
Black Magic: Witchcraft, Race, and Resistance in Colonial New England

Author(s): Timothy J. McMillan

Source: *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Sep., 1994), pp. 99-117

Published by: Sage Publications, Inc.

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2784416>

Accessed: 22-11-2019 16:35 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Sage Publications, Inc. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Black Studies*

BLACK MAGIC: Witchcraft, Race, and Resistance in Colonial New England

TIMOTHY J. McMILLAN
Humboldt State University

Whites accused Blacks¹ of the crime of witchcraft in New England but no executions resulted from these accusations. As Blacks occupied the lowest rung within the society, their ability to survive the ordeals of the witchcraft trials itself indicates something of the perceived power they possessed. The survival of the accusation of witchcraft also demonstrates Blacks' insignificance in the eyes of the Europeans. This contradiction in categorizing Blacks as both powerless and powerful actually served to empower Blacks in the society of colonial New England.

Social scientists have examined New England witchcraft through analyses of economic tension, folk culture, gender, and politics, but rarely in terms of race and ethnicity.² Anthropologists have generally ignored Salem witchcraft. This lacuna in scholarship may be a result of the general lack of interest in historical research or the desire to explore more exotic arenas than Puritan New England.

Thomas Buckley's research among the Yurok of northern California provides a clue for the dearth of research on race and witchcraft in New England: preconceived models of society based on 20th-century Eurocentric experience. Buckley (1982) examines the issue of women's power in Yurok society and reinterprets earlier research on menstruation and danger as indicating a misinterpretation of women's status. In the literature, menstruating Yurok women are portrayed as unclean and dangerous. According to Buckley, they are so full of power that they are threatening, not

polluting, to men. Buckley challenges the bias of male informants and male researchers and the discounting of contemporary Native American points of view.

Much the same is true of the study of colonial New England which is viewed through Eurocentric interpretations via the writings of White authors. With an eye to the biases inherent within the archival records of colonial New England, a more complete analysis of the role of race and witchcraft in this society is possible.

INTRODUCTION

The logic of witchcraft governed the relations between Blacks and Whites in colonial New England. It was a logic that in practice prevented Whites from executing Blacks as witches because of the possibility of supernatural retribution. Also, it was a logic that prompted Whites to execute Blacks and to destroy their physical remains when the inherent witchcraft of Blacks moved out of the control of Whites. The presuppositions that Europeans brought from the Old World concerning the nature of African people and the color black, combined with the novel situations to which the Europeans adapted in the New World, caused them to cast enslaved and free Blacks within the realm of the satanic. This proved to be both burdensome and empowering to the Blacks of colonial New England.

Although Blacks made up a very small portion of the population of early colonial New England (perhaps 1% for all of New England), with a somewhat greater concentration in Massachusetts (approximately 2% in 1715)³, they held an important position within White ideology. The first Blacks⁴ who arrived in the Massachusetts colony between 1624 and 1638⁵ came as enslaved peoples or indentured servants. The first English settlers arrived at Plymouth in 1620. Thus the development of Black and White subcultures within New England began at roughly the same time. The demand for slave labor continued unabated for over 100 years.⁶

Most enslaved Africans in New England originated in Barbados and other English colonies in the Caribbean, although in the later

colonial period some traders brought enslaved peoples directly from Africa. The strong desire for Africans, and not for indigenous (but potentially dangerous) Native Americans, is well illustrated in the colonial record. Adult male Native Americans captured in warfare would be sold to Caribbean plantations in return for Blacks or Caribs. It was much simpler to control dispossessed Africans and Caribbeans than knowledgeable, local native peoples.

As is clear from analyses of material from the southern United States, many enslaved Africans brought remnants of their African cultures with them to the New World. Although the African people transformed and modified their cultures to deal with the new environments and cultures they encountered, much persisted nonetheless. The roles of assimilation and accommodation are often overstated, particularly in analyses of the northern colonies. The Creole and Gullah languages, voodoo, marriage and funerary practices, folk medicines, and conjuring and divining practices are all well known from the enslaved and free Black communities in the South.⁷ In particular, the "master class" had little direct control over the religious beliefs, if not the practices, of the enslaved Africans. Blacks throughout the New World modified their African beliefs to deal with the novel and generally oppressive situations which presented themselves. The syncretism of Catholicism and West African belief which resulted in voodoo is perhaps the best known of these transformations of African religion in the face of New World pressure.

