ALSO BY MARTHA C. NUSSBAUM

Aristotle's De Motu Animalium

The Fragility of Goodness:
Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy

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The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics

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A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education

Sex and Social Justice

Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach

Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions

Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law

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The Clash Within:
Democracy, Religious Violence, and India's Future

Liberty of Conscience:
In Defense of America's Tradition of Religious Equality

From Disgust to Humanity:
Sexual Orientation and Constitutional Law

Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities

The New Religious Intolerance:
Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age

Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach

Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice

Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice

Aging Thoughtfully: Conversations about Retirement, Romance, Wrinkles, and Regret (with Saul Levmore)
INTRODUCTION

There's a lot of fear around in the US today, and this fear is often mingled with anger, blame, and envy. Fear all too often blocks rational deliberation, poisons hope, and impedes constructive cooperation for a better future.

What is today's fear about? Many Americans feel themselves powerless, out of control of their own lives. They fear for their own future and that of their loved ones. They fear that the American Dream—that hope that your children will flourish and do even better than you have done—has died, and everything has slipped away from them. These feelings have their basis in real problems: among others, income stagnation in the lower middle class, alarming declines in the health and longevity of members of this group, especially men, and the escalating costs of higher education at the very time that
a college degree is increasingly required for employment. But real problems are difficult to solve, and their solution takes long, hard study and cooperative work toward an uncertain future. It can consequently seem all too attractive to convert that sense of panic and impotence into blame and the "othering" of outsider groups such as immigrants, racial minorities, and women. "They" have taken our jobs. Or: wealthy elites have stolen our country.

The problems that globalization and automation create for working-class Americans are real, deep, and seemingly intractable. Rather than face those difficulties and uncertainties, people who sense their living standard declining can instead grasp after villains, and a fantasy takes shape: if "we" can somehow keep "them" out (build a wall) or keep them in "their place" (in subservient positions), "we" can regain our pride and, for men, their masculinity. Fear leads, then, to aggressive "othering" strategies rather than to useful analysis.

At the same time, fear also runs rampant among people on the "left," who seek greater social and economic equality and the vigorous protection of hard-won rights for women and minorities. Many people who were dismayed by the election are reacting as if the end of the world is at hand. A majority of my students, many acquaintances, many colleagues, feel and say, often with anguish, that our democracy is on the verge of collapse, that the new administration is unprecedented in its willingness to cater to racism, misogyny, and homophobia. They fear, especially, for the possible collapse of democratic freedoms—of speech, travel, association, press. My younger students, especially, think that the America they know and love is about to disappear. Rather than analyze matters soberly and listen to the other side, trying to sort things through, they often demonize an entire half of the American electorate, portraying them as monsters, enemies of everything good. As in the book of Revelation, these are the last days, when a righteous remnant must contend against Satanic forces.

We all need, first, to take a deep breath and recall our history. When I was a little girl, African Americans were being lynched in the South. Communists were losing their jobs. Women were just barely beginning to enter prestigious universities and the work force, and sexual harassment was a ubiquitous offense that had no laws to deter it. Jews could not win partnerships in major law firms. Gays and lesbians, criminals under law, were almost always in the closet. People with disabilities had no rights to public space and public education. Transgender was a category that had, as yet, no name. America was far from beautiful.

These facts tell us two things my students need to know. First, the America for which they are nostalgic never existed, not fully; it was a work in progress, a set of dynamic aspirations put in motion by tough work, cooperation, hope, and solidarity over a long period of time. A just and inclusive America never was and is not yet a fully achieved reality. Second, this present moment may look like backsliding from our march toward human equality, but it is not the apocalypse, and it is actually a time when hope and work can accomplish a great deal of good. On both left and right, panic doesn't just exaggerate our dangers, it also makes our moment much more dangerous than it would otherwise be, more likely to lead to genuine disasters.
It's like a bad marriage, in which fear, suspicion, and blame displace careful thought about what the real problems are and how to resolve them. Instead, those emotions, taking over, become their own problem and prevent constructive work, hope, listening, and cooperation.

When people are afraid of one another and of an unknown future, fear easily gives rise to scapegoating, to fantasies of payback, and to poisonous envy of the fortunate (whether those victorious in the election or those dominant socially and economically). We all remember FDR's statement that "we have nothing to fear but fear itself." We recently heard departing President Obama say, "Democracy can buckle when we give in to fear." Roosevelt was wrong if we take his words literally: although we had reason to fear fear, we certainly had many other things to fear in his time, such as Nazism, hunger, and social conflict. Fear of those evils was rational, and to that extent we should not fear our fear, though we should always examine it. But Obama's more precise and modest statement is surely right: giving way to fear, which means drifting with its currents, refusing skeptical examination, is surely dangerous. We need to think hard about fear and where fear is leading us. After taking a deep breath we all need to understand ourselves as well as we can, using that moment of detachment to figure out where fear and related emotions come from and where they are leading us.

But you might not be convinced, so far, that fear is really a deep problem for democratic self-government. Let me, then,