

“Black Metaphysical Religion and the Art of Being Somewhere Else”

Mr. Matt Harris



Candidate Talk

Wednesday, February 9th, 2022

3:00pm - 4:20pm

Zoom Link: <https://ucr.zoom.us/j/6502699408>

UCR Religious Studies and Black Study
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Drawing on the archive of the avant-garde musician Sun Ra, this talk brings into focus the intellectual and institutional outlines of a distinct culture of Black study and struggle that emerged in the wake of the Great Migration. Sun Ra is best remembered for declaring that “space is the place” of Black freedom. This talk grounds his celebrated space age aesthetic in the underappreciated Black popular culture of metaphysical religion. I argue that Sun Ra’s “music of the space age” emerged from and extended Black Chicago’s metaphysical cultures, mobilizing its sources and infrastructures into a distinct, otherworldly aesthetic idiom, making his Black radical imagination inseparable from his religious imagination.

Matthew M. Harris is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. His current project is a religious history of how outer space became the place of Black freedom dreams in the twentieth century and has been supported by the Ford Foundation; the UC Consortium for Black Studies in California; and Columbia University’s Center on African-American Religion, Sexual Politics, and Social Justice.