

The Journey  
An Immersive Exhibition that Explores the Tradition Surrounding Death and the Afterlife  
in Afro Caribbean Cultures

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Finally, I would like to thank my Mamá....The original exhibition designer in my life.

## Abstract of Thesis

### *“The Journey”*

#### Death and the Afterlife in Afro-Caribbean Cultures

Is an immersive exhibition that explores the traditions surrounding death and the afterlife within three Afro-Caribbean cultures. The thesis shows how the exhibition will create a space for visitors to delve into the traditions of the Creoles, Orisha and Garifuna peoples and how those traditions are believed to transition the soul and, more importantly, encourage acceptance of the inevitability of death through the celebration of life. The paper discusses the opportunities and challenges presented by staging a temporary exhibition in the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

## Contents

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Abstract of Thesis .....	iii
List of Illustration .....	vi
Introduction.....	1
I. Exhibition Overview.....	3
Thesis Statement .....	3
Key message .....	3
Precedents .....	4
Thematic structure .....	11
Site Assessment .....	12
Site choice.....	12
Relevance.....	13
Visitor demographics .....	13
Analysis.....	14
II. Concept Development .....	15
Exhibition Goals .....	15
Interpretive Goals.....	15
Curatorial Goals .....	15
Content Outline.....	16
Audience .....	18
Target Audience.....	18
Personae .....	18
Narrative .....	19
Exhibit Narrative.....	19
Narrative Device .....	19
Conceptual Strategies.....	20
Interpretive strategy .....	20
Engagement strategy.....	21
Design Strategy.....	21
Space plan .....	22
Design Concepts .....	23
Graphic Identity .....	25

V. Bibliography.....	27
Books: .....	27
Documentaries: .....	27
Articles:.....	28
Websites:.....	28
Appendix A. Precedents.....	29
Appendix B. Journey Map .....	36
Appendix C. Exhibition Script.....	37

List of Illustrations

Figure 1 Floor plan Concourse "c" NMAAHC ..... 12  
Figure 2 Floor plan Special Exhibitions Gallery ..... 12  
Figure 3 ..... 18  
Figure 4 ..... 18  
Figure 5 ..... 18  
Figure 6 Narrative Diagram..... 19  
Figure 7 Space Plan ..... 22  
Figure 8 ..... 25  
Figure 9 ..... 25  
Figure 11 Labels ..... 25  
Figure 10 Text Panel..... 25

## **Introduction**

Dying is an inevitable part of life; the way we deal with the loss of a loved one and what occurs in the moments after death can directly impact the way we grieve and accept a loss.

The North American funeral industry today has become subject to a commercialization of death in which funerals have become expensive, corporate and bureaucratic—keeping families separate from their dead and the death process itself creating spaces of forced poise that do not invite loved ones to process the visceral effect that losing a loved one can have on human beings which then makes acceptance of that loss even more difficult to achieve. The average funeral in North America costs between \$8,000- \$10,000 making up a \$20.7 billion per year industry (Public Broadcasting Services 2013)<sup>1</sup>.

In contrast, Afro-Caribbean cultures are very death engaged as the poet Octavio Paz said when describing Mexican culture, however the idea applies to Afro-Caribbean cultures, “Western cultures would burn their lips if they so much as uttered the word death, Mexican culture, on the other hand, frequents it, mocks it, caresses it, sleep with it, entertains it; it is one of their favorite playthings and their most enduring love.” (Paz 1950)<sup>2</sup>

Afro Caribbean cultures have a core belief that human beings are made up of two parts: The physical and the spiritual therefore when a loved one dies both parts need to accept

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<sup>1</sup>Economics of the Funeral Industry: <http://www.pbs.org/pov/homegoings/economics-of-the-funeral-industry/>

<sup>2</sup> From here to eternity: Traveling the world to find the good death by Caitlin Doughty

the loss. The series of traditions of Afro-Caribbean cultures are essentially the final act of love that the family and the community can do for a person that they loved. "A sense of purpose helps the mourner grieve. Grieving helps the mourner begin to heal" (Doughty 2017)<sup>3</sup>.

The following paper proposes an exhibition, "*The Journey*" that applies the design and interpretive strategies that will create an immersive, exciting and meaningful exhibition experience that explores the traditions that surround death and the afterlife in Afro-Caribbean cultures held at the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington D.C.

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<sup>3</sup> From here to eternity: Traveling the world to find the good death by Caitlin Doughty

## **I. Exhibition Overview**

### **Thesis Statement**

Traditionally within Afro-Caribbean cultures, the peoples that make up these cultures have held the belief that human beings are made up of two parts: the physical and the spiritual. Death is not about dying in the physical sense; it is about accepting the new journey and celebrating life through a series of unique and powerful traditions.

Today, with the influence of globalization, some members of Afro-Caribbean-Diaspora may have changed how they view the funerary traditions of their communities, however, most members of the three cultures explored in this thesis; the Orisha's from Cuba, the Creole's from Nicaragua, and the Garifuna's from Honduras and Nicaragua, still maintain and embrace the traditional funerary rituals as a manifestation of a spiritual belief system.

### **Key message**

Caribbean cultures believe that death is not about dying; it is about the celebration of life and the transition of the soul.

## Precedents

1. *The living need light, the dead need music* Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

A video exhibit created by artist collective "The Propeller Group". A film that documents and stages funeral traditions and public wake ceremonies in South Vietnam. The 30-minute video shot in HD featuring brass bands, professional criers and street performers.

### Relevance/Best Aspects

- Use of video as a centerpiece for narrative.
- Limited use of artifacts.
- Simplicity allows visitors to absorb and interpret the narrative without being influenced by too much text.
- Light sets the mood and allows focus on video.

2. *Death: The Human Experience*, Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, Bristol City, UK

The most universal experience we will encounter, this exhibition encouraged visitors to consider ethical issues, different attitudes to death and how different cultures across the world, from the earliest human societies to modern day, have dealt with the end of life.

Relevance/Best Aspects

- Use of lively colors and textures.
- Use of light to highlight meaningful text on a large panel.
- Use of warnings before particularly sensitive areas allows for a sense of tact with such an uncomfortable subject matter.
- Mortuary wall: inside each door, you would find video or information discussing the philosophical questions of what happens and what should be done when death occurs.
- Use of a space of reflection at the end of the exhibit.

