

Causes for the Outbreak of Witchcraft Hysteria in Salem

There are numerous theories about what caused the outbreak of witchcraft hysteria in Salem. It was very likely a combination of multiple factors including:

1. Strong belief that Satan is acting in the world.
 - "The invisible world": disease, natural catastrophes, and bad fortune attributed to work of the devil
2. A belief that Satan recruits witches and wizards to work for him.
 - Prior witchcraft cases in New England (and Europe before)
3. A belief that a person afflicted by witchcraft exhibits certain symptoms.
 - Cotton Mather's *Memorable Providences*
 - Most symptoms can be feigned
4. A time of troubles, making it seem likely that Satan was active.
 - Smallpox
 - Congregational strife in Salem Village
 - Frontier wars with Indians
5. Stimulation of imaginations by Tituba.
6. Convulsive ergotism, a disease caused by eating infecting rye that can produce hallucinations, causing strange behavior? (Interesting theory, but unlikely.)
7. Teenage boredom.
 - No television, no CDs, and lots of Bible reading
 - Strict and humorless Parris household
8. Magistrates and judges receptive to accusations of witchcraft.
 - See as way to shift blame for their own wartime failures
 - Admission of spectral evidence
9. Confessing "witches" adding credibility to earlier charges.
10. Old feuds (disputes within congregation, property disputes) between the accusers and the accused spurring charges of witchcraft.

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