John Vilanova is an interdisciplinary scholar and writer whose work focuses on structural and institutional inequalities manifest specifically in the creative and culture industries. He focuses specifically on the music industry, arguing for retheorization and reconsideration of it as a media industry with a set of key stakeholders, ideological formations, politics, representational issues, historical dynamics and other areas of study. This is primarily manifest in his monograph, tentatively titled "Not Simply the Best: The GRAMMY Awards, Blackness, and America," which analyzes critically the mediated discourses around the annual GRAMMY Awards ceremonies, considering them a lodestar of the global popular music industry. John's work takes the GRAMMYs and historicizes their results and the subsequent coverage in mass television, magazine, newspaper, online and social media to paint a picture of how influential members of the music industry hear and appraise racial difference. His work animates, historicizes and explores the interrelatedness of subjective taste, ideas of purported "excellence," genre, and broader sociocultural politics with which the GRAMMYS both follow and produce hierarchical racial difference. Ultimately, the GRAMMYs project shows the ways that racial attitudes are attached to the coverage, results, and collective memory of the music industry writ large.

John employs a multi-methodological approach that includes archival historical research, specifically reading newspapers and other journalistic media coverage as a network of data that produces discourse. This, alongside interviews with key stakeholders and other ethnographic fieldwork over a career working in various music industry contexts, allows for a robust set of methods that mutually enhance his analysis.

John's scholarly program contains a number of other related projects, chief among them ongoing field research in Kingston, Jamaica, where he has been studying a group of creative industries workers who are attempting to use reggae music, its politics, its connection to the Afrodiasporic religious practice Rastafari, and its infrastructure on Jamaica to actively decolonize the music industry, which has extracted Jamaican cultural signifiers from the island without sharing in its profits. This type of work adds a global media emphasis to John's program, which has included historical research on record-pressing in Jamaica, ethnographic field research on Jamaican mobile telephony as a manifestation of the Digital Divide, and ongoing research in Tokyo, Japan, a key site for the trade of vintage Jamaican-pressed vinyl records.

In addition to this work, John has recently published ethnographic work that explores and critiques the gendered dynamics of labor while working in live music touring and live music venues. This study emphasizes the historical and mediated construction of "the road" as a male space in which only certain types of labor, specifically the selling of merchandise, are recognized as being gendered "female." This article is the first of a planned series that explores how work at the live concert venue is constructed. He is also in the early stages of a project that explores the history of album reviews in music industry magazines and online publications such as Rolling Stone and Pitchfork.

He is also an established critic and thinker whose scholarship often has an impact outside the classroom and whose journalistic output supports his research, service, and teaching agendas.
He is the managing editor of MusiQology, the public-facing blog of esteemed scholar and musicologist Guthrie P. Ramsey. The blog focuses on African American and Afrodiasporic musics and features a podcast network, social media, a community arts nonprofit project, and writing from John, who is the site’s main voice. He is also a respected commenter who has recent bylines in Rolling Stone, The Atlantic, and the Los Angeles Times.

John is also a dedicated teacher who designs courses that sit at the intersection of race, media, and journalism. Courses such as From Lena Horne to Lemonade: Black Feminism and Media Industries; Dreams and Nightmares: Mediating Inequality in the Music Industry; and Global Media and Culture, John’s classes are intersectional, international, and interdisciplinary, giving students a robust introduction to cultural studies key texts, methods, theories, and topics. He designs assignments that scaffold skill-building with an emphasis on nurturing college writers who will gain communication skills that will be useful no matter what path they take while in college. He also designs creative assignments that allow students to explore course themes, such as a graphic novel assignment that allows students to make creative work that wrestles with the intersections of race and media themselves.