



## Fear: The History of a Political Idea

Corey Robin

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For many commentators, September 11 inaugurated a new era of fear. But as Corey Robin shows in his unsettling tour of the Western imagination--the first intellectual history of its kind--fear has shaped our politics and culture since time immemorial.

From the Garden of Eden to the Gulag Archipelago to today's headlines, Robin traces our growing fascination with political danger and disaster. As our faith in positive political principles recedes, he argues, we turn to fear as the justifying language of public life. We may not know the good, but we do know the bad. So we cling to fear, abandoning the quest for justice, equality, and freedom. But as fear becomes our intimate, we understand it less. In a startling reexamination of fear's greatest modern interpreters--Hobbes, Montesquieu, Tocqueville, and Arendt--Robin finds that writers since the eighteenth century have systematically obscured fear's political dimensions, diverting attention from the public and private authorities who sponsor and benefit from it. For fear, Robin insists, is an exemplary instrument of repression--in the public and private sector. Nowhere is this politically repressive fear--and its evasion--more evident than in contemporary America. In his final chapters, Robin accuses our leading scholars and critics of ignoring "Fear, American Style," which, as he shows, is the fruit of our most prized inheritances--the Constitution and the free market.

With danger playing an increasing role in our daily lives and justifying a growing number of government policies, Robin's *Fear* offers a bracing, and necessary, antidote to our contemporary culture of fear.



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