

CHAPTER 3

DOCUMENT SET 2

Witchcraft at Salem: The Social and Cultural Context

One of the key developments outlined in your textbook was the extension of Puritan settlements in the mid-seventeenth century. As the New England towns grew, the congregational principle and the town system contributed to rising tensions over group autonomy and access to land and resources. One result of an orderly pattern of expansion was the mutual watchfulness described in your text. By encouraging centers of settlement, Massachusetts Bay authorities forced close interaction among settlers that, in turn, facilitated the preservation of community values.

By the 1670s, however, the enforcement of close control was breaking down as new communities emerged. Worse yet, many Puritans were distressed by an awareness that the Puritan mission, as defined by the founders, had failed. After the Restoration, the Puritans increasingly turned inward, afflicted by a sense that history had passed them by.

Some scholars view the outbreak of the witchcraft phenomenon in 1692 as a symptom of that sense of failure. The bizarre episode began when several adolescent girls exhibited hysterical behavior following a fortune-telling session with a West Indian slave. Their accusations of witchcraft drew a supportive and increasingly alarming response from adult relatives and friends, resulting in the involvement of the local minister, Samuel Parris, whose home had been the scene of the beginning of the outbreak. With his

encouragement, the accusations escalated, trials were held, and more than twenty accused witches were executed.

Historians have explained this grisly affair in a variety of ways, stressing the rise of materialism, adolescent psychology, intergenerational tension, and religious fervor. More recently, scholars have focused attention on the social and economic conflicts present in Salem village and its larger neighbor, Salem town. Differences between rural Salem village and commercial Salem town surfaced, together with sharp conflicts over the pastorate and leadership of Samuel Parris. Similarly, tensions over the autonomy of the more distant settlements were evident in the social and religious alignments that were formed.

The following documents provide evidence to support a number of interpretive positions on the origins of this episode. As you examine the transcripts of the interrogation, the deposition and confession of accuser Ann Putnam, Samuel Parris's sermon, and the later findings of the Council of Elders, be alert to the social and psychological roots of the Salem crisis. Evaluate the written record in the light of statistical material detailing the generational and demographic bases for conflict. Finally, relate the social divisions and religious differences that emerge to your textbook's discussion of rising materialism and the failure of the New England Way.

Questions for Analysis

1. What do the maps and charts reveal about the identities of the parties to the conflict over the witchcraft issue in Salem? How do you account for the support for and opposition to the militant position taken by Samuel Parris?
2. What is the connection between the witchcraft episode of 1692 and the economic and religious trends described in your textbook? What motives and concerns lay behind the Parris sermon? What threat did witches pose, according to Parris? How could they be identified? What was the social significance of their alleged presence?
3. What do the charts that identify accusers and accused by age group reveal about the origins of the witchcraft episode? What is the significance of family relationships in understanding the events in Salem? What does the statistical evidence suggest with regard to the accusers' possible motives?
4. What does the Salem situation in 1692 suggest about social classes and economic change in late-seventeenth-century New England? What was the significance of the economic differences between Salem village and Salem town? What evidence is provided by the documents to clarify the changes under way at this moment in Massachusetts history?

5. Do the documents shed light on the relations between the sexes in seventeenth-century New England? Examine Martha Corey's testimony for evidence of gender tension. How would you explain her viewpoint?
6. Given the world view, religious environment, and belief systems of the seventeenth century, to what extent does the serious attention devoted by the community to witchcraft accusations seem irrational? What was the meaning of the witchcraft episode to Puritan divines and political leaders? Search the documents for evidence of their concerns.

1. Samuel Parris Sets a Tone, 1692

Christ Knows How Many Devils There Are (1692)

27 March 1691/92, Sacrament day.

Occasioned by dreadful Witchcraft broke out here a few weeks past, and one Member of this Church, and another of Salem, upon public examination by Civil Authority vehemently suspected for she-witches, and upon it committed.

John 6:70. "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a Devil." . . .

