



**S**ITCHCRAFT in Early North America

**ALISON GAMES**

# Witchcraft in Early North America



## American Controversies Series

*Series Editor: Douglas R. Egerton, Le Moyne College*

Students love debate. They love contention, which they see all about them in modern society. Yet to

many monographs or biographies erase the controversies that existed in earlier decades. Slavery and institutionalized sexism, for example, strike modern readers as being so clearly wrong that they cannot understand why rational Americans endorsed slavery or thought it foolish to enfranchise women. How could a politician as brilliant as Thomas Jefferson believe that forced assimilation was the best policy for Native Americans? Why did Americans allow Hitler to become so powerful before confronting him? Why were many of the so-called Greatest Generation indifferent to social justice at home? How did the Vietnam War become such a political and cultural powder keg? Hindsight is often the enemy of understanding, and what strikes us as obvious was often anything but simple to earlier generations.

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# Preface

Like many of my colleagues who teach classes in early American history, whether the U.S. history survey or courses on the colonial period, I have always made time to talk about witchcraft. For the most part, I have assigned books that explore the outbreak at Salem in 1692 or witchcraft in New England more broadly. As a result, the story of witchcraft in my classes tended to emphasize the experiences of European colonists and settlers in North America and to keep my students focused on the eastern seaboard, replicating a familiar narrative of American history that privileges the English colonies. But in 2002, I joined forces with my Georgetown colleague Amy Leonard, a specialist in early modern European history, to teach a class on witches and witchcraft in Europe and the Atlantic world. We anchored our class in Europe and then examined the collisions of witch beliefs that transpired beyond Europe, in Africa and the Americas. The class made it obvious to me that witchcraft was a unique and valuable way to understand how Europeans, Africans, and Americans made sense of each other in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. I wondered if it might be possible to develop a book on the subject that I could use in my own North American history classes. I envisioned a text that used witchcraft to explore the colonial encounters and occupations that transformed much of the continent, that moved away from the English colonies, that reached into French and Spanish territories, that integrated Native Americans and Africans, and that might be helpful to colleagues eager to find ways to incorporate the many different inhabitants of the whole continent in their own classes. *Witchcraft in Early North America* is the result of that investigation.

*Witchcraft in Early North America* covers the period from 1616, the year of an Indian revolt in the northern province of New Spain, through the first decade of the nineteenth century, the years of the Shawnee and Seneca witch hunts in the United States. The book's geographic focus is North America

ranging from the northern provinces of the Spanish Viceroyalty of New Spain (in other words northern Mexico and the territory contained in the modern state of New Mexico) through the British colonies on the eastern seaboard, French (and Spanish) Louisiana, and southeastern Canada. My goal in the introduction is to help readers understand the people the book examines and the wide array of witch beliefs they held. It thus explores European, African, and Indian witch beliefs in turn, trying to understand, as much as possible, these separate belief systems before each group encountered the other. It then examines how those beliefs changed when these people met, through conquest, enslavement, colonization, and trade, in North America. I explore how witchcraft beliefs manifested themselves in three different colonial jurisdictions (New Mexico, New France, and the British colonies), in addition to looking at the witchcraft beliefs and expression of Africans and their descendants in North America. The introduction also devotes considerable space to outbreaks, setting the familiar episode at Salem in 1692 in a broader North American context. It argues that much of what historians regard as exceptional about Salem ends up looking characteristic of outbreaks across North America when we take a continental approach. The discussion of North American outbreaks includes not only a close assessment of Salem, but also separate discussions of confession, possession, and the Indian witch hunts of the early nineteenth century. The introduction concludes with an exploration of skepticism.

A second goal of the introduction is to introduce students to the historiography of witchcraft—this is, the different ways in which historians have interpreted the subject over time. Scholars who examine witchcraft analyze it through the history of law, medicine, disease, religion, family, community, sexuality, economy, race, psychology, gender, politics, and popular culture. It is a subject characterized by methodological diversity, and thus witchcraft offers an ideal entry into how historians work to understand the past. The primary documents in Section II will encourage students to weigh historians' interpretations and to develop their own.

Readers are likely to understand the primary sources more easily if they read the introduction first, and indeed the two sections of this volume have been designed to be interdependent. The documents represent an array of source material, including missionary reports, trial transcripts, laws, newspaper letters, church records, and travel accounts. The documents focus on six core topics: First Impressions, Resistance and the Devil, English Witch Beliefs Cross the Atlantic, New World Possession, and Outbreaks. The documents delineate a wide variety of perspectives and experiences, although rarely are Indians and Africans and enslaved people able to speak for themselves. Students will have to read closely to get beyond European perceptions and viewpoints, and they will also have to wrestle with some archaic language, especially in some legal documents. While I have made some silent editorial changes, for the most part I have left English spelling unchanged from its original seventeenth-century form. Readers might find it helpful to read documents out loud if the spelling confuses them, and if they do so, they might enjoy imagining how the language sounded to those who heard it centuries ago.

I made extensive use of all facets of the Georgetown University libraries in the course of this project. I am especially grateful to the efficient sleuths in the interlibrary loan office, the invisible people who circulate books so expeditiously around the Washington Research Library Consortium, the solicitous staff at the circulation desk who knew when a book arrived from remote storage or another library on the subject of witchcraft that it was for me, and John Buchtel in Special Collections. David Hagen photographed material from Georgetown's Special Collections and worked some digital magic on an image from the Library of Congress. I also thank Steven Tabor at the Huntington Library, Anne Marie Walsh at the Folger Shakespeare Library, Susan Danforth at the John Carter Brown Library, and

Mary Haegert and John Overholt at Harvard University for their help with images. Robert D. Martín gave me permission to use his translation of Fray Toledo's letter about the possessions at Abiquiu, and I thank him for his generosity. I was fortunate that this project found a home in Rowman and Littlefield's American Controversies series, and I am grateful to Niels Aaboe, Karen Ackermann, Michelle Cassidy, and especially Elisa Weeks for their assistance. Bill Nelson made the map.

I have picked the brains of many friends and colleagues in the past two years as I worked on the book. I thank Rose Beiler, Judy Bieber, Elaine Crane, Steve Hackel, Cindy Nickerson, Carla Pestano, and Jim Williams for their assistance. In the History Department at Georgetown, one never lacks for patient, helpful, and generous readers. I sometimes wonder how historians in less collegial departments manage to write books. I am grateful to the many colleagues who read the introduction for me. I thank Tommaso Astarita, Katie Benton-Cohen, David Collins, Chandra Manning, Adam Rothman, and John Tutino. I have learned more about witchcraft (and all sorts of other interesting and important things) from Amy Leonard than she can imagine. Special thanks to Karin Wulf (who has been reading my work for twenty years) for her extensive editorial advice. My animal familiars have provided constant companionship. Doug Egerton read drafts of this book with care and enthusiasm and offered many helpful suggestions as I planned and worked on the project. I may have failed to follow all of the suggestions these kind friends and readers made, but this book is vastly better for their careful and helpful intervention.

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WITCHCRAFT IN  
EARLY NORTH AMERICA

*An Introduction*

# Witchcraft in Early North America

## *An Introduction*

What is a witch? Students of American history usually have a quick answer to that question: A witch was one of those poor accused women who were hanged at Salem, Massachusetts, in that town's infamous outbreak of 1692, one such as Sarah Good, whose "wicked spitfull manner," her "base and abusive words," and her "muttering" may have condemned her in her neighbors' eyes far more than her diabolical actions (see document 19).<sup>1</sup> But it turns out that witches were everywhere in North America. And witches were not only terrified English colonists. Witches could be Huron shaman, Pueblo healers, enslaved conjurers, and Jesuit priests. As Europeans, Americans, and Africans converged in North America, so, too, did their ideas about witchcraft. Witches, everyone agreed, were people who performed harmful acts and threatened community order. But when societies and cultures collided on the North American continent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was an irrevocable shift in people's assumptions about what harmful acts entailed, who was most likely to be committing them, and how one might preserve communities ravaged by disease and conquest and reform them anew out of strangers.

