

for example, proposed that public land sales be used to purchase slaves to be sent to colonies overseas. Though majorities within the PAS and NYMS held firm against colonization, in national meetings Southern abolitionists compromised, accepting colonization. Under these circumstances, Polgar explains, first movement abolition expired—setting the stage for the radical abolitionism of William Lloyd Garrison and the American Anti-Slavery Society.

Paul Polgar's *Standard-Bearers of Equality: America's First Abolition Movement* is illuminating, not only for those seeking to understand American abolitionism but also for grasping white people's mixed attitudes toward both African Americans and a society of equal rights. *Standard-Bearers of Equality* helps readers understand how the soaring idealism of the Declaration's promise of equal rights has been in tension with the Revolutionaries' commitment to property rights, and how difficult it has been to reconcile the ideal of republican citizenship with white prejudice.

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*Speaking with the Dead in Early America.* By Erik R. Seeman. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020. Pp. 344. \$39.95 cloth.)

A curious pamphlet appeared in Boston print shops in late 1774. "The Wonderful Appearance of an Angel, Devil & Ghost," according to its author, "S.W.," purports to be the true story of a Tory gentleman who had accepted a commission in the military government of Boston under the Coercive Acts. In a story anticipating Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, the man is visited one tempestuous night by three apparitions, the last, the ghost of one of his ancestors, who chastises him for turning his back on his libertarian Puritan heritage and clasping the hand of British tyranny. He immediately sees the errors of his ways and renounces his attachment to the crown. Aimed at a popular audience, "The Wonderful Appearance" was just one of many works addressing the exigencies of living in a city that saw itself as the besieged seat of the defense of colonial American rights and appealing to religious sensibilities in case the political and philosophical arguments failed to hit their marks. The pamphlet dually functions as an

entertaining ghost story with a timely political message and as a hair-raising tale confirming the political crisis that energized not just the living but the dead to stand against oppression. What would seem at first glance a highly unusual motif for a political screed turns out to be part of an emergent genre of literature tapping into widespread popular fascination with the afterlife, and the spirits of the dead themselves.

Belief in the supernatural is a somewhat underdeveloped area of early American religious studies, a staple being David D. Hall's *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment* (1990), which is focused on New England's popular religious culture. Erik R. Seeman took up a few of Hall's threads in the excellent *Death in the New World: Cross-Cultural Encounters, 1492–1800* (2010), and here he has offered a natural follow-up with *Speaking with the Dead in Early America*. His essential goal is two-fold: first, to support Robert Orsi's expansive definition of religion to include "a network of relationships between heaven and earth involving humans of all ages and many different sacred figures together" (8), even when veneration of the dead, as well as the sacralization of their remains, went against Protestant doctrine; and second, to prove that the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were not a period of the gradual secularization of American society but actually a time when laypeople defied clerical admonitions against asserting direct connections between the living and the dead. Such interactions, Seeman demonstrates, predate the rise in the popularity of spiritualism as practiced by the Shakers and the infamous Fox Sisters in the 1840s. Seeman accomplishes these twin goals skillfully, in prose that is eloquent, affecting, and provocative, establishing that an antebellum "cult of the dead" stemmed from roots reaching deep into the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Despite Protestantism's derision for veneration of the dead—particularly the corpses of loved or revered ones—as Catholic superstition, Anglo-American Protestants insisted upon inhabiting a world in which the living communed with the dead. Through tombstones in which the dead reminded mourners of their mortality, funeral elegies imagining conversations between the living and dead, iconographic portraits of the departed, mourning embroideries, and the treating of locks of deceased loved ones' hair as beloved talismans, Anglo-Americans proved to be deeply concerned about maintaining relationships beyond the veil of tears. Popular literature abounded with ghost stories—some allegedly true, others patently false—and implications that the spirits of the dead could return to guide loved ones.

