

HISTORY 201: THE HISTORIAN'S CRAFT WITCHCRAFT, DIABOLISM, AND MAGIC IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE (COMM-B)

Course Instructor: Alice Coulter Main Kwok
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Spring 2025 (In person, synchronous)
Classroom: 5245 Mosse Humanities
Class: Mondays 1:20pm-3:15pm
Credits: 3 (UW-Madison)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will address the problem of magic in European society ca. 1400-1700. We will read a selection of landmark studies that chart the importance of illicit belief in ordinary people's struggle to endure and make meaning in a precarious world. We will ask, what role did soothsaying, healing, charms, and curses play in early modern communities? Why did authorities like the State and Church seek to control these popular practices? How did anti-witchcraft initiatives drive new allocations of power? And how did this process birth a society we recognize as modern?

The readings in this course span the breadth of early modern Europe and its colonies. We will explore texts about men and women, the rural and the urban, the wealthy and the impoverished, the powerful and the disenfranchised. However, we will always return to our central topics: community dynamics; popular resistance to sanctioned doctrine; officials' march towards discipline; the creative appropriation of religion; gender; sexuality; and survival. By tracking the social, spiritual, and intellectual transformations incubated in early modern localities, students will strive to better understand the lived mentalities and perspectives of historical actors.

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

This course aims to facilitate student progress across three primary areas: content knowledge, general skills, and critical thinking. Students will gain a solid foundation in the social, religious, and cultural upheavals that drove the witch-hunts of early modern Europe. Students will also hone their abilities as readers and writers. Finally, they will practice asking provocative questions, testing claims against evidence, and elaborating logical connections.

TEXTBOOKS

- Darren Oldridge, ed., *The Witchcraft Reader*, 3rd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2020).
- Richard Godbeer, ed., *The Salem Witch Hunt: A Brief History with Documents*, 2nd ed. (Macmillan Higher Education, 2017).
- Peter A. Morton, ed., *The Bedevilment of Elizabeth Lorentz* (University of Toronto Press, 2018).
- Alec Ryrie, *The Sorcerer's Tale: Faith and Fraud in Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

ASSIGNMENTS

Students in History 201 are expected to come to class with copies of the relevant texts, ready to discuss them for the day. Active participation in seminar-style conversation is an integral component of the learning in this course.

Students will also complete five one-page reading responses, one three-page historiography paper, and two five-page directed primary source papers. Prompts for these papers will be distributed closer to the due date. The prompts will be interpretive and require critical thinking.

As the capstone project for this course, students will compose a final paper of 8-10 pages based on independent primary and secondary source research. With assistance from the instructor, students will select a topic relating to early modern witchcraft, diabolism, or magic to analyze, and will produce an original argument that puts their topic in conversation with other histories.

To fulfill the oral communication objective of a Comm-B course, students will also give two brief five-minute speeches. For the first speech, students will present an overview of their research paper proposal. For the second speech, students will assume the persona of a character from *The Sorcerer's Tale* and perform a courtroom monologue arguing for the guilt or innocence of the magician Gregory Wisdom.

GRADING

- Classroom Participation: 20%
- Discussion Posts: 10%
- Historiography Paper: 5%
- Directed Primary Source Papers: 10% each
- Oral Presentations: 5% each
- Research Paper Preparation: 10%
- Final Research Paper: 25%

CREDIT HOURS

The credit standard for this course is met by an expectation of a total of 135 hours of student engagement with the course learning activities, which include regularly scheduled instructor/student meeting times, reading, writing, and independent research.

EMAIL POLICY

My email address is amain2@wisc.edu. I will respond to all emails by the end of the following business day at the latest. For emails relating to specific assignments, be sure to email at least one business day in advance to guarantee a timely response

PLAGIARISM

One of the fundamental principles of this university is that “academic honesty and integrity are fundamental to the mission of higher education and of the University of Wisconsin system” (Wisconsin Administrative Code 14.01). While what constitutes in-class cheating (copying the work of others, unauthorized use of prepared notes, etc.) is often obvious to students, plagiarism merits further elaboration.

Plagiarism is...