3. *Tomb Treasures: New Discoveries from China's Han Dynasty*, Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, CA

One of the most powerful civilizations of the ancient world, China's Han dynasty achieved profound cultural and artistic influence, technological advancements and military might. Two thousand years later discoveries of royal tombs allow us to glimpse these extraordinary accomplishments firsthand.

Emulating their grand palaces, Han royals built lavishly furnished tombs so that in the afterlife no need would go unmet.

Relevance/Best Aspects

- Accessible user flow.
- Great use of color emphasizing the traditional Chinese red giving the exhibit cultural identity.
- Focused lighting on objects gives them impact.
- The 3D model interactive affords visitors the opportunity to delve deeper into the stories behind the objects as well as an understanding of the scale of the actual tomb.

4. *Day of the dead*, National Museum of Funeral, History Houston, TX

An exhibit that explores the colorful religious celebration practiced by Meso-American cultures that honors the souls of the departed. Families gather for festivities on November 1 (All Saints Day) and November 2 (All Souls Day), because it is believed the dead return to visit the living during this time.

Relevance/Best Aspects

- Focus on a practice unique to a specific region and culture.
- Use of full-scale models to recreate an immersive experience.
- Simple but effective narrative experience

5. *History of Embalming*, National Museum of Funeral, History Houston, TX.

Observe how—and ponder why—the Ancient Egyptians developed embalming rituals more than 5000 years ago and learn about the utter necessity of preserving bodies during the Civil War. This exhibit tracks the methods of preserving human remains through the centuries.

Relevance/Best Aspects

- Model objects and tools used in the embalming process.
- Use of pictorial displays and renderings of different embalming practices in different cultures throughout history.

6. *Visiting Hours*, Netherlands Uitvaart Museum Amsterdam.

The Space of the last farewell is most often the aula of a funeral home or crematorium.

This photo exhibit “Visiting Hours” shows the artist's fascination with Dutch design within these spaces. Worldwide funeral rites are largely dictated by religion but in a society increasingly becoming unaffiliated with any particular religion the last farewell become a moment of freedom to re-interpret funeral rites the way one wants.

This project documents the possible customization of the space the ceremony takes places.

Relevance/Best Aspects

- Recreating a funeral home aula to create an immersive experience.
- Use of pictures to show the different ways people customize funeral ceremonies in modern Dutch society.
- Use of atmospheric lighting to capture mood

## 7. *COCO*, Disney Pixar

US 3D computer-animated fantasy film produced by Pixar Animation Studios and released by Walt Disney Pictures. The story follows a 12-year-old boy named Miguel Rivera who is accidentally transported to the land of the dead, where he seeks the help of his deceased musician great-great-grandfather to return him to his family among the living. The concept for *Coco* is based on the Mexican holiday of the Day of the Dead.

Relevance/Best Aspects:

1. Great use of color.
2. Shows the idea of how the dead can look upon the living in a parallel existence.
3. Great explanation of the creation and use of altars.

## **Thematic structure**

Based on the precedents mentioned above “*The Journey*” exhibition will utilize the overarching themes of light and color as a conveyor of mood and emotion and focused use of artifacts, sound and video projections to help tell the overall story without overwhelming the visitor, use of a space of reflection as a closing inspired by the exhibition “*Death: The Human Experience*” and scenic recreations to create immersive environments such as the ones in “*History of embalming*” and “*Day of the Dead*”.

## Site Assessment

### Site choice

The Journey Exhibition will be held at the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) in their special exhibitions gallery located on Concourse “C” one floor below “L1” which is on the entrance level of the museum.

If the visitor follows the museums intended visitor flow, history galleries first, on concourses “C1, C2, C3” and work their way up they would have to pass near the special exhibitions gallery directly to the left when the visitor steps off the main escalators, elevator or winding staircase.

The special exhibitions gallery is a 4,273mt<sup>2</sup> space with a capacity for 230 people.

(National Museum of African American History and Culture 2016)<sup>4</sup>



Figure 1 Floor plan Concourse "c" NMAAHC

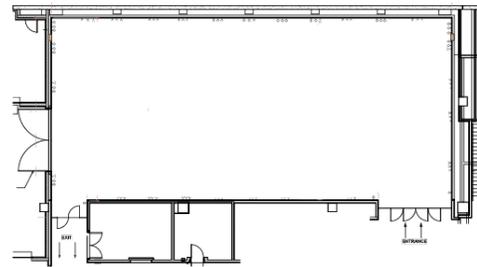


Figure 2 Floor plan Special Exhibitions Gallery

<sup>4</sup> <https://nmaahc.si.edu/visit/maps>

## **Relevance**

The National Museum of African American History and culture strives to tell the American story through the lens of the African American experience. Part of that story is its historical context within and in connection to the African Diaspora. The museum incorporates this key message in its overall themes and throughout most of the exhibitions currently on display.

## **Visitor demographics**

Since its opening in 2016, The National Museum of African American History and Culture has received 3.5 million visitors as of the end of March 2018 and is currently averaging 7,000 visitors per day (Smithsonian Institution 2016-2018)<sup>5</sup>.

52% of museum audience is African American or of African descent with the other 48% percent of visitors identifying as white, Hispanic or other.

The museum is not specifically targeted to an African American audience, rather its main audience objective of the museum is to attract people from all backgrounds. NMAAHC aims to tell the history of America through the lens of the African American experience.

Current data indicates that most of the visitors the museum has received since its opening are predominantly US citizens, however, the museum has a strong attraction for international visitors. The museum hopes to be able to accommodate all visitor demands when the need for timed passes has been eliminated and they are able to function under normal Smithsonian operating rules.

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<sup>5</sup> Newsdesk Newsroom of the Smithsonian institution: <https://newsdesk.si.edu/about/stats>

## **Analysis**

The next phase for the museum, which began mid-2017, is the inclusion of temporary exhibitions and events to supplement their permanent presentations the first of which is “More than pictures” an exhibition that opened May 15th, 2017 followed by the presentation of “King: A film record...Montgomery to Memphis” which premiered Jan 15th, 2018 in the Oprah Winfrey Theater.

For this phase the, goal is to create new stories to offer their visitors, create spaces to show the results of their strategic partnership programs (National Museum of African American History and Culture 2016)<sup>6</sup> and to explore related subject matters from different perspectives.

