

OMNI SPECIAL NEWSLETTER ON FEAR, October 22, 2007, compiled by Dick Bennett

OMNI's devotion to a CULTURE OF PEACE has sought to empower people against the many forces of fear that are employed to manipulate and control us.

For analysis of the Cheney-Bush Admin.'s exploitation of fear, go directly to Wolf's essay.

US CULTURE OF FEAR

2 essays: Cory on USA fears and rev. of Wolf's book *The End of America*.

America, Land of Fear? By John Cory truthout | Perspective

Wednesday 17 October 2007

"We will not walk in fear, one of another. We will not be driven into an age of unreason if we dig deep into our history and remember we are not descended from fearful men."

- Edward R. Murrow

They have presented us with their sinister box gift-wrapped in a thobe and ghutra tied in a bow with a chapan and pakol. And when the package loses its luster, they light the ribbon-fuse and toss the sparkling box into the air for all to see and remember and shudder. Such a lovely parcel, this box of fear; carefully packaged and marketed with shiny toys of death inside and extra coupons on the back to order more. Don't be the only kid on the block without one.

When did America change from "the land of the free" to the land of fear?

When did we become a nation afraid of tubes of toothpaste and shampoo and water bottles? Who taught us to fear brown people in all their shades? What is it that makes us fear and despise oral sex more than torture? How is it that a nation founded on revolution and free speech now cowers in "free speech zones" and trembles at every utterance of its citizens? How in the heck did we come to dread the truth from 12-year-old children?

We were a nation inspired by thought and words. Patrick Henry, "Give me liberty or give me death." Dr. King, "I have a dream." The hymns of the heart like, "We Shall Overcome." Suddenly we say "Give me less liberty so I don't worry about death." Standing on the mountaintop, we exclaim, "I have no dream." Overwhelmed by paranoia and despair, we lament, "We cannot overcome."

In the film, "Seven Days in May," a revolution is underway to overthrow the president of the United States. Behind it are members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, led by Gen. James Mattoon Scott. When fingers are pointed and the presidential adviser says it is time to face the enemy, President Jordan Lyman responds, "He's not the enemy. Scott, the Joint Chiefs, even the emotional, very illogical lunatic fringe: They're not the enemy. The enemy's an age - a nuclear age. It happens to have killed man's faith in his ability to influence what happens to him. And out of this comes a sickness, and out of sickness a frustration, a feeling of impotence, helplessness, weakness. And from this, this desperation, we look for a champion in red, white, and blue. Every now and then a man on a white horse rides by, and we appoint him to be our personal god for the duration. For some men it was a Senator McCarthy, for others it was a General Walker, and now it's a General Scott."

There have always been those who capitalize on our fears for their own power-starved greed; who gave us Manzanar, and "restricted" clubs and hotels, the Red-baiting scare and blacklists; those willing to violate the sanctity of freedom by spying on their own citizens while loudly proclaiming the need for "the right kind" of thought and expression to save the cherished American dream - who count lapel pins as patriotism.

How long ago did we lose the ability to meet and greet our friends and loved ones at the arrival gate in the airport? Do you remember? And no, it was long before 9/11.

And that, my friend, is the seditious subtlety of the politics of fear. It is never sudden, but creeps slowly into the mainstream. Small steps and small fears that acclimate us to the need for protection - from what or whom doesn't matter. It is enough to be afraid and sit quietly in the dark and wait for "them" to identify the danger and offer their warped protection.

America has always been more myth than reality, but it was that magical mix of fiction and fact that made the dream of America larger than life. We were a cross between Paul Bunyan and Paul Revere, and that was our charm. Tall tales and brash "can-do" Americanism lifted us on the swells of rising dreams all around the world.

The greatness of America was never its armies or corporate empires - it was its citizens, the everyday John Doe on the street. It was and should always be "we the people."

Immigrants came to America to be part of "we the people." They came to work, no matter how menial; it was all just a stepping-stone to the new frontier of being American. They believed in the myth and the magic despite the posted signs, "Irish need not apply" or drinking fountains labeled "Whites Only." America was Little Italy, Chinatown, Harlem and Little Saigon.