- Using someone else's words or ideas without proper documentation.
- Copying some portion of your text from another source without proper acknowledgement of indebtedness.
- Borrowing another person's specific ideas without documenting their source.
- Having another person correct or revise your work. This differs from getting feedback from a writing group, or from an individual, which you then attempt to implement.
- Turning in a paper written by another person, from an essay "service," or from a website (including reproductions of such essays or papers).

Writing handbooks are excellent sources for learning how to avoid plagiarism. The writing center has an online handbook that can be accessed at www.wisc.edu/writing. And of course, you may always talk with me if you have any questions about plagiarism.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- The History Lab
 - Assistance from History Department grad students in improving your history papers
 - <https://history.wisc.edu/thehistorylab.htm>
- The Writing Center
 - Workshops, writers' groups, and one-on-one assistance to improve writing
 - <https://writing.wisc.edu/>
- McBurney Resource Center
 - Help with necessary accommodations in testing, classroom, etc.
 - <https://mcburney.wisc.edu/>

SCHEDULE

UNIT 1: HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF WITCHCRAFT

- **Week 1 (January 27, 2025)**
 - Discussion
 - Introductions
 - Reading
 - Darren Oldridge, "General Introduction," in *The Witchcraft Reader*, 1-16.
 - Julian Goodare, "Modern Western Images of Witches," in *The Witchcraft Reader*, 452-456.
 - Due
 - None
- **Week 2 (February 3, 2025)**
 - Discussion
 - Community, Health, and the Social Function of Witch-Hunting
 - Types of Sources and How to Cite Them
 - Reading
 - Robin Briggs, "The Experience of Bewitchment," in *The Witchcraft Reader*, 65-76.
 - Edward Bever, "The Medical Effects of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe," in *The Witchcraft Reader*, 87-92.

- Wolfgang Behringer, “Weather, Hunger, and Fear: Origins of the European Witch-Hunts in Climate, Society, and Mentality,” in *The Witchcraft Reader*, 93-106.
 - “The Trial of Franquette Camont in Lorraine, 1598,” in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*, 179-184. (On Canvas)
 - Due
 - Reading Response (On Canvas)
- **Week 3 (February 10, 2025)**
 - Discussion
 - Gender and Accusations of Witchcraft
 - Writing Thesis Statements
 - Reading
 - Jane P. Davidson, “The Myth of the Persecuted Female Healer,” in *The Witchcraft Reader*, 291-294.
 - Clive Holmes, “Women, Witnesses and Witches,” in *The Witchcraft Reader*, 302-322.
 - Louise Jackson, “Witches, Wives and Mothers,” in *The Witchcraft Reader*, 347-360.
 - E. J. Kent, “Masculinity and Male Witches in Old and New England,” in *The Witchcraft Reader*, 323-336.
 - Heinrich Kramer, *Malleus Maleficarum*, in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*, 57-68. (On Canvas)
 - Due
 - Reading Response (On Canvas)
- **Week 4 (February 17, 2025)**
 - Discussion
 - Central Authority, Judicial Procedure, and Torture
 - Structuring an Essay
 - Readings
 - Stuart Clark, “Inversion, Misrule, and the Meaning of Witchcraft,” in *The Witchcraft Reader*, 143-154.
 - Stuart Clark, “Protestant Witchcraft, Catholic Witchcraft,” in *The Witchcraft Reader*, 161-173.
 - Brian P. Levack, “State-Building and Witch Hunting in Early Modern Europe,” in *The Witchcraft Reader*, 200-213.
 - Brian P. Levack, “The Decline of Witchcraft Prosecutions,” in *The Witchcraft Reader*, 379-386.
 - “The confessions of Johannes Junius at Bamberg, 1628,” in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*, 198-202. (On Canvas)
 - Due
 - Reading Response (Canvas)

UNIT 2: COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY AND WITCH PANIC

- **Week 5 (February 24, 2025)**
 - Discussion
 - Introduction to the Salem Trials

