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THE VIRTUOUS AND VIOLENT WOMEN  
OF SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY MASSACHUSETTS

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For mom and dad,  
historians in their own right.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	v
Introduction	1
Chapter 1. The Limits of Household Violence: Order and Disorder	20
Spousal Violence	26
Violence Against Children	37
Neighbor Violence	45
Violence Against Servants	52
Conclusion	63
Chapter 2. From “That wicked house”: Women and Infanticide	65
The Costs of Sexual Misbehavior	72
The Shame of Fornication	76
The Price of Adultery	82
The Importance of Sexual Reputation	89
Household Involvement in Infanticide	94
Conclusion	108
Chapter 3. Englishwomen and Indian War	110
Impact of the Indian Wars	117
Violence Against Colonial Officials	124
Life on a Frontier at War	136
Violence Against Indians	140
Conclusion	155

Chapter 4. Female Violence: A Tool for Societal Stability	158
Narratives of Possession	165
Execution Sermons	177
The Captivity Narrative of Hannah Dustin	187
Narrative Histories	196
Conclusion	208
Conclusion	211
Bibliography	216

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## Introduction

Historians of colonial New England have struggled to rectify the Puritan image of virtuous womanhood with the actual women who appear in the historical record.<sup>1</sup> History during this period is replete with stories of women who were assertive, unruly, and even violent. To understand how violence by colonial women was both practically and morally possible—and, in moments, acceptable—we must place women’s actions within the context of their cultural worlds, their everyday struggles, and the hardships that plagued colonial American life. Exploring women’s acts of violence enriches our understanding of the pervasiveness of violence in Puritan culture, an aspect of everyday life that has been downplayed in the larger narratives that describe this time and place.<sup>2</sup> My research traces a continuum of violence that appeared in almost all aspects of women’s lives, extending from within the home into larger society. This work also shows how the women of colonial New England struggled to maintain their corners of, and their places in, this distinctive environment.

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<sup>1</sup> Although I refer to “Puritans” and “Puritanism,” I do not mean to imply that New England Puritanism among the laypeople was a coherent body of thought. However, the clergy were largely consistent in the belief system they presented, and a distinctive Puritan culture can be discerned in colonial New England that dominated the discourse of New Englanders. See David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 15; Elizabeth Reis, *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England* (Cornell University Press, 1997), xvii; Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1939, 1961), vii; Also see Richard Archer, *Fissures in the Rock: New England in the 17th Century* (Hanover, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Barry Levy is an historian who emphasizes the relative peacefulness of colonial New England. He argues that the state’s use of violent force eventually created a society that was less violent than “virtually every other American colonial society.” The source he references in that remark, however, is referring to eighteenth-century Pennsylvania. Barry Levy, *Town Born: The Political Economy of New England from Its Founding to the Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 54; See, Jack D. Marietta and G.S. Rowe, *Troubled Experiment: Crime and Justice in Pennsylvania, 1682-1800* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 107, 210; Seventeenth-century New England had a relatively low murder rate, at least when infanticide was not included under the definition. As Susan Amussen explains, however, homicide rates alone are not a reliable measure of violent behavior overall in a society. Amussen, “Punishment, Discipline and Power: The Social Meanings of Violence in Early Modern England,” *Journal of British Studies* 34 (January 1995): 1, 2.

A unique confluence of social, cultural, and religious forces was at work in seventeenth-century Massachusetts, and the push and pull of these elements determined, at least in part, how women conducted their lives. Pressure to conform to the ideals of Puritan womanhood—and thus preserve their reputation in the eyes of both the community and authorities—existed alongside women’s imperative to protect the interests of their households and kin groups. The interaction between these forces was neither straightforward nor one-sided. The uncertainties of life and the ubiquity of everyday violence in early New England encouraged some women to act aggressively, bolstered by an English cultural tradition of female violence that lingered in the colonies. Yet, women risked exposing themselves to community censure and official condemnation.

New England Puritans held up the biblical Bathsheba as their model of womanly virtue.<sup>3</sup> In sermons Bathsheba stands as an industrious and productive housewife, a generous neighbor, and a trusted spouse and mother; a willing servant to her family and community.<sup>4</sup> She uses her skills and strength for the good of others. Bathsheba’s strength in accomplishing her tasks is considerable: “She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengthen her arms...Strength and honor are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come.” It is telling that this Puritan ideal was described as honorable, resourceful, and strong, but not gentle or timid. She was, however,

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<sup>3</sup> *Proverbs* 31: 10-31; Seventeenth-century Puritan advice literature frequently included references to the proverb of Bathsheba. E.g. John Dod and William Hinde, *Bathshebaes Instructions to Her Son Lemuel* (London, 1614) and Cotton Mather, *Ornaments of the Daughters of Zion* (Cambridge, MA, 1692). See Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England 1650-1750* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 11, 246; Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *Women and Religion in Early America, 1600-1850: The Puritan and Evangelical Traditions* (London: Routledge, 1999), 24.

<sup>4</sup> Sermons from New England overlook Bathsheba’s image as the nude bather who captured the attention of King David, or describe the incident as a minor detour in an otherwise exemplary life. Cotton Mather, for instance, addresses the issue briefly in *Ornaments*. “Bathsheba, after a very scandalous Fall, becomes a very eminent Saint, yea a Prophetess of the Lord. Although a Woman many have been remarkable and notorious for Sin, yet let her endeavor to make her Peace with God: It may be made, and she may enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, before others that have not had such Wounds upon them.” He then lists her many virtues and never mentions her “fall” again. Mather, *Ornaments*, 5-6; Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 3.



content to live privately. “Her husband is known at the gates...among the elders,” but Bathsheba is content to look after her household.<sup>5</sup> As Laurel Thatcher Ulrich explains, a “good wife” in colonial New England “earned the dignity of anonymity.” She did not seek to distinguish herself as an individual, but to fulfill her duties as a wife, mother, daughter, neighbor, and church member.<sup>6</sup> Cotton Mather described the pious women of New England as “Hidden.” While this is an exaggeration—women were interacting with neighbors and attending church meetings—in general, women performed their work “under a bushel” while “men’s candles burned on the hill.”<sup>7</sup> If a woman became more conspicuous in her community, or in more rare circumstances, infamous in the colony, it was usually a signal that her life had gone terribly astray.

My research shows that the good wives of colonial New England could use moderate physical aggression in their roles as mothers, mistresses, and even neighbors without challenging these societal expectations for their gender. They could maintain the “dignity of anonymity” as women while ensuring the obedience of servants and children, or protecting family property from unscrupulous neighbors, both male and female, by force if necessary.<sup>8</sup> That this was the

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<sup>5</sup> *Proverbs* 31: 10-31.

<sup>6</sup> Her virtues included “Holiness, Sincerity, Humility, Meekness, Patience, Weanedness From ye World, Self-denial, Publick-Spiritedness, Diligence, Faithfulness & Charity.” Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 3; Ulrich retrieved this list of virtues from the gravestone of Hannah Moody, who died on January 29, 1727. She is buried at the Old Burying Ground in York Village, Maine. Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 245, n 5; It is important to note that “Meekness” among Puritans in the seventeenth century was not synonymous with gentleness or weakness, but rather easiness of spirit before God. See Matthew Henry, *A Discourse on Meekness and Quietness of Spirit* (1662-1714).

<sup>7</sup> Ulrich, *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1990), 98; Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 37.

<sup>8</sup> Ann M. Little, *Abraham in Arms: War and Gender in Colonial New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 7, 14, 43; Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1996), 73-74, 78, 116, 119; A modest level of physical violence was acceptable in and around the household. An extension of the master, a mistress could strike subordinates and even use force against neighbors and not face prosecution unless the violence was severe. While rare, incidences of wives abusing their husbands appeared before the court. An inherent challenge to male authority, these cases were more likely to catch the court’s attention. George Francis Dow, ed., *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex Co., Massachusetts, Vol. 1-9* (Salem, 1911-21); See also G.S. Rowe and Jack D. Marietta, “Personal Violence in a ‘Peaceable Kingdom’: Pennsylvania, 1682-1801,” in *Over the Threshold: Intimate Violence in Early America*, ed. Christine Daniels and Michael Kennedy (New York: Routledge, 1999), 30-31; Roger Thompson, *Sex in Middlesex: Popular Mores in a Massachusetts County, 1649-1699* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1986), 186.

case demonstrates the ordinariness of violence in this society. Most colonial women in New England who engaged in violent behavior did not appear to be asserting a form of individual power or challenging existing structures of authority. Even in its more dramatic forms—when women’s actions dragged them into the public eye—violence by colonial Englishwomen rarely functioned as social protest or a call for rebellion, regardless of how it was interpreted by authorities. The idea of women asserting themselves as individuals would have been antithetical to their worldview, as immersed as it was in a society so based on identity through familial relationships, especially for women, who usually had no other means of self-definition.<sup>9</sup> Instead, most aggressive actions by women had conservative aims, dedicated to ensuring household security, property, or social standing.

Seventeenth-century Massachusetts was a routinely violent world. Hangings, whippings, brandings and other forms of public corporeal punishment took place in the village square. The public nature of such punishment was designed to both inflict pain and shame the offender. Every community was legally obligated to build and maintain at least one specific area for the execution of this public punishment, and attempted to schedule them on public days to guarantee an audience.<sup>10</sup> Sometimes a cart substituted for a pillory or whipping post so that the male or female offender could be dragged from location to location, tied to the “cart’s-arse,” for the

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<sup>9</sup> This argument is in opposition to assertions put forward by historians like Lyle Koehler, whose research in colonial New England is extensive, but whose conclusions are anachronistic in this regard. Lyle Koehler, *A Search for Power: The “Weaker Sex” in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Urbana, Ill., 1980); See John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970/2000); Gloria Main, *Peoples of a Spacious Land: Families and Cultures in Colonial New England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> Marblehead was fined by the Essex County Quarterly Court in 1641 for lacking a pair of stocks. George Francis Dow, ed., *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex Co., Massachusetts, Vol. 1* (Salem, 1911-21), 36; Systems of discipline in New England did not differ in their content from those in other English colonies or in England, but exceeded them in the zealotry with which they regulated behavior. See Helena Wall, *Fierce Communion: Family and Community in Early America* (State College, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990); Richard J. Ross, "Puritan Godly Discipline in Comparative Perspective: Legal Pluralism and the Sources of 'Intensity'," *American Historical Review* 113, no. 4 (2008): 977.

edification—and entertainment—of the populace. Those sentenced to sit in the stocks, the least onerous punishment besides a fine or public apology, were often treated to the scorn, and thrown trash, of bystanders.<sup>11</sup> Communities relied on such practices to maintain order, and they established a baseline acceptability of violence that informed the rest of colonial life.

The tasks to which most seventeenth-century colonial women dedicated their lives also brought them into intimate contact with many forms of violence. Far removed from the sanitized meat packing plants that emerged in the nineteenth-century, women, including mistresses of households, commonly slaughtered pigs and other livestock when preparing food for their families.<sup>12</sup> It was also a mistresses' responsibility to ensure that everyone in the household was performing their necessary duties properly. Especially in more remote frontier areas, a housewife's ability to manage her household was essential for the survival of her family.<sup>13</sup> As a result, most women's lives in the colonial period involved familiarity with violence.<sup>14</sup>

My work focuses on Essex County, Massachusetts, which possessed a diversity of settlements in the seventeenth century in terms of size, development, wealth, and religiosity. This enables me to explore a wide swath of women's experiences, and I have discovered that women were involved in an array of violent deeds, from attacking Indians to abusing magistrates, fighting with husbands, over-correcting children and servants, and quarreling with neighbors. A

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<sup>11</sup> Laurence Friedman, *Crime and Punishment in American History* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 37.

<sup>12</sup> Amy J. Fitzgerald, "A Social History of the Slaughterhouse: From Inception to Contemporary Implications," *Human Ecology Review* 17, no. 1 (2010): 59; Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 22-23.

<sup>13</sup> Main, *Peoples of a Spacious Land*, 165.

<sup>14</sup> Necessity dictated that women were also very familiar with blood and bloodshed in the colonial period. The household functioned as "old people's home," "hospital," and "welfare institution" in early American life. Women took responsibility for the care of the aged, injured and afflicted. Demos, *Little Commonwealth*, 184; Ulrich, *Midwife's Tale*, 64-66; The hazards of colonial life meant that accidents were frequent and sometimes deadly. It was primarily women who conducted preparations for funeral ceremonies, washing and dressing the corpse for display, either in the home or local church, and burial. David E. Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture and Social Change* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), 111-112; Ulrich, *Midwife's Tale*, 193; 257-8; Main, *Peoples of a Spacious Land*, 184.

minority in the criminal record, women nonetheless also committed acts of deadly violence against neighbors and intruders, as well as members of their own families. While the wealthiest and most prominent women in the colony were rarely brought to court as violent offenders, for women of more common means and social standing, property and attendance at meeting did not prevent them from committing violent actions.

In order to avoid underestimating the extent of physical violence in this society, my definition of “violence” is both broader and narrower than what was used in seventeenth century New England. I define violence as, simply, the deliberate exercise of physical force against a person or property. In early modern English societies, “violence” was used to refer not only to a physical altercation, but also to vehemence or intensity of emotion, behavior, or language.<sup>15</sup> The term violence was contested; it was used to delegitimize particular actions.<sup>16</sup> In colonial New England, physical aggression was labeled as “violence” when it was seen as disorderly, or opposed to the public order. Colonial authorities’ willingness to tolerate women’s violent behavior on behalf of the interests of their families or kin groups varied significantly depending on how visible and overt their actions were, and whether those interests aligned with the needs of society as a whole.

While women’s motivations for a variety of violent actions remained consistent, how their actions were received differed greatly. Open unruliness, of course, was not tolerated in men or women, but was seen as particularly disruptive when perpetrated by a woman. However, a mother beating a child behind closed doors, even brutally, was often deemed a necessary course of action to preserve household order. An act like infanticide, however, reflected Puritans’

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<sup>15</sup> "violence, n." OED Online. March 2016. Oxford University Press.  
<http://www.oed.com.proxy.uchicago.edu/view/Entry/223638?rskey=ajSLR6&result=1> (accessed May 06, 2016).

<sup>16</sup> Amussen, “Punishment, Discipline and Power,” 2-3.

concerns about the crime as a signal of both sexual wantonness and alienation from the community and, thus, could never be rectified with community standards of behavior, regardless of the women's motivations behind it. Some more visible acts of violence could be acceptable, within specific contexts. In the eyes of Essex County magistrates, attacking an Indian enemy in a time of war, for instance, could be regarded as beneficial to the colonial community at large, and thus, worthy of praise. Magistrates judged violence against colonial officials, however, to be against the interests of the community in general, and, thus, disruptive, and unacceptable.

Puritans' militant brand of reformed Protestantism contributed to a cultural milieu of tolerance for physical violence. This emerged most strongly in the context of anti-Indian violence during the seventeenth-century Indian Wars, but acceptance of more everyday violent behavior by women extended beyond battlefields. While the Puritan leadership of seventeenth-century Massachusetts took a strong stance against unruliness, my research shows that authorities were loath to intervene in response to violent action alone, even when women were the perpetrators. Puritanism in the New World allowed such inter-personal violence to continue in the midst of rhetoric urging obedience and order because women's violent actions were frequently in service to these ideals. For instance, some devout Puritan mothers employed violence to "break the will" of their children in order to prepare their souls to humbly accept God's grace.<sup>17</sup> More pressing concerns—such as such as dissent, sexual indiscretion, and slander—also overshadowed Puritan apprehensions regarding women and physical violence.

Thus, Puritan influences did not fully stifle the underlying "Englishness" of colonial settlers and their persistent use of violence to navigate their lives. In using violence to aggressively protect family interests against threats from both authorities and enemies, women

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<sup>17</sup> Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*, 134-7; Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns in Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (University of Chicago Press, 1988), 35-37.

did not abandon their English roots. Their sisters across the Atlantic had played a central role in riots against land enclosures and for common rights in the early seventeenth century.<sup>18</sup> These group demonstrations sometimes took a violent turn. As one contemporary commentator wrote: “Women are more disposed to be mutinous...[and] in all public tumults they are foremost in violence and ferocity.”<sup>19</sup> For Englishwomen, like their New English counterparts, their concerns expressed through violence centered on the well-being of their families.<sup>20</sup>

My research makes a significant contribution to the field by constructing a more multifaceted, if not necessarily attractive, image of colonial women’s interests, struggles, and capacity for violence. A problematic thread in early American women’s history is historians’ tendency to divide colonial Englishwomen into happy vs. unhappy “helpmeets.” These two tropes of colonial women seem separated by a gulf: one was inherently disorderly and violent, the other peaceful, virtuous, and obedient.<sup>21</sup> One goal of this project is to break down this dichotomy, chip away at the barriers surrounding these two “types” and examine these women as people responding to the challenges of their different situations and environments. “Violent” women could still be “virtuous,” and vice versa. Another goal of this project is to demonstrate commonalities between

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<sup>18</sup> Natalie Davis, “Women on Top,” in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975), 146; See also E.P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” *Past and Present* 50 (Feb. 1971): 115-118; Olwen Hufton, “Women in the Revolution, 1789-96,” *Past and Present* 73 (Nov. 1971); Patricia Higgins, “The Reactions of Women,” in Brian Manning, ed., *Politics, Religion, and the English Civil War* (London, 1973), 179-222.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Southey, *Letters from England, Volume 2* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1814), 47.

<sup>20</sup> Thompson, “Moral Economy of the English Crowd,” 116.

<sup>21</sup> Historians who have argued that these happy helpmeets were better off in the colonies than in England or would later be in the nineteenth century include Mary Beard, *Women as a Force in History: A Study in Traditions and Realities* (New York: Macmillan, 1946); Elizabeth Dexter, *Colonial Women of Affairs: Women in Business and the Professions before 1776* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1931); Julia Cherry Spruill, *Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938); Richard B. Morris, *Studies in the History of American Law, with Special References to the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1930); Roger Thompson, *Women in Stuart England and America: A Comparative Study* (Boston: Routledge, 1974). The concept of a golden age for women was countered by Mary Beth Norton. Norton, “The Myth of the Golden Age,” in *Women of America: A History*, ed. Carol Ruth Berkin and Mary Beth Norton (Boston, 1979), 37-46; Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*; Lyle Koehler takes this argument against the happy helpmeet theory too far, and presents a presentist argument that the women of colonial New England were constantly chaffing against the constraints of the repressive Puritan ideal. Koehler, *A Search for Power*.

women's various acts of violence. Upon closer examination, types of violence by women that appear completely different—such as over correcting children, attacking Indians, even infanticide—can be placed on a continuum, distributed by the circumstances in which they appear and the extremity of force used, but connected by common motivations.

Scholarship has brought greater attention to women's lives in colonial New England, but has not placed violence as a significant part of their realities. For instance, John Demos broke new ground in the study of the colonial family, but violence plays into his work only in discussions of the severity of childrearing among Puritan parents. More recently, Gloria Main has offered a fuller picture of domestic and family life in early New England, for both English and Indian communities, but her account is even more peaceful than Demos'.<sup>22</sup> When scholars have examined violence, they have tended to see it as an anomaly or only as a product of a flawed system of social relations. When women have been portrayed as violent actors, their actions have been interpreted as chaffing against the restraints of a repressive system. Helena Wall argues that the unruliness that plagued early New England sprung from the strain community policing and oversight put on personal relationships. Norton offers an image of power relations between men and women in early America that was constructive for men, but not for women. Violent women were subject to punishment by spouse and court for challenging male authority.<sup>23</sup> My research pushes back against an interpretative model that defines men's

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<sup>22</sup> Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*, 40, 131-2; Main argues that the demands of life in the New World, specifically the need for labor, tempered harsh English family dynamics. Main, *Peoples of a Spacious Land*.

<sup>23</sup> Wall, *Fierce Communion*; Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 42-7; 78-9. Koehler, *Search for Power*; Carol Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: Norton, 1987); In her work on the Salem witch trials, Norton illustrates how the violence and trauma of Indian war impacted those involved in the event, but she does not present that phenomenon as part of a larger phenomenon of female violence. Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 42-7; 78-9.

violence as “normal,” and thus, women’s violence as less important. In glossing over women’s violence as an aberration, we miss what can be learned by examining its cultural significance.<sup>24</sup>

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich was the first historian to give a true accounting of the lives of women in colonial New England, from the mundane to the heroic, and to discuss violence as an unavoidable part of those lives. She provides an illuminating typology of female violence, labeling violence as either “social”—when it is authoritarian, defensive, disorderly, or demonstrative—or “anti-social”—when it signals an aggressor’s “alienation from the community” in the form of murder.<sup>25</sup> Ulrich’s typology is very useful in labeling how New England authorities judged violence. Dividing violent actions into categories of “social” vs. “anti-social” violence seems less useful when attempting to discern how the women themselves understood their actions. While it is unreasonable to assume that historians can ever truly understand the intentions or motivations of the historical actors they study, it is reasonable to assume that women’s standards for judging their behavior could differ from those of colonial authorities. Even in cases where women’s violence was deemed inappropriate by colonial authorities, it appears to still have been targeted, unlike some of the more random forms of violence perpetrated by men.<sup>26</sup> What was “anti-social” according to the colonial authorities, was not necessarily so to the woman who committed the action, particularly for crimes like infanticide. My work shows female violence on its own terms, in its own context, and with its own complexity, offering a more realistic, and undoubtedly grittier, interpretation.

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<sup>24</sup> Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

<sup>25</sup> Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 186-7.

<sup>26</sup> Women were not usually involved in drunken brawls or street fights, for instance. See Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*



Another aim of this research is to place the Indian Wars in the context of women's experiences of violence in colonial New England. Englishwomen's involvement in the New England Indian Wars—as frontier heroines, refugees, war widows, grieving mothers, and careworn good wives—deserves far more attention than it has received. When women have been included in the histories of these wars, they appear as passive pawns in the conflicts.<sup>27</sup> Since the publication of Douglas Leach's foundational work on the Indian Wars of seventeenth-century New England, the topic has continued to engage historians who argue for the centrality of the conflicts in colonial history.<sup>28</sup> Works have emerged that discuss the wars as formative military events and trace their influence on American militia strategy.<sup>29</sup> Other treatments have explored the wars in the context of seventeenth-century colonial-Indian relations.<sup>30</sup> Still other scholarship

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<sup>27</sup> Indian captive Mary Rowlandson has been the prototype of woman as victim in the Indian Wars. Annette Kolodny discounts Rowlandson's ability to survive on her own—regardless of the endurance she demonstrates throughout the narrative—and claims that she “meekly submits before what she accepts as God's rightful chastening.” Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her, Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 19; Ulrich also describes her as a passive survivor, trusting in God for her deliverance. Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 174; See also Douglass Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk: New England in King Philip's War* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), 162-3, 175, 180-1, 213-4; However, scholarship has begun to complicate the image of Rowlandson as passive and content to depend on her faith for rescue by an outside force. See Russell Bourne, *The Red King's Rebellion: Racial Politics in New England, 1675-1678* (New York: Oxford Press, 1990), 17; Little, *Abraham in Arms*, 81-2; Teresa Toulouse, “'My Own Credit': Strategies of (E)Valuation in Mary Rowlandson's Captivity Narrative,” *American Literature* 64, no. 4 (Dec. 1992): 655-676.

<sup>28</sup> Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*; King Philip's War has received significantly more scholarly attention than King William's War. This is probably due to the more definable chronology and geography of that first conflict. There are several works devoted solely to that war, but I have yet to find a single scholarly work focused on King William's War alone.

<sup>29</sup> Patrick Malone, *The Skulking Way of War: Technology and Tactics in New England Indian Warfare* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1993); Ian Kenneth Steele, *Warpaths: Invasions of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Armstrong Starkey, *European and Native American Warfare, 1675-1815* (London: UCL Press, 1998); Eric B. Schultz and Micheal j. Tougias, *King Philip's War: The History and Legacy of America's Forgotten Conflict* (Woodstock, VT: Countryman Press, 2000); Guy Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness: The Triumph of European Warfare in the Colonial Northeast* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003); John Grenier, *The First Way of War: American War making on the Frontier, 1607-1814* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> See, Alden T. Vaughan, *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians, 1620-1675* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1965); Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (New York: Norton, 1975); Neal Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans, and the Making of New England* (New York: Oxford, 1982); Bourne, *The Red King's Rebellion*; Colin Calloway, *After King Philip's War: Presence and Persistence in Indian New England* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997); James David Drake, *King Philip's War: Civil War in New England, 1675-1676* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999); David Jaffee, *People of the Wachusett: Greater New England History and Memory, 1630-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell

has traced the social and cultural impact of the conflicts on particular communities, those in the direct path of the wars, or those who sent militiamen to fight.<sup>31</sup> These works have made progress in integrating the history of the Indian Wars into the larger history of the American colonies, but in these narratives one element remains constant: men are central in the story, with “women and children” on the periphery.<sup>32</sup> Given the nature of the wars as conflicts in which European rules of warfare protecting “civilians” did not apply—wars whose battlefields were the towns and villages in which women lived and worked—women's experiences of the conflicts are highly relevant.<sup>33</sup>

As the economic and social effects of the wars spread throughout Massachusetts and New England, women bore loss and hardship. Veena Das' work in the field of anthropology offers an intriguing way to interpret the impact of the Indian Wars on how women understood and enacted structures of authority in colonial New England. Das examines how the violent events of the Partition of India in 1947 created for families and communities a form of doubt about their social world and threw the fabric of their everyday lives into jeopardy. In the aftermath of events, people remade their social worlds, but based them on new givens, new limits of social

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University Press, 1999); Daniel R. Mandell, *King Philip's War: Colonial Expansion, Native Resistance and the End of Indian Sovereignty* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

<sup>31</sup> Michael J. Puglisi traces the economic and political repercussions of King Philip's War. Michael J. Puglisi, *Puritans Besieged: The Legacies of King Philip's War in the Massachusetts Bay Colony* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991); For the legal relationship between Puritan authorities and Native Americans in the context of the Indian wars, see Yasuhide Kawashima, *Puritan Justice and the Indian* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1986); Richard I. Melvoin and Kyle Zelner write about the impact of King Philip's War on individual communities. Melvoin, *New England Outpost: War and Society in Colonial Deerfield* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989); Zelner, *A Rabble in Arms: Massachusetts Towns and Militiamen during King Philip's War* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

<sup>32</sup> Exceptions to this include Ulrich, who discusses the Indian Wars through an analysis of colonial women's roles. Ulrich, *Good Wives*; and Mary Beth Norton, who discusses the wars through an examination of female refugees from the conflicts living in and around Salem, Massachusetts. Norton, *In the Devil's Snare*.

<sup>33</sup>For more on the intimate nature of fighting during the Indian Wars, see Folsom and Slotkin, *So Dreadfull a Judgment*; Norton, *Devils Snare*; Little, *Abraham in Arms*; Malone, *Skulking Way of War*; Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 66; David Stephen and Jeanne T. Heidler, *Daily Lives of Civilians in Wartime Early America: From the Colonial era to the Civil War* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), 6; Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*, 16.

behavior.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, the violence and loss associated with the Indian Wars, for some Englishwomen at least, seem to have caused them to question the authority of local officials and challenge the limits of appropriate social behavior in their communities.

In viewing women's acts of violence as connected to the functioning of larger society and culture, as opposed to separate from it and nonessential to its operation, this project benefits from the scholarship of Thavolia Glymph. As a scholar of gender and slavery in the American south, her work has been groundbreaking in holding (white) women accountable for their acts of violence. She argues that such actions cannot be dismissed as just "variations of capriciousness and hysteria" or a means for women of venting their anger at their own subordination beneath a system in which they had no control. This idea allowed white women to avoid the taint of the slave system, while submerging their "human and historical agency."<sup>35</sup> Similarly, this project seeks to show colonial Englishwomen's complicity in a violent system.

Jane Kamensky's work on the power of the spoken word in colonial New England provides a methodological model that is based firmly in the culture of that period and place and reveals the importance of reputation, particularly for women, in that society. Kamensky charts various "speech offenses" and their punishments in seventeenth-century Massachusetts' court records, and uses these cases to draft an image of the uses of speech in everyday life. She explores the "economy of speaking in the seventeenth century," the weight placed on maintaining reputation, and the dangers of slander. She traces when speech would "flare up" in colonial life and become a problem and when speech could be dismissed as innocuous.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

<sup>35</sup> Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 28-29.

<sup>36</sup> Jane Kamensky, *Governing the Tongue: The Politics of Speech in Early New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 6, 10; Cornelia Dayton also undertakes a systematic analysis of court records from Early New England, but focuses on the New Haven Colony in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Cornelia Hughes

Similarly, my project includes an analysis of seventeenth-century court records to explore what could be called a gendered “economy of violence” during that time: the exchanges of violence that shaped, and were shaped by, the society and culture of early New England.

Literature on gender and violence in English history provides theoretical contexts for exploring the meaning behind women's violence in colonial America. For instance, Natalie Davis has shown how women and men adopted the trope of the “unruly woman” in seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth century Europe when participating in riots and other forms of civil disobedience.<sup>37</sup> Women told off priests and pastors, were central actors in grain and bread riots in town and country, and participated in tax revolts and other disturbances.<sup>38</sup> Women, or men donning women's attire, were afforded a “complex license” for unruly action. As more subject to the sway of her “lower passions” a woman was not to be held accountable for her actions, nor could she be held fully responsible for them as a subject to her husband under coverture. Davis locates this female trope within the world of early modern European village festival rituals and humoral theories of human biology and gender difference.<sup>39</sup> She does not emphasize the role of religion in these ideas about gender, especially in periods following the middle ages. For this trope to be explored in Puritan New England, the important roles of Puritan religious belief and pervasive Puritan culture need to be taken into account.

The New England Puritan version of the “unruly woman” that has appeared through my research is less riotous and less of a subject of general amusement than her European counterpart. A few central elements of this European trope appear to have made the Atlantic

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Dayton, *Women before the Bar: Gender, Law, and Society in Connecticut, 1639-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

<sup>37</sup> Natalie Davis, “Women on Top,” in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975), 146-9.

<sup>38</sup> Davis, “Women on Top,” 146. See also Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd,” 115-118; Hufton, “Women in the Revolution”; Higgins, “The Reactions of Women,” 179-222.

<sup>39</sup> Davis, “Women on Top,” 124-125.

crossing, however. First, most unruly women in Old and New England were attempting to be sources of order and stability, regardless of how their actions were perceived by others.<sup>40</sup> In New England in particular, the struggle against disorder for the sake of the “City on the Hill” was a deadly serious, cosmic struggle against sin. Women, who made up the majority of church attendants almost from the beginning of settlement in the New World, most likely saw themselves as a part of that struggle.<sup>41</sup> When unruly women resorted to violence in this environment, they sought to make the world conform more closely to their vision of correct order, behavior, or belief.<sup>42</sup>

Second, the predominance of wives as assailants in seventeenth-century England and New England indicates the extent to which household structure and obligations informed patterns of female violence. Garthine Walker argues that it was as mistresses of households that women most often entered disputes in early modern England, maintaining order among servants, rescuing household goods, and defending property rights.<sup>43</sup> Out of necessity, women’s violence increased during the English civil wars.<sup>44</sup> The same appears to be true in seventeenth-century New England, in both the context of women's everyday experiences with violence, as well as during the upheavals of the Indian Wars. Both household ideology and practical circumstances

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<sup>40</sup> Davis, “Women on Top,” 130.

<sup>41</sup> Women’s involvement was central to the Puritan movement since its inception and women continued to shape New England Puritanism by both working within the dictates of its leadership and by expressing their dissenting opinions. See Marilyn J. Westerkamp, “Puritan Women, Spiritual Power, and the Question of Sexuality” in *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past*, ed. Catherine A. Brekus (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 52-4.

<sup>42</sup> This is adopted from Amussen's theory of violence in early modern England. Amussen, “Punishment, Discipline and Power,” 31.

<sup>43</sup> Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order*, 77.

<sup>44</sup> Historians have been much less reluctant to explore women’s roles in the English civil wars than they have the Indian Wars of colonial New England. This is probably due to the greater availability of source material. See A. Laurence, “Women's Work and the English Civil War,” *History Today* 42, no. 6 (1992); Charles Carlton, *Going to the Wars: The Experience of the British Civil Wars, 1638-1651* (London: Routledge, 1992); Stevie Davies, *Unbridled Spirits: Women of the English Revolution, 1640-1660* (London: The Women’s Press, 1998); Alison Plowden, *Women All on Fire: The Women of the English Civil War* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998); Roger Hudson, ed., *The Grand Quarrel: Women's Memoirs of the English Civil War* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2000).

required wives to maintain the integrity of their households and communities, with or without their husband's participation. In New England, the uncertainty of life on the edge of wilderness, and the demonic threat that seemed to lurk on all sides, made this defense all the more crucial. It also made colonial authorities more eager to turn stories of female violence to their social and cultural advantage by re-framing them through the popular religious and literary genres of the age.

In order to explore the motivations behind and responses to female violence in the colonial period—in women's daily lives and in the context of war—my project will need to have a chronological focus that spans most of the seventeenth and into the first few decades of eighteenth-century New England. It will begin during a period of relative calm for Essex County, the 1630s, which enables me to understand how women experienced and employed violence in the course of their everyday lives. King Philip's War (1675-1678) was a major event in the lives of New Englanders, male and female alike, and exploring women's expressions of violence during that conflict, and the continuing conflicts in the northern regions of New England—King William's War (1688-1697) and Queen Anne's War (1702-1713)—allows me to demonstrate the far-reaching implications of those wars. Trends in Puritan rhetoric as the seventeenth century came to a close, and the Puritan leadership regrouped in the aftermath of war and political upheaval, need to be examined from the perspective of the early decades of the 1700s.

Court records provide one of the few avenues through which historians can attempt to understand women's place in the functioning of this society. Therefore, I rely on records and files from the Essex County Quarterly Court, the Massachusetts General Court, the Court of Assistants, and the Superior Court of Judicature as the frame on which I hang other historical documentation filling in personal and cultural contexts, like letters, sermon literature, and

narrative histories. Seventeenth-century legal realities make measuring rates of violence difficult, particularly household violence. The evolution of its treatment by the courts makes charting instances of abuse that appeared before the court problematic as a reflection of actual rates of violence. By the time the seventeenth century came to a close, courts in Massachusetts, as elsewhere in New England, had lost interest in prosecuting cases of household violence.<sup>45</sup> Instances of household violence disappeared almost completely from court records after 1691, a change far too abrupt to attribute to a drop in actual instances of violence.<sup>46</sup> In addition, the criminal records of early New England tend to be both “incomplete and laconic.”<sup>47</sup> Physical violence between spouses, or directed against children and servants, was frequently handled—when handled at all—by local justices of the peace whose records have failed to survive. When cases reached the courts, clerks were also casual in recording the victim’s age and relationship to his or her assailant.<sup>48</sup>

While it is difficult to calculate an accurate quantitative measure of the rates of female violence in seventeenth-century Massachusetts, exploring why and how women appeared before the court provides invaluable evidence of societal and personal standards of behavior. Changes in colonial laws, and how those laws were enforced, reflect how authorities’ concerns evolved in the seventeenth-century. Women’s depositions in court can reveal their underlying motivations

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<sup>45</sup> This pattern solidified during the period of administrative and legal upheaval between the revocation of the Massachusetts charter in 1684 and the establishment of a new charter in 1691. Cornelia Dayton charts a drop in the number of such community policing cases that appeared before the court in New Haven, Connecticut from the late seventeenth century on, brought about by the rise of a predominantly male legal culture based on knowledge of technical legal maneuvers and with strong ties to English common law traditions, which supplanted the Puritan courtroom’s emphasis on confession and morality. Dayton, *Women before the Bar*, 4-5, 8-9, 10, 12.

<sup>46</sup> David Konig attributes this shift to a change in the role of colonial courts following the revocation of the Massachusetts charter in 1684. The revocation destroyed the familiar court system that people had relied on as a means of social control and community order. David Konig, *Law and Society in Puritan Massachusetts: Essex County, 1629-1692* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), chapter 7.

<sup>47</sup> Rowe and Marietta, “Personal Violence,” 29-30.

<sup>48</sup> Rowe and Marietta, “Personal Violence,” 29-30.

and beliefs. As Kidada Williams explains in her recent work on testimonies by African Americans about post-emancipation racial violence, scholars' focus on charting statistics to discern the larger societal effects of violence has meant that the lived experience of violence can often be overlooked.<sup>49</sup> To try to capture women's experiences, I have utilized women's depositions as much as possible. These are some of the only evidence historians have of colonial women's voices in the historical record. Women who were literate sometimes left personal letters or journals, but these are rare. Those unable to write left almost no record of their lives outside of their interactions with the legal system. What women said about their own actions, and about their neighbors, sheds light on the priorities and codes of conduct that shaped their lives.

The chapters of this dissertation are organized thematically. Chapter one, "The Limits of Household Violence: Order and Disorder" examines "household violence" by women. Both men and women were violent actors, but women's violence appeared to be more consistently used to advance family needs and protect their interests. Also, this chapter reveals that community members and Puritan authorities hesitated to get involved in household affairs in response to violent actions alone. Chapter two, "From 'That wicked house': Women and Infanticide" explores the religious and social forces that led some women to conceal their illicit pregnancies and kill their infant children. In a society in which worth was measured by sexual reputation, infanticide was a terrible, but pragmatic, choice made by some women in a desperate effort to remain a part of society. How colonial Englishwomen used violence to protect their families' interests during the turbulent period of the seventeenth-century Indian Wars is the subject of chapter three, "Englishwomen and Indian War." Women on the war-torn frontier frequently had no choice but to respond to their Indian enemies with violence. Tired of the personal and

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<sup>49</sup> Kidada Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me: African American Testimonies of Racial Violence from Emancipation to World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).



financial costs of war, some women in southeastern communities attacked a less obvious foe: constables and tax collectors. Chapter four, “The Utility of Female Violence,” looks at how Puritan authorities repackaged women’s expressions of violence as literary weapons in order to reassert the authority of the colonial leadership during the political upheavals of the late seventeenth-century.

## Chapter 1 – The Limits of Household Violence: Order and Disorder

As neighbors in seventeenth-century Salem, Martha Wolfe, and Elizabeth Woodberry had a close and contentious relationship. The fields each woman's family used for livestock grazing shared a common boundary, on which Martha and Elizabeth kept a watchful eye from their houses nearby. One spring day in 1657, the women's concerns over encroachment on their families' property erupted into a violent quarrel. Regardless of the fact that both her husband and son were in the field with her, Martha took it upon herself to defend their property when she accused Elizabeth of allowing her oxen to graze on the Wolfe's land. Martha then physically attacked her with a stick. Elizabeth fought back from the blows and scratches by pushing Martha, who fell over a bush. Martha then said that "she thought the Divell would take [Elizabeth] away for...lying," and that she "went to the meeting for nothing but to diceive others."<sup>1</sup> In response to these attacks and insults, Elizabeth went to church authorities, repeated Martha's offensive words and showed them the blood on her face. They declined to get involved, citing a lack of cooperating witnesses. Court magistrates presented and admonished both women for fighting after the incident had become public knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

This conflict offers a glimpse of how colonial Englishwomen used violence in seventeenth-century Massachusetts in the domestic arena. Men made up the majority of violent offenders brought before the courts, but women also appear as a visible, vocal minority in the criminal record.<sup>3</sup> This is particularly true for cases of what I call "household violence," violence

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<sup>1</sup> George Francis Dow, ed., *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex Co., Massachusetts, Vol. 2* (Salem, 1911-21), 50; "Relation of Elizabeth Woodbery," Essex County Court File Papers, April 1657, Massachusetts Judicial Archives Vol. 3: 127-1.

<sup>2</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 2*, 50; "Relation of E. Woodbery," Essex Co. Cr. File Papers, MA Judicial Archives Vol. 3: 127-1.

<sup>3</sup> Women accounted for 18% of all the persons accused of all types of physical violence, or the immediate threat of, in the county level courts in Essex County between 1636 and 1710. When instances of "household violence" are

between two or more people who interact in or near the household: husbands and wives, children and parents, masters and servants, and even neighbors.<sup>4</sup> Women were brought before the court for fighting with or attacking their husbands, over-correcting children and servants, and quarreling violently with neighbors during disputes over property or status.<sup>5</sup> While both men and women were violent actors, what marked violence by women was its consistent application in the service of perceived family needs and interests. As Martha defended her family's land from wandering livestock, most women's violence was focused on their primary domain: the household and surrounding areas. Court records show that men used violence in the household as well, but were more likely than women to be involved in more general displays of aggression in the community, such as drunken tavern brawls and violent contests for masculine dominance. Women's violence was more targeted, aimed at maintaining familial order or preserving family property, safety, or status.

The court record surrounding the dispute between the Wolfes and Woodberrys is also revealing of how colonial authorities responded to interpersonal violence between intimates by both men and women. Salem church authorities declined to get involved in the fight between Martha and Elizabeth, even after Elizabeth appeared before them bearing injuries from the altercation. While the Puritan leadership of seventeenth-century Massachusetts professed against violence between spouses, and against children, servants, or neighbors, authorities were reluctant

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taken into account, this number rises to approximately 25%. See Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co., v. 1-9*; Records of the Essex County Court, Massachusetts Archives, microfilm reel # 0877433, item 1; Records of the General Sessions of the Peace, MA Archives, microfilm reel # 877466, Records of the Massachusetts Court of Assistants, Superior Court of Judicature (after 1686), and the Massachusetts General Court.

<sup>4</sup> Given the close-knit nature of settlement in colonial New England, relationships with neighbors could sometimes be as intimate as those with family members. I, therefore, expand the definition of household violence to reflect this societal norm. Christine Daniels and Michael Kennedy, ed., *Over the Threshold: Intimate Violence in Early America* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 4-5; For more on neighbor relationships, see G.S. Rowe and Jack D. Marietta, "Personal Violence in a 'Peaceable Kingdom': Pennsylvania, 1682-1801," in *Over the Threshold*, 30.

<sup>5</sup> See records of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Court of General Sessions of the Peace (after 1686), Massachusetts Court of Assistants, Superior Court of Judicature (after 1686), and the Massachusetts General Court.

to actually intervene in household or inter-household affairs in response to violent actions alone. Some Puritan leaders like John Winthrop sought to make violence the monopoly of the state in this new land and discouraged extreme forms of violence in the household.<sup>6</sup> This was not due to a general aversion to violence; Puritanism was not a religion of the meek. Violence employed by women through the normal course of their everyday lives usually went overlooked and did not threaten a women's dignified anonymity.<sup>7</sup> However, overtly quarrelsome households, they preached, were a danger to social order.<sup>8</sup> As in the case of *Wolfe v. Woodberry*, only after word had spread around the community did the court step in to try and resolve these issues. When it did intervene in cases of violence alone, the action it took was usually aimed at minimizing public disruption.

In seventeenth-century Essex County it appears that violence was tolerated, and even expected by both men and women in certain household circumstances.<sup>9</sup> Violence was a part of everyday life. This is due, in part, to the fact that most of the early settlers of New England remained thoroughly "English." The long ocean voyage may have symbolized a spiritual rebirth for some, but this did not erode loyalties to English social customs, domestic habits, and established means of order and subordination. As in England, early Americans employed violence to enforce their standards of social order. Frequently, these methods of enforcing

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<sup>6</sup> Levy argues that Winthrop in particular sought to make an "art and science" out of corporeal punishment in order to create an effective, obedient labor force. Barry Levy, *Town Born: The Political Economy of New England from Its Founding to the Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 51-52; Peter Charles Hoffer and N.E.H. Null, *Murdering Mothers: Infanticide in England and New England, 1558-1803* (New York: New York University Press, 1981), 35.

<sup>7</sup> I have borrowed the idea of a Puritan woman earning and maintaining the "dignity of anonymity" from Laurel Thatcher Ulrich. Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England 1650-1750* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny: The Making of American Social Policy Against Family Violence from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 18.

<sup>9</sup> This chapter cites court cases from the jurisdiction of what is now Essex County, Massachusetts. Haverhill, Amesbury, and Salisbury were part of old Norfolk County until 1679-80 when they were officially incorporated into Essex County. For my purposes here, the term "Essex County" will include these towns.

orderly behavior included the employment of violence: the physical “correction” of wives, children and servants was particularly common and it was not unusual for disputes between neighbors to erupt into violent disagreements.<sup>10</sup> Puritanism did not serve to counteract these practices. As the altercation between Martha Wolfe and Elizabeth Woodberry shows, it was not just those outside of the bosom of the church who participated in household violence. One, if not both of the women regularly attended meeting. Religious conviction did not determine a person’s willingness to use violence.<sup>11</sup>

For an early modern society, colonial New England was remarkable for its social cohesion and stability. At a time when the rest of the world, including England, was immersed in revolt and internal strife, the Massachusetts Bay Colony was a relatively cohesive society for much of the seventeenth-century. There were no massive demonstrations of violence or violent challenges to the power of the state until the end of the century. Puritans’ emphasis on obedience, and their willingness to expel dissenters from their midst were partially responsible for this stability. Still, Massachusetts was not the happy Eden of its founders’ imaginings. Court records from the early colony, from the level of the Essex County court to the colony-wide courts of Assistants and the General Court are filled with brutal acts of violence, including

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<sup>10</sup> The Massachusetts Body of Liberties outlawed “conjugal correction” in 1641 but the extent to which husbands followed the law remains in question. W. Henry Whitmore, ed., *The Colonial Laws of Massachusetts...Together with the Body of Liberties of 1641* (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, City Printers, 1890), 31; See David H. Flaherty, ed., *Essays in the History of Early American Law* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969); C. Dallett Hemphill, “Women in Court Sex-Role Differentiation in Salem, Massachusetts, 1636 to 1683,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 39 (1982): 164-75.

<sup>11</sup> As David Hall explains, people in colonial New England had a variety of relationships with religion. There were those among the committed core, as well as those that limited their commitment to the church or rebelled against church authority. People’s attraction to the church also varied across their own lifetimes. David Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgement: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 15; While it is difficult to assess the religious convictions and associations of those who appear in the court records for violent behavior, it is clear that not all of them were outside of the influence of the church.

murders, rapes, and assaults.<sup>12</sup> What ultimately helped maintain the social cohesion and stability of Massachusetts Bay was its reliance on the household and family as the foundations for society, and in a seeming paradox, the employment of violence therein. This occurred, if not with the tacit approval of the Puritan leadership, at least with the benefit of their blind eye.

The diffusion of authority in early New England reached unprecedented, and perhaps, unanticipated levels that went beyond the English model. Without social welfare systems, police forces, or penitentiaries, the household filled the roles of all three and was the building block of social order.<sup>13</sup> The patriarch of each household acted as its representative in the village or town, but such a system also distributed authority within the household as well. It was primarily the mistresses' responsibility to ensure that everyone in the household was fulfilling their duties.<sup>14</sup> Both household ideology and practical circumstances required wives to maintain the integrity of their households and families, with or without their husband's participation.<sup>15</sup> In New England, the uncertainty of life on the edge of wilderness made women's participation in household preservation and governance more crucial. As a result, men did not possess a monopoly over household violence.

Cases of household violence by women and men in Essex County fail to follow patterns established by historians who chart a neatly progressive decline in violence in seventeenth-century New England.<sup>16</sup> According to records in Essex County, the number of cases of

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<sup>12</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co., v. 1-9*; Records of the Essex County Court, MA Archives; Records of the Massachusetts Court of Assistants; Superior Court of Judicature (after 1686); Records of the Massachusetts General Court.

<sup>13</sup> Daniels and Kennedy, *Over the Threshold*, 9; Demos, *Little Commonwealth*, 184.

<sup>14</sup> Main, *Peoples of a Spacious Land*, 165; Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 77.

<sup>15</sup> Ulrich describes this phenomenon as women acting as "deputy husbands." "Should fate or circumstance prevent the husband from fulfilling his role," she writes, "the wife could appropriately stand in his place." Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 36, 38.

<sup>16</sup> In his study of seventeenth-century Middlesex, Massachusetts, Roger Thompson cites a general, consistent decline in domestic violence, as well as violence between masters and servants during the seventeenth century. Roger

household violence peaked in the 1640s, and again in the 1670s and 1680s, depending on the specific type of violence involved, and then dropped off almost completely as the eighteenth century approached. This pattern holds for both male and female perpetrators: the prosecutions for a type of violence peaked for men and women at the same time.<sup>17</sup> This parallel pattern of violence does not fit a society that disapproved of female physical violence, per se, or targeted it for prosecution. It also does not portray a society that was gradually moving away from more violent means of social control and interaction.<sup>18</sup>

For both men and women, instances of household violence appear to have reached the attention of the court only when they were too dramatic, or too openly expressed, to be ignored.<sup>19</sup> The cases that appeared in court records were, therefore, only the tip of a “violence iceberg.”<sup>20</sup> Silences in seventeenth-century court records reveal the acceptability of a wide array of violent behaviors between intimates, even for women. As these cases illustrate, colonial courts chose to address instances of household violence when they encompassed other issues of greater concern

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Thompson, *Sex in Middlesex: Popular Mores in a Massachusetts County, 1649-1699* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1986), 125. Thompson does not focus on violent behavior among intimates, however. His work is more focused on sexual mores and standards.

<sup>17</sup> The number of men brought before the Essex County Court in the seventeenth century for wife abuse peaks in 1640s and then again in the 1670s-1680s. The number of women brought for husband abuse follows the same pattern, peaks in 1640s, and again in the 1670s-80s. The numbers of men and women accused of child abuse peaks in the 1660s and 1670s. The numbers of both men and women accused of violence against servants peaks in 1670s. Neighbor violence deviates from this parallel pattern slightly more than other forms. The number of women brought before the court peaks in the 1670s; the number of men peaks in the 1660s, and remains constant through the 1670s. See Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co., v. 1-9*; Records of the Essex County Court, Massachusetts Archives, microfilm reel # 0877433, item 1; Records of the General Sessions of the Peace, Massachusetts Archives, microfilm reel # 877466.

<sup>18</sup> This seems unlikely, in any event, for a colony like Massachusetts that was undergoing a periods of tension, fear and uncertainty surrounding reoccurring Indian attacks and political upheavals in the seventeenth century. I will address these general patterns of violence that can be discerned from the Essex County Court records, and their relationship to the Indian wars of seventeenth-century New England in chapter three of this work, “Englishwomen and Indian War.”

<sup>19</sup> “Violence within the household, as correction or otherwise, was a regular event in early modern society. However, only its abuse... was recorded, so to understand it we must work backward.” Amussen, “Punishment, Discipline and Power,” 13-14; See Rowe and Marietta, “Personal Violence,” 29-30.

<sup>20</sup> Jon Pahl, *Empire of Sacrifice: The Religious Origins of American Violence* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 18.

to Puritan communities, such as sexual indiscretion or slander.<sup>21</sup> Baring other complicating factors, most instances of violence remained below the authorities' notice.

### *Spousal Violence*

The phenomenon of household violence in seventeenth-century Massachusetts was part of a larger continuum of violence that included the most mundane acts of physical aggression to the most sensational. As the foundation of life in colonial New England, marital relationships are the logical starting point for an examination of this continuum. The importance of marriage in seventeenth-century New England cannot be overstated.<sup>22</sup> As much as the Puritan leadership of Massachusetts Bay wanted to keep at least the outward appearance of peace between spouses—The Massachusetts Body of Liberties actually took the then unheard of step of outlawing “conjugal correction” in 1641—spousal violence remained a part of normal marital life in colonial New England.<sup>23</sup> English practices of violent marital discipline and interaction proved impossible to abandon.<sup>24</sup> Some New English husbands used violent means to “correct” their wives and maintain their authority. Some wives responded in kind, or lashed out at their husbands, usually for failing to live up to their expectations as a family patriarch, husband or

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<sup>21</sup> Konig, *Law and Society in Puritan Massachusetts*; Peter Hoffer argues that the legal system in seventeenth-century America was a “cultural performance” for the community in which the social and cultural norms could be expressed and reinforced. Hoffer, *Law and People in Colonial America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> John Demos, in particular, emphasizes the importance of the nuclear family, beginning with the marital couple, as the essential building block of Puritan New England. Demos, *Little Commonwealth*; Gloria Main argues that it was the formation and spread of biological families and their farms that enabled the settlement of early New England. Main, *Peoples of a Spacious Land*; Other scholars tend to emphasize the importance of the household, rather than the nuclear family, but agree that marriage was a necessary precursor to the creation of this crucial community unit. See Ulrich, *Good Wives*, Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), Helena Wall, *Fierce Communion: Family and Community in Early America* (State College, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), Ann Marie Plane, *Colonial Intimacies: Indian Marriage in Early New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

<sup>23</sup> Whitmore, *The Colonial Laws of Massachusetts*, 31; See David H. Flaherty, ed., *Essays in the History of Early American Law* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969); Hemphill, “Women in Court,” 164-75; Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 73-74.

<sup>24</sup> In early modern England, “no one denied there was an appropriate place for discipline within the household...Discipline used with restraint helped keep subordinate members of the community-wives, children, and servants-in order.” Amussen, “Punishment, Discipline and Power,” 18.



provider.<sup>25</sup> Seventeenth-century New Englanders saw marriage as a contract, and violence alone did not void that contract: violence was a natural, if regrettable, part of the marital relationship.<sup>26</sup>

Though willing to police other types of personal behavior, courts in seventeenth-century Essex County were hesitant to intervene in violent marital relationships. Court records reveal that cases usually failed to reach the courts unless the violence between spouses reached outrageous levels of physical violence—such as those verging on murder—or unless the instances of violence were particularly public and, therefore, undeniably disruptive to the community at large. Otherwise, for an instance of marital violence to receive court attention it usually had to involve another issue of more serious concern, such as adultery.

When it involved only acts of violence, most neighbors, community members, and court magistrates in seventeenth-century Massachusetts chose to avoid meddling in the married lives of their fellow village or town residents.<sup>27</sup> When cases of violence became too destructive, and disruptive, to ignore, however, the puritan tendency for communal vigilance eventually appeared.<sup>28</sup> This was not a question of communal vigilance versus family privacy. Notions of family privacy did not appeal to the English Puritans who migrated to the New World. They believed that neighbors and the church had a duty to regulate family life. Nonetheless, although

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<sup>25</sup> Instances of couples being brought before the court for physical altercations were not uncommon in seventeenth-century Massachusetts. In several of these cases I have come across in my research, women either responded to abuse by their husbands with violence themselves, or they initiated the fight. Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. Vol. 2*, 344, 431, *Vol. 4*, 108, 280-82, *Vol. 8*, 101-102.

<sup>26</sup> Randolph A. Roth, “Spousal Murder in Northern New England, 1776 – 1865,” in *Over the Threshold: Intimate Violence in Early America*, ed. Christine Daniels and Michael Kennedy (New York: Routledge, 1999), 75; Elizabeth Pleck shows that in Massachusetts, extreme cruelty alone was not grounds for divorce until after 1870. Until then, physical cruelty “was not regarded as sufficient reason to sunder the bonds of matrimony; nagging wives, the courts appeared to believe, provoked their husbands into beating them.” Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny*, 23, 24.

<sup>27</sup> This pattern in the Essex County Court records does not necessarily contradict the findings of other historians who have emphasized the almost unrestrained interference of neighbors and authorities in the family life of others in Puritan New England. In matters involving sexual conduct outside of marriage, for instance, communal policing appeared to be the norm. Because marital violence alone was not seen as a threat to marital stability, per se, it was not as subject to community comment. See Wall, *Fierce Communion*, 8.

