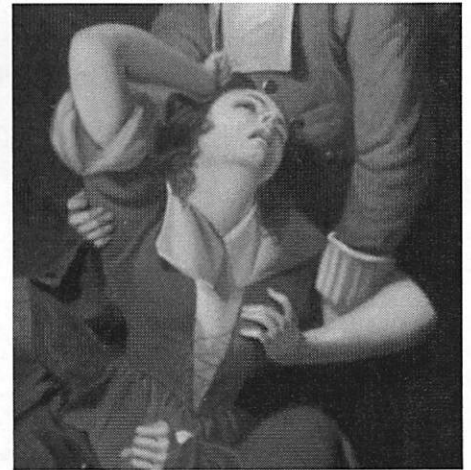
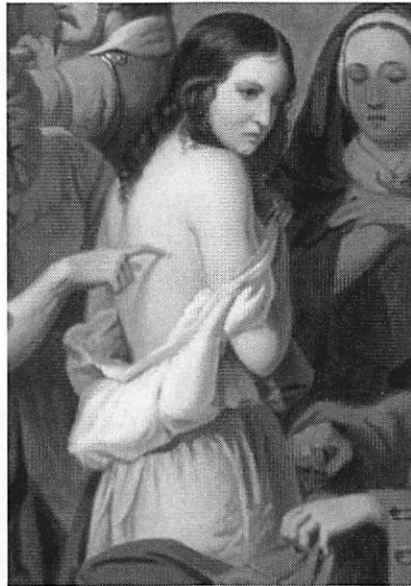


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# What Caused The Salem Witch Trial Hysteria of 1692?

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A Document Based Question (DBQ)

## What Caused the Salem Witch Trial Hysteria of 1692?

On September 19, 1692, 81-year-old Giles Cory lay beneath several boards piled high with rocks. A tough old man, Giles had refused to testify in the Salem witchcraft trials. As another stone was added, his last words are believed to have been, “More weight!” Something had gone terribly wrong. Why in the summer months of 1692 was Giles Cory pressed to death? And why were 19 other people from Salem, Massachusetts, hanged?

In the 1600s, a large number of English immigrants arrived in New England. The leaders of these settlers were **Puritans**. Puritans were Protestant Christians who were unhappy with their church in England. They came to New England so they could practice Christianity in a pure way.

The land of New England and Puritan beliefs fit together well. Both were tough. The New England climate was harsh with long cold winters. New England soil was rocky and not easy to farm. But the Puritans were determined. Hard times were simply God’s test.

Puritans believed in **predestination**, the idea that God elects or chooses before birth who will go to Heaven and who will not. Puritans lived with the possibility that they were damned to Hell. The Puritan ethic of hard work was partly an attempt to prove to themselves and others that they were among the chosen.

To guide them through this difficult life, Puritans had help – the Bible. Puritans were **fundamentalists**. They believed that every word in the Christian Bible was the true word of God and was to be followed to the letter. What

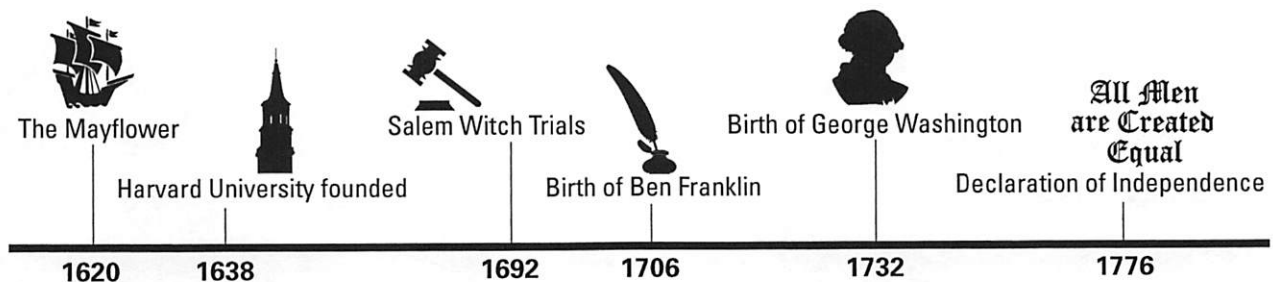
the Bible said, Puritans believed, and the Bible spoke of the Devil and of witches.

