The Devil's in the Details: A Comprehensive Look at the Salem Witch Mania of 1692

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Nine-year-old Betty Parris began to convulse, seize, and scream gibberish in the winter of 1692. The doctor pronounced her bewitched when he could find no medical reason for her actions. Five other girls began exhibiting the same symptoms: auditory and visual hallucinations, fevers, nausea, diarrhea, epileptic fits, screaming, complaints of being bitten, poked, pinched, and slapped, as well as coma-like states and catatonic states. Beseeching their Creator to ease the suffering of the "afflicted," the Puritans of Salem Village held a day of fasting and prayer. A relative of Betty's father, Samuel Parris, suggested a folk cure, in which the urine of the afflicted girls was taken and made into a cake. The villagers fed the cake to a dog, as dogs were believed to be the evil helpers of witches. This did not work, however, and the girls were pressed to name the people who were hurting them.[1]

The girls accused Tituba, a Caribbean slave who worked in the home of Parris, of being the culprit. They also accused two other women: Sarah Good and Sarah Osbourne. The girls, all between the ages of nine and sixteen, began to accuse their neighbors of bewitching them, saying that three women came to them and used their "spectres" to hurt them. The girls would scream, cry, and mimic the behaviors of the accused when they had to face them in court. They named many more over the course of the next eight months; the "bewitched" youth accused a total of one hundred and forty four individuals of being witches, with thirty seven of those executed following a trial. Fear and panic gripped the entire town. Any wrong movement led one to be accused of witchcraft.[2]

Although closely associated with Salem, the small village was not the only one affected. The hysteria spread all over the New England area hitting the nearby town of Andover, which is twenty miles away from Salem Village. More than forty Andover residents were accused of witchcraft, with a large majority being held in prison until the governor released them in 1693 (although the convictions remained). The villagers called in Cotton Mather and Reverend John Hale, both notable experts on witchcraft. The line of interrogation by the judges was on the automatic guilt of the accused, regardless of how much they begged for their lives. The magistrates introduced "spectral evidence"- when the accusers said they saw the "spectre," or apparition, of the accused coming to hurt them, a guilty verdict was automatically found. The mania, which had begun in the winter of 1692, ended as quickly as it had started. The court was dissolved, and no more trials were held. Many still languished in jail, however, until they were all pardoned by the governor in the spring of 1693.[3]

To properly understand what happened over those several months, it is necessary to understand the Puritan religion and the viewpoint of those involved. The Puritans were a group of English Protestants that originally had formed in 1558 during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. From their inception, the Puritans were known as non-conformists and extremists. They felt that the Protestant Reformation had not properly addressed the issues at hand, namely eradicating the elements of Catholicism from the Anglican Church. The Puritans wanted the Reformation to continue and make more sweeping changes. They were blocked from making the governmental changes they wanted, and instead looked to other countries to form the life they desired. Starting in the Netherlands, the Puritans eventually moved into Ireland, Wales, and to America.[4] Puritanism does not have a unique theology; instead, the term is applied to extremist Protestants.[5] The basis for their belief system was Calvinism, a Protestant religion founded in 1534. Calvinism is based on the precepts of man's absolute depravity and predestination. In this viewpoint, man will always sin and be in need of God's forgiveness; He will only give it to some, however, and not others. The Calvinist God chooses who will receive His mercy.[6] This view stresses the need for man to overcome a sinful and selfish nature.

Puritanism was a form of belief that argues in every way with the lavish rituals of the Catholic Church. Puritans did not celebrate holidays, had no images or candles in their churches, and believed heavily in demonic forces. American Puritans publicly punished sexuality outside of marriage, as well as public drunkenness. Society was strictly patriarchal, and each family was considered a small church. This societal structure reinforced the practice of accountability for each member's deeds and actions, both individually and for the group as a whole. The Puritans acted as a community in every sense of the word- one person's sin was the group's sin.

The Puritans have earned a reputation in history as strict, unrelenting, and extremely pious. Christmas, widely considered to be one of the most important Christian holidays, was illegal until 1680 in Puritan America.[7] Their forms of punishment ranged from humiliating (such as the wearing of the letter 'A' for an adulterer) to harsh treatment.[8] There was, however, an even stricter view of the world as full of demons. Witchcraft accusations and trials were not at all uncommon, and were dealt with on a case by case basis. There was precedence for both guilty and innocent verdicts. The events at Salem in 1692, therefore, began commonly enough. However, the difference lay in the small village's approach to the situation.[9]

Witch hunts and trials were not new to history; the first recorded trials concerning witchcraft were held in Europe during the fourteenth century. British migrants brought deeply seated fears and superstitions with them to the American colonies. Not surprisingly, soon after settlement, they established laws against witchcraft. The colonists who settled in New England in the mid-1600s would have known the Witchcraft Acts of 1542, 1562, 1563, and 1604. The Witchcraft Act of 1735 is still in effect, and is still considered a prosecutable offense, although it is very laxly enforced. Witchcraft was an accepted and expected part of life, and many devout Christians believed very strongly in the evil powers of a person who had aligned themselves with the Devil. Preeminent literary scholar and early folklorist George Kittredge argued in 1907 that belief in witchcraft was a "common heritage of humanity."[10]

