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## “McCarthyism and The Crucible” Does history repeat itself?

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### Abstract

It is a general belief that history repeats itself. The purpose of writing this research paper is to find out whether history repeats itself in case of The Salem Witch Trials and McCarthyism. If history repeated itself, to what extent it was repeated? Were both events two similar sides of the same picture or there was some difference in both events? It seems apparently that The Salem Witch Trials were revived in case of McCarthyism because many things were parallel in both events. Many people are of the opinion that McCarthyism was a sequel of The Salem Witch Trials because innocent people were accused in both events. Both leaders had personal gains behind their campaigns and the terrible campaigns spread fear among the people. Both events caused damage to the reputation of the innocent people. Both events occurred in America. The Salem Witch Trials took in Salem The allegations were false and fictitious. The paper will find answers by keeping the above questions in view.

**Keywords:** The Crucible, the Salem Trials, Joseph McCarthy, McCarthyism

### Introduction

It is a general belief that history repeats itself. The purpose of writing this research paper is to find out whether history repeats itself in case of The Salem Witch Trials and McCarthyism. If history repeated itself, to what extent it was repeated? Were both events two similar sides of the same picture or there was some difference in both events? It seems apparently that The Salem Witch Trials were revived in case of McCarthyism because many things were parallel in both events. Many people are of the opinion that McCarthyism was a sequel of The Salem Witch Trials because innocent people were accused in both events. Both leaders had personal gains behind their campaigns and the terrible campaigns spread fear among the people. Both events caused damage to the reputation of the innocent people. Both events occurred in America. The Salem Witch Trials took in Salem the allegations were false and fictitious. The paper will find answers by keeping the above questions in view.

### The Salem Witch Trials

Arthur Miller's "The Crucible" covers the history of The Salem Witch Trials. The Salem Witch Trials took place in the minute New England town of Salem, Massachusetts in 1692. Salem was a small village of puritans. It was surrounded by a forest which was considered the Devil's property. The forest was a symbol of evil for the villagers and all types of activities were banned in the forest because of puritan belief. The evil was a constant cause of worry for the puritans because evil could inflict the lives of the people. Witch trials took place many times between 1620 to 1700 and 16 persons were killed before Salem Trials. Three young girls and a slave from Barbados were found dancing naked in the forest around a kettle by Parris. The girls were not allowed to perform such activities like dancing in 1600s because these activities were not socially acceptable. The girls, Abigail Williams, Betty Parris, Mercy Lewis, and Tituba were immediately accused of being witches just because of dancing. The girls accused some women from the village that they were practicing witchcraft. The accused were put into jail. The girls wanted to save themselves therefore they accused the woman women whose names came to their minds. Only Abigail Williams accused Elizabeth of being a witch because she had a personal grudge against her. Abigail had a lust for Elizabeth's husband. Abigail Williams and Proctor had an affair. Abigail wanted to get rid of her. The girls accused more than 100 people and all of them had good names in the society. Court trials were held for witch-hunting. The accusers had two choices before them, either to confess and accuse others or to face death. All accusations were false and fictitious. A lot of people's lives were ruined because of a couple of

foolish girls. The victims had to lose their reputation in the society and their lives too. The trials spread a strange fear among the people. The court did not try to find out the truth and believed blindly. The dance in the woods resulted in the death of twenty innocent people. Nineteen were hung and the other one had his head crushed in. later on, Abigail ran away to another village and the court trials came to an end after destructing the lives of many innocent people. Another factor in stopping the killing was that Governor's wife was also accused of being a witch.

