

# *Salem Possessed* in Retrospect

Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum

Here are but 2 parties in the World, the Lamb & his Followers, & the Dragon & his Followers: & these are contrary one to the other . . . Here are no Newters. Every one is on one side or the other.

—Samuel Parris<sup>1</sup>

IT is now forty years after we began planning the experimental history course at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, that in turn led to *Salem Possessed*. We find it an interesting experience to collaborate again as we reflect on that book and its context and on the Salem witchcraft scholarship that has appeared in the intervening decades, including the essays in the present Forum. There is a certain appropriateness in this essay appearing in the *William and Mary Quarterly*, since our initial plan, when we first envisioned writing about this topic, was to submit an article to this journal. Only gradually did the planned article evolve into a book-length project. So here we are now, both retired, finally writing that long-delayed *WMQ* essay first envisioned near the beginning of our careers.

The experimental history course, which we called “New Approaches to the Study of History,” came first. We jointly introduced it in 1969. (This course, in turn, emerged from the earlier pedagogical experiments of two historians with whom Stephen Nissenbaum had studied as a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin: Stanley Katz and William R. Taylor.) Our aim was to engage beginning undergraduates in actual historical research, devoting an entire semester to the intensive study of a single historical episode and for the most part limiting our students to reading raw—uninterpreted—primary sources. We used the Salem witchcraft trials as our episode. As the two of us spent the summer

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Parris, Sermon 1a, Sept. 11, 1692, “After ye condemnation of 6. Witches at a Court at Salem, one of the Witches viz. Martha Kory in full communion with our Church,” in James F. Cooper Jr. and Kenneth P. Minkema, eds., *The Sermon Notebook of Samuel Parris, 1689–1694* (Boston, 1993), 203.

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of 1969 preparing a variety of documents for our students, we came across some unfamiliar published sources that had not been used by scholars. These sources, first published in the 1910s and 1920s, included the records of the Essex County Quarterly Court and the Probate Court (up to the early 1680s) and the Salem Village Book of Record from the period 1672–97. This latter source contained a clear and vivid record of factional conflict in Salem Village, which had festered during the two decades preceding the witchcraft trials. In addition it contained the various tax lists that would later prove helpful as we formulated our understanding of the deeper sources of the village's factional divisions.

As the semester progressed, we began, as a further experiment, to drive across Massachusetts to the Essex County courthouse in Salem, taking several of our more eager students with us, to examine and transcribe the land transactions and unpublished probate records of those individuals who were now coming to seem especially significant. Then, in the summer of 1970, acting on a hunch, the two of us tracked down the early manuscript records of the Salem Village church, written down from 1689 to 1696 in the meticulous hand of its first minister, Samuel Parris. These records were located in the most obvious of places: the First Church of Danvers, the very church, though not the same building, in which Parris had ministered. Included in these records, to our astonishment and gratification, were the two crucial petitions—one in opposition to Parris, the other in support—that the minister himself had copied out, along with the names of every villager who had signed one or the other.

We and our graduate teaching assistants transcribed and typed out this new material to make it available in the fall of 1970 to the growing number of students who enrolled for our Salem course the second time we offered it. We also contracted to have the documents published so that other teachers might use them.<sup>2</sup> Having done so, it occurred to us that one of those other teachers might decide to write an essay based on “our” documents! Early that same fall, after considerable deliberation and some reluctance (each of us had other scholarly projects underway), we made the decision to write the essay that, once completed, we planned to submit to the *William and Mary Quarterly*.

As we began to write, we worked with tools that now seem pathetically old-fashioned; this was before even electronic calculators (not to mention personal computers) had been invented. We remember with fond amusement Paul Boyer's old adding machine, a 1950s business

<sup>2</sup> Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem-Village Witchcraft: A Documentary Record of Local Conflict in Colonial New England* (Belmont, Calif., 1972). The volume has since been reprinted with a new preface by the authors. See Boyer and Nissenbaum, eds., *Salem-Village Witchcraft: A Documentary Record of Local Conflict in Colonial New England* (Boston, 1993).

model from his father that luckily came with a paper-roll printout—a literal paper trail—which kept a precious record of the various tax figures we entered. Both of us had been trained as intellectual historians with limited experience of even the “old” social history. (We do like to think that our background in intellectual and cultural history and in close textual analysis was not entirely a disadvantage, since we combined our research in tax lists, village elections, and residential patterns with close attention to the written and spoken word, from Parris’s sermons and bitter personal outpourings and the pronouncements of other elite figures to the words of ordinary folk caught up in extraordinary circumstances, and even extending to such seemingly unlikely sources as fairy tales and John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*.)

For all that, when we finally completed *Salem Possessed* in late 1972—that article had long since outgrown itself—we knew we had written a good book.<sup>3</sup> We still think so today, thirty-six years later. It is hardly surprising that our work should at some point be subjected to hard scrutiny. While confronting criticism of one’s scholarship is not an unalloyed joy, we recognize it as central to the process of historical inquiry that, at its best, should be a stimulating conversation among mutually respectful participants. More than three decades after the book’s publication, many might well conclude that it is high time for *Salem Possessed* to face the kind of rigorous scrutiny that this Forum so abundantly furnishes. (For ourselves, it is even a little flattering to find that our book after all these years remains the subject of so much attention.)

Margo Burns and Bernard Rosenthal present a thoughtful and illuminating discussion of the forthcoming Cambridge University Press edition of

<sup>3</sup> The title itself, *Salem Possessed*, has a curious history. Our original preference was “Puritan Village in Crisis,” which is the working title that appears on our July 1971 contract with Harvard University Press. As the manuscript neared completion, however, we spent quite a bit of time thinking about other possibilities: “The Politics of Witchcraft,” “Yeomen, Merchants, Witches,” “Bedevilled Village,” “Specter Over Salem,” “The Tightening Noose,” “Toil and Trouble,” and many others. (Late-night gag titles thrown into the hopper after too many hours at the typewriter included “Hang-Ups at Salem” and—cleverest of all?—“From Rags to Witches.”) By April 1973 we had settled on “Afflicted Village: The Story behind Salem Witchcraft.” Max Hall, the editor at Harvard University Press who had initially solicited our manuscript, concurred, and this was the agreed-on title as the compositor began to set the book into type in mid-1973. But literally at the last minute, the recently appointed director of Harvard University Press, Arthur J. Rosenthal, decreed that for marketing reasons, either “Witchcraft” or “Salem” had to be in the main title. It was Hall who suggested “Salem Possessed” (a variant of “Village Possessed,” one of our backup choices), and we agreed. At a cost of some two hundred dollars, “Salem Possessed” was substituted for “Afflicted Village” as the running head on the pages that had already been set into type. (Today, of course, such a change could be made with a few quick keystrokes.)

the legal records of the witchcraft outbreak, which is already at least partially available online.<sup>4</sup> Their essay makes clear the meticulous care they have brought to the task. They have discovered new documents, caught transcription errors, retrieved misfiled records, reunited separated documents, and restored to their proper place many of the miscellaneous “Additional Documents” of earlier editions of the witchcraft records. Up-to-the-minute in using computer resources, they even spotted a document in a 2006 eBay auction that solved an attribution problem posed by the similar handwriting of Thomas Bradbury and his son-in-law.

