A half century after John Winthrop stood on the deck of the Arabella and warned a ship full of pious settlers about the risks involved in making and breaking covenants with God, it seemed that divine retribution had come to his colony at last.

Beginning at midnight on August 8, 1679, a fire sparked to life in an outer room of one of Boston's dockside taverns, a small establishment owned by the publican Clement Gross, which he called the Three Mariners. It was the second time in four months that some unknown vandal had attempted to damage this particular house of ale and ill repute. In the first instance, the tavern keeper had stamped down the blaze without much trouble, smothering it before larger questions of its significance could kindle in his mind. He might have dismissed it as happenstance, the inevitable outcome of drunken men discarding clay pipe stems broken while tobacco still smoldered inside. But then, before the summer was out, it happened again. This second fire seemed more malign in its intent, and its consequences were incalculably more severe. In minutes, it spread to the inner tavern walls and then took the roof. Due to the hunger of the flames, the dry summer night on which it was set, or simply the willful refusal of Providence to intervene, the conflagration grew in size and intensity until Gross's entire building was engulfed, flashing on the harbor's edge like a beacon calling further misfortune to shore.

Boston at the time was a city built of sticks. The timber of Massachusetts forests made a ready resource, but it had made the quickly growing village as tinder-stocked as a smelting furnace. Thanks to the colonists' residual tendency to pack their dwellings and businesses as close together as if they were still in London, Bostonians had known a number of fiery catastrophes before, calling more than one of them "the Great Fire," as if in hope that each new holocaust would be the last. The first few of these great fires had been in the 1650s, when many of the colony's original arrivals watched in horror as the parts of a city it had taken a generation to build were consumed within hours; another had occurred just three years before the current calamity. Called "the greatest fire that ever happened in Boston," the great fire of 1676 destroyed a "meeting house of considerable bigness" and forty-six homes, including that of Increase Mather, the most prominent clergyman of the time. So susceptible was the city to this form of disaster, in fact, that a popular rhyming play on its name captured the general fear of its fate. "Lost-town," they called it, and it had never seemed so lost as in 1679, when a series of apparent arsons characterized by one early chronicler as a "grand triumph of incarnate desire and ambition" had resulted in the "most terrible devastation of property."

In this burning season, the “grand climax” was reached when the fire ignited at the Three Mariners spread to surrounding buildings. The blaze soon ravaged every warehouse in an active harbor—as many as seventy, by some counts—along with adjoining businesses and eighty homes. Many of these homes held households of ten or more (the average Puritan birthrate was eight children for every marriage, and single men were encouraged to board with families lest they be left to their own carnal inclinations), and the fire ultimately destroyed a not insignificant portion of the total shelter for a city of fewer than five thousand souls. When the flames reached the ships at dock, it seemed even the natural bulwark against such devastation—a whole ocean of water—was no match for whatever malevolent force had served as incendiary.

By daybreak on August 9, the first city of Massachusetts Bay looked as if fire and brimstone had rained down on it from above in recompense for some grievous sin. Any Puritans inclined to doubt might have wondered if they had built less an American facsimile of Calvin’s Geneva than New England’s very own Sodom and Gomorrah. Increase Mather, perhaps still smarting from the loss of his own home three years before, took this most recent fire as a cue to ask what had “provoked the Lord to bring His Judgments on New-England,” while his son, the soon to be equally esteemed Cotton Mather, would later say of his city’s remains, “Ah, Boston! Thou hast seen the vanity of all worldly possessions. One fatal morning, which laid fourscore of thy dwelling-houses and seventy of thy warehouses in a ruinous heap, gave thee to read it in fiery characters.… Never was a town under the cope of heaven more liable to be laid to ashes, whether by the carelessness or wickedness of them who sleep in it. That such a Combustible heap of Contiguous Houses yet stands, it may be called A Standing Miracle.”

Miracle or no, for a city upon a hill convinced of its place in the favor of the divine, the port blaze was only the latest in a series of setbacks that called into question the entire enterprise of occupying North America. In the classic jeremiad in which he pondered the source of the divine displeasure they were experiencing, Increase Mather went on to enumerate the “judgements” they had received. “That God hath a Controversy with his New-England People is undeniable,” he said, “the Lord having written his displeasure in dismal Characters against us.” Those “dismal Characters” included not only the most recent fire and those before it but a long line of agonies that made sense to the Puritan mind only if they were considered as punishments: King Philip’s War, for example, which had been fought against the Wampanoag and other local tribes in 1675–76, had decimated the English

population. In the years immediately following, a smallpox epidemic nearly replicated this awful casualty rate. A people given to see the hand of the divine in all things inevitably began to look about their Lost-town for reasons why they might deserve God's wrath.

