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The Devil is in the Details:

The Confluence of Women, Violence, and Conspiracy

The Salem Witch Trials of the 1790s represent a poignant manifestation of the systematic violence women experience when they stand accused of conspiracy as compared to their male counterparts. Fears of witchcraft in seventeenth-century New England were logical extensions of paranormal, and conspiratorial, modes of thinking that developed over the previous century. Influenced by a Puritanical conception of witchcraft, this paranormally-minded thought process specifically related women to the practice of witchcraft, a "crime" that has a storied history of violence against women. Puritan doctrine also explains the willingness of those "conspirators" brought to trial to concede guilt and accuse others, as it subtly perpetuated a cultural belief that the female gender was at greater risk for sin than men, and was, therefore, more likely to engage in plots with the Devil.

An assortment of scholars have grappled with the Salem Witch Trials through a gendered lens and argued that women suffered disproportionately both in accusations and violence, often attributing their Puritanical worldview as a predominate cause. Carol Karlsen confronted the issue of women and violence in witch trials in *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman.* Karlsen explained that the Puritan conception of witchcraft is intimately related to the female gender, using a statistical analysis of witchcraft incidents in seventeenth-century New England to establish an increased rate of accusation and execution of women over men. Elizabeth Reis built on Karlsen's argument by analyzing women's place within a Puritanical paradigm of damnation in *Damned Women: Sinners*

and Witches in Puritan New England. Reis claims that though Puritans espoused a doctrine of equality between the male and female soul in regards to salvation, by merit of culturally ingrained views this equality was not a practicable reality. Reis contends that male and female Puritans processed the religious doctrine of sinfulness differently, with women far more likely to associate their spiritual being with sin than men, who compartmentalized sin in a way that it was merely an action they took, rather than a defining aspect of their person. Reis proposes that this disparity in perceived wickedness of the self, combined with subtle cultural intonations of women as a physically weaker sex, led to an increase of suspicion, confession, and execution in the Salem witchcraft episode.

While scholars have explored the Salem Witch story through the lens of gender and violence, the propensity for conspiratorial thinking throughout the American narrative is an appropriate addition to analysis of the Trials. Undoubtedly paranormal notions of good and evil contributed to the witch hysteria that fed Salem's trials, but such religious ideas did not develop in an intellectual vacuum. Richard Hofstadter, in his essay "The Paranoid Style in American Politics" examined a tendency he found in American political life to resort to conspiratorial language to further one's political agenda.[1] Hofstadter focused on the irrational leaps necessary to engage in conspiratorial thinking and accordingly described a paranoid style in American political life with a pejorative connotation, viewing it as an irrational manifestation of near, but not quite, clinical paranoia. Gordon Wood took a different approach, attempting to reconcile how a conspiratorial mode of thinking that, to a modern viewer, borders on the absurd, could be

[1] Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics, " In *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and other Essays*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965). In Hist 4973 "Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in American History" Course Reader.

embraced by some of the brightest minds of the eighteenth century. Wood outlined a thought process that would have been familiar and logical to a mind shaped by the Enlightenment, in which a personalized view of shifting political events collided with a new, scientific schema based on causality. He asserted that this mixture of a personalized, uncomplicated view of political engagement and an emphasis on cause and effect of events led to a "widespread resort to conspiratorial interpretations," in which individual actors were primarily responsible for world events, and these actors would be either of good or bad intention based on the effect of their actions.[2]

Wood specifically addresses the intersection of these two conflicting thought processes in the context of the Puritan mind, arguing that Protestant reformers emphasized the work of divine providence in events to reduce "popular reliance on luck and magic."[3] Wood asserts that this confluence of personal responsibility and divine action resulted in men being "morally responsible for events; even natural catastrophes like earthquakes and floods were seen as divine punishments for human misbehavior."[4] While Wood deals primarily with the eighteenth century, his premise for analyzing Puritan thought in a framework of causality holds sway to a conversation on the Salem Witch Trials. Though the Trials took place in the late seventeenth century, Wood addresses a transitional pre-Enlightenment period in which a sort of paranormal middleman is necessary to facilitate events before focusing on the purely scientific cause and effect scenario he identifies with the eighteenth century. A unique combination of Wood and Hofstadter's approach to the paranoid style is necessary to understand the

