

Salem witch trials assignment

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Over 150 men and women at this time were accused of witchcraft and sentenced to life in prison, and twenty-five were later given the death penalty for not confessing to witchcraft. At each case little or no evidence was ever presented. Accusations were made, fingers were pointed, and there was little the accused could do to defend themselves. The Salem Witch Trials were a dark time in United States History, yet it enabled the colonists to recognize their irrationality, which shaped the United States Judicial system forever.

Quite simply, the witchcraft outbreak came out of a feud between two families, the Porters and the Putnam, over a long-standing land dispute. In February of 1692, Reverend Samuel Paris returned home to find his nine-year-old daughter Betty and two other girls, including Abigail Williams, attempting to conjure and speak with evil spirits with assistance from his land slave, Tuba. When the girls realized they had been caught, they displayed a series of unexplainable fits, including violent convulsions.

The young girls professed to have been tormented by apparitions, demonic entities, and other acts of witchcraft. The town of Salem, with evidence before them, was now convinced that evil was among them. Reverend Paris and the three girls saw their opportunity to obtain a long-awaited revenge. Here lies the beginning of the hysteria and random accusations of witchcraft, which started the Salem Witch Trials. Family feud, religious extremism, teenage boredom and curiosity, selfish jealousies, and blindness of the judicial system of the time brought about the imprisonment and even death of innocent men and women. “Innocent until proven guilty” were four simple words never considered during the Salem Witch Trials of 1692. At this time, <https://assignbuster.com/salem-witch-trials-assignment-essay-samples-2/>

all required was a claim or accusation in order to issue an arrest or call for trial. Having this knowledge and perceiving the power they now had over the town, the teenage girls began spewing out the names of the men and women whom they envied, as well as family rivals. That was all it took, one word from the accusers meant your life was now in the hands of an unjust court.

Once arrested, Finn or more Magistrates, often-recognized religious leaders of Salem, would listen to what the accused had to say and make the decision of innocence or guilt without any further evidence. If the accused sounded remotely guilty, he or she was sent to jail to either serve a term or await further trial. In the case of the Salem Witch Trials, so many men and women were accused, there was not enough time to try them all, resulting in many being left in jail to die. The seemingly lucky ones who received a trial were brought to court where they must face a Magistrate and a Grand Jury.

At this time, a jury was made up Of religious figures, including Reverend Paris, men and women attending the trial, and witnesses, including the teenage girls who had accused them. These girls would often pick at the Magistrate's mind by screaming that the accused was bringing demon spirits into the courtroom and bewitching them if they spoke up of them. They backed these ridiculous accusations with random convulsions and fainting spells. This often led to the false confession from the accused. Once a confession had been made, the girls' convulsions and shrieks would remarkably subside.

Even without the girls' tricks, the accused had a very hard time defending themselves, because courts at this time would hear anything, including rumors, gossip, and hearsay as evidence. If one was found guilty he or she had two options: One, confess and repent of your sin-even if you never actually committed the sin. This is the option that the Magistrate pressed for people to choose. After confession, the court would allow the prisoners to go free often to attend Samuel Paprika's church and be a part of the court jury.

The second option was to maintain innocence and face the death penalty for doing so. If local court could not make a decision the case was then brought to The Court of O'er and Terminate, tribunal court appointed by gubernatorial proclamation, and they then made the final decision on guilt or innocence. The head judge of this tribunal court in Salem just so happened to be William Sought, who was an obsessed witch hunter. Therefore, very few of the accused came out of his trials unscathed. Innocent until proven guilty' were four simple words taken much more seriously after the Salem Witch Trials. In fact, shortly after the trials had come to a close, in January of 1693, at least twenty-two witches who had been put in jail after being found guilty were re- tried to be found innocent. Only five of the estimated TVB??'0 hundred people accused of being witches were actually found guilty, and these five spent life in jail, rather than the death penalty. Today our judicial system has safeguards in place to try to prevent another situation as horrible as the Salem Witch Trials.

The courts realize that people are often unreliable and insincere, that what they say they witnessed might not actually be what occurred. Therefore, legal procedures have been established in order to discourage any instance

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of hearsay or false accusation. An accuser must submit to taking an oath in front of a judge and jury, swearing on the Bible to be honest at all times in court and also be willing to face cross examination in court. If one is caught in a lie, they are viewed as a criminal, and face charges of perjury. Perjury is a Federal offense carrying a sentence of up to five years in a Federal prison.

The Jury is now made up of carefully selected peers who are thoroughly interviewed so that the attorneys and judge can assess their Views and beliefs and determine if they are suited to sit on a specific jury or not. A judge is now elected by the citizens of the town as opposed to being a reverend, religious figure, or town authority. In conclusion, the Salem Witch Trials have had great impact on today's society by transforming our freedoms in the judicial System forever. Bibliography Borer, Paul and Stephen Einsteinium. The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim