

# Salem witch trials essay sample



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In 1692, Salem, MA was the scene of the Salem witch trials where there have been many innocent people were accused and convicted of witchcraft. As history has shown, there is no denying that the Salem witch trials occurred, which are being disputed today. The general belief is that the trials were brought on by a combination of the extreme religious beliefs of the Puritans, political control of the town and the hysteria and frenzy exhibited by these young women. The winter of the year 1692, the place is Salem, MA. The society was controlled by their religious beliefs. It was structured and any deviation was frowned upon. The children of Salem were expected to follow their elders. The Puritans who helped settle Massachusetts were members of a strict religious sector. They had faith that their simple ways were the purest form of Christianity.

Children and adults were bound by a moral code. All were expected to work hard, and they believed that everything in their lives were preplanned by God (Yolen, Jane & Stemple). Anything outside the code would allow bad influence to infiltrate their lives. Some of the children (Betty Parris, her little sister and her cousin Abigail Williams) would listen to stories by Betty's servant Tituba about her home country Barbados. Betty Parris father, Reverend Parris, was the minister in the town. Even the strict upbringing of the girls did not deter them from listening to the stories from Tituba about magic and fortune telling which was highly frowned upon. One morning, the girls were inflicted by some unknown sickness. It caused them to convulse and scream out in pain.

Due to this illness that inflicted the girls the local townspeople became scared and they were looking for answers. Obviously, the only explanation

by the local doctor is that this must be witchcraft. The Reverend Parris spent hours each day praying for help, but the girls grew no better. By the end of January, all of Salem Village knew about the girls' afflictions. Neighbors stopped by to see for themselves the strange goings-on at the parsonage. The thought of witchcraft frightened them, but it excited them too. (Kent, Deborah) The girls were persuaded to give names of the witches within the town. With some coaching from Reverend Parris, the girls started pointing fingers. The first victim was the servant Tituba, and then Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne. The men and women of Salem Village took these reports very seriously. They believed that the devil was constantly at work, trying to win souls away from God. (Kent, Deborah) The girls started to accuse everyone including some important people of the town. The girls started to accuse anyone they could - no one was safe. " The afflicted girls accused the most influenced people in the community.

Events spiraled out of control. (McBain, Jenny) Some of the other girls, Ann Putnam and Elizabeth Hubbard, started to act like they too were inflicted with the devil as well. Some of the men in the village wanted to seek out advice from Judges Hawthorne and Judge Corwin of Salem Village. The judges decided to charge the accused with witchcraft. Once the actual trials started, there were around 200 accused and jailed. By the time all the hysteria of the witchcraft craziness had finished, nineteen innocent people were hanged, one person was crushed under rocks, and four people died in jail waiting for their trials to start. The aftermath of the actual trials caused hardships on many due to the trials. Some remained in jail because they could not pay their court costs. The town structures and land suffered due to

lack of upkeep and care. No one died as a convicted witch in America again and it was the last religious witch hunts after the Salem witch trials. Salem Village separated from Salem Town in 1752 and became the town of Danvers. However, this separation did not wipe away the history of the witch trials from its past. For over 300 years, historians, sociologists, psychologists and others continue to research and write about them to this day, and they continue to serve as a reminder of how politics, family squabbles, religion, economics and the imaginations and fears of people can yield tragic consequences. (Tim Sutter)

It wasn't until 300 years later that all the accused including those that were hanged, were actually exonerated. Naturally religious people at that time were anxious to determine the extent to which their church was menaced by supernatural powers. Everyone believed that there actually was a devil, a created being whose efforts were directed toward the working of evil.(Shirley Jackson) Some believe that the Puritans extreme religious beliefs contributed towards the witch trials. As previously stated, the Puritans were expected to follow a strict set of rules. When the Puritans choose to leave the England way of life, is when they chosen to develop a more stern religion and this is when their idea of the devil became more defined. To begin with a little background information is needed on these people. First of all this happened in the Puritan village. The Puritans were a very religious group. They had left England to start a new colony free of religious tolerance. Many of them also wanted a colony without any sinners, which was a factor in their strong belief in the devil and witchcraft.(Boyer & Nissenbaum) Their beliefs were focused

on depravity, covenant, election, grace and love. Depravity was the belief that there is evil in the world.

“ The Puritans believed that evil was palpable presence in the world, and that the universe was a scene of cosmic struggle between darkness and light. But no evil ever surprised them or threatened to undermine their faith. (Hackett Fisher) The second belief was covenant. This belief was found in the Book of Genesis. The idea was that God made a contract with the people; in return they would have salvation. The third belief is election. This belief that there were only the chosen that would be admitted to the covenant. The conviction is that Christ died for only the chosen ones and not the entire human race. The fourth belief is grace. This idea played along with salvation and election. Grace is not an idea but more of an emotion. They believed that once the emotion was bestowed upon oneself that you would never lose it. The final belief is love. This faith goes hand in hand with salvation.

