

## **The Witchcraze**

### **Video - The Trial of Amy Denny and Rose Cullender**

1. Trials happened around 100,000 times and this case lasted for over 300 years
2. People who claimed others were witches were really afraid that they were witches
3. There was a building rumor mill and evidence over several years before the trial
4. Both men and women testify, more women than men
5. People that testified against them were wronged by them, and they connected this to the sickness, death of children and animals
6. Children claimed to have seen the women
7. Parents claimed that children had vomited pins and needles
8. Found guilty and were hanged
9. As the gavel came down the people who had come into the courtroom sickly were suddenly fine

### **Video - What Was a Witch**

1. The worldview of the Europeans was magical and superstitious
2. Way of dealing with a world that they had little control over
3. The official religion of Christianity but there are additional rituals
4. Believed in astrology, believed that earth was governed by what happened in the stars
5. Legitimate magic - catholicism, astrology (white magic), rituals to protect things
6. Black magic/maleficia - spiritual interventions that might do harm
7. Diabolism - devil worship intensifies after 1450 - this creates the witch craze
8. Witches were believed to be in league with the devil
9. By centering it on the devil hunting witches was in line with the bible

## **The Sabbath**

1. People were linked to the devil at this time
2. People are manipulated into dealing with the devil
3. Sabbath ceremony was their induction into witchcraft
4. Sabbath was a secret meeting, a version of black mass
5. Often suggested that they are unbaptized babies

### **Video - Why Women**

1. About 75% of accused witches were women but men could also be accused of witchcraft
2. Gendered crime in practice
3. Typically older and single (unmarried or widows)
4. Paintings often depicted witches as young, but most convicted were old

## **Why these Women**

1. Stereotypes of women being morally and intellectually inferior
  - a. Believed women would be more easily tempted and tricked mentally
  - b. Women's moral resolve was weaker and had less willpower, less moral fiber
2. Stereotypes about female sexuality, especially of single women and widows
  - a. Tempted by the devil for sex
  - b. Women were more lustful than men
  - c. Men wanted to control female sexuality within the confines of marriage
  - d. Single women had no sexual output so sought the devil

- e. Believed that older women would prey upon young men, seen as sexual predators

#### Video - Why These Women

1. Social roles in the community that made them more vulnerable to suspicion
2. Something goes wrong, setting the community on a hunt for a scapegoat
3. Women often prepared food which would be blamed if someone got sick
4. Women did a lot of childcare and they would get into trouble after children got sick or died
5. Midwives may have been suspected, but they also might have been well-respected women
6. Women often administered folk-medicine - often blurring the divide between medicine and witchcraft
7. Older women were the most common workers in these jobs, on social fringes so they were involved in the economy of makeshift
8. Their social position made them less able to defend themselves
  - a. Lacked a support network
  - b. Often had a history of conflict with neighbors
  - c. Existing on the fringe of society might incur suspicion
9. By the time someone is formally accused they were likely suspected for many years
10. Women were most likely to accuse other women

#### Video - Witchcraze and Social Instability

1. Range of factors destabilized European instability
2. A symptom of this instability
3. Intensity of the witch craze was not consistent

#### Local Factors

1. The strength of the legal system affected the number of convictions
2. In most places they allowed loser procedures and the torturing of witches
3. Sense that there were many witches that had to be rooted out
4. England did not have torture so they had less witches

#### Chronology

1. About 100,000 trials
2. 50,000-60,000 executions
3. Lasted from 1450-1750
4. Begins to intensify in 1520 and was the most intense from 1550-1650

#### Geography

1. 75% of trials occurred in west-central Europe - German, Swiss, French
2. Holy Roman Empire accounts for roughly half of the executions

#### Video - Religious Schism

1. Around 1500 they were all still Catholic
2. Halloween 1517 Martin Luther deeply critiqued the Catholic Church - in particular that priests mediated between you and God
3. 7 sacraments
  - a. Baptism
  - b. Confirmation

- c. Eucharist
- d. Penance
- e. anointing of the sick
- f. Marriage
- g. holy orders
- 4. Particularly critiqued indulgences as he claimed that they were a hoax and the pope was a hoax too
- 5. Luther and other protestant break off
- 6. More successful in Northern and Central Europe
- 7. Luther presented catholicism as evil and blasphemous
- 8. Luther believed in the devil
- 9. Claimed that the pope was the devil's agent
- 10. 1519 he claimed that the church was the antichrist
- 11. Presents the pope as a demonic monster or an agent of satan
- 12. In a way luther was calling the pope a witch
- 13. Luther believed in a real devil and witches

