

HISTORY 4261-SEC. 001 (FALL 2022)

Early American Witchcraft: Practices and Perceptions

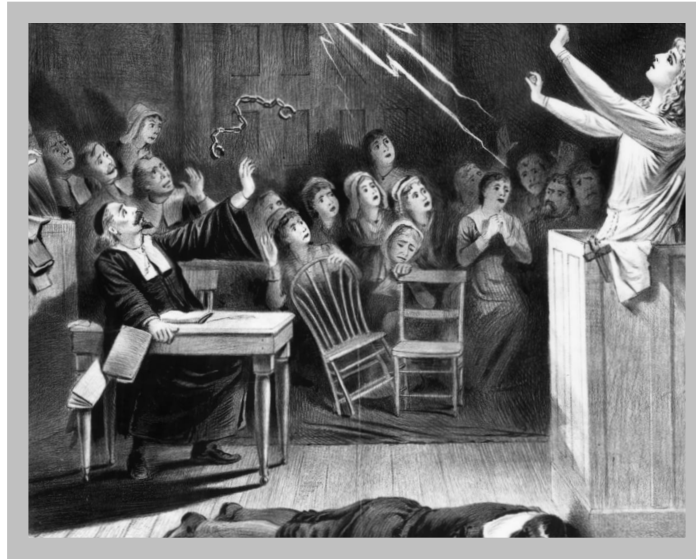
Dr. J. L. Tomlin

Office: Wooten Hall 246

Email: J.Tomlin@unt.edu

Website: www.jltomlin.com

Twitter: [@JLoganTomlin](https://twitter.com/JLoganTomlin)



MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	Friday
Wooten Hall 212 2:00-2:50 pm	Dr. Tomlin Office Hours 10am-12 pm	Wooten Hall 212 2:00-2:50, p.m.	available by appt.	Wooten Hall 212 2:00-2:50, p.m.

Course Description:

Most popular engagement with early American witchcraft focuses alternatively on the events surrounding the famous trials at Salem or stylized consumer images of witches themselves. In this course, we will explore the actual practices and beliefs that defined notions of witchcraft, the demographics of peoples associated with it, and the societal function of the “witch” in Early America. In the process, we will question early American assumptions about witchcraft, but also surviving iterations of the “witch” in modern society. Witchcraft, along with the belief in other forms of magic, the occult, or behaviors considered taboo by society, reflects a way of viewing the world. Fear or accusations of it, likewise, reflected the concerns, desires, and uncertainties of swiftly changing societies. Much like the one we live in. We will explore the function of the witch, practices associated with it, and, ultimately, the power of an idea we still struggle with.

Required Reading Materials:

Richard Godbeer. *The Devil's Dominion: Magic and Religion in Early New England*. ISBN: 978-0521466707

Alison Games. *Witchcraft in Early North America*. ISBN: 978-14422035587

Mathew Dennis. *Seneca Possessed: Indians, Witchcraft, and Power in the Early American Republic*. ISBN: 978-08122211992

*Students will also receive weekly supplementary source readings for free on Canvas.

Learning Objectives:

1. Understand some of the beliefs, behaviors, and functions of witchcraft in Early American societies.
2. Examine and understand the diversity of religious belief, practice, and experience in the American past and present, but also opposition and hatred toward that diversity.
3. Analyze how societies create and recreate notions of the “other” through mechanisms like witchcraft or the witch.
4. Explore the ways in which religious affiliation and belief have shaped social, economic, and political power in America.
5. Evaluate the approach of different authors on the topic of witchcraft, considering their methods, sources, and personality in analyzing such a complicated subject.

Requirements/Assessments:

- 1) Participation(20%):** This means more than simply “showing up to class,” although attendance is a huge part of it. It also means coming to class prepared to participate by:
 - Have the readings/assignments completed before class.
 - Ask questions. Challenge me and/or each other if you disagree or interpret a given set of evidence differently. Engage with the material and its usage. The result is almost always a more vigorous learning environment. But most importantly, pay attention and take it seriously. The Lectures and discussions will consider the evidence all of us need to make a historical interpretation/argument.
 - Approach the readings and materials in an active manner. Be curious and ask questions of your sources. You are reading not only for the information or content, but also for the analysis, research methods, argument and perspective. Keeping in mind that different opinions and interpretations are at the heart of doing history. The goal of our discussions is not to create some artificial consensus (the “right” answer), but rather to share our multiple perspectives in an informed, productive, and supportive manner.
- 2) Final Project(20%):** This will consist of a single 8-10 page historiographical essay that compares and contrasts each of our assigned texts with each other and with the primary sources/

lectures we examine throughout the course. This essay is comparative and reflection-oriented. It does not require original research.