[2] Gordon Wood, "Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style: Causality and Deceit in the Eighteenth Century," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 39, no. 3 (July 1982), 411. In Hist 4973 "Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in American History" Course Reader.
[3] *Ibid,* 412.
[4] *Ibid,* 412.

events that transpired in the Salem Witch Trials. Wood's suggestion of moral responsibility for seemingly inexplicable natural phenomena, tied with a propensity for a paranormally minded analysis of situations in a skewed gender environment, created a perfect environment for accusations of witchcraft against the women of Salem Town to develop, but it is Hofstadter's conspiratorial discontinuities of logic that allowed for its perpetuation.

And women were the primary conspirators with whom the Salem community was concerned. Though men faced accusations of and were executed for witchcraft in the Salem episode, women bore the brunt of accusations of witchcraft and the violence it entailed.[5] This gendered persecution is notable in the history of conspiracy, a story in which women rarely make appearances. In her book, *The United States of Paranoia*, Jesse Walker dissects the five "primal myths"[6] from which modern American conspiracies stem. Of these myths, women play no part as "Enemy Outside," which typically involves military forces and foreign conspirators like that seen in the Catholic/Native American plot discussed further below. Women make no appearances in narratives regarding an "Enemy Above," as they hardly held the societal status with which to pull strings and manipulate political situations. Women are absent too from conspiracies involving lower classes, though such conspiracies typically involved an outside source provoking action, much in the way the Puritans of Salem conceived of Satan as provoking the women he entrapped. Instead, Walker classifies women as the "Enemy Within," and uses Salem and the Shaker movement, in which women held positions of moral leadership, to highlight the intimate dangers women posed to those

[5] Elizabeth Reiss, *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 1997), 2.
[6] Jesse Walker, *The United States of Paranoia* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012), 16.

around them in the subversion of everyday life.[7] Women appear as active agents in a single mode of conspiratorial betrayal in Walker's outline and provoked violent reactions and accusations of witchcraft in both cases Walker outlines. Walker addresses the violence the Salem encounter entailed only in the context of discussing the accusations of witchcraft levied against the female leader of the Shaker movement, citing the times in which Ann Lee was born as a form of exoneration from violence for her accused association with the Devil.[8] However, while the eighteenth century did protect this modernly conceived witch from the gallows, it did not protect her or her constituents from mob violence against their communes, which included kidnapping of Shaker children, destruction of Shaker property, burning of churches, and physical assaults on practicing Shakers.[9]

Walker's "primal myths" and conspiratorial fears were a staple of colonial life, whether the threat was Native American attack, foreign invasion, Popish plots, or even devilish machinations. Residents of New England found themselves in a particularly conspiratorial mood on the eve of the 1690s, as their colony had just suffered a prolonged political crisis, for which they found blame in two traditional conspiratorial foes: Native Americans and Catholics. In 1684, the crown revoked the colonial charter issued for the New England colonies, instead opting to organize the territory into a much broader Dominion of New England under the rule of a crown-appointed governor.[10] Sir Edmund Andros assumed the governorship of the Dominion only in time to witness an increase in

[7] Jesse Walker, *The United States of Paranoia* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012), 54.
[8] *Ibid*, 55.
[9] *Ibid*, 59.
[10] Owen Stanwood, "Catholics, Indians, and the Politics of Conspiracy," In *The Empire Reformed: English America in the Age of the Glorious Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 54. In In Hist 4973 "Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in American History" Course Reader. Referred to from here on out as "Owen Stanwood, ""Catholics, Indians, and the Politics of Conspiracy."

attacks by Native Americans on the colonies, which came to a head in 1688.[11] These raids in the north and west of the colony resulted in a number of dead and refugees, many of which were young, female, and relocated to Salem Town as the crisis continued.[12] This continuing political crisis caused mounting discontent amongst the colonist who framed the Native American attacks as a "gigantic, diabolical coalition"[13] directed against English Protestants by an overarching Catholic conspiracy. Governor Andros made a series of diplomatic overtures in an attempt to gain Native American allies or at least a cessation of hostilities, but these actions proved to be a fatal political mistake. Colonists saw Andros' conciliatory attempts as sympathetic to the Native American and Catholic cause and used this as leverage to mobilize against him, with a culmination of their efforts resulting in his removal from the governorship.[14]

