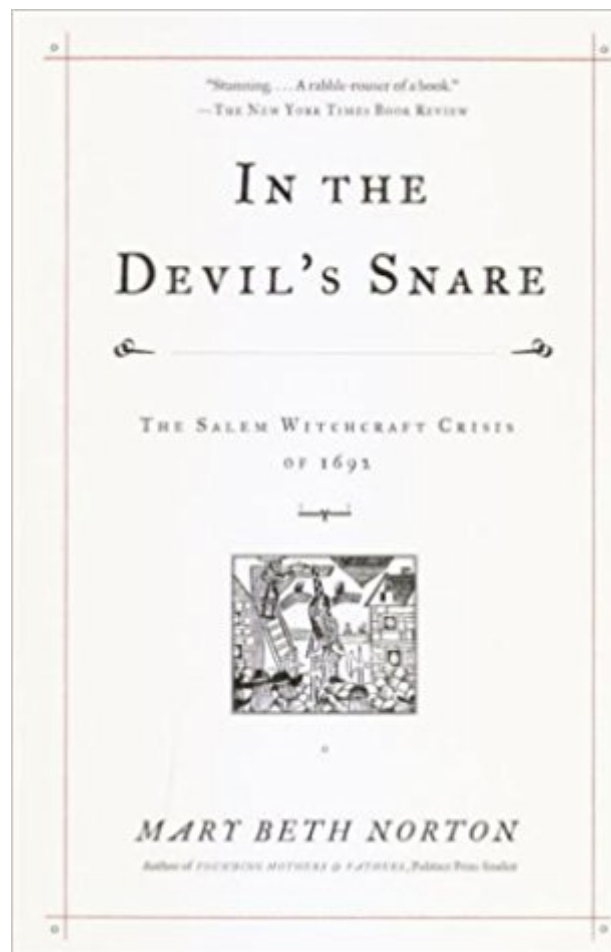




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# **In The Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis Of 1692**



## Synopsis

Award-winning historian Mary Beth Norton reexamines the Salem witch trials in this startlingly original, meticulously researched, and utterly riveting study. In 1692 the people of Massachusetts were living in fear, and not solely of satanic afflictions. Horrifyingly violent Indian attacks had all but emptied the northern frontier of settlers, and many traumatized refugees—including the main accusers of witches—had fled to communities like Salem. Meanwhile the colony's leaders, defensive about their own failure to protect the frontier, pondered how God's people could be suffering at the hands of savages. Struck by the similarities between what the refugees had witnessed and what the witchcraft "victims" described, many were quick to see a vast conspiracy of the Devil (in league with the French and the Indians) threatening New England on all sides. By providing this essential context to the famous events, and by casting her net well beyond the borders of Salem itself, Norton sheds new light on one of the most perplexing and fascinating periods in our history.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The story of the Salem witchcraft trials is well known, from both historical accounts and dramatic retellings, such as Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*. Cornell historian Mary Beth Norton now offers a significant reinterpretation of the events that (by her count) led to legal action against at least 144 people, 54 confessions of witchcraft, 19 hangings, and one "pressing to death ... by heavy stones." Norton's contribution is to contextualize what happened. She studies not just Salem itself, but all of

Essex County and northern New England, because so many of the people involved in the witchcraft crisis didn't live in Salem proper. She also says these grim events must be understood in relation to King William's War, which the early Americans called the Second Indian War. This frontier conflict and the religious interpretations thrust upon it created the conditions for what happened in Salem and the surrounding region, which, says Norton, would not have occurred in the war's absence. As might be expected, her narrative does not proceed along traditional lines. It is driven more by the academic imperative to break scholarly ground than by the urge to tell a harrowing story. For readers interested in knowing what really happened at Salem, though, *In the Devil's Snare* may be the best source. --John J. Miller --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In her splendid re-creation of the notorious events of 1692, Cornell historian Norton (her *Founding Mothers and Fathers* was a Pulitzer finalist) offers fresh and provocative insights into the much-studied Salem witchcraft trials. Using newly available materials from the trial records, letters and diaries, she argues that a complex of political, military and religious factors led to the outbreak of hysterical fits and other behavior that ended in the infamous trials. As Norton ably demonstrates, the settlers saw the First and Second Indian Wars and their resulting loss of prosperity as God's punishment for their sins. In April 1692, as these losses mounted, several teenage girls began having fits that they attributed to the devil, to witches and to Indians. The colonists thus found themselves, says Norton, being punished both by visible spirits (Indians) and invisible ones (the devil). In an unusual turn of events that Norton explores, the magistrates of the village took the testimony of these women who normally were not given any political or judicial authority at face value and began the trials. Moreover, as Norton shows, some judges used this opportunity of blaming witches to assuage their own guilt over their responsibility for political, economic and military mismanagement. Part of the originality of this study lies in Norton's refusal to read events through the lens of contemporary psychology, offering instead a lively account of the ways 17th-century men and women would have thought about them. Very simply, Norton's book is a first-rate narrative history of one of America's more sordid yet ever-fascinating tales. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

