



How and Why the State Thrives on Fear

Guest: Connor Boyack

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Connor Boyack is president of the Libertas Institute and the author of *Feardom: How Politicians Exploit Your Emotions and What You Can Do to Stop Them*.

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WOODS: A lot of these shows would be a heck of a lot more interesting if we included the pre-show banter in the final recording, but that's going to have to remain a secret. That's just between us.

BOYACK: Yeah, too dangerous to disclose.

WOODS: That's right. Well, this is a neat book you've got here, and I love the cover design. Is it by our friend Elijah Stanfield?

BOYACK: Yeah, he actually helped out with this one, yeah.

WOODS: Yeah, I'm going to have to use him or something. I like it. I like all of his work. But of course, the key thing is are the themes in this book *Feardom: How Politicians Exploit Your Emotions and What You Can Do to Stop Them*. You are taking this issue and looking at it from a number of different angles, but the main point is that the state thrives on fear.

BOYACK: Absolutely, this is the book that I wish somebody else wrote. It's one of those things that I waited and I waited and I waited, and you and I, all your listeners, we come from a perspective where we see the damage the state does, the tools that it uses—fear chief among them. And so here I am sitting along seeing friends and family and acquaintances all fall prey to this cycle of fear-mongering; myself part of it years ago before I finally kind of saw the light, as it were. And there was no material I could find out there that concisely went through and showed, that look, this isn't just a random event that happens. It isn't just, oh, Ebola. They have just preyed upon ignorance and used fear mongering in this one-off example. For me it stemmed back to—if you recall, you've probably seen this, Tom: after the 2004 Republican National Convention, somebody went through and spliced out all of the audio where Dick Cheney and Bush and all the rest were saying things like *war on terror* and *weapons of mass destruction, global terror*.

WOODS: Yeah, and it was unbelievable. It just went on and on and on.

BOYACK: Yeah, it was like two or three minutes showing—and you see how saturating it is once they extract it all. For me, that was the initial trigger point for this book. It just kind of planted a seed over the years where I said, you know what? There needs to be something. There needs to be something. There needs to be something. And so I finally said, you know what? No one else is doing it. Let's write a book. Let's show that ever since the inception of the American country, or our federal government, this has been a long-standing trend. Of course, it's just government in general—world history and everything else. But what I most wanted from this book was—it's easy for us, especially as libertarians or liberty-minded folks to point out problems. I think we are experts at saying, oh, there, here—here is something I take issue with. We're not as good with proposing solutions—with saying here's what needs to happen, and it's something practical or realistic. That's really what I wanted this book to be, is pointing out the problems. Yes, there's fear-mongering. Yes, it pervades government, but at the end of the book, it's what can we actually do about it. How can we stop it?

WOODS: When we look at one of the key theorists of the modern state, it's Thomas Hobbes, and he says that you begin the understanding of where the state comes from by looking at the state of nature before there is a government—a pre-political state—and he says, in that state, everybody is fearful of everybody else because everybody is vulnerable to everybody else. Everybody has to go to sleep at some point. So everybody is vulnerable to one degree or another, but he says eventually what we do is we set up this sovereign office, and we transfer a lot of our rights to it, and then it keeps order for us. But he does not say the fear goes away. The fear is transferred now. Instead of being fearful of each other, we transfer that fear, and we're fearful of the sovereign. So there is something about fear that is at the very heart of the state that we live under today. That is what it is founded on. Now, give us some examples of how it stokes fear among the general public.

BOYACK: The one that comes to mind immediately when you suggest that is John Adams, whom I reference in the book where he says, fear is the foundation of government, right? Here's a guy who presided over what ostensibly could be called the first attempt at widespread fear-mongering with the Alien and Sedition Acts—the fear of French Revolution spill over in America, the fear of losing power for the Federalist Party—all of these very real, and perhaps legitimate, fears all stoking these radical attempts to push what I perceive at least to be policy that was wholly contradictory to the ideals, the spirit, and even the letter of the law under the Declaration and the Constitution. So here you have a guy who presided over a policy initiative signed into law that was based on very rabid fear-mongering, who himself is admitting that fear is the foundation of government. Even if you take a minarchist point of view that there is this central and fundamental role of government that it should do that and nothing else. What is that? That is the protection of our property—our persons basically delegating the authority of the right to self-defense, and the government should protect us. That action alone—that power that we're in theory delegating to government—is itself predicated on fear; fear of an attack

whether the criminal down the street or the terrorist from another country. And so when you take that into the aggregate, everything the government does, everything that people are allowing it to assume power, for is in response to fear, and of course, any power, let alone delegated, but also centralized within a government, is ripe for being exploited.