Thanks to their word-by-word scrutiny of the documents, we now know that Tituba saw spectral cats, not spectral rats; that Dorcas Good was really named Dorothy; and that one afflicted girl saw neither a “cosen” (whatever that might be) nor a “basen” (basin), but a “kofen” (coffin). Toothaker descendents all over America will be relieved to learn not only that “Jerson Toothaker” was not an accused witch but also that he never existed at all and was only a spectral emanation arising from a transcription error. Thanks to Burns and Rosenthal, we now better understand the legal circumstances under which Bridget Bishop became the first to be tried, convicted, and hanged, though, as they explain, the underlying reason she went first remains conjectural.

Burns and Rosenthal’s essay reads like an advanced seminar by two experts in the retrieval, organization, dating, deciphering, and editing of colonial-era manuscripts, and specifically legal records. They demonstrate how much may be learned from careful attention to orthography, inks, excisions, insertions, and so forth. Their long-awaited work will facilitate a reconstruction of the legal history of the outbreak at a level of detail that has hitherto been difficult if not impossible. Students of Salem witchcraft, legal historians, and American colonial historians generally can only applaud the publication of this monumental work. It will clearly supersede all previous editions, including our own now out-of-print *Salem Witchcraft Papers*, though, as they note, earlier publications such as ours that employ a case-by-case organizational arrangement, rather than the chronological one they have adopted, may still prove useful for some purposes.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Margo Burns and Bernard Rosenthal, “Examination of the Records of the Salem Witch Trials,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 65, no. 3 (July 2008): 401–22; Rosenthal et al., *Records of the Salem Witch-Hunt* (Cambridge, forthcoming). The Web site, “Salem Witch Trials: Documentary Archive and Transcription Project,” is available on <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/salem/witchcraft>. Benjamin C. Ray is the project director.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, eds., *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692*, 3 vols. (New York, 1977).

Though most of their essay is descriptive and technical in nature, Burns and Rosenthal advance one substantive interpretive claim, asserting that the legal records they have mastered so thoroughly demonstrate the scrupulous care with which the letter of the law and contemporary due process were observed in the handling of the witchcraft cases. The judicial process, they claim, was “far from being hysterical” and, “though not fair by modern standards, was meticulous by the standards of its day.”<sup>6</sup>

One can indeed learn much from legal documents, but like all sources they have their limits. In this case they may convey a partially misleading impression of the punctilious and dispassionate application of the law under highly fraught conditions. For the full story, including the emotional tone of the proceedings and behind-the-scenes disputes and uncertainties, one needs to look beyond the legal records (invaluable as they are). Though the overused term “hysteria” should not be applied to the legal process, the Massachusetts judicial system of 1692–93 was clearly operating under highly stressful, contentious, and unprecedented circumstances. Interrogators, judges, juries, and court officers faced controversies over their methods, endured the frightening behavior of the afflicted girls, and puzzled over rambling depositions reciting past misfortunes, long-festered grievances, and terrifying nocturnal visitations. Such realities rarely show up in the formulaic language of the legal documents.<sup>7</sup>

The specially constituted Court of Oyer and Terminer faced criticism at the time from many prominent figures, including Boston ministers Increase Mather and Samuel Willard; Captain Samuel Cary of Charlestown, a mariner whose wife was accused; and wealthy Boston merchant and Harvard College treasurer Thomas Brattle. Nathaniel Saltonstall resigned from the court, refusing to sign death warrants for women from his town of Andover. Even Governor William Phips, who had created the court, distanced himself from it as the attacks intensified. Cary, disgusted by the court’s proceedings and the admission of “Idle, if not malicious Stories,” managed to help his wife escape from jail and possibly the hangman’s noose; others went into hiding to escape a judicial process they deemed grievously flawed. In 1697 Samuel Sewall, an erstwhile member of the witchcraft court, stood in his church pew while minister Samuel Willard read Sewall’s statement acknowledging “the Guilt contracted upon the opening of the late Commission of Oyer

<sup>6</sup> Burns and Rosenthal, *WMQ* 65: 417.

<sup>7</sup> One well-known exception is the trial of Rebecca Nurse. Thanks to a deposition by the grand jury foreman and a later petition by Nurse herself, we know that when the jury returned a not-guilty verdict, the presiding judge of the Court of Oyer and Terminer, deputy governor William Stoughton, sent them back for further deliberations, whereupon they reversed their verdict and found Nurse guilty. One can only speculate how many other such interactions failed to make it into the legal record.

and Terminer at Salem” and asking “that God, who has an Unlimited Authority, would pardon that sin and all other [of] his sins.”<sup>8</sup>

Robert Calef, a Boston merchant whose skeptical 1697 account of the outbreak, *More Wonders of the Invisible World*, was published in London in 1700, described chaotic courtroom scenes, including Sarah Good’s trial when one of the afflicted girls screamed that Good’s specter had stabbed her in the breast and broken the knife in the process. Sure enough a broken blade was found near the girl. But then a youth apparently present in the courtroom volunteered that he had broken his knife the day before when the girl was nearby. The judges, having confirmed that the blade fit the young man’s broken knife, admonished the girl not to tell lies—yet permitted her to continue to give evidence in subsequent trials.

Judicial proceedings involve more than technical due process, and observers at the time recognized this as clearly as we do today. Of course, Burns and Rosenthal fully understand this, too, but as they recount their immersion in, and scrupulous study of, the legal documents, the world beyond the documents sometimes seems to fade to near invisibility.

