

Christine Payson
 American Witches 2018
 Syllabus 3.13.2018

American Witches

When you imagine a witch, is she green and stockings like the Wicked Witch of the West? Or surprised by her own power like lovable nerd Willow Rosenberg from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*? Have you wondered if boredom, vengeance, or rye tainted with hallucinogens motivated the accusers of the 1692 Salem Witch trials? “American Witches” uses texts from American history, literature, popular culture, and law to explore the many ways in which witchcraft is depicted and understood in the United States from the 17th century to today. This interdisciplinary course examines how different representations of witches engage issues of sexuality, race, and gender at specific points in American history. Assignments for the course will give students structured opportunities to develop their skills leading discussion, conducting research, and providing constructive feedback.

Schedule of Meetings

First Meeting: Who and What is a Witch?

Discuss popular culture representations of witches and where our fascination with them might originate (no preparation required).

As a class we will watch “Trick or Treat” episode of *Bewitched!* (1965) and discuss how the episode depicts Samantha and her mother as witches. In small groups students will discuss reviews of the 2016 horror film *The Witch* and share their observations with the larger group, focusing on how reviews of the film characterize both its 17th century setting and contemporary interest in ideas and images of witchcraft.

Week 2: What do we know about Salem? Part 1

Discuss “The Salem Witch-hunt” from *Witch Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England* by David Hall pp 279-316.

Week 3: What do we know about Salem? Part 2

Discuss Excerpts from *The Penguin Book of Witches* (referred to as *PBW* below)

“The Apology of the Salem Jury” (1697) *PBW* 197-8

“More Wonders of the Invisible World” Robert Calef, (1700) *PBW* 197-199

“A Modest Enquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft” John Hale (1702) *PBW* 209-214

Witch Hunt podcast (by Nancy Mades-Byrd and produced by BrainyByrd Media)
 Episodes 1-3.

Primary Source Analysis Due: Students turn in 2 page analysis of one primary source historical text not assigned to the class and make a (very) short presentation explaining its significance.

Week 4: Witchcraft and the History of American Slavery Part 1

Discuss:

Giles Corey of the Salem Farms Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1868)

“The Metamorphosis of Tituba, or Why American Intellectuals Can’t Tell and Indian Witch from a Negro” by Chadwick Hansen, published in *New England Quarterly* in 1974.

Week 5: Witchcraft and the History of American Slavery Part 2

Discuss:

I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem Maryse Conde (1986/92)

Arrest and Examinations of Tituba *PBW* 130-148

Week 6: Salem on Display Part 1: History, Memory and Entertainment in Today’s Museum

Discuss:

“Museums in Larger Society” *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning*. John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking (205-218)

“Revisiting the Old Plantation: Reparations, Reconciliation, and Museumizing American Slavery” Faith Davis Ruffins *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations* pp 394-434.

Week 7: Salem on Display, Part 2: Field Trip to Salem, MA (details TBD)

Visit Salem Witch Museum, Salem MA

Armed with our knowledge about how museums work, we will tour the American Witch Museum together and then analyze our experience there, from the set-up of museum displays to the materials available in the gift shop.

Week 8: African traditions on American Soil

Discuss:

Selections from *Of Mules and Men*, Zora Neale Hurston (1935)

Excerpts from *Church of the Lukumi-Babalu Aye, Inc. v. City of Hialeah* (1993)

Eve’s Bayou (1997)

Week 9: Witchcraft, Coming of Age, and Women’s Sexuality

Discuss:

Sabrina the Teenage Witch pilot episode (1996)

American Horror Story: Coven episode 1, “Bitchcraft” (2013)

“Young Goodman Brown” by Nathaniel Hawthorne

Week 10: Indigenous Religion and Witchcraft

Discuss:

Tracks, Louise Erdrich (1988)

Week 11: Witches on the Big Screen: Are You a Good Witch?

