From Witch-hunts and Communist-hunts to Terrorist-hunts: Placing Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* in the Post-September 11 Power Politics

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He who believes in the Devil, already belongs to him (Thomas Mann in *Doctor Faustus*).

Abstract

Miller’s *The Crucible* (1953), written and performed at the height of McCarthyism in the early 1950s, contextualizes the tragic happenings in Salem Village and Salem Town, Massachusetts, from June through September of 1692. The unmistakable and frightening parallels between events at Salem and the 1950s House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) hearings present a powerful allegory for our contemporary world, especially the horrendous events of 9/11 and their aftermath. *The Crucible* employs the historical events of the Salem Witch Trials to develop a powerful critique of moments in human history when reason and fact became clouded by irrational fears and the desire to place the blame for society’s failures and problems on certain individuals or groups. While *The Crucible* achieved its greatest resonance in the 1950s – when Senator Joseph McCarthy’s reign of terror was still fresh in the public mind – Miller’s work has elements that have continued to provoke public and intellectual responses across the globe. A number of similarities can be found in terms of mob psyche, power politics and treatment of the accused in the case of the Salem witch-hunts, McCarthy’s
Communist-hunts, and today’s terrorist-hunts. The present study aims at analyzing the way power is politically manipulated in times of crisis. Hysteria, paranoia, and a carefully constructed fear are common threads in all three cases. The result is social stigmatization, stereotyping and persecution of the worst kind. The play has a broad sweep of moral contexts in which the mob mentality overrides personal integrity and places blame on scapegoats as it proves easier to do this than confront deep-rooted societal inadequacies, created especially by global capitalism.

Fanatical Othering

Human history is replete with instances of “Fanatical Othering” due to moral and security panic, often created by those who stand to gain from such paranoia. Monolithic super-structural “ideologies” are always deployed by power-holders; they shape subjectivities, structure social relations and legitimate forms of power, and use state apparatuses to do violence against those who contest such superstructures.¹ Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer define moral regulation as “a project of normalizing, rendering natural, taken for granted, in a word ‘obvious’, what are in fact ontological and epistemological premises of a particular and historical form of social order. Moral regulation is coextensive with state formation and state forms are always animated and legitimated by a particular moral ethos.”² One only has to look at post-9/11 USA today to be reminded that moral/political/social regulation imposed on the masses by the religious right is not the

² Corrigan and Sayer, The Great Arch, 4.
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purview of “Third World” or Islamic societies alone. This phenomenon has a much older history in the West. The Salem witch trials are the most glaring example.

What happened in Salem

Miller has almost faithfully adapted the actual historical happenings, except that he has raised the age of the girl characters, perhaps to emphasise their sexuality. Two dogs were also executed as suspected accomplices of the witches; Miller does not mention it.

Scholars have noted potentially telling differences between accused and accusers in Salem, Massachusetts. Most of the accused lived to the south of the town, and were generally better off financially, than most of the accusers. In a number of cases, accusing families stood to gain property from the conviction of the alleged witches. Also, accused and accusers generally took opposite sides in a congregational schism that had split the Salem community before the outbreak of hysteria. The conclusion that many scholars draw from these patterns is that property disputes and congregational feuds played a major role in determining who lived, and who died, in the Salem of 1692.

Causes of Madness at Salem

An unfortunate mix of reasons are known to be responsible for such a moral/security panic: the circumstances of their transatlantic migrations, the socio-political doctrines of the founding fathers of

the USA in the 1600s, an ongoing frontier war with the Indians, economic conditions, congregational strife, teenage boredom, and personal jealousies can account for the spiraling accusations, trials, and executions. Against such odds, they grew over-protective, for they had come to America to establish a New Israel. Therefore, any slight deviation from the norms, which were considered their anchor sheet for survival, was enough to create panic and mass hysteria. Life in Salem in the 1690s would offer little amusement.

In Arthur Miller’s play *The Crucible*, the slave girl Tituba, becomes the novelty for the young girls of Salem because of her knowledge from her native Barbados. She speaks and sings in a language unknown to the others and mixes a cauldron of soup containing chicken blood. The girls dance around this in secret; dancing was also prohibited in Puritan Salem.  

