



THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST HISTORY AND HERITAGE SOCIETY BULLETIN



Conrad Wright Lecture at General Assembly 2017

A LUMINOUS BROTHERHOOD: AFRO-CREOLE SPIRITUALISM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE, Dr. Emily Clark

Friday, June 23, 1:30 – 2:45 pm

The Unitarian Universalist History and Heritage Society invites you to join us at General Assembly in New Orleans for the Conrad Wright Lecture. This year's lecturer is Dr. Emily Suzanne Clark, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, Associate Editor for the *Journal of Southern Religion*, and author of the new book *A Luminous Brotherhood: Afro-Creole Spiritualism in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans* from University of North Carolina Press, 2016.

In this lecture, Dr. Clark introduces the practice of Spiritualism among a small community of Afro-Creole men in nineteenth-century New Orleans. From 1858 until 1877 a wise world of spirits guided these men as they sought to make New Orleans, the South, the nation, and the world a more just and moral place. The roster of spirit guides included figures like Abraham Lincoln, Jesus, Montesquieu, Saint Vincent de Paul, John Brown, and more, and their messages instructed the Spiritualists on issues of politics, society, religious institutions, and charity.

In the wake of slavery and the continued strength of white supremacy, the spirits advised the Spiritualists in ways practical and abstract on how to rebuild the country with justice as its core. The spirits identified the worth of a person with his or her spirit and not the raced body. The spirits scolded those who treated women with contempt and disregard. The spirits criticized those who fought for slavery, and the spirits of former slaves and slave owners lamented America's embrace of the institution. The spirits decried forms of religious authority that could be coopted for selfish and materialistic ways. Instead the spirits advocated charity, racial equality, respect for all, and the establishment of harmony. This lecture explores how the identities of the spirits communicating, the content of their messages, and the context surrounding the Spiritualists' practice all reinforced the spirits' calls for social justice. The first annual Conrad Wright lecture was given in 2008 by J.D. Bowers on Joseph Priestley and English Unitarianism in America. Past lecturers have included Charles Capper, Kristin Gwinn-Becker, Christopher Cameron, Megan Marshall, and James Ford.

Dr. Nicole Kirk and the Rev. Mark Harris will introduce Dr. Clark and Unitarian Universalist connections to spiritualism. Dr. Clark will be at the UUA bookstore for a book signing following the lecture.





Channing Grave Fundraising Nearing Completion

Special thanks to all UUHHS members who donated toward the restoration of the gravestone of William Ellery Channing at Mt. Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, MA. We launched a UUA Faithify Campaign this spring with a goal of \$5,000. As of April 24, 2017 we had raised \$5,415.99, and so we completed the Faithify goal. This is only a portion of what we needed, but others have also directly donated to UUHHS to help us reach the \$7,500 UUHHS pledge that will be added to the larger goal of \$15,000 needed for complete restoration. We will keep you informed as we near the end of this important project. Thank you again to all those who donated so generously.

Sincerely, the committee - Rosemarie Smurzynski, Stephanie May, Mark Harris, and newest member, Helen Cohen.

A Documentary History of Unitarian Universalism Is Here!

This spring Skinner House Books released *A Documentary History of Unitarian Universalism*, a two-volume collection of primary sources representing Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist history from Origen and Arius to Peter Morales and Rebecca Parker. Each volume contains more than one hundred distinct sources, ranging in length from less than a page to thousands of words, with brief scholarly introductions contributed by dozens of scholars. Sermons, hymns, theologies, autobiographies, and denominational statements are all included, drawn from the famous and the obscure alike. As the first source collection to include the period after Unitarian Universalist consolidation, the book provides rich resources for understanding the debates over consolidation and black empowerment, the liturgical and theological diversification of Unitarian Universalism, and the growing prominence of women and LGBTQ persons in our leadership. Readers will also encounter fresh perspectives on earlier historical periods through the chronological juxtaposition of Unitarian and Universalist sources and the inclusion of marginalized voices alongside prominent denominational leaders.

The Unitarian Universalist History and Heritage Society played an integral role in the development of *A Documentary History*. Three members of the UUHHS board—Dan McKanan, Mark Harris, and Nicole Kirk—served on the editorial committee, and the remaining editorial committee members—Peter Hughes, Emily Mace, Natalie Malter, Mark Morrison-Reed, and Susan Ritchie—have all appeared frequently in the Society's journal. Over the past six years, brainstorming sessions, progress reports at history convocations and gatherings of UU Collegium invited an even wider range of scholars to participate in shaping the project. The result is a collection that reflects the shared wisdom of a historical community that is committed to rigorous scholarship and attuned to the pastoral and social justice commitments of Unitarian Universalists today. Our hope is that every Unitarian Universalist congregation, along with every minister and professional leader, will purchase a copy of *A Documentary History*, and that it will serve as a standard reference work for at least a generation. Please do what you can to make this hope a reality!



PRESIDENT’S POST

VERY GOOD NEWS! As I hope you know, there has been a concerted ongoing effort to raise funds to renovate the William Ellery Channing Monument in Mount Auburn Cemetery. We were gratified to hear that the Faithify appeal this spring was successful in raising its \$5000 target, thanks to the dedicated work of Rosemarie Smurzynski, Stephanie May, and Mark Harris and the many others who contributed to preserving the monument. The UUHHS served as fiscal agent for this project; if you have not yet contributed, further donations are welcome and needed. Checks should be made out to UUHHS with “Channing Monument” in the Memo line, and sent to UUHHS, 670 High Street, Dedham, MA 02026

UUHHS at GENERAL ASSEMBLY: As usual we will have our table stocked with books and journals, and the annual Conrad Wright Lecture will be presented at GA again this year, following the large turnout last year. The speaker will be Emily Suzanne Clark, professor of religious studies at Gonzaga University and author of the fascinating book entitled *A Luminous Brotherhood: Afro-Creole Spiritualism in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*. See further information on page 1.

INTERESTED IN BEING A BOARD MEMBER? We are currently interviewing interested candidates who would like to serve on the UUHHS Board. If you would like to recommend someone, or are interested yourself, please contact me via email. (See below.) The Board is meeting via ZOOM on May 16, and will hold its annual “live” meeting July 28-29 at the Watertown church. All members of UUHHS are welcome to attend the Annual Meeting of the Society, beginning with a free lunch at Noon. RSVP to me if you want to join lunch!

Looking forward to seeing many of you in New Orleans,

Earl Holt

EarlHolt@aol.com

The 2017 Seminarian History Prize

The deadline is fast approaching for this year’s seminarian history prize! The UUHHS offers a \$500 prize (plus a free annual membership) for the best essay by an MDiv student, graduate from 2015 or later, and/or candidate for ministerial fellowship. If you are a seminarian, please submit your best work, and if you are not a seminarian, please encourage seminarians you know to participate. Essays should be 15-25 pages in length, and must draw on primary sources and be organized around a clear thesis. Submissions should be directed to Dan McKanan at dmckanan@hds.harvard.edu prior to June 1, 2017.

HAVE A COOL HISTORIC UU FIND THAT YOU WANT TO SHARE WITH UUHHS?

Please send any submissions about your local UU history and heritage to the UUHHS newsletter! Send all submissions to the newsletter editor, Phoebe Cos, at phobekates16@gmail.com by September 1st. We look forward to hearing your stories!

