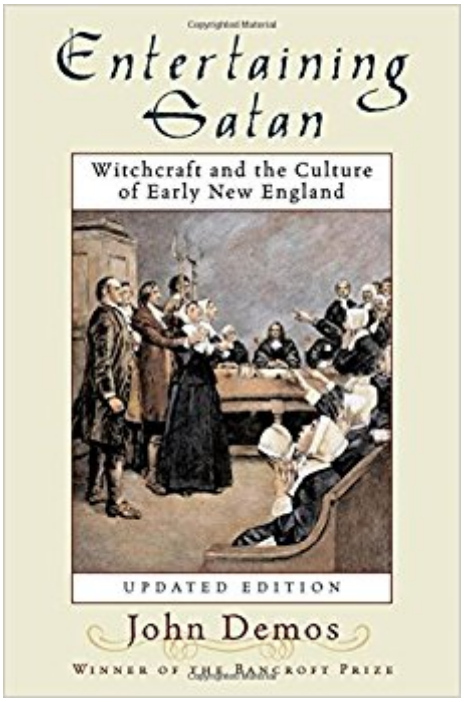
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Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft And The Culture Of Early New England



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Synopsis

In the first edition of the Bancroft Prize-winning Entertaining Satan, John Putnam Demos presented an entirely new perspective on American witchcraft. By investigating the surviving historical documents of over a hundred actual witchcraft cases, he vividly recreated the world of New England during the witchcraft trials and brought to light fascinating information on the role of witchcraft in early American culture. Now Demos has revisited his original work and updated it to illustrate why these early Americans' strange views on witchcraft still matter to us today. He provides a new preface that puts forth a broader overview of witchcraft and looks at its place around the world--from ancient times right up to the present.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"A book that will rank with the best, a book that shows how much we still may learn from these people. This is not simply a monograph on witchcraft but a major attempt to understand the kind of society and the kind of culture in which witchcraft had a place. Rich in insights."--The New York Review of Books"A remarkable piece of scholarship. Vividly illustrates what made certain individuals vulnerable to charges of witchcraft."--The New York Times Book Review"History in such capable hands becomes much more than a chronicle: it makes the past seem as vivid and dimensional, and every bit as compelling, as the present."--Newsweek"With the publication of this book, the historical study of American witchcraft finally comes of age."--American Historical Review"Beautifully written and exhaustively researched."--Virginia Quarterly Review"Well written and easy to read.... More

than a history of witchcraft. It is placed within the wider social context and is thus a history of early New England culture.... Very well documented."--History: Reviews of New Books"A work that sets the stage for the eruption in Salem and promises to transform the terms in which we understand that extravagant episode.... A rewarding and fascinating achievement well worth reading."--American History Illustrated"Demos has done an excellent job of researching a subject of great interest today."--William C. Viser, Ouachita Baptist University"An ambitious, informative work."--Paul Tiverow, Missouri Southern State College"Brilliant."--Herbert Cederberg, University of Wisconsin

John Putnam Demos is Samuel Knight Professor of History at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. He is the author of A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony and The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story from Early America.

I love the subject matter-- witchcraft in 17th century New England. The really good feature of this book is that the author gives accounts of smaller, lesser-known cases of "witchcraft" and accusations of witchcraft and doesn't focus on the Salem Witch Trials. That said, the writing style is rather dry. In spite of my interest in the topic, I found myself skimming large portions of the book because the author would take two pages to say something that could have been said in two paragraphs. Still, I appreciate the treatment of this social history of New England, and if you are at all interested in the beliefs and lives of 17th century colonial New Englanders, you should have this in your library.

Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England by John Demos is a comprehensive study of the various influences surrounding witchcraft in the early American colonies. Diving the book into four sections: biography, psychology, sociology, and history, Demos uses ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“the four corners of one scholarÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s compassÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• to provide a 360 degree perspective of early American witchcraft and culture (15). The primary focus of DemosÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ research was on the social and psychological aspects of witchcraft; however, including sections on biography and history, the author delivers an inclusive representation of early New England society through the lens of witchcraft. I was especially intrigued by how exhaustive and extensive court documents were for those put on trial for witchcraft. In the preface, Demos states that he wanted to tell true stories about witchcraft putting individual men and women at the center-stage (xii).Part one examines the biographical nature of witches in seventeenth century New England. Using the examples of John Godfrey and Rachel Clinton, Demos organizes a

considerable amount of historical records and court documents detailing the biographical characteristics of witches. Part two studies the psychology of those accused of witchcraft, those accusing others of being a witch, and examines the psychological structure of seventeenth century New England Puritan communities. The psychology of witchcraft is the strongest argument in the book. This was a new and thought-provoking analysis of the mass hysteria that flourished in New England over witches. A significant amount of research was done at the local level through archival documentation utilizing primary sources from court hearings and eyewitness accounts of those present during witchcraft accusations. Demos states very clearly that this information may not be complete, but provides enough primary and secondary evidence to substantiate his conclusions.Part three examines the sociology of witchcraft through the power of local gossip and DemosÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ own interpretation of how the community viewed those charged of witchcraft. In part four, Demos traces witchcraft throughout history concluding that witchcraft was more prevalent than originally believed and not limited to just Salem, Massachusetts. Providing a few examples of witchcraft outside of Salem, Demos strengthens his argument showing that witchcraft accusations were not specific to Salem, but occurred elsewhere. The last section tightly concludes the biographical sketches with the psychological and social influences witchcraft had on communities facing the phenomenon of witchcraft.In Entertaining Satan, there is a substantial amount of psychological interpretation of what it was like living in colonial New England during the witchcraft hysteria. The objective of Entertaining Satan is to show that witchcraft was not as simple as accusing an individual of being a witch. The witchcraft phenomenon was a conglomeration of multiple issues converging together providing the perfect storm for mass hysteria. There are really no simple answers, yet Demos does a brilliant job of interconnecting each idea to achieve his thesis.

There are lots of books about the infamous Salem witch trial, but Demos has instead chosen to give us a brilliant and readable study of the more typical smaller-scale cases that cropped up throughout the 17th century in New England.His ability to extract info from dry old records -- marriages, deeds, court cases, etc. -- and make us care about these people is astonishing. The tragic case of Rachel Clinton might actually put a lump in your throat: her voyage to America at age 6; her bitter mother who was eventually certified insane; her brother-in-law’s successful hijacking of her father’s substantial estate, leaving Rachel with virtually nothing; Rachel’s miserable marriage to a sleazy opportunist; and her embittered old age on public assistance. At least she was reprieved, and did not hang after her witchcraft conviction, but it was just about the only break she ever got. If that case doesn’t get to you, the description of Margaret Jones (one of the earliest to hang, in 1648), just

indicted, and going to her best friend’s house where the two women sat together "both of them crying" just might.The book is rich with case histories, interspersed with intelligent analysis of Puritan psychology, sociology, and historical events. Not one to settle for simpleminded explanations, Demos shows how all these factors interacted to impact a community and increase, or decrease, the likelihood of witchcraft accusations.Its description of colonial life is VERY detailled. If you like to read about the material goods and activities of earlier times (maybe if you enjoyed "Worldly Goods"), or if you like history brought to life through real human beings (as in "A Distant Mirror") you might enjoy this greatly. And it’s a demonstration of the historical method at its best.

Nice delivery of pertinent content. Not 5 stars because of the (overly) psychoanalytical approach to the historiography.

Thanks!

It’s a classic. A lot has been written about witchcraft in early New England, but few works are as comprehensive and well-researched as Demos’s Entertaining Satan.

This is a very scholarly look at witchcraft in 17th century New England. It should be regarded as a text book. It is not suitable for light reading

a bit scary, but shipped well and timely.

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