

Salem witch trial and the crucible

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The Salem Witch trials caused a lot of hysteria in history, during 1692. The town of Salem is located in Massachusetts. The hysteria was drawn from the beliefs of witches, witchcraft and black magic. The topics of witches, witchcraft and black magic have been questioned for many centuries. These questions have been dated all the way back to B. C. times. There have been writings in The Bible about people saying that others have been seen performing witchcraft and are in need of being saved by God.

There has been suspicion of witchcraft with the Egyptians, Native Americans, the Elizabethan Age, and Medieval times. Witchcraft and black magic can be described and seen in two ways. First, it can be looked upon as a religion of the ancient and traditional worships of the feminine, earthly, and amazing aspects of God which is considered a heresy. Secondly, it goes against the beliefs of the Christian Church. Witches and witchcraft are considered evil and are seen as making pacts, deals or connections with the Devil. It is not a coincidence that the first official witch trial took place in Massachusetts.

A witch trial is when a person is accused of being a witch; they will then have to go to court to be testified to be seen guilty or innocent by a judge. This first witch trial happened in 1648, to a woman named Margaret Jones. The man who accused her was John Winthrop. He was governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony at the time. His reason for accusing Margaret of being a witch was because anyone who touched Margaret was taken with deafness, vomiting, sickness or pains. She was seen practicing physics, which women were not allowed to be learning about at the time.

Also, anyone who she tried to help got worse and she foretold events that came true. The main reason why Winthrop accused her was because he was getting questioned about his authority by Margaret. Since she was a woman and was questioning him, he thought the best way to get rid of her was to send her to jail for being a “witch”. This became a common act used among many people in Salem to send the ones they hate to jail or even to death. The town of Salem is very small. Information and rumors can be spread around very quickly. This became a main factor of how hysteria started.

There was a Native American who was a slave to the Parris family, her name was Tituba. She soon began to create a chain known as Tituba’s Circle. This circle was her way of spreading stories about the supernatural. She would perform and teach tricks, spells, voodoo and chants to young Puritan girls. In the Puritan religion it is forbidden to ever be practicing witchcraft. Two girls who were in this chain were Betty Parris, nine years old, and Abigail Williams, eleven years old.

Abigail was Betty’s cousin and Tituba was Betty’s slave. The two girls all of a sudden started showing odd signs in their behaviors. 1) excruciating sensations of “pricking” or “pinching” (as by numberless pins and nails), also of “burning” (by invisible flames); (2) bizarre contortions of body parts: twisting, stretching, usual postures of extreme rigidity and limberness by turns; (3) frenzied motor activity: rolling on the ground, running about aimlessly, simulated “flying” and “diving”; occasional “barking” or other animal imitation; some impulse to injury or self or others; (4) periods of extreme immobility, amounting to paralysis; feelings of extraordinary

pressure on the chest; (5) anorexia: more or less complete inhibitions of eating; (6) occasional forced consumption of invisible liquids when overpowered by the witch; (7) “ frolicsome” intervals, mostly without pain; cavorting in a “ ludicrous” way, babbling impertinent nonsense; insults and gestures of physical assault toward bystanders, friends, and family(Rice, 24)

These conditions were rarely seen by doctors. There were no medicines to cure their behaviors, so they were diagnosed with witchcraft. They were thought to be under the hands of the devil. The girls received long periods of complete silence, lasting hours or days, to calm the girls down.

Now a day with the knowledge of doctors, these behaviors can be diagnosed as anxiety and can possibly be caused by being sexually abused or beaten.

Discrimination played a major part in the Salem Witch Trials. Most accusations were made upon old women. Betty and Abigail called upon two women, Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne to be witches. They said that they were seen to be in company with the devil and were sending their spirits to hurt them. The town believed them because Sarah Good was 39 but looked the age of 70. She had long gray hair, a raspy voice, wrinkled face and was seen smoking a pipe a lot. She was married two times, her first husband died and her second husband became poor after their marriage. The town's people believed she caused both of her marriages to fail.

Sarah Osborne was 69, widowed and had not been to the Puritan church for three years. The first execution in Salem was to a woman of 71, Rebecca Nurse. She was a well-respected woman in the town and was also a devoted member of the Puritan church. She had acquired land from the Putnam

family, but a rival over its ownership started to occur. Ann Putnam accused Rebecca of being a witch out of spite to get her family's land back. This led Rebecca to be put on trial. At first, she was proven innocent, but then Ann Putnam said that Rebecca tried again to send her spirit out. This time Rebecca was found guilty. On July 19th she was hung. The people in the town were getting over paranoid. People were accusing others left and right.

If someone was seen either mumbling to themselves, having an eccentric behavior, having a dispute with the Parris family, not going to church, going to a different church, speaking a different language, having connections to the previous Indian war, or expressing support for a recently accused witch then they were now being accused of witchcraft. Nineteen people were accused of witchcraft and were hung. They were hung at Gallows Hill from the month of June to August. Some of the ways people would try to get out of death for being accused as a witch were to flee Salem, accuse someone else, try to get pregnant or fake a pregnancy, confess even if innocent, plead innocent at trial or refuse to stand for a trial.

Getting pregnant or faking a pregnancy would give someone a year to live to have the baby and hope that the hysteria would be over. The confession of being a witch even if innocent actually didn't lead to death, just being sentenced to life in jail. The plead for innocence would be to hope that the judge would see you innocent. Out of the nineteen people hung, five of them were males. George Burroughs, John Willard, George Jacobs, John Proctor and Giles Corey were all convicted. The court was also getting out of hand and having inappropriate behavior. The men didn't have the suspicion of being

witches, like the woman. They went against the court to try and prove innocence for the accused and because of that they were convicted.

Finally on October 3rd, Governor Phipps in a sermon to other ministers, showed evidence that the witch trials should end. The court was dissolved and was not allowed to have any more witch trials. Property of the accused was given back. Those who were already found guilty were pardoned. The remaining accused were tried and then found innocent. In Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*, there are many similarities to the Salem Witch Trials. The play is based on the people and the events of the Salem Witch Trials. The play shows how the town's people were getting consumed by the thought of witchcraft. It displays how people were going behind each other's backs to get revenge.

It also demonstrates how the people acted in the court. Since *The Crucible* is a drama there are some parts that are not true. There was no incidence where a whole bunch of young girls were dancing in the woods. Abigail was not seventeen and did not have an affair with John Proctor. In conclusion, the hysteria during the Salem Witch Trials led to nineteen deaths. The want for revenge went to an extreme. Many innocent people were convicted without being properly heard, and their deaths came too soon. The Salem Witch Trials will never be forgotten or go unnoticed. They will forever be a reminder that no one will ever die again convicted as a witch in the United States.