<sup>28</sup> Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny*, 31.

Puritans did not have a modern notion of family privacy, they believed that dividing married couples was justified only in very unusual circumstances.<sup>29</sup> Violence alone was not considered unusual and authorities went to great lengths to keep troubled marriages intact.<sup>30</sup>

The cases against Daniel Ela of Haverhill and Thomas Russell of Marblehead illustrate this reticence to intervene in neighbors' violent marriages, as well as the Essex County Court's reluctant pursuit of spousal abuse cases. Daniel Ela was not averse to using violence to enforce familial obedience. The court officially frowned on such behavior only after violence as a tool of interpersonal social order was used to excess and became disorderly itself. Ela was brought before the court in Ipswich in 1682 and fined for the severe beating of his wife, Elizabeth, and for threats against her life with both a knife and a cudgel.<sup>31</sup> Following a beating, Elizabeth fled their house in a snow storm looking for help and was denied assistance by a neighbor even after she explained "if you do not entertaine mee and lett me abide in your house I will lie in the street in the snow & if I perish, my blood be upon your head."<sup>32</sup> The neighbor chose, instead, to return her to her husband, who threatened him for his "meddling" in his attempts to "order" his wife. Elizabeth fled to another neighbor. At that point the disruption was significant enough to reach the local authorities, who pressed charges against her husband.<sup>33</sup> During court proceedings, so many neighbors attested to the abuse Elizabeth had received—the same neighbors who chose to watch her struggles from behind closed doors—that the court could not ignore the incident entirely.

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<sup>29</sup> Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny*, 8.

<sup>30</sup> Wall, *Fierce Communion*, 81.

<sup>31</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 8*, 272-73.

<sup>32</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 8*, 273.

<sup>33</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 8*, 272.

Mary Russell of Marblehead also suffered persistent and intense violence at her husband, Thomas' hand, violence that was significant enough to gain the attention of authorities when combined with Thomas' other violent threats against neighbors. In 1680, Mary testified before the Essex County Court that her husband came home late, beat her unmercifully, kicked her around the house and struck her on the head. He had threatened to cut her throat or burn her, adding that if she complained, he would kill her. At least one neighbor testified that he had seen her bloody from her husband's abuse. Other residents of Marblehead testified that Thomas was a violent man and had frightened them many times at night with a gun or pistols "like a mad man."<sup>34</sup> Regardless of his violent tendencies, however, the Essex Country Court was willing to drop all charges against Thomas upon his promise of reform and Mary's petition attesting to their reconciliation. Since the time of her complaint against him, Thomas "hath carried it like a loueing husband to her," her petition stated.<sup>35</sup> This was enough for the court to drop the matter and move on to more pressing concerns.

Violence within seventeenth-century marriages was certainly not perpetrated exclusively by husbands against their wives. Both husbands and wives were capable of inflicting serious harm on their spouses. In most cases of wives abusing their husbands, the men appeared to have failed to fulfill their role as household patriarch providing for the personal and financial security of their families, to which their wives responded with violence. While these women's actions are reprehensible, the motivation behind them becomes clearer when they are placed in the context of a seventeenth-century household. As prominent Puritan William Perkins explained in his 1609 treatise on domestic relationships, while it was a wife's duty to "submit" to her husband—at his side as a wife, as opposed to a servant—she must also be able to "depend on him in judgment

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<sup>34</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 8*, 104-5.

<sup>35</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 8*, 104.

and in will.”<sup>36</sup> When either piece of that dynamic failed to fall into place, violence seemed to be the result. For a household in colonial New England to function properly, the patriarch of that household needed to be both dependable and capable. If he could not head the household, he needed to at least be out of the way, allowing his wife to take over the management of household affairs.<sup>37</sup> From the outside, violence against a husband by his wife may have appeared as the ultimate inversion of familial order. Indeed, according to Puritan teachings a husband-beating wife not only affronted her spouse, “but also God her Maker.”<sup>38</sup> Clearly, however, there were instances in which women deemed that inversion necessary. This behavior would not have sprung from an anachronistic desire for individual power, but the need to respond to relationships and households in disarray. Surprisingly, even when these women appeared as violent perpetrators, courts were hesitant to actively intervene.

In the late 1640s, the Pray household was in chaos. Richard Pray frequently beat his wife and verbally abused her, bragging about this ill treatment in front of the family’s houseguests. Richard would have failed to live up to William Secker’s advice to seventeenth-century husbands for a successful marriage: to exercise authority over the household, “protect” his wife “from injuries,” and “provide for her necessities,” while showing “charity for their failings.”<sup>39</sup> Several witnesses attested to seeing Richard attempt to beat Mary with a stick the size of a bedstaff, and almost break her wrist by throwing a porridge dish at her hand. When asked about the abuse, Richard claimed that he would beat her “twenty times a day” in order to maintain control over his wife. All evidence from their relationship suggests that Richard’s patriarchal

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<sup>36</sup> William Perkins, *Christian Oeconomie. Or a short survey on the right manner of ordering a familie, according to the Scriptures*, trans. T. Pickering (London 1609).

<sup>37</sup> Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 36-38.

<sup>38</sup> John Winthrop, “History of New England, 1630-1649,” ed. James Kendall Hosmer (New York: C. Scribner Sons, 1908), 239; Benjamin Wadsworth, *The Well-Ordered Family* (Boston: B Green, 1712), 25, 36.

<sup>39</sup> William Secker, *A wedding ring for the finger; the salve of divinity, on the sore of humanity* (1690), 67-72.

control over the household had completely broken down and he had turned to violence in desperation. Mary Pray did not take her husband's abuse or personal failings lying down. She responded by making her husband's abuse well known throughout the community, rolling up the sleeve of her shift to display the "marks of ye blowes' that her husband had given her, which were two great places black and blue."<sup>40</sup> Mary also responded with violence of her own. At dinner one evening, she "threw a trencher at him and also a bone," and directed her anger toward Richard's mother whose presence was clearly an imposition. Witnesses testified that "Shee should say to her mothr in lawe get you [home] yow old hogge," and throw stones at her.<sup>41</sup> Such a case seems like the type in which courts and neighbors would quickly intervene, but both delayed responding to the violent relationship. Mary was eventually admonished by the court and Richard was fined 20 shillings for swearing and cursing—the same amount he was fined for beating his wife—as well as 40 for contempt of court for denying their authority over him. For her involvement, Mary was only admonished.<sup>42</sup>

Isabell Pudeator was another woman who did not quietly suffer her husband's shortcomings. The Pudeators of Salem seemed determined to destroy each other, and several of their neighbors witnessed their contentious relationship. Jacob was a less-than-ideal mate. He had been presented for "stricking & Hitting his wife" but the court lessend his sentence to a fine after being informed that there was "grate provocation" for the abuse.<sup>43</sup> In 1676, Isabell was brought to court for disruptive behavior and for abusing her husband and his property. Neighbors testified that she was "a brawling and contentious woman & how yt she carieth both to her husband & her nieghbors...neither as ye Law of god or man requireth." They had also heard her

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<sup>40</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.* v. 1, 136; WPA 1-97-1

<sup>41</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.* v. 1, 184.

<sup>42</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.* v. 1, 136; Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.* v. 1, 184.

<sup>43</sup> Essex County Quarterly Court File Papers, June 1674, Massachusetts Judicial Archives Vol. 22: 31-1.

threaten to kill her husband by burning his house to the ground.<sup>44</sup> She would have been better off if she had followed through on her threats. Four years later, Isabell died, most likely poisoned by her husband, Jacob, with an excess of alcohol.<sup>45</sup> Within a year, he had married the woman who acted as her nursemaid.<sup>46</sup> Regardless of the mysterious circumstances surrounding the end of their marriage, the courts' inaction seems to express relief that the Pudeators were, at least, no longer fighting in the street.

Wives' abuse of their husbands in seventeenth-century Massachusetts was a persistent enough problem to justify amending the colonies' law code in 1650. The original language of the Body of Liberties outlawing conjugal correction in 1641 freed a wife from "bodily correction or stripes by her husband unlesse it be [given] in his owne defence upon her assault."<sup>47</sup> Nine years later, the Massachusetts General Court issued the following order, explicitly outlawing husband abuse: "It is ordered by this Court & authority thereof, that no man shall strike his wife, nor any woman her husband, on pennalty of such fine not exceedinge ten pounds for one offence, or such corporall punishment as the Shire Court that hath examination thereof shall determine."<sup>48</sup> The former law, titled "Women," was repealed and in its place was issued an ordinance dictating punishment for violence by either spouse. Although how equally this law was applied to both husbands and wives is uncertain, the fact that it was deemed necessary indicates that the Puritan founders were concerned about violence by wives.

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<sup>44</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.* v. 6, 193; Essex County Court Papers, WPA Transcription, "Depositions of John & Jone Baker, June 1676," Vol. 25: 89-2.

<sup>45</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.* v. 8, 59-60.

<sup>46</sup> Executed in September 1692 as a witch, Jacob's second wife, Ann Greenslit Pudeator, was one of the seven victims of the final hanging on Gallows Hill during the Salem Witch Trials. "Pudeator, Ann," in *The Salem Witchcraft Papers*, ed. Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum (New York: De Capo Press, 1977); Carol Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: Norton, 1987), 129, 130, 142.

<sup>47</sup> "A Coppie of the Liberties of Massachusets [sic] Colonie in New England," in *Collections of Massachusetts Historical Society*, ser. 3, VIII (1843), 299; Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay*, vol. 3 (Boston: W. White, 1853-4), 212.

<sup>48</sup> Koehler, *A Search for Power*, 49; Shurtleff, *Records of Massachusetts*, v. 3, 212.

Perhaps the colonial leadership should have known to include prohibitions against husband abuse in their initial law code, given women's behavior in early seventeenth-century England. Englishwomen were certainly capable of violent actions in early modern society, particularly in the context of the domestic household. During his travels around England in the autumn of 1599, Thomas Platter the Younger, the Swiss diarist and physician, commented that English "good wives often beat their men."<sup>49</sup> According to Platter, wives were, essentially, allowed to do as they wished and incidents of husband abuse were so frequent that they produced a familiar "rough music" in towns and villages.<sup>50</sup> Platter's observations that England was a "woman's paradise" were, no doubt, exaggerated for literary and comedic effect, but the problem of the "unruly" early modern woman was well established. Scolds, or women who spoke out too aggressively and disrupted their communities, as well as women who beat or cuckolded their husbands, were the focus of both literary and legal disapproval during this period.<sup>51</sup>

Records from the Essex County court attest that settlement in New England did not significantly alter these distasteful English social practices and means of navigating marital relationships. Some wives continued to respond to their unsatisfactory spouses with violence.<sup>52</sup> These instances were more likely to reach the attention of the court than cases of wife abuse, given the inherent, if unintentional, challenge to male authority that accompanied them.<sup>53</sup> Still,

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<sup>49</sup> Thomas Platter, *Travels in England, 1599*, trans. Clare Williams (Jonathan Cape, Ltd.: London, 1937), 182.

<sup>50</sup> Platter noted that the nearest neighbor was sometimes placed on a cart and paraded through the town as punishment for not having come to his neighbor's assistance when his wife was beating him. Platter, *Travels in England*, 182; See Susan Dwyer Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (New York and Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1988), 50.

<sup>51</sup> Amussen, *An Ordered Society*, 103; Amussen, "Punishment, Discipline and Power," 9; Natalie Zemos Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford University Press, 1975), 136, 140; See also David Underdown, "The Taming of the Scold: the Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England," in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, ed. Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 116-36.

<sup>52</sup> Hemphill, "Women in Court," 173.

<sup>53</sup> Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 78

the severity of violence that was involved in most cases indicates that they only came before the court when a browbeaten husband could no longer hide the violence from neighbors and authorities. In 1641, Elizabeth Browne was brought before the court for attempting to murder her husband, Hugh. A mariner from Salem, Hugh was probably gone to sea for extended periods of time, leaving Elizabeth to run the household and care for their children.<sup>54</sup> Their reunions were not pleasant and Elizabeth made it clear she felt her family was better off without him. Elizabeth was sentenced to be whipped for hitting Hugh over the head, throwing stones at him that cut his face, threatening to kill him, calling him “beast,” and wishing him hanged and gone from her sight. Several neighbors witnessed these various altercations and testified that they had seen the couple “scuffling together” on numerous occasions.<sup>55</sup>

Generally, family violence received mild treatment by the courts unless connected with a more dire charge. “For most assaults between family members, the most common sentence was a fine, a whipping, or both; then the wrongdoer was quickly restored to his or her family.”<sup>56</sup> At the same time, however, the Puritans passed laws to hang rebellious children and blasphemers.<sup>57</sup> Adultery, in particular, was an issue of concern for the courts and adulterous behavior was treated harshly. Adultery struck at the heart of orderly family life and undermined codes of sexual restraint. As a result, the offense was made a capital crime in Massachusetts and Connecticut legal codes even though it remained a misdemeanor in England.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 1*, 25; W. B. Trask, ed., *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, Vol. 21 (Boston: Samuel G. Drake, 1867), 256.

<sup>55</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 1*, 25.

<sup>56</sup> Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny*, 26.

<sup>57</sup> Executions for these crimes was almost nonexistent, however. New England had stringent rules for the prosecution of capital crime, which required two eye-witnesses to the actual offense for full conviction. David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), xxiii

<sup>58</sup> Hoffer, *Law and People*, 52; “Massachusetts Laws and Liberties of 1648,” in *The Colonial Laws of Massachusetts*, 6; While the harsh treatment of adultery in Massachusetts and Connecticut legal codes reflects the



Adultery cases were treated differently depending on the gender of the offender. As John Demos explains, “the essential element of [the] sin, was the women’s infidelity to her husband.”<sup>59</sup> Following Mosaic law, Massachusetts’ courts defined adultery in terms of the married status of the woman and ignored the marital status of the man. Adultery was considered to be intercourse by a married or espoused women with a man who was not her husband, regardless of his marital status.<sup>60</sup> A man’s affair with an unmarried woman, whether he was married or unmarried, was considered fornication, which was a crime against public order but not a capital crime. As Carol Karlsen points out, this definition reveals the threat posed by female sexual incontinence. A woman’s infidelity was a challenge to the man’s right of property “in his wife,” and unwanted pregnancy posed a threat to the “orderly transmission of the social estate to the next generation.”<sup>61</sup> Therefore, while violence between spouses, even violence by women, was considered a regrettable event, female adultery was much more of a public threat.

The Penions’ repeated encounters with the Essex County Court system attest to the relative importance of punishment for adultery over violent deeds in the maintenance of societal order. The Penions’ “two-generation record of twenty-six prosecutions over two decades in four colonies” remains unmatched.<sup>62</sup> The patriarch and matriarch of the Penion clan, Nicholas and Elizabeth, were prosecuted and occasionally fined for fighting with each other and causing various degrees of injury.<sup>63</sup> Neighbors witnessed their frequent altercations and on one occasion, Nicholas was presented for beating Elizabeth to the point of causing a miscarriage.<sup>64</sup> Of all the

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seriousness with which colonial authorities considered the offense, only one couple was actually executed for adultery in colonial New England. Fischer, *Albion’s Seed*, xxiii.

<sup>59</sup> Demos, *Little Commonwealth*, 97.

<sup>60</sup> Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 168.

<sup>61</sup> Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 168-9.

<sup>62</sup> Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 27.

<sup>63</sup> See Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. I*, 133, 135, 136, 138, 156, 173, 174, 194, 198, 254, 271, 298, 304, 305, 414, 424, 425.

<sup>64</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. I*, 138.

Penions' misbehavior, however, it was Elizabeth's suspected adultery that truly brought down the wrath of the court. In 1648, she was tried for adultery in front of the Massachusetts General Court. Found "not legally guilty" of the capital crime, Elizabeth was nonetheless ordered "severally whipt twice" within one month for her "adulterous behavior."<sup>65</sup>

Cases of adultery had the power to inspire communal policing in ways that cases involving only marital violence did not. When adultery occurred it was not uncommon for communities to band together and punish the transgressors, with a focus on the woman in question, while violent marriages seem to have gone relatively unchallenged.<sup>66</sup> The Rows of Ipswich had just such a contentious marriage. William Row, a mariner, was known to beat his wife, Sarah, who responded to his provocations violently. Witnesses testified that Sarah threatened to "take [a] knife & cut his throat" and that "shee hated Will Like a Toade."<sup>67</sup> These statements only surfaced in the course of Sarah's trial for adultery, however. Sarah was suspected of having an affair and warned by several townsmen to stop. When she persisted in her overly familiar behavior, no fewer than thirty-five Ipswich neighbors went to court and testified about the moral outrage.<sup>68</sup> The court appears to have shared the neighbors' sentiment, but could not prove adultery. The erring couple was found guilty of "unlawful familiarity." The man was whipped and fined, but Sarah was sentenced to a more public shame. After her month sentence in a house of correction, she was ordered to "stand all the time of the meeting" at the next lecture day at Ipswich "on a high place in open view of the congregation with a fair white paper written in fair capital letters FOR MY WHORESH CARRIAGE."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> John Bezis-Selfa, *Forging America: Ironworkers, Adventurers, and the Industrious Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004), 56; Alanzo Lewis, *History of Lynn, Essex County, Massachusetts, Vol. 1* (Boston: Shorey, 1865), 225.

<sup>66</sup> Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, xxiii.

<sup>67</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 5*, 146.

<sup>68</sup> Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, xxiii.

<sup>69</sup> Essex County Court Records, March 25, 1673, entry 67, Massachusetts Archives microfilm reel 877462.

In another instance of community policing, at least seven local witnesses came before the Salem Commissioner in Ipswich in 1680 to attest to Mrs. Robert Lawrence's sexual misbehavior.<sup>70</sup> During court proceedings, the violent way Mrs. Lawrence had treated her husband became a side note to the inappropriate company she kept. All witnesses agreed that Mrs. Lawrence had struck her husband with her fist, and beat him while he was on the ground. More important, however, was the domestic upheaval that resulted from Mrs. Lawrence keeping company with Samuel Gatchell and others in her home.<sup>71</sup> Neighbors testified that he and several of his friends were seen at her home at all hours of the day and night, and one witness claimed to have seen Mrs. Lawrence and Samuel share a kiss. After testimony concerning her physical violence had ended, questions concerning her sexual indiscretions remained in the forefront. What Mrs. Lawrence was charged with is unclear from the court records, but the nature of the testimony indicates that it was her adultery, more than the abuse of her husband, that alarmed her neighbors and local court officials.<sup>72</sup>

### ***Violence Against Children***

Patterns of violence directed at children in seventeenth-century Massachusetts were similar to those that informed violence in marital relationships. Violence toward children by both men and women was acceptable on a widespread scale, and usually went unquestioned unless it resulted in serious injury to the child, or was administered by an inappropriate party, such as a servant or neighbor. In retaining these practices of harsh child "correction," colonists in New England followed established English patterns of discipline in which the right to use violence to regulate children's behavior went almost unquestioned.<sup>73</sup> While Laurence Stone's image of early

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<sup>70</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 8*, 101-102.

<sup>71</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 8*, 101-102.

<sup>72</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 8*, 101-102.

<sup>73</sup> Hoffer, *Law and People*, 46.

sixteenth- and seventeenth-century family life in England has been shown to be overly grim, his depiction of child-rearing as involving breaking children's will by force, and formal emotional and physical distance between English children and their parents, has not been completely disproven.<sup>74</sup> Some elements of this treatment of children arrived with English settlers when they reached the New World.<sup>75</sup>

Indeed, the nature of Puritan religious belief, and the uncertainties of life in the New World, when combined with existing English practices of authoritative child-rearing, almost guaranteed that children would encounter violence from an adult at some point in their development. Some devout Puritan fathers and mothers employed violence to “break the will” of their children in order to prepare their souls to humbly accept God's grace.<sup>76</sup> New England's status as a “New Jerusalem” in the wilderness of the New World made the issue of a child's salvation desperately important not just to parents, but to the community as a whole. While the state attempted to monopolize the most extreme forms of violence—power over life and death—mothers and fathers had not only the right, but the obligation to administer physical correction if needed. Poet Anne Bradstreet eloquently expressed this sentiment: “some children are so tough and morose a dispo[sition],” she wrote, “that the plough of correction must make long furrows

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<sup>74</sup> Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1977), 284; Historians continue to engage with Stone's ground-breaking work and debate the nature of child-rearing practices of English and English colonial families in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Specific period, level of wealth and extremity of religious observance appear as variables that had an important impact on child-rearing. See Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns in Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (University of Chicago Press, 1988), Main, *Peoples of a Spacious Land*, Wall, *Fierce Communion*.

<sup>75</sup> Cotton Mather stated it simply: “Better whipt, than Damn'd.” Mather, *Help for Distressed Parents* (Boston: John Allen, 1695), 28; John Demos, Phillip Greven, Lyle Koehler, and Mary Beth Norton argue strongly that authoritative childrearing was common among New England Puritans. Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*, 134-7; Greven, *The Protestant Temperament*, 35-37; Koehler, *A Search for Power*, 13; Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 119.

<sup>76</sup> Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*, 134-7; Greven, *The Protestant Temperament*, 35-37.

on their back, and the Harrow of discipline goe often over them, before they bee fit soile to sow the seed of morality, much lesse of grace in them.”<sup>77</sup>

Records from the quarterly court of Essex County demonstrate the expectation that a certain level of physical violence, by either parent and within reasonable limits, was acceptable in child-rearing. A biological parent would not face court action unless the violence was particularly severe, the injuries noticeable, or the result was the death of the child. Undoubtedly, there were unknown numbers of child abuse cases that went simply unnoticed, brushed off as “correction,” or were ignored. In the seventeenth-century colonies, Mary Beth Norton explains, “beating one’s children seems to have been taken for granted.” The few cases brought against parents that actually appear in the court records “use such words as ‘immoderate and cruel’ or ‘crewell, unnaturall, and extreame’ to describe their conduct, thus implying that more ‘natural’ or ‘moderate’ correction would not have been censurable.”<sup>78</sup>

In the spring of 1676, Michael Emerson was brought before the county court for kicking and severely beating his daughter, Elizabeth, with a flail swingle, a large, wooden stick with a swinging arm designed for threshing grain. Details about the brutality of the abuse, and the extent of Elizabeth’s injuries, have been lost. But as one of only a few parents brought before a New England court for abusing their child, it seems fair to assume that both were significant.<sup>79</sup> A flail swingle would have been capable of inflicting serious harm. Even the court, not prone to particularly dramatic language, described the abuse as “cruel and excessive.”<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, the court dropped all charges against Emerson less than six months later. Elizabeth’s brutal beating

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<sup>77</sup> Anne Bradstreet, “Meditations,” in *The Works of Anne Bradstreet*, ed. John Harvard Ellis (Charleston: A.E. Cutter, 1867), 65.

<sup>78</sup> Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 119.

<sup>79</sup> Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny*, 27.

<sup>80</sup> “Michael Emerson, for cruel and excessive beating of his daughter with a flail swingle and for kicking her, was fined and bound to good behavior.” George Francis Dow, ed., *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex Co., Massachusetts, Vol. 6* (Salem, 1911-21), 141.

did not seem to damage her father's standing in the community any more than his contentious relationship with his neighbors.<sup>81</sup> He remained a respectable farmer and shoemaker in Haverhill and held the position of constable and occasional grand-juryman.<sup>82</sup>

Court records reveal that there were both mothers and fathers who perpetrated this level of physical violence against their children. Even in these extreme instances of violence, however, there were other factors at play that helped inspire the courts' disapproval. In 1642, Anne Hett was brought before the Massachusetts Court of Assistants for the attempted murder of her child via drowning. While the situation surrounding the case is unclear, Hett's abuse of her child took place with the knowledge of at least two witnesses. The court came down hard on Hett, given her existing reputation for "scandalous speeches" against God and "unruliness." As a result, she was sentenced to be "whipped, and kept to hard labor, & 'spare diet.'" <sup>83</sup> Similarly, John Turner was sentenced to be whipped, and sent to prison in Boston for stabbing his daughter in the presence of at least one witness. Like Hett's "unruliness," Turner's problems with alcohol ("being overtaken in drink") appear to have forced the court's hand in issuing its sentence.<sup>84</sup>

By failing to prosecute less extreme cases of violence against children, New England courts protected the rights of mothers and fathers to correct their children's misbehavior. When the Essex County Court brought charges against Guy Baylye in 1652 for cruelly correcting his

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<sup>81</sup> Kenneth Davis, *America's Hidden History: Untold Tales of the First Pilgrims, Fighting Women, and Forgotten Founders who Shaped a Nation* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 50.

<sup>82</sup> Charles Henry Pope, *The Haverhill Emersons* (Boston: Murray and Emery Company, 1913), 15.

<sup>83</sup> *The Journal of John Winthrop*, ed. Richard S. Dunn, James Savage, and Laetitia Yeandle (Cambridge and London: Belknap Press, 1996), 229-230, August 5, 1637, 391-2, May 1642; John Noble and John Cronin, *Records of the Court of Assistants of the Colony of the Massachusetts Bay, 1630-1692*, Vol. 2 (Boston: County of Suffolk, 1901-1928), 126; Hoffer, *Law and People*, 41.

<sup>84</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 1*, 130; Another concern of apparently of equal or greater concern for the Essex County court than violence against children was the destruction of property in the course of that violence, particularly in the form of livestock. In 1649, both Ann Haggett and William Flint were presented for abusing their children as well as a cow. In both cases, the court listed the "victims" of the violence together, human and animal. Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 1*, 174, 147.

eldest son, it was careful to point out that the court had only intervened because of great danger to the son's health and life.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, at times the courts actively encouraged the masters of households to control their children, by whatever means necessary. The household power structure functioned as an arm of the state, with the masters of families operating as "semi-official constables" encouraged to impose corporal punishment.<sup>86</sup> The court protected fathers by prohibiting children from retaliating. James White, Jr. was ordered to be whipped for threatening to strike back at his father during one such correction.<sup>87</sup> Authorities in New Haven ordered Nicholas Pinion of Essex County to whip his daughter, Hannah, in 1667/8 for her "wicked carriage" and "her bad Language as Cursing & other Corrupt base speeches."<sup>88</sup>

While less common, courts sometimes ordered mothers to impose punishment on their children for misbehavior, making these women an extension of state authority alongside their husbands. Female children, in particular, were often their mother's responsibility. After being brought before the Essex County Court for great "disturbance and disorder in the meeting house," Elizabeth Hunt and Abigaill Burnam, under family government, were remanded to the care of their parents for correction. Their parents were ordered to "correct" them for past offences and to ensure they were more well behaved in the future.<sup>89</sup> In a more explicit example of the state not only supporting, but actively ordering physical violence to be imposed by a mother on her children, the court in neighboring Suffolk County sentenced the son and daughter of John Chandler to be "severely whip't" by the parent of the same sex in "their own house in

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<sup>85</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 1*, 257.

<sup>86</sup> Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 48.

<sup>87</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 2*, 39.

<sup>88</sup> Franklin B. Dexter, ed., *Ancient Town Records: New Haven Town Records, 1649-1684, Vol. 2* (New Haven, Conn.: New Haven Colony Historical Society, 1917, 1919), 222-223.

<sup>89</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 5*, 306; originals v21: 41-44.

pursence of the constable” for their suspected incestuous activity.<sup>90</sup> Violence by both mothers and fathers was seen as a means to an end. What concerned the court was not family violence—since the court itself was perpetuating its use—but the maintenance of community order and social authority.

While parents were encouraged to “correct” their children, violence against children by male and female servants or neighbors was seen as a misappropriation of authority, and, therefore, not generally tolerated. The vast majority of cases of violence against children that appeared before the Essex County Court fell under this category. These acts caught the attention of the court not for their violent nature alone but because they demonstrated the internal disorder of a household, or were particularly public, and therefore, more disruptive to the community as a whole. Community order in colonial New England took precedence over almost all other considerations.<sup>91</sup> The suffering of the young victims of such violence, therefore, tended to fade into the background in these cases.

Violence by servants against household children was an indication that household governance had broken down more generally. Servants brought before the court for abusing the children of their masters were usually also prosecuted for other abuses of power, trust and access in the households in which they worked. Hana Gray gained a degree of infamy in 1674 for beating her master’s children, as well as for openly carrying on sexual affairs with at least one of her master’s neighbors.<sup>92</sup> She had also been seen riding her master’s mare “astride: beare...in a

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<sup>90</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, ed., *Records of the Suffolk County Court 1671-1680* (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1933), 478-79.

<sup>91</sup> Wall, *Fierce Communion*, 2, 8, 11, 12.

<sup>92</sup> Several neighbors came forward attesting to Hana’s ill treatment of her masters’ children, as well as to seeing Hana Gray in sexually compromising positions with various men of the community, of all ranks. “Deposition of Mary Sollas,” March 1674, Essex Co. Crt. Papers, WPA Trans. Vol. 31: 35-1; “Deposition of Hanna Groue,” March 1674, Vol. 31: 35-2; “Deposition of Freeborne Black,” March 1674, Vol. 21: 36-1.



rude maner.”<sup>93</sup> For her lasciviousness, she was ordered to stand at the meeting house in Salem on a lecture day with a paper on her head stating the offenses for which she had been charged.<sup>94</sup> In a similar case, Margaret Lord was brought before the Essex County Court in 1678 for abusing her master’s children and threatening them with further harm if they exposed her other “naughty doings.”<sup>95</sup> Margaret had stolen extensively from her master and mistress—everything from food, beer, milk and Indian corn, to a necklace, gloves, linen and silk. She was also seen wearing “a fine lace handkerchief,” stolen finery above her station.<sup>96</sup>

Female servants were not the only ones to be brought up on charges for abusing their masters’ children. For male servants as well, violence against children was usually accompanied by other indications that the servant in question had stepped out of his place. Stephen Goodwin, a servant, was found guilty of threatening to kill the master’s children and other servants, and for stealing and killing two hogs and breaking into the house of a neighbor and threatening them with violence as well. Goodwin was sentenced to treble damages for theft, to be severely whipped, and to pay his master for the loss of a month’s labor. He was escorted out of Essex County by several members of the court following his imprisonment.<sup>97</sup> Five years later, in 1669, Daniel Musselleway was charged with abusing his master’s daughter and maid. He was ordered to be whipped, imprisoned until he paid a fine, and to work forty more days to complete his contracted period of labor.<sup>98</sup>

Violence against children by adult neighbors was more acceptable than violence by servants. Due to the small size and close-knit nature of village life in colonial New England,

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<sup>93</sup> “Deposition of Hanna Groue,” March 1674, Essex Co. Ct. Papers, WPA Trans. Vol. 31: 35-2.

<sup>94</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.* v. 5, 291.

<sup>95</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.* v. 7, 46-55.

<sup>96</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.* v. 7, 47-48, 51.

<sup>97</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.* v. 3, 143.

<sup>98</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.* v. 4, 179.

some communal parenting was expected. As Helena Wall argues, neighbors in seventeenth-century New England played an important role in each others' lives, asking for assistance in raising each others' children to be god-fearing, obedient members of the community.<sup>99</sup>

Children's disruptions in the meetinghouse, for instance, were a matter of concern for everyone in the community. Monitors armed with a "stick or wand" were elected to limit children's "unruly and uncouth behavior" during church services with the full acceptance of their parents.<sup>100</sup> Neglected children were often the recipients of neighborly assistance and the practice of "putting out" children to live and work in the household of a neighbor or relative was common.<sup>101</sup>

Violence used for the reasonable "correction" of children, like a swat by the monitor in the meetinghouse, was within the bounds of acceptable neighborly interference. There were limits to the practice of communal policing and child raising, however. Violence against children that was not in pursuit of productive ends, that was inflicted in anger or resulted in potential injury to the child or children in question, was beyond these bounds. Guido Baly was brought before the court in 1647 for striking the child of his neighbor with a cudgel. The court emphasized the brutal nature of the attack, and the child's serious injuries<sup>102</sup>

Instances of violence against children that occurred during the course of public squabbles between neighboring families was also illustrative of a larger breakdown in social order and, therefore, became the subject of concern for the Essex County Court. In 1660, Elner Jackson was brought up on charges of threatening and abusing the children of her neighbor, Thomas Jones, as

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<sup>99</sup> Wall, *Fierce Communion*, 8, 9, 95.

<sup>100</sup> Wall, *Fierce Communion*, 8; Dexter, *New Haven Town Records v. II*, 379-80; Similar complaints and efforts appear in Massachusetts counties as well. Shurtleff, *Records of Massachusetts*, Vol. 4, part I, 200-201, part V, 60-61; Cambridge, Mass., *The Records of the Town of Cambridge, 1630-1703, Vol. 2* (Cambridge, 1901), 164; Lynn, Mass., *Records of the Town Meeting of Lynn, 1691-1742, Vol. 3* (Lynn: Lynn Historical Society, 1949-1964), 33.

<sup>101</sup> Wall, *Fierce Communion*, 94, 96.

<sup>102</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 1*, 123.

well as Jones himself. Jackson called the children “bastards” and pulled Thomas “by the hare of the head” and gave him “a boxe of the eare.”<sup>103</sup> The case was brought before the court after Goodman Jones insisted Jackson’s apology be as public as the attacks had been. He wanted her to publicly “give satisfaction” and admit her misdeeds in “publicke on the Lords Daie in the meeting house.”<sup>104</sup> She refused and the case was taken to court instead. Similarly, children were caught up in a public feud between the Fairefields and Coys over debt and property lines in Ipswich in 1665. Walter Fairefield was fined for his and his wife’s abuse of said Coy’s wife and children with blows and threatening words, as well as for breach of a debt. The attack on the children appeared to be in response to an attack on the Fairefield’s horse after it was found on a piece of the Coy’s land.<sup>105</sup> The Essex County Court intervened to try and ensure that the Coy’s and Fairefield’s tradition of name calling and violent retribution would end with this second generation.

### ***Neighbor Violence***

The type of violence that sometimes erupted between neighbors like the Coys and Fairefields, however problematic, was also not unusual in the context of seventeenth-century Massachusetts. Inter-neighbor confrontations—disputes that sometimes led to blows—fill Essex County Court records. This is to be expected, given the nature of colonial communities. Neighbors were an almost constant presence in each other’s lives and households, often entering each other’s homes and property.<sup>106</sup> Some neighbors were helpful and caring. Other relationships

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<sup>103</sup> “Statement of Thomas Jones against Elnor Jackson,” September 1660, MA Judicial Archives, Essex Co. Cr. File Papers, Vol. 6: 69-1, 2.

<sup>104</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 2*, 249; “Deposition by William Vinsoon,” 1680, Essex Co. Cr. Papers, WPA Trans. Vol. 6: 68-2.

<sup>105</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 3*, 273-4; “The Deposition of Martha Coye,” September 1665, Essex Co. Cr. Papers, WPA Trans. Vol. 11: 12-3, 4; “Depositions of Martha Coye and Richard Coye,” September 1665, Vol. 11: 13-1.

<sup>106</sup> Rowe and Marietta, “Personal Violence,” 30-31.

were unpleasant, distrusting, and violent. Both positive and negative relationships were played out in colonial courts. As an apparatus for negotiating social and economic agreements, the courthouse hosted affable exchanges.<sup>107</sup> At the same time, many of the cases that appeared in New England courtrooms hardly portrayed an image of neighborly affection. Instead, “vendettas between groups of households...spiteful individuals stirring up scandal, and lots of dirty washing...hanging out in public” were sometimes the order of the day.<sup>108</sup>

Disputes over boundaries were a particular source of trouble in colonial New England. As John Demos explains, “boundaries between one man’s land and his neighbor’s, or often between whole townships that were adjacent to one another” were an almost constant source of tension.<sup>109</sup> Associated with these property disputes was usually another type of “trespass” as well. These infractions included debt or theft, or breach of contract or agreement. Because of the close-knit nature of neighbor relationships, many of these disputes appear to have been “experienced emotionally, by those directly involved, as a form of personal ‘trespass’.”<sup>110</sup> Relationships between intimates gone sour sometimes erupted into violent arguments.

Married women in colonial Massachusetts could not technically own property; unless set aside in trust, any family property they possessed prior to marriage fell under the control of their husbands.<sup>111</sup> However, it appears that many wives saw their familial holdings as their joint concern, and like their counterparts in early modern England, some entered into disputes with their neighbors to protect their family’s interests. As Garthine Walker explains, it was

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<sup>107</sup> Thompson, *Sex in Middlesex*, 170.

<sup>108</sup> Thompson, *Sex in Middlesex*, 186.

<sup>109</sup> John Demos, “Developmental Perspectives on the History of Childhood,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 2, no. 2, *The History of the Family* (Autumn, 1971), 322.

<sup>110</sup> Demos, “Developmental Perspectives,” 322.

<sup>111</sup> Mary Beth Norton, “The Evolution of White Women’s Experience in Early America,” *The American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (1984), 603; Salmon, “The Legal Status of Women in Early America: A Reappraisal,” *Law and History Review* 1, no. 1 (Spring, 1983): 136-7, 146, 151.

predominantly as wives that women appeared before seventeenth-century English courts as violent assailants, rescuing household goods and defending property rights.<sup>112</sup> The same appears to be true in seventeenth-century New England, as the Essex County Court records reflect. Women were brought before the court for entering into violent disputes with neighbors over the use or misuse of property and space. These altercations reached the attention of the court when outside witnesses or groups became involved and neighborly argument devolved into some form of public disorder, frequently involving personal insult.

In 1656 and 1658, Bettres and William Canterbury and Goodwife Rowden were brought before the Essex County Court for disagreements over livestock boundaries that had devolved into violent confrontations. Several witnesses stated that upon finding the Rowden's pig on their property eating their peas, William Canterbury went to inform Goodwife Rowden of the offending swine. Rowden responded by throwing stones of two or three pound weight at Canterbury with such force that if he had not fallen out of their path, they "myght haue spoyld" him.<sup>113</sup> This was the most public incident to date, but it was not the first time Goodwife Rowden's behavior had proven violent. Rebecca Canterbury testified that when her father was working on his own farm she had seen Rowden throw stones at him with the intention of hitting him. She also noted that Goodwife Rowden would chase their cattle with her dogs, or hit them with sticks, whenever they were let out of their yard.<sup>114</sup> The Canterberys were not opposed to also using violence against their troublesome neighbor, however. A few years earlier, Bettres Canterbury had confronted Rowden carrying a stick and calling her a "lousie slutt" with "but one Shift," and saying that "all the clothes she had were upon her back." Witnesses then heard "a

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<sup>112</sup> Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order*, 77.

<sup>113</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 2*, 100.

<sup>114</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 2*, 100-101.

great crie” from Rowden, as if from a beating, and saw her display the “print of blows.” The Canterberys were charged with both “provoking speeches” and “a strong suspicion” of assault on Goodwife Rowden. John Rowden, for his wife’s offenses, was fined and bound for her good behavior.<sup>115</sup>

In 1667, Margaret testified before the Essex County Court that several neighbor women had attacked her as she attempted to prevent them from trespassing on her lot of land. According to her statement, when Margaret told the other women to go around her property, and that “she would not have them...make a highway through her lot,” Frances Gilligan and Martha Beale struck her in the face, knocked her down and “fetched blood on her,” calling her an “old whore.”<sup>116</sup> What Margaret’s testimony failed to mention was that she had not politely requested the women go around her land, but instead, with her adult son watching, had come armed with a “scragged clubb,” threatening to “knock out [their] brains.”<sup>117</sup> One of the trespassers sustained a serious injury during the conflict and died not long after.<sup>118</sup> When the women charged each other with battery, the court sided with Margaret. Her protection of her family’s property, even as a woman, justified the violence that ensued.

Disputes over space and its appropriate use took place outside of the context of land as well, and involved encroachment on personal boundaries and markers of status. Several women and girls were brought before the Essex County Court for fighting over seating in the meetinghouse. These quarrels turned into physical confrontations. Seating in the meetinghouse

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<sup>115</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 2*, 10; Essex Co. Crt. Records, September 1656, MA Judicial Archives Vol. 38, Entry 38.

<sup>116</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 3*, 414; “Testimony of Richard and Mary Downing,” June 7, 1667, Essex Co. Crt Papers, WPA Trans. Vol. 12: 88-1; “Arrest Order against [Mi]gilligan and Wife,” June 7, 1667, Essex Co. Crt Papers, WPA Trans. Vol. 12: 87-2.

<sup>117</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 3*, 420; “Testimony of Frances Gilliginn,” June 1667, Essex Co. Crt Papers, WPA Trans. Vol. 12: 89-4.

<sup>118</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 3*, 443.

was not something people in seventeenth-century Massachusetts took lightly. When attending meeting, men and women were assigned specific places according to their standing in the community. Seated on the opposite side of the aisle from the men, wives and daughters were placed in the same position and order as their husbands and fathers, with widows given a spot in relation to the standing of their late spouses.<sup>119</sup> These arguments, therefore, were about more than finding a place to sit, but were confrontations about one's place in the community. Women, it seems, were willing to physically, and sometimes violently, assert the status of their families. In such a public location as the meetinghouse, during church services, the court could not help but step in to restore order.

Goodwives Wolfe and Stackhouse of Salem were involved in one such power play in the meetinghouse that led to a physical confrontation. In 1673, on the Lord's day, Goodwife Stackhouse was sitting on a bench in the meetinghouse when Goodwife Wolfe came in to take her seat. Stackhouse, for unknown reasons, refused to move over to allow Wolfe to take her assigned seat next to her. Instead of sitting somewhere else, somewhere not reflective of her standing in Salem, Wolfe chose first to stand in front of her and later to sit on Stackhouse's knees. One witness attested to being "ashamed to see them...contend for the uperhand." When Stackhouse finally agreed to move down, she was apparently injured, and was so "sick" she had to be helped out of the meetinghouse. Wolfe was fined for her undeniably disruptive behavior in front of the entire church community.<sup>120</sup>

In another argument over seating and station, the Burnhams and Hunts of Ipswich took their dispute to more intense levels of physical aggression. Both Abigail Burnham and Elizabeth

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<sup>119</sup> Robert Dinkin, "Seating the Meeting House in Early Massachusetts," *The New England Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (Sept. 1970), 450, 456.

<sup>120</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 5*, 215-6.

Hunt were found “culpable of disturbance and disorder in the meeting house” for shoving each other, pushing each other’s chairs and fighting for space. Elizabeth was, apparently, kneeling in her chair when Abigail came into the meeting and pushed her. Elizabeth “rose up and spacke to her teling her it ware enough: enough att this time for shame.” Elizabeth then shoved Abigail down on her knees.<sup>121</sup> As girls who were still under family government, Elizabeth and Abigail were remanded to their parents for punishment. This was probably a wasted effort for Elizabeth, however, given the prominent role her mother played in their continuing conflicts. When not encouraging her daughter’s behavior, literally pushing her daughter’s chair against Abigail’s, Elizabeth Hunt, Sr. was herself pushing the girl, elbowing her, to “the “defacing of her linnon.”<sup>122</sup> Goodwife Burnham was more prone to verbal acts of aggression, telling the Hunt family’s servant sitting with them that she had no right there.<sup>123</sup>

In the course of their work to maintain community order, language and name calling appeared to be as much of a concern for the Essex County Court as acts of violence, even for women. As Jane Kamensky explains, the importance and power of the spoken word in early New England should not be underestimated. “Taken together, the dislocations of colonialism, the dictates of Puritan belief, and the mundane realities of village life” created an environment in which the spoken word came to hold “special powers and special dangers.” Massachusetts’ courts were filled with presentments for speech crimes, including blasphemy, witchcraft, contempt of authority, defamation, and swearing.<sup>124</sup> People’s words, Puritans believed, held the

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<sup>121</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 5*, 306-7; Several witnesses recorded depositions concerning the event, which was apparently, impossible to ignore in the confines of the meetinghouse. Essex Co. Cort. File Papers, MA Judicial Archive, Vol. 21: 41-44.

<sup>122</sup> “Deposition of Thomas Waite,” May 1674, Essex Co. Cort. File Papers, MA Judicial Archive, Vol. 21: 43-1; Elizabeth Hunt was also presented and admonished for her disorderly behavior during the incident. Essex Co. Cort. File Papers, MA Judicial Archive Vol. 21: 53.

<sup>123</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 5*, 306-7; v21: 41-44

<sup>124</sup> Jane Kamensky, *Governing the Tongue: the Politics of Speech in Early New England* (New York: Oxford, 1999), 6-7.



power to hurt in ways that even a physical blow did not. Nobody in New England, Kamensky argues, would have believed the old adage “sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me.” Instead, the New England version of this saying held that “a soft tongue breaketh the bone.”<sup>125</sup> For women, in particular, pressure to govern their use of language was intense.<sup>126</sup>

Records from the Essex County Court attest to the relative importance of speech offenses versus violent acts for women. In many cases in which a woman was brought up on charges of violence as well as inappropriate speech, the verbal transgressions appear to take precedence, at least according to the listing of the offenses in question and the detail devoted to explaining them in the court records. For instance, when Anis Chubb and Elizabeth Vinsent of Manchester physically assaulted another young woman, they were presented before the court in 1656 for “giving railing speeches & foule language & fighting.”<sup>127</sup> Similarly, Elizabeth Poe and Martha Henley were fined by the court in 1675 for “Scolding & rude cariage & speeches & hiting” one another.<sup>128</sup> When Mary Grant was presented before the Essex County Court for her violence and speech offenses against Elizabeth Mill in 1680, the court records detail her verbal attacks, but leave her violent deeds mostly to the readers’ imagination. Mary called Elizabeth a “a crooked-back slut and a thief.” Her “upbraiding her for her deformity of body and other provoking words” appeared more reprehensible, and therefore, more deserving of attention, than the assault on Elizabeth.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Kamensky, *Governing the Tongue*, 15; William Hubbard, *Benefit of a Well-Ordered Conversation* (Boston, 1684), 45-46

<sup>126</sup> Kamensky, *Governing the Tongue*, 4; Cotton Mather quoted scripture, stating “I will take heed unto my ways that I sin not with my Tongue; I will keep my Mouth with a Bridle.” Cotton Mather, *Ornaments of the Daughters of Zion* (Boston, 1692), 49; Whitmore, *The Colonial Laws of Massachusetts*, 49, 35.

<sup>127</sup> Essex Co. Crt. Record Books, MA Judicial Archives Vol. 4, September 1656, Entry 30; Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.* v. 2, 10.

<sup>128</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.* v. 6, 54.

<sup>129</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.* v. 8, 14.

The seriousness with which colonial communities treated instances of slander and defamation, as opposed to their relatively lenient treatment of violence, is also evident in a case from Haverhill in 1682.<sup>130</sup> One evening in 1682, the widow Sarah Stickney arrived at the Hayne's house, where John Atkinson and his wife were visiting, and accused John of being the father of her child. Goody Atkinson denied the charge, saying "you lo Impuent whore to Lay ye Child or bastard to my husband." Sarah responded with "like uprobias, reprochfull reviling speeches," and refused to leave. It was then that Goody Atkinson attacked, "slapt her hand in her face...and spit att her'."<sup>131</sup> Goody Atkinson was never charged or punished for the physical attack, but Sarah Stickney was charged with slander for her accusations of sexual misconduct.<sup>132</sup> Though Sarah received a physical blow, petitions to the court by both John Atkinson and his wife explained that it was they who had been "much wronged" by the "false information of the sayd Sarah Stickney."<sup>133</sup>

### ***Violence Against Servants***

Perhaps more than any other type of household violence, servant abuse in seventeenth-century Massachusetts illustrated the daily violence that people lived with, expected, and perpetuated.<sup>134</sup> Male and female servants were subject to physical correction by both masters and mistresses.<sup>135</sup> The men and women dispensing this correction were allowed incredible leeway in how they chose to keep their servants in line. Even Cotton Mather, who was known for arguing

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<sup>130</sup> Cases of defamation and slander took on a special significance in early New England because Puritan settlers in that region had "an extreme sensitivity to the threat of public exposure and humiliation." Demos, "Developmental Perspectives," 323.

<sup>131</sup> "Testimony of Hanah Merrek, wife of James, and Hanah Merrek, his sister," March 1682, Essex Co. Cr. File Papers, MA Judicial Archives Vol. 37:47-1; Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 8*, 262.

<sup>132</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 8*, 260.

<sup>133</sup> "Petition of John Atkinson," September 26, 1682, Essex Co. Cr. File Papers, MA Judicial Archives Vol. 38: 86-1; "Petition of Sarah Atkinson," April 10, 1683, Vol. 39: 65-1.

<sup>134</sup> Daniels and Kennedy, *Over the Threshold*, 9; Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny*, 8-9.

<sup>135</sup> Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 100-101, 116; Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 3, 224.

against the beating of children, expressed the harsh standard for correction of servants that served as a community and cultural norm when he argued that the punishment of a disobedient servant should be so “moderate with Humanity, that he may not be thereby Killed or Maimed.”<sup>136</sup> Handbooks for constables and justices of the peace affirmed that almost all forms of correction for unruly servants was acceptable, up to the point of serious injury or death. Court officials and the populace as jurors judged the point at which a master or mistress crossed the line from properly exercising the prerogative of authority to the “wrongful beating [of] another.”<sup>137</sup> As masters themselves, they ensured this standard remained difficult to reach.

This liberal standard for correction was in conflict with the written law of the land in Massachusetts. The Body of Liberties frowned upon the use of physical violence against servants to the point that it permitted servants to flee from abusive masters “with no penalty.”<sup>138</sup> In these cases, as in other instances of household violence, the practices and traditions from the old country overshadowed the stated wishes of Puritan authorities and the enactment of the Body of Liberties in real life. Following the English pattern, physical correction of servants was very rarely questioned.<sup>139</sup> The master possessed the right of correction over his servants and he “was permitted, even expected, to use the rod or the whip in a moderate fashion.”<sup>140</sup> He was not alone in this, however. As a wife was considered subject to her husband, servants in a household were also subject to her. As in England, women’s “authority to inflict discipline on others was delimited by the household.” As mistresses, women were empowered to correct servants with “words of reproof” and “stripes if needful.”<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny*, 28; Cotton Mather, *A Good Master well Served* (Boston, 1696), 16.

<sup>137</sup> Daniels and Kennedy, *Over the Threshold*, 30.

<sup>138</sup> Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny*, 22; Whitmore, *The Colonial Laws of Massachusetts*, 30, 105.

<sup>139</sup> Hoffer, *Law and People*, 46; Amussen, *An Ordered Society*, 96.

<sup>140</sup> Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny*, 8-9.

<sup>141</sup> Amussen, *An Ordered Society*, 90, 96.

Women's domestic authority—their position as holders of natural or civil authority or power—legitimated their use of force in these instances. In New England, in particular, women's domestic authority reached new levels. Women's authority over female servants went almost unquestioned, and Essex County Court records indicate that most violence by mistresses was directed at female servants. However, women's ability to discipline servants was not limited along the lines of gender. The insecurity of life in unsettled regions of the colonial wilderness, and men's necessary absences from the family farm, meant that women frequently took on the role of "deputy husband."<sup>142</sup> Although a good wife "never wore the breeches," she did often take charge of the house, the children, and all the servants.<sup>143</sup>

As reflected in the court records, violence by women was acceptable when it was used in the course of exercising their significant household authority as mistresses. On the other hand, violence by either male or female servants was almost never allowed. Given power disparities between masters and mistresses and their servants, court records do not illustrate the same give and take violence between these groups that existed between married couples, for instance. Servants who acted against their employers were always punished when these cases reached the courts, usually with a whipping or some sort of severe reprisal.<sup>144</sup> More commonly, these incidents were handled within the household and charges of overcorrection of servants were ignored.

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<sup>142</sup> Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 35-50.

<sup>143</sup> Main, *Peoples of a Spacious Land*, 69; Most historians now agree with Linda Kerber that the idea of "separate spheres" for men and women is largely a fiction, especially in the colonial period. Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (1988): 9-39; Ulrich provides a discussion of the innumerable responsibilities of women in colonial New England in *Good Wives and A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

<sup>144</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 1, 133; v. 2, 62, 63, 104, 134, 356; v. 3, 376, 143; v. 4, 200; v. 5, 291; v. 7, 46-55, 334; v. 8, 347-8; v. 9, 145.

Most personal assaults on servants were, of course, never recorded because the victim feared prosecution, accepted such violence as a normal part of life, or preferred not to publicize the incident.<sup>145</sup> Only the most “unusual” cases tended to reach the attention of the Essex County court: for example, when the violence was considered extremely brutal, when the abuse disrupted community life, when an unusual form of punishment was used, when it involved sexual indiscretions, or when a servant was assaulted by someone other than the master or mistress. As in other instances of household violence, therefore, the examples of violence against servants that appear in the seventeenth-century court records are the tip of the “violence iceberg.”<sup>146</sup>

The 1681 case brought by Joane Suifland, an Irish indentured servant, against her master and mistress, Thomas and Naomi Maule, illustrates the court’s unwillingness to prosecute even the most heinous examples of such violence. Suifland appeared before the court and testified that during her service to the Maule family, both the master and mistress had “many Tymes unreasonably beate” her with a “hors whip,” sometimes in excess of thirty or forty blows at a time, even before her “cloathes haue bin on.” She feared that the family would kill her before long and requested that “shee may be released from so cruell & barberous a servitude & putt to some other where she may be more Christian like dealt with.”<sup>147</sup> Several witnesses attested to seeing Suifland bloodied and bruised, and others saw Naomi Maule beating the maid and kicking her out of doors, threatening her with further violence.<sup>148</sup> Thomas Maule, known as a “greate lyar & a contentious person amongst his neighbors” was also known to beat his servant. None of this swayed the court. While Thomas Maule was presented and fined for profaning the Sabbath

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<sup>145</sup> Daniels and Kennedy, *Over the Threshold*, 25.

<sup>146</sup> Pahl, *Empire of Sacrifice*, 18.

<sup>147</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 8, 223.

<sup>148</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 8, 223-5.

during that same court visit, his and Goody Maule's repeated abuse of their maidservant was unworthy of even an admonishment.<sup>149</sup>

The unspoken assumption in cases of servant abuse was that the servant in question deserved whatever punishment he or she received, regardless of the servant's claims of excessive abuse. For example, in 1677, Sarah Taylor was charged with going from her service in a disorderly way and spreading rumors that her mistress had severely beaten her. As far as the court record shows, no effort was made to investigate Sarah's claims of abuse. The court, instead, found Sarah guilty of telling contrary tales and claimed that she must have had some evil counselors, which was the main source of the trouble.<sup>150</sup> They found no standing for legal conviction on her charges of cruel correction, but instead ordered that the servant's mother monitor her behavior and ensure that she refrain from entering the company of two other women who were, ostensibly, a source of the mischief. In a moment of leniency, the court allowed Sarah to be placed with another godly family for work, due to the extreme poverty of her family.<sup>151</sup>

Assumptions about servant misbehavior, and the normalcy of violence in ensuring servants' obedience, are evident in the case brought by Thomas Bettis against his master, John Simmons. Simmons had tied his servant to the foot of a bed in winter, regardless of the freezing temperatures and the servant's sparse clothing, in addition to beating him with a stick until the "blood ran down all...to [his] feet."<sup>152</sup> One of Bettis' fellow servants was called to testify in March 1681 in court concerning the incidents, and his responses to the vicious beating of his fellow servant are entirely lacking in empathy. He indicated that the beatings were justified by the servant's "rude" behavior. The court agreed and ordered Bettis to return to his master and

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<sup>149</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 8, 226.

