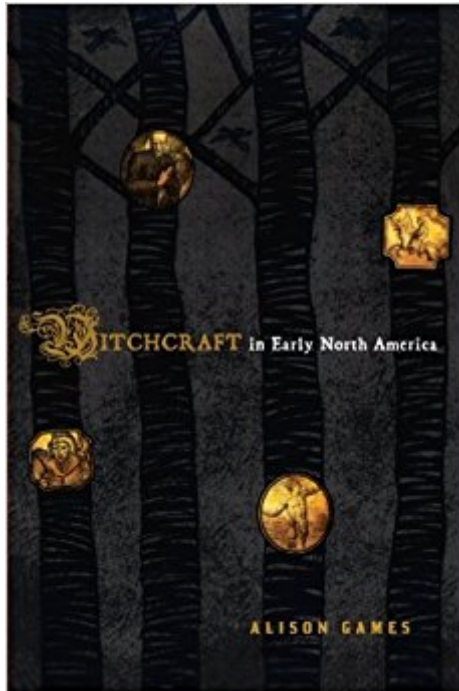




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# Witchcraft In Early North America (American Controversies)



## Synopsis

Witchcraft in Early North America investigates European, African, and Indian witchcraft beliefs and their expression in colonial America. Alison Games's engaging book takes us beyond the infamous outbreak at Salem, Massachusetts, to look at how witchcraft was a central feature of colonial societies in North America. Her substantial and lively introduction orients readers to the subject and to the rich selection of documents that follows. The documents begin with first encounters between European missionaries and Native Americans in New France and New Mexico, and they conclude with witch hunts among Native Americans in the years of the early American republic. The documents—some of which have never been published previously—include excerpts from trials in Virginia, New Mexico, and Massachusetts; accounts of outbreaks in Salem, Abiquiu (New Mexico), and among the Delaware Indians; descriptions of possession; legal codes; and allegations of poisoning by slaves. The documents raise issues central to legal, cultural, social, religious, and gender history. This fascinating topic and the book's broad geographic and chronological coverage make this book ideally suited for readers interested in new approaches to colonial history and the history of witchcraft.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In cogent prose, Games has done a remarkable work of synthesis, bringing together dozens of sources and a hundred pages of primary text to create a compelling and entertaining overview of

witchcraft history. She puts witch hunts into political and religious context, noting how colonial life laid fertile ground for sorcery and rebellion. While her editorial skills are admirable (included are transcripts of famous witch 'confessions,' the poisoning of one of Thomas Jefferson's slaves by a conjurer, and more), her own work may be of more interest. . . . [F]or students and history buffs who seek a larger context for the Salem outbreak, this is an admirable volume. (Publishers Weekly)

Games (history, Georgetown Univ.) makes a vital contribution to the pedagogical resources on early American witchcraft. With its introductory essay and interdependent collection of primary materials, the book demonstrates how accusations of witchcraft mediated colonial encounters between mutually illegible cultures. . . . Games's historical introduction broadens the scope of witchcraft study beyond New England to incorporate less familiar outbreaks in New France and New Spain. The author traces as well the conflicting beliefs European, Native, and African peoples brought to these encounters. A modest selection of Salem materials are among the 29 brief primary documents, which include legal documents, reports of first encounters, and possession narratives from across the continent. Games's premise is that the historical record tells the story slant; accordingly, this volume represents a necessary and ethical, albeit brief, attempt to counter the Anglo-centrism that has characterized witchcraft historiography. The author resituates episodes of witchcraft in the context of cultural contact and conflict in which they occurred, incorporating them into larger scholarly trends in the study of early America as a space of contact zones. . . . Summing Up: Recommended. (CHOICE)

The essay is very well written and clearly conveys complex ideas. The author provides useful analyses of why the Spanish were such ardent witch hunters in America (but not in Spain) while the French took a more lenient approach toward alleged Indian witches. (Journal of American History)

Undergraduate students looking for a concise introduction to witchcraft in Colonial America will find Alison Games's Witchcraft in Early North America to be a useful starting point....The book contains a fairly long overview essay, followed by a selection of twenty-nine primary sources. Throughout the overview essay, Games adeptly and usefully connects key points to specific documents, providing an opportunity for deeper critical thinking.... Witchcraft in Early North America will serve as an excellent introduction to those who have read comparatively little about the topic and seek to learn more about this controversial area in American history. (Journal of American Ethnic History)

The book is well-written, intelligent, and balanced. . . . Games excels as a scholar, and there are insightful passages in the text; her analysis of the decline of legal witchcraft prosecutions among European cultures, for example, is outstanding. She deftly explains the theories of multiple causation that are often difficult to explain to undergraduates. . . . The diverse document selection that follows Games's essay is far more interesting than any

collection specifically addressing witchcraft in North America. (Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft) Witches, witches, everywhere. That's the elegantly simple and subtle insight of Alison Games's new book. *Witchcraft in Early North America* combines an innovative approach to exploring the enmeshed histories of European, African, and Native American people in the early modern world with an important analysis of the deep and wide histories of witchcraft beliefs and practices across North America. Students, teachers, and general readers alike will appreciate this combination as they explore the richness of Games' introduction and the variety of primary sources she has gathered here. (Karin Wulf, College of William and Mary) Alison Games's wonderful book combines a superb historical introduction with an imaginative and wide-reaching collection of documents. *Witchcraft*, we learn, crossed cultural boundaries in North America, a finding that finally places the study of this aspect of the early modern world into our larger understanding of the period. General readers, students, and professors alike will benefit from the efforts of Professor Games, a leading scholar of the early modern Atlantic world, who brings her considerable talents and unique historical skills to the problem of witchcraft. (Peter C. Mancall, University of Southern California)

Alison Games is the Dorothy M. Brown Distinguished Professor of History at Georgetown University. She is the author of *Migration and the Origins of the English Atlantic World*, which won the Theodore Soloutos Award in Immigration and Ethnic History, and *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560-1600*, winner of the Bainton Book Prize in History.

This book is really a mixed bag, in more ways than one. For instance, although it ostensibly covers all of North America, it primarily focuses on just two areas: Salem, Massachusetts, and Abiquiu, New Mexico. Then, in an often rambling introduction, (which in fact accounts for almost half of the book), she does a less than convincing job of pulling these various outbreaks together and finding any common ground to explain them. About the closest she comes is to write them off to the pressures of opposing interests living in forced proximity, and being guided by fear and anger. But doesn't that also apply to thousands of other communities where there were no witchcraft outbreaks? I would think an explanation would have to go much deeper than that. But the heart of the book, the part worth reading, is in the second half, where she presents excerpts from a variety of primary sources, including statutes, court testimony, and descriptions of events written at or near the time the events actually took place. This may not be everyone's cup of tea, but I always find such reading to be fascinating. This is where we can see the issues as they actually appeared to the people living through them, and come to our own conclusions. (Although even here the author

mars the text somewhat by introducing a series of annoying study questions before each excerpt, as if we were middle school students needing her expert guidance rather than adults who can reason for ourselves. Perhaps it's just me, but I found this to be unnecessarily condescending). Overall, I rate this four stars because of the excerpts themselves. They are quite balanced and very informative. In fact, they so piqued my interest in the Abiquiu outbreak, that they led me to order a book solely devoted to that topic alone.

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