

# The salem witch trials analysis



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The Salem Witch Trials has been a debatable topic for many historians enamored by its deviation from the normal as seen in Europe or other European Colonies in North America. As presented in Bryan Le Beau's book *The Story of the Salem Witch Trials*, the story of Salem is unique in that it is centered primarily around the communities incapability to harmonize with one another. In the first two chapters, the book introduces its readers to a brief history of witchcraft trials, including how they began in Europe and followed colonists to the New World. In chapter three, the book describes Salem as it was before the trials and its ultimate path to the devastation it eventually created. It describes the division of the community and how that led to "...the point of institutional, demographic, and economic polarization" (p. 50).

Le Beau's thesis is that " New England communities...suffered from the economic, social, political, and religious dislocations of the modernization process of the Early Modern Period, but to a greater extent than others," he believed, " Salem village fell victim to warring factions, misguided leadership, and geographical limitations that precluded its dealing effectively with those problems" (p. 43). The chapters following Le Beau's thesis chronologically present the Salem Witch Craft trials and what was left in the wake the realization that followed. In using primary sources, the author is able to assert his thesis more thoroughly to his readers. A primary example of this can be seen in his descriptions of the separate cases in which were tried.

He used direct quotations from the accused to make the book more personable so that the reader may be able to digest what is happening. Take

the primal case Le Beau describes; that of “ Martha and Giles Corey and Dorcas Good” (p. 65). The author depicts the apprehension scene of Martha Good tactfully with direct quotes from Martha taken from reports on the case. These quotes prove the outspokenness that she is reportedly known for.

You can also see evidence of Beau’s use of primary sources towards the end of the book when measures were passed on accusing others of witchcraft by the General Court. Le Beau uses a direct quote from Chief Justice Stoughton to express his dismay in not being able to “ clear the land” (p. 181) of witches. Le Beau not only uses direct quotations, but also uses excerpts from reports and documents from the trials to describe the physical attributes of the person being tried. These excerpts are written documents, taken from primary sources by the author, in which the accusers are describing the actions in which they believe to be evidence against the accused. If noticed by the reader, these descriptions often times have physical characteristics about the accused that are meant to disgregate the jury from the accused so that they would prosecute him/her.

In the first couple of chapters it describes how “ historians have drawn a composite image of witches in seventeenth century New England as being comparatively poor, female, middle-aged, and married or widowed; having fewer than the average number of children; often being in trouble with the law or in conflict with friends an family; appearing abrasive in style;...” (p. 26). This description shows the reader that there were other factors influencing the persecution of the accused besides affliction. Salem believed in witchcraft, but they were also looking for someone to place the blame of <https://assignbuster.com/the-salem-witch-trials-analysis/>

their hardships. Because of the seclusion of Salem, they were placing their hardships on one another and accusing their neighbors of witchcraft if their cattle died, crops were bad, or anything was stolen from them.

Le Beau also references secondary sources throughout the pages in his book, giving his thesis reinforcement. His use of statistics and maps allow the reader to grasp and understand the full comparison between the Salem Witch Trials and those carried out in Europe or in other European colonies. The statistics used are to compare the witch trials of Salem to other witch hunts that occurred before and after. He uses statistical data proving his argument that the majority of those accused are female. He also uses statistics to make the reader understand the intensity of the Salem Witch Trails.

They were by far some of the worst statistically. The maps that Le Beau uses shows the reader geographically the broad scope at which accusers were accusing their neighbors. It is a very useful tool in understanding the severity of the witch trials. Le Beau's book is notably accommodating to readers who are uneducated in European and colonial witch craft trials. The brief, but descriptive, history captivates the reader by producing factual information with statistical analysis based on multiple European colonies and gender. Read the Crucible movie viewing guide I do agree with Le Beau's belief that "New England communities...suffered from the economic, social, political, and religious dislocations of the modernization process of the Early Modern Period, but to a greater extent than others," he believed, "Salem village fell victim to warring factions, misguided leadership, and geographical limitations that precluded its dealing effectively with those problems"

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because of its thorough details through primary and secondary sources (p. 43). Le Beau conveys his beliefs that the Salem Witch Craft trials occurred because of the ineptitude of Salem village to work as one to fix their community. Instead they warred and blamed each other for each others problems. Le Beau shows through his use of primary and secondary sources that Salem village created its own downfall and that it took the lives of their neighbors for them to realize what the problem really was. It was definitely useful for me to look at the primary and secondary sources that Le Beau used because it tells me that he did use other historian's work in researching for his; however, he does use the University of Virginia's Salem Witch Trials Documentary Archive and Transcription Project which tells me that the quotes from the accused and the accusers are verifiable.

This is true for the other document inserts he used as well. I would recommend this book to any reader who is just starting to learn about the Salem Witch Trials because I know that I found it very informative, easy to understand, and was chronological. There is close to no bias throughout the book and for that I am appreciative. Le Beau's book *The Story of the Salem Witch Trials* allows the reader to grasp " A biography of a terrible but perfectly normal superstition" (p. 1)