

matic performance, and he introduces students to the plot and cast of characters, along with several provocative explanations for why things happened as they did.

Elevating human agency over cultural exigencies, Hoffer singles out various actors, examining their actions and motivations during the witchcraft drama. He takes a close look at Samuel Parris, minister at Salem, and his slave, Tituba, in particular and perhaps exaggerates when he says that their accidental arrivals "were the reasons the crisis took the form it did." The group of girls who initiated the accusations come under close scrutiny as well. Hoffer provides two possible explanations for their ensemble performance: first, that the girls acted together as if they were in a modern gang. They collaborated in their concoction of damaging but credible tales, and they encouraged each other, much as a gang of delinquents cultivates solidarity and spurs its members to ever-greater misdeeds. Second, Hoffer suggests that the accusing girls may actually have been victims, not of witchcraft, as they alleged, but of child abuse. He admits that this theory is pure speculation, but he believes it helps explain their willingness to act out inappropriately.

On the one hand, Hoffer's narrative offers students an easy means of understanding a manifestly bizarre event in American history. Contemporary students often wonder how witchcraft could have seemed real and threatening, serious enough to justify executions. But even Hoffer's gang analogy and child abuse theory provide an explanation only for the accusers' behavior and do not address the credulity of everyone else who took their stories quite seriously. Hoffer therefore turns to other scholars' discussions of Salem's political economy, arguing that fear pervaded the town and village, not only of Satan and his witches but also of Indians, and that there was great concern over the colony's charter and bitter contention over land and suitable ministers. Various social and economic factors were stacked like logs; the spark of the girls' affliction, he suggests, set Salem ablaze.

In trying to make the seventeenth-century witch trials accessible to modern students, however, Hoffer downplays the crucial distinctiveness of the Puritans' world of wonder. Social and political tensions plagued Salem, but ulti-

mately the drama depended on the historical actors' belief in the devil and witches as much as it did on particular personalities and circumstances. Such beliefs were intrinsic, not merely a vehicle for mundane struggles. Tempting as it is to relate Salem's theatrics to our own secular lives, Hoffer's story would have been more compelling if it had conserved some of Salem's very strangeness and encouraged readers to suspend disbelief and to enter the Puritans' world, if only for the play's duration.

Elizabeth Reis

*University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon*

*Courts and Commerce: Gender, Law, and the Market Economy in Colonial New York.* By Deborah A. Rosen. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1997. xvi, 232 pp. Cloth, \$45.00, ISBN 0-8142-0736-7. Paper, \$17.95, ISBN 0-8142-0737-5.)

In this concise study, Deborah A. Rosen charts the rise of the market economy in colonial New York, its relationship to the formalization of the legal system in the colony, and the gendered effects of these developments on urban and rural New Yorkers. She argues that, as commercial networks expanded and the legal system evolved, women's participation in the market economy declined while that of men increased. By the eve of the American Revolution, she concludes, these changes combined to strengthen patriarchal authority in the home.

*Courts and Commerce* comprises three discrete sections. In the first, Rosen firmly locates the emergence of the market economy in early-eighteenth-century New York. Data from probate inventories, debt suits, and tax assessments reveal a surge of consumerism in the colony, where the amount and range of what were initially luxury goods—forks, knives, teaware, china—doubled between 1715 and 1740 and increased even more dramatically in the last decades before the Revolution. There were consumption differences between urban and rural New Yorkers: the former enjoyed more luxury goods, although this gap diminished over time, while the latter purchased craft tools to produce goods for the market. In both areas commercialization was accompanied by a rise in

debt and a polarization of wealth. Moreover, the market economy intensified the feminization of poverty: creditors exhibited forbearance toward men with whom they had continuing economic relationships and less tolerance toward widows whose husbands died indebted.

The response of the legal system to the demands of commercialization occupies the second section of the book. Debt litigation rose sharply in eighteenth-century New York, accompanied by an increase in written legal instruments that formalized commercial exchanges. Jury trials decreased as litigation shifted toward default or out-of-court settlements. Economic relationships among men grew increasingly impersonal as creditors brought debt suits against neighbors as well as distant trading partners. Commercial matters brought men from a wider range of occupations and ethnicities into court, while women were correspondingly marginalized.

The book's final section brings the expansion of the market economy and the formalization of the law to bear on gender relations. The female economy grew in eighteenth-century New York, but, because the common law was paramount, husbands controlled profits, and consequently women lacked control over capital. Women's litigation rates declined over the century, although they did occasionally use petitionary justice. Ironically, the labor of women supported the commercial efforts of their husbands, but at widowhood, women, particularly in urban areas, often slipped into poverty.

Translating public power into private patriarchal relations is tricky business. By measuring women's power so narrowly—exclusively through their participation in commercial exchanges—Rosen overlooks alternative forms of female agency suggested by her evidence. For example, the active and growing female economy in rural eighteenth-century New York conceivably brought some power to women. Additionally, while women's litigation rates decreased, their use of petitionary justice suggests their legal competency. Moreover, by the end of the century, republican motherhood had redefined women's domestic roles to include political functions. These caveats aside, for historians seeking the roots of commercialization, its concomitant developments in the legal system, and its effects on women in early Amer-

ica, this well-researched and thoughtful study will prove to be an essential starting point.

Terri L. Snyder  
California State University  
Fullerton, California

*The New England Village.* By Joseph S. Wood. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. xviii, 223 pp. \$39.95, ISBN 0-8018-5454-7.)

As an icon of national identity, a marker of historical change, and a symbol of democratic community and pastoral charm, the New England town resonates as powerfully in the academy as it does in the popular imagination. According to the historical geographer Joseph S. Wood, however, the image of the colonial New England village as a collection of sturdy clapboard houses clustered around the meeting-house is both a "historiographic fallacy" and "an invented tradition." The first settlers willingly sacrificed proximity to neighbors in favor of good grassland for their cattle. Towns and villages themselves were not "central places" in the classic commercial or institutional sense until after the Revolution; rather, they were merely "pieces of territory laid out for settlement," legal entities whose function was the distribution of land. As a result, the typical village consisted of small, widely dispersed one-story homesteads. Wood does not dispute New Englanders' communal impulses. His argument is with the persistent notion that community required, or created, nucleated settlements; buttressed with evidence from maps and town histories, his account is persuasive.

So where did the image of the compact community come from? Wood contends that it was a nineteenth-century phenomenon propagated by a cast of characters ranging from the transcendentalists to the lumberman Frederick Edward Weyerhaeuser. Beginning in the 1790s, the function and look of the New England village changed. Some towns became central commercial places, home to residents who built shops and large, two-story houses on newly subdivided meetinghouse lots. Economic prosperity sparked a regional boom in building and public improvements; colonial structures were torn down and forgotten. The efflorescence of