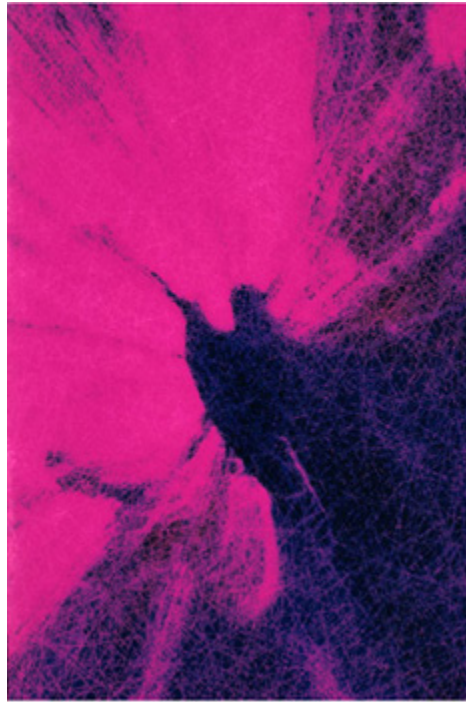


*In Conjunction with*



massachusetts institute of technology

## Magic, Witchcraft, and the Spirit World



Angel Statue in pink background. (Image courtesy of Eyewire Collection.)

### **Course Highlights**

This course features a complete [reading list](#) and all [assignments](#).

### **Course Description**

Spiritual, magical, and "occult" aspects of human behavior in anthropological and historical perspective: magic, ritual curing, trance, spirit possession, sorcery, and accusations of witchcraft.

Material drawn from traditional nonwestern societies, medieval and early modern Europe, and colonial and contemporary North America.

# Syllabus

## Overview

This class is concerned with the boundaries between everyday life and another order of reality, the world of spirits, powers, and mystical dangers, and with what happens when those barriers ease or break apart. Examples are drawn primarily from Europe and North America, in part to counter the assumption that belief in witchcraft and spirits is particularly associated with the non-western world. Throughout, our goal will be, not to promote or debunk belief and practice, but rather to understand them using approaches from anthropology and history, seeing them in social and political context and considering their place in people's lives.

Roughly half the semester will be devoted to spirit possession and visitation, trance, and altered states of consciousness, in particular to: snake handling and trance in Appalachia; spiritualism and mediumship in 19th century America; visitations by the Virgin Mary during 1931 in northern Spain; claims of abduction by space aliens in late 20th century America.

The other half of the semester will be devoted to fears that other people are causing harm through hidden or mystical means, and the consequences of such fears, especially moral panics. The primary examples will be great European witch hunt of the 15th-17th centuries; the Salem Village witchcraft trials of 1692; fears of satanic abuse and the daycare trials of the late 20th century, we will also look much more briefly at the practice of magic.

Historical and anthropological research on these topics has grown rapidly in recent decades, changing understandings of witchcraft and spirit possession. We will be concerned not so much with coming to absolute conclusions as with learning how to analyze belief and practice; appreciating the complexity and ambiguity of the historical record; and with weighing alternative interpretations.

There is no final exam. Students will write several essays and small research assignments over the course of the semester. We will see a number of films, as a way to consider the difficulties of dramatizing and analyzing historical events on film, as well as a source of information. There will be one afternoon field trip to the town of Danvers, the original Salem Village.

# Calendar

Ses #	Topics
1	Introduction
2	Videos and Discussion, Spirit Possession

<b>Ses #</b>	<b>Topics</b>
3	Film, <i>The Holy Ghost people</i>
4	Discuss Film and Covington Reading
5	Film, <i>Secrets of the Psychics</i>
6	Film, <i>Telegrams from the Dead</i>
7	Discuss Spiritualism
8	Divination and Magic
9	Discuss Visionaries Witchcraft
10	Film, <i>Strange Beliefs</i> Heresy, Millennialism and Witch Hunting
11	Class Reports Discuss European Witch Hunt
12	Class Reports Europe 2
13	Villages Europe 3
14	Gender  Class Reports
15	Film, <i>Three Sovereigns for Sarah</i> , Part I
16	<i>Three Sovereigns</i> , part II
17	Salem Village Discuss Salem
18	Class Reports Salem 2
19	Class Reports
20	Film on Space Alien Possession
21	Discuss Space Aliens, Split Personality
22	Film, <i>Search for Satan</i>
23	Satanic Conspiracies, Recovered Memory
24	Film, <i>Divided Memories</i>
25	Divided Memories, Discussion
26	Wrap-up

# Readings

In addition to the following bibliography, a listing of the [assigned readings](#) by class session is available.

