

# Exploring the potential causes behind the Salem witch hunts with special attention to ergotism

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## I

The purpose of the multidisciplinary treatise from which this chapter derives is to thoroughly map the Salem witch trials, but above all to academically explore their causes, in regards to which an attempt was made to discern potentially significant contributing factors. The topic in which the factual event is expounded content-wise includes the founding and development of the concerned colony and Puritan ideology with its effects on the isolated society, the accusations, the witch-hunt, legal procedures, together with the prosecutions within the witchcraft frenzy. Overall, the study is composed around that 1692 Salem, where a number of individuals had their personal liberty restricted or were directly executed outright on suspicion of witchery during the famous witch trials.

I intend to shed light on a potentially cardinal contributing factor to the incident, researched by among others Linnda R. Caporael, Benjamin C. Ray, David Harley, Mary K. Matossian, Nicholas P. Spanos & Jack Gottlieb, Paul Boyer & Stephen Nissenbaum and Franklin G. Mixon. With a great reliance on preliminary studies, I also attempt to discover and comprehend yet unexplored interdependencies and notable correlations, highlighting my assumption; that as a cultural episode, the witch craze was not dealt enough with, not even thenceforth Arthur Miller's "The Crucible" (1953) was published.

Regarding all the sources that appear in this chapter, the official system of MLA-referencing style is applied. Regarding the contemporary research apparatus, I focus on theories constructed around the notions of New England Puritanism, hysteria, bewitchment, ergotism, and spectral evidence. Aside from the main highlight of this chapter that is none other than the public health aspect, other features of the respective crisis are all worth devoting attentive analysis to.

## II

One section of my expansive analysis is for example generally meant to deal with the cultural factors, including the social-religious aspect, that determined the approach of the people of Salem to such phenomena. By introducing the historical period, I devoted special attention to the Puritan attitude, which dictated the belief that as such an exceedingly pure community, for the land given, gratitude must have been expressed. Factually, the standpoint and perspective towards religion is dissected. Tersely, the discussion is built around the people who once had the zeal to serve God and acted accordingly, but changed their perspective toward the strict regimen, and with that awakened a collective, conscious dread. I also shortly compared the witch crisis of Salem with other historical events (such as the Crusades), confirming the reality that the religious subjection as a notion reappeared in later intervals and phases.

The legal aspect explained in a different segment of my treatise is elaborated with a cardinal focus on the judicial structure of the historical incident. With a brief overview on the Anglo-Saxon legal system and its manifestation in Salem, it is reviewed how the Puritans related to the “Innocent until proven guilty” principle and how it affected their society. I explained how the processes of incriminations together with the accusations exceeded themselves to be final products of enmities and feuds with neighbours and families. What is more, my assumption, -also suggested by already existing research- that the Salem witch crisis was maintained also because it was beneficial for certain members of the Church is elucidated and highlighted.

In another unit, my analysis centralised around the psychological aspect, that indicates and suggests the investigation of children’s overreaction. Together with that, within the factor of generation gap and the attitude of the children towards adults is discussed. The discourse of this final chapter also targeted the matter of possible remedy for emotional problems. Here again, another inquiry joined the exercitation, proposed by not only myself, but another preliminary research; that encourages us to regard the Salem witch hysteria as a tragic, but special event providing entertainment factor for the isolated people. A special thought was given to this specific hypothesis besides the fact that it started from children, that proposes the question of reliability.

Within the dissection of the public health aspect which will be the focus of this chapter, I intend to demonstrate and confirm the theory that the typically marginalised significance (and failed perception of presence) of a disease spread by rye –namely ergotism- indeed had an effect on the incident, particularly the trials. In this part of

my thesis, I also wish to voice how problematic and questionable of a diagnosis was set up, that functioned as a valid cause for the spreading disease around Salem, and how the lack of recognition of the symptoms determined the unpleasant outcome of the historical event. With the help of already existing arguments and some associated connections within the medical-economic approach, I wish to demonstrate that the Salem court intentionally did not list or indicate symptomatic characteristics that would have referred to a medical disease, rather than bewitchment for various reasons, hence maintaining the chaotic beliefs about the condition.

From the analysis provided by my treatise I expect conclusive results concerning the different causes of the Salem witch hysteria, out of which I would like to point out details that, in my opinion, have either been neglected or have not received enough comprehensive attention in previous studies. My study may help not only to understand the episode better, but will point at different inferential reasons that may have contributed to the course of events.