There is strong evidence that elements of African religions persisted in the New England Black population. Witchcraft, and magical beliefs in general, are known to serve functions of dissipating social tension and of gaining control over situations which are not controllable by more direct physical means. In America, these aspects of culture were emphasized and elaborated above other economic, political, and social forms that the enslaved Africans were powerless to exploit. In addition to the cultures brought from Africa and the syncretism of these cultures with European cultures, the preconceptions of the Europeans about African religion and about Africans themselves must be considered. Certainly these opinions varied from European to European, and there were

both religious exploiters and religious reformers among the earliest White settlers of Anglo New England; however, a certain consensus becomes manifest in the writings of these early colonists and their descendants.

METHOD

The conceptual model that informs this research is a confluence and conflict between several mutually overlapping symbolic systems—those of European Christianity and European folk religion, and those of the numerous African religious beliefs (particularly, but not exclusively, West African religious beliefs⁸). For both the European immigrants and the enslaved Africans, America was indeed a New World. African peoples were forced into a position that most Europeans were not—that of assimilating, at least in its formal aspects—into a new cultural system. Along with the Whites, Blacks also adapted to the new social and physical environment of Anglo North America.

Much direct documentation exists concerning the attitudes and practices of the Europeans (at least the wealthier, empowered Whites if not the indentured Europeans). On the other hand, written records of Whites are the major source of data about the attitudes and practices of enslaved Blacks. The Europeans often misinterpreted and undervalued the cultures of the Africans. Analysis of these interpretations must take into account the preconceptions of Whites about Blacks.

ANALYSIS

The voluminous archival material available on colonial New England society provides the basic material for analysis in this investigation. The transcripts of the witchcraft trials, other court records, the legal code of Massachusetts, and the writings of contemporary theologians and social analysts have been mined for information relating to race and witchcraft. Exploration of analo-

gous material on the development of Black American religion in the southern colonies provides additional data. Analyses and reinterpretations of the historical material are another important source of information as these often refer to obscure or currently non-existent archival materials.

The study of race and witchcraft in New England is a highly complex endeavor in that there are several threads of belief and action to untangle: (a) the practice of witchcraft and magic by Blacks; (b) the accusations of witchcraft brought by Whites against Blacks; and (c) the use by Blacks of the European beliefs of the inherently satanic nature of Blacks to obtain relief from economic and social oppression. The first of these factors is again subdivided into (a) the practice of witchcraft and magic with an origin in African cultures; (b) the practice of witchcraft and magic with an origin in European cultures; and (c) the practice of a syncretic form of European and African witchcraft and magic. There is direct evidence for witchcraft accusation of Blacks, direct evidence for the use of magical practices by Blacks, and circumstantial evidence for the other categories of witchcraft practiced among Blacks.

AFRICAN BELIEFS IN NEW ENGLAND

Piersen's (1988) *Black Yankees*⁹ provides a wealth of material on the magical practices of Black people in colonial New England. Both African and European ideologies informed these practices. White observers tended to highly despise the magical beliefs and activities of Blacks. A most notorious point of friction between African beliefs and Puritan values is found in the funerary practices of the Blacks of Boston. Piersen (1988) notes:

In 1721 . . . Boston's selectmen limited the number of bells that could be tolled for Negro funerals to one in order to cut down on attendance; and they ordered the funeral processions to stop wending their way all over town and to take the most direct route to the grave. (p. 78)

African-inspired funeral rites, the use of magical talismans and charms of protection, divining, and belief in ghosts are all

illustrated in the documents of New England history (Piersen, 1988, pp. 74-86).

The retention of Africanisms well into the 18th century demonstrates the significance these beliefs and practices had in the lives of New England's Black population and the inability of Euro-American society to make full converts of the Africans and their descendants. Many of the African practices and beliefs meshed very well with those of Europe and a new set of syncretic beliefs arose, particularly in the area of magic and witchcraft.

BLACKS AS WITCHES

In the available archival material, there is evidence of the accusation of Black people for the crimes of witchcraft¹⁰ and satanic possession in colonial New England. Despite the small proportion of the population that was Black and despite the low status of Blacks vis-à-vis the European population—even indentured European servants had higher social ranking—Blacks appeared in a number of criminal proceedings that involved witchcraft either directly or by implication. As early as 1656, Old Ham, an enslaved African man, was accused of witchcraft in Strawberry Bank, New Hampshire (Piersen, 1988, p. 80).

