

IDST 089 (First-Year Seminar), Fall 2013

Magic, Religion, and the Origins of Science

T/Th 11:00 AM – 12:15 PM, Phillips 212



Instructors:

Maia Dedrick, Anthropology
mdedrick@live.unc.edu

Melati Nungsari, Economics
melati@unc.edu

Shaily Patel, Religious Studies
shailyp@email.unc.edu

Informal Office Hours:

10:00 – 11:00 AM

Smith Building 03

During informal hours we're available to discuss the course material, our expectations, and college life in general – anything, really.

Formal Office Hours are made by email appointment. Here you can confer with any or all of us about your grades and/or concerns about academic performance.

We're all pretty approachable, so don't hesitate to contact us.

Course Description:

This 3 credit seminar is designed for first year students regardless of intended major. It is an examination of the distinctions between magic, religion, and science through various methodological frameworks including anthropological, sociological, geo-political, and economic. We will use these frameworks to analyze how various definitions of magic,

religion, and science are constructed and maintained. As this is an interdisciplinary class, we will strive for breadth of content while deepening understanding of concepts via relevant case studies. In general, course topics will range in time from the early modern to contemporary periods. Seminar participants will learn to construct convincing analytical arguments; negotiate distinctions between magic, religion, and science in history; and develop an awareness of the various factors that precipitate the classifications made by analysts of these phenomena.

Course Text and Resources:

There is no official textbook for the class. Readings will be provided on Sakai. You should consult the introductory bibliography we've assembled in addition to readings assigned. It can be found on Sakai under "Resources." Consider this a list of sources that will help you get started on your final project (to be explained in further detail below). Remember that this is just a preliminary bibliography. Your final research project should include a number of sources that are not listed.

Course Requirements and Grade Distribution:

- **Weekly Reading Journal (25%):** As part of your final grade, you will be expected to keep a reading journal recording your observations and questions vis-à-vis assigned materials. **This will be submitted every other week in hard copy at the beginning of class.** Some questions you might want to consider are the following:
 - How is this author constructing "magic"? Do I agree with this characterization? Why or why not?
 - What explicit or implicit models of analysis (economic, sociological, anthropological, etc.) does the author utilize?
 - What's at stake in this reading? That is, what does the author gain by constructing magic, religion, or science in a certain way?
 - If we're reading about a particular interpretative framework, it might be beneficial to ask yourself what is gained when applying this framework to our object of study. For example, what does appropriating an economic lens give us that an anthropological or sociological lens does not?
- **Quizzes (15%):** On the day that you turn in your journal, you will be given a quiz on the readings assigned for the past two weeks (the ones you cover in your reading journal). Quizzes will be short answer and consist of three questions at most. These quizzes are designed to provide incentives for you to keep up with course readings and apply what you've read to class discussion.
- **Annotated Bibliography (25%):** Your final project will require a great deal of research. As such, you will need to turn in an annotated bibliography detailing the resources you consulted as you prepared for your final project. Instructions on how to format an annotated bibliography can be found on Sakai under "Resources."
- **Final Project (25%):** Your final project will be a performance. You and your classmates will be asked to debate on topics chosen by your instructors. Teams and topics will be assigned the third week of class. One team from each debate will be declared the winner (it's debate, after all), but **your performance will be graded individually and**

will not depend upon whether or not your team “won.” A set of guidelines to help you frame your performance is on Sakai under the “Resources” tab.

- **Active Class Participation (10%):** The class will benefit most from **active** discussions. So don't feel shy or embarrassed to speak up. This is good training for later courses wherein you'll be expected to be passionate and engaged. Increasing participation in class will also help significantly with the development of your oratory skills, which in turn will make you a hit at parties. Trust us, we know.

Grading:

The grading scale is as follows (in accordance with the University Registrar's standards at <http://registrar.unc.edu/academic-services/grades/explanation-of-grading-system/>):

>90% - A

>80% - B

>70% - C

>60% - D

>50% - F (i.e., consignment to the cold, outer darkness)

Policy on absences:

Excused absences: Students will be allowed to make up assignments and exams for excused absences. Examples of excused absences include serious illness (a doctor's note will be required) or death in the immediate family. All university athletic or club events are excused, provided that the student brings an official absence excuse beforehand.

Unexcused absences: Make-ups are not permitted on reading quizzes and will result in a zero. Arrival to class later than 20 minutes after start time is considered an unexcused absence.

Be aware that simply attending class will not earn you full participation points. We expect you to generate meaningful discussion while you are in attendance.

UNC Honor Code:

The UNC Honor Code governs our behavior and yours. If you do not yet understand your responsibilities under this code, we urge you to go to <http://honor.unc.edu> to learn more. We take the Honor Code very seriously and are required by the University to report all Honor Code violations without exception.

