*Witchcraft*

# Course Information

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*This course is open to freshman and upperclassmen. It is more specifically, for women and gender studies majors and minors. It is also open to history majors and minors. It is geared toward students with interest in these subject areas because of the historical context examined during the course. There is also a large focus on women and their role in society during this time period, as they were often targets of accusation.*

# Course Description

*Over the duration of this course, the learning objective will focus on explaining how factors such as mainstream culture, fear of the unknown, and a threat to longstanding power dynamics led to the targeting and victimization of hundreds of people in colonial America.*

# Course Schedule

## **Unit 1: *Healers***

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| **BIG Question:** How does the role of healer or midwife confine the accused and how does it liberate them? |
| **Argument of the Unit:** Healers and midwives have a complicated relationship with the church and the professional medical field. As a result of popular religious beliefs and superstitions, these women were persecuted as witches and blamed for illness their remedies could not heal. |
| **Key Words:** *Heretics, Malleus Maleficarum, Persecution, Prosecution, Midwifery* |
| **Link to Reading:** [*Public Health Then and Now*](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PabVYbVFSKQuwgVcjRQaow8QXDpCly0k/view?usp=sharing) |
| **Annotation of Reading:** *The widespread christian belief that disease originated from sin, possession or witchcraft and could only be remedied by prayer and penitence led to accusation of health practitioners when recovery was not always imminent. Midwives and healers were often persecuted, especially after the event of a stillbirth or malformed infant. They used therapies and medicines involving herbs and potions that reflected superstitions of the time. Midwives and healers were often poor, and some turned to practicing ‘sorcery’ to allow for more economic opportunity. Women were largely excluded from the professional medical field, despite their historical part in assisting in childbirth and nursing. Malleus Maleficarum or The Hammer of Witches was published in 1486 and became the official church text on witch hunting for 300 years. The information relayed in this source is applicable to my course because I was specifically looking at how these gender and social roles defined individuals and made them targets of the church and larger community.* |

## **Unit 2: *Infamy in Salem***

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| **BIG Question:** *What combination of factors produced the events in Salem?* |
| **Argument of the Unit:** *This source recounts the cases of witchcraft accusation trials and sentences to demonstrate how the investigations were conducted and why the events were allowed to unfold without any resistance from the members of society.* |
| **Key Words:** *Puritan, Superstition, Supernatural, Bewitched, Compos Mentis* |
| **Link to Reading:** [*Salem Witchcraft*](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_9aGoihELUoCLhahVXhsklzsaMG5_9M7/view?usp=sharing) |
| **Annotation of Reading:** *This source provides an overview of the convictions at Hartford, Connecticut and at Salem, Massachusetts. It describes the actions of the people, as very few questioned the existence of witchcraft and the occurrence of supernatural events. This was because many did believe, and if those who did not spoke out, they made themselves a target and were considered to be attacking the values of the church and society. It explains that some of the individuals that were considered to be bewitched showed symptoms similar to those that suffer from epilepsy today. Unfortunately, it was common to blame what could not be medically explained yet on witches. The source details accounts of individual people’s experiences during interrogation. Leading questions were employed in extreme efforts to receive confessions. This is worth including because it provides context and background information concerning the infamous witch trials.* |

## **Unit 3: *Grounds for Accusation***

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| **BIG Question:** *To what extent did an individual’s role in society affect the likelihood of becoming a victim of accusation?* |
| **Argument of the Unit:** *The author claims that those accused of witchcraft were overwhelmingly female victims, and of those it was common to be widowed or divorced and over age 40. These women were seen as threats to the Puritan’s hierarchical society, in which women should be subordinate to men and God.* |
| **Key Words:** *Excommunicate, Exorcise, Helpmeets, Hierarchical society, Moral Universe, Deviance* |
| **Link to Reading:** [*Women as Witches*](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1z6i5VH0RJJ5mHeCQfH31bEqRzW1ooPpH/view?usp=sharing) |
| **Annotation of Reading:** *This source summarizes and analyzes the research conducted by Carol F. Karlsen in her book, “The Devil in the Shape of a Woman.” She examines figures such as Anne Hutchinson, Sarah Osborne, and Eunice Cole, comparing and contrasting them among the 344 other accounts of witchcraft accusation of the period. This source’s contribution to my course on witchcraft is it’s focus on which individuals were being targeted and determining the reasoning through a feminist perspective.* |