All these things started out as tiny guilty pleasures, but soon, fear and guilt overtook the girls and what had started out as sport due to boredom, grew into a monstrous situation as the accusations became deadly. At such occasions, the power of suggestion, that someone is casting a spell on us, spreads like wild fire. The beginning of group hysteria is easy to see at the end of Act I of *The Crucible*. Once Tituba confesses publicly to Reverend Parris, the other girls of Salem, Betty and Abigail, also start naming names. This natural occurrence in the play is the first of many parallels to the naming of names during the McCarthy hearings.

Voltaire said that if there were no God, it would be necessary to invent Him. If this is true, man must surely also invent the Devil.

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5 The psychological, economic, pathological, social, religious, and historical reasons for the spread of these causes are very well documented in Frances Hill’s two excellent studies *A Delusion of Satan* (Cambridge:Mass.: Da Capo Press 2002), and *The Salem Witch Trials Reader* (Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo Press, 2000).
This is the only convenient place to dump one’s fears and blames. In a small community with one outsider, represented in The Crucible by Tituba, it was easy to assign, or transfer blame. In the same vein, blaming the Communists for everything was in vogue in the Cold War era.

In the introduction to his Collected Plays, and his interpretive remarks scattered throughout The Crucible, Miller calls our attention, almost with Shavian zeal, to the play’s contemporary relevance:

It was not only the rise of “McCarthyism” that moved me, but something which seemed much more weird and mysterious. It was the fact that a political, objective, knowledgeable campaign from the far Right was capable of creating not only a terror, but a new subjective reality, a veritable mystique which was gradually assuming even a holy resonance…. It was as though the whole country had been born anew, without a memory even of certain elemental decencies which a year or two earlier no one would have imagined could be altered, let alone forgotten.6

An overriding theme of The Crucible is the abuse of power. The power of the church and its ministers to the Puritan community is paramount to the whole witchcraft trial. Miller creates a world where the authorities of the Church and the town administrators use fear as a method of controlling people and the townspeople use the compensating defense of invoking the power of gossip and slander.

In the play, the Reverends Parris, Hale, and Danforth may differ

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considerably in motive and charity, but all three accept it as their right to root out what they perceive to be evil in Salem. “The Devil is alive in Salem, and we dare not quail to follow wherever the accusing finger points”\(^7\) says Reverend Hale, the most humane of the three. That the “accusing finger” is directed by vengeful or hysterical young girls, does not affect the willingness of the servants of God to hang the best people of the community. The trial scene is the climax of the play, and Deputy Governor Danforth establishes the credentials of the inquiry early on: “Do you know, Mr. Proctor, that the entire contention of the state in these trials is that the voice of Heaven is speaking through these children?”\(^8\) Anyone who disagrees will fall under the earlier pronouncement of Reverend Parris: “All innocent and Christian people are happy for the courts in Salem.” The imperfections of any system of judgment, possibility of error, any concept of mercy and the realities of human nature are banished as objections before this pronouncement and their self-ordained heavenly charter.

In her Preface to *The Devil in Massachusetts* (1949), Marion L. Starkey writes: “the story of 1692 is of far more than antiquarian interest; it is an allegory of our times. One would like to believe that leaders of the modern world can in the end deal with delusion as sanely and as courageously as the men of old Massachusetts did with theirs.”\(^9\) She speaks of the “ideological intensities which rent its age no less than they do ours”, and reminds us that: “only twenty witches were executed, a microscopic number compared to … the millions who have died in the species of witch-hunts peculiar to our own rational, scientific times”.\(^10\)

\(^8\) Miller, *The Crucible*, 81.
McCarthyism

On February 9, 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy, in a speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, claimed that he had a list of 257 communists working in the State Department. The names and the number of communists kept changing (just as in case of the Iraq War, the statistics about weapons of mass destruction kept changing).

McCarthy is credited with starting an epic hysteria often compared to the Puritan Salem witch-hunts. He gained international notoriety for his self-proclaimed knowledge of subversion in government and added a new word, McCarthyism, to the language of politics of hate, discrimination and political essentialism. Kenneth C. Davis writes:

In the 1950’s “McCarthyism” meant a brave, patriotic stand against Communism. It had the support of the media and the American people. Now it has come to mean a smear campaign of groundless accusations from which the accused cannot escape, because professions of innocence become admission of guilt and only confessions are accepted. Many who came before McCarthy, as well as many who testified before the powerful House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), were willing to point fingers at others to save their own careers and reputations.11

Now McCarthyism means ruinous accusation without any basis in

11 Kenneth C. Davis, Don’t Know Much About History: Everything You Need to Know About History But Never Learned (New York: Crown, 1990), 326.
evidence. Miller uses famous McCarthy sayings in the play; the Senator often maintained that those who opposed his hearings were Communists; anyone who criticized his methods was labeled and was forced to defend himself in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee. In *The Crucible*, Governor Danforth warns those who may oppose the court’s proceedings. “You must understand, sir, that a person is either with this court or he must be counted against it, there be no road between.”

