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Paranoia And The Culture of Fear

The culture of fear itself stems solely from paranoia, the thought that someone is out to get someone or do something to them at all times. Living scared of any and everything is no way to live but we, as humans, cannot help but have fears or thoughts that scare us. That is why when we, as an entire nation, are scared or threatened by something, we “unite” and stand together against it. Examples of this are all throughout history when people sometimes make irrational decisions out of fear and paranoia that cost others their pride, freedom, joy, and sometimes their lives just so others can feel safe and protected from whatever evil might be lurking around the corner. Some say it is just natural instinct that people act or make things like this occur others say that it is all a part of human evolution and that the strong survive and the weak do not when the going gets tough. Whatever the reason, paranoia and fear have and always will be a part of the human race because people are controlled by fear and fear makes everyone paranoid.

In the book *The Last Town on Earth,* by Thomas Mullen, he discusses a small mill town which was closed off for the most part from the outside world. It shows how when things begin to go wrong how paranoia and fear take over people and true human nature rears its ugly head. From draft dodging to the Spanish flu to crimes such as murder and stealing Mullen just gives us a little snippet of a look at how people begin to react when paranoia and fear take over. The book follows a 16 year old boy named Philip who from his point of view try’s to comprehend everything that is happening around him and shows how he reacts when faced with various situations which include the ones listed above. This book is a prime example of all the other topics I have addressed. It shows how the culture of fear controls people when the rumors of the Spanish Flu go around the town decides to close itself off completely from the rest of the world and lets no one come or go from the town taking way to drastic of measures. It shows how history today has repeated itself from back then like the Spanish flu scare was experienced just last year with the Swine flu scare and then gives key examples of draft dodging to get out of military service during World War One which was repeated majorly during Vietnam and lastly how the scare of the Soviet Union and the Cold War then was the same as the culture of fear which continued on up until the 1990’s. It shows how people surrender their free will and rational behavior when two people who attempt to get into the town one of which does not even have the flu are murdered by Graham a main character in the book out of fear that they might be carriers of the flu all to protect the species or in this case residents of the town. It shows how people who are supposed to be our leaders are just as paranoid as the ones they are supposed to be leading and protecting by giving us a look into the thought process of Charles Worthy the founder of the small town of Commonwealth and the founder and owner of the mill and how he was just as paranoid of the flu as anyone else. Another way it demonstrates this is by giving us a look at the people in the APL or the American Protective League which in itself shows the paranoia of our national government considering the jobs of this group of men were to go from town to town and find draft dodgers and try to sale war bonds and look for “communists” or people who weren’t patriots in the process and turn them in and send them to prison. All of these are spot on examples of how we, as humans, live in fear and give in to paranoia on a day to day basis and shows why this book should be an eye opener to all of us as Americans.

In the article "Lessons of Hate,” by Sean Price, he talks about different discriminatory experiences that a Jewish man by the name of Klaus Scheurenberg underwent as a young boy during the Holocaust time period in Germany from 1933-1945, around the same time when Adolf Hitler took control of Germany as a dictator and head of the Nazi regime. Scheurenberg talks about run ins at school with his teacher and other students as well as in public with perfect strangers that humiliated him and made him feel like an outcast from society. This is a prime example of how one man in Adolf Hitler took advantage of his position of power and turned an entire country, with the exception of a few people, against one religious group, in the Jews, whether they were young children or old men and women it did not matter as this article clearly demonstrates. Hitler had a fear or prejudice against them so he turned the whole country against them. Leaders are just as paranoid as the people they lead if not more so because of prejudices or hate of some sort towards that group of people that they have always had or because of knowledge they gained. In this case it cost approximately sixty-five million Jewish people their lives in concentration camps all over Europe.