Reis characterizes the "social and political dislocation"[15] experienced by New England residents at the hands of Native American raids and unresolved charter anxieties as unsettling, but not the only cause of the witch hunt in Salem only four years later. The immediate precursor to the Trials began with a category of Salem villagers Karlsen refers to as "the possessed,"[16] a group of predominantly teenage girls who presented with undefined "fits" that defied traditional medical wisdom. Specifically, Betty and Abigail Parris, daughter and niece of the town's reverend, first experienced symptoms of what their doctor later identified as demonic possession. From there, an almost contagious

[11] Owen Stanwood, ""Catholics, Indians, and the Politics of Conspiracy," 54.
[12] Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1987), 228.
[13] Owen Stanwood, ""Catholics, Indians, and the Politics of Conspiracy," 56.
[14] Owen Stanwood, ""Catholics, Indians, and the Politics of Conspiracy," 74.
[15] Elizabeth Reiss, *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 1997), 8. Hereafter abbreviated to Elizabeth Reiss, *Damned Woman*, Pg #.
[16] Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1987), 228.

outbreak of possession spread among peers of the children, resulting in Reverend Parris's plea for ministerial aid in dealing with what he had begun to suspect was an outbreak of witchery.[17] When ministerial aid failed in quieting the girls' fits of possession, town leadership drew a reluctant conclusion: "The girls must be induced to name their tormentors; the witches mush be ferreted out and brought to justice." [18] But even questioning left the town without answers for a period, until, in a violent fit, Betty Parris named the first witch and conspirator. With her accusation, a floodgate of further witchcraft allegations poured forth.

Of the twenty-four young women who formed the group Carol Karlsen refers to as "the possessed," seventeen had lost one or both of their parents, and many of the deaths were the result of Native American attacks.[19] Multiple theories address what motivated "the possessed" and attempt to dissect psychological ailments that led to their physical symptoms of demonic malfeasance. This is not an especially fruitful pursuit, as modern psychological pathology is ill adept to address the specific cultural foundations in which the young women lived. "The possessed" were largely a group of young women who, as refugees of the Native American attacks mentioned earlier, had been subjected to a great deal of violence and had adapted accordingly. They were raised in an environment rife with conspiratorial thinking regarding their precarious situation on the Northern frontier, and were, therefore, likely to be familiar with the logical leap required to associate their troubles, not just with the immediate cause apparent to them, but a broader, shadowy hand like the Catholics that shared the blame in their mind for the violence they

[17] Marion L. Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts: A Modern Inquiry into the Salem Witch Trials* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1949), 28.
[18] *Ibid*, 28.
[19] Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1987), 228.

experienced on the frontier. Additionally, these young women lived in a puritanical culture that saw possession as a feasible phenomenon. As Wood posed in a precursor to his dissection of Enlightenment thought, cause and effect for Protestants pre-Enlightenment still held a strong sway of personal responsibility for action, but that responsibility was seen in connection to divine providence. However, Wood, in his brief discussion of early Protestant analysis, did not address the strong tendency of Puritans to attribute divine intervention to a negative form of divinity, specifically Satan at work in Puritan communities, posing instead that negative outcomes were caused by man incurring God's displeasure. "The possessed" and those around them saw negative outcomes in their communities, such as the possession of Samual Parris's children or any number of instances of milk curdling or livestock dying unexpectedly, and, in a framework of Pre-Enlightenment causality and increased conspiratorial rhetoric, could logically attribute the symptoms of possession to the one negative paranormal conspirator that was known to tempt good Puritan's away from God: Satan himself.

By examining "the possessed" through the intellectual framework in which they lived, the tendency for conspiratorial thought and paranormal happenings could easily have combined under the Puritan narrative of the Devil as a tempter, seeking to lure those not diligent in their faith into sin. A long established tenet of Puritan thought identified the Devil as an active agent, a conspirator seeking human actors to further his malicious agenda. The confessions of the accused highlight this phenomenon. As accused witches confessed to their crimes, a script began to emerge: First, they implicated another townsperson of enlisting them into the Devil's service, often corroborating the testimony of "the possessed" when giving the names of new witches. These accusations proved

invaluable to the prosecution, whose cases relied on multiple allegations against a witch before conviction and sentencing were determined.[20] In the examination of Mary Barker, who the court exonerated for her cooperation, she "acknowledged that Goody Johnson made her a witch."[21] In the testimonies of both Sarah and Thomas Carrier, also exonerated, the children (Sarah was only seven at the time) acknowledged that their mother Martha had baptized them in the name of the Devil.[22] Only after indicting others in the devilish plot could these confessors begin their tale of conspiracy, one that would ultimately absolve them of their wrongdoings in the eyes of the court.

