Noel Erskine
Plantation Church: How African American Religion Was Born in Caribbean Slavery
February 9, 11:30AM
Callaway Hall, S221

Join us for a lunchtime conversation with Noel Erskine on his new book. Light refreshments will be served, but please bring your own lunch.

Erskine investigates the history of the Black Church as it developed both in the United States and the Caribbean after the arrival of enslaved Africans. Typically, when people talk about "the Black Church" they are referring to African-American churches in the U.S., but in fact, the majority of African slaves were brought to the Caribbean. It was there, Erskine argues, that the Black religious experience was born. The massive Afro-Caribbean population was able to establish a form of Christianity that preserved African Gods and practices, but fused them with Christian teachings, resulting in religions such as Cuba’s Santería. The Black religious experience in the U.S. was markedly different because African Americans were a political and cultural minority. The Plantation Church became a place of solace and resistance that provided its members with a sense of kinship, not only to each other but also to their ancestral past.

Despite their common origins, the Caribbean and African American Church are almost never studied together. Plantation Church examines the parallel histories of these two strands of the Black Church, showing where their historical ties remain strong and where different circumstances have led them down unexpectedly divergent paths.

How to Destroy a Shrine featuring Jacob Wright and Eric Reinders
March 24, 4PM
Pitts Library 360

Our history of discomfort with icons is in many ways linked to the Bible, which represents a rich tradition of attacking icons and shrines (both literally and rhetorically). But what were sacred shrines like in those days? What kind of sacred paraphernalia did they feature? How much do we know about the actual practices of attacks on temples and shrines? What remained from these destructions, and how did the conquerors use them in their strategies of rule and subjugation?

Jacob Wright, professor of Hebrew Bible at Emory, will address these questions in his contribution to the discussion.

With the Carlos Museum’s display of not just a Buddhist icon but a whole shrine assemblage, we have a chance to visualize an icon in its natural habitat — to a point. How much can a museum really represent or re-create sacred space? Or is the museum inevitably a de-sacralizing space? What does it even mean to “de-sacralize”? And how do we imagine the icons in museums that have no shrines, indeed sometimes have no head? Is the de-sacralization of icons always a hostile
act?
Eric Reinders, professor of East Asian religions at Emory, will speak on the spectrum of material effects, from obliteration through damage, abuse, hiding, and cultural redefinition, using Buddha images as his examples.

Join us for two short presentations and an open discussion of shrines and iconoclasm.

Silas Alard: Moving Words: Naming and Norming People in Motion
April 19, 11:30AM
Callaway Hall, S221

In 2016, the movement of people across international boundaries is hyper-regulated, and those regulations depend, in significant part, on typologies, for example: immigrant, emigrant, refugee, migrant laborer, family sponsored. Many of these typologies, such as "refugee," have both a specific legal meaning and another meaning or set of meanings in non-legal discourse. As such a category can be deployed simultaneously in its narrow legal usage and in its broad public usage. Thus, for example, refugee becomes a broad humanitarian category that extends beyond the narrow legal definition of a refugee. This set of conditions generates a confusion that is ripe for discourse that segments, judges, and distances the people transiting international (and sometimes internal) borders. What effect does this discourse have on, in the language of the Laney Colloquium, global religious circuits? What happens when religion is linked to movement? When some forms of movement are encouraged, some tolerated, and some discouraged? Is refugee religion perceived differently than migrant religion? And, what happens when religious categories (the sojourner, the resident alien) enter into the discourse?