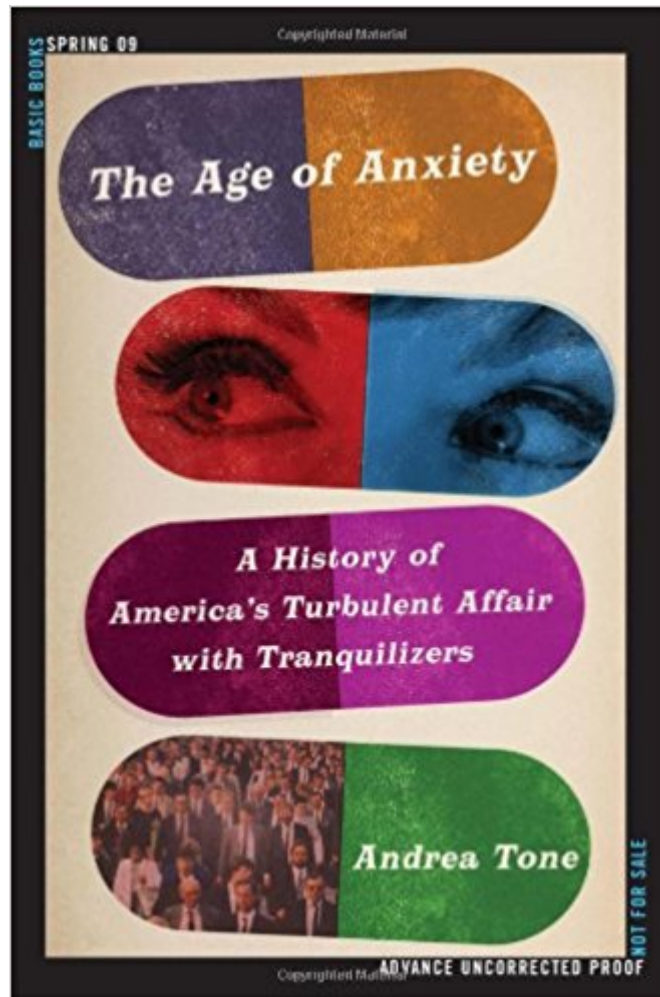


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The Age Of Anxiety: A History Of America's Turbulent Affair With Tranquilizers



Synopsis

Anxious Americans have increasingly pursued peace of mind through pills and prescriptions. In 2006, the National Institute of Mental Health estimated that 40 million adult Americans suffer from an anxiety disorder in any given year: more than double the number thought to have such a disorder in 2001. Anti-anxiety drugs are a billion-dollar business. Yet as recently as 1955, when the first tranquilizer—Miltown—went on the market, pharmaceutical executives worried that there wouldn't be interest in anxiety-relief. At mid-century, talk therapy remained the treatment of choice. But Miltown became a sensation—the first psychotropic blockbuster in United States history. By 1957, Americans had filled 36 million prescriptions. Patients seeking made-to-order tranquility emptied drugstores, forcing pharmacists to post signs reading “more Miltown tomorrow.” The drug's financial success and cultural impact revolutionized perceptions of anxiety and its treatment, inspiring the development of other lifestyle drugs including Valium and Prozac. In *The Age of Anxiety*, Andrea Tone draws on a broad array of original sources—manufacturers' files, FDA reports, letters, government investigations, and interviews with inventors, physicians, patients, and activists—to provide the first comprehensive account of the rise of America's tranquilizer culture. She transports readers from the bomb shelters of the Cold War to the scientific optimism of the Baby Boomers, to the “just say no” Puritanism of the late 1970s and 1980s. A vibrant history of America's long and turbulent affair with tranquilizers, *The Age of Anxiety* casts new light on what it has meant to seek synthetic solutions to everyday angst.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

An academic historian, Andrea Tone looks at the history behind anxiety and the tranquilizers used to calm it. Other books also look at how Americans use a lot of drugs like antidepressants and tranquilizers to improve their lives rather than fight a physical illness. But those authors typically push their own view on the subject. A good historian, Tone does not. Indeed, it's hard to know what Tone herself thinks about tranquilizers. That's good. We readers can learn the history and make a judgment for ourselves. Tone starts with a look at hundreds of years of history of mental disorders, and how anxiety played its role in that history. Then she lays out the history of the first tranquilizer, Miltown, and how it fit in with the society that took it up with such enthusiasm. Tone ends with the backlash against tranquilizers. As society continued to change, many found that the drugs could bite instead of comfort. Instant gratification came with a price, it seemed. A price many found too high to pay. The Age of Anxiety is not a perfect book. It turns a bit tedious at times. Not a book that was hard to put down, it was instead occasionally hard to pick up again. That said, I did find myself drawn back into the story, wanting to know what happened next. Many interesting glimpses into social history come out of the Age of Anxiety. Some I had known, but forgotten. For instance, how heavily the threat of nuclear war hung over the America of the 1950s and 1960s. That was a worry that even I had as a young child in that era. Tone points out that in 1959 two-thirds of American adults said in a poll that nuclear war was the issue that concerned them the most. Other glimpses I did not know.

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