**Loss, Grief, Activism (REL-230C)**

Spring 2021, WF 10:30-11:50 a.m.

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| **Instructor:** Lucia Hulsether (Ladd 205)  **Office Hours**: Wed 2-4 p.m. ([sign up here](https://calendly.com/proflh/15min)) | **Classroom:** Annex 217  **Zoom room**: 929 2592 4963 |

**Course Description.** This course reflects historically and theoretically on the political, affective, and public workings of loss. What does it mean to lose something? How do we make losses visible? How do we mourn loss? These questions have roots in the interdisciplinary humanities, particularly in religious and cultural studies, critical race and ethnic studies, and gender/queer studies traditions that guide this course. But it is clear, too, that the contemporary moment is one of acute, multiplying loss. Our present is shaped both by the coronavirus pandemic and mass uprisings in defense of Black life—two contexts that intersect in mass protests in which those seeking justice for victims of police murder simultaneously have exposed themselves to retaliatory state violence and to infection from a virus that has had disproportionate impact in communities of color. Focused on the political uses of loss—from rituals of public grief, to gestures of solidarity with Black Lives Matter,to the omnipresence of death statistics, to appropriation of loss for U.S. nationalism—this course proceeds on the assumption that loss is anything but a one-off event. It is, to use a metaphor from Christina Sharpe, the context and the climate in which we pursue our inquiry.

**Objectives**  
  
In this course, students can expect to do the following:

* Build a classroom collective characterized by anti-racist and feminist practices of mutual support, accountability, confidentiality, and challenge as we navigate and reflect on our present and the contexts that shape it;
* Develop a working understanding of notions of loss and grief as they exist publicly, with an emphasis on becoming conversant in the political implications of feelings that we often think of as private or interior;
* Map how different norms around loss have shaped social, cultural, political life, including whose lives are grieved, what political movements gain traction, and how collectives are formed; understand the raced, gendered, and classed dynamics of loss and grief;
* Analyze and reflect on primary sources—such as statistical charts, memorials, and artistic works—with reference to their historical contexts and social locations; read theoretical sources that may be dense or difficult to get through; practice putting these sources in conversation with primary ones, to illuminate both;
* Lean on the resources of the collective, by workshopping provisional ideas and writing; establish skills for working in small groups of peers across the arc of a term according to community norms and noncompetitive practices of support
* Emphasize independent thinking and learning; emphasize pleasure- and inquiry-centered approaches to learning over and above assessment-oriented approaches; reflect on learning experiences and their relationship to individual educational goals, challenges, and strengths.

**Course Materials**

* Anne Boyer, *The Undying* (Penguin, 2019). I encourage you to order from an independent bookstore. This is made easy by [Bookshop.org](https://bookshop.org/books/the-undying-pain-vulnerability-mortality-medicine-art-time-dreams-data-exhaustion-cancer-and-care/9780374279349).
* All other materials will be available on Brightspace.

**Class Policies and Info-to-Know**

**Communication and Feedback**

**Communication**: I welcome your questions about the course via email. I will make every effort to respond to emails and DMs received on Monday-Friday within 24 hours. Emails received after 6pm will be answered the following day; emails received on weekends most likely will be answered the following Monday. Please note that you don’t have to have an earth-shattering reason to communicate with me. I always welcome feedback on how class is going or conversations about topics that we haven’t had time to address during class.

**Office Hours**: You are welcome and encouraged come to office hours at any point in the semester, or to make an appointment if my regular office hours do not work with your schedule. [Sign-up slots are here.](https://calendly.com/proflh/15min) When possible, please let me know ahead of time when you would like to come to office hours and a little about what you want to discuss.

**Drafts**: I will gladly provide feedback on paper drafts or outlines during office hours or by appointment, or meet to discuss papers and writing more generally. We will also make time discuss the assignments, and the process of writing academic papers, during class meetings.

**Paper returns**: All papers turned in by the due date will be returned with feedback within 1-2 weeks of submission, and always at least a week before another paper or major assignment is due. For papers turned in later, I’ll do my best to keep this schedule.

