

Tituba, Indian Woman:

A Blurry Picture

“Tittuba the Ind’n Woem’n,”¹ the famous slave of the Salem witchcraft trials is recorded in history in only a few places. She has been stylized in various books, written about by myriad historians, and finally popularized to the modern reader in Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*. Tituba, “the Indian slave,” played a crucial role in one of the more famous events in early colonial history. Tituba was the arguable instigator of the Salem witch trials. As the first confessor, Tituba ignited a fire of witch-hunts that would grow to consume many of Salem’s female residents, either their reputations or lives. Tituba has a very obscure identity, even today, scholars have little understanding as to who she really was. Unfortunately Tituba’s contemporaries offer little help, identifying her only as “Indian” and providing little other data in court records. Tituba, it appears, lead a simple life, of little note, but her important role in the witch trials still begs the question: “Who was she?” Questions to her identity have been asked and answered time and again by scholars. Both scholars and literary artists answer often too incompletely and too much in contradiction to one another to be of much use. This debate still stirs in historical circles as to who Tituba was. I have read many of the works published over the last 30 years relating to Tituba and her identity. With the knowledge from this reading, I attempt to lend here to bring together the best of scholars’ answers. It is my hope, that through this discussion an understanding can gained of who Tituba was, who she is, and who from our theories might be.

Recent Scholars

Of the large volume of writing regarding the Salem witch trials during the last 30 years, I have picked 4 works that I view as key to the understanding of Tituba’s identity to historians today. Each of these uses Tituba’s stories to

¹ Salem Witchcraft Papers. Vol. 3. (750)

different ends, however, all are comparable under the pretense of understanding her identity.

A small group of authors set precedence 30 years ago for much of the discussion that was about to ensue. Two of this group of authors I have used extensively here, and others I make reference to throughout. One of these two is the aforementioned Chadwick Hansen with his "The Metamorphosis of Tituba, or why American Intellectuals Can't Tell an Indian Witch from a Negro." Second, is Elain G. Breslaw and her works "Tituba's Confession: The Multicultural Dimensions of the 1692 Salem Witch-Hunt" and *Tituba, Reluctant witch of Salem: Devilish Indians and Puritan fantasies*. Breslaw writes these works containing her work connecting Tituba to the South Caribbean state of Barbados and its slave trade with the colonies through the 17th century.

Two later works come from Bernard Rosenthal and my most recently Veta Smith Tucker. Rosenthal writes, "Tituba's Story," attacking many other recent scholars' arguments, all the time referring as much as possible to the primary sources. Rosenthal focuses on the disproving of many of the unjustified myths surrounding Tituba, and offers his critical opinion on how these have evolved. Rosenthal is highly critical of any speculation surrounding Tituba's identity, and does his best to stay close to the factual records. Finally, Veta Smith Tucker, an African American Literature, English, and Women's Studies professor, searches studies Tituba's disappearance from the records following her indictment. In addition, Tucker discusses the identity which has since evolved for her from our scarce knowledge. Veta offers the most African favoring account of Tituba's origins, and summarizes many possible theories surrounding Tituba's identity and her possible connection to Africa.

Her Story

The story of Tituba begins with the story of the Salem witch trials. Hearings, which Arthur Miller called "one of the strangest and most awful chapters in human history,"² began in 1692 with Tituba among the first of the accused. Tituba was a slave at the Parris house, the house in which the initial

² Miller, Arthur. *The Crucible*. (xi)