In the piece, "The U.S. Decision-Making Process and Conspiracy Theories” by Elisabeth Vallet, she talks about conspiracy theories that have come to pass in history that date back as far as the witch hunts in like the 16th century. Since the end of world war two when the United States finally reached “superpower” status and how each break in history between conflicts brings in a whole new set of conspiracy theories. Vallet discusses key points in history that have attracted more conspiracy theories than others such as the Cold War, Vietnam War, and even the terrorist attacks on September 11th 2001. The more the people in charge made mistakes and let information out the more fuel there was to the fire and the more and more theories that were brought about. This is a prime example of how the culture of fear began and has escalated over the years from the red scare to something as stupid as Area 51 and an imminent attack of aliens. The culture of fear has controlled this great country since the signing of the Declaration of Independence evidence of that is clearly seen as far back in history as the Salem witch trials. As a whole the world lives in fear and always will it is just human nature that has been more and more present with the evolution of the human race and until something changes we as a country will be controlled by the culture of fear.

In the article, “The Framing of Islam on Network News Following the September 11th Attacks" by Dina Ibrahim, he looks into the changing views on Muslims and the Islamic religion as well as the culture in the couple of weeks months and years following the attacks on September 11th. He looks to find and look at how the Islamic faith and Muslims in general are viewed in America as well as the rest of the world. He also looks to see in Islamic teachings how close they come compared to what scholars and other officials are saying on national television about the how radical the teachings really are. Through studying news coverage of post September 11th news he challenges reporters and news stations to not be so one sided or “subjective” towards Muslims and the Islamic faith. This article to me is a prime example of people surrendering their free will and rational behavior to “protect their species”. When September 11th occurred it was like an immediate wake up call to every Americans patriotic duty if you will and caused a mass discrimination against the Islamic faith and Muslim people all together in America. They were spit on, cussed at, and publicized on national television as basically being enemies of the country and were for the most part mutually hated by the entire country which is entirely unfair for the ones who had nothing to do with the attacks which was about ninety nine percent of the religious group. So we had a mass prejudice all over the entire country of Muslims and people of the Islamic faith but on top of that we also waged war within days after the attacks on Afghanistan a country which is known for being mostly of the Islamic faith as a whole. These two things together are both perfect examples on how when something goes wrong our human nature is to hold a whole group of people accountable instead of the people who actually did it therefore surrendering our free will and rational behavior to protect the species or in this case other fellow Americans.

In the article "Swine flu: fact versus fantasy" Debora Mackenzie talks about facts as well as lies about the Swine flu. One lie about the swine flu is the idea that it is just a mild and easily curable sickness exactly like any other flu when actually it has killed around five thousand people total in the world, other lies about the swine flu include that healthy people are safe from the swine flu and contrary to popular belief the symptoms are not the same as the regular flues most people think and it is estimated that at least a third of the entire world’s population is expected to contract it at some point or time in their life. This article shows how much history actually does repeat itself. This exact same thing happened during World War One when the Spanish Flu was going around and killing people and was known to be highly contagious just like the my next source *The Last Town On Earth* demonstrates perfectly. Just like then people and schools were quarantined and cautioned to stay inside, the difference now is that modern medicine is so good that there is a cure for the Swine Flu unlike back then when if someone got the Spanish Flu they had about a ten percent chance to live and for the most part were expected to die a cruel and extremely painful death. This being said it just goes to show history does repeat itself and if we as a country are not careful the next way it repeats itself could be a lot worse than the Swine Flu.

Paranoia and fear have and always will be a part of the human race because people are controlled by fear and fear makes people paranoid. All of these examples just mentioned all lead and point in one direction and that is that paranoia is part of Human Evolution. This is so evident because the only reason paranoia began was due to something that happened or something you heard about or something that somebody did to somebody else that made people weary or alert that it could happen to them and thus began the culture of fear and paranoia it is as elementary as that. If people did not only look out for their own personal gain and were not so selfish then maybe paranoia would not have occurred but it was because someone was trying to gain power, land, money, livestock, food, or something along those lines that first caused somebody to do something so unthinkable that created the fear and the paranoia that they could be next or that it could happen to them. These things such as greed and selfishness are all apart of human evolution and go along with the strong survive and the weak do not theory. This is how paranoia and the culture of fear were both started, showing that some things never change.