

Salem witch trials – bill of rights

Law



“ I plead the fifth!!” this along with the courtesies included in the Bill of Rights gave the citizens of a newly founded country liberties that were not granted to them before. A prime example of these injustices is the Salem Witch Trials as described by Arthur Miller in *The Crucible*. For example, the first amendment guarantees freedom to practice religion however one may choose, the fourth prevents unjust search and confiscation of property, and the eighth assures protection from excessive punishment.

In *The Crucible*, there is a preferred method of practicing religion and anyone who goes against it is looked down upon and rejected. John Proctor is harassed for the fact that he plows on Sunday instead of attending church services and that he did not have his youngest child baptized by Parris. This leads to an argument about whether John Proctor has sided with the devil. 2 Whereas, if “ freedom of religion” had been granted back in those times, this scenario would not have taken place- instead, Proctors’ own view of religion would not have been ridiculed and people would not have assumed him to be with the devil.

During the Salem Witch Trials, innocent citizens were not only unjustly accused of witchcraft, but their only salvation was to claim themselves guilty. This goes directly against the Fifth Amendment which says that one cannot be forced to testify against oneself. 1 Also in the Fifth Amendment citizens were not to be tried without being properly accused, which was hardly the case in the Salem Witch Trials when people were considered guilty from accusation from petty grudges others may have held.

Another amendment that contrasts directly with *The Crucible* is the Eighth Amendment which states that “nor cruel and unusual punishments [be] inflicted.”¹ During the Salem Witch Trials, the accused were horribly mistreated, tortured, and executed in a very harsh fashion. Some executions included hangings, burning at the stake, being pressed by large stones until dead, and dismemberment from tying limbs to horses and sending them in different directions. In *The Crucible*, Giles Corey and John Proctor die of these impractical methods.

If the Bill of Rights had been in place the Salem Witch Trials would have never taken place. Furthermore, the Salem Witch Trials could have been one of the underlying causes for the reconstruction of the Constitution, and the manifestation of the Bill of Rights. The Salem Witch Trials, as depicted in *The Crucible*, proved that citizens were in need of basic liberties that would protect them from this kind of spectacle from occurring again.