The proposed exhibition can contribute to a substantial and meaningful connection between the museum, its visitors and the African Diaspora of Caribbean nations in order to successfully advance the history and culture of these peoples and their connection to the African American story.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://nmaahc.si.edu/connect/osp>

## **II. Concept Development**

### **Exhibition Goals**

#### **Interpretive Goals**

- Visitors to “The Journey” exhibition will have the opportunity to get up close and personal with the unique funerary rituals that continue to be an integral part of Afro-Caribbean life.
- Visitors will have a multi-sensory experience through the use of lighting, interactives and visually engaging moments designed to help the visitor understand and engage with these beautiful and solemn rituals practiced by all three of the ethnic groups featured in this exhibition.
- This exhibition will encourage a discussion of how North American society deals with death and the afterlife in contrast to Afro-Caribbean cultures.

#### **Curatorial Goals**

- Afro-Caribbean cultures hold as a core belief that human beings are made up of two parts: physical and spiritual
- Peoples of Afro-Caribbean heritage view death as a journey of acceptance of the physical loss of a loved one and a celebration of the life lived.

## **Content Outline**

“The Journey: Death and the Afterlife in Afro-Caribbean Culture” is comprised of two overarching themes, physical and spiritual, that are then broken down into six sections that feature graphic elements, artifacts, interactive experiences and transitional spaces as storytelling tools.

**Theme 1 Physical:** Rituals performed within these three cultures to prepare the home and body when a person dies, as well as a section that discusses how North American culture approaches death.

- **Section 1 Introduction:** This section is focused on captivating the interest of the visitor through a design aesthetic that reinforces the themes of mystery and uniqueness as well as an introductory text that will give the visitor a quick summary of the overall beliefs that these cultures hold and rituals they perform surrounding death and the afterlife.
- **Section 2 Commercialization of Death:** This space used as a point of contrast between North American funerary practices and Afro-Caribbean funerary traditions. This section should reinforce what the visitor is familiar with in his/her society and challenge them moving forward in the exhibition.

- **Section 3 Home & Body Preparation:** An immersive space that is dedicated to the traditions that surround these sacred rituals of preparing the home for mourning as well as the incredibly intimate process of preparing the body for burial within the home.

**Theme 2 Spiritual:** this theme focuses on the rituals performed by relatives, friends and the community that allow for the acceptance of death, celebration of life and transition of the soul.

- **Section 4 Transition:** A space that will be used to explain the rituals performed by the family, community and religious leaders during the wake and the funeral in order to guide the soul of the person who has died so that they may successfully transition into the afterlife.
- **Section 5 Funeral Rituals:** This space will house a display of the three funerary altars that represent the three cultures being featured in this exhibition (Orisha, Creole and Garifuna) as well as video-mapping projection on the walls of the space that feature films of the funerary practices of these three cultures allowing the visitor to view the altars being used in the context of a traditional funeral.
- **Section 6 Afterlife:** This section is meant to convey through arte and interactive experiences the beliefs and practices regarding death and the afterlife in Afro-Caribbean cultures.

## Audience

### Target Audience

The target audience for “*The Journey*” exhibition is people ages 15 and up, due to the sensitive content being explored, the exhibition is targeting the current visitors of The National Museum of African American History and Culture who will need something new in the future as a hook to attract them as return visitors for the museum.



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

### Personae

Based on the audience assessment of the current visitors of the National Museum of African American History and Culture and the ideal target audience, “*The Journey*” exhibition is using the development of an IPOP personae as a tool for design development that responds to the needs of the ideal visitor profile along with a journey map that chronicles an idealized visitor experience through the exhibition<sup>7</sup>

The personae developed for this exhibition responds to three of the four key dimensions of experience: Ideas, People, and Objects.

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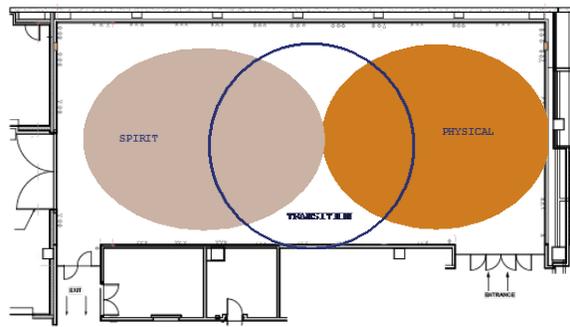
<sup>7</sup> Appendix B

Visitor Profile: Janelle is a 25-year-old woman of Afro-Caribbean descent that majors in African Studies; she is interested in visiting “The Journey Exhibition” as a way of connecting with her cultural heritage.

## **Narrative**

### **Exhibit Narrative**

The overall narrative for the exhibition are the traditional Caribbean practices that encapsulate the transition our bodies and souls go through when they pass from the physical plane to the spiritual one.



**Figure 6 Narrative Diagram**

### **Narrative Device**

The exhibition is organized around narrative cores that are connected by transitional spaces. These take the form of tunnels, curves, and light. The transitional space serves the purpose of being practical by creating a distinct narrative flow in which the exhibition must be experienced; overt in making clear the takeaway of the exhibition which is the

transitioning of the soul from the physical to the spiritual plane; and poetic in serving as metaphors for cultural expressions of belief.<sup>8</sup>

## **Conceptual Strategies**

### **Interpretive strategy**

“*The Journey*” exhibition will use a linear layout that tells a story that will allow the visitor to view the step by step rituals that take place with respect to the body and home preparations as well as funeral and spiritual rituals, come in contact with the objects used in these rituals and the meaning behind them.

This Exhibition will also apply a sculptural interpretive strategy such as tunnels, curves and translucent material as metaphors for the soul’s transition and the belief that the living and the dead exist on parallel planes with each other. Finally, and as an interwoven element this show will utilize a digital media strategy that will include a virtual reality experience, video mapping, video projection, and lighting to create an exhibit that will allow visitors to understand the importance that Caribbean cultures place on the celebration of life and transition of the soul.

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<sup>8</sup> Appendix D

### **Engagement strategy**

This exhibition will have multiple modes of engagement such as sensory created by the use of a lighting and smoke to convey mystery and emotion, digital engagement utilizing virtual reality to show the visitor how the human body is prepared in the home, visitor interaction through the use of a spaces for contemplation in which the visitor can process what they have experienced and finally tactile and visual engagement through the use of artifacts and physical interactives that allow the visitor to fully engage with the topic being described in this exhibition.