Puritans assumed that if they did not have unconditional love for God that they would not be delivered to salvation. The combination of the beliefs would have contributed to the overall hysteria that led to the Salem witch Trials. Something that couldn't be explained had to be witchcraft. What else could this actually be? Mather played a much more direct role in the Salem Trials. His sermons and written works fanned the flames of the witchcraft hysteria. He declared that the Devil was at work in Salem, and that witches should face the harshest punishment.(Ray Benjamin)

To them anything that is not in their normal world would have been due to witchcraft. Another contributing factor of the trials, the political control in the town. The background is that Salem was divided into two parts: Salem Town  
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and Salem Village. Salem Village was actually part of Salem Town but was broken away because of its economy, different class of people, and their character. The residents of Salem Village were poor farmers whose main way of living is cultivating crops. In a different light, Salem Town was an up and coming town at the center of trade with London. Many of those residing in Salem Town were wealthy merchants. Following the pattern common to other New England communities, as the village grew, it began to develop a distinctive identity and separate interests from the town. Most significantly, by the 1670s, the farmers requested their own church due to their distance from the town. For some villagers, though by no means all, a separate church represented a broader ambition for greater sovereignty or even complete independence from the town, something that would not occur until 1752 (Salem Village is now called Danvers).

Salem Town initially turned-down the farmers' request, but in March 1672, with a push from the colonial government, the town granted Salem Village the liberty to hire a minister for themselves. The village was also permitted to establish a committee to help assess and gather taxes for the ministry. Villagers still continued to participate in town life, voted in town elections, and paid most town taxes, but for certain purposes, primarily dealing with their own church, they had a degree of autonomy.(Boyer & Nissenbaum) For many years, Salem Village tried to gain independence from Salem Town. The town, which depended on the farmers for food, determined crop prices and collected taxes from the village. Despite the three-hour walk between the two communities, Salem Village did not have its own church and minister until 1674.(Peter Charles Hoffer) Salem Village was also divided into social

classes as well. The townspeople that lived within and nearby Salem Town had become merchants, such as blacksmiths, carpenters, and innkeepers. They supported the town and enjoyed the economic changes happening.

Sadly, many of the farmers who lived far from town believed the changes within Salem Town threatened the Puritan beliefs. One of the main families to denounce the economic changes was the Putnams—a strong and influential force behind the witchcraft accusations.(Peter Charles Hoffer)

Anxiety developed when Salem Village elected Reverend Samuel Parris as the new minister. Parris was a strict Puritan and would condemn the economic changes of Salem Town as the control of the Devil. His beliefs split Salem Village and caused hostilities between the merchants and farmers.

Accordingly, most of the people accused of witchcraft lived within town, while the accusers lived on the outskirts of Salem Village. Believe it or not Reverend Parris was a strong supporter of the witch trials, and his emotional lectures helped play a big role into the hysteria. In addition to their religious beliefs, the younger generation implicating the accused of witchcraft was a contributing factor of the trials. The children were expected to conduct themselves under the same stern way of life as the adults—doing chores, attending church services, and not expressing themselves at all. Any show of emotion, such as excitement, fear, or anger, was discouraged, and would be punished if they did so. The children weren't allowed to play." Puritans saw these activities as sinful distractions.(Jenny MacBain) Aside from the girls, boys had a few outlets for their imagination.

They were allowed to work as apprentices outside the home. Boys were also allowed to explore the outdoors, hunting and fishing. On the other hand, girls

were expected to tend to the house, helping their mothers cook, wash, clean, and sew. Their rigorous schedule it was inevitable that these girls looked for an outlet. Many children learned to read, but most households owned only the Bible and other religious works—including a few that described evil spirits and witchcraft in great detail. There were a few books written for children, but these often warned against bad behavior and described the punishment that children would suffer for sinful acts. (Yolen, Jane and Stemple, Heidi Elisabeth Yolen) Abigail Williams and Betty Parris were not so worried with the sin and punishment of doing things wrong. That is why they were attracted to Tituba's stories and fortune telling. These things were so horrid and activities were strictly prohibited, that it filled them with fear and guilt. This contribution may have been one reason for their hysterical behavior. And at a time when young girls were forbidden to act out or express themselves, it is easy to see why they were so enraptured by the attention they received when they became "bewitched." (Boyer & Nissenbaum)

Many of the girls wanted to participate in the hysteria because of the attention they were receiving from the townspeople. Of course, there were additional factors behind the girls' actions and motivation. Unfortunately, what is shocking is that the accusations from these girls were how the reaction from the community was taken. The girls may have influenced the witch hunt, but it seems that the adults are really the ones that instilled the hysteria into the townspeople. The girls played a big role in the starting of the witch trials but the adults had also contributed to them by not understanding what was going on and looking for any answer they could



fine. Unfortunately the most obvious one to them was witchcraft and devil must have been there. Boyer and Nissenbaum help us to understand not only the ways in which the outbreak of accusations in Salem was part of a larger pattern of communal conflict, but also serve to warn us that the divisive powers such conflicts have the potential to instigate modern witch hunts. This research paper has proven that with the combination of religion, politics and hysteria, which the witch trials were caused and of course it was a mistake by all accounts. **TIMELINE FOR SALEM WITCH TRIALS**

1629: Salem is settled.