Witchcraft might seem quaint and exotic to many readers, but to the people who are the subject of this book, it was a major preoccupation and concern. Witchcraft explained the unfathomable: prolonged drought, epidemics, deadly storms, earthquakes. Central Africans believed that witches (in the form of greedy and self-aggrandizing rulers) might even cause wars. The past was a time of far greater insecurity in meeting basic needs than most readers of this volume know today. Modern North Americans can alter their environment with ease, overcoming the constraints of the natural world. When it is cold, we can turn on heat, thanks to a massive infrastructure that delivers gas, oil, and electricity to homes in even the most rural regions. In sweltering summers, we reverse the action, chilling the air around us with fans or air conditioning. As night falls, we turn on lights, fending off scary creatures that dwell in the dark unknown and enjoying activities once reserved only for daylight—work, reading, recreation, and safe travel. We shrink distances with the telephone, the Internet, and the airplane, bringing the whole world within our reach with technology. We even traverse time, viewing planets, stars, and distant solar systems of the past through magnificent telescopes. We stave off sickness and delay death with a fantastic array of diagnostic tools, potent chemical cocktails, and palliative care. North Americans live amid unprecedented food security, with few people dependent on a single harvest to survive. In short, in the twenty-first century we have many tools and services at our disposal to challenge and circumvent the dictates of the natural world.

Yet it is in many ways too simple to assert that those who believed in witchcraft were people who, lacking our technology, could not explain or transform their world in any other way. The same people who believed that one drought was caused by witchcraft did not think that all droughts were. Although some mariners on a terribly rough and stormy passage across the Atlantic might find a witch in the midst, most voyages, even those plagued by hurricanes, shipwrecks, and death, did not produce witchcraft accusations. Christian parents might understand a child's death as the punishing hand of God or the unfortunate quirk of fate or just one of the many cruel sicknesses that carried away



many as half of all children before they reached the age of five. The Puritan minister Cotton Mather (1663–1728), who lived in Massachusetts, watched in helpless agony as eight of his fifteen children died before they reached the age of two—and he inhabited what was believed to be a salubrious region.<sup>2</sup> This was a lethal age, and people lived with death and chronic pains and aches in ways mercifully unknown to most of us. Magic might lift these pains and torments, and it might also cause them. People who could manipulate material objects and harness special powers in the supernatural world might effect good or evil. In other words, people believed in witchcraft not because there were so many inexplicable events in their world, but because they lived in a world that contained witches.

In Europe, as many as 90,000 people were prosecuted as witches between 1420 and 1780, and as many as 45,000 of those were likely executed.<sup>3</sup> In this same period, Europeans crossed the Atlantic and claimed, occupied, invaded, settled, and exploited the Americas. Christopher Columbus's successful transatlantic voyage in 1492 marked the inauguration of a new era. European states sought to project their power in the Americas, eager to extract wealth from American resources (natural and human) and to deploy that wealth in struggles for dominion in Europe.

North America figured prominently in this process. The Spanish moved north from the valley of Mexico (where they toppled the Aztec Empire in 1519) across the Rio Grande, establishing their first settlements in the region we know as New Mexico in 1598. The French approached the continent from across the North Atlantic; they followed short-lived experiments in the 1530s with a serious commitment to fur trading in the early seventeenth century, settling in the St. Lawrence valley after 1608. The English ran fisheries in Newfoundland and established numerous colonies to the south in the seventeenth century. By the late seventeenth century, tiny pockets of European settlement dotted the continent. These enterprises were accompanied by intermittent conflicts with indigenous inhabitants. Europeans, moreover, forcibly transported Africans to the Americas and appropriated their labor and their progeny. Witchcraft in North America emerged out of this crucible, one with multiple belief systems; with complex power dynamics; and with stunning social, economic, and demographic transformations. In this book, I invite readers to examine witch beliefs as a unique approach to how cultural beliefs and practices collided. Witchcraft was one important way in which people made sense of their turbulent and changing world.

Colonization and conquests changed witchcraft beliefs and their expression. Witchcraft always provided a mechanism for revenge: victims alleged that the accused had killed their cattle, sickened their child, hindered their sexual performance, or ruined their crops. Any community harbored infinite possibilities for such conflicts. But colonial societies introduced new elements of coercion and cruelty. North America became a place of expanded evil. Indians who linked sickness with malevolence lived in a transformed world, with far more witches in it than had been the case before the arrival of Europeans. (What else could explain the deadly epidemics that swept away entire villages?) Enslaved Africans found their ideas about evil power similarly altered by the expansion of malevolent forces in American slave societies. Christian Europeans believed in the Devil as surely as they believed in God, and the Devil had loyal helpers—witches—especially in North America, a land European theologians regarded as the last bastion of Satan. In a world so fraught with tension, epidemics, conflict, and exploitation, it is little surprise that the chronology of witchcraft in North America differed considerably from that of Europe, where witch hunts petered out by the end of the seventeenth century. In contrast, witchcraft continued to be a fundamental aspect of how European and Africans (and their descendants), Indians, and people of mixed race made sense of each other and of their world into the early nineteenth century, and a major outbreak occurred in eighteenth-century New Mexico.

Preexisting notions about a witch's gender and race and even economic status shifted in new colonial societies. In England, Spain, and France, women were more likely than men to face accusations of witchcraft. But in North America, witches were both men and women. The transition came in part because Europeans, especially Spaniards, linked witchcraft to Indians, to Africans, and to people of mixed race—and as this connection developed, witchcraft lost its special association with women and was attached more to race and caste.<sup>4</sup> In 1626, the first formal allegations of witchcraft reached New Mexican authorities; they involved an Indian woman and her mestiza (or mixed race) daughter. In that same year, across the continent, troubled Virginians charged one of their neighbors with witchcraft in the first known case in the English colonies. She was an Englishwoman, and in that respect typical of witches who landed in English colonial courts. English colonists continued to associate women with witchcraft, but wealthier women were more likely to face allegations than had been true in Europe.

While witch beliefs traveled across the Atlantic with Africans and Europeans, the context in which witchcraft accusations and trials functioned often did not. The manifestation of witch beliefs and trials is thus intertwined with the specific context of migration and colonization in North America. European migrants brought, for the most part, only fragments of their home societies with them. The ecclesiastical structures that shaped understandings about the Devil, the trained witch-hunters, the libraries of legal tomes that informed jurists, the long-standing personal relationships: all of these complex systems that enveloped witch beliefs, accusations, and trials could not be reproduced in America. Migration strained and sometimes shattered belief systems. Some Europeans had ideas about magical practices that were connected to specific geographical features—caves, waterfalls, mountains, forests, swamps. So, too, did Africans. West-Central Africans, for example, believed that forest to be a sacred space, where they buried the dead and where spirits might inhabit rocks or trees. Forests were also a source of herbs for healing and magical charms.<sup>5</sup> In new environments, key ingredients might be unattainable. Both Africans and Europeans were severed—by choice or by force—from the natural world that hosted supernatural spirits. For Americans, sacred places were sometimes deliberately assaulted by Spanish invaders, who placed cathedrals where temples had stood, in a time-honored strategy of conquerors. They did just that in Mexico City, where they built their great cathedral on the sacred grounds of the Aztecs' Templo Mayor.

Witchcraft gives us a raw and unfiltered—indeed, sometimes excruciating—glimpse at the lives of real men, women, and children who lived centuries ago. When we read a transcript of a witch trial, we find ourselves flung into the midst of community life. We learn of old injuries, tangled relationships, broken hearts, political ambitions, terrifying assaults, children long deceased but mourned with much anguish as if they had died just the day before, families in conflict over generations, petty disputes over baubles and trifles, and heart wrenching loss and betrayal. We meet, for example, husbands who defended their wives when they were accused of witchcraft (see documents 8, 10, and 20), husbands who suspected their wives were witches (see document 19), and one husband whose alleged infidelity drove his distraught wife to accuse three women of witchcraft (see document 12). As a subject of historical inquiry, witchcraft enables us to glimpse a distant and often alien culture with startling intensity and intimacy. This book pulls together documents from different parts of North America, by Spanish, French, and English settlers, about Indians, enslaved Africans, and European colonists. These documents touch on slavery and servitude, family and the individual, sickness and death, the law and the church, reflecting the ways that ideas about witchcraft permeated the entire fabric of society.