### **Design Strategy**

*“The Journey”* exhibition has an immersive, evocative, emotional, mysterious and moody look and feel. The basis for the layout of the exhibition is the transition from physical existence to spiritual, with this in mind the exhibition is then organized into six sections that represent the process of the funerary rituals of these three Afro-Caribbean cultures and one section which will focus on the commercialization of death as a point of comparison between how western cultures and Afro-Caribbean cultures handle death and grief today.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Appendix D

### III. Design Development

#### Schematic Design

#### Space plan

“*The Journey*” exhibition is divided into two overall themes: Physical and Spiritual. These themes help to tell the story of the exhibition as well as determine the layout and intended visitor flow.

The two overarching themes are then broken down into six sections with distinct design strategies that display specific moments that help to further the overall story behind the exhibition

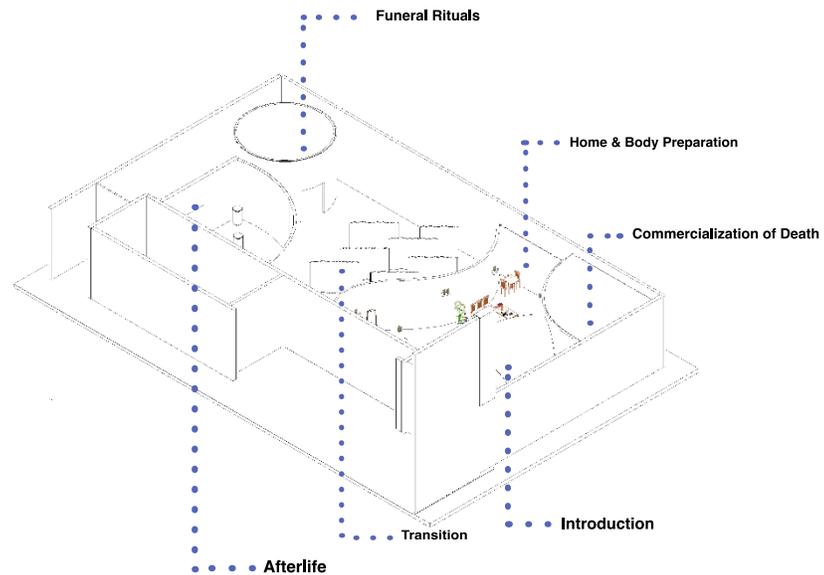


Figure 7 Space Plan

## **Design Concepts**

When preparing a design concept for this exhibition it was important to consider the overwhelming nature of the National Museum of African American History and Culture and how best to create an exhibition that would engage the visitor, enhance their experience and encourage them to return to the museum.

- **Introduction:** The introduction space for the exhibition will feature a tunnel experience that evokes a sensation of mystery; a feeling that you are stepping into an unknown but emotional environment. This section must set the mood of the exhibition.
- **Commercialization of Death:** A bright and sterile space that has a cold and emotionless feel to it. This section will be used as a way of confronting visitors with the realities of the North American funeral industry, reminding them of what they already know and using it as a base of comparison for the rest of the exhibition.
- **Home/Body Preparation:** For this section, the design concept was to create a fully immersive experience by recreating the two most important spaces for funeral rituals within these traditional Caribbean cultures; the living room: a room used for the rituals surrounding the first hours of the wake such as prayer, singing, eating, and playing games such as cards and dominos. The other room that will be recreated is the bedroom in which all three of these cultures go through the ritual of body preparation forgoing the use of morgues and undertakers.

- **Transition:** This space will feature slightly illuminated gauzy sheets that will project different moments of these traditional funerals. This space should evoke the sense of transitioning from the physical rituals to the spiritual ones as well as emphasizing the narrative device of the exhibition.
- **Funeral Rituals:** For the section dedicated to funeral rituals it was important to create a simple and solemn space with little to no light in which the main highlights are the funeral altars used in the funerary rituals of all three cultures, along with each altar there would be a 9 ft. screen on which videos of funerals in which the altars are used would be displayed to afford the visitor context for each piece.
- **Afterlife:** A space of reflection for visitors to absorb what they have seen in the exhibition as well as afford them the opportunity to learn about how these cultures view the aspect of life after death.

The design goal for this space is to create an ethereal feel utilizing soft lighting and translucent walls from which the visitor is able to see how other visitors are going through and experiencing the exhibition as well as emphasize the most important aspect of the concept of afterlife in Afro-Caribbean cultures: our souls don't go to the "heaven above" as Christian faith teaches but rather your soul goes into a parallel plane from which we still feel the presence of our departed loved ones and they in turn still guide us and walk beside us.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Appendix D

## Graphic Identity

The graphic intent for “*The Journey*” exhibition is inspired by candles and candlelight in different stages of use ranging from lit and bright to extinguished, this is used as a metaphor for the transition of the soul from the living to the afterlife. Candlelight is also used throughout the exhibition as one of the tools to convey the narrative device. <sup>11</sup>

Exhibition poster mockups

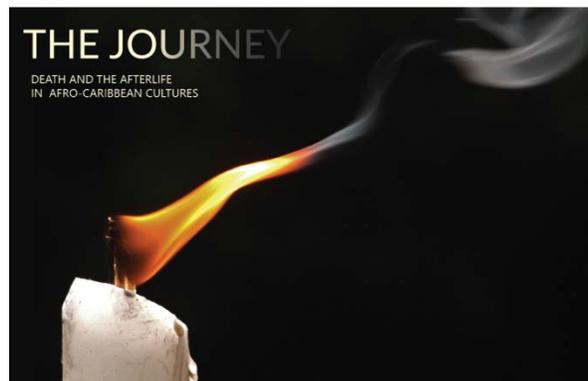


Figure 8

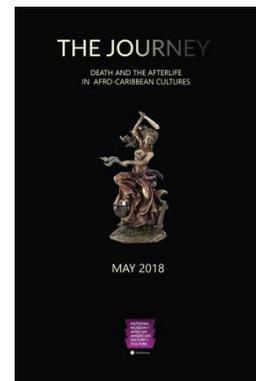


Figure 9

Sample text panels and labels



Figure 11 Text Panel



Figure 10 Labels

<sup>11</sup> Appendix D

#### **IV. Conclusion**

*“The Journey”* exhibition creates an opportunity for visitors to experience a unique aspect of Afro-Caribbean cultures explored through the Orisha, Creole and Garifuna ethnic groups allowing visitors the opportunity to view funerary rituals, a universal human experience, through a different cultural lens.