<sup>150</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 6, 340.

<sup>151</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 6, 340.

<sup>152</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 8, 91.

compensate him for “the damage sustained by his running away” by serving Simmons for another six months.<sup>153</sup> Neither the master, other servants in the household, nor the court, found the employment of such violence objectionable.

Differences in economic status and social standing between servants and masters meant that servants usually had little recourse for relief, even in instances of excessive abuse. Martha Stacy’s parents attempted to petition the court in 1680 concerning injuries she had sustained while a servant to Joseph and Mrs. Cocker of Newberry. The petition forced the court to investigate the claims, and they found several neighbors who would attest to the servant’s ill usage at the hands of her master and mistress. Neighbors had even urged the Cockers to return Martha to her parents rather than abuse her, but they replied that because her parents were poor they were less concerned about what became of her.<sup>154</sup> Mrs. Cocker, in particular, was seen beating Martha on several occasions, and when asked about her injuries, claimed that Martha had gotten drunk and fallen down.<sup>155</sup> Mrs. Cocker was the daughter of Capt. William Hawthorne of Salem, an eminent member of the community who had held the position of Assistant and was commissioned captain of Salem Company.<sup>156</sup> The end result of the case is unclear, but there is no evidence that either of the Cockers was charged with any crime or punished despite public knowledge of their abuse of Martha.

While public knowledge of violence against a servant was not usually enough to ensure that a master or mistress would be punished, it was an impetus for the court to acknowledge that instances of abuse were taking place. Community discussion of the abuse suffered by a servant

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<sup>153</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 8, 91-92.

<sup>154</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 7, 421-2.

<sup>155</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 7, 421.

<sup>156</sup> Henry Fritz-Gilbert, *The New England Historical Genealogical Register, Vol. 42* (New England Historic Genealogical Register, Heritage Books, 1996, orig 1888), 363.

boy in the Jones family brought the issue to court in 1682. A witness testified that she had seen Benjamin and Elizabeth Jones whip the little boy, beat him on the head and kick him. When confronted about the abuse by neighbors, Elizabeth replied that the more people talked of the situation, the worse it would be for the child.<sup>157</sup> In this case, concern for the appearance of community order appeared to trump a master's prerogative. The Jones were ordered to pay twenty shillings, and the boy was taken away from them. In 1673, when Jacob Garland was beaten by his master, John Mason, in the home of a neighbor, the outcome was less positive. After drawing him over the threshold and hitting his head against the stones, Mason escaped any punishment, but his servant Jacob was ordered to pay a ten shilling fine, ostensibly for being found in the wrong place.<sup>158</sup>

The burden of proof for cases of servant abuse fell squarely on the servant's shoulders and usually remained unattainable even when the violence took place in the public eye, and involved persons with as unsavory a reputation as the Coreys of Salem.<sup>159</sup> Mary Corey was brought before the Essex County Court in 1678 after she was seen by at least two witnesses beating a servant with a walking stick. The charge was brought amidst other complaints against the Coreys for public drunkenness, cursing, swearing and abusive speech toward their neighbors. While Mary was fined for several of these offenses, the charges of servant abuse were dismissed because they were not proved within the year.<sup>160</sup> The court, apparently, did not take into account the Corey's history of abusing servants. In 1675, Jacob Goodale, a servant for the Coreys, died from injuries sustained from a beating. Giles Corey himself admitted to beating Jacob, and

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<sup>157</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 8, 295.

<sup>158</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 5, 293.

<sup>159</sup> Giles Cory was famously executed during the Salem Witch Trials by being pressed to death on September 19, 1692. During his trial for witchcraft, community suspicions about Giles' bad character, including his previous abuse of servants, was again brought to light. Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devils Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 277-8.

<sup>160</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 7, 147-9.



witnesses described the almost one hundred blows he inflicted on the servant “with a stout stick.” Rather than being convicted of murder, Corey was only heavily fined.<sup>161</sup>

Cases of “unusual” punishment were more likely to reach the attention of the court than those that fell within “normal” bounds. Acceptable punishment included most beating and bruising that fell short of permanent injury or disfigurement.<sup>162</sup> Silences in Essex County Court records attest that many forms of violence were “usual” and, therefore, to be expected in the course of maintaining order over a servant. Correction that involved a kick, slap, or punch, would usually not even result in an admonishment, if it reached the court at all. Correction that was considered degrading, however, was more of an issue. In 1682, Phillip Fowler was reprimanded by the court and ordered to pay costs for hanging up his servant, Richard Parker, by the heels. The court reinforced Fowler’s justification in giving correction to his servant, which the boy deserved, but disapproved of the manner of punishment. Hanging by the heels like butchers do with animals for slaughter was too humiliating. Fowler was cautioned against using this method of correction again.<sup>163</sup>

Case against Samuel Bishop in 1682 illustrates the court’s discomfort with unusual forms of correction, as well as its concern with sexual immortality. The case also reveals a mistress’ role in, and opinion about, the appropriate punishment of servants. After a complaint from Tobiah Taylor, a servant to the Bishops, about the strange and cruel punishment that had been inflicted on him by his master, a grandjuryman investigated the incident. Taylor claimed that Bishop had tied and whipped him, hanging him by the hands with his legs tied straddling a bench so he could not move. When the grandjuryman and a magistrate went to Bishop’s house, Bishop

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<sup>161</sup> Marilynne K. Roach, *The Salem Witch Trials: A Day-by-Day Chronicle of a Community Under Siege* (New York: Taylor Trade Publications, 2004), 296.

<sup>162</sup> Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny*, 28.

<sup>163</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 8, 302-3.

admitted he had punished him.<sup>164</sup> Bishop's wife sprung to his defense, arguing that Taylor was a troublesome servant and had received punishment for being "very disobedient going out at night and not coming home in any season contrary to my husbands knowledge," smoking "his pipe of tobacco after he was in bed wch was very dangerous and hazarded our lifes and all," prophaning the sabbath," and for his "familiarity" with a female maidservant in the middle of the night. Her husband's actions were within the bounds of propriety, for he had only "Clapt" Taylor "with his hand," which "broke no bones & fetch no blood." Her husband also encouraged her to "get a Rod" and whip the maidservant "for fit as I saw."<sup>165</sup> The court accepted Goody Bishop's explanation of the incident as well as her definition of reasonable correction by both master and mistress. The case does not appear to have gone any further.

The violent physical correction of a servant was not enough to bring John and Mrs. Jackson before the Essex County Court in 1660. When the accusations turned sexual in nature, however, the court took notice.<sup>166</sup> Mary Soames was a less than ideal servant.<sup>167</sup> When told to do her work, Soames said to Goody Jackson, "Doe it youer selfe." In response, Goody Jackson gave her "a nick upon ye arm," and the maid cried out until Jackson told her to hold her tongue. Goody Jackson then "gave hir blow with the bake of her hand."<sup>168</sup> The court took issue with none of this until Soames accused Mr. Jackson of sexual molestation. Apparently, her master came into her chamber and tried to force himself on her. The fourth time this occurred, Soames

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<sup>164</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 8, 315-6.

<sup>165</sup> "Deposition of Esther Bishop," March 1682, Essex Co. Crt. File Papers, MA Judicial Archives, Vol. 37: 113-1; Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 8, 316.

<sup>166</sup> Norton argues that this type of crime is likely under-reported. "Sexual molestation was less often prosecuted than were other sorts of assaults and deprivation of food or clothing, but it is unlikely that the offense was an infrequent as the few criminal cases...suggest. The power imbalance between male superiors and their female subordinates in families was substantial, leading to the inference that many such incidents must never have been reported." Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 120.

<sup>167</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 2, 237.

<sup>168</sup> "Deposition of Anthony Day," September 1660, Essex Co. Crt Papers, WPA Trans. Vol. 6: 61-1; "Testimony of Zacheus Curtis," September 1660, Vol. 6-17-1; Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 2, 237-8.

was able to escape by biting his nose.<sup>169</sup> Jackson was presented for fornication and bound to appear at the next lecture day at Ipswich. Witnesses testified that they feared Goodwife Jackson would either kill or do deadly injury to Soames because of her accusations. Instead of ordering Goody Jackson to control her own behavior, however, the court ordered the constable to look after the maid.<sup>170</sup>

As these cases attest, masters and mistresses were expected to use violence against servants in order to maintain authority within their households. Violence against servants by other people, however, was unacceptable. The acceptability of violence against servants in seventeenth-century Massachusetts was determined less by the act of violence itself than by the party perpetrating that violence. Beating another man or woman's servant was frowned upon by the court and community in seventeenth-century Massachusetts, but not out of a distaste for violence itself. As Mary Beth Norton explains, "one's ability to strike a person determined one's standing as that individual's proper superior."<sup>171</sup> Assaulting someone else's servant was, in effect, depriving another master or mistress of their right to be that person's superior, and, therefore, their right to utilize that servant's labor. As a result, cases of violence against servants that reached the court were often either brought by, or directly benefitting, masters in an effort to preserve that right.

The court actions brought against Charles Hill and Walter Fairefield in 1666 and 1682, respectively, illustrate how much the court respected a master's access to a servant's labor and wanted to preserve it. Charles Hill was brought before the court for striking and wounding the

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<sup>169</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 2, 238; Rebecca Tannenbaum, *Healers Calling: Women and Medicine in Early New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 98.

<sup>170</sup> "Complaint Against John Pierce, Constable," September 1660, Essex Co. Crt Papers, WPA Trans. Vol. 6: 49-1, 2; 50-2/3; Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 2, 237-8.

<sup>171</sup> Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 116.

servant of Nicholas Maning. Hill was seen walking away from the servant, who lay bleeding in the lane. As a result, Hill was sentenced to a whipping, ordered to pay a fine to the injured servant, and sentenced to pay the costs of medical treatment. He was also ordered to reimburse Maning for the servant's lost labor.<sup>172</sup> Similarly, when Thomas Fiske brought a case against Walter Fairefield in the Essex County Court, for abusing and striking his servant, whereby he was unable to perform his work, the court found for Fiske. After the court discovered that the servant had lied regarding the weapon used and had exaggerated about the extent of his injuries, the sentence was repealed. Fairefield, the accused abuser, was only reimbursed for costs, however.<sup>173</sup>

The Essex County Court upheld a mistresses' right to a servant's labor, as well as her authority to dispense correction in the form of physical violence, even through a proxy. Elizabeth Woodbery's presentment for striking the Hubbards' maid, Elisabeth, in 1664 illustrates both tendencies. Woodbery admitted that she struck the servant, but claimed she was acting in the place of her cousin, Goody Hubbard. The Hubbards defended her by arguing that they had asked Woodbery to supervise Elisabeth in their absence, knowing the servant was untrustworthy. She was "bad, unruly, sulen, careless and destructive & disobedient...Haveing occasion to be from home, & not daring to leave such an one with or childe and house alone wee desired the aforesed Eliz Woodbery...to be over her & in place of vs."<sup>174</sup> They added that Woodbery "did noe more then she had or authority for & that her mistresse if prsent would have don the same." They expressed confusion about why the case had reached the court at all. "We do much wonder that there should be so much made of it, when as we conceive, had it been a breach of law for or

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<sup>172</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 3, 378.

<sup>173</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 8, 411.

<sup>174</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 3, 224; Essex Co. Crt Papers, WPA Trans. Vol. 10: 79, 81-1.

couzin to have strook her, wch it is not, she doeing of it by or power & representing us.”<sup>175</sup> The Hubbards believed that they had full power to correct their servant as they saw fit, and that it was the place of Goody Hubbard, or someone acting in her stead, to dispense the punishment.

### ***Conclusion***

The examples of household violence presented above—between spouses, against children, directed at neighbors, and used against servants—illustrate the pervasive violence that, as it went almost unquestioned, also seeped into the very foundations of colonial New England life. An examination of Essex County Court records brings into focus an important seventeenth-century reality, and one that historians have been far too apt to overlook: both men and women encountered and perpetuated a culture of household violence that extended from cradle to grave. Like men, women both experienced violence and committed acts of violence for their own ends. For women, those ends were consistently centered on maintaining familial order or preserving family property, safety, or status. Because this violence was woven into the social and cultural fabric of English settlers in early Massachusetts, it became a pervasive force that dictated the limits of acceptable human interaction.

Neither the colonial courts, nor Puritan authorities, effectively counteracted, or even necessarily contradicted, these ideas about the utility of violence. Instead, as Essex County Court records demonstrate, they tended to reinforce the notion that physical violence itself was usually unremarkable and part of the normal functioning of a marriage, household, and community. This is surprising, especially for women, given the Puritan lip service against domestic violence that appears in the Body of Liberties as well as ministers’ strictures on feminine obedience. While some forms of female violence were met with disapproval—those that involved extremely

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<sup>175</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 3, 225; Essex Co. Crt Papers, WPA Trans. Vol. 10: 81-1.

disruptive, public behavior, for instance—the courts’ treatment of many instances of household violence reveals that physical violence by women does not appear to have been disapproved of generally. Indeed, physical violence by women within reasonable bounds appeared to be relatively unimportant, especially when compared with concerns about their sexual and speech offenses. While concerns about female violence varied significantly according to the context in which that violence took place, alarm about female adultery, blasphemy and defamation was more uniformly expressed.

As explored in this chapter, women’s ability to use violent means to try and ensure the proper functioning of their households was relatively unhindered by Massachusetts authorities throughout the seventeenth-century. As we will see in the following chapters, however, authorities’ willingness to tolerate women’s violent behavior on behalf of the interests of their families or kin groups depended, in large part, on whether those interests forwarded the needs of society as a whole. The motivations behind a range of women’s violent actions may have remained largely the same, but how the community and authorities interpreted those actions differed greatly.

## Chapter 2 - From “That wicked house”: Women and Infanticide

In the spring and summer of 1691, the Emerson family of Haverhill, Massachusetts was the object of unwanted public scrutiny. The Court of Assistants had called Michael and Hannah Emerson before them to answer questions regarding their daughter, Elizabeth’s, alleged infanticide of her newborn twins. Unmarried Elizabeth was accused of “being instigated by ye Devil” to “feloniously kill & murder” her bastard infants, sewing up their bodies in a “small Bagg or cloath” and concealing them “in sd Emmersons house.”<sup>1</sup> When examining her parents, the court questioner asked with incredulity how neither her father nor mother was aware that their daughter was pregnant, that she had given birth, or killed her children. “Did you not know or suspect That yor daughter Eliza was at times w Child?” the court demanded of her mother. “Did you know nothing at the time or afterward of her delivery?” the examiner probed her father. The Emersons denied any knowledge of the incident. Elizabeth’s responses were the same. She had kept her pregnancy from her family, given birth silently and without their knowledge, and concealed the death of her infants on her own.<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth continued to insist on her family’s innocence until the end of her life on a Boston scaffold on June 8, 1693.<sup>3</sup>

Elizabeth and her family had received unwanted attention before, during her trial for fornication in 1686. Elizabeth had given birth to an illegitimate daughter that year. Her parents had been brought before the court, along with Elizabeth’s older sister, to testify concerning her

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<sup>1</sup> “Case of Elizabeth Emmerson,” Indictment, September 25, 1691, Massachusetts Archives, Suffolk Files Volume 31, case 2636.

<sup>2</sup> “Examination of Hannah, the wife of Michael Emerson,” May 11, 1691, MA Archives Suffolk Files 31: 2636; “Examination of Michael Emerson,” May 11, 1691, MA Archives Suffolk Files 31: 2636; “Examination of Elizabeth Emerson,” May 11, 1691, MA Archives Suffolk Files 31: 2636; “Examination of Elizabeth Emerson #2,” September 25, 1691, MA Archives Suffolk Files 31: 2636.

<sup>3</sup> “June 8, 1693. Elizabeth Emerson was executed...for the murder of [her] children.” MA Archive, Felt Collection, Vol. 40: 279.

alleged misdeeds.<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth claimed that her pregnancy was the result of a rape by their neighbor Timothy Swan. The community was skeptical. During her travail, several neighbor women called Elizabeth's account of the attack into question. Elizabeth claimed that she could not scream or fight "because his arm was cross her throat" and did not spread word of the attack because "She did think it would be a disgrace to her." The neighbor women found Elizabeth's answers unconvincing.<sup>5</sup> So did the Essex County Court, which failed to charge Swan for rape, but fined Elizabeth for fornication.<sup>6</sup> Even Elizabeth's claims of rape had failed to preserve her or her family from the public shame of sexual indiscretion and the stain of immorality. During the trial, the taint of Elizabeth's deed was already upon her and her household. When denying that his son was the father of Elizabeth's illegitimate child, Robert Swan Sr. also claimed it was unlikely that Timothy was the father because he would never have associated with Elizabeth or gone "into that wicked house"<sup>7</sup>

In Puritan New England female worth was measured in large part by a woman's reputation; it determined her status and her prospects, but it was tenuous to preserve. Pursuing pleasure, such as socializing outside of the home to the neglect of domestic duties, could draw community notice and censure. The consequences of sexual immorality for women could be dire. Colonial courts and communities imposed more severe punishments on women than their male

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<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth's sister, Hannah Dustin, would become a colonial celebrity after being captured by Abenaki Indians in 1697. Dustin escaped by leading two of her fellow captives to join her in killing, and scalping, ten of their sleeping Indian captors with tomahawks. After her return to Haverhill, Dustin's husband brought the scalps before the General Court to collect a bounty. Cotton Mather, *Humiliations Follow'd with Deliverances* (Boston: Printed by B. Green, 1697); Mather, "A Notable Exploit; Wherein Dux Femina Facti," in *Decennium Luctuosum*; Mather, "A Notable Exploit; Dux Femina Facti" in *Magnalia Christi Americana* (London, 1702).

<sup>5</sup> "Deposition of Johanah Hasteline, Johanah Corlis, Lidia Lad & Mary Neff," April 19, 1686, Essex County Court Papers, Salem, Massachusetts, Vol. 46:131.

<sup>6</sup> Records of the Court of Common Pleas, Essex County, MA Archives, microfilm reel #877465, 84; There is no record that Swan was similarly fined, although he was required to provide maintenance for the child, which he consistently failed to do. Essex Co. Quarterly Court File Papers, MA Judicial Archives, Vol. 47:3-4, 104.

<sup>7</sup> George Francis Dow, ed., *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex Co., Massachusetts, Vol. 9* (Salem, 1911-21), 603.



partners, and out-of-wedlock pregnancies provided inescapable evidence of a woman's guilt. A woman could salvage her reputation if she married her partner, but those who could not had almost no hope of restoring their place in society.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, women's families and households also faced public shame, humiliation, and contempt from their communities.<sup>9</sup> The consequences of a loss of reputation, including the chance to make advantageous alliances, could impact the entire household. For some women in this environment, hiding the evidence of their ruin through infanticide can be viewed as a terrible, but pragmatic, choice. When Elizabeth Emerson murdered her newborn twins, she was, of course, attempting to hide evidence of her sexual indiscretion for her own purposes. As with most women, she would have preferred to remain in dignified anonymity. Elizabeth also knew, however, the consequences of her pregnancy for her

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<sup>8</sup> "Puritan religious and gender ideology guaranteed that the consequences of an illegitimate fornication conviction were graver for women in Massachusetts than in other regions." Else Hambleton, *Daughters of Eve: Pregnant Brides and Unwed Mothers in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts* (New York: Routledge, 2004), xv; Couples who married following out-of-wedlock sex faced less opprobrium and were reintegrated into the community following a series of humiliating shame rituals. Courts released couples who had sex prior to marriage with minor punishments. Laura Henigman, *Coming into Communion: Pastoral Dialogues in Colonial New England* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 57; See also Else Hambleton, *Daughters of Eve: Pregnant Brides and Unwed Mothers in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts* (New York: Routledge, 2004), xv; An amendment to the Massachusetts Bay Colony fornication law in 1668 excluded men from prosecution for fornication in favor of an assignment of paternity. Hambleton, *Daughters of Eve*, xiv; This "sexual double standard" in treatment of men and women worsened in eighteenth-century New England. See Nina Dayton, "Taking the Trade: Abortion and Gender Relations in Eighteenth-Century New England Village," in Kathleen Kennedy and Sharon Rena Ullman, ed., *Sexual Borderlands: Constructing an American Sexual Past* (Ohio State University Press, 2003), 52; See also Dorothy A. Mays, *Women in Early America: Struggle Survival and Freedom in a New World* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 331.

<sup>9</sup> Hambleton argues that a woman "knew that an illegitimate pregnancy would mean public shame, financial and/corporal punishment and reduced marriage opportunities" and that "a fornication prosecution impacted the sexual reputation of all family members." Hambleton, *Daughters of Eve*, 58, 113; I have found this not only in the Elizabeth Emerson case, but also in other cases I have come across in Massachusetts court records from the seventeenth century. The amount of responsibility placed on households for their daughters' and female servants' acts of immorality is something that I will explore further in this chapter; Many of the women brought to court for sexual offenses were servants, but that did not necessarily mean that they did not have families in the area. Hambleton states, "Putting out adolescent children for employment in the houses of acquaintances and hiring unrelated adolescents to serve in one's own house in return were common in seventeenth-century New England. An analysis of the financial status of female fornication defendants in Essex indicates that while some female servants were poor, or orphaned, or both, or were recent immigrants, other women with documented work histories had prosperous parents living in the same community." Hambleton, *Daughters of Eve*, 63; Approximately one half of the women who bore illegitimate children came from families with middling status or higher. Hambleton, *Daughters of Eve*, 24.

family and tried to spare them further public shame. Paradoxically, women like Elizabeth broke Puritan mandates against concealment and taking life in order to try and ensure that they and their households would remain a part of that society, their status unremarkable.

Infanticide was not unique to the women of New England, although the act seems to have been more fraught with meaning and more heavily prosecuted in those Puritan-dominated colonies. Englishwomen in the mother country appeared in court for committing infanticide, prompted by a lack of reliable contraceptive methods, poverty, and fear of public disgrace for unwanted pregnancies.<sup>10</sup> Indictments and convictions for the crime increased dramatically in England after 1624 when a new law made the concealment of the death of an illegitimate child sufficient evidence for convicting the mother of infanticide.<sup>11</sup> This law resolved problems with proving whether a child had been born dead or died of neglect, violence, or natural causes. The statute presumed that a woman's child was born alive. If she maintained that the infant was stillborn, it was her responsibility to prove it "by One witness at least."<sup>12</sup>

For most of the seventeenth-century, New England courts did not need a formal statute to prosecute and execute women for infanticide without solid evidence of their guilt. The 1624 English concealment standard was not formally adopted into colonial legal codes until the end of the seventeenth century, but it served as the standard of evidence for colonial courts from the

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Charles Hoffer and N.E.H. Null, *Murdering Mothers: Infanticide in England and New England, 1558-1803* (New York: New York University Press, 1981), 13.

<sup>11</sup> 21 James I, c. 27 (1624); The law read: "That if any Woman be Delivered of any Issue of her Body, Male or Female, which if it were born Alive, should by Law be a Bastard; and that they endeavour privately, either by Drowning or secret Burying thereof, or any other way; either by herself or the procuring of others so to conceal the Death thereof, that it may not come to light, whether it were born Alive or not, but be concealed: In every such case the Mother so Offending, shall suffer Death, as in case of Murder. Except such Mother can make proof by One Witness at least, that the Child whose Death was by her so intended to be concealed, was born Dead." *The Charter Granted by Their Majesties King William and Queen Mary to the Inhabitants of the Province of Massachusetts-Bay in New-England* (1691)(Boston: Printed by S. Kneeland, 1759), Chapter 4, pg. 67; No mention of the father or a father who committed infanticide is included in the law.

<sup>12</sup> 21 James I, c. 27 (1624); G.S. Rowe and Jack D. Marietta, "Personal Violence in a 'Peaceable Kingdom': Pennsylvania, 1682-1801," in *Over the Threshold: Intimate Violence in Early America*, ed. Christine Daniels and Michael Kennedy (New York: Routledge, 1999), 42.

beginning. From 1646, the first recorded infanticide case in New England, juries convicted women for infanticide in the same proportion as English juries after 1624. During the seventeenth century, only 32 women in New England were charged with infanticide, but in a region with a low homicide rate, this number takes on a greater significance. Four out of every 17 homicide cases were for the crime and most women were convicted and executed. Puritans' harsh treatment of infanticide cases deviated from their general tendency toward magisterial discretion and leniency in felony cases, compared to the rigid "bloody code" of English common law.<sup>13</sup> This response reflected Puritans' particular concerns about the crime as a signal of both sexual wantonness and alienation from the community.<sup>14</sup> The Puritan leadership warned that women who hid their illicit acts and concealed the consequences of those unions, had, essentially, excommunicated themselves.<sup>15</sup> Cotton Mather called these women "forlorn Outcasts" who "stood just upon the Edges" of society and faced an "awful Eternity."<sup>16</sup>

Historians have followed ministers' and magistrates' lead in defining infanticide as a profound separation from the community. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich describes infanticide as a type of "anti-social violence," along with other deadly acts like murder. Infanticide, she argues, "signaled a [woman's] rejection of the entire social and human order" in Puritan New England. Similarly, G.S. Rowe in his study of infanticide in early Pennsylvania argues that it was a crime

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<sup>13</sup> John Acevedo, "Harsh Mercy: Criminal Law in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts Bay" (Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2013), 17-22.

<sup>14</sup> Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers*, 49; The first person ever convicted for infanticide in New England was Mary Martin, age 22. She was working as a servant in Boston when she became pregnant, concealed her condition, and murdered her newborn infant. She was executed on March 18, 1647 on the Boston gallows. Daniel Allen Hearn, *Legal Executions in New England, 1623-1960* (McFarland and Co: Jefferson, NC, 1999), 13; While the indictment rate for infanticide in the Chesapeake was higher than in New England, the conviction rates were much lower in the South. John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 34.

<sup>15</sup> Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers*, 33, 49; Laura Henigman, *Coming into Communion: Pastoral Dialogues in Colonial New England* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 59.

<sup>16</sup> Cotton Mather, *Warnings from the Dead* (Boston, 1693), 69.

committed “against nature and reason” and was used to not only cover up of sexual misconduct, but also as a “denial” of the social order. Peter Hoffer and N.E.H. Hull assert that Puritans’ focus on prosecuting infanticide sprung, at least in part, from their concerns about the crime as “the disobedience of women to community standards.” The performance of public execution sermons for women who committed infanticide, and last-minute salvation for the condemned, as Sharon Harris argues, offered a means of bringing a wayward woman back into societies’ fold after her dramatic rejection of the community. Lyle Koehler takes the argument that infanticide was a means through which women rejected the social order to the extreme, stating that women who committed infanticide in colonial New England “were implicitly rejecting one central characteristic of the feminine ideal” in New England society, and their place within it.<sup>17</sup>

Certainly conviction for infanticide placed a woman outside the social order, by way of the noose, but depicting infanticide as inherently anti-social or as a rejection of the community misses the profoundly “social” aspects of such a crime, especially in the unique environment of colonial New England. I argue that infanticide itself—while obviously a deplorable deviation from acceptable standards of behavior by any measure—was not inherently anti-social. When we take evidence into account that indicates women committed infanticide in order to preserve their reputations, and thus remain a part of society, it becomes increasingly difficult to classify the crime as anti-social. During a period in colonial New England in which sexual morality was

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<sup>17</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England 1650-1750* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 186, 196; Rowe, “Infanticide, Its Judicial Resolution, and Criminal Code Revision in Early Pennsylvania,” *American Philosophical Society* 135, no. 2 (Jun 1991), 200; Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers*, 49; Lyle Koehler, *A Search for Power: The “Weaker Sex” in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Urbana, Ill., 1980), 52-54, 55, 56, 59-60; Sharon M. Harris, *Executing Race: Early American Women’s Narratives of Race, Society, and the Law* (Ohio State University Press, 2005), 32-36; David B. Baker also argues that infanticide was an “affront to social order” in Puritan New England. Women who killed their children were seen as “unmanageable women who pandered to the sexual debauchery of Satan that in turn brought about social disruption.” See Baker, *Women and Capital Punishment in the United States: An Analytical History* (McFarland, 2015), 91.

policed and prosecuted with unprecedented intensity, women who committed infanticide sought to remain part of the very social order that condemned them.

This chapter offers a new interpretation of why colonial Englishwomen committed infanticide, further complicating categories of “social” vs. “anti-social” violence for colonial women. In doing so, it examines the profound role that both household reputation and practical circumstances played in these women’s crimes. This is not intended to normalize infanticide in Puritan New England. It is impossible to know how many instances of infanticide were successfully concealed, but by all accounts it was universally denounced. The public portrayed women accused of infanticide as disgraced perpetrators of unimaginable acts. Acknowledging that infanticides did occur, however, and why, reveals the extent to which violence infused even the most personal aspects of women’s lives. By examining the impact of fornication, adultery, and bastardy prosecutions on women and their households, as well as evidence from infanticide cases, we can also see that women in seventeenth-century Massachusetts committed infanticide as part of a conservative desire to avoid disgrace and social rejection for themselves and their households. My research also reveals that women rarely acted alone. Rather, other members of their households either assisted them directly or signaled their tacit approval by choosing to look the other way.

When examined in the context of other forms of violence perpetrated by women in seventeenth century Massachusetts—most of which, I argue, were aimed at preserving family property, safety, or status—infanticide is both a marked departure from the norm, as well as an extreme example of it. While violence alone, I argue, was not aberrant for women, such deadly violence by women was uncommon. On the surface, such a crime also signaled the destruction of the family order. It was anti-maternal violence at the expense of not only the family, but all

humankind, directed at its most vulnerable members. For Puritans, as Calvinists, this would seem to fulfill the promise of the worst of human nature: inherent selfishness and depravity allowed to flourish uncontrolled.<sup>18</sup> However, in those instances in which the reputation and standing of an entire household or family seemed at stake, infanticide begins to resemble other forms of female violence during this period. It could be interpreted as an extreme, terrible, and desperate sacrifice for the continued respectability and prosperity of those with whom a woman lived and worked and loved.

### *The Costs of Sexual Misbehavior*

The communal nature of life in colonial New England meant that personal privacy within a household was almost nonexistent.<sup>19</sup> It is unlikely that other members of a household would fail to notice a pregnant woman within its walls. It would have been more possible to conceal an unwanted pregnancy from the community at large in seventeenth-century Massachusetts than within an individual household, but avoiding the neighbors' watchful eye would have been a significant challenge. As discussed in Chapter One, while everyday acts of violence frequently went unnoticed and unchallenged, the same was not true for sexual misbehavior. Ordinary inhabitants of Puritan communities, as well as political and religious leaders, were on the lookout for out-of-wedlock pregnancies or even overlong dalliances between unmarried people of the community.<sup>20</sup> The Essex County Court focused significant attention on prosecuting sexual

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<sup>18</sup> Abram Van Engen, *Sympathetic Puritans: Calvinist Fellow Feeling in Early New England* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2015), 20; Martha Saxton, *Being Good: Women's Moral Values in Early America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 86.

<sup>19</sup> John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970/2000), 46-48.

<sup>20</sup> Abby Chandler, "At the Magistrate's Discretion: Sexual Crime and New England Law, 1636-1718" (Dissertation, University of Maine, 2008), 17; See also Helena Wall, *Fierce Communion: Family and Community in Early America* (State College, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990).

misconduct cases. Between 1636 and 1718, the court presided over 818 fornication cases alone, and devoted particular time to cases that involved extramarital pregnancy.<sup>21</sup>

Some historians have argued that the high number of cases involving sexual misbehavior indicates that such cases were routine affairs, conducted in rote forms and rarely the focus of the real energy of the colonial courts or communities.<sup>22</sup> On the contrary, as Else Hambleton argues, such fornication convictions and judicial assignments of child support “brought public awareness to private sexual behaviors the community considered shameful.” She continues, “Puritans thought of themselves as parts of a larger, Godly, community. The exposure of sexual activity that violated community standards...by a society that expected conformance to community values, was a source of great shame and experience to be avoided.”<sup>23</sup> Courts described sexual misdeeds in their records using terms like “incontinence” and “filthiness.”<sup>24</sup> Testimony from community members reflects the same views on extramarital sex. When testifying at a fornication trial in 1674, well-regarded and elderly Goodwife Reading remarked that anyone who engaged in sexual activity outside of marriage were “whoremongers and adulterers God would judge.”<sup>25</sup> Certainly Hester Jackson was not alone in feeling “undone” after an illicit sexual encounter. God had “left her to temptation” and her shame was severe.<sup>26</sup>

Likewise, Puritan ministers had strong words for those who would misbehave, warning of the consequences not only for themselves, but also those associated with them. Cotton Mather

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<sup>21</sup> George Francis Dow, ed., *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex Co., Massachusetts*, Vols. 1-9 (Salem, 1911-21).

<sup>22</sup> Chandler, “At the Magistrate’s Discretion,” 34; Roger Thompson, *Sex in Middlesex: Popular Mores in a Massachusetts County, 1649-1699* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1986).

<sup>23</sup> Hambleton, *Daughters of Eve*, 91.

<sup>24</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 1-9; Records of the Essex County Court, MA Archives; Records of the General Sessions of the Peace, MA Archives.

<sup>25</sup> Records of the Essex County Court, MA Archives, File Record 22-68-3.

<sup>26</sup> “Testimony of Hester Jackson,” 1662, Suffolk County Quarterly Court, Supreme Judicial Court, Division of Archives and Records Preservation.

called sex outside of marriage “an Odious Fornication, which is a further Step, of that Uncleaness whereunto the Raging Lusts of men do carry them.” He warned that those “Unwedded Persons” who chose to “prostitute themselves” with the sins of the flesh, “Shall not Inherit the Kingdom.”<sup>27</sup> Increase Mather, preaching on the topic of fornication, railed against the devastation that would be wrought by such deeds on those who committed them as well as their family members. According to Samuel Sewall’s recollections, Mather had shown that even respectable people “might fall into such scandalous Sins as might bring temporal Wrath and ruin upon themselves and upon their posterity.” The “temporal wrath and ruin” Sewall mentioned was why both men and women were so anxious to avoid fornication prosecutions. The inherent shame affected not only the person involved and those immediately around them, but also their descendants.<sup>28</sup> When Cotton Mather’s own son, Increase, was accused of getting a “Harlot big with Bastard,” Mather lamented his child’s misstep. “Oh! Dreadful Case! Oh, sorrow beyond any that I have met withal! What shall I do not for the, foolish Youth! What for my afflicted and abased Family?” Puritan Massachusetts was a society based on a culture of honor and shame. It mattered deeply what the neighbors thought.<sup>29</sup>

This image of colonial New England runs counter to scholarship that has attempted to downplay the importance of sexual misbehavior in Puritan communities. Roger Thompson, for instance, argues that seventeenth-century Massachusetts fostered a culture that was relatively tolerant of adolescent sexual misadventures. In Middlesex County, Massachusetts, Thompson describes a youth culture, “which took an earthy interest in sexual matters and spurned models of

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<sup>27</sup> Mather, *Warnings*, 42.

<sup>28</sup> Sewall, Samuel, *The Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674-1729*, M. Halsey Thomas, ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), 155.

<sup>29</sup> Kenneth Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 308.



obedience, reverence and continence advertised by their elders.”<sup>30</sup> Thompson is able to make this point because he does not take into account that women shouldered greater blame and punishment in the aftermath of unmarried sexual acts, or that most sexual encounters occurred in situations of dramatic power imbalances. Most sex that resulted in unwanted pregnancies was not between consenting teenagers or those who had previously arranged to marry, but between men and women of different social and economic status.<sup>31</sup> While scholars have shown that premarital pregnancy became more common throughout the seventeenth century, and courts were increasingly tolerant toward couples with “early births,” the same did not hold true for single women convicted of engaging in extramarital sex. As punishments for premarital pregnancy gradually disappeared, courts continued to prosecute single women for fornication in disproportionate numbers.<sup>32</sup> For women unable to marry their partners, there is little evidence of a sexually tolerant culture in seventeenth-century New England.<sup>33</sup>

Extramarital sexual contact in colonial New England communities was treated as a serious issue and those who committed it lived with a very rational fear of discovery. Colonial courts imposed punishments of public shame and humiliation on those found guilty of sexual crimes. Abby Chandler has argued that by “taking part in the community ritual of the sexual

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<sup>30</sup> Thompson, *Sex in Middlesex*, 104.

<sup>31</sup> Hambleton, *Daughters of Eve*, 70; See Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

<sup>32</sup> Couples who married following out-of-wedlock sex faced less opprobrium and were reintegrated into the community following a series of humiliating shame rituals. Courts released couples who had sex prior to marriage with minor punishments. Henigman, *Coming into Communion*, 57. For instance, Thomas Scot and his wife, for fornication before marriage, were ordered “to stand an hore...in the market place, with each of them a paper with great letters on their hatts.” John Noble, *Criminal Trials in the Court of Assistants and Superior Court of Judicature, 1630-1700* (Cambridge, Mass: John Wilson and Son, 1897), 10; See also Daniel S. Scott and Michael S. Hindus, “Premarital Pregnancy in America 1640-1971: An Overview and Interpretation,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* v. 4 (Spring 1975): 554; Edward Elliot, *Power and the Pulpit in Puritan New England* (Princeton University Press, 2015), 36; Between 1650 and 1685, 55% of those charged with fornication were single women. Acevedo, “Harsh Mercy,” 199.

<sup>33</sup> Hambleton, *Daughters of Eve*, 70; See Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*.

crime trial, defendants were punished while serving as an example to other transgressors.”<sup>34</sup> For these punishments to serve as a deterrent to others, they needed to be both harsh and humiliating. For most of seventeenth-century, Massachusetts courts commonly sentenced those convicted of fornication to a public whipping. A whipping was ten stripes; a severe whipping, between fifteen and forty. Whippings were usually conducted in public, with the victim stripped to the waist and tied to a post located in front of the meetinghouse.<sup>35</sup> The central location, and exposure of the victim, was no accident. Magistrates sought to convey that such behavior was not acceptable and those who transgressed would be put forward as examples to the rest of the community. One can only imagine the spectacle of a lone figure, tied to the whipping post, back exposed, while fellow community members gathered to witness her brutal punishment and shame. Family members must have flinched with every jeer from the crowd and lash of the whip. Women bore the brunt of these punishments for sexual misdeeds. With pregnancy as undeniable evidence of sexual misbehavior, at least for single women, they could not escape punishment for their crimes.<sup>36</sup>

### ***The Shame of Fornication***

When Mary Dane of Ipswich, unmarried, sixteen, and pregnant, was convicted of fornication by the Essex County Court in 1654, she was sentenced to be publicly whipped. The fact that John Dane, Mary’s father, was one of the most respected men in the community and that Mary had no previous record of misbehavior, failed to preserve her from public punishment. At the same time, Jeffrey Sknelling, the man convicted of fornication with Mary, was only bound

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<sup>34</sup> Chandler, “At the Magistrate’s Discretion,” 38.

<sup>35</sup> Hambleton, *Daughters of Eve*, 163, n8; John Noble and John Cronin, *Records of the Court of Assistants of the Colony of the Massachusetts Bay, 1630-1692*, Vols. 1-3 (Boston: County of Suffolk, 1901-1928); Dow, Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. vols. 1-9; The court of Massachusetts punished fornication more severely than any court in England, routinely inflicting corporal punishment or high fines. Acevedo, “Harsh Mercy,” 49.

<sup>36</sup> Chandler, “At the Magistrate’s Discretion,” 38; Hambleton, *Daughters of Eve*, xiii, xiv, xv; Acevedo remarks that “women were punished more often with physical punishments than men for fornication” between 1650-1683 in particular. Acevedo, “Harsh Mercy,” 197.

for good behavior. Sknelling's previous fine for "divers lies" and "suspicion of filthiness" in 1650 apparently did not influence the court's decision to release him without requiring a whipping, a fine, or child support payments.<sup>37</sup> The court did not explain its reasoning for such unequal treatment, but it was not unprecedented in seventeenth-century Massachusetts. Essex County Court judges had the discretion to release men accused of fornication--or named as fathers of their children by their female partners-- with lenient sentences, or no punishment whatsoever.<sup>38</sup> It appears a judge exercised that right of discretion in this case and laid the blame solely at Mary's feet.

In 1659, William Bingley and Elizabeth Pressye [Preston] of Newbury, both indentured servants in the Pearce household, were charged with fornication. In an unusual move, the judge ordered William to be whipped, probably due to his status as an indentured servant. He was also ordered to pay forty shillings to his master Pearce for Elizabeth's "laying in" from her resulting pregnancy. Elizabeth, on the other hand, was to face a more severe physical punishment than her partner. She was sentenced to be "severely whipped" and to remain in her indenture with her master until the court released her from service.<sup>39</sup>

When Mary Sheffield was brought before the Essex County Court twice for fornication, first in 1658 and again 1662, she was whipped both times, the second time, severely. During her first presentment, Mary refused to name the father of her child and faced punishment alone.<sup>40</sup> When she was brought back to court in 1662 for the same offense, she reluctantly named her then employer, Esaiiah Wood, as her partner in fornication and the father of her second child. She had been "enticed into the barn by him the night he lay with her," but afterwards when she

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<sup>37</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 1*, 337; Hambleton, *Daughters of Eve*, 24, 33.

<sup>38</sup> Hambleton, *Daughters of Eve*, 25.

<sup>39</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 2*, 151.

<sup>40</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 2*, 152.

became pregnant, he refused to own the child and face the “shame” of his sin in front of his wife and father. Even when witnesses in court attested to his general proclivity for “lascivious acts,” he declared all accusations false and refused to confess. While Mary faced a severe whipping for fornication, Wood was ordered only to pay child support for their son.<sup>41</sup>

An amendment to the Massachusetts Bay Colony fornication law in 1668 cemented the gender imbalances in punishment that had been growing in the colony. Whereas there had been a “slight overprosecution” of women for sexual crimes in the 1640s, by the 1660s punishment for fornication was heavily skewed toward women.<sup>42</sup> Concerns about financially supporting children born of wedlock led the court to exclude men from prosecution for fornication, in favor instead of an assignment of paternity. Paternity required a lesser standard of evidence to convict than fornication, just a woman naming the father of her child during her travail. The man accused could not be convicted of fornication, baring confession or witnesses, but would be considered the “reputed father” of the child and made to pay support. Assigning paternity in this manner helped ease the costs of supporting illegitimate children by colonial taxpayers, but also ensured that men would receive no public punishment for their crimes alongside their female partners. Even with this lesser standard of evidence, however, men would sometimes walk away from fornication cases with no repercussions.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to corporal punishment, part of the shaming ritual for women charged in fornication cases involved public name-calling by colonial courts. Criminal court judges shamed women convicted of fornication as a matter of public record and a moral lesson to the

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<sup>41</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 2*, 372-3.

<sup>42</sup> Acevedo, “Harsh Mercy,” 155, 198, 199.

<sup>43</sup> Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers*; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 149; Chandler, “At the Magistrate’s Discretion,” 58.

community. When Alice Williams, the daughter of a gentleman, was facing charges for fornication in 1643, the court referred to her as a “slutt” before imposing a fine and sentencing her to be whipped. Edward Flint, the father of her child and a married man, was fined.<sup>44</sup> Judges and juries also openly discussed the sexual history of female fornication defendants. In December 1710, for example, Elizabeth Dunwell was given “ten stripes on the naked back” for having a third bastard child. She named the father, but because no witness confirmed the charge, the reputed father was dismissed without punishment. During sentencing, the court noted “that this is the third bastard child which she hath had and so become a common strumpet or little better.”<sup>45</sup> This type of public reprimand and punishment was particularly powerful in the culture of early New England, where speech, language, and reputation were immensely important.<sup>46</sup> Denigrating those who transgressed was designed to reinforce respect for community values and domestic norms, thus promoting social cohesion.<sup>47</sup>

These type of punishments, however, were not necessary to reinforce community values against extramarital sex, which were well entrenched during this period.<sup>48</sup> At the same time, it seems unlikely that those who were willing to engage in sexual misadventures would be dissuaded from doing so because of these punishments. This is particularly true because men, who usually acted as sexual aggressors, were also not the ones to bear the brunt of punishment or shame.

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<sup>44</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 1*, 71; Noble and Cronin, *Records of Court of Assistants*, v. 2, 137.

<sup>45</sup> Paul Donald Marsella, “The Trial and Execution of Elizabeth Atwood in 1720,” *Sextant* VII, no. 2 (1997): 9-10.

<sup>46</sup> See Jane Kamensky, *Governing the Tongue: The Politics of Speech in Early New England* (New York: Oxford, 1999).

<sup>47</sup> Marsella, “Trial and Execution of Elizabeth Atwood,” 10.

<sup>48</sup> Hoffer and Hull summarize this point well in *Murdering Mothers*: “...the Puritans in England contributed to a flood of legislation controlling sexual conduct. From the pulpit, Puritan minsters in England thundered against the uncleanness of the wanton...In Massachusetts poet Anne Bradstreet held these sins at bay in her dialogue between ‘The Flesh and the Spirit’.” Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers*, 51; For more on Anne Bradstreet’s poetry, see Harrison T. Meserole, ed., *American Poetry of the Seventeenth Century* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1968), 21.

What these punishments succeeded in doing was to encourage women to conceal their unwanted pregnancies and to dispose of the evidence through infanticide. Women had far more to lose and most were left with few options.<sup>49</sup> Certainly, some women were resourceful and insubordinate enough to find a way to deal with the problem of an unwanted pregnancy through abortifacients or forcing or bribing her partner to marry her in the aftermath. Those without resources at their disposal faced a terrible dilemma.<sup>50</sup> They could bear bastard children, face their punishment and shame and try to move on with their lives. They must have known that their names would be tarnished in the eyes of their communities and their households would be the subject of gossip and speculation.

During her slow march to the gallows in 1701, Newbury woman Esther Rogers confessed her reasons for twice committing infanticide. She had concealed her pregnancies and births to avoid the public stigma of illegitimacy. Describing her first pregnancy, she states, “After I perceived I was with Child, I meditated how to prevent coming to Publick Shame.” In the absence of other viable alternatives, Esther fell victim to “Satan presently setting in with his Temptation,” and “resolved to Murder the Child.” She gave birth to a child in the upstairs room of her master’s home and “stopt the breath of it” before hiding it. The “Darkness of the Night following” allowed for a “Private Burial in the Garden.”<sup>51</sup> A year later, she fell again into that “horrible Pit” of “Carnal Pollution.” This time, she delivered her unwanted child outside by a

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<sup>49</sup> Thompson cites cases in which unmarried women attempted to escape detection or prosecution by using supposed abortifacients (such as herb savin); by flight to another jurisdiction; by duping an innocent man into a hasty marriage, or finding another sexual partner to whom the child might be charged; or by forcing the father into a private support arrangement. Roger Thompson, *Sex in Middlesex*; None of these options, however, were very feasible in colonial New England, especially for women without financial means. Some women, like Sarah Smith, attempted to end their pregnancies, but with no assured method for doing so, sometimes failed in the attempt. Daniel E. Williams, *Pillars of Salt: An Anthology of Early American Criminal Narratives* (Madison: Madison House Publications, 1993), 88.

<sup>50</sup> Judith S. Graham, *Puritan Family Life: The Diary of Samuel Sewall* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 56.

<sup>51</sup> John Rogers, *Death the Certain Wages of Sin* (Boston: G. Green and J. Allen for Samuel Philips, 1701), 122.

pond, “covered it over with Dirt and Snow” and returned to the house before her family would notice her absence. This time, however, her growing belly had aroused community members’ suspicions. Several neighbors followed her tracks in the snow the following day and discovered the dead infant.<sup>52</sup>

Esther emphasized in her narrative that “not a person living” in her master’s house was aware of what she had done on either occasion.<sup>53</sup> Born in Kittery, Maine, she was apprenticed to the well-respected and God-fearing Woodbridge family of Newbury when she was thirteen. The Woodbridges had treated Esther as a member of the family, gave her a Christian education, taught her to read, and schooled her in John Cotton’s catechism *Spiritual Milk for Babes*.<sup>54</sup> In her “Declaration and Confession,” she describes the Woodbridge house as a place of stability and godly living, and it stands to reason that she sought to conceal her pregnancies not only for her own reputation, but also to avoid scandal for the household as well. The fact that the father of both of her illegitimate children was a “Negro man belonging to that House” probably added extra incentive to hide evidence of the interracial affair. After the death of her first child, she was haunted by “Awakening, Frights, and Convictions,” and, fearing she would fall into sin again, she left the Woodbridge house several times to spare herself and the family further risk of shame.<sup>55</sup> In his sermon given before her execution, John Rogers made clear the stain that had fallen on Esther and those with whom she associated. “Can a man touch Pitch, and not be defiled forth with?” he demanded from the pulpit. The Woodbridges had failed to maintain a godly household, and thus allowed sin to darken their home.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Rogers, *Wages of Sin*, 124; Allen Hearn, *Legal Executions in New England: A Comprehensive Reference, 1623-1960* (Jefferson, N.C.: MacFarland & Co., 1999), 107.

<sup>53</sup> Rogers, *Wages of Sin*, 123.

<sup>54</sup> Rogers, *Wages of Sin*, 121; Joseph Woodbridge appears in town records for Newbury as a prominent citizen, at least according to his seat in the meetinghouse. Henigman, *Coming into Communion*, 49.

<sup>55</sup> Rogers, *Wages of Sin*, 123.

<sup>56</sup> Rogers, *Wages of Sin*, 98.

## *The Price of Adultery*

Public punishments for adultery were even more dramatic and shaming than those for fornication. Adultery, defined as sex with a married woman (the marital status of the man in question was not relevant to the crime), struck at the heart of Puritan communities by disrupting households and family dynamics. By definition, adulteries had to have at least one female culprit, making a far higher proportion of female to male defendants (1 to 1) than in all but two other crimes: witchcraft and infanticide. A misdemeanor in England, adultery was a capital offense under Massachusetts and Connecticut legal codes, technically punishable by execution.<sup>57</sup> Although only one couple was actually executed for adultery in colonial New England—juries usually tailored their findings to “suspicion of adultery” or “lying together” to avoid dispensing the death penalty—the threat of death hung over those discovered committing the crime. Offenders were frequently sentenced to stand on the gallows with a “roape about the neck” to symbolize how close they had come to death.<sup>58</sup>

Standard punishments for adultery included elaborate public displays designed to shame the offenders. Suspected of adultery, in 1677 Darby Bryan was sentenced by the Court of Assistants to stand on the gallows “wth a roape about neck” and “then taken doune & tyed to a Carts Tayle...stripped from the Girdle vpwads on his naked body to be whipped thence to the prison wth thirty nine stripes well layd on.” Abigaile Johnson, in whose bed Darby Bryan had been discovered, was sentenced “in like manner...to suffer in all respects.”<sup>59</sup> Whipping “at a cart’s tail” involved being tied to the back of a cart, stripped to the waist, and flogged while

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<sup>57</sup> Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers*, 52; *The General Laws and Liberties of the Massachusetts Bay* (1648), 6.

<sup>58</sup> Only one couple was actually executed for adultery, however. James Brittain and Mary Latham were condemned to death for adultery in March 1643/4. N.E.H. Hull, *Female Felons: Women and Serious Crime in Colonial Massachusetts* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 31; Noble, *Criminal Trials*, 13.

<sup>59</sup> Noble and Cronin, *Records of Court of Assistants*, v. 1, 114, 115.



dragged through town, enabling everyone in the community to witness the sentence being carried out and the perpetrators' shame.<sup>60</sup> In 1683, Joshua Rice and Elizabeth Crockett were found guilty of "lasivious Gross & foule actions tending to Adultery" and given the same sentence, with the specification that the rope hung about their necks also be draped over the gallows.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, Thomas Davis of Charlestown, being found "not Guilty legally according to Indictment but found...Guilty of very suspitious acts leading to Adultery" was sentenced to stand on the gallows and to be whipped "at a cart's tail."<sup>62</sup>

Courts reserved their most condemnatory language for women found guilty of adultery. Elisabeth Broune, the wife of William Broune and Thomas Davis' partner in the adulterous activity, was given the same sentence he received, but was subjected to a special indictment for "Prostituting hir body...to Comitt Adultery." At least according to the Court of Assistants, both parties involved in adultery had failed to have "the feare of God" before their eyes, and both had been "Instigated by the divil," but Elizabeth had offered to her body to Thomas Davis, not the other way around.<sup>63</sup> When Philip Darland and Mary Knights were found guilty of "of vile filthy and abominably libidinous Actions," both were sentenced to be "Conveyed to ye place of execution & ther caused to stand on hower with a Rope about [the] neck Cast ouer the Gallowes" and to be "fastned to the Carts tayle & whipt seuerely." When Mary's sentence was read, however, the Jury made sure to include the word "whorish" in their verdict. The "Jury brought in their virdict as aboue in all Respects adding the word whorish to ye Actions," the court recorder specified.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 194

<sup>61</sup> Noble, *Criminal Trials*, 11; Noble and Cronin, *Records of Court of Assistants*, v. 1, 234, 240.

<sup>62</sup> Noble and Cronin, *Records of Court of Assistants*, v. 1, 70.

<sup>63</sup> Noble and Cronin, *Records of Court of Assistants*, v. 1, 71.

<sup>64</sup> Noble and Cronin, *Records of Court of Assistants*, v. 1, 252-3.

Community members also mobilized to police those suspected of extramarital sex, particularly adultery. Even in the rough maritime community of Marblehead, neighbors would not abide rumors of the Beales' sexual misadventures. Martha had been previously married, but the union had been annulled.<sup>65</sup> Twenty-two years after marrying William Beale, Martha's earlier marriage continued to plague the couple. A neighbor was forced to pay a fine and publicly apologize for defaming Martha by calling her "an adulteress" who "made the church cover for her roger...to the dishonor of God the church and court." Blame for Martha's supposed transgressions did not fall on her shoulders alone. Later that year, a group of townspeople wielding clubs attacked their home. The crowd taunted William, shouting, "come out, you cuckoldly cut: we are come to beat thee. Thou livest in adultery."<sup>66</sup> Similarly, when Sarah Roe of Ipswich was spotted being overly familiar with her neighbor, Joseph Leigh, while her husband was away at sea, at least thirty-five of their neighbors came forward to testify concerning their moral outrage. Both Joseph and Sarah were found guilty of "unlawful familiarity." Joseph was severely whipped and fined. Sarah was sent to the House of Correction for a month, and ordered to appear in the meetinghouse on lecture day bearing a sign, "for my baudish carriage."<sup>67</sup>

In January 1698, Sarah Smith of Deerfield faced a dilemma. After her husband, Martin, had been captured in an Indian raid three years previously, she had taken comfort in the arms of a neighbor, Joseph Colson. Sarah was technically still married because Martin's fate was uncertain.<sup>68</sup> As Sarah's relationship with Joseph progressed, her "Godly father in law" offered

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<sup>65</sup> Thomas Rowlandson was fined 10 shillings in 1648 for "marrying without being published three times" and his marriage to sixteen-year old Martha Bradstreet was annulled. Hambleton, *Daughters of Eve*, 115; Edgar J. McManus, *Law and Liberty in Early New England: Criminal Justice and Due Process, 1620-1692* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 142.

