

REL 7.09: Living with the Dead

Religion and Spirituality in American History



Course Instructor: Prof. Vaughn Booker (Vaughn.A.Booker@dartmouth.edu)

Schedule: **Winter 2020, M & W (6A: 6:30pm-8:20pm), No X-hour, Berry Library 371**

Office Hours: **Tues, 1pm-3pm, and Fri afternoon by appointment, 305 Thornton Hall**

Welcome! Make sure to complete this [pre-course questionnaire](#).

Course Description

This First-year Seminar introduces students to American religious history and spirituality by focusing on how humans deal with death and the dead. Encounters with immaterial human subjects in North American history are somewhat distinct from communing and communicating with deities in a religion's pantheon. They involve religious subjects performing ritual engagement with human beings across time and space—those who have “passed on”—for familial, social, and even political purposes. Religious uses of the language of ancestors, “mystical persons,” and concepts of martyrdom and “mortuary politics” invite reflection on the material impacts of spiritual subjects in this world for various groups. This course will familiarize students with various “Spiritual” traditions in North American religious history, paying attention to the complex

categories and identities of race and gender in living religious subjects as well as the deceased subjects they engage—the dead who "talk back."

As a First-year Seminar, this course will prepare students to analyze American religion as thoughtful writers. For each evening meeting of the course, we will gather to focus on historical or ethnographic monographs, spanning the period of colonial encounters in America to the present. A variety of course media, including documentaries, interviews, films, podcasts, websites, and material/visual archives will supplement our learning experience. To develop analysis as writers over the term, students will produce 5 (five) 1-page response papers to religious documentaries and films, one short essay on an extended poem about communicating with the dead, and one culminating research paper.
Dist: TMV.

Learning Objectives

This First-year seminar will equip students with the history of religious understandings of death and the dead in America, primarily colonial North America and the United States, so that they can analyze religion in the modern world. By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Know and communicate, through student writing, the ways that religious and spiritual communities construct, interpret, or remake the dead as moral, racial, socioeconomic, and political beings
- Compare and contrast ways of making meaning of death and dealing with the dead across different religions in American history
- Analyze and assess multimedia strategies that religious communities use to teach about death
- Grasp the religiously distinct attitudes toward the dead at the intersections of class, gender, race, sexuality, free/enslaved status, and time period
- Deploy secondary sources (scholarly literature in religious studies) to assist in students' critical understandings of primary sources (religious writings, rituals, performances, and public rhetoric)

Required Readings

- All article, book chapter, and audiovisual selections listed for each meeting will be available on Canvas, through Dartmouth Library, or provided in advance of class sessions. **You are to complete all readings before each class session, unless otherwise indicated. I will inform students beforehand of which multimedia to view before class sessions.**

From the Baker-Berry Library Reserve Desk: Abuse of Library Privileges

Abuse of Library privileges is a breach of the College code of conduct (Standard VIII) and may result in disciplinary action as determined by the Deans.

It is expected that all people, following the College code of conduct, will treat with respect the recorded and published materials on course reserve in the library. All people will respect the rights of all to ready and continuing access to these course reserve materials.

Assessments

Weekly seminar meeting attendance and participation, multimedia responses, a midterm essay, and a final research paper

10% for seminar attendance and participation

20% for the 5 (five) multimedia responses, **DUE FRIDAYS BY 5PM EST**

30% for the midterm essay, **DUE 02/17 5PM EST**

40% for the research paper, **DUE 03/11 AT 5PM EST**

Mon. and Wed., each session is 1hr. 50 min. **There is no X-hour.**

Seminar Attendance and Participation

You are expected to be in attendance for every class session. Sessions will not only involve discussion of the assigned materials but also group activities and whole class activities based on materials introduced for discussion during class time. These class sessions are enjoyable and enlightening with each student involved. We will keep a running archive of all group work on Canvas through the Discussions page, so that students will understand their individual and collective contributions to our class understanding of American religious history. **If an emergency forces you to miss class, please email me as soon as reasonably possible.**

Multimedia Responses

Each response is equivalent to **1 double-spaced page (300 words)** with **1-2 discussion questions**. Responses are **due Fridays by 5pm EST (post to Canvas discussions)**. Responses are to address **5 (five) of the 7 assigned documentaries/films in the class** (in weeks 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 10). This is your opportunity to analyze audiovisual representations of religious subjects, communities, and issues as media that create narratives/arguments about religion in American history. Your responses **must also demonstrate your engagement with the relevant assigned readings**.