This exhibition also creates an opportunity for the National Museum of African American History and Culture, its visitors and the members of the African Diaspora to connect, explore, embrace and promote these cultural traditions.

## **V. Bibliography**

### **Books:**

- *Garifuna Understanding of Death* by Rev. Fr. Jerris J. Valentine.
- *Estampas del Caribe*, Photography Book by María José Alvarez and Claudia Gordillo
- *How Great Thou Art: 50 years of African Caribbean Funerals in London* by Charlie Phillips
- *From here to eternity: Traveling the world to find the good death* by Caitlin Doughty
- *Stiff: The curious lives of human cadavers* by Mary Roach
- *Encyclopedia of Death and the Human Experience* by Clifton D. Bryant and Dennis L. Peck
- *Handbook of Death and Dying* by Clifton D. Bryant
- *Remembering Well: Rituals for Celebrating Life and Mourning Death* by Sarah York

### **Documentaries:**

- *The Black Creoles*, Luna Films
- *Lubaraun*, Luna Films
- *Nine nights: Caribbean Funeral traditions in the UK*, SKN Heritage Museum
- *Homegoings* by Christine Turner

**Articles:**

This is how I want to be dead by Richard Conniff

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/07/opinion/sunday/death-cremation-.html>

Death wears bling: The glory of London's Caribbean funerals by Ian Thomson

<https://www.spectator.co.uk/2014/11/death-wears-bling-the-glory-of-londons-caribbean-funerals/>

After-death rituals from Latin America and the Caribbean

<http://www.latina.com/lifestyle/our-issues/after-death-rituals-latin-america-caribbean>

The disappearance of a distinctively black way to mourn by Tiffany Stanley

<https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/01/black-funeralhomes-mourning/426807/>

Why is the funeral ritual important by Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D

<https://www.centerforloss.com/2016/12/funeral-ritual-important/>

**Websites:**

Strategic Partnerships

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/connect/osp>

Newsdesk Newsroom of the Smithsonian

<https://newsdesk.si.edu/about/stats>

Museum Maps

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/visit/maps>

## VI. Appendix

### Appendix A. Precedents

DAY OF THE DEAD  
National Museum of Funeral History  
Houston, TX



This exhibition explores the colorful religious celebration honoring the souls of the departed, which is practiced by Meso-American cultures. Families gather for festivities on November 1 (All Saints Day) and November 2 (All Souls Day), because it is believed the dead return to visit the living during this time.

Relevance/Best Aspects:

1. Focus on a practice unique to a specific region and culture.
2. Use of full-scale models to recreate an immersive experience.
3. Simple but effective narrative experience

HISTORY OF EMBALMING  
National Museum of Funeral History  
Houston, TX



Observe how—and ponder why—the Ancient Egyptians developed embalming rituals more than 5000 years ago and learn about the utter necessity of preserving bodies during the Civil War. This exhibit tracks the methods of preserving human remains through the centuries.

Relevance/Best Aspects:

1. Model objects and tools used in the embalming process.
2. Use of pictorial displays and renderings of different embalming practices in different cultures throughout history.

THE LIVING NEED LIGHT, THE DEAD NEED MUSIC  
Carnegie Museum of Art  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



A video exhibit created by artist collective “The Propeller Group”. A film that documents and stages funeral traditions and public wake ceremonies in South Vietnam. The 30-minute video shot in HD featuring brass bands, professional criers and street performers

Relevance/Best Aspects:

1. Use of video as a centerpiece for narrative.
2. Limited use of artifacts.
3. Simplicity allows visitors to absorb and interpret the narrative without being influenced by too much text.
4. Light sets the mood and allows focus on video.

DEATH: THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE  
Bristol Museum and Art Gallery  
Bristol City, UK



The most universal experience we will encounter, this exhibition encouraged visitors to consider ethical issues, different attitudes towards dying and how different cultures across the world, from the earliest human societies to modern day, have dealt with the end of life.

Relevance/Best Aspects:

1. Use of lively colors and textures.
2. Use of light to highlight meaningful text on a large panel.
3. Use of warnings before particularly sensitive areas allows for a sense of tact with such an unconformable subject matter.
4. Mortuary wall: inside each door, you would find video or information discussing the philosophical questions of what happens and what should be done when death occurs.
5. Use of a space of reflection at the end of the exhibit.

VISITING HOURS  
Netherlands Uitvaart Museum  
Amsterdam, Holland



The Space of the last farewell is most often the aula of a funeral home or crematorium. This photo exhibit “Visiting Hours” shows the artist's fascination with Dutch design within these spaces. Worldwide funeral rites are largely dictated by religion but in a society increasingly becoming unaffiliated with any particular religion the last farewell become a moment of freedom to re-interpret funeral rites the way one wants. This project documents the possible customization of the space the ceremony takes places.

Relevance/Best Aspects:

1. Recreating a funeral home aula to create an immersive experience.
2. Use of pictures to show the different ways people customize funeral ceremonies in modern Dutch society.
3. Use of atmospheric lighting to capture the mood.

## TOMB TREASURES: NEW DISCOVERIES FROM CHINA'S HAN DYNASTY

Asian Art Museum  
San Francisco, CA.



One of the most powerful civilizations of the ancient world, China's Han dynasty achieved profound cultural and artistic influence, technological advancements and military might. Two thousand years later discoveries of royal tombs allow us to glimpse these extraordinary accomplishments firsthand.

Emulating their grand palaces, Han royals built lavishly furnished tombs so that in the afterlife no need would go unmet.

Relevance/Best Aspects:

1. Accessible user flow.
2. Great use of color emphasizing the traditional Chinese red giving the exhibit cultural identity.
3. Focused lighting on objects gives them impact.
4. The 3D model interactive affords visitors the opportunity to delve deeper into the stories behind the objects as well as an understanding of the scale of the actual tomb.

COCO  
Disney Pixar



US 3D computer-animated fantasy film produced by Pixar Animation Studios and released by Walt Disney Pictures. The story follows a 12-year-old boy named Miguel Rivera who is accidentally transported to the land of the dead, where he seeks the help of his deceased musician great-great-grandfather to return him to his family among the living. The concept for Coco is based on the Mexican holiday of the Day of the Dead.

