

Taft Center Fellows Cover Sheet

Date of Application: 9/9/12

Applicant Name: **Erika Gasser**

Department: **History**

Rank: **Assistant Professor**

Title of Research Project: *Manhood, Witchcraft, and Possession in Old and New England*

Intended Results of a funded research, e.g., concrete plans for publication or conference presentations:
I would use the year as a Center Fellow to revise my book manuscript in preparation for submission to publishers.

Other Funding Applied For or Received For This Project Conference (list source and amounts requested and awarded): **I received a Taft Summer Research Grant this summer, and have applied for an NEH fellowship for 2013-2014.**

Checklist

Applications of 1,000 to 1,400 should include, but are not limited to:

- Justification of the project as a major work that will result in significant contributions to the applicant's field and established record of research (see Taft website for more details).
- An explanation of how the project may be moved forward through the specific experience of serving as a Taft Center Fellow.
- A project schedule that details how the project will be completed during the Center Fellowship year.
- Two letters from outside experts (to be uploaded by external reviewers).
- A 2-page, recently updated curriculum vitae.

Review Taft website for full application guidelines.

Taft Grants Received in the Last Five Years

1. Type and Dates: **Taft Summer Research Grant**

Amount: \$8,000 plus \$1,100 for additional travel expenses

Project Title: *Manhood, Witchcraft, and Possession in Old and New England*

Resulting Publications and Presentations: If accepted, I will present a paper based in part on research gathered this summer at the Southern Association for American Studies (SASA) conference in Charleston, SC from January 31-Feb 2, 2013.

2. Type and Dates: **Domestic Conference Travel Grant**

Amount: \$700

Project Title: “‘The Refuse of the Whole Creation’: Manhood, Misogyny, and Race in Anglo-Caribbean Travel Narratives”

Resulting Publications and Presentations: Presented at “Race, Gender, and Sexualities in the Atlantic World,” the conference of the Program in the Carolina Lowcountry and Atlantic World (CLAW).

3. Type and Dates:

Amount:

Project Title:

Resulting Publications and Presentations:

4. Type and Dates:

Amount:

Project Title:

Resulting Publications and Presentations:

Manhood, Witchcraft, and Possession in Old and New England

Project Description and Contribution to the Field

This project analyzes cases of witchcraft and demonic possession in England and New England from roughly 1580 to 1720, taking as its particular focus the varied implications of gender for men. While scholars have explored witchcraft in England and New England for some time, I focus on demonic possession cases, which could result in accusations of witchcraft but did not always do so, and on ideas of manhood. Specifically, I examine three categories: men and boys who exhibited possession symptoms, men who were accused as witches during the course of possession cases, and men who observed and published religious propaganda about the cases. I argue that manhood was a crucial factor in the performance of possession and the construction of male witches despite the fact that approximately 80-90% of Anglo-American witches were female. I further argue that male witches were “unmade” as men in ways that demonstrate that images of honorable and degraded manhood operated intricately alongside other, often more explicit, concerns.

The book project will have significance for the humanities and general audiences because, unlike others in the field, it is a cultural history of witchcraft-possession that centers on the pertinence of gender and manhood. Existing scholarship about witchcraft in England and New England has focused for the most part on the social and demographic conditions that helped transform suspicions into panic, and historians have explored myriad factors that help to explain the trials' causes. Nowhere is this more evident than in the scholarship about the witchcraft outbreak of 1692 in Salem and Essex County, Massachusetts. Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum's sociological approach to the Salem outbreak in *Salem Possessed* (1974) and Carol Karlsen's gendered social history in *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman* (1987), for example, are excellent examples of scholarly attempts to show why the trials proceeded as they did. The most important recent contribution to the Salem literature, Mary Beth Norton's *In the Devil's Snare* (2002), differs in that it focuses on political and military factors but, as with many earlier works, it claims to offer a definitive cause for Salem. And, because witchcraft is a subject with broad appeal, popular authors have championed medical or psychological explanations for witchcraft phenomena—Linda Caporeal's 1976 article posited ergot poisoning, while Laurie Winn Carlson's *A Fever in Salem* (1999) pointed to encephalitis—that remain popular despite being overly simplistic and alienated from historical context. *Manhood, Witchcraft, and Possession in Old and New England* builds upon existing social and demographic studies, but rather than pursue a causal explanation it examines the cultural meaning of witchcraft-possession and the ways that participants and propagandists used customary scripts to support claims of guilt or innocence. The language of witchcraft-possession trials is especially revealing because witches were believed to be the opposite of decent women or men, and because the trials had consequences not only for life, death, and the meaning of community, but also for the political and religious agendas of those who claimed to discern true cases and pass judgment.

