

CONJURING HISTORY: THE MANY INTERPRETATIONS OF THE SALEM WITCHCRAFT TRIALS

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On February 26, 2007, my father died. Death stole one of my life's inspirations and heroes. For 33 years, he served our country in the U.S. Navy, including service in Vietnam. He gave me his love of history, which is partially responsible for my pursuit of a Masters degree in Social Studies Education at Rivier. He is loved and missed beyond the capacity of words to describe. – Sean Purdy

The Salem Witchcraft Trials have cast a spell over historians and non-academics alike. This episode invokes images of religious bigotry, unbridled abuse of power, discrimination, and persecution as well as the perils of a society possessed by irrational fears. Yet, the Trials are fascinating because no one explanation of the event has ever been universally accepted. Numerous theories have tried to elucidate the causes of the Hysteria from ergot poisoning to actual witchcraft. Throughout American history, people have summoned Salem as a warning against actions they perceive as bogus “witch hunts”. The numerous historical, social, and literary interpretations reflect the many dimensions of this drama and demonstrate that no one all-compassing explanation can contain Salem’s spirit. The Witchcraft trials are ultimately alluring because they are open to many interpretations for many purposes, namely to use the past to explain the present.

During January 1692, several girls in Salem Village had hysterical fits and began to exhibit bizarre behavior like babbling incoherently and trying to fly. Some of the “afflicted” girls included Betty Parris, 9, and Abigail Williams, 11, the daughter and niece of the town’s minister, Samuel Parris. After this behavior went on sporadically for a month, a doctor diagnosed that they were “under an evil hand.”¹ The girls were pressured to declare who was bewitching them and they accused Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne, both town outcasts, and Parris’ slave, Tituba.

All three were imprisoned and put on trial, but Tituba’s trial was the most significant. She not only confessed to being a witch but claimed there was a coven of witches in Salem. Had she merely said she alone was a witch, the trials may not have gone any further. Her testimony about a witch cabal ensured her trial would not be the last.

By this time, other girls were suffering afflictions. One girl was Anne Putnam, Jr., 12, whose father was Thomas Putnam, a friend of Parris. She became one of the leaders in this group of accusers. 1692 Salem was rent by many social divisions. At this time, Salem consisted of Salem Town (the modern day seaport of Salem) and Salem Village (modern day Danvers). There were social tensions between rural, conservative Salem Village and sophisticated, prosperous, maritime Salem Town. In addition, there were rivalries with the Putnams and the Parris’ on one side and other families on the other over the local power structure. Salem was a powder keg of jealousy, ambition and animosity and the Trials ignited it.

The Trials turned another corner with the accusation of Martha Corey. She was a respectable member of the church and when she was convicted, nobody was safe. By this time, the group of afflicted girls increased and shifted between ten to fifteen girls. In June, the governor, William Phips, established the Court of Oyer and Terminer to handle the crisis. From March to September, the Witchcraft Trials

progressed feverously and spread throughout Essex County. Nineteen people were convicted and executed, one person was tortured to death during questioning and 140 people were imprisoned.ⁱⁱ

One controversial aspect that powered the trials was the use of spectral evidence. Puritans believed that witches could project their spirit or specter to harm people. In this way, witches could harm other people without physically moving or having witnesses see the witches actually inflict the torture. If one of the afflicted girls claimed a defendant was using her “specter” to attack her, particularly during the trial, this claim was treated as legitimate evidence. A leading minister in the Colony, Cotton Mather, had authorized the use of spectral evidence but advised caution in its use. This caution was generally ignored and spectral evidence denigrated the legitimacy of the Trials in the eyes of many both then and now.

A backlash against the trials gained sufficient strength by October. In addition, the girls had begun accusing leading ladies in the colony including the governor’s wife. Phips stopped further imprisonments and finally dissolved the “Court of Oyer and Terminer” in late-October. Although some trials would limp along for several months determining the fate of those already imprisoned, most were found innocent. Samuel Parris was forced out of Salem Village in 1697.ⁱⁱⁱ That same year, Samuel Sewall became the only judge to apologize for his role in the Trials.^{iv} Also in 1697, Reverend John Hale, a participant and enthusiastic supporter of the Trials until his wife was accused, wrote *A Modest Enquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft*, which was part apology, part defense. Published in 1702, two years after his death, he wrote “such was the darkness of the day... that we walked in the clouds and could not see our way.”^v Ann Putnam, Jr., made a public confession in 1706 for her actions and said the whole incident “was a great delusion of Satan.”^{vi}

The battle of historical interpretations began not long after the hanging ropes stopped swinging. Cotton Mather, who had played an important role in the Trials, published a historical account in 1693 called *Wonders of the Invisible World*, followed years later by other writings. During the Hysteria, he had waffled uneasily between strong support for the trials and attempting to rein in their excesses. Once the trials subsided, his version of the event sought to accommodate his uneasiness about the trial’s atrocities and his belief in and opposition to witchcraft. He determined that Native American sorcery was the root cause. He, like many Puritans, believed the Native Americans were devil-worshipping sorcerers. These sorcerers had cast a spell on Salem so the colonists would attack one another instead of the Native Americans.

His version was immediately attacked by Robert Calef, a Salem merchant with ties to the persecuted, in his book *More Wonders of the Invisible World*. Calef demonized Mather and claimed the whole episode was a fraud. Calef claimed that Samuel Parris had beat Tituba in order to coerce her into a false confession. Parris did this so he and his associates could reassert their waning power in the village. When Tituba later recanted her confession, Calef claimed, Parris refused to pay the jail fees that were necessary for her release. Calef also criticized Mather for his role in ensuring the execution of his rival, Minister George Burroughs. At his execution, Burroughs had addressed the gathered crowd and said the Lord’s Prayer, something a witch was supposed to be unable to do. Mather intervened and told the wavering audience that even the devil could pretend to be an angel of light, thereby guaranteeing Burrough’s death. For years afterward, Calef and Mather conducted a heated exchange that reflected not only class differences, but also a war for interpretation.