### **The Catholic Response**

- 1. Called luther a heretic
- 2. Inquisition was a medieval church that looked for non-believers and prosecuted them
- 3. They claimed that luther was a agent of the devil

### **Religious Wars - 1540-1650**

- 1. Germany and France had the highest amount of conflict as they were officially catholic but had lots of Huguenots (Huguenots were french protestants that held the reformed tradition)
- 2. Holy Roman Empire had different cities with different religions
- 3. St Bartholomew's day had rioting with 10,000 protestants slaughtered in france
- 4. Continued into about 1650
- 5. Thirty years war raged from 1618-1648
- 6. Enlightenment has people looking back with shock and disgust who set the groundwork for more tolerance

### **Video - Connecting the Reformation and the Witchcraze**

- 1. Both catholics and protestants burned witches with a similar frequency
- 2. Most intense witching was right after luther
- 3. Religious battles and witch trials happen at the same time
- 4. Where the reformation was the most violent they burned the most witches
- 5. Mixed areas were the most violent
- 6. Proximity to religious wars increased the tendency to burn witches
- 7. Reformation battles brought cultural disruption
  - a. These communities were more on edge
- 8. Clerics were going into rural areas looking for heretics and preaching about the devil
  - a. Redefined popular magic as demonic
  - b. Priest and ministers were talking about the devil more
  - c. Parishioners were told that an evil army was at work
  - d. They preached more about the apocalypse (Eschatological preaching)

- e. Encouraged people to believe in and look for witches
- f. Job to root out heretics
- g. Encountered pagan village practices that were originally accepted, were reinterpreted and said that this folk magic was actually demonic
- h. Encouraged people to look for evil
- 9. Catholics and protestants did not kill each other as witches, but rather protestants killed protestants, and catholics killed catholics

#### Video - 17th Century Crisis

- 1. Economic depression starts at the end of the 16th century
- 2. There was a population boom in the 16th century that drove a high demand for land and bread, driving prices up
- 3. There was an oversupply of labour resulting in low wages
- 4. Full scale depression from 1590-1660
- 5. Prices were up and wages were down which dramatically increased poverty
- 6. Widespread political unrest in the period
- 7. These political rebellions are more likely to happen in times of economic and social stress
- 8. Economic turmoil added to community anxiety possibly causing witchhunts
- 9. Hardening of attitudes towards the poor
- 10. Begging and vagrancy was criminalized
- 11. These attitudes towards poor people affected the treatment of women accused of being witches
- 12. Poverty of women added to their ire against them as they were seen as burdens
- 13. Christianity taught europeans to be good to the poor but this conflicted with the increasing numbers of people that requested charity
- 14. Ostracised people who sought charity rather than believing that they were not generous christians
- 15. Crimen Exceptum - the pope removed legal limits towards the application of torture in cases of witchcraft

#### Lowestoft

- 1. English civil war had just ended enervating for decades of political instability
- 2. Fight between different branches of protestantism
- 3. Puritans execute the king but they were extremely unpopular
- 4. Lowestoft was a hotbed of puritanism
- 5. King started passing laws that limited the religious freedom of puritans
- 6. Other cities were sending boats down to fish in their areas
  - a. Lowestoft relied heavily on fishing
- 7. This instability made them more likely to search for witches

#### Images of the Witches Sabbath

De Confessionibus Maleficorum et Sagarum (Of the Confessions of Warlocks and Witches)

1589

- 1. People in candy dress
- 2. Harnessing the power of the sun
- 3. Flying on horses and broomsticks

#### 4. Boiling babies

#### Witches Sabbath

1. Water or steam is coming out of a cauldron
2. Seem to be controlling nature
3. Flying on a horse

#### New Years Greeting with Three Witches

1. Two women are stepping on a third
2. They are both elderly and young
3. There is a slate on the ground with symbols on it

#### La Vraye Femme (The True Woman)

1. A woman is walking on one side, in a nice dress
2. It is a male centaur on the other brandishing a stick
3. Villagers are praying and looking at the woman/horse

#### Excerpt from the Malleus Maleficarum (1487)

1. "As for the first question, why a greater number of witches is found in the fragile feminine sex than among men . . . the first reason is, that they are more credulous, and since the chief aim of the devil is to corrupt faith, therefore he rather attacks them . . . the second reason is, that women are naturally more impressionable, and ... the third reason is that they have slippery tongues, and are unable to conceal from their fellow-women those things which by evil arts they know ... But the natural reason is that she is more carnal than a man, as is clear from her many carnal abominations. And it should be noted that there was a defect in the formation of the first woman, since she was formed from a bent rib...And since through this defect she is an imperfect animal, she always deceives ... [and] she is ever weaker to hold and preserve the faith."

