

The Causes of the 1692 Salem Witchcraft Crisis: Annotated Historiographical Bibliography

Kai Erikson, *The Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Wiley, 1966).

Erikson argues that the witchcraft trials of the 1690s resulted from extraordinary social stresses which emerged within the Salem community; several of the causes of this social stress were Salem Puritans' sense of having lost their mission as the "City on a Hill," King Charles II's imposition of a Royal Governor to rule over them, and the Puritans's belief that, as they had settled the wilderness (formerly Satan's domain), now Satan must live among them.

Steven Boyer and Paul Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

Boyer and Nissenbaum use demographic methods to trace factions which emerged in Salem in the 1690s within the adult community over the economy, politics, and religious modernization, and reveal that these factions broke down along geographical lines into a conflict between Salem Town and Salem Village. These conflicts, Boyer and Nissenbaum argue, resulted in the witchcraft crisis, which was, in turn, a struggle over tradition and innovation.

Linnda R. Caporael, "Ergotism: The Satan Loosed in Salem?" *Science* 192 (2 April 1976): 21-26.

Caporael posits the witchcraft crisis as the result of an outbreak of the rye fungus, ergot, which flourished in the cold wet conditions of the early 1690s; the resultant outbreak of ergot poisoning affected the poor and young women disproportionately, in a direct correlation to the identity of the accusers (poor and young women).

Mary K. Matossian, "Ergot and the Salem Witchcraft Affair" *American Scientist* 70 (1982): 355-7.

Matossian, building on the initial work of Linnda Caporael, argues that the witchcraft crisis is evidence of an outbreak of ergotism, as reflected in court transcripts, climate indicators, and diaries of those affected. She states that the symptoms of severe ergotism (such as formication, paralysis, muscle spasms, seizures, hallucinations, delusions, and spontaneous abortion) align with the sufferings of accusers who felt themselves victims of bewitchment; and, further, that the parallel symptoms present in female nonhuman animals indicate that the witchcraft crisis was not merely a psychosocial phenomenon but instead traced from an organic cause.

John Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

Using psychological analysis, Demos argues that the witchcraft crisis emerged because of social tensions between younger and older women within the Salem community which can be traced to the organization of the family in Puritan New England and the inner psychological dynamics of the Puritan personality. According to Demos, the accusers (primarily young, single girls aged 11-20) targeted the accused (predominantly married or widowed women, aged 41-60) because the accused represented parental authority, competed with them for husbands, and, as the overseers of young female apprentices, were the only "safe" targets for young women's resentment and anger in a society which demanded respect for one's parents.

Carol Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1987).

Karlsen argues that Puritan cultural assumptions about women's "disorderly natures" led them to label women as dangerous and to believe them to be witches; women, the Puritans believed, had inherited Eve's connection to Satan and so were the most likely place for Satan to hide among the godly. Further, the Puritans believed that women were more likely than men to resort to covert (magical) ways to get power, attacking "more godly" women in order to get at the society that had thwarted their ambition and pride, and turning to Satan as a way to get the power that rightly belonged to men and fathers.

Laurie Carlson, *A Fever In Salem: A New Interpretation of the New England Witch Trials* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999).

Carlson traces the witchcraft crisis to an unrecognized epidemic of *encephalitis lethargica* ("sleeping sickness") spread by mosquitoes; the symptoms of the "bewitched" accusers (sensations of pinching and pricking, fits, and hallucinations) are also symptoms of *encephalitis lethargica*, which also can affect livestock.

Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York: Knopf, 2002).

Norton traces the witchcraft crisis to ongoing Puritan conflicts with the Indians, such as a series of massacres and battles in Maine and the larger King Phillip's War, which led Puritans to view Indians to be both real threats but also Satan's helpers. In Salem, to lose loved ones in Indian fighting was thought to be God's punishment for being a witch; and the evidence of Puritans (mostly women) who chose to stay with their Indian captors – so-called "unredeemed captives" – provided evidence that New England was "in the devil's snare."