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Salem Witch Craft Trial

The infamous Salem Witchcraft Trial was one of the most heinous crimes committed on innocents in the history of America. For a land which was created on the basis of religious freedom, it was unforeseeable that something like this would happen in that time and age.

Although the catholic pope of the 15th century deemed it appropriate to chase, hunt and kill people who practiced witchcraft, no one had foreseen the effect this much hatred could have on simple souls who lived in harmony with nature and its cycles.

The moral panic, mass frenzy and the wicked lynching by a legally sanctioned autocrat were transported to the new world which was to be a beacon of hope for all religions and ways of life.

Unfortunately, in Salem, Massachusetts, the drama of witch-hunt continued. During the years of 1692 and 1693, in the village of Salem, Betty Paris, a 9 year old, and her cousin Abigail Williams, about 11 years old, began to have epileptic fits. It could have been that they ate some wild flowers, herbs, fungi or berries that were toxic to their system.

However, instead of finding the reason for the strange behavior, their guardian and Betty's father, Reverend Samuel Parris decided that it was all the work and witchcraft of the children's nurse and babysitter, Tituba, who belonged to another community, practiced Voodoo and therefore was not a Puritan. She could have been a native American or of Spanish descent.

In addition to Tituba, they also found two other single women who didn't have anyone else to care for them. This pattern was similar to the witch hunts of the 15th century when single women who owned land that the neighbors or other family members coveted were the ones who were killed in the name of Witchcraft.





As the mass hysteria continued, more and more women were added to the list and found themselves in prison for a crime that they didn't commit. Their possessions were taken away and many of them lost their homes and other privileges. Women and some men, simple as a result of accusations, were jailed as a result of interrogations with children as young as four years of age!

Sarah Osborne, one of the three arrested initially, died in jail on May 10, 1692. In June of 1692, deliberations began and as a result, Bridget Bishop was executed by hanging. Roger Toothaker died in prison on June 16 and on July 19, Sarah Good, Elizabeth Howe, Susannah Martin, Sarah Wildes and Rebecca Nurse were executed.

Those who weren't witches as well as those who confessed to being witches were executed. Those who wouldn't plead guilty were tortured into confession of a crime that they didn't commit. This is happening even today as some in the police force get more vicious and deceitful.

Many cruel and horrific methods were used to "test" for evidence of witchcraft. These human beings were not only arrested and paraded through the streets, they were tortured and their bodies used to perform a number of "tests" so that the executors could decide whether they were guilty of their crime.

The patriarchal beliefs of the Puritans (and most communities at that time) induced people to expect women to be subservient to men. Women were seen as weaker, more cunning, lustful and in the Devil's service by nature while the men looked at themselves as honorable, hardworking and on the side of God. By the way, the concept of a "Devil" or "Satan" is the invention of the Roman Catholic religion. So it was the perverted ideas of the controlling cultures in combination with the ignorance and distorted beliefs of a religious system that paved the way for this mini holocaust.

Before the Salem Witch trials went to a close, nineteen innocent people were hanged; one eighty year old man was pressed to death with boulders and 13 innocent people died in prison.

Incidents such as these prove that it is easy to provoke hysteria in the masses and to continue down the path of destruction. We must be aware of the fact that our judicial system, even though it is among the best in the world, can still be manipulated and used to hurt innocents.

Always remember the popular poem credited to Pastor Martin Niemöller (1892-1954) about the inactivity of some German citizens following the Nazi rise to power and the destruction of their chosen targets, one group after another:

First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out--because I was not a communist





Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out--because I was not a trade unionist;

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out--because I was not a Jew;

Then they came for me--and there was no one left to speak out for me.

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