

The flaws of the salem witch trials essay sample



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Cowering behind a chair, a young child screams, " Please, please leave me!" In bewilderment her mother watches, unable to do anything. " No! Stop speaking to me, leave me!" the girl cries in anguish. These were the days of the devil; the days of the Salem Witch Trials. An analysis of the trials provides a unique contrast to today's trials.

The Witch Trials began in the Puritan town of Salem in late February of 1692 and lasted through April of 1693. According to National Geographic in their online article " Prologue," the trials began when Elizabeth Paris, the daughter of Reverend Samuel Paris, and her two friends, Abigail Williams and Ann Putnam, began behaving strangely such as shouting nonsense, cowering under chairs and contorting themselves (Internet). The Puritans could only explain this as the supernatural. After much prodding, the three girls confessed to the women that were causing the behavior: Sarah Good, Sarah Osburn, and the Indian slave, Tituba. By confessing she was a witch, Tituba created a great fear among the Puritans. They embarked upon a mission to find all the witches in the town and its surrounding area. In the trials, according to National Geographic, over 160 people were accused of being witches; 25 of whom were either executed or died in prison (" Epilogue" Internet).

When compared to today's trial system, the Salem Witch Trials reveals itself quite flawed and illogical. The first difference is that trials and decisions today are based on facts. The Salem Witch Trials were brought upon by hysteria and were based simply on personal testimony and inexplicable actions. The Puritan belief system was based on laws and fear. Instead of believing in the power of the Holy Spirit to deliver them from the power of

the devil, they feared the power of a witch. This great fear brought them to kill many innocent people. Also, when someone was brought before a trial, they were asked if they knew anyone else that was a witch. The people named would be brought to trial based simply on the words of someone else. In a trial today, someone is brought to trial because there was a violation of the law and evidence led them to believe this person was possibly guilty. According to Brendan Dignan in his article " Governor, Sir William Phips," it was found that " The court's aggressive use of spectral evidence and the seeking of confessions, backed up by naming new suspects, led to the unrelenting spread of witchcraft accusations across the eastern Colony and brought discredit upon the trials"(Internet).

Secondly, the Salem Witch trials assumed someone was guilty; whereas, in a trial today someone is assumed innocent until proven guilty. When a potential witch came into court he/she was assumed as guilty and confessions were forced out of them. Because they were assumed guilty, it was very easy to convict them with spectral evidence. This was later on looked down upon by Reverend Increase Mather when he stated on October 2, 1692 that, " It were better that ten suspected witches should escape than one innocent person should be condemned"(" Epilogue" Internet).

The most important difference between the Salem Witch Trials and a trial held today is how the decision is reached. Today everyone is entitled to a jury of their peers. This jury consists of 12 people that listen to both sides of the issue, have no known bias, and use facts to make a decision. The Salem Witch Trials had one judge making decisions, and he was bias. In the midst of the trials, Governor William Phips appointed William Stoughton who was <https://assignbuster.com/the-flaws-of-the-salem-witch-trials-essay-sample/>

described as an “ unrelenting zealot, who looked to find guilt by means of spectral evidence, in nearly every one accused of witchcraft”(Dignan Internet). To have a fair and just trial there must be a group of people who are unbiased and base their decisions on facts.

In conclusion, the Salem Witch Trials had many flaws. In comparison to today’s trials they conflict in three different ways. If these trials had been unbiased and based on facts rather than hysteria innocent people could have been saved.