Just as there was a kernel of plausibility in the demonized image of the American Communist, it was also conceivable that individual Communists, acting as subversives, spies, and saboteurs, could threaten American security. Protecting the nation from these alleged dangers was to become the primary justification for much of what happened during the McCarthy period. Though the dangers were not wholly fictitious, they were enormously exaggerated by Republican politicians and their allies who wanted to discredit the Democratic Party and the New Deal. McCarthyism contributed to the attenuation of the reform impulse by helping to divert the attention of the labor movement, the strongest institution within the old New Deal coalition, from external organizing to internal politicking.

The political repression of the McCarthy era fostered the growth of the national security state and facilitated its expansion into the rest of civil society. On the pretext of protecting the nation from Communist infiltration, federal agents attacked individual rights

12 Miller, *The Crucible*, 85. Addressing the joint session of the Congress on September 20, 2001, President Bush used language strikingly reminiscent of Governor Danforth of Salem: “Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. (Applause.) From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.” Quoted in Sandra Silberstein, *War of Words: Language, Politics and 9/11* (London: Routledge, 2002), 26.
and extended state power into movie studios, universities, labor unions, and many other ostensibly independent institutions. According to scholarly estimates, reported by Ellen Schrecker, ten thousand to twelve thousand people – teachers, actors, writers, journalists, and others – lost their jobs and had their careers ruined due to the panic created by McCarthy.¹³

When Miller was hauled before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1956 and was demanded to name Communist sympathizers, the following dialogue was exchanged between Miller and one of the committee members:

**Mr Arens:** Tell us, if you please, sir, about those meetings with the Communist party writers which you said you attended in New York city…. Can you tell us who was there when you walked into the room?

**Mr. Miller:** Mr. Chairman, I understand the philosophy behind this question and I want you to understand mine. When I say this, I want you to understand that I am not protecting the Communists or the Communist party. I am trying to, and I will, protect my sense of myself. I could not use the name of another person and bring trouble on him…. I take the responsibility for everything I have ever done, but I cannot take responsibility for another

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¹³ For a detailed account see Ellen Schrecker, *The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: St. Martin’s Press, 1994). The challenge to that demagogue came from a woman, Senator Margaret Chase Smith. Her fellow senators were so afraid of McCarthy and the increasing power of the Right that they deserted her.
human being.\textsuperscript{14}

Three years earlier Miller had written similarly in theme and content in \textit{The Crucible}. When John Proctor is cross-examined by Governor Danforth, he says:

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Proctor:} I speak for my sins; I cannot judge another. I have no tongue for it…. You will not use me! I am not Sarah Good or Tituba. I am John Proctor! … I have three children – how may I teach them to walk like men in the world, and I sold my friends…. \textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

The theocracy of Salem was absolute in its power. Later, the House Un-American Activities Committee became a power almost as strong. The fervor was contagious; many wanted to jump on the bandwagon while others were terrified into complying.

\textit{The Crucible} also examines political persecution as a tool for deflecting attention away from difficult problem areas for politicians and community leaders. McCarthy’s persecution of Communist sympathizers did little to strengthen the fiber of American life. The investigators in Miller’s play act in a similar fashion: they refuse to face the notion that due to their unnatural way of life several young women have resorted to certain acts for the sake of entertainment only. Instead they blame the wayward girls’ actions on the Devil and witchcraft. In much the same way, McCarthy’s persecution rested on the existence of an evil force threatening the American way of life (today, once more, in the

\textsuperscript{15} Miller, \textit{The Crucible}, 124.
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absence of a viable enemy, a new Devil is constructed which is equally undefined and faceless).

