The Trial Of Joan Of Arc

Joan of Arc was a deeply religious person, who believed she was hearing voices from God to help the French defeat the English and defend Catholicism. She lead the french army to a victory in the Hundred Years' War after experiencing visions fromGod in which she was encouraged to bring them to victory to defend catholicism. After her impressive battle successes she was tried and ultimately burned at the stake by the English under King Charles VII. She was tried for heresy and ultimately convicted and executed for her perceived crimes. To this day, Joan's trial receives a lot of criticism and its legitimacy is still debated by historians, philosophers, and legal scholars. Although it is clear that the legal standards used in Joan's trial would be deemed unfair by modern day standards, there is evidence to suggest it was not unusual from other trials in medieval Europe. The medieval legal system worked with a fair level of ambiguity, where public perception and religious beliefs held a lot more weight than they do today. Consequently, medieval Europe was deeply influenced by religion and less by a legal state focused on unbiased fact, which greatly differs from the modern American legal system.

Medieval European legal procedures had many practices that differed greatly from modern law. As opposed to our modern standard of being innocent until proven guilty, their court system believed defendants were guilty and had to prove their innocence. The prosecution in medieval times was also an extension of the office of the judge, showcasing another large difference in legal proceedings when contrasting modern United States with medieval Europe. Since public opinion mattered so much in these courts, and religion impacted public opinion, the cards were already stacked against Joan as far as receiving an innocent verdict. With this in mind,her trial was justified. Many historians look back and believe that Pierre Cauchon set Joan up for a trial she would ultimately lose, and claim that he put together a jury destined to convict her, and manipulated documents. However, scholars have claimed that he may have been trying to actually give her a fair chance. He knew that if she was sent back into English custody or to a lifetime in prison, she would die anyway so a trial could have been an attempt to give her a fair shot.

Although extremely different from our current legal standards, Joan's trial procedures were fair for the time period, even if the reason why she was being tried was questionable. The judge of the trial, Pierre Cauchon, ordered for a long series of investigation before the trial even began to make sure it would be justified. He wanted to make sure a formal trial was the proper response to Joan's alleged crimes. Cauchon also knew the importance and international recognition of the trial, so he knew it was in his best interest to run it correctly and protect his own reputation. Although there are some discrepancies over Joan never being read her articles, or charges, at the trial no contemporaries seemed to have a problem with it so it was most likely not a big deal. From the transcript of the trial it seems like Cauchon did everything he could to keep things legal and follow procedure. Like with any other major public trial there are critics of his decision, however they all seem to follow the procedure of the time period.

Although this trial may have been fair in medieval Europe, these practices would not be considered just under our modern standards. The primary reason that her trial would be deemed unfair today is simply that she was on trial for heresy. With the importance we now put on separating church and state it would be impossible to be executed for such a crime. Also as

mentioned earlier, the prosecutor worked for the judge as opposed to staying a separate entity, which would never be allowed in a court today. Another factor that would seem unfair in a modern trial is that Joan tried to appeal the decision and was not allowed. In our current legal system and medieval times it is not uncommon for people to go through multiple rounds of appeals, so it seems unfair that she was not given this opportunity.

Ultimately Joan of Arc's trial garnered a ton of attention and the legacy of what she went through still lives on. Her belief that she was hearing voices from God saying the French needed to win the war and separate from England encouraged her to act as a man and battle with the French. These voices she was hearing were ultimately the reason she was executed, but her conviction and belief in God was strong enough to make her listen anyway. Her accusers claimed she had gained "international notoriety" from her actions and convicted her of heresy, the ultimate crime in their society. Although medieval courts would not prove fair in our current legal system, her trial was run as efficiently as possible for the time period. Joan's trial and punishment ignites strong emotions from many people but it showcases the backbone of medieval Europe, obeying the command of rulers and their chosen religion.