From that time forward, partisans of both interpretations took sides and added their own views and embellishments. Most explanations can be categorized this way: Supernatural, Socio-Political and Natural/Scientific. At the core of all of these explanations are the following three questions: What caused the hysterical fits of the girls? Why did Salem society react the way it did? Who is ultimately to

blame, i.e., who is the scapegoat? The last question is important because the issue of a scapegoat recurs throughout the narrative.

Mather's supernatural explanation reflected his pre-Enlightenment, Puritan mindset that was obsessed with superstitions and witchcraft. As the Puritan influence waned in Massachusetts in the 1700's, so did society's beliefs in witchcraft. Thomas Hutchinson's 1765 *The History of Colony of Massachusetts Bay* dispensed with Mather's superstitions and accepted Calef's interpretation of fraud and conspiracy. Other writers began to focus on socio-political causes of the Hysteria. In 1834, George Bancroft's *The History of the United States of America* was the first account to call attention to the class strife in Salem and ultimately blamed a few, key leaders.

Charles Upham's 1867 *Salem Witchcraft* also highlighted the class and political strife as well. Upham, a minister from Salem, dealt with not only rivalries between Salem Town and Salem Village but the intense rivalries between families. Upham's account was the first to highlight and embellish Tituba's role in the drama. Although there were only passing references to Tituba's alleged magic in the original documents, Upham put her at the center of the storm. The popular image of Tituba performing witchcraft with the afflicted girls and telling them scary stories comes from his account. Upham believed Tituba's actions made the girls hysterical and that the Parris-Putnam factions exploited the girls to strike at their rivals. Over a century and many similar versions later, Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum's *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* placed the trials as a battle between rural, conservative Salem Village and cosmopolitan, prosperous, maritime Salem Town.

Mary Beth Norton's *In the Devil's Snare* took a different approach by identifying the Indian war, King William's War (1689-1697), as the primary and overlooked cause. Though other authors before her had cited the war as one of many causes, Norton was the first to claim it was the primary cause. She mentioned that the government headed by William Phips had experienced many disasters in this war and that there were many refugees from this war in Salem. Norton attributed the afflicted girls' behavior to psychological explanations such as fear and post-traumatic stress because some of the girls had experienced Indian attacks. The Hysteria outbreak in Salem served as an epiphany to the colony's leaders that the devil was responsible for their defeats. Norton does not claim that the government deliberately conspired to use Salem to cover up its disasters. She states that the Witchcraft trials gave the government a scapegoat and an explanation that made sense: The devil was to blame.

Many authors in the 20th century have sought scientific and psychological reasons for the episode. John Putnam Demos' *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* saw the trials as psychological reaction to generational tensions between teenagers and adults. Most of the accusers were teenage girls and most of the accused were older women. Demos perceived the Hysteria as a teenage attack on adult authority.

Chadwick Hansen's *Witchcraft at Salem* was one of the few academic efforts to exonerate Cotton Mather by using modern psychology. Hansen stated that actual witchcraft was taking place in Salem. For evidence for witchcraft in the village, he cited Bridget Bishop's pseudo-voodoo dolls and the "witchcake" Mary Sibley claimed Tituba made. Though these examples may seem as innocuous to modern people as calling a psychic hotline, Hansen reminded his readers that in 1692, this behavior was a capital crime. Moreover, the practitioners believed it was real. Cotton Mather, in Hansen's view, was merely advocating a crack down on crime. Hansen went on to identify the girls' fits as mental breakdowns. The girls were terrified both by the frequent, highly descriptive sermons against witchcraft and the witchcraft they witnessed in the village. It would be analogous to a child hearing a sermon about the perils of lying and then having a breakdown at home when they witness their parents cheating on their taxes.

Other writers offer medical explanations such as ergot poisoning and encephalitis. In 1976, Linnda R. Carporael postulated that ergot, a fungus that grows on bread, had caused the girls' strange behavior. When consumed, ergot created LSD-type hallucinations. This has become a popular explanation and is the one offered to visitors of the Witch History Museum in Salem today. However, other scientists have dismissed this theory. The girls showed no other signs of poisoning such as disintegrating fingertips. Also, the Puritans' diet consisted of dairy and seafood products that would have counteracted the poisoning.^{vii} Laurie Winn Carlson's *A Fever in Salem* claims encephalitis was the cause. However, other scientists have expressed doubts about this conclusion after reviewing Carlson's data.^{viii} The limitation of both theories is they do not explain why the girls looked healthy during the times they were not experiencing fits i.e. the majority of the time.

"Witchcraft confronts us with ideas about women, with fears about women, with the place of women in society, and with women themselves. It confronts us too with systematic violence against women."^{ix} The Salem Trials and the place of witchcraft in Western History generally are saturated with the issue of gender. Throughout Western history, the majority of people executed for witchcraft have been women while most of the accusers and all of the judges have been men. Western societies, such as the Massachusetts Puritans, were patriarchal communities where men controlled all aspects of women's lives. Fathers and husbands dominated their women and if women had neither living fathers nor husbands, they were subordinated to sons or brothers.

Feminist historians therefore have interpreted all witch trials generally as another social attribute designed to clamp down on women's independence. Often, convicted witches are seen as strong, independent women who dared to demonstrate intellectual or economic parity with men. These women are particularly vulnerable if they behave in ways the community finds shocking. Bridget Bishop, who was executed for witchcraft during the 1692 Trials, ran a tavern, wore a red bodice (red was considered the color of passion at the time) and was said to act seductively towards men in the town. Another general, witch trial facet is the accusation of social outcasts. In Salem, the first three witches accused, Sarah Good, Sarah Osborne, and Tituba, were social outcasts.

That Puritan Massachusetts was a typical patriarchal society makes it an easy target for feminist criticism. In addition, the Puritans had specific religious attitudes towards women that modern day women would find appalling. Though the Puritans believed women equally worthy of salvation, they believed women were especially vulnerable to the Devil's temptations. The image of Eve in the Garden of Eden was frequently invoked in Puritan sermons. Because Eve gave into the serpent's persuasion to defy God, she was responsible for mankind's fallen position. Furthermore, women's inherent sexuality made them a liability to the Puritans. The Puritans believed women at heart were wonton sexual beings who could lead men astray. Because the Devil encouraged such sexuality, the Devil could use this weakness to gain control over women and thereby men. The image of the witch in many societies has either been a grizzled crone or an enchantingly beautiful seductress. Puritans feared the latter. In this way, if the Devil was seeking to destroy Puritan society, women were the most vulnerable area of defense.