### McCarthyism

Joseph McCarthy was a US senator from Wisconsin since 1946. He was a drunkard and had not good reputation in the society. He had also not done any great work while he was a senator. He was a weak legislature, belonged to Republican Party and often voted for the Democratic Party. He was to start a campaign for re-elections but he had nothing in his credit which could be helpful for campaign. He consulted with his friends about election and decided that he would use anti-communist approach for campaign. After the Second World War, a cold war started between The United States of America and Russia. The Soviet Union was a Damocles' sword for U.S.A because of nuclear attack. Joseph McCarthy made the most of that situation. In Wheeling, West Virginia, McCarthy accused two hundred and five people of being communists in the early 1950s. He wanted to gain respect and political power by accusing the people. There was a natural hatred against Russia therefore, he became successful. Led by Joseph McCarthy, the House Committee on Un-Americans Activities sought to expose so-called communist sympathizers in the U.S. McCarthy came forward with the list by saying: While I cannot take the time to name all of the men in the State Department who have been named as members of the Communist Party and members of a spy ring, I have here in my hand a list of 205 people that were known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working and shaping the policy of the State Department. (issacs,147)

Those who were labeled as communists had to lose their jobs and reputation. Most of the people, who were accused, belonged to business class and Hollywood. McCarthy had personal gains behind this campaign. He stated that the accusers were trying to overthrow the United States Government. He belonged to The Republican Party and his victims were the democrats. At first the public began to wonder how far it would go. After McCarthy accused the U.S Army of housing Communists, his committee began to go down hill. The army strongly defended themselves as they sought to end McCarthy's "witch-hunts". In November of 1954 the Watkins committee censured McCarthy under two counts. The Senate voted to condemn him on December 22, 1954. Philosopher George Santayana best states McCarthy's fatal error – *"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."*

Similarities and Contrast between the Salem Witch Trials and McCarthyism:

The Salem Witch Trials and McCarthyism consist of similar and contrasting elements. Many times, the things go in parallel. The Salem Witch Trials took place in the late seventies (1692) and McCarthy Trials took place in 1950s. Both incidents deal with two different periods in the history which had totally different characteristics. The reason behind McCarthy Trials was political power and personal fame. The Salem Witch Trials occurred because of personal grudge and religious belief. Abigail Williams had personal grudge against

Elizabeth and wanted to remove Elizabeth from her way. McCarthy was a political person and a member of the government. Abigail was a simple girl but she influenced the authorities through her tactics. The Salem Witch Trials were totally unfair and the accused persons had no chance to present their stance before the court whereas McCarthy Trials were fair in their proceedings. It happened because there was no established legal document in the times of Salem Trials. Those who were accused of being witches were hanged. No death occurred due to McCarthy Hearings but the people were only blacklisted. The women were accused during the Salem Trials whereas the Democrats were accused of being communists during McCarthy Hearings. Those people who were accused of being witches lost their reputation forever because Salem was a limited area and the people had no chances. Those people who were accused of being communists lost their reputation for a little period because they had many chances to earn fame again. The people of the 1950s had fear of being communists and the people from Salem had fear of being witches.

Though McCarthy Hearings and The Salem Witch Trials had many contrasting elements yet they also had many things which were similar in both periods. The accused persons in both incidents were innocent. The accused women in Salem were named without any proof and the same thing was repeated in 1950s during McCarthy Hearings. Communists were scapegoats for society's problems and witches were also considered scapegoats for society's problems. Both events occurred in U.S. Arthur Miller was the writer of "The Crucible" and he also faced McCarthy Hearings. Both leaders became very famous during the trials but lose their respect in the end. The people remained silent because of fear when the trials were on the peak. The accusations were false in both cases.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the above discussion makes it clear that history repeats itself in some aspects but does not repeat itself in all aspects in case of The Salem Witch Trials and McCarthyism. The Salem Witch Trials repeated themselves in some aspects through McCarthy Hearings but McCarthy Hearings were not as harsh and devastating as The Salem Witch Trials. The Salem Witch Trials caused deaths of many innocent people but this brutal aspect of the history was not repeated in 1950s McCarthy Hearings. The Salem Witch Trials damaged the reputation of many persons and this damage could not be retrieved whereas McCarthyism did not cause a permanent damage to the reputation of the people. The reason behind both events was personal gain and the victims were innocent people but trials were fair during McCarthy Hearings. Both incidents spread fear among the people and they had to keep their mouths shut because of that fear. Many elements were found parallel in both events whereas many elements were also found in contrast. Therefore, on the whole it was a half repetition of the history. The results were very much different as were expected before this study. The history should revive itself but it should be pleasant history that should be revived. There should not be created such environment as harsh and terrible history (Salem Witch Trials) might get a chance to repeat itself.

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