## Required Readings

Covington, Dennis. *Salvation on Sand Mountain*. New York, NY: Penguin (Non Classics), 1996. ISBN: 0140254587.

Braude, Ann. *Radical Spirits*. 2nd ed. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001. ISBN: 0253215021.

Levack, Brian. *The Witch Hunt in Early Modern Europe*. 2nd ed. New York, NY; London, UK: Longman Press, 1995. ISBN: 058208069X.

Boyer, P., and S. Nissenbaum. *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976. ISBN: 0674785266.

Slyomovich, Susan. "Ritual Grievance: the Language of Woman?" *Woman and Performance* 5, no. 1 (1990).

Ong, Aihwa. "The Production of Possession: Spirits and the Multinational Corporation in Malaysia." *American Ethnologist* 15 (1987).

Christian, William. *Visionaries: The Spanish Republic in the Reign of Christ*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999, pp. 13-40, 243-254, and 287-301. ISBN: 0520219481.

Briggs, Robin. *Witches and Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1996, pp. 137-157, and 259-286. ISBN: 0140144382.

Willis, Deborah. *Malevolent Nurture*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995, pp. 1-43. ISBN: 0801481945.

Rosenthal, Bernard. *Salem Story*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 67-75. ISBN: 0521558204.

Karlsen, Carol. *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 1998, pp. 110-112. ISBN: 0393317595.

Showalter, Elaine. *Hystories*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1998, pp. 159-170, and 189-201. ISBN: 0231104596.

Acocella, Joan. "The Politics of Hysteria," *The New Yorker*, April 6, 1998.

Rothenberg, Daniel. *Gringo Organ Sellers*.

Grann, David. "Stalking Dr. Steere Over Lyme Disease." *The NY Times*, June 17, 2001.

Loftus, Elizabeth, and Katherine Ketcham. *The Myth of Repressed Memory: False Memories and Allegations of Sexual Abuse*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Griffin, 1996, pp. 20-30. ISBN: 0312141238.

Ofshe, Richard, and Ethan Watters. *Making Monsters*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996, pp. 155-175. ISBN: 0520205839.

## Additional Readings

In addition to the required readings for the course, following sources for background reading and the assignment on witchcraft theories are suggested.

Briggs, Robin. *Witches and Neighbors*.

Cohn, Bernard. *Europe's Inner demons*.

Demos, John. *Entertaining Satan*.

Levack, Brian, ed. *Articles on Witchcraft, Magic, and Demonology, v.3, Witch-hunting in Early Modern Europe: General Studies*.

Levack, Brian, ed. *New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic, and Demonology, v.4, Gender and Witchcraft*.

Rosenthal, Bernard. *Salem Story*.

Sharpe, James. *Instruments of Darkness*.

Willis, Deborah. *Malevolent Nurture*.

## Readings by Class Session

SES #	Topics	Readings
1	Introduction	
2	Videos and Discussion, Spirit Possession	Class Reader: articles by Slyomovichs & Ong

SES #	Topics	Readings
		Start Covington, Sand Mountain.
3	Film, <i>The Holy Ghost people</i>	Covington, all.
4	Discuss Film and Covington Reading	
5	Film, <i>Secrets of the Psychics</i>	Braude. <i>Radical Spirits</i> . Chapters 1-4.
6	Film, <i>Telegrams From the Dead</i>	Braude. Chapters 5-8.
7	Discuss Spiritualism	
8	Divination and Magic	Reader Christian. Levack. Chapters 1-3
9	Discuss Visionaries	Reader Briggs. "Projection of Evil."
10	Witchcraft Film, <i>Strange Beliefs</i>	Levack. Chapters 4-5.
11	Heresy, Millennialism and Witch Hunting Class Reports	Levack. Chapters 6. Reader Briggs. "Men against Women." Willis.
12	Discuss European Witch Hunt Class Reports	
13	Europe 2 Villages	Levack. Chapters 7-8. Boyer & Nissenbaum. Chapter 1.

