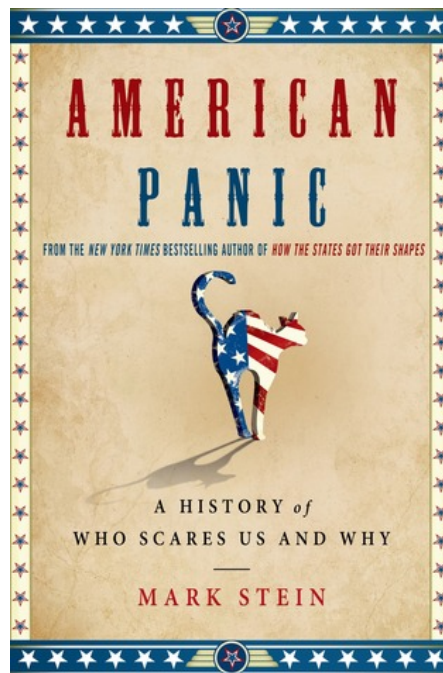




American Panic: A History of Who Scares Us and Why

Mark Stein

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In *American Panic*, *New York Times* bestselling author Mark Stein traces the history and consequences of American political panics through the years. Virtually every American, on one level or another, falls victim to the hype, intensity, and propaganda that accompanies political panic, regardless of their own personal affiliations. By highlighting the similarities between American political panics from the Salem witch hunt to present-day vehemence over issues such as Latino immigration, gay marriage, and the construction of mosques, Stein closely examines just what it is that causes us as a nation to overreact in the face of widespread and potentially profound change. This book also devotes chapters to African Americans, Native Americans, Catholics, Mormons, Jews, Chinese and Japanese peoples, Communists, Capitalists, women, and a highly turbulent but largely forgotten panic over Freemasons. Striking similarities in these diverse episodes are revealed in primary documents Stein has unearthed, in which statements from the past could easily be mistaken for statements today. As these similarities come to light, Stein reveals why some people become panicked over particular issues when others do not.

American Panic: A History of Who Scares Us and Why Details

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From Reader Review American Panic: A History of Who Scares Us and Why for online ebook

Jim Kahn says

While this is not a particularly easy read and sometimes seems to be nothing but endless quotes from newspapers, editorials, or politician speeches, the premise of this book is very interesting. The author spends the first chapter defining 'panic' and proceeds to analyze various groups throughout American history who have been the subject of such. Starting with witchcraft in the colonial days and working up through Native Americans, Catholics, Communists, Corporations (ironically at about the same time) and progressing through to the current ongoing panics about Muslims, Homosexuality, and Hispanic immigrants.

I thought it was very interesting to see the parallels drawn between ongoing panics which the media would have us perceive as real when compared to past panics which are absurd in retrospect. American history is a repetitive tapestry of fear, and our insecurity is constantly manifesting itself in different ways. Over time the panics fade, and it is heartening to note that in general our Constitution prevents panics from blowing out into full persecution as we have seen in other countries. Nevertheless, there are still many innocent victims and will continue to be as long as our collective insecurity continues.

Jennifer says

i can see why this author is on the bests sellers list.i was very impressed with what he thinks about how we as americans fall victim to the propaganda of the political panic.and how no matter what the generaltion we face the same obstacles in what we dont know or want to face.this book starts with the witch trials and ends up during the september 11 attacks.i am amazed by the shear magnitude of the ideas and information i obtained and will enjoy rereading this book over time.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the author and goodreads first reads for the chance to win this book and to review it.i recommend this book to anyone who enjoys history...

Robin Reynolds / October Woman says

Five chapters in (84 pages), I finally admitted to myself that this book was boring me to pieces. I was still interested to read about the women, so flipped ahead to the chapter, " Woman Suffrage", but one page in that interest faded.

There are parts of the book where the author talks about specific people, and the events that happened to and around them, and those parts kept my interest. But the rest of the book, dry and repetitive. (I'm actually sick of seeing the word "panic".)