Richard Latner offers a reexamination of the Salem Village tax lists. He supports our finding that in the 1695 assessment, the average tax of the pro-Parris faction was more than 25 percent lower than that of the anti-Parris faction. He also confirms the decline of the pro-Parris group during the crucial years of the early 1690s and agrees that the pro-Parris and anti-Parris petition lists correlate closely with the divisions that emerged during the witchcraft episode.

His principal focus, however, is on the 1681, 1690, and (to a lesser extent) 1700 tax lists, which, he contends, challenge the argument we advanced in *Salem Possessed*. The various operations he performs are not always easy to follow, as he shifts from numerical to percentile rankings and from averages (and means) to ratios, but the bottom line is that both in 1681 and 1690, the average tax paid by the group that emerged after 1689 as the pro-Parris faction was lower than the average of the anti-Parris faction. Latner, however, heavily emphasizes his finding that the gap somewhat narrowed in the course of the decade. In 1681 the average tax of the future pro-Parris taxpayers was 90 percent of the anti-Parris average, whereas by 1690 it stood at 93 percent.

When Latner employs medians rather than averages, the gap between the two groups narrows somewhat more during this nine-year

<sup>8</sup> Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Witchcraft Papers*, 1: 210 (“Idle”); Mark Van Doren, ed., *Samuel Sewall’s Diary* (New York, 1963), 139 (“Guilt contracted”).

period, with the pro-Parris group reaching parity in 1690. As he notes, medians tend to mute the effects of “extreme cases.”<sup>9</sup> (People with two arms have an above-average number of arms but are squarely in the median.) In the case of Salem Village, however, where perceptions so crucially shaped beliefs about economic conditions and where the residents did not have access to the sophisticated computational techniques Latner marshals, we concluded in analyzing the 1695 tax list that computing average rates, giving full weight to extreme cases, was actually the more useful and revealing measure.

Though Latner criticizes us for not examining village taxes diachronically, his diachronic data present such a tangle of problems that his claims for their significance must be viewed with considerable skepticism. As he concedes in a footnote, the tax changes in the 1680s “are too small . . . to be statistically significant” because of the relatively few pro-Parris and anti-Parris persisters who appear on these lists, yet he still claims that these changes affected villagers’ sense of their relative status. In a further warning, he writes, “Admittedly, one must proffer these conclusions with an abundance of caution. The numbers involved are small and the persisters [signers of the pro-Parris or anti-Parris petitions who also appear on the 1681 and 1690 tax lists] constituted less than half the adult males who signed the petitions in 1695.” Near the end of the essay, he reiterates the cautionary qualification: “There are limitations to what Salem Village’s tax lists can say about the actual wealth of its inhabitants, let alone how they derived their wealth. Even discounting the methodological problems of tracing the fortunes of villagers who moved in and out of the tax rolls, the lists cannot delineate with certainty whether inhabitants actually improved their standard of living or fell on hard times during these twenty years. Moreover the tax rolls cannot address a person’s involvement in or psychological relationship to capitalism or a market economy.”<sup>10</sup>

These and other caveats are amply borne out as one examines Latner’s statistical operations. Cross-generational land transfers, the appearance and disappearance of names, the entry of lower-taxed younger men on the lists, and difficulties in determining what forms of wealth apart from land have been assessed all affect the data, making it almost impossible to convincingly document change over time from tax lists alone. In a footnote readers learn the crucial fact that the 1690 data are skewed by the addition among the anti-Parris taxpayers of ten men

<sup>9</sup> Richard Latner, “Salem Witchcraft, Factionalism, and Social Change Reconsidered: Were Salem’s Witch-Hunters Modernization’s Failures?” *WMQ* 65, no. 3 (July 2008): 423–48 (quotation, 437).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 432 n. 18, 436, 446.

of the younger generation still at the lower end of the tax rolls. In another footnote Latner reports the important fact that the 1700 tax list (when the average tax of the erstwhile pro-Parris faction rose to 87 percent of the average of the former anti-Parris faction, up from 72 percent in 1695) included seven young anti-Parris men first taxed that year and as yet near the bottom of the tax rates.<sup>11</sup> Given all the caveats and qualifications, the usefulness of Latner's data for evaluating the village's economic history in the 1680s and the later 1690s seems dubious. By contrast the clear-cut differences between the two groups evident in the 1695 tax list (and to a somewhat lesser extent in the 1694 tax list) and the stark decline of the pro-Parris group's fortunes in the crucial years 1690–95 remain unchallenged.

It is precisely because comparing the tax lists diachronically is so problematic that we took care to build our argument using a variety of evidence, of which tax data constitute a small part. Yet apart from a brief summary early in his essay and a few passing references, Latner shows scant interest in the larger argument developed in *Salem Possessed* or in the evidence presented. He focuses almost exclusively on three paragraphs (pages 81–83) and other scattered mentions of taxes in a 220-page book. Our book's broader themes—the larger pattern of Salem Village's factional politics; the dynamics of two leading families, the Putnams and the Porters; the background and crucial role minister (and failed merchant) Parris played; the dramatic commercial changes transforming Salem Town and their impact on Salem Village; how all of these figured in the crisis of 1692; and, ultimately, the ways that crisis, and the circumstances that helped precipitate it, might illuminate the complex and dynamic forces at work in the countryside of coastal Massachusetts in the late seventeenth century—do not seem to engage Latner's interest.

We thank him for the appreciative comments about *Salem Possessed* with which he begins, yet in advancing his claims for the significance of his findings, we must say that Latner misrepresents our argument and erects a straw man that he then vigorously knocks down. In his caricatured version of our thesis, Salem Village was clearly and starkly divided between two diametrically opposed groups clinging to totally different values: “traditional agrarians,” vehemently opposed to commercial activity, and enthusiastic commercial capitalists, with the former trying “to thwart their opponents' economic advancement by launching a witch hunt.”<sup>12</sup> This Classic Comics summary is far from our actual representation of the situation. We do not depict Salem Village as a simple agrarian society but rather carefully delineate its social complexity as many villagers, coping with economic pressures, sought to balance conflicting

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 437–38 n. 23, 445–46 n. 33.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 434–35 n. 20, 444.

values and emotions and as they found the economic developments in Salem Town alluring and unsettling. We do not present the witchcraft outbreak as a deliberate plot by one faction to “thwart the economic advancement” of the other but as an expression of psychological and social tensions played out within individuals and factions as well as among them. As these tensions unfolded, we argue, they followed deeply etched factional fault lines that, in turn, were influenced by economic anxieties and by differing levels of engagement with and access to the political and commercial opportunities unfolding in Salem Town.<sup>13</sup> (More about this crucial strand of our argument a little later.)