girls first fell possessed. These girls, curious about their futures, had tried to divine their fortunes with an egg in a cup – their makeshift crystal ball.³ Receiving from this divination visions of coffins instead of lovers, the girls were “literally frightened... out of their wits and into the hysterical seizure which were so prominent a feature of the Salem trials.”⁴ From here Parris sought the help of his fellow ministers and that of the church.⁵ Through fasting and prayer Parris hoped to help the girls. Unfortunately, Parris’s methods proved of little avail, and Parris’s neighbor, Mary Sibley, took then a different course of action. Ms. Sibley addressed the slaves of Parris’s house – Indian John and Tituba – for help, who then are recorded to have attempted to divine who the children’s aggressors might be via the use of a “witch-cake.”⁶ Why Sibley sought help from these two slaves, and who among them first suggested divination through a witch-cake my research did not yield. Regardless, this cake was then fed to the household dog, taken perhaps as a witch familiar, from which the 3 hoped to learn the name of the witch possessing these young women.⁷ Not long after, the records show an arrest warrant issued on Feb. 29th 1691 for the arrest of “Sarah Osburne and titibe Indian,” thus beginning the involvement of the courts. Initial hearings began, and almost immediately, Tituba had confessed, naming more witches, and beginning the cycle of witch accusation, later termed a “witch craze” for its severity at Salem. Interesting to note, some believe, Tituba’s testimony was motivated by threats of her master.⁸ This confession was used, not only to convict Tituba, but also to implicate 3 other women. Tituba’s questioning also revealed that she had signed the devil’s list next to the names of 9 other witches, one of which she could identify as “a tall man with white hair from Boston.”⁹ Following questioning, on the 9th of May, Tituba was indicted. Of this indictment, the records lend only a single sheet of paper: her official indictment, on the reverse of which is written “Ignoramus.” Some have

³ See Hansen. “The Metamorphosis of Tituba” (4)

⁴ Hansen. “The Metamorphosis of Tituba” (4)

⁵ Breslaw. “Tituba’s Confession” (538)

⁶ Breslaw. “Tituba’s Confession” (538)

⁷ Hansen. “The Metamorphosis of Tituba” (5)

⁸ Rosenthal. “Tituba’s Story” (190)

⁹ Karlson, Carol F. “The Devil in the Shape of a Woman.”

interpreted this word to suggest that Tituba was acquitted.¹⁰ On this suggestion, Rosenthal offers some explanation and caution. Rosenthal cites other cases in which “Ignoramus” verdicts were assigned, with or without other true verdicts: in all of the cases he mentions, the accused were hanged. He suggests, that from this word alone, we cannot judge Tituba’s fate.¹¹ It is generally accepted that she was acquitted, and Veta Smith Tucker argues the records show, “after 13 months in jail, an unnamed person came forward, paid £7 for Tituba’s release, and removed her from the site”.¹² Finally, the last record relating to Tituba after this, is to note she was present in 1697 for public redress when several accusers publicly repented their mistakes. Neither were any relations present in 1704, when the Massachusetts General court reversed the bill of attainder regarding witchcraft allegations, or again in 1711 when it compensated those without estates (like Tituba) the cost of imprisonment.¹³ From this point on, Tituba disappears from any records, and the rest of what we know about comes from secondary sources, both historical and fictional.

Her Evolution

Following Tituba’s disappearance from the records Tituba has appeared works both of fictional and historical natures. In his work, a scholar, Chadwick Hansen, follows the long trail Tituba has led through literature. Hansen’s “The Metamorphosis of Tituba” focuses on Tituba’s “metamorphosis” through history from an Indian, to half-Indian half-Negro, to full Negro and then back again to Carib Indian in recent depictions. Hansen discussed mostly her racial appearance over time, however his work gives us great insight into how Tituba was seen in general throughout historical literature and allows us appropriate reference for a modern discussion.

The first example of Tituba’s appearance in literature Hansen refers to is Charles W. Upham’s “Lectures on Witchcraft” (Boston, 1831) and *Salem Witchcraft* (Boston, 1867). In the latter, Tituba appears, mentioned as “spoken of

¹⁰ Tucker, Veta Smith. “Tituba of Salem Village.” (625); Rosenthal, Bernard. “Tituba’s Story.” (198) Footnote #30.