You look even at marriage law, right? Here is the fear of racial people marrying or homosexual people marrying, and so conservatives have long consolidated within government the power to license marriage and therefore prohibit certain other marriages. That power over time has become—wrested from them that control from other political groups who have gained access to that power and then imposed their views on everyone else. This is, of course, fundamentally the problem with centralized power, but it's too tantalizing for any politician not to use it. As I discuss in the book, fear is this very raw and potent emotion. They get away with it time and again. It's almost too easy for them not to, and therefore, surprising that it just continues without abandon time and time again, and yet, we see the collateral damage. Nobody is really learning from it. We're not learning from history. Therefore, we're repeating it. It was a very prevalent thing that just continues to happen. I think we need to have some solutions to kind of help people step out of that system and see the light, as it were.

WOODS: One of the reasons they are able to be successful in this strategy involves the coupling of fear with ignorance, to incite fear in people regarding issues that they aren't necessarily privy to all the information about. So, for example, whether it's some foreign threat, the U.S. government can say, well, look, of course, we can't release classified information, but you've just got to trust us: this is pretty scary.

BOYACK: Yeah, of course, we see it most notably in things like—especially international issues, the supposed war on terror. You and I can't charter a plane to Iran to check out their facilities and see if their nuclear program is actually a threat. In the book, we discuss what's called risk communication, and that is we rely on other people to communicate not only about the existence of a threat to us, or an existence of a risk, but the extent to which that threat is a risk, and therefore, what solutions are needed. We become entirely dependent on these information brokers to convey to us what we should be afraid about, and then, of course, once that information is centralized, it's abused.

The children's fable of the boy who cried wolf is quite apt here, where the villagers below did not have a vantage point by which they could see if there were actually wolves coming or not. They were relying on this young shepherd boy, who then began to abuse that privilege of having become that focal point for informing the villagers below, and so what we talk about in the book is the solution. Well, the villagers couldn't—they never gained that vantage point by which they could see if there were actually wolves or not, but they could actually develop some information about the source, right? The shepherd boy. Over time as they realized that he was lying to them, they stopped listening to them. He no longer had power over them because he was distrusted. And so we can do the same thing. We can't charter a plane. We can't go do investigative research. We lead busy lives doing other productive things. But we can, at a

minimum, develop some information about what sources we're listening to—who is trustworthy, who is verifiable, and especially, with modern age and social media, and technology, and the decentralization of information, we no longer rely on one or a few sources—Walter Cronkite, or whoever. We have a litany of media sources that we can pay attention to and patronize so that we can figure out who is actually telling the truth, who is not exploiting that fear—because you're right, and we discuss it at length in the book: fear cannot happen without ignorance.

I'll give you one more quick example, and a modern one because this, of course, pervades government and history. But just last week we had the World Health Organization quietly admit that Liberia had drastically inflated the number of people who had Ebola; something by like 1,000. So, and of course, pre-election when everything was controversial. Of course, you don't hear about Ebola now. The election passed, and the cycle is over, but they exacerbate it. They manipulated the data. Therefore, people were ignorant as to the true nature of the threat. In other words, it wasn't that much of a threat, but they were basing it on highly inflated and totally incorrect numbers, and then after that happens, the WHO said last week, oh, just kidding. Liberia was off by 1,000. It wasn't as bad as we said it was, and yet, that ignorance that we were in, understandably so because we couldn't travel to Liberia, and who else had access to the information. Politicians were able to exploit a very real fear, and therefore gain political support for the policies that they desired to respond to what actually was not a real threat.

WOODS: Connor, you mentioned just now that these days we have more choices in terms of where we get our information from, but all the same, we're still living in an age in which the major media is still influential. It's at its peak right now in terms of where it's going to be 50 years from now. It's only going to go downhill. But right now it still is a substantial presence. A lot of people still do watch cable news networks. A lot of people still read newspapers, believe it or not. And those outlets tend to be not the dissipaters of fear, but they tend to be complicit in this problem.