SES #	Topics	Readings
	Europe 3	
14	Gender	
	Class Reports	
		B&N. Chapters 2-5
15	Film, <i>Three Sovereigns for Sarah</i> , Part I	Reader
		Karlsen & Rosenthal.
16	<i>Three Sovereigns</i> , part II	
17	Salem Village	B&N. Chapters 6-8.
	Discuss Salem	Reader
18	Class Reports	Showalter, Acocella, Rothenberg, Grann.
	Salem 2	
19	Class Reports	
		Reader
20	Film on Space Alien Possession	Loftus & Ketcham, and Ofshe & Watters.
21	Discuss Space Aliens, Split Personality	
22	Film, <i>Search for Satan</i>	
23	Satanic Conspiracies, Recovered Memory	
24	Film, <i>Divided Memories</i>	
25	Divided Memories, Discussion	
26	Wrap-up	

# Assignments

The following assignments are due during the sessions listed.

## Writing Assignments

Ses #	Assignments
4	Short Essay on Pentacostalist Snake Handlers
6	Essay on Spirit Possession
9	Witchcraft Theory Assignment, Written Report
12	Essay on European Witch Hunt and Salem Trials
23	Comparative Essay

### First Writing Assignment

**NOTE:** ALL writing assignments should be NO longer than 5 – 10 minutes of oral reading time.

Write a short essay on some aspect or aspects of the snake-handling Pentacostalist churches as we have been exposed to them in “The Holy Ghost People” and Salvation on Sand Mountain. Within the very limited space available, try to make your paper a coherent essay on your chosen topic, rather than a book report. Consider your sources critically. For possible topics, consult the study questions on the book and the film.

Be specific in your references. To cite Sand Mountain, use the following form, with author’s last name, date of publication, colon, and pages, all within parenthesis: (Covington 1995:73-84).

### Essay on Spirit Possession and Visitation

Write an essay about altered states and contact with the spirit world, using as your primary examples the Pentacostalists from “The Holy Ghost people” and Salvation on Sand Mountain; the 19<sup>th</sup> century spiritualists; and the Spanish case from Visionaries. You may also use, as appropriate, the articles by Ong and Slyomovics and late 20<sup>th</sup> century channeling. You may consider some or all of the following, and/or other issues that seem important.

- How do the examples of spirit contact reflect or bear on the social position and circumstances of participants? What rewards or benefits do they offer participants? How, if at all, do/did they change or affect those positions and circumstances?
- How are possessing spirits or visitations related to the individual identities of participants?

-In what ways are they concerned with issues and problems in society such as gender relations, marriage, morality, social class, urban/rural tensions, race, and class? In what ways, overtly or covertly, do they comment on, deal with, or attempt to modify those problems or issues?

-What does the ritual do for participants? What messages does it send? How does the frame of spirit contact and communication by invisible beings affect the message and its reception? How do others shape the experience and meaning of spirit contact? How do believers deal with opposition or skepticism?

Strive for a good balance between fact and interpretation. Support your claims with citations from our authors. The preferred citation form is the one used in social science, in parenthesis at the end of a sentence, as in the following example: (Jones 1923: 37-45).

### **Dennis Covington, *Salvation On Sand Mountain* Film "The Holy Ghost People"**

At the same time that we mine our sources for information, we need to scrutinize them, to read them critically, considering the nature and strength of their evidence and the interpretations they place on the evidence.

\* \* \*

What makes Covington's book similar to or different from the kind of study an anthropologist might have done? What kind of work is it? Can you think of other books you have read in the same style?

In what ways does Covington's intense personal involvement and identification with his subjects and their story affect his understanding? Is his willingness to empathize with the snake-handlers and to connect their lives with his own a source of strength or weakness in his book?

Covington's book is non-fiction, but it follows certain archetypes or themes found in many American novels and films. How do those patterns shape his understanding of his subject, for better or worse?

What is Covington's stance on whether anything happens randomly or accidentally? (See esp. p.203.) How does this stance affect his understanding?

How does Covington deal with questions of what is true or untrue, good or bad?

What can we say about the social backgrounds and daily lives of participants in snake-handling churches?

Why do the neighbors of the snake-handlers feel so strongly against them? What elements of middle-class culture are the snake-handlers rejecting? What takes their place?

What is the measure of someone's worth in a snake-handling church? What other measures do we have of someone's worth in other churches or in other sectors of American society?

Do the snake-handling congregations constitute communities? If so, what kind of communities are they?

What do you think members of these churches get from their participation and experiences? Why is power important?

Why snakes? What is their symbolism?

What is Covington's historical and psychological explanation of the snake-handlers? How do you think he reached it? What are the pieces of the explanation, and how do they fit together? Do you see any problems?

