

Devout Desperation: The Salem Witch Trials and the Holocaust

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Imagine your mom accusing you of stealing and eating some freshly baked cookies. You were not around and know you could not have possibly eaten them. Your siblings blamed you for the cookie-snatching. Your mom believes your siblings over you. And because of you “stealing” cookies, you are not allowed out. Your siblings felt guilty that they had done it and did not want to fess up, so they blamed you. You had to deal with a similar, but not as severe punishment, as the millions of Jews during the Holocaust and the twenty people of the Salem Witch Trials had to face: being unfairly blamed for something you did not do. In The Crucible, Arthur Miller indicates that desperation played a key role in these trials and fanaticism took over the town of Salem. The people of Salem believed it was their right to do God’s work and find the witches. Likewise, Adolf Hitler ridded the nation of anyone considered a non-pure German: Jews, Gypsies, Homosexuals, etc. Although Salem Witch Trials and the Holocaust are roughly 240 years apart, they both are similar in some aspects: many exterminations, scape-goats, and persecutions.

In Massachusetts and in Europe, groups of people were killed because of their diverse views on religion. In Salem, some twenty people were persecuted of witchcraft or not abiding by Puritan religion. During the Holocaust, six million people were persecuted because they were “racial enemies” of the so-called “superior” race. “In 1933, the Jewish population of Europe stood at over nine million.” But then, “By 1945, the Germans and their collaborators killed nearly two out of every three European Jews as part of the [...] Nazi policy to murder the Jews of Europe” (The Holocaust). The Jewish population was dwindling all because of Hitler’s attempt of wiping out all of the “inferior races”. During the Holocaust, the pure German, or Aryan race, was seen above all others. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum says, “The Nazis believed that superior races had not just the right but the obligation to subdue and even exterminate inferior ones.” This shows how the Nazi regime wanted to eliminate all races other than the Aryan race.

During the witch trials and the Holocaust, it is apparent that people were persecuted unfairly. Martha Giles was accused of witchery based upon her reading habits and was later sentenced to death. Martha’s husband, Corey Giles, said his wife was “so taken with books” [...] “but it were no witch I blamed her for” (40). For the duration of the Holocaust, Jews and other non-pure Germans were killed without any consent. If you wore the Star of David, you were already associated as “dead”, “gone”, or “executed” and you had a slim chance of survival. These persecutions depicted how morally corrupt people were like the ministers in charge of the village or in the case of the Holocaust, Adolf Hitler and others who followed his Nazi ways.

The Salem Witch Trials and the Holocaust were significant events that portrayed how people could manipulate what is right and just then turn it into something completely opposite. The witch trials were no longer about just finding witches; they were about lying to avoid the possibilities of being condemned to death. The Holocaust was not just about the purifying of the nation; it was a mass extinction of the Jewish people. These occasions both lead to the literal term of an “end result”. In both the Salem Witch Trials and the Holocaust: eliminating a race, blaming another person, and condemning the innocent, were all found during the time of these events.