To the elder Mather, the answers were obvious. To begin with, the August fire had started at a tavern. It stood to reason that all the activities one might find in such a place should be considered as shameful causes of such a terrible effect. "There is much Intemperance," he wrote. "The heathenish and Idolatrous practice of Health-drinking is too frequent. That shamefull iniquity of sinfull Drinking is become too general a Provocation."

Of course, it was not just the act of drinking "huzzahs" that warranted rebuke but the company one kept while doing so. "There are other heinous breaches of the seventh Commandment," he said. "Temptations thereunto are become too common, viz. such as immodest Apparel, Laying out of hair, Borders, naked Necks and Arms, or, which is more abominable, naked Breasts, and mixed Dancings, light behaviour and expressions, sinful Company-keeping with light and vain persons, unlawfull Gaming, an abundance of Idleness, which brought ruinating judgement upon Sodom." Likewise, the aftereffects of a night at a place like the Three Mariners were without question to blame: "There is great profaneness, in respect of irreverent behaviour in the solemn Worship of God. It is a frequent thing for men… to sit in prayer time, and some with their heads almost covered, and to give way to their own sloth and sleepiness, when they should be serving God with attention and intention." Such activities and others, including "Inordinate Passions" and "Inordinate Affection for the World," Mather warned, were the sort that "brings wrath, Fires and other judgements upon a professing People."

While Mather offered scriptural references for most of these offenses, establishing that the sad history of human proclivities stretched back well into biblical times, other sins worthy of punishment seemed to him peculiar enough to the American context that he offered no precedent. Too many New Englanders, he lamented, desired to leave the close confines of towns "to live like Heathen, only so that they might have Elbow-room enough in the world." This was a symptom of a larger problem, he explained, which would become a key for understanding another set of trials soon to be endured.

"Christians in this Land," Mather lamented, "have become too like unto the

Indians." He could not have known it, but an outgrowth of this fear would mark the Puritan legacy with a judgment more damning than fire.

Not long after the rebuilding of Boston had begun—with bricks this time, for arson was proving a surprisingly persistent problem in this supposedly rule-bound theocracy—there arrived by ship from the English island of Barbados a woman whose impact on the North American colonies would be greater than any disaster. Rather than divine judgment, she would be regarded first as a force sent by the devil and then as a victim of human folly.

We know her now as Tituba, though in the court records from the end of the seventeenth century, when she entered the drama of history as the first person accused of witchcraft in the Salem witch trials, she is named variously Titiba and Titibe. She may also be the young girl referred to as "Tattuba" on a deed of all "Negroes Stock Cattle and Utensils" from a plantation in Barbados a few years before her arrival. By the laws of the day, she was the property of one Samuel Parris, a young merchant with family in both the Caribbean and Massachusetts. After several years in Barbados working as an agent for sugar plantations, Parris set off for Boston to make a new life that would eventually include a change of vocation to the ministry. This future preacher arrived in the rebuilt port in the winter of 1680 with assets that included not only Tituba but a man called John Indian, who would later become her husband.

Despite Tituba's inclusion on a list of African-born slaves on a Barbados plantation, the court documents through which she has become known refer to her most often as an Indian, and recent scholarship agrees that this was most likely the case. Unlike Mustafa Zemmouri, she seems to have been born in the New World, but like him she did not arrive of her own free will in the place whose history she would shape. And she likewise did not leave behind entirely the person she had been before her arrival. Just as Esteban the Black and the other African-born men held in bondage by Spanish conquistadors carried something of their faith into the heart of America, "Titibe, an Indian Woman," as the 1692 warrant for arrest named her, carried stories from her youth in the Caribbean to the top of John Winthrop's city upon a hill.

To understand what Tituba wrought in Massachusetts, it is helpful to consider that the island of Barbados at the time was a hotbed of cultural blending. Three years before the Arabella had come to shore in Massachusetts, another British ship—

this one carrying ten African-born slaves, along with eighty English colonists—landed at the island's port of Holetown. Through the decades that followed, shiploads of English and Africans, as well as indentured Catholics sent from Ireland, would also arrive.