After naming other conspirators, the accused acknowledged their complicity in sin and conspiracy by elaborating on the contract they made with the Devil. Victims supposedly formed contracts ensnaring their souls to the Devil, who targeted the potential witch and weakened her will through threats and physical torment, when they acquiesced to his demands and signed her soul over to his dark biddings in a formalized agreement. In the case of young Sarah Carrier and her brother, the Devil made the same threat, namely that if they did not "touch the book" and consent to be witches, "she would tear (them) to pieces,"[23] in this case the 'she' to whom the children referred was likely the witch who led them astray, their mother. Transcripts of confessions, while not consistent

[20] "Margaret Scott Executed, September 22, 1692," SWP No. 119.1-119.9, Accessed November 22, 2016; "Martha Carrier Executed, August 19, 1692," SWP No. 24-24.18, Accessed December 6, 2016. All Trial transcripts retrieved from Salem Witch Trials: Documentary Archive and Transcription Project (Benjamin Ray and Visitors of University of Virginia, 2010.), and hereafter referred to only by name and the abbreviated Salem Witch Project number they are filed under,

[21] "Mary Barker" SWP No. 8-8.4, Accessed October 9, 2016.

[22] "Sarah Carrier," SWP No. 26-26.2; "Thomas Carrier Jr," SWP No. 27-27.1. Accessed December 5, 2016. Here is a good opportunity to note that while Thomas Carrier is male, he does not detract from the argument of a gendered reaction to the trial for several reasons: Firstly, Thomas Carrier was a child when he was accused, making him physically weaker than an adult male and more susceptible to devilish attacks, as will be discussed later. Secondly, it can be concluded that his mother, rather than him, is the target of the trial, as no further attempts are made at his prosecution. And finally, as Karlsen established, the kin of accused witches, especially young children, were more likely to be accused of witchcraft, but especially so if they were female.

[23] "Sarah Carrier," SWP No. 26-26.2; "Thomas Carrier Jr," SWP No. 27-27.1. Accessed December 5, 2016.

with the shape the Devil appeared to the newfound witch in, were remarkably invariable in describing the process of entering into collusion with the Devil by signing "in his book," with what was typically described as red ink, indicating a blood covenant with the new witch and Satan. Such an example can be found in the examination of Mary Barker, who confessed "…that (this) sometine last (spring) sumer she had made a red mark in the devils book with the forefinger of her Left hand."[24] Sarah Carrier described her induction into witchcraft similarly when questioned by the magistrate, who asked, "Who made you a witch?" To which she replied, "My mother, she made me set my hand to a book… I touched it with my fingers and the book was red, and the paper of it was white…"[25] On signing a contract with the Devil, these "witches" actively agreed to participate in his dark agenda and became co-conspirators in his plot to further sin and torment other villagers, crimes they also confessed to.[26]

While many of the women and children accused followed similar patterns of confession and exoneration, the women of Salem who did not confess received disproportionately brutal punishment for their supposed crimes. This correlation in the inordinate amount of accusations, confessions, and executions of women persisted even though the Puritan community in which they lived supposedly valued men and women equally in terms of the possibility of spiritual salvation. Elizabeth Reis demonstrates that though women were theoretically equally as likely as men to attain salvation by the standards set forth by their community, women were far more likely to internalize a message of damnation than their male peers. Reiss argues that Puritan women held

[24] "Mary Barker," SWP No. 8-8.4, Accessed October 9, 2016.
[25] "Sarah Carrier," SWP No. 26-26.2, Accessed December 5, 2016.
[26] "Mary Barker," SWP No. 8-8.4; "Sarah Carrier," SWP No. 26-26.2; "Thomas Carrier Jr," SWP No. 27-27.1. Accessed October 9, 2016 and December 5, 2016 respectively.

themselves to be spiritually inferior by examining the differences in rhetoric Puritan men and women used when describing sin in conversion narratives: Women were far more likely to see their whole person as depraved when confessing to wrongdoing, whereas men "focused on particular sins, separating their natures from the sins they committed."[27] Reiss theorized that this distinction between the ways in which men and women viewed themselves spiritually made women more susceptible to ideas of spiritual inadequacy and ultimately blurred the line for many of the female accused between every-day sin, and genuine, intentional collusion with the Devil. This tendency to blur the line between normal sin and devilish plotting made it easier for women to confess to witchcraft when accused.