Doctrine: *Our Lord Jesus Christ knows how many Devils there are in his Church, and who they are.*

1. There are devils as well as saints in Christ's Church.
2. Christ knows how many of these devils there are.
3. Christ knows who these devils are.

Proposition 1: There are devils as well as saints in Christ's church. Here three things may be spoken to: (1) Show you what is meant here by *devils*; (2) That there are such devils in the church; (3) That there are also true saints in such churches.

(1). What is meant here by *devils*? "One of you is a devil." Answer: By *devil* is ordinarily meant any wicked angel or spirit. Sometimes it is put for the prince or head of the evil spirits, or fallen angels. Sometimes it is used for vile and wicked persons—the worst of such, who for their villainy and impiety do most resemble devils and wicked spirits. Thus Christ in our text calls Judas a devil: for his great likeness to the devil. "One of you is a devil": i.e., a devil for quality and disposition, not a devil for nature—for he was a man, etc.—but a devil for likeness and operation (John 8: 38, 41, 44—"Ye are of your father the devil.")

(2). There are such devils in the church. Not only sinners, but notorious sinners; sinners more like

to the devil than others. So here in Christ's little Church. (Text.) This also Christ teacheth us in the parable of the tares (Matth. 13:38), where Christ tells us that such are the children of the wicked one—i.e., of the devil. Reason: Because hypocrites are the very worst of men—*corruptio optimi est pessimi*. Hypocrites are the sons and heirs of the devil, the free-holders of hell—whereas other sinners are but tenants. When Satan repossesseth a soul, he becomes more vile and sinful (Luke 11: 24–26). As the jailer lays loads of iron on him that hath escaped. None are worse than those who have been good, and are naught; and might be good, but will be naught. . . .

Proposition 2: Christ knows how many of these devils there are in his churches. As in our text there was one among the twelve. And so in our churches God knows how many devils there are: whether one, two, three, or four in twelve—how many devils, how many saints. He that knows whom he has chosen (John 13: 18), he also knows who they are that have not chosen him, but prefer farms and merchandise above him and above his ordinances (2 Tim. 4: 10). . . .

Use 1. Let none then build their hopes of salvation merely upon this: that they are church members. This you and I may be, and yet devils for all that (Matth. 8: 11–12—"Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down, etc. And however we may pass here, a true difference shall be made shortly, etc.")

Use 2. Let none then be stumbled at religion, because too often there are devils found among the saints. You see, here was a true church, sincere converts and sound believers; and yet here was a devil among them.

Use 3. Terror to hypocrites who profess much love to Christ but indeed are in league with their lusts, which they prefer above Christ. Oh! remember that you are devils in Christ's account. Christ is

lightly esteemed of you, and you are vilely accounted for by Christ. Oh! if there be any such among us, forbear to come this day to the Lord's table, lest Satan enter more powerfully into you—lest while the bread be between your teeth, the wrath of the Lord come pouring down upon you (Psalm 78: 30-31). . . .

Use 5. Examine we ourselves well, what we are—what we church members are. We are either saints or devils: the Scripture gives us no medium. The Apostle tells us we are to examine ourselves (2 Cor. 13: 5). Oh! it is a dreadful thing to be a devil, and yet to sit down at the Lord's table (1 Cor. 10: 21). Such incur the hottest of God's wrath (as follows—v. 22). Now, if we would not be devils, we must give ourselves wholly up to Christ, and not suffer the predominancy of one lust—and particularly that of covetousness, which is made so light of, and which so sorely prevails in these perilous times. Why, this one lust made Judas a devil (John 12: 6, Matth. 26: 15). And no

doubt it has made more devils than one. For a little pelf [money], men sell Christ to his enemies, and their souls to the devil. But there are certain sins that make us devils; see that we be not such:

1. A liar or murderer (John 8: 44)
2. A slanderer or an accuser of the godly
3. A tempter to sin
4. An opposer of godliness, as Elymos (Acts 13: 8 etc.)
5. Envious persons as witches
6. A drunkard (I Sam. 1: 15-16)
7. A proud person

2. Martha Corey's Testimony, 1692

“Mr. HATHORNE: You are now in the hands of authority. Tell me, now, why you hurt these persons.—I do not.

“Who doth?—Pray, give me leave to go to prayer.

“(This request was made sundry times.)

“We do not send for you to go to prayer; but tell me why you hurt these.—I am an innocent person. I never had to do with witchcraft since I was born. I am a gospel woman.

“Do not you see these complain of you?—The Lord open the eyes of the magistrates and ministers: the Lord show his power to discover the guilty.

“Tell us who hurts these children.—I do not know.

“If you be guilty of this fact, do you think you can hide it?—The Lord knows.

“Well, tell us what you know of this matter.—Why, I am a gospel woman; and do you think I can have to do with witchcraft too? . . .

“(CHILDREN: There is a man whispering in her ear.)

“HATHORNE continued: What did he say to you?—We must not believe all that these distracted children say.

“Cannot you tell what that man whispered?—I saw nobody.

“But did not you hear?—No.

“(Here was extreme agony of all the afflicted.)

“If you expect mercy of God, you must look for it in God's way, by confession. Do you think to find mercy by aggravating your sins?—A true thing.

“Look for it, then, in God's way.—So I do.

“Give glory to God and confess, then.—But I cannot confess.

“Do not you see how these afflicted do charge you?—We must not believe distracted persons. . . .

“You charge these children with distraction: it is a note of distraction when persons vary in a minute; but these fix upon you. This is not the manner of distraction.—When all are against me, what can I help it?

“Now tell me the truth, will you? Why did you say that the magistrates' and ministers' eyes were blinded, you would open them?

“(She laughed, and denied it.)

“Now tell us how we shall know who doth hurt these, if you do not?—Can an innocent person be guilty?

“Do you deny these words?—Yes.

“Tell us who hurts these. We came to be a terror to evil-doers. You say you would open our eyes, we are blind.—If you say I am a witch. . . .

“You say you are no witch. Maybe you mean you never covenanted with the Devil. Did you never deal with any familiar?—No, never.

“What bird was that the children spoke of?”

“(Then witnesses spoke: What bird was it?)”

“I know no bird.”

“It may be you have engaged you will not confess; but God knows.—So he doth.”

“Do you believe you shall go unpunished?—I have nothing to do with witchcraft. . . .”

“Do not you believe there are witches in the country?—I do not know that there is any.”

“Do not you know that Tituba confessed it?—I did not hear her speak.”

“I find you will own nothing without several witnesses, and yet you will deny for all.”

“(It was noted, when she bit her lip, several of the afflicted were bitten. When she was urged upon it that she bit her lip, saith she, What harm is there in it?)”

“(Mr. NOYES: I believe it is apparent she practiseth witchcraft in the congregation: there is no need of images.)”

“What do you say to all these things that are apparent?—If you will all go hang me, how can I help it? . . .”

“What book is that you would have these children write in?—What book? Where should I have a book? I showed them none, nor have none, nor brought none.”

“(The afflicted cried out there was a man whispering in her ears.)”

“What book did you carry to Mary Walcot?—I carried none. . . .”

“Who is your God?—The God that made me.”

“What is his name?—Jehovah.”

“Do you know any other name?—God Almighty.”

“Doth *he* tell you, that you pray to, that *he* is God Almighty?—Who do I worship but the God that made [me]?”

“How many gods are there?—One.”

“How many persons?—Three. . . .”

“Do not you see these children and women are rational and sober as their neighbors, when your hands are fastened?”

“(Immediately they were seized with fits: and the standers-by said she was squeezing her fingers, her hands being eased by them that held them on purpose for trial.”

“Quickly after, the marshal said, ‘She hath bit her lip’; and immediately the afflicted were in an uproar.)”

“[Tell] why you hurt these, or who doth?”

“(She denieth any hand in it.)”

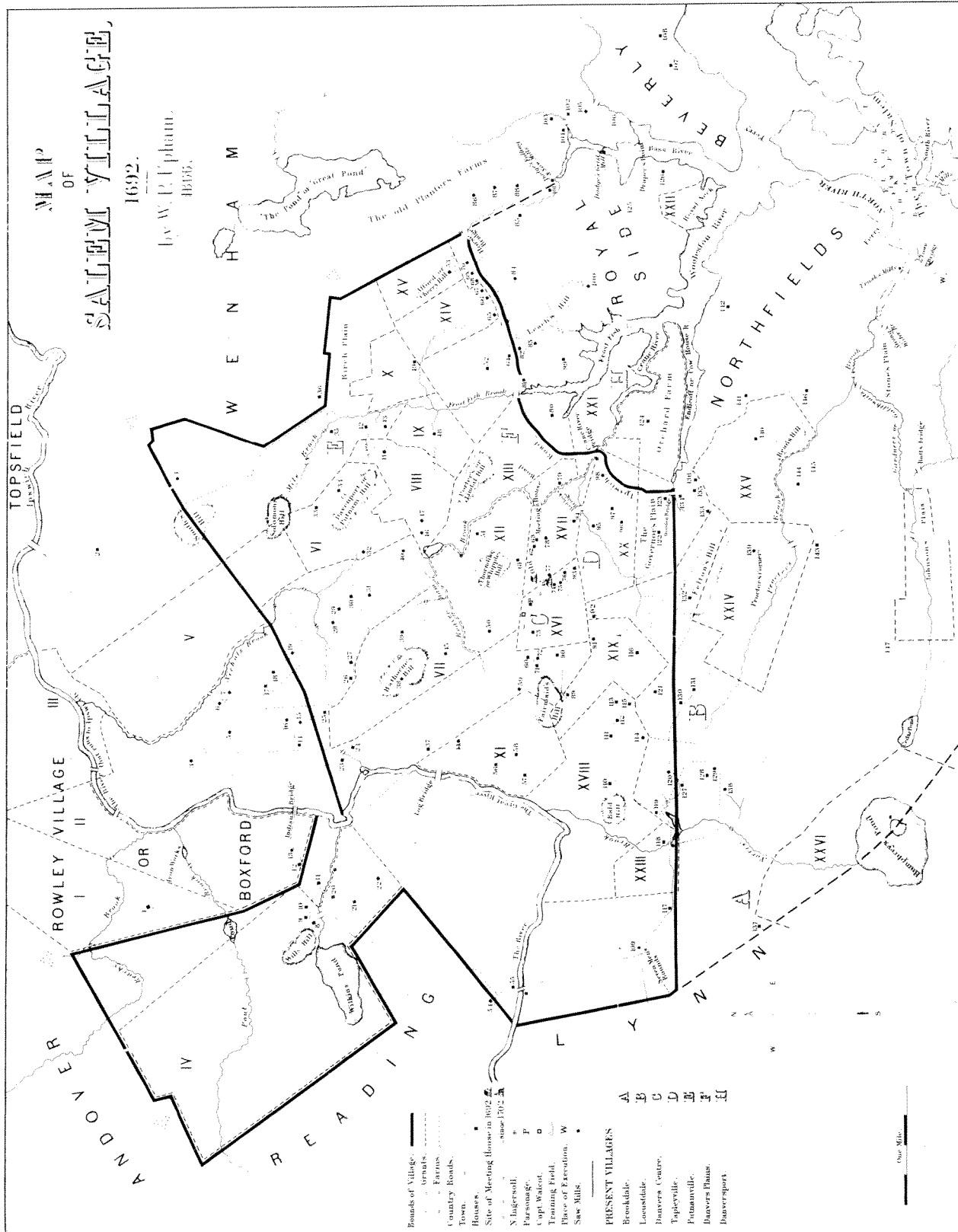
“Why did you say, if you were a witch, you should have no pardon?—Because I am a woman.”