Nor do we suggest in a simplistic fashion, as Latner implies in his concluding sentence, “that those associated with religion, such as the supporters of Parris’s church, were necessarily engaged in a battle against economic improvement, the market, or modernity.” Salem Villagers, church members and non-church members alike, were experiencing economic changes associated with Salem Town’s commercial development and anxiously assessing its effect on them. In his 2006 *New England Quarterly* article, Latner sees “religious discord” rather than economic factors as the key to Salem Village factionalism.<sup>14</sup> But it is not an either-or choice. To explore the economic and social history of Salem Village and Salem Town is not to deny the importance of religion, including the implications of establishing a full-fledged church in Salem Village; the widespread and biblically grounded belief in the reality of witchcraft; and Parris’s polarizing personality and inflammatory sermons. In *Salem Possessed* we document the interplay of religious and socioeconomic factors—from the controversies involving George Burroughs and other village ministers, to the bitter disputes over Parris’s salary demands, firewood allotment, and ownership of the parsonage, to his fateful decision, citing biblical and ecclesiastical authority, to attribute the afflicted girls’ behavior to demonic possession.

As though catching us in some sleight of hand, Latner claims that “the authors adjust their thesis at various points by arguing that the pro-Parris villagers were being ‘lure[d]’ and ‘transform[ed]’ by the very forces they resisted.” This perspective is no opportunistic “adjustment” of our thesis; it is at the core of the entire work. As we wrote:

One advantage we as outsiders have had over the people of Salem Village is that we can afford to recognize the degree to

<sup>13</sup> Richard Latner criticizes us for not demonstrating the existence of such factional divisions in the other nearby towns that became involved as the accusations and arrests spiraled out of control. As we make clear in *Salem Possessed*, we (like contemporary observers) see Salem Village as the heart and center of the outbreak, and thus we focus our attention on a close examination of the village and its history.

<sup>14</sup> Latner, *WMQ* 65: 448, 448 n. 35.

which the menace they were fighting off had taken root within each of them almost as deeply as it had in Salem Town or along the Ipswich Road . . . Samuel Parris and Thomas Putnam, Jr. were part of a vast company, on both sides of the Atlantic, who were trying to expunge the lure of a new order from their own souls by doing battle with it in the real world. While this company of Puritans were not the purveyors of the spirit of capitalism that historians once made them out to be, neither were they simple peasants clinging blindly to the imagined security of a receding medieval culture. What seems above all to characterize them, and even to help define their identity as “Puritans,” is the precarious way in which they managed to inhabit both these worlds at once . . . We have over and over again stressed the conflicting emotions most Salem Villagers must have felt as they witnessed the transformation of Salem Town into a major commercial center, and as they saw an altered social and economic order beginning to take shape. The witchcraft testimony itself makes plain that even those who felt most uneasy about those developments were also deeply attracted by them.<sup>15</sup>

This passage is a key to the meaning of *Salem Possessed*; it informs the second half of the book especially, as we explore the particular stories of the Putnam and Porter families and Parris. It was and remains our conviction that if these people had been simply traditional agrarians, they might not have lashed out so furiously in 1692; that it was their very ambivalence about marketplace values that fueled their resentment and transformed it into hatred. In a larger sense, we continue to believe, as we wrote in the quoted paragraph, that the Puritan sensibility itself represented a complex response to the subversion of more traditional values rather than a simple expression of those values. (Indeed the powerful reemergence of religious fundamentalisms in our own time seems to represent a similarly complex response to the pressures of globalization in the form of Islamic and Christian radicals who eagerly use communications satellites, laptop computers, sophisticated databases, Web sites, and computerized mailing lists to hasten the coming of a simpler, purer world.) Whoever thinks of *Salem Possessed* in terms of easy polarities—whether based on tax lists or lines on a map—has not read our book with sufficient care.

Benjamin C. Ray, using computer-based digital imaging, geographic information systems software, and ge positioning devices one could

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 434–35 n. 20 (“authors adjust”); Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), 180–81, 209–10.

only dream of in the 1970s, focuses on certain aspects of one of our maps. Supplementing much other evidence, this map, titled “The Geography of Witchcraft: Salem Village, 1692,” illustrated and served as one building block in our larger argument that villagers’ distance from the emerging commercial opportunities of Salem Town and differing levels of involvement in the town’s political and economic life figured significantly in the pattern of village factionalism that, in turn, underlay the crisis of 1692.<sup>16</sup>

Like Latner, Ray (a descendant of Salem Village resident Joshua Rea Jr., a signer of the anti-Parris petition of 1695) shows little interest in our broader argument or our effort to contextualize the witchcraft outbreak historically. He contends, for example, that John Procter’s “great mistake,” and thus the reason he was accused, was that he scoffed at the afflicted girls and beat his servant, Mary Warren, for her involvement. This exclusive focus on immediate events recalls earlier writing about Salem witchcraft that concentrated entirely on 1692 to the exclusion of historical context. In *Salem Possessed* we examine Procter’s “backstory” as a wealthy property owner, absentee landlord, and licensed tavern owner on the Ipswich Road, a district of commercial enterprises separating Salem Village and Salem Town.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, Ray devotes attention to the somewhat niggling question of whether John Willard’s landholdings extended into Salem Village and thus whether he should appear in the tally of accused Salem Village witches, yet he seems to have little interest in Willard’s relationship, as a newcomer to the area, to his in-laws (and principal accusers) the long-established Wilkins clan living on the far western side of Salem Village. We discuss this relationship in detail as one of several paradigmatic examples of the geographically inflected tensions afflicting the community, which is a story that readers cannot glean from maps.<sup>18</sup> Instead Ray simply suggests that Willard was accused because he was said to have mocked the afflicted girls, again focusing on the immediate events of 1692 with little attention to the deeper historical context.

Even Ray’s cartographic interest focuses exclusively on the Geography of Witchcraft map, ignoring or mentioning only in passing, without comment, the Ipswich Road map, the map showing Putnam and Porter

<sup>16</sup> “The Geography of Witchcraft: Salem Village, 1692,” in Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 34.

<sup>17</sup> Benjamin C. Ray, “The Geography of Witchcraft Accusations in 1692 Salem Village,” *WMQ* 65, no. 3 (July 2008): 449–78 (quotation, 460); Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 200–202.