<sup>66</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 4, 269; Hollingsworth was a gentleman, and the court's prosecution of his wife demonstrates the seriousness with which the court took her accusations. Hambleton, *Daughters of Eve*, 115; Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 4, 282.

<sup>67</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v.5, 143-46.

<sup>68</sup> Hearn, *Legal Executions in New England*, 105.

her “continual Counsils and Warnings” to stop the affair, for the sake of herself as well as their family. It was her failure to heed this familial advice, as Cotton Mather recounts in his narrative of her story, that “laid the Foundation for her Destruction.” Sarah soon discovered she was pregnant with Joseph’s child. He offered her money to conceal the child and begged her not to name him as the father. Sarah had few options. She knew that having the child virtually guaranteed conviction for adultery. Given the consequences for such a crime—repeated severe whippings and public shaming on the gallows, let alone irreparable damage to her reputation in the community—Sarah chose instead to try and erase the evidence of her crime, first attempting to abort the pregnancy without success. Eventually, she gave birth to a baby alone, and “with intent to conceale her Lewdnesse,” strangled it, and attempted to conceal the body. Neighbors who knew she was “ill” later found the child and reported her to the authorities. Sarah was executed for infanticide later that year.<sup>69</sup>

In his execution sermon for Smith, titled *Warnings to the Unclean*, minister John Williams looked out on the Deerfield assembly and admonished his audience for their lack of vigilance throughout Smith’s affair and resulting pregnancy. “I would fain have clarity...I fear there are several [in this assembly] that have Murdered in their hearts, and some who have been guilty of interpretative Murder, for hiding and concealing the Uncleaness for which this poor Condemned One was guilty,” he thundered from the pulpit. Williams suggested that Sarah’s neighbors knew of her affair, and possibly even her pregnancy, and thus became complicit in the lie and passive accomplices in infanticide. Others, who failed to come forward after Sarah was no longer showing signs of pregnancy, were also responsible.<sup>70</sup> Sarah’s father-in-law, for one,

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<sup>69</sup> Cotton Mather, “Pillars of Salt” in *Pillars of Salt: An Anthology of Early American Criminal Narratives*, ed. Daniel E. Williams (Madison: Madison House Publications, 1993), 88.

<sup>70</sup> John Williams, *Warnings to the Unclean* (1699), 21.

was aware of her extramarital relationship and could not have been ignorant of her growing belly, or its sudden disappearance. Sarah herself admitted in an interrogation that she confided her pregnancy to her friend, Mary Lyes, who advised her to “conceale it.” For Williams, at least, the entire community was implicated in Smith’s deed. Ironically, the one party that Williams did not blame in his sermon was the actual father of Smith’s child, Joseph Colson. When Smith named Colson as the father, he denied any involvement. Without evidence or a confession there was little authorities could do, and Colson was not charged with any crime.<sup>71</sup>

In addition to the penalties described above, those convicted of adultery faced the additional possibility of banishment. Banishment, as the ultimate social exclusion, would not have been a pleasant prospect for men, but it would have been particularly difficult for women and damaging to the households of which they were an integral part.<sup>72</sup> Margaret Seale was sentenced to be severely whipped and banished upon pain of death for committing adultery in 1637.<sup>73</sup> A few years later, when Thomas Owen and Sarah Hale were brought before the Court of Assistants for having a relationship outside of her marriage, both were charged with “adulteros practises” and sentenced to “bee sent to the gallos wth a roape about his neck, & to sit upon the lather an houre the roapes end throwen over the gallos.” Following punishment, Owen was returned to prison. Sarah Hale, on the other hand, after being “censured for her miscarriage” and

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<sup>71</sup> Henigman, *Coming into Communion*, 74; Saxton, *Being Good*, 89.

<sup>72</sup> Nan Goodman, *Banished: Common Law and the Rhetoric of Social Exclusion in Early New England* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); This was at least until 1694 when a Massachusetts law removed penalties of banishment or death for adultery, in favor of time on the gallows, whipping and wearing of a letter. Carolyn B. Ramsey, “Sex and Social Order: The Selective Enforcement of Colonial American Adultery Laws in the English Context,” *Yale Journal of Law & The Humanities* 10, 1: 208, note 111; According to Ramsey, “Banishment solved an economic problem left unresolved by capital punishment for adultery: It removed two hungry mouths from the community.” Ramsey, “Sex and Social Order,” 225; It has been difficult to find evidence of what actually happened to these women after they were banished. One source mentions that Thomas Owen and Sarah Hale left together after he escaped from prison and spent some time on Noddle Island. See Zachariah Gardner Whitman, *History of the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company* (J.H. Eastburn, Printer 1842), 96; Margaret Seale and Ruth Reed seem to have disappeared from the historical record.

<sup>73</sup> Noble and Cronin, *Records of Court of Assistants*, v. 2, 66, 67, 70; Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, Vol. 1* (Boston: William White, 1853), 198.

punished was also banished.<sup>74</sup> When Ruth Reed returned from England in 1673 to her husband in Massachusetts after a four-year absence with a toddler, she was charged for the attempted imposition of an illegitimate child on her husband. She offended all by “most Impudently returning to these parts Imposing the said child on hir husband Wm Read.” The court made it clear that if she did not vacate the colony within two months, she would be forced to stand on a stoole in the market place on a lecture day with a sign reading “THVS I STAND FOR MY ADVLTEROS AND WHORISH CARRIAGE,” and whipped thirty-nine stripes.<sup>75</sup>

Ruth Briggs, a married woman, concealed evidence of her adultery by committing infanticide, and was executed for her crimes in 1668. Originally from Essex County, Massachusetts, Ruth was the eldest daughter of the troublesome but close-knit Pinion family of Lynn. Her parents’ discordant relationship had brought them before the Essex County court on several occasions, but the couple had remained together and raised five children.<sup>76</sup> Ruth married and had a daughter, but her first husband died just a few years later and she returned to her fathers’ household when they relocated to New Haven. Ruth remarried in 1665, to a Peter Briggs, but was convicted of adultery with a man from the local ironworks. As a result, the Connecticut Court of Assistants banished her from the colony. Ruth was found again in her father’s household a few years later. The court charged her father with harboring a public enemy, asking why “he entertained Ruth Brigs soe Contrary to the mind of the towne & of authority,” and ordered Ruth removed. In a show of mercy, the court delayed her ousting due to the cold winter weather.<sup>77</sup> Ruth, however, had since become pregnant again outside of her marriage. She

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<sup>74</sup> Noble and Cronin, *Records of Court of Assistants*, v. 2, 108.

<sup>75</sup> Noble and Cronin, *Records of Court of Assistants*, v. 1, 10.

<sup>76</sup> Mary Beth Norton documents the unruly Pinion family at the beginning of *Founding Mothers and Fathers*. Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 27-38.

<sup>77</sup> Franklin B. Dexter, ed., *Ancient Town Records: New Haven Town Records, 1649-1684, Vol. II* (New Haven, Conn: New Haven Colony Historical Society, 1917, 1919), 215.

at first attempted to miscarry using an herbal draught, but failed to end her pregnancy. She later gave birth to the infant in secret and buried it in a nearby swamp, but not before her physical condition had aroused the suspicion of community matrons. They discovered her dead infant and Ruth was sent to Hartford for a trial in front of the Court of Assistants. She was executed for adultery and infanticide.<sup>78</sup>

The timing of Ruth's infanticide suggests that she attempted to conceal her illicit pregnancy in order to remain in her father's household in New Haven. The court's leniency in delaying her exit from the colony, and allowing her to remain with her family until the spring thaw, had perhaps planted a seed of hope that she could remain among them if she avoided further sinful and illegal behavior. When Ruth discovered that she was pregnant again, and the husband she had abandoned was nowhere in sight, she knew that her pregnancy would be de facto evidence of her adulterous behavior and ensure her immediate banishment from the colony. Her own future, and the fate of her daughter from her previous marriage, would be questionable at best if they were forced to leave and live without the protection of an established household. In addition, the Pinion clan was a problematic, but tightly knit family. Ruth relied on them for protection until the end of her life. From her jail cell in Hartford, as she waited for her trial to begin, she wrote a letter to her relatives apologizing for her past conduct and expressing gratitude

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<sup>78</sup> "Examination of Ruth Briggs and other witnesses," Feb 21-March 4, 1667/8, *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, Ser. i, I, doc. 32, Connecticut Archives, Connecticut State Library, Hartford, as cited by Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 420 n16; Unfortunately, records of the Court of Assistants for 1668 are lost, but according to Daniel Allen Hearn, "it is certain that Ruth was convicted and hanged on or about June 1, 1668." She was not mentioned in her father's will from 1676, which listed all of Ruth's fellow siblings as survivors and heirs, meaning she was dead by that time. Hearn, *Legal Execution in New England*, 44; Further evidence of her execution can be found in the journal of Simon Bradstreet, who recorded that there was "a woman hanged in Connecticut in 1668 for adultery and infanticide." "Bradstreet's Journal, 1664-83," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* IX (1855), 44.

for their efforts on her behalf, her “very life depending on [their] witness.” There is no record that the father of her illegitimate child received any punishment for his role in her crimes.<sup>79</sup>

### ***The Importance of Sexual Reputation***

While men stood a chance of absolving themselves of charges for adultery, fornication, and bastardy in early New England, too often women’s “swelling stomachs and closely witnessed births” gave them away.<sup>80</sup> Once blighted by sexual indiscretion, as well, women could never be fully absolved of their guilt. Women could be reintegrated into the community after charges of fornication, following a public confession and penitence, but Puritan communities offered little support or compassion to unwed mothers. One need not be tossed out of the community or excommunicated to suffer from a loss of reputation.<sup>81</sup> In large part, female worth was measured by their sexual reputation in Puritan colonies. In colonial Massachusetts, as elsewhere in the region, women lacked property rights, with very few exceptions. It was crucial for men to be assured that their property would pass to their legitimate male heirs for the future of their families. For women, chastity prior to marriage, and a good sexual reputation after marriage were vital to protect the status of households.<sup>82</sup>

The case of Susannah Martin vs. William Sargent Jr. illustrates the importance of sexual reputation and how a lingering stain of sexual uncleanness could follow a woman and a family even after her marriage. George Martin, Susannah’s husband, brought Sargent to court on

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<sup>79</sup> Hearn, *Legal Execution in New England*, 44; Most women accused of committing infanticide were single. This is not because married women did not become pregnant from adulterous affairs, or because no married women wished to dispose of an unwanted infant. For married women, however, a pregnancy was not assumed to be evidence of fornication, as it was for single women. Also, for a married mother, the death of an infant at the time of birth was not automatically considered an act of infanticide unless proven otherwise by witnesses, as it was for an unmarried mother. As the cases listed above illustrate, however, married women did commit infanticide in colonial New England; Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 37.

<sup>80</sup> Chandler, “At the Magistrate’s Discretion,” 65.

<sup>81</sup> Ellen Fitzpatrick, “Childbirth and an Unwed Mother in Seventeenth Century New England,” *Signs* 8, no. 4 (Summer 1983): 747; Graham, *Puritan Family Life*, 56.

<sup>82</sup> Hambleton, *Daughters of Eve*, 7.

charges of slander in 1669. Sargent had been spreading rumors around Salisbury that Susannah had become pregnant years before while working as a servant in the house of Captain Wiggins. According to his story, Susannah had given birth to a bastard child in Wiggins' stable. When a man entered and saw what had happened, she attacked him, grabbing him by the collar and threatening to kill him if he told anyone. Mrs. Martin denied the entire story, and her husband won the case for slander and a small sum in damages. While the court found the slander case in the Martins' favor, rumors about their family continued to swirl. Speculation that George Martin, Jr., was a bastard also reached the court and had to be silenced by the Martins yet again. The family's place in the community never seemed fully settled. For instance, George objected to their seat placement in the meetinghouse, arguing it was unsuitable for their station.<sup>83</sup>

Had Susannah's previous sexual misadventures come to light earlier in her life, it is unlikely that she would have been able to marry a prosperous blacksmith like George Martin. In Puritan communities, marriageability depended on a good sexual reputation. Chastity, femininity, and marriageability went hand in hand. Marriage was essentially the only path available for women, besides servitude, to leave their father's household or attempt to improve their station. For a woman who bore an illegitimate child in early Massachusetts, marriage was difficult. According to Hambleton, only 20% of women who bore illegitimate children between 1640 and 1685 "made a subsequent marriage free from the taint of sexual scandal."<sup>84</sup> There was almost no incentive for men to marry their pregnant lovers, especially if those women were of lower social and economic status. Puritans fathers were permitted wide discretion in when and how they distributed property to their sons, giving them a degree of control over their offspring's choice of spouse. Many sons remained economically dependent for years, delaying marriages

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<sup>83</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 4, 129.

<sup>84</sup> Hambleton, *Daughters of Eve*, xvii, 19.



until a relatively late age. More immediately, marrying a pregnant woman was a legal admission of guilt for fornication and bastardy in New England courts.<sup>85</sup> Most, like Mary Sheffield of Ipswich, after two convictions of fornication in 1659 and 1662, remained single until death. After being abandoned by the father of her child, who said he “would not abide the shame thereof,” she all but disappeared into her employer’s household. The only remaining record of her life is an inventory of her meager possessions by her employer after her death.<sup>86</sup>

Other women, like Hester Jackson of Scituate, lost most of their value to their households after becoming pregnant out of wedlock and convicted for fornication. Hester was seventeen when she was sent home to her father, unemployed and pregnant in 1663. She claimed the father of her illegitimate child was her employer’s son, Joseph Gilliam. The man who had “tempted her to Harlot,” as her father stated, would not marry Hester and there is no record that she was able to make another match. Her father regarded Hester as “unclean” and worthy of punishment. “If such uncleanness be not punished...sin will abound,” he said, “and the world fill’d with a generation of bastard Which god forbid.” Even Hester regarded herself as “undone.” “He did tempt me often, and at last the Lord left to the temptation, so I was undone by him,” she lamented in court.<sup>87</sup> If Hester was attempting to improve her social and economic status by trying to win her employer’s son as a husband, her gamble failed. Hers was a common tale in early New England. Most women who calculated the odds that pregnancy would gain them a wealthy husband faced the harsh reality that men rarely married their lower class lovers.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Elliot, *Power and the Pulpit*, 37; In New England, the criminal act was sexual intercourse; marrying a pregnant woman was an admission of guilt. In contemporary British jurisdictions, the criminal act was bastardy, sexual intercourse was not the problem, producing a bastard that required support from the public was. Hambleton, *Daughters of Eve*, xiv.

<sup>86</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 2, 152, 372; Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 9, 451.

<sup>87</sup> Hambleton, *Daughters of Eve*, xi; Suffolk County Quarterly Court, 1662, Supreme Judicial Court, Division of Archives and Records Preservation, 874.

<sup>88</sup> Chandler, “At the Magistrate’s Discretion,” 9.

Marriage was basic to women's survival in early New England and intermarriage was a crucial means by which colonial families formed alliances and kin networks. For Puritans and non-Puritans alike, people's identities, their standard of living, and their status in communities depended largely on their relations. Social and commercial networks frequently developed through kin relationships.<sup>89</sup> The loss of sexual reputation severely impaired a woman's ability to make a match and marked a significant missed opportunity for both women and their families to form advantageous connections. Those women who were able to marry following a conviction for fornication or bastardy often either married within an existing kin network or secured a husband of lower status than they would have expected to find had they remained "public virgins." Even in these lower-status matches, women with a previous conviction for fornication were unlikely to be welcomed with open arms by the other women of the family.<sup>90</sup>

After being publically labeled a "slutt" by the Court of Assistants, Alice Williams was unable to make a suitable match with a man of unsullied reputation. A gentleman's daughter, Alice should have been able to secure a husband of equal standing, but her prosecution for fornication appears to have limited her options. Eventually, Alice married her former lover and master, who was a divorcee and more than twice her age. Alice's dalliance with a married man had essentially taken her off the marriage market for anyone but her disgraced partner in

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<sup>89</sup> Hambleton, *Daughters of Eve*, 90; Though the importance of kin networks has been more emphasized in historical analysis of the Chesapeake and southern colonies, due to the higher mortality and remarriage rates, kin networks were also vitally important to familial identity and economic status in early New England. See James M. Volo and Dorothy Denneen Volo, *Family Life in 17th and 18th-century America* (Greenwood Publishing Group 2006), 41-42; Edmund Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion & Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 150-160; Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns in Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (University of Chicago Press, 1988); Sylvia R. Frey and Marian J. Morton, *New World, New Roles: A Documentary History of Women in Pre-Industrial America* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1986); John F. Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism in North America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984), 57; Marsha L. Hamilton, *Social and Economic Networks in Early Massachusetts: Atlantic Connections* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2009).

<sup>90</sup> Hambleton, *Daughters of Eve*, 45.

fornication.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, Mary Dane, from one of the most respected families in Ipswich, was whipped for fornication in 1654. The father of her child chose not to marry her and this incident seems to have left her with few options in marriage partners. Mary went on to marry a man within her family circle, her stepbrother by marriage.<sup>92</sup> Mary's public indiscretion dashed any hopes the family may have had of improving their situation through marriage. Elizabeth Sessions' pregnancy out of wedlock in 1690 drew the attention of the Essex County Court and brought her charges and punishment for fornication and bastardy. Her marriage to another man, Richard Carrier, whose family had a questionable reputation in Andover, signaled that the Sessions family had moved to the margins of respectable society.<sup>93</sup>

The infanticide case of Sarah Threeneedles illustrates the importance of sexual reputation, marriage, and family for women in early Massachusetts. A covenanted church member, Sarah nonetheless ignored the godly council of her ministers and parents by engaging in a sexual affair with Thomas Savage, Jr., a shopkeeper in Boston. This "undutiful Carriage towards her parents" resulted in an out-of-wedlock pregnancy. After the father of the child refused to marry her, Sarah lamented that "he had ruin'd her" by their sexual indiscretion and their unwanted child. Rather than have the child and face disgrace for herself and her family, Sarah took desperate steps to hide the evidence. She secretly gave birth to her bastard child before dawn in an open pasture and left it to die from exposure. During her trial for infanticide, Sarah made her motivations clear. If only Savage had married her, she would not have killed

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<sup>91</sup> Noble and Cronin, *Records of Court of Assistants*, v. 2, 137; Hambleton, *Daughters of Eve*, 30; Divorce was permissible in New England, but still very rare and certainly frowned upon. There were only 40 divorce petitions in Massachusetts between 1639-1692.

<sup>92</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 1, 337; George Chandler, *The Chandler Family, The Descendants of William and Annis Chandler who settled in Roxbury, 1637* (Press of Charles Hamilton, Worcester, 1885).

<sup>93</sup> "Statements from John Russ and Abigail Osgood," March 31, 1691, Essex County Quarterly Court; Chandler notes that the Carrier family "had a long history of making their neighbors uneasy." Few were surprised when the matriarch of the family was eventually hung for witchcraft in 1692. Chandler, "At the Magistrate's Discretion," 34, 49.

their child. If he had even held out the hope of marriage, she would have stayed her hand and things would not have “come to this.”<sup>94</sup> As a couple, the two would have faced court and community censure for engaging in pre-marital sexual contact, but would have been reintegrated into the community. After being abandoned, Sarah decided that the death of her child, and the possibility of getting caught, were preferable to facing ruin and the end of her chance for a respectable marriage and family.

### ***Household Involvement in Infanticide***

Colonial courts and the community called the respectability of an entire household into question during the course of a public trial for the sexual misconduct of one of its members, but the head of the household in particular was often a focus of court proceedings. Such cases “centered as much on the involved heads of household as the trial participants themselves,” Abby Chandler argues. One’s standing in a Puritan community depended on the public perception of character. The ability to maintain a godly house and keep control of ones dependents was integral to the self-definition and standing of a household master or mistress.<sup>95</sup> In the aftermath of an out-of-wedlock pregnancy, the wealthiest masters or mistresses of households could bribe or cajole the father of a pregnant woman’s child to agree to marriage, thus preserving her reputation, at least in part. When this was not possible, and unwed mothers

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<sup>94</sup> Sewall, *The Diary of Samuel Sewall*, 151, 399; Mather, *Pillars of Salt*, 89; Hearn, *Legal Executions in New England*, 106.

<sup>95</sup> Chandler, “At the Magistrate’s Discretion,” 53, 54; See also Anne S. Lombard, *Making Manhood: Growing Up Male in Colonial New England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 68; Though set in the Virginia colony, the cases surrounding the bastard child of Anne Orthwood are illustrative of the damage to a family’s reputation that could result from the scandalous sexual behavior of one its members. Colonel William Kendall, as he rose through the ranks of Virginia politics, was continually plagued by the family scandal surrounding his nephew, John, and his former indentured servant, Anne. The child of their illicit sexual encounter was the subject of several legal trials between 1664 and 1686, each of which dragged the Kendall name into the public eye and caused William to worry that his “honor and reputation would suffer” because “someone close to him committed a moral lapse.” John Ruston Pagan, *Anne Orthwood’s Bastard: Sex and Law in Early Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 4.

were brought to trial for fornication or bastardy, heads of households often appeared before the courts to attempt to redeem their own involvement in the incidences and restore some of their damaged family reputation.<sup>96</sup>

Mary Osgood was living with her grandfather, William Osgood, in Salisbury in 1686 when she became pregnant out of wedlock by a local man named Joseph Barnard. Mary's pregnancy ensured her conviction for fornication, but her grandfather still spared no expense in the course of her trial, paying for at least six depositions regarding the nature of his granddaughter's relationship to the father of her child and his own previous assurances of Barnard's honorable intentions. William himself testified that Barnard was "a suitor to her & had bin a great while." The Osgood's neighbor, Mary Whittier, also stated to the court that "as I did apprehend he intended to make her his wife."<sup>97</sup> William's logic in presenting an elaborate paternity case only makes sense as an attempt to redeem his household's reputation, and his own status as its head. The amount of child support he could have collected through such a trial would not account for the cost of the trial itself.<sup>98</sup> Instead, the case allowed William Osgood to make it clear that he had inquired about Barnard's intentions toward his granddaughter, and that both he and his granddaughter had been misled by a manipulative suitor. He hoped that by presenting the circumstances of Mary's pregnancy in this manner he could show that the family had no wish to flout Puritan law, and thus preserve the Osgood name and Mary's chances for a successful

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<sup>96</sup> Chandler, "At the Magistrate's Discretion," 32, 43-44, 65; In colonial courts, trial defendants had to shoulder all court costs, including paying for deponents to testify on their behalf. Even acquitted defendants had to pay court costs. Because of these costs, most defendants preferred the equivalent of a modern day guilty plea. In some paternity cases, however, court trials became an expensive business, with the costs of trial exceeding any amount an unwed mother could hope to claim from an accused father in terms of child support costs. This indicates that such trials were concerned with more than just securing financial security for an unclaimed child, but had to do with notions of honor. Chandler, "At the Magistrate's Discretion," 29, 53.

<sup>97</sup> "Deposition of William Osgood," May 31, 1687, Essex County Court of General Sessions, File Papers, Box 2, Philipps Library, Peabody-Essex Museum, Salem; "Deposition of Mary Whittier," May 31, 1687, Essex General Sessions, Box 2, Philipps Library.

<sup>98</sup> Chandler, "At the Magistrate's Discretion," 61.

marriage later on. His efforts seem to have been successful; Mary was able to marry Philip Favor less than two years later and start a household of her own.<sup>99</sup>

Similarly, the case of Susannah Andrews, orchestrated by her father, Joseph, demonstrates the importance heads of households placed on the public redemption of a household's sexual morality, and their own culpability for its damaged reputation. After his daughter became pregnant in 1707, Joseph Andrews pursued the father of her child, his nephew, Ezekiel Andrews, through the court system. He paid to file a formal complaint against Ezekiel to force him to appear in court for a paternity hearing. Before the court, Joseph testified that Ezekiel was a frequent guest in their home, and made every appearance of being a suitor for his daughter. He also publically claimed that he knew of no other suitors pursuing her.<sup>100</sup> Andrews paid to present other witnesses before the court to testify concerning the intimate relationship between his daughter and nephew. Jane Andrews, his daughter-in-law, stated in court that she had seen "Ezekill Andross gott out of the bed from my Sister Susannah Andross."<sup>101</sup> Unlike in the Osgood case, however, Joseph Andrews could not present any real evidence that Ezekiel actually intended marriage. The closest statement he could summon was that Ezekiel had stated he would "provide" for his daughter if their relationship progressed, and that she "shal not trouble you" if a child was the result.<sup>102</sup> In the end, Joseph's efforts to salvage his daughter's reputation, and that of himself and his household, were ineffectual. All he succeeded in doing was bringing greater attention to his family—almost all of the depositions and testimonies on either side from the trial

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<sup>99</sup> William Osgood was probably also inspired to redeem his family name, and his reputation as a patriarch, in court because his daughter, Elizabeth, had been whipped for fornication earlier in 1654. Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 1, 347; Clarence Almon Torrey and Elizabeth Petty Bentley, *New England Marriages Prior to 1700* (Genealogical Publishing Company, 1985), 280.

<sup>100</sup> "Testimony of Joseph Andrews," 1707, General Sessions of the Peace Papers, Box 3, Philipps Library.

<sup>101</sup> "Deposition of Jane Andrews," November 25, 1707, Box 3 Philipps Library.

<sup>102</sup> "Deposition of Joseph Andrews," November 25, 1707, Box 3 Philipps Library.

were from the Andrews clan—and his daughter was never able to marry and leave her father’s household.

The Martha Proctor versus Thomas Choat paternity case from 1705 illustrates the lengths to which heads of households would go to preserve their reputations. When Martha Proctor became pregnant out of wedlock, it was her mother, Deborah Proctor, who addressed the issue in court as her daughter’s representative in the fornication and paternity proceedings. Deborah’s husband, Benjamin, had died the year before, leaving the Proctors with few financial resources beside their land on Hog Island.<sup>103</sup> As a widow, Deborah could not afford to pay for numerous depositions attesting to her family’s good character.<sup>104</sup> As a means of getting around this obstacle, Deborah submitted a “Declaration of the Case” to the court, describing the circumstances through which her daughter had been “ensnared,” the identity of the accused father—Thomas Choat, their married neighbor—as well as the persecution her family had suffered from the Choat family since Martha’s pregnancy had come to light. Thomas Choat, on the other hand, as a financially stable head of a household, came to court armed with ten depositions in support of his claims of innocence, and filed a preemptive complaint against the Proctors to prevent them from smearing his good name. Deborah’s efforts to clear her family could not hold up against Choat’s legal onslaught, and he was acquitted due to lack of evidence. Martha was convicted of fornication and bastardy. After the trial, she disappeared from the historical record. It is logical to conclude, therefore, that she was unable to marry and remained in her brother’s household as an unpaid servant.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> E.O. Jameson, *Choats of America* (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Sons Printers, 1896).

<sup>104</sup> Chandler, “At the Magistrate’s Discretion,” 53.

<sup>105</sup> Proctor v. Choat, Essex General Sessions of the Peace, July 1705, File Papers Box 3, Philipps Library.

As these cases attest, both male and female heads of household took sexual misbehavior very seriously, particularly when the woman was a relative. When possible, they sought to shield their households from the stain of sexual impropriety. While infanticide has generally been viewed as a solitary crime, the close nature of life in a colonial household would have made concealing a pregnancy from a woman's immediate relatives, with whom she often shared a bed and other living quarters, nearly impossible.<sup>106</sup> Colonial courts handled cases after an unmarried woman's pregnancy had come to light. If the neighbors and local magistrates had not yet discovered a woman's illicit pregnancy, however, some family members sought to assist their pregnant relatives in hiding their shameful state from the court and community through infanticide. Given the stakes involved, some mothers and fathers chose to actively help during the birth and concealment of an unwanted infant, while others offered their tacit approval by choosing to ignore the situation. It is impossible to know how many pregnancies were hidden in this manner; pregnancy, birth and concealment would be easier for a woman who had their family members' assistance.<sup>107</sup> Unwanted pregnancies could be kept from public notice, especially pregnancies that came to term in late winter or early spring, when expectant mothers could either stay within their households and out of the public eye or wear concealing layers of clothing.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> For more on the practice of sharing beds in colonial New England, see D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 17; The interior of most early American houses in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries consisted of a single, large multifunction room called the hall in which people cooked, ate, worked, prayed, and slept. William Burns, *Science and Technology in Colonial America* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005), 68;

<sup>107</sup> It is impossible to know how many pregnancies and births were successfully concealed through infanticide in general. Hambleton argues that "The low number of illegitimate births and premarital pregnancies attests to the effectiveness of fornication prosecutions as a form of social control in seventeenth-century Massachusetts." Hambleton, *Daughters of Eve*, 11; However, I suspect that induced miscarriage and infanticide also contributed to these low numbers.

<sup>108</sup> Marsella, "Trial and Execution of Elizabeth Atwood," 10; Randolph Roth, "Child Murder in New England," *Social Science History* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2001), 102.



The Court of Assistants convicted John and Ester Andrews as accessories to murder when their daughter, Susanna, was tried for infanticide in 1695. Susanna shared a bed with her mother, but testified that neither her father nor mother had any knowledge of her pregnancy, and that “being alone” she was “delivered of two living bastard Children,” whom she then murdered and left in a field near her family home.<sup>109</sup> The court was suspicious of her parents’ involvement in her crime, though they could not prove that John or Ester was actually present at the time of the twins’ birth. John adamantly denied that he “knew any thing concerning his Daughter Susanah being with Child” or that she had given birth to two infants and disposed of the evidence. He withstood “much presing upon him” by local magistrates to admit his knowledge and involvement.<sup>110</sup> Other witnesses proved to be his and his wife’s undoing, however. After hearing testimony from Elizabeth Kenedy and Susanna Ransom, who worked in the Andrews’ household, the court found that John and Esther did take an active role in concealing the crime. They “did countenance comfort . . . and succour the sd Susanna and did hide and conceal the sd Murder, and did Secretly bury the sd Infants” according to the indictment. All three Andrews—Susanna, Esther and John—were sentenced to hang.<sup>111</sup>

Michael and Hannah Emerson avoided being sentenced to death alongside their daughter, Elizabeth, for infanticide in 1693, but the court questioned them as accessories to the crime. Most of the inquiries from the court centered on the location in which Elizabeth admitted to giving birth—“upon a trundell bed att the feet of her fathers bed in the same room where here father and mother were in bed”—and the fact that the newborn twins appeared to have been

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<sup>109</sup> “Indictment of Susanna Andrews,” MA Archives Suffolk Files 37: 3279.

<sup>110</sup> “Deposition of John Andrews,” MA Archives Suffolk Files 37: 3279.

<sup>111</sup> “Indictment,” MA Archives Suffolk Files 37: 3279.

carefully sewn up into a sack before they were concealed in a chest and buried in the yard.<sup>112</sup> Court questioners seemed skeptical that neither Michael nor Hannah, who were supposedly asleep next to her during the course of Elizabeth's travail, would not have noticed their daughter giving birth to twins. They asked Elizabeth why she did not "call for help," to which she responded that "there was no body to call but my father & mother & I was afraid to call my Mother for fear of killing her."<sup>113</sup> This exchange did not put the matter to rest, however. The court continued to ask Michael and Hannah how they could not be aware of the pregnancy or births. Hannah admitted to noticing that Elizabeth was "big," but nothing else. The court also did not believe that Elizabeth—who appeared very "ill in her Look," according to witnesses following the birth of her children—could have managed to sew the infants into the sack and dispose of them herself. They asked her mother why she did "Sew them upon a cloth for burial," which she denied.<sup>114</sup> Elizabeth and her parents' denials were suspect, for it would have been a feat for her to conceal the pregnancy and births, and then arrange the burial on her parents' property without their help. In the end, however, the court did not have enough evidence to execute them alongside their daughter.

Her mother may have assisted Elizabeth to conceal evidence of her sexual immorality to avoid the censure of the female community of Haverhill. During the birth of Elizabeth's first illegitimate child, neighbor women who attended the birth treated all the Emerson women with open contempt. Johanah Hasteline, Johanah Corlis, Lidia Ladd and Mary Neff—the women who attended the birth—gave a revealing deposition for the fornication case against Elizabeth in

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<sup>112</sup> "Examination of Michael Emerson," May 11, 1691, MA Archives Suffolk files 31: 2636; "Examination of Hannah, the wife of Michael Emerson," May 11, 1691, MA Archives Suffolk files 31: 2636; "Witness testimony #2 – Hanna Swan; Mary Neff," MA Archives Suffolk files 31: 2636.  
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<sup>113</sup> "Examination of Elizabeth Emerson," May 11, 1691, MA Archives Suffolk files 31: 2636.

<sup>114</sup> "Examination of M. & H. Emerson," MA Archives Suffolk Files 31: 2636; "Witness testimony #2 – Hanna Swan; Mary Neff," MA Archives Suffolk files 31: 2636.

1686. According to their account, they questioned Elizabeth during her travail about her claims that Timothy Swan had raped her and that the attack had resulted in her pregnancy. The women could not understand why Elizabeth did not effectively fight him off, “Scratch him, or kick him” or “make the Towne ring of it.” It was Hannah Emerson who answered for her daughter during the interrogation, first, reminding them that Swan’s arm was across her daughters’ throat and that Elizabeth had kept quiet of a desire to avoid disgrace. When Goodwife Hasteltine asserted that Swan must have “ly wth her more times” consensually, because “it was impossible...for a maid to be wth child at the first, being forced,” Hannah refuted the accusation. “Why might not she be with child?” she retorted defensively. When Goodwife Corlis asked Elizabeth if someone had “not counselled her to lay [her pregnancy] to Tim Swan,” Elizabeth’s sister, Hannah Dustin, felt the need to defend herself. “I am clear for some said I was her Counsellor,” Dustin stated, and that “she had nothing lay on her Conscience upon that acct.”<sup>115</sup> It is apparent from the women’s treatment of not only Elizabeth, but also Hannah Emerson and Hannah Dustin, that the entire family had been denounced for immoral behavior.

The Haverhill women’s behavior is not surprising in the context of Puritan New England. Women who bore children out of wedlock faced official punishments by colonial courts, but they also encountered unofficial punishment in the form of community contempt, particularly from other women who had managed to maintain their respectability through the trials of adolescence, and the process of courtship and marriage. As Hambleton writes, “Their successes enabled them to view the women who bore illegitimate children as contemptible failures and provided the women’s community with the moral authority to police the behaviors of single women.”<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> “Deposition by Johanah Hasteltine, Johanah Corlis, Lidia Lad & Mary Neff,” April 19, 1686, Essex County Court Papers 46:131.

<sup>116</sup> Hambleton, *Daughters of Eve*, 18.

Midwives and female neighbors often did the work of the law and community by bringing to light illicit sexual activity. In most cases in which an unmarried woman became pregnant, it was women who first became suspicious and sought to investigate a single woman's unexplained illness or changing figure. During a single mothers' travail and in the aftermath of childbirth, this community of women acted less like nurturing caretakers and more as "quasi-judicial, inquisitorial figures," collecting evidence for colonial courts and paternity suits.<sup>117</sup> The women's abrasive and thorough questioning during the birth of Emerson's illegitimate child is representative of the role these women adopted regarding out-of-wedlock pregnancies.

It was from the women in her community that Margaret West actively concealed her stepdaughter, Elizabeth Atwood's, pregnancy and tried to hide the birth and death of her bastard child in 1725. Whispers swirled around Ipswich that Elizabeth had been ill for most of the winter. When neighbors stopped by the West household, Elizabeth was lying in bed and Margaret was upset. "[O]ld mrs. West looked on her Daughter & hung her hands and Cryed," reported Elizabeth Dressor. Dressor was suspicious that Elizabeth was pregnant, and when she mentioned that she "seems to be like a woman in travel [sic]" both daughter and stepmother denied the accusation. Margaret replied, "No...how you talk so?" and that Elizabeth had "never known a man on such account, no never in her life," before ushering Dressor out of the house.<sup>118</sup> Dressor returned to the West house later in the day with another neighbor, Mrs. Jewitt, to find the bedclothes in disarray and Elizabeth weak and "in a miserable condition." Yet "Eliza Atwood said Her never had a Child if itt was the Last Breath She had to draw," they reported, "& her mother said no she never had a child if itt was ye last word she had to speak."<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Henigman, *Coming into Communion*, 66.

<sup>118</sup> "Testimony of Elizabeth Dressor," MA Archives Suffolk Files 131: 14363; "Testimony of Elizabeth Jewitt," MA Archives Suffolk Files 131: 14363.

<sup>119</sup> "Testimony of Elizabeth Jewitt," MA Archives Suffolk Files 131: 14363.

The women began to tell a different tale after Jewitt found Elizabeth's chamber pot "filled with...bloody matter and bloody cloaths," that had been "taken away by mrs West who caried it and put under the stayars."<sup>120</sup> Elizabeth confessed that she had given birth standing up and the baby had fallen on its head. She was not sure if the infant was alive or dead at the time. Her stepmother claimed that she had entered the room after Elizabeth had wrapped the baby in a handkerchief and hidden it between the bedstead and the wall, before their neighbors entered her chamber. She pleaded ignorance about Elizabeth's actions, even after concealing the bloody childbirth linens. The court imprisoned and investigated Mrs. West "upon Suspicion of being abettor or Aider" in the crime, but eventually released her.<sup>121</sup> Elizabeth was unapologetic until the end. She wore her shabbiest clothes to the gallows, knowing that by tradition the hangman kept the clothes of the person he executed. When asked why she laughed as she walked to her death, she said, "I am laughing to think what sorry suits the hangman will get from me."<sup>122</sup> Her one regret seemed to be what her stepmother had been forced to endure on her behalf. During her trial, she stated that she "did not Expect things would be as they ware." Instead, she expected her stepmother would not be implicated in her crime, and would only "be Examined and sent home again."<sup>123</sup>

Female relatives' sexual misbehavior was not the only source of potential shame and loss for a household. Pregnancies among unwed female servants also reflected poorly on other members of a household, particularly masters and mistresses. Household structure, if functioning correctly, was designed to bring order and godliness to colonial New England society. That a

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<sup>120</sup> "Testimony of Elizabeth Jewitt," MA Archives Suffolk Files 131: 14363.

<sup>121</sup> "Examination of John West Wife," February 24, 1719, MA Archives Suffolk Files 131: 14363; Hearn, *Legal Executions in New England*, 116.

<sup>122</sup> Robert Wilhelm, *Murder and Mayhem in Essex County* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2011), 29.

<sup>123</sup> "Testimony of Elizabeth Holden," MA Archives Suffolk Files 131: 14363.

member of a household had engaged in illicit sexual activity was a signal that such order had severely broken down, that the web of mutual obligations between husbands and wives, parents and children, and masters and servants had not been effective in controlling individuals' behavior.<sup>124</sup> Just as a household provided its members with a legal, financial, political, and social identity, via the household head, the behavior of its dependents helped determine how a community viewed a household and those within it. This held true for relatives and non-relatives alike.

When their servant, Amy Munn, became pregnant out of wedlock in 1699, there is no record that Mr. and Mrs. Wadsworth followed legal proscriptions to report her state to the local magistrate to begin both fornication and paternity proceedings. Amy's pregnancy remained a secret until the day of her travail, when once again the Wadsworths failed to make her pregnancy known to their community through the usual preparations for childbirth, which included calling the local midwife, as well as other neighbor women to attend the birth. Instead, Amy gave birth with only her master in the room. As the court later stated, such secrecy allowed her to "offer violence to the child in the Birth...In pursueance of her resolution to make away with the child." She "neglected all means and helps for preserving the life of the child," and apparently, so did Mr. Wadsworth. He, at least, absented himself from the room so Amy could finish her deed and ensure the child was completely "destroyed," cutting its throat with a "sharp edged instrument." Despite the Wadsworths' inaction, the court prosecutor laid the full blame at Amy's feet. "And to add to her wickedness she endeavoured to make [the Wadsworths] accessories to this Horrible crime," he stated. She persuaded "Mr. Wadsworth and his wife to conceale this murther..."<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Chandler, "At the Magistrate's Discretion," 8; Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 70.

<sup>125</sup> Munn's Case, May 5-19, 1699, Records of the Court of Assistants and Superior Courts, 1687-1749, Vol. 53 Early General Records of Connecticut, Connecticut State Library, 291-293; "Prosecution Summation for Munn Case," *Crimes and Misdemeanors I*, 223, Connecticut Archives, Connecticut State Library.

Regardless of the evidence of the crime, and the Wadsworths' role in it, all were acquitted of infanticide.<sup>126</sup> Munn was found guilty of fornication and willful neglect of her child. The Wadsworths were not found guilty of any crime. Although they did not explicitly state their reasons for concealing Amy's pregnancy and the birth of her illegitimate child, the integrity of their household must have been a major factor.

When their "spanish indian slave," Marea, became pregnant in 1676, Stephen and Hannah French took steps to preserve the moral integrity of their household against the stain of her behavior. The Frenches would have been held responsible for Marea's actions, as their slave, at least in the eyes of the community. They attempted to limit their neighbors' knowledge of Marea's travail by sending her to give birth on the Indian side of Weymouth. This was not an act of kindness on their part. Marea knew no one in the Indian community and did not speak their language. A local Indian sachem reported to Hannah that Marea had talked of a "grat many Indians me much Shamed" for coming among them in her condition.<sup>127</sup> Without any support, Marea gave birth alone. She claimed that the baby was stillborn, but neighbors soon grew suspicious. One neighbor gossiped that Marea had killed it and the child had been "throwed out to the hogges and they had eat some of it."<sup>128</sup> His gossip sparked others in the community to investigate the disappearance of Marea's baby, but they found no child, only evidence that she had recently given birth. After Marea was indicted for infanticide, the Frenches again took steps to preserve their reputation. There was no point in denying that Marea had fornicated while under their authority, but they had not harbored a murderer. Several members of the French's

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<sup>126</sup> At the time, Connecticut had not yet adopted the infanticide statute making concealment presumptive evidence of guilt and the court could not find the two witnesses necessary to convict for a capital offense. Edgar J. McManus, *Law and Liberty in Early New England: Criminal Justice and Due Process, 1620-1692* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 155; The Munn decision was met with public outrage and the Connecticut General Assembly adopted the concealment statute immediately in its aftermath. Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers*, 62.

<sup>127</sup> "Deposition of Hannah French," MA Archives Suffolk Files 19:123.

<sup>128</sup> "Deposition of Sarah Pratt," no. 1689, MA Archives Suffolk files 19:123.

network of kin testified that the afterbirth found on the scene was “much corrupted & wasted in the womb together with the Child,” indicating that the child was indeed born dead.<sup>129</sup> Marea was found not guilty, and the Frenches could salvage at least part of their sullied reputation.<sup>130</sup>

The women of the Parker household of Boston went to great lengths to protect their family’s reputation after a free African servant in their employ, Zipporah Done, became pregnant out of wedlock in 1663. The father of her child was almost certainly Jonathan Parker, nephew of her master, Richard Parker.<sup>131</sup> Zipporah was visibly pregnant by the time two well-respected African women of the community approached the Parkers’ housekeeper, Mrs. Sands. They asked her why Zipporah had not been taken to the magistrates to report the pregnancy, name the father, and pursue steps to attain support for the child, proper procedure in such a case. The housekeeper asserted “hir mrs sayd [Zipporah] was not wth child.”<sup>132</sup> The family continued to deny her pregnancy when another African woman came to inquire after Zipporah’s health, hearing she was “ill abed.” Mrs. Manning, the Parkers’ daughter, turned her away, claiming that Zipporah was “well on her leggs.”<sup>133</sup> A few days later, before Mrs. Parker could send her off to Barbados, Zipporah gave birth to a son.<sup>134</sup> Mrs. Parker, Mrs. Manning, and Mrs. Sands did not have a midwife attend, insisting that Zipporah’s birth bangs were a “fitt of the Collick” and that the

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<sup>129</sup> “Deposition of Sarah Pratt,” no. 1689, MA Archives Suffolk files 19:123; “Deposition of Hannah Whitmarsh,” MA Archives Suffolk Files 19: 123-4.

<sup>130</sup> Noble and Cronin, *Records of Court of Assistants*, v. 1, 115.

<sup>131</sup> Jonathan, the likely father of Zipporah’s child, had a history of sexual violence. He had gained notoriety for attacking a newly married neighbor in her home when her husband was gone by climbing in through the window and in her bed. She screamed and he was caught by the Boston watch. “In re Parker,” General Court, Boston, June 12, 1663, MA Archives Suffolk Files 4:532. He was removed to London quickly by wealthy relatives after the event before he could face authorities. As a resident in the Parker household, he would have had easy access to Zipporah and the timing of Zipporah’s pregnancy suggests she had become pregnant before he left the colony. Melinde Lutz Sanborn, “The Case of the Headless Baby: Did Interracial Sex in the Massachusetts Bay Colony Lead to Infanticide and the Earliest Habeas Corpus Petition in America?” *Hofstra Law Review* 38: 258; Michelle M. Jarrett Morris, *Under Household Government: Sex and Family in Puritan Massachusetts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 203.

<sup>132</sup> “Deposition of Besse Angolas,” October 4, 1663, MA Archives Suffolk Files 5: 605.

<sup>133</sup> “Deposition of Mary Negro, wife of Franck Negro,” October 4, 1663, MA Archives Suffolk Files 5: 605.

<sup>134</sup> “Deposition of Elizabeth Mellows, servant to Parkers,” October 4, 1663, MA Archives Suffolk Files 5: 605.



birth was “not Coming to its prime.” When Zipporah’s child arrived, they claimed it was stillborn. Mrs. Parker pinned the tiny corpse in a linen cloth to bury in the Parker’s field the following day.<sup>135</sup> The women agreed to keep the news secret from their patriarch Richard Parker, for fear his oath as an officer of the Massachusetts Bay Colony Council would compel him to reveal the incident that “providence had ordered it to be secret.”<sup>136</sup>

The Parker women’s attempts to conceal the birth and death of the child—and save their family’s reputation—were not successful. An unknown neighbor lodged a complaint about Zipporah’s suspicious condition. A search uncovered a full-term, light-skinned infant corpse in the general location Zipporah confessed her child was buried. This discovery contradicted statements the Parker women had made that the child was “sixe weekes before the time” and “blackish” in their attempts to point suspicion away from Jonathan as the father.<sup>137</sup> The inquest judged that the death was not natural, given that the infant’s head had been cut off. Removing the head would have served a dual purpose of obscuring both paternity and cause of death from suffocation or strangulation.<sup>138</sup> It is possible that one of the Parker women took this desperate, brutal step.<sup>139</sup> In the end, the court could not prove that Zipporah had murdered her child, or even that the headless child in the field was her issue, and she was charged with fornication. Her master and mistress refused to post bond for her release, forcing her to petition the court and beg

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<sup>135</sup> “Deposition of Zipporah,” October 4, 1663, MA Archives Suffolk Files 5: 605.

<sup>136</sup> “Deposition of Mrs. Sands,” October 4, 1663, MA Archives Suffolk Files 5:605; Morris, *Under Household Government*, 197.

<sup>137</sup> “Deposition of Mrs. Parker,” October 5, 1663, MA Archives Suffolk Files 5:605.

<sup>138</sup> “Jury Verdict Regarding the Inquest in the Matter of Zipporah,” October 5, 1663, MA Archives Suffolk Files 5: 605.

<sup>139</sup> Morris believes that one of the Parker women probably committed the actual infanticide. “What Zipporah’s story suggests is that at least one mistress was willing to commit murder to cover up her servant’s fornication and to protect both her nephew from a paternity charge and her husband from financial loss,” she writes. Morris, *Under Household Government*, 207.

for leniency.<sup>140</sup> The Parker women were admonished by the First Church of Boston for “Concealing the sin of fornication in their negro servant” in front of the “publick Congregation.”<sup>141</sup>

For a family like the Parkers, who were among the upper echelons of Massachusetts’ political society, their motivation for concealing the birth and death of a bastard child in their household was to preserve their family’s reputation and household image. Some women certainly committed infanticide for selfish reasons, embodying the sinfulness Puritan ministers expounded upon in their execution sermons on the evils of infanticide. The sermons made it clear that these women had committed the ultimate act of selfishness and were solely culpable for the deaths of their unwanted children.<sup>142</sup> As we have seen in the cases presented above, however, this image of the women who committed infanticide is far too simplistic. Self-interest and selfish concerns were frequently not the only motivations for such actions; household and family interests also played a role. Family members even sometimes played a part.

### ***Conclusion***

By the late seventeenth-century, Massachusetts ministers’ and magistrates’ concerns about community cohesiveness had reached a fever pitch. In the wake of the Indian Wars of that period, Cotton Mather spoke as if an entire generation of youth had been struck down by war as well as by sin. “How many Scores of Young men have sometimes been lost from one Little

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<sup>140</sup> Morris, *Under Household Government*, 199; In an interesting twist, Zipporah was able to marry as a free woman, and eventually became the first person of color to own a house in Boston. Her name appears in a Deed from Thomas Stevens to Zippora Potter, listed as “Zippora Potter of Boston widow” November 11, 1670, reprinted in *Suffolk Deeds 7* (Boston, Rockwell and Churchill 1894), 43-44.

<sup>141</sup> Richard D. Pierce, ed., *The Records of the First Church of Boston 1630-1868* (Publication of the Colonial Society of Mass, 1961), 39.

<sup>142</sup> Before meeting their end, some women produced final declarations to that effect. Scholars have noted that these declarations were often “just as correct as if they had been written by the ministers themselves.” Ann Jones, *Women Who Kill* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Wilson, 1980), 82; Elizabeth Emerson, for instance, lamented that she was “a Miserable Sinner” who had “Justly Provoked the Holy God” through her acts of “Disobedience,” Cotton Mather reported as her execution grew near. Mather, *Pillars of Salt*.

Town, witin two of three Years, by the Disastrous Plagues and Wars that have been upon us!” he lamented. “Tis Wickedness, and especially, tis Uncleanness; That is the Knife which cutts the Throats of Millions in every generation.”<sup>143</sup> In another execution sermon, he told his audience that: “Several Bastard Children have been Murdered in this Place: But there has not unto this Day been any Detection of the Murderers.”<sup>144</sup> Mather’s listeners took it upon themselves to police their neighbors’ ungoverned sexuality and deceit in order to return their communities to God’s favor. Women were the focus of the crackdown. Increased scrutiny brought an unprecedented number of prosecutions for infanticide in New England in the 1690s. Only one woman of the ten accused of committing the crime was acquitted during that decade.<sup>145</sup>

It is ironic that authorities’ efforts to ensure social stability were focused on women who, ultimately, were not trying to rip apart their communities, but sought to remain respectably within the fold. Frequently, it was their desire to be a part of society—their reputations intact and their family respectability preserved—that led them to commit such horrible crimes. The court, of course, did not take these motivations into account when they sentenced these women to death. In a final irony, the moral crackdown designed to preserve the Puritans’ future actually increased the body count: in the numbers of infants murdered by desperate women, as well as the number of mothers executed for their crimes.

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<sup>143</sup> Mather, *Warnings*, 56-57, 54.

<sup>144</sup> Henigman, *Coming into Communion*, 57.

<sup>145</sup> According to Kathleen Brown, “only one of ten accused...was acquitted during the 1690s, giving that decade both the highest rate and highest total number of infanticide convictions between 1670 and 1780...This trend distinguished the final decade of the seventeenth century in Massachusetts as the least forgiving of mothers who killed their illegitimate infants.” Kathleen Brown, “Murderous Uncleanness: The Body of Female Infanticide in Puritan New England,” in *A Centre of Wonders: The Body in Early America*, ed. Janet Moore Lindman and Michele Lise Tartar (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 78; Historians attribute this increase to the official adoption of “Bastard Neonaticide Act” (as historians call it) in 1696, which made only concealment of the death of an illegitimate child sufficient evidence for conviction of infanticide. This law certainly contributed to the increase, but judges were convicting women of infanticide under this standard well before passage of the law.

### Chapter 3 - Englishwomen and Indian War

In the aftermath of King Philip's War, frustrations over continued Indian threats led a group of colonial Englishwomen to commit an act of unimaginable brutality. By 1677, the war had drained manpower away from the seaborne trade with the West Indies, severely damaging the coastal economy.<sup>1</sup> Abenaki Indians were also targeting fishing as part of their continuing frontier strategy in the northern theater of the war.<sup>2</sup> By mid-summer, Indian pirates had captured more than twenty vessels off the northern New England coast, thirteen manned by men from Marblehead.<sup>3</sup> The crew aboard one of these ketches managed to retake their vessel and direct it to Marblehead harbor with two Indian pirates in custody. They intended to take their former captors to the authorities to collect a reward, or sell the prisoners into slavery and remedy some of their financial losses.<sup>4</sup> A group of colonial Englishwomen would ensure that the Indian prisoners never reached Boston.

On Sabbath day, when the fisherman and their captives arrived on shore, they met townspeople emerging from the meetinghouse. Word had spread that another Marblehead ship

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<sup>1</sup> David Stephen Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler, *Daily Lives of Civilians in Wartime Early America: From the Colonial Era to the Civil War* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), 13; James K. Folsom and Richard Slotkin, *So Dreadful a Judgment: Puritan Responses to King Philip's War, 1676-1677* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1978), 3.

<sup>2</sup> James Axtell, "The Vengeful Women of Marblehead: James Roule's Deposition of 1677," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. 31 (1974), 647-8; Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 92.

<sup>3</sup> Christine Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture: The Maritime Communities of Colonial Massachusetts, 1690-1750* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984), 225; Horace Beck, *American Indian As a Sea Fighter in Colonial Times* (Mystic, Conn.: Marine Historical Society, 1959), 31; Increase Mather, letter, May 23, 1677, in Thomas Hutchinson, *The History of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts Bay* (1764), 307n.; For more on the rough maritime community of colonial Marblehead, see Samuel Roads, Jr., *The History and Traditions of Marblehead* (Boston 1880); Pam Matthias Peterson, *Marblehead Myths, Legends and Lore: From Stories past to Modern Mystery* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2007); Lauren Fogle, *Colonial Marblehead: From Rogues to Revolutionaries* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture*, 225; "Statement of Robert Roules of Marblehead concerning the capture of fishing vessels at Cape Sable by the Indians," July 17, 1677, Massachusetts Archives, Felt Collection, Volume 69: 158.

had been taken, and most of the churchgoers assumed that all the sailors had been killed. According to influential Puritan leader Increase Mather, who recorded the incident in his diary, the women were especially angry that the Indian prisoners had been kept alive, and in “a boisterous rage,” they “set upon & killed them.”<sup>5</sup> According to another witness, mariner Robert Roule, who gave a deposition in front of the General Court, the women grabbed the Indians by the hair, and using their hands, stones and wooden billets—whatever was lying nearby—they “made an end of the Indians.” The constable of the town did not intervene to put an end to the attack. As they murdered the men, the women were “crying out” that “if [the Indians] had been carried to Boston they would have been set at liberty.”<sup>6</sup> Although the Indians probably would have been charged with piracy, a felony and hanging offense under Massachusetts’ law, the women did not trust the magistrates in Boston to sentence the Indians to death.<sup>7</sup>

The incident stands out as one of the more brutal moments in the clashes between English colonists and Native American peoples that marked late-seventeenth-century New England. However, the violence that these Englishwomen directed toward their Indian enemies—and their contempt for colonial authority—did not emerge out of nowhere on the shores of Marblehead harbor. These women were either members of the community, and dependent on the coastal economy, or refugees who had fled to the southeast to escape destruction on the frontier.<sup>8</sup> In either case, by attacking the Indians and expressing their antipathy for colonial authority, the women were looking after the interests of their families by confronting perceived threats.<sup>9</sup> The

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<sup>5</sup> Increase Mather, "Diary," in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, ser. 2, v. 13 (1899-1900), 405.