What differences do you see between the data and interpretations in Covington's book and the data and interpretations in the film, "Holy Ghost people"? Does anything in the film seem to

contradict his presentation or give a different slant on a subject, for instance the position of women?

How is the Holy Spirit, as it enters into church members, like other forms of spirit possession? How is it different? What happens in the meeting before members feel the spirit?

### **Writing Assignment Theories of Witch Hunts**

A great many theories have been advanced to explain the witch hunts in Europe and colonial New England. In addition, dramatic and literary presentations of the crazes often suggest implicit theories. For this assignment most students will take one theory or account, usually one that emphasizes a single cause or slant on the subject.

See the list of books on reserve in the course syllabus for some topics. For other topics, the books you want will be on the shelves in the Humanities Library. If you can't find an important source, I may have a copy you can consult, but only as a last resort.

A few students will instead take one topic and contrast two or more theories or approaches to that topic (see below).

Discuss the theory or presentation chosen. How does it explain the witch hunt in question? What features of the craze does it play up or play down? How adequate is the explanation? Be sure you communicate the main features of the explanation without getting mired down in excess detail. The theories in question vary from plausible and sophisticated to simplistic and silly, but in all cases discuss them critically. Make absolutely sure that you consider the theory in the light of the required reading for the course, especially Levack. It will be disastrous to ignore a discussion in the required reading relevant to your topic.

Try to go to the heart of the theory, its implications, and its strengths and weakness. Do not get bogged down in details, especially not in your class presentation.

Write a paper of at least three double-spaced pages. In addition, be prepared to give a concise summary and critique of the theory in class.

#### **FOR EUROPE**

**1. WITCHES AS PAGAN WORSHIPPERS.** Margaret Murray, *The God of the Witches, The Witch Cult in Western Europe* (paperback copies published by Oxford U. Press widely available) See also older editions of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. See Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, for criticism.

**2. LAWYERS AS WITCH HUNTERS.** Elliot Currie, "Crimes without Criminals," *Law & Society Review* 3:1, 1968, reprinted in: B. Levack, ed., *Witchcraft, Magic, and Demonology*, vol.3.

**3. WITCHES AS COMMUNAL CLOTH WEAVERS.** Jane Schneider, "Rumpelstiltskin's Bargain," in A. Weiner & J. Schneider eds., *Cloth and Human Experience*, chap.6 (also intro. to volume)

**4. WITCHES AS HALLUCINOGEN USERS.** Michael Harner, *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*, chap.8. See critique in Robin Briggs, *Neighbors and Witches*.

**5. WITCHCRAFT SCARES AS AN ELITE PLOT.** Marvin Harris, *Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches*, pp.207-240. Cf. H.C. Erik Midelfort, *Witch hunting in southwestern Germany, 1562-1684*

**6. WITCHES AS PERSECUTED HOMOSEXUALS.** Arthur Evans, *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture*.

**7. WITCHES AS MIDWIVES AND CURERS.** Barbara Ehrenreich & Deirdre English, "Witches, Midwives, and Nurses" (Humanities Library may have copy.) Mary Nelson, "Why Witches were

Women," in *Women, a Feminist Perspective*, Jo Freeman, editor. Anne Llewellyn Barstow, *Witchcraze*, chap. 6, "from Healers into Witches." Be sure to see criticisms in Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture*, p.5. See also Briggs in required reading.

**8. REAL SATANIC WITCHES WERE REALLY HURTING PEOPLE.** The (supposed) Reverend Montagu Summers, any of his works. See Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, for commentary.

**9. WITCHCRAFT, INTELLECTUALS, AND MOUNTAINS.** Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The European Witch Craze*. A classic statement on the subject. Consider especially the role of intellectuals, parallels with recent events, and environmental and racial determinism. See Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons* on the issue of early alpine witchcraft.

**10. WITCHES AS REBELS.** J. Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*

**11. WITCHES AS LOONIES, ACCUSERS AS HYSTERICIS.** Johann Weyer, *On Witchcraft*, esp. pp.96ff, 270-278, 289ff. Nicholas Spanos, "Witchcraft in Histories of Psychiatry"; George Rosen, "Psychopathology in the Social process"; R.E.Hemphill, "Historical Witchcraft & Psychiatric Illness" all reprinted in: B. Levack, ed., *Witchcraft, Magic, and Demonology*, vol. 3.