- Visit to Memorial Library
- Readings
 - Richard Godbeer, “Introduction: Explaining the Salem Witch Hunt,” in *The Salem Witch Hunt: A Brief History with Documents*, 1-31.
 - “Signs and Assaults from the Supernatural World,” in *The Salem Witch Hunt: A Brief History with Documents*, 38-50.
 - “Beginnings,” in *The Salem Witch Hunt: A Brief History with Documents*, 51-65.
- Due
 - Historiography Essay (On Canvas)
- **Week 6 (March 3, 2025)**
 - Discussion
 - The Evidence of the Salem Trials
 - Sample Research Paper Workshop
 - Readings
 - “Witches on Trial,” in *The Salem Witch Hunt: A Brief History with Documents*, 67-145.
 - “The Witch Court under Attack,” in *The Salem Witch Hunt: A Brief History with Documents*, 147-167.
 - “Aftermath,” in *The Salem Witch Hunt: A Brief History with Documents*, 169-185.
 - Due
 - Reading Response (On Canvas)
- **Week 7 (March 10, 2025)**
 - Discussion
 - Historiographic Interpretations of the Salem Trials
 - Final Research Paper Prospectus Presentations
 - Reading
 - Sarah Rivett, “Our Salem, Our Selves,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (July 2008): 495-502. (On Canvas)
 - Elizabeth Reis, “Damned Women in Puritan New England,” in *The Witchcraft Reader*, 295-301. (On Canvas)
 - Franklin G. Mixon, Jr., “‘Homo Economicus’ and the Salem Witch Trials,” *The Journal of Economic Education* 31, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 179-184. (On Canvas)
 - Veta Smith Tucker, “The Racial Metamorphosis of Tituba of Salem Village,” *Journal of Black Studies* 30, no. 4 (March 2000): 624-634. (On Canvas)
 - Due
 - Final Research Paper Prospectus (On Canvas)

UNIT 3: UNDERSTANDING DEMONIC POSSESSION

- **Week 8 (March 17, 2025)**
 - Discussion
 - Introduction to Demonic Possession
 - Sample Research Paper Workshop

- Reading
 - H. C. Erik Midelfort, “The Devil and the German People,” in *The Witchcraft Reader*, 227-239.
 - Sarah Ferber, “Ecstasy, Possession, Witchcraft,” in *The Witchcraft Reader*, 257-266.
 - Henri Boguet, “The Possession of Loyse Maillat, 1598,” in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*, 239-242. (On Canvas)
- Due
 - Salem Essay (On Canvas)
- **Week 9 (March 31, 2025)**
 - Discussion
 - Lutheranism in German-Speaking Europe
 - Reading
 - Peter Morton, “Introduction: The Devil in the World of Elizabeth Lorentz,” in *The Bedevilment of Elizabeth Lorentz*, xvii-lxii.
 - Due
 - Final Research Paper Rough Drafts (In class and on Canvas)
- **Week 10 (April 7, 2025)**
 - Discussion
 - Elizabeth Lorentz’s Trial and World
 - Peer Review Workshop
 - Reading
 - “The Trial of Elizabeth Lorentz,” in *The Bedevilment of Elizabeth Lorentz*, 1-50.
 - Due
 - Peer Review Letters on Research Paper Rough Drafts (In class and on Canvas)

UNIT 4: ALCHEMY, ASTROLOGY, AND EARLY MODERN SCIENCE

- **Week 11 (April 14, 2025)**
 - Discussion
 - Microhistory
 - Visit from Writing Center Instructor on Editing
 - Reading
 - Alec Ryrie, *The Sorcerer’s Tale*, xii-33.
 - Due
 - Demonic Possession Essay (On Canvas)
- **Week 12 (April 21, 2025)**
 - Discussion
 - Wisdom’s Economic Strategies
 - Reading
 - Alec Ryrie, *The Sorcerer’s Tale*, 34-108.
 - Due
 - Reading Response (On Canvas)
- **Week 13 (April 28, 2025)**
 - Discussion

- Wisdom on Trial
 - Farewells
- Reading
 - Alec Ryrie, *The Sorcerer's Tale*, 109-183.
- Due
 - *The Sorcerer's Tale* Presentations (In class)

FINAL PAPERS DUE THURSDAY, MAY 8, 2025 AT 11:59PM