Carol F. Karlsen's *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman* examined the demographic patterns of all witch trials in colonial New England. She discovered that the majority of the accused were women and most over the age of forty. Women over forty generally made up two-thirds of the accused witches and almost all of the women executed.^x Although the Salem Hysteria saw an increase in the number of women under forty accused, only one of the executed, Sarah Good, was under forty.^{xi} Karlsen attributed this pattern to several features. Women over forty were past their childbearing and child-rearing years and were more likely to be care-receivers than caregivers. Because these women were not engaged in

the primary function of Puritan women, child rearing, their lack of function made them suspect. Moreover, they fit into the pre-conceived notion of a witch as a “hag” and were more in danger because of their similarity to the stereotype.

The Salem Witchcraft Trials, however, featured two aspects that were abnormal in witchcraft persecutions. One, a significant number of the Trials’ victims were men and second, all of the accusers were women. Six of the twenty people who died during the Trials were men. Karlson’s demographic study noted that Salem did not fit the normal witch trial pattern. In Non-Outbreak cases, namely cases where only a small group of witches is accused, only about one in six of the accused, one in sixteen of the convicted and one in twelve of the executed are men.^{xii} In Salem 1692, men were almost one-fourth of the accused, one-sixth of the convicted and almost a third of the death toll.^{xiii} Although in the minority of those accused, almost all men convicted of witchcraft were executed.^{xiv}

All of the accusers in the Salem Witchcraft trials were women and most were between the ages of nine and twenty. This is in direct contrast to past trials where most of the accusers were men. Teenage girls were one of most powerless groups in Puritan society. They had less power than adult women and almost all facets of their lives were controlled by someone else. Their opportunities in life were restricted to motherhood and marriage. Yet, during the Salem Witch Trials, a group of teenage girls became the center of society’s attention and literally wielded the power over life and death. They were instant celebrities. They were not only able to strike out against social outcasts like Sarah Osborne and other children like five-year old Dorcas Good (daughter of Sarah Good), who were outside of their friend group, but also against other women in the community.

Some historians, who believe the Hysteria was a deliberate conspiracy, depict the girls as puppets of their parents. Others believe the girls were merely reacting to Salem’s rivalries. Betty Parris, for example, was probably well aware of her father’s difficulties with some of the town’s residents. It is possible she was acting without any direct influence from her father. She and the other afflicted girls may have consciously or unconsciously been attacking those people they saw as attacking their families. Other historians believe there was a generational conflict at the root of the Hysteria.

John Demos’ *Entertaining Satan*, like Karlson, called attention to the fact that most of the teenage accusers’ targets were adult women. He stated that the girls’ actions were a teenage rebellion, a response to what is sometimes called “mother-suffocation”. The girls were acting out subconsciously against social repression and directed their attacks on what they perceived as its source, mothers. Because mothers were more involved in child rearing than men, it is possible that the girls blamed their situation on their mothers.

In an article written twelve years earlier called “Underlying Themes in the Witchcraft of Seventeenth-Century New England.”, Demos noted that many of the “spectral attacks” were oral in nature such as biting and sucking. This, he postulated, may have a connection to motherhood and breast-feeding.^{xv} Also, he highlighted that both the girls’ fits and their accusations were rooted in aggression. Their fits were symbolic of attacks directed at them. On the conscious level, they felt that they were tormented by witches. On the subconscious level, the witches were a symbol for the attacks that a repressive society made on them.^{xvi} Also, girls used their accusations as a channel for their own aggressions. They were aggressive towards a society that was oppressing them. These girls may have justified their actions by thinking, “We are not attacking them. They are attacking us!”^{xvii} Lastly, the reason why boys were less likely to fight maternal authority in this way may have been related to the fact that boys’ chores took them outside of the home and thereby loosened maternal control.^{xviii}

Other historians, such as Mary Ryan, have accepted only part of Demos’ theory. They differ in that they believe the girls were not rebelling against their mothers but rather against the concept of

motherhood. Motherhood embodied the suffocating position girls were relegated to in Puritan society.^{xix} This episode therefore was a subconscious rejection of a future and an adult role that they did not want.

John Hale's 1702 account of the Trials, *A Modest Enquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft*, may have inadvertently hit upon another possible explanation. His account mentioned that several of the accusers participated in an English folk-magic ritual that tried to foresee the future occupation of their husband. When the ritual revealed the shape of a coffin, the girls' hysterical fits began. This account may be questionable because part of the intention of *A Modest Enquiry* is an exhortation against such fortune telling and citing it, as one of the causes of the Hysteria, is one way of discouraging other divination activities in the future. However, what is noteworthy in Hale's account is what it says about the anxiety impeding marriage might have caused the girls.

Finding a husband and bearing children were women's two most important roles in Puritan society. Failure at one or both was considered a tremendous blow. Moreover, Salem in 1692 was a town in transition. Not only was there a change in the economic and religious nature of the colony as embodied in the Salem Village and Salem Town dynamic mentioned earlier. Salem Village was poor in 1692 and the possibility of couples finding land and raising a family was decreasing.^{xx} The girls may have faced spinsterhood or relocation to the dangerous frontier with their husbands as possible futures. In this way, fear of the future may have played a role in the episode.

The Salem Witch Trials may have an explanation that is interwoven with gender and psychological issues. The fits may have been a guilt response to participation in fortune telling. Or, as Mary Beth Norton described, the fits were a result of fear and post-traumatic experiences caused by an Indian war. Social and generational tensions may be the root cause. Or, maybe fear and anxiety about their future prospects might have given the girls a mental breakdown. Any number or possibly all of these ingredients may have created the lethal brew of the Salem Witch Hysteria.