<sup>6</sup> "Roule Deposition," MA Archives, Felt Collection 69: 158.

<sup>7</sup> Yasuhide Kawashima, *Puritan Justice and the Indian* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1986), 158;

<sup>8</sup> Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York: Knopf, 2002), 92, 93, 352 n26; Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 183.

<sup>9</sup> Colonial New England society was highly patriarchal and organized around the household. It was through this lens that women defined their roles in society. See John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth*

Marblehead attack was not a random incident or an expression of uncontrolled female rage, but a dramatic example of women using violence to try and preserve their way of life, however horrific the result. The attack itself was extraordinary, but these women were not alone in either their aggressive inclinations or the sentiment that inspired them. The violence that these and other Englishwomen exhibited during the Indian Wars of the late seventeenth-century was a dramatic manifestation of more ordinary forms of violence that already played a part in women's lives in colonial New England.

Warfare and overt violence were broadly conceived of as men's prerogatives, and in this period masculine identities hinged on men's ability to defend their communities and control subordinates. Frequently, methods of enforcing orderly behavior included physical "correction" of wives, children, and servants and it was not unusual for disputes between neighbors to erupt into violent disagreements. However, as explored in Chapter One, the good wives of colonial New England could also use moderate physical aggression in their roles as mothers, mistresses, and even neighbors without challenging societal expectations for their gender.<sup>10</sup> Most aggressive actions by women had conservative aims, dedicated to preserving the property, safety, or status of their families and households.

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*Colony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Images and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1658–1750* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> Ann M. Little, *Abraham in Arms: War and Gender in Colonial New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 7, 14, 43; Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1996), 73-74, 78, 116, 119; A modest level of physical violence was acceptable in and around the household. An extension of the master, a mistress could strike subordinates and even use force against neighbors and not face prosecution unless the violence was severe. While rare, incidences of wives abusing their husbands appeared before the court. An inherent challenge to male authority, these cases were more likely to catch the court's attention. George Francis Dow, ed., *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex Co., Massachusetts, Vol. 1-9* (Salem, 1911-21); See also G.S. Rowe and Jack D. Marietta, "Personal Violence in a 'Peaceable Kingdom': Pennsylvania, 1682-1801," in *Over the Threshold: Intimate Violence in Early America*, ed. Christine Daniels and Michael Kennedy (New York: Routledge, 1999), 30-31; Roger Thompson, *Sex in Middlesex: Popular Mores in a Massachusetts County, 1649-1699* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1986), 186.

The devastation of King Philip's War (1675-1678), King William's War (1688-1697), and Queen Anne's War (1702-1713) added unprecedented urgency to colonial Englishwomen's desire to protect the interests of their families. Hardship inspired women to defy gendered strictures against women's publically aggressive behavior and openly direct their hostility against those most evidently to blame for their suffering. No longer would some wives and mothers quietly "bear Adversity" or "suppress Resentments, under the greatest Provocations," as Puritan divine Cotton Mather advised their sex.<sup>11</sup> The tragedies of the wars also instilled doubt in the validity of colonial authority and caused some women, as judged by their actions, to challenge the limits of appropriate behavior in their communities. The violence and loss of the wars left a void and when remaking their lives in its wake, some Englishwomen were willing to step out of their place.<sup>12</sup> During King Philip's War and its aftermath, women in Essex County, Massachusetts began attacking an almost inconceivable foe: colonial officials in the course of their duties, particularly constables, tax collectors, and tithingmen. Men holding these positions were the targets of female ire when women would no longer bear the personal and financial costs of the conflicts. Later, as raids continued in northern regions of the colony during King

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<sup>11</sup> Although many sources mark 1676 as the end of King Philip's War, fighting in the northern theater of the war continued until at least 1678. Little, *Abraham in Arms*, 1; I am referring to the formal public, composed of adult men, heads of households and those in charge of formal community affairs. Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers*, 20-21; Cotton Mather, *Bethiah: The glory which adorns the daughters of God* (Boston, 1722); In a population of less than 15,000, an increase in attacks by women on colonial officials from a few per decade to at least one per year between 1677 and 1681 is a suggestive trend. Given the small number of cases, however, I cannot claim that this trend is statistically significant. My population estimate of 15,000 for late seventeenth-century Essex County is derived from my assumption that the county would not contain more than one third of the estimated population of the colony of Massachusetts in 1688 (44,000). See Evarts Boutell Green and Virginia Draper Harrington, *American Population Before the Federal Census of 1790* (Genealogical Publishing Company, 1993), 14.

<sup>12</sup> In analyzing women's reactions to the Indian Wars in this way, I am drawing on the work of anthropologist Veena Das. Her work is focused on twentieth-century India, but her theories about how families and communities began to question the nature of their social worlds, and their roles within it, in the aftermath of violent events are applicable here. Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

William's and Queen Anne's Wars, stories emerged of Englishwomen attacking and defending themselves against Indians as the most obvious source of their suffering.<sup>13</sup>

Whether women were prosecuted for trespassing into more open expressions of violence depended more on the identity of their victims than the brutality of their actions. For instance, historians have overstated witnesses' moral outrage over the 1677 killings in Marblehead.<sup>14</sup> Authorities seemed almost less concerned over the loss of life than women taking control out of official hands. Increase Mather was concerned that the women had "very barbarously" murdered the Indian captives, but he was more focused on the ramifications for English/Indian relations. He wrote, "Doubtless if the Indians hear of it the captives among them will be served accordingly." In the end, the General Court reached a stalemate: the murder of Indian pirates, even one as brutal as this, was not worthy of further action and the women's misbehavior did not constitute enough of a threat to colonial authority to pursue.<sup>15</sup>

Historians have also mislabeled the Marblehead incident as "random" or as an expression of female rage gone astray in order to understand what they consider to be these women's inexplicable actions.<sup>16</sup> This interpretation takes the incident out of context, missing similarities between the murders and other anti-Indian violence by Englishwomen during this period, and it

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<sup>13</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co., v. 1-9*; Massachusetts Archive Court Records, Records of the Essex County Court, Records of the General Sessions of the Peace, Records of the Massachusetts Court of Assistants, Records of the Superior Court of Judicature (after 1686), and Records of the Massachusetts General Court.

<sup>14</sup> This misreading stems from misuse of the main source for the event. Historians who discuss the murders reference antiquarian Samuel G. Drake's nineteenth-century transcription of the Roule deposition, rather than the original. Drake re-phrased several passages, creating an almost entirely different version of events. Unaware of the discrepancy, historians have used Drake's version to mislabel the event as either a reviled "instance of frontier vigilantism" or an act of female behavior so outrageous that men distanced themselves from its brutality. See Drake, S., "Roule Deposition," MS 252, Edward E. Ayer Collection, The Newberry Library; James Axtell, "The Vengeful Women of Marblehead," 647-8; Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 194-5.

<sup>15</sup> Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture*, 225; Increase Mather letter, May 23, 1677, in Hutchinson, *The History of Massachusetts-bay*, 307.

<sup>16</sup> LePore depicts calls the incident a "random" and "unprovoked attack." Lepore, *The Name of War*, 183; Beck depicts the attack as an expression of women's irrational rage allowed to flourish uncontrolled. Beck, *American Indian As A Sea-fighter*.



also overlooks parallels to women's resistance to colonial officials during the Indian Wars. By not allowing magistrates to handle the Indians, the women were simultaneously demonstrating against the perceived lenience of the magistrates in Boston and expressing their anger toward Indians.<sup>17</sup> Like other women who used violence against colonial officials and Indians during the Indian Wars, they acted without male protection, confronting both real and perceived threats to their families.<sup>18</sup>

Aggressive protection of family interests against threats from both authorities and enemies was not unique to the women of colonial New England. The necessity for women's violence increased during the English civil wars.<sup>19</sup> Englishwomen's concerns, like their New English counterparts, centered on the well-being of their families.<sup>20</sup> Puritan strictures on the importance of female obedience seem to have dampened women's participation in mass demonstrations of violence in early Essex County, Massachusetts and elsewhere in New England. The incident in Marblehead, where the impact of Puritan teachings on the rough maritime community was relatively weak, was a rare event. At the same time, however, militant strains of New England Puritanism offered mixed messages regarding violence and served to

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<sup>17</sup> Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture*, 225; Heyrman, however, argues that the gender of the attackers was relatively unimportant to the incident overall and fails to notice similarities between the attack in Marblehead and other attacks on officials by colonial women during this period.

<sup>18</sup> Fogle, *Colonial Marblehead*, 111 n48; Peterson provides a similar interpretation of the event, but mistakenly recounts that the Indians were "tarred, feathered and dragged through the streets." Peterson, *Marblehead Myths, Legends and Lore*, 18.

<sup>19</sup> Historians have been much less reluctant to explore women's roles in the English civil wars than they have the Indian Wars of colonial New England. This is probably due to the greater availability of source material. See A. Laurence, "Women's work and the English Civil War," *History Today* 42, no. 6 (1992); Charles Carlton, *Going to the Wars: The Experience of the British Civil Wars, 1638-1651* (London: Routledge, 1992); Stevie Davies, *Unbridled Spirits: Women of the English Revolution, 1640-1660* (London: The Women's Press, 1998); Alison Plowden, *Women All on Fire: The Women of the English Civil War* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998); Roger Hudson, ed., *The Grand Quarrel: Women's Memoirs of the English Civil War* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> Thompson, "Moral Economy of the English Crowd," 116.

equate religious devotion with violent action against their enemies for men and women.<sup>21</sup>

Instances of women's violence that appear in the historical record from this period have been shaped by the push and pull of these forces.

Whether overt violence by women could be acceptable depended on how it was judged by local, colonial, or provincial authorities in seventeenth-century Massachusetts. Attacking an Indian enemy could be regarded as beneficial to the colonial community. While such an action was outside of a woman's purview, it could still be acceptable if beneficial for English peoples living under threat of attack. These incidents also had the benefit of appearing conflict-specific: springing from desperation rather than women's natural inclinations. Indian peoples, as well, particularly in the later seventeenth century, were rarely sympathetic victims. Juries frequently refused to convict white colonists of murdering Indians, regardless of the evidence. Violence against colonial officials by women, however, was always judged against the interests of the community and particularly disruptive. Prosecuting women who had attacked officials helped publically reassert hierarchies of gender and social and political power.<sup>22</sup>

While the targets of women's violence during these conflicts came from populations on opposing ends of the social spectrum, women's aggression against both groups sprung from the same motivation: their desire to protect their households and kin groups. The hardships of war reinforced this motivation. Because of King Philip's, King William's, and Queen Anne's Wars, many women lost property, a sense of security, and most importantly, loved ones. Sources from

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<sup>21</sup> Laurel Ulrich discusses the women of Marblehead as channeling this "Old World pattern" of female unruliness, but fails to place it in the context of Puritanism. This is in line with Ulrich's general tendency to treat Puritanism as a cultural observance as opposed to a system of thought. Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 194.

<sup>22</sup> Kawashima, *Puritan Justice*, 153-4; New England colonial court rituals "dramatized formal, masculine power and authority." Courthouses were designed to reinforce the social order, with judges on a raised bench and wealthy men in front-row seats. Women attended court only when called for prosecution or to testify. Rebecca J. Tannenbaum, *The Healer's Calling: Women and Medicine in Early New England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 96.

Essex County, Massachusetts indicate that some women during this period were unwilling to submit peacefully to these sacrifices imposed on them by the wars, by colonial authorities, or by their Indian enemies.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Impact of the Indian Wars***

Before examining women's violent behavior during these Indian Wars, it is crucial to understand the profound impact of these conflicts on this population. Fewer women than men were casualties of fighting, but as widows and refugees, women scrambled to find ways to survive; as wives, mothers, and household managers, they dealt with the personal, social, and economic strains of the conflicts.

In terms of the proportion of people killed to those in the population, the Indian Wars were some of the deadliest conflicts in American history. During King Philip's War, losses to English communities as well as to the Wampanoag and their northeastern Algonquian allies were devastating.<sup>24</sup> Nothing could prepare the English colonists for the losses they would experience in the wars, or the sense of uncertainty that accompanied them.<sup>25</sup> Puritans viewed the wars as "a bloody punishment for its people for sins committed" and searched for someone to blame.<sup>26</sup> Many men, women and children were killed, or carried into captivity; others died of starvation

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<sup>23</sup> During peaceful periods, women disappear from Essex County court records and emerge again in times of uncertainty. The numbers of acts of violence by men toward colonial officials was more consistent throughout the seventeenth-century, averaging at least two per year. Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co., v. 6-9*; The numbers of attacks by Englishmen or women on Native Americans is impossible to quantify. Most of these instances were never brought to the attention of colonial courts.

<sup>24</sup> An estimated death toll of 800 and an estimated population for New England of 52,000 English, makes King Philip's War more deadly per capita than the American Revolution, with 180 deaths (per 100,000), the Civil War with 857, or World War II with 206. The war was even deadlier for the Native Americans of New England, claiming an estimated 7,900 Indian victims. Kyle F. Zelner, *A Rabble in Arms: Massachusetts Towns and Militiamen During King Philip's War* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 201; Folsom and Slotkin, *So Dreadfull a Judgment*, 4; and Lepore, *The Name of War*, xi; King Williams' War was almost as deadly. By the end of the war in 1697, at least 650 English colonists were dead, killed in battles, raids, or in captivity. Indian death tolls were even greater, numbering between 600 to 1300 killed. Richard H. Bayor, ed., *The Columbia Documentary History of Race and Ethnicity in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 14.

<sup>25</sup> Norton, *Devils Snare*, 87.

<sup>26</sup> David Lovejoy, *The Glorious Revolution in America* (New York: Haper & Row, 1972), 144.

and exposure as a result of Indian raids.<sup>27</sup> Violent death “seemed to emerge without warning from the forests, then disappear . . . whence it had come.”<sup>28</sup> Raids brought the horrors of war to the colonists' very doorsteps.<sup>29</sup> As James K. Folsom and Richard Slotkin explain, because Puritan society was so relatively small, made up of tiny towns and hamlets, “virtually every community and every family” was affected by the extensive losses.<sup>30</sup> Even those communities that did not directly experience the devastation of war included members who had lost relatives to the conflicts, and news of the wars quickly spread throughout New England.<sup>31</sup>

Because women did not fight in colonial militias or officially take part in major skirmishes, historians have not recognized the extent of their losses in the Indian Wars. Few women recorded the events of the wars, so narratives usually fail to convey their experiences of the conflicts.<sup>32</sup> Though fewer women than men were actual casualties of fighting, women experienced the upheavals and struggles that accompanied the wars in profound ways. As widows and refugees women scrambled and fought to find ways to survive; as wives, mothers and household managers, they dealt with the personal, social and economic strains of the conflicts.

For the colonists of Massachusetts Bay, out of a total population of approximately thirty thousand, one in every sixteen men of military age was killed or died as a result of King Philip's War alone.<sup>33</sup> Increase Mather, in his *Earnest Exhortation to the Inhabitants of New-England*

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<sup>27</sup> Folsom and Slotkin, *So Dreadfull a Judgment*, 4.

<sup>28</sup> Norton, *Devil's Snare*, 87.

<sup>29</sup> Norton, *Devil's Snare*, 87.

<sup>30</sup> Folsom and Slotkin, *So Dreadfull a Judgment*, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Norton, *Devil's Snare*, 12.

<sup>32</sup> Exceptions to this general rule include Folsom and Slotkin, *So Dreadfull a Judgment*, Norton, *Devils Snare*, and Little, *Abraham in Arms*.

<sup>33</sup> Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 100; By the late seventeenth-century in Essex County, widows made up approximately 20 percent of the adult female population over 30. Vivan Bruce Conger, *The Widows' Might: Widowhood and Gender in Early British America* (New York University Press, 2009), 4.

(1676) remarked on the number of widows and fatherless children that had appeared as a result of the fighting in King Philip's War, and urged his listeners to heed it as a sign of God's punishment.<sup>34</sup> For every married man killed in the Indian wars, there was a widow who would have to find a way to subsist without her husband, or become a burden on the resources of her town or colony.

Widows began to appear regularly before the courts during King Philip's War to settle legal and financial affairs, their husbands having died "fighting the indians."<sup>35</sup> The first mention of "the war" in the Essex County court records appears in September 1675 with several cases of men being slain in the war without leaving wills.<sup>36</sup> As that year progressed, the number of intestate probate cases steadily increased, and cases of men killed in the wars would continue to appear through the end of the decade.<sup>37</sup> Widows who possessed some property were sometimes left to act as executrix of their husbands' estates. For those less fortunate, the loss of a husband could impoverish a woman and her family.<sup>38</sup> Some women undoubtedly turned to their extended families for assistance. Others pleaded for help more publicly. Mary Knight reached out to the court in June 1676, desperate for assistance after her husband was killed in the conflict. Mary

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<sup>34</sup> Mather wrote, "Is it nothing that so many have been cut off by a bloody and barbarous Sword? It is nothing that Widdows and Fatherless have been multiplied among us? that in a small Plantation we have heard of eight widows, and six and twenty fatherless children in one day? And in another of the Villages of our Judah, of seven Widows and about thirty fatherless children, all at once: How can we speak of such things without bleeding Lamentation? Shall not such solemn strokes as last awaken us?" Increase Mather, *An Earnest Exhortation to the Inhabitants of New England* (Boston 1676), 2.

<sup>35</sup> Cases of men dying intestate (without a documented will) in the war first appear in September, 1675, and continue through at least November, 1677. George Francis Dow, ed., *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex Co., Massachusetts, Vol. 6* (Salem, 1911-21), 6, 71, 92-3, 278, 383, 385, 386; Widows appear again toward the end of King Williams' War before the Superior Court of Judicature petitioning for relief. Records of the Superior Court of Judicature, Noble transcription, Vol. 1, 1692-1695, MA Archives, Suffolk Files reel #1: 124, 125, 209-210.

<sup>36</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co., v. 6*, 71.

<sup>37</sup> Cases appeared in Essex Co. Court records through 1677. Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co., v. 6*, 278, 383-6; Petitions for relief continue to appear before the General Court, or the Governor and Magistrates until 1682. MA Archives, Felt Collection, Vols. 68, 69, 70, 71.

<sup>38</sup> As Conger explains, while some widows enjoyed independent and financially secure lives after the loss of a husband, this was not the experience for the vast majority of widows in early British America, who "inherited neither large amounts of land nor personal goods" from their deceased spouses. Conger, *The Widows' Might*, 5.

was “very poore & herself & children...in great want.” The court ordered the committee of militia of Beverly and the selectmen of Manchester to “forthwith take care that the said mary & her children may be releived & not suffer for want.”<sup>39</sup> Desperate women inundated the General Court, as well as the Governor and Magistrates, with similar petitions for relief and assistance into the 1680s.<sup>40</sup> The majority of these petitions were successful and the General Court usually offered at least a few pounds for the widow and her family.<sup>41</sup>

A new generation of widows came forward for help during King William’s War and Queen Anne’s War.<sup>42</sup> Though fewer than during King Philips’ War, a steady stream of women brought petitions for relief and for compensation as war widows before the General Court, Governor and Magistrates between 1692 and 1711.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, militia leaders published bills to encourage men to volunteer to fight the Indians, assuring potential soldiers that their families would be taken care of if, “God forbid...any of ours should fall.” “[T]hat our

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<sup>39</sup> *Essex Co. Cr. Records*, June 1676, Massachusetts Judicial Archives, Vol. 5, Entry 39; Vol. 6, Entry 173.

<sup>40</sup> The “Felt Collection” in the Massachusetts Archives includes an extensive collection of petitions on a variety of topics to the General Court and the Governor and Magistrates from the late seventeenth century. From 1676 to 1682 almost all of these petitions are either asking for release from militia service in King Philip’s War, compensation for service in the war, or assistance due to injury or death suffered in the conflict. Many of these petitions were put forward by women as mothers, wives or widows. MA Archives, Felt Collection, Vols. 68, 69, 70, 71; One of these was from Mary Kimball, who witnessed her husband killed by two Indians. She expressed her desperation to retrieve whatever remaining possessions she could reclaim after a raid on her Bradford home. She petitioned the Governor and Counsel for assistance in returning for any goods “they have not destroyed,” including “two kittells and two or three baggs of linen.” Mary knew that her continued survival depended on gathering her remaining resources, however meager. “Petition by Mary Kimball to Governor and Council,” MA Archives, Felt Collection 30: 208.

<sup>41</sup> Of those held in the Massachusetts Archives Felt Collection, all of the petitions for relief by widows to the General Court in the late seventeenth, early eighteenth centuries were successful. The standard payment a widow received would usually be around 3-5 pounds, but some widows received as much as 25 pounds for their husband’s service in the wars. MA Archives, Felt Collection. Vols. 69, 70, 71; One unusual petition was that of Paren Broughton, the widow of George Broughton of Salmon River. Both her husband and son were killed during the war. Mrs. Broughton petitioned the Massachusetts General Court in July 1696, but did not expect to receive support from the government. In order to support herself, she requested permission to “to retail Wine, Ale and Sider.” Nathaniel Hubbard, “A Narrative of the Troubles with the Indians,” in *History of the Indian Wars in New England*, ed. Samuel Drake, Vols. 1 and 2 (Genealogical Publishing Company, 2002 reprint), 120, ftnt. 149.

<sup>42</sup> Conger argues that King William’s War and Queen Anne’s War “took a heavy toll on Boston marriages. A 1742 census revealed that, by the middle of the century, widows made up nearly 30 percent (1,200) of all adult Boston women.” Conger, *The Widows’ Might*, 4.

<sup>43</sup> MA Archives, Felt Collection, Vols. 61, 70, 71.

Encouragement be given them,” one bill from 1704 stated, “ye sum of three pounds be given to each surviving souldier engaged in that service” and “five pounds be allowed to ye widow of each of ye slaine.”<sup>44</sup> This was a costly, but necessary strategy to ensure that married men would continue to enlist to fight in the Indian Wars on the frontiers.

In order to support all aspects of the war effort, colonies imposed additional financial and social burdens on New England communities. Some of the major hardships that resulted from King Philip’s War, and continued as fighting on the northern frontiers of New England failed to abate, were the economic and social strains of the conflicts.<sup>45</sup> Difficulties from the wars spread throughout the region, far from where the battles raged. The destruction of property and the cost of conducting King Philip’s War amounted to 21 pounds per household, a sum that was more than the annual salary of the secretary or deputy governor of Connecticut at the time.<sup>46</sup> Colonies, in turn, placed a heavy load of taxes on the people to handle the tremendous financial burden. In five sessions between July 1675 and October 1676 alone, the General Court ordered thirty-five “rates,” or as-needed collections of property tax, to fight King Philips War.<sup>47</sup>

Colonial officials were less able to enforce wartime taxation increases on the frontier regions of New England. Haverhill residents, for example, could not keep up with the rising costs. Samuel Ayer, constable of Haverhill, wrote a letter to the Massachusetts General Court asking for leniency in paying their portion of taxes owed. The town was in “a poor condition,” and unable to collect additional taxes from its citizens. “There are many that Have not corn to

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<sup>44</sup> MA Archives, Felt Collection 71: 51; MA Archives, Felt Collection 36: 130.

<sup>45</sup> “Throughout the French wars, New England would experience various blows to its economy, including unremitting inflation, and the almost constant depreciation of its currency.” Steven C Eames, *Rustic Warriors: Warfare and the Provincial Soldier on the New England Frontier, 1689-1748* (New York University Press, 2011), 10.

<sup>46</sup> Heidler and Heidler, *Daily Lives of Civilians in Wartime Early America*, 13.

<sup>47</sup> Alvin Rabushka, *Taxation in Colonial America* (Princeton University Press, 2008), 169; Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 244; Koehler, *A Search for Power*, 338.

pay their Rates, manei more which have not mony,” he wrote. “I know not what to take.”<sup>48</sup>

Colonial authorities chose to focus instead on areas with greater wealth that they could logistically control more easily. For Massachusetts Bay, this placed a greater financial burden on the towns closest to Boston.<sup>49</sup>

At the same time, these safe towns in the interior took in refugees by the hundreds and struggled to sustain the added cost of their survival.<sup>50</sup> The towns had to cope with increased taxation, and this flood of refugees and widows as many of their able-bodied men were drafted for military service, or killed in combat. As Douglass Leach explains, this placed a strain on communities and “raised questions of fairness.”<sup>51</sup> Petitions for Relief of Service submitted by men illustrate these difficulties. John Leverrett, for instance, with the Council of Caleb Church of Watertown behind him, petitioned to be exempt from militia duty in order to run the local mill.<sup>52</sup> Women’s petitions seeking to keep men at home are even more revealing. Hannah Stanley of Malden begged the Council to release her husband from service to manage their farm, which was “lying to spoil for want of tending” as she tried to manage their family of four young children.<sup>53</sup> Like many colonial Englishwomen during this period, Hannah was overwhelmed trying to run a household, maintain a farm, and raise children in her husbands’ absence. Her personal struggles eventually took precedence over the fight against the Indian threat and she asked for him to return home.

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<sup>48</sup> Chase, *History of Haverhill*, 150; “Letter from Samuel Ayer to General Court,” February 11, 1689, MA Archives, Felt Collection 35: 232b.

<sup>49</sup> Lovejoy, *Glorious Revolution in America*, 196.

<sup>50</sup> David Corlett, “Forced to Flee for Our Lives: New England Refugees in King Philip’s War,” presented at Society for Military History 2005 Annual Meeting, February 26, 2005.

<sup>51</sup> Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 170.

<sup>52</sup> “Petition for Relief of Service by John Leverrett and Council of Caleb Church of Watertown,” June 22, 1676, MA Archives, Felt Collection 69: 20.

<sup>53</sup> “Petition by Hannah Stanley,” 1676, MA Archives, Felt Collection 69: 80a.



Petitions for relief and reimbursement that appear in the court record express the idea that many women during the Indian Wars felt they had given enough in support of the conflicts. Some widows petitioned for relief from taxes, given losses they had already sustained. Obedience Curtis, whose husband was slain in the wars, explained that she was “indebted to the Country for the rates” imposed on her estate but simply could not pay them.<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth Johnson petitioned for relief from taxes at least twice after her husband was killed in the wars.<sup>55</sup>

Other women sought compensation for their contributions to the war effort by other means. Sarah Tuckerman wanted repayment for curing her son of wounds suffered in King Philip’s War. Since his injury, she wrote, they had been surviving “by her hard labour,” and the government was “duty bound” to pay her.<sup>56</sup> Elizabeth Bent, war widow and mother of seven, sought to be repaid for the expense of quartering “severall Souldiers” during the war as well as for losing two horses that had been impressed for service.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, when soldiers arrived in Lancaster “when an attaque was made upon it by ye enemy,” Mary Garder did not appreciate the damage the soldiers’ horses did to her field. She petitioned for compensation for that damage, as well as the expense of “entertaining” soldiers afterward.<sup>58</sup> Hanah Wascarr petitioned for the return of a barrel of powder, or its equivalent. The powder had been taken “by Authoritie...for use, in the late Warrs.” Hanah, apparently, did not consider it a donation to the cause.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> “Petition to the Council from Obedience Curtise of Roxbury,” March 1676, MA Archives, Felt Collection 69: 106a.

<sup>55</sup> “Petition for Relief of Payment of Rates by Elizabeth Johnson,” Mar. 14, 1682/3, MA Archives, Felt Collection 70: 85, “Petition for Relief by Elizabeth Johnson,” February 7, 1682, MA Archives, Felt Collection 70:100.

<sup>56</sup> “Petition of Sarah Tuckerman,” December 14, 1676, MA Archives, Felt Collection MA 69: 86a.

<sup>57</sup> Elizabeth is careful to depict herself as a “poore ingnorant widdow” in her petition, but the overall tone of her petition, and her resourcefulness in petitioning the Governor for reimbursement, suggests otherwise. “Petition of Elizabeth Bent, widow in Marlborough,” May 29, 1679, MA Archives, Felt Collection 69: 229.

<sup>58</sup> “Petition to of Mary Gardner of Lancaster,” June 29, 1705, MA Archives, Felt Collection 71: 157-158.

<sup>59</sup> “Petition of Hanah Wascarr of Hadley,” May 27, 1685, MA Archives, Felt Collection 70: 137.

## *Violence Against Colonial Officials*

Public morale all over New England showed alarming signs of deterioration under the heavy and increasing burdens of war.<sup>60</sup> In the midst of this, the colonial governments quarreled so bitterly among themselves over the culpability and handling of the wars that they added to the difficulty of the situation.<sup>61</sup> Colonists distrusted the government under normal circumstances and colonial governments' failures further jeopardized their legitimacy.<sup>62</sup> A rash of physical attacks by women on colonial officials in the late 1670s demonstrates the impact of these additional burdens—and a loss of confidence in colonial authorities—among the women of eastern Essex County. While attacks by women on men in positions of official authority had been almost unheard of in the Essex County court before King Philip's War, several women aggressively protected their personal and family interests against tax collectors, constables and tithingmen in quick succession after the conflict.<sup>63</sup>

These women's responses to authority were part of a general dissatisfaction with colonial officials and their demands in the context of the Indian Wars. This disenchantment crossed socio-economic boundaries. Women from different walks of life perpetrated violence against colonial officials during this time, from those on the edge of subsistence to women of standing and property. Of course, most women who had other options usually did not choose to respond to such situations with violence. Those that could seek relief from their burdens in other ways, such as through petitioning, probably did so. Petitioning of this kind was not an option for most women, however. The women who attacked colonial officials during this period were more

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<sup>60</sup> Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 182.

<sup>61</sup> Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 94, 100-101, 118, 143.

<sup>62</sup> Randolph Roth, *American Homicide* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 51.

<sup>63</sup> Attacks by women against men in positions of public authority in Essex County went from a few per decade to at least one per year during the end of King Philips War between 1677 and 1681. See Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 6-9*. Again, in a population of less than 15,0000, this increase in the frequency of attacks by women on colonial officials is a suggestive trend, but I am not claiming that it is large enough to be statistically significant.

peripherally affected by the demands of the Indian Wars, and, therefore, unable to petition for relief from the increasing financial and social burdens the conflicts imposed.

These women share several other characteristics. They lived in eastern settlements like Salem, Ipswich, Lynn and Marblehead, and while they remained out of the line of direct attack in the wars, and were therefore not preoccupied with imminent, daily threats to their survival, they were not exempt from the hardships of war. These women's interior communities bore the brunt of the economic strains of the conflicts, contributed men to fight in militias, and supported growing numbers of refugees from the frontier.

As the court records show, women did not seek out public officials in order to attack them. Most violent actions by women occurred in their own households against those who imposed on them or on family members or close friends. While these women were not generally war widows, it is notable that the women who assaulted public officials were usually alone: their husbands, fathers or adult sons were out of the house, at least at the beginning of the incidents. This indicates that at least some of the women were defending their family members or households, or were trying to preserve family property without the assistance of a male family member.<sup>64</sup> The women who appear in the court record as violent assailants did not seem at all intimidated by the presence of male authority figures. On the contrary, their testimonies reveal their antipathy to these representatives of town and colony authority.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Married women in colonial Massachusetts could not technically own property, however, it appears that many women, as wives or widows, saw their familial holdings as their concern and some took violent action to try and avoid further losses during this period. Mary Beth Norton, "The Evolution of White Women's Experience in Early America," *The American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (1984), 603; Marylynn Salmon, "The Legal Status of Women in Early America: A Reappraisal," *Law and History Review* 1, no. 1 (Spring, 1983): 136-7, 146, 151.

<sup>65</sup> Most men holding public office were local residents of their communities, selected from among the more prosperous members of society to serve in positions of authority. See Kenneth Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First One Hundred Years, Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636-1736* (New York: Norton, 1970) and Edward Cook Jr., *The Fathers of the Town: Leadership and Community Structure in Eighteenth Century New England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); Therefore, attacks on colonial officials could also be interpreted as a form of

Near the end of King Philip's War, Mrs. Petter Harling of Marblehead was prosecuted and fined for abusing military officers in the execution of their duties. The officers had come to her home to collect a fine against her husband for neglect of militia training and also to make sure the home was "provided with armes" as the law required. Goody Harling first refused to show them her husband's weapons, him being out, and then refused to pay the fine in the form of specie or property, threatening, "If you touch any goods of mine I will knoke out your Braines." She also pushed one of the officers, who called for assistance, restraining her while they took a pewter dish as payment. As the men made a hasty retreat, Goody Harling's words rang in their ears: she would "haue [their] Hearts Blood," and she would "doe The Clerke a mischeefe" before long. In court, the officers provided a detailed account of what had transpired and described her "many Railling words" and disorderly behavior.<sup>66</sup>

During that same period, Mrs. Margaret Giffard of Lynn threatened the constable and a deputy marshal, bodily preventing them from seizing household goods in payment of debt to the state. The Giffards had been plagued by financial issues related to John Giffard's position as agent for the Iron Works Company in Lynn and had moved to upper Saugus to distance themselves from the trouble.<sup>67</sup> Only during King Philip's War, however— after Abenaki Indians

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neighbor violence. Particularly in smaller New England communities, some women who attacked constables and tax collectors would have known the men they acted against.

<sup>66</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 7*, 41-42; Records of the Essex County Court, MA Archives, microfilm reel # 877464, Item 3, entry 35.

<sup>67</sup> As an agent for the London Iron Works Company, John Giffard/Gifford had a checkered career. He was subjected to long and troublesome litigation regarding a bond given while in England. Even after moving to upper Saugus, John was prosecuted for the company's pecuniary issues, and was even briefly imprisoned in the 1650s for debt. *Register of the Lynn Historical Society*, Vol. 1-9 (Lynn Historical Society, 1898), 55, 59; Alonzo Lewis and James Robinson Newhall, *History of Lynn, Essex County, Massachusetts*, Vol. 1, 1629-1864 (Lynn: Published at Bookstore of G.C. Herbert, 1890), 230; Margaret Giffard/Gifford was married to Abraham Temple of Salem until his death in 1639. Before her husband died, she gave birth to their son, Robert, who moved to Saco in the 1660s. He was killed by Indians there in 1675. Levi Daniel Temple, *Some Temple Pedigrees: A Genealogy of the known descendants of Abraham Temple* (D. Clapp & Son, 1900), 9; William Richard Cutter, ed., *Genealogical and Personal Memoirs Relating to the Families of Boston and Eastern Massachusetts 2* (Boston: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1908), 580; *Obituary Records of Graduates of Yale University* (1911), 14.

had killed her son at Saco—did Margaret resort to physical violence to avoid payment. When men entered her residence and began collecting items of brass, iron, and pewter, as well as a gun, Goody Giffard was not willing to let her property go without a fight. She tried to detain the constable by force, grabbing his black staff—the symbol of his position in the community—in the process. She insisted that the family owed nothing else and “vowed they should have no goods there.” Witnesses recounted the incident in court as part of the Giffards’ lawsuit for unjust removal of goods. The constable had not pursued the Giffards in court, and the lawsuit only succeeded in bringing details of the incident into public view. Mrs. Giffard taking hold of the constable’s staff would have been a particularly damning breach of female conduct. Their lawsuit was unsuccessful and the Giffards were ordered to pay all costs.<sup>68</sup>

Similarly, the threat of increased taxation inspired violence from Elizabeth Dodg of Ipswich in 1680. Mrs. Dodg did not respect the authority of colonial officials to impose any further on her family, and was willing to attack them to defend her property. Thomas Hobs came to the Dodg's house and began discussing possible rate collection, and the attachment of several items of their property including a sled and a large kettle for payment of increased taxes.

Elizabeth Dodg may have been hardened by her first husband’s death at sea in 1672, and the extended absences of her second husband, the well-respected Captain John Dodg, while he was off fighting in King Philip’s War.<sup>69</sup> She responded that if men “did com thither” to collect for

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<sup>68</sup> “Deposition of John Nowall and Thomas Browne,” April 1677, Essex County Quarterly Court File Papers, MA Judicial Archives, Vol. 26: 97-2, Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 6*, 287; “Summons for Clement Coldam,” June 19, 1677, Essex Co. Ct. File Papers, MA Judicial Archives, Vol. 26: 97-1; Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 8*, 23; The constable’s staff was his legal badge of office in the Massachusetts Colony. Herbert Baxter Adams, *The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical Political Science* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1886), 32; Margaret Giffard was, apparently, a troublesome woman, however. She was summoned to court in 1680 upon suspicions of being a witch, but she did not appear to answer the charges. Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 8*, 23.

<sup>69</sup> Elizabeth’s first husband, John Woodbury, died in 1672 while working as a mariner on his Majesty’s ship “Crown.” He left her with significant debt and six children, the last born that year. Following his death, Elizabeth quickly married Captain John Dodg in 1675, only a year before he was involved in fighting in King Philip’s War.

rates “she would mak the blood run about there eares.” When Hobs commented that if the constable commanded him to collect her taxes he would not be afraid to come, she “caught” him by the hair and struck him in the face. Mrs. Dodg was also not intimidated by the constable. She stated that if she could get a hold of his staff, she would use it to beat him around the ears. When three selectmen arrived later to make good on their collection, Mrs. Dodg fought to keep her property, striking one man on the hat or the side of the head. Angered, three of the officials dragged her down and one struck her on the neck with a fist. A nearby witness exclaimed, “Rescue the woman, what will you let her be Cilld,” and neighbors rushed over to restrain the men. Their reprisal was so severe that the court seems to have decided she had been punished enough.<sup>70</sup>

In a region that had lost so many fighting in the Indian Wars, some women used violent means to protect their husbands, sons and friends from being imposed upon further by the authorities. Hana Mason was sentenced by the court in Salem to be fined or whipped for attempting to strike a tithingman in 1677. Hana was most likely the wife of John Mason, a former soldier who had been stationed at Wrentham, which had been hit hard during King Philip’s War.<sup>71</sup> When Henry West came to the Mason household to investigate a fight that had occurred there, Goody Mason was unwilling to allow him to question anyone in her household.

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He fought with distinction in the conflict in the “Troop of Horse” under Captain John Whipple and Captain George Curwin. He would later fight in King Williams’ War as the Captain of Beverly Troop in 1690. *Publication of the Society of Colonial Wars in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts*, Issue 9 (Boston, 1908), 102; Ezra Stearns, William Frederick Whitcher, Edward Everett Parker, *Genealogical and Family History of the State of New Hampshire*, Vol. 4 (New York and Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1908), 1632.

<sup>70</sup> “Deposition of Thomas Hobs,” July 1680, Essex Co. Crt. File Papers, MA Judicial Archives, Vol. 34: 25-2; Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 8*, 21-22; Alice Lapham, *The Old Planters of Beverly in Massachusetts and The Thousand Acre Grant of 1635* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1930), 50.

<sup>71</sup> John Mason was paid 5 pounds, 6 shillings and 3 pence for his service in the conflict. George Madison Bodge, *Soldiers in King Philip’s War*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boston, 1906), 366; For more on the devastation of Wrentham during King Philip’s War, see George William Ellis, John Emery Morris, *King Philip’s War: Based on Archives and Records of Massachusetts, Plymouth, Rhode Island and Connecticut* (Grafton Press, 1906), 206, 221.

She reached into her fireplace and seized an andiron—the horizontal iron bar upon which logs are laid for burning—and tried to strike him with it, calling “thou West, thou Harry, thou Deuill.” When the andiron was taken away, she picked up a chair and threatened West with it as well.<sup>72</sup> Goody Mason was accused of being intoxicated during the episode, which may explain her violent, bold response to West’s intrusion. Drunk or sober, however, she was clearly hostile to colonial authority. There were at least three men at the gathering, but Hana was the most angry at the tithingman for his attempts to enter her household, and she was the only person willing to use violence against him.

In 1679 Mrs. Mary Mould threatened the constable with a firebrand and punched his assistant in the face when they came to serve a warrant against her husband, Thomas. Mary had brought land and some property to her marriage to Thomas Mould, but he had squandered them away in the 1670s.<sup>73</sup> Thomas was charged with stealing wood from their neighbors’ fences, ostensibly to use as firewood. Mary had grown accustomed to poverty as well as hardship. Her brother, Eleazer Keyser (Keazer), had fought in King Philip’s War, but had been paid a pittance for his service. He had survived the experience, only to be later killed in a raid on Haverhill. When the constable and his assistant came to confront her husband, Mrs. Mould was in no mood to cooperate.<sup>74</sup> Both the constable and his companion “Receved severall bloes” from Goodwife Mould, according to the appearance of the constable’s coat, and the other man’s face, in the

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<sup>72</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 7*, 1.

<sup>73</sup> Sidney Perley, ed., *The Essex Antiquarian*, Vol. 11 (1907), 20.

<sup>74</sup> Her older brother, Eleazer, had fought in King Philip’s War in 1676, but was eventually lost in the attack on Haverhill in March 1696. David Webster Hoyt, *Old Families of Salisbury and Amesbury, 1897* (Higginson Book Company, 1990), 527; Eleazer served under Captain Thomas Lathrop, but seems to have been paid only twelve shillings for his service. Bodge, *Soldiers in King Philip’s War*, 138.

aftermath. When a warrant was taken out against her as a result of the attacks, Mary refused to appear before the court.<sup>75</sup>

Ann Fox was prosecuted in 1681 for the severe abuse of a deputy marshal after pulling him backward over a stool by the hair. Fox, an experienced nurse, had probably been called upon to help in the recovery of soldiers returning from King Philip's War.<sup>76</sup> The horrors of war had soon been joined by a smallpox epidemic the authorities were powerless to stop.<sup>77</sup> In 1681, Fox was working as a nurse for several smallpox sufferers in a house in Salem. When a deputy marshal arrived and inquired after Robert Cannon, a mariner, who was wanted for debt, Ann was anything but helpful to the authorities.<sup>78</sup> Cannon tried to flee and the marshal pursued him further into the dwelling. When the men arrived in the sick chamber upstairs, Ann prevented the marshal from pursuing Cannon with a grab "by the hair." The marshal testified that she "abused me with her tongue whilst Cannon & I were striving." When he had fallen backward over a stool, Cannon delivered two or three blows to the marshal and made his escape.<sup>79</sup> The relationship between Ann Fox and Robert Cannon is not clear. It appears that Ann was attempting to stop the men's fight from disturbing her patients. However, Ann's antipathy toward the deputy was apparent: she did more than just restrain the official, as she claimed, and she never attempted to seize Cannon when he was being as disruptive as the man who pursued him. Abraham Adams, the

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<sup>75</sup> "Testimony of Peater Chiver, constable and Joseph Gatchell," February 3, 1679/1680, Essex County Court Papers, WPA Transcription, Vol. 34: 113-1; Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 7*, 329, 332.

<sup>76</sup> Tannenbaum, *The Healer's Calling*, 116; Several women petitioned the General Court for reimbursement after treating wounded men who had returned from the front in King Philip's War. See MA Archives, Felt Collection 69: 86a, 61: 333.

<sup>77</sup> Smallpox had ravaged Native settlements in New England since European contact, but New England's European colonists had their first local encounter with smallpox in 1677. This was followed by another epidemic in 1689–1690. Stanley M. Aronson and Lucile Newman, "God Have Mercy on this House: Being a Brief Chronicle of Smallpox in Colonial New England," For *Smallpox in the Americas 1492 to 1815: Contagion and Controversy* Exhibit at the John Carter Brown Library (2002).

<sup>78</sup> Cannon owned a sloop that had been attach for debt. Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 6*, 410.

<sup>79</sup> "Deposition of Thomas Andrews, Deputy Marshal," March 18, 1677, Essex Co. Cr. File Papers, MA Judicial Archives, Vol. 36: 78-1; Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 8*, 191-2.



owner of the property, was ordered to pay a fine on her behalf for not controlling his subordinate.<sup>80</sup>

The last attack by women on colonial officials in the wake of King Philip's War occurred when Mrs. Elenor Hollingsworth struck a constable and threatened him with an axe in order to allow her son, William, to escape arrest.<sup>81</sup> Goody Hollingsworth was an elderly woman by the 1680s, but she was spry enough to be the main proprietor of the Blue Anchor, a licensed tavern she had been running since her husband's death in 1677. The Blue Anchor was on the edge of polite Salem society. Eleanor came from a respectable family in England, but the tavern on the eastern waterfront welcomed a variety of patrons, including passengers from Marblehead ferry, as well as fisherman and mariners from Salem and abroad.<sup>82</sup> Mrs. Hollingsworth had managed, in her husband's absence, to keep these dissident elements in her tavern in check, and to maintain a living with the help of her son, even in the midst of the turmoil of war. She was not going to allow William to be taken away from her. When she saw the constable and deputy accosting her son one afternoon, she came out into the yard and rescued him by physically detaining the constable and striking him with at least four blows. Old Mrs. Hollingsworth was publically admonished and ordered to pay court costs.<sup>83</sup>

Essex County court records list no attacks on colonial officials by women after the upheaval of King Philip's War had ceased and before King Williams' War would embroil the

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<sup>80</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 8*, 191-2.

<sup>81</sup> William Hollingsworth, Jr. had failed to perform on an agreement he had made to man and "victual" a ship bound for Virginia. Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 9*: 441.

<sup>82</sup> Sidney Perley, *The History of Salem Massachusetts, 1638-1670*, Vol. 2 (S. Perley, 1926), 355; Phyllis Whitman Hunter, *Purchasing Identity in the Atlantic World, Massachusetts Merchants, 1670-1780* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 53; Joseph Gilbert Waters, Marguerite Dlymple, Alice G Waters, ed., *Diary of William Bentley, 1793-1802* (Essex Institute, 1907), 23; Mrs. Eleanor Hollingsworth also ran a brewing business out of her tavern which supplied several merchants in the area with barrels of beer. James E. McWilliams, *Building the Bay Colony: Local Economy and Culture in Early Massachusetts* (University of Virginia Press, 2007), 149.

<sup>83</sup> Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 9*, 448.

colony in conflict in the late 1680s.<sup>84</sup> Sir Edmund Andros' tenure at the helm of New England politics was a period of political upheaval in New England, but the early days of his reign were a time of relative peace with neighboring Indian tribes. In addition, the direct financial burden on Massachusetts' communities was less than it had been previously. Under Joseph Dudley's interim leadership from 1684 to 1686, many Massachusetts residents simply chose not to pay taxes.<sup>85</sup> Andros' revenue acts under the Dominion of New England were highly unpopular because they were imposed without the benefit of an assembly.<sup>86</sup> However, the acts actually dispersed the tax burden more equally to Maine, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Plymouth and Rhode Island, lowering the burden on Massachusetts to less than it had been during the years of King Philip's War.<sup>87</sup>

Andros' disdain for colony and town sovereignty made his regime increasingly unpopular, however, and political animosity against it began to build. He and the Council passed

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<sup>84</sup> In Massachusetts alone, which was constantly ravaged by Indian attacks, King William's War cost upwards of £150,000. Guy Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness: The Triumph of European Warfare in the Colonial Northeast* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 78; For the rates imposed on various Massachusetts towns for King Philip's War, see MA Archives Felt Collection 68: 29a; The disastrous Quebec expedition of 1690 increased taxes to twenty times their normal rate. Eames, *Rustic Warriors*, 10.

<sup>85</sup> After the nullification of the Massachusetts charter in 1684, Massachusetts native Joseph Dudley was appointed temporary governor of a provisional government, covering Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maine, and Narragansett County or King's Province. Under this united New England, the King had denied the people a representative assembly on the advice of the Privy Council. Dudley, who was already highly unpopular in his home region, suggested that a controlled legislative assembly would actually make the collection of taxes run more smoothly, but his advice fell on deaf ears in London. Anticipating the loss of its colonial charter, the Massachusetts General Court had taken earlier steps to repeal all poll, property and faculty taxes. As a result, many Massachusetts residents simply chose not to pay taxes, let alone arrears, under Dudley's regime. Dudley's commission did not include powers to pass any new revenue acts, so the provisional government could do little in response. Rabushka, *Taxation in Colonial America*, 328; Lovejoy, *Glorious Revolution in America*, 159, 182-3.

<sup>86</sup> When Sir Edmund Andros took over as Governor-General of the newly made Dominion of New England in 1686, he inherited an empty treasury, and uncooperative colonies heavily in debt from years of war. Andros' royal commission gave him the authority "to impose, and assess, and raise and levy such rates and taxes" as he found "necessary for the support of the government." Charles Henry James Douglas, *The Financial History of Massachusetts: From the Organization of the Massachusetts Bay Colony to the American Revolution* (New York, 1892), 299; Lovejoy, *Glorious Revolution in America*, 183; Thomas F. Waters, *Ipswich in the Massachusetts Bay Colony* (Ipswich, MA, 1905), 239-64, and Robert N. Toppan, ed., *Edward Randolph*, Vol. 2 (Boston, 1898), 40-49, 307 n6.

<sup>87</sup> Rabushka, *Taxation in Colonial America*, 329.

a law in 1688 limiting town meetings to one a year, depriving local leaders control over their affairs through this long-standing institution of New England government.<sup>88</sup> Men in Essex County committed acts of violence against colonial officials during this time, but their actions had a political bent.<sup>89</sup> Women did not become involved in violent actions against colonial authorities again until King Williams' War. The war dredged up concerns about Andros' Catholic sympathies and dragged New England communities back into deadly conflict with neighboring Indian tribes and their French allies as part of the contest between England and France for control of North America. While less deadly than King Philip's War, King William's War was extremely destructive in terms of life and property. It was marked by frequent armed conflict with a variety of northern Indian groups, whose involvement was ever changing and complex.<sup>90</sup>

Andros was accused not only of instigating King Williams' War, but also of being secretly in league with French and Indian forces.<sup>91</sup> It was hinted that Andros, a peer from the Isle of Jersey, was "of a French extract, so in the French interests" and therefore had "Sinister designs...as to our Troubles with the Indians."<sup>92</sup> These suspicions seemed confirmed after

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<sup>88</sup> Rabushka, *Taxation in Colonial America*, 330; John Andrew Doyle, *The Puritan Colonies: English Colonies in America*, 3 (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1889), 239

<sup>89</sup> One example of men's violent resistance to authority figures during this time was a "riot" that occurred during a militia training in Topsfield in 1685. Several men protested when one of their own was taken to the stocks, saying that they would tear the stocks down and destroy the meetinghouse if he was not freed. When the militiamen were reprovved for their behavior by the tithingman, and threatened with the stocks themselves, one of them replied, "doe if you dare." Fighting and shooting ensued, and several men were injured. Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 9*, 606.

<sup>90</sup> Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 71, 63-4; Alden T. Vaughan, *New England Encounters: Indians and Euroamericans Ca. 1600-1850: Essays Drawn from New England Quarterly* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1999), 13.

<sup>91</sup> "John West to Fitz-John Winthrop," Feb. 23, 1688/9, *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections* 53: 496-97; William Stoughton et al., "Grievances Against Governor Andros," Jan. 27, 1689/90, MA Archives, Felt Collection 35: 187-92; "List of Evidence Against Sir Edmund Andros," MA Archives, Felt Collection 35: 255-260; "Evidence that Andros' raid on Pentagoet had Instigated the Conflict," MA Archives, Felt Collection 35:259, entry 107.

<sup>92</sup> "Declaration of Silvanus Davis," n.d. [after 15 October 1690], *Doc. Hist. State of Maine* 5: 144; "Brief Relation" (1689) in "Hutchinson Papers," *MHS Collections* 21 (1825): 100; Stoughton, "Grievances against Andros," MA Archives, Felt Collection 35: 191.

Andros released several Indian prisoners taken during an attack on Saco. His hopes for a reciprocal captive exchange never came to pass, and as far as many colonists were concerned, he had succeeded only in freeing “Cruell mordrous Rogs.”<sup>93</sup> In the wake of Andros’ failed diplomatic attempts, news of his friendly relationship with the Indians—and his supposed conspiracy to destroy the colonies—circulated widely. Mary Graves of Sudbury testified to hearing Solomon Thomas, an Indian, speak about the governor’s Catholic beliefs and true allegiance to the Indian cause.<sup>94</sup> Others also came forward with stories of Andros’ treachery.<sup>95</sup>

Andros’ strategy of impressing men for frontier anti-Indian expeditions during King Williams’ War achieved few military successes, but the price in manpower was high for New Englanders.<sup>96</sup> This sunk his popularity even further. In a “Declaration of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants of Boston,” Cotton Mather detailed the widely held belief that Andros’ strategy of amassing troops to the northeast was excessive, wasteful, and even purposefully ineffective. “Tho’ ‘tis judged that our Indian Enemies are not above 100 in number, yet an Army of One Thousand English hath been raised for the Conquering of them...not one Indian hath been kill’d but more English are supposed to have died though sickness and hardship thane we have adversaries their alive,” he wrote.<sup>97</sup> Soldiers under the command of Andros’ officers also told stories of severe mistreatment. The officers showed disdain for their untrained

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<sup>93</sup> Declaration of Silvanus Davis,” *Doc. Hist. State of Maine* 5: 144

<sup>94</sup> “Testimonies of Joseph Graves, Mary Graves and John Rutter,” Sudbury, Jan. 3, 1689, *Doc. Hist. State of Maine* 4: 446-7

<sup>95</sup> “Statement of Thomas Browne, John Goenow, Jonathan Stanhope, John Paramenter,” *Doc. Hist. State of Maine* 4: 447; “Testimony of Stephen Greenleaf Junr.” April 9, 1689, *Doc. Hist. State of Maine* 6: 472-3; “Testimony of George Little,” *Doc. Hist. State of Maine* 6: 473.

<sup>96</sup> Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 74-5; Norton, *Devil’s Snare*, 96

<sup>97</sup> Cotton Mather, et. al., “Declaration of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants of Boston,” in William Henry Whitmore, ed., *The Andros Tracts: Being a Collection of Pamphlets and Official Papers*, Vol. 2 (Prince Society, 1874), 17-8.

Massachusetts recruits.<sup>98</sup> A Captain Lockhart was one officer known to call his soldiers “Damn’d Sons of Whores” and beat them with his hands, or his half pike. He abused one soldier so badly that witnesses were convinced it was the “cause of his death.” Soldiers also testified concerning a general lack of supplies and being forced to labor while ill.<sup>99</sup>

The prolonged service of their husbands, sons and fathers under such deplorable conditions—in a cloud of suspicion about a secret Catholic threat in their midst—was more than some Massachusetts women could take. In April 1689, when colonists learned that King James had been deposed in the Glorious Revolution, a crowd stormed the fort of Boston and demanded that Andros be ousted from power.<sup>100</sup> Reports from the event describe the gathering as a mix of the everyday inhabitants of Boston and surrounding towns, rather than militiamen, suggesting that women were among the crowd. People filled the streets, and as “the drums began to beat,” they began “hasting and running, some with and some for arms.”<sup>101</sup> John Riggs, an ensign under Andros in Boston reported that “[B]y the time this reached the Governor's ears there were at least a thousand people in arms, seizing and carrying to prison all whom they suspected to oppose or disapprove their designs.”<sup>102</sup> Rumors swirled that before he was apprehended and imprisoned by leaders of the uprising, Andros attempted to flee by donning women’s clothes to escape into the crowd. Such a rumor was designed to humiliate the fallen leader, but it also supports the

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<sup>98</sup> Jenny Hale Pulsipher, *Subjects unto the Same King: Indians, English and the Contest for Authority in Colonial New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

<sup>99</sup> “Joint Depositions of Joseph Emerson & Jacob Whitaker of Haverhill relative to the treatment, accorded to the soldiers at Pemaquid under Andros Government,” December 17, 1689, MA Archives, Felt Collection 35: 128.