3. Ann Putnam’s Deposition, 1692

Who testified and said that on 20th of April, 1692 at evening she saw the Apparition of a minister at which she was grievously frightened and cried out oh dreadful: dreadful here is a minister come, what are Ministers witches too: whence come you and What is your name for I will complain of you though you be a Minister: if you be a wizard. . . . and Immediately I was tortured by him being Racked and almost choked by him: and he tempted me to write in his book which I Refused with loud outcries and said I would not write in his book though he tore me all to pieces but told him that it was a dreadful thing: that he which was a Minister that should teach children to fear God should come to persuade poor creatures to give their souls to the devil; oh, dreadful, dreadful, tell me your name that I may

know who you are; then again he tortured me and urged me to write in his book; which I refused and then presently he told me that his name was George Burroughs, and that he had had three wives: and that he had bewitched the Two first of them to death; and that he had killed Miss T. Lawson because she was so unwilling to go from the village, and also killed Mr Lawson’s child because he went to the eastward with Sir Edmon and preached to the soldiers and that he had made Abigail Hobbs a witch and several witches more: and he has continued ever since; by times tempting me to write in his book and grievously torturing me by beating, pinching and almost choking me several times a day and he also told me that he was above a witch he was a conjuror.

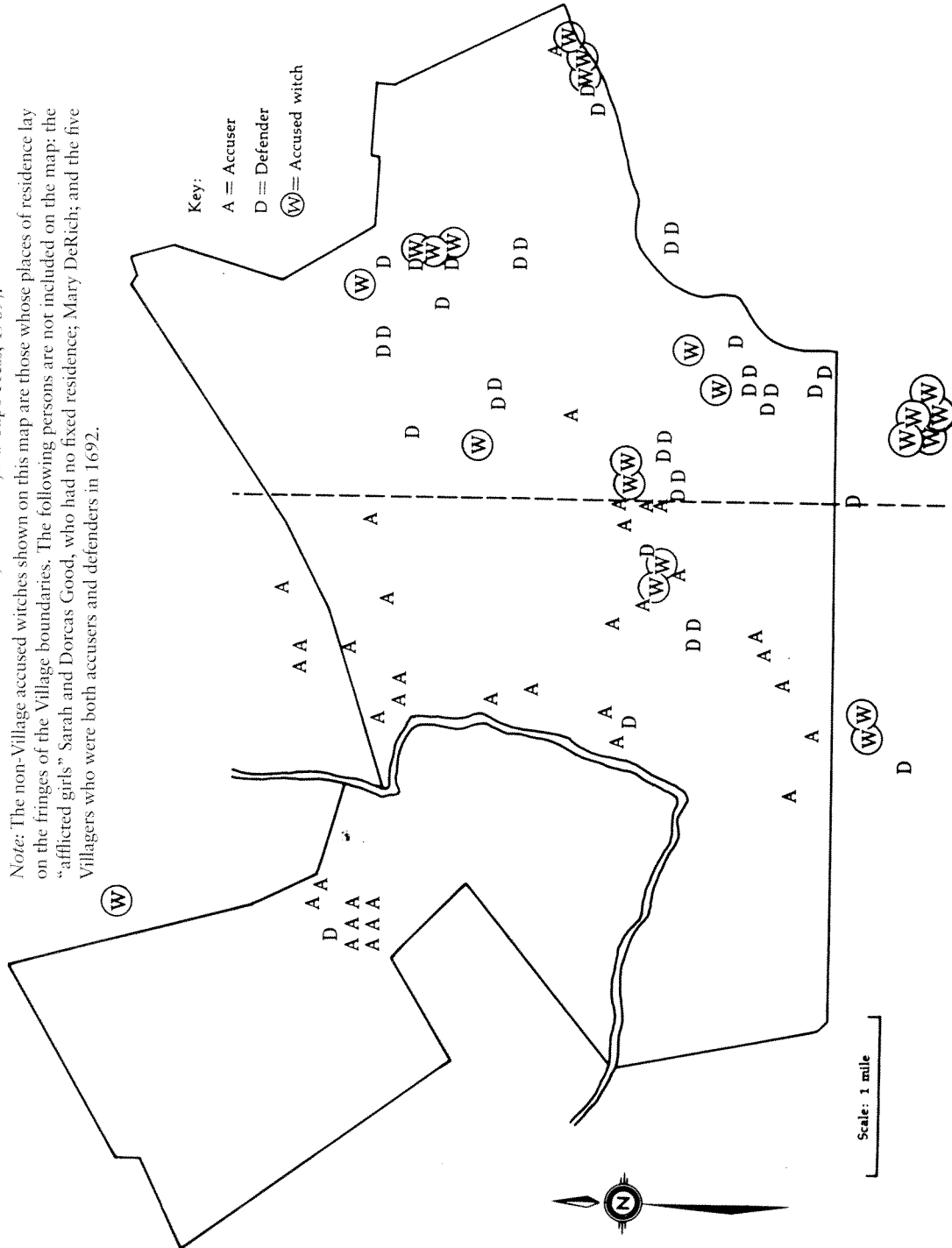
4. Salem Village, 1692



5. The Geography of Witchcraft in Salem Village, 1692

Sources: Residential map of Salem Village in 1692 included as a frontispiece to volume one of Charles W. Upham, *Salem Witchcraft*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1867); W. Elliot Woodward, *Records of Salem Witchcraft Copied from the Original Documents*, 2 vols. (Roxbury, Mass., Privately printed, 1864; reissued in one volume, New York, Da Capo Press, 1969).

Note: The non-Village accused witches shown on this map are those whose places of residence lay on the fringes of the Village boundaries. The following persons are not included on the map: the "afflicted girls," Sarah and Dorcas Good, who had no fixed residence; Mary DeRich; and the five Villagers who were both accusers and defenders in 1692.