The most helpful written responses accomplish some of the following things:

- Identify the main idea(s) of an author's media, article, or chapter(s), and engage these through questions, criticisms, and/or affirmations
- Place readings/authors in critical conversation with each other (within the same week of readings or from previous weeks)
- Place the readings in conversation with the major concepts and arguments raised in lectures

- Relate your acquired knowledge (from these readings) with familiar knowledge (past coursework or relevant life experiences)

Each of your reading responses can focus on one of these tasks or even combine some of them. Overall, however, you must strive to convey your ideas and questions clearly to others through the use of proper grammar, punctuation, paragraph structure, and carefully crafted sentences. Additionally, please feel welcome to elaborate on your responses in our class sessions.

Midterm Essay

This is your opportunity to think through our seminar discussions, as well as your multimedia responses and discussion questions, with a **5-page essay** on one of the assigned course readings. Your essay will interpret James Merrill's *The Book of Ephraim* (1976), an extended poem that takes communicating with the dead seriously. **DUE 02/17 5PM EST.**

Research Paper

This is your opportunity to think through our seminar discussions, as well as your multimedia responses and discussion questions, with a culminating **10-page research paper**. This paper should include engagement with our required course materials, but it is also your opportunity to incorporate your own research that centers death/the dead in American religious history or contemporary life. Each weekly unit header (see the Course Schedule below) provides ideas for potential areas to consider for your research, but you can be creative in this regard. To prepare your paper, you have **the following benchmark deadlines**:

- Prospectus due **01/31**
- Working bibliography due **02/14**
- Potential thesis statement + **EITHER** working draft **OR** outline due **02/28**
- Final 10-page essay due **03/11 AT 5PM EST**

You will receive feedback on each of these benchmarks over email, in class, and through scheduled office hours meetings. Please visit my office hours or schedule a meeting to discuss your approaches to this assignment.

Class Policies

Syllabus

I reserve the right to modify this syllabus and to add relevant brief discussion materials for class discussion.

Honor Principle

Please familiarize yourself with Dartmouth's Academic Honor Principle (<https://students.dartmouth.edu/judicial-affairs/policy/academic-honor-principle>) and additional resources about standards of conduct (<https://students.dartmouth.edu/judicial-affairs/>).

Seminar Sessions

As adults, we have the opportunity not only to develop our most articulate critical thinking in public spaces with these sessions—we also get to share a thinking space to help each other shape our critical/analytical voices and to learn how to take ownership of our ideas. I intend to facilitate discussion, but I also expect you to help your classmates learn and express themselves. This entails listening to the thoughts of others in class, responding to them, building on comments you find particularly engaging, and making sure everyone has the opportunity to voice her/his/their thoughts during class time.

Religious Observances

Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that occur during this academic term. If you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the course, please meet with me before the end of the second week of the term to discuss appropriate accommodations.

Electronic Device Usage

For a class that helps you to become thoughtful listeners, watchers, and interpreters of African American religion through cultural production, the internet can certainly be your friend. Many relevant audiovisual materials will be available on Canvas, but you should also spend time looking up relevant materials as you come across them in our weekly readings. This will help you to comprehend an author's intricate analysis of historical materials, and it may reveal that you see or hear something that the author did not. Consequently, the use of laptops and/or tablets beyond taking notes is acceptable if it facilitates class discussion.

Email Response Policy

The best way to reach me is via email at vaughn.a.booker@dartmouth.edu. I will likely respond to emails before 10pm. Otherwise, I will respond after 9am. It is best to send questions of high importance well in advance of an essay/assignment due date to ensure a timely response.

Accessibility Policy

Students requiring accessibility-related academic adjustments and services must consult the Student Accessibility Services office in Carson Hall 125 or by phone: 646-9900 or email: Student.Accessibility.Services@Dartmouth.edu. Please contact me as soon as possible if you require the use of accessible resources for participation in this course.

Once SAS has authorized services, students must show the originally signed SAS Services and Consent Form and/or a letter on SAS letterhead to me. As a first step, if you have questions about whether you qualify to receive academic adjustments and services, you should contact the SAS office. All inquiries and discussions will remain confidential.

Classroom Recording Policy

The use of audio or video recording materials in this course is prohibited except in circumstances of accessibility use.

I look forward to getting to know you and learning from you this term.