**12. A NOVEL OF WITCHCRAFT.** Michael Kunze, *Highroad to the Stake*

**13. THE REALITY OF WITCH CULTS.** Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*

**14. WITCHES, PAST AND PRESENT.** Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, Margot Adler, *Drawing down the Moon*, and other works

**15. ANIMALS AS WITCHES.** E.P. Evans, *The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals* (I have a copy).

#### **FOR NEW ENGLAND**

**1. WITCHCRAFT WAS REALLY BEING PRACTICED.** Chadwick Hansen, *Witchcraft at Salem*. Barrett Wendell, 1892, "Were the Salem Witches Guiltless?" reprinted in: B. Levack, ed., *Witchcraft, Magic, and Demonology*, vol. 8, pp.267-285. See also H.C.Erik Midelfort, "Were there really witches?" reprinted in: B. Levack, ed., *Witchcraft, Magic, and Demonology*, vol.3.

See esp. Rosenthal's commentary in *Salem Story*.

**2. HALLUCINOGENIC POISONING.** Linda Caporae, *Science*, 4/02/76, p.26; N.P. Spano and J. Gottlieb, *Science*, 12/24/76, p.1390. Mary Kilbourne Matossian, *Poisons of the Past*

**3. AN EPIDEMIC OF ENCEPHALITIS.** Laurie Winn Carlson, *A Fever in Salem*.

**4. EVIL GIRLS & MARTYRED CHRISTIAN WOMEN.** Charles W. Upham, *Salem Witchcraft* (1867), See commentary in Rosenthal.

**5. THE AFFLICTED GIRLS AS HYSTERICIS.** Ernest Caulfield, "Pediatric Aspects of the Salem Witch Tragedy" *American Journal of the Diseases of Children* 65:788-802, reprinted in: Marc Mappen, *Witches and Historians*, Compare Bernard Rosenthal, *Salem Story*.

**6. "WITCH HUNTS" & McCARTHYISM.** Arthur Miller, *The Crucible*. See also the volumes of critical essays on this play.

**7. WITCHCRAFT AND PSYCHOANALYSIS.** John Demos. *Entertaining Satan*, pp.153-210.

**8. WITCHCRAFT AND THE LAW.** David T. Konig, *Law and Society in Puritan Massachusetts*, chap.7; Peter Charles Hoffer, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: a Legal History*; Rosenthal, *Salem Story*. (also required readings in Levack and B&N)

#### **Final Writing Assignment**

Write an essay compares the phenomena discussed in the last section of term (recovered memory, multiple personality, and fears of space alien abductions and satanic conspiracies etc.) with the witch hunts in Europe and New England and the examples of spirit contact discussed in the first section of

the subject. In your essay, consider no less than three and no more than five significant points of similarity or difference. These may include, among others:

-the procedures by which abductions and abuse or witchcraft are discovered, including the place of special methods to discover hidden truths

-the non-ordinary physical and psychological states experienced by some participants (abductees, victims, mediums, trancers, afflicted girls) in these events; the way in which others involved influence and shape their experiences and accounts of those experiences

-how claims about spirit possession do or do not resemble claims about multiple personality and satanic control in terms of ideas about personal identity and responsibility

-the nature and role of the non-human beings, if any, with whom participants come in contact

-the place of gender

-the role of privileged experts, both in influencing particular cases and in shaping the public's understanding of what might be going on. The relationship between the ideas of elites and ordinary people.

-the way in which shared images, fears, hopes and scenarios originate, are shaped and changed, and consolidate into a relatively consistent understanding of what is going on; the role of printed books, pamphlets, sermons, magazines, newspapers and other mass media in shaping and developing those images and fears

-the way in which individual cases are handled and the role, if any, of legal procedures

-the ways in which claims about dangerous conspiracies, closeness of contact with the spirits world etc. indirectly express fears and preoccupations widely shared in society.

This assignment lets you show incisive and creative thought about course material as well as your knowledge of the material itself. Favor analysis over factual exposition, and especially avoid spending much space in your essay rehashing the details of the witch craze or snake-handling.

You do not have to decide that the material covered in the last section of the course is very like the witch craze or spirit possession--you may argue for difference rather than similarity, or a mixture of both. Some points of similarity and difference may apply more to one or two cases than to others. But you must argue your point cogently and back it up with citations of readings and material from class.