¹¹ Rosenthal, Bernard. “Tituba’s Story” (198) Footnote #30

¹² Tucker, Veta Smith. “Purloined Identity” (625), supported also by Robert Calef, *More Wonders of the Invisible World* (1700; rpt. Boston, 1828), 343

as having come from New Spain ... that is, the Spanish west Indies ... and, in all probability, contributed [to the scare], from the wild and strange superstitions prevalent among their native tribes." Upham portrays Tituba in his Salem Witchcraft, only in short mention, describing her assumed origin and magical practices. Not but a year later, Tituba appears in a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who provides, as Chadwick Hansen said, "a more colorful, and more stereotyped, suggestion in his verse-drama, Giles Corey of the Salem Farms." Tituba appears in the *Dramatis Personae* as "an Indian Woman," but as Hansen notes, it is later revealed she is "half-Indian." Longfellow tells of her mother, an Indian, and her father "a man all black and fierce."¹⁴ Hansen sights still other sources to his own purpose. I have omitted reference to the rest of his sources which do not serve as well for background. I have chose here to focus on other more recent scholarly depictions of Tituba, and use Hooper's aforementioned sources for reference purposes. Good to note however is Tituba's appearance in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and her following recognition in John Demmon's "Underlying Themes in the Witchcraft of Seventeenth-Century New England," at which "her metamorphosis was complete" from Indian to Negro, Hansen suggests. Arthur Miller characterizes Tituba in his popular play as a "Negro slave" and draws pictures that from which some have given her the label of "voodoo princess."¹⁵ This is important to note, because it is from this picture of "Negro voodoo princess" that much of recent scholarly work begins and reacts to.

This essay's concern with Tituba and her appearance in scholarly literature begins in the 1970's with Chadwick Hansen's "The Metamorphosis of Tituba," through Elaine G. Breslaw's article "Tituba's Confession: the multilingual dimensions to the 1692 Salem Witchhunts." I include also variety of other articles including my most recent article – a work predating this essay by only a few months – Veta Smith Tucker's, "Purloined Identity: The Racial Metamorphosis of Tituba of Salem Village." From this, a diverse and blurry picture of the slave Tituba can be acquired. It is that picture, which is here

¹³ Tucker, Veta Smith. "Purloined Identity" (625)

¹⁴ Hansen, Chadwick. "The Metamorphosis of Tituba." (6); Longfellow. "Giles Corey of the Salem Farms" in *The New-England Tragedies* (Boston, 1868)

broken down to its arguments and hopefully brought into a greater light of understanding.

Our hard evidence surrounding Tituba consists of a few scattered facts. It is recorded that she lived in the household of the Reverend Samuel Parris, as a slave. Her prior whereabouts, origin, and ethnicity are all disputed. The records lend no indication of her age.¹⁶ She was accused of witchcraft in February of 1692 and confessed in March. Lastly, we know she is tied to the witch trails by her persecution and also by her own claims of torture and affliction at the hands of witches. From these understandings scholars and artists speculated and theorized for two centuries. Here, other authors theories are compared and contrasted in hopes of bringing a clearer picture of our Tituba.

A Comparison

The authors lend their opinions, often conflicting, and leave a confused sense of who Tituba was. From this blurry picture, I lay out here, the multiple views taken regarding her magic, marital status, linguistical disputes surrounding her name and other records, and finally the two biggest questions: her race and origin. All of the scholars discussed comment on most of these views either in passing or direct quote. In each passage, reference is given to those authors who most thoroughly discussed the subject in question. The goal through this discussion facilitates an understanding of who Tituba was, who Tituba is to use now, and who from our theories might be.

Worth discussing here, is the confusion and assumption that, at one time, surrounded Tituba's magical skills. Specifically, Tituba is remembered by literature in reference to two accounts of magic: the first, the Parris girls divining of their fortunes using a raw egg in a glass. The second is Tituba's association with the witch-cake used to discover the girls' aggressors. Regarding Tituba's proclaimed magical talents, Chadwick Hansen discusses the issue most directly. Other scholars allude often to Tituba's magical power and it's origin as either of Indian or African nature. One such example of this allusion is in Erikson's *Wayward Puritans*: "Tituba herself, a woman who had grown up among the rich

¹⁵ Hansen, Chadwick. "The Metamorphosis of Tituba." (10).