3) Book Reviews(60%, 20% x3): These will consist of 3(three) 2-3 page reviews of Godbeer, Games, and Dennis, respectively. These reviews should introduce the author's thesis, supporting evidence, and strengths/weaknesses to their work.

Course Schedule:

Unit 1 WitchCraft in Practice

Week 1:(8.29-9.2)-Introductions, Course Methods, and Overview of Witchcraft in Early America (no reading assigned, acquire the books!)

Week 2:(9.5-9.9)-Perceptions of Magic in Early New England (Godbeer 1-54)

Week 3:(9.12-9.16)-Practices and Beliefs Associated with Witchcraft (Godbeer 55-84)

Week 4:(9.19-9.23)-Demographics of the Witch (Godbeer 85-121)

Week 5:(9.26-9.30)-Courts and Counter-magic (Godbeer, 122-178)

(Book Review 1 Due: October 7 on Canvas)

Unit 2 Witchcraft in Perception

Week 6:(10.3-10.7)-The Salem Witch Trials (Godbeer 179-222)

Week 7:(10.10-10.14)-Comparing Views of Witchcraft: Africa, America, Europe (Games 1-25)

Week 8:(10.17-10.21)-Witchcraft and the problems of Empire (Games 32-54)

Week 9:(10.24-28)-Understanding "outbreaks" of Witchcraft (Games 55-91)

(Book Review 2 Due: October 28 on Canvas)

Unit 3 Witchcraft and Popular Culture

Week 10:(10.31-11.4)-A New Nation and Old Fears (Dennis 1-52)

Week 11:(11.7-11.11)-Patriarchy and Witchcraft: New Challenges (Dennis 81-116)

Week 12:(11.14-11.18)-Rising Diversity and the Witch (Dennis 117-147)

Week 13:(11.21)-Changing Views on Possession (Dennis 148-178)

Week 14:(11.28-12.2)-The Witch, Witchcraft, and American Popular Culture (Dennis 179-220)

(Book Review 3 Due: November 28 on Canvas)

Week 15:(12.5-12.9) No meetings **Historiographical Essay Due by midnight December 12**

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES: When you are not sure about an assignment, ask. If you have problems finding a book, or a video, or accessing Canvas, let me know. If something we say in class is not clear, tell me. If you would like to discuss more some of the issues I cover in class, I will be happy to meet. If you have any concern about your performance and grades, be pro-active and come see me ASAP – assignments and exams cannot be undone after they have been graded; you cannot make-up for a poor participation throughout the semester in the last two weeks of class, nor we can make numbers appear out of thin air when you realize (usually around Thanksgiving!) that you “really, really need a (A/B/C) in this class” because of your scholarship, GPA, etc. And don’t forget: If you enjoy the class, let me know that too! You should always come to me first if you have questions and concerns.

COURSE POLICIES:

Syllabus: Read this syllabus thoroughly on the first day of class and keep it with you throughout the semester. Always check the syllabus (and canvas) first for information about assignments – emails asking for information that is on the syllabus (or on canvas) will receive low priority status in our answering schedule. Do come and see me *immediately* if something on the syllabus is not clear to you. If I do not hear from you, I will assume that you have read and understood everything.

Respect: Treat each person in the class with dignity, respect, and courtesy. Especially in discussion, remember that every class has a culture influenced by the fact that students come from widely diverse backgrounds and hold different viewpoints, values, and interpretations of the world. This classroom encourages diverse viewpoints. It is especially important that you listen to others whose opinions differ from your own; **debating opinions while remaining respectful of the individuals who hold them**. Neither I nor the University of North Texas will tolerate any comments or actions that create a hostile or uncomfortable learning environment for any member of the class. If using the email function or discussion boards on canvas to contact your classmates, make sure that your language is appropriate for a classroom setting.

Academic Integrity Standards and Consequences. According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University. I can and will punish all instances accordingly.

ADA Accommodation Statement. UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one’s specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of

accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the ODA website at disability.unt.edu.

Emergency Notification & Procedures. UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.