## Study Materials

### Topics

Pentacostalist Snake-handlers

### Study Questions

Dennis Covington, *Salvation On Sand Mountain*

## Topics

19th Century Spiritualism

Spanish Visionaries

European Witch Hunt

Salem Village Witch Hunt

Recovered Memory, Satanic Abuse,  
Daycare Trials

## Study Questions

Braude's *Radical Spirits* (

William Christian

Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, Chapters  
by Robin Briggs, Deborah Willis

*Salem Possessed* and Other Materials

Articles in Reader

### **Dennis Covington, *Salvation On Sand Mountain* Film" "The Holy Ghost People"**

At the same time that we mine our sources for information, we need to scrutinize them, to read them critically, considering the nature and strength of their evidence and the interpretations they place on the evidence.

\* \* \*

What makes Covington's book similar to or different from the kind of study an anthropologist might have done? What kind of work is it? Can you think of other books you have read in the same style?

In what ways does Covington's intense personal involvement and identification with his subjects and their story affect his understanding? Is his willingness to empathize with the snake-handlers and to connect their lives with his own a source of strength or weakness in his book?

Covington's book is non-fiction, but it follows certain archetypes or themes found in many American novels and films. How do those patterns shape his understanding of his subject, for better or worse?

What is Covington's stance on whether anything happens randomly or accidentally? (See esp. p.203.)

How does this stance affect his understanding?

How does Covington deal with questions of what is true or untrue, good or bad?

What can we say about the social backgrounds and daily lives of participants in snake-handling churches?

Why do the neighbors of the snake-handlers feel so strongly against them? What elements of middle-class culture are the snake-handlers rejecting? What takes their place?

What is the measure of someone's worth in a snake-handling church? What other measures do we have of someone's worth in other churches or in other sectors of American society?

Do the snake-handling congregations constitute communities? If so, what kind of communities are they?

What do you think members of these churches get from their participation and experiences? Why is power important?

Why snakes? What is their symbolism?

### **Study Questions on Spiritualism**

#### **Braude's *Radical Spirits* & "Telegrams from the Dead"**

What was the relationship of spiritualism to science? Is the relationship of science to religious and mystical belief different today? If so, why? What technologies were especially influential in spiritualism? Are there technologies today that play similar roles as metaphors for non-scientific belief systems?

Why did spiritualism spread so rapidly?

How and why did the media through which the spirits communicated change?

What beliefs and interests already existing in society made spiritualism plausible and acceptable to many people?

From the very beginning of spiritualism, there was great controversy over its validity. What factors might have influenced individuals towards belief or skepticism?

Are there any parallels between the social circumstances of mediums and the circumstances of the possessed in other societies? of the snake-handlers? Braude has most to say about public and professional mediums: what about all the domestic mediums and their role in their families?

What do you think was the physiological and psychological state of most mediums? In what ways was it different or similar to the state of the snake-handlers in "The Holy Ghost People" and the possessed in the videos from Morocco?

How according to Braude did spiritualism make it possible to speak in public? Why was this ability so crucial politically?

Why was the relationship between spiritualism and gender so important yet so contradictory?

Why was the connection with health so important? Why did the medical system affect women's lives so drastically? What was the appeal of spiritualist medicine? Do you see any parallels with alternative medicine today?

How did spiritualists address issues of marriage and sexuality? Do you know of other radical approaches to these issues in the 19<sup>th</sup> century?

What caused spiritualism's decline in the long run?

How was 19<sup>th</sup> century spiritualism similar to or different from the kind of mediumship and contact with the dead found on television today? from interest in angels?

Braude is most concerned with how Spiritualism was connected with bereavement and with the major social issues of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. What else might be going on in seances of a more personal nature? What was the relationship of mediums and others to the spirits they conjured up? How was the medium same/different from the spirit? responsible or not for what the spirit said and did? Were they playing with fire in some way?

### **Study Questions**

#### **William Christian, Visionaries**

How are visitations of the Virgin Mary like or not like spirit possession?

What was the role of the mass media? How were the controversies over the visions, and the ways in which they were critically examined, like skepticism and belief concerning spiritualism?

How are the circumstances and the antecedents of the visions in Ezkioga, especially conflicts and social tensions, like or unlike those in previous cases?

What kinds of people had visions? How do the social position and circumstances of the visionaries resemble or differ from those of mediums, snake handlers, and the possessed in previous cases? Who did not have visions?

How do the visitations connect with the great social and political issues of Spain and the Basque country in the 1920s and 1930s? Is the connection different from that between spiritualism and 19<sup>th</sup> century American social issues?