The Devil was indeed clever with the ability to enter a normal person’s body and turn that person into a **witch**. Once under the Devil’s power, the witch could make all kinds of trouble. A witch might cause a neighbor’s bread to burn or cow to run away. A witch might cause a young girl to cry out in church, or a faithful husband to commit adultery.

In 17th century New England, witchcraft was a serious crime. Convicted witches could be put to death. The problem was how to prove a person was a witch. Courts accepted several kinds of evidence:

1. Admission of guilt. This made it easy.
2. An unusual power or physical trait. A man who could hold a rifle, arm extended, with his finger in the barrel, was a suspect. A woman who confused the words when saying the Lord’s Prayer might be a witch.
3. Anger followed by mischief. If a suspected witch shouted hateful words at someone and later that person broke a leg, this was evidence of witchcraft.
4. **Spectral evidence**. This was testimony by a victim that they were “visited” by some demon, perhaps while sleeping. Courts did not like spectral evidence because it was hard to prove.

In the 80-year period from 1620 to 1700, 16 colonists outside of Salem were put to death for witchcraft. But this was a small number com-



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pared to the number executed in Salem. In just a 15-week period from June 10 through September 22, 1692, 19 men and women from the Salem area were hanged for witchcraft. Another, an 81-year-old man, was pressed to death by stones.

The trouble in Salem began when two young girls, Betty Parris, age nine, and her 11-year-old cousin Abigail Williams, asked a West Indian slave woman named Tituba to help them know their fortunes. They were interested in what their future sweethearts would be like. To find this out they used an old trick of suspending an egg-white in a glass of water. Then they looked for telltale shapes. Disturbingly, one of the girls thought she saw the shape of a coffin.

Over the next several months the two girls began to show strange behavior. Betty's father, the Reverend Samuel Parris, was puzzled by the girls' "getting into Holes, creeping under Chairs and Stools, . . . uttering foolish and ridiculous speeches. . . ." Reverend Parris learned about the sessions with Tituba. He decided that the girls were under the Devil's spell. Soon the strange behavior spread to other young girls in town. Under pressure from Reverend Parris and other adults, on February 29, 1692, the girls identified two local white women and the slave Tituba as the witches who were causing them such pain. The Salem witch hunt was under way.

The three accused women were carted off to jail in Boston. Only Tituba confessed to practicing witchcraft, an admission that saved her life. Over the next few weeks, the odd behavior of the

girls continued. Then in late March the first adult fell victim to the witches' spell.

Accusations increased and even included a four-year-old girl who spent nine months in leg irons before being released.

Throughout March, April, and half of May, the jails continued to fill. A special court was set

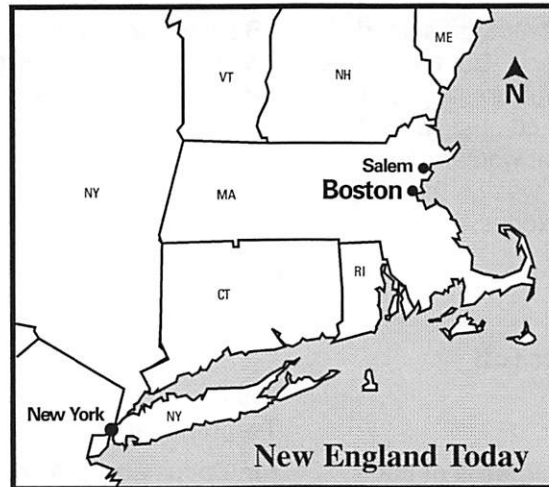
up and the first trials were held June 2. On June 10, Bridget Bishop from Salem Village was hanged. On July 19, five more witches met the same fate. And so it continued until September 22, when a mass hanging of eight accused witches ended the executions.

The tragedy at Salem was nearly over. The trials

were called to a halt by Governor Phips. The fact that the governor's own wife was accused helped to stop the killing. The Puritan church leader Cotton Mather agreed things had gone too far. Mather said, "It were better that ten suspected witches should escape, than that one innocent person should be condemned." By May of 1693 the jails had been emptied. One hundred accused witches still in jail were either declared not guilty or pardoned.

The hangings had ended, but the big questions remain. Why were 19 people put to death for witchcraft in Salem and another pressed to death by stones? Why were more people hanged for witchcraft in Salem in one summer than were put to death in all of New England in nearly 100 years? Who or what was to blame?

