

**SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF BLACK RELIGION  
ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

**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, South Carolina

**Wednesday, March 18, 2026**

6:00 PM Executive Committee Meeting

**Thursday, March 19, 2026**

11:30 AM Registration Opens

12:00 PM Lunch

1:00 PM Opening Session  
Dr. Raymond Carr,  
President and Presiding Officer, Society for the Study of Black Religion

1:15 PM

## Opening Plenary

Raymond Carr, President  
Blackwater: Shoals, Canebrakes and the Roots of Black Transcendence

Dr. Harry H. Singleton, III, Professor, University of South Carolina  
and 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-Emmy Award Winning and Tony Award Nominee, Keith David

Dr. Joi Carr, Professor and Director of the Multicultural Theatre Project, Pepperdine University

Respondents:

Rev. Dr. Andrea C. White, 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

Dr. JoAnne M. Terrell, Professor, Chicago Theological Seminary

Rev. Dr. Larry G. Murphy, Professor, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, IL

Moderated Discussion: 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

Kyle Brooks, Assistant Professor, University of San Diego

Raymond Carr, President, Pepperdine University

6:00 PM Executive Committee Huddle  
Conference Board Room

6:30 PM **Holding Space: Hush Harbors, AI, and Futuristic Approaches to Transcendence**  
Philip Butler, Associate Professor and Director of the AI Institute, Iliff School of Theology  
Rev. Dr. Melva L. Sampson, Assistant Professor, Wake Forest University School of Divinity

8:00 PM DINNER ON YOUR OWN

**FRIDAY, March 20, 2026**

8:00 AM Breakfast

10:00 AM **TOUR—INTERNATIONAL AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSEUM (IAAM)**  
14 Wharfside Street – Charleston, SC 29401  
(Transportation departs at 9:45AM)

12:30 PM Lunch  
(location TBD)

Museum Debriefing

1:45 PM **AI, Human Welfare, and Black Transcendence**  
Dr. Aaron Grizzell, Director of the NORCALMLK Foundation  
Dr. Sylvester A. Johnson, Professor, Northwestern University and  
Kluge Chair in Technology and Society at the Library  
of Congress's Kluge Center, Washington, D.C.

3:00 PM

## **BLACKWATER AND ITS ROUTES TO TRANSCENDENCE**

Esteemed Panelists:

Rev. Dr. Lisa Allen-McLaurin, Associate Dean and Professor, Methodist Theological School in Ohio  
Dr. Eric Williams, Associate Professor, Duke University  
Ahmad Green-Hayes, Associate Professor, Harvard Divinity School

Discussion

4:30 PM

### **BUSINESS MEETING**

Induction of New Members  
Memorial: Celebration of Life Lead by Rev. Dr. Melva Sampson  
Recognition of Achievements, Retirements, and Promotions  
Reports  
Discussion

6:00 PM

### **SSBR Reception**

(Sponsored by Wake Forest University School of Divinity)  
Embassy Suites

7:00 PM

### **SOCIETY DINNER**

Special Guest Performance:  
Sponsored by Iliff School of Theology and Wake Forest University School of Divinity

**SATURDAY, March 21, 2026**

8:00 AM Breakfast

8:30 AM 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