In what ways are the visitations distinctively Catholic just as the snake-handlers and spiritualists are mostly Protestant?

How did the content of visions change over time? How did people other than the seers themselves shape the visions?

Other material on the Ezkioga visions will be introduced in class.

What is Covington's historical and psychological explanation of the snake-handlers? How do you think he reached it? What are the pieces of the explanation, and how do they fit together? Do you see any problems?

What differences do you see between the data and interpretations in Covington's book and the data and interpretations in the film, "Holy Ghost people"? Does anything in the film seem to contradict his presentation or give a different slant on a subject, for instance the position of women?

How is the Holy Spirit, as it enters into church members, like other forms of spirit possession? How is it different? What happens in the meeting before members feel the spirit?

### **CONTRASTING THEORIES**

For the few of you who will take this option: Discuss the differences and similarities among the competing theories or interpretations of a single topic. Where possible, discuss the kinds of evidence the different authors consider and the ways they interpret it. As with other topics, concentrate on the main points and do not get lost in the detail.

**1. CONFESSION IN NEW ENGLAND WITCH TRIALS.** Contrast the positions of Boyer and Nissenbaum (pp.214-216); Bernard Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, pp.42-43,151-152, Richard Godbeer, *The Devil's Dominion*, pp.204-211, and Elizabeth Reis, *Damned Women*, chap. 4.

**2. GENDER IN WITCH TRIALS IN ENGLAND AND NEW ENGLAND.** Contrast the positions of several (not all) of the following: Carol Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*; John Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, pp.60-70, 153-165, 197-206, Briggs (required reading), Willis (required reading), Lyle Koehler, *A Search for Power*, and the articles in Levack, *New Perspectives*, v.4

**3. WITCHES AND SEXUALITY.** Contrast the positions of Anne Llewellyn Barstow, *Witchcraze*, pp.129-145, Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors* (see index), Levack (see index)

**4. TITUBA, HER IDENTITY AND ROLE IN THE SALEM CRISIS:** Maryse Conde, *Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*. Rosenthal, *Salem Story*, pp.10-31. Chadwick Hansen, 1974, "The Metamorphosis of Tituba, or Why American Intellectuals Can't Tell an Indian Witch from a Negro," *New England Quarterly* 47(1): 3-2. Elaine Breslaw, 1992, "The Salem Witch from Barbados: In Search of Tituba's Roots," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* v.128, pp.217-238.

### **Study Questions on the European Witch Hunt Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* Chapters by Robin Briggs, Deborah Willis**

How did different aspects of witch beliefs come together in one stereotype? How did they affect the course of the witch trials?

What were the key changes in law and legal procedure that made the witch hunt possible? What was the role of weakness in political and judicial systems?

What were the differences between secular legal procedures on the European continent and those found in England and the Inquisition, and why were they important?

What was the unholy synergy between prosecutors on the one hand and theologians and legal scholars on the other? between torture and the development of the witch stereotype?

In what ways did religion in this period, and especially changes in belief and conflict between Catholics and Protestants affect the witch trials? In what ways was religion irrelevant?

Where did the impetus for witch hunting come from? Who pushed or resisted?---the upper classes, lower classes, both?

What does Levack see as the social profile of accused witches? How does he explain the predominance of women among the accused? Do you think his explanation is adequate? How do the points of view of Willis and Briggs differ from Levack concerning gender? Why does Willis emphasize the role of mother?

How is witch hunting connected to village economic relations, especially gifts, loans, and charity?

Do we have any ideas today about curses and blessings from beggars?

What are the dynamics of witch hunting: how were hunts set off, and how did they progress?

How did people resist or cast doubt on witch hunts? Was resistance effective? (Important material on this question not in the readings will be introduced in class.) How could people call on science/religion/humanistic studies/psychology to counter witch accusations?

Why did the trials end, either in one locality or in Europe more generally?

What do changes through time and differences from one country and region to another tell us about the nature of the witch craze? How do they help us figure out causes and dynamics?

### **Study Questions**

#### **Salem Possessed and other materials on Salem Village**

Remember that the episode in Salem Village and New England witch hunting in general are parts of the wider European witch hunt.

"Three Sovereigns for Sarah" distorts the events in Salem Village less than other dramatizations, and in several respects it follows Salem Possessed closely. What are the difficulties of presenting history in a dramatic film? What is the influence of using a major star like Vanessa Redgrave? What great Hollywood theme is she playing out?

