

# Salem Witchcraft

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## Salem Witchcraft

Witchcraft accusations and trials in 1692 rocked the colony of Salem Massachusetts. There are some different views that are offered concerning why neighbors decided to condemn the people around them as witches and why they did what they did to one another. Carol Karlsen in her book *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman* and Bernard Rosenthal in *Salem Story* give several factors, ranging from woman hunting to sheer malice, that help explain why the Salem trials took place and why they reached the [magnitude](#) that they did. The theories put forth by Karlsen of a society that accusations against women as witches explain the trail, and Rosenthals ideas of discourse in the community are supported or partially disproved by the documents that are presented by Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum. The different motivations and reasons for witch accusations are exhibited in the fitting the profile of a witch, the belief in the accusers and guilt by association, the actions of the Putnam family, and the disagreements and discourse in the community.

The trial of Bridget [Bishop](#) shows how people who fit the general profile of a witch can be [accused](#). Karlsen points out that Bridget Bishop had been previously accused of witchcraft

in the 1680's the decade before the trials.<sup>1</sup> People who were accused of witchcraft were generally suspected of being witches before they are brought to trial. Because of her prior accusation the idea that Bridget Bishop could be a witch is in the mind of the community. Because of the prior accusation Bishop is a prime candidate to be accused again and a prime suspect whenever witchcraft is suspected in the community. Bridget Bishop was brought to court on witchcraft charges in Febr...

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...Nissenbaum (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1972), 204.

18. Rosenthal, 3.

19. Rosenthal, 192.

20. "Anti-Parris Petition (1695)," in Salem-Village Witchcraft, Paul Boyer, and Stephen Nissenbaum (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1972), 261-263.

21. "The first day of October, 1686," in Salem-Village Witchcraft, Paul Boyer, and Stephen Nissenbaum (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1972), 341.

22. "The 27th of December, 1681," in Salem-Village Witchcraft, Paul Boyer, and Stephen Nissenbaum (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1972), 321.

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