Few events in American history confound and continue to perplex scholars like the Salem witch trials of 1692 and 1693. Historians contin-

ue to discuss the events, but there still is no scholarly agreement as to the true cause of the mania that erupted in Salem.[11] One of the leading historians on the subject, Marion Starkey, has argued for a social cause.[12] She is not alone in this; many historians have supported a social reasoning, whether it is the panic from neighboring Indian tribes, social fractioning in the town, or the presence of too many older, single women.[13] Others, such as Anne Zeller and Linda Caporeal, have argued a medical cause (encephalitis and ergot poisoning, respectively). Historian Edward Bever has questioned psychological reasons and studied the connection between belief in the supernatural and somatic disorders.[14]

If a belief in witchcraft and prosecution against those believed to be witches seem to have been present almost as long as humans themselves, one has to wonder why many consider Salem to be distinctive. Why do the Salem Witch Trials stand out in American history? The events at Salem exploded in a way and to a degree that arguably had not been seen before in America or Europe. The fervor that carried the first accusation swept the town, causing the trials to last seven months, imprisoning one hundred and forty four people, and claimed the lives of thirty seven.[15] Popular legend has carried Salem into an eternal collective memory. Gretchen Adams and Robin DeRosa have both published books on the subject of Salem in American memory. This is touched on by Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissembaum in the prologue of *Salem Possessed*: "...it became increasingly clear to us that except for a brief moment, the inhabitants of Salem Village were 'ordinary' people, too, living out their lives in an obscure seventeenth-century farming village. Had it not been for 1692, they would most probably have been overlooked by 'serious' historians. But, as we have come to see, it is precisely *because* they were so unexceptional that their lives (and, for that matter, the trauma which overwhelmed them in 1692) are invested with real historical significance."[16] However, not every historian approaches the subject with as much enthusiasm. For example, John Demos stated: "It is faintly embarrassing for a historian to summon his colleagues to still another consideration of early New England witchcraft... It had no effect on the religious or political situation, it does not figure into the institutional or ideological development. Popular interest in the subject is, then, badly out of proportion to its actual historical significance, and perhaps the sane course for

the future would be silence."[17] The Salem mania, however, does belong in the American collective memory; it actually did figure prominently into the institutional development of New England. The decline of witch trials and prosecutions post 1692 show that what happened in Salem did greatly affect America as a whole. Every American learns about Salem in elementary school; older children read Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, or see the play (or the subsequent movie) as part of their curriculum. The witch hunt still affects Americans, as the term 'witch hunt' has entered our lexicon to describe the persecution of a discerned enemy in the court of public opinion, with no regard for the enemy's guilt or innocence. The person is automatically declared guilty. This can be used as a very brief explanation of what happened in Salem. Many were believed to be guilty because of race or gender.[18]

The main question is not why the Salem hysteria is important; but how it happened. Historians know who started the event, but are not able to decipher what started it. Many theories have been put forth, including psychological, socio-economic, medical, and of course, religious. This paper will examine the different theories put forth, and based on the evidence, come to a conclusion as to the true underlying cause of the Salem witch mania.[19]

Court transcripts are quite telling. The Puritan method of interrogation was not our modern idea; there was no concept of innocent until proven guilty. Rather, they worked based on guilty until proven innocent. These transcripts have been extensively examined, and interpreted in many different ways. As a result, many popular theories have been put forth. The first theory that will be examined explains the accusations on a medical basis. This can be divided into three theories: ergot poisoning, encephalitis, and Huntington's disease. All three of these rely heavily on the movements of the accused: auditory and visual hallucinations, fevers, nausea, diarrhea, epileptic fits, screaming, complaints of being bitten, poked, pinched, and slapped, as well as coma-like states and catatonic states.[20]

In 1976, Linda Caporeal published an article in *Science* magazine in which she stated that the symptoms of the accusers lined up quite well with a fairly well documented disease called ergot poisoning.[21] Ergot (*Claviceps Purpurea*) grows on cereal grains, such as rye. Ingestion of a

large dose of ergot will take one of two paths: gangrenous or convulsive. The gangrenous type of ergotism causes a rotting of the extremities, followed by the affected portions falling off. The convulsive type matches more with the symptoms of those at Salem-crawling sensations under the skin, finger tingling and/or numbness, vertigo, headaches, strong hallucinations, painful contractions, epilepsy, vomiting, and diarrhea. The convulsive type, if continually untreated, leads to mania, depression, psychosis, and delirium. Caporeal argued that the conditions were right for ergot poisoning in Salem; only a few years earlier, it was 'discovered' in France and it was in the early stages of study during the 1690s. She maintained that the growing conditions were right for ergot on the rye, and the villagers' dependence on rye bread would have exposed the accusers. While this theory had some support, it was quickly dismissed by Nicholas Spanos and Jack Gottlieb in the same magazine within a few months. They were quick to point out that if Salem Village's bread was poisoned, someone would have contracted the gangrenous type; also, they noted that that the afflicted people were a relatively small group. The entire village of six hundred ate the same bread. Only eleven girls were affected. If the bread was poisoned, they reasoned, it would have affected a larger group. They again argued that if the afflicted had ergot poisoning, they would not have appeared fine and comfortable when Reverend Samuel Parris began reading the Bible to them.[22]

Other medical explanations include encephalitis, which is a swelling of the brain. Its symptoms are characterized by headaches, confusion, drowsiness, vomiting, stiffness, seizures, and loss of consciousness. This theory was published by Laurie Winn Carlson in *A Fever in Salem*.[23] Critics, however, have pointed out that if this theory was plausible, then Salem would not have been the only one to suffer. These same critics also point out that her arguments are weakly supported, and need more research. Lastly, it has been suggested that the afflicted suffered from Huntington's disease.[24] This can be distinguished by muscles spasms and mental deterioration. Huntington's disease is hereditary, and comes from a dominant gene. This theory has also been quickly dismissed, however, because only two of the thirteen original accusers were related (Abigail Williams and Betty Parris). None of the other accuser's family members reported the same symptoms. Another blow to the theory is its onset:

Huntington's has a typical onset of forty to fifty years of age. The oldest accuser in 1692 was sixteen. Of the medical theories, ergot was the most likely and most researched, but historians have fairly easily dismissed it.