1641: English law makes witchcraft a capital crime.

1684: England declares that the colonies may not self-govern. November,

1689: Samuel Parris is named the new minister of Salem. Parris moves to Salem from Boston, where Memorable Providence was published. October

16, 1691: Villagers vow to drive Parris out of Salem and stop contributing to his salary. January 20, 1692: Eleven-year old Abigail Williams and nine-year-

old Elizabeth Parris begin behaving much as the Goodwin children acted four years earlier. Soon Ann Putnam Jr. and other Salem girls begin acting

similarly. Mid-February, 1692: Doctor Griggs, who attends to the “ afflicted” girls, suggests that witchcraft may be the cause of their strange behavior.

February 25, 1692: Tituba, at the request of neighbor Mary Sibley, bakes a “ witch cake” and feeds it to a dog. According to an English folk remedy, feeding a dog this kind of cake, which contained the urine of the afflicted, would counteract the spell put on Elizabeth and Abigail. The reason the cake is fed to a dog is because the dog is believed a “ familiar” of the Devil. Late-

February, 1692: Pressured by ministers and townspeople to say who caused her odd behavior, Elizabeth identifies Tituba.

The girls later accuse Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne of witchcraft. February 29, 1692: Arrest warrants are issued for Tituba, Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne. March 1, 1692: Magistrates John Hathorne and Jonathan Corwin examine Tituba, Sarah Good, and Sarah Osborne for “witches teats.” Tituba confesses to practicing witchcraft and confirms Good and Osborne are her co-conspirators. March 11, 1692: Ann Putnam Jr. shows symptoms of affliction by witchcraft. Mercy Lewis, Mary Walcott, and Mary Warren later allege affliction as well. March 12, 1692: Ann Putnam Jr. accuses Martha Cory of witchcraft. March 19, 1692: Abigail Williams denounces Rebecca Nurse as a witch. March 21, 1692: Magistrates Hathorne and Corwin examine Martha Cory. March 23, 1692: Salem Marshal Deputy Samuel Brabrook arrests four-year-old Dorcas Good. March 24, 1692: Corwin and Hathorne examine Rebecca Nurse.

March 26, 1692: Hathorne and Corwin interrogate Dorcas.

March 28, 1692: Elizabeth Proctor is accused of witchcraft. April 3, 1692: Sarah Cloyce, after defending her sister, Rebecca Nurse, is accused of witchcraft. April 11, 1692: Hathorne and Corwin examine Sarah Cloyce and Elizabeth Proctor. On the same day Elizabeth's husband, John, who protested the examination of his wife, becomes the first man accused of witchcraft and is incarcerated. Early April, 1692: The Proctors' servant and accuser, Mary Warren, admits lying and accuses the other accusing girls of lying. April 13, 1692: Ann Putnam Jr. accuses Giles Cory of witchcraft and alleges that a man who died at Cory's house also haunts her.

April 19, 1692: Abigail Hobbs, Bridget Bishop, Giles Cory and Mary Warren are examined. Deliverance Hobbs confesses to practicing witchcraft. Mary Warren reverses her statement made in early April and rejoins the accusers.

April 22, 1692: Mary Easty, another of Rebecca Nurse's sisters who defended her, is examined by Hathorne and Corwin. Hathorne and Corwin also

examine Nehemiah Abbott, William and Deliverance Hobbs, Edward and Sarah Bishop, Mary Black, Sarah Wildes, and Mary English. April 30, 1692:

Several girls accuse former Salem minister George Burroughs of witchcraft.

May 2, 1692: Hathorne and Corwin examine Sarah Morey, Lyndia Dustin,

Susannah Martin and Dorcas Hoar. May 4, 1692: George Burroughs is arrested in Maine.

May 7, 1692: George Burroughs is returned to Salem and placed in jail. May

9, 1692: Corwin and Hathorne examine Burroughs and Sarah Churchill.

Burroughs is moved to a Boston jail. May 10, 1692: Corwin and Hathorne examine George Jacobs, Sr. and his granddaughter Margaret Jacobs. Sarah

Osborne dies in prison. May 14, 1692: Increase Mather and Sir

William Phipps, the newly elected governor of the colony, arrive in Boston.

