

# SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF BLACK RELIGION

56TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

2026

THE WATERING OF OUR ROOTS



“Blackwater: Shoals, Canebrakes,  
and the Roots of Black Transcendence”

**THURSDAY, MARCH 19<sup>TH</sup> – SATURDAY, MARCH 21<sup>ST</sup>**  
**2026**

Embassy Suites  
5055 International Blvd | North Charleston, SC



**SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF  
BLACK RELIGION ANNUAL CONVENING SPONSORS**



## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18TH

6:00 PM **Executive Committee Meeting**  
(Meeting Room 12|13)



## THURSDAY, MARCH 19TH

11:30 AM **Registration Opens**

12:00 PM **Lunch**

1:00 PM **Opening Session** | (Meeting Room 12|13)  
Dr. Raymond Carr  
President and Presiding Officer, Society for the Study of Black Religion

1:15 PM **Opening Plenary** | (Meeting Room 12|13)  
Blackwater: Shoals, Canebrakes and the Roots of Black Transcendence  
Raymond Carr, President

Dr. Harry H. Singleton, III,  
Lilly Director of Faith-Based Education and Engagement,  
International African American Museum (IAAM)

2:45 PM **Break**

3:00 PM **“Living Voice(s) of the Past that Shape Our Future”**  
with Special Guest:  
Multi-E Emmy Award Winning and Tony Award Nominee, Keith David

Introduction  
Dr. Joi Carr, Professor, Director of Film Studies, Pepperdine University



**SSBR**

**Respondents:**

Rev. Dr. Andrea C. White, Associate Professor, Union Theological Seminary, NY  
Rev. Dr. Lee H. Butler, President, Iliff School of Theology, CO  
Rev. Dr. Valerie Bridgeman, Dean and Vice President, Methodist Theological School in Ohio  
Rev. Dr. JoAnne M. Terrell, Professor, Chicago Theological Seminary  
Rev. Dr. Larry G. Murphy, Professor, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, IL

**Moderated Discussion:**

Dr. Joi Carr

4:30 PM

**The President's Reception**

(Sponsor: Forum for Theological Exploration)

"Blackwater at Home and Abroad: A Report"

Reggie L. Williams, Associate Professor, Saint Louis University

Raymond Carr, President SSBR, Associate Professor, Pepperdine University

6:00 PM

**Executive Committee Huddle | (Meeting Room 12|13)**

6:30 PM

**Holding Space: Hush Harbors, AI,  
and Futuristic Approaches to Transcendence**

Introduction:

Dr. Leonard C. McKinnis, II, Associate Professor,  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Philip Butler, Associate Professor  
and Director of the AI Institute, Iliff School of Theology, CO

Rev. Dr. Melva L. Sampson, Assistant Professor,  
Wake Forest University School of Divinity, NC

**Moderated Discussion:**

Dr. Herbert Marbury

8:00 PM

**Dinner On Your Own**

# FRIDAY, MARCH 20TH

8:00 AM **Breakfast**

10:00 AM **TOUR—International African American Museum (IAAM)**

14 Wharfside Street – Charleston, SC 29401

(Transportation departs at 9:45AM)

Museum Debriefing:

Rev. Dr. Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, Professor, Oblate School of Theology,  
CEO Founder, Dr. Cheryl Enterprises, LLC.

12:30 PM **Lunch**

1:45 PM **AI, Human Welfare, and Black Transcendence |** (Meeting Room 12|13)

Dr. Aaron Terris Grizzell, Executive Director,  
Northern California Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.  
Community Foundation and Visiting Scholar at the Graduate Theological Union

Dr. Sylvester A. Johnson, Professor, Northwestern University  
and 2024 Kluge Chair in Technology and Society at the Library  
of Congress's Kluge Center, Washington, D.C.

Moderated Discussion:

Rev. Dr. Valerie Miles-Tribble, Professor, Berkeley School of Theology

3:00 PM **Blackwater and Its Routes to Transcendence**

Introduction Dr. Staney T. Talbert, Assistant Professor, Pepperdine University

**Esteemed Panelists:**

Dr. Ahmad Greene-Hayes, Associate Professor, Harvard Divinity School

Rev. Dr. Lisa Allen-McLaurin, Associate Dean and Professor,  
Methodist Theological School in Ohio

Rev Dr. Kamilah Hall Sharp, Assistant Professor, Chicago Theological Seminary

Dr. Eric Williams, Assistant Professor, Duke University

**Moderated Discussion:**

Rev. Dr. Sonya Maria Johnson, Associate Professor, Beloit College

- 4:30 PM **BUSINESS MEETING** | (Meeting 12|13)  
Induction of New Members  
Recognition of Achievements, Retirements, and Promotions  
Reports  
Discussion
- 6:00 PM **SSBR Reception**  
(Sponsored by Forum for Theological Exploration)  
Memorial: Celebration of Life: Rev. Dr. Melva L. Sampson, WFU School of Divinity
- 7:00 PM **SOCIETY DINNER**  
Special Guest Performance: Joshua Harris Experience  
Sponsored by Wake Forest University School of Divinity, Iliff School of Theology  
and Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School (CRCDS)

**SATURDAY, MARCH 21ST**

- 8:00 AM **Breakfast**
- 8:30 AM **SSBR Recognition of New Scholarship in Black Religion**  
President, Raymond Carr
- 9:00 AM **STATE OF BLACK RELIGION ADDRESS**  
“Still in the Blackwater”  
Dr. Stephanie Y. Mitchem,  
Professor of Religious Studies, McCausland College of Arts and Sciences,  
University of South Carolina
- 10:15 AM **Closing Discussion**

**“It is a great privilege to experience the watering of one’s roots at a time of  
such dryness in the world.”  
—Howard Thurman**