At the founding of this English settlement, Barbados had no native population of any kind. Though once home to a vibrant culture similar to those described on Hispaniola and Haiti by the historians las Casas and Pané, the island's original inhabitants had been driven out of existence by the Spanish and Portuguese throughout the previous century. In an effort to help the various new populations adapt to an environment wholly unlike any they had known before, the English enticed a small group of Arawak Indians from the northeast coast of South America to come to Barbados for the purpose of instructing the colonists and their forced laborers in the fishing and farming practices best suited to the region.

Though the first Arawak in Barbados may have come willingly, these Indians and their descendants were reduced to slavery within a generation. They began to live among—and were eventually absorbed by—the much larger African population, which quickly amounted to the island's majority, outnumbering even the English while the Indians never totaled more than 1 percent of Barbados inhabitants. Throughout the early decades of the colony, it is likely more South American Arawak were regularly added to the mix; whether kidnapped or enticed, once on the island they would not leave it except as an Englishman's property.

According to Elaine Breslaw, the foremost scholar on the intersection of witchcraft and medicine in early America and author of an examination of the origins of the "reluctant witch of Salem," Tituba likely came from this small group of transplanted Arawak. In one of the great forgotten ironies of history, such origins would make this woman distant kin to the Taino, who seem to have settled the islands centuries before from Arawak strongholds on the South American mainland—the same people of whom Columbus erroneously said, "They have no religion." As the tales of devotional zemies and the prophetic visions of Taino priests remind us, this statement was far from true in 1492, and it became even less so as the diverse populations of Barbados, with their wildly different practices and beliefs, became entwined. For perhaps forty years before Tituba arrived on the island, African, Indian, and European traditions had mingled and transformed each other, creating the earliest form of Creole culture, and setting a pattern that would be followed to varying degrees throughout the islands and across the south and southwestern

portions of North America.

Evidence of such blending is readily apparent in the music and languages of these regions, and religiously, too, new forms of expression were created that may have seemed to contemporary eyes mere perversions of established ceremonies but were in fact distinct traditions all their own. Not long after Tituba would have left the island, an English visitor to Barbados described hybrid African-Indian-Catholic rituals that involved using everyday items to commune with the spirit world. He claimed to have seen rituals "in which with their various instruments of horrid music howling and dancing about the graves of the dead," the multi-ethnic servants of the English colonists gave "victuals and strong liquor to the souls of the deceased" in order to ferret out the source of malevolent spiritual powers. Inhabited exclusively by people who had left behind the places where their religious lives had been formed, Barbados was an island haunted by traditions that were perhaps more susceptible to transformation because they were dislocated and half-remembered, and thus always in the process of reinvention.

This was true not only among the population of forced laborers but among the colonial occupiers as well. The Catholic Irish occupied a rung of society only slightly higher than the Africans and the Indians and so were natural participants in the blending of religious cultures, and the Protestant English seem likewise to have followed suit in taking part in the process of hybridization.

As Tituba made her way from the harbor to her first home in Massachusetts (a small house and shop Samuel Parris had rented to establish himself in the city), she would not have seen many signs that Boston, too, was a place of the blending of cultures and beliefs—at least not at first. Within the beleaguered Puritan community, the insistence on religious conformity was regarded as a matter not only of intolerance but existential concern. Remember that in the Puritan view, society itself rested on the notion of the covenant—an understanding that all relationships were a kind of contract between mutually agreeing parties. Failure to meet the demands of a contract between people could result in being cast out of the community; failure to meet the demands of a contract with God could result in even more dire consequences. As Winthrop himself had put it, to "deale falsely with our god in this worke wee have undertaken" would inevitably "cause him to withdrawe his present help from us."

For this reason, the Puritan fear of religious difference became manifest in

actions ranging from the symbolic to the homicidal. Between the landing of the Arabella and the ship that brought Tituba, the government of the colony would pass laws banning everything from public celebration of the semi-pagan holiday of Christmas to "direct, expresse, presumptuous or high handed Blasphemie." The responses to the crimes—a fine of a few shillings in the first case, hanging in the second—were different only in degree. They were varied means toward reaching the same impossible end, which was total consensus under a singular form of the faith.