Unlike existing studies that tend to focus on either England or New England, I use a transatlantic approach to trace the religious and cultural foundations these societies shared and the consequences of colonization and contact with Native Americans that set them apart. Of course, early modern England and New England had considerable differences that affected the creation and reinforcement of witchcraft and possession's cultural meanings. For example, as colony

rather than metropole, New England was committed to the pursuit of the contradictory projects of peace, proselytization, and war with Native Americans. The two regions also differed markedly in cultural aspects important for this project, such as the variety of witch images, the extent of official control over print culture, and the degree of receptivity to “remarkable providences.” Ultimately, though, there was considerable continuity in the ways that godly Anglo-Atlantic communities organized around patriarchal principles. For a time, magistrates and ministers maintained official support for witchcraft-possession cases despite the fact that they held the potential to be greatly disruptive in both material and psychological terms. Most seventeenth-century communities, having marveled at the appearance of supernatural malice in their midst, then externalized the supposed cause and recommitted themselves to restoring social relations along conservative lines. Popular belief in witchcraft and demonic possession did not disappear in the early eighteenth century, but when cases became too threatening to order and difficult to contain, elite gatekeepers closed down opportunities for official recognition and litigation. Anglo-American witchcraft-possession cases thus provide a lens through which to see how people—powerful and lowly, godly and worldly—invoked gendered power, both explicitly and implicitly, to do the cultural work necessary to compete and survive in early modern society.

While it is no longer possible to ignore the role of gender in Anglo-American witchcraft, recent scholarship often appears to acknowledge gender only to subsequently minimize it in favor of political, military, or sociological factors. This project, though, draws upon cultural history and feminist theory, and engages in the close reading of texts both to illuminate the implications of gender for men involved in witchcraft and to make the book accessible to scholars working across various disciplines. I have had the opportunity to present parts of chapters at conferences, and as a result a version of the third chapter is due to be published in an edited volume published by the Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies at the University of Toronto.

Multi-disciplinarity, Project Schedule, and Final Product

The Taft Center Fellowship provides the ideal environment in which to complete the revisions to my manuscript. My project originated in the dissertation I wrote for the University of Michigan’s joint Ph.D. program in History and Women’s Studies, and as such is inherently interdisciplinary. My past experience in multi-disciplinary writing programs, such as Michigan’s Community of Scholars, showed me how valuable it can be to share ideas and work with scholars from across the university. These experiences have considerably enriched my scholarship as a historian, as demonstrated not only by the centrality of Gender Studies to my work but also by the inspiration I have found in the methods and theoretical approaches of Literary Studies.

If I receive the Taft Center Fellowship, I will first reorganize the manuscript to emphasize the transatlantic nature of the study. For example, the previous first chapter will be condensed and made into a new introduction, and parts of the previous fourth chapter will become a new first chapter that establishes the demographic foundation. Second, I will conduct additional research on New England witchcraft-possession cases that took place from the 1650s-1680s, male “suspects by association” during the Essex County outbreak of 1692-1693, and the circulation of ideas about male witches during the Matthew Hopkins outbreak at the time of the English Civil War. Based on this research I will write a new fourth chapter and restructure the first, fifth, and concluding chapters. These changes are reflected in the following working chapter outline:

Introduction: Theory and Historiography, Foundations and Departures
Chapter 1: Types and Scripts: Male Witches and Demoniacs, 1580-1620
Chapter 2: Male Witches in England (Case study: the “Witches of Warboys,” 1589-1593)
Chapter 3: English Men & Possession Propaganda (Case study: Darrell/Harsnett, 1599-1603)
Chapter 4: Transatlantic Witchcraft-Possession from 1620-1690: Political, Religious, and
Domestic Violence
Chapter 5: Male Witches in New England (Case study: George Burroughs, 1692-1693)
Chapter 6: New England Men & Possession Propaganda (Case study: Mather/Calef, 1693-1710)
Conclusion: Continuity, Power, and Manhood in the Anglo-Atlantic

The Taft Center Fellowship offers something unprecedented for me: a year free from teaching responsibilities in which to focus entirely on writing, revising, and the preparation of the manuscript for submission to publishers. I have received some initial interest and requests for meetings from publication agents at conferences, and believe that the book will find a press given the extent of academic and popular interest in its subject matter. Even beyond the market for witchcraft scholarship, I believe the manuscript will find an audience because of the ways it represents—as a transatlantic gender analysis informed by feminist and literary theories—key departures from the existing literature.