Nicholas P. Spanos and Jack Gottlieb highlighted that “In a recent article of science -H.J. Muller and E. Altenburg, *Genetics* 15, 283 (1930)- it was suggested that the residents of Salem Village, Massachusetts, who in 1692 charged their neighbours with witchcraft did so because of delusions resulting from convulsive ergotism” (Muller qtd. in Spanos & Gottlieb 1390). Hence, the correspondence between the behaviour of the “bewitched” victims and the symptoms of the then common ergotism epidemics shall be analysed as potential concordant matters. Mary K. Matossian points to the work of psychologist Linnda Caporael, who in 1976 “proposed an interesting solution to the problem of why various physical and mental symptoms appeared only in certain communities at certain times. She also suggested that those who displayed symptoms of ‘bewitchment’ in 1692 were actually suffering from a disease known as convulsive ergotism” (Caporael qtd. in Matossian 335). Caporael unequivocally argued that “the general features of the Salem crisis corresponded to the features of an epidemic of convulsive ergotism, symptoms manifested by the girls who were the principal accusers” (Caporael qtd. in Spanos & Gottlieb 1390). This claim obviously requires a closer and broader inspection. Although, Caporael herself highlights, that “it is one thing to suggest convulsive ergot poisoning as an initiating factor in the witchcraft episode, and quite another to generate convincing evidence that it is more than a mere possibility” (23).

Firstly, in order to understand the origins of the condition, it must be noted that “ergot is a fungus (*Claviceps purpurea*) that under some conditions infests rye and other cereal grains” and that “when ingested the ergotised grain may produce a variety of cardiovascular effects leading (...) to gangrene (gangrenous ergotism),

or neurological effects leading, among other things, to convulsions (convulsive ergotism)” (Spanos & Gottlieb 1390). “The fungus which causes the formation of ergot grains is very widespread, occurring in practically all parts of the country and attacking a large variety of grasses, particularly rye” (A. Hansen 590). Professional, factual analysis is provided by Caporael, who formerly established that “ergot grows (...) in a slightly curved, fusiform shape with sclerotia replacing individual grains on the host plant. The sclerotia contain a large number of potent pharmacologic agents, the ergot alkaloids” (Caporael 23). “The fungus may dangerously parasitize a crop one year and not reappear again for many years. Contamination of the grain may occur in varying concentrations” (Caporael 23).

Matossian suggests that the emergence and development of ergot is more presumptive on a flat lowland that is damp and adumbral, particularly if it was recently, freshly cultivated (335). Also, the formation of the fungus is assisted by a chilliness brought by winter and it is further promoted by a beneficial humid springtime, that eventuates the ergot growth (Matossian 355). It must be noted that “unfortunately the usual sources of information about food supply, government records, are missing for 1692, but data from tree rings indicate that in 1690, 1691, and 1692, the growing season in eastern New England was cooler than average” (Matossian 357).

According to diary records the wintertime of 1690-91, as well as 1691-92, in coastal areas like Essex were extremely frosty (and consequently moist contributing to a more rapid growth), which suggests that unlike regular grains -that failed to survive or produce a significant output- rye managed to thrive, ensuring a nutrimental source for the people of Salem, forcing them to be more reliant on it, nevertheless limiting and hastening their consumption (Hammond qtd. in Matossian 357).

Incidentally, the infestation is transferred to people typically by them eating rye bread that is contaminated by ergot (Caporael 23). Every consumer can become victimised this way, but underage individuals are said to be more vulnerable to the disease for the reason that “they ingest more food per unit of body weight; consequently, they may ingest more poison per unit of body weight” (Matossian 355). “Made up of four groups of alkaloids, ergot produces a variety of symptoms. Diagnosis may be difficult because many symptoms are not present in all cases” (Matossian 355 and Barger 39). Matossian asserts that convulsive ergotism most typically produces symptoms such as diarrhoea and a livid skin colour, and he relies on modern official beliefs as he introduces more manifestations by claiming that “according to current medical thinking, the symptoms of early and mild convulsive ergotism are a slight

giddiness, a feeling of frontal pressure in the head, fatigue, depression, nausea with or without vomiting, and pains in the limbs and lumbar region that make walking difficult” (Berde qtd. in Matossian 355). “There are mental disturbances such as mania, melancholia, psychosis, and delirium. All of these symptoms are alluded to in the Salem witchcraft records” (Caporael 23). “Convulsive ergotism also involves symptoms such as sensations of heat and cold in the extremities” (Barger, Bove, et al. qtd. in Spanos & Gottlieb 1391).