## Beliefs: Europeans

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To make sense of why some people looked like witches while others did not, and why some regions contained numerous trials and others virtually none, we need to understand the witch beliefs that Europeans, Africans, and Americans held at the time of contact and settlement. The discussion starts with European beliefs for two main reasons. First, most of what we know about African and American witch beliefs comes from records generated by Europeans, so it is essential to understand what Europeans believed in order to make sense of what they thought they saw. Second, Europeans created the legal systems in which witch beliefs and accusations found traction in North American courts and through which most evidence of witchcraft has survived.

Europeans believed that a witch was a person who committed a crime using harmful magic. For example, a witch might cause a person or animal to sicken or die by chanting a spell or by sticking pins in a figure. A spell might similarly incite a storm or ruin crops or cause a drought (see document 9). A witch might thwart the hunt, as two men claimed Goodwife Wright did in Virginia in 1626 (see document 8). Witches might also cause men to become impotent. The Latin term for such crimes was *maleficium* (the plural is *maleficia*), and jurisdictions everywhere had statutes that banned and punished them (see documents 6 and 7). Even if a witch was also guilty of blasphemy (showing disrespect for God), her or his case normally appeared in secular courts by the middle of the sixteenth century, not ecclesiastical ones. A witch did not always need to perform any specific action to cause harm; damage could ensue if a witch only *wished* harm on someone. While magic might also be performed for beneficial ends—to heal the sick, to comfort the afflicted, to bring about good fortune or to recover lost or stolen items—by the sixteenth century European laws had defined even this so-called “white” magic as a form of witchcraft and thus also illegal and punishable by death in some jurisdictions. Witchcraft activity surged in Europe in the 1560s and 1570s, with trials in Germany and the Low Countries and new statutes in England and Scotland. Trial activity intensified from 1580 to 1630, followed by a very protracted decline between 1630 and 1770.

A rich folklore developed around witchcraft. Accused witches in Europe might be accompanied by creatures called familiars, including cats, rats, and toads (see figure 1). The more unpleasant and offensive the animal, the more it was “loathed by all people, who generally have a Natural Antipathy against that sort of Vermin,” the more likely witches—with their unnatural sensibilities—were to find affinity with it.<sup>6</sup> Some witches transformed themselves into animals. In Estonia, accused witches confessed to acts of *maleficia* while they were werewolves; one woman testified in 1623 that she had been a werewolf for four years. Other witches worked closely with their familiars, sometimes assuming their shape in order to carry out their crimes. Still others put creatures to work in their spells. Shepherds in Normandy were especially likely to be accused of performing *maleficia* with the assistance of toad venom. In Iceland, witches, mostly male, worked their magic with the aid of rune characters from the old Germanic alphabet used in Scandinavia and believed to have magical properties.<sup>7</sup>

One essential component of European witch beliefs was inextricably linked to Christian theology and that was the idea of a special relationship between witches and the Devil. The Christian religious system contains two arch rivals: a supreme deity of all power and knowledge whom Christians call God, and a competitive fallen angel, Lucifer, who is the main source of evil in the world. Lucifer reigns in Hell and is also known as Satan or the Devil. Christians believed then (and many still do) that God and Satan were consumed by an eternal struggle for power, one that manifested itself in part in Satan’s efforts to thwart God’s plans and to win away Christians to assist him in his diabolical

machinations. These recruits were witches.

Sorcerers, in contrast, used magic, but did not rely on the assistance of evil spirits. That was the defining feature of the witch—that he or she joined with Satan and with his assistance performed evil acts in the world. In North America, however, this distinction eroded, and European observers used the terms *witch* and *sorcerer* and *wizard* and *demon* interchangeably to describe those (universally Native Americans) whom they saw as engaging in malevolent practices (see documents 1 and 2). Europeans also distinguished “high” magic from “low” magic, another blurred line that ensnared some unfortunate practitioners. High magic included alchemy (transforming metals) and divination (finding out secret or hidden information through astrology and other methods). Although witchcraft statutes banned divination (see document 6), practitioners of high magic were infrequently charged with witchcraft; however, those who had unnatural knowledge of the future or about the location of lost objects might well be accused of witchcraft. So Goodwife Wright’s accusers claimed in court in Virginia in 1626. Rebecca Grey testified that Wright predicted the death of numerous people (see document 8).

This connection between witchcraft and the Devil emerged over centuries and was solidified in the middle of the fifteenth century, and then circulated in a range of published tracts, all more easily dispersed in the wake of Johannes Gutenberg’s invention of movable type in 1439. The most famous of such tracts, *Malleus Maleficarum* (*The Hammer of the Witches*), was written by two Dominican friars, James Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer, both inquisitors in the Holy Roman Empire and the first men to be commissioned by the pope to hunt witches. It provided graphic accounts of witches’ behavior, describing their crimes, their sexual relations with the Devil, their demonic progeny, and their deviant ways, and it helped elaborate a complex demonology for readers. Published in 1487, it was widely disseminated in Europe among educated elites, and during the Reformation was popular with Protestants, too.<sup>8</sup>

Witches made a pact with the Devil and agreed to serve him. Thus, witchcraft was also diabolism or worship of the Devil. Europeans emphasized that witches had made a free choice in their service of the Devil. The particulars of this relationship varied by region, but there were some common features. Witches signaled their allegiance to the Devil by signing a book with their signature or, more typically in this era of pervasive female illiteracy, their mark. In the course of doing so, witches acquired a distinctive mark on their bodies. It was allegedly impervious to pain and unable to express blood, and it featured prominently in witch trials as bodies were examined, pricked, and prodded for evidence of the tell-tale sign (see documents 9 and 10). Witches often flew through the air, sometimes many thousands of miles, to meet with other witches at Sabbaths, as witches’ assemblies were called. Witches in the Labourd (on the French and Spanish border and the site of a major witch hunt in 1609–1610), a region whose inhabitants made their living from the sea and especially from the fisheries of Newfoundland, confessed to flying across the ocean to Newfoundland at night.<sup>9</sup> Sometimes witches rode on beasts, and sometimes they rode on sticks, with the broom the most common form of nocturnal transport. The larger the gathering, the farther witches needed to fly to reach it. There, witches engaged in all sorts of unusual sexual and social practices. They had orgies, danced naked, and even killed and consumed unbaptized babies. Some Sabbaths included blasphemous practices, including reciting prayers backward, or performing a mock Eucharist (see figure 2). Tortured witches also confessed to having sex with the Devil and bearing his offspring.

Educated, elite men, often the lawyers, judges, and church officials who prosecuted witchcraft in court, expected to hear about diabolical practices, and often they could only get their suspicions confirmed under torture. (Torture

was an integral feature of the judicial system on the European continent, which was based on Roman law; in contrast, the English common law system used torture infrequently.) Accused witches, on the other hand, tended to confess more easily to core elements of popular beliefs about maleficia, animal familiars, and charms and potions. Anna Roleffes (known as Tempel Anneke), tried in Brunswick in the Holy Roman Empire in 1663, confessed to several practices that she clearly regarded as harmless white magic, including a divination ritual designed to help her find stolen goods, and making a concoction of berries, salt, leaves, hops, and sage to cure sick sheep. Rituals required words to give them power, as any Christian knew, and so Tempel Anneke called on God. Sometimes she needed more elaborate prayer. If, for example, one was blessing a man, she explained to the court, one might say, “John and the Holy Evangelists, they pluck a branch in Paradise.”