BOYACK: Yeah, I think while we are stuck living with these very influential institutions, they can't help but be disrupted by technology and social media. One example I share in the book is during the Israel-Gaza conflict of several months ago that was very prominent in the news, you had media institutions, the big players, starting to suppress information, starting to, of course, give a very pro-Israel slant, basically kicking their journalists out of the country that were doing anything sympathetic towards Gaza, and what happened was these reporters were on Twitter, and they were reporting what was going on, and these Tweets just start exploding, and there was so much outcry on social media that some of these media institutions were forced to reverse course, to bring back that correspondent, to give airtime to the pro-Gaza point of view, to change what they otherwise would have done because they were being kept honest by the actions of these centralized masses who had access to information that wasn't becoming—wasn't coming down from them filtered from this media outlet—CNN or MSNBC or whichever one. So yes, they are still powerful, yes, they still exist, but already we see the disruption that's

happening with the tech and with the social media and with the decentralization. And I really think this is the way we combat the fear and the ignorance.

Again, if we are informed, if we have a rational discussion about an issue, then we are not going to act irrationally. You think of a woman seeing a spider. Well, if she knows that there are different kinds of spiders, and some are threats and some aren't, if she says, well, that's a black widow, so I am going to freak out, versus this is a common house spider, so no big deal, she's not just going to have this general, irrational freak-out just because there is a spider there. We need to be informed about the true nature of threats, and only then will this ability for people to fear-monger and to exploit our fears really subside. I mean, the power just totally dissipates when we know what is actually a threat, when we don't rely on these centralized sources of conveying information to us.

WOODS: You use a quotation from Thomas Jefferson in here regarding the calm of despotism. Expound on that.

BOYACK: He uses the quote in a couple of different forms over the years, but he effectively says that—and he's referring when he wrote this letter to specific people, but we can extrapolate it, I think, legitimately out to people at larger where he says, "Timid men prefer the calm of despotism to the tempestuous sea of liberty." We break that down in the book to say, look, this is really what it comes down to. People who prioritize safety over liberty prefer to support policies that will bring them a perceived sense of calm that is physical security, economic stability. They don't want the turmoil in their life of not knowing where the next paycheck is going to come from, if they are going to pay rent or pay for their food. They don't want to worry about criminals on the street or terrorists. And so whatever it takes, they want to have calm in their life. They just want to go on and be happy, and enjoy their family and their jobs. They want calm. And so, of course, especially in a post-9/11 world, where safety has substantially been prioritized over liberty, this is what is the primary motivating factor for people. Of course, then liberty subsided. It's violated through all these measures that are introduced and supported purportedly to keep us safe and help us to feel calm.

But as we explain at length in the book, they are despotic acts. They require a violation of our liberty. So as Jefferson says, it is the calm of despotism. You don't get calm really any other way. The antithesis to that is this notion of the tempestuous sea of liberty, that if we prioritize liberty as our first priority, then everything else is kind of secondary. We assume risk in our life. We realize that only in a totalitarian state could we come anywhere close to mitigating all risks that exist. We step outside the door, and we're already risking things. We drive over to grandma's house, and we're risking many things along the way. We need to understand and embrace that there is a certain measure of risk that we want to assume in our lives because we do want the freedom of travel in association and speech and everything else.

And Jefferson himself admits, and of course, it's legitimate to do so, it's accurate to say that that sea of liberty is quite tempestuous. Too often, I think, we as a group of liberty-minded folk

