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**THE WITCHCRAFT HYSTERIA IN SALEM
IS A RESULT OF FEAR OF WOMEN**

format

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The issue in question is the witch hunt in Salem, Massachusetts during 1692, and whether a fear of women spurs the hunt. Two authors come to state what they view as the cause. Carol Karlsen says Salem believes women are evil, and that gives them cause to accuse mostly women of being witches. Kai Erikson infers that the colonists of Salem are trying, only, to restore a "common sense of mission" that is vanishing. The witchcraft scare in Salem is a result of the fear that women inspire, as individuals and as women in power.

Karlsen states that, yes, Salem believes women are evil. It inspires them to accuse women of being witches. Women scare the colonists of Salem. Accusing women of witchcraft is an easy way to keep women in check. Old assumptions of women as witches are already evident, Karlsen notes. Early on in Europe, before coming to America, the relationship between women and witches is very apparent. People talk about the relationship and what they say becomes the "established truths." Although Salem has its definition of witchcraft, the colonists develop their own "belief system" to interpret what witchcraft consists of. The old view of women as evil changes into the view of women as good. The old idea of women remains in the conscience of Salem, though. The Bible also dictates the way Salem views women as evil. In the story of Adam and Eve, Eve causes man to fall. The devil offers the forbidden fruit, and Eve succumbs first. She causes man and herself to endure punishment. This vision of evil women causes

men to fear women. They try to say women are good, but this image of Eve causes Salem to endure the old beliefs. Karlsen also bases her theory on the writings of Cotton Mather. In Mather's two books, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion* and *Wonders of the Invisible World*, he intends to "to advocate virtue...and and to promote fear of God in the female sex." He also wants to justify the trials of witchcraft in Salem. Karlsen points out that Mathers is trying to make women inferior to men.

Erikson contends that the witch trials are only Salem's way of trying to return to their original values. They are not the result of a fear of women, Erikson assesses. There are other reasons for the witch trials. The colonists are pessimistic about the survival of Salem. They feel gloom and doom approaching from England's control over them. Charles II orders Massachusetts to establish an Anglican church. England gets rid of the protection they provide for the colony. William of Orange saves Massachusetts, by gaining the crown in England, and the colony experiences anxiety over the decision of to restore their old charter. Religious bickering also adds to the colonists reasons for witch trials, Erikson believes. Dissension reaches the saints, as well as the colonists. The people are acting "more out of jealousy and greed than any sense of religious purpose." There is a bad spirit in the religion of Salem. The third reason why witchcraft is not of fear of women is the fact that persecution of witches goes on far before Salem conducts its

witch trials. Witchcraft comes to England, along with the Protestant Reformation. Queen Elizabeth brings in legislation to handle witchcraft, and King James I writes a book, as a reference on witchcraft. During the Civil Wars in England, burning and hanging of witches occurs, killing hundreds and thousands of people. Witchcraft, as a crime, does not only occur in Salem from a fear of women. It has other reasons, Erikson believes.

In agreement with Karlsen, in the article, the witchcraft hysteria in Salem is a result of fear of women. Salem fears the individual woman and the woman in power. Women must be inferior to men. Otherwise the clergy is afraid of what the woman in power can do, "if the power relations within marriage were reversed, they envisioned men kept as vassals or enchained as slaves." Ministers preach that women must try to be individual by being quiet and respectful to God and men. If women do not stay in their place, who knows what they would do. To the Puritan authorities, women must remain in the "helpmeet role," where they repress what they want, to please their husbands. The accused witches are those women that wish to remain individuals. The only way to ensure that the individual women would not take over, is to accuse them of being witches and execute them. Individual women pose the greatest threat to Puritan society.

Many of the individual women, accused of being witches, also entail some power. This power is in wealth, as Salem sees it. According to the book *After the Fact*, most witches are women.

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Pressure is put on the women to confess that they are in contact with Satan, and when they confess, the authorities execute them. People expect women to be witches, and when witches are men, the authorities generally do not except men as witches. This is where the economic power of women comes in. A good amount of accused witches have economic power. These women inherit property and refuse to sell, so they are violating Salem's social fabric. These women stand out. "One way a woman might stand out was through a contentious, argumentative nature." (p. 54) These women of power do not conform, and people accuse them of being witches. That is the way to get the women out of power, Salem conceives.

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Women in power and women as individuals cause fear in Salem, and this fear results in the witchcraft hysteria. The fear in Salem is common in England, and it is because they feel women should take a seat behind men, not being their own individuals.