6. Factionalism and Wealth in Salem Village, 1695

Amount of 1695–96 tax	Number of householders in each tax bracket		Percentage of householders in each tax bracket	
	Pro-Parris (average tax: 10.9 shillings)	Anti-Parris (average tax: 15.3 shillings)	Pro-Parris	Anti-Parris
Under 10 shillings	31	15	61	43
10–20 shillings	16	12	31	34
Over 20 shillings	<u>4</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>23</u>
Total	51	35	100	100

Sources: Tax list, Village Records, Dec. 13, 1695; pro-Parris and anti-Parris petitions as transcribed by Samuel Parris in the Village Church Records preceding the entry for June 2, 1695.

7. Ann Putnam's Confession, 1706

"I desire to be humbled before God for that sad and humbling providence that befell my father's family in the year about '92; that I, then being in my childhood, should, by such a providence of God, be made an instrument for the accusing of several persons of a grievous crime, whereby their lives were taken away from them, whom now I have just grounds and good reason to believe they were innocent persons; and that it was a great delusion of Satan that deceived me in that sad time, whereby I justly fear I have been instrumental, with others, though ignorantly and unwittingly, to bring upon myself and this land the guilt of innocent blood; though what was said or done by me against any person I can truly and uprightly say, before God and man, I did it not out of any anger, malice, or ill-will to any person, for I had no such thing against one of them; but what I

did was ignorantly, being deluded by Satan. And particularly, as I was a chief instrument of accusing of Goodwife Nurse and her two sisters, I desire to lie in the dust, and to be humbled for it, in that I was a cause, with others, of so sad a calamity to them and their families; for which cause I desire to lie in the dust, and earnestly beg forgiveness of God, and from all those unto whom I have given just cause of sorrow and offence, whose relations were taken away or accused.

[Signed]

"This confession was read before the congregation, together with her relation, Aug. 25, 1706; and she acknowledged it.

"J. Green Pastor."

