

AAR Regional Development Grant Application, 2018–2019
“Sovereignty & Strangeness” Graduate Student Conference
Northwestern University

Event: “Sovereignty & Strangeness” Graduate Student Conference
Northwestern University Department of Religious Studies

Contact: Courtney Rabada
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Department of Religious Studies
Northwestern University

Project Description

The Northwestern University Department of Religious Studies Graduate Student Association is hosting the interdisciplinary graduate student conference “Sovereignty & Strangeness” on October 19-21, 2018. [You can view our website and the Call for Papers here.](#) We are writing to ask the AAR to help fund us \$XX to help with expenses of running a conference.

“Sovereignty & Strangeness” aims to explore the constitutive relationship between sovereignty and that which is deemed strange, queer, or illegible. How might the language of sovereignty be useful for thinking about power in religious or secular contexts when spiritual communities, charismatic individuals, and state institutions make claim to and perform supreme authority over populations and territories? And how might the language of strangeness help trace the disruptive potential of places, practices, and bodies that exceed the logic of sovereignty? Such questions converge in talking about queer and trans* materialities, racialized cosmologies, gender troubles, cultic communities, and liberation theologies, to name just a few examples. This conference hopes to put two intellectual currents -- studies of sovereignty and studies that critically deploy the idea of strangeness -- into conversation in ways that open these terms up to new and unexpected meanings. Strangeness, here, works both as a topic of study and as a mode of thought -- one at home in the humanities. We aim to explore the imaginative and political possibilities that result from thinking strangely.

Student panels will have focused topics and respondents whose task it is to connect panelists and panels together to cultivate a broader conversation. Professors [Ashon Crawley](#) (Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and African American and African Studies at the University of Virginia) and [Melissa M. Wilcox](#) (Professor and Holstein Family and Community

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Chair in Religious Studies at the University of California, Riverside) are our confirmed keynote speakers. Both are experts in religious studies, queer studies, and, in Prof. Crawley’s case, critical race theory. Prof. Crawley published his first book, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*, in 2016. Prof. Wilcox is publishing her most recent book, *Queer Nuns: Religion, Activism, and Serious Parody*, in 2018.

In addition to the panels and keynotes, the conference will also host a professionalization workshop. The workshop is designed so give graduate students whose research resonates with the keynote speakers’ areas of expertise the opportunity to pre-circulate conference-sized papers, and to receive feedback from Professors Crawley and Wilcox. The feedback will be focused on the process of turning conference-sized papers into publishable journal articles. Up to fourteen graduate students from across disciplines will participate. Professors Crawley and Wilcox will guide discussion. Responding to peers’ papers and receiving feedback is a useful skill for students to practice. More specifically, the conversation will help graduate students craft their article to be legible to a particular journal’s audience. This is an especially important and often difficult task for young scholars researching how religion intersects with queer and racialized communities.

We believe that the program of “Sovereignty & Strangeness” resonates with the mission of the AAR Regional Development Grant.

First, while the conference attracts graduate students from across the nation, many presenters will be from the Midwest region, especially Illinois and Indiana, the home of Midwest AAR. Our conference offers graduate students, postdocs, and faculty from across the nation the opportunity to engage with burgeoning and respected scholars in the fields of religion, race, queerness, and gender. This is a chance for young scholars to circulate their research within the broader scholarly community. Based on numbers from our past conferences, we predict robust attendance: 35 to 40 local graduate students; 20 visiting graduate students; 3 to 5 local postdoctoral fellows; and 15 to 20 local faculty.

Second, the conference has curated regionally specific topics. “Sovereignty & Strangeness” will host papers on Standing Rock, Muslims living in suburban Indianapolis, and a number of papers that explore shifting ideas of “the West” throughout US history. The mythos of the Midwest has papered over the relevance of the themes of sovereignty and strangeness for the

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region. The Midwest—in terms of the removal of Native Americans, varying populist movements, and the idea of the “Heartland”—has been a key region in which US Americans have defined and made claim to US American sovereignty. The mythology of the Midwest as fly-over country has at times obscured the strangeness of Midwestern religious communities. This is not to exoticize religious communities in the Midwest, but to suggest their value for study and theoretical attention.

The support of the AAR Regional Development Grant will help us realize the full potential of this conference. We believe our program will highlight the best traits of the study of religion today: critical and creative research that provides new -- and even strange -- perspectives on key issues today. We would be deeply gratified for “Sovereignty & Strangeness” to be supported by and affiliated with the American Academy of Religion.

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Project Statement

As graduate student conferences are already common across AAR regions, we suggest that one element in particular could be utilized in different regions: the professionalization workshop. This workshop allows students to share research with visiting graduates and faculty with a pragmatic goal: of turning their short papers into publishable articles for a specific journal. The conference committee would be happy to report back to the AAR about the successes and flaws of this type of graduate training event.

As mentioned in the previous section, “Sovereignty & Strangeness” is regionally specific in two ways: First, while the conference attracts graduate students from across the nation, many presenters will be from the Midwest region, especially Illinois and Indiana, the home of Midwest AAR. Our conference offers graduate students, post-docs, and faculty from across the nation the opportunity to engage with burgeoning and respected scholars in the fields of religion, race, queerness, and gender. This is a chance for young scholars to circulate their research within the broader scholarly community. Based on numbers from our past conferences, we predict robust attendance: 35–40 local graduate students; 20 visiting graduate students; 3–5 local postdoctoral fellows; and 15–20 local faculty.