Discuss:

The Wizard of Oz (1939)

Week 12: Witches on Stage: McCarthyism and the political “Witch Hunt”

Discuss:

The Crucible Arthur Miller (1955)

Week 13: Witches on the Small Screen: Gender in Mid-Century American Society

Discuss:

Bewitched! Episodes 1-3 (1964)

Materials:

The Penguin Book of Witches ISBN: 978-0-14-310618-0

I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem, Maryse Conde ISBN:0-345-48420-2

The Crucible, Arthur Miller (any edition will do)

Tracks, Louise Erdrich (any edition will do)

All other materials, including articles, films, and television episodes, will be available via our class website.

Other Expense: Our field trip to the American Witch Museum will include costs for transportation and museum admission. The museum is accessible via public transportation (MBTA commuter rail). The total cost will not exceed \$25.

Assignments:

This course depends on active participation in every meeting. As a class we will construct guidelines and expectations defining constructive, active participation. Participation will determine 20% of each member’s final grade for the course.

Weekly Analysis Post (20% of final grade)

In preparation for each class meeting, post a 250 word analysis of that week’s reading material to our class website no later than 10pm on the day before our class meets. At least part of each analysis must respond to one of the prompt questions posted. I will provide feedback on your first three posts.

Leading Class Discussion (10% of final grade)

In teams of two, all class members will lead the first hour of in-class discussion once during the semester. Preparation for this task includes posting two questions to our site for everyone to consider as they write their weekly analyses.

Primary Source Analysis (5%) due in week 3

This 500 word piece will analyze one of the primary source documents included in *The Penguin Book of Witches*. Class members will both submit the written document to me and present the key points of their analysis to their classmates.

Character Dossier (5% of final grade) due last day of class

Each class member will specialize in the representation of a specific participant in the 1692 Salem Witch trials, compiling a dossier of short descriptions of the various forms that character assumes throughout the course's materials.

Characters to document include: Samuel Parris, Judge Hathorne, Rebecca Nurse, Sarah Good, Tituba Indian, Cotton Mather, Giles Corey, Thomas Putnam, Elizabeth Proctor, John Proctor, Mary Sibley, Mercy Lewis

Research Conference (40% of grade, in total)

Sharing your research with others means more than just talking at them for 15 minutes (though I have endured conference papers delivered that way). The largest graded component of this course will be a conference at which each member of the class will share their research project with us and guests invited by members of the class. Each project must focus on a specific text, event, or phenomenon related to our theme of American Witches and use an appropriate analytical frame for its argument. This conference offers a way to transition between the 'book report' style presentations most high school students are assigned to the professional presentations to colleagues that students will make later in their careers. Practicing those skills in a supportive academic environment with built-in steps for feedback and revision can make those later presentations both more successful and less nerve-wracking.

Project Proposal: Due in week 8, (10% of final grade)

Proposal includes an abstract and an annotated bibliography.

I will use the abstracts to create conference panels of 3-4 presenters each.

Rehearsal and Revision: Due in week 11 (10% of final grade)

Members of each panel will exchange drafts of their research presentations and hold a rehearsal together in order to provide specific feedback to support one another's revisions.

Conference Presentation: Date and Location TBD

Each class member will present their research project to conference attendees and submit a portfolio of materials documenting its creation and revision.

Grading:

- 20% weekly online analysis posts
- 20% active participation
- 10% leading class discussion
- 5% primary source analysis
- 5% character dossier
- 10% research project proposal
- 10% research project draft & rehearsal
- 20% complete research project portfolio, including presentation

Miscellany

If you have a documented disability, please meet with me as soon as possible to discuss ways we can make this class work for you. If you have had documentation for a disability in the past but have yet to register here at Tufts, I encourage you to contact Student Accessibility Services and talk with someone about whether you wish to proceed with getting appropriate documentation on file. You may never wind up needing accommodations during your time here at Tufts, but it can be nice to know you have support ready and available if you do decide that you need it.

The Academic Resource Center employs a number of Graduate Writing Consultants from across disciplines and I heartily encourage you to work with them on your research project for this course and any other writing project. They also offer consultants to help with public speaking and with time management and study strategies. These folks are experts who you have already hired!