A new approach was suggested in 1990 by Anne Zeller in *Anthropologica* magazine. She labeled it Arctic Hysteria. This is the common name for pibloktoq. Arctic Hysteria occurs among the Inuit Indian tribes whose diets include high levels of vitamin A. There are serious doubts as to whether or not Arctic Hysteria exists at all. Its symptoms include anxious preoccupation, fainting, hysteria, disoriented speech, frenzied motor activity, making animal sounds uncontrollably, pricking, pinching, or burning sensations, and hallucinations, among others.[25] Many of the symptoms do indeed line up with the suffering of the afflicted. However, Zeller fails in her article to properly explain how Arctic Hysteria made it from Inuit tribes in the Arctic to Salem Village, Massachusetts.

Others have looked at the symptoms presented by the afflicted and diagnosed them with somatization disorder. This falls in the psychological realm, although somatic issues are both physical and psychological in nature. Somatization disorders are characterized by a history of somatic (physical) complaints before the patient is thirty. Somatic complaints include gastrointestinal problems, constipation, nausea, vomiting, colitis, migraines/headaches, backaches, and skin disorders that are brought on by mental or emotional stress.[26]Somatization disorder can be diagnosed if four criteria are met: somatic complaints, "at least four different sites of pain on the body, AND at least two gastrointestinal problems, AND one sexual dysfunction, AND one pseudo-neurological symptom; symptoms cannot be fully explained by a general medical condition...; complaints are not feigned as in malingering or factitious disorder."[27]

Although the afflicted girls were too young to display any sexual dysfunctions (certainly none were recorded), they did often complain of gastrointestinal problems. One must realize, however, that it is impossible to properly diagnose a patient who has been dead for several hundred years. Even the best of psychologists cannot look to the past and diagnose a person whose actions were only partially documented. "Unfortunately, it's not ethical for psychologists to diagnose people they've never met or interviewed."[28]

This idea has been approached, however, by Edward Bever in his 2000 article for *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*. Bever wrote that there were certainly similarities between superstitious belief and somatic disorders. If the Puritans were anything, they were a suspicious lot. "Belief in magic or witchcraft is not a prerequisite for susceptibility to someone's hostility. On the contrary, fear of witchcraft and belief in (this form of) magic reflect that fact that any strong negative emotion provoked by another person's attitude or actions can cause, or contribute to, physical disorder."[29] If one assumes that the afflicted girls did, in fact, have a somatization disorder, how does that account for the actions of the rest of the village? Although the girls accused others of hurting them, the judges, the counsels, and the villagers all played a role in the deaths of those accused. Bever explained this as well: "Since such attacks abuse the very interpersonal bonds that hold the community together, the community generally makes common cause with the victims, turning on those who seem to abuse the social fabric... Those accused tended to have limited social power and reputations for chronic hostility, and the denunciations tended to attribute specific harm to them. The purpose of the trials was essentially to determine whether their behavior manifested a deep hostility toward the community in general."[30] He concluded his article by stating, "Accusations of malefic witchcraft are often naive or cynical attempts to create scapegoats, but the belief in witchcraft is not fundamentally a scapegoating reflex."[31]

For those who lived in Salem Village in 1692, religion was not just a major factor of their life; it was their pure driving force, their whole entire being. Living an upright and holy life was the only thing that mattered to the Puritans—all personal comforts and needs were put aside in order to focus more intently on God's will. This fervent belief has been considered to be the ultimate cause of the Salem mania; the villagers so deeply believed in the Devil's presence among man that the worship of God fell short to fear of the Devil.[32] The worst sin a person could commit was rejecting God and joining his adversary, and witchcraft was seen as the categorical denial of God. Since the community was intended to be a reflection of God's love and a covenant to His people (as a church), antisocial behavior and denial of God were also an affront to the community. One theory holds that the community as a whole made the decision to

execute those who seemed to disregard God's plan. Another, though, puts a very interesting figure at the start of the mania.

In 1689, Salem Village needed a new pastor. Their previous pastor, Reverend Deodat Lawson, had left in 1688 due to his belief that his family had fallen under some sort of malicious curse. Although he left the village to minister elsewhere, Lawson still had strong ties to the community. He officially returned to Salem in 1692 to witness the trials, and published the first book on the subject immediately after the conclusion. The year after Lawson left, however, Salem Village chose Reverend Samuel Parris as their minister. It was not a unanimous vote, however. By 1691, votes had been cast to oust Parris. His salary was stopped, and his power within the church was cut off.[33] Parris' response was to continually lecture the Village that the Devil was at work among them. He repeatedly reminded the congregants of their worst fears, saying that they had now come true. The divisions in the church, he argued, were the sign of the Devil at work. As the village's issues with Parris grew, however, so did the darkness in his sermons. Every attack on Parris personally was translated into a Sunday sermon about the recent attacks on God Himself. Reverend Parris used his pulpit and the fears of the people to keep his power. In February of 1692, villagers (having had enough) began to refuse to pay the taxes that became Parris' salary. His sermon that week focused on himself as a Christ figure and his opponents as Judas.