There are several more serious, grievous signs of the disease, which can be listed as the followings: “Formication” (a feeling that ants are crawling under the skin), “coldness of the extremities”, “muscle twitching”, “spasms of the limbs, tongue, and facial muscles”, “renal spasm”, and “urine stoppage” (Matossian 355). According to Caporael, in the most serious cases the victim might experience epileptic convulsions (Hale qtd. in Caporael 26), “spastic muscular contractions in the extremities, which in severe cases may become permanent sequelae, severe itching and tingling sensations”, (Spanos & Gottlieb 1391) “a ravenous appetite following convulsions, and death in severe cases” (Barger, Bove, et. al. qtd. in Spanos & Gottlieb 1391). Permanent dementia is also listed as a potential side effect of the disease (Stockman 237, Spanos & Gottlieb 1391). Matossian also emphasises that the victim “may lie as if dead for six to eight hours and afterward suffer from anaesthesia of the skin, paralysis of the lower limbs, jerking arms, delirium, and loss of speech” and even suffer an idle death afterwards from the disease (355). Visibly, therefore; the side effects of ergot-infested rye can be considered the begetter of an original, out of the ordinary phenomenon as opposed to previous regular illnesses, that assuredly frightened the inhabitants of Salem.

Several other adverse effects of the disease can be pointed out due to modern research, on the one hand, for example “nursing infants can develop ergotism from drinking their mother’s milk” (Berde qtd. in Matossian 365). On the other hand, “Caporael points out that one ergot alkaloid, isoergine (lysergic acid amide), has 10 percent of the activity of LSD and might therefore produce perceptual disturbances” (Caporael qtd. in Spanos & Gottlieb 1931). Evidently, the symptoms affecting human behaviour might vary in a significantly wide range, making the identification of the disease challenging.

Although the researches mentioned above render an extremely thorough biological inspection about the structural characteristics, the occurrence of the parasite, and the symptoms, in order to squarely associate the conditions of the 1692 Salem with the favourable plight that potentially cankers the plant, the contingencies have to be analysed in greater detail. As an attempt to demonstrate the candid correspondence,

one shall explore the symptoms even more deeply, that were with justification present in the Salem witchcraft-related court records. During the bewitchment crisis, several of the most common characteristics of this specific condition might be present in cases of ergotism as well, which include temporary blindness, deafness, and speechlessness; also burning sensations; seeing visions like a “ball of fire” or a “multitude in white glittering robes”; and the sensation of “flying through the air out of body” (Matossian 356).

As emphasised before, the Salem court chronicles do not note or specify particular symptoms, which most typically point or refer to ergotism cases, “such as headache, nausea, diarrhoea, dizziness, chills, sweating, livid or jaundiced skin, and the ravenous appetite likely to appear between fits. If these symptoms were present, they may not have been reported because they were not commonly associated with bewitchment. Nor does the court record establish whether or not the victims suffered relapses or how the cases ended” (Matossian 356). According to my standpoint, such details were not by chance smothered up.

Objectively speaking therefore, it is also conceivable that the Salem court as well as the government intentionally and felicitously applied the witchcraft issue as a deterrent example for the public. The court claimed it to be the only or primary reason for the chaos even when they suspected there might be a possible explanation pointing to a medical-economic cause regarding the unusual phenomenon. Could they possibly do so? The potentially correct answer might arise parallel to the fact that “in 1676, before the afflictions in Salem began, a scientific report (by biologist Denis Dodart) on ergot was presented to the French Royal Academie des Sciences that established a link between ergotised rye and (...) bread poisoning known as ergotism” (Mixon 180).

Spanos & Gottlieb refer back to and support the ideas of Barger, who highlighted that “convulsive ergotism has occurred almost exclusively in locales where the inhabitants suffered severe vitamin A deficiencies” (Barger qtd. in Spanos & Gottlieb 1390). They also share the view that “ergot poisoning in individuals with adequate vitamin A intakes leads to gangrenous rather than convulsive symptoms” (Barger qtd. in Spanos & Gottlieb 1390). Then they conclude that given the fact that “vitamin A is found both in fish and dairy products” and that “Salem Village was a farming community and Salem Town, which bordered the village, was a well-known seaport; cows and fish were plentiful”, it is problematic to claim explicit correspondence. (Barger qtd. in Spanos & Gottlieb 1390). At the same time, I do believe that vitamin A absence in itself does not determine whether a certain location in Massachusetts was under the influence of ergotism epidemics or not. As the sources formerly confirmed, the

emergence and appearance of the disease is extremely complex, due to the concomitant, almost inextricable manifestations induced by the repertoire of symptoms which were sometimes present, sometimes not. What is more, as mentioned before, certain pieces of data from the 1690s were deficient, and their absence not by chance resulted in uncertain diagnosis.