are criticized for being utopians. It's alleged that we believe that if only our ideals are instituted, whether that's anarchism, minarchism, or whatever flavor, that suddenly the world is going to be a happy place, and we'll be singing Kumbaya, and there'll be rainbows and unicorns and everything else. We need to get away from that stigma and say, no, look, we recognize the world is a dangerous place. It's not to say that everything is going to be hunky dory. It's only that we prioritize liberty over everything else, recognizing that it's worth assuming a certain amount of risk for freedom. And so that's what Jefferson talks about. We talk about that in the book, that fear leads us to want to be safe, and therefore, we get the despotic acts. We need to get away from the fear-mongering in order to be informed, in order to prioritize liberty and say, you know what? You're trying to scare me with this hobgoblin, this bogeyman. It's just not going to work because I value liberty. I understand that there are threats out there, and I am going to take some rational actions in response to mitigate that threat, but I understand that, you know, if I support this policy that purports to totally mitigate the threat not only is that very unlikely to happen as we've seen with the Patriot Act and everything else, but doing so would require violating my chief objective, that being liberty. So it's a great narrative, a great quote from Jefferson, and I think it really sets the stage overall for what we see as being the effect of widespread fear in our political institutions, and that is that people have come to prefer the calm of despotism over the tempestuous sea of liberty.

WOODS: I should tell everybody that I wrote the foreword to this book. I'd like to post the text of the foreword as a teaser to get people to buy the book on my blog and link to it on the show notes page. Do you have any objection to that?

BOYACK: That would be fantastic, Tom.

WOODS: Okay, so the show notes page for this episode—because this is episode number 300, you are on episode number 300, Connor.

BOYACK: Hurrah!

WOODS: How about that?

BOYACK: Excellent.

WOODS: It's TomWoods.com/300. On the back here I am looking at a couple of the blurbs you have, and it's very interesting to look at the juxtaposition of a couple of these. On the one hand you have Walter Williams, who has been a guest on this show, and on the other hand you have Anthony Romero, who is the executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union. Now, not all of us could get that particular endorsement. Is there a story behind this?

BOYACK: Well, the story is reflective of the nature of the work that I do. I run an organization in Utah called the Libertas Institute. We're a libertarian state-based think tank, and a lot of our success, and we've had quite a bit, in especially in the past year has been through a concerted effort to build coalitions. And so we've done a lot of civil liberties work, especially in this post-Edward Snowden kind of era where we've said, look, there is a lot of state-type stuff that's

violating the Fourth Amendment. So we brought together the local chapter of the ACLU, an association of criminal defense lawyers, and we proposed a whole bunch of legislation earlier this year that passed successfully that now has positioned Utah as leading the nation in civil asset forfeiture, in electronic data privacy—so protecting your cell phone under the Fourth Amendment—and forcible entry, law enforcement transparency. There's been a number of issues where our coalition has been wildly successful and has now positioned Utah as leading the states.

And so what I wanted for this book was to show the same thing, and that is this is not a libertarian thing. This is not a right-wing thing. This is a non-partisan, systemic thing. And so I thought the endorsement—someone picking up the book and looking at the back cover I immediately want to set the stage for the fact that this is not a Left or a Right or a whatever kind of thing. So I said, let's get a very prominent conservative person on the Right. Let's get a prominent person on the Left to immediately, even if only subconsciously, show that this is just across the board—that people of differing political persuasions can agree on these core issues, and so that's why we sought the endorsement and received very gratefully these wonderful endorsements from these prominent people to show that this is not just Rush Limbaugh and some of these Righties endorsing a book for their audience. We're really trying to get out the message to Left, Right, middle—everything in between, if you even subscribe to that political spectrum, which I don't, but show that this is a general issue that we can all agree on whatever your background, whatever your political inclinations.

WOODS: What's an easy way for people to get the book? I know you've set up a book page for this book. We're linking to it on the show notes page, but tell people what it is anyway.

BOYACK: Well, your listeners perhaps are going to do a double take because it turns out you and I use the same wonderful template. So check out Tom's book at RealDissent.com, and then you'll see that when you go to my website, which is FeardomBook.com. You can go see the endorsements, download an excerpt, find the book. It's just now available on paperback and Kindle and Audible and everything in between, and so actually, the book already is doing very well early on, getting a lot of great media attention. We're really excited because this—I mean, I've written several books. This is a message I feel needs widespread attention, and then of course, with those solutions, some implementation so we can actually try to counteract this. I don't want this to just be a book that you come away from and say, huh, that's interesting. That is a problem. I want this to be an inspirational book to say I can awake from this cycle of fear-mongering. I can do something about it. Or, hey, my spouse, or my kid, or my uncle, or co-worker. Like, I know that they are particularly susceptible to this. Here's an action plan that you can do not only to understand the problem, but then implement a solution.

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