<sup>18</sup> While John Willard does appear on the 1690 Salem Village tax list, Sidney Perley’s meticulous real-estate history of Salem Village does not mention him. See Perley, *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 46–56 (1910–20).

landholdings, and the important Geography of Factionalism map showing a clear geographic pattern in the signers of the 1695 pro- and anti-Parris petitions.

Though attention to detail is always helpful, we find it frustrating to deal with narrowly focused criticism that ignores our book's overall structure and the full range of evidence offered. The critiques we have found most helpful over the years have been those that addressed our argument and supporting evidence as a whole.

As the epigraph of his essay, Ray reprints part of a single sentence that appears on the facing page to the Geography of Witchcraft map: "The alleged witches and those who accused them resided on opposite sides of the Village."<sup>19</sup> That sentence is clearly an overstatement, incorporated in an early draft and reflecting the excitement of first discovery. In retrospect we should have taken note of it and phrased it more carefully in the process of revising. It does not accurately represent either the map itself or our own overall account of it, both of which make clear that what we had found was a telling geographic pattern in the outbreak, not an absolute division.

Indeed, over the years it has been an ongoing source of frustration when that simplified summary of the Geography of Witchcraft map has been misused to represent the entire argument of *Salem Possessed*. The most blatant public example of such misuse was doubtless the 1985 PBS American Playhouse movie *Three Sovereigns for Sarah*, starring Vanessa Redgrave and Kim Hunter, which concludes with a dramatic scene in which the Redgrave character triumphantly unfurls a version of our very map, and sure enough, every single witch and defender resides on one side of a vertical line bisecting Salem Village, with every single accuser on the other side. (Stephen Nissenbaum, a consultant for that movie, tried hard but in vain to make some changes in that map.) In retrospect, as Ray makes amply clear by highlighting that single sentence, we ourselves remain at least partly responsible for whatever misuses or misrepresentations of our work may have occurred.

Within the narrow compass of his paper, Ray raises several points that merit comment. He "corrects" the Geography of Witchcraft map in various ways, adding to, deleting, and rearranging its Ws, As, and Ds (shorthand for accused witches, accusers, and defenders of the accused), concluding that these changes blur the geographic pattern that we found. Citing a 1981 genealogical article, he removes the W representing Bridget Bishop from Ipswich Road.<sup>20</sup> As with Latner's tax data, however,

<sup>19</sup> Ray, *WMQ* 65: 449.

<sup>20</sup> Sidney Perley shows Edward Bishop's lot on the Salem Village side of Ipswich Road and notes: "he lived in a house which stood upon this part of the lot;

many of his “corrections” are problematic. For example, he adds a W representing Warren, one of the afflicted girls, who was indeed accused of witchcraft. We omitted Warren (even though including her as a W would have strengthened the geographic pattern the map shows) not through an oversight, however, but because of the categorical decision to exclude those who played ambiguous roles in the outbreak, as both accusers and defenders or, in this case, as both accuser and accused.

Another instance: Ray adds three Ws just across the Salem Village line in Topsfield, representing William and Deliverance Hobbs and their daughter Abigail (near where we placed three As representing accusers of Willard, who figures importantly in our analysis). As it happened, Abigail and Deliverance (reversing Warren’s progression from accuser to accused) were accused witches who, in turn, accused others. (William Hobbs, whose testimony survives in fragmentary form, answered only “I do not know” when asked if his daughter was a witch.) We omitted the three Hobbses, again following our policy of not including people who fall in more than one of the A, D, or W categories. Ray has decided otherwise, but this is a matter of judgment, not a simple correction of an oversight or deliberate misrepresentation. In a similar arbitrary decision, Ray moves still farther away from Salem Village to add a W representing Mary Esty of Topsfield on the grounds that she was the sister of two accused Salem Village witches.

More crucially, Ray reshapes the map by adding thirteen accusers whom we excluded for reasons we clearly explained. Five of these are individuals who appear in the records first as accusers but later as defenders, most by signing the Rebecca Nurse petition circulated by Israel Porter, a highly risky public act given the climate of the time and, at the very least, indicative of reservations about the course of events. (It is worth reiterating that Porter and his circle, including his son-in-law Joseph Putnam and nephew Daniel Andrew, so central to our interpretation, go essentially unmentioned by Latner and Ray.) Ray also adds eight so-called afflicted girls (plus Susannah Sheldon and Jemima Rea) to his map as accusers. In planning the map, we made the considered judgment that though these girls were obviously important in the onset and forward momentum of the outbreak, their specific accusations were so tainted by adult intervention or, as Ray suggests, by “village gossip” that their residences were not germane to the geographic pattern we were documenting. (Interestingly, Burns and Rosenthal reinforce this conclusion, attributing the similar phrasing in many accusations to “the

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and from here his wife Bridget went to jail . . . for the alleged crime of witchcraft.” See Perley, “Rial Side: Part of Salem in 1700,” *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 55, no. 1 (January 1919): 49–74 (map facing 49, quotation, 69).

influence of Thomas Putnam, who was the recorder and the one common element across the group of accusers.”) Our decision to omit the so-called afflicted girls was further influenced by the fact that six of them were not living in their parents’ households in 1692.<sup>21</sup>

As Ray points out, others have made differing judgments on these points. That is the nature of scholarly discourse. So we find it highly surprising that Ray repeatedly implies we deliberately manipulated the Geography of Witchcraft map to buttress a thesis we had already formulated. By citing the book *How to Lie with Maps*; by characterizing our judgments as “curious”; by citing our decision to exclude from the map the afflicted girls and those who were both accusers and defenders (or accusers and accused) as proof that we “did not intend [our] map to represent information as recorded in the court documents”; and by other comments scattered throughout the essay, Ray creates the impression that we deliberately distorted the map to support a predetermined interpretation.<sup>22</sup> We did no such thing. Here and throughout our book, the evidentiary findings came first and the interpretation followed. This sequence was exactly the process by which the two of us moved, slowly and after much deliberation, from discovering and teaching these documents and thinking about what they could tell us to making the decision to write about them. Indeed it would probably be more accurate to say that we stumbled on our interpretation than that we imposed it on the evidence. Ray is free to make his own maps and to include whomever he wishes. But it should be understood that his “corrected” map in significant measure involves differing judgment calls and is not necessarily either more accurate or so dramatically different from ours as to justify his sweeping claims regarding its significance for our argument.

