AP® European History
2002 Sample Student Responses

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Part B   #3   Q 1

Throughout Europe during the period from 1580 to 1750, the number of witchcraft ~~history~~ accusations and persecutions ~~rosen~~ was out of control. The majority of the alleged ~~user~~ witches were women. Reasons for the rise and fall of witchcraft are many, but the major impacts on the witchhunt era were the societal structure, the power of religious convictions, and the development of the Scientific Revolution. Witchcraft rose because of the chaotic status of European life and because of the vulnerability of women, and it fell because of the development of science and the gradually increasing stability of religious and social life.

During the time when witchcraft first began to emerge, European life was very chaotic and unstable. Questions revolving around religion were prevalent because of Martin Luther's questioning and because of the newly formed radical religious groups. Additionally, the were various diseases and deaths that plagued the lives of many, not to mention the growing uncertainty ~~among~~ the social structure of society as a whole. The people of various communities needed ~~a force of~~ ~~stability~~ something to explain ~~what~~ their problems in this time of religious, scientific, and social uncertainty. In order to explain their hardships,
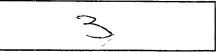
Part B #3

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people began to target alleged witches as evil scapegoats. These scapegoats filled the need of the community to explain the reason for the evils of the world. Furthermore, the witch hunt process provided a source of stability for the community during times that were so unsure and challenging. The community was able to unite together against one source of evil while they were persecuting a witch. This ability to strengthen the community and to provide security during chaotic times was a major reason why witchcraft emerged.

Another reason why witchcraft started was because of the social status of women in Europe during that time. Because of the family structure, women were often dependent upon their husbands for security and income. Single women who were widowed or simply unmarried were very vulnerable during this time period. Consequently, some women turned to witchcraft as a source of power or importance in order to feel significant in a society that would have otherwise cast them aside. Other times, single women were just as vulnerable outcasts who were the easiest targets for scapegoats. Because of their vulnerability, many of these single women

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Part B # 3   Q3

were accused of witchcraft and persecuted by the entire community. This is a major reason why witches were primarily women.

As years passed, witchhunts reached a climax in which very intense and violent persecutions took place. Women who were thought to have communicated with the Devil or who were not following the norms of society were commonly burned at the stake. However, the number of witchcraft cases began to gradually decline as everyday life became better and more and more stable. The religious frenzy of the earlier years had died down and technology had progessed to a point that enabled people to live healthier lives. People were no longer at the mercy of disease, and uncertainty about religion and society had decreased. Because of this shift, witches as scapegoats were no longer needed for security and strength. Stability was definitely more present as the witchhunts died down than when they first began. It was because of this new found stability that people began to return to normal lives without the need to persecute others in order to become more powerful.

Complementing this first reason why witchcraft persecution declined, was the beginnings of

Part B #3

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new technology and scientific advancement quelled the superstitious belief in witches. Aspects of the Scientific Revolution contributed to the fall of witch persecution because the focus of life began to shift from religion and superstitious explanations to scientific and rational thought. Scientists began to pursue actual and factual knowledge from nature, rejecting old beliefs in God, spirits, the Devil, and superstitious explanations for life. There was a new desire to explain the ~~real~~ causes of everything in terms of science. Consequently, witches could no longer be used to explain evils or hardships, and the use of witches as scapegoats decreased. Along with the decline in magic came the decline in the belief of witches. The rational thought of the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, and other such movements ended the previously superstitious attitude that people had toward life.

In closing, it is clear that witchcraft persecutions initially emerged in order to ~~ensure~~ find stability during an otherwise chaotic time. However, as things settled down, vulnerable women no longer were needed as scapegoats. And as science progressed, the belief in magical things like witches decreased, as rational ~~eee~~ and scientific explanations replaced superstition.

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R1

Witchcraft persecution was a big part of Europe from the late sixteenth century to the mid eighteen century. It was a time of wild accusations and outrageous deaths. Religion and reason contribute to the rise and decline of this hectic time.

People back in the days were definitely much more religious. It was the central aspect of their lives and guided them throughout their days. Nothing was held in higher regard. Due to this mindset, superstitions arose. Anything not understood was generally feared. When a problem came up, something had to be the cause of it. If there was no logical explanation, people simply blamed other people. It gave them a sense of security knowing that the reason for their problem was punished. Witch trials grew out of this. If something went amiss, someone was always there to take the fall. An excellent example of this can be found in the play, the Crucible by Arthur Miller. He devised his play from

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3   R2

actual research and happenings during the Salem, Massachussets witch trials. When someone's crops failed or baby died, a witch was blamed. Although this resulted in the innocent deaths of thousands, it became a common practice.

Another factor accounting for the rise of witchcraft was the inferior attitude towards women. They were seen as less capable than men and therefore more likely to fall into Satan's hands. An overwhelming majority of those killed were women. Few men experienced such a fate. Sadly, women sometimes supported the deaths of other women, as long as there was someone to be the scapegoat.

The decline of the witch trials can be attributed mostly to the Enlightenment and the creation of different Catholic sects. When the Enlightenment arose, religion took a back seat to reason. Science and actual mathematical deductions prevailed over the tradition teachings of the church. When this occured, people realized that the witch theories

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were not events that could actually be proved. They discovered logical explanations to their shortcomings. The church also had a hand in this matter. After the Protestant Reformation, various sects developed. People had less faith in the Church and its tradition teachings. If the Church did not hold the answers to the previous questions, how could it be depended upon on the witch issue? As individuals parted with the Church, their original fanatical beliefs died as well.

The witchcraft trials of the late sixteenth and eighteen centuries was a low point in European History. However, as with every situation, a lesson is learned. The longterm effects of the persecution led to a greater appreciation of humans, more advancements in reason and a better understanding of religion.