



Contagion in the Rye

The terror started toward the end of 1691. Young girls convulsed and saw visions of taunting witches. Local officials arrested the residents who appeared in the girls' apparitions. Within the year, 19 people and two dogs were executed for witchcraft. Scholars have long theorized what motivated the accusations. In the 1970s, a behavioral scientist suggested the convulsions were due to convulsive ergotism caused by a grain fungus. Modern medicine now supports the theory, but it remains unpopular. Why?

Communication scholar and author Dr. Emilie Lucchesi explores the history, the theory, and why it never dominated.