Now we have become a nation besieged by desperation. Politicians running for office sneer at us, holding themselves up as "leaders" rather than "representatives" of we the people. Demographics and demagoguery pass for political discussion, and the rubber stamp echoes through the halls of Congress. One party clutches frantically to power, while the other is smug in the knowledge that we the people want change so badly we'll probably vote for anyone but the current regime. They do not fight or stand, but choose to nod weakly while democracy passes by.

In the play "Inherit the Wind," an allegory for the McCarthy Era, Henry Drummond speaks about wicked laws and fanaticism: "I say that you cannot administer a wicked law impartially. You can only destroy, you can only punish. And I warn you, that a wicked law, like cholera, destroys every one it touches. Its upholders as well as its defiers. Can't you understand?.... And soon you may ban books and newspapers. And then you may turn Catholic against Protestant, and Protestant against Protestant. If you can do one, you can do the other. Because fanaticism and ignorance is forever busy, and needs feeding."

I disagree with President Lyman above - it is not a nuclear age or terrorism, but rather the men and women of the age who determine whether the disease of dictatorship and fascism continues to infect or is killed in the sunlight of pure democracy.

SOLUTIONS

America deserves better. We the people deserve better.

This will be my America and my vote: (Are you listening, Democrats?)

An end to the war in Iraq and an end to its funding. An end to the lies that kill.

A Sunday morning bathed in autumn sunlight, presidential candidates and members of Congress standing on the tarmac at Dover AFB, ready and willing to serve as pallbearers for the caskets that cradle our American pride and joy now stilled by this senseless war.

A mosque in Detroit surrounded by Christian and Muslim Americans embracing their love of GOD and rejecting the fear of GOP.

A border town bulldozing chain-link fences and reciting Robert Frost.

A multinational corporation showing up at a veterans' hospital with building materials and employment counselors and funding for those for whom duty and honor are not political marketing slogans.

A child, born in the security of never going without health care, and parents never having to choose to which of their children they can afford to give medical treatment or where they will all live after selling off house and home to pay hospital bills.

Impossible, you say? Impractical and unreal?

My friend, this is America. We have danced on the moon and scuffed the dust of Mars. We once put pen to paper and ignited a revolution heard round the world.

We are not descended from fearful men. (from Fran A)

Culture of fear is a term that refers to a perceived prevalence of [fear](#) and [anxiety](#) in public discourse and relationships, and how this may affect the way people interact with one another as individuals and as democratic agents. Among those who share this perception there are a variety of different claims as to the sources and consequences of the trend they seek to describe; however, most share the basic claim that this is a relatively new [mass media](#)-related phenomenon with important and potentially harmful implications.

Variations on the thesis

Several different social commentators have offered different Culture of Fear theses, each with a distinctive emphasis. They may be categorised along a spectrum, from those which consider the phenomenon to be consciously directed - a deliberate policy of scaremongering - to those which treat it as arising spontaneously out of historical developments, as a reflexive response to other changes in human society.

Constructed fear

Among those tending to argue that a Culture of Fear is being deliberately manufactured might be counted linguist [Noam Chomsky](#), sociologist [Barry Glassner](#), political filmmakers such as [Adam Curtis](#) and

[Michael Moore](#) or reporters such as [Judith Miller](#). The motives offered for such a deliberate programme of scaremongering vary, but hinge on the potential for increased social control that a mistrustful and mutually fearing population might offer to those in power. In these accounts, fears are carefully and repeatedly created and fed by anyone who wishes to create fear, often through the manipulation of words, facts, news, sources or data, in order to induce certain personal behaviors, justify governmental actions or policies (at home or abroad), keep people consuming, elect [demagogic](#) politicians, or distract the public's attention from allegedly more urgent social issues like [poverty](#), [social security](#), [unemployment](#), [crime](#) or [pollution](#). Such commentators suggest that we consider a range of cultural processes as deliberate *techniques* for scaremongering. For example:

- Careful selection and omission of news (some relevant facts are shown and some are not);
- Distortion of [statistics](#) or numbers;
- Transformation of single events into social epidemics; ([Salem witch trials](#))
- Corruption and distortion of words or terminology according to specific goals;
- Stigmatization of [minorities](#), especially when associated with criminal acts, degrading behaviour or [immigration](#) policies; ([Yellow Peril](#))
- Generalization of complex and multifaceted situations;
- Causal inversion (turning a cause into an effect or vice-versa);
- Outright fabrication of events or claims.