What came to interest Miller were the workings of fear, the mechanism of guilt, and the willing surrender of conscience on the part of the accused. This handing over of conscience by individuals to the state seemed to Miller the central and informing fact during times of public terror. Miller’s earlier preoccupation with such subjects as guilt, confession, atonement, and conscience qualified him to take up this theme in the context of the 1950s atmosphere of panic and terror. He had adapted Ibsen’s play *An Enemy of the People* because it dealt with:

… the central theme of our social life today. Simply it is the question of whether the democratic guarantees protecting political minorities ought to be set aside in time of crisis. More personally, it is the question of whether one’s vision of the truth ought to be a source of guilt at a time when the mass of men condemn it as a dangerous and devilish lies. It is an enduring theme … because there never was, nor will there ever be, an organized society able to countenance calmly the individual who insists that he is right while the vast majority is absolutely wrong.16

The play contains other elements that resemble such cases, particularly the scenes of collective hysteria, the speed with which gossip and rumours spread, and the inability of people to stop accusations once they start. The juggernaut of racial attacks on

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Arabs and Asian-looking men and women in America, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, is the latest example of the mob hysteria of which humans are capable.

One essential difference between the Salem demagogues and today’s Neo-Conservatives is that the former were local in their reach; the resultant damage to individual lives was also limited. But the latter have a global reach to hatch plots for self-aggrandizement in the name of national interest. The American Neo-Conservatives have the single-mindedness of the Puritans and the Capitalists, who have traditionally acted in collaboration.

As E. Miller Budick observes in his essay, “History and Other Spectres in The Crucible”, “Miller’s play, we would all agree, is an argument in favour of moral flexibility. The fundamental flaw in the natures of the Puritan elders and by extension of the McCarthyites, as Miller sees it, is precisely their extreme tendency toward moral absolutism.”17

Parallels with the War on Terror

The term “terrorism” is taking on the same kind of characteristics as the term “communism” did in the 1950s. It stops people in their tracks, and they are willing to give up their freedoms. People are too quickly panicked. They are too willing to give up their rights and to make scapegoats of people, especially immigrants, considered as outsiders, and people who criticize the War. Professor Richard Godbeer in his article “Escaping Salem” opines:

The Salem witch hunts were an unfair judgment of

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a group of people. This is a constant trend throughout human history. One group feels they can or should assert power over another. Whether it is to cover something up and get off free, like the girls in the Salem trials. Or if it is to boost your approval ratings like Joseph McCarthy during his “communist hunt”. There’s always some type of gain in the exploitation of others.\textsuperscript{18}

Today around 600 prisoners, mostly non-combatant innocent civilians are detained at Guantanamo Bay in the name of the War on Terror. They are not given even the status of prisoners-of-war; they are never charged in a court of law; they are tortured, not because they fought against the American forces in Afghanistan, but to extract information about others and to name names, as happened in Salem and during the McCarthy era.

The relevance of Miller’s theme to our times has been reemphasized by the 1996 film production of \textit{The Crucible}, directed by Nicholas Hytner and adapted by Miller himself. In his introduction to the published edition of that screenplay, Miller commented “as we prepared to shoot the movie, we were struck time and again by its alarming topicality … there is no shortage of contemporary Salems ready to cry witchcraft…. \textit{The Crucible} has outlived McCarthy, and has acquired a universal urgency shared only by stories that tap primal truths.”\textsuperscript{19}

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, Haynes Johnson has written what is not only a brilliant history of the McCarthy era, but also a


\textsuperscript{19} Miller, “Why I wrote \textit{The Crucible}”, in \textit{Salem Witch Trials Reader}, 385.
warning about our present fears manufactured by politicians, and about right-wing demagoguery. For example, fears following 9/11 parallel those of the Cold War. After 9/11, Johnson wrote:

Americans, the most optimistic of people, now faced unnerving official terror warnings…. Their television screens broadcasted alerts. Their newspapers published emergency preparedness articles full of alarming instructions on how to protect themselves from biological, chemical or radiological attacks. Their government authorities, already vastly expanding the surveillance and interrogation of citizens suspected of being security risks, advised them to be on the lookout for terrorists.20

One of the most ancient claims made about an enemy is that the enemy is an abominable “evil” in contrast with one’s own people’s essential goodness. The enemy’s qualities are always the mirror opposite of those in one’s own culture. So, for example, Bush administration officials have constantly painted the terrorist enemy as motivated by their “hatred of freedom”. US efforts to counter terrorist threats are framed as “fighting for freedom”, even if that fight involves invasion of privacy under the USA PATRIOT Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001); or spying on antiwar Americans by the FBI and the National Security Agency. The USA PATRIOT Act gives sweeping powers to these secret agencies: they can detain an alien, suspected of any disruptive activity, for seven days without any charges in a court of