¹⁶ Rosenthal, Bernard. "Tituba's Story" (202).

colors and imaginative legends of Barbados and who was probably acquainted with some form of voodoo.”¹⁷ This is just one of many examples where authors both in the historical and literary context, refer to Tittuba’s claimed magical abilities. Hansen disputes the level of Tituba’s involvement, arguing, that from the records, Tituba was in both remembered cases not an instigator of magic. Referring to the first instance, the girls alone are thought to have attempted to divine their own futures. They used what should have been a well-known folk method of fortune telling. In regards to the second act, the “witch-cake,” scholars commonly refer to Parris’s own diary where he attests to Mary Sibley contacting first the two slaves. It might be assumed here, that she may have been more of the motivation behind the cake seeing her initial action.¹⁸ In his second point, Hansen contends that Tituba in fact was not shown in records as possessing extraordinary magical talent, but rather, the “magic” with which she was associated was no more than folk methods and lore. Hansen says “The egg and glass is an English folk method of divining,” and the cake was “an old English recipe for witch-finding.”¹⁹ Tituba, in Hansen’s eyes, had basis to being associated with many magical powers. This is a drastic difference from many other portrayals that link her to all sorts of magical acts that began the trials. Tituba is cited as “idling with the little girls” during which she “yielded to the temptation to show the children tricks and spells, fragments of something like voodoo remembered from the Barbados,”²⁰ and in “The Crucible” to having held Sabbats with the local town girls.²¹ Breslaw discusses what she terms as Tituba’s familiarity with practices derived from three cultures [English, Indian and African]” justifying the existence of such knowledge by “the events of 1692.”²² I would argue our modern non-belief in a fantastical world plus most scholars’ admonition of Tituba’s seemingly innocent interaction with magic involving these witch trials, to have removed any solid claims of magical origin from

¹⁷ Erikson, Kai T. *Wayward Puritans*. (143)

¹⁸ Breslaw, Elain G. “Tituba’s Confession.” (539).

¹⁹ Hansen, Chadwick. “The Metamorphosis of Tituba.” (4-5)

²⁰ Hansen, Chadwick. “The Metamorphosis of Tituba.” (8), Starkey, Marion L. *The Devil in Massachusetts*. (New York. 1950) (9-11)

²¹ Hansen, Chadwick. “The Metamorphosis of Tituba.” (10)

²² Breslaw. “Tituba’s Confession” (538), Breslaw lends little explanation to “the events of 1692, and I must conclude that she implies the witch-cake, with still little understanding of justification.

Tituba's image in modern scholarship. Finally, Breslaw also attests to Tittuba's lack of magical involvement:

It is unlikely that Tituba or Jon were known for their skill in magic before 1692. There is not documentary or trial evidence that Tituba participated in occult rituals before that year. On the contrary, there is every indication that she lived an unremarkable life until the last week of February 1962.²³

Modern scholars take what seems to be a unified stand in discounting magic from Tituba's identity. Magic was once a point of dispute, and continues to be referenced to in literature, but is something that scholars agree has most likely little basis. I found it almost universally assumed that magic offers little evidence in defining Tituba's character, and that she herself was involved in very little magic during her life.

A point on which historians have more varied opinions is the existence of her husband. By some it is simply taken as fact that Tituba had a husband, that being John Indian, while yet others have provided a more skeptical opinion. Breslaw, for example, seems to take it as fact, that John and Tituba were husband and wife. She takes this view, likely, I argue, because it fits nicely in her theory to have John and Tituba both originate from Barbados. Breslaw writes, "Little is known about Tituba's background beyond the fact that she and another slave, John Indian, who became her husband."²⁴ Breslaw assumes it a common fact, and footnotes to other secondary sources who provide "commentary on Tituba and John's married status."²⁵ There are however others who find no credulity in denoting John and Tituba as husband and wife. In example of this view, Rosenthal writes, "there is no evidence that Tituba and John were married, or even cohabiting, although almost every scholar assumes, without proof, that a conjugal relationship existed."²⁶ Rosenthal gives us greater detail in his footnotes, justifying his argument by his search of the "Salem Witchcraft Papers," in which he rightly cites that Tituba was referred to as the slave of Samuel Parris, and not as the wife of a husband as other women were. Rosenthal admits "servant status may have overtaken marital" in precedence for such legal documents, however he concludes "the burden of proof ... remains with those

²³ Breslaw, Elaine G. "Tituba's Confession." (539)

²⁴ Breslaw, Elaine G. "Tituba's Confession." (538)