<sup>100</sup> Lovejoy, *Glorious Revolution in America*, 240-1; Cotton Mather et al., “Boston Declaration of Grievances” (1689) in Michael G. Hall, Lawrence H. Leder, Michael Kammen, ed., *The Glorious Revolution in America: Documents on the Colonial Crisis of 1689* (University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 42-46.

<sup>101</sup> “Letter from Samuel Prince to Thomas Hinckley,” Boston, April 22, 1689, Hinckley Papers, *MHS Collections* ser. 4, v. 5, 192-96; Lovejoy, *Glorious Revolution in America*, 240.

<sup>102</sup> “A Letter from a Gentlemen of the City of New York” (1698) in Charles McLean Andrews, ed., *Narratives of the Insurrections, 1675-1690* (Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1915), 362, fnt 1; John Riggs, “A Narrative of the Proceedings at Boston in New England upon the Inhabitants seizing the Government there,” *Colonial Board of Trade Reports 1679-88*, Vol. 5: 905/85-87.

assumption that women participated in the uprising if Andros would have tried to blend in among them wearing female attire.<sup>103</sup>

### ***Life on a Frontier at War***

Confidence and trust in colonial authorities only deteriorated further during King Williams' War as Indian forces ravaged frontier settlements. Women living on the northern frontiers of New England witnessed the ineffectiveness of garrisons and colonial militia forces to keep their enemies at bay. Town fortifications could protect the lives of some of the townspeople in a community under attack, but they were not designed to defend the towns in their entirety. Not every settler could reach the safety of a garrison in time to avoid being injured, killed or taken captive. Indian raids produced extensive damage to public and private property outside of fortified areas, including homes, agricultural fields and grain stores.<sup>104</sup> Colonial governments could not afford to reimburse these heavy losses or provide military and material support.

The vulnerability of frontier fortifications, and the apparent mismanagement of the war, encouraged the Indians to undertake further attacks on colonial settlements. After her return from Abenaki captivity, Ester Waldron Elkins Lee, daughter of the prominent Waldron family of Dover, New Hampshire, testified that the Indians with whom she was living for a time in 1689 were emboldened by the weaknesses of English settlements. They reported moving around them with ease and were unimpressed by the protective strategies the English put in place. As they told Ester, "since yy came into oure Bay yy heave some of ym beene under everie of our Garrisons and know wt wee are in Number and all our circumstances." Undaunted, the Indians amassed a large force of "upwards of two hundred fiftie" Indians to continue their attacks on the

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<sup>103</sup> John Fiske, *The Beginnings of New England, or the Puritan Theocracy* (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1889), 272; Nathaniel Byfield, "An Account of the Late Revolution in New-England," in Andrews, ed., *Narratives*, 170-75; Whitmore, ed., *The Andros Tracts* Vol. 2, 8.

<sup>104</sup> Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 63-4.

frontier. The disorganization of colonial authorities in conducting the war heartened them further. The Indians say they “are much encouraged by some Gentlemen in Boston for ye managing ye warr,” Ester reported after her return home.<sup>105</sup>

Several colonies attempted to utilize raiding parties to prevent attacks on towns. This offensive strategy was a less expensive option than building substantial fortifications, but militia forces in the field were notoriously unsuccessful.<sup>106</sup> Frontier towns reached out for assistance in times of threat, usually to no avail. Colonial forces could not police such vast wilderness frontiers with towns separated by up to twenty or thirty miles. By the time relief forces arrived, the attackers would have long retreated into the wilderness.<sup>107</sup> Nathaniel Saltonstall of Haverhill wrote several letters to the Massachusetts leadership regarding threats to the town during King Philips and King William’s Wars, and asking for soldiers to remain on the ground there. They were in “need of present & settled assistance,” he wrote. “[M]ischief is done us; for before ye can be wth us ye enimie is hidden or gone, & nothing to be done but for ye men to return, unless ye would stay as men in service.”<sup>108</sup> At the same time that Saltonstall was asking for help, however, he was also turning down requests for assistance from neighboring towns. “I am not in a capacity to help [them]” at Salisbury, he wrote, “but want men for o[u]r necessary defence.”<sup>109</sup> Saltonstall himself was accused of being “very negligent of his Duty as Coll” in allowing “his majesties subjects” to be “killed & captivated” in Indian raids.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> “Testimony of Ester Waldron Elkins Lee,” *Documentary History of the State of Maine* Vol. 9 (Maine Historical Society, 1869), 60.

<sup>106</sup> Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 63-4.

<sup>107</sup> Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 74-75.

<sup>108</sup> “Letter from Saltonstall and others Regarding Haverhill,” 1677, MA Archives, Felt Collection 69: 152; Chase, *History of Haverhill*, 158.

<sup>109</sup> Chase, *History of Haverhill*, 158-9.

<sup>110</sup> Chase, *History of Haverhill*, 199.

Historians disagree about the reasons behind the poor performance of colonial forces in the wars, and even the fairness of evaluating those forces by the military standards of the day.<sup>111</sup> Public perception of their effectiveness at the time, however, is a more important measure for our purposes. Confidence in colonial and provincial militias was not high. Mary Pray's letters to Captain James Oliver reflect these doubts. Living and running a tavern on the front lines of conflict in Essex County, Pray was extremely critical of the authorities' inability to protect her community. She was incredulous over the failure of the militias to "destroy the savages" and stop the Indians' advance.<sup>112</sup> "We here are all amazed to see...that no course is taken with these villains," she wrote. After placing their trust in a "false peace" with the Indians, authorities left the colonists exposed to further attacks as the war continued westward.<sup>113</sup> Upon hearing that the governor intended to send a company of militia, Pray wished that "The Lord grant they may not be deluded to spare them by flattery."<sup>114</sup> She wanted the "murderous wretches" wiped from the face of the Earth, but doubted the militia's ability to accomplish the task.

After Andros was ousted from power, neither the situation for settlers on the frontier nor confidence in provincial authorities improved. As news spread that the governor had been deposed and arrested, militia men pressed to serve under him deserted frontier forts and garrisons en masse. The new government of Massachusetts reduced the number of garrisons Andros had put in place, and recalled any officers suspected of Catholic sympathies, leaving frontier

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<sup>111</sup> Chet places the blame for what he calls the "miserable performance" of relief forces in the Indian Wars on poor training of mostly civilian militia forces as well as "poor vigilance" on the part of local towns. "The unprofessionalism that characterized colonial armed forces made them uniquely inept and unreliable," he writes. Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 62, 74-75; Eames takes a more practical view of provincial troops' performance in the wars, arguing that it is unfair to judge their actions in comparison to the ideal of professional British or European troops. He also states that the "enormous difficulties of waging war in the New World have been underestimated." Eames, *Rustic Warriors*, 9-10, 13.

<sup>112</sup> "Mary Pray to James Oliver," Letter, October 20, 1675, *MHS Collections*, ser. 5, v. 1 (1871), 105-110.

<sup>113</sup> "Pray to Oliver," *MHS Collections*, ser. 5, v. 1, 105.

<sup>114</sup> "Pray to Oliver," *MHS Collections*, ser. 5, v. 1, 105-110.



settlements even more exposed to Indian attack.<sup>115</sup> The result was disastrous. English residents of Schenectady and Salmon Falls were massacred in February and March of 1690. Colonial leaders like Samuel Sewall blamed the losses on settlers' "own carelessness and want of vigilance," while continuing ineffective, even disastrous offensive missions into New France.<sup>116</sup> A false peace treaty with the Eastern Abenaki in 1694 resulted in the devastating attack on the English settlement at Oyster River later that year.<sup>117</sup>

The General Court only increased personal losses in the wars by ordering residents of communities under attack to stand fast or lose their property and by forbidding poor relief for refugees.<sup>118</sup> Colonial governments wanted to preserve their frontier towns to act as a buffer for their interior settlements. Hence, General Courts informed the inhabitants that any family that left home without permission from the Governor or Assembly would risk forfeiture of their property. An "Act to Prevent the deserting of the Frontier of this Province" was issued by the General Court of Massachusetts Bay in 1699, listing frontier communities as "outposts" not to be "broken up or voluntarily deserted" in a time of war, upon threat of seizure of property. The "maintaining and defending of the Frontier" was considered to be "of very great import," and it would "greatly prejudice his Majesties' Interest & encourage an Enemy if any of the outposts should be quitted or exposed by lessening the Strength thereof," regardless of the threat to the town residents.<sup>119</sup> This left frontier settlers in an impossible bind: lose their lives if they stayed,

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<sup>115</sup> Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 80; Norton, *Devil's Snare*, 98; Pulsipher, *Subjects unto the Same King*, 255-8.

<sup>116</sup> Norton, *Devil's Snare*, 103-5; Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 83-4.

<sup>117</sup> Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 86; Hutchinson, *The History of Massachusetts-bay*, Vol. 2: 61-2; Samuel Adams Drake, *The Border Wars of New England* (1910; reprint, Scituate, MA: Digital Scanning, Inc., 2001), 96-101, 102, n.I.

<sup>118</sup> Heidler, *Daily Lives of Civilians in Wartime Early America*, 13.

<sup>119</sup> "Act to Prevent the deserting of the Frontier of this Province," 1699, MA Archives, Felt Collection 70: 457.

or their livelihoods if they fled. The provincial government had, essentially, abandoned its settlers on the frontier while forcing them to act as a human barrier to attacks on the interior.

### ***Violence Against Indians***

In the face of such an impossible situation, some of those women who stayed behind took it upon themselves to protect their families, and the interests of their kin groups through violence. Most often, this was directed against the most immediate source of their distress: the Indians they encountered. The exploits of Mrs. Susanna Eastman Wood Swan of Haverhill demonstrate the lengths to which some women were willing to go to protect their kin.<sup>120</sup> Mrs. Swan knew well the costs of living on the frontier. Indians had killed her first husband and daughter and she had been taken captive by Abenaki Indians during King Philip's War in 1676. Upon her return, Susanna married and had a child, only for her husband and child to be killed in the raid on Haverhill in 1697, when she was again taken captive, alongside Dustin and Neff. When she was able to return to Haverhill and remarry in 1699, Mrs. Swan was determined to protect her family and prevent being taken again. Whenever her husband, Captain John Swan, was away fighting the Indians, Susanna hung balls of carpet rags in the upper windows of her home, and had her children move them about with the yard stick and beat a drum when the Indians were in sight, giving the impression of greater numbers within. When Indians attacked her home in 1708, Susanna first attempted to bar the door. When her attackers managed to break it down and were trying to crowd inside, Mrs. Swan seized the spit off of her fire and drove it

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<sup>120</sup> Nehemiah Emerson heard the account told by his grandfather, who lived with this father, Jonathan Emerson (Hannah's brother) and his family in their garrison. The Swan and Emersons were long-time neighbors in Haverhill. Benjamin L. Mirick and John Greenleaf Whittier, *The History of Haverhill, Massachusetts* (A.W. Thayer, 1832), 223.

through the body of the man in front. According to local legend, this sent the invaders into retreat, saving herself, her children and her family's property from harm.<sup>121</sup>

When fighting for their lives, Englishwomen on the frontier must have recalled the horrific Indians raids they had either lived through themselves, or heard about from their fellow settlers. No family wanted to recreate the Wakelys' fate in their Falmouth settlement in the mid 1670s. It was a late summer evening when Lieutenant George Ingersoll heard guns go off in the distance in the direction of the Wakely farm and noticed "great smoke up in the River." He sounded the alarm but could not assemble enough men to investigate safely. The next day, with reinforcements, Ingersoll followed the smoke to what had been the Wakely's home. The carnage that Ingersoll found was truly horrifying. "An house burnt down, and six persons killed," he reported. An older couple was "halfe in, and halfe out of the house neer halfe burnt." Thomas Wakely was "shot through the body...his head dashed in pieces." His pregnant wife and two of their children were similarly killed, their bodies mangled. Several family members were missing, including an eleven-year-old girl.<sup>122</sup>

In the wake of incidents like these colonial Englishwomen were willing to use whatever means necessary to ensure their survival. Some were praised for their actions, particularly those who acted in defense of homes or were taken captive. Clearly, when Indians attacked, gendered expectations for women's appropriate behavior were altered in the face of the coming onslaught. In a few histories of the wars, some women were praised for their "Amazonian" courage in fighting like men when forced among the savages.<sup>123</sup> The reality of life for women during these

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<sup>121</sup> Emma Lewis Coleman, *New England Captives Carried to Canada: Between 1677 and 1760 During the French and Indian Wars*, Vol. 1 (Portland: The Southworth Press, 1925), 345.

<sup>122</sup> "Letter by Lieutenant George Ingersoll," in John James Babson, *Notes and Additions to the History of Gloucester: Part First, Early Settlers* (M.V.B. Perley, 1876), 39.

<sup>123</sup> Little, *Abraham in Arms*, 98; Cotton Mather, *Decennium Luctuosum* (1699) in Charles H. Lincoln, ed., *Narratives of the Indian Wars 1675-1699* (New York: Charles Scriber Sons, 1913), 94.

periods of war made societal acclaim or condemnation irrelevant, however. Their actions had more practical motivations. Most of their stories have, undoubtedly, been lost to history. The uncertainties of life on the frontier, the fragmentary nature of colonial record keeping during the late seventeenth century, and the deadly, hand-to-hand nature of fighting during the Indian Wars, suggest that numerous instances of Englishwomen using violence against Indian men and women were never recorded.

The everyday militarism of early New England also would have made any anti-Indian violence less remarkable, whether by men or women. From the earliest days of English settlement, New England was a military culture. The first emigrants came prepared for military confrontations with the “savage and brutish” natives in this new land. Puritan pilgrims brought muskets, pikes, armor and artillery pieces, and a supply of powder and ammunition when they crossed the Atlantic.<sup>124</sup> They were preoccupied with security and military issues, as records from this early stage of settlement demonstrate.<sup>125</sup> During the early 1630s, the Court of Assistants required every settlement to take measures for its defense, including mandating militia service, and ensuring all English settlers were equipped with a musket, powder, bullets and match.<sup>126</sup> Legislation issued in March, 1630/1 “ordered that evy Towne within this Pattent shall...take espetiall care that ewy pson within their Townes (except magistrates & ministers) as well servts as others, be furnished with good & sufficient armes.”<sup>127</sup> Weekly drills were mandatory for all

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<sup>124</sup> Marie L. Ahearn, *The Rhetoric of War: Training Day, the Militia and the Military Sermon* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 58.

<sup>125</sup> Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 13; Alden T. Vaughan, *The Puritan Tradition in America, 1620-1730* (New York, 1972), 90-91.

<sup>126</sup> Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 21.

<sup>127</sup> Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England* (Boston: William White, 1853), 1:25-26.

militia units.<sup>128</sup> In 1645 the Court passed a law requiring that not just grown men, but all youth from ten to sixteen years of age to be “instructed upon ye usual training days, in ye exercise of armes, as small guns, halfe pikes, bowes and arrowes, &c.”<sup>129</sup> These laws ensured that every household contained guns and other weapons and that most would have at least been familiar with them, if not proficient in their use.

Households on the frontier frequently doubled as military garrisons. Some garrisons were made out of public buildings, like meetinghouses, but most were fortified private dwellings. This meant that many women lived and worked in the midst of military installations. A few garrisons were made out of brick, but most were fortified log houses, vulnerable to fire and other destructive forces.<sup>130</sup> These dwellings would have been well stocked with weapons and others supplies in case of an attack. In the event of Indian raids, women did what they could to defend their garrison homes, firing muskets and wielding whatever weapons were at hand.

A few stories of their bravery have survived to the present day. The women of Wells, Maine famously fired muskets during King William's War to hold off a greater number of attackers.<sup>131</sup> Donning men's hats and “loosening their hair that they might appear like men,” women in a small garrison in Oyster River defended their post against a war party in 1706. The women, “seeing nothing but death before them... fired so briskly that the enemy, apprehending that the people were alarmed fled...”<sup>132</sup> These stories are remarkable not because these women attempted to defend themselves, but because they were successful in their efforts.

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<sup>128</sup> Louis Effingham DeForest and Anne Lawrence DeForest, *Captain John Underhill: Gentleman, Soldier of Fortune* (Underhill Society of America Education and Publishing Fund, 1985), 9; Vaughan, *New England Primer*, 101-2.

<sup>129</sup> Chase, *History of Haverhill*, 66.

<sup>130</sup> Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 58; Preferably, garrisons were designed with a second floor that projected beyond the first, forming an overhanging gallery that enabled defenders to fire on attackers storming the doors and windows below. Edward M. Cook, Jr. in discussion with the author, February 2014.

<sup>131</sup> Mather, *Decennium Luctuosum*, 237.

<sup>132</sup> Jeremy Belknap, *The History of New Hampshire I* (Philadelphia, 1784), 338-339.

If given a choice, women would have preferred either to flee with their children, or allow men to handle the fighting.<sup>133</sup> In the midst of a frontier war, however, this was frequently not possible. Indian forces had perfected the element of surprise in their military strategy. English towns and settlements took vigorous measures to try and detect an imminent attack, including signals for alarms, continual watches and scouts.<sup>134</sup> Still, Indian attacks too often took them by surprise. Enemy forces made their attacks slowly and cautiously, approaching with stealth and camouflaging themselves behind objects until they came near enough to strike. At times they would fall upon the inhabitants before daybreak, while most were unprepared to defend themselves.<sup>135</sup> Englishwomen living in settlements under attack had few options. Some chose neither to run nor surrender.<sup>136</sup>

The case of Mary Loggia demonstrates women's willingness to defend themselves against Indians in wartime. A Salem resident, Mary was not on the front lines of fighting in King Philip's War, but had been left alone, with the help of a "Youth" named John King, while her husband was off at sea. In the middle of the night in May 1677, a man known as Joseph Indian crept into her house. Mary recalled in her deposition that she noticed a figure in the room. It "gott upon my bed," she noted, but when she tried to speak to the figure, "Hee gaue mee noe Answer, which made mee Sitt up in the bed to see what the Matter was, or whoe itt should bee." In the moonlight, Mary noticed the intruder was an Indian and shouted out for help. She called to John and "told him there was An Indian upon my bed desireing him presently to Arise & call some body to Kill him." Before reinforcements could arrive, however, Mary had "gotten a hould

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<sup>133</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich is careful to explain that fighting was not a "typical female response" and that given a choice, the community would have evacuated the women and children from the area. Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 179.

<sup>134</sup> Chase, *History of Haverhill*, 66; Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 58; See Patrick Malone, *Skulking Way of War: Technology and Tactics Among the New England Indians* (Landham, MS: Madison Books, 1991).

<sup>135</sup> Chase, *History of Haverhill*, 152.

<sup>136</sup> Samuel Penhallow, *The History of the Wars of New England with the Eastern Indians* (Boston, 1726), 28; Cotton Mather, *Good Fetch'd Out of Evil* (Boston, 1706), 38.

of [Joseph Indian] by the haire of the head & was beating him with my ffirst as I was Able.” The intruder freed himself eventually and jumped out of the window.<sup>137</sup> John King’s recollection of the event confirmed that Mary was not content simply to scare her Indian attacker away, but was determined to try and inflict serious harm upon him.<sup>138</sup>

For breaking into Mary Loggia’s home and attempting to assault her, Joseph Indian was sentenced to be “whipt,” a relatively lenient punishment for such a crime against an Englishwoman.<sup>139</sup> The court’s sentence demonstrates colonial governments’ attempts to distinguish between enemy and non-enemy Indians, and their efforts to treat non-enemies in their midst fairly. Official colonial policy was to punish all offenders in assault cases strictly, but equally.<sup>140</sup> The principle of fairness behind the colonial Indian policy was not based on the idea that the Indian nations of New England were equal to the English, or that the Indians themselves were equal individuals, but instead upon the “just rule of a civilized nation over a backward, savage tribe; the superior over the inferior; the strong over the weak; the wise over the ignorant.” Colonial policies for most of the seventeenth century reflected this paternalistic approach to Indian affairs, as well as the practical desires of colonial leaders to avoid exacerbating conflicts with Indians. Just as Increase Mather feared retribution against English captives for the 1677

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<sup>137</sup> “Deposition of Mary Logia,” June 1677, Essex Co. Ct. Papers, WPA Trans. Vol. 26: 107-3.

<sup>138</sup> “Deposition of John King against Joseph Indian,” June 1677, Essex Co. Ct. Papers, WPA Trans. Vol. 26: 107-5.

<sup>139</sup> “Joseph the Indian for coming into the house of Phillip Logee in the night, & being found upon his wife’s bed the sd Phiilip not being at home being proud was ordered to be whipt,” Essex Co. Ct. Records, July 1677, entry 43 MA Archives microfilm reel # 877462; Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co.*, v. 6, 295.

<sup>140</sup> Kawashima, *Puritan Justice*, 162-3; Alden T. Vaughan, *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians, 1620-1675*, Rev. ed. (New York: Norton, 1979), 320; Not many cases of white man’s assault against natives reached the courts, because the Indians usually resorted to direct action to redress such grievances. When Indians did bring action for assault against the whites, they had some chance of obtaining damages or the satisfaction of seeing their assailants fined, or both fined and charged for damages. In New England there were several instances of execution of white men for the murder of Indians, though no evidence of similar cases can be found in other colonies. Kawashima, *Puritan Justice*, 152, 162.

murders of Indians in Marblehead, other colonial leaders wished to avoid giving Indian tribes any further excuse for violence.<sup>141</sup>

Most settlers in colonial New England did not appear to share these officials' concerns, however. Juries (always made up of adult, white men) were reluctant to convict other white men or women of any charge more serious than manslaughter for murdering an Indian, commonly citing "extenuating circumstances" in order to lower the charges.<sup>142</sup> Particularly during King Philip's War, and again in King William's and Queen Anne's Wars, many English settlers equated "Indian" with "enemy." Initially, English colonists viewed Indians as a heathen nuisance to be ignored, destroyed, displaced, or converted. The Indian Wars marked a turning point in which the "savage" became a threat as well as a destructive force sent by God. Mary Rowlandson, who was taken captive by a group of Narragansett Indians during King Philip's War, illustrated this view in her captivity narrative. For Rowlandson, Native Americans acted as "a scourge to the whole Land."<sup>143</sup> The idea of Indians as less-than-human took greater hold as the seventeenth century progressed. After the execution of captured Indians in 1676, judge Samuel Sewall and several physicians conducted a dissection. Reaching into the abdomen of the Indian's corpse and "taking the heart in his hand," one of the physicians "affirmed it to be the stomach." While said in jest, the remark was a comment on the notorious "heartlessness" of the Indian. This pervasive notion helped justify violence against Native Americans, and colonists indiscriminately lashed out against any Indian who dared enter an English settlement.<sup>144</sup> Women

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<sup>141</sup> Kawashima, *Puritan Justice*, 237.

<sup>142</sup> Kawashima, *Puritan Justice*, 154.

<sup>143</sup> Increase Mather, *A Brief History of the Warr with the Indians in New England* (1676); Daniel R. Mandell, *King Philip's War: Colonial Expansion, Native Resistance, and the End of Indian Sovereignty* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 11; Mary Rowlandson, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God: Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682) in Lincoln, ed. *Narratives*, 107-166; Little, *Abraham in Arms*, 53.

<sup>144</sup> Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, 316.



were not necessarily a civilizing influence on the frontier in this respect, nor does it seem that they were expected to be. As colonist Mary Pray had reveled in the idea of wiping the Indians from the face of the earth, at least one woman jumped for joy when militiamen returned to Fort Amsterdam with a number of severed Indian heads. Another began to celebrate by kicking the heads around the compound.<sup>145</sup>

One need only read Captain John Underhill's account of the Puritan's war against the Pequot people in the late 1630s to understand the brutality that the English settlers had imposed on the native tribes of the region from the earliest years of settlement. In response to the death of two English soldiers, and the Pequot leaders' refusal to name the parties involved, English forces descended on Pequot villages. Although the native people had fled, soldiers "burnt their houses, cut downe their corne, destroyed some of their dogges" that remained.<sup>146</sup> When the Pequots responded by shooting arrows, and torturing an English sailor they had captured, Captain Underhill and his forces attacked a Pequot fort. Surrounding the fort with 300 men, the soldiers sent "a volley of shottee" upon it. Praising God for the accuracy of "souldiers so unexpert in the use of armes," the English ignored the "dolefull cry" of the men, women, and children within. After setting the fort on fire, and watching people burn to death inside, the soldiers killed anyone who attempted to flee. "[O]ur souldiers received and entertained with the point of the sword, downe fell men, women, and children...there were about foure hundred soules in this Fort, and not above five escaped out of our hands." To justify their actions, Underhill declared that

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<sup>145</sup> Samuel Sewall, *Diary of Samuel Sewall*, Vol. 1 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1878-82), 23; Roth, *American Homicide*, 46, n41; Edmund B. O'Callaghan, ed., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York* (Abany, NY, 1853-1887), 412-414.

<sup>146</sup> John Underhill, *Nevves from America; or, A New and Experimentall Discoverie of New England: Containing, a True Relation of their War-like Proceedings these two yeares last past, with a figure of the Indian fort, or Palizado...* (London, 1638), 2 - 8.

“sometimes the Scripture declareth women and children must perish with their parents... We had sufficient light from the word of God for our proceedings.”<sup>147</sup>

When placed in this context, it is apparent that the Puritans would not have demanded that anyone, including women, in colonial New England refrain from violence against Indians on religious grounds. Cotton Mather depicted Hannah Dustin and Mary Neff as heroines from the Old Hebrew Bible after they slaughtered and scalped their Indian captors in 1697. In his depiction, they were valiantly protecting the Puritan enterprise from a heathen other. Mather asserts that the women intentionally “took up a resolution to imitate the action of Jael on Sisera.”<sup>148</sup> If this was the case, identification with a strong and violent female figure like Jael, who murdered an enemy of the Israelites with a tent stake through the temple, would have only strengthened the women’s resolve to murder their captors and anyone else nearby who they saw as a threat. In Puritan New England, Hannah and Mary would probably have been familiar with the figure of Jael, who appears prominently in “The Song of Deborah” in the Book of Judges.<sup>149</sup> Jael was considered “blessed above women” for her deed.<sup>150</sup> In Dustin’s letter petitioning for church membership at the end of her life, she cites her religious belief as a source of strength and inspiration during her captivity.<sup>151</sup>

While Hannah and Mary may have identified with a figure like Jael, and even, perhaps, modeled themselves on her, they also had immediate and tangible inspiration for their violent

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<sup>147</sup> Underhill, *Nevves from America*, 22, 23, 26, 29-34, 36-40.

<sup>148</sup> Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 634.

<sup>149</sup> Hannah’s religiosity at the time of her capture is unknown. She would not become a church member until 1724. “Hannah Dustin’s Letter to Elders of The Second Church of Haverhill,” 1724, Haverhill Historical Society Collection, Haverhill, Massachusetts. Mary Neff’s religious affiliations are unknown. However, the pervasive nature of Puritan religious belief in the cultural milieu of colonial New England suggests that most people would at least be familiar with the more well-known stories from the Old and New Testaments; Mather published their story first in *Humiliations* in 1697, next in *Decennium Luctuosum* in 1699 and again in *Magnalia Christi Americana* in 1702.

<sup>150</sup> Judges 5:24-31.

<sup>151</sup> “Dustin to the Second Church of Haverhill,” Haverhill Hist. Society.

actions. As colonial Englishwomen, defined by their place in familial relationships, they were guided also by pragmatic concerns to avenge their loved ones, protect themselves and ensure the continued economic survival of their kin. Both women had been profoundly, and personally, affected by the Indian Wars, in terms of the loss of loved ones and family property, as well as the sense of insecurity that must have plagued them throughout their lives on the frontier of New England.

The outbreak of King William's War in the fall of 1688 struck close to home for Thomas and Hannah Dustin, their family, and Haverhill neighbors. When fighting broke out on the frontier, Governor Andros declared war on the Eastern Indians and led a force of seven hundred provincial soldiers into Maine.<sup>152</sup> Hannah's cousin, Joseph Emerson, was impressed into service as a soldier for the expedition.<sup>153</sup> By the time Andros' forces reached Pemaquid, the Indians had retreated for the winter. Andros ordered his men to remain in Maine to build forts, however, causing many men to die from exposure and harsh treatment.<sup>154</sup> Though Joseph survived the experience, the hardships of war would soon follow him back to Haverhill. His brother, Thomas Emerson, was killed during an Indian raid on Haverhill in 1696, along with his wife and three children. Their son, Thomas Jr., was carried into captivity and never recovered.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Eames, *Rustic Warriors*, 3.

<sup>153</sup> Chase, *History of Haverhill*, 149; Joseph Emerson was born February 26, 1669, the fifth child of Robert Emerson, brother to Michael Emerson (Hannah's father). Hannah and Joseph would have been close. Michael and Robert Emerson had together purchased a large farm in Haverhill from Robert Swan in 1661. Charles Henry Pope, *The Haverhill Emersons* (Boston: Murray and Energy Company, 1913), 21, 31-32.

<sup>154</sup> Chase, *History of Haverhill*, 149; "Joint Depositions of Joseph Emerson & Jacob Whitaker of Haverhill relative to the treatment, accorded to the soldiers at Pemaquid under Andros Government," December 17, 1689, MA Archives, Felt Collection, Vol. 35: 128.

<sup>155</sup> Pope, *Haverhill Emersons*, 31; Thomas Emerson (Joseph's brother, Hannah's cousin) was born in Haverhill on June 4, 1662. He married Elizabeth 'Goarding' (Gordon) on May 26, 1686 and they resided in Haverhill with their five children until their deaths on March 15, 1696. Considerable time and expense went into attempting to recover Thomas, Jr. from captivity, but he was never found. The only child of the family who remained alive and unharmed was Mary. Presumably, she was taken in by the extended Emerson family. Pope, *Haverhill Emersons*, 31.

Several of Hannah's relatives were living at Oyster River during the devastating Abenaki attack on that settlement. Before daybreak on the morning of July 18, 1694, 230 Indians and twenty French-Canadians burst without warning on the sleeping village. According to a local history, "Before the sun was two hour high, forty-five of its people, tomahawked and scalped, lay in grotesque heaps among the smoldering timbers of their homes."<sup>156</sup> Three garrisons and thirteen farmhouses were burned to the ground, and forty-nine people were taken captive. Among the captives was Judith Emerson, the wife of Hannah's brother, Samuel. Judith was also a cousin to Hannah Dustin's midwife, Mary Neff, through her mother's family, the Davises.<sup>157</sup>

In addition to what they already suffered by Indian hands, the brutal murder of Hannah's newborn daughter at the beginning of her captivity—an infant Mary had helped bring into the world as a midwife—would have been a loss beyond description. Their Indian captors threw the infant against a tree, killing her, and then left her body on the ground without a Christian burial before forcing Hannah and Mary to march into the wilderness. In his retelling of Dustin's story, Cotton Mather was careful to portray Hannah as a grieving mother, filled with a righteous anger to destroy her child's murderers. According to Mather's version of events, her subsequent murder of ten Indians, including women and children, was justified in the aftermath of such a tragedy.<sup>158</sup>

When Hannah and Mary Neff were taken captive in the spring of 1697, they could not have been entirely surprised to see the Abenaki forces descending on Haverhill. At the time,

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<sup>156</sup> Everett Schermerhorn Stackpole, Lucien Thompson, Winthrop Smith Meserve, *The History of the Town of Durham, New Hampshire (Oyster River Plantation)*, Vol. 2 (Vote of the Town, 1913), 89.

<sup>157</sup> Stackpole, *History of Durham*, 89; Pope, *Haverhill Emersons*, 28; Judith's aged mother was captured and dismissed by one band of Indians. She hid in a field of corn and another band discovered and slew her. See Coleman, *New England Captives Carried to Canada*, Chapter 10; *Collections of Maine Historical Society*, Series 2, Vol. 5: 516; Judith is listed among the "Captiues yet in the Indians hands" as of January 24, 1689/9 as "Judah Emmerson of oyester River." *Coll. of Maine Hist. Society* 2, 5: 317.

<sup>158</sup> Cotton Mather, *Humiliations Follow'd with Deliverances* (Boston: B. Green & J. Allen for Samuel Phillips, 1697), 43.

Hannah's husband was in the process of turning their home into a frontier garrison by order of the Committee of the Militia of Haverhill.<sup>159</sup> During King William's War in particular, Haverhill was one of the exterior settlements that provided English settlements in the interior with a protective frontier. Surrounded by an immense and mostly unexplored forest, the town was constantly exposed to attack.<sup>160</sup> From 1689 to 1697, Haverhill men went to work, and even to church, carrying loaded muskets.<sup>161</sup> Like many in their community, both Hannah Dustin and Mary Neff had been living among the horrors and hardships of war for most of their adult lives.

Hannah Dustin's fame has overshadowed the violent contributions of her fellow captive, Mary Neff. Neff, however, was actively engaged in the murders, swinging her hatchet alongside Dustin. Mary's desire for bloody vengeance against the Indians would have sprung from the personal tragedies she had experienced during the Indian Wars. In terms of the number of family members lost in the conflicts, and even, perhaps, the relative importance of those people in her life, Mary's losses were even greater than Hannah's. Indians had killed Mary's husband of twenty-three years, William Neff, at Pemaquid fort in 1688 while he was serving in the militia.<sup>162</sup> Their son, William Neff, Jr., had been wounded in a surprise attack by Indians and French at Saco in 1691.<sup>163</sup> Mary's aunt, Jane Davis, as well as several of her cousins, were killed in the

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<sup>159</sup> As one of the few brick buildings in town, the Dustin house would have been an obvious choice for a garrison. Francis W. Cronan, *Red Sunday: The Saltonstalls, the Dustons, and the Fighting Ayers* (Anundsen, 1965), 75; An order establishing Thomas Dustin's house as a garrison was issued in April, 1696/7. "You being appointed master of the garrison at your house, you are hereby, in his Maj's name, required to see that a good watch is kept at your garrison both by night and by day, by those persons hereafter named who are to be under your command and inspection in building or repairing your garrison; and if any person refuse or neglect their duty, you are accordingly required to make return of the same, under your hand, to the Committee of Militia in Haverhill." Chase, *History of Haverhill*, 200; The Dustin Garrison is included in "A List of the Frontier Garisons Reviewed by Order of His Excellency the Governour," November 1711, MA Archives, Felt Collection 71: 871.

<sup>160</sup> Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, 71; Chase, *History of Haverhill*, 52.

<sup>161</sup> Robert Wilhelm, *Murder and Mayhem in Essex County* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2012), 39.

<sup>162</sup> Cronan, *Red Sunday*, 73; *Vital Records of Haverhill, Massachusetts, to the End of the Year 1849*, Vol. 2 (Topsfield, MA: Topsfield Historical Society, 1911), 450; "William Neff, Estate Inventory," May 14, 1689, Essex County Probate Records, MA Archives, Vol. 304: 208.

<sup>163</sup> "Men killed & wounded in the Sako Expedition," August 7, 1691, MA Archives, Felt Collection 37: 105.

Indian massacre at Oyster River in 1694, and their family compound destroyed. Two daughters of that family were also taken captive, including Mary's cousin, Judith.<sup>164</sup> Indians irrevocably scarred the families of Mary's two sisters. Samuel Ladd, Mary's brother-in-law, was murdered during a raid on Andover in 1698, and his son was taken captive.<sup>165</sup> Indians took John Robie, another brother-in-law, and Mary's nephew, John, Jr., captive near their home in Haverhill. John Sr. did not survive the ordeal.<sup>166</sup>

Such losses would have inspired a desire for revenge. However, other considerations also appear to have played a role in their decision about when and how to kill their Abenaki captors. The timing for the murders demonstrates that Hannah and Mary thoughtfully and deliberately took steps to protect themselves from further harm by their Indian captors. Their actions do not seem to be those of two women filled with an uncontrollable rage for vengeance. At the time of their capture, the fate of their mutual relative, Judith Emerson, was unknown. Taken captive by Indians in 1694, Judith was presumed dead at the time Hannah and Mary were captured three years later.<sup>167</sup> Both women also had other relatives who had been Indian captives, many of whom did not survive. Hannah and Mary knew that their lives were in danger, but chose to wait for the opportune moment to strike, traveling for several weeks with the Indians in peace. A few days

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<sup>164</sup> James Otis Lyford, *History of the Town of Canterbury, New Hampshire, 1727-1912*, Vol. 2 (Concord, NH: The Rumford Press, 1912), 93.

<sup>165</sup> Chase, *History of Haverhill*, 128, 145, 199, 201.

<sup>166</sup> Chase, *History of Haverhill*, 160; "Letter from Nathaniel Saltonstall, re: Attack and Capture of John Roby of Haverhill," 1691-2, MA Archives, Felt Collection 37: 41a; "Letter Regarding Roby, Injuries & Death," 1691-2, MA Archives, Felt Collection 37: 43.

<sup>167</sup> Judith remained a captive of the Indians for five years in Canada, but was eventually returned to her husband after being discovered by a Yankee fur trader who paid her ransom. Stackpole, *History of Durham*, 89; Pope, *Haverhill Emersons*, 28; According to a local history, "Judith Emerson was redeemed from captivity a Mr. Morill for two shirts, one of which he took from his back. Samuel Emerson, thinking his wife was dead, went to Portsmouth to complete arrangements for a second marriage. There he met an old acquaintance and told him of his designs. The acquaintance, knowing that some captives had just arrived from Canada and that Mr. Emerson's wife was among them said, 'I bet a double drink of grog your wife is in town.' The bet was taken, whereupon Mr. Emerson was conducted into the presence of his wife. Emerson's second marriage was indefinitely postponed." Stackpole, *History of Durham*, 99-100.

before their attack, news reached the women that when they reached Penacook village they would be forced to “run the gauntlet through the whole army of Indians.” Many English had “fainted and swoon’d away under the torments” of the gauntlet as an initiation for captives. After this unwelcome communication, Hannah and Mary set the time for the attack. Having lulled their captors into believing they were not a threat, Hannah and Mary waited until “the whole crew was in a dead sleep” before picking up their tomahawks and striking.<sup>168</sup>

Experience in slaughtering animals may have given Hannah and Mary the wherewithal to accomplish such a bloody task. Women in seventeenth-century New England, including mistresses of households, commonly slaughtered pigs and other livestock when preparing food for their families. This would have involved a familiarity with wielding various domestic “weapons,” such as knives and other implements for skinning hides.<sup>169</sup> Pig slaughter practices in an English household in 1673 by a “cook-maid” inevitably mirror practices in New England during this period that were often undertaken by the mistress of a household, especially in frontier regions such as Haverhill. The description is not for the faint of heart:

...making ready to slaughter a Pig, she put the hinder parts between her legs as the usual manner is, and taking the snout in her left hand with a long knife she stuck the Pig and cut the small end of the heart almost in two, letting it bleed as long as any blood came forth, then throwing it into a Kettle of boyling water, the Pig swom twice round the kettle, when taking of it out of the dresser she...stript off the hair, and as she was cutting of the hinder pettito, the Pig lifts up his head with an open mouth...the belly was cut up, and the entrails drawn out, and the heart laid upon the board...<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 636.

<sup>169</sup> Amy J. Fitzgerald, “A Social History of the Slaughterhouse: From Inception to Contemporary Implications,” *Human Ecology Review* 17, no. 1 (2010): 59; Ulrich makes the connection between Hannah Dustin’s experience with slaughtering pigs and her ability to scalp her Indian victims. Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 22-23.

<sup>170</sup> Jay Allen Anderson, “A Sold Sufficiency: An Ethnography of Yeoman Foodways in Stuart England” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1971), 101.

The description above suggests that the pig was alive during much of the slaughtering process. While killing an animal differs greatly from killing a human being, Hannah and Mary may have been hardened to the act of taking life by fulfilling such duties. Hannah's will, recorded in Essex County probate records, lists a "flesh fork," a tool used for preparing meat, and her husband's will mentions that the family owned livestock in pigs, cattle, etc.<sup>171</sup> This implies that Hannah, at least, would have been familiar with caring for and probably butchering these animals. In addition, and as mentioned earlier, after suffering through half a century of warfare against their native enemies, sentiment spread among the colonists that the Indians were barely human, which could have made the women's actions slightly easier to undertake.<sup>172</sup>

Hannah and Mary were also motivated to act by the promise of recouping some of their financial losses. Anger, of course, may have inspired the women to want to take trophies of their fallen enemies, but a tradition of scalp bounties in the Massachusetts Bay Colony also seems to have played a role. Both women had lost family property in the course of King Williams' War. After losing her husband because of the conflict, Mary was left as a widow to fend largely for herself. In the estate inventory following his death, the court noted that some of the family's goods "had been taken away by Indians" during his absence.<sup>173</sup> Indians had burned and ransacked the Dustin's home in the raid on Haverhill.<sup>174</sup> The practice of scalp bounties could be a lucrative enterprise and New England colonies had been offering bounties for heads and scalps

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<sup>171</sup> "An Inventory of the Estate of Mrs Hannah Dusten, late of Haverhill," March 10, 1737/8, Essex Probate, MA Archives, Vol. 325: 145-6; "The Will of Thomas Dustin," 1724, Essex Probate, MA Archives, Vol. 319: 348-50; "An Inventory of the Estate of Mr. Thomas Dustin late of Haverhill," Essex Probate, MA Archives, Vol. 319: 341.

<sup>172</sup> Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, 316.

<sup>173</sup> "William Neff, Estate Inventory," May 14, 1689, Essex Probate, MA Archives, Vol. 304: 208; As a widow with few remaining possessions, Mary was probably at least partially supporting herself by working as a midwife in Haverhill in 1697 and tending to Hannah Dustin after the birth of her child.

<sup>174</sup> Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 635.



of their enemies from the earliest years of settlement.<sup>175</sup> Perhaps the women had this in mind as they carefully wrapped the scalps in a piece of linen and carried them back to their settlement. For her “just Slaughter of soo many of the Barbarians,” and in consideration that “ye Petitionr havoing Lost his Estate in that Calamity wherein his wife was carried into her captivity,” the General Court awarded Hannah Dustin 50 pounds as the leader of the attack. Mary Neff was given 10 pounds, 12 shillings for her assistance.<sup>176</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The colonists of New England paid a heavy price during King Williams’ War. That “Lamentable Decade” had seen the progress of the English frontier “beaten back twenty years.” The Treaty of Ryswick in 1697 brought a few years of peace, but war in Europe reignited hostilities in New England between English settlers, their Indian neighbors and French allies in

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<sup>175</sup> Scalp hunting offered American frontiersmen a means of earning replacement income during times of war when frontier settlers would have otherwise evacuated their homes for the protection of forts and garrisons. A bounty of 200 shillings “at a time when the daily wages of laborers rarely exceeded 2 shillings, must have seemed appealing.” John Grenier, *The First Way of War: American War Making on the Frontier, 1607-1814* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 42, 41; The tradition of scalp bounties dates back, unofficially, to the Pequot war in New England when Indian allies offered English settlers Pequot scalps, heads, and hands and proof of allegiance. Michael A. Bellesiles, ed., *Lethal Imagination: Violence and Brutality in American History* (New York University Press, 1999), 20; Massachusetts offered a bounty on Indian heads during King Philip’s War. Payment for heads—and possibly a scalp bounty as well—was also offered to the Narragansetts early in the war, an effort to convince them to assist in the slaughter of the Wampanoags before the Narragansetts were themselves targeted for extermination. Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas, 1492 to the Present* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights, 1997), 180; Prior to Hannah and Mary’s capture in 1697, the Massachusetts Bay Colony had attempted to revoke the presentment of scalp bounties. In 1694, the Massachusetts Bay colony had offered a bounty of fifty pounds for an Indian scalp presented. In 1695, the bounty was reduced to twenty-five pounds, and in December 1696, it was revoked completely. Wilhelm, *Murder and Mayhem*, 43; This effort proved to be short lived, however, and soon bowed to public pressure and the need to control Indian populations in their midst. Thomas Dustin’s petition for scalp bounty on behalf of his wife in front of the Massachusetts General Court in June 1697 seems to have ushered in a new era of scalp bounties and they were reinstated later that year. “An Act for the encouragement of the prosecution of the Indian Enemy and Rebels,” Oct 19, 1697, listed specific amounts for adult scalps vs. the scalps of children: 50 pounds for women and men, 10 for children. The Act also specified that parties could keep their plunder, and that money would be paid to garrisons that had been attacked. Those injured in Indian attacks would be “cured at expense of the Public,” and those maimed or disabled to receive a stipend. MA Archives, Felt Collection 30: 435, 435a; As fighting against Indians continued through the end of the seventeenth century during Queen Anne’s War, scalp bounties were increased to 100 pounds for each scalp of an adult male Indian capable of bearing arms. Grenier, *The First Way of War*, 42.

<sup>176</sup> “Thomas Duston, Petition for Scalp Bounty,” June 8, 1697, MA Archives, Felt Collection 70, 350; Mary Neff’s son would later be awarded 200 acres of land for his mother’s heroism. “Petition by Joseph Neff (son) to General Court,” May 1739, MA Archives, Felt Collection 31: 261.

Queen Anne's War.<sup>177</sup> With the outbreak of war, patterns of female violence from King Philips' and King Williams' Wars emerged again. Englishwomen on the frontier resorted to violence to protect their interests and those of their families. By this period, women on the frontier had gained experience in defending against raids, and even surviving in Indian captivity. It is little wonder that they would use any and all weapons in their power to preserve their lives, as well as the lives of their children, and to avoid being torn away from everything they held dear.

During several raids on Haverhill, Mrs. Bradley, who had been taken captive alongside Hannah Dustin in 1697, took steps to try and ensure her family's safety and to avoid being taken captive again. In 1704, she scalded two Indian attackers with boiling soap, killing one of them. This did not prevent her from being captured and dragged into the wilderness. Pregnant at the time, she gave birth to a child in captivity. The infant died of starvation and abuse by the Indians with whom she was living. Mr. Bradley was able to secure her release a year later and she settled back into her life in Haverhill. One summer night in 1707, she, her husband and children watched a group of Indians approach their garrison home. Mrs. Bradley told her husband that she would rather die than be a captive again. When the attackers rushed on the garrison, and had partially beaten down the door, Mrs. Bradley was the first to open fire. She shot and killed the first invader and then the rest of the family fired into the group, causing them to retreat.<sup>178</sup>

During Queen Anne's War, as during the earlier Indian Wars, frontier towns bore the brunt of personal losses, while other communities were left to pay taxes, supply soldiers and support refugees.<sup>179</sup> In Salem and Marblehead, several women objected to the burdens placed on

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<sup>177</sup> Samuel Adams Drake, *The Border Wars of New England* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), 9-10, 136-7; Rabushka, *Taxation in Colonial America*, 365.

<sup>178</sup> Penhallow, *The History of the Wars of New-England*, 28; Mather, *Good Fetch'd Out of Evil*, 38; Chase, *History of Haverhill*, 216; Cronan, *Red Sunday*, 72; Coleman, *Captives Carried to Canada*, 348-9.

<sup>179</sup> Chase, *History of Haverhill*; Records of the General Sessions of the Peace for Essex County, MA Archives, microfilm reel 0877466, 169; Heyrman, *Commerce and Culture*, 250.

them during this period, and they responded with violence. Five Marblehead women were presented by the grand jury in 1706 for opposing “with force and arms” several colonial officials attempting collect property in payment of debt. Lucy Codner, Mary Williams, Rebeckah Allen, Hannah Allen, and Miriam Allen were wives and daughters of poor fisherman in an area hurt by the interruptions of war. These women and their families lived a precarious existence even before the wars, and the Allens in particular found it difficult to support their family of fifteen children after rate increases. Thus, when collectors arrived to confiscate their property, these women banded together to defend their family interests against the constable and his men.<sup>180</sup>

A few years later, Mary Ordway of Salem took steps to avoid the increasing burden of financially supporting the conflict by “assaulting and hinging” a tax collector in the execution of his office in 1709. Mary, apparently, was far more aggressive than her husband during the incident. He was charged only with obstructing the office of the collector. The Ordways had contributed soldiers to fight in the Indian Wars and one of their daughters, Joanna, had been taken captive by Abenaki Indians five years earlier. Colonial officials had not been able to recover her. The Ordways also had relatives on the Massachusetts frontier, including in Haverhill. They were cousins to the Emersons and Hannah Dustin. Perhaps when the tax collector arrived looking for more money, Mary Ordway concluded that she and her family had given enough. Like other colonial Englishwomen before her, including her famous cousin, she used violence to try to preserve her life against the enemy at her door.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> “Petition of the Inhabitants of Marblehead,” 1668/9, MA Archives, Felt Collection 60: 39; Perley, *Essex Antiquarian* Vol. 3, 175; Gen. Sessions of the Peace, MA Archives, microfilm reel 0877466, 169.

<sup>181</sup> Gen. Sessions of the Peace, MA Archives, microfilm reel 0877466, 212; There are no attacks by women against colonial officials in the court records for Essex County for at least seven years after 1709. Gen. Sessions of the Peace, MA Archives, microfilm reel 0877466; MA Archives, Felt Collection 68: 97; Charles Henry Pope, *The Pioneers of Massachusetts* (1900, reprint, Heritage Books, 2010), 156; Coleman, *Captives Carried to Canada*, 352.

#### Chapter 4 –Female Violence: A Tool for Societal Stability

They to whom the common use of Swords is neither Decent nor Lawful, have made a most Laudable use of Pens; and they that might not without sin, lead the Life which old stories ascribe to Amazons, have with much Praise done the part of Soldiers in the World; But we sometimes also find a woman among the Amanenses or scribes, or that Spriti, who moved Holy men to write the most sure work of Prophecy.<sup>1</sup>

Sometime between the beginning of her imprisonment in the spring of 1691 and her execution for infanticide two years later, Elizabeth Emerson came under the care and guidance of Reverend Cotton Mather.<sup>2</sup> How he found the time to minister to Emerson while at the same time actively pursuing those both afflicted and implicated in the Salem Witch Trials is unknown. Perhaps, at first, it was convenience; she was incarcerated in Boston, presumably with the unfortunate victims of the witchcraft hysteria. It was during his visits that Mather recorded spending “many and many a weary Hour...in the Prison,” trying to “serve the Souls of those miserable Creatures” he had come to reach, including Emerson and Grace “a negro woman” also convicted of infanticide.<sup>3</sup> According to his report, Mather was able to elicit from the “Haughty and Stubborn” Emerson a confession of her crime and her sins. Mather recorded her confession that “when [the twins] were born, I was not unsensible, that at least, One of them was alive; but such a Wretch was I, as to use a Murderous Carriage towards them, in the place where I lay, on purpose to dispatch them out of the World.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cotton Mather, *Ornaments of the Daughters of Zion* (Boston, 1692), 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Emerson was imprisoned from “May 3, 1691 – May 2, 1693, at a cost of L13.” Massachusetts Archive Felt Collection, Vol. 40, 625; A petition for reimbursement by the constable of Haverhill, Robert Hastings, lists Emerson’s transportation to the Boston jail in May 1691 among his expenses. Massachusetts Archive Court Records, John Noble, trans., *Records of the Superior Court of Judicature, Vol. 1, 1692-1695*, microfilm reel 1, 177.

<sup>3</sup> Cotton Mather, *The Diary of Cotton Mather, Vol. 1*, ed. Worthington Chauncey Ford (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1911-1912), 164-5.

<sup>4</sup> Cotton Mather, *Warnings from the Dead* (Boston, 1693), 70, 71.

Elizabeth's execution did not conclude Mather's involvement with her family, however.<sup>5</sup> Just four years later, Mather would become reacquainted with Hannah Dustin, Elizabeth's oldest sister, after her heroic slaughter of her Indian captors in 1697. Following her return to civilization, and Thomas Dustin's petition in front of the General Court for scalp bounty, Hannah visited Samuel Sewall to recount her tale of captivity and escape.<sup>6</sup> During the visit to Boston, Dustin and Mather renewed their relationship.<sup>7</sup> Mather was intrigued by Dustin's story, and the presence of a "Subject of such wonderful Deliverance...from captivity" among them. According to Mather, all three captives—Dustin, Mary Neff and Samuel Lenardson—came, unexpectedly, to hear him preach and to "give Thanks unto God their Saviour" for their "Deliverance from a Captivity in the Hands of horrid Indians."<sup>8</sup> Mather focused his attention on Dustin almost exclusively, however. The Puritan minister recorded Dustin's harrowing capture and suffering, as well as her violent escape, with Neff and Lenardson providing assistance for her deeds.

In Cotton Mather's hands, neither Elizabeth's death nor Hannah's redemption would bring an end to their stories, or their fame and notoriety. On the day of Emerson's execution, Mather gave a moving sermon on her behalf. He published both that sermon, and Emerson's confession, on several occasions throughout the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>9</sup> Mather also published accounts of Dustin's captivity and escape three times between 1697 and 1702.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "June 8, 1693. Elizabeth Emerson was executed, together with Grace, a negro woman, for the murder of three children." MA Archive Felt Collection, Vol. 40, 279.

<sup>6</sup> Samuel Sewall, *Samuel Sewall's Diary*, ed. Mark Van Doren (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963), 142.

<sup>7</sup> The Mathers and Sewalls had maintained a lengthy, if occasionally acrimonious relationship, and certainly frequented the same circles of Boston society. Mather and Sewall were both involved in the witch trials; Sewall presided over them, while Mather impacted their outcome with his espousal of spectral evidence and work with the afflicted. Judith S. Graham, *Puritan Family Life: The Diary of Samuel Sewall* (Boston: Northeastern Univ. Press, 2003), 104.

<sup>8</sup> Cotton Mather, *Humiliations Follow'd with Deliverances* (Boston, 1697), 40, 47.

<sup>9</sup> Mather published his sermon, *Warnings from the Dead*, in 1693 and Elizabeth Emerson's confession separately as part of his larger work, *Pillars of Salt*, in 1699. Mather, *Warnings*; Mather, *Pillars of Salt: An History of Some Criminals Executed in This Land for Capital Crimes* (Boston, 1699).

<sup>10</sup> Mather published Dustin's story first in *Humiliations* in 1697, next in *Decennium Luctuosum* in 1699 and again in *Magnalia Christi Americana* in 1702. Mather, *Humiliations*; Mather, *Decennium Luctuosum: An History of*

Through Mather's literary skill, Elizabeth Emerson and Hannah Dustin would become examples to others: one woman would become a lesson about the price of sin and the other, the promise of divine inspiration. For both sisters, however, their violent actions would ultimately become, in literary form, tools to preserve the Puritan's cultural, religious, and political domination of New England.