In her years in Boston, however, Tituba would have noticed that the city's uniformity was not what it seemed. Despite the religious motives that had led many of the colonists to emigrate, many of them had allowed their spiritual inclinations to travel as far from their origins as they themselves had from their birthplaces. Lamenting the difference between the first generation of Puritan settlers and those he regarded as his ministerial responsibility, Increase Mather opined, "It was not any worldly consideration that brought our Fathers into this wilderness, but Religion.⋯ Whereas now, Religion is made subservient unto worldly Interests."

With fear of straying from religious orthodoxy the animating concern of the Puritan colonies, it became common for crimes of all sorts to be associated with religious deviancy. While Tituba settled in Parris's new home, another woman brought to Boston against her will, an African-born domestic servant named Maria, burned her master's house to the ground, killing him and his family. This crime was not regarded as the inevitable outcome of a dehumanizing system in which humans were treated as property. It was instead seen as yet another religious dilemma. Convicted of "not having the fear of God before her eyes and being instigated by the devil," Maria was burned at the stake for murder, yes, but also for the far more dangerous crime of calling into question the religious basis of Puritan order.

Tituba no doubt would have heard of Maria's case, and perhaps she would have felt sympathy for her actions and her fate. To see the smoke over Maria's execution pyre wafting over the city no doubt would have served as a reminder to Tituba that she had come to a place prone to conflagrations both theological and fiery; a place that often saw people like her—who carried with them signs of religious difference that was a threat to Puritan existence—as a source of a spiritual flame that must be snuffed out.

In the Puritan mind, Satan was the true author of religious difference, and so it was deemed natural that those people who seemed most different of all must be on

the closest terms with the devil. Many Puritan writers assumed that it was Native Americans who led English settlers astray.

Mather himself counted the “Sorcery” of Indians to be their greatest threat, and saw the source of their magic-making to be the Enemy himself. Not even English pets were safe: “The Indians, in their wars with us, finding sore inconvenience in our dogs, which would make a sad yelling if in the night they scent the approaches of them, they sacrificed a dog to the devil; after which no English dog would bark at an Indian for divers months ensuing.” Increase Mather had likewise declared the war waged by the Indians against the English to be “devil-driven.” Reverend William Hubbard, meanwhile, framed his 1677 history of the “Troubles with the Indians” entirely in terms of their “devilish idolatry.” What little religion they have, he wrote, “they have learned from the Prince of Darkness.” And even one who seemed to convert, he claimed, would be found out to be a “diabolical miscreant who hath put on a garb of religion… performing religious worship amongst the Indians in his way” while having “very familiar converse with the devil.” The most popular literary genre of the day was the “captivity narrative,” which recounted, with varying degrees of exaggeration, tales of colonists kidnapped by Indians. A common trope of these stories was the place of the devil in native cultures.

With no distance between the physical world and the realm of the spirit in such tales, the wilderness itself was often described as the source of both Satan’s and the Indians’ power. This was among the reasons for Tituba’s arrival in Massachusetts. It was not legal to own or indenture a member of the local tribes as a servant; it was felt that such servants would still draw power from the land, bringing demonic influence into Puritan homes. Instead, Massachusetts Indians were regularly captured and sold into slavery as far away as Barbados. Natives from the south, in turn, were sent to New England. It was hoped that these “Spanish Indians” were sufficiently removed from their own sources of demonic power that they could be Christianized without risk of spiritual contamination to the households they served.

Eight years after he had arrived in Boston, the newly ordained Reverend Samuel Parris moved his family to Salem Town. His household now included not just Tituba and John Indian but a wife and three children, the second of whom—his eldest daughter, Betty—would soon cause more trouble than any preteen in American history.

To Tituba it might have been a relief to be away from the city where the smoke

of execution fires still lingered in the air. Yet, as she soon would discover, greater scrutiny can also be found in a smaller town. Salem would turn to her as another in a long line of troublemaking women disturbing New England's Puritan peace. The infamous religious troublemakers of Massachusetts are rarely mentioned in the same breath as Tituba. After all, she arrived in Boston nearly fifty years after Anne Hutchinson was driven out, Dorothy Talbye was driven mad, and Mary Dyer swung from a tree. Yet the Indian woman from Barbados was the logical extension of the question previous outliers had asked. To what extent could a community built on the myth of religious uniformity tolerate or survive spiritual difference?