In the Salem witch trials, three of the accused were Black: Mary Black, Candy, and Old Pharaoh. Piersen (1988) states that Old Pharaoh was "accused of being one of those who came to torment and entice Mercy Lewis during the trials" (p. 80). The fate of Old Pharaoh is not known.¹¹ Mary Black refused to confess to having practiced witchcraft despite the afflictions demonstrated in the courtroom by Mary Walcot, Abigail Williams, and Mercy Lewis (the accusing girls) at the time of her testimony. Her punishment was imprisonment. After the witch frenzy had blown over in 1693, Mary obtained her freedom by proclamation from the governor (Upham, 1971, p. 137). Most of the Whites accused of witchcraft gained release at this time as well. Candy confessed to the crime of witchcraft and produced as evidence of her magical practices "a handkerchief wherein several knots were tied, rags of cloth, a piece of cheese, and a piece of grass" (Hansen, 1969, pp. 70-71). This

confession, along with the corroborating physical evidence, indicated that Candy was actively practicing "witchcraft of some sort." Candy stated that her knowledge of witchcraft came from her experience in Salem and not from her home in Barbados.

The magical items possessed by Candy bear closer analysis and provide evidence for a possible connection to African or Afro-Caribbean beliefs. The knotted handkerchief was obviously a doll to stick with pins or to rend to inflict pain on others. The pieces of cloth were possibly shreds of clothing to be used to identify the dolls with a particular victim, as is common in the sympathetic magic which makes up part of voodoo belief. More interesting, and more perplexing to many historians of Salem, are the cheese and grass. In an agricultural area such as Salem Village, magical harm often extends beyond human victims to include the destruction of essential crops and livestock. In the case of Wonn (presented below), there is an explicit connection between a witch (Bridget Bishop) and cattle and hay. Again, in the case of Candy, the possession of cheese (curdled milk) and grass can be seen as evidence of sympathetic magic, this time oriented toward destroying the livelihood of Salem as well as its inhabitants.

In an unusual but no doubt empowering twist, Candy testified against her own mistress. She stated that she had learned witchcraft from Marguerett Hawks and had been made to write in the notorious book (the covenant with Satan) (Upham, 1971, p. 215). The court jailed both Candy and Mrs. Hawks while they awaited trial, but the governor freed both in 1693 despite Candy's confession.

THE BURNING OF BLACKS

Maria, a less fortunate enslaved African woman, was indicted for burning a building in Roxbury, Massachusetts in 1681. Her sentence was the extraordinary one of execution by burning at the stake (Noble, 1901, p. 198). Judicial immolation was a fate to which no convicted witch was subjected in New England.

Even more telling was the fate of "Jack, negro servant to Mr. Samuel Woolcotone" (Noble, 1901, p. 198) also accused of arson

by the same court. The sentence pronounced against Jack was "that he should goe from the barr to the place whence he Came & there be hangd by the neck till he be dead & then taken down & burnt to Ashes in the fier w[i]th Maria negro" (Noble, 1901, p. 199).

Burning was the punishment for those possessed by Satan; witchcraft in New England (unlike in Europe) was seen as a civil crime and the ultimate punishment was hanging. The burning of the victim after some other method of execution was a common method of disposing of witches in Europe. The use of this method to destroy the body of a criminal strongly suggests that witchcraft and not arson was the actual crime.

A number of Blacks in New York met the same fate as Maria and Jack. In 1741, in response to fears of a conspiracy, four Whites and 18 Blacks were hanged in New York City. In addition to the more usual method of execution, burning at the stake was the fate of 11 other Blacks (Upham, 1971, p. 437). The use of this traditional method of execution demonstrates the fear among Whites of the satanic power possessed by Blacks and the need to cleanse their society of the threat. Chase (1983) explored the underlying tensions in New York City in 1741 and concluded that a great deal of African religious practices were looked on suspiciously by Whites. The immolation of Blacks occurred when they presented not only a moral threat but also a physical threat: All of these cases involved physical violence, or potential violence against Whites. Each of these cases was met with the most powerful European symbolic reaction possible: burning to purge Satan.