Emergent fear

At the other end of the spectrum, a Culture of Fear is presented as a sensibility that emerges from every corner of contemporary society, spontaneously. [Frank Furedi](#), a Professor of [Sociology](#) at the [University of Kent \(UK\)](#), who also founded the [Revolutionary Communist Party of Great Britain](#), exemplifies this end of the spectrum with his books, *Culture of Fear: Risk-taking and the Morality of Low Expectations* (1997) and *Politics of Fear: Beyond Left and Right* (2005). Furedi's account locates the source of the phenomenon in what he characterises a 'failure of historical imagination', a symptom of what he identifies as the exhaustion of [20th century](#) systems of political meaning.

It was my experience of the 1995 contraceptive Pill panic that motivated me to write Culture of Fear. I carried out a global study of national reactions to the panic, and it quickly became clear that the differential responses were culturally informed. Some societies, like Britain and Germany, responded in a confused, panic-like fashion - while countries like France, Belgium and Hong Kong adopted a more calm and measured approach. [\[1\]](#)

By Furedi's account, a universal sense of fearfulness pre-exists and underpins the expression of fears by media and politicians. While media and politicians might amplify and exploit this sensibility, their activities are not decisive in its cultural production. Furedi levels the charge at various 'anti-establishment' or 'liberal' voices that they are at least as complicit in the exploitation of fears (ecological catastrophe, for example) as the 'establishment' that is more commonly held to benefit from the culture of fear.

Lack of fear

Some commentators^{[\[citation needed\]](#)} also point out that a process similar to that of creating fear can be used to dampen it either by trivializing or outright ignoring the problem, a kind of death by [apathy](#). It's hard to be scared of something which doesn't exist. Examples of this are the issues of [asbestos](#) and [cigarettes](#): until people could conclusively prove harm, all these problems were commonly treated as if they were nonexistent. Another example could be the idea of not reporting on wars to give the appearance they don't exist or to attempt to downplay their significance.

Case studies

Each of the above commentators has picked out examples from recent public discourse to illustrate their case. In each case, the general argument is that the nature of the threat described in public discourse is out of all proportion to the real risks and harms entailed. Different commentators focus on different aspects of such cases - for example, one will focus on how stories might be distorted as they filter through the national media, while another will concentrate on the receptivity of the audience, or its willingness to alter its behaviour or voting preferences. For each case, there may be several experts and organizations who dispute the implication that the issue is unduly exaggerated.

- [Anonymous](#) - [Internet Hate Machine?](#)
- [Antibiotic resistance](#) - Will [germs](#) become immune to drugs? (e.g. [MRSA](#), known as the [Superbug](#))
- [Bioengineering](#) - Could bio-engineered food have undesired effects in the human body, or might bio-engineered plants cause havoc in the environment?
- [Breast implants](#) - Do they leak?
- [Cellular phones](#) - Do they cause brain cancer and fires at gas stations?
- [Chemtrails](#) - Harmless [contrails](#)? Or traces of secret atmosphere-altering projects?
- [Drug companies](#) - What are the side effects of prescription drugs?
- [Drug prohibition](#) - Should recreational drugs be legal?
- [Dungeons & Dragons](#) & [Harry Potter](#) & [music](#) - Do they corrupt children's minds?
- [Food safety](#) - Is food safe to eat? Does it consist possibly harmful bioengineered corn? Might it contain [E. coli](#)?
- [Global Warming](#) - What is the global impact of rising CO₂ levels?
- [Google](#) - Does aggregation of search term data potentially compromise customer privacy?
- [Hackers](#) - Will they gain access to my computer?
- [Home security](#) - Are homeowners and tenants safe from intruders?
- [HIV](#) - How contagious is the disease?
- [Identity theft](#) - Is somebody going to destroy my life by impersonating me?
- [Immunizations](#) - Are they safe even though they are made from chicken eggs and contain mercury?
- [Killer Bees](#) - How lethal are they?
- [Missing white woman syndrome](#) and other [kidnapping](#) fears - How does one protect one's family?
- [Nuclear power](#) - What are the effects of long term exposure to radiation?
- [Organ Trafficking](#) - Are people waking up with a kidney missing?
- [Ozone hole](#) - Will the [ozone](#) hole cause greater incidences of cancer?
- [Paganism](#) & [Witchcraft](#) - Can we trust our neighbors? A target of many [Conservative Christian](#) groups.
- [Pandemics](#) - Is there a disease somewhere which will spread uncontrollably and kill everyone?
- [Pedophilia](#) or [nanny abuse](#) - Can one trust strangers with ones children? Should every man who seems to like kids be treated as a danger? Panics including the harassment of a [pediatrician](#) in the [UK](#).
- [Poor](#) - Are they desperate enough to rob the better off?
- [Red Scares](#) - Hundreds of people were imprisoned, [blacklisted](#), or deported out of fear of anarchism and communism.
- [Satanic ritual abuse](#) - Are strangers out to kidnap children? Several high-profile cases of children being erroneously taken into care.
- [Second hand smoke](#) - Can one get cancer from it?
- [Snuff films](#) - Could ones loved ones be kidnapped to be killed on film?
- [Social Network](#) - Could children be kidnapped / stalked / encounter an [Online Predator](#) -- see [MySpace](#) and [Facebook](#)
- [Social Security reform](#) - Will today's workers have a safety net when they retire?