Tempel Anneke was understandably confused about her ability to use words and actions together. Rituals and sacraments endorsed by the Catholic Church and performed by priests did, indeed, seem magical. Priests transformed wine into blood and bread into flesh. Clerics uttered prayers and suggested that their words could be heard and acted upon by a remote deity. In all these actions human activity intersected with the divine. Is it any wonder worshipers might believe that their spells were nothing but prayers? Tempel Anneke’s potions sounded harmless, and her words Christian, but her interrogators knew better. When they consulted physicians about her herbal concoctions, the doctors denied that the medicines could cause any benefit, so any cure could only be achieved through magic and thus through the aid of the Devil. Tempel Anneke adamantly denied this charge. Under torture, however, when the torturer took her to a new interrogation chamber in the jail’s cellars, blindfolded her, and tightened a leg screw, Tempel Anneke confessed to apparitions from a “black man” who threatened to avenge Tempel Anneke on those who insulted her. With leg screws the fastened on both shins, eyes covered, encased in darkness, and with no advocate by her side, only the company of her torturer who exhorted her to acknowledge her crimes and end her ghastly misery. Tempel Anneke confessed to making a pact with the Devil to serve him twelve years, to having sex with him on her bed, to becoming pregnant with salamanders as a result of this intercourse, and to bewitching people and causing injury. She confessed on October 22; just over two months later, on December 30, she was beheaded, and then her body was burned.<sup>10</sup>

As a woman, Tempel Anneke was typical of most executed witches in Europe, where women represented 75 percent of executed witches in most regions.<sup>11</sup> This sex ratio was especially pronounced in England, where some 93 percent of accused witches in the county of Essex were women. There was, however, considerable range within Europe. In Iceland, for example, only 1 percent of accused witches were women; in Poland, 96 percent were.<sup>12</sup> There could also be great variation within a single nation. Take France. In the Department of the Nord, a territory in the far north of the country, 81 percent of accused witches were women. But in one part of Normandy, the Pays de Caux, men were especially likely to be accused of witchcraft, and the region was the “epicenter of male witchcraft in western Europe.”<sup>13</sup> Of 381 people accused of witchcraft in Normandy between 1560 and 1660, 278 (73 percent) were men, and 103 (27 percent) were women.<sup>14</sup> Seventeen men from this region—and one woman—were executed as witches. The occupations of the accused were male occupations: half of the accused were shepherds, and the next most frequent occupation category was clergy. Thus, in many places witchcraft might be commonly associated with women (a sex-linked crime) but not associated *only* with women (and thus not a sex-specific crime).

In England, so obvious was the connection between women and witchcraft that when the magistrates of Newcastle, having hired a witch-hunter from Scotland, sent their crier through town, he called on the people of Newcastle to bring forward their complaints “against any *woman* for a Witch

In the wake of this roundup, fourteen women and one man were condemned and hanged. Moreover, the Newcastle authorities were more likely to believe that attractive women were innocent and elderly women guilty (see figure 3). The witch-hunter's method involved sticking pins in alleged witches. When he proposed to do so to one woman, "personable and good like," the magistrates objected. The witch-hunter persevered and found her guilty in a cruel and humiliating ritual in which he stripped her clothes to her waist and plunged pins in her thighs. The magistrates nonetheless intervened, and she was finally cleared.<sup>15</sup>

What was it about women? Attitudes toward women and especially about women's bodies and sexuality persuaded people that women were predisposed toward witchcraft. Medical ideas, derived from Aristotle, regarded men and women as binary opposites; women were wet and cold, men were warm and dry. Women's genitals were likewise the reverse of men's. Aristotelian medical theories moreover, held that the male body was the norm; the female body was a corrupt variation. Commentators universally discussed women's sexuality in a negative fashion. Women were insatiable creatures, naturally prone to lust and deviance. Their carnality led them to witchcraft: witch-hunting manuals, most notably the *Malleus*, which drew on these ancient ideas about women, emphasized the sexual relationship between Satan and his human agents, and it was easy enough for believers to associate women's lust with their attraction to the Devil, who could fulfill their sexual needs as no mortal man could.<sup>16</sup> Thus, in those societies where people believed that a witch's body contained telltale marks of her relationship with Satan, those marks were invariably found in woman's genitalia. Her "very hidden places," as one legal manual for English justices in the 1630s put it.<sup>17</sup> Women's bodily defects and their immoral natures were accompanied by their greater credulity. Women were frail and impressionable, more likely to be superstitious than men. And their weakness also encouraged them to resort to occult arts to seek revenge on those who wronged them.<sup>18</sup> The *Malleus* codified these ideas, assembling a devastating critique of women's natures and yoking women inextricably to witchcraft.<sup>19</sup> The documents in Section II offer many opportunities to read trials against women and to examine the role that gender played in the charges against them (see especially documents 8, 9, 10, 12, 19, 20, 21, 23, and 24).

Because witchcraft was a crime, its detection and punishment were governed by the prevailing rules of evidence and procedure in different jurisdictions. But witchcraft was also an exceptional crime—*crimen exceptum*, one to which the normal practices did not apply. Because witchcraft was so difficult to prove using the normal rules of evidence, jurists applied different standards. Thus, for example, courts applied torture in places where it was otherwise not regularly employed as a key element of witchcraft trials in order to compel the accused to confess. Severe torture was essential because the Devil could help accused witches withstand pain. Courts even had a word for their assistance—*taciturnitas* (keeping silent). It referred to the ability of a witch to endure the agonies of torture without confession.<sup>20</sup> People who were otherwise not normally allowed to give testimony in court, including children, women, and felons, were often able to do so in witchcraft trials. In Sweden, for example, thousands of children testified during a major witch hunt between 1668 and 1676, although in Swedish legal practice, children under the age of fifteen were not normally allowed to testify. During the outbreak, this principle was set aside and child witnesses were calculated as the equivalent of fractions of adults; in this reckoning, a five-year-old child equaled one-tenth of an adult witness, and thus by adding together many children, the courts met the legal obligation to have twelve witnesses for witchcraft convictions.<sup>21</sup> Those whose testimony might otherwise be disregarded in English courts—excommunicated people, children, unreliable servants, runaways—could testify against witches.<sup>22</sup> Some jurisdictions also allowed ordeals to serve as proof of guilt or innocence.

Such “ordeals” were legacies of early medieval legal practices and rooted in Celtic and Germanic law in which, for example, people could demonstrate their innocence by their ability to recover miraculously from carrying a hot iron in their bare hands. In the case of the water ordeal, featured in the trial of Grace Sherwood in Virginia in 1706 (see document 10), a guilty party floated, while the innocent sank.

In many respects, these deviations from normal legal procedures contradicted other prevailing trends in the legal culture of the era. In these centuries, law became transformed in ways that would seem familiar to Americans in the twenty-first century. Courts became more centralized, thus applying standard policies and punishments to guilty parties. Courts expected witnesses to see through crimes of which they spoke; juries were not supposed to have an active interest in the outcome of trials; confessions were not to be compelled by force; witnesses, likewise, should not endure pressure to provide testimony.<sup>23</sup>

Where courts banned torture, executions tended to be less frequent and accused witches rarely confessed to diabolical practices. The relative absence of torture in the Netherlands, where less than 150 people were executed out of a population of 1 million, for example, might explain the low number of executions there. In England, juries (not judges) tended to determine a witch’s guilt or innocence and they tended to be lenient. The English also rarely employed torture: it was used once (illegally) during the English Civil War. In Scotland, torture was employed more frequently (but still illegally). There were some significant panics in Scotland in the sixteenth century, and a large witch hunt in England in the 1640s, but there was never anything like the massive hunts that occurred in central Europe. The kingdoms of England and Scotland experienced perhaps 5,000 prosecutions for witchcraft during the era of the witch hunt, and probably half of those were in Scotland, with perhaps 1,500–2,500 executions.<sup>24</sup>

Another key to acquittal was the rise of centralized states, as people with a greater distance from the personal conflicts that expressed themselves in witch accusations tended to bring greater skepticism not to witchcraft in general but rather to the particular features of any given case. The lack of centralization in the Holy Roman Empire, composed of a collection of individual political entities, is one explanation that historians have offered for the high number of accusations, trials, and especially executions there (20,000–25,000), in contrast, for example, to France, where the Parlement of Paris, the kingdom’s main judicial body, gradually gained control over reviews of regional jurisdictions’ decisions about guilt and overturned local sentences. Between 1588 and 1624, the Parlement ended up dismissing 36 percent of cases, and confirmed only 24 percent.<sup>25</sup> By 1640, the Parlement no longer prosecuted witches, and this termination of prosecutions extended to the whole kingdom in an edict in 1682. There were perhaps only 1,000 executions in France. Likewise, although ecclesiastical courts employed torture in Spain and Italy, executions there were infrequent, largely because the Inquisition was a centralized institution. In the kingdoms of Spain and the Italian states there were about 10,000 prosecutions altogether, many for minor offenses, with very few executions. Iberian and Italian authorities, for the most part, had little interest in allegations of Devil worship, the most serious offense witches committed. Most crimes there pertained to love magic (the use of spells and divination, for example, to attract a lover, or to seek revenge) and healing, behaviors that were believed to be heretical, but not capital crimes.