While the intelligentsia scoffed at occasional attempts to claim the reality of ghosts, ordinary people nodded in agreement while laying sleepless in their beds when something went bump in the night. Over time, the dead transitioned from being disquieting specters bearing doleful messages or accusing their murderers to becoming reassuring guardian angels as part of hyperextended companionate families and circles of friends. Such notions were strongest in middle-class families increasingly defined by women's sensibility (221–22, 254, 256).

The book's only serious defect is its misleading title. Seeman's expertise in the New England religious landscape led him to concentrate almost entirely upon that region in his analysis, ignoring the degrees to which supernaturalism similarly suffused Southern culture. He ignores, for example, how literary trends in the 1790s (chap. 5) gave rise to Southern Gothic literature in the 1800s, the greatest exponent of which was Edgar Allen Poe. While much of his analysis of the North is equally applicable to the South, his apparent refusal to incorporate this region into the narrative is puzzling. Perhaps to include the South would mean to address African American funerary practices and beliefs about the supernatural, which he avoided altogether even for the North because he "could not find significant. . . African influences on Euro-American communication with the dead" (5). While certainly Africans retained much of their native beliefs and practices in the Americas, in British America and the United States these mixed with Euro-American beliefs and practices over time. His assertion about African American influences upon Euro-American religious culture may be valid with regard to New England, but the farther one travels south, the more such a statement's validity dissolves. References to a handful of novels and treatises on supernaturalism as having broad appeal, or of a few incidents purportedly taking place in the South described in northern newspapers and magazines, does little to counter the geographic imbalance. Consequently, a more accurate title would be *Speaking with the Dead in Early New England*.

These misgivings aside, *Speaking with the Dead in Early America* remains an excellently researched and written monograph that shines a light in a particularly dark corner of the scholarship on popular religious culture—one into which historians have too often been reluctant to peer.

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Product Information. In *Speaking with the Dead in Early America*, Erik Seeman undertakes a 300-year history of Protestant communication with the dead, from Elizabethan England to the mid-nineteenth-century United States. Through prodigious research and careful analysis, he boldly reinterprets Protestantism as a religion in which the dead played a central role. Product Identifiers. Publisher. All are enlisted to convey the true depth of early Americans' love affair with the dead. Seeman is an expert storyteller, and in his hands (as in the minds and hearts of his subjects) the dead come to life again."--Susan Juster, author of *Sacred Violence in Early America*. Lccn. 2019-017143. Book Editions for *Speaking With The Dead In Early America*. 1 results. All matches. Books. Study. Textbooks. *Speaking with the Dead in Early America*. Some religions prohibit speaking with the dead, and there are reasons for that belief. Ask yourself if your own belief system, personal or organizational, permits you to attempt contact. Thanks! You may very well likely not connect with the dead in the clear way that the article states but that doesn't mean that they are not there watching over you. Mediums practice for years; so don't be upset if you don't get it the first time. Thanks! Helpful 1 Not Helpful 0. Use music. Pick out a particular piece with meaning to you (such as *Afterlife* by Rossano Galante), listen to it, visualize yourself in mist of whatever color feels right to you, and envision the spirit you want to talk to. Chat for a while, or just take in their presence. Do this regularly until you get good at Communication with the Dead. Distant communication has been transformed since ancient times. People can bridge the distance between absent loved ones by picking up a cellular phone, sending e-mail, or boarding a jet that quickly eradicates physical distance. Apparently one could see visions by gazing into the mirror in a receptive state of mind. The Queen was among those who believed she had seen a departed friend in Dee's mirror. Some claim that the dead choose to communicate with the living and the living can also reach out to them by using special techniques and rituals. These propositions have been accepted by many people since ancient times. Greek religious cults and the Aztecs both discovered the value of reflective surfaces for this purpose. Death Series. Episode #1 of 4. Today we delve into the new book, *Speaking with the Dead in Early America*, by historian and friend-of-the-pod Erik Seeman, where he explores the history of Protestant communication with the dead in the three centuries before the advent of Spiritualism. Coming up in our Death series: The Black Death.