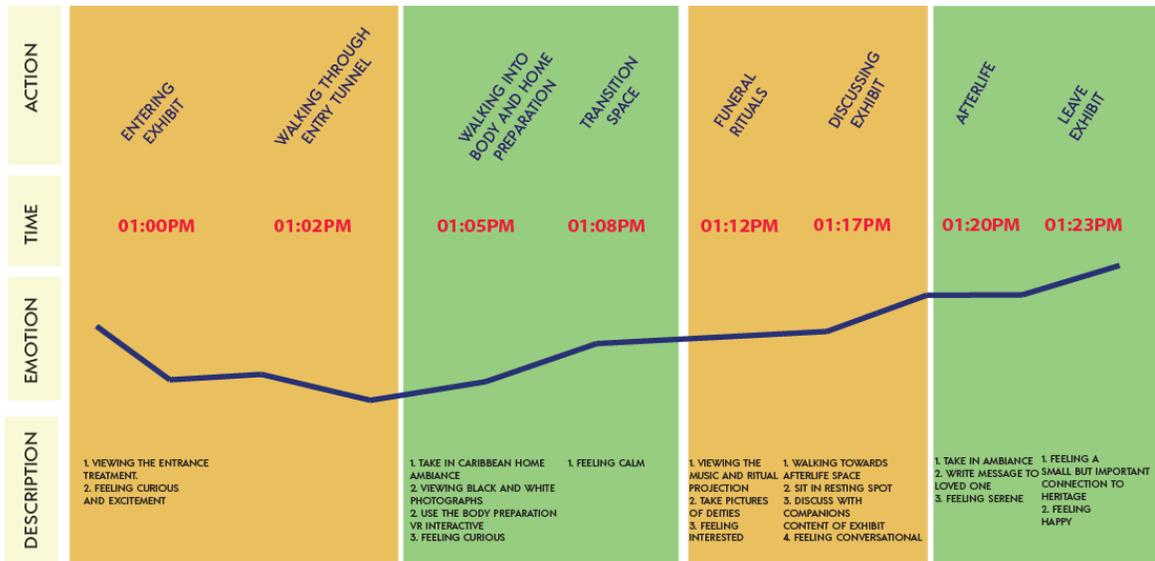
Relevance/Best Aspects:

1. Great use of color.
2. Shows the idea of how the dead can look upon the living in a parallel existence.
3. Great explanation of the creation and use of altars.

## Appendix B. Journey Map



**Janelle**  
**Afro-Caribbean descent**  
**Majors in African Studies at the University of Maryland**  
**Goal: Visiting the exhibition to connect with her cultural heritage**



## Appendix C. Exhibition Script

### Section 1: Introduction

<b>Section Title</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
<b>Description</b>	This section is the set up for the entire exhibition. Visitors enter the exhibition on Concourse “c” level of NMAAHC. When visitors descend from the escalators or the elevator the special exhibitions gallery will be at the far-left corner of the of that level. This section contains more of the aesthetic of the exhibition.
<b>Content</b>	
<b>Section Text 1.1</b>	Afro-Caribbean cultures share a core belief that humans are essentially made up of two parts: Physical and spiritual or the body and soul. When a loved one dies both parts need to accept the loss. The funerary rituals practiced by Afro-Caribbean cultures in Nicaragua, Honduras and Cuba make up the final acts of love that a family and community can do for the person they love.
<b>Section Quote 1.2</b>	“Dying is an inevitable part of life; the way we deal with the loss of a loved one and what occurs in the moment after death can directly impact how we grieve and accept loss”-Caitlin Doughty Author of “From here to eternity: Traveling the world to find the Good Death” published in 2017.

## Section 2: Commercialization of Death

<b>Section Title</b>	<b>Commercialization of Death in North American Culture</b>
<b>Description</b>	This section appears directly after the introductory tunnel. This space used as a point of contrast between North American funerary practices and Afro-Caribbean funerary traditions. This section should reinforce what the visitor is familiar with in his/her society and challenge them moving forward in the exhibition.
<b>Content</b>	
<b>Section Text 2.1</b>	<b>Are you ready for death?</b> Most people are not ready for the emotional and financial burdens of burying a loved one. The death industry is a money-making machine. By learning about it now, you might be better prepared in the future.
<b>Sub Text 2.1.1</b>	Today, funerals in North America are considered to be a billion-dollar industry with very little to no personal or emotional connection. During what should be one of the most personal moments of a human being's life we have completely divorced ourselves from the process creating a void that does not allow us to emotionally or financially cope with grief.
<b>Story Text 2.2</b>	<b>Can you afford to die?</b> This infographic breaks down the process, average funeral cost, service trends and rising costs in North America today. Source: Infographic.org
<b>Section Quote</b>	"You got to live before you can afford to die"- John Steinbeck from his book "Grapes of Wrath" published in 1939
<b>Object list for Story Text 2.3</b>	2.3 (a) Infographic panel 2.3 (b) Embalming table 2.3 (c)Morgue drawers 2.3 (d)Hydro aspirator 2.3 (e)Sterilizers 2.3 (f) Surgical kit 2.3 (g) Arterial tube 2.3 (h) X-ray replica

### Section 3: Home/Body preparation

<b>Section Title</b>	<b>Home/Body Preparation</b>
<b>Description</b>	Once you have exited the section dedicated to the commercialization of death in North American culture you are then immersed in a space that is dedicated to the traditions that surround these sacred rituals of preparing the home for mourning as well as the incredibly intimate process of preparing the body for burial within the home.
<b>Content</b>	
<b>Section Text 3.1</b>	At death: When we die there is quite a lot that happens to our bodies and our homes but the soul, too, goes through many changes. At the point of death there are many things that require immediate attention from the grieving family and community.
<b>Sub Text 3.1.1</b>	All three of the cultures featured here emphasize the importance of women being in charge of funerary rituals because as natural nurturers they are the most capable of handling this most visceral of tasks providing the grieving family and community with a sense of dignity and affection.
<b>Section Quote 3.2</b>	“Western cultures would burn their lips if they so much as uttered the word death, Mexican culture, on the other hand, frequents it, mocks it, caresses it, sleep with it, entertains it; it is one of their favorite playthings and their most enduring love”-Octavio Paz, Labyrinth of Solitude book, 1950
<b>Story Text 3.3</b>	<b>Garifuna home preparation:</b> Immediately after a Garifuna person has died the extended family and community springs into action in order to prepare the home for the mourning period. Part of the preparations include the covering or removal of mirrors and clocks because they have been known to stop and break upon a person’s death. Wall hangings, pictures and curtains are removed in order to leave all windows and doors free at the moment of death, so the soul may leave the home. The following day the windows are draped with white curtains with purple ribbons to signify mourning.
<b>Object list for story text 3.3</b>	3.3 (a) white curtains with purple ribbons. 3.3 (b) hickety: Artisanal rum 3.3 (c) Bime Kakule: sweetened rice