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20 Haynes Johnson, Age of Anxiety: McCarthyism to Terrorism (Orlando: Harcourt, 2005), 34.
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law. One can see a consistent pattern in all “witch-hunts”, medieval or modern, irrespective of the nature of allegation and crime. Robert Rapley in his study has traced out characteristics common to all such “witch-hunts”:

1. The accused is judged as guilty before any evidence is established.
2. Extreme torture is rendered legitimate and is used against the accused, to extract confessions and obtain accusations against others.
3. Any incriminating evidence, however dubious, is acceptable as final.
4. The emphasis is on making the accused accept all charges against them.
5. False evidence is created to convict the suspects.
6. Those who dare to speak in favour of the accused are threatened and are treated as accomplices.
7. The accused is stripped of all legal rights as s/he is supposed to be “anti-social”.
8. Secret accusations are accepted and the identity of the accuser is protected.
9. It is always assumed that the suspect is only the tip of the iceberg, and that he has supporters.
10. All errors and outright crimes against humanity, suspension/violation of basic rights of the citizens, and naked aggression are justified by appeals to National Security, Protection of Society, and fight against Evil.21

The result is perversion of justice, and the destruction of mostly innocent people, their lives and careers. The way to eradicate

“Evil” is paved with evil intentions.

David Cole, in his article “The New McCarthyism: Repeating History in the War on Terrorism” has compared America’s global War on Terror with McCarthyism:

Today’s war on terrorism has already demonstrated our government’s remarkable ability to evolve its tactics in ways that allow it simultaneously to repeat history and to insist that it is not repeating history. We have not, it is true, interned people solely for their race, but we have detained approximately two thousand people, mostly through administrative rather than criminal procedures, and largely because of their ethnic identity. In addition, we have subjected Arab and Muslim noncitizens to discriminatory deportation, registration, fingerprinting, visa processing, and interviews based on little more than their country of origin. We have not, it is true, made it a crime to be a member of a terrorist group, but we have made guilt by association the linchpin of the war’s strategy, penalizing people.22

Guilt by association is a common tool used to gain power. The linguistic device flows from moralistic thinking in dichotomies of good and evil. There are no neutrals in a war against “ultimate evil”.

Fear and 9/11

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It was the sixteenth century French essayist Michel de Montaigne who first declared, “The thing I fear most is fear.” The primordial fear of the unknown and the terror of the Devil have always perpetrated horrendous acts and have many a time determined the course of human actions and relations. According to Karen Armstrong, “Western Christianity is unique among the monotheisms in the power it has attributed to the Devil.”

Prior to 9/11, Americans were living in their private paradises, “idling in a warm bath of social autism”. Political fear can also have widespread repercussions. It may dictate public policy, bring new groups to power and keep others out, create emergency laws and overturn old ones. In the War on Terror, we once again see the manipulation of fear in pursuit of partisan gain.

In an article “The Coming Anarchy”, Robert Kaplan illustrates the sense of threat and paranoia that significantly preceded 9/11, “… foreign affairs entail a separate, sadder morality than the kind we apply in domestic policy and in our daily lives. That is because domestically we operate under the rule of law, while the wider world is an anarchic realm where we are forced to take the law into our own hands.”

Tony Blair’s adviser Robert Cooper echoed this analysis in April 2002:

> The postmodern world has to start to get used to double standards. Among ourselves, we operate on

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23 Karen Armstrong, “Introduction” in Delusion of Satan, Frances Hill.
the basis of laws and open cooperative security. But, when dealing with old-fashioned states outside the postmodern continent of Europe, we need to revert to the rougher methods of an earlier era – force, pre-emptive attack, deception, whatever is necessary. Among ourselves, we keep the law but when we are operating in the jungle, we must also use the laws of the jungle.26

Analyzing the effects of War on Terror, Zbigniew Brzezinski, a former National Security Advisor to President Nixon writes in the *Washington Post*:

The damage these three words have done – a classic self-inflicted wound – is infinitely greater than any wild dreams entertained by the fanatical perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks…. The phrase itself is meaningless. It defines neither a geographic context nor our presumed enemies…. It stimulated the emergence of a culture of fear. Fear obscures reason, intensifies emotions and makes it easier for demagogic politicians to mobilize the public on behalf of the policies they want to pursue…. The culture of fear is like a genie that has been let out of its bottle. It acquires a life of its own – and can become demoralizing.27

But the ultimate question is “Who benefits from such fear-

26 Keen, “An Occident Waiting to Happen”.
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mongering?” and how is this carefully constructed fear being manipulated in the new Great Game and international power politics?