²⁵ Breslaw, Elaine G. "Tituba's Confession." (551) Footnote #13.

who clam that Tituba and John were married.” Finally, others, such as Tucker in her “Purloined Identity” strangely seem to ignore Tituba’s relation to John completely. Tucker mentions how “no one came forward representing Tituba’s family,” and discusses at length Tituba’s relation to the community and Parris. She makes reference to family, yet she neither supports nor denies claims to Tituba having any family relations, husband or otherwise. Such non-mention of John during her discussion of Tituba’s relations could suggest Tucker’s ambiguity at least regarding John. I must concede, that without an exhaustive search, or more scholarly reading on my part, I cannot wholeheartedly support either theory. However, beyond numerous scholarly references to their implied relationship, I was not able to find any evidence of such in my readings of source material. I also have myself read through most of the material referring to Tituba contained in “Salem Witchcraft Papers,” and not found any reference of Tituba and John Indian existing as man and wife. I am then contented at the writing of this essay and do conclude with Bernard Rosenthal that Tituba and John Indian were not linked in the bonds of marriage, and the burden of such proof lies on the shoulders of those who claim such.²⁷

One of the most interesting arguments of modern scholarship centers around Tituba’s name itself. The debate centers mostly on research stemming from Hoffer, who uses linguistical grounds to base Tituba’s origin in the Caribbean. Hoffer identifies Tituba’s name as “a Yoruba name.”²⁸ Several scholars site his work repeatedly, including Tucker remarking how “This new linguistic evidence might put all doubts to rest about Tituba’s African identity.”²⁹ Hoffer’s work however is not universally accepted among scholars. Of those I’ve read, one stands out in particular opposition to this theory. Bernard Rosenthal refutes Hoffer on three grounds. One, he finds the lack of a dependable spelling of Tituba’s name in the court records unable to support this theory. He writes: “In a quick survey of The Salem Witchcraft Papers, I counted more than forty

²⁶ Trask, Richard B. “The Devil Hath Been Rasised”: *A documentary History of the Salem Village Witchcraft Outbreak of March 1692* (Danvers, Mass.: Yeoman Press, 1997) p. 131

²⁷ Rosenthal, Bernard. “Tituba’s Story” (196)

²⁸ Hoffer, *Devil’s Disciples*. Tucker also notes that Yoruba are found in Nigeria today. “Purloined Identity.” (632).

²⁹ Tucker, Veta Smith, “Purloined Identity.” (632)

occurrences of Tituba's name, only thirteen of which carried the "uba" ending needed for the etymological argument.³⁰ Tituba, in the original court records is identified as Titiba, Tituba, Tittiba, Tittuba, or Titipa. Such a variety of spellings "in an age of haphazard orthography" were common, as such it is impossible to base a theory on the name alone.³¹ Two, Hansen attacks Hoffer's week basis again: "there can be no basis for attributing an individual's heritage to three letters ("uba") in a name."³² Rosenthal expresses his frustration, that Hoffer is perhaps stretching the evidence to declare that this name is a Yoruba name based on its consequential possibility as a proper Yoruba word construction. Lastly, Rosenthal argues that naming was, and is arbitrary, and taking also into consideration Tituba's recorded existence as a slave, Rosenthal writes that no basis can be drawn of ethnicity from a name that might be so arbitrarily assigned. Rosenthal more crudely states: "what is to prevent a white owner from naming his female slave simply according to his fancy? ... Slave masters who could rape women with impunity could surely name them as they chose."³³ Hoffer is then left with a fatal problem: although his argument is a good one and one frequently referenced to, it is not very well accepted. Hoffer's argument is hurt greatly by the frequent typographical inconsistencies found throughout the 17th century and is met by much skepticism by modern scholars. I also find it very hard to support Hoffer and would contend that Hoffer has done conditionally brilliant work: his linguistical analysis is quite impressive, however, he is missing a strong evidential basis. Without this strong basis, Hoffer has no possibility of having the convincing edge needed to amass such existing confusion. I resolve that Hoffer has proven perhaps that Tituba's name sounds African in nature, but that little else can be taken from her name.

