lurked in the scholarship. Professor Thurman builds conceptual and thematic bridges that shape the conversation about music, race, and culture in fruitful ways—now and in years to come.

Recent and Significant Publications:

Singing Like Germans: Black Musicians in the Land of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2021.

“Performing Lieder, Hearing Race: Debating Blackness, Whiteness, and German Identity in Interwar Central Europe.” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* (Special Issue on Race and Ethnicity) 72, no. 3 (Fall 2019): 825-865.

“When Marian Anderson Defied the Nazis.” *The New Yorker*, July 15, 2020.

“Singing the Civilizing Mission in the Land of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms: The Fisk Jubilee Singers in Nineteenth-Century Germany.” *Journal of World History* (Special Issue: “Preaching the Civilizing Mission”) 27, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 443-471.

Service: Professor Thurman’s service contributions consistently exceed expectations of an assistant professor, both at UM and in her disciplines. In History, she has served as job-skills coordinator, on search committees, on undergraduate curriculum committees including weekly advising, on the graduate program committee, and as an application reviewer for the Society of Fellows. In Germanic Languages and Literature, she is a member of the department Executive Committee, and has also served on search committees, lecturer review committees, and post-doctoral selection committees. Professor Thurman also served as the faculty liaison to the Michigan Humanities Emerging Research Scholars Program (MICHHERS), an ambitious program to attract a diverse student body to Ph.D. programs in the humanities at UM, conducted online during summer 2021. In the larger field, she serves on numerous editorial boards and other committees.

External Reviewers:

Reviewer (A): “Professor Thurman carefully dissects German ideas about Blackness steeped in a range of devastatingly destructive racial ideologies (the influences of U.S. white supremacy, colonial racism, and transnational racial romanticism), the ways that these ideas shaped German listening practices, and the altogether remarkable way that Black classical musicians in Germany and Austria nonetheless devoted themselves to their own virtuosic craft and leaned into this music that was putatively not their birthright in order to ultimately expand the lexicon of Blackness itself and simultaneously problematize essentialist notions of ‘German’ music...I do believe that this is one of the finest and most elegant first monographs I’ve read in a very long time.”

Reviewer (B): “The other thing I want to draw attention to here is that your colleague is in *extraordinarily* high demand. [Professor Thurman] has had more prestigious external fellowships, given more talks at other institutions, participated in more public events, and contributed more visibly to public intellectual discourse from Twitter to the *New York Times* than many scholars with decades’ more experience in the field. If she had not published the items listed at the top of this paragraph those things would not matter, but since she has, I want to emphasize that she is a powerful and positive representative of your University well beyond the confines of standard academic publishing.”

Reviewer (C): “This article, containing the germ of what would ripen into Professor Thurman’s book, very early in her career revealed the talents that are now so strikingly on view in her tenure dossier.”

Reviewer (D): “Thurman’s book, then, combines bold vision with alertness to the nuances and paradoxes of her story, above all in the tension between a German musical tradition that was supposed to be universal but in practice was often treated as a national attribute. The story’s complexity builds on its wide variety of sources, including both secondary literature and materials

from numerous archives. Finally, it's worth noting the book's unaffected but always knowledgeable discussions of the music itself: without jargon or theoretical overload, it moves from instrumental music to lieder and opera, always illuminating her discussion with well-chosen musical examples. Very few scholars are able to move between history and another discipline, especially one as technical as classical music, with the expertise that informs *Singing Like Germans*."

Reviewer (E): "Given its singular topic, its relevance in today's racially fraught climate, and its readability, I predict this book will win a cluster of major book awards, and it is unfortunate that your tenure review cannot be conducted after the prizes have rolled in. Mark my words, however! The accessibility of *Singing Like Germans* carries into Thurman's impressive profile in public scholarship. She has the instincts of a solid and engaging journalist, and she is capitalizing on those talents, with articles in the *New York Times* and the *New Yorker*, to cite the most illustrious examples. Given the perilous position of the humanities today, outreach of this sort—delivered in clear and engaging prose—is essential for the work of humanists to remain relevant. Thurman has that capacity, and she puts it to the service of her scholarship."

Reviewer (F): "Meanwhile the next research and writing projects Dr. Thurman already has underway testify to the highly impressive research and publication trajectory ahead. One (once pandemic-driven travel and archival restrictions relax) will be an archivally intense critical history of Black lives in nineteenth century Germany: in the years *before* German overseas colonial expansion began. The second—urgently needed, and there is no one better to write it—will be a broader history of Black people within classical music."

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Thurman is a highly productive and creative scholar who has gained the respect of scholars in the multiple fields—of music studies, German studies, Black studies, and modern European history—to which she contributes. The Executive Committee of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and I recommend that Assistant Professor Kira Thurman be promoted to the rank of associate professor of Germanic languages and literatures, with tenure, and associate professor of history, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.



Anne Curzan, Dean
Geneva Smitherman Collegiate Professor of
English Language and Literature, Linguistics,
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