

HIST 410/510: FREEMASONRY AND SECRET SOCIETIES

Prof. Ian F. McNeely – University of Oregon – Spring 2006

Meeting times: MW 10:00-11:20 in 214 MCK

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Course description

Why do people join masonic lodges and other so-called “secret” societies? What do they do within their windowless confines? What benefits, social, spiritual, psychological, or economic, do they derive from membership? How long have these groups been active? Do they really date to ancient or biblical times? What influence, if any, have they exerted on key historical developments since their inception? Why have they so often been suspected of nefarious activities? Are they really subversive, satanic, and/or sexist? Why do outsiders show such fascination with them? Why have academic historians been so reluctant to take them seriously?

In this course, we trace freemasonry back to its origins in the age of Enlightenment. Then we take stock of the traditions, both authentic and invented, tying freemasonry to ancient, medieval, and Renaissance spiritual quests. This leads naturally into consideration of controversial, alternative forms of freemasonry and the antimasonic agitation that often surrounded them. Finally, we turn to masonry’s revival in the mid-nineteenth century, and to its increasing influence outside Europe and America.

Assignments

- Two 3- to 4-page [short analyses of course readings](#), each from a different unit on the syllabus (20% each; due *in class* on the relevant discussion day; sign up during week 1)
- One 8-page [analysis of an historical text](#) from the 1700s (30%; due Mon. 5/8 in class)
- Final exam: [analysis of contemporary writings on freemasonry](#) (30%, Wed. 6/14 @ 10:15-12:15)

Readings

For purchase

- Margaret Jacob, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Facts and Fictions* (Pennsylvania, 2006)

- David Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century, 1590-1710* (Cambridge, 1990)
- Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (Yale, 1991)

Online/E-reserves

- Wikipedia articles on [freemasonry](#) and [anti-freemasonry](#).
- [James Anderson, "The Charges of a Free-Mason," in *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons Containing the History, Charges, Regulations, &c of that most Ancient and Right Worshipful Fraternity* \(London, 1723\), 49-56.](#)
- [Steven Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730-1840* \(North Carolina, 1998\), 50-68, 85-108, 277-308.](#)
- [The Free-Masons Accusation and Defence in Six Genuine Letters \(London, 1726\).](#)
- [William Hutchinson, *The Spirit of Masonry in Moral and Elucidatory Lectures* \(London, 1775\), 23-81.](#)
- [John L. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644-1844* \(New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994\), 5-29, 92-104.](#)
- [J.M. Roberts, *Mythology of the Secret Societies* \(London: Secker and Warburg, 1972\), 105-121, 133-149.](#)
- [John Robison, *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against All the Religions and Governments of Europe Carried on in the Secret Meetings of the Freemasons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies* \(Belmont, MA: Western Islands, 1967 \[1798\]\), 1-10, 62-79, 91-97, 119-21.](#)
- [Martin Summers, "Diasporic Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transnational Production of Black Middle-Class Masculinity," *Gender & History* 15 no. 3 \(Nov. 2003\): 550-574.](#)
- [Jessica Harland-Jacobs, "All in the Family: Freemasonry and the British Empire in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Journal of British Studies* 42 \(Oct. 2003\): 448-82.](#)
- [Michael Lind, "Rev. Robertson's Grand International Conspiracy Theory," *New York Review of Books* 42 no. 2 \(Feb. 2, 1995\).](#)
- [Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* \(Berkeley, 2003\), 39-64.](#)

SCHEDULE

Introduction

(4/3) Tour of McKenzie River Lodge #195

(4/5) Jacob, 1-25; Wikipedia articles (browse controversy)

Sign up for short papers

UNIT I: THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Grand Lodge freemasonry

(4/10) Jacob, 26-46; Stevenson, 166-89

(4/12) Jacob, 47-70; Anderson

Schisms in a world of gentlemen

(4/17) Jacob, 71-91; Bullock, 50-68, 85-108

(4/19) Jacob, 92-132; "Free-Masons Accusation and Defence"

UNIT II: THE DYNAMICS OF INVENTED TRADITION

Medieval and Ancient "mysteries"

(4/24) Stevenson, 1-25, 125-165

(4/26) Hutchinson

Hermeticism and Rosicrucianism

(5/1) Stevenson, 77-124

(5/3) Brooke; Roberts, 105-121

Scottish Rite (higher-degree) freemasonry

(5/8) Source discussion on higher-degree freemasonry

(5/10) Discussion (continued)

UNIT III: THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The Illuminati and antimasonry

(5/15) Roberts, 133-149; Robison

(5/17) Bullock, 277-308

Masculinity and the Victorian revival

(5/22) Carnes, 1-65

(5/24) Summers; Harland-Jacobs

(5/29) Memorial Day

(5/31) Carnes, 69-159

Conspiracy theory and historical method

(6/5) Lind; Barkun

(6/7) Conclusion

(6/14) *Final exam* (10:15-12:15)