- [Sudan I](#) - A food scare in the [United Kingdom](#).
- [Terrorism](#) - Are people from other countries safe to be around?
- [Vaccines](#) - Do they cause Autism in young children?
- [Violent and/or sexually explicit video games](#) - Are videogames corrupting youth?
- [Water Quality](#) - What toxins are in our tap water? Is fluoride dangerous? Are bottled waters safer?

Political context and criticism

The conduct of and rhetoric surrounding the "[War on Terrorism](#)" and the [2003 Invasion of Iraq](#) have been a prime target of criticism by those of many political ideologies. In this context, the "culture of fear" is purportedly generated by the [Bush](#) Administration and its allies, in a top-down effort to increase support for strong military and domestic security operations. In a broader domestic political context, many believe that conservative politicians and moral leaders make people afraid about things such as terrorism, crime or illegal drugs both to influence public opinion and personal behavior.

Conservative talk show hosts have accused many liberal groups of creating irrational fears to manipulate people for their purpose or being solely motivated by fears.^[1] While certain liberal points may be valid, conservatives accuse liberals of demonizing certain people and entities. To these conservative speakers, liberal speakers much talk of "Big Oil" "Big Tobacco" giving large complex entities such human, selfish, and amoral qualities that, something, "anything", must be done. ^[citation needed] Right leaning politicians in power have often been vilified by the left, say conservatives, and the resulting fears and doubts are not generated by the politicians themselves, but of the naysayers speaking dishonestly and frightfully about their opponents. Some have claimed that this led to the ousting of [Newt Gingrich](#) as [Speaker of the House](#).^[citation needed] But conservatives have conducted tactics similar to that which they have accused the left. [Bill Clinton](#) received quite a bit of vilification from the right. ^[citation needed] The term "Big Government" was often used pejoratively in discussions relating to nationalizing health care. ^[citation needed] Before the 90s, [Ronald Reagan](#) was often vilified. The history of vilification of presidents in the United States goes back towards the beginning of the 19th century. ^[citation needed]

The idea of a society-wide "culture of fear" might be perceived by liberals and other opponents of conservatives as a shorthand for cultural manipulation for conservative political purposes.

Conversely, liberals have also been accused of their fair share of scaremongering to suit their own political agendas, especially on issues of environmental protection, global warming, biotechnology and gun safety.

There are several alternative views

- Politicians and orators speak to create an environment more amicable to their intended policies and philosophy.
- Promoters of a particular cause may want many people to join them in the cause. However, because people generally don't become emotional about something complex and hard to understand, promoters may tend to oversimplify matters to emphasize their main points and deemphasize points of contention.
- Commercial media outlets are simply maximizing their audience, and scary information happens to be one thing that grabs people's attention. (Some would even argue that this serves the public interest.)

On issues that have not become strongly associated with left/right political controversy, an explosion of

overblown fears in the public discourse might be labeled by other commentators as "scares". Typical symptoms of a scare include a lack of scientific or general education among the public, intrinsic human biases in the assessment of [risk](#), a lack of rational thinking, misinformation, and giving too much weight to [rumor](#).