BLACKS AS ACCUSERS

Not only did Whites accuse Blacks of witchcraft, but on several occasions Blacks also accused Whites of this crime. Candy implicated her mistress as a witch. In 1679, a Black man named Wonn accused Bridget Oliver¹² of witchcraft. He stated that Oliver harassed him with apparitions, drove his horse away, and disturbed him in the hayhouse (Konig, 1979, p. 151). Wonn indicated that the spectral harassment prevented him from doing his agricultural

chores. In both of these instances the slaves were able to express their resentment of Whites in a socially acceptable form and also to escape punishment.

THE SATANIC BLACKS

In addition to evidence of magical practices among Blacks and of witchcraft accusations between Blacks and Whites, another significant source of data is the attitudes about Blacks that are manifest in the writings of theologians and lay people. The clearest statement of White attitudes about the religious makeup of Blacks comes from noted Boston minister Cotton Mather's (1706) work *The Negro Christianizæd*:

A roaring Lion who goes about seeking whom he may devour, hath made a seizure of them [Black slaves]. Very many of them do with Devillish Rites actually worship Devils, or maintain a magical conversation with Devils. And all of them are more slaves to Satan than they are to You, until a Faith in the Son of God has made them free indeed. Will you do nothing to pluck them out of the Jaws of Satan the Devourer? (pp. 14-15)

To many Whites, Africa was a strange and heathen land rampant with demons and devils who were the objects of worship by its inhabitants. Devils were often in the thoughts of the colonists and were found at almost every turn. The belief that Blacks were inherently connected to the worship of satanic forces no doubt greatly influenced many Whites automatically to suspect them of witchcraft. The belief also caused Whites to fear the efficacy of the Blacks' control of the familiar demonic forces. Not only were Blacks consorting with Satan in Africa and in New England, according to the fears and misconceptions of many Europeans, but Africans also mirrored Satan's image as well.

The Devil in the Shape of a Woman (Karlsen, 1987) is the title of a recent book on witchcraft in New England but more appropriate from the spectral evidence admitted in New England courts is the devil's image in the shape of a Black man. William Barker of Andover confessed, "God having called me to Confess my sin and

Apostasy in that fall in giving the Devil advantage over me appearing to me like a Black" (Burr, 1914, p. 419). "The black man," is the description of Satan in the testimonies of many of the accusers in the Salem witch trials. Even Tituba, an Indian woman, described Satan and his familiar animals in terms of the color black.¹³ Peoples of African origin were considered to traffic with devils and actually resembled Satan himself.¹⁴

European symbolic systems encoded blackness, sacrifice, prayer, fate, and magic (to name but a few) in very different ways from the African symbolic systems. The two systems, however, overlapped in the areas of witchcraft and possession. The formal structure of these may be similar but the mythical-ritual meanings underlying these systems are highly divergent. I argue that Africans adopted much of the formal structure of White culture, but they then transformed this system to their own benefit.

A ZUNI EXAMPLE

An excellent example of the confluence of religious beliefs at the formal level can be seen in the "Zuni visitation to Salem" in which the Zuni visitors lauded the Salem townspeople for discovering and ridding themselves of witches that were seen to be evil, destructive, and disposable in both religious systems (Proper, 1968). The underlying cosmologies and ideologies of the Zuni and the inhabitants of Salem were highly divergent, but the belief in witches provided a node of connection between the cultures. Much the same occurred between the Blacks and Whites in New England.

BLACK RELIGION IN THE SOUTH

The use by Blacks of the hierarchy and prejudices of the Euro-Americans against themselves is the central focus of this research. Analogies between the responses of enslaved Africans and indentured servants in New England are seen in comparison to the responses of the better-documented experiences of Blacks enslaved in the southern United States. This is an important heuristic device

that allows interpretation of the developing religious life of a Black New England culture in the context of colonial American culture.

Blacks in the South used varied religious forms to protect themselves from the ire of their masters, to make their often precarious lives more predictable and to create a cultural breathing space in which they could assert their own individuality and humanity. The practice of both Christian and folk traditions including divination, voodoo, herbal magic, and witchcraft were common throughout the South and often were not mutually exclusive. Neither the African nor the European cultural elements were maintained without change. Adaptations in both occurred in response to the changing cultural environment. The use of spirituals as a method of secular communication, the transformation of African myths into educational stories for children, and the belief in the coming of a Moses to set his people free are all indicative of the types of cultural elaboration that characterized the southern slave community.