One of the great virtues of Salem Possessed is that it ties together individuals and broad patterns, so we can see the impact of individuals on events but also their place in the big picture. What is the importance of the following actors in the Salem drama? Tituba? Bridget Bishop? Governor Phipps, Justice Stoughton, Cotton Mather, Increase Mather, Samuel Parris, the Porters and Putnams, George Burroughs, John Proctor, Mary Easty?

How does B&N's take on Sarah Good (pp.203-206) differ from Carol Karlsen's in the Reader? What do the differences say about historical interpretation?

Most interpretations of the Salem episode pay great attention to the "afflicted girls," and most get caught up in the question of whether they were faking or crazy. How do B&N avoid this trap? What do you think was going on with the girls? How do our examples of spirit possession from the first half of the semester bear on this question?

Most interpretations of Salem follow the dramatic events closely day by day and week by week. How do B&N avoid that trap? How does the outbreak of 1692 end up as just one step in a long process?

In what ways do B&N's interpretation of the impact of legal procedures resemble Levack's? Many historians have treated the Salem episode as a kind of mass lynching---how do B&N see it differently?

What elements in the Salem trials played roles analogous to torture in continental European trials?

In what ways were Salem village and its long history of factionalism typical or unusual?

Why does it matter that the frontier had moved away from Salem Village?

How did the Mathers and Samuel Parris, as religious leaders, shape the Salem crisis? In what ways do they resemble the demonologists discussed by Levack? Do you know examples from your own home towns of conflicts between minister and congregation?

Do you buy the argument by B&N (p.145) that the Putnams "displaced" their accusations, attacking stand-ins like Rebecca Nurse rather than the individuals they really hated? What are the strengths and dangers of the displacement argument?

The culmination of B&N's argument is their analysis of "Witchcraft and Social Identity" (pp.179-216). What do the life histories of the accused and the ways they were portrayed tell us about the value conflicts felt by everyone, including their accusers?

How does B&N's analysis of witches and social mobility connect with the chapter by Briggs called "The Projection of Evil"? to the tables from McFarlane introduced in class? to Levack's theme (pp.64-67) of rebellion?

(For anyone who has read *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*): How does B&N's interpretation of the relationship between Puritanism and the economy differ from Max Weber's? What do B&N tell us about witches and gender?

What witches do B&N exclude from consideration? How might this shape their interpretations?

How can the Salem Village episode be unique and at the same time typical?

### **Study Questions**

#### **Space alien possession, recovered memory, Satanic abuse, daycare trials**

People arguing about whether space alien abductions are real, in our readings and especially, in the film, use a variety of criteria for making judgements about truth, about how we know something is true or false? What are some of these criteria? ("We know space alien abductions really happen/are ridiculous because.....")

How is space alien abduction like or unlike spirit possession? Does it matter that we don't call them spirits? Ditto multiple personality disorder? Are the multiple personalities like spirits? How do spirits and personalities affect issues of identity and responsibility?

Any altered states?

How are the claims about aliens and Satanists like those concerning witches? What doctrines further claims, just as beliefs about the witch's sabbath did?

What kinds of issues and fears in late 20<sup>th</sup> century American society are projected onto space aliens and Satanists? What is the significance of experiments on board the spaceships?

What about the role of courts? How is it different for aliens and Satanists?

Who are the privileged experts like the ministers and lawyers of the great witch hunts? How do they interpret and shape events? Is there an equivalent to the *Malleus*?

What kind of special discovery procedures equivalent to torture are used to uncover abductions and Satanism? What hidden realm is it most important to uncover and reveal?

How do the positions of John Mack and Bud Hopkins differ concerning the nature and intentions of the aliens? What is the alternative Mack keeps offering us (Either X is true and it's not likely, or else Y is true)? What is anthropology's answer?

How do the images of alien abduction and satanic conspiracies build over time? What is the role of the media? How clear is the boundary between fiction and non-fiction?

Most of the accused witches were innocent, and although malevolent magic does occur, worldwide conspiracies of witches were imaginary. Space aliens, on the other hand, may or may not be real, but child abusers and Satanists do occur. Some abusers, moreover, do conspire together. Lyme disease (see the article by Grann in the reader) is real, and Americans were held prisoner in Indochina. How then could fears and beliefs about real things be like fears of imaginary witches? What do we do with the fact that while Joseph

McCarthy was raving on about Communist spies in the State Department, there really were spies there?