History of Witchcraft and Magic 510:253
Professor Mack

This is a course about the culture of witchcraft and the occult—the values, assumptions, and attitudes that have generated beliefs about witches and the supernatural, both in earlier times and in our own day. This is also a course about witchcraft as a crime, specifically, the witch craze of the 16th and 17th centuries, which resulted in thousands of executions, mainly (but not exclusively) of women. We will discuss these persecutions as episodes in the history of women and of gender relations in European societies, and also in relation to religious and intellectual ideas in the early modern period.

The first section of the course deals with theories of witchcraft, ancient goddess religions, and Christian doctrines relating to gender, magic, and sexuality. We will also discuss the nature of Church authority and folk beliefs in medieval and early modern Europe. The second section is a close examination of the witch craze of the 16th – 17th centuries in Europe and New England. In the final section, we study ideas of magic and the occult in the 19th and 20th centuries, including spiritualist movements in Victorian England, the McCarthy “witch hunts” of the 1950s, and the feminist and environmentalist Wicca movement.