The well-documented uprisings of Gabriel Prosser in Richmond, Virginia (1800) and Denmark Vesey in Charleston, South Carolina (1822) were both informed by Christianity and folk beliefs, particularly those folk beliefs of the Gullah people of the Sea Islands of South Carolina. The Nat Turner uprising in Southampton County, Virginia in 1831, although very strongly focused on Christianity, demonstrates the ability of enslaved Africans to transform Christianity to meet their own unique needs.¹⁵ It also demonstrates the fear generated in Whites by the actions of their supposedly docile slaves. The aftermath of the Nat Turner revolt was widespread panic among the Whites of Virginia and calls for increasing control over the religion practiced by Blacks. The burning of 11 Blacks in New York City acknowledges the same types of White fears. The expression of these fears was an anxiety over satanic possession rather than the Christian beliefs that informed Nat Turner's revolt.

By analogy with the southern Black experience, it would be facile to assume that New England Blacks either fully accepted the religion presented to them by the Whites or fully maintained their beliefs from Africa. It is clear that they (as did their southern kin)

developed religious systems that helped them cope more effectively with the rigors of life in servitude. Most southern Blacks, both enslaved and free, could maintain and create cultural forms in the company of other Blacks due to the large percentage of the population that was of African origin. Blacks in the north had to be much more covert in their attempts at religious transformation. The differences between the Methodist and Baptist South and New England puritanism also are highly significant. It is likely that any possible link between the beliefs of the Blacks and those of the Whites was emphasized; thus the significance of "witchcraft" and "folk magic," categories that transcended the ethnic and racial barrier separating Blacks and Whites.

THE NEW ENGLAND BLACK EXPERIENCE

New England differed markedly from the other areas of Anglo North America in the acknowledgment of the legal rights of Blacks¹⁶ while insisting on the utter legitimacy of the slavery system. The desire for enslaved Africans exceeded the economic usefulness of a slave economy. Native American and European enslavement existed side by side with African enslavement, but these were neither justified nor explained in the same way.¹⁷ Blacks also brought much higher prices than did Europeans or Native Americans due to their total legal and political bondage. Under the law, Blacks in New England fared much better than did their enslaved brothers and sisters to the south. Nonetheless, the social and moral world in which northern Blacks lived was one of oppression and prejudice, some of it founded on New England Puritan religious beliefs. Whites denied church membership to Blacks—and to many Whites—but still stressed that Blacks adhere to the Puritan code of behavior.

One result of the preexisting beliefs of Europeans concerning the supernatural nature of African religious practice was that some peoples of African descent could create a more comfortable environment in which to escape or resist the oppression of New England society. This attitude was manifest in several different ways:

through the practice of African religious traditions, through the practice of European folk religious traditions (particularly fortune-telling), and through more direct means such as arson or attempted uprisings against the White power structure.

Racial oppression has been a major part of Black life in the United States since the early colonial period. Responses to this consistent social and political discrimination took many forms, but religion was particularly effective in creating a cultural breathing space. A significant and heretofore entirely overlooked factor in the development of Black power was the development of a syncretic view of European and African concepts of witchcraft. This view empowered Blacks in that it gave them a degree of control over the system of witchcraft practice and accusation that the Europeans never could.

CONCLUSION

It has been 300 years since the witchcraft trials of Salem, Massachusetts. It is thus appropriate to consider the lack of interest among anthropologists in plumbing the well of information that has been so popular in the works of historians. The wealth of documentary evidence available about witchcraft in colonial New England, and the theoretical concerns of anthropology should make this a productive arena for research. A recent review of bibliographies makes it clear that this area has been almost untouched. The wealth of social and cultural data provides an excellent proving ground for many anthropological theories and models and needs to be more generally exploited. The pattern of witchcraft accusations that boiled up in 1692 and then subsided permanently, fits well into Carneiro's (1982) theory of successive reequilibration in social evolution. The analysis of the myriad cultural elements that came together in New England witchcraft provides much information about enculturation and reverse colonization (the acquiring of cultural patterns by the colonizers instead of the colonized). Detailed symbolic information on gender, religion, color and social status exists within the records on early New England society and

would allow fascinating interpretations in the manner of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Clifford Geertz, or Victor Turner.