An ambitious project, that in the hands of someone like Mary Roach or Barbara Ehrenreich, could have been fascinating.

Rick Lee Lee James says

Invite panic on one issue by bringing in aspects of other issues that cause panic. This seems to be one of the easiest ways to motivate a group of people. Unverified claims and filtered facts based off of superstition and hearsay seem to be the way to do it if you want to create panic and influence groups of people toward your agenda. This book is a great study in this kind of manipulation. Making sweeping untrue generalizations about a group of people with blanks left open to be filled in can be an effective tool in advancing your cause. 'Gays want to destroy the family', 'Mexicans want to kill all whites', 'Blacks are inferior in intelligence', 'The Chinese are dangerous', 'all Muslims are violent', are all stereotypes that have been effectively used to create panic in America . This is the story of how lies like these gain traction.

PennsyLady (Bev) says

“Mark Stein reveals just what it is that causes us as a nation to overreact in the face of the unknown. Whether recounting panics centered around African Americans, Native Americans, Catholics, Communists, women, or Freemasons, Stein reveals striking similarities in each episode-all centered around a desperate need to make the world comprehensible. Ultimately, he shows how panic has always run through our cultural DNA-and what it says about the underpinnings of our society.”
(quoted from a review of American Panic)

The Salem witch trials initially piqued my interest and I found an unbiased, enjoyable journey through many known and forgotten events of American history.

Gloria says

Interesting idea but hard to read. Not written like a good history or novel, but more like references and quotes. Someone else might make a better more readable book from these same ideas. Definition of panic is troublesome. It is more likely irrational fears and actions than what we might think of as panic. Still the idea fits American history even to the "Ebola fears" of today (which is not mentioned in the book) but he starts with the Salem witch trials and moves on through all American history even to the present with fears of gays, etc.

Shawn says

This book was difficult to get into, but by the second half I found it very interesting. I believe the conclusions need to be discussed in professional reading circles. Some of the references were presented with significant bias to make the author's point. The thesis of finding what we need to fear is ourselves is very clear by the end of the book.

Ray says

"No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear".

— Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*

In his book *"American Panic: A History of Who Scares Us, and Why"*, author Mark Stein takes us through a litany of things which have, at one time or another, given rise to fear and/or panic in the American public. Stein gives times and examples of how and when the general attitude in our Country was that to allow Native Americans, Jews, Catholics, Blacks, Irish, Chinese, Japanese, Hispanics, etc., to be accepted into the Country would have terrible consequences. Not all, I'm sure, but most Americans probably can look at these examples and see how wrongheaded those attitudes were, and smugly feel that we're all above that today.

Stein gives us some tips to help us recognize when we're being manipulated by others to make us fearful about any number of different things. Often, people will filter out facts to make their point seem reasonable, and use absolutes to cement their point. Recognizing these steps can help all of us use our critical thinking techniques to see when we're being manipulated into unwarranted fear.

Stein gives examples from the past in which our forefathers had been fearful in many situations, whether it was the fear of witches in Salem, the fear of admitting certain classes of emigres into the Country, or the fear of allowing women or former slaves to vote, or allowing inter-racial marriage, etc. And yet, as these things came to pass, society hasn't seemed to totally collapse. In the 50's, we had the "Red scare" and McCarthyism, fearing Communists were everywhere looking to bring us under the power of Moscow. In the 60's, Kennedy had to defend himself against the historic charge that as a Catholic, he'd be under the thumb of the Pope in Rome. More recently, we had feared Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, and that they'd soon be used against us. Today, we worry that the fear of Climate Change is a conspiracy by globalists to bring our government under control of the United Nations. Also, many today have fear of childhood immunizations, genetically modified foods, radiation from Fukushima, AIDs, and now, Ebola.

