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The making of a germ panic, then and now.

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Abstract

Over the last 2 decades, a heightened interest in germs has been evident in many aspects of American popular culture, including news coverage, advertisements, and entertainment media. Although clearly a response to the AIDS epidemic and other recent disease outbreaks, current obsessions with germs have some striking parallels with a similar period of intense anxiety about disease germs that occurred between 1900 and 1940. A comparison of these 2 periods of germ "panic" suggests some of the long-term cultural trends that contributed to their making. Both germ panics reflected anxieties about societal incorporation, associated with expanding markets, transportation networks, and mass immigration. They were also shaped by new trends in public health education, journalism, advertising, and entertainment media. In comparison to the first germ panic, the current discourse about the "revenge of the superbugs" is

considerably more pessimistic because of increasing worries about the environment, suspicions of governmental authority, and distrust of expert knowledge. Yet, as popular anxieties about infectious disease have increased, public health scientists have been attracting favorable coverage in their role as "medical detectives" on the trail of the "killer germ."

Full Text

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Selected References

These references are in PubMed. This may not be the complete list of references from this article.

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