

# *HISTORY OF WESTERN WITCHCRAFT*

HISTORY 5485

Spring 2009

Dr. Charles "Skip" Clark

OFFICE: Cobb Hall Graduate School

TUES/THUR 12:30-1:45 pm

678-839-6419

CLASSROOM: Pafford 206

Office Hours: Wed. 1:30-3:30, TH. 2:00-3:30 and by appt.

## **Assigned Readings:**

- Levack, Brian P. (ed.) The Witchcraft Sourcebook. New York: Routledge, 2004
- Levack, Brian P. The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe. 3rd Ed. New York: Longman, 2006
- Magliocco, Sabina. Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004
- Oldridge, Darren. (ed.) The Witchcraft Reader. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Routledge, 2008
- Rosenthal, Bernard. Salem Story: Reading the Witch Trials of 1692. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

## **Learning Outcomes:**

Graduate students completing this class will be able:

- To identify the major schools of thought on the historiography of witchcraft;
- To identify how the history of witchcraft fits into a general study of Early Modern European history;
- To assess the validity of various interpretations of witchcraft through a research project on the topic;
- to differentiate between facts, interpretations and inferences concerning the subject of witchcraft; and
- To analyze primary documents and assess their relevance to the history of the witchcraft trials.

Students taking this class for 5485 credit should examine the 4485 syllabus for schedules of assignments and readings.

## **Course Description and Questions to Ponder:**

Between about 1500 and 1700, as many as 100,000 people were executed for the crime of witchcraft in Europe and the American colonies. How did that happen? Where did the ideas come from that certain people, especially women, had the magical power to harm people, animals and crops by bewitching them?

Few historical topics have been as intensely debated as that of witchcraft. The very existence of historical witches has been ardently defended and denied by numerous scholars. In previous centuries, the existence of witches was real because the Devil himself was real and a tempter of souls. The Devil, however, could make people believe anything, even that they were witches when, in fact, some argued, witches did not exist.

Instead, the Devil, as some insisted, seduced certain people into believing they actually were witches. This, indeed, is the attitude of the early Christian Church, dating from the Canon episcopi of the tenth century (included in Gratian's Decretals).

Other historians have seen witches as symbolic of the social protest movements of the early modern period. In this scenario, witches are "victims" of repression on the part of authorities trying to establish rigid conformity to the prevailing ideology in a time when everything is breaking down. Society needs scapegoats and, in this case, scholars argue, local people found witches to fulfill that function. Some see witches as scapegoats of the changing nature of charity as a result, in part, of the Protestant Reformation where witches "cursed" those who refused them charity. Others have seen witches as protesters of their dreary lives who turn to fantasy as a means of protest. In their hovels, according to Jules Michelet, the nineteenth-century historian, women placed their hopes, dreams, and wishes on the Fairies and the witches they imagined inhabiting the world around them. These powerless women invested these supernatural creatures with a power to help or harm, and to live lives they could not themselves. So, witchcraft might be seen as a rebellion of women against the patriarchal structure of the Christian Church and society of the early modern period.

Witchcraft as rebellion, as protest, as a means to explain evil in society, as a demonic way of attempting to destroy Christianity, as invention of the power structure to suppress the common people, as a survival of the oldest form of religion, all of these and more have been advanced as reasons for the existence of witches. However, did witches really exist? Did certain people, especially women, believe themselves capable of performing magical acts affecting others? Who were the witches or who were those accused of being witches? What were the characteristics of a witch and how were those characteristics developed and by whom? Why were the majority (80-90%) of those executed for witchcraft in Europe women? What caused the "witch-craze" of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe and America? Why did the witch craze occur at the same time that colonists were settling the New World, the scientific revolution was under way and the Renaissance and Reformation were changing the way people looked at the world? How did demonologists, victims, accusers and judges work together to fashion the idea of the witch and witchcraft? What was the relationship between theology and witchcraft? Why has there been a resurgence in the interest in witchcraft? Is there really any connection between the primitive "mother goddess" religions and witchcraft (or Wicca), as many believe? Is witchcraft, therefore, the oldest of all religions? What is the significance of the study of witchcraft for us today? Is there any relevance in the term "witch-hunts" as used now to depict certain practices of one group toward another? We will consider these and many other questions during the term.

### **Procedures, policies, etc.:**

**Class meetings:** Students are expected to attend class each day and to participate in the class discussions. More than **two** unexcused absences will result in a lower final grade. Please make sure that all cell phones, pagers, etc., are turned off before coming into the classroom. Also, disruptive students will be removed from the class rolls.

**Assignments:** Graduate students will meet with the instructor **once every two weeks on Tuesdays**. Students will turn in 5-7 page response papers on the assigned readings and discuss them at that time.

