

# *HISTORY OF WESTERN WITCHCRAFT*

HISTORY 5485

Dr. Clark

MWF: 10:00-11:45 A.M.

CLASSROOM: Pafford 208\* [\*Note room change]

Office Hours: MWF 1:00-2:00 P.M.

SUMMER 2006

OFFICE: TLC-3206

678-839-6031

## **Assigned Readings:**

Ankarloo, Bengt and Clark, Stuart (eds.) Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Twentieth Century. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999

Levack, Brian P. (ed.) The Witchcraft Sourcebook. New York: Routledge, 2004

Levack, Brian P. The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe. 2nd Ed. New York: Longman, 1995. For a brief outline of the Levack book, see this site.

<http://www.roanoke.edu/history/Leeson/Witchcraft/newlectures.html>

Norton, Mary Beth. In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002

**Graduate Students:** Also pick up: Oldridge, Darren. The Witchcraft Reader. New York: Routledge, 2002

## **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 major 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? How were these people identified, prosecuted and executed? Why did the trials and executions stop? What is the relationship between the witchcraft accusations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the revival of modern neo-paganism and Wicca?

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 could make people believe anything, however, even that they were witches when, in fact, some argued, witches did not exist. Instead, as some insisted, certain people were seduced into believing they were witches by the Devil. 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, contemporaries "found" witches to fulfill that function. Some see witches as scapegoats for the changing nature of charity as a result, in part, of the Protestant Reformation. 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 couldn't 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, scholars have advanced all of these reasons and more for the existence of witches. Did witches really exist, however? Did certain people, especially women, believe themselves capable of performing magical acts affecting others? That is one of the questions we will explore. 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 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 the New World was being settled, the scientific revolution was under way and the Renaissance and Reformation were changing the way people looked at the world? How did victims, accusers and judges work together to create 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, 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.

**Tests, Quizzes, etc.:** There will be **two** tests covering the material in the reading assignments. If class discussion wanes, “pop quizzes” on the assignments may be given. Students with documented special needs must see me to make special arrangements for test taking and/or other needs. No extra credit assignments will be given.

**Papers:** There will be **three [3]** papers due for this class. The first paper is a two-three page paper in which you will write a response to your reading of the “cases” presented in class. In the paper, you will discuss the main features of the trials, the methods of the questioners, the common elements of the trials, and what these trials tell you about the nature of witchcraft beliefs and practices as understood at the time. This paper will be due **June 16, 2006**. [More on this paper](#). The second paper will be four to six-page typed double-spaced, typically margined paper in which you will write a **comparative book review** on two books covering the same, or a similar, topic. This paper will be due **July 5, 2006 by 4:00 PM** in my office. **See handout**. The next paper will be a three-four page summary and analysis of two articles from the Oldridge Reader one which you are **not** doing your oral reports. That paper will be due **July 21, 2006**.

A site from Bowdoin College. <http://academic.bowdoin.edu/WritingGuides/> will help here. To use the standard History citation method, see this site by Diana Hacker. <http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/> or this one by Longwood College: <http://www.longwood.edu/history/HDPTSTS2.htm>

**Oral Presentations:** Graduate students will present **two** oral presentations each on articles from the Oldridge Reader. Dates for these presentations will be discussed in class.

**Class discussions:** Students will be reading material for their papers that will form an integral part of class discussions of the topics that will be covered.

**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:

1st paper	10%
2nd paper	10%
3 <sup>rd</sup> paper	10%
1st test	20%
2nd test	20%
Class participation	<u>30%</u>
(includes two presentations and “pop” quizzes if needed)	
	100%

[Grading rubric](#): Look at this site to see what constitutes an “A” paper, etc.

**Plagiarism:** Please look at the Department of History’s policy on plagiarism: [www.westga.edu/~history/plagiarismhtm.htm](http://www.westga.edu/~history/plagiarismhtm.htm) . No work prepared for another class is acceptable in this course. Students who plagiarize will flunk the course and may be referred for other disciplinary action.

**NOTE: Please bring 3 small blue books to class for use in taking your tests. You should write your name in the upper right-hand corner of the blue book. Please turn those in by the end of the second week of class.**

## **Schedule:**

### **June:**

5 **Witchcraft and Magic in the Ancient World—Near Eastern and Egyptian Roots**

7 **Witchcraft and Magic in the Ancient World—Biblical and Classical Antiquity**

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

9 **Witchcraft and Magic in the Early Medieval Period**

Reading: Levack, Witch-hunt, ch. 2; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 27-8; Oldridge, Witchcraft Reader, Part 1, pp. 25-35

12 **Witchcraft and Magic in the Early Medieval Period (con’d)—The Devil, the Pact and the Sabbat(h)**

Reading: same; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 31-35, Oldridge, Witchcraft Reader, Part VI

14 **Witchcraft and Magic in the Later Medieval Period—Heresy and the Cumulative Concept of Witchcraft**

Reading: same; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 36-68; Oldridge, Witchcraft Reader, pp. 36-52

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

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 3, Oldridge, Witchcraft Reader, Part II  
**Short Paper Due Today by class time.**

19 **The Reformation and Its Impact on Witchcraft Beliefs and Prosecutions**

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 4; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 69-116, Oldridge, Witchcraft Reader, Part III

21 **The Social Context—Who Were the Witches? I. Context**

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 5

23 **The Social Context—Who Were the Witches? II. Gender and Witchcraft—Sexuality, Theology and Witchcraft**

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 5; Levack, Sourcebook, Part VI, Oldridge, Witchcraft Reader, Part VII

26 **FIRST HOUR EXAMINATION**

28 **Trial and Punishment of Witches— The legal use of torture**

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 6; Levack, Sourcebook, Part IV; Oldridge, Witchcraft Reader, Part VIII

30 **Trial and Punishment of Witches—The Geographical and Chronological Scope**

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 7; Levack, Sourcebook, Part V, pp.214-219, Oldridge, Witchcraft Reader, Part V

**July**

3 **Witchcraft at Salem—Background and Context--Movie**

Reading: Norton, In The Devil's Snare, Introduction and ch. 1; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 220-229; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 261-265

5 **Witchcraft at Salem—1692**

Reading: Norton, In The Devil's Snare, ch. 2-3

**Comparative review due today.**

7 **Witchcraft at Salem—1692 and beyond**

Reading: Norton, In The Devil's Snare, ch. 4-conclusion

10 **Doubts about Witchcraft**

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 8, pp. 238-250; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 158-172; Oldridge, Witchcraft Reader, Part IX

12 Movie

14 Movie

17 Movie

19 **Survival of magic and witchcraft**

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, pp. 250-260; Ankarloo, The Twentieth Century, Part 3, pp. 141-180; Oldridge, Witchcraft Reader, Part X

21 **Modern Witchcraft: Ideas and History**

Reading: Ankarloo, The Twentieth Century, “Modern Pagan Witchcraft,” Section 1

**Reviews of Articles Due today by 4:00 P.M.**

24     **Modern Witchcraft: Ideas and History**

Reading: Ankarloo, The Twentieth Century, “Modern Pagan Witchcraft,”  
Section 2

**Final Examination July 27: 10-12.**

**[Useful Sites for the study of Witchcraft](#)**