While the earlier cases involved women who actively sought to assert their religious differences, Tituba may never have drawn attention to herself were it not for the real hunger for spiritual alternatives within the Puritan community. Especially in children—born in this new land, believing they were surrounded from birth by the threat of Indian attack, throughout their young lives witness to, and survivors of, epidemics that emptied households as surely as had the arsonists' fires—there was at large a rampant desire for practices not sanctioned by the divines who had exiled Hutchinson and condemned Maria and Mary Dyer to death.

Such practices were apparently so widespread that Puritan religious writers were particularly drawn to this theme. "Some young persons through a vain calamity to know their future condition, have tampered with the devil's tools," the Beverly minister John Hale wrote in 1697. He further described one such young person he knew who "did try with an egg and a glass to find her future Husbands Calling." Using a device called a Venus Glass, this credulous and unfortunate girl, Hale reported, looked into her future and saw a coffin. So upset was she by this vision that "she was afterward followed with diabolical molestation to her death." Like the preacher who used the executed woman's temptations as a warning to those who had watched her hang, Hale offered this story as "a just warning to others, to take heed of handling the devil's weapons, lest they get a wound thereby." Nor was this an isolated case. There was another girl, he writes, who suffered "sore fits and vexations of satan." She, too, he discovered, had dabbled with the Venus Glass.

These activities were not merely the pastimes of children. They were the last best hopes of a people clinging to the fringes of their own half-remembered folk traditions—practices brought from England that were likely far older than the orthodoxies to which they formally ascribed. To the consternation of official representatives of sanctioned belief, improvised rituals were blended with

established doctrine by the English in Massachusetts no less than by the Indians and Africans of Barbados.

"I knew a man in the East, who possessed the art of curing wounds, and stenching blood by a form of words," Hale writes. "I discoursed him about it, and he told me, he had been in the practice of it; and believed it to be the gift of healing given him from God, upon the use of some Scripture words he used as he had been taught by an Old woman." This man, Hale explained, had begun his career as a healer by trying such incantations out on himself. During a mishap while chopping wood, he had cut halfway through his leg with an adz. He tied up the gash with cloth, recited the magic verses the crone had taught him, and was healed within days. When he recounted the words to Hale, the shocked minister found this backwoods healer "almost as ignorant in Scriptures as an heathen." The minister informed the man that his words were in fact "a perverse addition to the Scriptures," and "that if any such healing followed upon such a form of words, it could not come from the efficacy of the words themselves or from a divine concurrence working a wonder because of those words, which were indeed a lye in the additions made; therefore if any vertue were in them, it came by the devil, and so those words a kind of Sorcerery."

Hale does not condemn those who did these things, for to do so would condemn far more of Puritan society than would be sustainable. In this spirit-haunted world, appeals to powers beyond the bounds of religious propriety were the norm. He excuses "those that ignorantly use charms, spells, writings, or forms of words, &c. being taught them by others, which are a kind of Witchcraft" because those who used them may not have realized that what they were doing stretched the limits of orthodox practice. Whether they were engaged in rituals involving pulling "fish bones out of a wound," using spells to cure tooth aches, fevers, and warts, or indulging in other such "devilish means," Hale suggests that those using such magic were "beguiled by the Serpent that lies in the grass unseen." In fact, they were merely appealing to an alternate spiritual authority, a system of practice and belief that perhaps seemed more responsive to their actual needs.

It is within this dual context of Puritans' frequent use as individuals of transgressive religious practices, and their inability as a community to be so broadminded, that we should consider what befell the Indian woman Tituba in the spring of 1692.

All that is known for certain about the onset of this infamous time in Salem is

that two members of Reverend Parris's household began one day to behave in strange ways. It has become part of the story of the Salem witch trials that these two young girls, nine-year-old Betty Parris and her cousin, eleven-year-old Abigail Williams, had been experimenting with the kinds of practices described by John Hale before they were afflicted, yet the historical record does not provide proof of this beyond Hale's reference to two unnamed youngsters tampering with "the devil's tools."