Ray correctly removes from the map six signers of the Nurse petition who also made witchcraft accusations and who therefore, by our criteria, should not have been included. He cites no source but presumably he has used the forthcoming new edition of these documents that we assume will be meticulously indexed and will also, Ray reports, include some fifty additional court records not in the WPA compilation that we indexed and reprinted as *The Salem Witchcraft Papers* several years after completing *Salem Possessed*. In researching *Salem Possessed* a generation ago, we relied for the most part on W. Elliot Woodward’s *Records of Salem Witchcraft*, published in 1864 and reissued in facsimile by Da Capo in 1969. Two of the six whom Ray identifies as accusers as well as defenders (Jonathan Putnam and John Putnam Sr.) appear in Woodward’s index as accusers,

<sup>21</sup> Burns and Rosenthal, *WMQ* 65: 44. See also Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, 34–35.

<sup>22</sup> Ray, *WMQ* 65: 463.

and we should have caught this fact. The other four (Joseph Hutchinson Sr., Lydia Hutchinson, Rebecca Putnam, and Joseph Holton Sr.) do not appear in Woodward's index, and though we carefully read the actual documents, for some purposes we relied primarily on Woodward's index and so missed these four. While conceding that we may have missed some accusers "by oversight," Ray repeatedly places a vaguely sinister interpretation on what he views as our errors or omissions, scarcely acknowledging legitimate differences of judgment or the emergence since the early 1970s of new evidence or more accessible research aids as factors worth noting.<sup>23</sup>

Ray also adds fourteen more accusers. Discussing each in detail would extend this paper to unconscionable length. Suffice it to say that several have already been addressed, and our reasons explained; some are missing from Woodward's index; and others are, indeed, oversights. Since Ray does not report where eleven of these fourteen lived, how their addition affects our geographic findings remains unknown.

Pursuing his bill of particulars regarding our Geography of Witchcraft map, Ray questions the placement of the east-west dividing line. Inevitably, within obvious limits, the exact siting of this line is somewhat arbitrary. Further, as he notes, several accused witches, accusers, and defenders lived in or near the village parsonage, making any geographic division among them difficult. Still, even if one obviates this problem by moving the line one-quarter mile to the west (and accepting the principles of inclusion explained in *Salem Possessed*), perhaps five or six more of the accusers on our map would fall on the eastern side, which would not appreciably affect the larger pattern.

Ray concludes with some map exercises of his own. His Figure XI displays the residences of Salem Villagers on the basis of their rank in the 1689–90 tax list. Though this map shows twice as many of the community's lowest-taxed farmers on the western side as on the eastern side, Ray surprisingly concludes that the two geographic cohorts were "not . . . radically different" economically. Not only does this map fail to trace changes over time—the issue that looms so large for Latner—but Ray has chosen the 1689–90 tax list rather than the 1695 list, on which the economic differences between the two factions (also clearly divided geographically) are so striking.<sup>24</sup> He does not show a demarcation line (at

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.; W. Elliot Woodward, ed., *Records of Salem Witchcraft, Copied from the Original Documents* (1864–65; repr., New York, 1969); Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Witchcraft Papers*.

<sup>24</sup> Ray, *WMQ* 65: 471. Benjamin C. Ray justifies his decision to ignore the 1695 tax list by asserting that "the tax rates do not vary much between . . . 1689–90 and 1695" (ibid., 472 n. 23). In fact Richard Latner's essay, which he cites for this claim, documents a dramatic shift in this crucial six-year interval, with the average rates of

least on the draft we saw), but if one places it where we do in the Geography of Witchcraft map (and excludes those residences that lie directly on or very near the line), the east side appears to have five men in the top tax bracket and fifteen in the middle bracket, whereas the west has three in the top bracket and nine in the middle bracket—not a “radical” difference, perhaps, yet not insignificant, particularly when combined with the overwhelming preponderance of the lowest-taxed farmers in the west.

Figure XII, plotting the geographic location of men whom Ray considers “village leaders” in the period 1680–92, purports to show that those living on the eastern (Salem Town) side of the village were just as committed to the village’s political life and welfare as those on the western side. But the map is a strained effort, raising more questions than it resolves. Ray’s village leaders are a mixed bag indeed. He includes militia officers, who were actually a part of the Salem Town militia.<sup>25</sup> Dr. William Griggs is included as “the village physician,” as though this were an official position. In fact, Griggs was a Salem Townsman who purchased a property on the town side of the Ipswich Road (outside the village bounds) as late as February 1692, when he was around eighty years old, and who died less than a year later. Griggs, in short, lived on the periphery of Salem Village for at most a year.<sup>26</sup> Equally problematic is the inclusion of Samuel Parris, an outsider who arrived only in 1689 and promptly became a lightning rod of controversy. Ray’s inclusion of militia officers, about whose selection we know so little, along with Griggs and Parris among the village leaders who, he claims, had logged “years of service” in promoting “the village’s welfare” raises serious doubts about the relevance and even the credibility of this map.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, Figure XII reveals nothing about changes over time in an extremely volatile period of intensifying factional polarization, culminating in the dramatic political shift that swept the anti-Parris faction into power late in 1691—an event, not incidentally, that increased Ray’s tally of village leaders living on the Salem Town side of the village. In fact

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the pro-Parris taxpayers declining sharply both absolutely and compared with the anti-Parris group.

<sup>25</sup> For militia purposes, as for many others, Salem Village in these years remained a part of Salem Town. Unless the village had a quasi-autonomous company within the Salem Town regiment, its officers would have been chosen by the town-wide militia as a whole, in which village residents would have constituted a minority. We have been unable to resolve this question with any degree of certainty.

<sup>26</sup> Griggs died sometime before Feb. 10, 1693, when his will was probated. See Perley, *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 55: map facing 48, 63; Walter S. Griggs, “Genealogy of the Griggs Family,” [http://www.franklinfamily.info/ancestry/griggs\\_family\\_genealogy.htm](http://www.franklinfamily.info/ancestry/griggs_family_genealogy.htm).