The area holding the most promise, however, is that on theories of witchcraft and magic as methods of reducing or expressing social tension. Because extreme social tension existed between European immigrants, enslaved Africans, and Native Americans, it is reasonable to investigate the roles played by race in the accusations of witchcraft and in the legal and social consequences of these accusations.

Blacks in New England were viewed by Whites as true witches in the anthropological sense—they were inherently evil creatures, unable to control their connection to satanic wickedness. In contrast, Whites were viewed by other Whites as more like sorcerers—people who had to undergo certain rites—in this case, signing Satan's book—to become evil. Conjuring was low-level evil, playing with satanic magic but not playing with Satan. Witchcraft was the internalization of Satan. According to Whites, if Blacks could not become White they could not be cured of their evil, but the containment of their evil was possible. It is interesting to note that although Blacks could not become White, Whites who were afflicted by witches often turned black and blue from supernatural pinching and prodding.

In colonial New England, Blacks were accused of witchcraft and they were basically powerless within that social order. There was mounting tension between Whites and non-Whites due to the fear of Native American aggression and White apprehension over planned uprisings by enslaved Africans (Konig, 1979, p. 167). Why then was the punishment exacted on Blacks for the crime of witchcraft less severe than the punishments given to some Whites—a group much more legally and socially empowered than Blacks? Why were so few Blacks accused of witchcraft when these accusations were overt acts expressing underlying tension and fear? Why were Blacks who were not accused of witchcraft executed in a manner consistent with the execution of witches?

Several factors worked to protect the peoples of African origin in New England against witchcraft accusations. Blacks were valuable property and thus their destruction was costly. The expenses

of jailing and executing Whites were borne by their own estates; if enslaved Africans were executed, not only were the costs difficult to recover but also their owners lost expensive capital investments. In the economically trying times of the colonial period, this was a strong motivation not to accuse an enslaved African of witchcraft (accusations against enslaved peoples by their owners did not occur).

The preconceptions of Whites about Blacks also served to protect the peoples of African extraction. Blacks were seen as morally inferior to Whites; therefore, Europeans did not expect the same standards from Africans as they did from themselves. Thus, even when an enslaved African confessed to the crime of witchcraft and demonstrated his or her magical paraphernalia, the court did not punish him or her severely.

The most significant factor which served to protect the peoples of African origin from the accusations and punishments of witchcraft, however, was that Whites feared the believed magical powers of Blacks. The execution by immolation of one Black woman and the destruction of her codefendant's remains in the fire is a strong indication of the fear which Black violence against Whites could inspire. The expression of this fear was through the symbolic system of Puritan witch beliefs. The courts treated some Black criminals as associates of Satan and dealt with them appropriately. Burning was not a punishment for White arsonists, nor was it used against Whites who participated in uprisings against the enslavement of Africans, such as the one in New York. The punishment of immolation was reserved for the so-called satanic Blacks.

In White ideology, Blacks were morphologically and culturally associated with Satan. Even before the New World contact between Africans and Europeans, Europeans conceived of Satan as a Black man. As the Euro-American culture developed, this image strengthened. A tantalizing piece of negative evidence is that Satan never presented himself as a Native American. Native Americans were frightening to many of the White inhabitants of New England due to the almost constant warfare between them. In fact there has been some speculation that witchcraft outbreaks occurred when there was a great deal of anxiety among Whites resulting from intense

raids by Native Americans (Kences, 1984). In spite of this, Satan remained a Black man. If Satan was testing the mettle of the inhabitants of colonial New England, and Blacks were his closest kin, it would have been imprudent to accuse them or to execute them without ample cause lest they wreak their unholy revenge.

NOTES

1. As a heuristic device, peoples of African origin and their descendants will be referred to as Blacks in this article despite the diversity of their cultural and geographical origins. Peoples of European origin and their descendants will be referred to as Whites (once again ignoring the many cultural and class differences in this population).

2. Among the plethora of historical reinterpretations of New England witchcraft, the most influential are Boyer and Nissenbaum's (1974), *Salem Possessed*, John Demos's (1982) *Entertaining Satan*, Chadwick Hansen's (1969) *Witchcraft at Salem*, and Carol Karlsen's (1987) *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*. All of these works use anthropological concepts of witchcraft and culture to interpret the society of colonial New England but all fall squarely within the realm of historical scholarship.

3. For a discussion of the problems in ascertaining the population of colonial America and the best figures available of the Black population in New England, see Greene and Harrington's (1932) *American Population Before the Federal Census of 1790*.