Contrary to the usual narrative, the first and only act that one might call magic or witchcraft known to have occurred in the Parris household was performed by Tituba. In the days following the beginning of the girls' affliction, Tituba and John Indian were asked by a member of Parris's church, Mary Sibley, to make a "witchcake." Taking rye flour and a measure of the sick children's urine, the two servants then baked this mixture into an unappetizing biscuit which they fed to a dog in hopes that the animal's behavior might reveal to them the source of the girls' torment. According to a sermon Parris himself soon gave, this was the real start of Salem's troubles:

It is altogether undeniable that our great and blessed God, for wise and holy ends, hath suffered many persons, in several families, of this little village, to be grievously vexed and tortured in body… It is also well known, that, when these calamities first began, which was in my own family, the affliction was several weeks before such hellish operations as witchcraft were suspected. Nay, it was not brought forth to any considerable light, until diabolical means were used by the making of a cake by my Indian man, who had his direction from this our sister, Mary Sibley; since which, apparitions have been plenty, and exceeding much mischief hath followed.

Though Parris did not name Tituba in his sermon, she apparently received far worse attention than merely being mentioned for her involvement in this kitchen magic. According to at least one source, the minister of Salem beat his servant in an attempt to force a confession that the witchcake was indeed her doing. While such practices were known as part of the kinds of English folk traditions described by Hale, they likewise were present among the enslaved and indentured laborers of Tituba's Barbados, where "victuals," as that early English observer called ritual food items, were regularly used to discover the source of spiritual powers. Whether the baking of a witchcake originated in England or in the Caribbean, however, what is most significant here is that it was apparently a practice recognizable across a huge cultural divide, and it was two Indians who were seen as actively responsible for

introducing it to the Parris household. “By these means,” Parris concluded, “the Devil hath been raised amongst us, and his rage is vehement and terrible; and, when he shall be silenced, the Lord only knows.”

It was not merely the girls’ distress and the accusations which followed that created witchcraft hysteria in Salem. It was also, perhaps especially, terror at the prospect that Indian sorcery had been carried out within the very heart of New England society, the godly household of a Puritan minister. It was fear of Tituba and what she represented as an Indian woman within a Christian home. She was the overwhelming metaphysical power of the wilderness suddenly brought into the one place where they imagined they were safe from its reach.

In this it is tempting to see Tituba’s actions as a kind of spiritual rebellion. Despite the ambient influence of Christianity, she—enslaved though she was—believed her own skills and traditions could make a difference where conventional religious authority had not. In the days following the revelation that she had performed magic for the benefit of Betty Parris, Tituba was arrested for the crime of witchcraft.

As had been the case in the court proceedings against Anne Hutchinson, it is in the transcripts of her interrogation that Tituba’s true mettle as a religious outlier is shown. She had been brought in for questioning along with Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne, two middle-aged women plainly unliked and unsupported by the townspeople of Salem. For each, an accusation of witchcraft may have seemed the inevitable end of a decades-long string of bad luck. Good’s father, once a well-off innkeeper, had killed himself twenty years before, when Sarah was a teenager. When her mother remarried, she was left without her promised inheritance. She then married a former indentured servant who died in short order, leaving her without a home, deeply in debt, and with a four-year-old daughter, Dorcas, who would soon be accused of witchcraft as well. Sarah Osborne, meanwhile, was not poor but had been accused of sexual misconduct many years before. At sixty, she maintained her infamy by keeping her distance from church. Questioned over the course of three days after she had already received a beating, and now arraigned beside two people the community only needed an excuse to censure severely, Tituba no doubt feared for her life. The beginning of her testimony is understandably defensive:

“Tituba, what evil spirit have you familiarity with?” she was asked.

“None,” she replied.

“Why do you hurt these children?”

“I do not hurt them.”

“Who is it then?”

“The devil for ought I know.”

Her first word, as Anne Hutchinson’s had been in her own interrogation, was one of defiance. Given the likely consequences of admitting anything having to do with magic or other devilish behavior, she naturally hoped to distance herself from it. Even her first reference to the devil is dismissive; a pointed insistence that she had nothing to do with the children’s suffering. But then something dramatic happened. Perhaps she realized, as Jacob Lumbrozo had some thirty-five years before, that in this situation simple denial would not suffice, for when she was next asked, “Did you never see the devil?” she gave an astonishing answer.

“The devil came to me and bid me serve him,” she said.

Reading the transcripts, one can almost feel the air sucked out of the room. From one question to the next, Tituba moved from flat denial to descriptions of a visit from Satan himself. The effect this had on her audience—people who believed what she was saying truly happened—could only have been terrifying. What then followed, over the course of two long examinations, was a remarkably detailed account of just how Tituba served the devil and why. She recalled feeding the witchcake to the dog, and visits from spirit animals. She described flying on a stick from Salem to Boston and ultimately admitted making her mark in a “Devills Booke” that pledged her in service to a man who came to her in the night and, she said, “tell me he god.”