<sup>27</sup> Ray, *WMQ* 65: 473.

this election brought onto the village committee (and thus into the ranks of those Ray counts as village leaders) men who were hardly proponents of the village's welfare and were actually at bitter odds with the previously dominant faction in village politics! Finally, and most bewildering to us, Ray significantly revised Figure XII after we finished writing this response.<sup>28</sup> What had been an eighteen to fourteen east-west division in the essay we responded to suddenly became a sixteen to seventeen split tilting toward the western side. Such a striking last-minute revision unavoidably raises questions in our minds about the overall reliability of Ray's imposing array of cartographic, geographic, and prosopographical evidence.

Less importantly, Figure XIII, plotting the geographic distribution of the signers of a 1670 petition requesting a village minister, goes far back to a time when the social and economic changes we trace in *Salem Possessed* were in their earliest stage. Figure XIV shows that signers of 1689 and 1692 petitions to the General Court seeking release from Salem Town taxes included men from the eastern part of the village. If anything this map underscores the ambiguity and fluidity of the situation so often obscured in reductionist summaries of our argument. It was entirely possible for individuals, particularly those with easier access to Salem Town, to be drawn to its economic and political promise while also favoring a specific measure—abatement of town taxes for village residents—that offered obvious and immediate economic benefits. In any event we have never claimed that every conceivable piece of evidence supports our interpretation. In researching and writing *Salem Possessed*, we looked for the *preponderance* of evidence and formulated an interpretation that seemed best able to explain that evidence and that most firmly rooted the village's factional divisions, and the witchcraft outbreak, in the local and immediate political and economic context, thereby illuminating why the outbreak erupted when it did, and precisely where it did, rather than at some other time or in numerous other communities affected by more general causal factors.

In summary, Ray's critique, involving assumptions and procedural decisions over which scholars may legitimately differ, fails to justify his sweeping conclusion, supposedly proved by objective cartographic evidence free of interpretive assumptions or polemical intent, that Salem Village was "not a community geographically divided . . . by wealth, social leadership, church membership, or the witchcraft accusations."<sup>29</sup> In our view the case for an economic and geographic component in all

<sup>28</sup> We learned of this revision only as the result of an editorial query at the copyediting stage, just as this issue of the *Quarterly* was about to go into production.

<sup>29</sup> Ray, *WMQ* 65: 477.

these tangled elements of Salem Village's history up to and including 1692 remains strong, resting not only on tax data or a single map but also on the full array of evidentiary sources and analytic approaches we drew on in *Salem Possessed* to get at the lived experience of individual men and women, households, and extended family networks.

Benjamin C. Ray closes with the observation that "mapping the accusations [and, by implication, all historical research] needs to be as free of interpretive assumptions as possible." Echoing as it does Leopold von Ranke's insistence that historians remain faithful to the evidence, without allowing their ideological commitments to dictate their scholarly interpretations, Ray's claim is, in an important sense, axiomatic.<sup>30</sup> Yet historians *are* products of their era, and its concerns, preoccupations, and perspectives inevitably influence the questions they ask and the interpretive approaches that seem most alive for them. In this sense we readily concede that *Salem Possessed* reflects a particular moment in American historical scholarship, in the nation's history, and in our personal lives.

The late sixties was a seedtime not only of the new experiments in historical pedagogy that led us to build a documents-based course around Salem witchcraft but also of what was quickly being dubbed a new social history. *Salem Possessed* was a product of that development too. These were the years when John Demos, Philip J. Greven Jr., Kenneth A. Lockridge, and others were publishing their microhistories of other early Massachusetts communities. (And they, in turn, were influenced by the young Bernard Bailyn who, with his pathbreaking, statistically grounded study *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century*, had begun to move beyond the awesome and sometimes intimidating shadow of Perry Miller and his magisterial two-volume intellectual history of a core group of New England ministers.)<sup>31</sup> It was their work that encouraged us to approach the events of 1692 from a new angle, not as an aspect of the psychology of adolescent hysteria, the side effects of Puritan religious superstition, or even the larger history of witch trials, but rather as a single extraordinary episode in the individual

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 478 (quotation). On Leopold von Ranke, see for example Georg G. Iggers and James M. Powell, eds., *Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1990).

<sup>31</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1955); John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York, 1970); Philip J. Greven Jr., *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1970); Kenneth A. Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years, Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636-1736* (New York, 1970).

and collective lives of otherwise unexceptional people—people who happened to reside in or near what we discovered to be a rather exceptional community.

As we note in the preface of *Salem Possessed*, the book was also the product of a tumultuous era in the nation's history, with society torn by clamorous disagreements over what many saw as a disastrous and ill-considered war waged by an arrogant and blundering administration. Beginning our teaching careers in the late sixties, we had experienced this turmoil firsthand, as every semester seemed to end chaotically with strikes, moratoria, and cancelled classes and with authority questioned at every level, from the university lecture hall to the White House.

The late sixties spawned not only a new social history but also a "New Left." And we were not just observers but participants in these developments. Stephen Nissenbaum, while still a graduate student in 1967 in Madison, Wisconsin, and an instructor in the first incarnation of the Salem witchcraft course, was actually meeting with a group of his students on October 18, 1967, as they marched around an academic building in peaceful protest of on-campus recruiting by the Dow Chemical Company (the manufacturer of napalm), an episode that would achieve national notoriety several hours later when the state police violently attacked the protesters. Paul Boyer took time from work on the Salem book to participate in teach-ins, including a crowded and intense late-night session at a UMass dormitory where a tearful young woman burst out: "My brother was just killed in Vietnam. Are you telling us this war is wrong?" All these experiences, too, certainly shaped the perspectives and affinities we brought to bear as we looked at the history of a single community that was itself caught up in agonizing, seemingly intractable conflict.

These personal experiences may help explain why we were prepared to accept the evidence that the two opposing Salem Village factions could be differentiated from each other by their relationship to an increasingly powerful market economy: that the pro-Parris faction was struggling within (and in part against) that economy, to which it was nevertheless strongly attracted, whereas many members of the anti-Parris faction had a closer and more advantageous, if still ambiguous, relationship with it. In interpreting the history of an early New England community in such terms, we were not alone. By the mid-seventies we would find ourselves in the company of early New England social historians such as Christopher Clark, James A. Henretta, and Michael Merrill, all of whom addressed in provocative fashion the transition-to-capitalism question by arguing, in one way or another, for the centrality of the countryside in that process and contending that rural Americans were generally reluctant to embrace the entrepreneurial values of the

marketplace.<sup>32</sup> That idea, too, was in the air as we were writing *Salem Possessed*.