Examine the 9 documents that follow and formulate your answer to the question: *What caused the Salem witch trial hysteria of 1692?*



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## Document 1

Source: Exodus 22:18, King James version of the Bible.

*“Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.”*

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## Document 2

Source: Adapted from Salem Court Records.

### SALEM WITCHCRAFT HANGINGS 1692

June 10	Bridget Bishop
July 19	Sarah Good
July 19	Elizabeth Howe
July 19	Susannah Martin
July 19	Rebecca Nurse
July 19	Sarah Wildes
August 19	George Burroughs
August 19	Martha Carrier
August 19	George Jacobs
August 19	John Proctor
August 19	John Willard
September 19	Giles Cory (pressed to death)
September 22	Martha Cory
September 22	Mary Easty
September 22	Alice Parker
September 22	Mary Parker
September 22	Ann Pudeater
September 22	Margaret Scott
September 22	Wilmot Redd
September 22	Samuel Wardwell

### ACCUSED WHO DIED IN JAIL

Sarah Good's child died prior to July 19, 1692.

May 10, 1692	Sarah Osborne
June 16, 1692	Roger Toothaker
December 3, 1692	Ann Foster
March 10, 1693	Lydia Dustin



### Document 3

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**Source:** Cotton Mather. *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions*, Boston, 1689.

These evil spirits are all around.... Go tell mankind, that there are devils and witches.... New England has had examples of their existence...and that not only the wigwams of Indians...but the houses of Christians...have undergone the annoyance of evil spirits.

**Note:** Cotton Mather was one of colonial New England's leading ministers and intellectuals. His words were read and taken very seriously by much of the Puritan population throughout the colony.

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### Document 4

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**Source:** "Examination of a Witch" painting by T.H. Matteson, 1853. Reprinted by permission of the Peabody Essex Museum.



## Document 5

Source: John Demos, "Underlying Themes in the Witchcraft of 17th Century New England."  
*American Historical Review*, June, 1970.

### The Accused (Salem, 1692)

#### Marital Status

	<i>Single</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Widowed</i>	<b>Total</b>
Male	8	15	1	24
Female	29	61	20	110
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>134</b>

#### Age

	<i>Under 20</i>	<i>21-40</i>	<i>41-60</i>	<i>Over 60</i>	<b>Total</b>
Male	6	6	11	7	30
Female	18	15	41	14	88
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>118</b>

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### The Accusers (Salem, 1692)

#### Marital Status

	<i>Single</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Widowed</i>	<b>Total</b>
Male	5	0	0	5
Female	23	6	0	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>34</b>

#### Age

	<i>Under 11</i>	<i>11-15</i>	<i>16-20</i>	<i>Over 21</i>	<b>Total</b>
Male	0	1	1	0	2
Female	1	7	13	6	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>29</b>

## Document 6

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**Source:** The examination of Bridget Bishop at Salem Village, 19 April, 1692, as recorded by Samuel Parris.

*As soon as she came near, all (the afflicted girls) fell into fits....*

**(Examiner)** (Speaking to afflicted girls) Hath this woman hurt you?

**(Bridget Bishop)** I never saw these persons before....

**(Examiner)** They say you bewitched your first husband to death.

**(Bishop)** If it please your worship, I know nothing of it.

*She shook her head, and the afflicted were tortured.*

**(Examiner)** Why you seem to act witchcraft before us by the motion of your body, which seems to have influence upon the afflicted?

**(Bishop)** I know nothing of it. I am innocent to a witch.  
I know not what a witch is.

*Then she turned up her eyes, and the eyes of the afflicted were turned up.*

## Document 7

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**Source:** Charles W. Upham, *Salem Witchcraft*, Boston, 1867.

What are we to think of those persons who...continued the accusations – the “afflicted children” and their associates?... They soon...became intoxicated...by the terrible success of their imposture (acting), and were swept along by the frenzy they had occasioned.... Once or twice they were caught in their own snare; and nothing but the blindness of the bewildered community saved them from...well-deserved punishment.... It is dreadful to reflect upon the enormity of their wickedness.... there can be no doubt that they were great actors.

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**Document 8**

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Source: James West Davidson and Mark Hamilton Lytle, *After the Fact*, 1982.