4. The status of these early Blacks is legally indeterminate as the definition of slavery had not yet been fully differentiated from that of indentured servitude. By 1641, however, in *The Book of the General Lawes and Libertyes Concerning the Inhabitants of Massachusetts* (see Barnes, 1975), the following description of bond slavery is to be found:

It is ordered by this Court and authoritie therof, that there shall never any bond-slavery, villenage or captivite amongst us; unless it be lawfull captives, taken in just wars, and such strangers as willingly sell themselves, or are sold to us: and such shall have the Libertyes and christian usages which the law of God established in Israel concerning such persons doth morally require, provided this exempts none from servitude who shall be judged thereto by Authoritie. (1648, p. 4)

The wars in Africa were considered to be just wars and thus the enslavement of Africans (as well as Native Americans captured in war and Whites who sold themselves into slavery) was legally defined.

5. There is conflicting evidence for the date of the first arrival of African bondspeople in New England; however, the most convincing date at this time is 1638, the year that the ship, *Desire*, returned to Massachusetts from the West Indies. For a discussion of the origin of the Black population in New England, see Greene (1942, pp. 16-17).

6. Exactly why there was any desire for enslaved Africans is not entirely clear as the economy of New England was amply supported by free and indentured Whites. The low number of Blacks is not surprising; that any Blacks were put into slavery in New England is. Generally, the enslaved Africans imported into New England were those not salable in

the Caribbean, those who were thought to be unfit for plantation work. However, there is evidence that, from time to time, special orders were made for "first quality" enslaved peoples from either the Caribbean or from Africa.

7. For a detailed investigation of the role of African beliefs in North American Black culture, see Puckett's (1969) *The Magic and Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro* and Holloway's (1990) *Africanisms in American Culture*.

8. New England was unusual in colonial America in its source of African peoples. Many of the Africans for sale in New England were transported from the Caribbean (and often as rejected peoples seemingly unfit for the rigors of plantation slavery) and not directly from Africa due to the control of the African ports by Spanish and Dutch traders. To circumvent this control, many New England slavers went to Eastern Africa, particularly Madagascar, to obtain bondpeople. This source of enslaved Africans in East Africa may explain some of the differences in African retentions in New England as opposed to those in the South where most of the enslaved were of West African origin.

9. Piersen's work is an admirable descendant of Lorenzo Greene's *The Negro in Colonial New England* (1942). However, there is one disturbing element in this book relating to Blacks and witchcraft. Piersen (1988) notes that "the most famous of the accused was the much romanticized Tituba, an Afro-Carib slave from Barbados" (p. 81). In an endnote, it is mentioned that several authors believe Tituba to have been a Carib person with no African roots. In fact, Hansen (1974) in his seminal article "The Metamorphosis of Tituba, or Why American Intellectuals Can't Tell an Indian Witch From a Negro" demonstrates clearly that there is absolutely no evidence to believe Tituba to have been anything but a Carib woman.

10. The definition of the capital crime of witchcraft in Massachusetts was a short but pointed one: "If any man or woman be a WITCH, that is, hath or consulteth with a familiar spirit, they shall be put to death." Exod. 22.18, Lev. 20.27, Deut. 18.10-11.

11. The names of these two accused male witches, Old Ham and Old Pharaoh, demand further investigation. Both names have a strong connection with Africa—Ham, the cursed son of Noah, whose son Canaan and his descendants were condemned by God to be servants. It had been believed that the cursed children of Canaan moved to Africa and were burned black as a mark of their servile status. Pharaoh, of course, is the title of a ruler of Egypt. As most Blacks bore more orthodox Christian names of the era, it would be interesting to discover if these names indicated a more overtly expressed pagan nature either to their bearers or to the Whites in the community.

12. Bridget Oliver was Bridget Bishop in 1692 when she was again charged with witchcraft and this time was executed for the offense.

13. In terms of the underlying tensions between Whites, Blacks, and Native Americans, it is significant to note that in Tituba's confession she described satanic apparitions such as a talking black dog, a bestial hairy man, and most interesting, two talking rats—one red and one black (Woodward, 1969, pp. 43-48).

14. For a complete, though somewhat dated, discussion of the development of the meaning of the color black in America and the development of the connection of the values associated with the color black with peoples of African origin, see Winthrop Jordan's (1968) *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*.

