

Salem witch trials in
"the crucible" by
author miller essay
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Salem Witch Trials in “ The Crucible” by Author Miller Essay Sample

Every one in a while, America erupts into mass hysteria because of the ranting of some crazy people. In the 1600's, we had the Salem witch trials, and as described in the book, “ The Crucible”, a group of girls falsely accuse their neighbors of witchcraft, and regular, innocent people are hung. Then, in the 1950's, a man named Joseph McCarthy sparked a craze of accusing people, mainly government officials, of being communist, thus scarring their careers. The McCarthy hearing are similar to the Salem witch hunt because the accuser exaggerates and fabricates evidence, the accused are used as scapegoats for society's problems, and McCarthy and the Salem girls use the accusations to obtain power.

In neither McCarthyism nor the Salem witch trials were real evidence put forth to prove the guilt of the accused. Instead, people readily agreed with the accusers, having to assume that they were telling the truth. In the fifties, with the war going badly in Korea, the communists were making advances in China and Eastern Europe, which caused the American public to be scared of communists infiltrating the U. S. government. Hundreds of people- actors, government workers, and even military personnel, were accused by McCarthy (Joseph McCarthy - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). Some admitted to being affiliated with the communist party, and lost their jobs. In 17th century Salem, the girls would completely fabricate evidence against the witches.

" Suddenly, from an accusatory attitude, her face turns, looking into the air above- it is truly frightened.

Danforth, apprehensively: What is it child?

Abigail, looking about in the air, clasping her arms about her as though cold:

I- I know not. A wind, a cold wind, has come. Her eyes fall on Mary Warren."

(108)

In this scene, Abigail clearly pretends that she sees Mary Warren's spirit, and then the other girls go along with it. At these witch trials, the evidence was created by the accusers, and could not be refuted; however, during McCarthyism, Joe would not present evidence, but state hardly believable claims.

In McCarthyism and the Salem witch trials, the accused were being used as scapegoats for society's problems. During McCarthyism, communism around the world was spreading, to a point that the ratio of people under the reign of communism compared to free was 8 to 5. Americans were scared, and McCarthy fed on their fear. In a speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, he began the speech saying, " I have in my hand a list of 205 cases of individuals who appear to be either card-carrying members or certainly loyal to the Communist Party," (Friedman). In 17th century Salem, people lived in a theocracy that restricted individual freedoms with tight rules that led to the girls dancing in the woods. John Proctor realizes that Abigail and the other accusers are not genuine, " Why do you never wonder if Parris be innocent, or Abigail? Is the accuser always holy now? Were they born this morning as clean as God's fingers?

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I'll tell you what's walking Salem—vengeance is walking Salem. We are what we always were in Salem, but now the little crazy children are jangling the keys of the kingdom, and common vengeance writes the law!" (77). The girls are trying to shift the punishment of their dancing to the punishment of others, and on top of that, people like Putnam are using this opportunity to cry witchcraft against their farming competitors. In the 1950s, McCarthy found scapegoats to the problem of communism in the nation, and as in Salem, these people were unjustly accused.

Both McCarthy and the accusers in *The Crucible* used the accusations to gain power. McCarthy actually used communist sympathizing accusations to gain political power. In 1950, during his campaign against Millard Tydings, an altered photograph picturing Tydings put next to a well known communist was distributed. This dirty method of campaigning won McCarthy the election and ruined Tyding's political career (Joseph McCarthy - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). In *The Crucible*, the witch-hunt enabled neighbors to gain land by crying witchcraft and to feel justified because of long-standing hatred of their neighbors (9). In court, Giles Corey charges Putnam, " If Jacob hangs for a witch he forfeit up his property—that's law! And there is none but Putnam with the coin to buy so great a piece. This man is killing his neighbors for their land!" (96). Putnam used the girl's accusatory powers to help him gain land from his hanged neighbors. Times of fear and hysteria allow people like McCarthy, Putnam, and Abigail to get their way.

In both of these times of history, people took advantage of turbulent times. These were both cases of accused people being guilty until proven innocent, though there was basically no way to prove someone innocent. Though <https://assignbuster.com/salem-witch-trials-in-the-crucible-by-author-miller-essay-sample/>

Joseph McCarthy ruined hundreds of careers, he never was able to convict a single suspected Communist of a crime. In *The Crucible*, however, almost 20 people are put to death for their accused crimes. This shows that our nation has learned from past experiences that people are innocent until proven guilty in a court of law. Nevertheless, in the public eye, a person accused of a crime is perceived at fault until he clears his name. Just as in *The Crucible* and in the 1950s, during a time of national fear, it is still possible that people will believe anything that finds a solution to immediate dangers.