It is a striking moment in America’s religious history. For here is a woman forced into a life of labor, completely dependent on her pious master and his god-fearing congregation, and by professing religious experiences that they could only deem demonic, she managed to break free of the powerlessness expected of her. In so doing, she took control not only of her own story but of the entire community.

“Who have you seen?”

“Four women sometimes hurt the children,” Tituba said.

“Who were they?”

“Goode [Mrs.] Osborne and Sarah Good and I doe not know who the other were. Sarah Good and Osborne would have me hurt the children but I would not.”

“When did you see them?”

“Last night at Boston.”

“What did they say to you?”

“They said hurt the children.”

“And did you hurt them?”

“No, there is four women and one man, they hurt the children,” she insisted, “and then lay all upon me and they tell me if I will not hurt the children they will hurt me.”

“But did you not hurt them?”

“Yes, but I will hurt them no more.”

“Are you not sorry you did hurt them?”

“Yes.”

“And why then doe you hurt them?”

“They say hurt children or wee will doe worse to you.”

Her testimony became more fantastic by the moment. The more she embellished, the more it seemed her audience was willing to believe. And her ability to make them believe was certainly what saved her life. Of the three on trial that day, only Tituba would survive the accusation of witchcraft. Sarah Goode would hang before the year was out. Sarah Osborne would die in jail while waiting to learn her fate.

Unlike Anne Hutchinson, whose answers in court ring with the confidence of a woman of some social standing, Tituba is humbly agreeable. Yet under the surface of her testimony, she was laying claim to an alternate spiritual authority no less than Hutchinson had. While her accusers had only fears and accusations, she had answers—detailed answers—about powers beyond their imagining. As the Tituba scholar Elaine Breslaw notes, in her creative response to impossible circumstances, this “reluctant witch of Salem” reframed her role in the drama. No longer a passive player and victim, she “improvised a new idiom of resistance.” The key to this, for her, was drawing on the wealth of eclectic religious ideas she seems to have brought with her into this supposed bastion of Christian conformity. “Hidden in that confession,” Breslaw adds, “was not so much a Puritan concept of evil but one derived from non-Christian cultures; a set of ideas that was familiar and strange.”

In the end, Tituba was one of the lucky ones in Salem. More than one hundred people would eventually be accused throughout 1692; two dozen would die as a result. Tituba, as the first arrested for the crime, seems to have escaped execution at least in part because of her audacious attempt to control the story of which she had unwittingly become a part.

Today the Salem witch trials are remembered mainly as a moment of hysteria over imagined transgressions of the established religious order. Yet while the community response certainly was hysterical, it does appear that many of these transgressions were not imagined at all. The practices we might call witchcraft today, carried out by the English and by the native peoples of the Americas before them, can be thought of as a kind of spiritual equalizer, providing religious authority outside social structures that were inevitably defined at the time by class and gender.

In this sense, the understandable feeling of outrage with which the witch trials are recalled serves inadvertently to write religious difference out of history. By insisting that these so-called witches were not what some of them clearly were—women and men who experimented outside accepted religious practices, who lived by circumstance or choice on the margins of the dominant faith—we ignore the permeability of boundaries between faiths, and the fact that individuals living in close quarters are bound to influence one another's practices and beliefs.

The occasional exile or execution of troublemakers like Anne Hutchinson or Mary Dyer might suggest that they were exceptions proving the rule of Puritan uniformity. But the documents related to the Salem witch trials, with their catalogue of the ways in which those with the least authority in the community sought spiritual solace and sanction outside the bounds of authorized religious practice, suggest that spiritual diversity was the true rule. Tituba—the South American Indian, who lived among Africans in Barbados, who baked witchcakes with an English woman, who for years served a family that seems to have had its own dabblings in non-Christian practices—was a mirror held to differences that were already present before she arrived.

In fictional depictions of Tituba's life she is often shown as a dramatic Voodoo priestess, practitioner of a religion now called, in academic circles, Voudon. Scholars of her life maintain that she was no priestess, yet the practices in which she seems to be implicated do suggest something similar: Hoodoo or conjure. While Voudon is primarily a Caribbean phenomenon, Hoodoo grew out of a blending of African American and Native American cultures. As the historian Jeffrey Anderson notes, Native Americans "did much to preserve African ideas and practices" in America, "enrich[ing] conjure with their own distinctive contributions."