Adolescents, especially in the presence of Tituba, might very well have succumbed (given in) to the suggestion of bewitchment. The fits they experienced were very likely genuine, born of anxiety over a magic that threatened to overpower them. The diagnosis also explains many of the adult fits experienced by those who were convinced that their neighbors were conjuring against them.

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**Note:** This drawing of a 19th century hysterical convulsive attack is strikingly similar to the Salem girls' fits. Note the crossed legs--a symptom of many of the Salem girls.

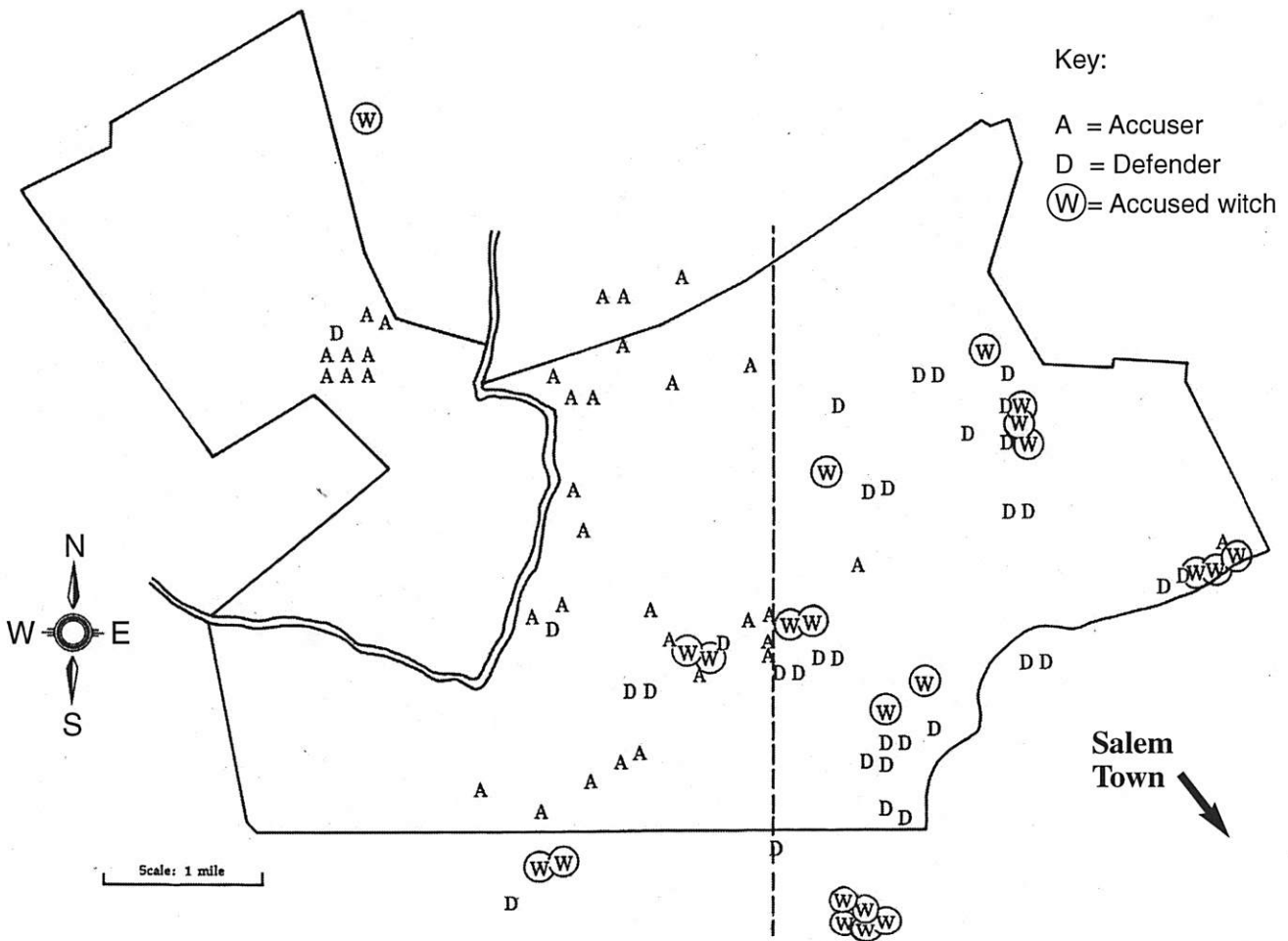


Document 9

Source: Reprinted by permission of Harvard University Press from *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft*, by Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Copyright (c) 1974 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

Map of Salem Village 1692

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Question: What were the major causes of the hysteria that took place in Salem Massachusetts at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century?