Course Schedule

Week 1

The Study of Religion and the Suspension of Disbelief

****WATCH BEFORE OUR FIRST CLASS****

- *Father's Kingdom* (2017) (Documentary) ([Course Media Gallery](#))

01/06

- "[Where to Find Ghosts, Ghouls and Scares in the Granite State](#)," *New Hampshire Magazine*, Oct 2012
- *Larry King Now*, "[Theresa Caputo Opens Up on Rare Gifts & Shares It With Our Studio Audience](#)," (2013) (YouTube) (in-class viewing)

01/08

- Cassandra White, "[Validation, Comfort, and Syncretic Belief in the Afterlife: U.S. Viewers' Perceptions of Long Island Medium](#)," *Anthropology of Consciousness* 30.1 (2019): 90-112.
- Knapp, Krister Dylan, **Ch. 1**, "[A Relish for the Non-Normal](#)," in *William James: Psychical Research and the Challenge of Modernity* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 21-60.

Week 2

Material and Visual Encounters with the Deceased

01/13

- Laderman, Gary, [Introduction, Ch. 1. "Signs of Death." Ch. 2. "From the Place of Death to the Space of Burial," and Ch. 3. "Simplicity Lost: The Urban Model of Death,"](#) in *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes towards Death, 1799-1833* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 1-50.
- [Jamestown's Relics: Sacred Presence in the English New World](#) (online)

01/15

- Lindsey, Rachel McBride, **Ch. 3**, "[Agents of a Fuller Revelation](#)," in *A Communion of Shadows: Religion and Photography in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 113-157.
- [William H. Mumler spirit photography collection, Getty Museum](#) (online)
- *PBS POV*, "[Homegoings: Funeral Rites in the African American Community](#)," (2013) (Documentary)

Recommended: Lindsey, Rachel McBride, **Ch. 2**, "[Here is My Name When I Am Dead](#)," in *A Communion of Shadows: Religion and Photography in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 64-112.

Week 3

Constructing Martyrdom

01/20

- **MLK Day: NO CLASS**
- [1968 Martin Luther King Jr Memorial](#) (1968) (Documentary)

01/22

- Anderson, Emma, [Ch. 1, "A Spectacle for Men and Angels,"](#) and [Ch. 6, "The Naked and the Dead,"](#) in *The Death and Afterlife of the North American Martyrs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 14-53, 255-308.
- *Smoke Signals* (1998) (Film) ([Course Media Gallery](#))

Week 4

Movement and Repose with the Dead

01/27

- Brown, Vincent, [Ch. 2, "Last Rites and First Principles,"](#) and [Ch. 4, "Icons, Shamans, and Martyrs,"](#) in *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 60-91, 129-156.

01/29

- Marchi, Regina M., [Ch 1, "An Ancient and Modern Festival,"](#) [Ch. 4, "Ritual Communication and Community Building,"](#) [Ch. 5, "U.S. Day of the Dead as Political Communication: A Moral Economy,"](#) and [Ch. 6, "Day of the Dead in the U.S. Media: The Celebration Goes Mainstream,"](#) in *Day of the Dead in the USA: The Migration and Transformation of a Cultural Phenomenon* (2009), 9-20, 56-69, 70-82, 83-96.
- *Coco* (2017) (Film) ([Course Media Gallery](#))

****PROSPECTUS DUE 01/31****

Week 5

Posthumous Politics

02/03

- Braude, Ann, [Ch. 3, "'Thine for Agitation','](#) and [Ch. 5, "'The Body and Soul Destroying Marriage Institution','](#) in *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 56-81, 117-141.
- *Telegrams from the Dead* (Documentary) ([Course Media Gallery](#)) (in-class viewing)

Recommended: [Ch. 1, "Unbroken Communication between the Infinite and All Beings,"](#) [Ch. 2, "The Blessedness of Sinless Childhood in the World Beyond,"](#) and [Ch. 4, "The Meaning of Mediumship,"](#) in *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 10-31, 32-55, 82-116

02/05

- Clarke, Emily Suzanne, [Ch. 1, "The Creation of the Cercle Harmonique,"](#) and [Ch. 4, "The Spiritual Republic and America's Destiny,"](#) in *A Luminous Brotherhood: Afro-Creole Spiritualism in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 22-49, 115-149.
- Du Bois, W. E. B., [Ch. 11, "Of the Passing of the First Born,"](#) in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) (in-class reading)

Week 6

Channels to the Dead through Mysticism and Literature

02/10

- Bender, Courtney, [Ch. 2, "Becoming Mystics,"](#) and [Ch. 4, "Karmic Laundry: Imagining and Embodying Spiritual History,"](#) in *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 56-89, 119-152.
- *Real Stories, Children's Past Lives* (Documentary) (in-class viewing)

02/12

- Merrill, James, *The Book of Ephraim* (New York: Alfred E. Knopf, 2018 [1976]). (poetry)
- *Niño Fidencio... de Roma a Espinazo* (2008) (Documentary) ([Course Media Gallery](#))