This is not to suggest that Salem witchcraft, or any historical event, is a mere Rorschach inkblot to be interpreted however one wishes. All historical writing reflects the circumstances of its production and is the work of men and women who are citizens and social beings as well as historians. This fact is often easier to recognize in retrospect than at the time, but we would be surprised if the many scholars who have brought their own interpretive perspectives to bear on New England witchcraft since *Salem Possessed* would disagree.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed we are inclined to believe it is not mere coincidence that Richard Latner and Benjamin C. Ray imply that the two factions in Salem Village cannot be meaningfully distinguished from each other by economic standing or geographic location; by implication, apart from "religious discord" (which looms so large in contemporary America), the differences between them cannot be explained by reference to larger issues of ideology and behavior. The instruments of quantitative micro-analysis and even of basic scholarly work have improved exponentially over the decades, with sophisticated database software, geographic information systems devices, and word processors replacing our clattery typewriters, archaic adding machine, laborious cut-and-paste composition,

<sup>32</sup> Michael Merrill, "Cash Is Good to Eat: Self-Sufficiency and Exchange in the Rural Economy of the United States," *Radical History Review* 4, no. 1 (Winter 1977): 42–71; James A. Henretta, "Families and Farms: *Mentalité* in Pre-Industrial America," *WMQ* 35, no. 1 (January 1978): 3–32; Christopher Clark, "Household Economy, Market Exchange and the Rise of Capitalism in the Connecticut Valley, 1800–1860," *Journal of Social History* 13, no. 2 (Winter 1979–80): 169–89.

<sup>33</sup> These scholars include John Demos, who employed psychology and anthropology to explicate New England's pre-1692 witchcraft accusations; Richard Weisman, a sociologist with a fine historical eye who differentiated popular notions of witchcraft from theological ones to suggest what made 1692 unique; Carol F. Karlsen, who dealt subtly and powerfully with gender issues; Bernard Rosenthal, who brought the sensibility of a literary scholar attuned to current trends in textual analysis to the testimony of the afflicted girls; and Mary Beth Norton, who carefully and imaginatively connected 1692 with the sometimes violent interactions of European settlers and the indigenous peoples they displaced. Overall the tendency in much of the recent witchcraft scholarship has been to shift the focus from immediate and local issues to questions of gender, law, and ethnicity: from microhistory back to macrohistory. In this scholarship, as in our own work, we can see the effect of broader shifts in cultural politics. John M. Murrin offers a concise summary and analysis of the recent historiography of Salem witchcraft, though we believe he goes too far (or is simply being shortsighted) in suggesting that *Salem Possessed* amounted to something like a diversion from more important issues. See Murrin, "The Infernal Conspiracy of Indians and Grandmothers," *Reviews in American History* 31, no. 4 (December 2003): 485–94.

and photocopied nineteenth-century maps. But there has been another kind of change as well. As the political culture of the late sixties shifted sometime around 1980, so, to some degree, did the inclinations of historical scholarship. Important studies of the social and economic history of early New England (by scholars such as David Grayson Allen, T. H. Breen, Stephen Innes, John Frederick Martin, and Winifred Barr Rothenberg, for example) reengaged the vexed transition-to-capitalism question by asserting that from an early period the region's farmers, whether as producers or consumers, embraced the entrepreneurial behavior and values of the marketplace and the values it encouraged.<sup>34</sup> From such a perspective, early New Englanders came to look very much like Reagan-era Americans. The scholarship of those years has posed a challenge to works such as *Salem Possessed* that emphasized resistance, or at least ambivalence, toward the marketplace. Latner and Ray implicitly support that challenge. To make this observation about their critiques is not to impute bias or distortion to them. It is only to say that they, like us, not only write about history but also live within it.

When the two of us began almost four decades ago to teach our experimental course about Salem witchcraft and then to write about it, some of our more senior UMass colleagues looked on our work with something like bemused condescension. Surely, they implied (no, they said outright!), we would glean nothing else from so overworked a topic, and they even wondered whether there was something rather unserious about devoting an entire course to teaching it. Though we were confident at the time that our doubting colleagues were wrong, we also probably assumed that our book was likely to be the last word on Salem witchcraft.

How little we knew! Today, now that both of us have long since gone on to do very different kinds of scholarly work in very different

<sup>34</sup> David Grayson Allen, *In English Ways: The Movement of Societies and the Transfer of English Local Law and Custom to Massachusetts Bay in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1981); Stephen Innes, *Labor in a New Land: Economy and Society in Seventeenth-Century Springfield* (Princeton, N.J., 1983); John Frederick Martin, *Profits in the Wilderness: Entrepreneurship and the Founding of New England Towns in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1991); Winifred Barr Rothenberg, *From Market-Places to a Market Economy: The Transformation of Rural Massachusetts, 1750–1850* (Chicago, 1992). T. H. Breen contributed to this literature with a series of important essays, beginning with “An Empire of Goods: The Anglicization of Colonial America, 1690–1776,” *Journal of British Studies* 25, no. 4 (October 1986): 467–99, that culminated in *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York, 2004).

periods of American history, we would not dream of condescending toward all the recent efforts to explore the events of 1692. Indeed, as new generations of historians have been drawn to this seemingly inexhaustible topic, we have come to suspect that nobody is likely for very long to possess Salem.

Possession is a term for the belief that witches, demons or spirits can take control of a human body. Possession can be countered with a ritual of exorcism, which evicts the demons from the human host. The concept of spirit possession exists in many religions and spiritual beliefs, including Christianity, Witchcraft and Shamanism. Depending on the cultural context in which it is found, possession may be considered voluntary or involuntary and may be considered to have beneficial or detrimental effects. In "Salem Possessed" (1974), Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum revolutionized the field of social history with their patient mapping of the domestic and economic tensions that, they argued, explained the outbreak. More recently, Mary Beth Norton's "In the Devil's Snare" (2002) advanced an electrifying analysis of the witch crisis as a reaction to the Indian wars that consumed northern New England in the 1680s and 1690s. ^ "Salem Possessed in Retrospect." Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum. *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (Jul. 2008), pp. 503-534. ^ Review of Salem-Village Witchcraft, Chadwick Hansen, *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Jul, 1973), pp. 528-529. ^ Review of Salem Possessed, T.H. Breen, *William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Jan, 1975), pp. 137-139. ^ "Salem Possessed in Retrospect." Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum. *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (Jul. 2008), pp. 503-534. ^ Salem Possessed in Retrospect." Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum. *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (Jul.