It is known that the accusations peaked between midsummer and early autumn, coming to an end with the governor's command which led to the closing of witch trials as well in October. However, the winter of the same year has brought so-called "religious revivals" that consorted with visions seen by certain members of the society (Burr qtd. in Matossian 357). This study -priming upon the input provided by Cummings- further theorises the idea and the speculation continues as the following: How come the people were not evinced to have symptoms of ergotism before wintertime, if the rye was garnered already during summer? As a complicating factor, the proceeded argument stands: "these episodes occurred in communities heavily dependent on rye as a staple crop and among people so poor that they had to begin eating the new rye crop immediately after the harvest" (Matossian 357).

At the same time, "the diary of Zaccheus Collins, a resident of the Salem area during the epidemic, and probate inventories show that the rye crop often lay unthreshed in the barns until November or December if other food was abundant" (Cummings qtd. in Matossian 357). As the author of the study points out that the possible storability-span of rye and hence ergot is durable, and might last up to one and a half years remaining structurally the same, and concludes that the accrued yield of grain may be authoritative in generating the symptoms, the accuracy of our analysis might increase. By contrast, it is emphasised that if the consumption of rye was postponed until December, the phenomenon is not reconcilable with the rise of convulsive symptoms that people experienced in the summer.

Caporael unambiguously confirmed the idea that "threshing probably occurred shortly before Thanksgiving, (...) and that the children's symptoms appeared in December 1691" (23). She argues that to a certain extent the totality of rye was assailed by ergot and ratiocinates that "it is a matter of the extent of infection and the period of time over which the ergot is consumed rather than the mere existence of ergot that determines the potential for ergotism" (Caporael 23). Apparently, the obtainment of the rye-based aliments typically determined the estimate symptoms among the locals (Caporael 24). Her concluding ideas include that "the growing conditions and the pattern of agricultural practices indeed fit the timing of the 1692 crisis" (Caporael 26). As a corroboration, Mixon also highlights that "according to Mappen (1980),

the climatic (wet) and geographic (low-lying lands) conditions necessary for ergot to flourish were present in Salem during the late 1600s” (Mappen qtd. in Mixon 181).

I find Caporael’s concluding thoughts that suggest “One Satan in Salem may well have been convulsive ergotism” (26) indubitable. Seemingly therefore, one cannot proclaim ergotism as the exclusive reason for the Salem witchcraft episode. At the same time, upon analysis, common sense and just the smallest hint of intuition I absolutely would label ergot as a contributing factor, because the former researches resulted in the mapping of way too many correspondences. I have not made a specific mention of animal victims that suffered too, which again affirm the presence of the epidemic. At the same time, heavily relying on Caporael’s ideas which are extremely comprehensive, I find it necessary to note that she occasionally seems to exclude factors and evidences that do not verify her study, which resulted in a challenging assignation of mine.

Consequently, in objective reality, I can conclude that a clear dividing line that would confirm either assumption about the impact of ergot on the Salem witch trials, cannot be drafted. Based on the research that has been made to confirm the hypothesis, it would be relatively logical to assume that the presence of ergotism epidemics played a significant role in the Salem witch hysteria.

### III

The criteria of 1692 display the eminent magnitude of the historical event, marking the procession memorable. “Instilled into the collective memory of Americans, the Salem trials have become a benchmark for any similar event where unfolded accusations lead to the suffering of innocent victims” (Findling & Thackeray 168). “Additionally the Salem trials have provided an intimate view of the much greater witch craze that had gripped Europe during the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries” (Findling & Thackeray, 168). It is known that the “political instability, economic uncertainty and conflict, and the threat of war with local Native American nations were clear and present concerns to the residents of Salem” (Findling & Thackeray 165) but visibly, there was more to the causes of the mass hysteria than these internal tensions, demonstrated and highlighted by my study.