Tituba brings the issue of race into the trials. She had three characteristics that made her vulnerable in Puritan New England: She was a woman, of a different race and an outsider i.e. not from the town of Salem. She has run the gamut from being the cause of the Trials with her scary stories to the scapegoat for the sins of the community. She has also become a symbol of different things for different people. For the black community in particular, she embodies their suffering throughout American history. Though black people have suffered since the first slave ship landed in 1619, Tituba is the one of the first names and identities that materializes out of that dark, anonymous mass of torment. Yet, like much of the Salem story, the historical record is limited and tendency to speculate, romanticize, or intrude the present on the past is strong.

Her race itself is possibly the most contentious battleground. Symbols and images are powerful and people naturally wish to possess them. All of the Salem documents refer to her as an Indian. She is at various times referred to as "Tituba Indian" or "Tituba, an Indian woman." This description of her race would go unamended for over a century and a half.

Renowned poet and writer Henry Wordsworth Longfellow was the first to give Tituba an African, albeit partially, lineage. His play *Giles Corey of Salem Farms* would have a domino effect on both historians and writers. Though Longfellow introduces Tituba as an Indian woman, in Act 1, Scene 3, he reveals her mother was Native American but her father was "a man all black and fierce...He was an Obi man, and taught (her) magic."^{xxi} It is not entirely clear why he did this. It was artistic license to be sure. Perhaps, he felt that Obi, which is an African/African-American form of magic, had an exotic quality that would allure the audience. Whatever the reason, that shift in popular image would have more of a public impact than the play itself.

The play itself was not very popular. But, the revised perception of Tituba took flight in the imaginations of the public and historians. In 1876, while revising his American history book, Bancroft changed Tituba's identity from Indian (which it had been in all previous versions) to "half-Indian, half Negro"^{xxiii}. Other historians from Samuel Eliot Morrison to Marion Starkley continued the mixed race persona in their books. The literary world as well seized upon this version of Tituba, William Carlos Williams' *Tituba's Children* being one example.

The literary world again shifted her identity with Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. Miller made her a Negro slave. He did that for two dramatic reasons. One, Miller's Tituba is a voodoo priestess therefore the audience expects a black woman. Playing to a pre-existing notion is easier than creating a new one. Only a black, voodoo priestess is credible. But, her race also fits into his goal of the play, namely demonizing McCarthyism by way of the 17th century clergy. The Salem ministers and judges are easy stand-ins for the McCarthy hearings that were challenging Miller and his friends. During Tituba's confession scene, she is badgered by a minister until she breaks and confesses to their accusations. Miller's symbolism is obvious. The clergy started their rise to power by subjugating the weakest segment of society. The joyous prayers of thanksgiving at her confession (which inspires the other girls to begin their wild accusations) therefore become celebrations of victory in their rise to power. As Chadwick Hansen described it, Tituba becomes an Aunt Jemima style tool for Miller.^{xxiii}

Once again, this literacy shift in identity had a ripple effect. Historian John Demos as late as 1970 has her as a Negro. There is no apparent reason why. Novelist Ann Petry has a black Tituba as the main character of the juvenile book, *Tituba of Salem Village*. Because *The Crucible* is most people's frame of reference for the Trials, the public perception is that of a black Tituba. So, if the evolution of her racial designation is clear, why is the issue still so contentious?

The answer depends upon whether one is fighting for the historical person named Tituba or the powerful symbol. Salem's ability to invoke strong emotions makes it nearly impossible to treat the story or its attributes with detachment. Unlike, say, the Hamilton-Burr duel, the battle for historical interpretation goes hand in hand with the possession and usage of symbolism. Even the most unemotional historian could face accusations of their own while attempting to explain the accusations of 1692. Studying the 1692 hysteria could bring a hysteria of its own down upon the head of a scholar. Such a scholar would receive perhaps an immediate understanding of Bridget Bishop whose unconventional worldview clashed with her neighbors. But, for the purposes of this study, the analytical starting point will be the historical record.

Tituba entered the historical stage in Barbados. That fact is disputed by no one. The earliest record of her may be a 1676 slave deed. This deed refers to a girl named "Tattuba."^{xxiv} Not only was it an uncommon name but given the numerous variations of spelling words in this era generally, there is a strong possibility that this is the same girl. Likewise, there is no dispute that Reverend Parris purchased her in Barbados and brought her to Salem. But, arguments begin from there.

Elaine G. Breslaw's *Tituba, Reluctant Witch of Salem: Devilish Indians and Puritan Fantasies* takes the position that Tituba was an Indian. Circumstantial evidence indicates that she was from the coast of South America and was brought to Barbados to work as a plantation slave. The Barbadian slave population at the time was a mixture of African and Native Americans with the African portion on the rise. Breslaw states that these two peoples naturally brushed up against each other culturally and from that exchange, Tituba could have learned African folklore though not necessarily African magic.

Everyone who knew Tituba called her an Indian. Every document at the time referenced her as such. There were both black and Indian slaves in Salem. Contemporaries did differentiate between the two races in documents. But, were those descriptions accurate? The pro-black Tituba camp argues no.

They argue that Salem residents either did not perceive a dual racial identity or that their racial classifications are not as strict as our own. Obviously determining a race by someone's looks can be inaccurate. This is particularly true if a person's lineage is multi-racial. She might have looked like an Indian but the Puritans might not have known and probably would not have cared if she was of mixed blood. In addition, this line of argument believes that Puritans were not precise in their racial classification either. Blacks and Indians were "the other" and these terms could be used as a catchall term devoid of all exclusivity. The Devil was at various times described as an Indian or an African. Perhaps, the same loose identification pertained to people.

This debate sheds as much light upon our current attitudes on race as it does about 1692. What are the qualifications to be in the black race? Though scientists explain that race does not really exist on a DNA level, the simple fact is that most people believe it does in some degree. So, how much black lineage makes a person black? In the Jim Crow South, one drop of black blood made you black. Ironically, there are many on the opposite side of the political spectrum that take that view as well. Halle Berry accepted her Oscar as a victory for black women though she has one white parent. Golfer Tiger Woods is lionized by the black community despite his mixed ancestry. In the Caribbean, there exists a whole social structure with whites on top, people of color (with some white and black lineage) beneath them and full-blooded blacks below them. The Spanish Colonial Empire in Latin America had an elaborate classification system for people based on every conceivable lineage. If Tituba had a black parent, does that make her black or something else? There is no one agreed upon answer.