#### Witchcraft and Fantasy in Early Modern Germany

1. Witches were accused of hurting and killing young infants, and women who had just given birth
2. Mothers typically accused post-menopausal, infertile women
3. Mostly accused lying-in maids, rather than midwives
4. People would often attribute supernatural beings to random or circumstantial details
5. Witches could not feel normal pain and were tortured to get detailed and so that they could die in a state of grace
  - a. Feeling pain could bring the women closer to christ
6. Witches had to affirm their confession without torture, resulting in confessions being changed
7. They would repeatedly torture women until their story was consistent
8. Women were well acquainted with their tourer and hangman
9. They wired it as the devil was their seducer and the cause of their fall
10. Breast, milk, and nourishment were key images for witches
  - a. Witches had poisonous breasts
  - b. Their warts were diabolic teats for the devil
11. Witches were accused of excess maternity, as they had no children for their own commonly

12. Women sometimes had lying-in maids while they recovered from birth and before they could rejoin public life
  - a. Postnatal depression means that women placed their fears and paranoia on these maids and accused them of witchcraft
  - b. Lying-in maids disturbed the household hierarchy
  - c. Maids were accused of sleeping with the husbands
13. Harm would often come to the child after the lying-in maid left
14. Maids were accused of envy - they were widows, infertile women who did not change legitimate children
15. After 1700 child-witches were accused

### **The Dynamics of Witch-Hunting**

1. amalgamation of thousands of separate hunts

### **The Preconditions**

1. Community had to believe in witches
2. Mood of the community
3. Old popular witch beliefs were rekindled by preachers
4. Ruling elite had to believe
5. As the ruling elite became literate they read treatises and this made the hunts more likely to occur
6. Courts had to have clearly defined jurisdiction and the procedural tools necessary
7. Courts often used coercive measures and torture to interrogate
8. Both protestants and catholics heard sermons on witches
9. Economic, religious, or political crises produced a mood
10. Epidemics of the plague or a succession of bad harvest created a mood but did not spark the hunts
11. Millenarianism was a religious belief that the antichrist had appeared and christ was imminent, cleared witches to make way for christ
12. Political crisis disrupted the judiciary, temporary pausing witch hunts, usually appeared in the immediate aftermath
13. Witch trial were rare during actall warfare or the immediate exhaustion following

### **The Triggers**

1. Ball rolling by an original accusation, usually based on a personal misfortune
2. Occasionally a communal misfortune like a fire or a hail storm
3. Plague was not a catalyst but witches were accused of being plague spreaders
4. Individuals also made confessions with coaxing or in the context of other investigations
5. Demonic possession was often communal
6. Apocalyptic thinking in britain and america caused them to look for signs that the devil was loose
7. Pressure to prosecute came from neighbours, but also authorities could take the initiative
8. Local elite often were involved in the torture

### **Development of Hunts**

#### **Small Hunts**

1. 1-3 people

2. Search is limited to those originally accused
3. Had the potential to develop into larger hunts

#### Medium Hunts

1. 5-10 people
2. Torture was employed and a second round took place

#### Large Hunts

1. 10-hundreds of people
2. High degree of panic
3. Chain reaction hunts
4. Sometimes a single accuser or a group of people served as the source of names
5. Often composites of small hunts
6. Occured in waves
7. The hysteria crested in the community was called collective obsessional behaviour

#### **End of Witch-Hunts**

1. Splanned a period of 2-3 years
2. Often ended abruptly
3. Not everyone who was accused was tried
4. Ended why people came to the conclusion that innocent people were being accused, social effects were more detrimental, loss of confidence in the process, breakdown of the stereotype, judges became sceptical was the evidence became weaker
5. Acquittals broke the chain of accusations and may have contributed to popular skepticism
6. Some, like lawyers, could get the guilty parties private property
  - a. They were usually poor however
7. Brokers and Finders charged the communities to hunt witches but they stopped when the communities stopped paying them as they had run out of money
8. Population was drained of resources due to judicial extravagance
9. Burden of prison maintenance
10. Stopped by higher ranking officials when the hunt was causing chaos, they risked abandoning procedures, or the courts were being carlous
11. Higher courts stepped in for oversight and overturned convictions

#### Conclusions

1. Propagators of violence were terrified and thus convinced of the righteousness of their actions
2. Ordinary fear became panic because of underlying social and cultural disruption
3. Victims of terror were already smeared by cultural prejudices (in this case gender)
4. A long campaign of dehumanization preceded the eventual violence