At the end of the seventeenth century, political upheaval joined the disruption of war in exacerbating a feeling of disorder and vulnerability in New England, and Massachusetts Bay in particular. King Philip's War, the revocation of the original Massachusetts charter in 1685, followed by continued fighting during King Williams' and Queen Anne's Wars, and political restructuring under the new charter in the 1690s all combined to make the colonists feel as if they were under attack.<sup>11</sup> In addition, population growth continued in the eighteenth century and religious observance among third and fourth-generation Puritans began to wane. A growing divide in religiosity between the clergy and the laity emerged around the turn of the century. New England appeared to be threatened from within, and its leaders worried about a loss of control over their "experiment in the wilderness."<sup>12</sup>

Cotton Mather voiced the loudest warnings that worldly issues had begun to divert attention from the Puritans' divine mission and that New England was backsliding in its commitment to religious devotion, but he was not alone in his concern about the Puritans' future

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*Remarkable Occurrences in the Long War which New England hath had with the Indian Salvages* (Boston, 1699); Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana or The Ecclesiastical History of New-England* (London, 1702).

<sup>11</sup> Teresa A. Toulouse, *The Captive's Position: Female Narrative, Male Identity, and Royal Authority in Colonial New England* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 2-3.

<sup>12</sup> David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgement: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 32; Peter Charles Hoffer and N.E.H. Hull, *Murdering Mothers: Infanticide in England and New England, 1558-1803* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1981), 56; Toulouse, *The Captive's Position*, 108.

and the leadership's role within it. Other leaders expressed similar sentiments.<sup>13</sup> As Perry Miller explains, in the 1640s, a lament had commenced in the sermons of New England over "the waning of primitive zeal and the consequent atrophy of public morals." This lament would become an "incessant chant" within forty years.<sup>14</sup> Michael Wigglesworth in *God's Controversy with New-England*, a poetic jeremiad from 1662, bewailed the languishing state of faith in New England, and cited a recent drought as God's punishment.<sup>15</sup> Joshua Moody, Increase Mather and Eleazor Mather all expressed concerns that "profanation" had spread beyond the unregenerate and had begun to infect the saints themselves.<sup>16</sup>

By the late 1670s, the subject dominated sermons and jeremiads increasingly at length. Clerics in Massachusetts responded to these concerns with a call for moral and social reform that took the shape of the Reforming Synod of 1679. The meeting of church representatives was called to answer crucial questions about New England's future, including "What are the evils that have provoked the Lord to bring his judgement on New England?" And "What is to be done so that those evils may be reformed?"<sup>17</sup> The ministers saw it as part of God's plan that they had been blessed with the ability to read the signs and interpret His warnings, among them divine judgments in the guise of Indian wars, natural disasters, disease, and political unrest. These signs

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<sup>13</sup> The Puritan leadership was generally united when it came to the most important issues facing the colonies. The "unified body of thought" among the first three generations in New England ensured that "individual differences among particular writers or theorists were merely minor variations within a general frame." Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1939, 1961), vii.

<sup>14</sup> Miller, *The New England Mind*, 472.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Wigglesworth, *God's Controversy with New-England* (1662) in A. Heimert and A. Delbanco, *The Puritans in America: A Narrative Anthology* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 229-236.

<sup>16</sup> Joshua Moody, *Souldiery Spiritualized, Or the Christian Souldier Orderly, and Strenuously Engaged in the Spiritual Warre* (Cambridge, 1674); Increase Mather, *The Day of Trouble is Near* (Cambridge, 1673); Eleazor Mather, *A Serious Exhortation to the Present and Succeeding Generation in New-England* (Cambridge, 1678).

<sup>17</sup> Richard P. Gildie, *The Profane, the Civil, and the Godly: The Reformation of Manners in Orthodox New England* (Univ. Park: Pennsylvania State Press, 2010), 13, 20; The Massachusetts General Court called the Reforming Synod at the behest of Increase Mather and eighteen fellow ministers. The synod convened in two sessions. The first, in September of 1679, produced a list of New England's sins that had provoked god, with proposed remedies. The second, in May 1680, included the adoption of the Savoy Declaration, a statement of faith. William T. Youngs, *The Congregationalists* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990), 64, 66.

convinced the clergy that America was under God's judgment. The Synod was, at least in part, an attempt to support the authority of both the ministers and magistrates in bringing New England back in line.<sup>18</sup> Stories of violent, problematic women of the age offered a means through which the Puritan leadership could spread this message.<sup>19</sup>

Under normal circumstances, colonial authorities tolerated women's violence only when it was contained within acceptable boundaries, most notably, the household.<sup>20</sup> Such behavior actually served to reinforce household, and therefore social, order and tended to receive the tacit approval of authorities as long as it did not become disruptive to the community at large. Prosecutions for "household violence" disappeared almost completely at the end of the seventeenth century. The disappearance of prosecutions for violence against servants, children, and spouses, and neighborly routs, did not indicate a change in people's behavior. With the upheaval at the end of the seventeenth century—and the Anglicanization of the court system following the new charter—policing these types of violence became less of a priority for those in charge.

Other types of violence that women participated in, however, remained a genuine and growing concern for colonial authorities. Violence against colonial authorities during the Indian

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<sup>18</sup> Miller, *The New England Mind*, 472-3; Puritan belief dictated that God had a rational plan, and that according to that plan there should be at least one person able to read the patterns in His works of creation and providence; to reconstruct at least part of God's infinite wisdom through the study of objects and events. Naturally, the Puritan leadership saw this as their particular gift. Miller, *The New England Mind*, 168-9; Gildie, *The Profane, the Civil, and the Godly*, 19-22.

<sup>19</sup> That the Puritan leadership chose to engage with women's stories is, perhaps, less surprising than it would appear at first glance, however. As Sarah Humphreys writes, the "conventional expectation is that Puritan rhetoric will be invariably based in masculine tropes and figures"; however, it is imagery of the female body that permeates Puritan writings. "Puritan ministers often called themselves the "breast of God" in sermons," she continues. "Such imagery depicts the female body as symbolic of the colonial body... that must be protected at any cost." Humphreys, "The Mass Marketing of the Colonial Captive Hannah Duston," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 41, no. 2 (2011): 156.

<sup>20</sup> Chapter 1, "The Limits of Household Violence: Order and Disorder," recreates the everyday violence of life for colonial women in order to establish how women both experienced and employed violence, and how colonial authorities largely tolerated that violence within certain boundaries.



Wars had drawn the court's attention and became particularly problematic during a period in which the leadership of the colony was under threat from without. Women were also necessarily drawn into violent confrontations during the Indian Wars as a matter of survival. Although most women would have preferred to avoid such situations, some were forced to use violence to protect themselves and their families from the constant threat of attack from their Indian neighbors on the frontier. The attention some of these women received, and the necessity of women's violence for protection on their frontier, highlighted the failings of the colony to protect its settlers.<sup>21</sup>

Also in a time when the population of English colonists had received several severe blows due to fighting in the Indian wars, the practice of infanticide became a focus of concern. Women gained the attention of their communities by allowing themselves to be led astray, and committing murder to conceal their missteps. Not only did infanticide seem at odds with efforts to repopulate New England, it signaled a woman's willingness to defy the dictates of her community and government, something that could not be tolerated during this turbulent period. The change in the law governing prosecutions for infanticide signaled heightened concerns about the secrecy and subversive nature of the act.<sup>22</sup>

While addressing these types of unacceptable or revealing acts of violence, as well as their concerns about declension and their own leadership during this period, colonial authorities produced stories of female victimization and heroism in many of the sermons, narratives, and narrative histories they created. Cotton Mather led the charge in re-framing women's violence

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<sup>21</sup> For more on Englishwomen's violence directed at colonial officials and Native Americans during the Indian Wars of the late seventeenth-century, see chapter 3, "Englishwomen and Indian War."

<sup>22</sup> See chapter 2, "From 'That wicked house': Women and Infanticide," for more on prosecutions for infanticide in the late seventeenth-century, as well as an exploration of women's possible motives for committing the crime in Puritan-dominated New England.

through the written and spoken word. Authorities repackaged women's expressions of violence, and in doing so, reasserted the authority of male colonial leadership, while providing powerful examples for society of the consequences of both positive and negative behavior. This chapter will explore some of the most famous examples of this—narratives of demonic possession, execution sermons for women convicted of infanticide (beginning with Elizabeth Emerson), the captivity narrative of Hannah Dustin, and narrative histories of the Indian Wars—to discern how and why some forms of women's violence went from socially disruptive to practically and symbolically useful. These women's actions, and the publicity that they inspired, became one means of preserving the Puritan's way of life in their struggling New Jerusalem.

It was almost a foregone conclusion that the leadership of New England would embrace the power of literacy and the spoken word in their struggle. The godly valued direct access to the word of God as one of their most precious privileges, which ensured that the region had nearly universal literacy. As David Hall explains, most people learned to read as children and had access to a Bible. Literacy figured “at the heart of cultural politics.”<sup>23</sup> Spiritual education was augmented by books and pamphlets extolling people to faith, as well as spoken sermons, which most regarded as sacred as the printed page and were often written down for more extensive distribution. A “shifting coalition of ministers, printers, booksellers” in New England made these godly works available to a desiring public. According to patterns of production and consumption, lay men and women preferred religious books, pamphlets and sermons to other kinds of written or spoken works. An “ideology of print,” and a general respect for what the clergy said and wrote, “strengthened the role of the clergy as ‘ambassadors’ of Christ.” The Puritan leadership was not afraid to take advantage of both newsworthy events, and the cultural resources of the

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<sup>23</sup> Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*, 7.

literary marketplace, in order to reinforce their orthodoxy in the minds of the general public. Narratives that “mated terror and evangelical inquiry” were by far the most popular.<sup>24</sup>

### ***Narratives of Possession***

Few types of literature during this period had the capacity to inspire as much fear and curiosity as the possession narrative. Possession narratives were designed to tell stories of those afflicted and invaded by otherworldly spirits, the suffering the possessed endured, and the heroic process of their salvation through the power of God, as guided by the clergy. The narratives were usually written about a single person or group of persons, frequently women, and told from the point of view of a third party. The personal elements of the tale would have allowed individual colonists to relate to the struggles of the afflicted, while the third-person narration added the sheen of objectivity to the story. These stories were simultaneously entertaining and educational; proving the power of the invisible world and the dark forces that lurked within it, as well as the power of belief to overcome them.<sup>25</sup>

In the wilderness of the New World, these tales held a particular fascination and power. Possession narratives offered a “psychological rescue from the devil,” as Richard Slotkin argues, in which ministers could emerge triumphant. In so doing, Mather and other Puritan leaders hoped to restrain the “atomism and individualism” encroaching on New England in the late seventeenth century.<sup>26</sup> Not everyone involved in the possession narratives was necessarily self-consciously using them for a purpose, however. Janice Knight reads many of the “victims” of possession as “confused, fractured,” and unconsciously laying personal traumas onto the possession narrative,

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<sup>24</sup> Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*, 46, 57, 80, 81.

<sup>25</sup> See John Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982); Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), Richard Godbeer, *The Devil's Dominion: Magic and Religion in Early New England* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992).

<sup>26</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1973), 114, 139

such as those resulting from Indian captivity or other hardships.<sup>27</sup> The young women who are the subjects of the narratives were confused, and probably not involved in plans surrounding their creation. For Mather and other men of his standing, however, instances of possession—like captivity stories, tales of violent crime, and the events of war—provided a vehicle to not only address the latest news in the region, but also a means of spinning that news to spread their message.

Cotton Mather's treatment of Elizabeth Knapp, Mercy Short, and Margaret Rule, victims of demonic possession during the 1670s and 1690s, came at an important period. A genuine believer in the ever-presence of both God and the Devil, as well as the power of Providence, Mather attempted to save these female sufferers of unholy, unseen torments and to document and distribute his accounts thereof. In publicizing his recollections of the young women's battles against their "Devilish Masters" Mather identified a source for New England's troubles: the dark forces of the Devil testing the Puritan's resolve in their spiritual mission. Through his narratives, the instances of women's violent "possession" Mather described, he displaced rumblings of popular discontent, either due to the societal changes that were overtaking New England, or surrounding the losses that the Indian Wars had brought to the people of that region. The narratives also showed that Mather was a leader capable of helping the colony spiritually survive those crises.

By involving a young, female servant employed in the household of a respected Puritan minister, Elizabeth Knapp's case in 1671 anticipated possessions that would emerge during the panic in and around Salem in the 1690s. Although her possession did not involve an explicit connection to the trauma of the Indian Wars—as did Short's and Rule's—similar strange and

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<sup>27</sup> Janice Knight, "Telling It Slant: The Testimony of Mercy Short," *Early American Literature* 37, no. 1, Interiority in Early American Literature (2002): 63 n6.

violent behavior she exhibited would appear among the young women afflicted decades later. Like other young women afflicted, Knapp also demonstrated a personal discontent with her position, and a violently aggressive attitude toward the symbol of authority in her life, in her case her family and the Reverend Samuel Willard of Groton. When Knapp began to exhibit her “very strange manner” and “violent agitations,” the Reverend reached out for help to Cotton Mather. Mather documented her afflictions, as Willard described them, and published her story many years later along with his other possession narratives.<sup>28</sup>

The daughter of English immigrants, James and Elizabeth (Warren) Knapp, Elizabeth was employed as a servant in the Willard household at the age of sixteen. The Willards were a more respected and prosperous family than her own. Scandal and suspicion seemed to haunt the Knapp family. Prior to their move to Groton, her father, James, was charged with adultery (though not convicted) and suspected of being the father of an illegitimate child. He had also confessed to drunkenness. Elizabeth’s uncle, John, had also been convicted as a thief. Although she was an only child, something relatively rare in this period of large families with many children, Elizabeth was “bound out” to the Willards soon after the Knapp’s arrival in Groton. This suggests, perhaps, that the domestic upheaval that had plagued the family in Watertown may have followed them to their new establishment and her family thought Elizabeth would be better off under another roof.<sup>29</sup>

Elizabeth Knapp had come under the protection of a more respectable role model, but this did not appear to make her content with her life. Being exposed to the luxuries that accompanied

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<sup>28</sup> Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (Hartford, 1820), Book 6, 390 – 1; An account of the possession also appeared in Increase Mather’s *An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences* (1684) and Willard’s recollections were later published as “A Brief account of a strange and unusual providence of God befallen to Elizabeth Knapp of Groton by me, Samuel Willard,” in Samuel A. Green, *Groton in the Witchcraft Times* (Groton, Mass., 1883), 7 – 21.

<sup>29</sup> Carol Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: Norton, 1987), 236; Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 126.

a greater income and a stable home life seems to have caused her to resent her lesser circumstances. As she later explained, it was her discontent with her “condition” as a servant, the “burdensome” nature of her labor, and her desire for worldly extravagance that left her open to the influence of the Devil in her life. Rev. Willard noted that in the midst of her possession, Knapp confessed that “...she was neither content to be at home nor abroad; and [that she] had oftentimes strong persuasions to practice in witchcraft, had often wished the Devil would come to her at such and such times, and [had] resolved that if he would she would give herself up to him soul and body...” The Devil preyed upon her weaknesses, “presenting the treaty of a covenant...[with] such things as suited her youthful fancy, money silks, fine clothes, ease from labor, to show her the whole world.”<sup>30</sup> In the midst of her agitations, she was known to call out “money! money!” while sometimes “weeping” or “roaring.”<sup>31</sup>

Both Mather and Willard’s accounts of her possession suggest that it was Knapp’s discontent that was the cause of her affliction, a detail that both men felt was important to communicate with their New England audiences. Knapp’s dissatisfaction itself had inspired the Devil to attack her, and had she been satisfied with her position, with her limited opportunities and resources, she would have avoided the traumatic experience. Her sin was to question her place in the “divinely planned social order.” It was this sin that also marked older women as witches, even prior to the trials at Salem. It was also a tendency that was symptomatic of larger societal changes, and had the potential to leave the colony itself open to attack from its spiritual foes. Willard wrote, Knapp “is a monument of divine severity...and the Lord grant that all that

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<sup>30</sup> “A Brief account of a strange and unusual providence of God befallen to Elizabeth Knapp of Groton by me, Samuel Willard,” in David D. Hall, *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England: A Documentary History* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1999), 200, 207.

<sup>31</sup> Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, Book 6, 390.

see or hear may fear and tremble.”<sup>32</sup> Knapp became a cautionary tale for the dangers of striving for greater individuality or prosperity beyond one’s station or place.

Knapp’s possession involved a great amount of physical violence. Willard recounted, “she was violent in bodily motions, leapings, strainings and strange agitations, scarce to be held in bounds by the strength of 3 or 4.”<sup>33</sup> In his version of events, Mather increased the number of men necessary to restrain her. He wrote, “six men were scarce able to hold her in some of her fits.”<sup>34</sup> Knapp would lash out at those that held her, spit on their faces, and “if any time she had done any harm or frightened them she would laugh.”<sup>35</sup> The afflicted young woman seemed to reserve her most disturbing outbursts and violent threats for those in positions of authority in her life. Perhaps this stemmed from their inability to fully care for her. The devil, “urged upon her constant temptations to murder her parents, her neighbors,” Knapp claimed. “Once he put a bill hook into her hand” and instructed her to murder the Rev. Willard himself.<sup>36</sup> Mather noted that “The chief things that the daemon [within Knapp] spoke were horrid railings against the godly minister of the town.” Sometimes, the demon took this a step further and “belch’d out most nefandous blasphemies against the God of heaven.”<sup>37</sup>

The solution for Knapp’s possession was not a change of circumstance, but a wiliness to accept her position in the community and quiet her personal sense of discontent. As a “subject of hope” for all, Willard urged Elizabeth to acknowledge her sin and repent, thereby cleansing herself.<sup>38</sup> Mather offered a similar solution to her affliction: prayer, reflection, acceptance of her place in divine order. Once Knapp “confess’d, that she had been deluded by satan, and compell’d

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<sup>32</sup> Karlsen, *Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 240.

<sup>33</sup> Willard “A Brief account,” 199.

<sup>34</sup> Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, Book 6, 390.

<sup>35</sup> Willard “A Brief account,” 207.

<sup>36</sup> Willard “A Brief account,” 200.

<sup>37</sup> Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, Book 6, 390.

<sup>38</sup> Willard “A Brief account,” 212, 212n7.

by him unreasonably,” she began to improve. By praying alongside those in the community she had targeted and accused as her possessors, and agreeing to not “speak evil...without a cause,” her cruel torment seemed to subside.<sup>39</sup> Through the guidance of these Puritan divines, Knapp was able to recover fully, and even successfully marry and start a family three years after her possession. She became a good Puritan wife and mother, almost completely disappearing from the public record after 1673.<sup>40</sup>

Two decades later, Mercy Short was one of several persons afflicted during the course of the Salem witchcraft crisis who had intimate experience with the Indian Wars.<sup>41</sup> Though based in Boston, like many of the Salem accusers, Short was young and female, and had been held captive and left orphaned as a result of the war on the Maine frontier.<sup>42</sup> As Mather recounted, Short was taken captive by “cruel and Bloody Indians in the East” who “horribly Butchered her Father, her Mother, her Brother and her Sister, and others of her Kindred, and then carried her, three surviving Brothers with two Sisters...unto Canada.”<sup>43</sup> The manner of her return to civilization is unclear. Like other “afflicted” girls in Salem, Short was left without any emotional or financial support in the wake of the Indian Wars.<sup>44</sup> She had since found work as a servant to support herself.

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<sup>39</sup> Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, Book 6, 391.

<sup>40</sup> Karlsen, *Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 241.

<sup>41</sup> Several scholars have noted the connection between the Salem Witchcraft crisis of 1692 and the Indian Wars of the late seventeenth century. Mary Beth Norton, in particular, argues that the grim events that took place in Salem cannot be understood without looking at them in relation to King Williams’s War, as well as continued fighting on the frontiers of Maine. Norton, *In the Devils Snare*, 12; Carol Karlsen notes that of the 21 possessed women in Salem, at least 17 of them had lost one or both parents, most as a result of the Indian Wars. Karlsen, *Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 226, 42, 59, 60.

<sup>42</sup> Knight, “Telling It Slant,” 42.

<sup>43</sup> Cotton Mather, “A Brand Pluck’d Out of Burning” (1693) in *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases, 1648-1706*, ed. George Lincoln Burr (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1914), 259.

<sup>44</sup> Karlsen, *Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 227.



According to Mather's narrative of her possession and redemption, *A Brand Pluck'd Out of the Burning* (1693), Short met several persons who had been imprisoned on "suspicion of having an Hand in that most Horrid and Hellish Witchcraft" after being sent by her mistress on an errand to the "gaol" in Boston. One of the suspected witches, Sarah Good, asked Short for some tobacco. In response "she affronted the Hag... (since executed at Salem) by throwing a Handful of Shavings at her and saying, That's Tobacco good enough for you." Good "bestowed some ill words upon her," Mather commented, and Short was taken ill soon after.<sup>45</sup>

Short's possession thus began with an act of physical aggression—throwing the tobacco—and her expressions of violence and anger only increased as it continued. When Short fell ill in the meetinghouse, under the influence of her "Invisible Troublers," her physical reaction was apparently so disruptive that she had to be restrained and carried from the building by "many strong men with an united Force." Even these men, however "could not well carry her any Further than the House of a kind Neighbor."<sup>46</sup> Short was "Insolent and Abusive to such as were about her" and "it was no Rare Thing for the Standers-by to have their Arms cruelly scratch'd, and Pins thrust into their Flesh."<sup>47</sup> Short was also abused and assaulted by a "Number of Spectres" to the horror of those who cared for her. She was plagued by pins stuck in her skin and in her mouth, by scratches and pinches, and by unseen forces that prevented her from eating for days on end.<sup>48</sup> These attacks, Short reported, were committed by spirits "resembling the persons of several people in the countrey" who "obeyed their Devilish Master."<sup>49</sup> It is

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<sup>45</sup> Mather, "A Brand Pluck'd Out of Burning," 259.

<sup>46</sup> Mather, "A Brand Pluck'd Out of Burning," 261.

<sup>47</sup> Mather, "A Brand Pluck'd Out of Burning," 271, 278.

<sup>48</sup> Mather, "A Brand Pluck'd Out of Burning," 264-5.

<sup>49</sup> Mather, "A Brand Pluck'd Out of Burning," 261.

impossible, however, not to surmise that at least some of these injuries were the result of self-inflicted violence.

Physical torment, and self-inflicted violence, were also hallmarks of Margaret Rule's spiritual affliction a few months later, as chronicled by Mather in *Another Brand Pluck'd out of the Burning* (1693). Indeed the "Afflictions" of the girls were so much alike that Mather commented, "the relations I have given of the one, would almost serve as the full History of the other."<sup>50</sup> The evening before "Margaret fell into her Calamities" in September 1693, she had been "bitterly treated" and "threatn'd" by a "Miserable Woman, who had been formerly Imprisoned on suspicion of Witchcraft." The following day Rule caused a considerable "disturbance" in the meetinghouse and had to be carried home.<sup>51</sup> From then on, she fell into "odd Fits," and began to see specters. She was tormented by spirits "in a manner too Hellish to be sufficiently described," confining her to bed.<sup>52</sup> "In obedience to [the Devil] they addressed themselves into various ways of Torturing her," Mather wrote. Accordingly, she was "cruelly pinch't with Invisible hands very often in a Day, and the black and blew marks of the pinches came immediately visible unto the standers by."<sup>53</sup> Her attendants found pins "stuck into her Neck, Back and Arms" and noted "she would also be strangely distorted in her Joynts, and thrown into...Convulsions."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Cotton Mather, "Another Brand Pluck'd Out of the Burning, or More Wonders of the Invisible World" (1693) in *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases*, 310.

<sup>51</sup> Cotton Mather, "Another Brand Pluck'd Out of the Burning," 311.

<sup>52</sup> Mather, "Another Brand Pluck'd Out of the Burning," 311-2.

<sup>53</sup> Mather, "Another Brand Pluck'd Out of the Burning," 312.

<sup>54</sup> Mather, "Another Brand Pluck'd Out of the Burning," 312; Rule was also delighted to watch physical violence play out between the specters themselves, Mather wrote. When several specters were unable to harm Rule, she "insulted over them with very Proper derision, daring them to do their worst, whilst she had the satisfaction to see their Black master strike them and kick them, like an Overseer of so many Negro's, to make them do their work." Mather, "Another Brand Pluck'd Out of the Burning," 318.

It was in these fits of violence that the different impact of the Indian Wars on the two women became most apparent. As both Short and Rule reported it, the “Devel” who taunted and controlled them was clearly an Indian. “[H]aving the Figure of A Short...Black man,” the specter who possessed Short “was of a Tawney, or an Indian colour.”<sup>55</sup> Though she did not lose family members to the Indian Wars, Rule’s fears of the conflicts also caused her tormentor to manifest as the same Indian figure; a “Short...Black man” who the other spirits “call’d their Master.”<sup>56</sup> By physically acting out against this Indian, Knight explains, the women could express their fear and anger in a socially acceptable way, without fear of reprisal. For Short in particular, some of that anger sprang from the “impotence of pastoral surrogates” and other colonial leaders’ failures to protect her.<sup>57</sup> Short’s violence and frustration were directed more outwardly as a result. When Mather came to pray over Short, she “flew upon him,” seized the Bible from his hands and tore it.<sup>58</sup> This was not a random act of violence, Knight argues, but representative of Short’s suffering during captivity and frustrated hopes after her return to civilization.<sup>59</sup> Short was also seen and heard to argue with the specters, shout at them and reject their false promises of a husband, fine clothes, and a place in heaven.<sup>60</sup> In so doing, Short was calling attention to her personal losses in the wars. Like so many women, she was missing loved ones, had been alienated from the promise of prosperity, and denied the comfort of security because of the wars.

According to Mather, Short’s and Rule’s illnesses were the same as that “which held the Bewitched people then Tormented by Invisible Furies in the County of Essex.”<sup>61</sup> Mather related

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<sup>55</sup> Mather, “A Brand Pluck’d Out of Burning,” 261; Mather, “Another Brand Pluck’d Out of the Burning,” 312.

<sup>56</sup> Mather, “Another Brand Pluck’d Out of the Burning,” 312.

<sup>57</sup> Knight, “Telling It Slant,” 50, 55.

<sup>58</sup> Mather wrote in his Bible – “Nov. 29, 1692 – While I was preaching at a private fast (kept for a possessed young woman) – on Mark 9.28.29 – The Devel in the Damsel flew upon mee, and tore the Leaf, as it is now town over against the Text.” Mather, “A Brand Pluck’d Out of Burning,” 260, note 4.

<sup>59</sup> Knight, “Telling It Slant,” 55.

<sup>60</sup> Mather, “A Brand Pluck’d Out of Burning,” 268-9.

<sup>61</sup> Mather, “A Brand Pluck’d Out of Burning,” 259-60.

the women's possessions to the events in Salem and portrayed them as part of a larger demonic attack on the colony.<sup>62</sup> The spectral "Black Man" who possessed them had "exactly the same Dimensions and Complexion and voice, with the Divel that has exhibited himself unto other infested People...in other parts of this Country."<sup>63</sup> In Mather's narratives, the devil and the Indian were one in the same, imbuing the Indian enemy with unforeseen powers and giving the Puritans' struggles against them a spiritual basis and urgency. As others afflicted by spirits had testified before her, Short saw meetings take place among witches in which "there had been present some French Canadians, and some Indian Sagamores, to concert the methods of ruining New England." The group took "Directions for their Devotions" at these Meetings from a book of Catholic Devotions they stole from Mather's own study.<sup>64</sup> As a united effort, Mather shows, the witches and the Indians, with their French Catholic allies, planned to destroy the Puritan colonies. Against such an organized invasion, colonial authorities could only do so much.

Witchcraft "had brought in the Divels upon several parts of the Country," but Mather and other Puritan leaders were willing to do spiritual battle against these aggressors.<sup>65</sup> In his narrative of Short's possession, and his account of the similar afflictions that plagued Margaret Rule, Mather demonstrated that he held the answer to the upheavals that threatened their society, and their very souls. Short would frequently quote Mather "in her Arguments against the Divel," he recounted.<sup>66</sup> These quotations and arguments held a great weight and served as powerful weapons against these unseen forces, because "the Divel had a very particular Provocation and Malignity" against Mather himself.<sup>67</sup> Mather also reported that both Short and Rule were visited

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<sup>62</sup> Mather, "A Brand Pluck'd Out of Burning," 257; Mather, "Another Brand Pluck'd Out of the Burning," 312.

<sup>63</sup> Mather, "Another Brand Pluck'd Out of the Burning," 312.

<sup>64</sup> Mather, "A Brand Pluck'd Out of Burning," 281-2.

<sup>65</sup> Mather, "A Brand Pluck'd Out of Burning," 259.

<sup>66</sup> Mather, "A Brand Pluck'd Out of Burning," 267.

<sup>67</sup> Mather, "A Brand Pluck'd Out of Burning," 267-8.

by a “white spirit” during the worst of their possessions who encouraged them to maintain their faith in God.<sup>68</sup> For Rule, this spirit also explicitly called on her to consider Mather as her “Father.” According to Mather’s recollections, the white spirit said to her “Margaret, you are now to take notice that (such a Man) is your Father, follow his counsels and you shall do well.”<sup>69</sup>

Evidence that Mather was chosen by Providence to lead the colony out of their spiritual sufferings was in the results he achieved for these women: each was “delivered” from harm by his Holy efforts.<sup>70</sup> Mather and the people of the neighborhood were ceaseless in their prayerful devotion to Short, “for the Deliverance of the Afflicted Maid.” He wrote, “There was, I think, scarce a Night for near a Month together, which was not All spent in the Exercise of Devotion, by those that Watched.” Eventually, their prayers were answered when one evening an “unseen Defence” protected Short from the specters’ attacks: “The Spectres Try’d all the Evening long to inflict their Tortures on her, but...they were unable to Touch her.”<sup>71</sup> Shortly thereafter, “God was pleased at length to hear the multiply’d prayers of His people for her Deliverance.”<sup>72</sup> Similar efforts, accompanied by a three-day fast, were enough to protect Rule from spirit attacks. Unable to prick her with pins, her “Tormentors...flew out of the Room,” never to return, and she gave thanks for her deliverance. By their “unwearied Cares and Pains,” the faithful had rescued these girls from their suffering and banished the dark forces that threatened them.<sup>73</sup>

In order to use stories of demonic possession, Mather showed that the female sufferers of possession were innocent victims in the ordeal. These were not flawed women capable of violence against themselves and others, but instead, young, vulnerable victims of circumstance

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<sup>68</sup> Cotton Mather, “Another Brand Pluck’d Out of the Burning,” 316.

<sup>69</sup> Mather, “Another Brand Pluck’d Out of the Burning,” 317.

<sup>70</sup> Mather, “A Brand Pluck’d Out of Burning,” 287; Mather, *Diary of Cotton Mather, Vol. 1*, 160.

<sup>71</sup> Mather, “A Brand Pluck’d Out of Burning,” 285.

<sup>72</sup> Mather, “A Brand Pluck’d Out of Burning,” 260.

<sup>73</sup> Mather, “Another Brand Pluck’d Out of the Burning,” 318.

and Satan's meddling.<sup>74</sup> While Cotton Mather depicted Mercy Short as a poor orphan of the Indian Wars reliving the conflicts in spectral form, Margaret Rule had a more difficult time fitting into the mold of innocent victim. Born of "sober and honest Parents, yet Living," Mather could not comment on Rule's "Character" with "exactness," he claimed.<sup>75</sup> Instead, he gave vague hints about rumors that surrounded her previous life. Mather argued that "wherever the Devils have been let loose to worry any Poor Creature amongst us," people would always "inquire and relate all the little Vanities of their Childhood, with such unequal exaggerations, as to make them appear greater Sinners than any whome the Pilate of Hell has not yet Prayed upon."<sup>76</sup> He assured the reader, however, that whatever misdeeds had marked Rule's past had been behind her "for about half a year before her Visitation" and that "she was observably improved in the hopeful symptoms of a new Creature" by then. She had become "seriously concern'd for the everlasting Salvation of her Soul and careful to avoid the snares of Evil Company" at the time she was taken ill.<sup>77</sup>

Mather's efforts to use these women's expressions of violence for the good of the colony during the trials did not turn out as he intended. He and other colonial leaders could not make up the authoritative ground they had lost during the Indian Wars, and were continuing to lose during the upheavals of the 1690s. Ultimately, Mather's involvement with the afflicted during the witch trials backfired, as did his unwillingness to strongly renounce the trials in their aftermath. Although Mather kept his physical distance from the Salem debacle—he did not attend the trials or even come to Salem except to watch the execution of Reverend George Burroughs in

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<sup>74</sup> Mather, for instance, refers to Margaret Rule's youth on almost every page of his narrative of her possession. Mather, "Another Brand Pluck'd Out of the Burning," 310, 311, 312, 313, 315, 316.

<sup>75</sup> Mather, "Another Brand Pluck'd Out of the Burning," 310.

<sup>76</sup> Mather, "Another Brand Pluck'd Out of the Burning," 310.

<sup>77</sup> Mather, "Another Brand Pluck'd Out of the Burning," 310.

August—his early support of spectral evidence had kindled the flames of the Salem witch-hunt.<sup>78</sup> Mather was also tainted by the trials after writing letters and narratives vindicating them and their work.<sup>79</sup> At the end of his narrative of Margaret Rule’s possession and deliverance, Mather responded to his detractors with dismay. After all his efforts “to rescue the Miserable from the Lions and Bears of Hell, which had seized them,” and after all his “Studies to disappoint the Devils in their designs,” he found it unfathomable that he would be “driven to the necessity of an Apologie.”<sup>80</sup> The dominance of Cotton Mather and other men of his ilk was showing signs of strain.<sup>81</sup>

### ***Execution Sermons***

Even as men in positions of power tried to solidify their authority, the post-Salem renunciation of spectral evidence, and new skepticism about interpreting the workings of Providence all contributed to the marginalization of men like Mather, or those who had been the loudest proponents of beliefs of witchcraft.<sup>82</sup> Mather, however, continued to present women’s violence in narrative and sermon form to offer examples to the community and demonstrate his

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<sup>78</sup> I agree with Janice Knight and others who argue that the witch trials ended up subverting Puritan structures of cultural authority. Part of the reason for this was that “[a]dvocacy of spectral evidence destroyed the identity of appearance and reality that had underwritten preparationist doctrine, typological prophecy, and the hermeneutical system that secured the identity of New England as the New Jerusalem.” Knight, “Telling It Slant,” 41.

<sup>79</sup> Diane E. Foulds, *Death in Salem: The Private Lives behind the 1692 Witch Hunt* (Guilford, Conn.: Globe Pequot Press, 2010), 152; Mather would eventually admit that the trials were a mistake, but unlike Samuel Sewall, he never went public with an apology. Foulds, *Death in Salem*, 155; Mather was certainly aware that public opinion had turned against the trials, and that many had begun to suspect the afflicted had been faking their possessions. He explicitly responded to these suspicions in “Another Brand Pluck’d Out of the Burning.” He also acknowledged that the trials had become a standing joke in local coffee house conversations. Mather, “Another Brand Pluck’d Out of the Burning,” 312-315, 318.

<sup>80</sup> Mather, “Another Brand Pluck’d Out of the Burning,” 319-320.

<sup>81</sup> Cotton Mather would never achieve the respect or renown of his father, Increase. He came close to the Harvard presidency, the one post he truly coveted, when his father was removed and his name was submitted as a successor, but he was denied the position. Only by surviving his father would Cotton take command of the second church in 1723, but even that triumph would be short-lived. Within five years, he was dead. Foulds, *Death in Salem*, 154-5.

<sup>82</sup> Kathleen Brown, “Murderous Uncleanness: The Body of Female Infanticide in Puritan New England,” in *A Centre of Wonders: The Body in Early America*, ed. Janet Moore Lindman and Michele Lise Tartar (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2001), 82; In his subsequent work in the late seventeenth century, Mather continued to infuse his writing with the same rhetoric he had used during the witch trials, arguing that Satan was still among them. Mather, *Warnings*.

leadership. In the aftermath of the trials, he shifted his focus to one that would cause little controversy: women's violence that sprung from sexual sin and filth.<sup>83</sup> One of the major avenues he and other Puritan ministers utilized was the execution sermon.

During much of New England's early history, the public execution process often included a sermon given by a member of the clergy. These sermons were addressed to the condemned, but also contained messages for local populations who came to partake in the spectacle. Execution sermons were not unique to Puritan New England, but the sermons, in both spoken and written form, appear to have unprecedented popularity there compared to the rest of the western world in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>84</sup> In addition to being accounts of the crimes committed by the condemned, or recordings of their final words—although those elements were incorporated into them—execution sermons were opportunities for Puritan divines to impose their vision of moral order on their flocks.<sup>85</sup> Most were structured around particular passages from the Bible, examined as doctrine, and then draw out as exhortations to improvement: to the accused and the audience in general.<sup>86</sup>

Focusing on cases of infanticide, and the sinfulness and uncleanness of a society that could foster women who would commit such a deed, offered a way for Mather and other ministers in New England to demonstrate their moral authority. Mather referred to executions as

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<sup>83</sup> Brown, "Murderous Uncleanness," 82.

<sup>84</sup> Daniel Cohen argues that the execution sermon "as an autonomous literary genre" seems to have been an invention of the New England Puritans. Daniel A. Cohen, "In Defense of the Gallows: Justifications of Capital Punishment in New England Execution Sermons, 1674-1825," *American Quarterly* 40 no. 2 (1988): 147; Daniel E. Williams argues that the decline of the execution sermon in the late eighteenth century can be read as a decline in the power of the clerical class in New England, and the dominance of communications they favored. Williams, *Pillars of Salt: An Anthology of Early America Criminal Narratives* (Madison, WI: Madison House Publishers, 1993), 19-20.

<sup>85</sup> Preachers saw an execution as a useful method of reaching large numbers of people, much larger than their normal congregations. Stuart Banner, *The Death Penalty: An American History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2002), 32-34.

<sup>86</sup> Mark Winston Brewin, "The New England Execution Sermon: Texts, Rituals, and Power," *Observatorio Journal* 5, no. 2 (2011), 135-6.



“opportunities” to spread his message of salvation.<sup>87</sup> The timing for Mather to diagnose the ills of Puritan society could not have been better; Elizabeth Emerson’s execution came just a month after the last of the Salem imprisoned were reprieved and released by Governor Phips.<sup>88</sup> Mather wrote in his diary about Emerson, “I had often wished for an Opportunity; to hear my Testimonies, against the Sins of Uncleanness [when] A young Woman of Haverhill (and a Negro Woman also of this Town) were under sentence of Death, for the Murdering of their Bastard-children.” He spoke of the time he spent trying to save their miserable souls, and held them up as examples to “vast Multitudes of others.”<sup>89</sup> He attributed it to Providence that their execution should fall on his lecture day, “Their Execution, was ordered to have been, upon the Lecture of another, but by a very strange Providence...the order for their Execution was altered and it fell on my Lecture Day. I did then with the special Assistance of Heaven, make and preach, a Sermon.”<sup>90</sup>

Female violence could be used in this guise as a very public instrument to reaffirm Puritan leadership in the colony. Execution sermons for women being put to death for infanticide offered a powerful platform and authorities soon realized that these women’s executions were a perfect combination of public spectacle and spiritual theater. Huge crowds would gather to witness a public hanging and jostle for a glimpse of the accused as she listened to her final sermon. Describing the scene at Emerson’s execution, Mather claimed, “Whereat one of the

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<sup>87</sup> Historians debate about the role and influence of Puritanism in a heterogeneous society like late seventeenth-century New England. I agree with N.E.H. Hull’s assessment when she wrote “if the great mass of its denizens were ordinary working people, servants and serving maids, agricultural day laborers, cartmen, craftsmen and their apprentices, shipwrights and their assistants, and a steadily growing number of marginally employed sailors, ‘mechanicks’ and former soldiers, the tone of its society was set by its spiritual founders.” N.E.H. Hull, *Female Felons: Women and Serious Crime in Colonial Massachusetts* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1987), 3.

<sup>88</sup> Brown, “Murderous Uncleanness,” 78.

<sup>89</sup> Mather, *Diary v. 1*, 164-5.

<sup>90</sup> Mather, *Diary v. 1*, 164-5.

greatest Assemblies, ever known in these parts of the World, was come together.”<sup>91</sup> The execution of Sarah Threeneedles for infanticide in 1698 also offered an opportunity to spread the word to a massive and enthralled audience. As Samuel Sewall noted in this diary on the occasion of Mather’s execution sermon for Threeneedles, the meetinghouse was filled with a “very vast Assembly, and the street full of such as could not get in.”<sup>92</sup> Mather himself commented that “four or five thousand Souls” had come to hear him speak and to watch Threeneedles die. There were so many people crammed into the meetinghouse that he “could not get unto the Pulpit, but by climbing over Pies and Heads.”<sup>93</sup> Mather was not the only spiritual leader to take advantage of such an enormous and attentive crowd. Samuel Willard and Increase Mather also treated the gathering to their exhortations on the nature of sin and its consequences for New England.<sup>94</sup>

The large crowds were not merely incident to the spectacle, they were a necessity. Execution sermons and the executions that immediately followed were scheduled for the middle of the day, and frequently on lecture days, to ensure maximum attendance. “The women who went to the gallows did so in such a way as to involve the public’s participation,” N.E.H. Hull argues.<sup>95</sup> Threeneedles’ execution sermons were given at noon on a lecture day, a time when they would hardly be missed by the community at large. She was not an exception. In Puritan New England, “the condemned met their fate in the middle of the day or early afternoon, after the dire public sermons of the ministers.”<sup>96</sup> Mather noted feeling elated by the large numbers who had come to hear him speak. When he described the spectacle of Threeneedles’ lecture, he

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<sup>91</sup> Mather, *Diary v. 1*, 164-5.

<sup>92</sup> Samuel Sewall, *The Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674-1729, Vol. 1* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1878), 400, 486; Hull, *Female Felons*, 122.

<sup>93</sup> Mather, *Diary v. 1*, 139.

<sup>94</sup> Samuel Willard, *Impenitent Sinners Warned of their Misery* (Boston 1698, reprint 2010); Increase Mather, *The Folly of Sinning, Opened & Applied* (Boston 1699)

<sup>95</sup> Hull, *Female Felons*, 124.

<sup>96</sup> Hull, *Female Felons*, 124.

admitted that on the day he felt “weak” faint and spent. After seeing the crowds that had come, however, he was reinvigorated by the “Spirit of the Lord.”<sup>97</sup> Presented before as many people as possible, execution was a drama meant for public consumption, and it reinforced the social order by reaffirming the values that had been threatened by the crime and the legitimacy of those who condemned the accused.<sup>98</sup>

Ministers were aware of this, and adjusted their execution sermons to address the public at large. Mather’s sermon given prior to Emerson’s execution is an example of this. The minister himself called the event a “dismal Spectacle,” and urged his listeners to take her example to heart. “You have before your Eyes, a Couple of Malefactors, whose Murderous Uncleaness ha’s now in ther Youth brought upon them a most miserable Death. May your Hearts now give a profitable Attention unto the Use that should be made of such.”<sup>99</sup> The majority of Mather’s sermon was in this same tone, and though ostensibly for the benefit of the condemned, was not actually directed at Elizabeth. Mather used “him” and “he” throughout and only referred to Emerson in vague terms until the very end of his sermon when he offered her “confession,” called *Warnings from the Dead*. He used her name once, and never referred to the other woman being executed that same day by name, calling her “thy Black Fellows-Sufferer there.”<sup>100</sup> When Mather did address Emerson directly it was only for a few minutes before leading her to the gallows. The rest of the sermon Mather devoted to the generalized “You” in the audience. “I demand this from all the rest of You,” he called, “that the Circumstances of These, do quicken

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<sup>97</sup> Hull, *Female Felons*, 123.

<sup>98</sup> Williams, *Pillars of Salt*, 3.

<sup>99</sup> Mather, *Warnings*, 35.

<sup>100</sup> Mather, *Warnings*, 75.

your all to mind...the Lamentble Desolations, which an Unclean Life do's bring upon the Children of men."<sup>101</sup>

While executions sermons were directed to the audience as a whole, when women were the condemned it bolstered the power of public punishment as both deterrence and an example of redemption. Mather acknowledged that the sight of the weaker sex about to be executed—those “unhappy and condemned Malefactors, who make a Sight in this house at this Time”—was “very moving unto all Spectators.”<sup>102</sup> Women, as physically and legally more vulnerable than the men who might be punished, were a pitiable object to those who came to witness their suffering. In her shame and pain, even the most hardened of female criminals could usually inspire a sympathetic chord and, in turn, her punishment proved particularly moving and cathartic to the multitude.<sup>103</sup> Hull observes, “In her punishment [the audience] could feel the lash or the noose and be purified of sin—at least for a moment.” At the same time, ministers’ narratives of women’s sins offered vivid lessons for others about the road to ruin.<sup>104</sup>

Publication amplified the effects of confessions and execution sermons beyond the meetinghouse and the gallows. A larger audience than those who attended the event could partake of a dramatic execution experience through a literary recreation of the ritual. Sermons and confessions were printed and distributed soon after the execution to take advantage of the public’s curiosity and to meet demand at its peak. These works also sold for cheap and were thus available to people from a wide range of social ranks and classes.<sup>105</sup> Cotton Mather was known

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<sup>101</sup> Mather, *Warnings*, 36.

<sup>102</sup> Mather, *Warnings*, 1-2; see Williams, *Pillars of Salt*, x, 2; Daniel A. Cohen, *Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace: New England Crime Literature and the Origins of American Popular Culture, 1674-1800* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 7; Toulouse, *The Captive's Position*, 108; Hull, *Female Felons*, 123.

<sup>103</sup> Hull, *Female Felons*, 124-5; Jodi Schorb, “Hard-Hearted Women: Sentiment and Scaffold,” *Legacy* 28, no. 2 (2011): 290-311.

<sup>104</sup> Hull, *Female Felons*, 56.

<sup>105</sup> Although discourses to condemned prisoners were delivered in England at the time, they were rarely published as separate works. Cohen, *Pillars of Salt*, 3, 5.

to pass out copies of his work to people he met on the street.<sup>106</sup> He appreciated the lingering impact published sermons could have: “Sermons Preached, are like Showres of Rain, that Water for an Instant,” he wrote. “But Sermons Printed, are like Snow that lies longer on the Earth.”<sup>107</sup> The effect of an execution sermon and confession together were made particularly “profitable” via publication. When discussing his use of Emerson’s execution, Mather wrote: “Take these Affectionate Warnings... Give Ear unto the Dying Speeches of the Young Woman, whose Execution you are to see this Afternoon. She has put into my Hand... these Dying Expressions of her Distressed Soul; which it will not be unprofitable for me to publish this Day among you.”<sup>108</sup>

In their execution sermons, and the women’s “confessions” that were attached to them, ministers in the 1690s returned again and again to the argument that a failure to listen to those in positions of social and spiritual authority led to inevitable ruin. Drawing parallels to the situation plaguing the colony—the threat of declension and destruction embodied in the wars—ministers hoped to reassert their political and theological upper hand through these interpretations.<sup>109</sup> In her confession, published as part of Mather’s *Warnings of the Dead* sermon in 1693, Elizabeth Emerson cited “disobedience” to her parents as “the chief thing that hath, brought me, into my present Condition.” Elizabeth was quoted as saying, “I despised all their Godly Counsils and Reproofs; and I was always an Haughty and Stubborn Spirit. So that now I a become a dreadful Instance of the Curse of God.”<sup>110</sup>

Similarly, for Sarah Smith and Sarah Threeneedles—both executed for infanticide in 1698—ignoring Godly counsel and “undutiful carriage” toward authority led them to their

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<sup>106</sup> Cohen, *Pillars of Salt*, 5.

<sup>107</sup> Mather, *Pillars of Salt*, 2.

<sup>108</sup> Mather, *Pillars of Salt*, 69.

<sup>109</sup> Brown, “Murderous Uncleanness,” 82.

<sup>110</sup> Mather, *Warnings*, 71.

unfortunate positions as sinners condemned before God. Smith, since disdainng the advice of her Godly father-in-law to rectify her sinful ways, was bound for the gallows. “Her Despising the continual Counsils and Warnings of her Godly Father-in-law laid the Foundation of her Destruction,” Mather wrote.<sup>111</sup> The chief sin for Sarah Threeneedles was also her failure to listen to authority and tailor her behavior accordingly. “But the chief Sin, of which this Chief of Sinners, now cries out, is, Her undutiful Carriage towards to her parents...they often told her, It would come to this.”<sup>112</sup> Mather placed Threeneedles’ morality tale at the beginning of his compilation of sermons and confessions, appropriately titled *Pillars of Salt* (1699). Like Lot’s wife, the women condemned for infanticide had failed to heed the warnings and advice of their Godly counselors and had paid the ultimate price.<sup>113</sup>

Disobedience had doomed these women to a life of sin, and to their own destruction. In describing the events that led them to commit their heinous deeds, ministers painted the lives of the condemned in vibrantly sinful shades. In his sermon, *Warning to the Unclean*, given at the execution of Sarah Smith for infanticide in 1698, John Williams coupled the murder with a pattern of sinful behavior.<sup>114</sup> After her husband had been taken captive in the raid on Deerfield, Smith had a sexual relationship with a neighbor. Smith became pregnant and according to the court, smothered the infant to conceal her “Sins of unchastity.” In his sermon on her execution, Mather noted Smith’s “Hardness of Heart” and continual commission of “New Lyes” while in

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<sup>111</sup> Mather, “Pillars of Salt” in *Pillars of Salt: An Anthology of Early American Criminal Narratives*, ed. Daniel E. Williams (Madison: Madison House Publications, 1993), 88.

<sup>112</sup> Mather, “Pillars of Salt,” 89.

<sup>113</sup> When fleeing from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot’s wife disobeyed the angel’s command not to look back on the cities as God rained fire and brimstone upon them. She looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt. Genesis 19:26.

<sup>114</sup> John Williams, *Warning to the Unclean* (Boston 1699), 4, 6, 12, 15, 17, 22, 24, 30, 32, 42.

prison following the murder of her child. She even fell asleep in church during an exhortation for her benefit. She “seem’d the most unconcern’d of any in the Assembly,” Mather noted.<sup>115</sup>

Female perpetrators of infanticide were easy targets for the tarnishing brush of colonial authorities’ written expressions. Most of these women were single or widowed and had a history of previous sinful behavior. Many were reluctant to reform and become ministers’ muses for lessons on the consequences of sin and uncleanness. Although he brought Elizabeth Emerson to the point where she was willing to confess her sins, and allow that confession to be published for the good of others, Mather doubted that Emerson’s initial confessions were sincere. He claimed that she “has more to confess, I fear...” and held little hope for her salvation.<sup>116</sup> According to Mather “there never was a Prisoner more Hard-Hearted, and more Unfruitful” than Emerson.<sup>117</sup> Her history of sexual impropriety made this easy to believe for Mather. In *Warnings from the Dead* he referred to her previous “Uncleanness,” which had resulted in the birth of her first illegitimate child, a baby girl.<sup>118</sup> Had she seriously repented for her actions the “First Time [she] fell into it,” Mather wrote, she would not have been led into the more serious sin of murder that followed.<sup>119</sup>

If these particularly sinful and unrepentant women and could be brought to see the error of their ways, however, there was still hope for all. Their redemption, of course, could only come through the Puritan ministers’ efforts. Even as hardened a sinner as Smith could be brought to heel. During her visits with Williams, as he fought to redeem her soul, “sometimes violent pangs

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<sup>115</sup> Mather, “Pillars of Salt,” 88.

<sup>116</sup> Mather, *Diary v.1*, 164-5.

<sup>117</sup> Mather, *Warnings*, 73.

<sup>118</sup> Elizabeth Emerson was fined for fornication in 1686 after the birth of her daughter, Dorothy. “Elizabeth Emerson of Hauerill presented for fornication...Court fined her 40 to his Majesties court to stay committed till payed. Bound Elizabeth by oath...Timothy Swan ...ye father of the Child borne of her body 10 April 1686 and no one else. Received the fine.” MA Archives, Records of the Court of Common Pleas, Essex Co. microfilm reel 877465, 84.

<sup>119</sup> Mather, *Warnings*, 71.

of Horror would come upon her, wherein she detected her own Lying and seemed greatly to Bewail it.”<sup>120</sup> Before being hanged she was brought to acknowledge some of her sins and to warn other women not to follow her behavior. In the end, she “desured to Give Glory unto God, and to take shame unto her self,” Mather wrote. “She would warn all others, to beware of Sins, that had brought her unto this miserable End.”<sup>121</sup>

Some women refused to be brought to heal. Sarah Threeneedles’ darker tendencies lurked not far beneath the surface and did not lessen as she awaited her execution and the “gallows theater of repentance.” Far from reforming her sinful behavior, Threeneedles had sexual relations with another prisoner while awaiting her execution.<sup>122</sup> She also failed to either repent or accept blame for her actions. According to Samuel Sewall, who witnessed her presentation in court on the day of her trial, Threeneedles bitterly described herself as “ruin’d” by the father of her child, “Thomas Savage, junr, shopkeeper.” It was his fault, not hers, that matters had taken such a disastrous turn: “She said he had ruin’d her; if he would have promis’d her any thing, it had not come to this,” Sewall recorded in his diary.<sup>123</sup> Highlighting these sins, Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, Samuel Willard, and Sewall used Threeneedles as a cautionary figure for others on the disaster that accompanied sinfulness. All four used the “horrible Sight” of her execution to transfix their spiritual and reading publics in New England.<sup>124</sup>

Just as these women’s sinful ways and hardened hearts had led them to be “Extinguished by the Justice of God,” sinful corruption within Puritan New England had brought down the

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<sup>120</sup> Mather, “Pillars of Salt,” 88.

<sup>121</sup> Mather, “Pillars of Salt,” 88.

<sup>122</sup> Cohen, *Pillars of Salt*, 55.

<sup>123</sup> Sewall, *Samuel Sewall’s Diary*, 151.

<sup>124</sup> Mather, *Pillars of Salt*, preface; In order to depict Threeneedles as a villain, all but Samuel Willard failed to address her status as a covenanted church member before her fall from grace. Willard alone seemed bothered that one of the “Flock,” who “had received the Seal of the Covenant” could commit such an act. Samuel Willard, *Impenitent Sinners Warned of their Misery and Summoned to Judgment* (Boston, 1698), n.p. Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, and Samuel Sewall chose not to discuss this problematic detail.



scourge of God upon them in the Indian Wars.<sup>125</sup> In the turbulent 1690s, Mather and others like him seized the substantial weapons they possessed to craft their own versions of events, and deflect blame for the devastation the colony had suffered. Linking sin to the losses of war, Mather made it clear that the sinful corruption of women like Emerson, Threeneedles and Smith was a specimen of the larger corruption that would continue to destroy them all if not purged.<sup>126</sup> The young were the most prominent victims. “This Land is making the Lamentation that was made by the Church of old, The Lord ha’s called an Assembly against me, to Crush my young men,” he wrote. “How many Scores of Young men have...been lost...by the Disastrous Plagues and Wars that have been upon us! Unto us may our God say, He said unto Isreal of old, Your Young men have I Slain.”<sup>127</sup> The reasons for the decimation were clear, “Wickness & Especially the Uncleanness...should be acknowledged, among the Causes of these Calamities.” New England was weak with sin, and ripe for the taking: “So little Joy indeed ha’s our God in our Young people, that He is evey day saying over them, Indians, Do you come: Frenchmen do you come...cut off as many of those young People, as come in your way!”<sup>128</sup>

### ***The Captivity Narrative of Hannah Dustin***

In the midst of this destruction and loss, another literary creation emerged in the late seventeenth century to serve as a rallying point for the colonial experiment in distress: the captivity narrative. Written and distributed by Puritan divines and historians, these narratives of Indian capture, English suffering, and eventual redemption frequently highlighted female captives as sympathetic heroines and sometimes described them both suffering from, and

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<sup>125</sup> Mather, *Warnings*, 36.