Books

- *Culture of Fear: Risk taking and the morality of low expectation*, [Frank Furedi](#), [ISBN 0-8264-7616-3](#)
- *The Culture of fear: The assault on optimism in America*, [Barry Glassner](#) [ISBN 0-465-01490-9](#)
- *Manufacturing Consent: The political economy of the mass media*, [Edward S. Herman](#) & [Noam Chomsky](#) [ISBN 0-09-953311-1](#)

- *Politics of Fear: Beyond Left and Right*, [Frank Furedi](#), [ISBN 0-8264-8728-9](#)
- *State of Fear*, [Michael Crichton](#), [ISBN 0-06-621413-0](#)
- *Urban Nightmares: The Media, the Right and the Moral Panic over the City*, [Steve Macek](#), [ISBN 0-8166-4361-X](#)
- *Kingdom of Fear: Loathsome Secrets of a Star-Crossed Child in the Final Days of the American Century*. (Simon & Schuster; 1st Simon edition, November 1, 2003, [ISBN 0-684-87324-9](#))
- *You Have the Power: Choosing Courage in a Culture of Fear* [Frances Moore Lappe](#) and [Jeffrey Perkins](#) , [ISBN 978-1585424245](#)

[More: *The Assault on Reason*, Al Gore, opening chapter, “

- [The culture of fear, by Barry Glassner - Introduction](#) - "Why Americans are afraid of the wrong things"
- [The Culture of Fear by Frank Furedi](#) - "Culture Of Fear: Risk-Taking And The Morality Of Low Expectation"
- [The Culture of Fear by Noam Chomsky](#)
- [Beyond a Culture of Fear, by K. Lauren de Boer](#) - article published in the EarthLight magazine, #47, fall/winter 2002/2003
- [A Legal Culture of Fear](#) - Common Good : safeguarding Americans from a legal culture of fear. Philip K. Howard's testimony before the U.S. House Judiciary Committee, June 22, 2004
- [You Have the Power: Choosing Courage in a Culture of Fear](#) by [Frances Moore Lappé](#) and Jeffrey Perkins
- [Fearless News](#) - An online community collecting statistics on fear in mass media
- [Creating Fear: News and the Construction of Crisis](#) by David Altheide
- [The Political Implications of a Discourse of Fear: The Mass Mediated Discourse of Fear in the Aftermath of 9/11](#) by Stefanie Grupp Clasby

Naomi Wolf EXAMINES The STATE of US DEMOCRACY

<http://www.alternet.org/bloggers/howard/65748/>

Posted by [Adam Howard](#) at 1:41 PM on October 21, 2007.

From Adam Howard: Mussolini created the blueprint, Hitler followed suit, Stalin studied Hitler and it all leads to Bush.

Even though her message is frightening, Naomi Wolf wants to assure people that there can be a light at the end of the tunnel. The [YouTube](#) video is a terrific speech by Wolf (at Kane Hall on the University of Washington campus) about her provocative new book "[The End of America](#)" which talks about the parallels between the Bush Administration's tactics and those of fascist dictatorships of the last century.

The same language, images, manipulation that would-be despots have used in the past to break down existing democracies are being employed now. From Italy in the 1920s, Germany in the 1930s, and on and on, Wolf finds that all these despots do that same things. Mussolini created the blueprint, Hitler followed suit, Stalin studied Hitler and these methods just get passed down to the next generation of dictators throughout the world. Wolf has summarized their method is ten points:

1. Invoke a terrifying internal and external enemy
2. Create a gulag
3. Develop a thug caste
4. Set up an internal surveillance system
5. Harass citizens' groups
6. Engage in arbitrary detention and release
7. Target key individuals
8. Control the press
9. Dissent equals treason
10. Suspend the rule of law

Wolf argues that all of these methods are underway in the United States right now. We ran a [piece](#) by Wolf just a couple weeks ago where she talked about number three, the thug caste, and Blackwater. In this video she provides ample evidence of all the other ten as well.

She says she wrote this book to inspire young people in particular to combat this trend, and to restore democracy asap. The arguments she marks are compelling, thoroughly researched and impossible to dispute. So what can we do? What is the light at the end of the tunnel? You'll have to skip ahead to about the 5:37 mark to find out.