All of these beliefs and practices concerning witchcraft, finally, were entangled in the major religious transformation of the period, the Protestant Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. In 1517, a monk named Martin Luther launched what became a major religious upheaval after he posted ninety-five critiques of the Catholic Church on the doors of the cathedral at Wittenburg. New churches

emerged in the wake of this protest. Protestants (as the followers of Luther's initiative came to be called) established new churches and defined codes of conduct for believers, and they were especially concerned with reforming personal behavior (whether banning card playing and other games or regulating sexual conduct) and ensuring orthodox beliefs (making sure, for example, that worshippers understood church doctrine).

The line between religion and superstition was a fuzzy and shifting one, especially in this period when all churches, Protestant and Catholic, were clamping down on behavior. Across and even within religious traditions, there was little agreement on what might be superstitious or even pagan practices. English Puritans, for example, rejected the celebration of Christmas or the many feast days and seasonal rituals that were practiced in the Protestant Church of England. They refused to use the months' names, which they regarded as pagan, and instead used only the number. They sought to live by God's laws as they strictly interpreted them, and this aspiration affected even their witchcraft statutes, which turned, as the Connecticut colony's 1642 law did, to Leviticus, Exodus, and Deuteronomy for inspiration (see document 7).

Yet these were people whose own habits might strike modern readers as bizarre and laden with superstition. The Puritans believed that God's will was unknowable, yet that his hand was everywhere. Their predestinarian theology convinced them that God had already consigned them to Heaven or Hell regardless of their actions on this earth. They accompanied this uncompromising doctrine with the belief that God gave men and women clues to read so that they might make educated guesses about the likelihood of their salvation—although they always accepted the real possibility that they might well guess wrong. These two beliefs—that God was present in all aspects of life and that God might have left clues to the eager believer about salvation—made Puritans intensely aware of the world around them. No natural event, no odd coincidence, no accident, passed without some study of God's hand. Thus, for example, a gathering of ministers paused during a meeting in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1648 because a snake had slithered into the chamber. What did that mean? What was God trying to tell them? After some deliberation, the ministers concluded that the snake was Satan, and he sought to disturb their gathering, although they were also certain that God knew of Satan's plan, since nothing happened without God's knowledge.<sup>26</sup> Natural events, such as storms or floods or late spring snows or prolonged drought might reveal God's power as well. A people who believed just as firmly in Satan as they did in God could equally find Satan's hand, vying with God for power.<sup>27</sup>

Enhanced regulation of personal conduct and religious expression was only one aspect of the reforms that accompanied church schism and creation in this era. A second important feature was the emergence of political rivalries that were expressed through religious opposition. Europe was divided into warring camps, Protestant and Catholic, even though the composition of those camps shifted continuously throughout the sixteenth century. By the end of the sixteenth century, England had emerged as a major Protestant kingdom, setting itself in opposition to Spain, a bastion of Catholicism. The struggles between these kingdoms for power in Europe leaked into North America, and part of this competition was the battle for souls to convert to their respective faiths. Zeal for conversion interacted with witchcraft beliefs in important ways, in both Europe and North America, emphasizing ideas about the Devil, heightening concerns about the failed orthodoxy of new converts (and thus tempering evangelical fervor), and producing impassioned converts who sometimes expressed their enthusiasm through possession.

These beliefs about what witches did, the importance of the Devil to witches' powers, and the forensic strategies essential to discern and punish malefactors suggested a frame of reference with which Europeans could understand what they encountered in Africa and America. It is difficult to



discern genuine indigenous ideas about witchcraft among non-European people in Africa and the Americas in the era of European expansion largely because our sources come from those Europeans—mostly priests—who described indigenous rituals and observed them in the context of their own clearly defined witch beliefs. These sources hinder efforts to move beyond hyperbole and to reveal what Africans and Indians were actually doing—let alone what they believed and what cultural logic lay behind their rituals. Europeans were predisposed to believe that Satan existed everywhere, that everywhere he had his followers, and that unfamiliar practices might well be diabolical. Historians can at best piece together non-Christian ideas about witchcraft. One crucial commonality, however, is that Native Americans and Africans did not tend to have an idea of Satan as a single, fixed entity, the focus of all evil in the world and forever doing battle with God. Thus one central feature of European witch beliefs—the concept of a pact between a witch with free will and the Devil—had no meaning for non-Christians. Like Europeans, however, Africans and Americans agreed that disease and misfortune might be caused by witches.

### **Beliefs: West and West-Central Africans**

Africans who were captured and forcibly transported to North America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries came primarily from a few key regions of Africa: West Africa (especially Senegambia [where The Gambia and Senegal are today], Sierra Leone [modern day Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia, and Ivory Coast], the Gold Coast [modern day Ghana], and the Bight of Biafra [modern day Cameroon, Gabon, and southeastern Nigeria]) and West-Central Africa (especially Angola and Congo).<sup>28</sup> What do we know about their beliefs, and how do we know it? Historians trying to understand African witch beliefs in previous centuries rely heavily on observations generated by Europeans, who found their way to West and West-Central Africa most commonly as traders. Merchants frequently recorded information on religious practices, although they were often mocking and derisive of these traditions. In some of those places, traders were accompanied by missionaries who also studied religious practices in order to enhance their ability to convert people. In the kingdom of Kongo (located in present-day western Congo and northern Angola), where the king converted to Christianity in 1491, priests played an important role in educating people about Catholicism, and they provide some of our best sources for religious beliefs there. Elsewhere, ministers and priests were banned from proselytizing.

Africans regarded sickness and death as misfortunes caused by spirits and supernatural powers who worked through human agents. Witchcraft, then, functioned as a common explanation for misfortune just as it did for Europeans. Witchcraft was part of a collection of secret religious powers, including divining, conjuring, and healing, that could restore harmony to a community or to an individual. These rituals could also be used to punish offenders. In the kingdom of Kongo, witches—*ndokis*—were selfish and greedy people who used powers harnessed from the other world to achieve their goals (in European thinking, comparable to those witches who worked magic with the aid of the Devil). But the same powers could also be used for good ends. An individual might thus have the power both to cause harm and to uncover and counteract it. Witches, then, were not solely or inherently evil (as European authorities believed them to be by the seventeenth century) but rather had the ability to effect good or evil. And witches could be men or women.<sup>29</sup>

European men who worked at coastal trading posts were especially fascinated by fetishes and the use of poisons. The word *fetish* derives from a Portuguese term, *feitiço*, which traders used to describe the charms and amulets they saw in West Africa. The meaning of the term expanded to include a wide

range of practices, not just the material charms themselves.<sup>30</sup> Those like the trader Willem Bosma who observed and commented on African religious practices, noted the pervasive use of poison in such rituals (see document 13). Robert Elwes, a merchant at the Royal African Company fort in Egypt in 1687, and John Carter, at Whydah in 1686, related stories of others being poisoned and, in Carter's case, of threats of poison against him. When a sergeant at Winneba fell ill "with vomiting and strange paines" in August 1697, the trader there was sure he had been poisoned.<sup>31</sup>