Tied into the issues of name and marital status is an assertion made also by Hoffer: "Tituba became Indian because her husband was Indian John."³⁴ This deserves attention as a possible key to this confusion. Hoffer contends that John's "identity became hers, just as women took their husband's name and their

³⁰ Rosenthal, Bernard. "Tituba's Story." (200)

³¹ Rosenthal, Bernard. "Tituba's Story." (200)

³² Rosenthal, Bernard. "Tituba's Story." (200)

³³ Rosenthal, Bernard. "Tituba's Story." (200)

³⁴ Hoffer, Peter C. *The Devil's Disciples*.

husbands took married women's property. There were a number of such intermarriages in the 18th century in which racial identity shifted from African to Indian."³⁵ Tucker also supports Hoffer's claim and argues:

Given the circumstances of the time—the frequent opportunities for cross-racial encounters occasioned by cross-Atlantic colonization, the incomplete legal codification of racial segregation, especially among servants of all racial backgrounds— it seems timid not to conclude that Tituba embodies a mixture of African and Indian ancestry.³⁶

Tucker twists the argument a little to include specific racial possibility, but the idea is the same. She is suggesting that Tituba may not have been what her contemporaries would have called "Indian" but rather was called so by her association with John. I have found an unfortunate lack of commentary on this argument by other scholars. I agree with Hoffer. My readings of texts of that time period especially with the cultural understanding presented in Karlsen's period description of the Puritan Inheritance system and property laws³⁷, I find it highly possible that women did during that time acquire their husband's identities both in name and in person. Hopefully, more work will shed light on the possibility of Tituba's "Indian" nature being a reference to her relation with John Indian and not her own "Indian" origin.

There are also two more small linguistical considerations to note which affect arguments which these scholars, as a group, have made. The first of these mentioned is that surrounding the word Indian. Although minor, it should be noted, that the word Indian worked for contemporaries as a general catch all term for any of a large varieties of people and should be understood in all contemporary reference as such. Quoted from McWilliams (1996):

By 1692 (exactly two centuries after first contact) Columbus' misnaming [of aboriginal people as all "Indians"] had yielded a catchall term variously applied to the Guanahani, the Caribbe, the Aztecs, and West Indies Africans, as well as to the Iroquois and the Abnaki.³⁸

McWilliams argues that Columbus's mistake has stuck, and that "Indian" refers now, and in the 17th century to several groups of people. Another definition which should be noted more closely, is the definition understood for the word "country." During the first examination (second version) of Tituba, March 1,

³⁵ Hoffer, *Devil's Disciples* pg. 210

³⁶ Tucker, Veta Smith. "Tituba of Salem Village." (633)

³⁷ Karlsen, Carol F. *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*.

³⁸ McWilliams, J. "Indian John and the Northern Tawnies." (586).

1692, Tituba is asked the question “Q. did you never practice witch-craft in your owne Country?” To which, she replied “A. Noe Never before now.”³⁹ John Hale, argues that the reference here to her “owne Country,” suggests that she hails from abroad and more specifically in light of other evidence from Barbados.⁴⁰ Rosenthal on the other hand argues against this reasoning, citing the Oxford English Dictionary for the word country: “A tract or expanse of land of undefined extend; a region, district. ... Two adjoining parishes might be spoken of as different countries,” leaving the meaning of the examiner’s inquiry in question. To the modern ear, this rings as suggestion that at least the examiner believed that Tituba originated from another nation. However, if Rosenthal is correct, this examiner could simply be referencing to “back home” as in at the Parris’ household, or wherever she might have lived before. I mention this to provide better reference for the difficulty surrounding the study of these. Already, three language considerations alone have affected Tituba’s understood identity. The frequency of linugistical disputes suggests of the difficulties and possible inaccuracies involved in studying a subject where the records originate for a time of moderately different language structure.

Central to the dispute surrounding Tituba’s identity in modern scholarship has been her race, and with that, her place of origin. Scholars have attempted to place Tituba coming from anywhere around northern Indian tribes, all the way south, through the continent of North America, throughout the Caribbean, and across the Atlantic to Africa. Modern theoretical debates places Tituba most often in the Caribbean, and more specifically from the island of Barbados. This modern theory is based on three points: The presence and likelihood of slave trade with Barbados; Rev. Parris’s personal connection with Barbados from time spent there as a trader; and Breslaw’s most recent addition: the record of a slave named Tattuba on a 1676 deed.