The media today seems to delight in making the biggest headlines and the scariest stories out of any breaking news. Of course, this is their profit motive. Unless people are willing to investigate the stories, they're left with a sense of foreboding. The take-away from the book - if you are made fearful by some breaking news, you can either trust the blogger or minister or politician with the scary news, and trust him (her) to make it better (probably a bad choice), or take the time to investigate the issue to determine the FACTS.

Things often sound scary when you simply watch cable news or read the paper. You can live with the fear and hope for the best, or investigate the problem yourself, and that may be the best take-away from the book. Few of us have the technical expertise to be able to work through all the background science behind the claims, and with the blog sites today, you can always find a study, a scientist, a physician, an economist, a military leader, a politician, etc. to support ANY position. The best we can do is think, ask questions, and investigate. In the long run, for peace of mind, knowledge and truth are the best antidotes to fear.

Argum says

I received a free copy of this book as part of the Goodreads First Reads Program.

American Panic while interesting was not exactly the history I expected. Some eras were shaped to convey

the story desired by this author at the expense of unbiased presentation. The definition of panic and how it operates in the US while not entirely defined is interesting and engaging as the book progresses. I did learn something in every chapter and found the book engaging to read when I wasn't angry at its misrepresentations.

From the outset the author acknowledges that he is not going to cover each panic comprehensively which is fair for a popular history book. What he doesn't acknowledge is that his summary and highlighting at times leaves a biased impression of the panic. For example, the Catholic chapter for the first time I have ever seen leaves open the option that Maria Monk was telling anything resembling the truth in her anti Catholic polemic. It is established that her time in a convent was in fact at a home for wayward girls. At the end of this chapter, Kennedy magically invokes his military service and all fears of his Catholic presidency evaporate. While that speech did change the game, Catholic panic was not done away with even if the military service argument serves the authors argument better. These are especially strange omissions and shaping of facts given the author is a professor at Catholic University of America. Other chapters had equally story line serving interpretations and omissions. Thesis should serve the facts not facts fitted onto his thesis. This left me dismayed while reading.

The idea that a panic and alarm are distinct and we can see repetition in the various panics in our history was intriguing. I think to some extent this is proven here, but there is not a clear distinction given or criteria to meet besides unverified claims leaving a blank to fill in at will for those who wish to panic. Knowing that at least some chapters had selective facts chosen to highlight his thesis it does draw the whole into question for me.

Those complaints aside I did find these stories interesting to read about and reflect on the sheer number of times regular Americans have set out to expel/relocate/marginalize the Other of the moment. It was worth reading but not buying in my opinion.

Scott Haraburda says

Goodreads First Reads Giveaway Book.

American Panic: A History of Who Scares Us and Why is an interesting account of a dozen different examples of panic within American history, beginning with the 1692 Salem Witch Trials to modern issues involving gun control.

The author tries to explain the cause of panics and attempts to the similarities involving different groups of people, including African Americans, Chinese immigrants, women, homosexuals, Catholics, Jews, anarchists, Communists, Latino immigrants, and corporations. The book was interesting, as I learned different examples when panic developed as emotion dominated reason. This book included examples of the different elements, which were incomplete data, generalizations, logic errors, and lies. But, it failed to relate a compelling case that panic is actually predictable and controllable.

The author, Mark Stein, is the New York Times bestselling author of *How the States Got Their Shapes*, which made this an enjoyable read.

American Panic is an interesting book that attempts to explain the history of panic within the United States.

Dan Dundon says

This book is an interesting endeavor to learn from the past in the way we view panics of the present. For the most part, it succeeds because readers are brought through the history of many panics beginning with Indians and continuing with alleged witches, Catholics, Chinese, African Americans and many others. The common elements with the current panic involving Hispanic immigrants are especially impressive. If more citizens took the time to read this history it might make them less likely to panic the next time someone claims our "American way of life" is under attack. If I have any criticism, it's that the author does establish a pattern and then selects historical facts to fit that pattern. This is a convincing method of proving a point but it can distort the truth by eliminating facts that do not conveniently fit into the pattern. Nevertheless it is a very compelling book.