As these traders' remarks suggest, charms were part of practices that ranged from punishing enemies to ferreting out the truth behind a crime. They were employed in two aspects of African religious practice that endured (often in altered form) in the Americas and that Europeans in some jurisdictions identified as witchcraft, most notably conjuring and divination. In the kingdom of Kongo, for example, specialized practitioners called *ngangas* worked with amulets, *minkisis*. These charms had important symbolic power. A *nganga* who put a stone inside a charm might intend the ritual to remove a tumor, in the same way that a feather could convey the flight required for a charm to look for and identify a criminal. One Capuchin missionary readily identified these practices as "magic" in 1643 and believed that in these rituals the *ngangas* "speak with the devil, as if they were insane and possessed." At the same time, Catholic priests understood the power of these rituals, specialists and their amulets, and tried to appropriate it for themselves: in Kongo priests adopted the title *nganga* and translated *minkisi* as "holy."<sup>32</sup>

Rituals varied, of course, across Africa. Among the Igbo, who lived in the Bight of Biafra, within modern-day Nigeria, and who comprised the largest single contingent of slaves bound for the colonies of Virginia in the eighteenth century, diviners (called *obea*) performed sacrifices (real and symbolic) in order to seek help from the many invisible spirits of the Igbo world.<sup>33</sup> In the late seventeenth century, the French slave trader Jean Barbot described the gris-gris (charms) he saw in Senegal, and said that they contained words written in Arabic. A staunch Protestant, Barbot compared the gris-gris to the "supposed saints" worshipped by "Italian and Spanish bigots."<sup>34</sup>

If the intellectual limitations and religious prejudices of European observers make it difficult to understand indigenous African ideas about witchcraft, so, too, does the specific context within which most Africans and Europeans encountered each other: through the slave trade. The historian James Sweet has explored this puzzle for the coasts of West-Central Africa (Kongo and Angola), where the evidence of malevolence *increased* with the slave trade. West-Central Africans, for example, believed that when Europeans took Africans away on slave vessels, never to be seen again, they did so in order to eat them. These were not simply metaphorical concerns about being eaten, but a literal belief. Witches were cannibals. They sated themselves on enslaved bodies. If remedies against witchcraft conventionally kept evil in balance, the slave trade introduced a new form of evil, one that could not be combated through customary means. In that respect, the slave trade might have created witchcraft (as Europeans understood and used the term) in Africa and among Africans who lived within its orbit. Africans associated witchcraft with selfishness and greed, and thus linked it not only to harm inflicted on individuals (out of revenge or dislike) but also to political and social institutions, to rulers and traders who sought to enhance their own wealth, power, or prestige at the expense of other members of society. One Kongolese woman, an *nganga* named Dona Beatriz who was trained in rituals to reach the other world, started a movement in 1703 in which she sought to use her own special powers to combat the malevolence of rulers who permitted decades of civil war and whose wars fed the slave trade. The slave trade fit neatly into this conceptualization of greed as a sign of witchcraft, producing a world of enhanced evil, one in which European merchants and shippers acquired reputations as cannibals.<sup>35</sup>

Africans believed witches could be people with power—men of greed seeking to aggrandize the

authority or wealth. Even a king might be feared as a witch. Europeans, in contrast, were far more likely to associate witches with the weak and marginal, people such as Indians, slaves, and elderly women who sought power through diabolical ends precisely because they were people *without* other avenues to power within their communities. Not until the witch hunts among the Shawnees in North America in the early nineteenth century do we see a similar association between witches and men with political power.

### **Beliefs: Native Americans**

Among those who already lived in North America, there was a wide array of belief systems. Historians know most about the people who lived in areas where Europeans colonized, traveled, traded, and proselytized, along coasts and waterways and near other resources valued by Europeans. Our knowledge of Indian religious beliefs comes mostly from the recorded accounts of men who had their own religious agenda and their own demonology. Historians work hard to read these sources sensitively and creatively—and readers of these documents will have the same challenge—to try to recover and comprehend beliefs and cultures of non-Europeans. It is a difficult enterprise in which our understanding will only ever be partial, as if what we are seeing is a shadow cast on the ground, a clouded and imprecise image of something real and tangible but only that, an image. Spanish chroniclers ready to condemn all indigenous healing practices as witchcraft, for example, make it very difficult for historians to understand the cultural context in which these healing traditions existed.<sup>36</sup>

Europeans saw the Devil everywhere in North America.<sup>37</sup> When Fray Alonso de Benavides described indigenous religious practices on his journey to New Mexico in 1625–1626 he labeled indigenous spiritual leaders as wizards or sorcerers guided by demons (see document 1). Thomas Mayhew, a Puritan minister fluent in Wampanoag, derided the Indians he met on Martha's Vineyard in 1652 as “zealous and earnest in the Worship of False gods and Devils.”<sup>38</sup> The English also likened Indian shamans to witches. They were disturbed by Indian ideas of direct and personal connections to Indian deities, usually achieved through rituals that required fasting, trances, and the consumption of potent narcotics. The Englishman George Percy put the centrality of Satan succinctly: “They worship the Devill for their God, and have no other beliefe.”<sup>39</sup>

It was not just that the Devil was pervasive; Europeans believed that America was in fact his home. As the Jesuit José de Acosta explained in his *Natural and Moral History of the Indies* (1590), directly linking religious reformation in Europe with Catholic endeavors in America, “once idolatry was rooted out of the best and noblest part of the world, the devil retired to the most remote places and reigned in that other part of the world, which, although it is very inferior in nobility, is not so in size and breadth.”<sup>40</sup> Because of this certainty that the Americas were the Devil's lair, it is hard to reconstruct with any certainty whether Indians had ideas of “witches” before European contact and what exactly these “witches” did. Europeans believed that evil was concentrated in a single entity (a witch or Satan), but it seems that Indians did not. There was no notion of concentrated evil among Andean people at the time of first contact with Spaniards, but rather a commitment to the idea of complementarity, of good *and* evil existing together. Thus, for example, early Spanish dictionaries reported the Andean word *supay* meaning both “good angel” and “bad angel,” but later dictionaries defined this word only as “Devil,” thereby erasing the earlier complexity of the concept.<sup>41</sup>

In the northeastern woodlands (where the French and English established themselves) at the moment of contact, Indians' belief systems probably did include ideas about witches and sorcerers. Like Europeans, Indians debated the causes of misfortunes and tried to remedy them with natural

cures. But when these cures did not work, they concluded, like Europeans, that witchcraft was present. Early Jesuit accounts—written, of course, by people predisposed to see a world of witches and demons—spoke of sorcerers, people who cast spells and who harmed others in doing so. These witches called on powers to do evil, not good, and were greatly feared by the Senecas (one of the tribes of the powerful Iroquois confederacy) as people distinct from the shamans and other religious practitioners (a distinction that normally eluded Europeans).<sup>42</sup> The Iroquois killed witches if they detected them in their midst. A Jesuit, François-Joseph Le Mercier, told of one such execution in 1637 among the Hurons. A woman accused of witchcraft was sentenced to death and was first tortured with fire before the executioner split her skull with a hatchet and her body was burned to ashes.<sup>43</sup> Other Indians, including the Algonquian-speaking people whom the English encountered at Roanoke (in modern-day North Carolina) in the 1580s, seem not to have believed that witches—at least witches within a tribe—should be executed for witchcraft, and instead reserved that penalty for outsiders.<sup>44</sup>

While Europeans tended to think that most witches were women, a gendered association of women with witchcraft appears not to have been the case among the Iroquois and other woodland people. The evidence, as always, is elusive and indirect. One clue comes from the best-known Iroquois witch, a man named Atotarho, who figures in the Iroquois creation myth and almost destroyed Hiawatha before Hiawatha neutralized him and turned him into a good leader.<sup>45</sup> A second clue comes from the tendency of the Iroquois to accuse the Jesuits (all men) of doing the kinds of malevolent deeds that they associated with witches: spreading disease, for example (see document 2). Some Potawatomi killed a group of priests in the 1680s for precisely this reason.<sup>46</sup> One Jesuit, Isaac Jogues, was killed by the Iroquois in 1646 because they believed him to be a sorcerer (see document 3).<sup>47</sup> The connection between Europeans and disease was common, and because the first Europeans many Indians met were missionaries, they readily linked disease with the new faith and its clergy. Shamans and other leaders sometimes used this connection to thwart the efforts of Catholic missionaries (see document 2). Possibly the association of priests with witchcraft *increased* the gendered association among North American Indians of witchcraft with men, but there is simply not enough evidence to know with any certainty.