Even after a thorough analysis and understanding of preliminary treatises about the subject, it is hard to assign about the direct contribution of factual reasons inducing the crisis. As Caporael states, “numerous hypotheses have been devised to explain the occurrence of the Salem witchcraft trials in 1692, yet a sense of bewilderment

and doubt pervades most of the historical perspectives on the subject” (21). Lucidly, the incident occurred way too long ago to enable a provision of all details fully recorded or clarified at our disposal.

Notably, there have been several researches constructed around the topic that aimed at analysing different segments of the hysteria. As Matossian pointed out “the work of historians Paul Boyer & Stephen Nissenbaum, for example, has been concerned with the social reactions to the symptoms of bewitchment, rather than the origin of the symptoms” (Boyer & Nissenbaum qtd. in Matossian 355). It was one way of approaching the historical incident, with a study focalising the societal attitude. Matossian highlights that the settlers supposed the reality of the occult preliminarily and after the Salem incident as well “yet in no other year was there such severe persecutions of witches” (355). To reflect, the matter of religion and Puritan ideology is equivocal, but its role can be labelled significant leastways.

The question of public health is another aspect that was confirmedly worth devoting attention to, because its analysis features ergotism as a verisimilarly impactful phenomenon, displaying that the locals were suffering from the disease. For the community, the symptoms implied the general presence of witches, which is today an inconceivable belief.

The inspected legal aspects highlight it well how “the trials [were] an opportunity to view the dynamics of a primitive frontier culture, established in a hostile environment, clinging to its European beliefs, and restricted by its dogmatic religious beliefs” (Findling & Thackeray 165). The irrationality regarding the court’s adjudications is another factor that indubitably characterised the trials, even after the spectral evidence was abrogated. The lack of demonstrable evidence victimised numerous innocent people as the Bible with a function of a penal code failed. What is more, modern, accurate analysis about the legal procedures is not made easier by the fact that “scholars lack the formal records that would identify judges, jurors, and witnesses for each trial” (Burns and Rosenthal qtd. in Norton, “Essex” 485).

Another “avenue of understanding that has yet to be sufficiently explored is that a physiological condition, unrecognized at the time, may have been a factor in the Salem incident” (Caporael 21). In consonance with that, Caporael examined theories posed by M. L. Starkey, who argued that the girls were “overexcited, and committed sensational fraud”, and C. Hansen refers to the matter as clinical psychic illness, stating that witchcraft was actively pursued by several individuals slain (Starkey and C. Hansen qtd. in Caporael 22). While I do not personally agree with the latter speculation –what is more, I find its basis doubtful-, I am unable to objectively name the felonious cause or people responsible for the hysteria.

Universally, the main reason for the mass-hysteria is the partly unexplored, still existing group-dynamic which has driven the tragic event. It is conventionally recognised that the Salem witchcraft episode is more dominant, prominent and divergent than any other New England-wide located settlement's witch-hunt hysteria (Ray, "The Salem" 40). "It lasted longer, jailed more suspects, condemned and executed more people, ranged over more territory, and afterwards was quickly repudiated by the government as a colossal mistake - a great delusion" (Ray, "The Salem" 40). "As the only example of a mass witch-hunt in American history<sup>1</sup>, Salem wit exerts a continuing fascination to both scholarly and professional audiences" (Latner 137). Yet there were indeed several witch crises from all around the world. Karlsen (1987) pointed out that "it was the number of people who spoke out about witchcraft in the language of the clergy that distinguished the 1692-1693 Salem cases from others" (Karlsen qtd. in Mixon 181).

Additionally, this cleric directorate greatly contributed to the crystallisation of an individual's common beliefs about the subject that opposed their ideology. Other historical examples are characterised by the same conception, namely in the case of the Red Scare after World War I, Senator McCarthy's persecution of alleged communists, coinciding with the 1950-53 Korean war among others. This sentiment projected by a higher community decision also provoked fear in people.

By looking for answers, why the occurrences of the frenzy happened and how the panic developed, I wish to point out the eloquent roles that granted the basics of the evident overreaction. The colossal significance of the hysteria is pointing to the aforementioned cultural-religious, public-health, legal, and psychological aspects relatively thoroughly analysed and projected at the reality of the incident, which touched upon not only the Puritans, but the whole isolated community within Massachusetts. According to Latner, "the data confirm the idea that the 'Salem' witchcraft extended well beyond the boundaries of Salem Village or Town" (138). He also accentuates the magnitude of both waves of accusations during the historical episode, marking the secondary stage not less extensive than the first one, basing his reasoning on the facts that each phase concerned approximately equal amounts of sufferers and timespan (practically three months) (Latner 139, 143).