In history, legitimate documentation is the ultimate judge. The records say she was a full Indian. We cannot know at this time if they made a mistake because they were not racially precise. Nor do we know if perhaps they were privy to some information they did not choose to record. Tituba might have told them she was an Indian (and having experienced slavery in the Barbados, she knew the obvious differences between the races). Native Americans clearly saw the visual differences between the two races though it is debatable what the differences meant to them. And if Tituba told someone her lineage, given how little generally is written about this lowest of social levels, it is not unlikely that nobody thought it noteworthy to write down Tituba's revelation. Were it not for the Trials, Tituba's scant documentary existence might have been relegated to slave deeds and passing mention as Parris' slave, thereby not even earning her a historical footnote.

Therefore, through the historical record, 1692 Salem saw her as an Indian. If modern people feel otherwise, the burden of proof is on them. While it may be tempting to turn the tables and say "Prove that she wasn't black!", that is the weakest of all historical arguments. The historical record says what it says and it is up to others to prove otherwise. Some may claim that the record is of limited accuracy because it reflects the biases and failings (however one defines them) of the authors. While acknowledging such biases as well as the context, in which any document is written, is important in any historical study, it becomes dangerous to disqualify documents simply because they were written by imperfect human beings. Such disqualifications practically invalidate history itself, which would defeat the whole purpose of the exercise, which is proving the accuracy of a historical fact, namely Tituba's heritage. Such invalidation would descend into a relativistic morass where reality is only what the individual perceives it. If that is one's inclination, then history is the last place one should visit.

Some have pointed to her name as evidence. Tituba is a Yoruba name. The Yoruba are a group of people living in modern day Nigeria and many of them were enslaved in the slave trade. Titi in Yoruba means "endless or never ending" and frequently occurs in female names.^{xxv} It is also a verb root that signifies apologize or atone.^{xxvi} However, names can be deceiving. After all, many slave owners gave

their slaves Roman names like Jupiter and Cicero. This did not make them Roman. Malcolm X's Celtic first name does not make him a Scottish Highlander.

Another theory contends Tituba's marriage to John Indian might have confused the matter. P.C. Hoffer, author of *The Devil's Disciples: Makers of the Salem Witchcraft Trials* and one of the only major scholars to claim Tituba's African heritage, holds that theory. He states that Tituba acquired the last name Indian upon marriage and that influenced how the Puritans saw her. However, though they referred to her as "Tituba Indian", they also designated her sometimes as "Tituba, an Indian woman." Hoffer's theory is therefore conjecture, intriguing but yet unproven. Such speculation has the same possibility as the "Maybe the Puritans knew she was an Indian for reasons they never wrote down" theory described earlier.

So, if the historical record says otherwise, why did the shifts in her identity take root in the historical and popular perception? Chadwick Hansen argues the answer is racism, both open and subconscious. Longfellow, as far as can be determined, shifted her race to make her more exotic and therefore appealing to the audience. What is artistic license after all other than a tool an artist uses to place their stamp on a story or artwork? Artistic license is about the storyteller and how they make it work for their purposes, rather than the story itself. But, Longfellow's device obviously struck something in the public consciousness.

Tituba is one of "The Other" theme that runs throughout the story. She is an outsider both racially and geographically. The concept of "The Other" in Sociology explains that for reasons of self-identification, people and societies will point to a different group of people in order to differentiate the two. The other is different from you. They think and do things differently, they have different goals and agendas, and have different loyalties. They are someone to be feared, hated, looked down upon, or at least viewed suspiciously. When dealing with them, if you have to, you must attack them, denigrate them, defend against them and any of their thoughts and viewpoints that might threaten your community. At the very least, you must be eternally suspicious and on your guard against them.

Tituba, therefore, both in 1692 and in later interpretations becomes the bringer of evil. She brings black magic into the community for reasons of disruption and contamination. Despite living in Puritan society and experiencing Christianity, she is unassimilated (begging the question if assimilation is even possible). She, as Bernard Rosenthal described her, becomes a "Dark Eve", someone who brings discord into a community that had imagined its theocracy, its "City on a Hill" as a type of Garden of Eden. Even scholars who have no sympathy with either the Puritans or racists, might still contend that Tituba created this whole episode through her actions and stories.

But, what is the connection between her race and her role as disrupter and contaminator? If both Indians and Africans were considered dangerous, why should a racial designation matter if they are interchangeable evils? The answer is time changes what people fear. In the colonial era, Native Americans scared the people more. In the Puritan mindset, the Indians were Devil Worshipers who wanted to prevent the Puritans from establishing God's Kingdom in the New World. To other colonists throughout the British colonies, Indians were the allies of the hated French and Spanish. They were often described as tawny serpents and wolves as if they were just an unpleasant fauna that needed to be exterminated. Though Native Americans stopped posing a major threat to New England after the end of the Seven Years' War (The French and Indian War, as it was called in North America) in 1763, the Indian could still be a psychological fear. Even as the "Indian Threat" was being dealt with on increasingly further Western stages, the image of the menacing Indian had currency with most people.

By the Civil War, the Indian presence east of the Mississippi was extremely marginal. Most of them were gone, wiped out, pushed West or driven to the margins of Eastern society i.e. nearly invisible

to the broader American society while living in places like Nantucket or remote areas of Northern New England. New Englanders generally had no contact with Indians in their daily lives. Indians, they might have thought, were those people out West. A common image used in American literature (Such as James Fennimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*) and thought is that of morning snow melting as the sun rises in the day. The Indians were disappearing like snow in front of the sun of American cultural and technological superiority. This was the era of Manifest Destiny that claim America's expansion was a God-ordained mission. History, they argued, had shown that backward people always evaporated in the face of advanced civilizations. The image of the terrorizing Indian had lost its punch.

Black people were not gone. All the social baggage of "The Other" regarding blacks was alive and well. This fear amplified after the Civil War ended slavery. If blacks were scary as slaves, seeing them walking around as free people and conscious of their rights to freedom and equality must have been terrifying. The scary image of the Indian was out, and the scary image of the black was in.