The connection of disease to witchcraft—since one thing witches did was to spread sickness—meant that evidence of witches' activities was pervasive in the years during and after European encounters, which brought dreadful epidemic diseases in their wake (see documents 2 and 3). The spread of Eurasian diseases in the Americas accompanied and enabled European military conquest. Historians and epidemiologists talk about “virgin soil populations”—groups unaccustomed to certain diseases and who possess no immunities to them. Indeed, diseases often moved in advance of Europeans, sometimes spread inadvertently by traders. What this meant, for Americans, was sometimes a devastating destruction. Smallpox was perhaps the worst of the new invaders, but almost as deadly were influenza, measles, diphtheria, whooping cough, mumps, and chicken pox. Amid the chaos of an epidemic, crops might not get planted or harvested; thus famine often followed epidemic and the overall consequences could be catastrophic (see figure 4). The Huron population, for example, plunged from 20,000–35,000 in the early seventeenth century to 10,000 in 1640.<sup>49</sup>

Indians and Europeans sometimes interpreted epidemics differently. Europeans who benefited from these catastrophes might be inclined to attribute them to God. John Winthrop put this view succinctly in a letter in which he described the terrible toll taken by a smallpox epidemic that raged through southern New England in 1633 and 1634, eviscerating Indian communities. “God hathe hereby cleared our title to this place,” he explained to a friend in England.<sup>50</sup> Indians, too, could appreciate the supernatural origins of disease, but they had another explanation that was just as logical and consistent

with modern ideas about disease transmission: Europeans brought the diseases. Thus the exact same smallpox epidemic had dramatically opposed meanings for those who endured it: for Europeans covetous of land, it was a clear sign of God's favor; for those who succumbed to the ravages of the terrible disease, it was just as clear an indication that European witches were at loose in the countryside.

Those launching evangelical missions in North America were optimistic that the Devil could be displaced. William Crashaw conveyed this expectation of Christian triumph in an exhortation to English clerics on their way to Jamestown. "And though Satan visibly and palpably raignes there more then in any other knowne place of the world: yet be of courage (blessed brethren) *God will tread Satan under your feet shortly, and the ages to come will eternize your names, as the Apostles of Virginia.*" Moreover, there was strong evidence that the Devil should not hold sway in North America. Europeans believed that the Devil tempted followers with promises of riches, luxury, and goods beyond their economic or social status. Elizabeth Knapp, possessed by the Devil in the English colony of Massachusetts in 1671 (see document 17), reported that the Devil offered her "money, silkes, fine cloaths."<sup>52</sup> When witches testified about gatherings at their Sabbaths, they recounted witches adorned in fabulous garments that were forbidden by sumptuary laws that restricted certain fabrics and colors to people of noble birth. Tituba, an enslaved woman from Barbados but probably of Indian, not African, descent, attested in Salem in 1692 that she saw women wearing silk hoods at a Sabbath she attended.<sup>53</sup> In contrast, French, English, and Dutch observers who recorded their impressions of the people of the northeastern woodlands of North America marveled at their modest economies and their generosity. In such circumstances, where people had to carry their possessions in their semi-sedentary economies and any gathered surplus could prove a burden, what could the Devil tempt people with? Indeed, as one Jesuit reported in 1634, when people are free of want, "not one of them gives himself to the Devil to acquire wealth."<sup>54</sup>

## Colonization, Witchcraft, and Resistance

Europeans regarded the contest for religious dominion in North America as a competition between gods—between the strong Christian God and weaker Indian deities that served Satan and resisted God's rule. If the Devil ruled America, then the colonization efforts that took place there could only be comprehended as an epic struggle between good and evil.<sup>55</sup> The connection between resistance and diabolism is especially important in the colonial context. Europeans believed the Devil was characterized above all by his pride. It was that trait that led him to challenge God's dominion, to prefer (as John Milton put it in *Paradise Lost*) "to reign in Hell than to serve in Heaven."<sup>56</sup> Second to his pride, however, was his obstinacy, and the two were deeply intertwined. Resistance thus confirmed European suspicions about Indians and witchcraft in two ways, since those who resisted likely used sorcery as one of their weapons, and since Europeans understood other forms of resistance in terms of the diabolical witchcraft they already expected to find.

The growing evidence of the failure of Christian conversion, especially after decades of apparent success in New Spain in the sixteenth century, encouraged despondent priests to look to the Devil for the cause. They blamed him for deceiving the Spanish with false conversions. Some priests worried that converts used their old rituals in a new Christian form, and had been instructed on how to do so by the Devil.<sup>57</sup> Especially insidious, Acosta explained, was the Devil's habit of creating rituals that mimicked Christian practice. Thus Acosta reported monasteries of virgins in Peru and women in Mexico who lived like nuns for the space of a year. The consecration of Indian priests with sweet

smelling oils was another trick of Satan—these oils were made of noxious animal excretions. It was a simple step to conclude, as Acosta did, that the gods of the Americans were identical to the Devil. And the Devil encouraged resistance to the Christian message. When the Jesuits encountered Tepehuan Indians in North America in the early seventeenth century who did not want to convert to Christianity, they readily blamed Tepehuan religious leaders whom they identified as witches.<sup>59</sup>

Even a priest who initially had doubts about the presence of the Devil found that his experience among the Indians of New France altered his views. The French Jesuit Paul Le Jeune (1591–1662) originally thought that the Devil was in South America but was not pervasive in New France. There were sorcerers there, he believed, but not the Devil himself. But knowledge, it turns out, can breed distrust as well as understanding. The more Le Jeune learned of the Indians among whom he lived and preached, the more he began to believe that the Devil was in their midst. His view was reinforced by Indian resistance to his Christian message.<sup>60</sup> In the end, the Jesuits in New France came to rely on Satan as a way to explain Indian resistance to Christian conversion.

Europeans associated resistance of all sorts, both to conversion and to secular rule, with diabolism. One case from northern New Spain reveals the connection. In 1599, Spanish officials executed an Indian woman for witchcraft. She was a Guachichil Indian, and she was tried in the region of San Luis Potosí, a part of the northern frontier of New Spain that had only recently come under Spanish control. The Guachichiles were one of several hunter-gatherer tribes that resisted Spanish occupation and conquest between 1548 and 1590 in a protracted series of conflicts called the Chichimeca Wars. The Spanish, propelled by the discovery of silver in Zacatecas in 1546, were highly motivated to expand commerce and settlement into this region, and the result was regular conflict. The Spanish, and the sedentary Indians who accompanied them in their movement northward, feared the Guachichiles. “So frightening” were they, decorated with animal figures when they fought, “that they even scare mules. But the Spanish moved from fear to irritation, irked by the “audacity” of the Indians who resisted the occupation.<sup>61</sup>

The link between witchcraft and resistance was not subtle in this case. Estimated at approximately sixty years old, the accused woman had endured the ravages of conquest. She lived in a neighborhood occupied by Tlaxcallan and Tarascan Indians who had been moved north with the Spanish. They were Christian converts. The alleged witch went into their churches, removed the sacred images, and broke the crosses. The Indians who reported the case to Spanish authorities were troubled by her powers as a witch. Indians were ready to follow her because she had threatened to destroy them if they did not, and they believed she had the ability to do so. She was alleged to have killed a Tarascan Indian with magic (by grazing his ear with a stick). She turned herself into animals (as Indian witches were believed to do, by both Indians and Spaniards), including a coyote, and transformed others into animals as well.<sup>62</sup> She insisted that she had taken all of the Indian dead and made a pueblo for them—a village of the dead, a fitting symbol of the impact conquest had on Americans.

