Salem Witchcraft Trials Essay, Research Paper

One of the most devastating events in American events in American history was the Salem Witchcraft Trials. Due to a few hysterical girls’ accusations and the fear of a village, twenty people were executed and hundreds were put in jail. Now the question still asked today is, “Were the people accused really witches possessed by the devil?” No, they were not witches nor were they involved with the devil. In fact, the people who were at fault were really the accusers. The puritan people (the ones involved in the trials) had endured many coincidental hardships and dangers, which they blamed on the devil. This helped fuel their very religious and superstitious ways ( ). In fact, the minister’s sermons were oftentimes more anti-devil than pro-christ. In addition, merrymaking and playing were considered very non-religious activities to these people ( ). Their entire lives were devoted to working, and the children were usually very bored. If a little girl was caught playing with a doll, then she was sent to the minister for a long talking-to, since even dolls were considered to play a part in witchery ( ). When the girls first started acting disturbed, it was after hearing stories about children who had been tormented by witches ( ). The girls would throw tantrums and have fits in which they would run around, screaming that the devil and evil spirits were torturing them. This kind of behavior was defined as being an act of the devil ( ). But strangely enough, they never seemed to have these fits when there was not an audience around to see them ( ). Therefore, the bewildered people asked the girls who harmed them, and the girls just started giving them names of fellow villagers. This is when the actual court trials started. During the trials, the main source for prosecution was through spectral evidence. People who had been afflicted with the devil supposedly had a “second sight” to see their tormenters. Therefore anyone that they reported to have “seen” was automatically thought to be guilty ( ). There were two different types of tests given during these trials. These were used to “prove” that someone was a witch. The first test to see if a person was a witch was if they could say the Lord’s prayer correctly. If the accused was indeed a witch, then they would say “hollowed” instead of “hallowed” and add phrases not in the King James version of the Bible ( ). The second test was referred to as the “touch test”. When the accused person looked at the afflicted girls, the girls would fall on the floor. Then the accused would have to touch the affected person, as if they were removing their spell. However, if the accused person looked at any other person in the courtroom, those people were not affected ( ).

Another piece of evidence proving there was fraud in the courtroom is that one of the accusers was reported to have been seen taking pins out of her dress, sticking herself and then screaming she was being tormented by witches ( ). There was also a five-year-old girl who was accused of witchcraft. However, she just agreed to whatever the judges asked her during her questioning, because she was too young to understand ( ). The worst proof that they used against the accused people was that if they pleaded innocent, then everyone thought that they were lying ( ) because of the influence of the devil. Many people would just say that they were asked who else was guilty of being a witch ( ), since they most likely had come in contact with other witches. Many innocent people were brought forth as witches in this way. Some of the accusers were thought to have been trying to get back at their enemies by accusing them of witchcraft. In one incident, the girls who were the main accusers were giggling as they said they would have anyone they disliked hung for practicing witchcraft. When questioned about this, they declared that they “must have some sport” ( ). This again referred to the boredom children suffered during this time. All of a sudden, the trials came to an abrupt halt. Everyone just stopped believing what the girls said ( ). It was all too atrocious and coincidental. However, before the trials had come to a complete stop, 20 people had been executed and others had died in jail. In 1697, the state of Massachusetts publicly asked for pardon, saying that they were “sadly deluded and mistaken” ( ). The Salem Witchcraft Trials lasted only a year, but they occupy an entire page of history. It was best put when Marilyn Roach (an accused witch) said to always remember “that all such tragedies begin with ordinary people–like us” ( ). THE SALEM WITCHCRAFT TRIALS OF SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS