

# Cambridge Elements

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## THE WAR ON WITCHCRAFT

*Andrew Dickson White, George  
Lincoln Burr, and the Origins  
of Witchcraft Historiography*

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**Abstract:** Historians of the early modern witch-hunt often begin histories of their field with the theories propounded by Margaret Murray and Montague Summers in the 1920s. They overlook the lasting impact of nineteenth-century scholarship, in particular the contributions by two American historians: Andrew Dickson White (1832–1918) and George Lincoln Burr (1857–1938). Study of their work and scholarly personae contributes to our understanding of the deeply embedded popular understanding of the witch-hunt as representing an irrational past in opposition to an enlightened present. Yet the men's relationship with each other, and with witchcraft sceptics – the heroes of their studies – also demonstrates how their writings were part of a larger war against 'unreason'. This Element thus lays bare the ways scholarly masculinity helped shape witchcraft historiography, a field of study often seen as dominated by feminist scholarship. Such meditation on past practice may foster reflection on contemporary models of history writing.

**Keywords:** witchcraft historiography, history of science, Andrew Dickson White, George Lincoln Burr, masculinity

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