

(Name Withdrawn)
Soc 101
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December 6, 2007

Fear: America's Reality

*"Explanation lay not in a lack of intelligence...but in the social conditions at the time." -
Barry Glassner*

A major view in the sociological world is Marxism. Marxism is a view of society that describes society's way of living and thinking that is allegedly derived from the social elites that rule the country and the lower social classes being oppressed and exploited. The book The Culture of Fear describes how Americans are afraid of certain social problems in the United States and how the issues become problems. The mass media plays a large part in what the American society thinks, believes, does and concerns. The main purpose of his book is to debunk these fears that are instilled in the American society and directly point out the origins of these fears.

Glassner's argument in his book The Culture of Fear is essentially the idea that the American society, as a whole, has fears without reasonable causation. The media plays a major part in putting these different fears into the minds of society. If society sees something in the mass media or in the news Glassner says that "We judge how common or important a phenomenon is by how readily it comes to mind. We are likely to give top billing to whatever the media emphasizes at the moment, because that issue instantly comes to mind" (Glassner 133). This means that if a new disease breaks out like SARS did years back; people will be more paranoid and show signs of anxiety and even go to the extreme to diagnose them with the disease. The disease is on their mind all the time, however if they wouldn't of broadcasted it on television, there is a good chance the person would not of have known about it in the first place. This is where

Glassner makes his point of society having the wrong fears. The wrong fears are concerns, issues or problems that the media puts into society's minds through television, internet, radio and other mediums. Furthermore, these wrong fears are making people highly anxious, worried and stressed because of the bogus statistics, reports and over exaggeration of events such as crimes or illnesses. Glassner's point to the reader is that the mass media can exploit any topic that they want and therefore control most of the American society.

A main point in Glassner's essay is the exploitation of crime and related happenings by the mass media. Crime in the news is highly over exaggerated and most of the reports aren't accurate. There are examples like the daughter who was stealing from her ill father, the wife who hired her brother to kill her husband and child murderers. The mass media tells all of these stories but they leave out important things such as the history and other information behind the reasons why the people commit crimes. There are reason such as the daughter was stealing and wasn't caring for her father, the wife who was already married and recently increase her husband's insurance policy and the depression of one child who shot an other individual. Glassner makes it quite clear that all of these happenings are terrible, although the stories are taken out of context and made to manipulate society. As a result of these horrific stories, society get paranoid, anxious, and on high alert so therefore it thinks that these things could happen to them, when in reality, there is a very small percentage of that chance. Crime rates, actual homicides and suicide rates, along with other violence rates are actually down far more than what they were when society wasn't aware of their fear. Fear is only instilled into society by what they see via the mass media and what is currently on their mind. As

soon as another problem or fear is brought up, people's awareness of crime rates, which are at a low despite what the media portrays, will be directed in another direction.

Glassner strongly believes that Americans do not need to fear these fears that the mass media instills on them. In the mindset of a sociologist, I believe that these fears that are instilled into American society are seen through a Marxism point of view. Marxism is the idea that the social elites have power and dictate what the lower class buys, eats, does and basically their whole life. Considering how much power and control the mass media has over the views and beliefs of people in the United States; anyone who can pay the media to focus or not focus on a certain subject and therefore control society as a whole. There are examples that Glassner gives that explicate these ideas such as: suppressed researched findings regarding breast implants, how crack became the reason for economic distress in the 1980s or even how the media blames low test scores and high school drop outs on teenage mothers. (Glassner) The suppressing of the research about breast implants was the fault of a certain lawyer who was making a lot of money. With the social elite (lawyer) come a great amount of money and power and this is the way that the elites keep things out of public knowledge. Money and power combined can make the public think whatever the elites want them to think. The other way that social elites make people think what they want is through a scapegoat or a distraction that keeps their attention off of the certain controversy or problem. The media comes down harshly on teen mothers and blames them for many different social problems such as: crime rates, poor school testing, welfare costs, drug abuse and other social problems. Glassner debunks these theories and gives many examples of how teen mothers aren't responsible and actually earn about the same salary that their parents made. This whole idea of

media diversion is, in my opinion, Marxism at its finest. The media will instill these thoughts and fears with their endless supply of money to produce anxiety and distress among the American people. The anxiety and distress achieves the ultimate goal of the public forgetting or focusing their attention on what they want. And the elites controlling the lower classes through money, power and the media is the exact definition of Marxism.

Overall, Glassner's The Culture of Fear was a very easy to understand reading. The structure was very repetitive in the sense that he would state an issue and its stereotypes, give accounts for the stereotypes and then go on to debunk it with information and quotes from other researchers and from there, he would make his point of why Americans shouldn't have that fear. Glassner has some very interesting and under-the-rug issues that he talks about which open the readers' eyes to the real problems that America has. These fears that the mass media promotes makes way for more stereotypes and with more stereotypes comes heightened fear. The media exploits black people who rape white people more so than if a white person raped another white person, and therefore, puts the fear into the minds of white people to fear the black people. This is just one example that is among other media based stereotypes such as: homosexual pedophiles, drug abusing teen mothers, breast implants causing cancer and many other examples that Glassner gives. Furthermore, Glassner takes each one of these examples and completely debunks them and breaks them down for the reader to understand. Through the medium of this text book, Glassner tries to explain the fears that American society has and explain to the reader why society need not be fearful, because the fears are conceptualized by the mass media. This book was very informative and made me

think about why I have certain fears, and I realized that they were conceptualized and stereotypical.

Glassner's idea of the American society having these fears is completely true. America has a lot of stereotypes and other preconceived notions about people, cities, countries and illnesses. Glassner makes it quite clear that these are all wrong fears and there is no reason that American society should have any of these fears. He blames the mass media for putting these fears and stereotypes into society's minds. Money that is being spent on trying to protect American society from their own fears and make them feel comfortable in their surroundings should be spent on serious dangers that can affect American society. Fear is not needed in American society, and Glassner suggests that we look past the influential media and make our own informed decisions to decide what we really need to fear.

Works Cited

Glassner, Barry. The Culture of Fear. New York, New York: Basic Books, 1999.