In particular, we want you to be mindful about plagiarism. Plagiarism is the deliberate or unintentional representation of another's words, thoughts, or ideas without attribution. What this means is that you should be careful to cite anything that you have consulted (internet, book, interview, whatever). All students at Carolina are expected to know best practices in citation. So if you are in doubt, cite! Or use your resources: speak to one of us or to someone at the Writing Center.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

Please note that readings are listed under the day in which they will be discussed. In order to prepare for a class, read the material we're discussing on that particular day of class.

Methodology I: (Re)defining Magic

In this introductory unit we will become familiar with the traditional scholarly distinctions between religion, magic, and science in order to identify each of these concepts within case studies in the coming weeks.

T, Aug. 20: Introductory Material and Al Jazeera English documentary 'Witch Trials'.
Discussion to follow.

Th, Aug. 22: Classifications and Distinctions

Reading:

- Rodney Stark, "Reconceptualizing Religion, Magic, Science"

Methodology II: Economics, Religion, and Magic

Economics is a field that studies the science of choice-making. The tools that are taught in economics can be used to examine many issues that concern how individuals behave when faced with various constraints. We will explore how economics applies to magic and religion by combining studies of history and philosophy. We will learn basic economic ideas and terminology before delving into analyses of the intertwined nature of markets and world religions.

T, Aug. 27: Introduction to Economics

Readings:

- Gary S. Becker, *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior*, Chapter 1: The Economic Approach to Human Behavior
- N. Gregory Mankiw, *Principles of Economics*, Chapter 1: Ten Principles of Economics
- Steve Cohn, *Reintroducing Macroeconomics (A Critical Approach)*, Chapter 1: Philosophical Debates in Economics

Th, Aug. 29: Society and the Science of Choice

Readings:

- Viviana Zelizer, "Human Values and the Market: the Case of Life Insurance and Death in 19th century America"
- Hadley Robinson, "Money-grubbing" (found at: <http://www.gelfmagazine.com/archives/moneygrubbing.php>)
- Barry Gordon, "Theological Positions and Economic Perspectives in Ancient Literature"

T, Sept. 3: The Economic Model of Religion

Readings:

- Larry Whitham, *Marketplace of the Gods*, Chapter 1: The Economic Approach; Chapter 2: Rational People and Religion; Chapter 7: The Marketplace of the Gods

Assignments:

- Reading Journal Due
- QUIZ

Methodology III: Sociology, Magic, and Religion

In this unit, we'll dive into magic through the work of important figures in the history of sociological thought. What is magic? How does it differ from religious practice? Where does it reside within larger societal trends?

Th, Sept. 5: Sociology of Religion

Readings:

- Max Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, Chapter 1: The Rise of Religions and Chapter 2: Gods, Magicians, and Priests

T, Sept. 10: Sociology of Magic

Reading:

- Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, Chapter 2: A Definition of Magic

Methodology IV: Anthropology, Magic, and Religion

In this unit we'll use the data of anthropologists—ethnography—to understand how people have characterized magic and witchcraft when such rites are a normal occurrence within societies. This week will also provide a foundation in anthropological method and theory.

Th, Sept. 12: Anthropology of Magic

Readings:

- Susan Greenwood, *Anthropology of Magic*, Introduction and Chapter 1: Mystical Mentality

T, Sept. 17: Anthropology of Magic Continued

Readings:

- Susan Greenwood, *Anthropology of Magic*, Chapter 6: Webs of Belief
- E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*, Chapter 1: Witchcraft is an Organic and Hereditary Phenomenon and Chapter 4: The Notion of Witchcraft Explains Unfortunate Events

Assignments:

- Reading Journal Due
- QUIZ

Case Study I: Alchemy

Now that we have learned the tools of the trade, we'll transition into case studies. Alchemy might be considered the root of modern-day chemistry, although its trappings were magical in nature. We will contrast early scientific and alchemical thinking with current conceptions of the scientific method and compartmentalization between science and the sublime.

Th, Sept. 19: The Economics of Alchemy

Reading:

- John Levin, "Alchemy and the Economy in 17th-century England"

T, Sept. 24: Alchemy Continued

Readings:

- Stanton J. Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, Introduction
- Walter William Woodward, *Prospero's America*, Chapter 1: John Winthrop, Jr., and the European Alchemical Movement of the Early Seventeenth Century

Th, Sept. 26: Alchemy and Witchcraft in America

Reading:

- Walter William Woodward, *Prospero's America*, Chapter 7: The Magus as Mediator: Witchcraft, Alchemy, and Authority in the Connecticut Witch-Hunt of the 1660s

Case Study II: Witchcraft

What were the witch trials about anyways? Were they motivated by actual witches and fear of them? By money? By religious radicals? In this unit we use the knowledge gained thus far to try to explain Salem in America's historical trajectory and archaeological record.