The following month, on March 1, 1692, his daughter Betty and niece Abigail were ill, and were diagnosed as bewitched. Parris had managed to capture a group of congregants during his struggle in 1691, and the bewitchment of a group of young girls gained him more followers. Those who opposed Parris, it is worthy to note, made up a large majority of those later accused (and executed for) witchcraft.

We must pause here to gain a full understanding of this theory. Reverend Samuel Parris was a lynchpin to the community, in his own mind. However, his dark sermons and self-comparisons to Christ only served to divide the town and worsen the fears of his followers. He created a hostile atmosphere, and used this atmosphere to prove the point he wanted to make- that he was right about the presence of the Devil and the need for strict religion. The importance of Parris' household as the epicenter of the mania is necessary to study. He created a fearful environ-

ment. When two members of his household were said to be bewitched, his slave (Tituba) and his neighbor (Mary Sibley) used an old wives' tale to try and discern the witch in their midst (this is the witch-cake made from the girls urine). This did not have the desired effect, however. When pressed to declare who had bewitched them, the girls accused Parris' slave Tituba. When interrogated, Tituba confessed to joining the Devil and said that he was a tall, white man, in nice clothes. Her description of the Devil is a general description of Samuel Parris.[34] Tituba also named two others in the community who she said were in league with the Devil: Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne. Neither of these women were members of Parris' congregation. The mania grew from there.

Reverend Lawson was invited to give sermons for the next few weeks, and he was constantly interrupted by the afflicted girls. By the end of March, Lawson announced that he agreed that the Devil was in fact assaulting Salem, and called for a day of observance, fasting, and prayer to beg God to save them. Lawson was a deeply religious man, and he sincerely believed the town was under a hellborn attack. Abigail Williams had told Lawson about celebrating a sacrament with the Devil. Other afflicted girls asserted the same story, confirming that they were tempted by the Devil to sign his book and drink blood. They all refused and quoted the Bible, showing their piety. From this point, the accusers began to call names of witches at a fast pace, including the name of a former Salem Village minister- George Burroughs. Burroughs had been a minister in the village from 1680-1683. He was involved socially in the town, accused of multiple offenses, including being a braggart, a strange approach to his faith (the complaints were that he was bored by his faith), and the suspicion of murdering his first two wives. He had also borrowed money from one of the wealthiest families in town (the Putnams, the family of his of the accuser), and did not repay the debt until twelve years later.[35] Burroughs was quite roughly treated during this process. In 1692, he was preaching in Maine, having left Salem in mild disgrace (among rumors of beating his third wife combined with the village's unhappiness with his ministry). His accuser, Ann Putnam Jr., said that God revealed this to her. Her father, Thomas Putnam, attested to the truth of this, and as Benjamin Ray states, "God has communicated with a twelve

year old girl and revealed to her that a Puritan minister is Satan's high priest."[36]

Parris' supporters later found themselves at direct odds with non-supporters over the issue of witchcraft; his supporters were the accusers and his opponents were the accused. "Equally significant is the fact that seventy-six percent (13 out of 17) of the most active village accusers (those who accused more than three people) belonged to church member families. Indeed, Thomas Putnam, father of Burroughs' first accuser and a prominent founding member of the Salem village church, wrote out over one hundred complaints and depositions, mainly on behalf of the afflicted girls, against local residents and others of nearby towns."[37]

Of the psychological theories presented, Benjamin Ray's seems to be the most substantive. There is much more presentable evidence to support the idea that Reverend Parris created and maintained the mania, until he was unable to support it any longer. The accusers had no one left after filling the jails with around one hundred and forty four people. They then began to go after prominent families in the town, even accusing one of the judges' wives of witchcraft. Seven months after the first accusation was made, Governor Phips ended the madness and dissolved the court. There was no one left to support the wild accusations that were being thrown, and to carry on the trials would have been madness on the part of the Governor. Phips must have realized that he was being made a fool. In the spring of 1693, he pardoned those still languishing in jails. Families began to seek the courts to restore property and rightful names. Salem Village began to pick up the pieces and move on from the tragedy.[38]

A popular social-based explanation is rooted in gender; Puritan society was strictly patriarchal. Both men and women were believed to be stained by original sin—women, however, were all reflections of Eve. In the Puritan mind, Eve was corrupt, sinful, and the one to blame for all of mankind's suffering. Every woman since Eve has carried this burden, according to the Puritan mindset. Thus, women were viewed harshly in some aspects, and confusingly, less harshly in others. For example, the man was viewed as the head of the house, and the woman was the head of the family. This was a religion at odds with itself; women were at the same time capable of the utmost evil, and were easy prey for the Devil;

they also were the makers of the next generation of the faithful, they were responsible for the care and guidance of the home and family. Women were to be silent in church, but were allowed to testify on conversions at home.[39]

Beyond the scope of raising a family, however, a Puritan woman had no real place. "In the eyes of her community, the woman alone in early New England was an aberration: the fundamental female role of procreation was at best irrelevant to her."[40] Although by law she could own land, she should not. Although she could speak freely in public, she should not. Similarly, she could go to court to settle a property dispute, but it was unseemly and made the woman an enemy in the eyes of neighboring men. The proper solution for this community was to allow the sons to fight on their mother's behalf.[41]