Sermons made by Samuel Parris during the height of the trial support the idea of sin as an all-consuming activity that led women on the path to damnation and interaction with the Devil. Parris preached, "There are such Devils in the Church: Not only sinners but notorious sinners; sinners more like to the Devil than others."[28] Here, Parris failed to make an important distinction; in his sermon there is no separation made between being a "Devil" and committing acts of sin. Parris essentially elevates "notorious sin" to a level of intentional, malicious connivance with the Devil. This escalation of the notion of sin to that of deliberate wickedness and conspiracy with Satan would have been an especially powerful one when delivered by a member of the clergy, whose status was increasingly important in the community given the paranormal nature of the threat faced. Given the already all-encompassing way in which women perceived their own sin, and the timed

[27] Elizabeth Reiss, *Damned Women*, 39.
[28] Samuel Parris, "The Sermon Notebook of Samuel Parris," *Salem Witch Trials Documentary Archive and Transcript Project,* September 19, 1689 (Benjamin Ray and Visitors of University of Virginia, 2010.), Accessed October 5, 2016.

delivery of the sermon to correspond with the events taking place in the trial, this conflation of sin and devilish conspiracy by the clergy undoubtedly led to an increase in association amongst the accused and those prosecuting them with any admitted sin representing a willing partnership with the devil.

Reiss's idea of spiritual inadequacy explains in part why the accused would see themselves as collaborators with the Devil, but does not fully explain why the women's accusers and the men who prosecuted them would have regarded the trial as a gendered exercise, or at least had subconscious leanings to do so. To address this, Reiss turns to a less abstract explanation. Many medical journals published in the seventeenth century categorize women's bodies as inherently weaker than men's. The female form was considered to be more susceptible to disease, as well as inadequately adapted to physical labor, with one physician referring to it at "the weaker vessel."[29] This weaker female form left women at a distinct disadvantage when fending off the Devil's temptations because Puritans saw the body as the only physical safeguard of the soul. Puritans believed the Devil and his coven of already established witches subjected potential witches to torture in order to convert them to his ungodly cause.[30] Because collaboration with the Devil began with the physical tormenting of the intended witch, the inhabitants of Salem Town held a culturally ingrained view that women's souls were at greater risk than their male counterparts due to the inferiority of their physical forms to fend of fiendish attacks.[31]

[29] Cotton Mather, *The Angel of Bethesda* (1724; Barre, Massachusetts, 1972), 233. This source was initially found in Reiss's *Damned Woman* on page 110.
[30] "Mary Barker" SWP No. 8-8.4, Accessed October 9, 2016.
[31] Elizabeth Reiss, *Damned Women*, 5.

Given women's physical disadvantage in staving off the Devil's advances and a judiciary steeped in conspiratorial concern with paranormal dealings, the trial process was hardly staged to be a fair one. Laymen were left to run the trial, with only one of the judges present having obtained a partial legal education, and none of the magistrates inclined to adhere to typical English jurisdiction regarding the presumed innocence of the accused.[32] The structural disadvantage of having a largely inadequately educated prosecution was not the end of the accused witches woes, as the evidence the court agreed upon in advance of the trial had the potential to be- and in many cases was- damning. Admissible evidence for the Trials included highly invasive strip searches to identify "witch's teets," or strange bodily markings with which the supposed witch was alleged to feed animal familiars; neighbor testimony regarding property damage and conflict between the parties; and testimony of the apparition of a witch appearing to the witness. [33] This "spectral evidence," though treated with a lesser of degree reliability, when compounded with multiple witnesses alleging witchcraft was enough to send 19 accused witches to the gallows, and as many as eighteen others to languish in prison.[34] A final nail was hammered in accused witch's proverbial coffins as the trials continued; the courts eagerly gave away pardons to "witches" who confessed to their crimes and named their fellow conspirators, but those who refused to implicate themselves only seemed to compound their own guilt.