Witch beliefs were not simply religious; they had a political component, too, tangled as they were with resistance to properly constituted authorities. The Guachichil witch’s crime was not only her witchcraft; it was also her ability to persuade the Guachichiles to join her in her rejection of the symbols of Spanish rule. As one Guachichil attested (perhaps self-servingly), before the accused witch rebelled, all of the Indians were “quiet, peaceful, and calm, and because of the said Indian woman they have become stirred up and restless.”<sup>63</sup> And so she was put to death. Spanish officials moved quickly, permitting no appeal, because the witch threatened Spanish security. The Spanish justice of the town whisked her to the gallows. There, she was executed in an especially cruel fashion, hanged by her feet until she died, a process that took several hours. A priest in the Andes similarly admitted that he had

whipped three women not primarily because they were witches, but rather because their behavior encouraged others in their village to rise up against Spanish rule.<sup>64</sup>

The Spanish inclination to link resistance to their political dominion to witchcraft had the consequence of making witchcraft seem pervasive in the Americas where it had been of minor importance (in terms of executions and threats to community order) in Spain. In many respects, the same old notions of witchcraft continued in Spanish America, especially those centered on malefic and love magic. These ideas played themselves out regularly in secular and ecclesiastical courts in New Mexico (see below). But a new element emerged in the context of colonization and resistance and that was the association of witchcraft with armed resistance to Spanish authority. In this respect, witches were not only rebels against godly order (as they were throughout Europe), but also armed rebels bent on overthrowing established governments.

The Spanish confronted two major uprisings in North America in the seventeenth century, first between 1616 and 1620 at Tepehuan in the province of Nueva Vizcaya (established in 1563), and second, the Pueblo Revolt, in New Mexico in 1680.<sup>65</sup> Santa Fe de Nuevo México (New Mexico's original and full name) was established in 1598. Both regions lay within the Viceroyalty of New Spain. The second revolt was so successful that it removed the Spanish from the region for some ten years. Missionaries, the Jesuits in the case of the first episode and the Franciscans in the case of the second, blamed both resistance movements on the Devil.<sup>66</sup> Each revolt had been preceded by growing doubts of Indian converts, who were questioning both the Christian message and the entire colonial project. In both resistance movements, the indigenous leaders whom the Spanish defined as demons and witches organized millenarian movements, predicting a more perfect world and the restoration of indigenous society once pernicious outside influences were removed (see documents 4 and 5).

In the Tepehuan revolt, at least 200 Spaniards and their allies were killed, including 10 priests. Some 4,000 Tepehuanes died. The rebels destroyed numerous symbols of Spanish occupation, including mines, missions, and settlements, in Sierra Madre Occidental. They staged mock religious processions, and then desecrated the objects, flogging statues and shredding crucifixes. They deliberately humiliated priests, mocking them with Latin before clubbing them to death.<sup>67</sup> The most elaborate account (see document 4) of the revolt came from the pen of a Jesuit, Andrés Pérez de Ribas, in his *History of the Triumphs of the Holy Faith among the Most Barbarous and Fierce People of the New World* (1645). Pérez de Ribas had a simple explanation for what had transpired in the Tepehuan revolt: the leader of the revolt, a man named Quautlatas, was the antichrist, and the other leaders were demons.<sup>68</sup> This explanation was important to Pérez de Ribas—and to the Spaniards—because, to them, the uprising was otherwise inexplicable, and with no logical material explanation they turned to a logical supernatural one: The revolt was the work of the Devil.<sup>69</sup> One reason the Tepehuan revolt was so hard for Spaniards to fathom was that it arose after many years of Spanish activity in the region. Missionary activity had commenced with two Franciscans in 1555, and the Jesuits began their own work in 1596.<sup>70</sup> This interpretation of the uprising as diabolically inspired was useful not only in making sense of its unexpected nature and of the Tepehuanes' assault on churches, missionaries, and religious symbols; it also helped to inspire and justify a counterattack, since those who punished the Tepehuanes were striking at Satan himself.<sup>71</sup>

This link between resistance and witchcraft was especially charged during the Pueblo revolt several decades later because of the character of Spanish expansion in New Mexico. The Spanish had started exploring the region in the early sixteenth century, soon after their conquest of the Mexica in the Valley of Mexico. But concerted settlement efforts did not get underway in New Mexico until the early seventeenth century. Even then, the Spanish presence—in numbers—was sparse. Important

features distinguished New Mexico's early decades and shaped the context in which the Pueblo Revolt emerged and was understood by priests and secular officials. The Franciscans who traveled to New Mexico experienced some rapid successes in their conversion efforts—at least as they measured success and as they understood the fragile faith of the neophytes. By 1608, ten years after the first mission was established, several thousand Indians had converted to Christianity. As had been the case with the rapid success of evangelical efforts in the Valley of Mexico in the sixteenth century, these new converts to Catholicism were useful weapons in Europeans' religious conflicts, offering living symbols of the vitality and expansion of the Catholic Church at a time when it endured attacks and retrenchment in Europe.

Because of the missionaries' apparent success, the Spanish crown was loath to abandon the territory despite the absence of any obvious sources of wealth. And also because of their missionary accomplishments, the priests gained a powerful sense of their importance to the fate of the colony. They challenged the authority of the state, and there was regular friction between the colony's governors and the priests. The Indians often emerged as pawns in these struggles. Missionaries required access to Indians to justify their presence in New Mexico, but if there were to be any sort of viable and profitable colonial state in the region, colonial officials needed to find ways to benefit from Indian labor and resources. Thus, governors had to ensure the cooperation of Indians and were not always willing to enforce the Church's decrees against concubinage or ceremonial dances. The latitude permitted many indigenous practices to endure, but only if they were tolerated by the governors.<sup>72</sup>

The 1670s were a difficult time for the Pueblos, especially during the rule of Governor Juan Francisco Treviño (1675–1677), who prohibited many important religious practices. He even ordered the unprecedented destruction of the kivas, which are sacred ceremonial underground chambers. Famine in 1670 was followed by death and pestilence and by Apache and Navajo raids in 1672. Sandwiched between raids by nomadic tribes, demands on their labor by Spanish officials and settlers, and violent assaults on their rituals by whip-wielding Franciscans, distraught and angry Pueblos turned to their ancient gods in time-honored ceremonies to ask for rain and fertility, while their religious practitioners used their magic to curse Christians and steal their hearts (a traditional form of Pueblo witchcraft).<sup>73</sup> In response, the governor launched a massive witch hunt.<sup>74</sup> In 1675, Treviño brought some forty-seven accused witches to Santa Fe for trial with allegations that they had bewitched a priest and other people and had even killed ten people, including seven friars. Three of the accused were hanged, and all the rest (except one man who hanged himself) were punished in various ways.<sup>75</sup> The testimonies in the wake of the revolt (see document 4) speak directly to the hostility these actions generated among the Pueblos, and they played a crucial role in sparking the revolt. In 1680, some 17,000 Pueblos rose against a Spanish population numbering only several hundred, and in the wake of the revolt, 20 (out of 41) Franciscans were dead, as were 30 Spanish soldiers and colonists.<sup>76</sup>

The Spanish saw the Devil in the Pueblo Revolt. Spanish officials paid close attention to testimonies given after the revolt by Indians who claimed that the revolt's leader, Popé, had communicated with the Devil (see document 5). Witchcraft emerged as a crucial explanation for the revolt, not only explaining its timing and personnel, but also in helping the Spanish make sense of the targets of the Pueblo attack. One of the men whipped in the 1675 witch hunt was Popé. It was Popé who emerged to lead the revolt in 1680, and it was Popé who articulated a vision of a new society, one in which all Spanish influences were expunged and the old gods restored. The millenarian visions that were conveyed so fully in the Tepehuan and Pueblo uprisings, the expectation that the Spanish could be



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