<sup>126</sup> Brown, “Murderous Uncleanness,” 84.

<sup>127</sup> Mather, *Warnings*, 84-5.

<sup>128</sup> Mather, *Warnings*, 56-7.

engaging in, physical violence.<sup>129</sup> The narratives traced an individual's "progress through the temptations of sin and disbelief," enhancing the "terrors which surrounded the soul" for dramatic and moving effect. The women in these narratives served as symbols of the larger suffering of New England as whole, as well as its potential for restoration.<sup>130</sup>

The suffering of female captives rallied political and spiritual unity, while their actions, however violent, demonstrated what was possible with the assistance of the divine and when directed for the good of the colony. Cotton Mather used Hannah Dustin's narrative to just such effect in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. In so doing, Mather's narrative harnessed a dramatic act of female violence to accomplish three aims: to negate her actions by illustrating their divine origin, to bolster Mather's own position and relevance as the interpreter of God's message, and to rally the public to politically and spiritually unite against their common enemies.

Dustin was not the only woman to use violence, and even deadly violence, in late seventeenth-century Massachusetts. The scale of her violence, and the destruction she left in her wake, placed her beyond other colonial women of her time. However, while her story is exceptional, she was still a part of what appeared to be an increasingly visible trend among women toward more open expressions of anger and aggression. By the summer 1697, Dustin's actions were known around the colony.<sup>131</sup> Thomas Dustin claimed that her story had already

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<sup>129</sup> See Phillips, D. Carleton, "The Indian Captivity," *American Literature* 15, no. 2 (May, 1943); Roy Harvey Pearce, "The Significances of the Captivity Narrative," *American Literature* 19 (1947); June Namias, *White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the American Frontier* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1993); Tara Fitzpatrick, "The Figure of Captivity: The Cultural Work of the Puritan Captivity Narrative," *American Literary History* 3 (1991); Kathryn Z. Derounian-Stodola and James A. Levenier, *The Indian Captivity Narrative, 1550-1900* (New York: Twayne, 1993); Kathryn Z. Derounian-Stodola ed., *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998); Gary L. Ebersole, *Captured by Texts: Puritan to Postmodern Images of Indian Captivity* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia, 1995).

<sup>130</sup> Williams, *Pillars of Salt*, 12.

<sup>131</sup> Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her, Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1984), 24.

become public knowledge when he petitioned the General Court for scalp bounty in June. Hannah's "Slaughter of soo many of the Barbarians" was an extraordinary action worthy of "Considerable Recompense from the Publick," he argued before the court. Furthermore, regardless of the fact that the policy rewarding bounties for Indian kills had been revoked a few years before, it was still a "matter of universal desire thro the whole Province" that her heroism "Should not pass unrecompensed."<sup>132</sup>

Mather addressed his concerns about colonial men's inabilities and inaction—weaknesses that had pushed Dustin and other women into violent action—and their role in the current calamities troubling New England in his publications of Dustin's narrative.<sup>133</sup> In that story, as elsewhere in his *Decennium Luctuosum*, it was colonial men's procrastination and cowardice that had forced colonial women to defend themselves bodily.<sup>134</sup> While using her tale of female heroism to shame men into action, Mather also recognized the dangers inherent in allowing a woman to be such an active, and violent, public figure.<sup>135</sup> Dustin's aggressive individual action—her ability to escape capture through her own strength or cunning—might suggest that anyone, even a woman, could rely on themselves for survival and salvation.<sup>136</sup> To undermine this idea, Dustin's narrative required Mather's careful explanations to make it acceptable for public consumption. In order to avoid perpetuating, or even exacerbating, trends toward female action, Mather had to remove the agency for Dustin's actions from her hands and place it elsewhere.

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<sup>132</sup> MA Archives Felt Collection, "Thomas Dustin Petition for Bounty," Vol. 70, 350.

<sup>133</sup> The very name that Mather gave to Dustin's narrative in *Decennium Luctuosum* and *Magnalia Christi Americana*, "Dux Femina Facti," translated as "a woman the leader in the achievement," revealed his frustration and, perhaps, amazement, that a woman would lead the way in battling these heathen elements; Mather also made comments to that effect in *Humiliations*, 9; Brown, "Murderous Uncleanness," 91.

<sup>134</sup> Toulouse, *The Captive's Position*, 106.

<sup>135</sup> In his ending for Dustin's narrative in *Decennium Luctuosum* and *Magnalia Christi Americana*, Mather emphasized the attention Dustin received from government officials, and the applause and compensation given to her. Mather, *Decennium Luctuosum*, 143; Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, Book 7, 91.

<sup>136</sup> Kolodny, *The Land Before Her*, 23.

From the beginning, Mather used the fact that Dustin had just given birth to her eighth child the week before to justify her actions as the natural response of a grieving mother. In the beginning of the narrative, still recovering from the ordeal of childbirth, Dustin was forced to passively witness the destruction of her home and her children.<sup>137</sup> Mather recounted how the Indians killed Dustin's newborn child soon after her capture. "But e're they had gone many Steps, they dash'd out the Brains of the Infant, against a Tree." The "Salvages" did not provide the child, or any others they had killed, with a proper burial, but instead, left "their Carcases on the ground, for Birds & Beasts to feed upon."<sup>138</sup> Witnessing this destruction, Mather claimed, made Dustin a law unto herself. "[B]eing where she had not her own Life secured by an Law unto her, she thought she was not Forbidden by any law to take away the Life of the Murderers, by whom her Child had been butchered."<sup>139</sup> In emphasizing her suffering as a mother, and enlisting reader sympathy for her actions as a result, Mather hoped to divert attention from the more problematic aspects of Dustin's narrative.<sup>140</sup>

In all the versions of Dustin's narrative, Mather also emphasized the hand of God in her act of retribution. From the beginning, it is clear that Dustin and the other captives passively "received" their "Deliverance" from captivity by humbling themselves before the Lord.<sup>141</sup> Dustin and Mary Neff, her midwife and fellow captive, were passionate in their religious observance, defying the disapproval of their Indian captors to sneak off to pray. Like another Hannah,

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<sup>137</sup> Michelle Burnham, *Captivity and Sentiment: Cultural Exchange in American Literature, 1682-1861* (Dartmouth College, Univ. Press of New England, 1997), 53; Kolodny, *The Land Before Her*, 23.

<sup>138</sup> Mather, *Humiliations*, 43.

<sup>139</sup> Mather, *Humiliations*, 46.

<sup>140</sup> Historians debate whether Mather's re-framing of Dustin's narrative was enough to counter the image of her as a too self-sufficient and violent woman. Most scholars agree that Mather was largely unsuccessful in this endeavor. Even emphasizing Dustin's status as a grieving mother could not close the "yawning gap, between the image of the innocent English mother and her incredible act of 'indianized' aggression," Burnham explains. Burnham, *Captivity and Sentiment*, 53.

<sup>141</sup> Mather, *Humiliations*, 40.

Samuel's mother from the old Hebrew Bible, Dustin and Neff were persistent in "pouring out their Souls before the Lord."<sup>142</sup> As a result of their devotions, God heard their supplications and enabled their escape. But their means of attack were not their own, but were, instead, part of God's "Favour." In slaying the Indians, the women were merely imitating "the Action of Jael upon Sisera" in slaying their "Oppressors."<sup>143</sup>

In his *Humiliations Follow'd with Deliverances* (1697), Mather attributed Dustin's agency to the prayerful public of New England as a whole. The "Praying Friends" of Dustin and Neff did not "forbear to pour out Supplications for them."<sup>144</sup> It was by their friends' fervent belief and willingness to humble themselves as Christians before God, as opposed to any action by the two women themselves, that this praying public successfully "besought His Mercy for our poor Captives that were become the Prey of the Terrible."<sup>145</sup> The women, as passive, seemingly helpless victims, had only others to thank for their return to civilization. Mather wrote, "Yea we have done it."<sup>146</sup> In so doing, he carefully contained Dustin's captivity experience and expressions of violence within his own interpretations. He was also able to illustrate the divine sanction of Puritan violence against the Indians more generally.

Through a careful re-framing of Dustin's story, Mather simultaneously neutralized a particularly visible act of female violence, while crafting a powerful narrative weapon.<sup>147</sup> By presenting his own interpretations of religious doctrine, as read through those dramatic events,

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<sup>142</sup> Mather, *Humiliations*, 45.

<sup>143</sup> Mather, *Humiliations*, 44; 46; Jael is a heroine from the Book of Judges in the Hebrew Bible who killed a powerful general, Sisera, an enemy of the Israelites, by driving a tent stake through his skull as he slept. Judg. 5:23-27.

<sup>144</sup> Mather, *Humiliations*, 45.

<sup>145</sup> Mather, *Humiliations*, 37, 40.

<sup>146</sup> Mather, *Humiliations*, 40.

<sup>147</sup> This interpretation falls in line with Slotkin's reading of the Dustin narrative. Mather succeeds in "eliminating all suggestions of human heroism" from the narrative. He narrative, as "carefully contained by Mather" could then be used as a "testimony on man's utter dependence on God." Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence*, 114.

Mather also supported his relevance as a religious leader of the colony. Time and again through Dustin's narrative, Mather defined both sin and the road to redemption. He warned that the only means of saving them all from destruction was by following instructions for salvation.<sup>148</sup> He used the women from Dustin's narrative as a primary example. At the end of the narrative, he pointed out that the former captives themselves were actually in the church to listen to his sermon and "to give Thanks unto God their Saviour."<sup>149</sup> While offering praise for their brave deed, he took the opportunity to present them with a warning. They would need to become the "sincere Servants of the Lord" who "by his Blood has brought you out of their Dungeon" or else they would be "the Slaves of Devils" which was "worse than to be in the Hands of the Indians."<sup>150</sup>

In making this statement, Mather's meaning was clear. If these women who had felt God's presence so powerfully in their lives were still in danger from the dark forces of Satan, no one in Puritan New England was safe. Mather defined the sinfulness that had opened the "Flood gates for Innumerable... Woes." If such sinfulness continued—in the form of sexual "uncleanness," the "Decay of good Family Discipline," and other "wicked sorceries"—no one would be spared.<sup>151</sup> "Have Bloody, Popish, and Pagan Enemies, made very dreadful Impressions upon us, and Captived and Butchered multitudes of our Beloved Neighbours?" Mather wrote. If so, he continued, "Let us Humbly Confess, our Sins have [been] Deserved."<sup>152</sup> The "Scourges of Heaven," in the form of such "Pagan Enemies" would continue to be employed against them for "Crimes against the Holy and Just... Laws of the Lord."<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Mather, *Humiliations*, 6.

<sup>149</sup> Mather, *Humiliations*, 47.

<sup>150</sup> Mather, *Humiliations*, 49.

<sup>151</sup> Mather, *Humiliations*, 9, 10.

<sup>152</sup> Mather, *Humiliations*, 12.

<sup>153</sup> Mather, *Humiliations*, 4-5.

While Mather was defining the nature of the sin that had brought God's wrath upon them, he also pointed out that all was not yet lost, and that the Puritan leadership, as appropriate interpreters of God's word, knew the path to redemption. Humility before the Lord, first and foremost, and trust in those chosen to present His message was the answer. And as his narrative made clear, if a weak woman like Dustin could prostrate herself before God and achieve her redemption, surely others could as well. "When a Sinful People Humble themselves before the Almighty God, it is an Hopeful and Happy Symptom, that He will not utterly Destroy [them]."<sup>154</sup> While the people of New England had felt the "Anger of God" most acutely, the Lord had not completely "Turned away" from them.<sup>155</sup> Through confession of sin, reformation of behavior, and a demonstration of complete humiliation by fasting, they could once again feel God's saving Grace.<sup>156</sup> Although Dustin was not necessarily of the "chosen people," her actions, as inspired by God, turned her into one of the elect.<sup>157</sup>

Perhaps more than any other violent woman used by colonial propagandists, Hannah Dustin failed to neatly fit the mold of a colonial heroine. While the narrative depicted her as a devout woman of faith, unlike Sarah Threeneedles, Dustin was not a church member at the time of her capture, and would not become one until the end of her life.<sup>158</sup> Mather was preaching a form of religious practice that featured, as Teresa A. Toulouse states, a "performed passivity that grants all to Christ's humiliation," and one that ostensibly brought about a desire for both the public as well as personal benefits of church membership. The unconverted Dustin's individual

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<sup>154</sup> Mather, *Humiliations*, 6.

<sup>155</sup> Mather, *Humiliations*, 5.

<sup>156</sup> Mather, *Humiliations*, 14-15, 16-17; 18-19.

<sup>157</sup> Humphreys, "The Mass Marketing of Hannah Duston," 156-7; Mather is able to turn a potentially distasteful part of Dustin's narrative—the rewards she received in the form of money and gifts—into a statement about her status as within the community. He frames the remuneration as a reward for services rendered to the colony as a whole.

<sup>158</sup> Hannah Dustin's letter asking church elders to join the Second Church of Haverhill is dated from 1724, almost thirty years after her escape from the Indians in 1697. "Hannah Dustin's Letter to Elders of The Second Church of Haverhill," 1724, Haverhill Historical Society Collection, Haverhill, Massachusetts.

aggressive female action failed to fit this model.<sup>159</sup> In addition, Dustin's family history was less than idyllic. Her father was violent, prone to abuse his children and quarrel with neighbors.<sup>160</sup> Her sister, Elizabeth, of course, had been fined for fornication and executed for infanticide.<sup>161</sup>

Without the softening lens of Mather's descriptions, Dustin's own actions also made her an unlikely woman to shoulder the burden of sainthood. Dustin was far from the passive victim of circumstance of Mather's imaginings. Stealthily waiting for the cover of darkness, Dustin planned the attack in advance with her fellow captives. She also embraced two prominent symbols of Indian barbarity for her own purposes: using the very tomahawks the Indians had used to slay her brethren to commit the murders, and collecting the scalps of the fallen as trophies. Six of the ten Indians slain and scalped by Dustin were children. Mather does not include these aspects of the story in his version of Dustin's tale, and glosses over the most brutal details. He is not afraid to embrace her violent methods more generally, however.

The violent language that Mather employed in presenting his road to salvation mirrored the violent methods Dustin herself used in making her escape. "A fasting Day must be a...Sin killing Day, or 'tis nothing," he wrote. "Our Fasts are to Slay our Lusts; those are the Beasts, which are then to be slaughtered."<sup>162</sup> In using this language, and Dustin's story, Mather re-packaged her violence in order to place his listeners and readers on the front lines of the war with

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<sup>159</sup> Toulouse, *The Captive's Position*, 89.

<sup>160</sup> In the spring of 1676, Hannah Dustin's father, Michael Emerson, was brought before the county court for kicking and severely beating Elizabeth with a flail swingle. He was fined and bound to good behavior. Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 6*, 141; Emerson appears to have quarreled extensively with fellow Haverhill resident and neighbor James White, who even offered Emerson a parcel of land if he would move away "into the woods." "Dustin Family Letters," HB2.D97.15, Records of the Dustin Family, Haverhill Public Library Special Collections, Haverhill, Massachusetts; Robert Wilhelm, *Murder and Mayhem in Essex County* (Charleston: The History Press, 2011), 26; Emerson also engaged in heated exchanges with Robert Swan, father of Timothy Swan, the accused father of Elizabeth's first illegitimate child. Dow, *Quarterly Courts of Essex Co. v. 9*, 603.

<sup>161</sup> MA Archives, Common Pleas # 877465, 84; MA Archives, Suffolk Co. Court Records, Early Files, Vol. 31, case 2636.

<sup>162</sup> Mather, *Humiliations*, 21.



the Indians and present his message of solidarity beneath the Puritan leadership. Changes and catastrophes, most prominently Indian War and political upheaval, were interpreted as signs that New England was backsliding. Sermons and narratives served as a means of drawing Puritan audiences into a greater war against this evil, the greatest of all battles, as opposed to a war against the authorities. Through “imaginative involvement they demonstrated that every individual was part of this eternal and spiritual war and that every soul was at stake.”<sup>163</sup>

Using the narrative, Mather sought to unite Massachusetts’s residents against their common foes—most prominently, the Indians and their French allies—in order to rally the colony and promote internal stability. The intense, anti-Indian feeling that had emerged during King Philip’s War reawakened during King Williams War. Using captivity narratives, Mather and others embraced this antipathy, and used it to eventually create a unified citizenry in the colonies following these conflicts.<sup>164</sup> Mather described the Indians as “Angels of Death shooting the Arrows of Death,” as “Barbarous” wolves, “Furious Tawnies” and “Raging Dragons” as he recounted in detail the raid on Haverhill, the slaughter of civilians, and Dustin’s capture.<sup>165</sup>

Later in the narrative, the reader discovers that the Indians themselves were Christians, converted to Catholicism and under the sway of the French. The Indian family that had undertaken the raid, and taken Dustin and Neff into captivity, were fervent Catholics who prayed “no less than Thrice every Day” in “Obedience to the last injunction the French had given them.”<sup>166</sup> In making this a prominent element of the tale, and linking the Indian “Idolaters” to their French “whiter Brethren,” Mather took advantage of anti-French, and anti-Catholic sentiment among New Englanders. Certainly fears of French encroachment had a basis in reality,

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<sup>163</sup> Williams, *Pillars of Salt*, 13.

<sup>164</sup> Randolph A. Roth, *American Homicide* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2009), 79.

<sup>165</sup> Mather, *Humiliations*, 33, 42-3.

<sup>166</sup> Mather, *Humiliations*, 44.

the French had been fighting alongside their Indian allies in northern New England to try to re-take territory from the English. Many English colonists believed that the French and Indians were conspiring with the devil to destroy them.<sup>167</sup> Mather simply encouraged their hatred of both “savagery” and “popery” in Dustin’s narrative by depicting the French and their Indians allies as part of a “Spiritual Plague” that had attacked New England, and threatened to overwhelm them all.<sup>168</sup> In doing so, he could confirm and rally their spiritual and political loyalties as Puritan New Englanders.

### *Narrative Histories*

As the seventeenth century drew to close, and the more immediate state of emergency associated with the Indian Wars began to lessen in all but the northernmost areas of New England, the concerns of colonial authorities turned more explicitly toward shoring up political stability and reestablishing secure domestic relations within both the colony and household. The narrative histories that colonial historians produced in the eighteenth century thus focused less on the spiritual dangers that lurked in the shadows and more on the necessity of effective male leadership for the challenges still to come. These narratives embraced more transparent political and social agendas.<sup>169</sup> They also highlighted women’s past acts of anti-Indian violence during the Indian Wars, presenting them as heroic deeds performed in moments of only the greatest necessity. By showing women performing distinctly “unwomanly” acts, colonial historians

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<sup>167</sup> Roth, *American Homicide*, 79.

<sup>168</sup> Mather, *Humiliations*, 34.

<sup>169</sup> Toulouse points out the “political and social uses” of narrative histories featuring female actors in the inter-charter period. As a stand in for all of New England, the captive or threatened woman represents “the state to which New England had been reduced by past and continuing external challengers...but also by its own internal religious and social controversies.” Toulouse, *Captive’s Position*, 73, 81, 100, 103; Stephen Carl Arch argues that narrative histories of the period are “successive attempts in seventeenth-century New England to respond to sociocultural crises by rewriting the past.” The histories represent the colonial version of “visionary compacts,” or agreed on versions of the past used to bring together the citizenry (to borrow Donald Pease’s phrase). Arch, *Authorizing the Past: The Rhetoric of History in Seventeenth-Century New England* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994), 189.

sought to encourage male New Englanders to rise to the occasion and reaffirm their position at the top of the social hierarchy. They also urged the public to rally behind men in positions of political authority, thus negating the need for such behavior by women in the future.

Cotton Mather's history of the Indian wars, *Decennium Luctuosum*, was one of his more political works published in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries.<sup>170</sup> The dedicatory and concluding comments to the earl of Bellomont, who in 1697 was designated the royal governor of Massachusetts, made it clear that the work was an expression of solidarity with the new leadership, as well as with King William, during a period of yet another political transition. At the end of the work, Mather praised King William and Bellomont as the "Illustrious Image of His own Royal Virtues."<sup>171</sup> Mather had high hopes that Bellomont's reign would end the political upheavals that had plagued the colony throughout the 1680s and 90s. He also hoped that by tying his fate to the new leader he could distance himself from earlier political missteps. Mather had strongly backed the temporary government of Simon Bradstreet, including his ill-fated expeditions against the "Armies of Indians and Gallic Blood Hounds" in Canada.<sup>172</sup> Mather had also been pleased to support his father's choice for royal governor, Sir William Phips, prior to Phips' political disgrace.<sup>173</sup> In addition, the Mather family had a personal stake in the

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<sup>170</sup> Mather's major publications of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century coincided with moments of political transition and upheaval in colonial Massachusetts. Mather published *Humiliations Follow'd with Deliverances* in 1697, three years after the disgraceful fall and death of Governor William Phips and just before the announcement of a new royal governor. *Magnalia Christi Americana*, published in 1702, coincided with the appointment of Joseph Dudley to the royal governorship. Mather's history of the Indian wars, *Decennium Luctuosum* of 1699, however, was explicitly prefaced and concluded by comments supporting the latest royal governor to take power. Toulouse, *The Captive's Position*, 73-6.

<sup>171</sup> Cotton Mather, "Decennium Luctuosum" (1699) in *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases*, 276; Toulouse, *The Captive's Position*, 206.

<sup>172</sup> The expeditions were a disaster and left Massachusetts at the end of 1690 more vulnerable than ever, "burdened by an unstable government, a depleted treasury, an exultant enemy on its borders, mourning in many homes, and the sense of miserable defeat." Kenneth Silverman, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 75.

<sup>173</sup> Cotton Mather was pleased to have Phips as governor. Phips, he wrote, was a man "whom I baptised...and one of my own flock, and one of my dearest friends." Silverman, *Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, 80.

establishment of political stability under the latest, and unpopular, Massachusetts charter.

Increase Mather had negotiated the charter in London and both Mathers had been defending it since the early 1690s.<sup>174</sup>

In his narrative history, Mather used instances of female violence to demonstrate the need for both political and domestic stability, as well as effective male leadership in these realms. Besides his treatment of Hannah Dustin's narrative of captivity, Mather discussed the "heroic" actions of other colonial Englishwomen, including the women of Wells, Maine and their defense of a garrison against Indian attack in the midst of King William's War. Mather recounted that Englishwomen in the garrison "took up the Amazonian stroke, and not only brought ammunition to the men, but also with a Manly resolution fired several times upon the enemy."<sup>175</sup> While appearing to applaud their actions, Mather's description of the women as "Amazonian" and "Manly" also painted them as both uncivilized and unfeminine. The appearance of women acting like men revealed Mather's awareness that such female action had the capacity to fundamentally disrupt the English patriarchal domestic order, even as the women themselves fought to defend it.<sup>176</sup> It was the ineffectiveness of men, however, that forced the women to act in this way. Mather emphasized that the attacking Indians badly outnumbered the number of Englishmen willing to take up arms against their Indian foes: some fifteen men to the Indians several

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<sup>174</sup> The new charter took some convincing by Increase to be accepted in the colony. One problem that many had with the charter was that it did not abandon the policy of Charles II of stricter control over colonial affairs. The charter gave the new governor – who could be appointed now by the King – greater powers over the government and General Court. Liberty of conscience was also introduced in the charter by the elimination of church membership requirements for voting. Opposition to the charter was widespread and the Mathers both spent considerable time trying to convince their flocks to accept the benefits of the new plan. Silverman, *Life and Times of Cotton Mather*, 80-81.

<sup>175</sup> Mather, *Decennium Luctuosum*, 94.

<sup>176</sup> Teresa A. Toulouse, "Bodies in Discourse," in *A Centre of Wonders*, 206.

hundred.<sup>177</sup> Of these few brave Englishmen, at least one of the men had spoken about surrendering.<sup>178</sup>

Such chaotic results of ineffective male leadership—examples of the “Feebleness discovered by my Countrey-men, in some of their Actions, during this War”—littered the pages of Mather’s *Decennium Luctuosum*.<sup>179</sup> At the same time, however, he held up Bellomont, with the support of the King and united colonies behind him, as the hope for the future of New England. “But that which yet more assures a Break of Day after a long and sad Night unto us, is, That...the Greatest Monarch, that ever Sway'd the Sceptre of Great Britain, hath Commissioned a Noble Person...to take the Government of these Provinces,” Mather wrote.<sup>180</sup> He credited Bellomont, the “Greatest person ever to set Foot on the English Continent of America,” for installing William in power during the Glorious Revolution, and remarked that the “Continent of America must now Share in the Influence of that Noble Person.” Undoubtedly, Bellomont’s “Great and Good Influences” as Governour—his “Virtus et Summa potestas” (virtue and highest power)—would help reinstall manly leadership in the colony.<sup>181</sup> His nobility would thus end the need for women to step out of their appropriate gender roles.<sup>182</sup>

Samuel Penhallow also used stories of gender dynamics in chaos—and the female violence that resulted from it—to encourage male leadership and political stability in New England in the uneasy seventeen-teens and twenties. New England had yet to achieve political

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<sup>177</sup> Mather, *Decennium Luctuosum*, 96; The details of Cotton Mather’s account of the incident should be taken with a grain of salt, argues Ann Little. “Mather never went anywhere near the frontier during the war,” she writes, “instead preferring to write his hawkish screeds in favor of invading the St. Lawrence River valley from the comfort and safety of Boston.” Ann M. Little, *Abraham in Arms: War and Gender in Colonial New England* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 41. I argue that Mather’s distance from the actual event would have given him even greater freedom to craft the narrative to suit his political goals.

<sup>178</sup> Mather, *Decennium Luctuosum*, 93.

<sup>179</sup> Mather, *Decennium Luctuosum*, 98.

<sup>180</sup> Mather, “Decennium Luctuosum,” 276.

<sup>181</sup> Mather, “Decennium Luctuosum,” 277.

<sup>182</sup> Toulouse, “Bodies in Discourse,” 206.

homeostasis under secure leadership during the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Poorly conducted diplomacy with respect to the Native American Wabanaki Confederacy of northern New England had even led to yet another war with the Indians, Dummer's War, from 1722 to 1725.<sup>183</sup> Originally settling in Massachusetts, Penhallow found his political calling in the upper echelons of New Hampshire politics. Near the end of his life, while still the chief Justice of the Superior Court of Judicature, Penhallow published his *History of the Wars of New-England with the Eastern Indians, or a Narrative of their Continued Perfidy and Cruelty* (1726). Penhallow's scathing portrayal of the Indians is clear from the title of his work; to other narrative histories, Penhallow added accounts of colonists being burned alive, and even cannibalized by their Indian captors.<sup>184</sup> These barbaric forces routinely invaded women's sphere in Penhallow's work, forcing Englishwomen to use manly, violent action to defend themselves and their families.

Penhallow's treatment of an unnamed "oxford woman," and her response to an Indian attack on her home is a prime example of this. According to Penhallow, in the midst of Queen Anne's War, a woman in oxford shot and killed an Indian who was attempting to break through her roof. According to local legend, she also had two muskets and two pistols charged and ready for his three companions.<sup>185</sup> The woman had apparently been left unprotected by the men of the house. More disturbing, however, was that her preparedness indicated that she did not expect assistance from masculine rescuers. The woman had loaded several different kinds of guns for her own use, against New English social custom with regard to firearms.<sup>186</sup> Men in New England "seem to have held their guns in special regard," Ann Little argues, as symbols of their dominant

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<sup>183</sup> Howard Peckman, *The Colonial Wars, 1689-1762* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1964), 84.

<sup>184</sup> Samuel Penhallow, *History of the Wars of New-England with the Eastern Indians, or a Narrative of their Continued Perfidy and Cruelty* (1726), 49.

<sup>185</sup> Penhallow, *History of the Wars of New-England*, 107.

<sup>186</sup> Patrick Malone, *The Skulking Way of War: Technology and Tactics in New England Indian Warfare* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1993).

masculinity as householders.<sup>187</sup> Owning and knowing how to operate a gun was a privilege of their sex. Women did not usually own or keep guns. When they were widowed, New England women did not keep their husbands' gun or other weaponry in their homes.<sup>188</sup> Thus, the Oxford woman's familiarity with firearms, and willingness to use not just one, but four guns, would have been seen as a undeniable disruption of the gender order. Her heroism, as Penhallow described it, was to be lauded, but then it also needed to be rectified.<sup>189</sup>

The trope of women stepping out of their prescribed gender roles in the context of war was well-known in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>190</sup> Popular literary tales suggested that simply by adopting English men's clothing and armor, Englishwomen might successfully impersonate English manhood. "Images of cross-dressing women, and of women masquerading as soldiers in particular, were familiar figures in English pamphlet literature and popular ballads," Ann Little notes.<sup>191</sup> Stories of these "warrior women" circulated quite broadly, and on the surface seemed to praise those women who were willing to put on men's clothing and fight alongside men. They even, at times, showed that women might fight as equals to men,

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<sup>187</sup> Guns were one of the very few moveables men mentioned in their wills and designated for a particular male legatee. Little, *Abraham in Arms*, 27.

<sup>188</sup> "Of six women's inventories in the New Haven and Connecticut records total, not a single household kept guns, ammunition, armor or other weaponry." Little, *Abraham in Arms*, 27; For the English colonists, arming Englishwomen on the American frontier was regarded as a particularly distasteful departure from civilized practices. Joyce Chaplain, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500-1676* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001), 252.

<sup>189</sup> This woman from Oxford was not alone in stepping outside the boundaries of her sex and using guns for protection in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. New Hampshire Historical Society Records indicate that Philip Moodey purchased a half-pound of gunpowder for his mother in Nicholas Perryman's store in Exeter in 1722. Nicholas Perryman Ledger, Exeter, NH, 1723-1754, MS, *New Hampshire Historical Society Records*, 7.

<sup>190</sup> Historians have been much less reluctant to explore women's roles and the role of gender in the English civil wars than they have the Indian Wars of colonial New England. This is probably due to the greater availability of source material. See A. Laurence, "Women's Work and the English Civil War," *History Today* 42, no. 6 (1992); Charles Carlton, *Going to the Wars: The Experience of the British Civil Wars, 1638-1651* (London: Routledge, 1992); Stevie Davies, *Unbridled Spirits: Women of the English Revolution, 1640-1660* (London: The Women's Press, 1998); Alison Plowden, *Women All on Fire: The Women of the English Civil War* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998); Roger Hudson, ed., *The Grand Quarrel: Women's Memoirs of the English Civil War* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2000).

<sup>191</sup> Little, *Abraham in Arms*, 88-9.

displaying a form of “manly virtue” in the process.<sup>192</sup> In reality, however, these women were not taken seriously as enlistees fighting for the honor and glory of the English nation. Instead, these stories functioned as both popular entertainment and moral lessons. They were “meant to humiliate cowardly or defeated men by implying that even women could be better soldiers than the present lot.”<sup>193</sup>

This theme appeared in many of the historical narratives of the Indian Wars of early eighteenth-century New England. For a people still reeling from those wars, while struggling with the social disruptions of a growing and expanding New England population in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, messages regarding masculine, paternal dominance and appropriate gender roles were both relevant and timely. As the population of New England continued to rise in this period through both natural increase in the region and immigration, land in the older agricultural communities was becoming scarce by the third and fourth generations. Young people coming into maturity found that they either had to go into non-farming occupations or move to new towns. As a result, outmigration from old communities and the founding of new towns proliferated after 1715.<sup>194</sup> As New Englanders became increasingly more mobile, and young adults more willing to migrate away from the traditional farming household establishment, male-dominated parental authority seemed in jeopardy, and with it, a clear understanding of gendered household roles. “The imperatives of autonomy and independence that had been so powerfully manifest everywhere else in the English American world throughout the seventeenth century” had finally arrived in New England.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Little, *Abraham in Arms*, 88-9.

<sup>193</sup> Little, *Abraham in Arms*, 89.

<sup>194</sup> Jack Green, “Recent Developments in the Historiography of Colonial New England,” *Acadiensis* 17, no. 2 (1988), 71.

<sup>195</sup> Green, “Recent Developments,” 71; For more on the social transitions that accompanied population shifts in New England, see Philip J. Greven, *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1970), 41-71; Kenneth A. Lockridge, *A New England Town, The*



The story of the courageous—and cross-dressing—women of Oyster River reflects the discomfort that accompanied many of these changes in the early eighteenth century. Local minister Jabez Fitch, of Portsmouth, N. H., relayed the tale in his *Brief Narrative of Several Things Respecting the Province of New Hampshire in New-England*, published in 1728-29.<sup>196</sup> Fitch's appointment to North Church in Portsmouth in 1724, from a church in long-settled Ipswich, Massachusetts, paralleled population expansion away from the oldest New England communities to more out-lying areas. As a result, this graduate of Harvard College witnessed the troubling social shifts and "unhappy consequences" for Portsmouth as it emerged as a commercial port in early eighteenth century.<sup>197</sup> In recounting an Indian attack on a garrison in Oyster River in 1706 in his narrative, Fitch emphasized the fact that Englishmen were not at the helm during the crisis. The garrison under attack "had not a man in it at the time," he wrote, which forced the women to assume "an Amazonian courage and put on the Habit of men," in order to defend the garrison. By donning men's attire, they acted their part so manfully that they frightened away the enemy.<sup>198</sup>

When compared to another account of the Oyster River incident, it appears that Fitch exaggerated the absence of men, as well as the success of the women's counterattack, in his narrative of the event. In his journal, Reverend John Pike of Dover and Portsmouth noted the

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*First Hundred Years: Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636-1736* (New York: Norton, 1985), 79-118, and Lockridge, "Land, Population and Evolution of New England Society, 1630-1790," *Past & Present*, no. 39 (1968), 62-80.

<sup>196</sup> Jabez Fitch, *Brief Narrative of Several Things Respecting the Province of New Hampshire in New-England* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1728-29).

<sup>197</sup> Jabez Fitch Letter, September 22, 1724, The Belknap Papers, *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (1891), 3-4).

<sup>198</sup> Fitch, *Brief Narrative*, ch. 4; Jeremy Belknap, American clergyman and historian, would incorporate Fitch's story again in the 1780s in his work *The History of New Hampshire*. On the heels of the American Revolution, and all its attendant social dislocations, including women's involvement in the war effort, Belknap's version included even greater detail about the Oyster River women's manly appearance. "The women, who assumed an Amazonian courage...put on hats, with their hair hanging down, and fired so briskly that they struck a terror in the enemy, and they withdrew without firing the house, or carrying away much plunder." Jeremy Belknap, *The History of New Hampshire I* (Philadelphia, 1784), 338-339.

attack on the garrison in Oyster River in April 1706. “The Indians came in upon the south part of Oyster river, by the little bay, and killed ten persons,” he wrote. Among those killed in the exchange with the Indians were “brother John Wheeler, and his wife, John Drew, &c.:”<sup>199</sup> According to Pike’s recollections of the event, not only were men present during the attack, but several were killed. The Indians did not run and hide in the face of female force either, but stayed long enough to dispense with ten English settlers. Pike was widely regarded, even by Jabez Fitch, as a “person of great humility, meekness and patience...without gall or guile.” It is unlikely that Pike’s version of the events, which included the actual names of those killed in action, varied significantly from reality.<sup>200</sup> Fitch, therefore, must have amplified the women’s role in the incident, as well as their gender-bending attire and behavior, in order to play on existing social anxieties for dramatic effect.<sup>201</sup> In so doing, he emphasized that the absence of effective male leadership, and the resulting female aggression, threatened to undermine whatever patriarchal order still remained.

A gendered hierarchy was central to the structure and functioning of colonial and provincial society.<sup>202</sup> The destruction of the well-ordered and secure domestic realm appeared throughout many of the narrative histories of the wars from this period. The importance of the household in early New England meant that attacks on English homes were seen as attacks on

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<sup>199</sup> John Pike, “Journal of the Rev. John Pike,” *Collections of the New Hampshire Historical Society* v. 3 (Concord, printed by Jacob B. Moore, 1832), 55.

<sup>200</sup> Pike, “Journal of John Pike,” 40; Dr. Belknap, in the Dover church records said that Mr. Pike “was esteemed as an extraordinary preacher and a man of true godliness...a grave and venerable person.” Pike, “Journal of John Pike,” 40.

<sup>201</sup> “Hierarchical establishments...increasingly came under attack in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,” Vern and Bonnie Bullough argue. As a result, anxiety over cross-dressing and a belief in its transformative power, increased during the early modern period in general. Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Cross-Dressing, Sex and Gender* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), ch 4; see also Little, *Abraham in Arms*, 59.

<sup>202</sup> Little, *Abraham in Arms*, 62-3.

Englishness itself.<sup>203</sup> The narrative histories pointed out that no staple of New English family life was safe: even the Sabbath “became a Day of Danger,” Penhallow remarked, “in which [the Indians] often did Mischief, as at Dover, Oyster-River and Berwick.”<sup>204</sup> Mather’s *Decennium Luctuosum* catalogued numerous frontier atrocities in King William’s War, reading “like a rusticated Book of martyrs.”<sup>205</sup> Families and young English children were the frequent targets of destruction in these accounts. While these works thus excuse women’s behavior in the narratives as understandable reactions to Indian encroachment on the sanctity of the community and household, and the loss of loved ones, they also demonstrate the chaos that ensued as a result. In publishing these narratives, authors expressed their implied hope that the eighteenth century would bring with it a return to traditional structures of domesticity. When men took their rightful place atop the political and social hierarchies, women could return to their normal duties, as well as a less visible place in society.

Men’s failure to protect her forced Hannah Bradley to step out of the orderly picture of household domesticity into a world of violence and horror in Penhallow’s *History*. When the Bradley’s garrison in Haverhill was “unhappily surpriz’d” by a small band of Indians, they found that the Englishmen were not at their posts. “Seeing the Gates open and none on the Sentry,” Penhallow writes, the Indians were able to enter the garrison without meeting any manly resistance. As a result, the savages “became Masters thereof.”<sup>206</sup> The only person who fought back against the incursion was the pregnant “Housewife” working in her kitchen. “Perceiving the Misery that was attending her,” Hannah Bradley attempted to defend herself using a primary tool

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<sup>203</sup> Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip’s War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), chapter 3.

<sup>204</sup> Penhallow, *History of the Wars of New-England*, 104.

<sup>205</sup> Little, *Abraham in Arms*, 108.

<sup>206</sup> Penhallow, *History of the Wars of New-England*, 10-11.

of domesticity itself, a kettle of boiling soap. Throwing it on one Indian attacker, she scalded him to death, before being dragged into the wilderness to endure continual horrors at the hands of the Indians. Despite “being with Child,” Bradley was “yet oblig’d to travel in a deep snow, under a heavy burden, and many Days together without Subsistance.” After giving birth while in captivity, her baby died due to want of food, as well as the “Cruelty of the Indians, who as it cry’d threw hot Embers in its Mouth.”<sup>207</sup>

In Penhallow’s hands, however, Bradley’s narrative ends on a hopeful note. While men’s leadership failures had led to her capture and suffering, her eventual redemption was the result of masculine effort. After a year in captivity, Bradley was finally rescued through the valiant exertions of her husband. “After a Years Bondage she was sold to the French for eighty Livers,” Penhallow recorded. Upon hearing of her sale, Bradley’s husband, Joseph, traveled to Montreal to “redeem” her.<sup>208</sup> Penhallow’s history does not record that Bradley attempted to escape on her own or negotiate her own release during this period. According to local history, Joseph was so determined to rescue his wife, he traveled on foot and dogsled into Canada to find her and purchase her freedom. The couple then took a boat to Boston, and then on to their home in Haverhill.<sup>209</sup> In a dramatic demonstration of the possibilities for male action and leadership, Joseph Bradley had successfully “redeemed” his wife from the wilderness and brought her back into the peaceful domestic fold.<sup>210</sup>

Historians of colonial New England tried to avoid the moral ambiguity that plagued “real” women of the period in their narrative histories. Some tried to downplay the barbaric

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<sup>207</sup> Penhallow, *History of the Wars of New-England*, 11; Bradley was lucky compared to other pregnant women who fell into Indian hands as Penhallow described in his history. “Teeming Women, in cold Blood have been ript open; others fastned to Stakes and burnt alive,” he wrote. Penhallow, *History of the Wars of New-England*, 37.

<sup>208</sup> Penhallow, *History of the Wars of New-England*, 10-11.

<sup>209</sup> Wilhelm, *Murder and Mayhem*, 46.

<sup>210</sup> Penhallow, *History of the Wars of New-England*, 11.

influences of life on the frontiers of New England and their English heroines' interactions with Indians. In his depiction of Hannah Bradley's attack on an Indian invader, Penhallow mentions briefly that her resulting capture was "the second time of her captivity."<sup>211</sup> Unlike later authors who would use Bradley's story, Penhallow offers no details about Bradley's earlier life with the Indians that lasted almost a year. Later historians would use the impact of her first captivity, and her earlier loss of a child to the Indians' barbarity during that time, as an explanation for her behavior during the second invasion.<sup>212</sup> These later authors would also, however, include other, disturbing details about Bradley's attack on the Indian with the boiling soap. Benjamin Mirick, in his *History of Haverhill*, recorded that "Having been brought home by her husband," Bradley was taken a second time, "but not before she had finished and wounded an Indian by pouring boiling soap into his mouth."<sup>213</sup> In this account, instead of simply throwing boiling soap on an attacker, Bradley used it as a targeted weapon. The intimate violence of holding down an Indian intruder and actually forcing him to ingest the boiling liquid changes the nature of Bradley's act almost entirely. In avoiding such detail, as well as an account of her earlier experience among the Indians, Penhallow also carefully avoided the taint of uncivilized behavior on the heroine of his tale. Her effectiveness as a symbol, therefore, remained intact.

In order to use the violent women in their stories as symbols of the need for male social and political leadership, other colonial historians presented their female characters as anonymous women compelled by the circumstances of war. In Jabez Fitch's narrative of the Oyster River

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<sup>211</sup> Penhallow, *History of the Wars of New-England*, 11.

<sup>212</sup> Benjamin Mirick wrote, "[The Indians] told the mother that if she would permit them to baptize [the child] in their manner they would suffer it to live...she complied with their request. They took it from her and baptized it by gashing its forehead with their knives...Before they arrived at their place of rendez-vous she had occasion to go a little distance from the party and when she returned...she beheld...her child...piked upon a pole." Benjamin Mirick, *The History of Haverhill, Massachusetts* (Haverhill, 1832), 109.

<sup>213</sup> Mirick, *History of Haverhill*, 110. Mirick's account is taken from Rev. Abiel Abbot's collection of historical materials. Abbot was a prominent eighteenth-century clergyman from Andover and later Haverhill. Abbot Abiel and Ephraim Abbot, *A Genealogical Register of the Descendants of George Abbot, of Andover, etc.* (Boston, 1847).

heroines, he never names any of the specific women involved in the incident, although as later accounts illustrated the names of those involved in the attack were well known. Instead, in his *Brief Narrative* and other works that would follow, the cross-dressing women who displayed such “Amazonian courage” remained unidentified.<sup>214</sup> Historians also did not focus any time on describing their appearance, aside from their male attire and behavior. They focused much more time and page space on describing the looming Indian threat, and Englishmen’s failures, that had forced the women to step outside of gender norms.

### ***Conclusion***

Despite the appearance of female characters in narratives of possession, execution sermons, captivity narratives and narrative histories as either morally corrupt villains or self-sacrificing heroines, the actual differences between these women were much less significant than their literary depictions claimed. All of the women in this chapter, on either end of this artificial dichotomy, had employed violence in brutal ways and for their own ends. The violent tenor of colonial New England society – combined with the difficulties imposed on many women in the context of the Indian Wars and other struggles from the period – meant that most women were unlikely to be ideal inspirational symbols. Therefore, while it was easy to villainize the “bad” women as using violence as a last desperate act in a life filled with sin—at least prior to their last-minute redemptions—shaping the “good” ones into heroines appropriate for public consumption was more difficult.

Colonial authorities’ decisions to use these women as inspirational symbols becomes easier to comprehend when we examine the everyday realities of life for women in colonial Massachusetts, and the violence they experienced and employed. Although these women were

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<sup>214</sup> Fitch, *Brief Narrative*, ch. 4.

thrown into remarkable circumstances, the moral ambiguity of their real lives was not unusual. Like other colonial women, they were exposed to violence in war, and between family members, against servants, and among neighbors. Also like other women in seventeenth-century New England, they employed violence for their own ends. As part of a colony and a people reeling from the destruction of war and internal upheaval, they were among those women willing to use violence to protect themselves and their interests when the authorities either could or would not. As far-too visible representations of this troubling tendency, their stories could be negated, appropriated, and re-packaged for the spiritual and political good of the colonies.

At the end of the seventeenth and through the turn of the eighteenth century, the political, social, and religious changes that were occurring in New England from war—against real and spiritual enemies—as well as the inevitable changes that accompanied an expanding society, all combined to worry the Puritan leadership that their experiment in the wilderness was under threat from without and within. In response, Puritan leaders took some of the most problematic narratives of their time—stories of women violently possessed by demonic spirits, the tales of those who had committed the unforgiveable by killing their children, the narratives of those who had fought to escape the barbaric wilderness, and the histories of those who had done battle against the encroaching Indian threat—and used them in remarkably creative ways to unite the colonial population and solidify their positions.

Mather led the push to rescue the colonies from both internal discontent and demonic invaders, as he helped free Elizabeth Knapp, Mercy Short, and Margaret Rule from their possession. When the witch trials in Salem failed, ultimately, to bolster the cultural authority of the Puritan leadership, Mather and other religious leaders shifted their focus to women more clearly guilty of evil deeds. Their execution sermons for women convicted of infanticide outlined

the path for New England's redemption, and the ministers' role in that endeavor. When warfare again threw the colonies into hardship, narratives like Hannah Dustin's rallied colonists against both the Indians and their French allies. Finally, when the ministers sought to reestablish their society in the new century, secure domestic relations, and inspire men to effectively take on leadership roles, they turned to narrative histories of women forced to commit valiant, but unwomanly acts in defense of themselves and their communities. Through all of these efforts, the Puritan leadership transformed these women and their actions from potential threats into weapons for the societal and cultural survival of colonial New England.



## Conclusion

In the preceding pages, I have traced the circumstances in which women in colonial New England committed acts of violence, and how those actions were shaped by the unique social, cultural, and religious forces that marked this Puritan society. The pervasiveness of violence in Puritan culture allowed most women to commit acts of violence while maintaining the ideal of womanly virtue, and living out their lives in industrious, dignified anonymity. The realities of running a household sometimes dictated the use of violence by women for the benefit of their kin groups—to preserve family property, safety, or status—but these deeds only caught the attention of the court and community when they crossed the line from enforcing order to creating disorder. Violence alone, even when perpetrated by women, could go unnoticed, its perpetrators not a threat to Puritan society or belief. That women were permitted to use everyday violence in this way not only illustrates the ordinariness of violence in Puritan culture, but also demonstrates that other issues were of much greater concern to the Puritan leadership.

Two issues that loomed particularly large in the consciousness of leaders in colonial New England, as the history of Essex County illustrates, were the looming Indian threat and the dangers of sexual immorality. As my research shows, these concerns were not separate issues in the minds of Puritans; the moral failings that plagued the “City on a Hill”—chief among them, it seemed, sinful sexuality—had led God to send the Indians as a scourge upon their society. For Puritan women, as well, these issues were connected, but in another way. Both led women to commit their most deadly acts of violence. In slaughtering Indians to protect themselves and their families during raids—or out of retribution for what their people had suffered at Indian hands—women murdered Indians using their bare hands, sticks, pots and pans, boiling soap, muskets, and even tomahawks. Powerful puritan strictures against illicit sexuality, and the

consequences of out-of-wedlock pregnancy for women and their households, led some desperate women to take the lives of their own infant children. As such, the realities of life in seventeenth-century New England gave women's violence a deadly tinge.

Women in colonial New England were a minority in the criminal record. Men committed more acts of violence overall, however, women appeared to be deadlier perpetrators than men, proportionately. In a study encompassing all of colonial Massachusetts, N.E.H. Hull has shown that in the late seventeenth-century, as recorded by the Massachusetts Superior Court, homicide represented less than one-fifth of male prosecutions but was over one-third of all criminal indictments against women. When infanticide is included in calculations of deadly crime, it becomes clear that while men were more prone to crimes against property, women primarily committed crimes against persons. In addition, when women committed violent crimes, they were more likely than men to take those actions to a fatal conclusion.<sup>1</sup>

The dangers of Puritan policing of sexual immorality, as well as the dangers of the Indian Wars—and the impact of each on women's violent actions—became clearer by the mid-eighteenth century. By that time, both of those issues had become less of a concern and this was reflected in trends of women's deadly violence. A decline in the severity of punishment for illicit sex and bastardy in the eighteenth century lessened the social stigma attached to it.<sup>2</sup> This removed a major motive for women committing infanticide, and the homicide rate by women declined.<sup>3</sup> Although acts of violence against Native Americans by colonial women usually fails

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<sup>1</sup> N.E.H. Hull, *Female Felons: Women and Serious Crime in Colonial Massachusetts* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 60-2.

<sup>2</sup> See Daniel S. Scott and Michael S. Hindus, "Premarital Pregnancy in America 1640-1971: An Overview and Interpretation," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* v. 4 (Spring 1975): 5; Hindus, *Prison and Plantation: Crime, Justice, and Authority in Massachusetts and South Carolina, 1767-1878* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 85.

<sup>3</sup> Hull states, "female rates for homicide per 100,000 population declined by 8.56 cases per decade between 1673 and 1774." While men's homicide rates declined by a slightly greater number, "11.5 cases per decade" men

to be taken into account when calculating homicide victims, the end of most of the violence of the Indian Wars also would have naturally brought an end to Englishwomen's acts of violence against this population as well. Famous tales of women defending themselves with lethal force against Indian incursions stop appearing in narrative histories and captivity narratives from New England by the end of the 1720s.<sup>4</sup> In both instances, when the threat to women and their families had passed, women's incentive to kill subsided.

That women in seventeenth-century Massachusetts were more likely than men to commit acts of deadly violence should not lead historians to view these women as particularly bloodthirsty. This was certainly not the case. The deadly nature of women's violence simply illustrates, in a stark way, what was at stake for women in this society during this period. Life seemed more uncertain, practically and spiritually, in the wilds of the New World; women were willing, at times, to take drastic measures to protect their family interests. At the same time, the Puritan emphasis on appropriate personal behavior and orderliness kept much of that behavior in the dark.

It was, perhaps, this instinct that some women possessed—a willingness to take their violence to its ultimate end—that so frightened the Puritan leadership of early New England. Women's behavior had dire implications. They had, as Cotton Mather pronounced, a “Natural Distemper” which made women more susceptible to dangerous behavior. The “Malignant Vapours and Humours” that plagued women more than men, also made them easier prey for “Devils” to turn them into an “engine of the Execution of their Malice.” Women's tendency toward distemper also explained, Mather argued, why “the Old Serpent made where he did his

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committed substantially more individual acts of crime, making the decline itself less significant. Hull, *Female Felons*, 65-66.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Penhallow, *History of the Wars of New-England with the Eastern Indians, or a Narrative of their Continued Perfidy and Cruelty* (1726).

first Address.”<sup>5</sup> As the corruptible “daughters of Eve,” women’s violent actions could be dismissed if inconvenient or inconsistent with the desires of the Puritan colonial leadership.

It is well documented that women who acted violently, against authority, or against the dictates of their gender were more likely to be accused of witchcraft, thus negating whatever reasoning lay behind their actions initially.<sup>6</sup> It was fear of disorder among colonial authorities, reflecting and exacerbated by the real social and economic disruptions of the moment, that brought an unprecedented number of women before the colonial courts in the 1690s not just for prosecutions for infanticide, but also charges of witchcraft.<sup>7</sup> The links between witchcraft, sexual misbehavior, and the death of children were well known in colonial New England.<sup>8</sup> The mysterious deaths of infants would often be attributed to evil doings, “maleficium,” or other dark forces unknown. Accusations of witchcraft, like sexual immorality, seemed to plague certain families and households. Those who could be persuaded to yield their sexual favors, it followed, could also be “persuaded to yield their souls.”<sup>9</sup> Women who defied authority, in general, also made themselves easy targets from both accusers and the colonial courts. “A wife who refused to bend to her husband’s will, who abused her children, or raged against her neighbors could be accused of witchcraft,” Elizabeth Pleck explains. In the Puritan mind, only a thin line separated the unruly woman from those who covenanted with the devil.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Cotton Mather, “Another Brand Pluck’d Out of the Burning, or More Wonders of the Invisible World” (1693) in *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases, 1648-1706*, ed. George Lincoln Burr (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1914), 313.

<sup>6</sup> Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil’s Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York: Random House, 2002); Elizabeth Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny: The Making of American Social Policy Against Family Violence from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); John Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982), 93-121.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Charles Hoffer and N.E.H. Hull, *Murdering Mothers: Infanticide in England the New England, 1558-1803* (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 56.

<sup>8</sup> Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers*, 55.

<sup>9</sup> Else Hambleton, *Daughters of Eve: Pregnant Brides and Unwed Mothers in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 10-11.

<sup>10</sup> Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny*, 19; Carol Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: Norton, 1987), 129-130; Demos, *Entertaining Satan*, 93-121.

While women were the majority of those accused of witchcraft, they also played a role as accusers, most prominently after King Philip's War in New England. The evolution of witchcraft accusation from a male-dominated practice that lacked a real threat of violent retribution, to a female-led process that contained within it a very tangible risk to life and limb by 1692 deserves further exploration. I suspect that this phenomenon could be another instance of women being willing to take life when they saw their families under significant threat, and by the final decade of the seventeenth century, to most Puritans, the threat of witchcraft seemed very real indeed.

Accusations of witchcraft delegitimized problematic, violent women. At the same time, as virtuous English goodwives, mothers and daughters, women's efforts to protect their children and families, however violent, could also be removed of their more problematic elements and turned into a Godly example for the rest of society. As this project has explored, Hannah Dustin, for instance, became infamous in New England, but the murders she committed were held up as an example both of God's favor, and an expression of a mother's enduring love, the deaths of the six Indian children she slaughtered and scalped glossed over in the re-telling. The lengths to which a woman like Dustin was willing to go, not just to free herself, but to exact revenge for her fallen loved ones, must have frightened the Puritan leadership. Yet, that a woman was capable of such deeds—that women, in general, were capable of taking life—could not be denied. Through Cotton Mather's prose, however, they were able to bend and contain this instinct for deadly violence to create something different: a picture of womanly virtue.

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