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Timeline for the Completion of the Grant

September 2017 - October 2018

September 2017	Choose conference theme: Sovereignty & Strangeness
December 2017	Select keynote speakers and extend invitations
January 2018	Finalize call for papers
February	Contact and secure keynote speakers
March	Create conference website (Link)
March	Circulate call for papers to relevant university departments throughout Midwest and nationally
March	Apply for Northwestern University grants: The Graduate School’s Professionalization Grant and Kaplan Humanities Grant
May 13	Abstracts submissions from potential finalists due
May 13	Extended abstract deadline
May 31	Review abstracts as a committee and arrange papers into conference panels
April 1	Book hotel rooms for keynotes and request hotel block for panelists
June 1	Deadline for AAR Regional Grant application
June 5	Apply for funding from Northwestern departments and clusters with relevant interests to our conference’s aims, including African American Studies, Gender and Sexuality Studies, History, English, Anthropology, and Performance Studies.
June 15	Send acceptances and regrets to graduate students
July 1	Book travel for keynote speakers
August 1	Advertise conference to universities throughout Midwest
August 15	Finalize list of Northwestern student moderators and respondents for the panels
September 10	Start advertising conference on Northwestern campus, and at universities in the broader Chicago area
September 20	Finalize logistics, including meal planning and dinner reservations for keynote speakers and graduate student presenters
October 10	Prepare and print conference program
October 16-18	Finalize all travel plans and catering orders; create panelist welcome packets.
October 19-21	Sovereignty and Strangeness Conference held at Northwestern
October 23	Conference Recap and Review with committee; Send keynotes, presenters, and attendees request feedback (via online survey) on their experience at conference

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Detailed Budget

Budget for Graduate Student Conference “Sovereignty & Strangeness”		
Expense	Explanation	Amount
PAYMENTS TO INDIVIDUALS		
Speaker fees or honoraria	Honorarium for keynote speakers Professors Ashon Crawley and Melissa Wilcox	\$
Travel expenses/reimbursements (airfare, ground transport, hotel, etc.)	Flights and Hotel for Crawley and Wilcox	\$
Other payments to individuals	Fee to use art by Adrian Landon Brooks	\$
Other payments to individuals	Website support	\$
Other payments to individuals	Student hired support	\$
Other payments to individuals	Best paper prize	\$
PAYMENTS TO INDIVIDUALS TOTAL:		\$
FOOD/REFRESHMENTS		
Food costs (include cost per person and total attendance for each meal)	Friday reception, Friday dinner with keynotes, Saturday breakfast, Saturday lunch, Saturday reception, Saturday dinner, Sunday breakfast, professionalization workshop lunch	\$
FOOD EXPENSES TOTAL:		\$
OTHER COSTS		
Item	Advertising materials, office supplies, programs, lanyards, conference packets	\$
Item	Subsidies for visiting student boarding	\$
SUPPLIES/EQUIPMENT TOTAL:		\$
TOTAL EXPENSES		\$

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Budget for Graduate Student Conference “Sovereignty & Strangeness”		
Expense	Explanation	Amount
FUNDING FOR CONFERENCE		
Secured Funding	Department of Religious Studies	\$
	Alice Kaplan Institute for the Humanities	\$
	The Graduate School	\$
Requested Funding (Not Secured)	Various Departments (African American Studies, Gender & Sexuality Studies Program, English Literature, Anthropology)	\$
	AAR Regional Development Grant	\$
TOTAL FUNDING		\$
BALANCE (i.e., Difference between Cost and Funding)		\$0

SOVEREIGNTY & Strangeness

CALL FOR PAPERS



OCTOBER 19-21, 2018
EVANSTON, IL

A GRADUATE STUDENT CONFERENCE PRESENTED BY THE
NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY DEPT. OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Call For Papers

The Religious Studies Department of Northwestern University invites graduate student papers for a conference on

Sovereignty and Strangeness

to be held in Evanston, Illinois on October 19-21, 2018.

We request abstracts by May 13, 2018.

This conference aims to explore the constitutive relationship between sovereignty and that which is strange, queer, or illegible. How might the language of sovereignty be useful for thinking about power in religious or secular contexts when spiritual communities, charismatic individuals, and state institutions make claim to and perform supreme authority over populations and territories? And how might the language of strangeness help trace the disruptive potential of places, practices, and bodies that exceed the logic of sovereignty? Such questions converge in talking about queer and trans* materialities, racialized cosmologies, gender troubles, cultic communities, and liberation theologies, to name just a few examples. This conference hopes to put two intellectual currents -- studies of sovereignty and studies of strangeness -- into conversation in ways that open these terms up to new and unexpected meanings.

Keynote Speakers

Ashon Crawley Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and African American and African Studies at the University of Virginia

Melissa M. Wilcox

Possible Paper Topics

- Cults, Fanaticism, and the Surveillance of “Dangerous” Religions
- Homophobia and Homonormativity in the War on Terror Queer
- Futurity and Dystopian Desires Celebrity Worship and the
- #MeToo Movement
- Monstrosity and the Fantastic in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein Black
- Lives Matter and the Limits of Liberalism The Glass Closet and Black
- Sexual Cultures
- The Women’s Marches and the Politics of Pussy Hats Tibet and the
- Religious Affects of Self-Immolation Ceremonies of Possession and
- Protest at Standing Rock Spiritualized Nationalisms and
- Eschatologies of Occupation Disability, Debility, and Capacity
-
- Feminist Killjoys and Complaint Biographies

We seek burgeoning scholars from all academic disciplines, including but not limited to:

Religious Studies African/African-American/Black Studies
Anthropology Chicana/o/LatinX Studies Comparative Literature
Cultural Studies Gender/Women’s/Sexuality Studies History
Indigenous Studies Media Studies Performance Studies
Sociology

Please send a 500-word abstract, along with your name, institution, and year of study to **NUReligiousStudiesConference@gmail.com** by **May 13, 2018**. Decisions will be communicated by the beginning of June. Presentations should not exceed fifteen minutes in length and may approach the topic from any discipline or methodology.