

History 457: The Witch Hunt in Early Modern Europe
Fall 2014
Prof. Jennifer Selwyn



Learning Goals

- To gain a substantive knowledge of the key conceptual issues, debates, institutions, societal and cultural impact of the early modern witch-hunting phenomenon.
- To attain historical empathy for peoples and cultures from a distant historical epoch whose values, ways of life, and ideas are often unfamiliar and quite distinct from our own.
- To develop the critical skills to analyze, discuss, and write about primary historical sources, including evaluating author bias, weighing the strengths and limitations of different genres (types) of historical source materials, and comparing contemporaneous sources.
- To understand the myriad perspectives and questions that frame modern historical writing (historiography) on the early modern period and to begin to identify authors' main arguments and the strategies that they use to present supporting evidence.
- To work effectively to synthesize key arguments, evidence, and implications of course material and to link specific information to broader class themes.

I encourage you to contact me with any questions or concerns that you might have. The best way to do so is via email: Selwyn@pdx.edu, or Selwyn@d2l.pdx.edu. Please note that webmail and D2L email are not linked, so the best bet is to email me through the D2L mail function, using webmail as a backup. As you begin to negotiate the D2L course site, I encourage those of you new to this system to take advantage of the excellent tutorial that you can find at the Home Page.

Required Texts:

Levack, Brian. *The Witch Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (3rd Edition). Pearson, 2006

Witchcraft in Europe 400-1700. A Documentary History. 2nd Edition, Alan C. Kors & Edward Peters, Editors. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.

All of the assigned texts for this course may be purchased through the Portland State University Bookstore, or at an online bookseller. Other documents that are available for downloading at our D2L course site are noted as such in this course syllabus and may be found by going to the Weekly Learning Modules link from the Home Page of our course site. Each document will be available at the appropriate Learning Module for the week that it is assigned.

Course Requirements and Policies:

Submit All Required Papers: You must submit all required paper assignments in order to pass this course. Papers must be uploaded to the D2L Drop Box as Word (or RTF) attachments. No exceptions!

Late Paper Policy: I do not accept late papers, except in extraordinary circumstances. If you need to arrange an extension, due to an emergency, please contact me prior to the due date. I cannot accept papers that are pasted into the Assignment Drop box, because they lack formatting and I do not have time to figure out what you meant without this all-important formatting. Please do whatever you can to upload your essay onto the Drop box. Let me know by email if you face a problem. Sometimes, it takes a minute or so to upload, so be patient! If all else fails, send the essay to me via D2L email as a Word (or, RTF) attachment. I cannot download obscure, or archaic formats like Works (sorry ;).

Plagiarism: As you know, all of your work must be original. When you cite the work of another author, you must give her/him their due by providing either a parenthetical citation, or a footnote/endnote. For the short paper assignments, I will accept either Chicago-style footnotes or parenthetical citations. Guidelines are provided on our course site, at the "Getting Started" folder on the Home Page, under "Course Content". Presenting another's work as your own can put you at risk for plagiarism and could potentially lead to your failing this course, and facing disciplinary action from Portland State University. When in doubt, always cite any sources from which you borrowed ideas, whether you are quoting directly, or paraphrasing. Always err on the side of caution! For a fuller definition of what constitutes plagiarism and the procedures followed by Portland State University in cases where it is suspected, please go the following website: <http://www.pdx.edu/dos/conductcode.html#Code> See, especially, the section on "Proscribed Conduct," Item #2, and "Procedures for Complaints" regarding cases of academic dishonesty.

Final Grade Criteria: The following point totals represent the maximum number of points that a student may earn for each category of class performance. Paper/Exam prompts will be available well in advance of the due dates for your planning purposes.

*Participation/Discussion: 50 points. (Each discussion will be worth a possible 5 points, including two original, substantive posts, worth a possible two points each, and one substantive response to a classmate. Students are welcome to contribute additional posts, if so motivated.