****WORKING BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE 02/14****

Week 7

Raced Afterlives

02/17

- Soape, Kenny, *The Paranormal Search, The Myrtles Plantation Ghost* (2013) (YouTube) (in-class viewing)
- Miles, Tiya, **Preface**, "[The Haunting Blues](#)," **Introduction**, "[A Ghost Hunt](#)," **Ch. 3**, "[Chloe and Cleo: Louisiana Plantation Phantoms](#)," and **Conclusion**, "[A Revisitation of Spirits](#)," in *Tales from the Haunted South: Dark Tourism and Memories of Slavery from the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), xi-xx, 1-20, 80-114, 125-132.

****MIDTERM ESSAY DUE 02/17****

02/19

- McSpadden, Lezley, with Lyah Beth LeFlore, [Selected chapters](#), in *Tell the Truth & Shame the Devil: The Life, Legacy, and Love of My Son Michael Brown* (New York: Regan Arts, 2016).
- Holloway, Karla FC, **Ch. 4**, "[Funeralized: The Remains of Our Days](#)," in *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 150-188.
- *PBS News Hour, Michael Brown's funeral service | August 25, 2014* (YouTube)

Recommended:

- Trethewey, Natasha, [Selected poems](#), in *Native Guard: Poems* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006), 5-15. (poetry)

Week 8

Virtual Communication, Digital Preservation, and Artificial Resurrection

02/24

- Gibson, Margaret, "[Automatic and Automated Mourning: Messengers of Death and Messages from the Dead](#)," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 29.3 (2015): 1-13.

- Golan, Oren, **Ch. 12**, “[Charting frontiers of online religious communities: The case of Chabad Jews](#),” in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell (New York: Routledge, 2013), 155-163.
- “[All About the Rebbe’s Resting Place](#)” (**Short video**), “[How to Send a Letter](#)” (**Ohel Chabad-Lubavitch**), “[The Miracles Continue](#)” (**Responses from the Rebbe**)
- [Jewish Ancestral Healing](#)
- **Ancestral Lineage Repair w/ Pavini** (<http://bespokenbones.com/ancestral-lineage-repair/>); **Episode 16: Trauma as Call to Prayer** (**podcast**)
- Davina Pardo, *New York Times* Op-Doc, “[116 Cameras](#)” (2017) (**Documentary**) (**in-class viewing**)

02/26

- Gibbs, Martin, Joji Mori, Michael Arnold, and Tamara Kohn, “[Tombstones, Uncanny Monuments and Epic Quests: Memorials in World of Warcraft](#),” *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research* 12.1 (Sept. 2012)
- Gibson, Margaret, “[Grievable Lives: Avatars, Memorials, and Family ‘Plots’ in Second Life](#),” *Mortality: Promoting the Interdisciplinary Study of Death and Dying* 22.3 (2017): 224-239.
- [Facebook – Memorialized Accounts](#) (**website**)
- [eterni.me](#) (**website**)
- [The Digital Beyond](#) (**website**)
- Lal, Kish, “[The Inevitability and Murky Morality of Hologram Tours](#)” (**commentary**)
- [Michael Jackson – Slave to the Rhythm](#) (2014) (**YouTube**)
- Quartz, [The story of Replika, the AI app that becomes you](#) (2017) (**YouTube**) (**in-class viewing**)

****POTENTIAL THESIS STATEMENT + EITHER WORKING DRAFT OR OUTLINE DUE 02/28****

Week 9

Communion and Memorialization through Artistry

03/02

- Henking, Susan E., “[If SILENCE = DEATH, Then What Is Life?](#)” in *Mourning Religion*, ed. William B. Parsons, Diane Jonte-Pace, and Susan E. Henking (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 177-193.
- [Common Threads: Stories from the Quilt](#) (1989) (**Documentary**)

03/04

- Manigault-Bryant, LeRhonda S., **Ch. 3**, “[Ah Tulk to de Dead All de Time](#),” **Ch. 4**, “[Sendin’ Up My Timbah](#),” and **Epilogue**, “[Between the Living and the Dead](#),” in *Talking to the Dead: Religion, Music and Lived Memory among Gullah/Geechee Women* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 104-135, 136-171, 205-209. (**online**)
- *Talking to the Dead* [supplemental music selections](#) (**Audio**)

Recommended:

- Watson-Doost, Valeria, and Rainer Doost, *Ancestor Veneration* (**Documentary**) ([Course Media Gallery](#))

****FINAL RESEARCH PAPER DUE 03/11 AT 5PM EST****