In the cases of Sarah and Thomas Carrier, and that of Mary Barker, each admitted guilt, testified against another accused witch, and accepted responsibility in conspiring

[32] Marion L. Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts: A Modern Inquiry into the Salem Witch Trials* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1949), 35.
[33] *Ibid*, 38.
[34] Jess Blumberg, "A Brief History of the Salem Witch Trials," October 23, 2007, Smithsonian.com, Accessed December 5, 2015.

with the Devil, but that is not the only similarity present in these cases. In all three instances, the admitted "witches" were acquitted of their crimes and accepted back into their communities. Martha Carrier, Bridgette Bishop, Margaret Scott, and the seventeen others who joined these women at the gallows were not so lucky. The trial transcripts of these three women also share remarkably similar traits. Multiple parties accused all three women of various forms of spectral evidence.[35] All three women appeared as apparitions to "the possessed" and other members of the community with the aim of physically tormenting their fellow citizens.[36] But the defining trait shared by these women's testimonies is their refusal to confess to their supposed crimes, and this is the commonality that ultimately damned them.

By denying their involvement with the Devil, and corresponding sinfulness, the women on trial subverted Puritanical cultural norms, thus incurring the wrath of their community. Reiss identified the process of confession to witchcraft as not only a means of ensuring one's safety from the hangman but as partaking in a "cultural performance" in order to gain "perfect redemption" in the eyes of the community.[37] Those members of the community, some two hundred accused in total, who confessed to their crimes validated the proceedings of the trial and engaged in a public purging of their supposed sinfulness through acknowledgment of their wrongdoing. However, those who refused to participate with the community in the manner demanded of them faced dire consequences. Reiss categorizes their "vehement denial and absolute refusal to confess" as an act that "repudiated Puritan theology, contradicted the court's proceedings, and

[35] "Martha Carrier Executed, August 19, 1692," SWP No. 24-24.18, Accessed December 6, 2016; "Bridget Bishop Executed, June 10, 1692," SWP No. 13-13.22, Accessed October 9, 2016; "Margaret Scott Executed, September 22, 1692," SWP No. 119.1-119.9, Accessed November 22, 2016.
[36] *Ibid.*
[37] Elizabeth Reiss, *Damned Women*, 136.

invalidated notions of proper female decorum."[38] Due to the conflation of sin and conspiracy with the Devil that had taken place throughout the trial, and leading questions used to draw out confessions, those facing trial often admitted to one set of sins, which proved sufficient in the mind of the court to demonstrate an affiliation with Satan and an even stronger bond with him as they continued to deny the charge of witchcraft.[39]

In the case of Bridgett Bishop, her denials of her wrongdoing were so meticulous as to almost completely seal her fate. She claimed, "I know nothing of it. I am innocent to a Witch. I know not what a Witch is," and the magistrate asked in response, "How can you know, you are no Witch, & yet not know what a Witch is?"[40] The skepticism of the magistrate in his questioning is clear, which led to the ordering of a physical examination. The examination "proved" positive for a witch's teet, and Ms. Bishop's last hope of exoneration was lost. While in jail, she was further questioned and admitted to having been tempted by other townspeople, who she named, to sign the Devil's book, but would not confess to having done so. Accordingly, Ms. Bishop completed only one half of the confessional script, the accusation of others, and denied the court the satisfaction of a full confession, an act that ultimately cost her life. Martha Carrier and Margaret Scott too went to their death denying any wrongdoing, but this action enraged the public rather than garnishing sympathy. In a letter to Reverend John Cotton, a witness of the trial described the July 19th, 1692 hanging of five "witches," decrying their wickedness as

