

Aristotle's classical definition of rhetoric is "the available means of persuasion." Following that spirit of rhetoric, this course will develop your rhetorical skills (persuasion) at a more advanced level. Historically and in our contemporary social and political climate, the appeal to fear (argumentum in terrorem) constitutes one of the most effective rhetorical strategies. As distinguished from many other rhetorical appeals that rely upon deliberative or contemplative reason (logos) or ethics (ethos), however, a rhetoric of fear relies upon the pathetic (pathos) immediacy of affect. To that end, rhetorics of fear are capable of persuading us even when we don't recognize such happening: that is, rhetorics of fear often persuade us in an unconventional and unconscious manner. While the rise of Fascism in the 1930s indicates the totality (or total potential) of a rhetoric of fear—wherein we still wonder, how could that have happened?—the rhetoric of fear as a general, abstract rhetorical strategy still exists today.

As we will discover in class, we still encounter the rhetoric of fear on a daily basis, and it still very much informs the social and political fabric of our day-today lives. Franklin D. Roosevelt once famously declared that, "we have nothing to fear but fear itself." While this is a tautology, it nonetheless forces reflection on the question, nature, and exigency of rhetorics of fear. We will explore such rhetorics of fear in this class.