He then continues to verify the relevance of the second period by going as far as to state that "the limited duration of local witch-hunting during this phase is even more dramatic outside of Salem Village and Town" (Latner 141). In consonance

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<sup>1</sup> The source makes this explicit statement, nevertheless, I do not agree with it, and hence mention other instances to justify my point.

with this claim, many researches point to the significance of the special interval of the witchcraft hysteria, which I also find significant. The original argumentation can be summed up as follows: “Viewed up close, then, Salem witchcraft was not a continuous, yearlong event but, rather, took place in two distinct phases, each associated with different communities” (Latner 146) in which the witch-hunt and accusations were merely happening in a concise period (Latner 146).

By thinking with the community’s mind, in which such an interpretation was dominant, one can conclude that the assured cause of a relevant, befalling, then unknown disease could confirmedly not be other than Satan. The diagnosis was consequently set up as “bewitchment”, the reflection of a supreme power’s wrath. The perception of the phenomena was obviously invalid, and I suggest that a certain percentage of people might have known that. Otherwise, the matter affected several other segments within the society. As Mixon proposes, “the Salem witchcraft episode shows how relatively easy it was in colonial North America for ministers to interpret questionable actions as witchcraft and thereby increase the demand for ministerial services (the intended consequence)” (182). Together with that, “as the witch craze spread a special court was established to deal with the accused” (Detweiler 597).

According to the Puritan standpoint, the dark adversary aimed at individuals, in order to capture and control them. Consequently, “anxious to dominate their souls, Satan harassed his victim’s bodies first. The language of the indictments brought against the accused witches illustrates the extent of the agonies inflicted by the Devil” (Reis 28). The primary target were women, being believed to be more impressionable. As Reis emphasises, “during the witchcraft trials the unfulfilled feminine soul, quick to succumb to the Devil’s possession, became equated with discontented women, subjects primed for the Devil’s intrusion” (25). Such beliefs were not only advocated, but directly forced.

Even after the abrupt termination of the hysteria, that lead to the intended death of twenty individuals and more unplanned demises behind bars, the threat of the Devil was further reiterated by the Salem preacher. “After the witch trials concluded in May 1693, Parris continued to equate his enemies with the forces of Satan. In a sermon he preached in October 1693, he proclaimed, ‘When Sin & conscience, men & Devils accuse us, why then let the death of Christ appease our bleeding, wounded & disquieted Souls’ (p. 275)” (Ray, “Satan’s War” 93).

“The Salem ‘hysteria’ of 1692-93 surely qualifies for a category where the dysfunctional elements predominate” (Demos 317). Only after the hysterics of the historical episode concluded, did people admit the futility of the witch craze and its fatal concomitants. Purportedly, naivety lead to unjust procedures, which

were based on evenly false deductions. Puritanism itself can be considered to have founded the basis of the illogical assumptions, where the self-impulsive process lacked a philanthropic attitude regarding the condemned.

But why did all these historical events happen in Salem exactly? Why were these people taught to fear the witches instead of the ones who baselessly killed them? Not incidentally, the Puritans developed a specific ideology, in which conceptions of God and the Devil played the crucial role. Being isolated, practicing the religious cleanliness and bigotry, following their errand that was previously drawn in a form of an exceptional paragon by John Winthrop were all important characteristics for them. However, these strict dogmas have seemed to fall after a while, which according to my standpoint, might have awakened a sense of guilt in the ones that no longer fit perfectly into the society. The occurrence of this process broadly concerned Massachusetts, where there was a “state of general unrest in the late 1680’s and 1690’s. The society was fully aware that Puritanism was declining and this religious decay was cause for alarm” (Detweiler 606). As Detweiler put it, the “people feared God’s wrath and the possibility of inroads by the Devil’s agents” (606). Visibly, the change aroused the society, particularly encouraging the leaders of the Church to go as far as to announce the direct, threatening presence of the Devil himself. By such actions an overly extreme impact was achieved. To sum it up, by reflecting on the applied sources and incorporating my own ideas, I can see the witch-hunts even as a direct consequence of fear. Fear of the unknown, fear of the exclusion, or collectively; fear of consequences.

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