This is where modern historians have found the greatest issues: those accused of witchcraft in 1692 and 1693 in Salem Village demographically covered the entire spectrum of single, married, widowed, and divorced/deserted. The only unifying factor was their sex. "The single most salient characteristic of witches was their sex. At least 344 persons were accused of witchcraft in New England between 1620 and 1725. Of the 342 who can be identified by sex, 267 (78 percent) were female."[42] Younger females were not as often accused. Statistical evidence shows that when younger women were accused, ninety percent (seventeen of nineteen cases) were related to previously accused witches. Women over sixty were also not often accused; once they were, however, they were much more likely to be executed. It must be noted again, that when a woman over the age of sixty was accused, all of the female members of her family could be examined as well.

There is also strong evidence to show that while married, a woman was afforded some protection. A widow, however, lost this protection. It is possible that this had to do with inheritance laws. Although women were legally allowed to own land, the Puritans firmly believed that she should not. Early New England law made provisions for women inheriting land, but not many. "Neither the widow's dower nor, for the most part, the daughter's right to inherit signified more than *access to* property. For widows, the law was clear that the dower allowed for 'use' only. For inheriting daughters who were married, the separate but inheritance-

related principle of covertures applied. Under English common law, 'feme covert' stipulated that married women had no right to own property—indeed, upon marriage, 'the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended'."[43] In the case of Martha Corey, who was accused in 1692, her husband was still alive, but had no sons. Giles Corey had daughters from a previous marriage, and it was therefore presumed that his bountiful land would be passed on to the women. Coincidence or no, Martha and Giles Corey both were accused, as well as one of Giles' daughters. All three were executed.[44]

There is definitely strong evidence to suggest that women were targeted, if only because they were easy targets. Puritans placed women in a lower stature in society, due to their "easily temptable" nature. According to Elizabeth Reis, "Puritans regarded the soul as feminine and characterized it as insatiable, in consonance with the allegedly unappeasable nature of women... Puritans believed that Satan attacked the soul by assaulting the body. Because in their view women's bodies were weaker, the devil could reach women's souls more easily and breach these 'weaker vessels with greater frequency'."[45]

Possibly, the best way to describe the mindset of those in Salem in 1692 was stated by Reverend John Hale when he wrote, "Such was the darkness of that day, the tortures and lamentations of the afflicted... that we walked in the clouds, and could not see our way."[46] Historians have taken an extensive look into the primary sources (court documents, interrogations, witness statements, books, and letters) to try and decipher the cause. This question has been addressed in thousands of works. Anne Zeller has found strong links to a disease suffered by Inuits with a vitamin overdose. Linda Caporeal has suggested that they suffered from an early agent of LSD. Carol Karlson, however, feels that the economic presses of a land struggle were to blame. She contends that the village felt that were too many women holding property, and they were taking it from the men.[47] This is in contrast to Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissembaum, who wrote that the Salem trials were borne out of a class conflict in the Village. Benjamin Ray suggested that Reverend Samuel Parris was the one to blame- in his 2007 article for *The New England Quarterly*, Ray wrote that Parris referred to himself as a Christ figure in

his sermons, and suggests that it is plausible that Parris created the mania in order to convert people to his church.

Other historians, however, do feel that there is a social cause to blame. Elaine Breslaw has written on the subject in several works. She has documented social causes, particularly the idea of the "easy target," when the accusers named Tituba—a Caribbean slave. Mary Beth Norton, a highly praised author on the subject, seems to agree with Breslaw, but has focused her attention instead on the neighboring Wabanaki Indians. Norton's 2002 book, *In the Devil's Snare*, was written based on the idea that the villagers were so upset by the presence of the Indian tribe that they turned on each other. Marion Starkey, often referred to as the definitive source on the topic, wrote a major book in 1949 (*The Devil in Massachusetts*) that is still considered to be one of the most important works on the topic. She looks at a psychological perspective, questioning the motives of the entire town.[48]

There are also historians who just seem to accept that the villagers at Salem were truly under an attack by the Devil. Edward Bever is one of these historians. He comments that the residents of Salem truly felt that they were under attack by the Devil, and we cannot question them in this belief. The hundreds of historians that have looked at Salem in the past have all had a slightly different theory to be shared, and it is quite worth one's time to sit down and go through these theories. The evidence that has been compiled does strongly suggest that there were social and economic tensions in the village, as well as a justified fear of the nearby Indian tribe. There were also psychological fears in place based off their faith. All of these things worked together to create what has been called a "perfect storm"—a bad state of affairs created by an unpredictable series of events. Other elements are not mentioned in their works, causing the reader to assume that the author feels there is only one clearly defined cause.

Having studied the evidence and using the clues provided, it is clear that the blending of the theories is quite necessary to answer the above questions. The girls obviously suffered from something—whether it was a legitimate medical issue or a somatic disorder is another question entirely.[49] Due to the limited medical technology of the time, modern historians possibly will never know for certain the answer to this question.