Document G

Description of Bridget Bishop Accused Witch

Edward Bishop had resided, for some seven years previous to the witchcraft trials, within the limits of Salem, near the Beverly line. His wife Bridget was a singular character, not easily described. She kept a house of refreshment for travellers, and a shovel-board for the entertainment of her guests, and generally seems to have countenanced amusements and gayeties to an extent that exposed her to some scandal. She is described as wearing 'a black cap and a black hat, and a red paragon bodice, bordered and looped with different colors . . . ."

Document H

Reverend Hale, the Minister of the Beverly congregation

"A certain woman being in full communion in our church, came to me to desire that Goodwife Bishop, her neighbor, wife of Edward Bishop, Jr. might not be permitted to receive the Lord's Supper in our church till she had given her satisfaction for some offences that were against her; namely, because the said Bishop did entertain people in her house at unreasonable hours in the night, to keep drinking and playing at shovel-board, whereby discord did arise in other families, and young people were in danger to be corrupted. The night after this complaint was brought to me, the woman was found to be distracted and we sought the Lord by fasting and prayer. After a while, the woman recovered her senses and expressed a suspicion that she had been bewitched by Bishop's wife."

Document I

Testimony by Richard Coman at the witchcraft trial of Bridget Bishop

I being awake did then see Bridget Bishop of Salem, alias Oliver, come into the room we lay in and two women more with her, which two women were strangers to me. I knew them not, but said Bishop came in her red paragon bodice and the rest of her clothing which she then usually did wear. . . . And quickly after they appeared the light was out, and the curtains at the foot of the bed opened, where I did see her. And presently [she] came and lay upon my breast or body and so oppressed me that I could not speak nor stir, no not so much as to awake my wife, although I endeavored much so to do it.

Document J

Crimes the accused witches were convicted of prior to 1692

Assaultive speech	20
Theft	10
Lying	6
Sex offenses	5
Physical assault	4
Resisting authority	2
Arson	1
Fraud	1
Unspecified	3

Question: What were the major causes of the hysteria that took place in Salem Massachusetts at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century?

Document K

Woodcut from R.B. Crouch's The Kingdom of Darkness (London, 1688), a work popular on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean



Document L

Female Witches by Presence or Absence of Brothers or Sons, New England, 1620-1725 (A)

Action	Women without Brothers or Sons	Women with Brothers or Sons	Total
Accused	96 (61%)	62 (39%)	158
Tried	41 (64%)	23 (36%)	64
Convicted	25 (76%)	8 (24%)	33
Executed	17 (89%)	2 (11%)	19

Question: What were the major causes of the hysteria that took place in Salem Massachusetts at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century?

Document S

Examination of Tituba

- Q. Whatt familiarity have you w'th the devill, or w't is itt if you Converse w'th all? tell the truth whoe itt is that hurts them.
- A. The devill for ought I know.
- Q. W't appearance or how doth he appeare when he hurts them, w'th w't shape or what is he like that hurts them.
- A. I saw a thing like a man, that tould me Serve him & I tould him noe I would nott doe Such thing, she charges Goody Osburne & Sarah Good as those that hurt the Children, and would have had hir done itt, she sayth she Seen Foure two of which she knew nott she saw them last night . . . they tould me hurt the Children & would have had me gone to Boston, ther was the 4 woemen & the man, butt she knew none butt Osburne & Good only, the others were of Boston.
- Q. What Other likenesses besides a man hath appeared to you?
- A. Sometimes like a hogge Souetimes like a great black dogge, foure tymes.
- Q. What Cloathes doth the man apeare unto you in?
- A. Black Cloathes Some times, Some times Searge Coat of other Couler, a Tall man w'th white hayr, I think.
- Q. What apparrell does the woeman ware?
- A. A black Silk hood w'th a White Silk hood under itt, w'th top knotts, w'ch woeman I know not but have Seen hir in boston when I liyed there
- Q. What cloaths the little woeman?
- A. A Searge Coat w'th a White Cap as I think