8. Witchcraft in Salem: Analysis by Age and Sex, 1692

Accused Witches

<i>Sex</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Male	42	Single	8	29	37	Under 20	6	18	24
Female	120	Married	15	61	76	21-30	3	7	10
		Widowed	1	20	21	31-40	3	8	11
Total	162	Total	24	110	134	41-50	6	18	24
						51-60	5	23	28
						61-70	4	8	12
						Over 70	3	6	9
						Total	30	88	118

Young Witches

<i>Sex</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Male	5	Single	5	23	28	Under 11	0	1	1
Female	29	Married	0	6	6	11-15	1	7	8
		Widowed	0	0	0	16-20	1	13	14
Total	34	Total	5	29	34	21-25	0	1	1
						26-30	0	1	1
						Over 30	0	4	4
						Total	2	27	29

Witnesses

<i>Sex</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Male	63	Single	11	3	14	Under 20	3	2	5
Female	21	Married	39	16	55	21-30	13	4	17
		Widowed	3	1	4	31-40	14	6	20
Total	84	Total	53	20	73	41-50	18	7	25
						51-60	11	1	12
						61-70	2	1	3
						Over 70	2	0	2
						Total	63	21	84

9. The Conclusions of the Massachusetts Bay Elders, 1695

The elders and messengers of the churches—met in council at Salem Village, April 3, 1695, to consider and determine what is to be done for the composure of the present unhappy differences in that place,—after solemn invocation of God in Christ for this direction, do unanimously declare and advise as followeth:—

I. We judge that, albeit in the late and the dark time of the confusions, wherein Satan had obtained a more than ordinary liberty to be sifting of this plantation, there were sundry unwarrantable and uncomfortable steps taken by Mr. Samuel Parris, the pastor of the church in Salem Village, then under the hurrying distractions of amazing afflictions; yet the said Mr. Parris, by the good hand of God brought unto a better sense of things, hath so fully expressed it, that a Christian charity may and should receive satisfaction therewith.

II. Inasmuch as many Christian brethren in the church of Salem Village have been offended at Mr. Parris for his conduct in the time of the difficulties and calamities which have distressed them, we now advise them charitably to accept the satisfaction which he hath tendered in his Christian acknowledgments of the errors therein committed; yea, to endeavor, as far as 'tis possible, the fullest reconciliation of their minds unto communion with him, in the whole exercise of his ministry, and with the rest of the church (Matt. vi. 12–14; Luke xvii. 3; James v. 16). . . .

V. Having observed that there is in Salem Village a spirit full of contentions and animosities, too sadly verifying the blemish which hath heretofore lain upon them, and that some complaints brought against Mr. Parris have been either causeless and groundless, or unduly aggravated, we do, in the name and fear of the Lord, solemnly warn them to

consider, whether, if they continue to devour one another, it will not be bitterness in the latter end; and beware lest the Lord be provoked thereby utterly to deprive them of those which they should account their precious and pleasant things, and abandon them to all the desolations of a people that sin away the mercies of the gospel (James iii. 16; Gal. v. 15; 2 Sam ii. 26; Isa. v. 4, 5, 6; Matt. xxi. 43).

VI. If the distempers in Salem Village should be (which God forbid!) so incurable, that Mr. Parris, after all, find that he cannot, with any comfort and service, continue in his present station, his removal from thence will not expose him unto any hard character with us, nor, we hope, with the rest of the people of God among whom we live (Matt. x. 14; Acts xxii. 18).

All which advice we follow with our prayers that the God of peace would bruise Satan under our feet. Now, the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means.

INCREASE MATHER, *Moderator*.

JOSEPH BRIDGHAM.
SAMUEL CHECKLEY.
WILLIAM TORREY.
JOSEPH BOYNTON.
RICHARD MIDDLECOT.
JOHN WALLEY.
JER: DUMMER.
NEHEMIAH JEWET.
EPHRAIM HUNT.
NATHLL. WILLIAMS.
SAMUEL PHILLIPS.
JAMES ALLEN.
SAMUEL TORREY.
SAMUEL WILLARD.
EDWARD PAYSON.
COTTON MATHER.

Chapter 2: Document Set 2 References

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2. Martha Corey's Testimony, 1692

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3. Ann Putnam's Deposition, 1692

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 9. The Conclusions of the Massachusetts Bay Elders, 1695
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Chapter 3:
Document Set 2 Credits

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