15. Henry Tragle's (1973) *The Southampton Slave Revolt of 1831* provides a wealth of information on the Nat Turner rebellion, particularly the social and economic tensions which brought Blacks and Whites into conflict. The underlying Christian themes are fully explored. The complete text of Nat Turner's confessions is included as well.

16. For a full account of the treatment of Blacks under the law in colonial America, see Higginbotham's (1978) *In the Matter of Color: Race & the American Legal Process: The Colonial Period*.

17. Several prevailing theories that justified the keeping of enslaved Blacks were: The peoples of Africa were often seen as the product of the curse of Ham (see note 11), Black people were often viewed as satanic in appearance and character, and Blacks were thought by many Euro-Americans to need the care of White masters to survive and, perhaps, to have their immortal souls saved.

REFERENCES

- Barnes, T. (Ed.). (1975). *The book of the general lawes and libertyes concerning the inhabitants of the Massachusetts*. San Marino, CA: The Huntington Library. (Facsimile of the 1648 edition).
- Boyer, P., & Nissenbaum, S. (1974). *Salem possessed: The social origins of witchcraft*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Buckley, T. (1982). Menstruation and the power of Yurok women. *American Ethnologist*, 9, 47-90.
- Burr, G. (Ed.). (1914). *Narratives of the witchcraft cases: 1648-1706*. New York: Scribner.
- Carneiro, R. (1982). Successive reequilibrations as the mechanism of cultural evolution. In W. Scieve & P. Allen (Eds.), *Self-organization and dissipative structures: Applications in the physical and social sciences* (pp. 110-115). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Chase, J. (1983). The 1741 conspiracy to burn New York: Black plot or black magic? *Social Science Information*, 22(6), 969-981.
- Demos, J. (1982). *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the culture of early New England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Greene, E., & Harrington, V. (1932). *American population before the federal census of 1790*. Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith.
- Greene, L. (1942). *The Negro in colonial New England: 1620-1776*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hansen, C. (1969). *Witchcraft at Salem*. London: Hutchinson.
- Hansen, C. (1974). The metamorphosis of Tituba, or why American Intellectuals can't tell an Indian witch from a Negro. *New England Quarterly*, 47(1), 3-12.
- Higginbotham, A. L., Jr. (1978). *In the matter of color: Race & the American legal process: The colonial period*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Holloway, J. (Ed.). (1990). *Africanisms in American culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Jordan, W. (1968). *White over Black: American attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Karlsen, C. (1987). *The devil in the shape of a woman*. New York: Norton.
- Kences, J. (1984). Some unexplored relationships of Essex County witchcraft to the Indian Wars of 1675 and 1689. *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 120(3), 179-212.
- Konig, D. (1979). *Law and society in Puritan Massachusetts: Essex County, 1629-1692*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

- Mather, C. (1706). *The Negro Christianizaed: An essay to excite and assist that good work, the instruction of Negro servants in Christianity*. Boston: B. Green.
- Noble, J. (Ed.). (1901). *Records of the Court of Assistants of the Colony of the Massachusetts Bay: 1630-1692, Vol. I*. Boston: The County of Suffolk.
- Piersen, W. (1988). *Black Yankees: The development of an Afro-American subculture in eighteenth-century New England*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Proper, D. (1968). The Zuni visitation to Salem. *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 104(1), 80-85.
- Puckett, N. (1969). *The magic and folk beliefs of the southern Negro*. New York: Dover.
- Tragle, H. (1973). *The Southampton slave revolt of 1831*. New York: Vintage.
- Upham, C. (1971). *Salem witchcraft: With an account of Salem Village, and a history of opinions on witchcraft and kindred subjects, in two volumes*. Williamstown, MA: Corner House. (Reprint of 1867 edition).
- Weisman, R. (1984). *Witchcraft, magic and religion in seventeenth century Massachusetts*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Woodward, W. E. (Ed.). (1969). *Records of Salem witchcraft, copied from the original documents*. New York: Da Capo. (Republication of the 1864 and 1865 works, in one volume).

Timothy J. McMillan received his Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in anthropology. His dissertation fieldwork, "Resistance to Colonial Change in Highland Kenya: The Kipsigis Orgoiik," was conducted in Kenya. He is currently a lecturer in anthropology and ethnic studies at Humboldt State University.