Likelihood of New England slaves originating from Africa through Barbados, scholars justify with arguments citing how many of the slaves living in Massachusetts in this time, including Mary Black, another accused in these trials, originated form Barbados. Tucker comments to the frequency Caribbean and

³⁹ *Salem Witchcraft Papers*. Vol. 3. 752.

African slaves in New England: “ Most enslaved Africans in New England originated in Barbados and other English colonies in the Caribbean.”⁴¹ Barbados, was a close slave-trading colony with New England, and provided mostly African slaves, which the New Englanders preferred over indigenous Indians. McMillian writes to New Englander’s preference for Caribbean slaves: “Adult male Native Americans captured in warfare would be sold to Caribbean plantations in return for Blacks or Caribbeans. It was much simpler to control Africans and Caribbeans than knowledgeable local, native peoples.”⁴² This frequent slave trade, plus the presence of Carib Indian slaves on Barbados supports theories of Tituba’s origination there. Their argument flows as follows: since Tituba was a slave, and most slaves were from Africa, Tituba may be from Africa. Tucker, in her analysis of this theory, cites Hoffer’s warnings that although Carib Indians were present on the island during the time in question, their numbers were few. When the British initially arrived on Barbados, “Barbados was deserted, its Carib inhabitants dead and gone.”⁴³ After which time, from 1668 to 1678, a treaty declared that Indian slaves were not to be imported into Barbados. However, “by 1684, there were an estimated 72 Caribs on the island.”⁴⁴ Tituba would have been a child sometime during the 1670’s through 1680’s.⁴⁵ A time at which, the number of Carib Indian slaves on the island was presumably low. The possibility still exists however, that Tituba and John Indian did come as Carib Indian slaves from Barbados with Rev. Parris.

The second point on which scholars base their argument, is Parris’s time spent in Barbados. Parris was a trader who spent time in Barbados and returned to Boston in 1680.⁴⁶ Some suggest that it was at this time when Parris brought John and Tituba to the colonies.⁴⁷ Not all sources agree with this. Quoting Trask: “Tradition holds that Tituba and John were acquired by Parris when in the

⁴⁰ Hale, A Modest Inquiry. (414); Salem Witchcraft Papers. Vol. 3. 752.

⁴¹ Tucker, Veta Smith. “Purloined Identity.” (629).

⁴² McMillian, T. “Black Magic: Witchcraft, Race and Resistance in Colonial New England.” *Journal of Black Studies* Vol. 25 (101); see also Tucker, Veta Smith. “Purloined Identity.” (630).

⁴³ Hoffer, Peter C. *The Devil’s Disciples*. (207); see also Tucker, Veta Smith. “Purloined Identity.” (630).

⁴⁴ Hoffer, Peter C. *The Devil’s Disciples*. (207).

⁴⁵ Tucker, Veta Smith. “Purloined Identity.” (630).

⁴⁶ Breslaw, Elain G. “Tituba’s Confession.” (537).

⁴⁷ Breslaw, Elain G. “Tituba’s Confession.” (537).

Barbados, though no direct proof of this exists."⁴⁸ Other scholars offer little help, either ignoring the issue, or assuming that Parris accquired John and Tituba in Barbados when there. Little then can be concluded either way, however I believe Trask's questioning is justified and doubt should be assumed until proven otherwise.

The most recent justification that scholars have adopted comes from Elaine G. Breslaw. Breslaw has found "the name 'Tattuba' for a slave girl in a 1676 deed."⁴⁹ This, Breslaw argues is the same Tituba who we later find in the Salem witch trials. Breslaw's intends to show with this evidence that our "Tituba" existed, even as "Tattuba" on Barbados in 1676. Those against this theory, sight its shaky basis on a singular instance of name, and moreover, a name that is spelled differently. Breslaw and her critics both note, that on this deed, the name Tattuba appears under a list of "Negroes" identified as slaves.⁵⁰ Her critics sight the overwhelming decision of Tituba's contemporaries to refer to her as Indian in the court records, even though this Tattuba is referred to under the heading "Negroes." Breslaw admits this discrepancy, and attempts justification, sighting yet another linguistical question. The word "Negro," she argues is used here "to connote the condition of enslavement and not necessarily color or ethnicity."⁵¹ Breslaw's work is again conditional, based on too few facts to be accepted as truth.