Critical Response Essays (2): 25 points possible for each essay. Each essay should be approximately 6-7 pages in length, double-spaced--using either 11- or 12-point type fonts. The first essay will be based upon common course readings and there will be a choice of prompt questions, with an option to develop one's own topic, as well. For the second essay, students may choose to build upon one of their discussion posts, or to focus upon a

particular topic of interest within the scope of early modern witch hunting and include outside reading materials, with my advice and consultation. A third option could involve a comparative analysis of the historical backdrop for the witch hunting phenomenon and a popular cultural representation, such as a work of fiction, a play or film. The specific criteria for each paper will be posted under “Assignments” on the action tabs, as well as linked to the Home Page.

***An Important Note on Discussions*:**

Online courses offer a unique opportunity to build a non-traditional learning community, but because we do not meet face to face, both students and instructor must be that much more committed to making the course atmosphere inclusive, dynamic and truly interactive. In order for our class to achieve our shared learning objectives and be meaningful for each of us, we need to participate actively in the “virtual” classroom environment, as we engage with the readings and with one another online. This means that each of us must participate in each discussion with substantive comments/posts that help to illuminate the course readings and the larger themes that they bring to life. Let’s commit ourselves to creating an informal, but intellectually serious, and lively learning community in which all participants can engage. I welcome your feedback throughout the term on ways to improve our class community.

Please refer to the “Discussion Posts” icon on the Blackboard course homepage for general guidelines for online discussion participation and “netiquette.” For my part, I promise to listen attentively and respectfully to all students, read all students’ posts with great care, and participate in all discussions, although I may not respond to each post each week. If you have an individual question or matter to discuss with me, you are welcome to write me via the D2L Email function. I will check my mail at least twice a day and respond to you in a timely manner (normally within 8-12 hours, but often sooner).

Students should plan to respond to two discussion questions (and/or make original posts relevant to the week’s readings/key themes) and also offer at least one substantive response/critique of a fellow student’s post. In cases where there are more than two discussion questions (which may happen frequently), feel free to choose those questions that interest you most. These critiques are not intended to be personal attacks, but nor should students feel shy about debating points of interpretation from the readings. Rather, they are intended to help each of us to read carefully and thoughtfully and help our classmates to do the same. We are critiquing one another’s arguments, not individuals.

Timely Discussion Posts/Responses: Students will rely upon one another’s participation for their own success, so please do your part! Discussion posts should go up as early in the week as possible to give ample time for responses and all posts and responses to a classmate should be in by the end of the weekend (Sunday evening), so that we can move on to the next topic/set of readings on Monday. If at all possible, try to post at least one of your discussion posts by mid-week! If I find that students are not posting/responding with critiques in a timely manner, I reserve the right to “lock” discussion topics” with ample advanced notice given to all students. In the event that a student does not have sufficient posts to which to respond with a critique, you are invited to make an additional post(s), and the class will address this matter as a group and come up with a collective solution. Do not miss a week’s discussion posts, as this will have a serious impact on your course grade, not to mention robbing your classmates and me of your insights into the readings. Students who earn the full 50 points for their discussion grade find that this allows them greater “wobble room” with the papers.

Writing Effective Discussion Posts:

There is no specific formula for writing successful discussion posts. Most importantly, do the required reading, choose the discussion questions that most interest you, and allow you to integrate both primary and secondary source readings, where appropriate. Be sure and give some thought to what you want to highlight in your responses to the discussion questions. If you prefer, you may choose to highlight themes from the readings that my discussion questions do not address. Try to be expansive in your comments, providing specific examples to clarify your ideas, and use text material as often as possible to illustrate and support your arguments. Feel free to offer your personal interpretations, but remember that one of our goals in this class is to learn to think historically and analytically, so if you're simply "shooting from the hip," I (or one of your classmates) may very well ask you to elaborate, so be prepared to explain your ideas fully and clearly. Please note that responses to fellow students' posts that do not contribute anything substantive, such as: "Great comment, Jane, I hadn't thought of that;" or, that are vague, like: "I agree with you that the Machiavelli source is cool," will not automatically earn points. If you have not earned the number of points that you had hoped, you may feel free to ask me why. If I am consistently asking you to elaborate, or be more specific in your discussion comments, you will already have your answer!