We can see that the girls made severe complaints through the evidence that was gathered.[50] Once the villagers found this, they acted on it. They acted poorly, however. Instead of making logical decisions, the villagers acted on superstition and fear. This fear caused them to forget their humanity. This is a documented phenomenon that author Stanley Cohen has termed 'moral panic'.[51] Moral panic is a situation in which a group of people together decide that someone or something has threatened the community's moral value. As a group, they work to eradicate this threat. While this does not sound negative, a moral panic is often a very negative event. The group (known as 'moral entrepreneurs'), then create two groups: 'us' and 'them'. Cohen then states that the 'moral entrepreneurs' take disproportional actions against the enemy (in which he has labeled the enemy 'folk devils'). Another characteristic of moral panics are how quickly the incident ends. All of this perfectly fits the hysteria at Salem. The actions of the village can thus be explained.

The Bible condemns murder, but those at Salem Village saw this as a necessary evil; it was necessary to cleanse the land. Witches were not human, and therefore, killing them was not a sin ("Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live").[52] The adults told the children that they were bewitched as the girls lay on their sickbeds. Ministers preached daily sermons full of imagery of the Devil coming to get souls, and the Puritans believed heavily in the idea of predestination. It was clear that evil walked among them, and very few were called to be saved.[53] "English Puritan leaders in New England brought with them an anxiety about the devil's influence, as well as a belief that he worked through a hose of malignant servants. Strong believers in the power of the supernatural, they proved able to find the work of Satan as readily, perhaps more readily, than the providences of God. The Puritan clergy viewed both the Indians who dwelt in the New England woods and transgressive women within their own settlements as conduits for satanic power, parts of a larger conspiracy against the work of God on Earth. The 'city on the hill' was beset on all sides by the forces of hell... Gradually, folk belief and Puritan theological belief coalesced into a single system of thought that regarded Satan as active in all aspects of life."[54]

The Puritans raised their children in this world, so it is no wonder that the girls easily believed that they were bewitched. The doctor said

they were. The adults then pressed the children as to who bewitched them. Note that this was not a logical, reasoned conversation; the adults told the children of their affliction, and then pressed them for details on their afflicter. The children reacted out of fear, and named those in the village who were easy targets. It worked like the proverbial charm; the very first person accused was Tituba; Tituba confessed guilt and confirmed the other two accusations. The group of accusers grew, and they continued to accuse the "easy targets." The accusers named everyone in the village who fit into the archetype of a witch. They accused outspoken women, widows, the poor, or those who openly stood against the minister of the theocratic town. This only worked for a short period of time, however. The accusers ran out of "acceptable" witches by the fall of 1692; then they began to accuse others. The villagers hesitated to accept the accusations of a reverend's wife, or other wealthy people. Europeans had set the precedence that wealthy people were not witches (by hundreds of years of ignored accusations through bribery).[55] This was the only thing that stopped the flood of accusations. Governor Phips likely felt embarrassed by the mockery that happened under his charge; he dissolved the court immediately and began to sort through all of the paperwork that the trials had created (families petitioning to get their land back—all worldly belongings were seized when a person was accused of witchcraft).[56]

The village had been hijacked by fanatical belief and mass hysteria. Two apologies were issued, one by a judge, and one by an accuser. These two accusations are very telling—Judge Samuel Sewall stated that while witchcraft was a real danger, he felt that he was guilty of shedding innocent blood.[57] When Ann Putnam Jr. apologized in 1706, she did not fully take responsibility for her actions.[58] Twelve jurors also stated that they regretted their actions, but they, like Ann Putnam Jr., felt that they had the best of intentions and were simply misled. The present writer feels that the accusers were forced into a situation that was perpetuated by a strict religious system that allowed no room for admitting errors. Once the judges began executing, there was no way to turn around. The girls felt compelled to keep going, and it is possible that as one of the most marginalized groups in Puritan society, they enjoyed the attention and power they received. Every whirlwind has a stopping point, however.

The fact that all of the accusers (except one, Ann Putnam Jr.) disappeared from history sends a clear message: Salem was a blight on their memory.

One of the most arguable reasons for keeping Salem alive in modern memory is the reoccurrence of this type of hysteria. Salem was not the first outbreak of mass hysteria, nor will it be the last. Its details make it matchless. We see this again in the Terror of the French Revolution, and the McCarthy Era in United States history. Another example took place in the years prior to World War II in Germany—normal people were turning on their neighbors, because the neighbors were Jewish. As the cattle cars pulled away, these normal people did nothing to stop the executions.[59] In the same way, normal people did nothing to stop the executions in Salem Village in 1692. These cases, however, were not about witches in the same sense that Salem was. However, there is a common thread in that in each instance, a group found a common enemy to express their frustrations on, and the hysteria developed in a frightening direction.[60] The Salem Witch Hysteria is a sad piece of American history. However, if they must be judged, they must be judged lightly. "No person who looks around him on the scene in which he is placed, reflects upon the infinite wonders of creation, and meditates upon the equal wonders of his own mind, can be at a loss respecting the sources and causes of superstition. Let him transport himself back to the condition of a primitive and unlettered people, before whom the world appears in all its original and sublime mystery. Science has not lifted to their eyes the curtain behind which the secret operations of nature are carried on. They observe the tides rise and fall, but know not the attractive law that regulates their movements; they contemplate the procession of the seasons, without any conception of the principles and causes that determine and produce their changes… It is for their fancy to explain, interpret, and fill up the brilliant and magnificent scene." [61] The memorial that stands at Danvers, Massachusetts (formerly Salem Village) is a reminder to the world of this: the unmarked graves of those executed also serve as a silent reminder.