	<p>3.3 (d) Pinule: corn porridge</p> <p>3.3 (e) Conch soup</p> <p>3.3 (f) bread</p>
<b>Story Text 3.4</b>	<p><b>Orisha Home preparation:</b> While the body of the Orisha person is being prepared the home is also going through a ritual process to prepare for mourning and the funeral rituals. This preparation is known as the death-feast. The mourning period in Orisha culture lasts three days, during this period the home is first cleansed with an Ewe, an herb solution prepared to cleanse the home of the Orisha person, the house is immediately filled with mourners who bring offerings of food, flowers and rum to the funeral altar, while outside the house a continual beating of druin drums is being kept up.</p>
<b>Object list for story 3.4</b>	<p>3.4 (a) bottle of Ewe cleansing herb solution.</p> <p>3.4 (b) rum bottles</p> <p>3.3 (c) Tropical flowers</p>
<b>Story Text 3.5</b>	<p><b>Creole Home preparation:</b> In creole custom the home of the deceased is prepared for the wake which can go from two to nine days. The mirrors in the home are covered with white or black thick fabric to discourage the soul of the deceased from lingering in the home, funeral wreaths are placed all over the home as well as candles which are a symbol of life and the passage of the soul, the altar is placed in the hall of the home; upon the table used for the altar a picture or portrait of the deceased is placed along with flowers, candles and a bible opened to a particular scripture that may be important to the person that has passed.</p>
<b>Object list for story text 3.5</b>	<p>3.5 (a) Journey cake replicas</p> <p>3.5 (b) Domino set</p> <p>3.5 (c) rum bottles</p> <p>3.5 (d) deck of cards</p> <p>3.5 (e) flower wreaths</p> <p>3.5(f) Covered wall mirrors</p>
<b>Story Text 3.6</b>	<p><b>Garifuna body preparation:</b> Once a person has passed away rum, due to its preservative qualities, is forced down the throat of the dead preventing the body from decaying too quickly the body is then turned face down and pillows are removed so that the body may lie flat, the body is not dressed for viewing until it is</p>

	<p>completely cold. A candle is then lit. The candle is left in the room where the body is as a reminder that although the body is dead the soul, represented by the “live” candle is still alive. Crying is discouraged in the room where the dead is. This is only allowed much later when all the senses have gone.</p>
<b>Object List for story text 3.6</b>	<p>3.6 (a) Alcohol  3.6 (b) Large safety pins  3.7 (c) A yard of cloth  3.8 (d) One pound of white linen  3.9 (e) a bottle of strong rum</p>
<b>Story Text 3.7</b>	<p><b>Creole body preparation:</b> When a creole person passes away a group of creole women from the community called the helping sisters comes into the home and goes about the washing and dressing of the body of the deceased. Death is a community occurrence and therefore it is handled as a community.</p>
<b>Object list for Story Text 3.7</b>	<p>3.7 (a) bitter sweet lemons for washing the body  3.8 (b) Rum bottle  3.7 (c) alcohol  3.8 (d) ice  3.7 (e) cotton</p>
<b>Story Text 3.8</b>	<p><b>Orisha body preparation:</b> When the final breath has departed the body of the Orisha there is an outburst of grief, whit loud cries, lamentations and frenzied gestures. Following the overwhelming grief, the home then moves into action at which point the corpse is washed with rum and herbs and dressed in their finest white linen clothing. The thumbs and toes are tied together. If the deceased is a man his head is shaved, and the hair is carefully wrapped up in a piece of white cotton and buried in the earth behind his home. If the deceased is a women any exposed body parts are stained with a decoction of bark tree, giving the skin a reddish hue. Finally, the deceased is wrapped in a line cloth and placed on a mat at the door of the room.</p>
<b>Object list for Story Text 3.8</b>	<p>3.8 (a) bottle of rum  3.8 (b) aromatic herbs  3.8 (c) linen clothing  3.8 (d). razor  3.8 (e) cotton</p>

	3.8 (f) petate mat
<b>Object label 3.9</b>	<p><b>VR interactive touchscreen table:</b> let's delve further into the rituals that take place in the preparation of the body in Afro-Caribbean cultures. This VR experience allows you to delve into the world of Afro-Caribbean cultures during their time of mourning in a very up close and personal manner.</p> <p>Note: If you are uncomfortable with a VR experience you are invited use our touchscreen that explains the process of body preparation by culture though the use of videos, text and graphics.</p>

## Section 4: Funeral Rituals

<b>Section Title</b>	<b>Transition from the physical to spiritual</b>
<b>Description</b>	This section is meant to be a metaphor for the belief that Afro-Caribbean people hold which is that once a person has passed away they go through a process of transition which is assisted by their loved ones left behind after which they then enter the afterlife. This section will display photographs that show the rituals performed in service of transitioning the soul of the deceased.
<b>Content</b>	
<b>Section Text 4.1</b>	Afro-Caribbean people believe that when a person dies the family and the community must perform rituals that will help the soul of the deceased transition into the desired afterlife. All three cultures featured in this exhibition practice slightly different rituals however the end goal is the same.
<b>Section Quote 4.2</b>	“Ritual is the passage way of the soul into the infinite.” Algernon Blackwood from the book “Four weird tales” 2011.
<b>Object list for Story Text 4.3</b>	Projections of Black and white photography on gold luminous hanging fabric.
<b>Object label 4.4</b>	Oya: in Orisha culture she is the goddess of transformation and the gatekeeper between the realm of the living and the dead.
<b>Object list for Story Text 4.4</b>	Shadow box of the deity Oya
<b>Object label 4.5</b>	Garifuna Nine night: During the nine nights ritual performed on the night day of a person’s passing the women in the family or community of the deceased will go to the sea in thanks for the safe passage of their loved one into the afterlife.
<b>Object list for story 4.5</b>	Shadow box of Garifuna women performing a “Nine nights” rituals at the shore of the beach.
<b>Object label 4.6</b>	Church funeral singing: During creole funerals it is customary for members of the community to sing hymns that are mournful but hopeful all in service of the soul transitioning to the afterlife.
<b>Object list for Story 4.6</b>	Shadow box of a creole funeral service.