Paper Due Dates:

First Paper: Tuesday, October 28th, 2014 by 11:59PM (Midnight)

Second Paper: Wednesday, December 10th, 2014 by 11:59PM (Midnight)

(N.B.: Descriptions of all written assignments will be posted on the Home Page under "News". All papers should be submitted through the "assignment drop box." If you are unfamiliar with D2L, please take advantage of the tutorial available at the Home page, which will acquaint you with all aspects of navigating the website, submitting assignments, using the Discussion Board...)

Syllabus

Week One (9/29-10/5) Introduction to the Course; Witch Hunt Simulation; Emerging Notions of "Witch" in Late Medieval Europe.

Reading: Michael Bailey "The Feminization of Magic and the Emerging Idea of the Female Witch in the Late Middle Ages." (Week One Course Module)

Discussion Questions:

1. Reflect upon your experience with the witch hunt simulation.
2. What is Michael Bailey's principal argument about the "feminization" of ideas of the witch in late medieval Europe that prefigured the witch hunts? What kinds of evidence does he use to support his arguments?

Week Two (10/6-10/12) Defining Terms: Causes and Conceptual Debates Around the European Witch Hunt

Reading: Brian Levack, *The Witch Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (hereafter, *The Witch Hunt*), Chapter One: "Introduction."

Discussion Questions:

1. How does Brian Levack define "witchcraft" for the purposes of this book and does he believe that it was a real phenomenon, based on available evidence? Why or why not?
2. What generalizations does Levack make about the nature of the early modern witch-hunts? Does any of this surprise you? Why or why not?

Week Three (10/13-10/19) Intellectual Foundations

Reading: Levack, *The Witch Hunt*, Ch. 2 "Intellectual Foundations;" Pope Innocent VII, "Summis desiderantes" (1484); Kramer and Sprenger, "Malleus Maleficarum", in *Witchcraft in Europe 400-1700. A Documentary History* (hereafter, *A Documentary History*), 177-204.

Discussion Questions:

1. What were the key ideas that formed the basis for the belief in the widespread presence of "witches" in late medieval/early modern Europe?
2. How does the "Malleus Maleficarum" reflect (and, perhaps, create) these core ideas? How does the tone of the source and the imagery that it uses seek to convey the dangers represented by witches?

Week Four (10/20-10/26) Legal Foundations and Procedures of the Witch Hunt

Reading: Levack, *The Witch Hunt*, Ch. 3; Jean Bodin, "On the Demon-Mania of Witches"; Finish *Malleus Maleficarum*," in *A Documentary History*, 204-229; 290-302.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why does Levack argue: "The great European witch hunt was essentially a judicial operation"? Which specific legal innovations and/or structures made this true? Provide specific examples.
2. What are some of the key arguments that Kramer and Sprenger make in the "Malleus Maleficarum" regarding legal procedures to try accused witches and what methods may legitimately be used (including torture) to exact confessions?
3. Why, according to Jean Bodin, must states try accused witches through their legal systems?

First Essay Due on Tuesday, October 28^h by 11:59PM

Week Five (10/27-11/2) Religious Influences on the Witch Hunt

Reading: Levack, *The Witch Hunt*, Ch. 4; Martin Luther, "The Two Kinds of Sorcery and the Reformation," Jean Calvin, "Witchcraft and the Reformation," *A Documentary History*, 261-270.

Discussion Questions:

1. Which were the particular religious conditions prevalent in early modern Europe that facilitated the development of the witch-hunt? How did the sectarian conflict between the Catholic Church and the new Reformation churches play into this situation? Be specific.
2. Compare the writings of Martin Luther and Jean Calvin, two of the key Reformation figures of the sixteenth century. How do they characterize the threat posed by witches and witchcraft and what do they propose should be done to combat the "evil" posed by witches?