The debate over Tituba's origin continues in scholarly literature of this very day. In my most recent source article, Tucker references to this argument almost in its entirety. Here, on this particular point can I leave with no hard and fast conclusions. I can however return to what little we know: her contemporaries perceived Tituba as an Indian. She in my belief continues to be such. Whether Tituba as an Indian originated from North America, the Caribbean, or beyond, I leave for scholars to decide. On the point of origin too much speculation and not enough evidence is yet present for speculation to lend much help.

⁴⁸ Richard B. Trask, "The Devil Hath Been Raised": A Documentary History of Salem Village Witchcraft Outbreak. 1692 (Danvers, Mass.: Yeoman Press, 1997) p. 131

⁴⁹ Breslaw, Elaine G. *Tituba, Reluctant Witch*. (22).

⁵⁰ Rosenthal, Bernard. "Tituba's Story." (197-198).

⁵¹ Breslaw, Elaine G. *Tituba, Reluctant Witch*.

Final picture

At times it seems in history as though as much as one labors over the documents, little is known but what was already there. Here I have reinterpreted what others have said regarding Tituba's life and come to at least a sturdier picture and a few general realizations about historical evidence. It is evident, that regardless of how much analysis we do over our present Tituba, our few records of her life are not enough to create a full picture of this slave so important to the Salem witch trails. What can hopefully be gleaned from this discussion is a firmer picture of Tituba the witch. These discussions of Tituba however, are not near the end. Her great importance to this event of Colonial history will continue to foster more debate about who she was. Tucker and others have stated often that it was Tituba's confession which was arguably responsible for the over 200 later accusations and the 20 people who died as a result of these trials.⁵² Had Tituba not confessed how would it all have played out? Historians hope then, through understanding the identity of Tituba, to better understand how the events actually happened and what part this woman Tituba took in those events. I would also venture to say that in light of so much recent historical discussion, at least any future depictions of Tituba, artistic or otherwise, will most likely be more accurate than any of these previous. It is my expectation, that our perception of Tituba will continue to grow and change, and that that change will be based on fact and reason and not those pictures and stereotypes with might hold of her.

⁵² Tucker, Veta Smith "Purloined Identity." (190).

Sources

- Boyer, Paul and Stephen Nissenbaum. *The Salem Witchcraft Papers*. Vol. 1-3. Da Capo Press. New York, 1977.
- Breslaw, Elaine G. *Tituba, Reluctant Witch*. New York University Press, 1996.
- Breslaw, Elaine G. "Tituba's Confession: The Multicultural Dimensions of the 1692 Salem Witch-Hunt." *Ethnohistory* Vol. 44 (1997): 535-556.
- Erikson, Kai T. *Wayward Puritans*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. New York, 1966.
- Hansen, Chadwick. "The Metamorphosis of Tituba, or Why American Intellectuals Can't Tell an Indian Witch from a Negro." *The New England Quarterly* Vol. 42 (1974): 3-13.
- Hansen, Chadwick. *Witchcraft at Salem*. G. Brazziler. 1969
- Hoffer, Peter C. *The Devil's Disciples: Makers of the Salem Witchcraft Trials*. John Hopkins University Press. Baltimore, 1996.
- Karlsen, Carol F. *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*. Norton. 1987
- McWilliams, J. "Indian John and the Northern Tawnies." *The New England Quarterly* Vol. 69 (1996): 580-604.
- Miller, Arthur. *The Crucible*. The Viking Press. New York, 1953.
- Rosenthal, Bernard. "Tituba's Story." *The New England Quarterly*. Vol. 62? (1994):190-203.
- Tucker, Veta Smith. "Purloined Identity: The Racial Metamorphosis of Tituba of Salem Village." *Journal of Black Studies* Vol. 30 (2000): 624-634.