Notes

[1] Marilynne K. Roach, *The Salem Witch Trials: A Day-by-Day Chronicle of a Community Under Siege* (New York: Cooper Square Publishing, 2002), 18.
[2] Richard B. Trask, *The Devil Hath Been Raised: A Documentary History of the Salem Village Witchcraft Outbreak of March 1692* (Danvers, MA: Yeoman Press Publishers, 1992), 118.
[3]*Ibid*, 126.
[4]For more information, see Douglas Campbell, *The Puritans in Holland, England, and America: An Introduction to American History* (New York: Harper Brothers Publishing, 1902), Introduction. Also see John D. Seymour, *The Puritans in Ireland, 1647-1661* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1917), Chapter One.
[5] Alden T. Vaughan, *The Puritan Tradition in America, 1620-1730* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1972). Chapter IV deals with the order of society and the Puritan's strict belief system.
[6]David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Documented* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Reformed Publishing Company, 1963), 25.
[7]This was due to the Puritan interpretation of the Bible. The Sabbath was the only Holy Day mentioned, and therefore, the Puritans chose not to celebrate Christmas. For more information, see Bruce Collin Daniels, *Puritans at Play: Leisure and Recreation in Colonial New England* (New York: St. Martin's Publishing, 1996), 89.
[8] For examples of Puritan punishments, see Mitchell P. Roth, *Crime and Punishment: A History of the Criminal Justice System* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing, 2011), 59. One example Wadsworth discusses is the death penalty, which was mandated for many crimes, among them the rebellion of a child against his parents. Those who were put in pillories were often pinned there with a nail through the ear. If they wanted to escape, they had to pull until the pinned portion of their ear came off. (39).
[9]George Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, (New York: Athenaeum Press, 1972). Kittredge spends the better portion of his book naming examples of witchcraft cases, as well as the judicial forces that enforced the laws. From the examples he names, it is clear to see that this type of hysteria was uncommon.
[10]George Kittredge, "Notes on Witchcraft," *American Antiquarian Society Proceedings* 18 (April 1907): 210.
[11] Thousands of books and articles have been published on the Salem hysteria, according to the Salem Historical Society. Among the most reputable are Laurie Winn Carlson's *A Fever in Salem* (Chicago: Ivan Dee Publishers, 1999), John Demos' research and subsequent volumes, Stephen Boyer and

Paul Nissembaum's extensive books, Elaine Breslaw's books and articles, and Frances Hill, *A Salem Witch Trials Reader* (New York: Doubleday Publishing, 1975), Chadwick Hansen, *Witchcraft at Salem* (New York: Braziller Publishing, 1969), and Peter Charles Hoffer, *The Devil's Disciples* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1996).

[12] Marion Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts* (New York: Doubleday Press, 1969).

[13] Older, unmarried women were seen as a burden on society. This was due to the patriarchal structure of the Puritan society. As Carol Karlson addresses in *The Devil in the Shape of A Woman*, women such as Margaret Hawkes, Dorcas Hoar, and Ann Pudeator were all widowed or divorced, and were much more likely to be accused. Ann Pudeator, Margaret Scott, Susanna Martin, and Sarah Osbourne all died due to the accusations against them.
Carol Karlson, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman* (New York: Norton & Company Publishing, 1998), 20.

[14] Edward Bever, "Witchcraft Fears and Psychosocial Factors in Disease," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 30 (2000): 577. See also, Anne Zeller, "Arctic Hysteria in Salem?" *Anthropologica*, (1990): 264-293, and Linda Caporeal, "Ergotism: The Satan Loosed in Salem?" *Science* 192(1976): 21-26.

[15]Marilynne K. Roach, *The Salem Witch Trials: A Day-by-Day Chronicle of a Community Under Siege* (New York: Cooper Square Publishing, 2002), Appendices.

[16] Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissembaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1974), xii.

[17]John Demos, "Underlying Themes in the Witchcraft of Seventeenth-Century New England," *The American Historical Review* 75 (1970): 1311-1326.

[18] Timothy J. McMillian, "Black Magic: Witchcraft, Race, and Resistance in Colonial New England," *Journal of Black Studies* 25 (1994): 99-117. McMillian argues here that there were three African-Americans accused of witchcraft, and the basis of their accusation was the color of their skin. Also see Elizabeth Reis, *Damned Women* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 92. Reis states here that the largest majority of those accused were women. Many of these were older, widowed women who continued to own property. They did not fit into the typical Puritan ideal of a woman, and therefore, they were targeted.

[19]The authors mentioned are Laurie Winn Carlson, *A Fever in Salem* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publishers, 1999); Pete Charles Hoffer, *The Devil's Disciples* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), Carol Karlson, T*he Devil in the Shape of a Woman* (New York: Norton and Company Pub-

lishing, 1998), Charles W. Upham, *Lectures on Witchcraft Comprising a History of the Delusion in Salem in 1692* (Boston: Wiggin and Lunt Publishing, 1867), Linda Caporeal, "Ergotism: The Satan Loosed in Salem?" *Science* 192 (1976): 21-26, Anne Zeller, "Arctic Hysteria in Salem?" *Anthropologica* 32 (1990): 293-264, Marion Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts* (New York: Doubleday Press, 1969), Elizabeth Reis, *Damned Women* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), Frances Hill, *A Salem Witch Trials Reader* (New York: Doubleday Publishing, 1975), and Benjamin Ray, "Satan's War Against the Covenant in Salem Village, 1692," *The New England Quarterly* 79 (2007): 69-95.

