

Department of History Thursday Speakers' Series

M(M)A

McMaster Museum of Art

Nnamdi Nnake

McMaster University

Visualizing African Workers and The Telegraph in Nigeria – 1925-45

This seminar draws on an exhibition showing throughout Fall 2026 at the McMaster Museum of Art, and the thesis research of Nnamdi Nnake, who is studying the development of the telegraph in colonial Nigeria. The paper argues for visual analysis as a tool of historical analysis and uses images from archival collections to examine the contributions of African workers to sustaining Nigeria's telegraph networks between 1925-45. From daily operations to maintenance and repairs, this paper shows how visual analysis makes African labour, expertise and technical practices visible in ways that textual sources can not. Nnake contends that images represent more than illustrations of telegraph technology or infrastructure and reads them as historical evidence that reveals the material and social conditions under which Africans operated Nigeria's telegraph systems. By foregrounding African workers contributions to telegraph operations, maintenance and repair, the seminar contributes to emerging histories of infrastructure, materiality, and technology-in-use while highlighting the value of visual sources for reconstructing African histories of technology.



Date: Thursday, October 1, 2026

Time: 1:30–3:00 p.m.

Location: McMaster Museum of Art (MMA), lower-level gallery.

Register early to secure your spot



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