The terrorism scare is a moral panic, similar to many throughout recent history. Moral panics easily lead to government abuses of power and are spread due to acceptance of beliefs about a widespread risk to society. Some individuals/groups can gain ideological benefits by promoting fear. Ideological struggles inevitably reflect power struggles within a society, whether they are among political parties, special interest lobby groups, or religious entities. Since 9/11, alongside some levelheaded responses, many public figures – motivated by fear, displaced resentment, or opportunism – have magnified and exploited the menace in ugly ways. Pandering to an angry, chauvinistic populism, they brand opponents, especially liberals, as unmanly, naive, or traitorous. They scorn civil liberties as luxuries in a national crisis. So it was during the 1950s, and so it is today.

Limitations of the parallels

At the same time it is imperative not to overdo this parallelism, for it is obvious that witches never existed, even though the Puritans believed in their existence, while the Communists and actual terrorists do exist. As David Greenberg notes:

The perils posed by the Soviet Union in the 1950s and al-Qaeda today differ enough to limit the coherence or usefulness of any analogy. A superpower that vied with the United States for the loyalties of peoples around the globe, the U.S.S.R. never attacked this country; al-Qaeda, a terrorist network that already has struck our soil and
probably will again, nonetheless hardly rivals the Soviet Union in might. And whereas communism, at least in the 1930s, did command the allegiance of many Americans, especially in intellectual circles, the number of Islamist radicals here has always been negligible. It is primarily in the realm of domestic politics – in the rhetoric of politicians and in the fights over such issues as civil liberties, patriotism, and press coverage – that terrorism has become the new communism.\(^{28}\)

Frances Hill makes a fair distinction between the two eras in her *Such Men Are Dangerous: The Fanatics of 1692 and 2004* and argues that the Puritans twisted a popular fear of imaginary “spectral” forces to bolster their power and wealth.\(^{29}\) Today’s Neo-Conservatives are twisting the very real public fear of terrorism to bolster their ideological agendas, power and wealth. We know how the story of the witch-hunts ends. The modern equivalent is still under way, with far more chilling ramifications for the future of humanity.

**Conclusion**

The history of witch-hunts, in Western Europe and America, is spread over a thousand years. The fear of the Devil gripped the imagination of Western peoples particularly during the 16\(^{th}\) and 17\(^{th}\) centuries. Thousands were burned alive in Swiss villages. The fate of those thousands, especially women, has attracted less attention than individual cases such as: a priest at Loudun, France,

\(^{28}\) David Greenberg, *The American Prospect* 16:11 (November 2005), 44.

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in 1634; the Jewish soldier Drayfus, in France, in 1894; the Scottsboro Boys in Alabama in 1931; the McCarthy era persecutions, and many more. All of them are a grave reminder that, in spite of our claims to modernity, scientific objectivity, and postmodern relativism, the human race, particularly those armed with power and ideological state-apparatuses, would continue to project their private demons and primitive fears onto others with tragic consequences for the political, social and cultural “Other”. The medieval idea of witchcraft has been replaced by concepts like “race”, “nationality”, and “the clash of ideologies and civilizations”. The age of ideology is by no means over; and it will keep on taking a heavy, tragic toll of its ever-new victims.

In the story of Salem witch trials, Miller is able to show the “domino effect” of absolute power that corrupts absolutely. In the end the only people left standing are awaiting the hangman’s noose. *The Crucible* reminds us that we must always question the status quo, as well as the power structures and authorities that we allow – by our vote and consent – to govern us.

Martin Luther King is worth quoting here:

> The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it…. Through violence you may murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate…. Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a

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night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.\textsuperscript{31}

By now, \textit{The Crucible} is understood to be an historical play on a subject perennially topical, and not exclusively American. Much of the play, alongside what is happening since 9/11, can be summed up in W.B. Yeasts’ lines:

\begin{quotation}
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity. (\textit{The Second Coming})
\end{quotation}

Those who insist on their monopoly of righteousness have always been full of dangerous intensity; from Samuel Parris of Salem to McCarthy and the protagonists of the War on Terror.

\textsuperscript{31} Martin Luther King, \textit{Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?} (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968) 62.
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