They bring with them a charter ending the 1684 prohibition of self-

governance within the colony. May 18, 1692: Mary Easty is released from

prison. Following protest by her accusers, she is again arrested. Roger

Toothaker is also arrested on charges of witchcraft. May 27, 1692: Phipps

issues a commission for a Court of Oyer and Terminer and appoints as judges

John Hathorne, Nathaniel Saltonstall, Bartholomew Gedney, Peter Sergeant,

Samuel Sewall, Wait Still Winthrop, and Lieutenant Governor William

Stoughton.

May 31, 1692: Hathorne, Corwin and Gednew examine Martha Carrier, John Alden, Wilmott Redd, Elizabeth Howe and Phillip English. English and Alden later escape prison and do not return to Salem until after the trials end. June 2, 1692: Bridget Bishop is the first to be tried and convicted of witchcraft. She is sentenced to die. June 8, 1692: Eighteen year old Elizabeth Booth shows symptoms of affliction by witchcraft. June 10, 1692: Bridget Bishop is hanged at Gallows Hill. Following the hanging Nathaniel Saltonstall resigns from the court and is replaced by Corwin. June 15, 1692: Cotton Mather writes a letter requesting the court not use spectral evidence as a standard and urging that the trials be speedy. The Court of Oyer and Terminer pays more attention to the request for speed and less attention to the criticism of spectral evidence. June 16, 1692: Roger Toothaker dies in prison.

June 29-30, 1692: Rebecca Nurse, Susannah Martin, Sarah Wildes, Sarah Good, and Elizabeth Howe are tried, pronounced guilty and sentenced to hang. July 19, 1692: Rebecca Nurse, Susannah Martin, Elizabeth Howe, Sarah Good and Sarah Wildes are hanged at Gallows Hill. August 5, 1692: George Jacobs Sr., Martha Carrier, George Burroughs, John Willard and John and Elizabeth Proctor are pronounced guilty and sentenced to hang. August 19, 1692: George Jacobs Sr., Martha Carrier, George Burroughs, John Willard and John Proctor are hanged on Gallows Hill. Elizabeth Proctor is not hanged because she is pregnant. August 20, 1692: Margaret Jacobs recants the testimony that led to the execution of her grandfather George Jacobs Sr. and Burroughs. September 9, 1692: Martha Corey, Mary Easty, Alice Parker, Ann Pudeator, Dorcas Hoar and Mary Bradbury are pronounced guilty and sentenced to hang. Mid-September, 1692: Giles Cory is indicted.

September 17, 1692: Margaret Scott, Willmott Redd, Samuel Wardwell, Mary Parker, Abigail Faulkner, Rebecca Earnes, Mary Lacy, Ann Foster and Abigail Hobbs are tried and sentenced to hang. September 19, 1692: Sheriffs administer Peine Forte Et Dure (pressing) to Giles Cory after he refuses to enter a plea to the charges of witchcraft against him. After two days under the weight, Cory dies. September 22, 1692: Martha Cory, Margaret Scott, Mary Easty, Alice Parker, Ann Pudeator, Willmott Redd, Samuel Wardwell, and Mary Parker are hanged. Hoar escapes execution by confessing. October 3, 1692: The Reverend Increase Mather, President of Harvard College and father to Cotton Mather, denounces the use of spectral evidence. October 8, 1692: Governor Phipps orders that spectral evidence no longer be admitted in witchcraft trials

. October 29, 1692: Phipps prohibits further arrests, releases many accused witches, and dissolves the Court of Oyer and Terminer. November 25, 1692: The General Court establishes a Superior Court to try remaining witches. January 3, 1693: Judge Stoughton orders execution of all suspected witches who were exempted by their pregnancy. Phipps denied enforcement of the order causing Stoughton to leave the bench. January 1693: 49 of the 52 surviving people brought into court on witchcraft charges are released because their arrests were based on spectral evidence. 1693: Tituba is released from jail and sold to a new master. May 1693: Phipps pardons those still in prison on witchcraft charges. January 14, 1697: The General Court orders a day of fasting and soul-searching for the tragedy at Salem. Moved, Samuel Sewall publicly confesses error and guilt. 1697: Minister Samuel

Parris is ousted as minister in Salem and replaced by Joseph Green. 1702: The General Court declares the 1692 trials unlawful.

1706: Ann Putnam Jr., one of the leading accusers, publicly apologizes for her actions in 1692. 1711: The colony passes a legislative bill restoring the rights and good names of those accused of witchcraft and grants 600 pounds in restitution to their heirs. 1752: Salem Village is renamed Danvers.

1957: Massachusetts formally apologizes for the events of 1692. 1992: On the 300th anniversary of the trials, a witchcraft memorial designed by James Cutler is dedicated in Salem.

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