T, Oct. 1: Economics of Witchcraft

Readings:

- Emily Oster, "Witchcraft, Weather, and Economic Growth in Renaissance Europe"
- Franklin Mixon, Jr. and Ernest King, "'Homo Economicus' and the Salem Witch Trials"
- Franklin Mixon, Jr., "Religiosity and the Political Economy of the Salem Witch Trials"

Assignments:

- Reading Journal Due
- QUIZ

Th, Oct. 3: Sociology of Witchcraft

Readings:

- James McDonald, "Three Centuries of Trial: Salem's Witches Battle Modern-Day Persecution"

Video (in class):

- "Salem Witch Hunt: Examine the Evidence"

T, Oct. 8: The Trappings of Witchcraft

Readings:

- Owen Davies and Willem de Blécout, *Beyond the Witch Trials*, Chapter 9: The Archaeology of Counter-Witchcraft and Popular Magic
- Marshall J. Becker, “An American Witch Bottle” (found at: http://archive.archaeology.org/online/features/halloween/witch_bottle.html)

Case Study III: Magic and the Colonial Encounter

What role does colonialism play in religious assimilation and subversion? How does a particular political dynamic shape magical practices?

Th, Oct. 10: Magic and the Colonial Encounter in Mexico

Reading:

- Ruth Behar, “Sex and Sin, Witchcraft and the Devil in Late Colonial Mexico”

T, Oct. 15: Material Record of Magic and the Colonial Encounter

Reading:

- Laurie Wilkie, “Secret and Sacred: Contextualizing the Artifacts of African-American Magic and Religion”

Assignments:

- Reading Journal Due
- QUIZ

Th, Oct. 17: **FALL BREAK.** Do something magical with your holiday.

T, Oct. 22: Magic and the Colonial Encounter Resumed

Reading:

- William Olsen, “Children for Death: Money, Wealth, and Witchcraft Suspicion in Colonial Asante”

Th, Oct. 24: Impacts of Colonialism: Sociological, Economic, and Anthropological

Reading:

- Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, “Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony”

Case Study IV: Black Magic, White Magic

This unit tackles the issues of “black” versus “white” magic. What are some of the ways in which these categories are constructed and maintained? We will consider how approved and prohibited magical practices are distinguished.

T, Oct. 29: Black Magic Defined

Readings:

- A. E. Waite, *The Book of Black Magic and Ceremonial Magic*, selections entitled “The Distinction between Black and White Magic” and “Concerning the Infernal Necromancy”
- *Malleus Maleficarum* (handbook on witch-hunting), selections compiled on Sakai

Th, Oct. 31: Black Magic and Folk Magic

Reading:

- Hans Sebald, “Franconian Witchcraft: The Demise of Folk Magic”

Assignments:

- Reading Journal Due
- QUIZ

Case Study V: Healing Magic and Medicine

This unit is dedicated to the distinction between healing magic and medicine. Why have some types of healing been designated as scientific “medicine” while others are “shamanistic”? We’ll talk about the socio-economic factors that influence the perception of healing practices.

T, Nov. 5: Folk Healing and Medicine

Readings:

- Katherine Knight, “A Precious Medicine: Tradition and Healing in the Seventeenth Century Household Remedies”
- Mildred Mathias, “Magic, Myth, and Medicine”

Th, Nov. 7: The Economics of Healing and its Legacy

Readings:

- Kenneth Leonard (IK Notes), “African Traditional Healers: The Economics of Healing”
- Robert Voeks, “African Medicine and Magic in the Americas”

Assignment:

- ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE

T, Nov. 12: Magic and Healing

Readings:

- Susan Greenwood, *Anthropology of Magic*, Chapter 7: Magic in Everyday Life
- Martha Few, *Women Who Live Evil Lives: Gender, Religion, and the Politics of Power in Colonial Guatemala*, Chapter 4: Illness, Healing, and the Supernatural World

Case Study VI: Magic and Modernity

Our final case study is a wrap-up of sorts. Here, we’ll discuss how the distinctions between alchemy and chemistry, between healing magic and science, and between religion and magic contributed to the notion of “modernity” and “rationality”. What do we gain from such distinctions? How are they maintained?

Th, Nov. 14: Magic and Capitalism

Reading:

- Aihwa Ong, “The Production of Possession: Spirits and Multinational Corporations in Malaysia”
- Heather Murdock, series of articles for the *Global Post* on Juju Trafficking compiled on Sakai

Assignments:

- Reading Journal Due
- QUIZ

T, Nov. 19: Modern Healing: Religion or Magic?

Reading:

- Graham M. Jones, “Magic with a Message: The Politics of Christian Conjuring”

Video (in class):

- “Answered Prayers? Investigating the Healing Power of Prayer”

Course Wrap-Up: Definitions of Magic (Re)considered

Our last day of “official” discussion will reopen our initial inquiries about definitions. Where is the boundary between religion and magic? Between magic and science? We’ll consider whether or not such distinctions are useful.

Th, Nov. 21: Course Wrap-Up

- *Course Evaluations (in class)*

T, Nov. 26: Debates for groups 1 and 2

Th, Nov. 28: **THANKSGIVING**

T, Dec. 3: Debates for groups 3 and 4