Longfellow inadvertently tripped this landmine in American Victorian psychology. Just Longfellow's Tituba's mixed heritage would have both horrified and disgusted most white Americans. Race mixing was a taboo and in some places, illegal. A mixed race person would have been a contamination or an abomination, an infectious disease or a freak, depending upon an individual's viewpoint. Such a person was suitable for a half-devil sorcerer.

A person with an English degree who is trained to look for symbolism and deeper messages in literature is tempted to read into the specific racial mixture of Longfellow's character. Her Indian mother is her feminine, weaker side and therefore would symbolize the weaker strength of the menacing Indian image. Her "all black and fierce" father is her masculine, stronger side, reflecting the stronger image of the scary black. This of course is speculation and interpretation. Literature, unlike history, is about imaginary things and is not reliant on facts. So, such an interpretation is at least thought provoking.

The mixed race Tituba became the dominant image in spite of the history. Once she became a stereotype, she received all of a stereotype's attributes. Because she had been accused of practicing "hoodoo" (voodoo), she received all the expected attributes of a voodoo priestess. William Carlos Williams's play gave her down home corn pone lines such "Maybe I feed it to de dawg" and "He going to whup me hard."^{xxvii} Marion Starkey's book describes her as "half-savage" and doing heavier chores "but not, one gathers, with energy."^{xxviii} Tituba prefers "idling with the little girls" and is at one point called "the trembling black woman".^{xxix}

To this point, Chadwick Hansen, in his article "The Metamorphosis of Tituba or Why American Intellectuals Can't Tell an Indian Witch from a Negro.", argues that historians and others have become knowingly or unknowingly racists. An open racist would point to Tituba as a parable against race mixing and as a demonstration of the havoc blacks will wreak on white society. Others are playing along unknowingly out of ignorance. Hansen states that historians and dramatists affect each other more than they would like to admit. Once an image is in a person's mind, they may continue to reinforce that stereotype. If your image of Tituba is a black, you may take that image for granted without bothering to research your ignorance. If you have read something over and over in a history book and that image has been reinforced in popular culture, would you necessary make the effort to see if that image is accurate?

Arthur Miller, like Longfellow, tripped a psychological mine when he shifted her race again. Miller did not make her black because he was racist. He took artistic license to make his story do what he wanted it to do. He played to the audience's psychology to do the work for him. The audience expected a black voodoo priest so he gave them one. The audience expected a slave to be black. Miller wanted her to be the first to break because she represented how the weakest in society are always the first victimized. Blacks in the 1950's (as in all previous American history) were the lowest rung so that is

where the audience expected to find a black person in colonial time. A free black person, which was historically possible, was simply inconceivable to Miller's 1950's audience. She is presented as an Aunt Jemima cliché in speech and actions because that is what the audience expected. (Later incarnations of Tituba in other literature and movies have her as a young, sexy woman not only because that is a more appealing and titillating but because they want to extend her victimization into the sexual realm. There will be a discussion later on this theme.). She crumbles just like the trembling woman found in Starkey's version.

But, the all black incarnation came at a time when American society was changing its outlook slowly. The new Tituba fit into how America was starting to alter its views on history and race relations. Inadvertently, Miller's version played into a popular misconception. The majority of Americans are ignorant of the extent of Indian slavery in Colonial history. You say slave to Americans and they picture a black person.

But, the image of a black Tituba takes flight for other reasons.

The 19th century Americans have enormously shaped the modern impression of Puritans and their society. These Victorian-era people, no strangers to sexual repression, social conformity or gender and racial discrimination, projected their attitudes on the Puritans. Contrary to popular opinions, the Puritans thought sex was normal and healthy albeit within the bounds of marriage, though some forms of pre-marital sex were condoned. These Victorians inserted their Romantic-Era fascination of magic and witchcraft into the story by overemphasizing or fabricating Tituba's role in the drama. Moreover, as will be discussed later, they interjected their racial fears into the character of Tituba. Most importantly, 19th century Americans were people in search of their identity. Through their history, art and literature, they sought to understand what set America apart from Europe. The Puritan past, colored by the Trials, became one of many motifs through which they sought to discover meaning of themselves and their past. These Americans like many people before and since, have used the Salem episode as a form of therapy to assuage their spiritual dilemmas.

Writers and other artists were inevitably drawn to the Salem tragedy. Salem is a potent brew of drama, rich characters, the supernatural, strong emotions like fear and ambition, and larger themes ranging from sin and guilt to corruption to discrimination. Often, artists' presentations become intertwined with history and cloud historical accuracy and public understanding. For the entertainers and entertained alike, the Witch Trials have become both therapy and entertainment.

Two examples of Salem as therapy are Nathaniel Hawthorne and Maryse Condé. Hawthorne's great-great grandfather was John Hathorne, one of the witch judges. Characteristically of many families, the Hawthorne's were possessed by enormous guilt over the episode and inserted a "w" into their last name to distance themselves from their ancestor. Nathaniel's obsession with the Puritan past shows throughout his writings. His writings become a catharsis for his own guilt and vehicles to condemn Puritan sins. In "Young Goodman Brown", he tells the tale of a man guilty of hyper-introspection and hypocrisy. Like other Puritans, Brown is obsessed with his own salvation and compulsively seeks out the sins of others. In so doing, he creates a hell on earth where paranoia and obsession kill any potential for real redemption in the form of love. In the *House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne used his ancestor for the model of Col. Pyncheon.

Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* is another example of a writer using the story in a search for identity and therapy. Condé, a black women from the Caribbean, creates a Tituba who is an African sorceress endlessly victimized by white society. The Salem episode is only one stop on a parade of discrimination and brutality. While practically the entire story and Tituba's characterization are Condé's invention, she like Arthur Miller does not claim to be a historian. "Tituba and I lived for a year

on the closest of terms. During our endless conversations she told me things she had confided to nobody else,” She says in the introduction. Angela Davis, who writes an introduction of her own in the book writes, “There are those who dispute her African descent, countering that she was an Indian, perhaps hoping to stir up enmity between black and Native American women as we seek to recreate our respective histories.”^{xxx} “I was not interested at all in what her real life could have been...I really invented Tituba. I gave her a childhood, adolescence, an old age. At the same time, I wanted to turn her into a sort of female hero,”^{xxx1} Condé says in an interview at the end of the book. Condé’s goal is to restore to Tituba an identity that was stolen by racist, misogynist historians. In this way, Tituba becomes an early example of a minority and woman serving as a scapegoat for the ills of white society and victim of discrimination and cultural misunderstanding. Obviously, Condé’s interpretation is manna for those who feel discrimination in the present but feel their modern self and that of their ancestors was deliberately ignored, misrepresented or outright falsified. Despite this novel being a naked vehicle for the author’s agendas and therapy, this novel is an important reminder of Tituba’s Caribbean identity.

Pop culture has embraced Salem as an American Transylvania, replete with witches, ghosts and haunted houses. Visitors to Salem today might think that the witches have finally taken over the town. The city abounds with witchcraft and occult stores. The city is proud to be considered “The Witch City” and features witches and broomsticks on their police cars (though in recent years, the city government has emphasized other tourist attractions such as the Peabody Essex museum or the historic waterfront in an attempt to show there is more to visit the city than witches). Witch tourism is a boon to the city and the lucrative month of Halloween culminates with a Mardi-Gras style Halloween celebration. Hollywood has made several movies about the Trials from *The Crucible* (1996) to 2002’s television movie “The Salem Witchcraft Trials”. Other movies like *The Devonville Terror* (1983) and *I’ve Been Waiting For You* (1998) take place in Salem-like towns, whose witch-burning past comes back with a vengeance. Witch-centered TV shows like *Bewitched* and *Charmed* have made obligatory trips there. The main character on *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* even has a black cat, named Salem.

Salem has not been a stranger to pulp fiction either. As early as the 1820’s, titles such as *The Salem Belle* and *A Tale of Love and Witchcraft in 1692* predate Harlequin romances by a century and a half. With unrestrained imagination and fragments of the historical record, even minor players such as Dorcas Good can be subjects of conjecture. In the historical record Dorcas was the five-year daughter of accused witch, Sarah Good. Dorcas was also fingered as a witch and implicated her mother. Dorcas was chained to a wall in the fetid, Salem jail for several months and suffered severe, lifelong mental damage. Fifteen years later, her father requested compensation from the state for her imprisonment which he said made her “very chargeable (a financial burden) and having little or no reason to govern herself”.^{xxxii}

Yet, from these meager strands, Rose Earhart wrote *The Diary of Dorcas Good, Child Witch of Salem*. This book depicts Salem drenched in sexual repression where sex and violence are intertwined. Dorcas is physically and sexually abused by her father, prostituted out to other men and she witnesses various sundry activities such as a lesbian affair between two of the afflicted girls. While this book obviously reflects the tabloid-style tastes of a possibly depraved modern society, it is interesting to note that the deviant, unrestrained sexual activities that were once directed at witches by the religious Puritans have now become directed at them.

While Salem has always had love and romantic tragedy inserted into it by the literary world, sex has come recently into the storylines. Tituba used to be presented as either an older Aunt Jemima type or an old crone. In some recent versions, she is a sexy, young woman. Her husband, John Indian, is not even mentioned. Her new sexy image serves two purposes. One, it hopes to stimulate and titillate the post-sexual revolution audience. Second, this image allows the writer to expand her victimization into

the sexual realm. The “Salem Witch Trials” TV movie has her bathing in a tub when Rev. Parris walks in on her. Though he does not act on it, his lust and shame at his temptation (all juxtaposed with a failing marriage) are implied to be the driving force of the witch trials. In Condé’s book, she is sexually assaulted to make sure she will confess to witchcraft so the Parris cabal can take over the town.

What sources did Arthur Miller use?

The most-renowned, fictional interpretation of the Witchcraft Hysteria is Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*. For some people, this play is their first introduction to the events and the play shapes their perceptions of both the Trials and the anti-Communist McCarthy hearings of the 1950’s. Miller wrote the play as a criticism of the hearings. McCarthy attacked Hollywood and Miller’s friends because of their leftist or Communist political views. Miller immediately saw the parallels between the two events. He saw two societies possessed by fear that had fallen under the influence of a demagogue (Parris and McCarthy) that exploited that fear for political gain. Miller’s play dealt with the issue of unbridled government authority in the characters of Samuel Parris and Judges Hathorne and Danforth.

The play also manufactured a love triangle between one of the accusers, Abigail Williams, and John and Elizabeth Proctor. Miller made Abigail seventeen years old and John in his mid-thirties, the same age as Miller when he wrote the play. In truth, John was in his sixties at the time and Abigail was only 11. But, Miller himself believed there really was a relationship between the two in reality.^{xxxiii} The love triangle in the play bears a strong resemblance to the love triangle with Marilyn Monroe in Miller’s personal life at the time, thereby adding him to the list of people using Salem as therapy.

Not only was Miller guilty of projecting his own unsupported beliefs and his personal life into the play, but also he used a technique that entertainers frequently use when creating historically based works. The purpose of entertainment is obviously entertainment not education. Many writers invoke dramatic license in order to make a historical period more recognizable and comprehensible to their audience. The love triangle served two purposes. First, the relationship delegitimized the accusers, symbolized by Abigail, when he shows them motivated by vengeful jealousy and ambition. Miller inserted a final coup de grace at Abigail and thereby other accusers at the end. He invented a legend that has Abigail becoming a Boston prostitute after the trials, completing the audience’s disdain at the whole process.^{xxxiv}

The love triangle serves a second, more important purpose. It makes Salem 1692 seem more modern and comprehensible to the audience and strengthens Miller’s allegory. The play was met with mixed reviews. Some praised its message and the courage of the author. Critics, like Eric Bentley, derided the allegory as naïve and trivializing the very real danger of communism.^{xxxv} Famous playwright, Clifford Odets, ridiculed the play as “just a story about a bad marriage.”^{xxxvi} However, Miller scored two, important victories against McCarthy. By modernizing Salem, Miller drew the connection between these two events for people in the 1950s. Also, Miller’s play has shaped the interpretations of both events and their interconnection for subsequent generations. He not only manipulated how people would perceive those events in the present but also ensured that his interpretation would be the popular version of history in the future.