## Section 5: Funeral Rituals

<b>Section Title</b>	<b>Funerary Rituals</b>
<b>Description</b>	Upon exiting the transition section of the Journey exhibition the visitor will approach a spherical room that will house a display of the three funerary altars that represent the three cultures being featured in this exhibition ( Orisha, Creole and Garifuna) as well as video-mapping projection on the walls of the space that feature films of the funerary practices of these three cultures allowing the visitor to view the altars being used in the context of a traditional funeral.
<b>Content</b>	
<b>Section Text</b> <b>5.1</b>	On the ninth and final day of prayer the home of the deceased is prepared for the <i>dismissal</i> . Very early, at dawn, family members arrive to begin preparations for food and burial of the deceased.
<b>Sub Text</b> <b>5.1.1</b>	During the <i>dismissal</i> , family members and friends of the deceased are expected to offer their songs and prayers to the departed as a final farewell. Once the <i>dismissal</i> ends the altar is dismantled. All signs of mourning are then removed from the house. This final farewell is usually accompanied by loud wailing and crying.
<b>Vocabulary Label</b> <b>5.1.2</b>	<i>Dismissal</i> : Ritual that takes place on the final day of mourning prior to the removal of the body from the home.
<b>Section Quote</b> <b>5.2</b>	“I believe humans have souls and I believe in the conservation of souls” -By John Green Author of the book “The Fault in our stars” published June 2014
<b>Story Text</b> <b>5.3</b>	<b>Garifuna Funeral:</b> When a person dies it is important to decorate the altar for the <i>Beluria</i> , the period of mourning that lasts up to nine days from the moment a person has died up to their burial, typically ornamented with flowers on the backdrop, food, especially fruit, rum and multiple candles are also placed on the table as offerings to the soul and to the deities. All decorations must be taken to the cemetery to be placed on the grave of the deceased the night of the burial. No sign of mourning must linger in the home.

<b>Object list for Story Text 5.3</b>	<p>5.3 (a): Two or more white wax candles.</p> <p>5.3 (b): Loaf of bread</p> <p>5.3 (c): Bime Kakule: sweetened rice, almost like rice pudding.</p> <p>5.3 (d): Pinule: porridge made from ground corn</p> <p>5.3. (e): Conch soup</p> <p>5.3. (f): Coffee</p> <p>5.3. (e): Bottle of rum</p> <p>5.3. (g): Tropical flowers</p>
<b>Story Text 5.4</b>	<p><b>Orisha funeral Altar:</b> Throughout their lives, members of the Orisha culture own an altar to a specific deity. Upon the death of that person their altar will be utilized for the funeral rituals. Adimmu (food offering) is made to Oya, the goddess of Transformation and gatekeeper between the land of the living and the afterlife, to guarantee the safe passage of the soul.</p>
<b>Object list for Story Text 5.4</b>	<p>5.4 (a): white wax candles.</p> <p>5.4 (b): Tropical fruits</p> <p>5.4 (c): Statue of Oya</p> <p>5.4 (d): Conga drums</p> <p>5.4. (e): Crucifix</p> <p>5.4. (f): Tropical flowers</p>
<b>Story Text 5.5</b>	<p><b>Creole Funeral Altar:</b> Creole funeral practices have maintained their African roots but are heavily influenced by Christianity because of colonization. When a creole person dies, the family of the deceased dresses a table with a white linen table cloth. A portrait of the person placed on the table along with white or purple flowers, a candle to light the way for the soul, a cross and a Bible open to a psalm.</p>
<b>Object list for Story Text 5.5</b>	<p>5.5 (a): White wax candle.</p> <p>5.5(b): White or purple flowers</p> <p>5.5 (c): Cristian Cross</p> <p>5.5 (d): Photograph of the deceased person</p> <p>5.5. (e): White linen tablecloth</p>
<b>Caption and Credit 5.6.</b>	<p>Video mapping Projection film: Funeral practices from the Garifuna, Orisha and Creole peoples.</p> <p>Documentary films:</p>

	<p>“Lubaraun” by Maria Jose Alvarez and Martha Clarissa Hernandez of Luna Films, released February 2014</p> <p>“The Black Creoles: Memories and identities” by Maria Jose Alvarez and Martha Clarissa Hernandez of Luna Films, released August 2011</p>
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## Section 6: Afterlife

<b>Section Title</b>	<b>Afterlife</b>
<b>Description</b>	The final section of this exhibition deals with belief system surrounding the afterlife in Afro-Caribbean culture. In this section the visitor will be able to see artistic depictions of the Afro-Caribbean afterlife, clips of people from these cultures explaining their belief systems as well as an interactive that asks the visitor: “if you could speak to a loved one that has passed, what would you say?”
<b>Content</b>	
<b>Section Text 6.1</b>	The Afterlife in Afro-Caribbean culture is not seen as heaven and hell as it is depicted in the Christian faith but rather as a parallel existence in which our loved ones walk beside us and guide after death.
<b>Section Quote 6.2</b>	“Conscience is no more than the dead speaking to us “Jim Carroll from the Void of course: poems, 1994-1997
<b>Object label 6.3</b>	Guided Night by Marissa Whilloughby Holland: Painting depicting the belief Afro-Caribbean cultures hold that we are never alone but rather we are guided by those who have passed.
<b>Object list for Story Text 6.3</b>	Guided Nigh: 12”x14” oil on board
<b>Object label 6.4</b>	The funeral by Clementine Hunter: Depiction a creole funeral march to the church showing the Christian influence on traditional Afro rituals due to colonization.
<b>Story Text 6.4</b>	The Funeral painting: 24”x16” oil on canvas
<b>Object label 6.5</b>	Interactive video station: These clips show brief interviews with people from the Orisha, Creole and Garifuna community discussing their beliefs practices regarding the afterlife within their cultures. All clips used come from the Documentary films: “Lubaraun” by Maria Jose Alvarez and Martha Clarissa Hernandez of Luna Films, released February 2014 “The Black Creoles: Memories and identities” by Maria Jose Alvarez and Martha Clarissa Hernandez of Luna Films, released August 2011
<b>Object Label 6.6</b>	Interactive message wall: Write on the paper provided your answer

	to the question “What would you say to a loved who has passed away?” then place the notes on the leafless tree of life.
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