Hoodoo existed well into the twentieth century. As documented most notably by Zora Neale Hurston, it was a central part of African American culture from the

days of slavery until the Great Migration of southern African Americans into the Northeast and Midwest. Hurston was not only a novelist; she also trained at Barnard with the father of American anthropology, Franz Boas, and chose as the site of her fieldwork the black southern world from which she had come. Among the dozens of tales of legend and belief Hurston recounts in her classic collection of folklore Mules and Men, one in particular echoes Tituba's testimony both in its cast of characters and in the subtle claim it makes about the power of a good story. With the same matter-of-fact familiarity with which Tituba recounted her own dealings with the witches of Salem, a storyteller recounts a yarn about a man named Jack who played cards with the Devil and ended up losing his soul. Afraid that he will die when the Devil comes to collect, Jack decides to stop waiting for the worst and take matters into his own hands.

Hurston writes, in the voice of the storyteller, "Jack walked up to de Devil's house and knocked on de do'."

"Who's dat?" the Devil's wife asks.

"One of de Devil's friends," Jack says.

Claiming closeness with the Devil when it might do him some good, Jack not only wins back his soul, he runs off with the Devil's daughter on two horses stolen from the Devil's barn, then gets the Devil's bull to trample its master. As the storyteller wraps up the yarn, "So dat's why dey say Jack beat de Devil."

Legends involving the everyman Jack, whom Hurston called "the great human culture hero of Negro folklore… like Daniel of Jewish folklore, the wish-fulfillment hero of the race," are part of an American mythology that turned the religious tradition brought from Europe on its head. They included not only the devil but God, Jesus, and any other holy character that might be conscripted into retellings that would better serve the people against whom scripture was so often used as a cudgel justifying slavery or segregation. "Even the Bible was made over to suit our vivid imagination," Hurston once said. "The devil always outsmarted God, and our over-noble Jack… outsmarted the Devil." Such tales are part of a genealogy of American religion that has its origins in acts of religious nonconformity like Tituba's "witchcake." They were attempts by the powerless to exert control over their lives.

And they continue to be. The Anglican minister and amateur folklorist Harry Middleton Hyatt found that witchcakes were used by African Americans in Illinois as late as the 1930s. "If you think you are hoodooed," he recorded, "take one pint of salt, one pint of corn meal, one pint of your urine." After mixing this together, to rid

yourself of the magical affliction, you would then "[p]ut that in a can on the stove at twelve o'clock at night and cook until it burns."

Long after the memory of Boston's great fires of divine retribution had dissipated, the smoke of Tituba's spiritual rebellion lingers. As Jeffrey Anderson has observed, "Conjurelike practices occur in some churches even today." Often these practices are masked by more orthodox beliefs, but they nonetheless remain the spiritual medium of choice for those grasping for a sense of control over their lives. And they are found not just in churches. The maintenance staffs of courthouses around the nation regularly find evidence of Hoodoo spells. In restrooms, in stairwells, before the doorways of judges' chambers, defendants and their families have been known to leave behind eggs, feathers, hair, black pepper, and blood. Sometimes they bake these ingredients into cakes, just as Tituba did shortly before her own dramatic court appearance.

In the 1990s, the physical manifestation of Hoodoo, Voodoo, and conjuration became such a problem at a Miami courthouse that officials enlisted a special cleaning squad to dispose of ritual materials. Dade County officials pointed to the city's large number of immigrants from Haiti, Cuba, and elsewhere in the Caribbean—the islands, in other words, from which Tituba and so many others were sent north into servitude three centuries before. When tasked by a newspaper with explaining this phenomenon, a local sociology professor, Teresita Pedraza, asked, "Why do people go to Lourdes? Because they believe it works. It's part of a religious belief and value system."

As the story of Salem reminds us, this is a system that has been part of the American narrative nearly from the beginning. For those who will never hold the keys to the kingdom, the idea that objects borrowed from the kitchen can be as powerful as any found in a grand temple provides a sense of hope and possibility. For Tituba, the belief that she could control the world around her nearly saw her hanged, but her ability to tell the story of that belief certainly saved her life.