Week Six (11/3-11/9) Social, Gender Context and Other Dynamics

Reading: Levack, *The Witch Hunt*, Chs 5 & 6; “The Prosecutions at Bamberg” (includes letter by the accused, Johannes Junius to his daughter); “The Trial of Suzanne Gaudry” both in *A Documentary History*, 348-353; 359-367; Dale Hoak, “Witch-Hunting and Women in the Art of the Renaissance” (Week Six Course Module)

Discussion Questions:

1. How did social status and the gender of those accused in the witch hunts help to shape the story of early modern witch hunting? Use specific examples to support your arguments.
2. These two trials reveal dramatically different victims of the witch-hunts, both in terms of their social status/levels of education and gender. Based upon these trials, as well as the material in Levack and other sources, what generalizations, if any, might we draw about the broader social dynamics of the witch-hunts?
3. What observations does Dale Hoak make about the visual depiction of women in Renaissance art dealing with the witch-hunts?

Week Seven (11/10-11/16) Chronological and Regional Diversity

Reading: Levack, *The Witch Hunt*, Ch. 7; H. Erik Midelfort, “Witch Craze? Beyond the Legends of Panic,” (Week Seven Course Module); “The Persecution in Scotland (1591)” and one other document from a seventeenth-century witch trial, in *A Documentary History*, 318-322 and ?

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some of the generalizations that Levack makes about regional and chronological dynamics in early modern witch hunting? Do the primary sources from different locations/time periods bear this out? How so? Please provide specific examples.
2. Erik Midelfort’s article, “Witch Craze?” argues that we need to move beyond referring to the witch hunts by loaded terms, such as “craze” or “panic.” Why does he argue that this is so and how does his article on local and regional variations in the witch hunting phenomenon contribute to a larger understanding of this topic? Be specific.

Week Eight (11/17-11/23) Salem, Massachusetts (1692) and the North American Witch-Hunt

Reading: Gretchen Adams, “Specter of Salem in American Culture;” Carol Karlsen, “Devil in the Shape of a Woman;” Elaine Breslaw, “Tituba’s Confession: The Multicultural Dimensions of the 1692 Salem Witch-Hunt,” (Week Eight Course Module)

Discussion Questions:

1. Compare Carol Karlsen and Elaine Breslaw’s respective discussions of the Salem witch trial and the larger historical, colonial, religious, and economic contexts that framed it. Which factors and/or individuals does each scholar choose to emphasize and how do gender and ethnic/racial dynamics play into the narrative of the Salem story. Use specific examples.
2. What does Gretchen Adams argue about the long-term “specter” of Salem on the development of American culture and the power of the notion of “witch-hunts” in the popular consciousness? Provide specific examples.

Week Nine (11/24-11/30) The Decline of the Early Modern Witch-Hunt and Its Critics.

Reading: Levack, *The Witch Hunt*, Ch. 8; Michel de Montaigne, “Concerning Cripples,” Thomas Hobbes, “Of Demonology . . .” (From *Leviathan*); Friederich Spee, “*Cautio Criminalis*” in *A Documentary History*, 402-406; 419-425; 425-429.

Discussion Questions:

1. Which factors led to a gradual decline in witch-hunting by the eighteenth century, according to Brian Levack? Provide specific examples to support your arguments.
2. Compare the three primary sources that offer critical perspectives by contemporaries on the witch-hunts. Do they share any critiques in common and, if so, which ones? How do they differ? Use specific examples to support your arguments.

Week Ten (12/1-12/7) Modern Manifestations of “Witch-Hunting” in Europe and beyond

Reading: Levack, *The Witch Hunt*, Ch. 9; David Frankfurter, “The Satanic Ritual Abuse Panic as Religious-Studies Data”

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some of the modern manifestations of the witch-hunting mentality that Levack considers in Chapter Nine and what do they share with the early modern phenomenon that we have been studying? What can we learn from their recurrence?
2. What does David Frankfurter argue about the “satanic ritual abuse panic” that gripped the U.S. and Britain in the 1980s and 90s? How does he believe that scholars of religion should examine such episodes? How does this relate to issues raised in the rest of the course? Be specific.

Final Paper Due on Wed., December 10, 2014 by 11:59PM (Midnight)