*In the Devil's Snare* (Mary Beth Norton) is a path-breaking re-examination of the 1692 Salem witch trials. *Snare* examines the York Deeds and similar sources, making possible detailed reconstruction of Indian attacks on Maine coastal settlements, and subsequent

displacement of survivors to households in Essex County, Massachusetts. In the process, Norton uncovers a plethora of relationships between accused and accusers stretching back to imperiled settlements on Casco Bay. Rumors that began there, such as those concerning Rev. George Burroughs, were carried forward with little change to Salem. Norton paints a vividly detailed portrait of a township riven by class conflict and clan rivalry, where relocated and unquestionably traumatized young women kindled an already volatile mixture. While not overthrowing the established thesis put forward by Boyer and Nissenbaum, which traces the origins of the 1692 Salem hysteria to a long-festering feud between the Porter and Putnam families, Norton reasonably inquires why the outbreak of witchcraft extended beyond Salem (although taking its most virulent form there), and why what had been smoldering for two decades finally erupted in the conflagration of 1692. What she finds is revealing. In examining the lives of accusers and confessors, those of the accused, as well as the experiences of clergymen, jurors, and judges in the witch trials, Norton reveals a consistent and illuminating pattern: dozens had ties to the Northern Frontier.

Norton's analysis suggests, in no uncertain terms, that several of the afflicted young women may have suffered post-traumatic stress disorder. Lurid details of claimed spiritual affliction and torture included being roasted alive, a torture not unfamiliar to the Indians of 17th-century New England. Norton deftly posits that the afflicted may have been reliving events witnessed on the Northern Frontier. What Norton fails to explain is what caused the first few episodes of possession. Long-established claims that Tituba, Reverend Samuel Parris's slave, put the thought of Satan in the impressionable minds of Betty Parris and Abigail Williams are not completely compelling. Puritan strictures regarding divination notwithstanding, such pursuits were a common part of social, if not religious, practice. To the extent that they are common, they remain inadequate to explain the unprecedented scope of the Salem hysteria. However, readers and historians alike must eschew the naive practice of looking at the events in Salem through the lens of a 21st-century observer. For the 17th-century Puritan, God's hand was seen in all things, and the temptations of Satan were very real. Consequently, a river flooding and damaging farmlands was seen as the Devil's scourge, not as a natural phenomenon. In the Puritan iconography, Satan and Indians were the "black man"; little distinction was made between them. In light of such observations, Norton's thesis, and the evidence she brings to bear in support of it, is compelling. That evidence is drawn from a wide variety of sources: journals, trial testimony, and the writings of Puritan clergyman Cotton Mather, among others. Norton remarks that 1692 Massachusetts had no daily newspapers, making gossip the normal mode of transmission of