## **Unit 4: *Cultural Comparison***

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| **BIG Question:** *What are some similarities and differences between this recent study and the events in early Connecticut and Massachusetts?* |
| **Argument of the Unit:** *Women were accused of witchcraft because of their social and economic standing, and the accuser is able to benefit by upholding the society’s patriarchal values and by opening themselves to more abundant resources.* |
| **Key Words:** *Witch tag, Poison givers, Zhu/Zhubo, Anthropologists, Patriarchal, Matrilineal* |
| **Link to Reading:** [*Why are Women Accused of Witchcraft?*](http://theconversation.com/why-are-women-accused-of-witchcraft-study-in-rural-china-gives-clue-89730) |
| **Annotation of Reading:** *A study was conducted in South-Western China, examining 800 households from five villages. It tested the impact of “witch tags” on specific households and the outer reaction from the larger community. While there, they were cautioned about eating at households known to have “poison givers”. The conductors of the study found that tagged houses were often headed by single, middle aged women with decent wealth. They examined the effect of this on cooperation with the surrounding community. They concluded that witch accusation resulted from competition for resources between households, in which the accuser stood to gain something by taking this action. The information gathered from this source is critical for my course because these factors heavily influence the way we treat people today and always have. It is important to analyze and acknowledge it because it affects the lives of every innocent individual who has been forced into a marginalized group and persecuted.* |

## **Unit 5: *Superstition***

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| **BIG Question:** *What is the connection between superstitions and religious beliefs concerning witchcraft?* |
| **Argument of the Unit:** *The crime of witchcraft evolved from superstitions of demons and apparitions and strong public belief in the supernatural*. |
| **Key Words:** *Physician, Compact with the Devil, Mental Philosophy, Magistrate, Condemnation* |
| **Link to Reading:** [*Essay on Demonology, Ghosts, and Apparitions and Popular Superstitions*](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Yuce-RLwwt2pB_4AsF9KfEsQeX2xSl8s/view?usp=sharing) |
| **Annotation of Reading:** *This source describes the influence of cultural superstitions on the behavior of the members of society. They regarded these when attempting to remedy sickness and disease or to expel demons or the devil. Those who disputed the idea of witchcraft were accused of being atheists. To determine who was innocent and who was not, those accused of witchcraft were subjected to a variety of tests. Those found guilty were hanged in America and were burned in most of Europe. This is relevant to the overall course because it details the history of these cases and the origin of superstitions that sparked these trials.* |

## **Unit 6: *Religion***

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| **BIG Question:** *To what extent does the influence of religion and gender determine an individual’s innocence and strength?* |
| **Argument of the Unit:** *In Puritan society, women’s bodies were recognized as being weaker than men’s bodies and thus they were more susceptible to corruption by Satan.* |
| **Key Words:** *Clergy, Laity, Gender Role Fluidity, Matrimony Analogy, Maleficium* |
| **Link to Reading:** [*The Devil, the Body, and the Feminine Soul in Puritan New England*](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1N-qIMTLsn0GSPVTYWNyGXXJ9D-ochHyv/view?usp=sharing) |
| **Annotation of Reading:** *This source explains the relationship between gender and witchcraft by examining Puritan beliefs. It was thought that all souls were feminine and that Christ and Satan were masculine figures competing for these souls. Preachers often explained this with the matrimony analogy, that believers will be conjoined, like in marriage, with Christ on judgement day, and taken home to heaven. Women had weaker bodies than men, which made them easy targets for the Devil to possess. Those who were tempted by the Devil were accused of maleficium, or practicing witchcraft to serve Satan. Those not worshiping Christ had souls that were barren and unfruitful that became fertile and fruitful upon conversion. This connection may be why many women that were accused were past the age of childbearing.* |

## **Unit 7: *Scapegoats***

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| **BIG Question:** *To what extent do ideas of religion and superstition govern the behavior of the members of society?* |
| **Argument of the Unit:** *The author critically examines the relationship between victims of conviction and execution with the justification by those condemning them. The collusion of religion, reality, and fear of being persecuted themselves resulted in employment of capital punishment of unfortunate groups.* |
| **Key Words:** *Capital Offense, Witchcraft, Swimming Test, Infanticide, Healers* |
| **Link to Reading:**[*In 1647, The Capital Crime was Witchcraft*](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UTcF7Xy-4dk55Jpwh-xTxwVU0fPr529c/view?usp=sharing) |
| **Annotation of Reading:** *This source details historical context about the prevalence of witchcraft in colonial America, primarily Connecticut. The year 1647 may have been the beginning of executions occurring over this crime. Those accused of practicing witchcraft were usually women and sometimes village healers, blamed when their remedies did not work. People mixed magic and religion and reality, often forcing confessions from victims to justify their beliefs. This source does a good job explaining who specifically was being charged for witchcraft and why society at large believed this and condoned the actions of the governing powers.* |