[20] John Hale. *A Modest Inquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft,* http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/Bur6Nar.html.

[21]Linda Caporeal, "Ergotism: The Satan Loosed in Salem?" *Science* 192 (April 1976): 21-26.

[22] Nicholas P. Spanos and Jack Gottlieb, "Ergotism and the Salem Village Witch Trials," *Science* 194 (Dec. 1976): 1930-1934.

[23]Laurie Winn Carlson, *A Fever in Salem*, (Chicago: Ivan Dee Publishing, 1999).

[24] Huntington's Disease Society of America, http://www.hdsa.org/about/our-mission/what-is-hd.html. 24 January 2012.

[25] Anne Zeller, "Arctic Hysteria in Salem?" *Anthropologica*, 32, no. 2 (1990): 239-264, 243.

[26] Disorders in this category have no medical condition that can be found by a physician. A doctor was called by Reverend Parris after his daughter Betty was ill, but the doctor found nothing physically wrong. This led him to pronounce the girl as bewitched, beginning the whole Salem witch hunt episode. American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Volume 4* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2000), 486.

[27]*Ibid*, 486.

[28]Jared DeFife, "The Shrink Tank," *Psychology Today*. http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-shrink-tank/201006/stuff-psychologists-1-diagnosing-fictional-characters. 25 April 2012.

[29] Edward Bever, "Witchcraft Fears and Psychosocial Factors in Disease," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 30, no. 4 (2000): 573-590.

[30]*Ibid*.

[31]*Ibid*.

[32]This theory was put forth by Edward Bever in "Witchcraft Fears and Psychosocial Factors in Disease," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 30 (4): 577.

[33] This all had to do with several disagreements. Parris' church was much more conservative than many local Puritan churches. Many in the village

disagreed with the Reverend's overly harsh viewpoint. Parris then began to use his sermons to promote himself and the Salem Village church, although many that attended were officially members of the more liberal Salem Town church. Parris noted that over four hundred members of the village were not baptized, or they did not attend the village church. This was something that Parris seemed to have felt that only he could rectify. He stated that this was shameful for those guilty, and admonished them to accept his offer of baptism and communion with the church. His constant admonishes, however, had little success, which only led Parris to criticize more. See Benjamin Ray, "Satan's War Against the Covenant in Salem Village," *The New England Quarterly*, 80, no. 1 (2007): 69-95.

[34]*Ibid*.

[35]http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/salem/SAL_BBUR.HTM. 15 March 2012.

[36] *Ibid*.

[37]*Ibid*.

[38]Benjamin Ray, "Satan's War Against the Covenant in Salem Village, 1692." *The New England Quarterly* 80 (2007): 69-95.

[39]Bruce Collin Daniels, *Puritans At Play*, (New York; Saint Martin's Press, 1995), 193.

[40] Carol F Karlson, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman* (New York: Norton and Company Publishing, 1998), 75.

[41]*Ibid*, 82.

[42]*Ibid*, 47. Karlson continues on (page 51) to illustrate how women were more often forced to confess to witchcraft than men were. Men were accused, but much more often, were acquitted. There are also surviving court documents of men who incriminated themselves and were then fined or whipped for lying.

[43] Karlson, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 82-83.

[44]*Ibid*, 263.

[45]Reis, *Damned Women*, 93.

[46] George Lincoln Burr, *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases 1648-1706*, (New York: Dover Publications, 2012), 427.

[47] Carol F. Karlson, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman* (New York: Norton and Company Publishing, 1998.), 217.

[48]Marion Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts: A Modern Enquiry into the Salem Witch Trials*. (New York: Doubleday Press, 1969).

[49] More recent historians have all argued that the girls were not actually suffering, and that their pains and screams were not genuine. These scholars, such as Peter Charles Hoffer in *The Devil's Disciples* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), and Bryan F. LeBeau in *The Story of the Salem Witch Trials* (Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall Publishing, 1998), have all

stated that the girls were not actually in pain, but rather that they were acting out of frustration from events happening in the village at the time.

[50] For example, Samuel Parris' personal diary and sermon notes. Excerpts can be found here: Bernard Rosenthal, "The sermon notebook of Samuel Parris, 1689–1694." *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 35 (July 1996): 288-290.

[51]Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panic* (New York: Routledge Publishing, 2002).

[52]http://www.genevabible.org/files/Geneva_Bible/Old_Testament/Exodus.pdf.15 March 2012.

[53]For more information on the Puritan religious belief in predestination, see David E. Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

[54] W. Poole, *Satan in America: The Devil We Know* (Plymouth: Rowman& Littlefield Publishers, 2009): 13-15.

[55] This is heavily detailed in George Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (New York: Athenaeum Press, 1972).

[56] A theory has also been put forward by Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissembaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1974). Boyer and Nissembaum state that the economy of the time was land-based, and so the Salem trials were borne out of a desire for land reform in some sense.

[57] Richard Francis, *Judge Sewall's Apology* (New York: Harper Collins Publishing, 2005).

[58]*Ibid.,*184-185.

[59]There is a theory called 'moral panic' that was first discussed by Stanley Cohen in his book, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (London: Paladin Press, 1973). Cohen defined moral panic as "A condition, episode, person, or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests." (1).

[60]*Ibid,* Chapter One.

[61] Charles W. Upham *Salem Witchcraft* (Toronto: General Publishing Company, 2000), 219.