The Witchcraft Hysteria has been summoned often as a cautionary tale in American politics. Inherent in the warning is the belief that neither religion nor any type of fanaticism mix well with politics. Church and state must be separate. In the 1800’s, critics of the Mormons scorned the Mormon fusion of the church and politics.^{xxxvii} Slave owning Southerners, citing the falsehood of Salem burning witches, condemned New England-based Abolitionists as another incarnation of Yankee witch-burners.^{xxxviii} In this way, Southerners used the fire image to link Abolitionist zeal with witch-burning fires. This perception caught on in the North as well and influenced how national history was written.

Because 19th Century Americans viewed the Puritans through the lens of the Trials, the Pilgrims were elevated at this time as the symbolic founding fathers of America. Jamestown, VA was similarly demoted because of slavery and because post-Civil War, Northern historians were reluctant to credit Southerners with foundation of the country.

The term “witch hunt”, thanks to the Salem Hysteria, has an instant recognizable, political meaning. To call an investigation a witch-hunt is to delegitimize it and charge both the investigator and accuser with fraud. The McCarthy’s hearings faced that accusation. More recently, President Bill Clinton’s supporters claimed the various scandals, particularly Monica Lewinsky, were “witch hunts”.^{xxxix} First Lady Hillary Clinton even went so far as to call the scandal a “right-wing conspiracy”, denigrating his accusers as cabal with dubious evidence. (She has since altered her meaning).

Child-abuse investigations are frequently called “witch-hunts” and there are similarities between these episodes and 1692 Salem. First, the accusers are children. This aspect raises the question of whether actual abuse took place, whether the child made up the story in order to get attention, or whether they are merely telling adults what they want to hear. The McMartin case in California in 1983 saw religious-minded parents falsely charging a day care with using their children in a number of bizarre Satanic and sexual rites. When Massachusetts Governor Jane Swift was pardoning five of the Salem witches on Halloween, 2001, she was criticized for failing to pardon a sex offender named Gerald Amirault whose conviction was controversial. One writer drew the similarity between this case and the 1692 accusations.^{xi}

Yet, these analogies are only as good as their similarities to the event. For example, Jean-Paul Satre’s Marxist interpretation of *The Crucible*, where the rich use the trials to exploit the poor, fails because in reality the reverse happened.^{xli} Moreover, to link a dubious threat like 1692 witchcraft to modern terrorist, cannot ignore the unquestionable reality of 9/11.

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 and the subsequent war on terrorism in the form of the Patriot Act have given Salem new life as a political allegory. Both 9/11 and the Witch Trials possess similarities. Both examples are battles against an invisible enemy that strikes and disappears. The terrorists’ ability to hide within American society invokes the image of “the enemy among us” fueling distrust of the “others” in American society, namely Muslim-Americans who like Parris’ slave, Tituba, are perceived as bringing corrupting influences (like religious extremism, ironically) to America and perceived to be incapable of assimilation.

The comparison gains strength from both President Bush and former Attorney General John Ashcroft’s very public, religious enthusiasm. Critics find it easy to link them with the religious bigots who drove the Witch Trials. While promoting his pro-activism book, *Hope Dies Last*, Studs Terkel started a NPR radio interview with a Salem-based rant against Ashcroft.^{xlii} Terkel simultaneously called Ashcroft a reincarnation of and the actual Samuel Parris. Terkel, with the usual historical inaccuracy of people invoking the Trials as a prop for their interpretations, had Parris/Ashcroft showing up after the Hysteria started, manipulating someone else’s children and terrorizing old women. Most appalling was Terkel’s implication that the modern-day terrorist threat was as over-blown and imaginary as Salem. One wonders how Terkel could make such a galling statement because the terrorists murdered three thousand people on national television on 9/11.

He is not alone. Noted journalist Helen Thomas criticized Ashcroft in an article called “Ashcroft’s Power Grows in Terrorist Witch Hunt.” Other investigations of people accused of funding terrorism from within the U.S. are frequently derided as witch hunts.^{xliii} While many of the comparisons are guilty of misrepresenting or falsifying the historical record, they demonstrate the flexible character of the

Witchcraft Trials and the use of their imagery. The Trials are guaranteed a long life in the political realm because their interpretation is easy to manipulate in order to serve modern needs.

Author Gail Collins accurately describes the Witch Trials as a Rorschach test.^{xliv} Reflections on them reveal as much about the interpreter of the events as the events themselves. Salem challenges historians to solve its mystery. Activists, politicians, and other public figures often use the history as a proxy for their own modern agendas and interpretations. Entertainers, writers and the public are enthralled with the Witch Trials' potent brew of drama, intense emotions, heroic martyrs, corrupt villains, the supernatural, repressed sexuality, and all the themes these ingredients bring with them. For all people, the Salem Witch Trials' imagery and emotion will continue to enchant for the foreseeable future.

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Notes:

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- ⁱⁱⁱ Norton, Mary Beth. *In the Devil's Snare*. New York: Vintage Books, 2002, pg. 309.
- ^{iv} Ibid, pg. 311.
- ^v Hill, pg. 269.
- ^{vi} Putnam, Ann. "The Confession of Ann Putnam". In *The Salem Witch Trials Reader*. Hill, Frances ed.. Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2000, pg. 108.
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- ^{viii} Norton, pg. 327.
- ^{ix} Karlsen, Carol F. *The Devil in the Shape of a Women*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987, pg. xii.
- ^x Ibid, pg. 64-67.
- ^{xi} Ibid, pg. 65.
- ^{xii} Ibid, pg. 48-49.
- ^{xiii} Ibid, pg. 51.
- ^{xiv} Ibid, pg. 48-49.
- ^{xv} Demos, John Putnam. "Underlying Themes in the Witchcraft of Seventeenth-Century New England." *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 75, No. 5. (Jun., 1970), 1325.
- ^{xvi} Ibid, pg. 1322.
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- ^{xx} Ryan, pg. 81.
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- ^{xxii} Ibid, pg. 6.
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