

Salemwitchcraftthyste ria essay

[Law](#), [Court](#)



The 17th century was riddled with strong beliefs in the supernatural and the presence of Satan on Earth in colonial North America. Witchcraft was majorly used by peasants with particular charms associated with evil spirits and demons for prosperity in their agricultural activities. There was in fact literature on the same written around the same time. For instance, Joseph Glanvill in 1668 claimed proves of the existence of these powers in witches and ghosts in a treatise titled " Against Modern Sadducism". This and other works by the likes of Cotton Mather, a minister at the Boston North Church, raised the fears of the population that demons roamed and were active on Earth (Adams, 2009). As a result, there was caution from all quarters regarding activity of witchcraft and dark magic. This shows that the society at the time had common thinking and religious views and beliefs were blindly followed. Christianity was almost occult.

In Salem Village (today's Danver, Massachusetts), people believed that ills and misfortunes were as a result of the Devil's underhand antics. Otherwise natural occurrences like death at infancy, crop failure or social conflict and friction were attributed to the supernatural. There were numerous witchcraft accusations as a result of many unusually sized outbreaks.

In his 1689 book, *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions*, Cotton Mather described alleged oracular observations in which stupendous witchcraft affected children of a Boston mason. In his book, the mason's eldest child was tempted by the devil and consequently stole linen from their laundry woman, Mary Glover (Adams, 2009). Since Mary Glover's husband often referred to her as a witch, she was accused of casting evil spells on the children. Allegedly, after this event, four of the mason's

children went into fits of strange experiences which were at that time called “disease of astonishment”. The children experienced neck and back pains, their tongues were drawn out of their throats, loud random outcries, becoming limber, flapping their arms like birds, or trying to harm others as well as themselves. This was quickly associated with witchcraft. This was a stage set for the craze of 1692 known as the Salem Witch Trials.

The Salem Witch Trials were a number of hearings and prosecutions that involved a number of people accused of witchcraft between February of 1692 and May of 1693. The hearings were done in Salem Town and the surrounding towns too. The court of Oyer and Terminer conducted the most infamous of the trials in Salem Town, 1692.

A daughter and a niece of a minister, Reverend Parris, had fits that were termed as beyond epileptic fits or natural disease fits by a minister in the nearby Beverly, Reverend John Hale. An eyewitness, Reverend Deodat Lawson, a former minister of the town, detailed the symptoms of the fits and alleged work of demons and witches. William Griggs, a doctor, found no evidence of ailment. Consequently, there were similar behaviors exhibited by other women of the village especially when Lawson preached.

In a trial that was largely attributed to family feuds, Sarah Good a homeless beggar, Sarah Osborne who was in her second marriage and rarely attended church and Tituba a slave of a different ethnicity were accused, arrested and jailed. They were ‘perfect’ descriptions of witches as they were outcasts with no one to defend them (Adams, 2009). After this there were more accusations and counter accusations. Several people were jailed with some dying in prison. The Oyer and Terminer Court sought advice from the

influential ministers of New England and it was composed by Cotton Mather. As evident from the buildup of events, the trials were based on theocracy. The firm believers, instigators, eyewitnesses and the afflicted mainly were ministers or those in their immediate families (Adams, 2009). The court also sought advice and guidance from the ministers. It is therefore not hard to conclude that the accusers were mainly the theocrats led by the ministers. A new governor, William Phips, put the trials to an end in February 1693. At this time there were at least 50 people in prison. George Lincoln Burr records that that was one of the most notorious cases of mass hysteria and is a cautionary tale pointing at the dangers of isolationism and religious extremism as well as false accusations and lapses in the process of law. It is argued that the trials were the rock upon which theocracy was shattered.

References

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