[38] Elizabeth Reiss, *Damned Woman*, 142. Note: Deviation from 'notions of proper female decorum' could result in testimony being levied against women of Salem Town, even in less extreme cases than confessing ones guilt. In the case of Sarah Bibber, later acquitted, her neighbor, John Porter, alleged that she was "a woman of unruly turbulent spirit; and shee would often fall into strange fits; when she was crost of her humor…" Simply by behaving in a way that did not fit with Mr. Porter's notions of Puritan womanhood, Sarah Bibber became a target of witchcraft complaints. "Sarah Bibber" SWP No. 12-12.5, (Benjamin Ray and Visitors of University of Virginia, 2010.) Accessed October 9, 2016.
[39] Elizabeth Reiss, *Damned Women,* 117.
[40] "Bridget Bishop Executed, June 10, 1692," SWP No. 13-13.22, (Benjamin Ray and Visitors of University of Virginia, 2010.) Accessed October 9, 2016.

they "impudently demanded of God a miraculous vindication of their innocency."[41] The witness goes on to state that five other witches later named the hanged as fellow conspirators with the Devil, exposing the dead's true villainy, and eagerly awaits the continuation of the trial.[42]

In many instances, the inhabitants of Salem Town did not have to wait for a posthumous substantiation of guilt, as many who denied their ensnarement in conspiracy later recanted. Interrogation of those condemned to death did not cease upon their condemnation. Many family members and acquaintances hoped to illicit last minute confessions and exerted tremendous pressure on their loved one, though whether they hoped to illicit a pardon for cooperation or a clearing of conscience before execution is unclear.[43] Additionally, though little is known about the interrogation techniques used to extract confessions from accused witches, it is widely accepted that the court employed forms of torture, whether through invasive physical examinations or a technique known as "pressing" in which the interrogator placed increasing amounts of weight on the victim in hopes of extracting a confession. Giles Corey, one of the few male witches convicted and sentenced to death, died in prison, ultimately succumbing to this technique.[44] Due to the intensity of interrogation and the community and familial pressures placed on women to confess to their "crimes," many later succumbed to this pressure after denying any wrongdoing, increasing their suspicion in the eyes of the court.[45]

[41] Author Unknown To John Cotton, 5 August 1692, Letter, Salem Witch Trials: Documentary Archive and Transcription Project (Benjamin Ray and Visitors of University of Virginia, 2010.) Accessed October 15, 2016.
[42] Author Unknown To John Cotton, 5 August 1692, Letter, Accessed October 15, 2016.
[43] Elizabeth Reiss, *Damned Women*, 128.
[44] *Ibid,* 128.
[45] "Mary Barker" SWP No. 8-8.4, Accessed October 9, 2016; Elizabeth Reiss, *Damned Women*, 128.

The logic that those who approved of and conducted the trial engaged in, namely taking the denial of guilt as further confirmation of their wickedness, contains a distinctly conspiratorial flair. As discussed, Wood's focus on rationality behind conspiratorial thought can, with adaptation for the period in question, be neatly applied to the Puritan narrative, in which a paranormal entity engaged with a human actor to negatively effect outcomes. This propensity to regard the Devil and women as causal players when negative, unexplained phenomenon occurred represents the logical framework in which those engaged with the Trial worked under. However, to understand the logical leap needed to take denial of evidence as further proof of conspiracy, it is necessary to examine Hofstadter's conception of the "paranoid style." Hofstadter noted, "What distinguishes the paranoid style," is not a lack of evidence or facts, "but rather a curious leap in imagination that is always made at some critical point in the recital of events."[46] Hofstadter further argued that the paranoid subject tends to accrue an excess of facts and figures in building their logical argument in preparation for their jump in reasoning. This tendency for gathering an overwhelming body of evidence holds true when one examines the transcripts for the Trials. Margarett Scott had no less than eight witnesses testify against her, bringing charges of spectral torment that the supposed witch had visited on them in the night, as well as tales of dead cattle and deaths of neighbors that seemed suspicious only in the light of the accusations against her.[47] Martha Carrier and Bridget Bishop also had an abundance of complaints levied against them, with the witness lists

[46] Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics, " In *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and other Essays*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 37. In Hist 4973 "Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in American History" Course Reader.
[47] "Margaret Scott Executed, September 22, 1692," SWP No. 119.1-119.9, Accessed November 22, 2016.

and inquiries of those who faced execution invariably the most thoroughly investigated among those who were accused.[48]

Only after accumulating an abundance of evidence, much more than that gathered for witches who admitted their guilt and retreated into their community, could the prosecution justify accepting the denials of the women who were sent to their death as evidence of their guilt. The leap of logic in this case is the convergence of seemingly logical thinking and a circular loop: If sin is enough to bring one into conspiracy with the Devil, as Samuel Parris implied in his sermon, and all are guilty of sin, as exposed through trial testimony, the denial of said sin only serves to further entrench the accused with their perceived Satanic affiliation. And thus the conspiratorial loop is established. Those who confess achieve perfect redemption in the eyes of their community while those who deny their affiliation with Satan only further affirm their guilt, the eventual result being such an isolation from the community through their continued depravity and unrepentant nature that execution is the only alternative left available.