Jason Fasano says

Stein presents an interesting historical overview of various instances of collective societal panic throughout American history, but the book was lacking in terms of any legitimate analysis from social science perspective. The book was compelling for what it was, which was more of a summary, progressing through a narrative of various 'panics' from colonial times to the present, but I was expecting more insightful analysis.

There doesn't seem to be any clearly articulated methodology informing the analysis. For starters, there is never any operationalization of what constitutes a 'panic'. Stein refers at various times to distinctions between 'alarm' and 'panic', 'political panic' and 'private panic', and between 'portal to panic' compared to actual 'panic', but readers are left to surmise what exactly these categorizations and distinctions mean for themselves, since they are never clearly defined or explained in the text.

He also fails to ever directly address the *why* in his subtitle. He repeatedly declares in chapter after chapter that phenomenon such as causation/correlation fallacies, endorsing hypocritical policies, 'filling in the blanks', and citing unverifiable claims are all hallmarks of a panic, without ever bothering to clearly define any of these features or explain the nature of their relationship to panic. Of particular note was the abject lack of attention paid to the role media institutions plays in fomenting societal panic (with the exception of a brief mention made in passing in the concluding chapter), which is a widely acknowledged factor amongst sociologists.

Because the methodology informing his determination of what constitutes a panic is never clearly stated, it is difficult to formulate a coherent criticism of it. Nonetheless, the narrative Stein tells regarding the various panics he surveys is telling enough to warrant a few broad criticisms. Most significantly, he ends his chapters on Native Americans, African Americans, and Women with implications that the panics surrounding these demographics have ended, and they are now no longer living under threat of persecution. If Stein had bothered to consult with any contemporary Indigenous, Black, or Feminist scholars, these inaccuracies could've been avoided. In the chapter addressing the Red Scare, Stein demonstrates a stunning lack of historical nuance for a historian, seemingly conflating socialism, communism, and anarchism as equivalent and interchangeable ideologies.

Overall, it was by no means a *bad* book. It was an interesting and compelling history of various issues that Americans have raised alarm over throughout history. That being said, for anyone seeking to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of *why* people panic, I would treat this book as only a preliminary starting

point, and seek out a more analytical book, presumably from the sociological literature, although I imagine scholars from a number of disciplines would be qualified to write such a book.

Randy says

A must read to understand how and why people are driven by fear. Fear of other races, ethnicities, religions, and sexuality and how these fears drive certain groups.

Donna says

This was an interesting read. I usually like my nonfiction written without bias, but I didn't mind that this book strayed from that. It had some thought provoking ideas.

This isn't really an in depth look at the way panic has influenced American history, but some of the 'incidences' mentioned were used well in presenting the author's concept. The basic premise is how panic of the unknown or of a physical threat, has propelled America into certain paths that have led to change (often times painful change) like: ethnic cleansing, annihilation, civil rights for all, extermination, oppression, religious freedom, etc. The book refers to that as panic, but it felt like the powers that be felt threatened and didn't want or welcome change. And some of this seemed propelled by greed, misunderstanding, and preserving the status quo. It always amazes me the creative depths that people will sink to in order to get what they want.

Karin says

I picked this book up at the library because my husband and I had fun watching Mark Stein's How the States Got Their Shapes and thought it might be interesting how he handled panics and in so doing help me and my husband to "decompress" from the shocking election results and aftermath. It did. In reading American Panic, the author helped us to remember pieces of high school history lessons of past issues. I was able to see a common theme of panics, how they started, purposes behind them and how they eventually calmed. I realized that we had been in a panic state and grieving for a future the new administration is determined to push forth. Reading about these other panics helped us to understand our own reactions, to take a deep breath, exhale slowly and to let go of the panic and move on to the "doing" stage.