information within townships. That gossip often stirred up hard feelings, long buried, and fostered widespread hysteria. However, books other than the Bible were just beginning to make their appearance. Devout Puritans often viewed them with suspicion, taking them to be instruments of Satan; not surprisingly, the spiritually afflicted, from Tituba onward, described writing in the Devil's book, promising to serve his ends, essentially indenturing themselves for a period of years to tormenting others. Norton persuasively demonstrates that most of the fantastic claims leveled against the accused mirrored common social practices, or were remembrances of Northern Frontier atrocities. *Snare*, vivid in its details and compelling in its arguments, is supplemented with revealing maps, graphs, and charts that make a welter of information accessible at a glance. Insets, perhaps too few in number, provide concentrated discussions of key issues. Norton's book has been the definitive study on the role of Northern Frontier events in shaping Salem's witch craze for a decade. During that time, it has won converts and gained credibility. It has not totally supplanted the Boyer-Nissenbaum thesis, but instead added to and grown beside it. The perspective of Norton's *Snare* is certain to enrich future investigations; at the least, it has forced critical re-examination of older theories. For both scholars and general readers hoping to arrive at a deeper understanding of one of colonial America's darkest chapters, Norton's seminal work will serve as a provocative addition to the burgeoning field of Salem studies.

Her thesis about a Maine connection is pretty flimsy, but her methodical, chronological detailing of the events is terrific. Not only does it give you all the evidence for making your own theses, but it puts you on the scene so much better than post-modern mind- or idea-centric scatters. I already read a library copy of the book, then decided I really wanted it for my own bookshelf.

Mary Beth Norton's, *In the Devil's Snare*, argues the fear of Indian attacks on frontier settlements in colonial New England triggered the 1692 witchcraft crisis. Over a period of eighteen months and through the use of primary sources, Norton explores the idea that early New England settlers had a very real reason to fear the devil. Norton identifies the devil as, "the black man whom the afflicted described as resembling a [Wabanakis] Indian" (297). Pre-Enlightened New Englanders believed they were chosen by God to spread his word to the heathen land of the New World. English settlers had long thought the Native American Indians were devil worshipers and combined with the Puritan belief in God facilitated the English acceptance that the devil was real and appeared

to women as a spectral. Norton's states, "the frequent references to the 'black man' by confessors and the afflicted establish a crucial connection between the witchcraft crisis and the Indian war[s]" (59). Placing the Salem witchcraft trials in the context of the Indian Wars, Norton concludes the trials were driven by the failed politics of those protecting English settlements and driven by superstition, not the legitimate belief in witchcraft. In the opening chapter, Norton directly connects the witchcraft hysteria to the First and Second Indian Wars. Norton vividly describes how a group of a hundred and fifty Wabanakis Indians raided and burned the settlement of York, Maine in 1691.

Norton's evidence suggests that the accusers and those accused of witchcraft were refugees from the Indian Wars and directly associated to the violent attacks by the Wabanakis Indians (54-55). Ignoring a yearly Tribute of Corn, disrespecting the Wabanakis fishing rights, and settlement on unpurchased land by the colonists caused friction with the local Indians prompting raids on English villages (94). Norton argues that redeemed captives of the Wabanakis had returned to the villages with tales of English settlers being "roasted to death by slow fires as one explanation for the mass accusations of witchcraft during 1692" (48). The previous experiences of the participants of the witchcraft trials on the Maine frontier, specifically their connection to the Indian Wars, was the first contributing factor to the witchcraft hysteria. Norton also argues, "Satan had preferred to deal with women, who were 'more credulous' and 'more malicious' when displeased than men, 'and so herein more fit instruments of the Devil'" (32). Women were also more likely to escape the Indians and return to the village retelling the horrors witnessed on the frontier. Norton argues the men presiding over the trials were to blame for the hysteria getting out of hand. The political and judicial leaders used public fear to divert attention from their failure to protect settlement expansion of the frontier into Indian Territory. In other words, the witchcraft trials were a political conspiracy to cover up the inadequacies of Puritan leaders. Norton's research concludes the judges of the witchcraft trials were the generals who led the English army into battle with the Indians and were losing the war on the Maine frontier. Accusations of witchcraft shifted the focus of the battle from the frontier and into the courtrooms. In the courtrooms, the founding members of New England settlements leveraged a deeply religious community blaming the devil for the attacks and the spectral visions seen by the accused.

Bought this book for a college class & thought it was OK. Came in great shape.

This is the most common sense approach to the Salem Witch Trials and it reads like a Novel, while a lot of it is grounded in speculation. The speculations are grounded in commonsense based on what else was taking place at the time with excellent sources. A must read!

Great book @ a Great price! Fast shipping! Would recommend!

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