What terrifies you? Financial ruin? Global pandemic? Alien invasion? Zombie apocalypse? Do you feel more frightened when people around you are frightened?

We like to think that the more we understand about the world, the less we have to fear. But mass panic is just as prevalent today as it has been at any time in human history. The object of this course is to explore episodes of mass panic over the last thousand years. Why do concern and anxiety transform into panic and hysteria in some contexts but not in others? What do panics reveal about the societies in which they occur? Panics have provided the context to justify attacks on immigrants, women, the disabled, minorities, and any other group that could be construed as a threat. Panic, as we will see in this course, has always been about much more than just panic.

Themes:
Long-term preconditions – Are there underlying forces that need to be in place for mass panic to occur?
Short-term triggers – Is there a single event that sets it off?
How panic is spread – Is panic different in our modern mass-media age than it was in pre-literate societies?
Impacts of panic – Who gets hurt? Who profits?
Panic in popular culture – Why are we so fascinated by books and films involving mass panic?
Assignments:
In-class primary source assessment 15%
Mid-term examination 35%
Final examination 50%

Readings:
There are no textbooks to purchase for this course. Readings are available on the course website. You should keep up with the readings on a weekly basis, as they will be referred to in lecture. You will be responsible for ALL of the course readings for the mid-term and final examinations.

Learning outcomes:
By the end of this course, students should:
- understand the impact of fear on human society through history
- appreciate how improvements in communications have affected the spread of panic in different societies
- be aware of the challenges in seeking to make sense of fundamentally irrational human behavior
- be familiar with a variety of notable examples of mass hysteria in different societies
- understand how scholars in various disciplines interpret panic in an historical context

Lectures:

5 January - Introduction
Panic in ancient societies

“You don’t look so good ...” – Threats to the Body
12 January
Disease panics in the old world: the Black Death, the Plague, cholera, smallpox

Readings:
19 January
Disease panics in the modern world: Mad Cow, SARS, and avian flu

Reading:

“There’s a run on the bank!!!” – Threats to the Home
26 January
Financial panics from the Tulip Mania to the Global Meltdown

Readings:

2 February
** in-class primary source assessment

The Enemy Among Us – Threats to the Community
9 February
Revolutionaries and anarchists: from the Fifth Monarchists and the Great Fear to the Indian Mutiny

Reading:
Georges Lefebvre, The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France (1932): part III “The Great Fear”

16 February - no class - reading week

23 February
Communists and terrorists: Red Scares to the National Terrorism Advisory System

Readings:
Cyndy Hendershot, Anti-Communism and Popular Culture in Mid-Century America (2003): ch 1 “Paranoiac Discourse and Anti-Communism”
“We shall fight on the beaches” – Threats to the Nation
2 March
Invasion scares from Napoleon to Hitler

Readings:
“Bonaparte may pass this way”
Martin Kitchen, “The German Invasion of Canada in the First World War,”

9 March
** mid-term examination

“Double, Double, toil and trouble” – Threats from Other Realms
16 March
Witches, dancing mania, and demonic possession

Readings:

23 March
Space invaders, Martian attacks and alien abduction

Readings:

“It’s the end of the world as we know it” – Threats to Existence
30 March
Armageddons and apocalypses: Planetary alignments, Doomsday cults, and the End of Days
Readings:

**Conclusion**

6 April

Zombies, Vampires, and Werewolves: Towards a Typology of Panic