The violence levied against these women in the name of witchcraft highlights just the extent to which their community feared them for their perceived betrayal of community and elevation of power. By shaking off the role of "proper female decorum" and seeking to gain paranormal control over their community, the community elevated these women to a position of power they had not previously experienced.[49] Only after this elevation occurred could Puritan women represent a conspiratorial threat to their friends and neighbors. Walker's categorization of the witches of Salem Town as "The Enemy Within" becomes limiting when examining the nature of the conspiratorial threat the

[48] "Martha Carrier Executed, August 19, 1692," SWP No. 24-24.18, Accessed December 6, 2016; "Bridget Bishop Executed, June 10, 1692," SWP No. 13-13.22, Accessed October 9, 2016.
[49] Elizabeth Reiss, *Damned Woman*, 142.

community felt these women posed. While the intimate nature of a betrayal based in everyday life is fitting of "The Enemy Within," when one frames the women's actions as a subversion of the typical gendered power structures of Puritan society, a more fitting categorization of their conspiracy would be "The Enemy Below," which explored slave insurrections and lower class revolts.[50] And as with many societally downtrodden groups, their society could only view them as a threat with the aid of a powerful co-conspirator.

Salem's women could only constitute a threat to their society when their community viewed them in collaboration with the Devil, and this trend of repressed groups requiring a traditionally feared conspirator to for colonists to perceive them as dangerous occurs throughout several other stories of conspiracy. As Gregory Evans Dowd states in his work *Groundless Rumors, Legends and Hoaxes on the Early American Frontier*, "The commonplace… idea that masterminds would manipulate the simple public mirrored the colonists understanding of African or Indian violence: it threatened the most danger when masterful enemy Europeans… worked the levers."[51] The Native American threat on the Northern frontier that drove so many young women to Salem as refugees was far more tangible than any devilish act, but only could be validated in the minds of the colonists under attack through the tying of the threat they saw at hand and a more traditional enemy, the Catholics of the Old World.[52] This thread of conspiratorial validation continued when discussion turned to slave insurrection fifty years after the events in Salem. In a slave conspiracy that wracked New York following a series of fires, whispers of Spanish influence pervaded the trial, which proceeded with a lower class white family

[50] Jesse Walker, *The United States of Paranoia* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012), 83.
[51] Gregory Evans Dowd, "Solidarity: Fugitive Rumor, Modern Legend," In *Groundless Rumors, Legends, and Hoaxes on the Early American Frontier* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 148. In . In Hist 4973 "Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in American History" Course Reader.
[52] Owen Stanwood, ""Catholics, Indians, and the Politics of Conspiracy," 56.

as scape-goated masterminds behind the plot.[53] The narrative these colonial conspiracy theorists concocted necessitated a powerful enemy to elevate a group that they perceived to be beneath them societally as a threat.

Though women were perceived to be the physically, and subsequently spiritually, weaker sex, when cases of possession overtook Salem Town, they were suddenly considered the paramount threat to the town's security. The very systems that categorized women as weaker, both through internalized messages regarding damnation and overarching societal trends, placed them at greater risk of accusation, conviction, and execution than their male counterparts. Due to the Puritanical association of women with witchcraft, and coinciding logical, conspiratorial, and paranormal frameworks of thinking surrounding devilish activity, women became the target suspects for a crime that was both impossible to prove oneself innocent of, and that on conviction, entailed a violent end. Because of the relatively brief history of women gaining power in American life, they do not often make appearances in conspiracy theories, as before the turn of the twentieth century they were not perceived to have the ability to much influence the course of historical events, through secretive machinations or not. Because of their lower societal status, this left women vulnerable to systematic acts of violence when identified as threats.

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