**This syllabus is subject to change, so please attend class to keep up with assignments.**

**Grading:**

The final grade for the course will consist of the following:

Response Papers:	60%
Research Paper	<u>40%</u>
	100%

**Schedule:**

**January**

8 **Introduction: definition of “Witch” and “Witchcraft” by class**

**Part I: The Ancient and Medieval Roots of the Witch-Hunts**

13 Witchcraft and Magic in the Ancient World

Reading: Levack, Witch-hunt, Preface and ch. 1; Levack, Sourcebook, Introduction and part I pp. 5-26.

15 Witchcraft and Magic in the Ancient World (con'd)

Reading: Levack, Witch-hunt, Preface and ch. 1; Levack, Sourcebook, Introduction and part I pp. 5-26.

20 Witchcraft and Magic in the Early Medieval Period

Reading: Levack, Witch-hunt, ch. 2; Levack, Sourcebook, pp.27-38

**Response paper on Oldridge, part one due.**

22 Witchcraft and Magic in the Early Medieval Period (con'd)—The Devil, the Pact and the Sabbat(h)

Reading: Levack, Witch-hunt, ch. 2; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 39-68

27 Witchcraft and Magic in the Early Medieval Period (con'd)—The Devil, the Pact and the Sabbat(h)

Reading: Levack, Witch-hunt, ch. 2; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 39-68

**Part II: THE AGE OF THE WITCH-HUNTS**

29 Witchcraft and Magic in the Later Medieval Period—The Legal Foundations

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 3; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 117-144

**February**

3 Witchcraft and Magic in the Later Medieval Period—The Legal Foundations (con'd)

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 3; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 117-144

**Response paper on Oldridge, part two due.**

5 The Reformation and Its Impact on Witchcraft Beliefs and Prosecutions

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 4; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 69-103

10 The Reformation and Its Impact on Witchcraft Beliefs and Prosecutions (con'd)—  
Catholics, Protestants and stereotypes

Reading: same; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 104-116

**12 No class for grad students**

17 TBA

**Response paper on Oldridge, part three due.**

19 The Social Context—Who Were the Witches? I. Context

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 5; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 173-209

24 The Social Context—Who Were the Witches? II. Gender and Witchcraft

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 5; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 210-219

26 The Trials: Dynamics, Chronology and Geography

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 6-7

**March**

3 The Trials: Dynamics, Chronology and Geography (con'd)

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 6-7

**Response paper on Oldridge, part four due.**

**PART III: The American Context of Witchcraft**

5 Witchcraft at Salem—Background and Context--Movie

Reading: Rosenthal, Salem Story, Introduction and ch. 1

10 Witchcraft at Salem—1692

Reading: Rosenthal, Salem Story, ch. 2-6; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 220-229; 261-273

12 Witchcraft at Salem—1692

Reading: Rosenthal, Salem Story, ch. 7-10

**March 16-20 Spring Break**

## **Part IV: Skepticism and the Decline of Witch-hunting**

24 Doubts about Witchcraft

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 8; Levack, Sourcebook,

**Response paper on Oldridge, part five due.**

pp. 145-172

26 **No class for Grad students**

31 Doubts about Witchcraft (con'd)

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 8; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 275-317

**Response paper on Oldridge, part six due.**

## **PART V: Survival and Revival of Witchcraft Beliefs and Practices**

### **April**

2 Survival of magic and witchcraft

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 9

7 **Modern Witchcraft: Ideas, Folklore and History**

Reading: Magliocco, Witching Culture, Introduction and ch. 1.

**Response paper on Oldridge, part seven due.**

9 **No class**

14 TBA

**Response paper on Oldridge, part nine due.**

16 **Modern Witchcraft: Ideas and History**

Reading: Magliocco, Witching Culture, ch. 2-4.

21 **Response paper on Oldridge, part ten due.**

**Modern Witchcraft—movie**

23 **Modern Witchcraft—Varieties**

Reading: Magliocco, Witching Culture, ch. 5-7.

28 **Summary and conclusions**

**Final revised research paper due today**

**Final Exam: May 7, 2009 11:00am-1:00pm**

**\*Note:** In addition to the readings for the above, some students might be interested in pursuing the witch in fiction and popular literature. If so, there are several good places to start: Robert Graves, The White Goddess, Aldous Huxley, The Devils of Loudun (a true

story of the possession of a group of nuns in the 17th century, cf. movie “The Devils”), Julio Carlo Baroja, The World of the Witches. Trans. O.N.V. Glendinning, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964); Grimm’s fairy tales (as reflections of folk lore), various popular accounts and novels of the Salem witch trials, etc.