**Resources for Equity, Inclusion, and Universal Learning**

**Health and Mutual Care.** Care for yourself and others! Do not come to class if you feel sick! Do not come to class if you’ve been around someone who is sick! There will be hyflex options when we meet in person (and we’ll be kind with each other about tech glitches). Everybody has committed to wearing a mask in class and on campus; cleaning their workspaces upon entry and dismissal; and otherwise following the Skidmore guidelines around COVID-19. We will value the time we have in person by keeping ourselves and one another as healthy as possible under the circumstances.

**Accessibility**: This course is built on principles of universal learning, meaning that we will together strive to make our class as inclusive as possible. [Skidmore’s Office for Disability and Accessibility Services](https://href.li/?https://www.skidmore.edu/accessibility/index.php) facilitates accommodations for students with documented disabilities. To officially request accommodations, please contact Meg Hegener, Coordinator of Student Access Services (518-580-8150), or just drop by the front desk of the Office of Student Academic Services in the Starbuck Center. Beyond that office’s specific interventions, please talk to me about your learning needs and about how our course can best accommodate them. I encourage you to come to me with these needs as early as possible and, throughout the course, as often as necessary.

**Writing and Research Resources**: Skidmore provides many resources to support student success in writing and research, including and especially the [Writing Center](https://href.li/?https://www.skidmore.edu/writingcenter/) and the college’s [reference librarians](https://href.li/?https://lib.skidmore.edu/library/index.php/ask-a-librarian). Strong writers know that their work improves with feedback and discussion; strong researchers know that research librarians can help bring a project from good to great. Take advantage of these resources.

**Mental Health and Counseling**: The [Counseling Center at Skidmore College](https://href.li/?https://www.skidmore.edu/counseling/) is a key resource for students looking for additional professional support on a range of issues — major transitions, depression, anxiety, eating concerns, grief and bereavement, navigating structural oppression, processing the times we’re all living through. Counselors can see students individually or in small, topic-specific therapy groups. Do not hesitate to reach out to them at their main number, 518-580-5555.

**Title IX Statement:** All people have the right to live, work, and learn in a context free of harassment and intimidation. This class is no different; the instructor is committed to feminist pedagogy and, with this in mind, reaffirms the Title IX policy at Skidmore College. Sexual and gender-based misconduct violates the stated values and standards of the college; it is also a violation of federal law. If you have experienced harassment or assault and need to talk to somebody about it, it is important to know the policies about mandatory reporting. If you would like to talk to a confidential resource person, then seek out the Counseling Center, Health Services, or Victim Advocates. Most everyone else on Skidmore’s faculty and staff, including the instructor of this class, are mandatory reporters. This means that if a student confides in them about an incident of sexual or gender misconduct, they must report the incident to the [Skidmore Title IX Office](https://href.li/?https://www.skidmore.edu/ocse/safety/title-ix.php). The Title IX Coordinator and/or Deputy Coordinator will then be aware of the case, and will contact the student to discuss next steps (this could include submitting an official report, pursuing a formal investigation, or simply connecting the student to personal support resources). This office takes confidentiality very seriously and shares identifying information only with the small group of college officials in its official governance processes.

**Academic Integrity**: Everyone in this class has signed the Skidmore Honor code. You are responsible for and have committed to upholding Skidmore’s [policies on academic honesty and plagiarism](https://href.li/?https://www.skidmore.edu/arthistory/academic/writing/plagiarism.php). A shorthand definition of plagiarism is any form of writing that represents someone else’s ideas or words as your own or lacks proper citation. Plagiarism may take place intentionally or unintentionally. If you have any doubts or questions about academic honesty, do not hesitate to ask.

**Conscientious Religious Observance Policy.** If religious observances cause absence from class, campus employment, athletic practice, and/or game days or necessitates accommodations, students should notify their faculty prior to the date(s) of their absence. Students will be allowed to make up academic work and/or campus employment requirements without penalty.