

# **SIUE's Dr. Tisha Brooks Reveals The Sanctity Of Black Women's Travels In New Book**

by Patricia Merritt

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**EDWARDSVILLE** – Research on the spiritual impact of Black women’s travel appears light, if not altogether absent in literature, despite the weightiness and significance of their contributions throughout history. To remedy this, Tisha Brooks, PhD, Southern

Illinois University Edwardsville College of Arts and Sciences associate dean and associate professor, wrote her own book, ["Spirit Deep: Recovering the Sacred in Black Women's Travel"](#).

Brooks is one of three authors who will be part of "African American Literature at SIUE," a panel and book discussion, at 4 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 28 in the Redmond Learning Center (LB 2020) of the Lovejoy Library. Also on the program will be CAS faculty: Assistant Professor Donovan Ramon, PhD, author of ["Striking Features: Psychoanalysis and Racial Passing Narratives"](#) and Distinguished Research Professor Howard Rambsy II, PhD, author of ["Bad Men: Creative Touchstones of Black Writers."](#) Ramon and [Rambsy](#) are in the Department of English, Language and Literature.

Visit here to [RSVP for the African American Literature at SIUE Panel](#). Free copies of all three books will be available to attendees on a first-come, first-served basis.

"'Spirit Deep' started with my love of spiritual autobiography but was also informed by my fascination with Black women's travel," explained Brooks. "I grew up with a grandmother who traveled and made it possible for me to travel from a young age. Yet, culturally I did not see Black women represented as travelers."

"When I started exploring 19<sup>th</sup> century Black women spiritual autobiographers, I was amazed at their mobility and the extent of their travels, especially during a time when the majority of African American women were enslaved or living in contexts that made such travel unlikely or even impossible," she continued. "I was looking for a book that took seriously Black women's spirituality and travel but couldn't find that book. So, I wrote it."

"What would it mean for American and African American literary studies, if readers did take the spirituality and travel of Black women seriously?" Brooks asks and deals with this question in her book, which was published in March 2023 by University of Virginia Press.

"Spirit Deep" focuses on three 19<sup>th</sup> century Black women writers who merged the spiritual and travel narrative genres: Zilpha Elaw, Amanda Smith and Nancy Prince. The book also considers the impact of these women's journeys on Julie Dash's 1991 film, "Daughters of the Dust," and Saidiya Hartman's 2008 travel narrative, "Lose Your Mother."

"Bringing together both sacred and secular texts, 'Spirit Deep' uncovers an enduring spiritual legacy of movement and power that Black women have claimed for themselves in opposition to the single story of the Black (female) body as captive, monstrous and strange," said Brooks. "As such, the book addresses the marginalization of Black

women from larger conversations about travel writing, demonstrating the continuing impact of their spirituality and movements in our present world.”

“My hope is that this book makes visible the significance of Black women's journeys in the past and present, and the ways in which their journeys and lived experiences expand our understanding of travel, spirituality and of Black people's continued struggles for freedom,” she added.

Brooks, Ramon and Rambsy discussed their books with CAS Dean Kevin Leonard, PhD, on the WSIE’s “The SIUE Beat” radio show on Sunday, Feb. 25. Additionally, Brooks will give a talk about her book in March for Women's History month at SIUE. She also plans to record a podcast interview about the book for the New Books Network in March.

“The response has been enthusiastic,” shared Brooks. “I have had multiple opportunities to talk about the book with students in the classroom and beyond, with fellow scholars, and with community members – many of whom have reached out to share how impactful the book has been for them.”

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