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EDUCATION:

Sep 1999-Aug 2007 **University of Michigan**, Ann Arbor, MI
Ph.D. in History and Women's Studies, May 2007
M.A. History, Dec 2000
Dissertation: "Manhood, Witchcraft, and Possession in Old and New England"
Committee: Carol Karlsen, Susan Juster, Michael MacDonald, & Susan Scott Parrish

Sep 1990-May 1994 **Brown University**, Providence, RI
B.A. American History and B.A. Educational Studies (Honors), May 1994

TEACHING EXPERIENCE:

Sep 1, 2011-present **Assistant Professor of History**, University of Cincinnati
U.S. History I, to 1877
Introduction to Historical Thinking
Gender in Britain and North America, 1600-1850
Senior Seminar: Conflict and Rebellion in Early America
Graduate Seminar: Literatures of Early America

Sep 2007-Aug 2011 **Assistant Professor of History**, California State University-Sacramento
Survey of U.S. History, 1607-1877
Introduction to Historical Skills
Colonial America
The Age of the American Revolution
The Young Republic, 1790-1840
Women in Britain and North America, 1600-1850
Senior Seminar: Methods and Sources in Native American History
Graduate Seminar: Gender, Religion, and Power in Colonial America

Sep 2005-Dec 2005 **Instructor**, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI
Contact, Captivity, Religion, Slavery: Early American Gender History

Sep 2000-May 2004 **Graduate Student Instructor**, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI

Sep 1996-June 1999 **History/Social Studies Teacher**, Andover High School, Andover, MA
World Civilizations (ninth grade); U.S. History (tenth grade)

PUBLICATIONS:

Forthcoming in 2012 "Samuel Harsnett, John Darrell, and the Use of Gender as an English Possession
Propaganda Strategy, 1599-1603" in Richard Raiswell and Peter Dendle, eds., *The
Devil in Society in the Premodern World*, Centre for Reformation and Renaissance
Studies, University of Toronto Press.

- April 2012 “Salem witchcraft” in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Social History*, Lynn Dumenil, ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- Summer 2012 Review of Malcolm Gaskill, *Witchcraft: A Very Short Introduction*, in *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural*, Vol. 1 No. 2, 2012.
- June 2011 “Bringing Professional Development Home: From Field Study to Lesson Study,” with Mimi Coughlin, Mimi Lee, and Brenda Collum, Shifts and Trends in Social Studies Education, *Social Studies Review*, Vol. 50, June 2011.
- Sept 2010 Review of Owen Davies, *The Haunted: A Social History of Ghosts*, in *The British Scholar*, Vol. III, Issue 2, pp. 271-274.
- Sept 5, 2008 Review of the National Women’s History Museum’s online exhibit, “Building the New World: The Women of the Jamestown Settlement,” *The Public Historian*, Summer 2008, Vol. 30, No. 3, pp. 117–119.
- July 2007 Review of Ann M. Little, *Abraham in Arms: War and Gender in Colonial New England*, H-NewEngland, H-Net Reviews, July, 2007.
URL: <http://www.hnet.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=13375>

RECENT CONFERENCE PAPERS:

- March 8-11, 2012 “The Refuse of the Whole Creation?: Manhood, Misogyny, and Race in Anglo-Caribbean Travel Narratives,” at The Program in the Carolina Lowcountry and Atlantic World (CLAW) conference, “Race, Gender, and Sexualities in the Atlantic World.”
- Dec 2-4, 2011 “1776 in California: the De Anza Expedition and Colonial ‘America,’” at the *National Council for the Social Studies*, Washington D.C.
- Nov 4-6, 2011 “Violence, Witchcraft, and Manhood during England’s Civil War” at the *Midwest Conference of British Studies*, Terre Haute, IN
- June 9-11, 2011 “Domestic Violence and Witchcraft in Old and New England,” at the 2011 *Berkshire Conference on the History of Women* at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst
- Sept 24-25, 2010 “Analyzing Slavery and the American Revolution via Gender and Race,” *California Council for History Education*, Sacramento, CA
- June 11-14, 2009 “‘Snatch’d out of the unclean Divels Hands’: Indians, Witches, and the Gendering of Enemies in Puritan New England,” 15th Annual Conference of *The Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture*, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT

RESEARCH INTERESTS:

Gender history of colonial New England, early modern England, Atlantic history
Witchcraft, demonic possession, religion
Early publishing, satire and propaganda in England and New England